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This dissertation titled
Hostile Takeover: The New Right Insurgent Movement, Ronald Reagan, and the
Republican Party, 1977-1984

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ABSTRACT

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The debates involved in the post-World War II period concerning the growth of the conservative movement center on factors such as race, a shift in public thinking to the right, a divided Democratic party, demographics, and cultural issues as a way to explain the success of conservatism in the latter half of the twentieth century. Some historians credit grassroots movements for their impact on conservatism, while others believe that influential intellectuals and conservative leaders changed the perception of the Republican brand.

This dissertation examines the contentious relationship between the New Right and the Ronald Reagan’s first presidential administration. Led by Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, Terry Dolan, and Howard Phillips, the New Right arose during the 1970s as an insurgent movement within the Republican Party that had become disillusioned with party elites and its moderate positions. Together, these men sought to move the Republican Party further to the right. They led fundraising groups for congressional candidates and used direct mail as a way to mobilize grassroots support for conservative political and social positions.

The New Right met with some success in the late 1970s over the Panama Canal and other “hot button” social issues such as abortion and school prayer. Along with the Moral Majority, they were instrumental in attaching social and cultural issues to the
Republican Party platform. Despite Reagan’s support for many of the issues on the New Right’s social agenda, this work demonstrates that their relationship was fraught with contention, disappointment and distrust. Rather, diverse conservative constituencies within the Republican Party vied with each other for the president’s attention. This dissertation challenges the notion that Reagan came to office with a unified conservative movement behind him; and draws on archival research, special collections, news coverage and interviews to reassess the importance of the New Right to the larger conservative movement. Perhaps most importantly, this work will demonstrate that the long-term legacy of the New Right was to change the Republican Party into a more culturally conservative institution than it had been in the 1960s and 1970s.
This dissertation is dedicated to Sarah Iler, my future wife. Thank you for everything you have given me. May we have many long years together. I love you.
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INTRODUCTION: “IT’S VERY SIMPLE. THE LEFT IS OLD AND TIRED. THE NEW RIGHT IS YOUNG AND VIGOROUS.”¹

These words from New Right fundraiser Richard Viguerie encapsulated the attitude of the New Right movement. The New Right emerged in the 1970s as a major force in American conservatism. The New Right was an insurgent movement that saw itself existing outside the Republican establishment. While not a grassroots movement, the New Right began as a small cadre of conservative activists who wanted a more ideologically driven Republican Party. It challenged the party to become more outspoken on social and cultural issues. To achieve its aims, the New Right revolutionized fundraising through direct mail techniques and used controversial social issues to galvanize conservatives and evangelical Christians. The individuals who made up the New Right had been involved in Republican politics since the 1960s. By the 1970s, the New Right saw an opportunity to remove moderates from the party. Its organizations challenged incumbents in Republican primaries over their voting records by raising money for their own candidates. A candidate’s stance on issues, like abortion and school prayer, served as a litmus test for those running for office and in need of New Right financial assistance. By 1980, the New Right reached its peak of political and national prominence. During the early years of the Ronald Reagan administration, the New Right, in conjunction with the Moral Majority, continually pressured the administration to maintain its conservative ideals. The New Right and the White House would find

themselves at odds over the needs of governing and remaining committed to conservative principles. The New Right’s legacy was its ability to make the Republican Party more conservative on cultural and social issues in the following decades.

This dissertation confronts prevailing assumptions about the important actors in the modern American conservative movement. Much of the emphasis in the recent literature has discussed the neoconservatives and the religious right as the central political players in the 1970s and 1980s. This work will show the New Right’s contribution to the movement. The New Right is equally important, if not more, than neoconservatives and the Moral Majority in the fundamental way it changed the Republican Party. The New Right’s stature has diminished over time, but its role is essential to understanding how the far right became influential in conservative politics. Its fundraising organizations set the New Right apart from other conservative groups. This ability to generate outside money allowed it to build a base within the Republican Party, expand the conservative ranks, and shape public policy in the past few decades. The autonomy of the New Right insured that it remained outside the control of party leaders. The New Right’s lasting effect on modern American politics extended beyond the 1970s and 1980s.

The New Right is also crucial to understanding the political climate in American society during the latter half of the 20th century. By the late 1960s, American liberalism had fractured over the Vietnam War and the Democratic Party was divided as well along sectional lines over Civil Rights. It became increasingly difficult to hold what Arthur
Schlesinger referred to as the “vital center” together.\(^2\) Conservatism had problems as well. During the 1950s and 1960s, the liberal establishment viewed conservatism as a fringe movement and a discredited ideology. Historian Richard Hofstadter described what he called the “paranoid style” of the extreme right. Essentially, when conservatives felt threatened during times of conflict or change, they used conspiratorial theories to explain the political situation. For example, the extreme right believed, according to Hofstadter, by embracing the New Deal, liberals undermined capitalism and subverted the country, and that the government had been infiltrated by communists.\(^3\) Such attempts to marginalize conservatism, however, lacked insight into the changing demographics and political alignments occurring throughout the United States after World War II.\(^4\)

Conservatism, in fact, grew during this time and appealed to a broad range of Americans. In the 1950s, William F. Buckley, Jr. made conservatism more mainstream with his magazine *National Review*. Despite Barry Goldwater’s (R-AZ) humiliating

\(^2\) Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., wrote *The Vital Center* in 1949 as a way to explain the current state of American liberalism after World War II. The twin evils of fascism and communism made it imperative that the U.S. reject both forms of totalitarianism and to “reclaim democratic ideas …against the extreme left and right” with a “commitment to preserving democracy.” Thus, the “vital center” was the desired consensus needed in U.S. politics to protect America against Soviet communism and potential threats from the extreme right. Historian Richard Pells in *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* also argues that intellectuals after World War II “all shared a disenchantment with the political and cultural radicalism of the 1930s” *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949).


defeat in the presidential election of 1964, conservatism endured as a mainstream political force. The movement of the American electorate to the political right culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980. Historians, sociologists, and political scientists focus on how and why this shift occurred. Scholars examine critical questions involving the exact nature of this political realignment. They question whether Americans fully embraced conservatism or whether conservative politicians used the divisions in the Democratic Party and the economic malaise of the 1970s to gain political power. From the vantage point of the present, one can focus on trends, groups, and individuals who were essential to cultivating the success of modern conservatism. The New Right is one such group. The expanding conservative movement in America during the latter half of the 20th century created opportunities for the New Right to influence national politics.

The ability to appreciate the hopes and fears of millions of Americans benefitted conservatism with its ideology of traditional values, small government, and low taxes. The New Right is only one part of a larger conservative movement that used this ideology as well as racial and social issues to gain public support. Scholars debate the scope and extent of conservative ideas in the United States. One historian argued that a “new conservatism,” with its emphasis on ideas of growth and expansion of freedom, became “hegemonic in public discourse” and blamed cultural decay on postwar liberalism. He believed, however, this new discourse undermined American democracy.5

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Conservative intellectual Russell Kirk argued the marginalization of conservatives resulted because they never fully embraced the forces of modernism and industrialization because they primarily focused on preserving traditional order and morality.\textsuperscript{6} Thus, according to another scholar, conservatism, by its very nature, was anti-intellectual and its focus on preserving the past made reform under Republican administrations unlikely. The secularization of American society has made a true conservative revolution, one that would restore traditional values, difficult. For example, social changes within the United States forced many conservatives to embrace ideas of environmental protection and racial equality. These ideas tended to have broad public support and became entrenched in public discourse. Thus, “the liberalism of today is the conservatism of tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{7} Nevertheless, a conservative ideology emerged that stressed free market solutions to America’s economic problems, smaller government, virulent anticommunism, and the preservation of traditional family values. As a result, many Americans gravitated to these positions by the late 1970s.

Other historians use race or religion to explain conservative political success in the 1970s and 1980s. Joseph Lowndes noted that Southern racial politics influenced the right after the 1960s. He described how “race has been both an open and coded signifier for popular mobilizations against redistribution, regulation, labor protections, and myriad

\textsuperscript{6} Russell Kirk, \textit{The Conservative Mind from Burke to Santayana} (Chicago: Regnery, 1953).

other aspects of neo-liberal opposition to ‘big government.’” Manuel Gonzales and Richard Delgado explained how fear has allowed the Republican Party to win elections while simultaneously appealing to a demographic that did not benefit from its policies. Racial politics took “center stage” in their understanding of how the Republican Party used the excesses of the 1960s to play on some Americans’ distaste of increasing secularism and women’s and minority rights. These Americans saw conservatism as an alternative that addressed their concerns with society. In turn, the New Right gained a base from which to increase its national influence.

Not all scholars agree that race or racism was central to conservative success. Joseph Crespino challenged the idea of race as a driving factor in modern conservative politics. Crespino described how white Mississippians changed their message after 1964 from a focus on segregation towards one of preserving American freedoms that liberal social policies threatened. This new rhetoric appealed to white Americans, even outside the Deep South. Thus, white Mississippians were able to merge “their efforts with a broader insurgent conservative movement in the 1960s and 1970s.” Basically, the fears of southern whites were no different from other whites across the country when it came to social policies that threatened traditional values. Crespino acknowledged the importance of race in the rise of the modern conservative right. However, he noted how

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other things, such as religion and social issues outside of race, mattered to white Americans. The New Right used religion and social issues to create its own unique brand. Its ability to raise large sums of money, and its use of the media helped the New Right dominate conservative politics in the late 1970s.

In the 1980s, the New Right became part of the conservative grassroots base that supported Ronald Reagan. One of the major historiographical debates concerning the Reagan Revolution seeks to understand the culmination of events in 1980. The main questions involve whether Reagan’s election indicated a shift to the right among the American electorate or if his victory resulted from the failures of the Carter administration. After the setback of Watergate, the Republican brand recovered during the 1970s and led to Reagan winning the White House. Reagan’s personality held together a diverse constituency of conservative groups and causes. His call for a renewed faith in the United States appealed to many Americans. The New Right and Moral Majority believed that voters had given the president a mandate to institute major economic and social changes. The merger of these two groups, which in many ways became synonymous with each other during the early 1980s, created a potent force advocating a return to “traditional” family values.

The cultural battles from the 1960s and 1970s continued on in the 1980s. Reagan was a different brand of politician and his optimism “set the cultural tone” for the decade. Even critics of the president could not deny his appeal. Reagan reflected Americans’ hopes and fears. What many detractors saw as a time dominated by greed, poverty, and individualism, others saw as a time of renewal and growth. The president embodied
these contradictions. Historian Gil Troy explained that “Reaganism was liberty-laden but moralistic, consumer-oriented but idealistic, nationalist but individualistic, and consistently optimistic.” This reality differed from the dour outlook of the 1970s. The children of the 1960s became the middle-aged parents of the 1980s. These individuals co-opted aspects of their youth that influenced the Reagan years. For instance, “the conservative movement mimicked some of the 1960s ‘movement culture,’ to the mainstreaming of granola and blue jeans, of Naderism and environmentalism” which “did more to advance the sixties agenda, such as it was, than to dismantle it, especially culturally.” Another facet of Reagan’s appeal was of the “outsider” and “the cowboy.” One author notes that “as a propaganda tool, then, Reagan’s outsider image had the political value far beyond its factuality (or lack thereof) in that it helped deflect any criticism of the government in general from hitting the president.” Reagan’s “renegade/cowboy image” allowed him to become the “total embodiment” of what scholars “refer to the entire cultural/political dominant theme of the eighties…as Reaganism, with the president himself as its leader and hero.” Thus, the personality of the president represented the complexities of the time.11 The personal charisma of Reagan, however, could not keep his conservative base happy. Problems emerged between the New Right and Reagan over a host of issues dealing with social and foreign

policy. These disagreements reflected a history of contention between the New Right and the president.

**New Right Origins**

According to Paul Weyrich, conservative journalist Kevin Phillips first used the term “New Right” in 1975 to “distinguish the coalition thus indicated from the network of older groups acting in the name of conservatism.” Thereafter the media and New Right groups adopted this label for their movement.\(^{12}\) The New Right created a standard narrative of its origins. Richard Viguerie offered an account of a cadre of conservatives who had reached their limit with the Republican Party establishment in 1974. According to Viguerie, the day after President Gerald Ford announced Nelson Rockefeller as his choice for vice president, New Right leaders met to decide on how to reclaim the Republican mantle for true conservatives.\(^{13}\) They had two options: create a third party or work to get their candidates elected as Republicans. New Right organizations would rely on direct mail solicitations to do the latter and made enemies on the right and left by these techniques. What ensued over the following years after 1974 ran the spectrum from the apex of New Right prestige and influence in the late 1970s to relative obscurity in the 1980s and 1990s.

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\(^{12}\) Paul Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood?” in Roger Whitaker, ed., *The New Right Papers*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 49; Richard Viguerie noted that columnist M. Stanton Evans used the term in 1969 in discussing the conservative movement on college campuses that countered the New Left, *The New Right*, 55; However, Donald Critchlow believed that Paul Weyrich had come up with the term, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2011), 128.

\(^{13}\) Viguerie, *The New Right: We’re Ready to Lead*, 51-52.
Works on the New Right tend to question its conservative credentials or be critical of its methods and organizations. Alan Crawford, a conservative journalist, called the New Right “a serious threat to the nation” because it exploited the fears of many Americans to gain political influence.\footnote{Alan Crawford, \textit{Thunder on the Right: The “New Right” and the Politics of Resentment} (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), xv.} He believed the New Right was a populist and not a true conservative movement. Crawford wrote how the New Right’s radical individualism and its anti-institutional impulse militate against order and stability, and encourage rootlessness and upheaval— the inevitable consequence of the “free enterprise” the New Right champions. The New Rightists have thus become the celebrants of change, of rootlessness, of progress— all that classical conservatives deplore.\footnote{Crawford, \textit{Thunder on the Right}, 221.}

No doubt, the New Right’s outspoken political activism posed problems for some mainstream Republicans who questioned its interference in their campaigns. Crawford reflected his own biases due to the tone and arguments he used in disparaging the New Right. His work, however, attests to the contemporary anger of moderate Republicans towards New Right activism.

Sociologist Jerome Himmelstein noted that the New Right grew out of the conservative movement. Modern conservatism embodied “a paradoxical combination of respectability and rebelliousness” that “combined solid socioeconomic and political roots and the access to resources these provided with a broadly anti-establishment ideology that
allowed it to appeal to the growing discontents bequeathed by the 1960s.” In Himmelstein’s assessment, the New Right did not constitute a “right-wing populist break” but rather indicated that a larger political shift to the right was occurring in the United States. To call the New Right a populist group presents only one part of its important characteristics. New Right leaders were committed to causes the modern conservatism had always championed: low taxes; limited government; and strong national defense. The populism of the New Right was reflected in its political messaging of appealing to a broad constituency of Americans. The hostility of detractors towards New Right organizations involved its tactics.

Scholars have examined the New Right’s fundraising techniques in an effort to understand the group’s impact on elections and political discourse. Richard David Ross focused on these two efforts in his 1982 dissertation on the New Right. The New Right was able to take advantage of changes in campaign finance laws after 1974 that regulated the amount of money a person could donate to a candidate. It also produced “political changes through its efforts to build coalitions, propagandize, lobby, influence elections and build ever-larger lists of donors for the future.” Ross identified Jerry Falwell, Jesse Helms, and Richard Viguerie as New Right “entrepreneurs” because of their ability to raise capital for political purposes. The author further concluded that although New Right

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fundraising “does cause political change, however, those changes are modest rather than
dramatic.”¹⁸

In the most recent work on the New Right, Norwegian historian Alf Tonnessen
argued that its fundraising tactics were more effective than previous scholarship suggests.
Tonnessen stated that “direct mail fundraising and campaign organizational guidance
were particularly important for the conservative movement in the effort to turn Congress
to the right in the late 1970s and 1980.” Thus, the New Right was “far more successful
than their liberal counterparts in 1978 and 1980 in helping to get candidates elected.”
The grassroots efforts of the New Right and its ally the Christian Right laid “the
foundation for the Republican Party’s success in a number of subsequent elections during
the Age of Reagan of the last thirty years.”¹⁹ This analysis correctly highlights the New
Right’s political stamina over the long term.

This dissertation focuses on the New Right, 1977-1984, and primarily the ties
between the New Right and the Reagan administration during the president’s first term in
office. A major question it examines is how this association changed over time in order
to increase our understanding of the New Right outside the confines of the 1970s and
expand the existing historiography into the 1980s. This research supports the view that
the New Right was a more potent political force and a greater influence on the modern
Republican Party than usually realized by scholars. The relationship between the New


¹⁹ Tonnessen, How Two Political Entrepreneurs Helped Create the Modern American Conservative
Movement, 3, 310; Tonnessen is referring to Sean Wilentz’s book Age of Reagan.
Right and Ronald Reagan vacillated between support and hostility during this time and challenges the notion of a unified conservative movement under Reagan. The legacy of the New Right reveals that no such unity existed. Instead, this project will show that the New Right was one of many conservative movements that jockeyed for control and influence in the Reagan White House. The subsequent chapters will argue that when divisions arose between the New Right and the administration over policy, Reagan was more pragmatic as president than it would have preferred. The New Right realized early on that Reagan would push his ideological views on the American people only so far. Such actions led New Right leaders on numerous occasions to question Reagan’s conservative credentials. This constant tension between ideological solidarity among conservatives and the need to govern a large and diverse nation strained the bond between the president and the New Right. The New Right, however, found success in moving the Republican Party to the right. Its tactics and fundraising allowed it to remove moderates from office and made cultural issues more relevant to Republican politics. These distinctions gave the New Right the ability to reshape the Republican Party over the long term.

The project will be divided into six chapters. Chapter One defines and examines the organizational structure of the New Right. The chapter discusses the New Right in relation to other conservative groups at the time, particularly neoconservatives, in order to illuminate its distinct characteristics. I use legislative and social positions, fundraising apparatus, and grassroots activism to describe the New Right organizations. Its organizational framework allowed the New Right to influence conservative politics and
gain national attention. Its fundraising abilities, particularly those associated with Viguerie, distinguished the New Right from its contemporaries. Viguerie’s direct mail business had substantial donor lists from which to raise resources for candidates and conservative causes. The existing literature has focused on its fundraising apparatus in the 1970s. However, the New Right organization in the 1980s requires further study. The emphasis will be on Richard Viguerie, Howard Phillips, Terry Dolan and Paul Weyrich as the four most important leaders of the group. The conclusion of the chapter will analyze the ramifications of the New Right from its emergence on the national stage.

Chapter Two presents a case study of the New Right’s organizational structure. The Panama Canal “truth squad” serves as an example of how the New Right actually operated on a national level to raise money and awareness against the Panama Canal treaties. This chapter will serve as a model to explore the New Right’s efforts during the 1980s. Despite Senate ratification of the treaties, the truth squad gave the New Right valuable experience in political organizing. The tactics used by the truth squad applied to Reagan’s 1980 candidacy as it used direct mail to raise money for the campaign and to assail Jimmy Carter’s record.

Chapter Three focuses on the election of 1980 and the New Right endorsement of Reagan. Reagan’s call for restoring American prestige around the world and economic prosperity inspired conservatives. The Reagan “revolution” created the conditions in which conservative philosophy, according to Gerald Nash, moved “from theory to
practice.”20 Reagan embodied the leadership style and ideological temperament that conservatives strongly supported. Reagan upheld traditional values and had an unwavering commitment to small government and low taxes. Historian Robert Collins noted that Reagan “shifted the national political conversation to the right” even though American culture was moving towards a “more secular, modern, multicultural, and therapeutic cultural order.” The force of Reagan’s personality attracted many Americans and his rhetoric still resonates today.21 The New Right, however, reluctantly supported his candidacy. This ongoing relationship highlights the challenges facing the modern presidency between governing and enacting campaign promises. The extent of New Right support for Reagan is crucial to understanding their relationship from 1981-1984.

Chapter Four examines this relationship in greater detail. The New Right wanted a role in the incoming administration to help shape policy. New Right leaders believed the American public gave Reagan a mandate to institute changes similar to what Franklin Roosevelt had done almost a half century earlier. The major areas of disagreement involved appointments of moderate Republicans to cabinet level positions. The New Right argued that a dramatic realignment of the federal government could not occur with “non-Reaganites” influencing White House policy. A second point of contention involved the administration’s initial focus on the economy and not social issues. The New Right believed that both could be achieved at the same time. What the New Right


received instead for its support was a series of “symbolic” gestures meant to placate its leaders into thinking the administration would eventually focus on their concerns.

Chapter Five explores the New Right’s foreign policy agenda and how it related to the realities of the cold war at that time. Both the administration and the New Right remained very concerned about the spread of communism. Degrees of difference arose over the White House’s policies towards Central America and Taiwan. Reagan’s Central American policy reflected this fear of communist expansion.\(^{22}\) As Reagan took office, he faced a renewed hostility and tension between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. His pragmatic responses to these issues diverged from the bold action the New Right wanted the administration to take. This division illustrates a better understanding of how the Reagan “revolution” experienced a clash between the necessities of governing and the New Right’s desire to relentlessly pursue an aggressive anti-Soviet policy.

Chapter Six delves into the relationship between the New Right and the Moral Majority. Both groups were ideologically and religiously similar. They believed that the United States was in a period of moral decay. Consequently, it mounted forceful challenges against the television industry for promoting shows that contained too much sex and violence. Furthermore, it attacked the music industry, especially heavy metal music, for its endorsement of bands that promoted satanic lyrics and imagery. Many

genres of pop culture ignored this fear of decaying morality espoused by the religious right and mocked their leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, as intolerant and hypocritical.

The New Right had greater success in the 1970s than in the 1980s. The New Right had to compete with a host of other constituencies with Reagan in office. In many instances, its leaders received numerous invitations to visit with the president or administrations officials. Political realities, however, required the White House to make tough choices that angered its base at certain times. It had been easier to attack Carter’s agenda rather than a Republican president. The New Right publicly expressed its disappointment with Reagan. Despite the New Right’s lack of success in instituting its policy positions, it had a more lasting legacy. The New Right changed the Republican Party and shaped contemporary conservatism. This alteration did not happen all at once, but expanded in the subsequent three decades. Its ability to raise money and support candidates for office became a model for both major parties. However, with the infusion of social and cultural issues, the Republican Party became more ideologically rigid and extreme in its views. The result of these changes in the Republican Party created an atmosphere in which bipartisanship remains elusive today.
CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING THE NEW RIGHT

To define the New Right requires an examination of the modern conservative movement in the latter half of the 20th century and the zeitgeist of the decades after the 1960s. These two areas help put the New Right in its proper historical context and facilitate an understanding of its ideological foundations. The New Right was heir to the growing conservative movement in the United States before and after World War II. The New Right’s core philosophy of small government, traditional values, and anti-communism places it within the lineage of American conservatism after 1945. Its revolutionary use of direct mail, its populist message and religious zeal, however, gave the New Right distinct characteristics that differentiated it from other conservative factions, especially neoconservatives and the “Old Right.” The New Right was also a product of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the social and cultural areas where the United States experienced rapid changes during this time. These structural and philosophical forces reflected the reality from which the New Right emerged. The New Right reached its apex in national politics during the 1970s and 1980s as an insurgent force in the Republican Party. Its legacy still influences modern conservatism and the Republican brand.

Before 1945, isolationism, support for business interests, and disdain for the New Deal constituted the “Old Right’s” political platform. The rise of the Cold War, however, forced both Republicans and Democrats to support policies that confronted the Soviet Union on a global scale. Many leaders in both parties agreed that the United States should use its power to stop the spread of communism at home and abroad. This required the
United States to construct a massive national security apparatus and engage in a continued military buildup. Nevertheless, divisions remained among conservatives. In the 1950s, Frank Meyer of *National Review*, a conservative magazine founded by William F. Buckley in 1955, formulated the concept of “fusionism.” Fusionism blended the major intellectual strands of conservative thought that included libertarianism, traditionalism, and anti-communism. The mainstream American right embraced fusionism as a way to bridge their philosophical and ideological differences.23 By the 1970s and 1980s, the tacit consensus among conservatives began to splinter. Remnants of the Old Right, called “Paleoconservatives,” wanted the United States to refocus on national issues and scale back its international commitments. This stance brought them into conflict with the foreign policy agenda of the New Right and neoconservatives, who both wanted a more confrontational stance against Soviet communism.24 Paul Weyrich, one of the New Right leaders, further explained the differences between the Old and New Right encompassed the latter’s “political origins, its philosophical/political motivations, its strategic/tactical operations and its self conscious goals.”25 Each of these four areas

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helped shape the New Right’s ideology and distinguished it as a separate conservative movement.

The political activities of the New Right date back to the 1960s. John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society created the peak of American liberalism. Many future New Right leaders disdained liberalism and saw Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign as their motivation to get involved in Republican politics. Goldwater’s campaign invigorated conservatives and also helped launch the political career of Ronald Reagan as a conservative spokesman and activist.26 New Rightists such as Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie saw firsthand the potential of conservative ideas and the experience of political defeat. While Paul Weyrich criticized Goldwater for not providing leadership for the conservative movement after his loss to Johnson, the growth of conservatism as a viable alternative to liberalism was evident by the late 1960s.27 The 1968 election showed how Republican Richard Nixon, along with a conservative third party candidate, George Wallace, garnered 57 percent of the electoral vote. One conservative writer argued that the Democrats lost this election because they alienated the social conservatives in their party. Such results posed future problems for Democrats as this constituency started to vote Republican. The New Right embraced


27 Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood?,” 51.
social conservatives as a key demographic in its movement.²⁸ By the 1970s and 1980s the New Right almost exclusively utilized this group for its grassroots support.

The political situation in the 1970s remained in flux. The Democrats were weakened over internal divisions stemming from the losses in 1968 and 1972 and lacked a unifying national leader. The Republicans found themselves in the political wilderness after Watergate and Richard Nixon’s resignation. This fluid situation provided an opportunity for other political groups to fill the void. The desire to change the country drove the New Right to prominence. In order to address its cultural and political concerns, the New Right attacked what it perceived as the political status quo. The New Right opposed liberal Democrats as well as the Old Right of the Republican Party, which it believed too moderate and willing to accommodate the liberal establishment. Alan Crawford aptly noted how the New Right decried “what they believed to be the slightly effete conservative leadership of the East Coast- for example, William F. Buckley, Jr., and his National Review.” The New Right rejected Buckley’s more moderate positions on domestic social issues such as abortion, busing, and taxes, as well as his acceptance of the Republican foreign policy establishment. Buckley took issue with the New Right’s support of the George Wallace campaign; expressing “skepticism about the New Right’s attempt to blend populism and conservatism in the person of Wallace.” The New Right juxtaposed Buckley’s brand of Eastern Establishment Republicanism with the Western conservatism associated with their hero of the 1960s, Barry Goldwater. Many members

²⁸ Roger Whitaker, The New Right Papers, x.
of the New Right such as Richard Viguerie, Orrin Hatch (R-UT), and Paul Laxalt (R-NV) came from Western states. Their admiration of the Old West and appreciation of the political power of the Sun Belt states exposed additional differences with East Coast Republicans. The New Right achieved its aims of challenging the political establishment by raising resources, creating organizations that promulgated its message, and using the media for exposure of its causes.29

The cultural, political and social context in the United States during these tumultuous decades provides an understanding of the New Right’s ideological outlook. The New Right’s political philosophy resulted from its members’ experiences during the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, and the rapid social changes in American society. Paul Weyrich recalled, “by the 1970s…the bitter fruit of liberalism became known: the fostering and propagating of policies and values that were increasingly destructive to society, policies which are anti-family, anti-religion, and devoid of respect for traditional values.”30 These events shaped the thinking of New Right leaders during the 1970s and 1980s.

The 1970s became known as a decade of cultural excess, political apathy, and changing notions of sexuality and gender. Prominent rock artists such as Alice Cooper, Led Zeppelin, Rush, Kiss, and David Bowie revealed an androgynous and sexually


30 Paul Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood?,” 52.
charged atmosphere while delving into lyrical content that involved politics, promiscuity, drug use, and the occult. Disco music promoted self indulgence and an escape from modern life. Punk rock tapped into the anger and apathy many young people felt at the time. Other artists, notably Bruce Springsteen, wrote songs about the declining northern manufacturing base, joblessness, and the struggles of Vietnam veterans adjusting to life after the war. Popular television shows such as *Three’s Company, Saturday Night Live*, and *Soap* openly dealt with changing attitudes about homosexuality, looser sexual mores and questioning of authority. Historian Bruce Schulman argued, “The Seventies transformed American economic and cultural life as much as, if not more than, the revolutions in manners and morals of the 1920s and the 1960s.” Thus, many Americans welcomed these changing values and adopted an attitude geared more towards self gratification. However, other Americans viewed this cultural reality with alarm. The

31 Alice Cooper was known to shock audiences with his onstage antics such as carrying around a pet boa constrictor and being “guillotined” at the end of his shows, Tom Zito, “Alice Cooper Cutting Up,” *The Washington Post*, Dec. 20, 1973, B1. Led Zeppelin’s lyrics involved the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and the English occultist Aleister Crowley. Rush’s lyrical content was influenced by the libertarian writer Ayn Rand. Kiss’s music involved the themes of sex. David Bowie continually re-invented himself during the 1970s especially during and after his 1972 *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* concept album. He and others, including the New York Dolls, were part of the “glitter rock” subculture movement that sought to create “authentic” rock that “dissolved the star/fan dichotomy.” Thus, glitter rock was a way for artists to explore their various sexual identities while still appealing to a large audience. Van M. Cagle, “Trudging through the Glitter Trenches: The Case of the New York Dolls,” in Shelton Waldrep, ed., *The Seventies, The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 125-127.

32 Bruce Springsteen’s “Born in the USA,” written initially as an acoustic song, tells the story of a Vietnam veteran returning home to a different America than the one he left and his job prospects limited. Bruce Springsteen, *18 Tracks* (New York: Columbia Records, 1999).

33 Laura Kalman noted the groundbreaking role of comedian Billy Crystal’s gay character in *Soap* and the hostile conservative response to the show, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010), 264.
results of such changes proved a rallying point for social conservatives who decried the culture of the 1970s.\textsuperscript{34}

Outside of the realm of aesthetic culture, social divisions over women’s rights, abortion, busing, public school textbooks, and the funding of Christian schools dominated the headlines. These polarizing issues increased animosity among religious and social conservatives and the white working class towards the federal government. The traditional family and the role of women changed during the decade as more women entered the workforce. In 1973, the Supreme Court decision of \textit{Roe v. Wade} legalized abortion in some circumstances in the United States. This ruling galvanized Catholics who argued for the sanctity of all life. In 1979, Protestant evangelicals joined the pro-life movement and formed the Moral Majority, headed by the Rev. Jerry Falwell, which became a powerful critic of abortion rights and American culture. After Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, ratification seem likely at the time even though it ultimately failed to win approval in the required number of states. Conservatives like Phyllis Schlafly made it their mission to prevent ratification of the ERA. Race relations became more complex as the triumphs of the Civil Rights movement from the 1950s and 1960s gave way to the Black Panthers and whites moving out of cities. Attempts to address past discrimination by desegregating schools and busing angered many middle class whites who did not what to see their children transported across town to another school. The outcry extended beyond the south as northern cities like Boston experienced

racial riots over busing. Christian schools and textbook content became important to
religious conservatives who wanted to control where and what their children learned.
New Right and Moral Majority leaders worried that the IRS would take away their tax-
exempt status because critics saw parochial schools as discriminatory against African-
Americans. All of these issues would linger throughout the decade and carry on in the
1980s creating deep social and political divisions.35

New Right Financial Operations

The organizational structure of the New Right contained three elements: a
financial operation; congressional and legislative supporters; and a social and economic
agenda that had coalesced into a formal movement by the latter part of the 1970s. These
three elements were central to its origins, political philosophy, operations and goals. By
examining the interactions between these areas, a cohesive portrayal emerges of this
complex political movement. Initially, the organization revolved around the fundraising
and direct mail efforts of Richard Viguerie and the Richard A. Viguerie Company
(RAVCO) founded in 1965. RAVCO utilized computer generated mailing lists to reach
millions of potential donors and used popular media (radio, television, and print) as an
effective tool to reach a larger audience. The New Right network expanded to also
include the political action committees (PACs) associated with Terry Dolan’s National
Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), Paul Weyrich’s Committee for the

35 Rev. Jerry Falwell believed that the decision to legalize abortion “violated the principle of the dignity
of life,” Interview with Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich, Frank Church, Evan Bayh, and George McGovern
Nightline November 5, 1980; Schulman, The Seventies, 56-57, 114, 161, 185. Schulman highlights a Gallup
poll in 1980 that showed 45% of “Americans felt that the family had gotten worse over the past decade;”
Kalman, Right Star Rising, 271-273.
Survival for a Free Congress (CSFC), and Howard Phillips’ Conservative Caucus. The latter three groups were formed in the mid 1970s. These four men emerged as the public faces of the movement and they helped to orchestrate the grassroots effort for supporting New Right candidates and initiatives. By working together, these New Right groups acted independently of the Republican Party and began to build a movement that challenged the party for control.\textsuperscript{36}

Richard Viguerie started the New Right’s financial operation with his direct mail company. Born in Texas in 1933, he began his career as chairman of the Harris County Young Republicans in the 1950s before moving to New York in 1961 to serve as executive secretary for William Buckley’s Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). Viguerie always considered himself a conservative and supporter of the Republican Party. He believed the party’s philosophy aligned with his staunch anti-communism and Catholic religious faith despite his misgivings towards many in the Republican leadership. Working for YAF and the Goldwater campaign introduced Viguerie to direct mail as a way to raise money from many donors. Direct mail letters appealed to a target audience and could potentially increase awareness for a cause or generate funds. In 1965, Viguerie moved to Washington D.C. to start RAVCO and used his client lists to help conservative candidates running for office. The original list from which he started his business came from 12,500 Goldwater contributors who had given at least fifty dollars.

These names served as the start of a database for fundraising. With advances in computer technology, direct mail became an extremely profitable and quick way to raise money. Viguerie became one of the first proponents of direct mail and his use of this fundraising method set him apart from other political operations. He realized he could invest one dollar in a mailing and generate two or three dollars in profit. RAVCO and its ability to generate vast financial resources became critical to the entire New Right organization. Viguerie’s direct mail scheme revolutionized the way that political groups and candidates could raise money. RAVCO generated funds through direct mail solicitations for conservative causes and candidates. It also publicly promoted conservative positions on domestic issues such as busing, gay rights, and abortion. With its computer lists, New Right organizations and candidates had access to donors from which to generate any publicity for their campaigns. For example, direct mail was the vehicle that drove the New Right to national prominence in 1975. Viguerie, raising money for the National Right to Work Committee, had been successful in getting President Gerald Ford to veto a bill Ford initially supported concerning a union’s right to strike. Business interests favored the Right to Work movement as a way to diminish the power of the unions. This victory showed the type of pressure direct mail could put on a president or any other government official. Viguerie made it clear that the growing New Right movement “depended on direct mail” for their survival.

37 “The New Right’s Strong Ambition is Fueled by a Huge Mail Campaign,” *New York Times*, 12/4/77, 73 [No author given].

38 “The New Right’s Strong Ambition,” [No author given], 73; Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 162-163; Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
The New Right understood the benefits of publicity and controlling their message. Viguerie and Weyrich wanted to change how information was delivered to its supporters. Weyrich believed that the Old Right had not utilized the media to its advantage and sought more favorable news coverage. Thus, the Old Right sacrificed its message to media distortion. Viguerie’s desire not to have his messages filtered through the mass media reflected how the New Right’s views would not be reinterpreted or distorted. Direct mail served as an unfiltered source of information between New Right advocates and their supporters. “Our communication has had to begin at the grassroots level,” Viguerie observed, “by reaching individuals outside the channels of public opinion.” He believed the result made the New Right as “independent of the mass media as we are of the political parties.” Weyrich wrote, “The New Right recognizes that technology, like the media, is morally neutral and exists to be taken advantage of by anybody.” Furthermore, he added, “the fact that the New Right does speak the language of the common man helps explain the facility with which we can get coverage when we want it.” Therefore, it wanted to present its views on its own terms. Howard Phillips explained, “We must recognize the need to develop our own systems for communication so that we are not dependent upon the errors or good natures of our adversaries to communicate our views.” Thus, the New Right entered the age of mass media by

40  Paul Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Blood?,” 56-57.
running ads in newspapers, television, and direct mail campaigns asking like-minded Americans across the country to donate money to their organizations. By the late 1970s, the New Right had an effective and well-funded direct mail and media apparatus in place.

In addition to his direct mail company, Viguerie also served as an unofficial leader of the New Right. He became the most noticeable figure besides Paul Weyrich. Beginning in the mid 1970s, Viguerie hosted weekly dinners at his home in McLean, Virginia outside of Washington D.C. These meetings included young conservatives in Congress like Newt Gingrich and other New Right activists. They served as a forum to plan ways to build the movement or defeat the Democrats. These strategy sessions lasted nearly a decade after the formation of the New Right. Viguerie’s home became a place where conservative activists could establish contacts and discuss their ideas in a friendly environment. He wanted these young conservatives to find a way to provide leadership for the Republican Party that he believed it had lacked for some time.

The congressional and legislative parts of the New Right included NCPAC, the Conservative Caucus, and the CSFC. John Terry Dolan was a lawyer who graduated from Georgetown University where he had been active in the Young Republicans. While

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42 Viguerie stated in a radio interview that he used direct mail to reach a larger audience. According to Viguerie, people motivated by fear and anger are more likely to send money. His business capitalized on these insecurities of a wide range of issues (Viguerie on Fresh Air with Terry Gross, recorded 12/15/04).

43 Viguerie, The New Right, 19-29; Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11; In discussion with the author, 10/13/11; Viguerie notes how he got his first 12,500 names in the summer of 1964 by going to the office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives and copying the names by hand with hired helpers.
in college he lost the chairmanship of the College Republicans to Karl Rove, who would go on to play a pivotal role in American conservative politics. In 1975, he helped to form NCPAC with Charles Black, a former aide to Senator Jesse Helms, and Roger Stone. NCPAC served a confrontational role in the New Right. NCPAC relied on over-the-top ads known for their vitriolic attacks on candidates. Dolan famously quipped “We could elect Mickey Mouse to the House or the Senate.” With access to New Right fundraising, NCPAC could continue its campaign against anyone as long as the resources remained available. In 1976 alone it had raised over three million dollars which made NCPAC the largest and most prominent of the New Right organizations.44

Howard Phillips, the one New Right leader with experience working in the White House, was involved in efforts to elect more conservatives to Congress. He started his career at the Young Americans for Freedom before moving on to the Richard Nixon White House in the early 1970s to work in the Office of Economic Opportunity. Phillips changed his political positions over time to become more conservative. As a result, he left the administration in 1974 over disagreements with the direction of the president’s policies.45 Phillips started the Conservative Caucus in 1975 as a pressure group on Congress. The Conservative Caucus became a grassroots organization designed to “mobilize a Congressman’s constituents so as to influence his legislative record and


45 Hunter, “In the Wings,” 10.
thereby his national policy.”46 In addition, the group served as an umbrella organization for numerous “home and family” groups that promoted single-issues such as abortion. However, the group met with limited success. The Conservative Caucus in the late 1970s was burdened with massive debts and relied on RAVCO to continually raise money for the group. According to journalist Alan Crawford, by 1978 the organization became known as the “Conservative Carcass” among other names.47

Paul Weyrich was the social and cultural spokesman for the New Right. A devout Christian, Weyrich focused much of his attention on attacking abortion, the ERA, and other social policies that diverged from his religious beliefs. Born in Racine, Wisconsin, Weyrich started in broadcast journalism in his home state. After moving to Denver to continue his career in radio, he met Gordon Allot who was running for the senate in 1966. He went on to become Allot’s press secretary following the election, and also to serve on the staff of Republican Sen. Carl Curtis of Nebraska. His time in Washington taught him two important lessons. First, liberal groups were better able to organize to support their legislative agenda and second, conservatives needed to copy this organizational skill in order to be more successful. Weyrich believed the Old Right’s inability to organize in Congress hurt them legislatively and was something he wanted to change. He argued this “reticence was due to the Old Right’s enormous fear of the media.”48 In this capacity

Weyrich met beer magnate Joseph Coors, who provided funding for the CSFC and the initial $250,000 investment for the Heritage Foundation. The Heritage Foundation was an important conservative think tank that produced policy papers and analysis that provided detailed information on various areas of government and business. Weyrich served as the foundation’s first president for one year before turning his full attention to running the CSFC, which he founded in July 1974. The CSFC raised money for candidates as well as provide seminars to train campaign workers. It would become an important New Right organization that would expand beyond campaigns for Congress and into matters of foreign and domestic policy.49

New Right groups worked together for common goals. During the Watergate scandal, Weyrich understood conservatives would be running during a tough campaign season.50 His CSFC generated $194,000 for seventy-one candidates leading up to the 1974 midterms.51 The ability to acquire such a large amount of capital quickly relied on RAVCO and CSFC collaboration in direct mail fundraising. A July 1974 legal agreement between the two specifically outlined this relationship. The CSFC agreed to use “RAV as its sole and exclusive consultant and assistant in conducting direct mail solicitations of contributions.” In return, RAVCO received payment of six cents per name and address. RAVCO was able to maintain control of its mailing lists which it

could sell to other groups and candidates to use for a fee. The importance of this union highlighted the effectiveness of direct mail to the New Right organization.\textsuperscript{52}

The importance of the CSFC rested on the expertise it provided to candidates and their staff. CSFC workers gave candidates “in kind” assistance that included polling data, seminars, and campaign assistance instead of money. However, candidates were required to fill out a detailed questionnaire as well as attend seminars run by the CSFC.\textsuperscript{53} Weyrich stressed the importance of precinct organization, also known as the “Kasten Method,” named for Robert Kasten of Wisconsin. The concept, according to Weyrich, “required that every precinct be considered, not just safe ones.” To be competitive required a greater effort from the candidate and his staff. The CSFC decided which candidate had the best chance of winning an election and sent out a field representative to train the staff. In addition to providing this “in kind” support, the CSFC created a “conservative index” that ranked members of the House of Representative based on their voting records. These vote tallies, along with additional information, were then sent to conservatives running for Congress against what the CSFC considered a liberal incumbent. This campaign assistance proved invaluable to many races across the country.

\textsuperscript{52} “Agreement By and Between Richard A. Viguerie Company, Inc. and The Committee for Survival of a Free Congress,” July 1, 1974. This agreement was initially from July through November 1974 but was extended through 1977, series “Committee and Foundation Files, 1968-2001,” Box 23, Folder 10, Coll. 930325, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Tonnesen, \textit{How Two Political Entrepreneurs}, 64-65.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Conservative Digest} noted that it was “a 72 item, 12-page questionnaire on issues ranging from the B-1 Bomber to abortion.”
in which a relatively unknown person running for office could have the organization to compete against an incumbent.54

**How the New Right’s Fundraising Worked**

The New Right’s ability to raise revenue to fund candidates who supported its domestic and foreign policy agenda came about through changes in the campaign finance laws. In 1971, the Federal Election Campaign Act limited the amount of money a candidate could use for their campaigns and required disclosures of donors over $100. The subsequent 1974 amendment by the action of Congress capped the amount at $1000 for individuals and $5000 for an organization that could be given to a presidential candidate. Among other provisions, the amendment also created the Federal Election Committee (FEC). The FEC had six members, three Democrats and three Republicans to provide bipartisan election oversight.55 In 1976, the Supreme Court, in *Buckley v. Valeo*, upheld most of these campaign finance laws, including the limit on personal contributions in order to protect against corruption. The one difference, however, involved the court’s finding that putting limits on how much an individual could spend on their own campaign violated the First Amendment right of free speech. Despite this small change to previous campaign laws, the decision still required disclosure of funding


55 Clymer, *Drawing the Line*, 130-131; Melvin I. Urofsky, *Money and Free Speech: Campaign Finance Reform and the Courts* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 253-260. The 1974 amendment continued to limit the amount an individual could spend on their own campaign to “$50,000 for president or vice-president, $35,000 for a Senate seat, and $25,000 for a House seat,” 256.
sources and provided public financing of presidential elections. This ruling led to an increase in the number of political action committees (PACs) that used direct mail to raise money. The mandatory limitations on individual campaign contributions made direct mail vital to fundraising initiatives. In this new political situation, Viguerie understood the need for many donors giving smaller amounts.

Viguerie’s way of making money from direct mail made him a target for those who criticized his methods. Viguerie’s mailing lists generated a hefty profit for RAVCO through the fees charged to its clients. The New York Times reported how Viguerie made a fortune by “charging a high percentage of the money raised and by using the mailing lists to build his data banks for further fundraising.” He would keep up to seventy-five percent of the profits raised from direct mail contributions as a fee and then use the rest to support candidates. In some instances, Viguerie charged up to ninety percent or more for his services. He soon found his company under scrutiny by state officials in New York and Ohio. New York authorities criticized RAVCO’s fundraising efforts on behalf of Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s Children’s Relief Fund, which netted over one and half million dollars. However, “less than 6.3 percent ever got back to needy, starving Asian children” because of “the unconscionably high fees of $920,302 (60 percent of expenses) disbursed to the professional fundraiser Viguerie.” Other states that inquired into the relationship between Viguerie and Moon found wrongdoing with the fundraising


57 Clymer, Drawing the Line, 130-131; Crawford, Thunder on the Right, 43-45.
operation and financial disclosures. The states of Ohio and Connecticut penalized Viguerie for his actions. Ohio officials forced him to limit his fees in order to conduct business in the state, arguing that his efforts generated “substantial annoyance, inconvenience and pecuniary injury to residents.”

Viguerie and Weyrich defended their efforts by explaining the high costs involved in direct mail printing costs and other services their groups provided. For Viguerie, the criticisms of direct mail and his group did not reflect the way his business functioned. He saw himself as an entrepreneur who took all the risks. In many instances, he put up the capital necessary, wrote the mailers, and paid the shipping costs. The fees he charged were meant to repay the costs generated to create publicity for a candidate or a cause. If a certain mailing failed to generate any money, RAVCO would take the financial loss. More importantly, according to Viguerie, he “was building a movement.” He saw the potential in keeping a donor for life as a resource for future fundraisers. Direct mail was not just about raising money, but advertising as well. This activity allowed Viguerie to remain in business for nearly half a century and slowly create a conservative force in national politics.

New Right direct mail efforts were not always welcomed in Republican circles. After Watergate, Republicans had worked to restore the image of the party and regain voter confidence. The New Right’s targeting of Republican incumbents who did not


59 Crawford, Thunder on the Right, 76-77; Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
support its positions was a source of consternation among some Establishment Republicans. One Republican consultant wrote a scathing piece in the The Nation calling the New Right “dinosaurs” that hurt the party’s attempt to diversify, attract new voters, and potentially gain a majority in Congress. Leaders of the New Right were not true conservative but rather “a talented group of nonelected technocrats.” The New Right, “having given up all hope of a GOP majority… has determined to settle for ideological purity.” While the New Right had the potential to help the Republican Party, the writer lamented “one wishes they would go away, these dinosaurs.”

The New Right and Ronald Reagan

Ronald Reagan played a critical role in the story of the New Right. The future history between them would highlight the vicissitudes of their political alliance. By the time Reagan took office, the divisions between them continued to grow. New Right leaders had a tenuous relationship with Reagan. They looked for a successor to Barry Goldwater to carry the conservative mantle, but found Reagan lacking. Ideology and financing are the two most probable answers to their problems with Reagan in 1976. First, Viguerie questioned Reagan’s conservatism. Viguerie wanted either former governor John Connally of Texas or former Alabama governor George Wallace to run for higher office. He saw these two men as more conservative than Reagan. Despite Viguerie’s efforts to convince Connally to run against Ford, Reagan emerged as the


61 Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
conservative favorite. Second, Viguerie was angry that Reagan’s campaign did not use RAVCO for fundraising, and also for choosing Sen. Richard Schweiker (R-PA), as his candidate for vice-president. These actions prompted Viguerie, Weyrich, and Philips to attend the convention of the American Independent Party (AIP) in Chicago following the end of the Republican National Convention.\(^62\) Viguerie wanted to run as a vice-presidential candidate in an attempt to create a third party candidacy and potentially prevent Ford’s reelection. Robert Morris, an attorney and columnist from Dallas, would lead the ticket as the presidential candidate for the AIP. Viguerie’s attempt to get on the AIP ticket proved unsuccessful. The AIP favored Lester Maddox, a former governor of Georgia, as its presidential candidate. This ended Viguerie’s relationship with the AIP. This flirtation with third party candidates, or support for other conservatives revealed the extent of the discomfort Viguerie felt for Reagan. By 1980, Viguerie grudgingly moved to support Reagan’s candidacy.\(^63\)

The election of 1976 was a critical year for the New Right, the Republican Party, and Ronald Reagan. Reagan challenged the incumbent president Gerald Ford for the nomination. Conservatives came very close to getting Ronald Reagan nominated for president over Ford at the Republican’s Kansas City convention. Ford's near loss of the nomination highlighted the division between his and Reagan's wing of the Republican


Party and foretold of the changes to come. For example, Reagan’s supporters had introduced a “Morality in Foreign Policy” clause to the party’s platform. This clause stipulated that U.S. foreign policy officials would not engage “in secret agreements, hidden from our people.” The purpose of this language was to criticize the secretive diplomatic measures taken by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger with communist nations like China and the Soviet Union. This proposal, in reality, attacked the notion of détente, which Ford had initially supported. Reagan believed that détente had allowed the Soviet Union to surpass the United States militarily. Ford reluctantly agreed to this clause in the party platform. The New Right also wanted the Republican platform to support its domestic and foreign policy agenda and move the party more to the right. It challenged the party’s support for abortion rights and the ERA. The public rift at the 1976 Republican convention highlighted the growing strength of conservatives in the Republican Party.

**New Right Congressional Supporters**

Many people labeled as New Right supporters, both in and out of Congress, believed the failures of the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford administrations highlighted the lack of influence that conservatives had in the Republican Party. Members of the New Right even called into question the legitimacy of the party after the Watergate scandal. Howard Phillips argued “the New Right was born out of Watergate.” The problem in

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Phillips’s view was that “many of us [New Right leaders] believed that conservative fortunes were synonymous with Republican fortunes” due to the fact that “we [Phillips, Dolan, Viguerie, and Weyrich] placed an inordinate hope in the GOP and Nixon.” 66 In 1972, Phillips and Viguerie formed the Conservatives for the Removal of the President (CREEP II), out of fear that Nixon “would make concessions to the Russians as he tried to deal with Watergate.” This group is not to be confused with the Committee to Reelect the President that worked on Richard Nixon’s behalf in 1972. For conservatives, this estrangement from the Republican establishment was understandable due to Nixon’s actions in the cover up of the scandal. More importantly, Nixon became synonymous with détente, moderate domestic policies, and Establishment Republicanism. Nixon’s domestic agenda included support for environmental protection, continued desegregation of schools, and workplace laws, among others. These policies angered various constituencies on the right.67

The New Right wanted to set a new course in foreign policy that challenged détente by addressing what they perceived as a shift in the military balance of power toward the Soviet Union. Many U.S. political and military leaders feared that the Soviet Union's military buildup had surpassed that of the United States and remained skeptical that arms negotiations could address this disparity. 68 The New Right also questioned the foreign policy leadership of Republican presidents Nixon and Ford. As one historian


aptly wrote, “What, conservatives ask themselves, had over six years of Republican governance accomplished? South Vietnam had gone under, Red China had been recognized, détente had become the entrenched foreign policy, and the military balance of power was shifting in the Soviets’ favor.” Many conservatives regarded Nixon's rapprochement with China and the Soviet Union as weak and defeatist. These conservatives believed a realist approach to foreign policy was unacceptable in a Cold War environment. As conservative journalist Alan Crawford wrote, the New Right “retains the psychology of the Old West” in its desire to confront international problems with American firepower.” Terry Dolan said that in order “to take on international communism,” the United States should send its forces to the world’s trouble spots, which included Angola, Iran, and Afghanistan.

The cadre of New Right supporters in Congress mainly consisted of Republican lawmakers. The most notable examples included Rep. Philip Crane (R-IL), Rep. Robert Bauman (R-MD), Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC), Sen. Orrin Hatch, Sen. Jake Garn (R-UT), and Sen. Paul Laxalt. The mainstream media and New Right leaders also referred to these members as part of the New Right. Very few Democrats received funding from New Right PACs. For example, in 1978, only ten percent of campaign funding from NCPAC went to conservative Democrats. One exception included Rep. Larry

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69 Reinhart, The Republican Right Since 1945, 229.
70 Crawford, Thunder on the Right, 88-89.
McDonald, a Georgia Democrat, who was supported by the American Conservative Union (ACU), the CSFC, the Conservative Caucus, and served on the national council of the John Birch Society.\(^72\) Kent Hance, a Texas Democrat, also received funding in 1978 from NCPAC and CSFC to defeat future Republican president George W. Bush in the 19\(^{th}\) Congressional district. The New Right did not support Bush due to his father’s connections to Eastern Establishment Republicans.\(^73\) These lawmakers worked in Congress to further the New Right agenda or attempt to block legislation they found objectionable.

**New Right Economic and Social Agenda**

The 1970s was a decade of high unemployment and inflation in the U.S. economy. In order to address these problems, the New Right supported tax cuts, attacked big business, and claimed to preserve “middle class values.” New Right organizations joined with anti-tax groups to promote their agenda.\(^74\) Its economic program embraced the “supply side” economic theory promulgated by Arthur Laffer, an economist at the University of Southern California, and economist Robert Mundell of Columbia University in the early 1970s. The basic idea behind supply-side economics involved tax cuts and less liquidity, or assets that can be sold easily for cash, in the economy to

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\(^72\) The John Birch Society was a far right organization started in 1958 by Robert Welch that made outlandish claims such as calling President Dwight Eisenhower a communist and saw a communist conspiracy throughout the US government, Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), 222-223.

\(^73\) Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 133, 268; Weyrich, “Blue Collar or Blue Bloods?,” 61.

dampen inflation. According to Laffer and Mundell, tax cuts would stimulate economic production and eventually expand the tax base which would increase government revenues. This enhanced revenue would, in turn, balance the federal budget. Many conservatives became enamored with supply-side economics and this theory corresponded to the New Right’s emphasis on overall tax breaks for Americans.

Jack Kemp, Republican congressman from New York and former San Diego Charger and Buffalo Bills quarterback became one of the most vocal supporters of this economic theory. Kemp believed that a “rising tide” would “lift all boats.” By 1976, Ronald Reagan also saw the virtues of supply-side economics. That same year, Kemp and Sen. William Roth (R-DE), introduced the Kemp-Roth bill that they believed would lower tax rates, expand the economy, create jobs, and lead to future balanced budgets. This bill appealed to many Americans frustrated with inflation and lack of economic growth. This proposal called for a thirty-three percent cut in income tax rates over a three-year period for all wage earners. Conservatives saw Kemp-Roth as a positive piece of legislation that gave Republicans a chance to challenge Jimmy Carter’s economic policy and to bring the party together. Kemp-Roth offered an alternative to Carter’s desire to close tax loopholes and not to lower taxes for the wealthiest Americans.

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75 Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 227-232; for a definition of liquidity and other economic terms see http://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/liquidity.asp#axzz1ySybHjVp. Investopedia is a website that provides news and analysis on financial matters related to investing, stocks, and other economic issues. It is a good site that helps one understand how the financial world operates.


Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) exclaimed, “People want to enjoy life, even if they can’t afford it. They don’t like being told they don’t have money. Now along come Kemp and Roth and tell people they’ll be doing a service by spending money…Kemp-Roth has given Republicans a new argument, and a new style, and it’s delightful.” However, the Kemp-Roth amendment was voted down in both the House and Senate during the larger debates over President Carter’s Revenue Act of 1978 which dramatically cut capital gains taxes as well as taxes for most Americans. However, supply-side economic ideas still resonated among New Right leaders and other conservatives.

The New Right’s economic message was hostile to big business. This criticism contradicted the traditionally close relationship between the Republican Party and corporate America. New Right leaders stressed moral and national security reasons behind their attacks on business. Viguerie took issue with companies that wanted to expand trade with the Soviet Union. Other conservatives did not trust corporations. Sen. Paul Laxalt said, “We found that our ‘friends,’ the Fortune 500, were playing both sides,” noting that both Democrats and Republicans received corporate contributions. Paleoconservative Pat Buchanan linked big business to “radical politics and hard-core pornography” by advertising in magazines such as Playboy and Rolling Stone. This

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78  Broder, Changing of the Guard, 167; Alan Ehrenhalt, Congressional Quarterly, 8/5/78, 2024, Lugar quote from Congressional Quarterly, 2024; Crawford, Thunder on the Right, 242.

79  Kalman, Right Star Rising, 242-248.

80  Richard Viguerie, interview on Fresh Air with Terry Gross, 12/15/04.

advertising, in effect, was “subsidizing and contributing to the degradation of moral values.” These detractors wanted to see business subsidies eliminated as well. According to Viguerie, subsidies actually threatened competition in the marketplace. In a larger sense, the New Right’s attitude towards big business reflected its position on big government. To Viguerie, big business was “far too cozy” with big government. Both symbolized inflated bureaucratic entities that intruded into the lives of the American people.

The New Right’s domestic social agenda reflected the backlash of white middle-class Americans following the tumultuous 1960s and amid the growing evangelical Christian movement. Sociologist David I. Warren argued how “the social movement that the New Right expresses--and whose values, resentments, aspirations, and fears it tries to articulate—is composed” of what Warren termed “‘Middle American Radicals—MARs.” These MARs consisted primarily of ethnic blue collar groups such as Italian Catholics. Their anger resides in the “view of government as favoring both the rich and poor simultaneously” along with a “feeling that the middle class has been seriously neglected.” This hostility towards government led to resentments that help explain the power of social issues that defined these middle-class Americans. While Warren’s use of the term “radical” seems hyperbolic, emotionally charged issues became a way for the

82 Patrick Buchanan quoted in Crawford, Thunder on the Right, 214.


New Right to engage social conservatives in the political process. Paul Weyrich quipped, “Yes, they’re emotional issues, but that’s better than talking about capital formation.”

The New Right’s social agenda mirrored that of the Christian Right. It was hostile towards abortion, homosexual rights, forced busing, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). While these were two separate groups, they worked together during the 1980s on the same issues. The two conservative entities forged an alliance in 1979. Paul Weyrich and Howard Phillips met evangelist Jerry Falwell that year through Ed McAteer, their intermediary who worked for Phillips’s Conservative Caucus. Falwell formed the Moral Majority in May 1979 using the name Weyrich had mentioned in their conversation. Falwell, Viguerie, and Weyrich forged a strong relationship because of their religious and cultural beliefs. Viguerie’s best friend was Falwell’s personal assistant. This friendship gave the New Right access to Falwell’s mailing lists with additional new donors and voters. They worked together throughout the late 1970s and 1980s to rally churchgoers to vote for candidates that upheld their “pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-moral, and pro-American” values. The Christian Right also had an interest in a political alliance as it worried about the potential loss of tax exempt status for private Christian schools over racial integration. Consequently, the cooperation of


86 Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11; quote from Kalman’s Right Star Rising, 273-274.
these two groups gave conservatives a new voice in national politics that advocated for its issues.  

The 1970s was not the first foray of evangelicals into national politics. Historian Laura Kalman argues that evangelicals had been politically active since the 1930s, but by the 1970s, “more evangelicals and fundamentalists embraced political involvement.” A demographic shift occurred when more middle-class Americans left mainstream Protestant churches for evangelical “mega-churches.” Under the rubric of “family” issues, the New Right and the Religious Right worked in tandem to attack the Equal Rights Amendment, anti-discrimination laws against homosexuals and textbooks that contained controversial subject matter. Conservative historian Gerald Nash placed the New Right within the larger religious right movement of the late 1970s. Nash argued that the New Right phenomenon “was a revolt by the ‘masses’ against the secular virus and its aggressive carriers in the nation’s elites.” Americans who favored the New Right’s message reflected the growing anger over the rapid changes in society and the move towards secularization. Thus, the alliance of these two groups seemed natural due to the nearly identical political and spiritual positions and created a powerful voting bloc.

The three elements of an organizational, legislative, and social and economic policy worked in tandem to increase the national prominence of the New Right. The concerns it emphasized appealed to Americans worried about the state of the country.


89 Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 558-559
Social issues, a growing Religious Right, and fear of Soviet communism galvanized many Americans, especially the growing evangelical movement, who believed that the United States was in moral and political decline. Parents across the county protested the busing of their children to different schools to ensure diversity. Americans also worried about the demise of the traditional family due to divorce, abortion, drug use, and children born out-of-wedlock. Leaders in both major political parties believed that the Soviet Union had the upper hand in the cold war, and after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, tensions increased between the superpowers. These fears created an atmosphere conducive to success as the New Right and Moral Majority’s message resonated with many Americans.90

**Similarities and Differences between New Right and Neoconservatives**

While the New Right and the neoconservatives shared many similarities, stark differences also existed between the two. Today the term “neoconservative” is used to describe individuals in the George W. Bush administration who wanted to invade Iraq and spread American democracy to the Middle East. However, in the 1970s, neoconservatives were Democrats and former leftist intellectuals who moved to the political right on foreign and domestic policy issues. The New Right saw itself as a conservative, populist organization that worked to build a grassroots network of activists. Its message blamed corporations, new social mores, and liberal elites for the country’s

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90 In a 1980 interview, Jerry Falwell argued that evangelicals who agreed with these ideas voted in greater numbers than in previous elections. Interview with Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich, Frank Church, Evan Bayh, and George McGovern *Nightline* November 5, 1980.
problems. Thus, the New Right believed its conservative brand represented a “backlash” against “New Deal welfarism” and “the social liberation movements and government reforms of the 1960s and 1970s.” Some neoconservatives saw the New Right differently. Jeane Kirkpatrick argued that the New Right movement as “not really new at all, but...a strain of nativist populism whose roots lie deep in American history.” She questioned the New Right’s assertion that a “hidden conservative majority” existed among the American electorate. Kirkpatrick’s critique of the New Right was similar to Alan Crawford’s earlier assertion of the New Right as a populist movement, not a conservative one.

The neoconservatives used editorials and journals to discuss their ideas within a smaller community of educated policy makers and intellectuals. Neoconservative journals, such as Commentary and Public Interest offered an intellectual forum in which their ideas could be discussed and debated. The New Right relied more on media attention and bombastic public statements. It broadened its appeal using rhetoric to attack elites on the left and the right who it saw as out of touch with average Americans. Its status as outside the Washington establishment and its disdain with the federal

91 Berlet and Lyons, Right Wing Populism in America, 220-222.
92 Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, “Why the New Right Lost” in Dictatorships and Double Standards: Rationalism and Reason in Politics, (New York: Simon and Schuster and American Enterprise Institute, 1982), 172, 185; Crawford called the New Right as a “primitive kind of right-wing populism that has all but exterminated the few remnant of the Burkean tradition,” Thunder on the Right, 303.
government and business interests increased its appeal. The New Right had two main journals, *The New Right Report* and *Conservative Digest*, which provided two literary sources where its leaders presented its ideas and policy positions.

By contrast, in the realm of ideas, neoconservatives focused on the so-called “New Class,” which consisted of professionals, experts, technocrats, social scientists and other “knowledge producers” that worked in government, academia, and the corporate world. To some neoconservatives, the New Class controlled government, universities, and the state behind the scenes. This class embraced liberal values at the expense of capitalism and looked for ways to expand government power and authority in order to use their experts to fix society’s problems. As a consequence, neoconservatives remained antagonistic to the New Class. Neoconservatives also believed that government needed to reestablish its authority to protect American society. While some neoconservatives supported government social and cultural programs, most felt that government had

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93 Crawford, *Thunder on the Right*, 176-180. Crawford noted that the New Right disdained William Buckley, George Will, and William Safire as representing the over educated elites who did not connect with those below them.


“overextended” itself by attempting to create an equal society. They highlighted the “unintended consequences” of government social programs.96

The New Right and neoconservatives further differed in their respective intellectual approaches over religion. Those in the New Right had been historically located on the political right. Richard Viguerie, Howard Phillips, Paul Weyrich, and Terry Dolan, began their political careers as avid supporters of the Republican Party in the 1960s as members of Young American for Freedom or worked for the 1964 Goldwater campaign.97 By contrast, neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol and Jeane Kirkpatrick, among others, gradually moved from the political left to the right over their careers. The neoconservatives tended to be Jewish intellectuals while the New Right leaders were Catholic, with the exception of Howard Phillips, who was Jewish before becoming an evangelical Christian.98 Belief in absolute truth espoused by religious faiths separated the New Right from their intellectual compatriots on the right. George Gilder, who was program director of the International Center for Economic Policy Studies, gave a speech to Heritage Foundation in 1980 describing why he shifted from calling himself a neoconservative to becoming a New Right supporter. His argument hinged on how neoconservatives approached the world. Gilder argued, “The problem is that the

96  Steinfels, The Neoconservatives. He noted how the neoconservatives attacked the New Class for its support of egalitarianism and liberal social policies. The neoconservatives wanted to provide a different ideology to the New Class.


neoconservative believes not chiefly in principles but in empirical techniques. He believes that through study and analysis of social questions, one can arrive at a reliable conclusion.” The New Right’s emphasis on moral values made it unique and that neoconservatives lacked awareness of “the paramount truths of God and Man.” Gilder posited that the neoconservatives’ reliance on his or her intellectual capabilities clouded their judgment. This speech’s premise that neoconservatives relied too much on intellectualism and the New Right embraced eternal moral truths seemed unsubstantiated and meant to appeal to a select audience. However, Gilder was correct in that the New Right appealed to its evangelical faith in defending its policies, whereas neoconservatives eschewed such matters in their arguments.99

In the realm of foreign policy, the New Right and neoconservatives agreed on the threat posed by Soviet communism. They both were critical of détente and viewed the Soviet Union as a major threat. Historian John Ehrman argued that neoconservatives were the standard bearers of cold war liberalism and upheld “the superiority of American democratic values.”100 The Wilsonian idea of spreading democracy played a key role in neoconservative thinking. After Reagan’s election, neoconservatives identified with the president’s staunch anti-Communism and influenced his thinking on foreign policy. As Ehrman noted, “the neoconservatives were able to pursue the institutionalization if Wilsonian and democratic goals within the government’s foreign policy establishment”


100 Ehrman, The Rise of Neoconservatism, vii-ix.
with the support of the president to a point. For example, the administration began Project Democracy as a bipartisan effort to spread democratic values across the globe.\textsuperscript{101} The New Right also advocated the spread of democracy to bring down the Soviets. Both of these ideas relied heavily on rebuilding American prestige and working towards usurping Soviet authority in Russia and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{102}

Each group believed that détente made the United States more vulnerable. Détente, according to conservatives, worked to the advantage of the Soviet Union, which gained military strength at the expense of the United States. Thus, the United States had to sustain its vigilance against the Soviet Union. In addition, arms control treaties, such as the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT and SALT II), received a hostile reception from the New Right and neoconservatives. Both felt that these treaties benefitted the Soviets and relegated the United States to the role of “number two” nuclear power.\textsuperscript{103} To reclaim America’s position of strength, neoconservative intellectual Norman Podhoretz wrote in 1980 that the United States should re-embrace the policy of “containment” that had guided American policy from 1947-1969 and aspire to a \textit{New Nationalism} that would rebuild American military might.\textsuperscript{104} New Right writer Robert Moffitt argued the Soviet Union was an imperial power, and that America needed to

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{101} Ehrman, \textit{The Rise of Neoconservatism}, 162. Ehrman argued that Norman Podhoretz had become increasingly disillusioned with what he saw as Reagan’s tendency to compromise with the Soviet Union, 138.
\bibitem{103} Tonnessen, \textit{How Two Political Entrepreneurs}, 165-169.
\bibitem{104} Norman Podhoretz, \textit{The Present Danger: Do We Have the Will to Reverse the Decline of American Power?} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980).
\end{thebibliography}
establish a “counterimperialist” policy that avoided war but allowed the United States to gain leverage against the Soviets.\textsuperscript{105}

American society had entered a period of cultural and moral decline during the 1960s and 1970s according to New Right and neoconservative ideologues. Both feared activist government policies that sought to address previous discrimination. Although he disagreed with the term neoconservative, sociologist Daniel Bell embodied the neoconservative critique of American culture. Bell discussed the discrepancy between a consumer-driven capitalist system and the structure of the traditional family. In his view, materialism and the desires it created undermined the family and harmed an individual’s character by replacing self-control with instant gratification.\textsuperscript{106} New Right leaders also feared the decline of the traditional family. The New Right advocated a “pro-family” agenda that railed against pornography, divorce, abortion, and the loss of prayer in public schools. New Right activism centered on changing American culture back to some mythic past that seemed obtainable if only conservatives could reverse the cultural decay they saw as rampant in the country.\textsuperscript{107}

In the history of modern American conservatism, the New Right was a unique entity. The four main New Right leaders honed their political skills in the YAF as young men and eventually worked in Washington or formed their own organizations and

\textsuperscript{105} Moffit, “Soviet-American Relations in the 1980s,” 227-234. According to Moffit, this policy had three objectives: first, “neutralization of Soviet power and influence beyond its traditional sphere of influence in Eastern Europe;” second, the “weakening of Soviet power and influence behind Soviet controlled borders;” third, compel “the Soviet elite to abandon global imperial ambitions.”


\textsuperscript{107} Viguerie, \textit{The New Right}, 151-161.
companies. These formative years gave them insight into the problems of the Republican Party that seemed unable to fully counteract the prevailing liberal orthodoxy. As a result, the New Right network led an insurgency to remedy this situation. Its financial operation changed the way outside groups could raise money. RAVCO showed its political clout in conservative politics despite lingering questions over its profit margins. The New Right met with limited success in challenging the status quo of the Republican establishment in 1976 and the AIP resented New Right interference at its convention. Moderate Republicans rebuffed its challenge. This was only a temporary setback. By 1978, the New Right was able to get some of its candidates elected to higher office at the expense of moderate incumbents. Its social and legislative policies mirrored that of the religious right and, to a certain extent, the neoconservatives. The cooperation between the New Right and Moral Majority swelled the ranks of the conservative movement. Social and cultural issues would come to play an increasingly larger role in public debate due to this alliance. The New Right gained more political clout and prestige in the coming years as it honed its skills and message. As the stature of the New Right grew, it would face new problems in its relationship with Ronald Reagan and the party elites. This divide with Reagan showed the tensions between ideological purity versus the necessity of governing.
CHAPTER TWO: THE PANAMA CANAL TRUTH SQUAD: A MICRO COSM OF THE NEW RIGHT'S ABILITY TO INDEPENDENTLY PROMOTE ITS CONSERVATIVE AGENDA

The New Right gained national attention during debate over ratification of the Panama Canal treaties in 1977-1978 by denouncing President Carter for “giving away” a strategic piece of U.S. property. Both supporters and critics of the treaties used media and print ads either to denounce or support ratification. Opposition in the U.S. Senate to the treaties included a series of amendments that would have changed the context and meaning of what the United States and Panama had signed in September 1977. These unsuccessful legislative measures failed in changing the treaties or blocking ratification. For its part, the New Right financed the Panama Canal “truth squad” that traveled the country seeking to increase public pressure against ceding the canal back to Panama. The truth squad relied on direct mail, television, and radio in order to finance its operations and broadcast its anti-treaty message. The Carter administration countered with its own similar efforts in favor of ratification in what became a major foreign policy debate. The legacy of the truth squad highlighted two important results in the history of the New Right. First, the truth squad allowed the New Right to hone its fundraising skills and political message outside the control of the Republican Party. It targeted senators who had voted in favor of ratification in 1978 and 1980. Although not successful in removing many pro-treaty senators from office, the New Right had three victories in 1978 with the election of Bill Armstrong, Roger Jepsen, and Gordon Humphrey to the Senate. Its confrontational style of politics enabled the New Right to get its candidates
elected to higher office without the assistance of the Republican Party. Second, the truth squad’s message resonated with many Americans who feared national decline and a retreat of U.S. power in the world. Anti-treaty advocates argued that American prestige was at stake. They saw the loss of U.S. influence in Central America and the Caribbean as a potential gain for Soviet communism. These factors emphasized the ideological divide between the Carter administration and those groups that saw the canal as vital to the overall U.S. strategic position. The period from 1978-80 was the high point of New Right influence and notoriety as it would become one of the movements instrumental in Ronald Reagan’s 1980 presidential election.

The History of the Panama Canal and the United States

The United States and Panama had a long divisive history over the canal. When Panama revolted against Colombia in 1903, the Theodore Roosevelt administration sent U.S. warships to protect the Panamanian uprising. The United States acquired the right to build a canal from Panama after supporting its independence from Colombia. Panama was not involved in negotiating or signing the ensuing treaty. Instead, Philippe Bunau-Varilla, member of the French company that initially attempted to build a canal across the isthmus, negotiated terms with the U.S. government. The subsequent treaty and issues of sovereignty over the future canal angered many Panamanians who viewed America as an imperial power, not a benevolent neighbor. The 1903 treaty granted the United States sovereignty over the land for the canal and the surrounding Canal Zone as its own territory. The United States, however, would pay Panama an annual annuity for the use of the canal. The language concerning sovereignty in the Canal Zone would serve as a
constant source of tension between both countries. With the land acquired through the treaty, the United States began building the Panama Canal during Roosevelt's administration in 1905 and completed the project in 1914. Contemporaries praised this accomplishment as evidence of growing American power and ingenuity.\(^{108}\)

Tensions continued between the United States and Panama over the next several decades. On January 9, 1964, a major conflagration broke out between Panamanian students and a crowd of North Americans who lived in the Canal Zone. The cause of the confrontation involved flying the American flag and the Panamanian flag at a local high school. The Americans wanted only the U.S. flag flown, but Panamanian students wanted their flag included as well. This expression of Panamanian nationalism reflected the tense history of the country. Fighting erupted and the ensuing violence quickly spread throughout Panama City. The Lyndon Johnson administration sent in troops to quell the uprising at a cost of scores wounded and killed on both sides. By the 1970s, both the United States and Panama agreed to chart a new course in relations. In 1974, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Panamanian Foreign Minister Juan Tack agreed to terms for a new treaty to abrogate the 1903 version and eventually return the canal back to Panama. This agreement laid the foundation for the treaties signed between both countries in 1977.\(^{109}\)

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The Panama Canal became a national political issue during the 1976 presidential campaign. The ongoing debates between the United States and Panama and within Congress over the finer points of the agreement became a political issue. Conservatives in Congress denounced any attempts to relinquish “sovereignty and control of the Panama Canal.” Reagan used the Panama Canal to attack Gerald Ford because his administration had negotiated the eventual return of the canal. Former president of Panama, Arnulfo Arias, who had been removed from power in a coup by General Omar Torrijos in 1968, and others advised Reagan against supporting the treaties. Reagan challenged Ford over the Panama Canal and presented himself as the candidate who would protect the canal against Torrijos, a “petty dictator.” Historian Walter LaFeber noted, however, Reagan “benefited politically, but his gains were limited.” After Reagan revitalized his campaign, Ford, then on the defensive, changed his position. He explained, “The United States will never give up its defense right to the Panama Canal and will never give up its operational rights as far as Panama is concerned.” Jimmy Carter, running as the Democratic nominee, also did not support the Kissinger-Tack agreement during the campaign. Carter, however, shifted his stance on the canal treaties after he won the election and assumed the presidency.110

Jimmy Carter spent an enormous amount of political capital during his first year in office to get the new treaties signed and passed by the Senate. On September 7, 1977, President Carter and Torrijos of Panama signed two historic treaties concerning the Panama Canal. The first transferred ownership of the canal back to Panama on December

31, 1999. The second guaranteed neutrality of the canal after the United States ceded ownership. Carter believed ratification of the treaties would enhance U.S. stature in Latin America. These treaties, as stipulated by the U.S. Constitution, required consent from the U.S. Senate. Carter's proposal, however, set off a firestorm among many conservatives, both in and out of Congress, who believed that the treaties would diminish American prestige and leave the country strategically vulnerable. The ensuing public debate over ratification showed how potent the canal had become in American politics.111

After the signing of the treaties in 1977, opponents believed that the canal still served a valuable strategic function to the United States. Proponents of the treaties disagreed. They noted that modern U.S. warships and oil tankers could no longer transverse the canal due to their size and that the United States maintained naval fleets throughout the world that diminished the canal's importance.112 On a deeper level, the canal treaties created a vitriolic domestic debate about the role of the United States in the world after its loss in Vietnam. Conservatives, such as Reagan, argued that U.S. power had not diminished and that "giving away" the canal would be a sign of American weakness that could embolden Soviet aggression in the world. Other critics believed the treaties emasculated the United States and its virility as a world power. In contrast, President Carter understood that the United States did not have the capacity to function as it had in the early years of the Cold War. He realized the limits of American power and


the threat posed to the United States by overextension of its global commitments. Thus, according to Carter, relinquishing control of the canal would enhance U.S. security in the region and heal the "diplomatic cancer" that hurt relations between Panama and the United States.113

The New Right and other anti-treaty groups responded quickly to the treaties. The New Right reacted by creating the truth squad. The origins of the Panama Canal truth squad, the four cities it chose to visit in January 1978, how the media responded to it, and the effectiveness of this group serves as a case study of how the New Right operated. The truth squad formed in January 1978 and went on a week-long tour to rally public support against ratification. The cities included Miami, Denver, St. Louis and Portland, Oregon. The truth squad included conservative members of Congress, including Sen. Jesse Helms, Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-SC), Rep. Robert Dornan (R-CA), Sen. Paul Laxalt, Rep. Mickey Edwards (R-OK), Rep. Philip Crane, and Rep. Larry McDonald, the only Democrat. It also included New Right fundraisers Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, and Terry Dolan. Reagan joined the truth squad for its Denver stop. The truth squad serves as a microcosm of how the New Right changed the modern conservative movement. First, the Panama Canal treaties gave the New Right a foreign policy issue that allowed it to raise money outside of the Republican Party. Second, the canal debates created an opportunity for the New Right to organize themselves nationally to challenge

the Carter administration. Third, the canal issue offered a national forum for anti-treaty proponents to argue their case and raised the stature of the New Right. The truth squad showed the political strength of the New Right as an independent conservative organization that advocated for its own causes.

The role of Ronald Reagan in the canal debate is vital to understanding the New Right's message concerning the treaties. Reagan’s rhetoric against relinquishing control of the canal mirrored the New Right’s anti-treaty message in 1978. Before and during the canal debates, Reagan became one of the most prominent opponents of treaty ratification. He recorded national radio addresses about foreign and domestic policy issues. His message concerning the canal centered on a nationalistic and bipolar understanding of the Cold War. He maintained that the United States should not give an inch to the Soviet Union. Reagan believed that relinquishing control of the canal served as another example of American weakness that the Soviet Union would exploit. He continually referred to Torrijos as a "tinhorn dictator," a potential ally of the Soviet Union, and a "drug dealer" who was incapable of controlling the canal. The national media also gave Reagan airtime to present his message to the American public. After President Carter addressed the nation on February 1, 1978, concerning ratification, CBS let Reagan respond in a thirty-minute rebuttal seven days later. According to Reagan, returning control of the canal to Panama would jeopardize the security of the United States. Reagan warned that if the United States relinquished control of the canal "the ultimate price we pay may one

day be our own freedom.” The Panama Canal debates put Reagan back into the national spotlight and positioned him for his successful 1980 presidential run.

Not all conservatives supported Reagan’s position. Former President Gerald Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, William Buckley, and Senate minority leader Howard Baker (R-TN) were just a few of the prominent Republicans who advocated ratification. Despite Ford’s political posturing during the 1976 Republican primaries, he and other Republicans supported the treaties and campaigned on their behalf. Conversely, conservative groups and New Right organizations aggressively raised money through direct mail and other contributions in order to finance radio and television ads denouncing the treaties. These groups wanted to influence senators to vote against ratification. In 1978, treaty opponents could not block ratification of both treaties, which passed the Senate in March and April, by a vote of 67 to 23 for each treaty. This victory hurt three senators in the 1978 midterm elections when they lost their seats because of their votes in favor of ratification.

The Formation of the Truth Squad

The exact time and location of the formation of the truth squad varied according to the recollections of some prominent New Right activists. In planning the truth squad, Bill Rhatican, who worked for Richard Viguerie and handled the media relations for the truth squad, recalled, “I can't give you a specific date, but it was probably within a week or maybe days after Carter announced his intention to turn the canal over to Torrijos...It

115 The Panama Canal: Round One,” Newsweek 2/20/78, 30, [no author given].

is my recollection that the meeting occurred in Richard's office at Falls Church to take on
the president on the issue of the treaty.” Richard Viguerie said that this meeting occurred
at his home before the signing of the treaties. One news report quoted Phil Crane as the
individual responsible for creating the group. The answer probably lies in all three
explanations since New Right activists routinely met and strategized with each other.
Regardless of where the meeting took place, the New Right saw the canal issue as
something that could allow it to provide the leadership it thought the Republican Party
lacked. It also needed to generate media attention to highlight its anti-treaty efforts. As a
result, the New Right relied on its own financing and media strategy without assistance
from the Republican Party and denounced with impunity those in the party who
supported the treaties.117

The earliest public statement concerning the truth squad appeared in the Detroit
Free Press on September 10, 1977. The paper reported that "a conservative coalition led
by Nevada Sen. Paul Laxalt and including congressional 'truth squads' announced Friday
an all-out offensive against the new Panama Canal treaties." Laxalt wanted to "send out
truth squads of congressmen and senators to inform the public." The name "truth squad”
implied how this group wanted to address the perceived lies told by the administration
concerning the treaties. Reagan noted in a radio broadcast that "nothing angered me more
than the falsehood continuously perpetuated by treaty proponents that we sinned against
Panama" by owning the canal. The truth squad's message would counter arguments made

117 Bill Rthatican, in discussion with the author, 1/13/2007; Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the
author, 10/13/11; “For a Broader Constituency,” Washington Post, 1/29/78, A14 [no author given].
by supporters of the treaties who believe that ratification would be good for both countries.\textsuperscript{118}

In addition, the New Right began gathering funds for anti-canal efforts and the truth squad. Journalist David Broder noted that the New Right had "outstripped the rest of the political world in the exploitation of computerized direct mail" by capitalizing on the Panama Canal.\textsuperscript{119} Direct mail served as the main vehicle to raise this revenue. RAVCO, Viguere's company, generated millions of direct mail pieces from its computer lists and sent them out to individuals across the country. These lists contained the names and addresses of over 30 million Americans who had given to conservative causes. Such an operation had the potential to raise vast sums of money in a short amount of time.\textsuperscript{120}

In order to pay for the truth squad, Viguere's company sent out two direct mailers. The first sought to raise money from Americans who disagreed with the President's proposal to relinquish control of the canal. The second was "a specific direct mail to what he [Viguere] called 'high dollar contributors' telling them we were specifically going to do the truth squad ... that would have been late August, early September when they needed to raise several hundred thousand dollars quickly in order to finance the truth squad." This mailer went out to 5000 people. Viguere explained that his first mailing generated around $120,000. He noted that from the summer of 1977

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\textsuperscript{119} Broder, \textit{Changing of the Guard}, 476.

\textsuperscript{120} "The New Right's Strong Ambition is Fueled by Huge Mail Campaign," \textit{New York Times} 12/4/77, 73.
\end{flushright}
until early 1978, "the New Right sent between 7 and 9 million cards and letters to Americans" prompting them to send money or contact their senator to vote against ratification. By the end of the debate, these New Right organizations spent nearly $3 million dollars to defeat ratification through funding the truth squad, media ads, and TV commercials. Another type of mailing came from anti-treaty members of Congress to their constituents. One example from George Hansen (R-ID) relied on fear to exploit the issue. Calling the treaties an “outrageous giveaway scheme” created the impression that ratification would be disastrous for the United States. Hansen attached two postcards for individuals to write their respective senators against voting for ratification. These mailings had the potential to put tremendous pressure on undecided senators concerning their vote.

A second source of funding came in October 1977 when the American Conservative Union paid for a thirty-minute television program. The producers wanted to raise money for anti-treaty efforts and gather public support against ratification in certain areas of the country. Twenty-nine stations across Texas, Louisiana, and Florida aired the ACU's program from October 29 to November 13. Crane, joined by Sens. Helms, Thurmond, Garn, and Laxalt, moderated the program. Crane, echoing Reagan’s rhetoric, argued that the United States owned the canal and that U.S. national security interests would be in danger if Panama took ownership of the canal. As a way to raise money,

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121 Bill Rhatican, in discussion with the author, 1/13/2007; Viguerie, The New Right. 68-69; Kalman, Right Star Rising, 268; Kalman noted that the American Conservative Union spent half a million dollars against ratification efforts; Viguerie, telephone interview 10/13/11.

122 Letter from Hansen to constituents, folder Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan Papers, Box 50, Jimmy Carter Library.
Crane explained to the audience "how to write their senators and to urge that they call a toll-free number to 'pledge a contribution of $10 or more so we can continue our TV campaign against the canal giveaway.'" ABC News reported on the ACU's efforts to raise money from this TV program and noted that the show generated $250,000 dollars, part of which would help pay for the truth squad. Richard Viguerie wrote that the show "reached an estimated 10 million viewers, and raised $1 million dollars." Regardless of the final tally, this program achieved its objective of raising money and awareness of the truth squad.123

The importance of these New Right fundraising efforts for the truth squad was that they accomplished this financial task without the assistance of the Republican National Committee. In fact, Bill Brock, chairman of the Republican National Committee, angered Ronald Reagan and other truth squad supporters by not contributing $50,000 that they had requested to help fund the group. Reagan told the RNC in response not to include him in fundraising “until this issue has been resolved.” Without the help of the RNC, Viguerie raised in about five days the additional money for the truth squad, which included paying for the plane, hotels, food and other costs. According to Viguerie, this action highlighted the "New Right's ability to engage in and finance important political activity outside a major political party." For his part, Bill Brock, who personally opposed the treaties, had to balance the fact that many moderate Republicans supported

the treaties. Nevertheless, Sen. Laxalt wanted to put Brock's "feet to the fire" and for the RNC to help do something about the treaties. With their funding secured, the truth squad prepared for its journey across the nation at the beginning of 1978.124

The upcoming senate debates in 1978 created the impetus for both the Carter administration and the New Right to prepare for a political fight. The battle for and against ratification of the treaties was fought over the nation’s airwaves and in print. Both sides marshaled resources for radio, television, and print ads to present their views. The local and national media outlets became important to reach certain demographics or persuade constituents to contact their senator over his or her vote. For its part, the Carter administration understood before the treaties had been signed that it had to use the media to get out their message. In a confidential memo, Hodding Carter, Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, explained that in order to increase support for the treaties, the administration “must move quickly with education of the public.” This effort entailed speaking engagements and using the media to either get out a positive message or to counteract negative stories. It was important in the administration’s planning to make officials available for television news shows and radio spots in order to present its talking points. The White House media campaign strategy mirrored the truth squad anti-treaty efforts.125


125 Memo to Joseph Aragon from Carter, 6/17/77, folder Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan Papers, Box 36, Jimmy Carter Library.
Treaty proponents also raised money and awareness through direct mailings, as well as high-profile groups and events. Similar to RAVCO efforts, treaty supporters used a group called New Directions that mailed one million letters. One high profile pro-treaty group was the Citizen's Committee for the Panama Canal Treaties headed by W. Averell Harriman, the former governor of New York. The 35-member committee included former President Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and to South Vietnam. This group raised $1,000,000 to institute a media campaign designed to bolster support for the treaties. It was also no coincidence that during the same time that the truth squad traveled the country, the administration sent Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on a trip to Charleston, West Virginia, Louisville, Kentucky, and New Orleans, Louisiana to combat the anti-treaty message. This was the beginning of a White House effort to send out other officials, including Secretary of Defense Harold Brown and others, who met with constituents and tried to gain their support for ratification. Both cabinet officials used these stops to express the importance of these treaties to the United States. The administration’s efforts culminated in “fireside” chat with the president addressing the American people.126

The administration had a difficult task in persuading the public to support ratification. American public opinion for or against the treaties depended on the source.

During the summer of 1977, some polls showed that seventy-eight percent of Americans opposed the treaties. Public opinion, however, began to shift by the end of 1977. *Congressional Quarterly* highlighted a January poll that showed "a majority of Americans now would support the treaties if amended to assure that the United States could defend the canal if it were threatened." However, it would have been disastrous to amend the treaties because it would have changed the meaning of the agreement signed by both countries. Despite the views of the American public, the Carter White House needed momentum behind its position in order to influence the outcome of the Senate vote.127

The truth squad would use its national tour to sustain the anti-treaty message in the public arena. To challenge the administration, Laxalt told the press: "President Carter says he is going to take the canal issue to the people. So are we." The truth squad officially announced its upcoming tour on January 9, 1978 at a press conference. The speakers included former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Thomas Moorer, McDonald, and Laxalt. McDonald told reporters that the canal treaties represented another example of "American retreat from greatness in recent decades" and that the truth squad aimed to "give substance to that concern." The anti-treaty forces needed to get the upper hand in the debate. On January 16, Howard Phillips lamented, "Right now, I think

127 David M. Maxfield, "Panama Canal," *Congressional Quarterly* 1/ 21/78, 136-137; This number came from a national poll conducted by the Opinion Research Corporation (ORC) in May 1977. Respondents were asked, "Do you favor the United States continuing its ownership and control of the Panama Canal, or do you favor turning ownership and control of the Panama Canal over to the Republic of Panama?" Bernard Roshco, "The Polls: Polling on Panama-Si; Don't Know; Hell, No!," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Winter, 1978), 554-556; Maxfield, "Panama Canal," 1/21/78, 135.
we are losing, but this will turn around if senators see they'll be opposed and defeated if the vote for the treaties." Thus the truth squad set out a week later aboard a chartered DC-9 airplane for its cross-country trip.\textsuperscript{128}

The truth squad also sought to gain as much exposure as possible. Rhatican explained that "the first concept behind the trip was to run as if it were a presidential campaign trip with a traveling press corps, media events, rallies ... that would give the traveling press, and the local press, the photo opportunities that would be equivalent to a presidential press trip." The second concept "was once we got on the ground, in addition to the media, the rallies, and the photo opportunities, to visit with the media in a more thoughtful way, like visiting the editorial board at the \textit{Miami Herald} for example." The purpose of such actions was to build "large media events on the day of our arrival and the following day, but also to leave some residue behind in terms of the editorial boards, the Sunday talking heads, so that long after we left the city there would be reverberations." The result of the media campaign would keep the issue in the public spotlight.\textsuperscript{129}

The truth squad's primary message placed the Panama Canal in both a national security and a nationalistic context. This message was nothing new. Treaty opponents since 1976 believed that the Panama Canal belonged to the United States. The canal and the surrounding zone constituted U.S. property. According to a press release from Helms, "The Panama Canal is ours. We own it, we have sovereignty over it, we developed it, and

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\item Bill Rhatican, in discussion with the author, 1/13/2007.
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we have operated it as a model for the world."\textsuperscript{130} Reagan attacked the pro-treaty argument as "designed to soften us up by creating a guilt complex over the canal as if it symbolized American imperialism." Instead, Americans should feel honored that they built the canal and for "our complete lack of selfishness in all the years of its operation." Such rhetoric presented a distortion of the U.S. role in gaining access to build the canal. Helms and Reagan offered a simplistic and one-sided rationale for why America should keep the canal. They did not address the grievances associated with the 1903 treaty between the United States and Panama. They never explained that the U.S. government and Bunau-Varilla signed the treaty without any Panamanian representatives present. Reagan only mentioned that the United States had paid for the land and that workers faced the threat of yellow fever to build this symbol of American ingenuity. According to these anti-treaty advocates, the loss of the canal would damage the country's standing in the world by showing that American power had diminished. The canal was, and always should be, part of the United States.\textsuperscript{131}

The national security argument stipulated that the canal remained vital to the United States. Thus, losing control of the canal aroused "a great fear on the part of the conservatives that Torrijos might be able to shut off the canal to American military or commercial use." Reagan's address to a radio audience explained that "the real threat to us has to do with the Marxist leanings of the present govt. of Panama & the possibility of


\textsuperscript{131} Skinner, Reagan, In His Own Hand, 198-199; Kalman, Right Star Rising, 265-266.
an arrangement similar to what [Fidel] Castro has with Russia.” Treaty opponents continually wove the fear of communist expansion in Latin America and the potential economic losses into their public rhetoric. The anti-ratification movement used these two explanations throughout the canal debates to make their case. Some evidence existed to confirm these fears. For example, Torrijos had warned the United States that his military would attack the canal in the event the Senate did not vote in favor of ratification. Whether or not he would have carried out such a provocative action remains uncertain. Torrijos’s implied threat to destroy the canal’s locks placed the Carter administration and its pro-treaty allies in a difficult position. The right attacked the treaties regardless of whatever policy the White House supported. As one historian aptly noted, “If Carter said that sabotage would occur absent ratification of the treaties, conservatives would condemn the administration for employing ‘blackmail’ to win their passage.” The right countered any claims made by Carter concerning the security and economic viability of the canal by questioning White House assurances. These doubts forced pro-treaty supporters to continually defend positions for which there was no guarantee about the future Soviet threat or the potential loss of the canal in a hostile takeover.132

The truth squad began its trip on January 16, 1978. It planned to travel to seven cities including Atlanta, Nashville, Cincinnati, Miami, St. Louis, Denver, and Portland, Oregon. Paul Weyrich was instrumental in the choices of the cities that the truth squad visited. According to Rhatican, “the rationale for going to the spots that we went to was

132  Skinner, Reagan’s Path to Victory, 208; Rhatican in discussion with the author; Michael Conniff, Panama and the United States, 136; Kalman, Right Star Rising, 267.
Weyrich's assessment of who susceptible in the next election. What made a senator susceptible hinged on four questions. First, was the senator up for reelection in 1978? Second, was either senator in the state still undecided on ratification? Third, was "there a major media market within the state that would allow us [the truth squad] to 'radiate' our message of opposition beyond the state's borders (neighboring states with senators possibly on the fence) or radiate the message nationally?" Last, did the truth squad "have some supporters within the state who could do the groundwork in advance of our arrival?" Furthermore, Rhatican explained, "we had both local [state-wide] considerations (providing pressure on the local senator by demonstrating opposition to the proposed treaty within his own constituency) and national in that we wanted to demonstrate that the conservative movement had 'come of age' and knew how to play on the national stage."\(^{133}\) The choice of Atlanta as the first stop "was more of a go in Jimmy Carter's face than it was to try and get the two Georgia senators to vote our way. It was essentially to tell Carter that we could go any place."\(^{134}\) The death of Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), who had served as vice-president and ran for president in 1968, on January 13, however, delayed the start of the truth squad's trip. The national mourning that followed Humphrey’s passing kept the truth squad from going to Atlanta and Nashville.\(^{135}\)

Therefore, Miami served as the first stop for the truth squad on January 16, 1978. About 250 people attended, many of them from various conservative organizations. Paul

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\(^{133}\) Bill Rhatican, email message to author, 2/26/2007.

\(^{134}\) Bill Rhatican, in discussion with the author, 1/13/2007.

\(^{135}\) "Squaring off on the Canal," *Time*, 1/30/78, [no author given].
Laxalt noted, "To some extent, we're preaching to the choir, but hopefully every one of them will be a messenger of what we're saying." The state's two Democratic senators, Lawton Chiles and Richard Stone, had not committed to either side in the treaty debate and Laxalt told the crowd to make sure they voted against ratification. The *Washington Post* speculated that despite the importance of the two senators' votes, "people here seemed less than impressed by the administration's arguments than by the efforts of the conservative, antitreaty forces who blanketed the state with TV documentaries, newspaper ads and massive direct mail campaigns." In this same article, one Floridian noted, "like most folks around here, I’ve been a down-the-line Democrat all my life. But I'm with Ronald Reagan on this one. We built the canal. We put billions in it. Why should we give it away just because some dictator says he'll make trouble for us if we don’t?" This response showed that the rhetorical anti-treaty message spread by the truth squad and its supporters influenced the thinking of some Americans.136

The next day, the truth squad headed for Cincinnati, Ohio, but their aircraft could not land due to a snowstorm that blanketed the region. The Cincinnati region was crucial because its TV market included Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia. The group was diverted to St. Louis a day early. The people involved with the truth squad had to scramble to find hotel rooms for the members of Congress and the press corps traveling on the plane. After arriving in St. Louis, Rhatican asked members to do any radio and TV

interviews scheduled for that day. The truth squad also held an event in St. Louis. Rep. McDonald, no stranger to outlandish claims as a member of the John Birch Society, told the crowd of 360 people that "this treaty is backed by the unholy alliance of Big Government, Big Business, and Big Labor." It is unclear exactly what McDonald meant by such a statement, but the message contained conspiratorial undertones. Such inflammatory rhetoric deviated from the other truth squad arguments surrounding national security and loss of national prestige.137

The following day, January 19, the truth squad made its biggest stop in Colorado. This stop included the only appearance of Ronald Reagan during the trip. Earlier in the week, Reagan had a televised debate with William F. Buckley, Jr., who supported the treaties. Buckley believed that the Panamanian government had a strong economic interest in keeping the canal open and secure. Buckley viewed cooperation with Panama as "desirable" and in the national interest of the United States. Reagan disagreed. This debate again highlighted the divisions among conservatives concerning ratification. Reagan, according to Ratican, "lent his credibility at the stop in Colorado" and "from a symbolic standpoint he was a major element to it because he had become an icon for the conservatives in the Republican Party."138 Upon arriving in Denver, the truth squad went to a morning rally at Heritage High School in Littleton to address a crowd of 750 supporters. Later that evening, members of the truth squad spoke to a crowd of 300

137 William Claibome, "Anti-Canal-Pact Blitz" Washington Post 1/19/78, A2; Ratican in discussion with the author; "Squaring Off on the Canal," Time 1/30/78, [no author given].

138 "The Canal Debate," Excerpts printed in Washington Post, 1/24/78; Ratican in discussion with the author.
people at the Denver Hilton. Reagan explained to the audience, "We built a canal. We have run the canal for 64 years at no profit. We have never gotten back our original investment." Reagan denounced the treaties as "hogwash." Again, the truth squad targeted a vulnerable senator. In Denver, the truth squad put pressure on Floyd Haskell, a Republican running for reelection. Paul Weyrich told reporters at the stop, "We feel a definitive show of constituent sentiment might help him [Haskell] clarify his own thinking."139

The Denver stop also occurred the day after President Carter's State of the Union address to Congress. Carter briefly touched on the canal during his speech and noted that ratification would "discourage the spread of hostile ideologies in this hemisphere and directly contribute to the economic well being and security of the United States." This statement contradicted the truth squad's arguments. Laxalt told reporters in Denver the treaties would not benefit American interests in the region. McDonald, the truth squad's lone Democrat, lamented that he was "shocked and ashamed" that his party would have supported the treaties.140

The local Denver press mistakenly reported that Ronald Reagan led the truth squad despite the fact that he made only one appearance with them. This misrepresentation showed the stature that Reagan possessed. For example, the Rocky


Mountain News began its story by noting that "Former California Gov. Ronald Reagan brought a traveling truth squad to Denver Thursday to drum up opposition to the pending Panama Canal treaties." Such reporting revealed the powerful link between Reagan and the truth squad in the eyes of the public and the media. When asked if Reagan overshadowed the truth squad on this stop, Rhatican responded, "probably, but that always happens in politics where you get a charismatic individual and he kinda co-opts the issue and makes it his and it was pretty clear to us that we were supporting characters in a national melodrama, but that didn't seem to bother anyone on the truth squad." The truth squad headed for their final official stop the next day in Portland, Oregon on Friday, January 20. After the event in Oregon, the truth squad ended its campaign in Miami again before the members of Congress went back to Washington to begin debate on ratification of the treaties. The Senate debates would consume the month of February before the final vote.141

The limited role of Reagan in the truth squad creates the impression of a division between him and the New Right. Some scholars and journalists argue that Reagan had softened his stance against the treaties by 1978. Adam Clymer described the event that led to Reagan’s “shift in tone” in 1977. He met to discuss the treaties with Sol Linowitz and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, who were the chief diplomats for the United States concerning the treaties with Panama. Reagan remarked to his assistant afterwards, “What if they are right” concerning the potential for violence in Panama if the Senate failed to

ratify the treaties. William Buckley noted, “I think, ironically, that Reagan would not have been nominated if he had favored the Panama Canal Treaty, and that he wouldn’t have been elected if it hadn’t passed.” Historian Laura Kalman said Reagan made a political calculation for his future. Kalman explains “his pollster saw that opposition to the treaties did not appeal to the moderates Reagan needed to win in 1980.” Reagan sought to broaden his appeal among various groups outside the Republican base. In January 1978, at the height of the canal debates, Reagan told an NAACP luncheon that Republicans were “not a band of ideologues trying to take over the majority…there is a new majority out there.” These assessments, however, do not correspond to the fact that Reagan was very outspoken against the treaties at the Denver stop and his public rhetoric did not change. What remains unclear is why Reagan did not go on the entire trip with the truth squad. Scheduling conflicts or other commitments could have kept Reagan unable to devote an entire week to the truth squad. What is known about a split between the New Right and Reagan is that by the summer of 1978, Crane declared his intention to run for president and Viguerie helped finance his campaign. When Reagan announced his candidacy for president in 1979, Viguerie and Weyrich did not support him and only went over to the Reagan camp in 1980. The Panama Canal treaties did not factor into why the New Right did not endorse Reagan’s candidacy initially in 1979. For Viguerie’s part, his financial relationship with Crane is a better explanation of why he did not sanction Reagan’s campaign.142

Analysis of the Truth Squad's Impact

The efforts of the truth squad and other anti-treaty activists did not prevent the United States Senate from ratifying both treaties in March and April 1978. The New Right’s nearly $3 million campaign could not convince thirty-four senators to block ratification. Instead, opponents of both treaties mustered only thirty-two votes against them in the Senate. Treaty opponents in the Senate failed to pass amendments to the treaties that would have altered the agreements made between the United States and Panama. For example, anti-treaty senators proposed changes to the wording or the meaning of the treaties as a way to make them unacceptable to Panama. The outcome had not been assured during the first two months of 1978. Public opinion was against the treaties and pro-treaty advocates encountered hostile crowds in some cases. For example, at one stop, audience members heckled Secretary of State Cyrus Vance on the administration’s position. The effectiveness of the truth squad remains difficult to measure in terms of how its message influenced the Senate’s vote. For example, both senators of every state in which the truth squad stopped, including Florida, Missouri, Colorado, and Oregon, voted to ratify the treaties. Even both senators from Ohio and Georgia, states initially targeted by the truth squad but not visited, voted for ratification. When asked to explain why the senators voted as they did, Rhatigan surmised, "It was the
senators themselves voting their individual consciences" that accounted for their decisions.\footnote{Viguerie, \textit{The New Right}, 69-70; Maxfield, “Panama Canal: Senate Kills Pact Revisions but Debate Moves Slowly; Long Sessions Threatened,” \textit{Congressional Quarterly} 3/4/78, 563-564. Many senators offered amendments designed to change the language or meaning of the treaties. For example, \textit{Congressional Quarterly} explained that Orrin Hatch proposed that “the English text and not the Spanish version of the treaties be legally binding in cases where there were differences in meaning,” 564. If any one of these amendments had passed, the Panamanian government could have reneged on its support of the treaties; John H. Averill, “Mobilizing Public: Friends, Foes of Canal Pacts Stump Country,” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, 1/22/78, A1; John M. Goshko, “Panama Pacts Stir Strange Debate: Vance on Tour to Rally Support, Hears Frustrations Expressed,” \textit{Washington Post} 1/14/78, A8; Rhatican, in discussion with the author, 1/13/2007.}

The reason why certain senators voted the way they did remains a source of debate. One author argued that the New Right could not find allies in the traditional Republican establishment in the Senate. The New Right's hyperbolic rhetoric made any agreement between the old and new conservatives impossible. Another scholar noted that the canal issue did not “separate the Old from the New Right,” but “it did drive a wedge between Republicans.” This division between the New Right and the Republican establishment over the canal issue had the potential consequence of shifting the balance of power in the party to the right. One columnist concluded that many senators did not buy the truth squad’s arguments. Allegations of "giving away" the canal and of Panama turning into a communist state led the American public to realize "that such talk verges on the idiom of cranks.” No doubt the New Right and the truth squad put tremendous pressures on senators not to vote for the treaties. Their anti-treaty message galvanized a sector of the American electorate that called or wrote their senator as instructed by the direct mail campaign. Such volumes of mail worried many senators. A congressional staffer noted, "The mail had a significant obfuscating effect that made senators cautious
about making public commitments for the treaties.” Sen. Thomas McIntyre (D-NH) remarked, "There's no doubt in my mind that the mail generated by the Panama Canal treaties had an effect... If it did not sway many votes, it surely encouraged the prolongation if the debate and invited the near destruction of the treaty by reckless amendments."144

The 1978 midterm elections were important for the New Right. It was able to get three of its candidates elected to the U.S. Senate. New Right leaders saw the canal as one of the defining events that would affect the outcome of the midterm elections. For its efforts, the New Right saw the truth squad as an overwhelming success. Rhatican stated, “In ideological terms, the truth squad essentially ignited conservative activists to become more involved than they had before.” Weyrich said the canal was a “means of enlarging our constituency.” Viguerie spoke of success in much broader terms. The canal debates “launched the New Right” onto the national stage. "The New Right," Viguerie explained, "came out of the Panama Canal fight with no casualties, not even a scar." The canal effort showed to the country the potential of the expanding conservative movement. Furthermore, "The New Right did not really lose. Our ‘defeat’ became a victory seven months later when the American people went to the polls" in November 1978. A candidate's voting record on the treaties served as a litmus test of their conservative credentials. New Right fundraising and organization attacked the voting records of

senators during the midterm election. The New Right accomplished some of its goals, but also had setbacks. Viguerie noted that three senators who voted in favor of the canal treaties lost reelection. Sens. Floyd Haskell, Dick Clark (D-IA), and Thomas McIntyre lost to three candidates funded by New Right organizations who made their vote in favor of ratification a campaign issue. The winners, referred to as the “kamikaze” candidates by CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite, included Bill Armstrong, Roger Jepsen, and Gordon Humphrey. Terry Dolan assisted Humphrey’s campaign and Viguerie and Weyrich raised money for Jepsen. The New Right, however, failed to unseat liberal Republican Edward Brooke III in the Massachusetts Republican primary or get its candidate, Jeff Bell, elected to the senate from New Jersey. The New Right was responsible for the success and failures of its candidates using its own resources with no assistance from the Republican Party. These victories served as a stark example of the New Right’s growing influence in conservative politics and its ability to finance its own campaigns.145

Whether the canal vote or other factors led to a candidate’s defeat remains a point of contention. Journalist Adam Clymer argued that conservatives overstated the impact of canal votes on senators up for reelection in 1978. He explained that only McIntyre’s loss to Gordon Humphrey and John East’s defeat of incumbent Robert Morgan (D-NC) in 1980 directly resulted from their vote on ratification for the canal treaties. Senator Helms

used television and radio ads to attack Morgan’s vote two years after the fact. The canal issue, nevertheless, became “a lightning rod as conservatives tried to take over the Republican Party” with primary challengers to incumbent senators. Clymer further described two tactics from the canal debates: attack the incumbent early in the election cycle and use independent spending to support candidates. These two tactics became an integral part of how the New Right operated in political campaigns. Although political races hinge on several factors, debates still continue on whether or not the canal vote was the sole reason a candidate lost reelection. The New Right, however, relied on its expanding donor base and political action committees (PACs) for its successes. The New Right considered its efforts as triumphant in the long term as it became a threat to Republican moderates and also because the Senate had more conservative members than in previous years.¹⁴⁶

The media's portrayal of the truth squad showed a range of both good and unfavorable coverage. Laxalt called the truth squad operation a “political campaign” that selected certain markets in which to present its message for the maximum amount of exposure. The administration did the exact same thing. How the general public reacted in these markets to anti-treaty ads and mailers cannot be certain. The evidence from existing sources reveals how some in the media reacted to the truth squad. *Time* magazine offered harsh analysis of the truth squad. The details of the Miami and St.

Louis stops presented in this article noted that in Miami, "shoddy advance work produced a turnout of 250 people," the majority of whom "were elderly, conservative, already dead set against the canal pact.” In St. Louis, the truth squad provided the slightly larger audience of 360 people "a dose of ripsnorting right-wing rhetoric," Reagan's appearance in Denver appealed to a crowd that needed little convincing.” The *Time* article implied that the truth squad attracted only a small, diehard band of conservative followers at its stops and minimized the impact that this group had on the public at large. When asked about media coverage, Rhatican noted that "there may have been some specific instances where a particular newspaper or magazine didn't treat us especially fairly, but...we got pretty good, pretty accurate coverage where we went." The national coverage of the truth squad in general presented the group and its message in a fair context. The problem of sustaining the media spotlight can be difficult in a climate where both sides of an issue seek the advantage over the other. Contemporary news coverage of the truth squad competed with stories involving pro-treaty efforts and the ongoing debates in the Senate over ratification.\(^{147}\)

Despite the media coverage at the time and the fact that the Senate ratified the treaties, the truth squad made a major impact on the Republican Party. The truth squad served as a model for how adequate funding and media exposure can sustain any political agenda. The truth squad reflected the times in which they acted. The changing American landscape that resulted from the loss in Vietnam and the social upheavals of the 1960s

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and 1970s created an atmosphere where partisan political groups could operate effectively. At its core, the truth squad's ideas reflected a nationalistic approach to how the United States should conduct its foreign policy in not only Latin America, but the world as a whole. These ideas differed from the Carter administration's arguments that placed limitations on America's ability to act on the world stage. While this hyper-nationalism was not new to American politics, the truth squad utilized this rhetoric to make the ratification process very difficult for many senators.

The truth squad challenged the national malaise of the 1970s and reasserted a different vision of America. This image offered Americans an idealized conception of their nation's past. To anti-treaty advocates, the Panama Canal symbolized American power and dominance in a time when some believed that American prestige had waned. Inflation, gas shortages, fear of the Soviet Union, and unemployment during the decade disillusioned the American people. Many Americans were drawn to this popular message of a strong and prosperous United States. To anti-treaty advocates there was more at stake than just the Panama Canal. To Reagan, the United States was the preeminent world power and should act accordingly. Reagan told an audience, “The Panama Canal is just one facet of our foreign policy. And what do we do to ourselves in the world and to our allies? Will they ... see this as the magnanimous gesture of a great and powerful nation? I don't think so.” To relinquish the canal would serve as another example of the United States in decline and embolden the Soviet Union. Ronald Reagan emerged from the Panama Canal debates with his conservative credentials strengthened. Despite its growing distrust of Reagan, the lessons of organization and fundraising that the New
Right learned during the canal debates prepared it for helping his successful presidential campaign. No doubt Reagan's message defined the Republican Party's position on foreign affairs for the 1980 campaign and attracted many Americans upset with the nation's problems in the 1970s.148

The growing New Right movement wanted to provide leadership for the Republican Party which it felt had been lacking for years. Its ability to use direct mail fundraising and the media, and to operate outside the party organization, gave the New Right the flexibility to choose its candidates and causes. Rhatigan recalled that "the Panama Canal issue was the first in a series of issues in which the New Right/conservative activists began to flex their muscles within the Republican Party and essentially demand that their voices be heard." Laxalt was more direct. He exclaimed, "Conservatives will control the party as a result of the Panama Canal." In the short term, the truth squad redirected public attention to the treaties during its weeklong tour, but the anti-treaty advocacy had started before and lasted well after their brief national trip. One can certainly assert that they raised awareness insofar as the American people understood that a well funded and well organized opposition to President Carter's agenda existed. In the long term, the members who served in the truth squad became a vanguard that helped push the Republican Party to the right and, in many ways, redefined the conservative movement in the United States. Senators who voted in favor of ratification faced the New Right’s wrath. Viguerie warned, “We’re going to look very carefully at the votes

when this is all over and do an awful lot of punishing next election.” Although the New Right did not remove every incumbent from office who vote in favor of ratification, its victories gave it credibility and headlines in the national media. This spotlight showed the Republican establishment that it faced a powerful movement that could potentially assert its dominance in party affairs. The New Right embraced the opportunity to change the party to fit its ideological temperament.149

The actions of the Panama Canal truth squad showed that domestic politics has the potential to influence the direction of the nation's foreign policy. Partisan political groups from any point on the political spectrum can pressure Congress or the executive to acknowledge, or at times submit to, its demands. Such a political reality indicates that U.S. leaders must consider the mood of the country when making difficult foreign policy choices. The truth squad understood that Americans responded favorably to its nationalistic message and used it to advance their own political agenda. Through this process, conservatives gained a more prominent role in the Republican Party, a fine-tuned money making operation, and a powerful and appealing conservative candidate who could win a national election in 1980.


Ronald Reagan won the 1980 presidential election in a three-way race against Democratic incumbent Jimmy Carter and independent John Anderson. Many people believed Reagan’s career was over after he lost the nomination to Gerald Ford in 1976. Reagan defied the odds. The dream of a conservative winning the nation’s highest office had vindicated those who remembered the stinging defeat of Barry Goldwater in 1964. The battle for the White House, and the New Right’s pressure to create a true, conservative revolution, strained relations with Reagan. Although New Right leaders did not initially endorse Reagan, once they did, they wanted the president-elect to support their agenda and choices for federal offices. The distrust between Reagan and the New Right reveals a story of money and political temperament, not ideological differences. Reagan was neither beholden to New Right financing nor inclined to impose a radical social agenda on the American people. Viguerie, in particular, supported two other Republicans running for president before Reagan. These two candidates, Rep. Philip Crane (R-IL) and former Texas governor John Connally, were RAVCO clients. This relationship became even more difficult after the New Right embraced Reagan as its choice for president. During the campaign, Reagan acted pragmatically and in the interest of party unity rather than in furtherance of New Right demands. Divisions over Bill Brock as head of the Republican National Committee (RNC), the role of cultural issues in the Republican Party platform, and the nomination of George H.W. Bush as vice-president on the national ticket enraged the New Right. For their part, New Right
organizations had raised money for Reagan and believed they were instrumental in his success. Despite their discontent, the New Right, with the help of the Moral Majority, succeeded in moving the Republican Party more toward the cultural right. While Reagan largely ignored the New Right over these specific concerns, he could not disregard the cultural shift taking place within his own party. In a larger sense, these intraparty squabbles foreshadowed the even more intense public battles with the New Right that occurred after Reagan took office.\(^{150}\)

The New Right’s tepid acceptance of Reagan also highlighted the divisions among its leaders and presented challenges for the group itself. The Republican primary field showed the ideological scope of the party in the late 1970s. In 1979, Reagan was the front-runner in the national polls with name recognition, money, and organizational structure. When Reagan announced his third run for the White House in New York on November 13, 1979, he was the candidate to beat for the nomination. Other potential Republican candidates who entered the race sought to challenge this assumption of Reagan’s certain victory. These included two members of the House of Representatives from Illinois, Philip Crane and John Anderson. Crane was the more conservative candidate while Anderson, had moved to the left of the party during his tenure in Congress. The list also included Senators Bob Dole of Kansas and Howard Baker of Tennessee, former Texas governor John Connally, and finally George H.W. Bush, who had served in the U.S. House, as ambassador to China, and also CIA director under Gerald Ford. Former President Gerald Ford remained a potential candidate as well. As

the primaries progressed, Bush and Reagan were the two strongest candidates in the Republican field.\footnote{For biographies on each of the Republican candidates mentioned here, see Andrew Busch, \textit{Reagan’s Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right}, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 41-54; Kalman, \textit{Right Star Rising}, 332-333.}

These Republicans also showed the split between the party establishment and conservative activists as each candidate vied for the various constituencies. In 1979, \textit{Human Events} reported the establishment candidate to be John Connally, who had switched to the Republican Party and served as Richard Nixon’s Treasury Secretary. Connally drew his support from the business community. Bush, Baker, and Ford were favored by the party’s elite. Ronald Reagan appealed to the grassroots conservative base. Such a divided field presented problems for the party going into an election year. Memories of the 1976 Republican primaries, and the tensions between the Reagan and Ford factions, weighed on conservatives’ minds. In 1979 and 1980, Republican leaders did not want a repeat of what happened at the Kansas City convention a few years earlier. The division between Reagan and Ford at Kansas City had hurt party unity going into the general election in which the incumbent Ford lost to Jimmy Carter. Conservatives had little enthusiasm for Ford and the president blamed Reagan supporters for their lackluster support in the general election.\footnote{Donald J. Devine, “GOP ‘Establishment’ Battles Grass Roots,” \textit{Human Events} 5/12/79, folder “Committee and Foundation Files, 1968-2001,” Box 21, Folder 18, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. The article shows the results of two polls, a Gallup Poll of “Republican Identifiers” who supported Reagan with 31% of the total and a second US News poll of “Republican Elites” who supported Connally with 32% of total vote. Busch, \textit{Reagan’s Victory} 41-54; Kalman, \textit{Right Star Rising}, 332-33.}
As a faction outside the Republican Party, the New Right wanted conservative leadership. Morton Blackwell, editor of *The New Right Report*, a twice monthly newsletter from Viguerie’s company, criticized the 1976 Reagan campaign for “avoiding intra-party fights with the liberals over party control.” Furthermore, he urged that, “we must not have a repeat in 1980.” Blackwell stated that he addressed these concerns with Reagan at a meeting in July 1978, but he remained unconvinced that the 1980 campaign would be different or that conservatives would not be disappointed by Reagan. “I’m hopeful,” Blackwell wrote to Lyn Nofziger, the most conservative of Reagan’s advisors, “but not particularly optimistic, that Reagan decision makers will seek to further the conservative cause in party struggles elsewhere. I know that one of the most frequently heard reasons for GOP conservative activists’ decisions to go with [Rep. Phil] Crane is the number of times they were left hanging by the Reagan campaign in 1976.” In a statement that encapsulated the New Right’s desire that the campaign maintain a conservative agenda, Blackwell warned Nofziger that he “can expect to hear a lot more voices than just mine speaking out on the subject,” who, “of course will aid your efforts to keep the Reagan campaign on the right track.”

**Viguerie’s Early Support for Crane and Connolly in the Republican Primaries**

The New Right’s hesitancy to embrace Reagan emphasized its quest for ideological purity. New Rightists had other potential conservative candidates in mind.

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153 Letter to Nofziger from Blackwell, 2/13/79, Series II, “Lobbyist Research Files, 1974-1998,” Box 38, Folder 14, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. A copy of this letter was also sent to Paul Weyrich; Viguerie, *The New Right*, 38. I cannot ascertain when the *New Right Report* actually started. The earliest back issues I have found of the *New Right Report* were from April, 1978. It was printed by Viguerie Communication Corporation in Falls Church, Virginia.
Ronald Reagan was not Viguerie’s first choice for president. Viguerie made his feelings about Reagan evident when in 1975, he quipped, “I wish I could take the spine of (George) Wallace – as badly damaged as it is – and transplant it into Ronald Reagan. It would be a big improvement over Reagan’s spine.” Viguerie initially supported Crane, who announced his candidacy on August 2, 1978. Crane had attained some national prominence during the Panama Canal treaties by writing a polemical book supporting American control over the canal. Crane approached Viguerie for help in the summer of 1977 to raise money for his presidential run. Viguerie, who believed that Crane was a great orator, agreed and utilized his database of around 80,000 donors to generate campaign funds.\(^{154}\)

During the early primary season, Crane gained little traction with voters who favored the two front-runners Bush and Reagan. More importantly, Crane and Viguerie severed ties over fundraising. Unbeknownst to Crane, his campaign had amassed a large debt despite having raised substantial sums using Viguerie’s mailing lists. According to the *Boston Globe*, the two men split over Viguerie’s desire to keep “prospecting,” or finding new donors, and Crane’s continued use of “house lists” that contained individuals who had previously given to his campaign. The price of Viguerie’s direct mail services yielded Crane’s campaign less money than it expected. As a result, of the $2.5 million raised, Crane’s campaign “had already paid $1.2 million of that to five different

\(^{154}\) Quote from *Chicago Tribune* reprinted in David Nyhan, “Reagan and the New Right: How Long Will it Last?,” *Boston Globe* 12/25/80, 1; Crane, who had taught history, was elected to Congress in 1969 to take over the seat formerly held by Donald Rumsfeld. Andrew Busch, *Reagan’s Victory*, 43; The book, *Surrender in Panama: The Case Against the Treaty* had an introduction by Reagan as well. Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
companies in which Viguerie was owner, officer, or director.” Furthermore, Crane “owed him $400,000 more, meaning that at that point, after almost a year of campaigning, Crane was paying two-thirds of what he raised to the man who raised it.” To make matters worse, “Viguerie had taken out a $500,000 insurance policy on Crane” because “he wanted to get paid in the event Crane died or was disabled.” In a recent interview, Viguerie responded that his company lost close to $500,000 supporting Crane who had no money of his own to run a national campaign. For his part, Viguerie vigorously defended his fees and method. He argued that his direct mail lists had yielded close to $2 million dollars for someone with little name recognition. Viguerie noted, “Would you write on a piece of paper the name of a man in the world who could do that?” After cutting ties with Crane, Viguerie moved on to help raise money for the Congressional Club, a group started by Senator Jesse Helms.\footnote{David Nyhan, “He still owes $30,000 dollars to a direct-mail wizard,” \textit{Boston Globe} 6/8/80, 1; Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.}

In 1979, Viguerie began consulting and raising money for John Connally’s campaign. Although Viguerie cannot recall who approached who to help the campaign, he noted that mailings done for Connally had been successful and impressed the former governor. Connally announced his run for the presidency on January 24, 1979. After meeting with Connally, Viguerie joked, “he was interested and we got married. Connally and I agree on 75 percent of the issues. And he has the best chance of beating Teddy Kennedy.” This statement reflected Viguerie’s belief that Kennedy would beat Carter in the Democratic primaries to become the nominee for the 1980 general election. Connally
started strong when he entered the race in 1979 but this initial success did not last long. The strategy, according to Eddie Mahe, Jr., Connally’s campaign manager, was to make him the conservative alternative to Reagan. After the election, Mahe recalled, “We felt we had to take on Ronald Reagan because his base and our base were too much the same.” His eventual loss to Reagan in the southern primaries effectively ended his candidacy.156

Viguerie showed his devotion to Connally in the February 1980 issue of Conservative Digest. Despite his differences with him, Viguerie rationalized, “as conservatives, we have been getting about 10 percent of what has come out of the White House during the last 20 years. If, overnight, we could get this up to 75 to 80 percent, I think conservatives should be very happy.” With the problems facing the nation, “conservatives’ agreement with Connally is close to 90 percent.” He argued that Connally would be the candidate to lead the growing conservative movement, and that the New Right was “pragmatic” in its selection of the person who could win a general election. Viguerie also offered three reasons why Reagan was not qualified to be president. First, Reagan was unelectable because he would be portrayed as too extreme. Second, Viguerie believed that the conservatives needed “time” to become better organized as well as to deal with the growing Soviet threat and Connally “has a better

chance to buy us the time we need.” Viguerie offered no evidence to support his claim that Connally could halt Soviet machinations except by restating that the United States lagged behind the USSR in military prowess and that the nation needed a strong leader. Finally, he felt that “Connally is a leader and that Ronald Reagan is not a leader but a spokesman.” His dismissal of Reagan as a “spokesman” was just a way to belittle him at the expense of his own candidate. Viguerie’s hostility towards Reagan seemed inconsistent with the fact that Reagan supported the majority of the New Right’s positions. Reagan had been a key anti-Panama Canal treaty ally in 1977-78. One plausible explanation is that Viguerie placed his own economic interests over ideological considerations and favored Connally because he was a RAVCO client.

The New Right leaders did not unanimously support Connally’s candidacy for president. Weyrich’s support for Connally was tepid at best. He contributed a piece to Conservative Digest concerning Connally’s refusal to accept taxpayer dollars for his campaign. Connally, Weyrich explained, was the only Republican candidate to make such a move and noted, “I admire the fact that he took charge of his campaign and made the key decision which went against the grain of some of the political mythologists.” Although not a rousing endorsement of him, Weyrich’s article nonetheless praised the

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157 Richard Viguerie, “John Connally for President,” Conservative Digest, 2/80, 48; Pastor Tim LaHaye speculated on this fact in a letter to Paul Weyrich condemning Connally as a viable conservative candidate., series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 3, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Kalman, Right Star Rising, 346-347.
governor’s action. Weyrich’s position upset Tim LaHaye, a New Right religious supporter and friend.\textsuperscript{158}

Pastor Tim LaHaye, who later became famous as one of the authors of the \textit{Left Behind} series, excoriated Weyrich for the \textit{Conservative Digest} issue on Connally. LaHaye wrote to Weyrich that “this article is a threat to your credibility.” The pastor lamented, “Why you would back a promoter of the ERA (‘but not the extension’) who is a warmed over LBJ (who helped that turkey get elected) fasinates [sic] me. He is no born again Christian, is unelectable and has little or no conservative following in his home state.” In his response to LaHaye, Weyrich vehemently denied his support for Connally. He claimed that he was unaware that the issue would be primarily devoted to Connally and “was sick to my stomach” over the content. Weyrich assured LaHaye that he had personally rejected Connally’s request to work for his campaign, and rebuffed Viguerie who had “made no less than 25 attempts to get me to join the Connally team” and claimed “our friendship, such as it is, has been strained over the matter.” Asserting that he was not beholden to Viguerie’s political persuasions, Weyrich stated, “I hope we convert Richard someday, as he is a man who badly needs the love and healing power of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Weyrich seemed to imply that Viguerie had forsaken his religious convictions for the sake of political opportunism and his client.

Such internal divisions demonstrate the lack of unity among New Right leaders over who would be the conservative standard bearer in 1980.\textsuperscript{159} Viguerie’s support did not help, and Connally dropped out of the race in March 1980. Despite amassing $9 million dollars, by February, Connally’s poll numbers and campaign were in trouble. He laid off staff and focused on trying to win the upcoming March primaries in the South and in Illinois. Connally’s hope that he could win the South did not materialize. Reagan beat him in the South Carolina primary, which proved to be a key loss. On March 9, he conceded, “I don’t think my continuation as a candidate will be of benefit to the party or the country. I don’t think we are going to overtake Gov. Reagan.” His previous ties to the Democratic Party, as well as the scandals in the Nixon Administration hurt him among Republican voters. One operative remarked that “the stench hangs on” concerning Connally’s past. In the end, Connally received only one delegate despite the fortune spent on the primaries. He also had to contend with the lack of media coverage for Republican campaigns after the start of the Iran hostage crisis began to dominate national attention. As a conciliatory gesture, Reagan asked those Connally staffers who were interested to join his campaign, claiming both candidates were “appealing to the same group of voters.” For the New Right and Richard Viguerie in particular, this was the second candidate to drop out who made little impact on the

\textsuperscript{159} Note from LaHaye to Weyrich 3/2/80 and response from Weyrich to LaHaye, folder “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 3, March 1980, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. In a draft of the article, Weyrich appealed to the reader to “watch for the actions, not the rhetoric” and praised Connally for taking the more difficult path of rejecting taxpayer funds when campaign advisors usually advise a candidate to take the funds, series “Committee and Foundation Files, 1968-2001,” Box 17, Folder 6, Coll. 10138; Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; Kalman, \textit{Right Star Rising}, 347.
presidential race. As a result, Reagan became the New Right’s last resort for president, despite its lukewarm support for him throughout the primaries.160

The distrust Viguerie had towards Reagan is difficult to comprehend because both men shared the same political and ideological outlook. They saw the Soviet Union as a growing threat to the United States, they both disdained a large federal government and high taxes, and each supported the same social issues. However, Reagan’s tenure as governor of California, and his penchant for compromise, worried many in the New Right about his conservative credentials. Reagan and the New Right did not have a close relationship. New Right leaders, as one historian aptly noted, “were still excluded from Reagan’s inner circle.” The New Right was cognizant of this fact and its lack of influence. The most plausible reason for this initial hesitancy on Viguerie’s part to support Reagan was a simple business calculation. With Viguerie raising funds for Crane and Connally, and at the same time making money for himself, it is counterintuitive that he would publicly favor Reagan at the expense of his own clients. Viguerie wanted to present his clients in the best possible way, which included attacking Reagan. If Reagan had been a RAVCO client, which he never was, the relationship may have been much different. Instead, Reagan used Bruce Eberle, Viguerie’s direct mail competitor. Viguerie changed his rhetoric towards Reagan by the fall of 1980. In September 1980, he wrote in Conservative Digest that Reagan had been “an excellent governor” and a

“leading conservative voice since he first appeared on the national scene.” His call for all conservatives to vote for Reagan was a complete shift from earlier in the year when Viguerie said many of the same things about Connally. Viguerie bet on his two clients and lost. He understood that for the sake of the national election, and his future sway in a possible Reagan White House, he would support the former governor.\(^{161}\)

Reagan differed from the New Right in temperament and political calculation. He was more interested in dealing with the economy rather than social issues. While he supported conservative social issues, he was not willing to stake his political capital in promoting the New Right agenda. Reagan was savvy enough to understand that he could push through measures that would have delighted the New Right, but the results would have been a Pyrrhic victory. Reagan once told Alfred Kingon, who served as Ambassador to the European Union, concerning his opposition to abortion “Al, there is a limit to what you can do in politics.” This outlook was unacceptable to New Right leaders who wanted to institute dramatic change in American society. Reagan’s pragmatic political choices were bound to conflict with the extreme ideological positions of the New Right. These areas of Reagan’s personality and political choices raised suspicions among conservative ideologues. The differences between the New Right and Reagan became more pronounced after his election to the White House.\(^{162}\)


Attempts by Congress or the Supreme Court to regulate money for political campaigns have been difficult since the 1970s. The Federal Election Campaign Act of 1974 put in place strict parameters on the amount of money that could be given to a campaign and established a regulatory body, the Federal Election Commission (FEC), which monitored financing in elections. Campaign finance laws changed following the 1976 *Buckley v. Valeo* Supreme Court case. The law was ambiguous in the fact that the decision limited individual contributions to a campaign, but not personal expenditures related to running for office. The law, however, allowed groups like the New Right to offer “independent” aid to candidates. According to the law, “Independent expenditures have to be just that, totally independent of the campaign, or any agents of the campaign. Their efforts have to be made without cooperation or consultation with the candidate’s own campaign.” Political campaigns that received federal dollars were limited in how much they could spend, but independent groups could raise unlimited resources. This “loophole” gave the New Right, and other organizations, an advantage in fundraising. The ability to generate a lot of money raised alarm among groups, such as Common Cause, a Washington D.C. lobbying organization, George H.W. Bush’s campaign, and the Carter/Mondale re-election campaign. Each entity complained that this type of
fundraising was unfair and challenged the legality of independent expenditures in court.\textsuperscript{163}

The Bush campaign tried to have the FEC investigate these independent fundraisers for Reagan. During the Republican primaries, when Reagan lacked resources, New Right groups, such as the Congressional Club and the Fund for a Conservative Majority (FCM), raised money to voice their support for Reagan. The Congressional Club ran ads in the North and South Carolina primaries as well as in Texas, which claimed “There’s a Difference” between the two front-runners. Common Cause also filed a similar lawsuit on July 1, 1980 to prevent the Congressional Club, the FCM, and others from spending “an estimated $30 to $60 million” on advocating for the Reagan campaign. Common Cause argued that they are not independent but rather “by many subtle but substantial ties” working on behalf of Reagan’s candidacy and violated the 1974 Federal election law. Both lawsuits believed that these groups were not separate from the campaign. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) disagreed with the lawsuits claiming they violated free speech. These two lawsuits did not change the courts. Common Cause’s senior vice president Fred Wertheimer understood the potential damage to the entire electoral process with such an influx of money. Wertheimer, however, had limited options to fight this type of spending and noted, “Certainly it is a danger area that needs watching and one in which the court has left us very little control.”

James Baker, Bush’s campaign manager, complained that right-wing attacks had hurt Bush in the primaries. While Baker did not claim that laws had been broken, he nonetheless cautioned, “We think this is something to watch, the rules are so technical.” The Bush campaign had difficulty countering the ads from the Reagan camp.164

The Carter/Mondale campaign also filed suit concerning outside spending for the Reagan campaign. It wanted to block the Reagan campaign from receiving federal election funds. The premise of Carter’s case hinged on whether Buckley v. Valeo allowed independent groups to join together to help a certain candidate. In a setback for the president, the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington D.C. ruled in favor of allowing the Reagan campaign access to $29.4 million in federal election money.165 The Carter/Mondale campaign also tried to persuade the FEC to require major media outlets who sold “airtime to independent campaign committees working for Reagan…to provide free rebuttal time to the Carter committee.” Such actions drew a swift response from the Reagan camp and failed to stop the negative attacks against President Carter.166

The New Right use of “independent expenditures” pointed to larger issues for Democrats. Some Democrats felt that they lagged behind New Right fundraising, a fact which suggested envy on the part of some for the growing political power of the


165 “Court Denies Plea by Carter Unit that Reagan’s Funds Be,” New York Times, 7/25/80, A8 [No author given].

166 Interview with William Casey in David Nyhan, “Reagan Campaign Chairman Confident,” Boston Globe, 9/13/80, 1.
conservative right. One official from the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) lamented, “I’ve been a little concerned over the past years that the liberals haven’t matched the mailing of the right-wing people. Viguerie seems to have a great deal of this to himself. Liberals haven’t built up the counterpart of Viguerie.” Democrats had ample reason to worry. According to the FEC numbers reported during the election cycle, Democratic groups had raised only $6 million dollars as opposed to the $38.5 million raised by the Republicans, and “eighty percent of that came in thousands of checks averaging $25 in response to direct-mail appeals.” This difference reflected the clear advantage that New Right technology and tactics had over the Democratic Party in the 1980 election. New Right fundraising helped Reagan in the general election. NCPAC and Americans for an Effective Presidency amassed over $10 million dollars which they spent independently. This effort to help Reagan was not always appreciated in his own campaign. William Casey, Reagan’s campaign manager, worried these groups would “make Reagan look harsher and more rightwing.” Nevertheless, outside fundraising benefitted the Republican Party more so than Democrats in the 1980 election.\footnote{David Nyhan, “News Analysis; The State of the US Right Wing,” \textit{Boston Globe}, 5/23/80, 1; E.J. Dionne, Jr., “Small Gifts to Allow G.O.P. to Outspend Foes in Fall,” \textit{New York Times}, 7/20/80, A14; Quote from Busch, \textit{Reagan’s Victory}, 102.}

In 1979, Reagan’s campaign strategy centered on maintaining the lead it already had in important primary states, and focused on the theme of leadership. Richard Wirthlin, Reagan’s pollster, believed a positive message that “spoke rather hopefully about an America that can deal with its problems” countered President Carter’s dour outlook on national problems. During the first months of 1980, key battleground states
held their primaries. In early January 1980, Paul Weyrich wrote to Sen. Paul Laxalt, a Reagan campaign advisor, to offer his advice on campaign strategy. He explained how Reagan should do a television program dealing with social and foreign policy issues. The majority of Weyrich’s ideas focused on cultural issues. What Weyrich deemed a “shot in the arm” would have Reagan address a national audience to discuss themes advocated by the New Right. These included support for private and Christian schools, an end to racial quotas and busing, giving funds to anti-communist fighters, and bringing back prayer in public school. He believed that by making this speech, Reagan “would reinfuse enthusiasm into his campaign, and would get it back on track.” Despite his dislike for the governor, Weyrich explained to Laxalt that Reagan’s “future and that of conservatism in America are linked and if he goes down like he is now, we all suffer.” This event never transpired. Reagan’s advisors wanted to keep him on message, broaden his appeal, and keep the momentum going in their candidate’s favor.  

Reagan’s campaign encountered some problems in the early battleground state of Iowa. Reagan still had trouble with the perception that he was too extreme. Such a situation improved the standing of George H.W. Bush to potentially win the nomination. John Sears, Reagan’s first campaign manager, wanted to project a softer image of Reagan and restrict his public events. Richard Wirthlin believed that Reagan’s positive numbers presented “an opportunity to really start running for the general election early.” Sears also reached out to moderate Republicans as a way to dampen the perception that Reagan

\[168\] Moore, *The Campaign for President*, 38-39; Memo to Laxalt from Weyrich 1/31/80, Conservative Movement Files, 1974-2001, series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 1, 10138, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.
was a fringe conservative and ran a low-key national campaign. Sears expected Reagan to win Iowa and he spent little time in the state and lost to Bush on January 20, 1980. Sears’s attempt to control Reagan backfired. Ignoring Sears’s strategy after Iowa, Reagan campaigned in New Hampshire and won the primary after beating Bush by twenty-seven points. Reagan paid for the Nashua, New Hampshire debate that allowed the other candidates running in the primary a chance to make an appearance. Bush, for his part, had a terrible debate performance that diminished his momentum from Iowa. Reagan charmed the audience with his statement “I’m paying for this microphone, Mr. Green [sic].” As a result, William Casey, who had chaired the SEC, replaced Sears as campaign manager when Reagan fired him on February 26 before the results of the primary were known. Reagan had shown himself a formidable candidate and secured the nomination after the Illinois primary in March. As one historian explained, Bush, “developed his message too late, delivered it poorly, lacked sufficient delegates and ran out of cash.” Journalists Roland Evans and Robert Novak argued that what turned Reagan’s campaign around and changed public perception of him was a series of commercials he taped that espoused a positive message, especially the “Good Shepherd” commercial’s pledge not to “leave anyone behind” if he was elected president. John Anderson would leave the Republican Party and run as a third party candidate for the National Unity Party. The nomination now belonged to Reagan. Now that Reagan was the Republican leader, he needed to unify the party for the general election. This task presented Reagan with challenges as he dueled with his conservative base.169

169 Andrew E. Busch, Reagan’s Victory, 65-67; The New Right, according to Kalman, disliked Sears
Bill Brock, the RNC Chairmanship Battle, and Quest for Party Unity

One of the first difficulties Ronald Reagan faced as the presumptive nominee involved keeping Bill Brock as head of the Republican National Committee. Conservatives wanted Brock removed as RNC chairman prior to the election. Senator Laxalt was Brock’s most vocal critic. His animosity towards the RNC chairman dated back to the Panama Canal treaty debates when Brock refused to give $50,000 dollars to the truth squad. The New Right was also hostile to Brock’s leadership position and wanted him replaced. The argument among some advisors, including Lyn Nofziger, was that since Reagan emerged as the nominee, he should be allowed to appoint a conservative RNC chairman. Influential moderate Republicans, however, expressed concerns over Brock’s potential dismissal. At a press conference Reagan minimized the idea of a dramatic split within the party, telling reporters “I think Washington is a town in which rumors thrive like spores in a fungus.” His decision to keep Brock, despite pressure to fire him, revealed Reagan’s desire for party unity over infighting.170

Brock also garnered respect both outside and inside the party for his efforts to expand the Republican base and his fundraising capabilities. As one Democratic leader noted, Brock “understands perfectly that the minority party’s job is to appeal to


170 Hedrick Smith, “Move to Oust Brock Poses Test of Reagan’s Leadership,” New York Times 6/13/80, A14; Robert Lindsey, “Reagan Keeps Brock as Chairman of the G.O.P.,” New York Times 6/14/80, 11; Congressional Quarterly. Tom Wicker, “The Republicans try to get their Act Together,” New York Times 2/12/78, SM2. Wicker reported that Reagan was so upset about Brock’s refusal for funds for the truth squad, he “no longer permits his signature to be used on letters the National Committee sends out to raise funds for its own efforts against the treaty.”
disaffected Democrats and make it respectable for them to vote Republican. The Republican Party hasn’t talked this way to blacks and Jews since 1928.” The evidence indicates that the Reagan campaign wanted cohesion for the upcoming Republican National Convention in Detroit under the banner of “Together, a New Beginning” with Brock at the helm. Reagan showed a willingness to ignore the pleas of the New Right and took counsel from the moderates who implored him otherwise. This action suggested that Reagan was not willing to take the party in a completely conservative direction. Rather Reagan understood the realities of entering a general election in which he would need a broader base of support.

“We Simply Lost Control of the Situation”: The Culture Wars Come to the Republican National Convention

When Republican delegates, party officials, and candidates arrived in Detroit they needed to showcase Reagan to the American public as a potential president. The convention’s agenda included settling the key issues of the party platform and the nominee for vice-president. The public debate over the platform worried party leaders who wanted to project a more positive image of the Republican brand. Richard Wirthlin wanted the convention to highlight “the attractiveness that we felt Ronald Reagan would inherently have among nonpartisan, younger voters.” Reagan was ahead of Carter in the polls and the party wanted to keep up the momentum. Brock noted, “We had very, very carefully worked to break several Republican stereotypes” by using Detroit to reach out to various minority and working-class constituencies. “I was obviously distressed to see

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the primary debate focused on what was described as the social issues,” Brock lamented. This intraparty fight on social issues meant Republicans “were risking the under-forty target group that we had identified as our primary goal.” The RNC chairman wanted to expand the party to include younger, ethnic voters who were less rigid in their political positions. In order to broaden Reagan’s appeal among this demographic, Brock sought to keep abortion and the ERA out of the public spotlight. The problem, according to Brock, was “we simply lost control of the situation” as delegates, who were more ideologically rigid in their views, dominated the convention floor.172

The presence of the New Right and the religious right changed the convention and platform. These two groups wanted to shape social policy. The outcome of the convention strained relations between the campaign and its conservative supporters. Reporting from Detroit, Elizabeth Drew of The New Yorker explained that the New Right and Moral Majority believed “the candidate is less important that the cause; these groups are unresponsive to arguments that what they seek to do might hurt the candidates’ chances of winning the election.” Both groups were instrumental to Reagan’s nomination. Drew noted that the New Right in particular “plays an important part in Reagan’s attempt to build a ‘new coalition’” through its organizational and fundraising efforts. She described both as “actually more radical than conservative” in which “Reagan is astride this uneasy, even unwitting coalition, each element seeing in him the

172 David S. Broder, “Republicans Dream of Watershed Year,” Washington Post 7/13/80, A1; Andrew Busch notes that the Republicans chose Detroit “to reach out for black and urban voters.” Reagan’s Victory, 80; Moore, The Campaign for President, 141-149.
vehicle for achieving its purposes.” As the convention unfolded, the manner in which this “unwitting coalition” played out proved integral to the New Right-Reagan relationship.173

The New Right and the Moral Majority had more success in getting party officials to take their cultural agenda seriously. Its social positions, however, appeared extreme to moderate Republicans. The two main platform issues concerned the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and abortion. Republican leaders wanted to reach out to women voters with sensible policies. The planks adopted by the convention, however, showed the growth of the culture wars within the Republican Party. In terms of the ERA, the draft of the platform’s wording reflected the hostility to the amendment by conservative activists such as Phyllis Schlafly. The platform also highlighted the internal debate over the issue. It began, “We acknowledge the legitimate efforts of those who support or oppose ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.” Subsequent passages revealed the disdain of the Right for the ERA. Although claiming to protect women’s rights and their “exemption from the military draft,” the statement concluded, “We oppose any move which would give the federal government more power over families” and “We reaffirm our belief in the traditional role and values of the family in our society.” Such language drew strong criticism among some Republican women who found the platform excessive. Other women found the wording balanced. The final outcome of the ERA plank, according to Betty Heitman, co-chair of the RNC, “would do everything short of

endorsing ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, but which indicated a very strong support for equal rights for women."\(^{174}\)

Reagan agreed with the party’s platform on the ERA. Reagan explained his views on the ERA plank to *60 Minutes*. He noted, the language contained “some middle ground,” but the reality of politics showed how “either way you went, you estranged and angered one group.” Reagan, however, made it clear “I’m for equal rights. I can prove it by my record.” During the convention he realized that the Republican position worried some delegates as too extreme. Reagan met with some of these ERA supporters at the convention but did not change his mind. This inability to convince Reagan to advocate stronger wording in favor of women’s rights worried many delegates that it could hurt him in the general election.\(^ {175}\)

The goal to end abortion had been central to the New Right social agenda since 1974, but alienated moderate Republicans. The resulting platform language contained a compromise similar to the ERA. On abortion, pro-life advocates got the party to endorse “a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children.” Furthermore, the platform stated, “We [pro-life advocates] also support the Congressional efforts to restrict the use of taxpayers' dollars for abortion.” This statement reflected the anger from the pro-life movement over what they perceived as federal resources being used to perform abortion services despite the 1977 Hyde amendment stating the contrary.


Many Republicans did not want to see abortion debated publicly on the convention floor for fear it would exacerbate the divisions over the issue and push away potential voters. Brock explained that “something like 63 percent of our delegates supported the Supreme Court decision” of *Roe vs. Wade*. Republican officials, as with the ERA, found themselves in a difficult position and had to address the concerns of pro-life advocates lest the situation became untenable.¹⁷⁶

The importance of the ERA and abortion fight at the convention showed the split between the party leaders, who did not want to alienate women, and conservative activists who sought to reduce party support for the amendment and take a tougher pro-life position. The platform adopted in 1980 was different from what the party supported in 1976 on these two issues. The Republican Party came out strongly in favor of the ERA in 1976. Its position stated emphatically, “The Republican Party reaffirms its support for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Our Party was the first national party to endorse the E.R.A. in 1940. We continue to believe its ratification is essential to insure equal rights for all Americans.” On abortion, Republicans understood that some in the party had moral objections. The policy in 1976 shared similarities to 1980. “The Republican Party favors a continuance of the public dialogue on abortion and supports the efforts of those who seek enactment of a constitutional amendment to restore protection of the right to life for unborn children.” This language, however, at least

implied that the party recognized the divisiveness of the issue and was unwilling to completely shut off debate.177

Although pro-life advocates did not get strong support of the party establishment, they nevertheless forced Republican leaders to take the anti-abortion stance seriously. For their part, the moderates “have pretty much given up. They are outgunned” and “talk, at least privately, with bewilderment about ‘those nuts’ who they felt have taken over this Convention.” These two issues, however, angered Republican officials who wanted the New Right to remain silent on abortion and the ERA in order to prevent Democratic attacks on their positions. Lyn Nofziger pointed out “we were dealing with two no-win issues. Neither abortion nor the ERA are Republican issues. They are individual issues that cut across party lines.” One author noted, “Both the abortion plank and the ERA plank demonstrated the degree to which a new Republican coalition revolved around the sudden power of the cultural Right.” This debate attested to the rising prominence of conservative cultural positions within the Republican Party and growing influence of the New Right and Moral Majority.178

The grand finale of the convention involved choosing Reagan’s running mate. The vice-presidential candidate would be named during the third night. Remembering how Reagan had picked Richard Schweiker four years earlier, the New Right wanted to


178 Drew, “A Reporter at Large,” 39-40; Moore, 145; Text of platform quoted from Andrew Busch, Reagan’s Victory, 81-82; Elizabeth Drew, “A Reporter at Large,” 40; Schlafly, according to Kalman, believed that Reagan needed “a competent advisor on women’s family, and social issues,” Kalman, Right Star Rising, 347.
ensure that he chose a conservative for the ticket. Weyrich drafted a letter to the
delegates attending the convention advocating “support for an open Republican
convention” to nominate the vice-presidential candidate. He argued that Republicans
wanted someone “who is compatible with his [Reagan’s] philosophy” and dispelled the
notion that by having two conservatives on the ticket, “Republicans will defect to John
Anderson.” Anderson had left the Republican Party and was running as an independent
in 1980. This letter to the delegates had an ulterior motive. Weyrich wrote on behalf of
Jack Lee, who also served as director of “Jesse Helms for Vice-President.” Helms
wanted to be considered for the vice-presidential nominee. However, after debating
pursuing the VP slot and possibly disrupting the pursuit of unity, Helms asked Reagan for
a chance to address the convention. Helms was allowed to give a five minute speech that
focused on the themes of anti-communism, anti-abortion and the Panama Canal.179

The choice for vice-president became the highlight of the convention. The short
list of potential vice-presidential candidates included those who had run in the primaries
including Bush and Baker. Ford was mentioned as a possible choice as well despite the
fact he had not campaigned. According to insiders, he seemed open to being on the ticket
and operated as a “power broker” behind the scenes. The dark horse candidate was Guy
Vander Jagt, the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, who
was slated to speak at the convention. He told reporters, “I have a very strong feeling

179 The handwriting in the marginalia states that the idea for the letter was “suggested by Jesse Helms to
try to gain some time/chance to prevent a bad V-P nomination. Helms did not want to do anything himself
but he still wanted to be a viable option for V-P,” series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 4,
Apr-June 1980, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming;
that I remain on the list.” During the opening days of the convention, the debate in the Reagan camp oscillated between either Bush or Ford. One Reagan staffer recalled “that Bush was the best bet, with the caveat: ‘Of course, if you could get Ford, that would be the ticket.’” Many in the Republican establishment saw a Reagan-Ford ticket as a winning combination of the two wings of the party. This potential alliance would not come to fruition.180

The real drama came on the night Ford was supposed to address the convention. The feeling existed among many present that the former president would be chosen as the nominee. Earlier in the day, Ford had given an interview to Walter Cronkite implicitly supporting the possibility of serving as “co-president” with Reagan. In the end, neither the Ford nor the Reagan camps could agree on the details of such an arrangement, and Reagan dismissed such a unique situation. That evening CBS News reported Ford as Reagan’s choice, prompting an outcry of anger among some in attendance. One delegate exclaimed, “Isn’t this a shocker? Reagan said the man had to be philosophically compatible. What are they going to do about the E.R.A., SALT, the Panama Canal thing?” The discouragement felt by many at the moment did not last too long as Reagan aides assured delegates that Bush would be the actual nominee. Reagan appeared the same night and spoke to the convention. He explained that “I know I am breaking with precedent,” but in order to calm the crowd and quell any rumor about Ford, he said, “we have gone over this and over this and over this and I have come to conclusion that”

180 Andrew Busch states that Reagan and Ford first discussed this possibility on 6/5/80, Reagan’s Victory, 82; Drew, “A Reporter at Large,” 43-44, 53-64.
[Ford] “can be of more value as a former President campaigning his heart out, which he has pledged to do, and not as a member of the ticket.” This left Reagan with George H.W. Bush, who readily accepted the offer. 181

The selection of Bush as Reagan’s vice-presidential nominee disappointed the New Right. It thought Bush too moderate and disliked his stance on abortion and his support of the ERA. His stance on abortion alienated religious voters. Bush believed abortion was a state, not federal, issue and did not support a constitutional ban on the practice. National pro-life groups expressed anger and dismay over the choice of Bush on the ticket. Reagan and Bush had disagreed on many policy issues on the campaign trail. New Right activists criticized Bush when he referred to Reagan’s embrace of supply-side economics as “voodoo economics.” Conservatives thought Bush would be too weak on national security. Many also remembered how Bush had performed poorly in the debate with Reagan and other candidates in Nashua, New Hampshire. When Bush was asked to join the ticket, Reagan received assurances that Bush would support the Republican Party platform. 182

Following the convention, the Reagan camp sought to assuage religious conservatives. Reagan addressed a meeting of evangelicals and New Right activists in August 1980. The meeting in Dallas was sponsored by the Roundtable, a group that


included national figures such as preachers, political leaders, and Weyrich. Notable conservative leaders Jesse Helms, Phyllis Schlafly, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, all delivered speeches to the convention as well. President Carter declined to attend the event.\textsuperscript{183} In his speech, Reagan told the crowd, “When I hear the First Amendment used as a reason to keep traditional moral values away from policymaking, I am shocked. The First Amendment was written not to protect the people and their laws from religious values, but to protect those values from governmental tyranny. But over the last two or three decades the Federal Government seems to have forgotten both ‘that old time religion’ and that old time Constitution.” Such rhetoric assured those present that Reagan supported the truths found in the Bible and exclaimed that “Religious America is awakening, perhaps just in time for our country’s sake.”\textsuperscript{184} Candidate Reagan understood the Religious Right to be an integral part of his campaign, using this speech to express his religious faith and also remind those in attendance that he was one of them.

Evidence provided after the election suggested that the Moral Majority and the New Right had helped in Reagan’s success at the polls. Despite the controversy surrounding these groups, the Congressional Club and NCPAC had raised nearly $1.5 million by September 1980. They used this money to attack Carter in certain markets


through direct mail and television ads. Journalist John Lofton of the *Conservative Digest* noted that Lou Harris “was the only major pollster to predict a Reagan victory due to the clout of white religious conservatives.” Lofton presented Harris’s polling data, which showed that white evangelicals voted for Reagan over Carter in substantially large numbers. How much influence these groups actually exerted over Reagan remained a matter of debate and contention. Undoubtedly, the New Right had some electoral success in 1980, removing from office more moderate members of Congress. The New Right and Moral Majority attempted to use this new political clout to influence Reagan’s decision-making during and after the transition into office. Here, however, they would find disappointment.

In the final days of the campaign, Reagan emerged as the stronger candidate with his solid debate performance against Carter and the president’s continued perceived weakness in handling the Iran hostage crisis. Reagan’s staff realized how some in the media portrayed him as too extreme. Jimmy Carter emphasized the fear among voters that Reagan was too far to the right as a way to divert attention from the economic and political problems. Despite Carter’s attempt to demean Reagan, Americans were attracted to his positive message and the desire for change. On Election Day, the extent of the win for Reagan was evident as Carter conceded the race before the polls had even

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closed on the West Coast. Reagan soundly defeated the president winning 51 percent of the popular vote and 489 electoral votes to Carter’s 49. The Unity Party candidate John Anderson received seven million votes and no electoral votes. The Republicans regained the majority in the Senate, which they had not had since 1952. The New Right was able to get its candidates elected to office in House and Senate races across the country. Senate races in Alabama, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Idaho, saw incoming conservatives who had been recruited by New Right organizations. Reagan ran a more optimistic campaign as well as had more money on hand to run for office. During and immediately after the election, Reagan emerged as an astute political leader who placed party unity above ideological division. As the incoming president, Reagan would have staunch conservative support in Congress to help his legislative agenda.\textsuperscript{188}

\textbf{Conclusion: The Legacy of 1980}

The New Right embraced Reagan as the conservative standard bearer with great reluctance. Viguerie supported his clients first and attempted to boost their conservative credentials over those of Reagan. This effort failed and Viguerie belatedly accepted Reagan as the Republican choice for president. Reagan’s feelings towards the New Right are complex. I have found no evidence to suggest that Reagan personally disliked any of the New Right leaders. However, it is clear that the New Right angered Reagan by

\textsuperscript{188} Busch,\textit{ Reagan’s Victory}, 160-162; Moore,\textit{ The Campaign for President}, 251-259, 275-293; Jonathan Moore noted that the RNC had a budget of $26 million while the Democratic Party had about half of that figure,\textit{ The Campaign for President}, xvi; David Nyhan, “They Recruited, Marketed, and Won; Now Conservative Backers Look Ahead,”\textit{ Boston Globe}, 11/23/80, .1; Clymer,\textit{ Drawing the Line}, 164-203. In North Carolina, John East defeated incumbent Robert Morgan, in Idaho, incumbent Frank Church lost to Steve Symms, and Herman Talmadge lost to Mack Mattingly.
attacking his conservative principles on several occasions. This fact did not preclude the Reagan campaign from disagreeing with the New Right over Bill Brock or George Bush. Reagan was willing to offer rhetorical support for New Right social issues in public, but he placed party unity above ideological considerations. The Republican National Convention in 1980 showed the growing cultural shift to the right within the Republican Party, especially over abortion and the ERA. This change in party orthodoxy remains the main area where the New Right found success. Republicans now had to acknowledge and support more extreme positions on social issues than in previous years. These efforts would change the Republican Party in the coming years. For the election of 1980, the New Right offered its services to the Reagan campaign. The problem with this support for Reagan was that after the election, the New Right expected the new president to enact its legislative priorities and appoint its candidates to federal offices. Reagan did not acquiesce to the New Right’s agenda, which increased tensions between them during his first term in office.
Immediately after the election of Ronald Reagan, the New Right reached the apex of its prestige and influence in national politics. The New Right saw Reagan’s election as an opportunity to build a conservative alliance of blue-collar Democrats, evangelical Christians and Catholics, and conservative grassroots activists. New Right leaders wanted to harness this conservative coalition to shape national policy. Using the Democratic New Deal coalition in the 1930s as a model, they intended to push through a conservative economic and cultural agenda. The New Right interpreted Reagan’s victory in 1980 as a public mandate for this action. The two sources of friction between the White House and the New Right involved Reagan’s appointees for Cabinet posts and the administration’s focus on economic and not social issues. The New Right wanted their own candidates to serve in key government positions. These conservatives were more ideologically to the right than many of their party elders and tended to be younger than those Reagan designated for his Cabinet. The New Right failed to get Reagan’s approval for its choices to important positions within the administration. Reagan picked establishment Republicans that had usually served in previous administrations or in the financial sector. The president made the pragmatic decision to appoint experienced officials over untested neophytes. In addition, Reagan officials made the economy the highest priority. The New Right, however, was not completely alienated from the administration. Reagan and other White House officials met with New Right leaders on numerous occasions before and after taking office. Administration officials kept tabs on New Right groups and sought their help at various times in supporting White House policies. Reagan publicly
backed many New Right and Moral Majority issues. Nevertheless, the strain in the relationship was evident before Inauguration Day and showed a growing split between ideology and governance as the New Right looked to remain a potent force in national politics. The conflict over personnel became a test of wills between Reagan and the New Right after the election.

At the beginning of Reagan’s first term, the publicity garnered by the New Right reflected a grudging respect in the mainstream media for its political and fundraising skills. In February 1981, David Nyhan of the *Boston Globe* argued

> Now…the New Right is the most potent growth stock in national politics…the most important New Right leaders refuse to take government appointments, shun the traditional Republican hierarchy, and tend their computerized fund-raising lists like diligent fishermen, hauling in their nets loaded with contributions and throwing them back to trawl endlessly over the shoals of single issue politics.\(^{189}\)

A few months later, Nyhan aptly summed up the New Right’s success, “At its core, the New Right sells a service: Send us money, we’ll punch out a liberal. They can point to results. If they didn’t cause the Reagan landslide, they took part in it, and helped lurch the country a couple of compass points in their direction. But they thrive on dissatisfaction.”\(^{190}\) This created a sense of entitlement among the New Right and Moral Majority.

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“Personnel Is Policy”

The New Right wanted compensation for its fundraising efforts and Reagan failed to deliver. After the victory, the Reagan transition team began vetting potential nominees for positions in the new administration. New Right leaders met with various officials to offer their input. Their disdain for moderate Republican nominees became a publicly divisive issue. Even before the election, New Right leaders were cognizant of their lack of influence within the Reagan camp. In an October 1980 meeting with Edwin Meese, an important Reagan advisor, Howard Phillips, head of the Conservative Caucus, “expressed concern that there were no advocates for New Right positions anywhere in the Reagan campaign, policy councils, staff, or transition committee.” While Phillips explained that Meese was sympathetic to his request, there is no evidence Meese made specific moves to hire more New Right staff members.\(^{191}\) This tension over personnel would come to dominate every main legislative, cultural, and economic policy taken by the White House and the subsequent New Right response. The New Right, in effect, blamed what they saw as bad policy choices on the moderates, or non-Reaganites, in the government.

Paul Weyrich met with Sen. Laxalt, a close personal friend to Reagan, in December 1980 to discuss possible Cabinet nominees. Weyrich had called Reagan a “closet moderate” and stated publicly that he did not want Reagan to “bring back the Ford-Nixon retreads with bald tires.” He specifically feared a return of Henry Kissinger

who never received an appointment. He also believed that Reagan had a chance, similar to Franklin Roosevelt’s Democratic coalition in the 1930s, to create a conservative revolution in the 1980s. Weyrich called for “bold initiatives and bold actions” to change the country. This feat could not be accomplished by “the moderate-type of Republican.” He wanted individuals who embraced the New Right agenda of pro-life, tax cuts, schools vouchers, and “an absolute U-turn on busing, gay rights, and quotas.”

When asked about the extent of his advice concerning specific individuals, Weyrich told reporters “I have been in on a couple, but I’m not being consulted on certainly all of them.” In addition Weyrich explained that Laxalt “views himself as the link to the conservatives, and he wants to be sure that we have input.” The Reagan team did not heed Weyrich’s opinions due the outrage he and other conservatives expressed after the president appointed his Cabinet. The disappointment from the New Right strongly suggests that its candidates were given little, if any, consideration. The fact that Reagan’s transition team consulted Weyrich, however, attests to his influence and that administration officials at least considered his proposals.

Richard Viguerie wanted Reagan to offer top positions to younger, more ideological conservatives. Viguerie lamented, “The Fortune 500, Harvard and Yale are represented by at least eight of the Cabinet appointees” and “Reagan wasn’t elected by the Eastern Republican Establishment” but rather by a host of Americans from different backgrounds.

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income levels and beliefs. Furthermore, he noted, “by appointing young conservatives, he will help elect the governors and senators and congressmen of tomorrow.” Viguerie also urged the president-elect to reach out to the black community, especially black conservatives such as “Thomas Sowell, Walter Williams, and Clarence Thomas, who recognize the destructive cycle of dependency fostered by the liberal program.” These three individuals would go on to prominent positions later in their lives. Thomas currently serves on the Supreme Court as an associate justice, Sowell works at the Hoover Institute, and Williams is an economist. These appointments could expand the growing conservative movement among African-Americans and replace the “safe” choice of establishment Republicans that Viguerie had come to disdain. This argument made some headway in the incoming administration as Thomas was appointed chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1982. Reagan’s only outreach to the African-American community during the campaign was when he addressed the National Urban League after being criticized for not attending the NAACP Convention.194

Reagan’s Cabinet appointees reflected his desire to have qualified advisors over candidates who shared the New Right’s ideological convictions. The three most powerful advisors to Reagan on appointments were James Baker, who served as White House chief of staff, Michael Deaver, who dealt with media relations for the White House, and Edwin Meese, who had served as chief of staff for Reagan in California and

would handle domestic policy and White House relations with government agencies. The New Right was the most disappointed with the choice of Baker for several reasons. Baker had previously served in the Ford administration and was also the campaign manager and close personal friend to George H.W. Bush. He would be instrumental in shaping policy during Reagan’s first term. The New Right despised Baker and called for his resignation on numerous occasions. All the top Cabinet choices angered the New Right. The appointment of Casper Weinberger as Secretary of Defense and Alexander Haig as Secretary of State met with New Right disapproval. New Right leaders decried Haig’s past work in the Nixon White House and criticized Weinberger for misunderstanding the gravity of the situation with the Soviet Union. This assessment of Weinberger failed to mention his staunch advocacy for increased defense spending. The selection of Donald Regan, who had worked for Merrill Lynch, as Secretary of the Treasury angered the New Right due to his previous donations to Democratic candidates. Paul Weyrich attacked David Stockman, selected to head the Office of Management and Budget, for his leftist beliefs while in college during the 1960s at the height of the Vietnam War. Stockman had renounced his political past and moved to the right in the 1970s. Clearly, the New Right believed that the incoming president was being undermined by advisors like Baker who wanted more establishment figures in prominent positions. These nominees served as a reminder to the New Right of its impotence in setting the tone and trend within the administration.  

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These appointments led the New Right to question the conservatism Reagan’s advisors. The issue of personnel established the New Right narrative that moderate, or non-Reaganites, ran the administration. For instance, *Conservative Digest* asked its readers: “Is Reagan really a Reaganite?” John Lofton believed that the Eastern Establishment Republicans held too much sway over Reagan. Lofton explained that the administration “ignored its supporters or shuffled them into insignificant positions while appointing to the highest and most powerful positions” individuals who “do not share his [Reagan’s] philosophical conservatism.” This belief among conservative activists that moderates controlled the White House served their own political purposes. It allowed conservatives to attack the supposed moderates in the administration while at the same time protecting the man they helped elect to office. Non-Reaganites continued to be an easy target for conservatives who lamented certain policy decisions. The belief that ‘personnel is policy’ became a constant mantra from the New Right during the first Reagan term.196

Undoubtedly, some in the New Right believed they were being taken for granted. Its leaders continually made the argument that Republican moderates were moving Reagan to the center. Journalist Kevin Phillips wrote in mid-November 1980 that Reagan

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“now seems to be listening to those centrist GOP Establishment figures who…now suggest that he owes little to the right and can ignore their leaders and causes with impunity.” According to Phillips, the New Right and the Moral Majority were instrumental in Reagan’s victory and “far more successful than anyone expected.” By denying the support of both groups,

the Reagan camp is taking the implicit position that the New Right and the Moral Majority can be finessed—that they do not represent a Reagan constituency entitled to a major voice in White House councils, that they do not represent a growing national force (but only a transient phenomenon) and that, most of all, they need not be catered to because they have nowhere else to go, lacking the faintest hope of competing with Ronald Reagan’s popularity among the conservative electorate.  

The inability to change the president’s mind on his choices suggested the New Right was being ignored. People within the incoming administration minimized the role of the New Right or Moral Majority in getting Reagan elected. One editorial noted that “there has been no suggestion from Mr. Reagan or his advisors that the New Right will be accorded anything like veto power over the new administration’s policies.” In fact, Laxalt stated Reagan was not “all that beholden to anybody but the American people.” Thus, the editorial concluded, it “is bad news for the New Right, but good news for the nation.”

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The New Right had a few high profile appointments in the federal government. For example, a New Right candidate attained a mid-level position in the administration. Bob Billings, who had previously worked with Paul Weyrich at the National Christian Action Coalition, served in the Department of Education where he was a vocal advocate for private schools. The choice of Billings appeased Christian school activists who feared losing their tax-exempt status. Outside of this relatively minor appointment, the New Right could not stop Reagan’s selection of moderate Republicans. This continued dispute, which was on public display, exposed the fault lines that would deepen in the coming years. Journalist James Kilpatrick accused the New Right of “sulking” over administration appointments. He wrote, “Mr. Reagan cannot be President for the New Right only. If he is to govern effectively, Mr. Reagan must rally support on Capitol Hill from various quarters.” John Lofton responded emphatically, “People make policy. There will be no Reaganism without Reaganites. It’s that simple really.”

One of the most telling statements from the incoming administration came from vice-president elect George H.W. Bush. Bush explained his disdain for the New Right and Moral Majority’s attempt to influence either Reagan or himself on policy matters. Bush retorted, “I happen to take violent exception to certain individuals in some of those groups, some of their positions, and have stated it publicly and am not intimidated by those who suggest I better hew the line. Hell with them.”


200 John Lofton, Jr., “With James, Cavanaugh Running Personnel It’s the Blind Leading the Bland: One is Apolitical, In a Job That’s Over His Head; The Other’s Given Conservatives Fits for Years,” *Conservative Digest*, 2/81, 5. Lofton made a point to directly quote part of Kilpatrick’s article in order to refute his “sulking” claims.
relates Bush’s own sense of outrage from being continually targeted by the New Right. The relationship between Bush and the New Right was tenuous at best. The Boston Globe editorialized “in 1980, the efforts of the New Right happened to coincide with the discontent of a lot of people who care not a whit for its pet causes. Unless it recognizes that, the New Right will richly deserve the fate of remaining outsiders as the Reagan era marches off in its own direction.”201 This last statement encapsulated the disconnect that occurred between the need for the support of one’s base to win an election and the actual reality of governing once in office.

While the New Right publicly criticized Reagan’s appointments, it recoiled at the president’s nomination of Sandra Day O’Connor as the first female justice to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1981. O’Connor’s nomination unleashed a wave of criticism from many conservatives and highlighted the administration’s refusal to succumb to New Right pressure on personnel. When Reagan announced his decision in July, the press immediately questioned the president on her abortion stance. President Reagan told the press corps that he was “completely satisfied” with O’Connor’s position on this issue.202 New Right leaders held a different opinion. They believed that the president had misled them. Connie Marshner, chair of the New Right’s National Pro-Family Coalition, believed this appointment violated Reagan’s pledge to nominate a pro-life candidate. She denounced O’Connor’s position not only on abortion, but the ERA and the death penalty

201 “The New Right’s Tactics Won’t Work,” Boston Globe, 11/13/80, 1 [no author given].

as well. Detractors argued that O’Connor’s record as a state legislator had not been sufficiently pro-life, especially her support for a bill in 1970 to legalize abortion in Arizona.\footnote{“Statement by Connaught Marshner- Chairman, National Pro-Family Coalition,” series “Committee and Foundation files, 1968-2001,” Box 17, Folder 8, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; “O’Connor Choice Breaks Reagan Promise, Made in Haste and Harms His Coalition,” \textit{Conservative Digest} August 1981, 3, 8-10.} The hostility unleashed by conservatives astonished Reagan. The president noted in his diary that the pro-life movement was misinformed on this issue and O’Connor’s record on abortion had been vetted. Nevertheless, Viguerie used more strident language to describe his feelings. He exclaimed, “The White House slapped us in the face…The White House is saying you don’t have a constituency we’re concerned about. We don’t care.” Howard Phillips explained the situation as, “in terms of having any real influence with the Reagan administration, we just haven’t any. All they’ve done is throw us a few bones to keep the dogs from biting their heels.” When Jerry Falwell said that Christians should opposed O’Connor, Barry Goldwater replied, “Every good Christian ought to kick Falwell right in the ass.” Their opinions emphasized how public excoriation of Reagan’s choice failed to resolve the major discrepancy in how the administration and pro-life activists viewed O’Connor’s record.\footnote{Douglas Brinkley, ed., \textit{The Reagan Diaries: Volume One January 1981-October 1985}, (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 553-54; Bill Peterson, “For Reagan and the New Right, The Honeymoon is Over,” \textit{Washington Post}, 7/21/81, A2; William E. Pemberton, \textit{Exit With Honor: The Life and Presidency of Ronald Reagan} (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1997), 137.}

This tension culminated in a meeting on July 21 between New Right leaders and James Baker a few weeks after the nomination of O’Connor. The results of this encounter still did not change the administration’s position regarding its nominee.
Weyrich discussed the outcome of it afterwards. “I am happy to say the meeting went beyond vague generalities,” he noted. Weyrich was confident that each side better understood their respective positions, but still displayed some hesitancy surrounding the notion that both the administration and the right could continue to work in tandem. He argued that a symbiotic relationship existed between them. Weyrich wrote, “We need each other and we need to work together with respect, not lip service, for each others’ causes.” This public statement failed to show the specifics discussed with Baker or how he soothed Weyrich’s anger. The rhetoric used left the impression that Weyrich was not completely satisfied with the White House’s response and gave some indication of the growing rift. In the end, New Right activists had little chance to block the nomination or persuade the president, who continued to defend O’Connor, to change his mind. Its members continued to challenge O’Connor’s conservative credentials even after her swearing in as a new justice. John Lofton, editor of Conservative Digest, criticized O’Connor on her statements regarding the Supreme Court’s decision that a 1978 “moral nuisance” law in Washington dealing with pornography was unconstitutional. Lofton berated O’Connor for not allowing the state courts to deal with the enforcement and application of the law. The New Right had to grudgingly accept O’Connor despite their best efforts.

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New Right Social Policy

The incoming Reagan team wanted to prioritize the economy in order to deal with the country’s dire situation. The administration’s Initial Action’s Project (IAP), a report released on January 29, 1981, outlined what the president hoped to accomplish in his first hundred days in office. The IAP, written by Richard Wirthlin and David Gergen, one of Reagan’s speechwriters, highlighted the two main areas of focus as the economy and foreign policy with no mention of social issues. The report explained the “sense of urgency” required to bring inflation and government fiscal policy under control. In terms of foreign policy, the United States needed to re-establish itself back in world affairs with firm resolve. The administration’s economic platform involved passing tax cuts. Eventually, the White House’s economic plan, after it passed its tax cut in 1981, required subsequent tax increases to deal with the growing deficit. This economic reality served as a point of contention between the New Right and the administration. The domestic policy mentioned in the IAP reflected Reagan’s desire to cut federal spending for domestic programs. It advocated “volunteerism” on the local, state, and federal level as a way to address decreased government funding for these programs. Missing from this report was any mention of ending abortion, the ERA, school prayer or any other aspect of the New Right’s domestic agenda. The IAP report was a strong indicator that the White House did not intend to spend political capital fighting to change social policy in a dramatic fashion.208

Reagan’s personal feelings towards abortion, school prayer, and other social issues reflected the values of the New Right and the Moral Majority. He did not support abortion rights or the ERA and he favored an amendment to the Constitution for prayer in public schools. He supported tuition tax credits despite conservative criticism that the White House needed to further restrain the IRS’s authority over tax-exempt schools. The major difference was that Reagan understood that pushing a social agenda too far could create a backlash among voters who supported him over Carter. Journalist Kevin Phillips explained how Reagan supporters included both blue-collar workers and the New Right. The economy was more important to the working class and Reagan advisors feared these swing voters could return to the Democratic Party. According to one historian, Reagan “had spoken forcefully on the social issues over the years, but he always subordinated them to Reaganomics.” The president’s unwillingness to pursue vigorously the New Right’s ideological social agenda would become one of the defining issues that split the two during Reagan’s term in office.\textsuperscript{209}

Reagan had not been in office even a month when the \textit{Wall Street Journal} declared “the honeymoon is over” between the New Right and the president.\textsuperscript{210} New Right leaders seemed not to have read the IAP. The New Right wanted more action on


\textsuperscript{210} Dennis Farney, \textit{Wall Street Journal}, 2/3/81.
social issues. After the transition, the administration’s effort at outreach to New Right activists created confusion and resentment towards the White House. The Reagan administration had aides assigned to deal with conservative organizations. Lyn Nofziger and Morton Blackwell, who had previously served as editor of *The New Right Report*, were the two prominent liaisons.211 Both men worked to assuage potential problems concerning administration policies and actions and to keep support from the base. They handled the public and private concerns of conservative activists. Blackwell kept a list of all New Right groups and relevant information on its leaders and what they could do to help the administration. He noted that Weyrich was “the best in the business at creating conservative coalitions in legislative battles.” The administration was also well aware of Viguerie’s public anger over “staffing decisions,” but understood that his direct mail business could reach millions of people. Despite their differences, Blackwell knew the importance of having the New Right act in tandem with the White House to generate support at the grassroots level.212

The initial problem occurred when the New Right wanted the White House to concentrate on social issues such as busing, abortion and religious charter schools. This focus on social issues tied into the New Right’s larger argument that if the administration

211 Nofziger remained with the White House through 1981 and in 1981, Blackwell was named the “Man of the Year” by the College Republicans National Committee. This same committee also elected Jack Abramoff as its chairman. “Nofziger to Leave White House” and “Blackwell Honored; Abramoff Elected,” *The New Right Report*, 8/7/81 Vol. 10, No. 15, 1. In 2006, Abramoff was tried for a corruption scandal and sentenced to six years in prison. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/01/03/AR2006010300474.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/01/03/AR2006010300474.html). Accessed 3/21/2012.

had the right personnel, both economic and social change could occur simultaneously. Journalist John Judis reported in February 1981 that administration officials chastised the “terrible three,” Viguerie, Weyrich, and Dolan, for publicly attacking the president’s choices. Their silence on this matter did not last long and they began denouncing those within the White House as antithetical to New Right concerns.213 The New Right’s emphasis on social issues struck some conservatives as unimportant. *National Review* argued that social issues, such as the ERA and a constitutional ban on abortion, had either diminished as national issues or lacked majority support among most Americans.214 The White House took a more subtle approach. A reporter asked Lyn Nofziger, “Is the President feeling crowded by the conservatives who want the social agenda acted upon?” He replied, “The conservatives in this town are not necessarily Republican. They are primarily the New Right. They are primarily ideologues…these guys – the [Richard] Vigueries, the [Paul] Weyrichs – will tell you that the President’s agenda is basically their agenda…I don’t mind if you criticize this President. He needs pressure from the right.”215 Nofziger’s admission reflected an understanding of how Reagan’s political base functioned but offered no explanation of how seriously the White House took the New Right’s demands.


215 “Reagan political aide: We’re…looking at ’84 now,” *The Christian Science Monitor* Tuesday 5/12/81 [No author given].
Older Republicans, such as Barry Goldwater, disdained New Right tactics and motivations. Goldwater, a libertarian on social issues, worried about these groups’ inflexible ideology and their blurring of the lines between church and state. The senator told reporters, “I don’t like what the New Right is doing.” Goldwater believed that the country had more pertinent economic and military issues to deal with instead of social issues. He explained further, “I don’t get all jazzed up about busing. And I don’t get too excited about abortion. Nor do I get too exercised over ERA.” Such an indictment of the New Right from the conservative standard bearer of the 1960s did not go unnoticed. Jerry Falwell, who had received the bulk of Goldwater’s ire, dryly noted that “time has passed him by.” In these public disagreements over the extent of social policy, Goldwater seemed unaware of the cultural changes in his own party and reflected the Old Right’s less rigid ideological positions.216

In Congress, the level of commitment to the New Right’s social agenda from the incoming Republican Senate remained unclear. After a Senate Republican Policy Committee meeting on March 19, 1981, Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker told the press that all fifty-three Republican senators agreed to postpone “emotional” social issues for a year in order to focus on the economy. A few days later Baker, however, backtracked on this statement. New Right senators, including Jesse Helms and Paul Laxalt, refuted his claim by stating publicly that they did not vote for his

recommendations. Sen. Laxalt noted “social issues…should be vigorously pursued. That’s what the election was all about. It is part of the Reagan mandate.”\textsuperscript{217} \textit{The New Right Report} angrily denounced Senator Baker for stating that he “had received unanimous support…to defer consideration on social issues” for the immediate future. The New Right interpreted Baker’s actions as a way to force the president to move away from its social agenda. The article noted that “while there is virtually unanimous agreement among conservatives that economic issues should take priority, there is no reason that some constitutional amendments and social issues cannot proceed at the same time.”\textsuperscript{218} As a result of this dispute with the Majority Leader, New Right relations with Baker declined further since the Panama Canal debates a few years earlier.

The administration’s agenda strained relations between the White House and the New Right. New Right activists usually reacted with cynicism and anger when the president or White House officials addressed their concerns over policy. In turn, the administration’s response to the New Right’s frustration included mainly palliative measures. Media stories from unnamed White House sources exacerbated the New Right’s anger. Shortly after taking office, Lou Cannon wrote a piece concerning Reagan’s first few days in office. Aside from the usual actions of getting acquainted with the job, immediate problems with the base had to be addressed. Cannon described the president’s naming of Cabinet posts “the administration’s biggest headaches.”


assuage conservative hostility required some finesse. One Reagan aide explained the administration’s strategy in dealing with its conservative supporters as “We want to keep the Moral Majority types so close to us they can’t move their arms.” The meaning of this statement reflected efforts by the White House to appease the religious right. A more telling quote from another official when asked “What do you want to give them” answered simply “Symbolism.” For example, Cannon pointed to Reagan’s meeting with the pro-life group March for Life as “giving moral support to the anti-abortion constitutional amendment he frequently endorsed during the election campaign.” However, Christian leaders were upset that the president did not attend the rally. In response, Weyrich quipped, “We didn’t do what we did in the year of our lord 1980 for symbolism.”

This symbolic gesture by the White House intended to mollify religious and social conservatives outraged the New Right and its religious allies. For example, John Beckett, president of the R.W. Beckett Company and the Intercessors for America, a religious group founded in 1973 to pray for the nation’s problems, was especially upset concerning this specific remark. He had previously met with Reagan in 1980 as head of the Intercessors for America and received a letter from him before the election. Reagan’s short message promised “If it should be my honor to become President of this great land, I do intend to surround myself with men and women of high caliber and integrity.” In a

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response written to Reagan, Beckett thought that Reagan had let him down. He explained to Reagan “what is required is not symbolism, but substance, particularly in the area of appointments.” Beckett further warned, “If you do not surround yourself with men and women who hear God, and can give you godly counsel, you will fall prey to the same distorted humanist value system that has marked the preceding administration.” Beckett believed Reagan’s choices for government positions did not reflect his religious values. This exchange reveals the hostility that movement conservatives felt over personnel issues and their sense of being used.220

Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie understood the anger and sense of rejection among the conservative base. Weyrich received a letter from the head of a Christian education company who lamented, “I am convinced he [Reagan] is still the same as he was before the election. We must remember he is not ‘Far Right’ on the political spectrum-but Right of Moderate Right…Let’s keep applying the pressure and moving him to the right.”221 In a recent interview, Viguerie reflected on the Cannon article and commented, “Truer words were never spoken” concerning the symbolism given to conservative supporters.222 This early disappointment in Reagan showed the resentment that New Right leaders harbored for not being consulted on White House staffing.


222 Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 10/13/11.
Cannon’s unnamed source was only one part of the larger effort by the administration officials to address New Right concerns. Reagan officials never entirely shunned the New Right and in several instances met directly with it to discuss policy matters.

In reality, all was not symbolism. The New Right had some legitimate grievances over appointments. Consumer advocate Ralph Nader released his evaluations of Reagan appointees and noted that the establishment conservatives were chosen over New Right candidates. Nader lamented the creation of a “Reagan Ruling Class” as opposed to the New Right’s desire to have officials in place that shared its views. As a result of this criticism from the right, the administration relented and appointed several New Right choices to non-Cabinet level positions. Chief of staff James Baker admitted publicly that Reagan’s choices had angered the right. In March, Baker told the *New York Times* that “conservative protests had an effect on the selection process and led the president’s advisors to give greater weight to political loyalty in their recent appointments.” As a result, conservative activists claimed that “more than 150 of 450 Reagan supporters on their list of job candidates” had found positions in the Federal government within a short period of time. New Right leaders also exaggerated their lack of access to the highest levels of government. Privately, they visited with the president and other officials at the White House at various times. In early 1981, they noted that “Reagan has come across as absolutely sincere and solidly committed to conservative principles” during their

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meetings. The New Right believed at this time that “despite their differences with the President,” they could work together.224

During the debates on Reagan’s tax plan, the New Right expected a sympathetic hearing on social issues from the White House. These pro-family groups wanted to meet Reagan for a briefing, but were eventually rebuffed in May 1981. After months of discussions, the White House declined to have the briefing. Paul Weyrich wrote to the administration urging it to change its mind. He pointed out that discussions had been going on between Connie Marshner, chair of the Library Court, a New Right organization focused on “pro-family” issues, Morton Blackwell, Elizabeth Dole, a public liaison assistant for Reagan, and himself. In the administration’s response, Dole explained to Weyrich that Mike Deaver had dismissed the idea of Reagan meeting with them because, according to Weyrich, “the President had met with ‘these types’ before, and that he should be spending more time with ethnic groups.” An insulted Weyrich speculated “I think this move is politically foolish and will be viewed as a slap in the face by these pro-family leaders.”225 The disappointment among the right was palpable. By September, The New Right Report stated “it appears that White House senior staff is deliberately and

224 Hedrick Smith, “Conservatives Cite Gains in Top Posts: Many Reagan Loyalists Chosen for High-Level Jobs After Protest,” New York Times 3/8/81. Whether this number is correct cannot be certain, but Smith mentioned Gerald Carmine as director of General Services Administration and Donald Devine as director of the Office of Personnel Management and two others as those who had helped in Reagan’s election campaign or were conservative activists that received an appointment after conservative complaints; The New Right Report, 3/24/81, Vol. 10, No. 6, 2.

225 “Presidential Briefing/Religious and Pro-Family Communities,” Memo from Weyrich 5/19/81, Series II “Lobbyist Research Files, 1974-1998,” Box 38, Folder 26, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. There is no indication from this memo who Weyrich was addressing. The recipient of this letter was not revealed.
successfully isolating the President from the religious/pro-family groups.” For example, Jerry Falwell was upset that Michael Deaver had not delivered a personal letter to the president on his behalf. In response, Falwell noted Reagan was “not being well served by his senior staff, who insists on cutting him off from major elements of the coalition that was so instrumental in his election.”226

In addition to Falwell, prominent conservative leaders and financial backers contacted the administration urging this meeting. New Right senators Orrin Hatch and William Armstrong (R-CO) wrote to White House officials and advised the president to reconsider. Hatch explained, “I really believe that these people could help a great deal in providing grass roots support for your economic program.” Armstrong called members of these groups “natural allies of the President and among the most dedicated and responsible leaders in our nation today.” Max Friedersdorf, the assistant to the president for legislative affairs, responded to Sen. Armstrong that “a meeting can take place in the near future.” One month later, Joseph Coors, the beer magnate and major Republican donor, wrote to Michael Deaver asking him to “try to arrange this for as soon as possible because these groups are most anxious to support the President and do need his blessing.”227

226 “Presidential Isolation,” The New Right Report, 9/30/81, Vol. 10, No. 19, 2. The evidence suggests that Deaver did not like Falwell. Richard Viguerie told the author in an interview of when Deaver personally insulted Falwell and was forced to apologize personally to the pastor, Viguerie in discussion with the author, 10/13/11.

227 Letter from Orrin Hatch to the president May 28, 1981 and letter to Elizabeth Dole from William Armstrong 5/29/81, Series II “Lobbyist Research Files, 1974-1998,” Box 38, Folder 26, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. The recipients of these letters were also Edwin Meese, Michael Deaver, Lyn Nofziger, Max Friedersdorf, and Jim Baker; Letter from
The exact reason why this specific meeting was not held remains unclear. In an interview with *Conservative Digest*, James Baker blamed “scheduling reasons.” He noted the president “met with a number of profamily supporters” at the National Right to Life Event in January 1981. In November 1981, Paul Weyrich responded that Reagan’s conservative base had been largely ignored in favor of other groups and constituencies and getting the “royal shaft.” Weyrich angrily noted,

> The chances are excellent you haven’t been to the White House for a private meeting with the President if (1) you were one of the members of Congress who stuck his neck out for Reagan when it looked as if his candidacy might be fading, if (2) you were one who sold the Reagan candidacy against the advice—and to the sneers—of most of your district’s large corporate supporters, if (3) you were out defending Reagan’s program in tough districts where support of the President would cost you votes. You haven’t been to the White House yet, and that after nearly a year of Reagan’s presidency!  

Although hyperbolic, Weyrich’s observation suggests that the New Right’s claim that the administration only offered it symbolic gestures of appreciation carried some degree of truth. Indeed, evidence shows that the administration ignored the New Right on
several occasions. Although New Right leaders did meet with administration officials throughout Reagan’s first year in office, it seems as though they got photo ops and invitations to public events rather than serious policy sessions. One example was a full page picture in *Conservative Digest* which showed every New Right and major conservative leader from pro-life to gun rights groups meeting at the White House with Reagan and James Baker on February 17, 1981.\(^{230}\) Another was the Dick Richards’s breakfast on May 19, 1981 in which all New Right leaders met with Morton Blackwell, Lyn Nofziger, Ed Rollins, and other officials.\(^{231}\) Viguerie also recalled periodically talking with either the president or other officials but could not give exact dates for meeting on these specific issues.\(^{232}\) While the administration acknowledged the concerns of the New Right and periodically made officials available to conservative groups, it refused to allow an outside political group to dictate policy. No administration would give such leeway to an outside partisan group. New Right leaders, however, never seemed to have accepted this fact.

**Reagan’s Economic Policy**

When Reagan entered office, his economic priorities involved tax cuts and curbing federal spending. The administration wanted the support of the conservative base for its budget and initially received the New Right’s help. In return, the New Right

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232  Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 10/13/11.
wanted the president to meet with religious/pro-family organizations. A major piece of New Right legislation was the “Family Protection Act.” Among its various stipulations, the act dealt with a host of issues from the federal government’s ability to deal with parental decisions concerning child rearing, to birth control, abortion, and school prayer. According to journalist Kevin Phillips, “The bulk of the Family Protection Act, however, consists of federal tax code changes designed to encourage families—in lieu of public authorities—to assume burdens ranging from caring for aged relatives to adoption of disadvantaged children.” The Family Protection Act went nowhere. After being introduced by Rep. George Hansen (R-ID) in 1981, the act stalled in several subcommittees with no further action taken to pass the bill.

New Right leaders gave their assistance to the White House. Paul Weyrich offered advice on getting public support. He wrote a memorandum from February 1981 detailing a media strategy on how to sell the president’s economic package. This strategy included use of TV programs, direct mail, and radio spots that would explain the


suggested cuts and economic policies to the “Mork and Mindy” types as well as garner Congressional support. Weyrich wanted to “extend campaign politics into the area of government.” Fearing a media backlash, he hoped to “make it anti-American to oppose the President’s program—wave the flags, and don’t back off from the cuts—every program has fat in it.” The New Right believed in the president’s economic plan as part of his conservative mandate. Thus, it willingly helped push the budget process along. In fact, the New Right took some credit for its direct mail efforts in pressuring House Democrats to vote in favor of the president’s budget.

In August 1981, Congress passed the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 (ERTA). This major piece of legislation was the cornerstone of the president’s economic agenda of tax reduction. Reagan and his advisors believed that such measures would stimulate economic growth. The president also wanted to continue increasing defense spending. The growth of federal spending on the military, coupled with tax cuts expanded the deficit. The inevitable problem for the administration was how to deal with this deficit during the 1981-82 recession and the subsequent public backlash. After passage of ERTA, the New Right forgave OMB Director David Stockman’s past indiscretions with leftist politics. Richard Viguerie personally hosted Stockman, and 160 other conservative

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leaders, at his home to celebrate. Stockman served as a key economic advisor to Reagan and received an award from the Council for National Policy, a group chaired by Tim LaHaye. This event represented the culmination of cooperation between the New Right and the administration over its economic policy. This affection, however, would not last or extend into the social realm.238

The New Right became increasingly critical of Reagan’s economic policy. No doubt, by 1982, the administration had become deeply concerned about deficits and their potential impact on public anxiety. According to historian W. Elliot Brownlee and economist C. Eugene Steuerle, “the loss of conservative Republican seats in the 1982 congressional elections, along with polls that pointed to loss of confidence in the economic stewardship of the Reagan administration, focused minds on deficit reduction.” The White House needed funding sources to deal with this growing problem.239 The deficit forced President Reagan to face a difficult choice. Administration officials knew that an increase in revenue was needed to lower the deficit. Politically, the White House feared what would happen at the polls. From an economic standpoint, both liberals and conservatives worried about the increasing government debt. With large deficits looming in the coming years, the president supported a $98.3 billion dollar tax increase. In the summer of 1982, Reagan and Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill worked out a compromise to pass the $98.3 billion dollar tax bill to help lower the deficit. The bill


passed the House 226 to 207 and the Senate 52 to 47. The bill, known as the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982 (TEFRA), “imposed the first major tax increase during an election year in peacetime since 1932” by closing certain tax loopholes. Before the final passage, Viguerie sent out a direct mail flyer urging Americans to contact their member of Congress to reject the bill and to join his new group “Conservatives Opposed to Tax Increases.” Such a lobbying effort did not stop passage of TEFRA or change the president’s mind. Reagan supported this effort with great reluctance and aroused conservative anger for his action. James Baker understood the conservative disappointment. He attempted to spin the outcome in a positive light by claiming the president “emerged with his leadership intact.” Baker wanted conservatives to know that with TEFRA passed, Reagan could focus on “issues dear to some of the people who broke with us on the tax bill” such as “the school prayer proposal” and “tuition tax credits” that appealed to social conservatives. Such an effort to placate the base showed the awareness the administration had concerning the unpopular measure and its attempts to soothe the hurt feelings of those disappointed in the White House’s action.240

TEFRA outraged conservatives who believed strongly in Reagan’s economic vision. The tax increases angered the New Right and disillusioned supply-side economics supporters. The New York Times aptly noted “by sacrificing Reaganomic orthodoxy for tactical pragmatism, the President risked a showdown with the ideological Republican

conservatives who had been the hard core of his coalition.” This change in policy led the New Right and other supply-side supporters to again speculate that Reagan was being led astray by the non-Reaganites in his inner circle or had succumbed to pressure from Democratic lawmakers. Viguerie complained “we feel impotent and beaten up on. There could be difficult times next year.”

William Buckley called the deal “the collapse of Reaganomics.” Buckley surmised the bill would force Republicans running for office to admit “a) Americans are undertaxed; or b) Reagan made an awful ass of himself in 1981 by asking for more tax reductions than he should have done.”

Patrick Buchanan explained the political calculus for the Republicans was “that the political cost of further budget cuts is higher, much higher, than the political price of raising $100 billion in new taxes.” The result was “a Republican admission that the press and Democrats won the national debate, a Republican surrender of ‘supply side economics.”

Paul Weyrich, however, publicly blamed the Democratic controlled House for the budget impasse. The source of the problem was Congress’s failure of leadership, not Reagan’s policies. He noted, “If Tip O’Neill and his liberal fellow travelers can’t manage to run the House, he should resign.” The administration took notice of this political cover from Weyrich.

Morton Blackwell wrote thanking him for his support and blaming “the liberal

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241 Hedrick Smith, “Reagan Wins His Gamble On Taxes, At A Price,” New York Times, 8/22/82, A1; Browlee and Steuerle, “Taxation,” in The Reagan Presidency, 162-163. Brownlee and Steuerle noted that “TEFRA reduced some of the tax benefits for investment, thus beginning a reversal of the move that ERTA had begun toward a zero or even negative tax rate on income from physical capital.”


democratic leadership” for the budget difficulties. Weyrich’s effort did little to assuage conservative anger over the nation’s economic problems.

**1982: The Coming Midterm Elections and their Fallout**

By the end of 1981, the New Right remained critical of Reagan for his policy and personnel choices. For example, the Heritage Foundation gave the president a grade of “C” for not implementing more of its ideas for its *Mandate for Leadership*. This large volume, published by Heritage and given to incoming administration officials, outlined policy proposals that aligned with the foundation’s conservative principles of limited government. With the 1982 midterm elections approaching, John Dolan of NCPAC wrote to Ed Meese, Jim Baker and Mike Deaver to address the continued need to expand what he termed “a new Conservative-Republican majority.” Dolan argued that the administration had been unsuccessful in expanding the Republican base due to the political fight over Reagan’s budget. Democrats in Congress attacked the president’s economic plan to cut domestic spending. Dolan noted how “framing the Reagan economic plan as ‘budget cuts’ is phony and permitted the liberals to take the moral high ground.” Republicans needed to reclaim the narrative on the budget debate. In response, Dolan believed that in order to gain traction among Democrats and Independents, the administration needed more “input from people who have demonstrated they can build


He explained how conservatives had been largely ignored despite the desire in the White House to maintain their loyalty. Dolan wanted the White House to go on the offensive and implied that the New Right could be instrumental in Republican success as it had been in 1980.246

The level of distrust between the New Right and the Reagan administration was palpable. New Right activists attacked the White House publicly. The New Right wanted the president to return to his conservative principles in order for Republicans to be successful in the midterm elections. It did not hesitate to make this political position known. One example of this conservative hostility came at a meeting in Washington on January 21, 1982. Forty-five conservatives gathered and expressed their discontent. The majority of conservative ire resided with top officials and not necessarily the president himself. They complained of the way the administration handled social issues. One attendee noted “crucial positions are occupied by people who have small history of sympathy with, or understanding of the Reagan mandate, the principles on which it rests, or the sense of urgency that it communicates.” Thus, more Reaganites were needed in positions of power. For his part, Weyrich lamented, “President Reagan offered hope, but that had diminished. We are back to the Old Republican way of doing business.” They

246 Memo to Meese, Baker, and Deaver from Dolan 12/23/81, series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 6, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. In the margins, Weyrich had hand written a note stating that the ideas presented in the letter had been discussed with Baker and Meese “off the record” at an earlier White House meeting.
sent the content of their discussions as a formal letter to the president that reiterated their social and economic policy positions.\textsuperscript{247}

The theme resonated throughout the campaign season. The New Right continued this hyperbolic rhetoric. In February 1982, \textit{Conservative Digest} asked its readers, “Has Ronald Reagan’s Presidency Been Captured By Wall Street- Big Business-Corporate Executives Suite-Big New York/Houston Law- Eastern Establishment And/Or Establishment-Non-Reaganite Republicans? Do You Have to Ask?” The cover cartoon showed Ronald Reagan tied to the ground similar to \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} and unable to move. The articles again called into question the conservative credentials among Reagan’s inner circle, or Non-Reaganites as \textit{Conservative Digest} referred to them, especially Vice President George Bush. The editorial did not criticize the president, but rather those officials who “share the feeling that Ronald Reagan has to be protected from getting carried away by his strong personal conservative beliefs.” If only the president was surrounded by true conservatives he could be more effective in office. Vice-President Bush was interviewed for the issue and a hostile exchange ensued between him and the reporter over his conservative credentials and supposed lack of Reaganites on his staff. This line of questioning reflected the lingering animosity toward Bush among many New Rightists. The president took note of the issue and its hostile tone in his diary.

He wrote on February 21, 1982 “Geo. Murphy [sic] 248 came by. He’s worried about the hard core conservatives rebelling. The ‘Conservative Digest’ now has me captured by moderates.” Reagan’s tone in this entry seemed disappointed that his own base resorted to such rhetorical excess in attacking him. More importantly, those close to the president were concerned about the New Right and made their feelings known to him. 249

In February 1982, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington D.C., the New Right held its annual Conservative Political Action Conference. Understanding the level of dissatisfaction among his conservative base, Reagan, and other top level cabinet secretaries, addressed those in attendance. The real concerns came over the growing budget deficit and spending cuts. The conference was also a chance for the New Right to assail Reagan cabinet officials they did not like such as Secretary of State Haig. In his defense, Reagan explained that his budget was consistent with conservative principles. Reagan noted, “We will press for further cuts in spending, we will protect the tax reductions already passed, we will spend on defense what is necessary for our national security. I have no intention of leading the Republican Party into next fall’s election on a platform of higher taxes and cut rate defense.” In terms of criticizing Reagan’s appointments for his cabinet, Secretary of State Al Haig was roundly considered the

248 George Murphy was a close personal friend of the president and former senator from California who had worked as actor in Hollywood with Reagan, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Murphy.

worst choice from a poll conducted by *Conservative Digest.*\(^ {250}\) The *Boston Globe* editorial assessment of this meeting correctly reflected the position of the New Right in the Republican Party. Despite having a Republican president in office, “Ideologues are by definition perpetually dissatisfied…the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel was awash in zealotry.” Reagan’s promises, however, did not placate the New Right ideologues. Thus, “with President Reagan increasingly isolated by real political problems, they’re not ready to follow, which is why the New Right is fading.”\(^ {251}\)

A few months later, in July 1982, *Conservative Digest* offered another provocative headline: “Has Reagan Deserted the Conservatives?” Throughout the entire issue, various commentators questioned the president’s foreign policy, commitment to defense, the pro-life agenda, taxes, and lack of invitations to the White House, among others. For example, conservatives were disappointed with the appointment of George Shultz as Secretary of State after Alexander Haig resigned from office. Summing up the anger of those who contributed, Viguerie editorialized, “Reject the four C’s of Jerry Ford—Compromise, Conciliation, Communication and Cooperation—And adopt the two C’s of Coalition and Confrontation: Coalition with your supporters and confrontation with your opponents.” President Reagan angrily responded to *Conservative Digest* by


calling it “one of the most dishonest and unfair” attacks on his credentials. He dismissed Viguerie and Weyrich as “narrow ideologues.” Journalist Mark Shields addressed the New Right complaint of not being invited to the White House more often and its dislike of James Baker. Shields concluded, “Baker is Ivy League, which seems to bother a number of his New Right critics who have not been invited to a White House dinner…just maybe the answer to New Right criticism lies in smaller deficits and bigger guest lists.” The overhyped rhetoric against Reagan revealed the New Right’s belief they were being slighted by the administration. The issue also reflected the sense of entitlement that New Right activists possessed. It seemed by this point the president could do little to appease New Right hostility to his policies or appointments.

The continued animosity towards the White House from Conservative Digest angered the president and soured his relationship with the New Right. In one high profile public spat in October 1982, Reagan was addressing Republican candidates running for office at the White House. The president noted in his diary that “a young bearded cand.[sic] from Calif. stood up and started a diatribe against me. It was if he was reciting that terrible edition of the ‘Conservative Digest.’” According to Reagan, he “answered his charges with facts & told him to shut up.” The candidate in question, Gary Arnold, running against Leon Panetta in the California 16th Congressional district, interrupted the president and yelled “we have a Tylenol-taxing situation here, and we have Reagan-

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mortis setting into the nation’s body politic.” Arnold was angry over the tax increase signed earlier in the year and questioned Reagan’s commitment to conservative ideals. Once Reagan told Arnold to “shut up,” the president received applause from the rest in attendance. Such a display of contention between Arnold and the leader of the party was evidence of how far the New Right message resonated. The fact that Reagan specifically referred to *Conservative Digest* indicates the continued irritation he had with the New Right.\(^{254}\)

The New Right wanted to build upon its successes from 1978 and 1980 in the 1982 midterm elections. Speculation, however, existed among pundits whether the New Right’s time had passed and how much could the New Right reasonably accomplish legislatively. *The Washington Post* editorialized “There is a strong case to be made that the kind of goals New Right activists have been seeking – a government much diminished in size, but at the same time encouraging certain moral practices- is far enough out of line with what most Americans want that it cannot be obtained by democratic means, and the New Right...has shown no interest whatever in nondemocratic means of exerting power.” No doubt, the New Right did not wish to see Republican gains from 1980 disappear and remained confident that it could affect the

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outcome of certain races. However, some leaders like Terry Dolan were skeptical that it could recreate the previous national election without Reagan running.  

Noting the upcoming elections, James Baker agreed to meet with the four New Right leaders in May to discuss social issues. This meeting attempted to placate the New Right. According to news reports, James Baker told those in attendance “not to worry…We’re on your side.” Reagan supported school prayer and with abortion he did not take a firm stance due to the differences among pro-life advocates on how to legislate the issue. Not all New Right officials agreed with the president’s positions, or lack thereof. Some hesitancy towards the White House still existed. Howard Phillips shrewdly noted, “It is easy for the White House to endorse something like school prayer which has the support of the majority of the public, and alienates no major Reagan constituency…It is a no-lose situation for them.” The president, according to Phillips, was not taking the more difficult path in being more proactive on religious values. Inconsistent and lackluster support for the New Right’s social agenda did not stop it from trying to repeat its successes in 1978 and 1980 for the upcoming midterms.  

As November approached, the New Right knew the difficulty facing the administration. The Democrats hammered the administration on the recession and unemployment. Polls indicated continued public anxiety over the economy and a questioning of Reagan’s leadership. By the fall of 1982, unemployment reached 10.1


percent despite the fact that inflation was declining. With the president’s falling poll numbers and economic distress, Republicans had a difficult time running for office.\footnote{Richard Reeves, \textit{President Reagan}, 125-126, 130-132; Ehrman, \textit{The Eighties}, 68-69.} Reagan had been campaigning for Republican candidates and expressed concern about holding onto the Senate. Paul Weyrich offered advice to help the Republican cause. In a letter to James Baker, he outlined an election strategy called the “Bottled Up” project. Weyrich’s idea included creating a task force comprised of administration officials, the business community, New Right groups, and the Republican National Committee. He suggested a slogan of “Stay the course, we can’t go back” along with a direct mail campaign to get supporters to the polls. The antagonist to the administration’s “calm, realistic approach to government” was the “professional, liberal bureaucracy” that wanted to make Reagan “look bad.”\footnote{Brinkley, ed., \textit{The Reagan Diaries}, Monday, October 25 1982, 166; Letter to James Baker, Williamson, and Laxalt from Paul Weyrich, 9/15/82, series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 7, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.} There is no evidence that Baker embraced Weyrich’s plan to form an alliance between the New Right and the White House. Due to the constant attacks on the president and his advisors, one could argue Baker was not inclined to institute this task force.

The left also became more attuned to how the New Right operated in elections. The New Right’s strategy of using social issues to divert attention away from the economy put Democrats on the defensive. This New Right tactic alarmed the left. Nicholas O. Berry, who was a professor at Cornell College in Iowa and had run for the Iowa Senate in 1978, provided an insightful analysis of New Right political success. He
explained that by focusing on social issues, it had forced Democrats running for office to take positions that inevitably “alienate a segment of their normal base of support.” Consequently, “the key to the strategy was making social issues salient and then forcing a split between the social conservatives and social liberal within the Democratic electorate.” This tactic divided the loyalties of Democrats and kept many from wanting to vote out of frustration over the party’s values. Berry understood “the central question facing liberals is whether they can neutralize social issues and then forge up-to-date economic programs to restore a majority coalition.”

Democrats needed to counter the New Right attacks in order to be successful. Speaking at a convention for Planned Parenthood called “The New Right vs. Our Rights” George McGovern told the audience that although his run for reelection in 1980 ended in defeat due to New Right attacks on his social positions, he believed the New Right “won’t be as effective because people are alerted to their tactics.” The left also had organizations and fundraising mechanisms to counter the New Right.

The 1982 midterms were a stinging defeat for the New Right and the administration. Republicans lost twenty-six House seats but were able to maintain control of the Senate 54 to 46. Democrats also won big in gubernatorial races across the country as well. The economy and high unemployment played a key role in voters’

259 Nicholas O. Berry, “The hidden strategy of the New Right,” *Christian Science Monitor* 2/10/82, 22.

decisions to support Democrats and not Republicans.\textsuperscript{261} Many candidates targeted by the New Right were re-elected. It spent considerable sums during the campaign running negative television and print ads. New Right activists, with NCPAC funds, targeted Sen. Robert Byrd (D-WVa) with “The Bye-Bye-Byrd Committee” and Ed McAteer of the Religious Roundtable claimed Sen. Jim Sasser (D-TN) had a “perverted conscience who votes in favor of slaughtering little babies.” Byrd countered the harsh political and personal attacks against him and won re-election despite the claim made, “Are you sure he’s really one of us?”\textsuperscript{262} Following the loss at the polls, The \textit{Christian Science Monitor} noted “it appears that the New Right oversold its power – as extremist movements often do.” Having raised $5 million dollars and using negative campaign ads, NCPAC supported candidates failed to remove Democrats from office. Republican candidates not affiliated with the New Right fared better in winning their seats. The \textit{Monitor} editorial explained that many people on both sides of the political spectrum, from the ACLU to Barry Goldwater, saw the New Right’s social agenda as too extreme. While the New Right should “be concerned about what is regarded as an alarming decline in moral values,” It cannot “impose these views on a society at large” using “misrepresentation, false accusation, and other reprehensible political tactics.”\textsuperscript{263}


Speculation abounded on who or what to blame for the loss. Some people focused on the president’s economic policies. Paul Weyrich speculated a year earlier that Republicans would lose big if the president continued to listen to “soft headed advice” from some officials. He recognized that the economy remained in trouble, but Reagan needed to win the public perception battle. The president needed to change the notion that “stingy conservatives are taking food out of the mouths of hungry children and forcing old ladies in New England to freeze in the Winter.” After the election, *The Washington Post* noted that the White House wanted “to pre-empt the Democrats on spending for job creation—or rather the illusion of job creation…” in order “to buy voter loyalty for Republicans. And show the electorate the Reagan White House really cares.” The article called on Reagan “to get rid of his mis-advisors” who did not help the party during the election. Richard Viguerie and *Conservative Digest* placed the blame on the administration as well. When the White House tacitly agreed to raise the gasoline tax, Viguerie responded in a letter to supporters. He argued that instead of raising taxes, the government should “reduce spending on low priority and counter-productive projects.” For example, the government should begin “transferring funds out of the budgets of the Departments of Energy and Education, from foreign aid, or out of our contributions to the


United Nations." These notions from the New Right sought to shift blame away from itself and towards the White House for Republican losses.

Recently, Viguerie blamed the defeat in 1982 on the administration for “not nationalizing the election.” He noted, “In the ’82 election we were not in charge… Jim Baker was in charge of ’82.” He recalled meeting with Baker and other conservative leaders at a Washington D.C. restaurant several days after the midterm elections. The president’s chief of staff lamented the loss and asked those in attendance why Republicans had lost when the economy showed signs of recovery. Viguerie told Baker “never in the annals of recorded history has it ever been noted that people went to the polls to thank you for a job well done” and spoke of Winston Churchill’s loss in 1945 to Labour’s Clement Attlee. The public will “vote for the future, every election is about the future, or they are scared of somebody else, afraid of them, as the Goldwater campaign in ’64. Republicans…only win… national elections under one set of circumstances…and that is you’ve got to nationalize the elections.” Democrats win elections because they want them local in order to promise their constituents projects and other services. “I think Baker, Deaver, and Reagan ran a poor campaign,” Viguerie said, and they “did not involve the movement in the election campaign.” In addition, “We were treated as kind of a country cousin. We got invited to the wedding, but they hoped they don’t come, hope they sit in the back and don’t embarrass us.” Viguerie’s interpretation of the


267 Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
1982 midterms suggests that the administration did not coordinate strategy with the New Right. If both factions had worked together, Baker would neither have been so dumbfounded by the defeat nor sought consolation from New Right leaders. Consequently, the loss allowed for Weyrich and Viguerie to fault the White House for allowing “non-Reaganites” to run the campaign and not examine their own electoral failures as well.

With the midterms over, the New Right believed the time had arrived for the administration to finally focus on social issues. According to Paul Weyrich, liberals had used the tax cuts, the unemployment numbers, and social security as a way to attack Reagan for favoring the rich at the expense of the average American. He offered a “new strategy” that would bring back together the coalition from 1980 “which did not actively participate in the 1982 elections because of the administration’s pre-occupation with Reaganomics.” Weyrich asked that “the President should not retreat on the social justice issues but rather should propose a whole series of new initiatives to deal with freedom of education, parental rights, adoption and welfare reform.” To him, Republicans needed to win back the blue-collar constituency.268 Morton Blackwell took notice of the New Right’s emphasis on social issues and not just the economy. In a memo to Elizabeth Dole concerning the upcoming 1983 State of the Union address, Blackwell explained that Reagan’s speech should focus on: “cleaning up pornography; Neighborhood schools;

Voluntary school prayer; Tuition tax credits; Federal funding of abortions; death penalty.” The potential of highlighting these things “will raise activism on other than strictly economic issues. The Reagan coalition in 1980, which was largely dormant in 1982, must be reconstituted now.” 269 Such an admission reflected an understanding that New Right and Moral Majority issues had to be addressed. It was also a subtle way of acknowledging that Reagan would need these groups in his 1984 re-election campaign. It is possible, however, that the White House learned from its mistakes in the November loss and looked to bring the conservative base back together under its leadership.

As the tensions continued to build, some New Right and Moral Majority leaders openly contemplated the idea of supporting a primary challenger to Reagan. The Religious Right was upset over the president’s lack of action on issues of Christian schools. For example, in August, 1983, Gregory Butler, the Legislative Director of the National Pro-Family Coalition, sent a letter to the president expressing his anger over what he perceived was a lack of commitment to tuition tax credits. Advocates for this issue objected to what they believed was a “double taxation,” meaning that in addition to paying for their children’s private school education they were also required to pay taxes to fund local public schools. Butler complained of the “mixed signals we get from the White House” and the “grave reservations about the level of staff commitment” to tax credits. The letter listed the times Butler’s group tried to get passage of the tuition tax credits only to have lukewarm support by the administration or its supporters in

Congress. Butler concluded that “there has been little evidence other than rhetoric these past few months to indicate that the strong commitment you have is shared by those on your staff” and desired a meeting with the president.\footnote{Letter to Ronald Reagan from Gregory Butler 8/26/83, series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 8, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming; For an example of tuition tax credits, in 1983, the Lutheran Church’s stance on this issue favored “school choice” and reliance in tax credits, while acknowledging that it supported public schools, \url{https://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/History/ELCA-Archives/Achival-Documents/Predecessor-Body-Statements/American-Lutheran-Church/Tax-Credits-for-Private-Schools.aspx}.}

In a more telling letter, Bob Jones, Chancellor of Bob Jones University, excoriated Reagan for his lack of fealty to the conservative cause. Jones lamented the way Reagan supporters were being treated telling the president, “You have broken your promises to them and treated them with contempt.” Jones complained that Reagan’s policies did not “protect religious freedom and assure the Constitutional rights of Christian schools.” In the end, Jones warned “Do not take us for granted. We are not going to vote for you in desperation in 1984.” The palpable anger of these two letters reflected hostility towards the White House that was hard to ignore.\footnote{Letter to Ronald Reagan from Bob Jones 12/30/83, series “Correspondence, 1974-1999,” Box 4, Folder 8, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.}

New Right leaders began to openly speculate about supporting another candidate in the upcoming presidential election in 1984. Howards Phillips noted at the Conservative Political Action Conference, “Reagan has been a total disaster.” New Right leaders lamented the lack of legislative success despite having a president who supported their positions in public. Viguier speculations, “You don’t run against a sitting president easily…but we’re looking.” However, Viguier later recanted this remark to support the
president. No doubt, the New Right had lost some of its prestige in the 1982 midterm losses, but believed that it could find success again by energizing its grassroots’ base. The response by Reagan aide Michael Deaver to this apostasy by Phillips and Viguerie was an angry reply to the press, “Screw ‘em, and you can quote me.”\textsuperscript{272} Paul Weyrich sought to assure the administration that he had no plans to support a challenger to Reagan. Weyrich explained in a letter to the White House that published quotes in the Washington Times had been taken out of context. While he acknowledged his criticisms of the president, Weyrich noted that he was not part of a movement to challenge Reagan’s re-election.\textsuperscript{273} Viguerie, in a June 1984 interview on Meet the Press, also gave his support for the president but warned that a third party could emerge after the election. He cautioned, “We’re going to see what a second Reagan administration is going to look like before we make our final decision” on whether to create another political party.\textsuperscript{274}

Viguerie defended his position in U.S. News and World Report. He explained how Reagan had “moved toward the left in many areas when it is unnecessary to engage in give-and-take with the Democrats” and had only “reduced the growth of spending” and not cut government expenditures as promised. When asked whether the president “had abandoned the ‘new right’ on social issues,” Viguerie explained “one of the President’s top aides said these issues were ‘peripheral to the kinds of things a national government


\textsuperscript{273} Letter to Mrs. Faith Whittlesey, Special Assistant to the President for Public Liaison from Paul Weyrich, 9/7/83, folder “Conservative Groups?” Morton Blackwell Papers, Ronald Reagan Library.

\textsuperscript{274} NBC’s Meet the Press, aired 6/10/84 with guest Richard A. Viguerie, publisher of Conservative Digest.
should be concentrating on.” I wish Reagan had told us that when he was campaigning for President.” In response to Viguerie’s admonitions of the president, Frank Fahrenkopf, the Republican National Committee Chairman, vigorously defended Reagan. Fahrenkopf questioned whether the New Right was truly conservative since these groups and individuals had not been early supporters of Reagan. The chairman also reiterated the difficulties of the modern presidency in keeping all of his constituents satisfied. He noted, “I’ve told some of the so-called new-right leaders such as Richard Viguerie, Howard Phillips, and Terry Dolan that we want to keep open our lines of communication,” but “I’ve also told them not to expect the President to get up every morning at 7 o’clock to get his marching orders from them.”

“New Populism”: An Attempt to Rebrand the New Right Movement

After experiencing defeat at the polls in 1982, the New Right shifted its rhetoric and strategy towards what Viguerie called “New Populism.” In a recent interview Viguerie elaborated on New Populism and its impact on his political thinking. Viguerie explained, “I’ve always been a populist” since beginning his political activism in Harris County Texas during the 1950s. He noted, I “always felt that the Establishment was the problem and we weren’t going to solve our problems with the Establishment.” The Establishment has “in the last forty, fifty, sixty years …begun to focus on their own needs instead of the country.” To Viguerie, the Establishment perpetuated itself through

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275 Darryl Heikes, “Has Reagan Deserted the Conservative Cause; YES—“Conservative issues get the rhetoric but not much action: Interview with Richard Viguerie; Publisher of Conservative Digest,” and “Has Reagan Deserted the Conservative Cause: NO—“Ronald Reagan has not abandoned his basic philosophy” Interview with Frank Fahrenkopf; Chairman of the Republican National Committee, U.S. News & World Report, 4/18/83, 67.
“crony capitalism.” This fundamental problem plagued both parties in the United States. In reality, New Populism was an attempt to rebrand the New Right by focusing public anger towards undefined institutions such as big government, big business, and big labor. Viguerie believed that many Americans could sympathize with his attacks on these groups.276

At the time, however, he defined “1980s style” populism as “anti-racist, compassionate, anti-Communist, future-oriented, and grounded in traditional values while sympathetic to libertarianism.”277 In a speech to the National Press Club in early 1984, Viguerie outlined his philosophy. The basic ideas espoused by Viguerie attempted to reshape the conservative movement to include the majority of middle-class Americans. He provided a short list of proposals to explain his brand of populism. First, New Populists would “disassociate ourselves in the strongest possible terms from extremism in any form.” Second, they would “reach out to the middle class by proposing innovative reforms such as a flat-rate income tax, education vouchers, legislation protecting the rights of crime victims, and a restructuring of the military to eliminate bureaucratic waste.” Finally, they would not be “tied to the Republican Party,” or “Big Business or Big Labor.” In a unique twist of logic, Viguerie argued that in the past, “Big Business bears much of the responsibility for the tremendous growth of government regulation,” and that “most of the early labor unions in this country were in favor of free enterprise.” In the final analysis, it was government interference and regulation that stifled growth

276      Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.

and personal freedoms. Thus, the true battle was between “the establishment and the people.” While not advocating a third party, Viguerie envisioned a group that would bring people from across the political spectrum that could change the dynamics of the two-party system by the mid 1980s. This platform in theory would attract many Americans who found themselves angry at their station in life and could blame the government and elements of Big Business as the culprit.

Viguerie explained New Populism to a television audience on NBC’s *Meet the Press* in 1984. He lashed out at the elites who allowed for a general decline in values. Viguerie advocated “new leadership” that did not include the current establishment. He also wanted the United States back on the gold standard as a way to fight inflation and argued that most Americans would support a flat tax. Viguerie heralded the conservative mantra that would become part of the flat tax argument in the years to come. He conjectured, “I don’t think that Americans would agree with you that if they could just pay the government 10 percent of what they earn and keep 90 percent, and fill out their yearly income tax on something the size of a post card and do away with thousands of government rules and regulations…Americans would jump at the chance.” Viguerie was not alone in his advocacy of a flat tax. Since 1982, the administration internally debated the merits of the flat tax as a way to raise additional revenues by broadening the tax base. Secretary of State George Shultz convinced the president of its merits to raise


money without raising taxes. However, key economic advisors, like David Stockman, believed that the flat tax would not provide the revenues needed and by early 1983, the administration shelved the idea.²⁸⁰

This shift in New Right thinking began in 1983. During this year, Viguerie released his book, *The Establishment versus the People*, which expounded his political ideas. According to early press reports, the New Right saw an opportunity to move away from the negative politics of the past. Cal Thomas, who was serving as Vice President of the Moral Majority at the time, noted, “I think a positive campaign will work. We need to stay away from inflammatory rhetoric, like calling people who support legalized abortion ‘murderers and baby killers.’”²⁸¹ Viguerie editorialized in *Conservative Digest*, “I’m not saying we should abandon the White House. But we should realize that the Reagan Administration is not concerned with many conservative issues.” Therefore, conservatives should strengthen their own organizations and candidates and highlight the issues important to them.²⁸² *National Review*, however, questioned the purpose of New Populism. One article argued that populism, when used in its historical context, “has always been a movement of the Left” that “was founded on economic fallacies, simplistic remedies, and a conspiracy theory of history.” While acknowledging that Viguerie had


²⁸² Richard Viguerie, “Conservatives Need to Play Their Game,” *Conservative Digest*, 1/83, 56.
some good ideas, the desire for the United States to go back on the gold standard was “the very antithesis of everything populism has ever stood for.” The author concluded, “Either Viguerie is ignorant of the history and meaning of populism in which case his analysis lacks credibility, or he is aware of it, in which case his book is a blatant attempt to deceive his audience by the deliberate use of terminology.” New Populism was Viguerie’s attempt to refashion the New Right as concerned with traditional values and middle-class America by demonizing nebulous entities such as big government and big business as scapegoats.283

**Conclusion: The New Right’s Legacy During Reagan’s First Term**

Despite the criticism over the years towards Reagan and his administration, the New Right supported the president’s re-election effort. In December 1983, *Conservative Digest*, the nemesis of the White House for the previous three years, polled its readers who expressed disappointment in Reagan, “but still not enough for most to ditch him for another candidate.” The coming 1984 election diminished the open hostility between the administration and the conservative base. The Moral Majority made it clear that it supported the White House. Ronald Godwin, executive director of Moral Majority, explained “we understand the need to maintain open communications and access with the Administration rather engaging in vitriolic attacks.” In October 1984, one of Richard Viguerie’s efforts to support the administration was a ninety minute televised debate in Kansas City with Ralph Nader over the topic, “Should Reagan be Re-Elected?” For his part, Ronald Reagan won the 1984 presidential election by a landslide. Former Vice

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President Walter Mondale was unable to stem the tide of “Its Morning Again in America” or counteract the argument that many Americans were better off than they had been four years earlier. Despite the lack of public disputes between the New Right and Reagan during the re-election campaign, many of the same arguments that had dominated their relationship over the years remained after the election. Differences still existed between the New Right and the administration over personnel and social issues. The New Right still wanted action on social issues and change among top officials. Concerning social issues, Cal Thomas explained his views about the administration, “They’ve teased us, but they haven’t pleased us.” Faith Whittlesey, head of the White House public liaison office, explained, “Personnel has moved from No. 3 to No. 1 on the conservative agenda.” The New Right and Moral Majority again calculated to hold their critique of the administration under after the election. It was no surprise that little had changed in the dynamics of the relationship between Reagan and the New Right.  

The 1984 campaign also revealed that the New Right did not have a new standard bearer to replace Reagan. After three years of public disputes over administration policies and personnel choices, the New Right returned to the Republican fold. What had the New Right achieved in the previous four years? The social issues it promoted so heavily found little reception in either Congress or the White House. New Right activists believed Reagan’s election in 1980 signaled a conservative transformation of the country.

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They thought that New Right assistance was important in helping Reagan win. Yet few could argue that the conservative movement had come of age and was a powerful force in American politics. The once dominate Democrats could not counter Reagan’s charisma and appeal. The New Right claimed some success now that social issues had become a greater part of the Republican identity on a state and national level. Candidates who received New Right funding needed to pass a litmus test on issues that appealed to social conservatives. The candidates and their supporters fundamentally changed the Republican Party of the previous decades. As a result, the New Right demanded a more ideological agenda than Reagan or his advisors were willing to pursue. The dramatic change the New Right wanted did not materialize. In the end, the New Right leaders were correct on one thing: the administration gave them symbolism and not much action on their issues. This bitterness encapsulates the legacy of the New Right-Reagan relationship.
CHAPTER FIVE: THE NEW RIGHT’S FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

When Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency in 1981, conservatives since the 1970s argued that the United States had fallen behind the Soviets in the cold war struggle. Reagan responded by continuing the American military buildup started under Jimmy Carter and provided assistance to countries fighting against communism.\textsuperscript{285} The New Right’s foreign policy agenda, especially its virulent anti-communism, corresponded to Reagan’s views. Nevertheless, \textit{degrees of difference} emerged between them over how to handle certain situations, such as Taiwan, Central America, and the downing of the Korean Airliner in 1983. The New Right publicly pressured the administration to react more strongly to what it saw as Soviet machinations than many White House officials wanted. With the end of the cold war, however, New Right members like Richard Viguerie embraced the idea that Reagan and his policies won the struggle. Viguerie argues that Reagan did confront the Soviets more aggressively and those confrontational policies eventually allowed the United States to win this conflict. This revisionist position belies the animosity and divisions that emerged a quarter of century earlier when the administration became a frequent target of New Right disappointment.

During the 1970s, détente, or the easing of tensions, between the United States and the Soviet Union had become part of cold war relations since the Nixon administration. Many conservative commentators and members of Congress had criticized détente as beneficial to the Soviets. These individuals believed it gave the Soviet Union time to exceed the United States in key areas of nuclear and military

superiority. The New Right and neoconservatives disdained détente as well. New Right leaders were disappointed in Reagan appointees due to their ties to previous administrations that had embraced the practice. Many also questioned the need for treaties with the Soviets, such as SALT and SALT II, which left the United States vulnerable to Soviet nuclear weapons. For example, Reagan told his radio audience in 1979 that the Soviets were “eager” to sign the SALT II treaty “because they will get more out of the treaty than we will. Our President is telling us that Salt [sic] II holds out the promise of peace and an end to any costly arms race. But what does that do to us if we are the only one’s not racing?”

Consequentially, the United States needed to expand its capabilities and technology to defeat a possible future Soviet attack. At the same time, New Rightists also argued that treaties and test bans were ineffective because the Soviets used them to their advantage or violated the terms. The Soviets could test new weapons without the public outrage seen in the West due to their “totalitarian system” and then seek treaties with the United States. Again, according to detractors, such actions left America vulnerable and at a disadvantage because the Soviet Union could not be trusted.

Reagan developed his approach to the Soviet Union before taking office. As historian Chester Pach, Jr. noted, “Reagan had a core set of beliefs or ideas, which he

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287 “After SALT II, Carter Going for Total Test Ban Treaty,” The New Right Report, Vol. 8, No. 3 2/28/79; The Republican platform in 1980 claimed that President Carter had allowed a “cover-up” of violations of SALT I and II and that Republicans promised to hold the Soviet Union accountable, Conservative Digest 12/81, 8-9, Interview with James Baker.
developed – sometimes at length – prior to his presidency and which guided his decisions once he entered the White House.” According to Pach, top priorities for Reagan was to continue the increase in defense spending begun under President Carter, regain the strategic advantage over the Soviets, and also to allay the fears of many Americans that pursuing a vigorous foreign policy would not lead to “another Vietnam.” During his first term Reagan faced what one historian called the “second cold war” as tensions increased between the two superpowers.288 As a result, the Reagan administration sought to confront the Soviet Union in key parts of the world. It took a very active role in Western Europe, Central America,– particularly in Nicaragua and El Salvador, and Grenada,– and for a time the Middle East. When the president introduced his Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI, in 1983 he antagonized the Soviet leadership even more over the idea of a missile shield that could defend the United States and its allies from a nuclear strike. The growing “nuclear freeze” movement in Western Europe and the United States deplored Reagan’s policy as untenable and untested. It was not until Reagan’s second term, however, that relations with the Soviet Union improved, but from 1981-84, superpower relations were locked in a dangerous stalemate.289

The foreign policy goals of the New Right had remained constant since the 1970s. The New Right shared Reagan’s hatred for communism in moral and political terms. Since the Panama Canal debates in 1977-78, the New Right made the argument that Cuba


and the Soviet Union had expansionist designs in Central America and the Caribbean. It also believed that the U.S. position vis-a-vis the Soviets had diminished and blamed many U.S. companies for selling technology to them as the cause of this imbalance.\(^{290}\) New Right defense and foreign policy was handled under the aegis of the so-called Stanton Group, headed by Weyrich and the CSFC. Weyrich chaired meetings of this group to discuss and formulate policy positions.\(^{291}\) The group was able to meet with White House officials, but the regularity of such events remains unknown. *The New Right Report* noted that on July 30, 1981 the Stanton Group met with Secretary of State Alexander Haig. The article noted, “While Haig made no startling revelations or concessions, he got an earful if the gravest concerns on the minds of conservatives.”\(^{292}\) This quote reveals the sometimes contentious relationship between the New Right and the administration over foreign policy.\(^{293}\)

After Reagan took office, the New Right supported many of his foreign policy initiatives. The New Right defended the administration’s position on the “nuclear freeze” movement. Reagan made it clear he would not submit to “nuclear blackmail” by freeze proponents that wanted the United States to negotiate with the Soviet Union about each countries’ nuclear stockpiles. The president and the New Right believed the Soviets


\(^{291}\) I have been unable to find a working list of who was involved in the group. However, it served as an umbrella for various conservative leaders, similar to the Liberty Lobby, to meet.


\(^{293}\) “Newswatch Thomas Griffith: Muted Thunder on the Right,” *Time* Monday 7/12/82.
could not be trusted to uphold their end of the bargain in an agreement between both nations. The New Right agreed with Reagan’s tough talk against the Soviet Union and the threat posed by communism. New Right activists praised Reagan’s 1983 “Evil Empire” speech to the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida. Viguerie, however, told the press afterwards that he wanted to make sure that the president backed up his words with concrete action. “Our criticism has never been in the area that we don’t get the rhetoric,” Viguerie explained, “We get it…it is not what we’re looking for.” The New Right encouraged the administration to pursue the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), or “Star Wars,” that would, in theory, create a missile defense shield to shoot down incoming Soviet nuclear warheads. This potential system was important to the New Right’s foreign policy objectives to counteract the Soviet military buildup. Both the New Right and Reagan found common ground on the Soviet threat and the menace of communism.294

The New Right, however, disagreed with the president’s appointments for key positions in the State and Defense Departments. Senator Jesse Helms took the lead in the Senate to attack the White House’s choices for these two prominent cabinet positions. Most notably, Alexander Haig served as the focal point by the New Right and some neoconservatives over Reagan’s foreign policy until he resigned in 1982. New Right leaders viewed Haig as tied to the Nixon administration. Viguerie called him “a disciple

of détente” and another one of the “Nixon-Ford retreads.”

Sen. Helms derided Haig “a protégé of Henry Kissinger.” Neoconservatives, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, also saw Haig as too moderate. Kirkpatrick, as ambassador to the United Nations, wanted a more confrontational U.S. foreign policy. Neoconservatives believed Haig had moderated Reagan’s views and moved U.S. policy to the center which was dominated by the traditional foreign policy elites. George Shultz, who replaced Haig as Secretary of State, also disappointed the right. Journalist Pat Buchanan viewed Shultz as another “admirer and friend of Henry Kissinger.” He lamented, “Where is the sense of danger and urgency in the rhetoric of Shultz?” Such attacks on Haig and Shultz reflected the New Right belief that the United States was locked in a “protracted, decisive world struggle with the Soviet empire.” These personnel choices highlighted the disdain the New Right had for the Republican foreign policy establishment.

The New Right targeted Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger as well. Sen. Helms described Weinberger as misguided in his understanding of Soviet intentions, especially over the SALT talks and the nuclear “imbalance” that existed between the two superpowers. The senator believed that the Soviets were disingenuous in their approach to arms talks and had a different understanding of what results such treaties should

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entail. This criticism did not reflect the fact the Weinberger strongly supported enhancing U.S. military capabilities. In addition to Weinberger, six New Right Senators including Jesse Helms and Orrin Hatch unsuccessfully tried to block the nomination of Frank Carlucci as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. New Right leaders questioned his “commitment to a strong defense.” Carlucci, *The New Right Report* explained, “as Carter’s number two man at CIA, did nothing to stop the dismantling of the federal intelligence network.” Helms explained in a speech that Carlucci “sat through the destabilization of Iran…the signing of SALT II…the ousting of President Somoza and the installation of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua” and a host of other failings while in office. More likely what angered the New Right was Carlucci’s supposed assertion, “conservatives are all a bunch of talk. When the chips are down, they never produce.” Another “downer,” according to the New Right, was the administration support for Eugene Rostow as director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Rostow was a Democrat who had served in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and Senator Helms failed to stop his nomination as well.


298 Ironically, in 1978, Reagan devoted six radio addresses to explaining Rostow’s reaction to the ongoing SALT II negotiations. He called Rostow “a man of unquestioned liberal credentials” as a way to bolster his case that the SALT II treaty endangered the United States and left the nation vulnerable. If the treaty raised the alarm of an “eminent, liberal scholar,” then all Americans should be wary of the committing the U.S. to SALT II. Skinner and Anderson, *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 92-99.

These appointments led many New Rightists to question the ability of the White House to take a hard line against the Soviet Union. The New Right saw these nominees as “retreads” from past administrations and questioned their conservative credentials. Similar to domestic policy, by appointing so called “non-Reaganites,” conservatives criticized the president on his foreign policy positions. They complained that the president had been deceived by the more moderate members of his staff who downplayed Soviet intentions around the world. Columnist George Will argued that the Reagan administration’s response to events in Poland and the continued selling of grain to the Soviet Union revealed “a crisis of American conservatism.” The Solidarity movement in Poland, led by Lech Walesa, created fears that the Soviet Union would use force to quell the uprising as it had done in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. Such tensions over Poland strained American-Soviet relations, but the United States still sold foodstuffs and technology to its main rival. The problem for Will was “this administration evidently loves commerce more than it loathes communism.” The crisis existed because “conservatism that is so reverent about free trade and so unwilling to infringe private freedoms for public purposes is incompatible with the avowed aims of conservative foreign policy,” which was to put the Soviet’s on the defensive. Taking a shot at Haig, Will noted the administration’s foreign policy was being “increasingly run by unreconstructed detentists,” a failed policy in his assessment. The New Right was angry that the U.S. government paid off the interest of Poland’s debt to American and European creditors without allowing the communist country to go into default.300

300 Richard Reeves, President Reagan, 47-48, 97-98; George F. Will, “Reagan’s Weak Response on
Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China

The defense of Taiwan, formerly called Formosa, served as a point of contention for the right since the Truman administration. With the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, remnants of the nationalist Chinese forces under Chiang Kai-Shek retreated to the island. Chiang created a separate government in Taiwan outside the control of Mao’s communist China, (The People’s Republic of China, or PRC). Relations between the United States and communist China remained tenuous at best. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the United States guaranteed the safety of Taiwan with military and diplomatic support, effectively severing any potential ties between the U.S and the PRC.301 By 1971, President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had secretly conducted high level negotiations with China that laid the groundwork for Nixon’s historic 1972 visit to China. However, this new relationship threatened Taiwanese sovereignty. The 1972 Shanghai Communiqué issued between both the United States and China made it clear that American military forces would be removed from the island nation. Historian Harvey Feldman called the U.S. position “well-calibrated agnosticism” and deliberately ambiguous. The communiqué specifically stated

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the U.S. “acknowledges that all Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait maintain that there is but one China and Taiwan is a part of China. The United States does not challenge that position.” The PRC, for its part, would pressure North Vietnam to come to a resolution with the Americans to end the U.S. role in the Vietnam War. A few years later, on January 1, 1979, President Carter normalized diplomatic relations with China. At this time, America again “acknowledged the Chinese position that there is but one China and Taiwan is part of China.” This new relationship came at a time of declining U.S.-Soviet relations over a host of issues. In response to normalization, Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act that was intended to allow the island to purchase American military weaponry for its own protection. U.S. officials at the time believed Taiwan had the capacity to repel any attack from the Chinese mainland. After the rapprochement between the United States and PRC, many conservatives saw this new relationship as a betrayal of a democratic ally in favor of a communist nation.302 Reagan publicly doubted Taiwan’s defense capability against China and argued for America to provide more advanced weaponry to the island.303

Reagan, while not in public office during the late 1970s, was a vocal critic of the Carter administration’s policy towards Taiwan. He argued in a radio spot that “we


simply gave into Peking’s demands” to sever America’s relations with Taiwan. As a result, “the nations of the world have seen us cold bloodedly betray a friend for political expediency.” In a second address, Reagan reiterated, “there was no consultation with the new Pres. [sic] warning him of our decision to accept the terms laid down by the Communist rulers in Peking.” The Carter administration’s actions represented to Reagan the results of a tepid foreign policy that seemed willing to accommodate the communist world at the expense of the United States and its allies. Taiwan served as another reminder to conservatives of waning American power and influence in the cold war after Vietnam.304

By the early 1980s, however, U.S.-Chinese relations became contentious over the sale of arms to Taiwan. Once in office, Reagan changed his hard line position of advocacy for the former U.S. ally to the chagrin of conservatives. Historian Raymond Garthoff points out that the Reagan administration was willing to sell arms to both Taiwan and China, but the problem arose over the selling of advanced fighter aircraft to Taiwan. In January 1982, the United States decided not to sell the advanced F-5G aircraft to Taiwan but instead provide them with used fighter jets. Fears existed among many White House officials, such as Haig and Weinberger, that dealing arms to Taiwan could damage the growing American-Chinese relationship. Hawkish Democrats like Henry “Scoop” Jackson (D-WA) also agreed with the administration over its desire not to upset the U.S.-PRC detente. As a result, the president canceled the transaction of the F-5G

304 Reagan was referring to Chiang Kai-Shek’s son who had recently been installed as the new president. Skinner and Anderson, *Reagan in His Own Hand*, 45-46, 61-62.
fighter aircraft to Taiwan. Columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak lamented how “Reagan’s reversal again shows the tenacity of the permanent government in maintaining policy even against a doctrinaire president bent on change.” Both journalists reported that the move angered Sen. Helms to the point that he told the White House “he could no longer support the administration on economic questions.” National Review offered more practical advice to the president. The magazine opined, “Next time we sell arms to Taiwan, don’t tell Peking. They will find out, of course, and they won’t be happy. But if it’s not rubbed in their faces, they won’t have to throw a public tantrum. That way, Taiwan remains secure, Peking stays in our good graces, and we—do not turn our backs.”

The diplomacy, however, between China and the United States over Taiwan was more nuanced than conservative critics acknowledged. The administration decided to sign another communiqué with the PRC, known as Shanghai II, on August 17, 1982. The wording explained that the United States “does not seek to carry out a long term policy of arms sales to Taiwan,” and “intends to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan.” According to Feldman, the problem with the diplomatic language resided in how each nation interpreted the terms of the agreement. To the Chinese, this statement meant no additional sale of weapons to Taiwan. To Reagan and subsequent administrations, China

305 Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 1040-104; Harvey Feldman, “Taiwan, Arms Sales and the Reagan Assurances,” 1; While the administration canceled this certain fighter sale, according to Garthoff, the U.S. “reaffirmed continued coproduction of the F-5E and supply of some used F-104 Gs” to Taiwan. Détente and Confrontation, 1041

was required to deal peacefully with “the Taiwan question” and that under U.S. law, America had to right to ensure that Taiwan “maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.” Reagan also inserted the “Six Assurances” in the communiqué that reaffirmed its commitment to Taiwan and that the U.S. “had not agreed to set a date for ending arms sales to the Republic of China” (Taiwan) among other commitments. 307 Such language provided some cover for the administration in its claims that it had not abandoned its ally. The New Right still dismissed the communiqué as a defeat for Taiwan. Conservative Digest editorialized that “the communiqué puts a time-limit, however vague, on such sales and recognizes Red China’s sovereignty over Taiwan.” These attacks put Reagan on the defensive. He promised “to continue to arm Taiwan” and even shifted blame to “a few State Department types” and reiterated “no one is trying to push me that way.” 308 The idea of blaming the State Department allowed some conservatives to argue that the president was misled by certain individuals at the department who had served during the Carter years and carried on many of the same policies. 309


309 Samuel T. Francis, “Five Who Abandoned Taiwan,” Conservative Digest 9/82, 14-15. Francis referred to Charles Freeman, deputy to the U.S. ambassador to China at the time Admiral Hummel and Assistant Secretary of State John Holdridge, who according to Freeman was a principal author of the first Shanghai Communiqué.
Central America and the Threat of Soviet Aggression

With the demise of European colonialism around the world and the power vacuums that ensued, the United States and the Soviet Union supported groups or governments that favored their ideological outlook. These Third World “proxy wars” pitted America and Soviet backed factions against each other for control. Cuba’s communist government under Fidel Castro had been a target of American ire since the John F. Kennedy administration. Since the 1970s, the New Right and Ronald Reagan had issued dire warning against potential communist infiltration in the Caribbean and the alliance between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Reagan made his feelings towards Castro very clear. He noted that the Cuban leader had a history of lying and stated unequivocally that was due to his ideological foundation in Marxism. Castro, according to Reagan, was “not bound by our morality.” The future president discussed at length the machinations of Cuban troops in Africa and South America. The Castro regime had sent troops, material, and medical assistance to various African countries, notably Angola, to aid Marxist groups fighting for control of the government and resources left by former colonial governments. Cuba supported the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA). In Central and South America, Cuba sent the same support to leftist groups, such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, at war with right-wing governments favored by the United States. Since the Panama Canal debates engulfed the United States, many staunch anti-communists believed that if America relinquished its

support of pro-democracy forces in the region then the consequences would damage its prestige and potentially spread to other neighboring nations. These same individuals raised the alarm in 1979, when the Sandinistas, a guerilla force, removed the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle from power, whose family had been a staunch U.S. ally since the 1930s. The fear of spreading communist revolutions, especially in neighboring El Salvador, generated a strong response from the incoming Reagan administration.311

Upon entering the White House, Reagan continued U.S. military and economic support for El Salvador. In keeping with the “Reagan Doctrine,” which provided aid to countries fighting against communism, anti-communist fighters required American assistance to fight “a war …that is being fueled by the Soviets and the Cubans.” He argued that El Salvador was important to America’s national security. If it fell to communism, it could threaten other countries in the region. The administration used Nicaragua as an example of what happened to a country under communist control. The Sandinistas provided a safe haven for supplies destined to enter El Salvador to aid leftist guerilla fighters. Soviet control over the Caribbean basin or Central America, Reagan argued, could prevent the United States from sending material to allies across the world in a time of emergency. While Reagan stressed the importance of the region to U.S. interests, the amount of support would only go so far. Reflecting the prevailing “Vietnam Syndrome” of the times, the president told an audience that the U.S. would not send

combat troops to El Salvador and noted “only Salvadoreans can fight this war.” Reagan understood that the American public did not want to see the country fighting again in another war that could be costly in terms of lives and money. This fear among many people of another Vietnam put the onus on government aid to these groups instead of an American commitment of combat troops.312

The New Right strongly supported efforts to aid “freedom fighters” in Central America and elsewhere. In one of the more comprehensive New Right policy positions, Paul Weyrich described the New Right’s agenda for the region. Weyrich claimed that the administration “lacked an overall perspective on what needs to be done to preserve freedom in Central America.” In response, Weyrich explained “the conservative movement’s project to defeat communism in the Americas has four strategic objectives” to change public opinion and fight communism. Weyrich described his goals as:

To influence U.S. foreign policy in the right direction, toward a strong, principled stand for freedom for all American states, we seek for the region freedom from communist aggression and subversion;
To provide U.S. governmental and other aid to indigenous pro-freedom, pro-American and pro-Western forces, whether these forces be governments or anti-communist freedom fighters;
Here in America, to influence political opinion and weaken the liberal base while strengthening the conservative base of support; and
Here in America, to frame public opinion by forming a coalition which encompasses broad aspects of the political, educational, cultural and religious spheres of U.S. society.

312  Skinner and Anderson, eds., Reagan in His Own Hand, 23-25, 64-66; Ronald Reagan “The Strategic Importance of El Salvador and Central America,” 3/10/83 speech to the National Association of Manufacturers in Washington D.C. and “Saving Freedom in Central America,” 7/18/83 speech to the International Longshoreman’s Association in Florida. For a good overview of the region, see Lafeber, Inevitable Revolutions, 5-13.
Weyrich envisioned a grassroots effort that would reach out to various constituencies in the media, business, academic, and political community to help in the “elimination of communism in Central America.” 198 The New Right also applied the same term to the mujaheddeen in Afghanistan. In their fight against the Soviet army, “it is crucial for the Free World to come to aid of these freedom fighters with food, medicine, and military supplies. They must succeed.” 199 In reality, Weyrich’s recommendations corresponded with what the White House implemented in the region. Problems arose in sustaining policies that resulted in tremendous loss of life and the America’s public’s fears of being drawn into another foreign policy debacle like Vietnam.

To implement a policy in the middle of a guerilla or civil war, however, remains difficult in the best of circumstances. Previous administrations relied on dictators in Central America to insure stability and eschewed revolutions as harmful to U.S. economic interests. 200 The Reagan administration encountered the problems inherent in dealing with civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua. The history of the United States in Central America had been one of countless interventions to restore order or protect American interests. Historian Walter LaFeber notes that Reagan’s policies in the region reflected previous U.S. actions. American leaders feared revolutions in Central America,

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198 “Politics by Paul Weyrich: Reframing the Issue and Organizing the Grass Roots: Keys to Victory in Central America,” series “Committee and Foundation Files, 1968-2001,” Box 17, Folder 9, Coll. 10138, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.


but at that same time “U.S. power has been the dominant outside (and often inside) force shaping the societies against which Central Americans have rebelled.” In 1981, the new administration focused intently on events in both countries. Despite increasing military aid to $82 million in 1982, LaFeber argues that Reagan’s policies in El Salvador exacerbated the killings and the violence. Washington was supporting the Salvadoran government. Investigations into the White House’s claims of active Cuban and Soviet involvement with the rebels proved false leading to public anger over its policies. The carnage, however, increased in El Salvador as government forces, armed and trained by the United States failed to defeat a smaller rebel force. Right-wing death-squads killed thousands of civilians and opposition politicians each year with impunity. Attempts to stop the violence were not forthcoming. The administration did not negotiate with the revolutionaries because it wanted a decisive military victory and Reagan hoped that the 1982 election in the country would bring the factions together. The result of that election brought Roberto D’Aubuisson’s right-wing coalition to power. While the administration desired a more moderate leader than D’Aubuisson, it continued asking Congress for increased aid claiming the potential fallout for the region if the government fell. LaFeber blames conservative ideologues in the administration, such as Jeane Kirkpatrick, for blocking any attempt to broker a settlement between the warring parties. In addition, Reagan remained committed to defeating the guerillas who fought against the government he supported.\footnote{LaFeber, \textit{Inevitable Revolutions}, 12-13, 271-293.} For his part, the president believed that a “worldwide
propaganda put forth by the Cuban and Soviet disinformation network” had led Americans to the wrong conclusions despite his own apprehensions about the right-wing death-squads.317

The situation in Nicaragua made headlines when the Sandinistas overthrew the previous government in July 1979. The Somoza family had run the country as a dictatorship since 1934. As a staunch U.S. ally, the Somoza family became very wealthy from the influx of American capital. The corruption among the Nicaraguan elite and the increasingly dire situation of the peasants ignited a revolution against Somoza’s government. The Sandinistas, or the FSLN, continued with brazen attacks against government officials that prompted a brutal crackdown in response. The Catholic Church condemned the harsh treatment of prisoners by the Nicaraguan National Guard and prompted some U.S. leaders to begin to question the relationship between the two countries. The Carter administration was unsuccessful in pressuring Somoza to address the needs of his people or open the political process. By 1978, Somoza’s National Guard massacred scores of civilians as his government increasingly lost legitimacy among its own people and also among surrounding countries. Carter was unsuccessful in convincing many in Latin America that the FSLN was a Cuban proxy. When Somoza fled to Paraguay, he was replaced by the Government of National Reconstruction that encompassed both moderate and radical factions of the FSLN. The new government needed American assistance and, while critical of U.S. policies, allowed American assistance.

investment back into the country. Nicaragua’s junta moved to the left and sought aid from the Soviet Union prompting the United States to secure funding for the indebted nation. When Reagan took office in 1981, U.S.-Nicaraguan relations had ebbed to a new low point.318

The similarities between the New Right and the administration’s policies towards Central America consisted of wanting to aid “freedom fighters” and to prevent Soviet expansion. The difference emerged when some New Rightists broke with the White House’s strict policy of no military intervention. The New Right wanted tougher action. They argued that the fear of “another Vietnam” did not reflect the reality of the situation in the region. M. Stanton Evans, in an article reprinted in Conservative Digest, argued that El Salvador and Vietnam were very similar situations. To Evans, Vietnam was not “an indigenous struggle for peasant freedom,” but rather “a war of communist aggression, meant to install a regime of monstrous terror.” The same thing could happen in El Salvador if the United States did not prevail. Evans reversed the conventional wisdom of an unwinnable war by noting, “To be ‘another Vietnam’ in short, is to be a struggling country delivered up to communist bondage by the grotesque delusions of the liberal-left.” Pat Buchanan, in the same issue of Conservative Digest, took the military option further. “If Reagan has ruled out American military force,” Buchanan warned, “We must rule in the probability of a communist victory in Central America.” He overlooked the human rights abuses and other problems in securing a victory for the Salvadoran military. To Buchanan, American firepower should be directed at Nicaragua, which provided a

safe haven and base of operations to those elements fighting the Salvadoran government. He theorized that “decisive U.S. military intervention in El Salvador, and coordinated naval, air, and ground assault in the Nicaraguan base camp could inflict on the Soviet empire the first major military defeat in almost 30 years.” Such fanciful thinking in no way corresponded to the desires of the American public not to engage in another war, however limited. For all of his staunch anticommunist rhetoric Reagan was a savvy enough politician to realize that direct military action advocated by the far right would not have improved the situation in either country.

In 1983, the Reagan administration’s desire to create a comprehensive Central American policy furthered angered the New Right. Whereas the New Right called for bold action, the White House instead appointed Henry Kissinger to head a twelve-member commission to develop a plan to address the needs of the region. The administration hoped that Kissinger could create a bipartisan report that would silence skeptics on the left that the White House’s policy was too militaristic. Conservatives reacted with hostility as well. Viguerie did not mince words concerning Kissinger’s new position. Kissinger, according to Viguerie, was responsible for many of the debacles that dominated U.S. foreign policy over the previous decades from Vietnam, to the Panama Canal, and “for policies that winked at the continued Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.” The crucial factor for Viguerie was that Reagan remained beholden to establishment Republicans. He argued that having Kissinger back in an appointed

position demoralized the grass roots base and hurt the administration’s foreign policy. Viguerie provided no evidence to support his claims. However, the memory of Kissinger evoked a visceral reaction among the New Right due to his previous ties to the Nixon and Ford administrations and détente.320

**Korean Airlines Flight 007: The New Right Loses One of its Own**

The downing of Korean Airlines flight 007 in 1983 by a Soviet warplane could not have come at a worse time in American-Soviet relations. Earlier in the year, the president had given his “Evil Empire” speech to a group of evangelical Christian leaders and had also announced his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) which undoubtedly alarmed Soviet leaders. KAL flight 007 was headed for Seoul, South Korea on the night of August 31-September 1 when it had crossed into Soviet airspace over the Sakhalin Islands. The Soviet interceptor shot down the plane killing all 269 passengers including sixty-one Americans. The most notable death was New Right Congressman Larry McDonald, a conservative Democrat from Georgia and a member of the John Birch Society. The administration’s response was swift and vitriolic as Reagan condemned the “barbaric act.” For its part, the Soviet Union blamed the United States for the incident claiming that it believed the aircraft to be a spy plane. Raymond Garthoff notes that despite the suspension of Russian commercial flights to the United States, the administration did not pursue more retaliatory measures.321 Garthoff believed U.S.

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321 Other Western nations followed the ban as well for two weeks after the event, James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan*, 73.
officials had “leapt to unjustified initial assumptions” in stating that the Soviets had intentionally targeted a civilian aircraft. Leaders of both political parties denounced the action as uncivilized and evil. In spite of this tragic event and the subsequent public outcry, the White House still pursued arms negotiations, secured a grain deal, and approved the sale of American pipeline technology to the USSR. The New Right wanted a stronger response and resulted in another split between it and the administration. New Right leaders seemed to suggest that McDonald was targeted for his outspoken anti-communism. McDonald’s wife publicly claimed that her husband had been chosen “in an act of deliberate assassination” by the Soviets. *Conservative Digest* eulogized that the New Right ally had been “silenced by a sudden act of communist savagery.” This tragic event again reinforced conservatives’ apprehension towards the president’s commitment to confront the USSR.322

As the New Right mourned the loss of one of its own, its members demanded action. Many conservatives wanted Reagan to impose more substantial consequences on the Soviets for their behavior than the White House was willing to implement. The New Right called for extreme measures. At McDonald’s funeral, Howard Phillips declared that he wanted to sever all ties between the United States and the Soviet Union. “We must expel the evil presence of our enemy from our country,” Phillips eulogized, “discontinue all dealings with that enemy, cancel all benefits we provide that enemy, and

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withdraw from all international organizations that assist that enemy.” Richard Viguerie agreed with Phillips idea of cutting ties with the Soviet Union. Viguerie wrote a scathing critique of the White House’s response to McDonald’s death and asserted that Reagan “owes Jimmy Carter an apology.” According to Viguerie, “At least Carter cut off grain sales and withdrew from the Olympics. At least Carter backed up his words with meaningful actions.” He referred to the Carter administration’s actions after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Viguerie argued, among other things, that the administration should not provide assistance to the Soviet Union or Eastern Bloc countries that purchased U.S. technology. Reagan’s lack of decisive action amounted to appeasement and a proper response would entail a “carefully calculated action sufficient to discourage the Soviets from doing something like this again.” This editorial highlights a profound instance when Viguerie questioned Reagan’s ability to continue as president. “Reagan,” Viguerie explained, “may believe that it is impossible to reverse the decline in the West’s ability to defend itself from Soviet aggression; perhaps a new president would bring more energy and vision to the battle.”

The New Right response did not adequately reflect the nadir of the diplomatic and political relationship that characterized U.S.-Soviet relations in the early 1980s. The New Right missed the bigger picture. The Reagan administration had no desire to cut all ties with the Soviets, to stop trade, or to end arms control talks and other sensitive diplomatic measures. A more visceral response from the United States could have escalated tensions

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even further. Reagan explained at an NSC meeting, “We’ve got to protect against overreaction, vengeance isn’t the name of the game.” One administration official aptly noted, the event was “hideous, but so is Afghanistan, Poland, and Yellow Rain.” The official continued, “A realistic assessment of the Soviets must recognize that the shootdown of Flight 007 is not out of keeping with past Soviet performance.” A more prudent course, according to this unnamed White House source, was to continue trade with the Soviet Union because it strengthened the U.S. economy. The complexities of high stakes foreign policy was lost on the New Right who lashed out at the president for his hesitancy in provoking the Soviet Union even further.324

The New Right’s Foreign Policy Legacy: “Reagan Was Right.”

When Reagan won reelection in 1984 by a landslide against former Vice-President Walter Mondale, the hostility of the early 1980s between the two superpowers began to fade. After Mikhail Gorbachev assumed the leadership of the Soviet Union in March 1985, Reagan found a willing partner with whom he could discuss issues of arms control and other bilateral relations. What had been strained relations in the first years of his presidency turned into a mutual and respectful partnership by the late 1980s. Scholars question what turned Reagan away from his confrontational stance. Historian Beth Fischer believed that fear of nuclear war prompted by U.S. war plans, the KAL tragedy, 

324 Bernard Gwertzman, “Reagan Avoids Dramatic Response to Shooting,” The New York Times, 10/6/82, A15; Reeves, President Reagan, 167-170; Mann, The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan. Mann describes the meeting between Suzanne Massie, an advisor to the president, and Radomir Bogdanov, deputy director of the KGB, who met after the disaster and Massie was told ‘You don’t know how close war is” by Bogdanov. She relayed this message back to Washington that eventually led Reagan to restart discussions again with the Soviet leadership, 73-81.
and the 1983 television program *The Day After* “reversed” Reagan’s outlook.\(^{325}\)

Conversely, Sean Wilentz suggests a softening of the president’s rigid ideology, rather than a reversal, and willingness to work with Gorbachev accounts for improved superpower relations. This change in attitude allowed Reagan to pursue a Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) in his second term.\(^{326}\) Nevertheless, by 1988, President Reagan was able to visit Moscow and declare that “Evil Empire” term applied to “another time and another era.”\(^{327}\) The New Right, in advocating extreme policies at the time, was unaware, or did not care, how the Reagan administration carried out its foreign policy. New Right activists wanted to punish the Soviet Union despite the cost. While both shared many of the same foreign policy objectives, the administration was not about to sacrifice its long term objectives with the Soviets to score political points with the New Right. Nearly a quarter of a century after this event, Richard Viguerie conceded that Reagan’s policies had actually worked despite the continual criticism directed at the White House in the 1980s.\(^{328}\)

With the end of the cold war and subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, scholars and pundits debate who ended the decade’s long conflict. Republicans have refashioned Reagan into the quintessential conservative icon whose memory is virtually sacrosanct. The dominant narrative embraced by conservative politicians

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\(^{328}\) Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
highlights Reagan as the formidable president who stood up to the Soviets and restored prosperity to an America that had lost its way in the 1970s. To align oneself with the former president has become part of contemporary Republican, and to some extent Democratic, party politics. Such a deification of Reagan glosses over other aspects of his presidency, such as the 1982 tax increase, that conservatives would rather forget. Years later, Viguerie has changed his views on Reagan and believes him to have been “a great president.” However, he cautioned, the man “wasn’t Saint Ronnie, but it’s fair to criticize him in some areas” and that contemporary ideas of Reagan as the ideal conservative are misguided.\footnote{Richard Viguerie in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.}

Outside of politics, the scholarship on the end of the cold war is comprised of several different lines of thinking. Beth Fischer lists the four main areas that reflect this broad range. The first credits Gorbachev, and not Reagan, whose domestic policies, or “New Thinking,” created the conditions for change. The second point of view, the “Reagan victory school,” places the onus on his policies that hastened the collapse of the USSR. The third argues that the president’s actions and rhetoric actually extended the cold war struggle because it emboldened Soviet hardliners to continue the confrontation with the United States. The last gives Reagan some credit, but relegates his role to a “secondary” status.\footnote{Fischer, “Reagan and the Soviets: Winning the Cold War?,” in Brownlee and Graham The Reagan Presidency.} One primary example of this latter position is explained by historian Melvyn Leffler. Leffler notes “No one, then was more responsible for ending
the cold war than the Soviet leader…Reagan was critically important, but Gorbachev was
the indispensible agent of change.”

Journalist James Mann shared that same sentiment by claiming, “Unquestionably, Gorbachev played the leading role” in ending the conflict and Reagan “played a crucial role by buttressing Gorbachev’s political position.” In the end, “Reagan didn’t win the Cold War; Gorbachev abandoned it.”

Richard Viguerie embraces the “Reagan victory” argument because it bolsters the New Right’s foreign policy credentials. According to Viguerie, after years of détente, “conservatives were able to change the conversation” away from coexistence towards the “fact that we were in a war and that we were seriously threatened.” Reagan’s bellicose rhetoric “electrified people behind the Iron Curtain to do things.” It inspired Eastern Europeans, such as Lech Walesa, to lead pro-democracy movements or defy the Soviet leadership. He also encouraged Western European allies like Margaret Thatcher to pressure the USSR. Consequently, while the New Right was very critical at the time, Viguerie concedes, “Reagan was right and I was wrong in the foreign policy area.” He continued, “He had his plan and it was frustrating to people like myself who went out there and wanted to see things happening,” but “we will all go to our graves never fully understanding everything Reagan did.” Viguerie’s appraisal of the president’s foreign policy is nothing new. Conservative commentators at the time argued that America’s


333 Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 11/16/11.
confrontational attitude gave it an edge over the Soviets. *The Washington Times* noted the growing strength of conservative governments in Western Europe willing to support U.S. policies. In addition, Voice of America broadcasts encouraged the burgeoning pro-democracy movements in Eastern Europe. This aggressive style resulted from the president’s “populist foreign policy” that aimed to divide “the Soviet government from its people” and to put the communist nation on the defensive. These efforts were “America’s only weapon against gradual Western surrender and withdrawal…against a tyrannical empire.”

The relationship between the White House and the New Right during the early 1980s over foreign policy was less confrontational than in the realm of domestic policy. Both sides shared the belief in America’s need for military superiority. What the record shows is the reality of governing. Whereas the New Right could advocate extreme and harsh measures against the Soviets, Reagan had to make difficult political decisions that at times alienated him from his conservative supporters. The New Right’s influence on the administration’s foreign policy seems to have been very little. The president was never going to send troops into El Salvador or take the extreme posture against the Soviets after the KAL disaster despite pressure from hardliners. In retrospect, the high stakes diplomacy occurring even during Reagan’s first term indicates that contemporary political groups like the New Right can only do so much to influence foreign policy. While sympathetic to the New Right, Reagan realized that the potential for nuclear

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conflict necessitated the need for dialogue. For Richard Viguerie to concede that he was wrong on Reagan is a cautionary tale to those who find themselves at odds with a president’s current policy regardless of who is in office.

During the early 1980s, the New Right focused on its conservative domestic agenda despite a White House that offered only token support for drastic social changes. The New Right and the Moral Majority sought to change the culture of the times. Both groups joined forces in their desire to re-establish what they believed were traditional values inherent to the United States. This “New Christian Right,” or “Religious Right,” advocated a host of issues: the return of prayer in public schools; support for Christian schools; control of the content in textbooks; censoring offensive material on television and in music; and an end to abortion. Many Americans resisted the best efforts of conservatives to impose their values on the country. With public attitudes changing towards certain social issues, New Rightists, especially Jerry Falwell and Sen. Jesse Helms, came to be seen by many as out of touch with the times. The New Right and the Moral Majority could not end abortion, but had some success in boycotting certain television networks and their sponsors over what the Christian Right deemed offensive content. In reality, the New Right and its allies fought a losing battle in the culture wars of the eighties with the public at large. They could not influence the minds of a majority of Americans to embrace their political and religious ideology. However, the New Right had success in changing the Republican Party on social issues as its ideas and policies continued to resonate among a core, vocal constituency. The New Right and the Moral Majority splintered over internal controversies by the last half of the decade. Nevertheless, their staunch support of traditional values fundamentally remade the
Republican Party by the 1990s as more ideologically rigid members took command of the party leadership.

Supporters of the New Right saw the culture wars of the 1970s in terms of defending Western values against ideas and opinions that undermined society. *National Review* publisher William Rusher, writing in the *Conservative Advocate*, chastised fellow conservatives who questioned whether the New Right’s social goals were achievable. No doubt, American culture had grown more tolerant of certain behaviors. As a result of this cultural clash between traditional values and changing social mores, he argued that the United States would experience “a large-scale collision between those forces broadly favorable of the family as an institution” and those “which are explicitly or implicitly hostile both to the family and religion.” Rusher understood the difficulty in achieving legislative success for the New Right domestic agenda, but saw this “collision” of forces as a longer trend that had its roots “in Western society since the Enlightenment.” The New Christian Right held secular humanism as destructive to religious principles because of its affirmation of science and reason and dismissal of a divine creation. To the Christian Right, secular humanism, according to one historian, is “characterized by godlessness, moral relativism, and permissiveness regarding decency issues.” It was not uncommon for the New Christian Right to discuss in apocryphal terms the decline of American society. They called for a return to traditional, Biblical values for the country.335

The culture wars of the 1980s were about the fundamental direction of the country in terms of its way of life. Partisans on the left embraced the changing social norms related to sexuality and gender roles and eschewed religious fundamentalism. On the other hand, the New Right and Moral Majority believed that America had experienced a moral and cultural decline since the 1960s. They wanted a return to what they called Christian values. This religious right alliance publicly attacked what they perceived as examples of debased American culture. In particular, three areas enraged these activists: abortion and homosexuality; excessive violence and sexual content on television; and popular music. These groups did not anticipate the public disregard against their crusades to monitor and change popular culture. The result of their efforts made the religious right and Ronald Reagan synonymous with intolerance and hypocrisy among some sections of the American public. Reagan supported the New Right and Moral Majority on key social issues and spoke at various times of his own religious faith. Thus, many people equated Reagan with the religious right despite his own lack of evangelical fervor. In response to the New Right and Moral Majority, pop culture in television and music ignored the religious right’s view on homosexuality and religious values. Hit television shows challenged the prevailing notions of traditional families and gender roles. These shows attracted millions of viewers each week and became a primary target of the New Right’s effort to promote its brand of decency on television. Artists on the fringes of mainstream American culture, particularly those in punk rock music and comic

books, perceived the New Right, the Moral Majority, and President Reagan as one and the same. Many of the artists associated with these cultural genres, notably the Dead Kennedys, often possessed distinctively politically left views and as a result, tended to interpret conservatives as extreme. Their music and art reflected a dystopian view of the United States as an emerging fascist police state under Reagan and the religious right. Thus, Hollywood and these minority groups had a very different vision about what constituted a stable and healthy society.

**New Right Social and Cultural Involvement during the 1980s**

The New Right had been involved in cultural and social debates since its inception. Similar to the Stanton Group, the New Right’s foreign policy group, the “Library Court,” founded in 1979, served as the domestic arm of the New Right. Chaired by Connie Marshner, a member of Weyrich’s Free Congress Foundation, the Library Court consisted of twenty national conservative groups including Christian School advocates, Pro-Life and Religious Roundtable leaders that focused on “pro family” policies. Paul Weyrich explained that the movement arose in response to the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe vs. Wade*, the growth of the ERA during the 1970s, and, most importantly, the controversy surrounding the tax exempt status of private and Christian schools. Since the Carter years, the group lobbied Congress on legislation that it deemed detrimental to the family such as bills relating to domestic violence, pornography, or homosexual rights. While some members of the Library Court distanced themselves from the New Right, New Right leaders, such as Marshner and Weyrich, headed this particular group. This organization served as a nexus between politics and
religion with a decidedly Christian outlook. It serves as another example in which the New Right and religious groups joined forces to defend their ideas of traditional values.336

In Congress, New Right Senator Jesse Helms emerged as the leading voice in defense of traditional values. Helms gained notoriety in the 1980s among the left for his outspokenness on cultural issues. He had a reputation for criticizing homosexuality, abortion, certain literature, art, and rock music. For example, his crusade against the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) over the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe highlighted the debate over freedom of expression versus government funding of the arts. Mapplethorpe’s photos included celebrities and rock stars such as Richard Gere and Debbie Harry, but also erotic pictures of naked men and women by themselves or in sexual positions. Helms wanted to reduce the NEA’s budget because of its support of what he deemed “obscene” material. During the 1980s, Helms would become the most ardent backer of the New Right and Moral Majority’s cultural agenda. He called the Moral Majority “the cause,” and believed that a “spiritual revival” was occurring in the country that reflected “faith in God versus secular humanism.” New Right leaders called

336 “The Pro-Family Movement-Library Court: The Washington Hub,” Conservative Digest May/June 1980, 14-15, 26-27. The name of the organization derived from the street in Washington where the first meeting was held. According to her biography in the issue, Marshner served as director of the Family Policy Division at the CSFC. Other members of the group included Paul Weyrich, Bill Billings of the National Christian Action Coalition, Jack Clayton of the American Association of Christian Schools, and Judie Brown of the American Life Lobby among others.
the senator “their anchor” and saw Helms as an ideological compatriot in their battle against moral decay.337

Ronald Reagan’s election emboldened the Christian Right. The New Right and the Moral Majority used evangelical Christianity as an instrument to appeal to middle-class Americans. Both groups employed the rhetoric of the moral struggle against secular, humanist forces in their arguments for change. William Bennett, who served as Secretary of Education during Reagan’s second term, equated this movement to the Civil Rights struggle. Claiming support from sixty million followers, he explained, “The New Right Christians may be called a civil rights group…in the important psychological sense common to all civil rights groups, that they have been shut out of politics and are now ignored. Feeling so oppressed, they have now become the aggressors.” Televangelist James Robison described the role of Christians in the election as “that of the messenger heralding the truth.” Americans, according to Dobson, were “tired of excessive government masquerading as God” and wanted “to return this nation to the fundamental strength of the past.” These sentiments reflected the notion of a spiritual mandate to return the nation to its mythical religious past.338

The Moral Majority and its New Right ally argued they upheld traditional values against forces that wanted to destroy the United States. Falwell referred to the 1980s as a

337  Helen Dewar, “The Senate’s Archangel on the Right,” The Washington Post, 2/15/81, A1; Bondi, American Decades, 47; for a views of Mapplethorpe’s work, see http://www.mapplethorpe.org/portfolios/.

“decade of rebirth.” They believed they had a strong ally in the White House. These groups received assurances from Reagan during and after the campaign. In an August 22, 1980 address in Dallas to religious leaders, Reagan told the crowd that the United States had forgotten “that old-time religion” and assuaged their fears over the Internal Revenue Service, funding for religious schools, and Federal Communications Commission rules on religious broadcasting.\(^{339}\) In addition, soon after taking office, Reagan’s speech to CPAC in April 1981 called for the nation “to renew our spiritual strength” in order to protect our own heritage and make it someday the birthright of all men.” The president’s public endorsement of issues important to evangelicals highlighted this relationship between the administration and religious groups.\(^{340}\)

The New Right and Moral Majority also believed they had been critical to Reagan’s electoral success. They referred to an ABC News-Harris Poll that showed how white evangelicals voted overwhelmingly for Reagan.\(^{341}\) The night after the election, Falwell and Weyrich appeared on ABC’s *Nightline* to reinforce these points to host Ted Koppel. Koppel also interviewed Senators George McGovern (D-ND), Birch Bayh (D-IN), and Frank Church (D-ID) who had all lost their bids for re-election. These three

\(^{339}\) Bruce Buursma, “Falwell calls ‘80s ‘decade of rebirth,’” *Chicago Tribune*, 1/28/81, 14; Excerpts of this speech to the Religious Roundtable reprinted in *Conservative Digest*, 1/81, 43.

\(^{340}\) Speech to CPAC reprinted in *Conservative Digest*, 4/81, 24-26.

\(^{341}\) John D. Lofton, Jr., “Pollster Harris Credits Moral Majority Vote for Reagan’s Stunning Landslide Win,” *Conservative Digest*, 12/80, 13-14.
men had been on NCPAC’s “hit list” for defeat. The three senators accused both groups of distorting their records on abortion and homosexuality. Senator Bayh called Weyrich’s CSFC a “hate group.” Senator Church added that the CSFC was “a menace to the American political process.” These three also blamed Falwell for the misleading ads and mailers that the Moral Majority put out that misinformed voters in their states. In response, Falwell deflected responsibility from his group. He claimed he was unaware of such ads and promised “to correct” any errors. He also sought to mask his overt theological positions by telling Koppel, “we are not in favor of a Christian republic…we’re for pluralism.” In addition, New Right groups like the CSFC willingly distorted facts and information to remove from office those with whom it disagreed. This heated debate revealed the cultural divide of the eighties. The importance of this interview involved one of the main criticisms on the Christian Right. Sen. McGovern warned that neither side had a “monopoly on the truth” and saw the Moral Majority as pushing its own brand of Christianity on the American public. McGovern forcefully argued for a “counter-organization” to strike back at these groups. The senators, despite their anger at being attacked by the New Right during the campaign, reflected the fear many saw in the Moral Majority and its positions. On the other hand, to Weyrich, “this is really just the beginning. I think we have to have fundamental reforms in the country,

and I think that has just begun.” Many of the same arguments presented that night would continually resurface in one form or another between supporters and detractors of the Christian right.

**New Right Social Goals 1981-84: “Defunding the Left”**

Since the late 1970s, the New Right made the case that federal tax dollars supported liberal groups and causes. It attacked many government agencies as poor stewards of taxpayer financing and argued that these agencies and groups used federal funds for their political causes or “radical” agendas. It advocated that the administration “defund the left.” Paul Weyrich wrote that this issue presented the White House with an “enemy” that “would give conservatives something to fight for.” He explained to Reagan aide Ed Meese that this issue would “shift the focus” away from the budget to “put the liberals on the defensive.” According to Weyrich Reagan, needed to “point to the massive conflict of interest on the part of hundreds of these groups which are his most vocal opponents and which received federal funds.” Morton Blackwell at the White House supported the New Right’s belief that liberal groups and causes benefitted from federal largesse. Blackwell wrote to Tony Dolan, a White House speechwriter, that “our foes are special interest advocacy groups desperate to keep their hands in the Federal till so they can continue to get government grants to organize political action.” These detractors “grew fat by ripping off the American taxpayer.” This letter assured Dolan

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that the president took these charges seriously and saw this as an “opportunity to rekindle the enthusiasm of 1980.”

The New Right targets included Planned Parenthood, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the AFL-CIO, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Energy among others. It criticized these groups because they “attack Reagan and conservatives.” Conservative Digest explained “How Washington Funds the Left” by tracing how federal dollars helped individuals or groups that the New Right disliked or opposed the president’s policies. For instance, it targeted the Department of Education for a $98,000 fund to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) because “AFT President Albert Shanker attacked President Reagan’s tuition tax credit proposal.” The New Right highlighted how Health and Human Services grants and funding went to Planned Parenthood to provide abortions and contraceptives to minors as well as continuing a policy of blocking “legislation at the local, state or national levels which impedes access to abortion.” The New Right described U.S. resources going to the United Nations as keeping “strongly anti-American organizations in business.” These included the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as well as the UN being “a haven…for anti-American spies.” In a letter to Paul Weyrich, Tom Farr, a lawyer at the National Right to Work Legal Foundation, referred to the National Labor Relations

Board (NLRB) as “a captured agency for organized labor.” These few examples only highlight a small part of the list of entities and causes that the New Right sought to eliminate from any federal resources.345

The New Right’s effort to expose groups that received federal dollars as examples of big government spending taxpayer money on questionable sources distorted the facts. In reality, it was a tactic to silence critics of the administration. By taking away federal funds, these groups would lack the resources to institute their programs or policies. As a result, New Right activists wanted public pressure and congressional action to deny financing to those organizations it deemed harmful to moral sensibilities. The result proved difficult for the New Right as it lacked the sustained momentum and a fully engaged administration to continue its attacks on American cultural and social issues. In addition, with Democrats in control of the House of Representatives, the possibility of defunding all of these entities was highly unlikely. More importantly, the New Right could neither stem to tide of federal spending nor the growth of government.

Critics of the New Right saw their tactic as hypocritical. Gary Trudeau’s comic strip Doonesbury encapsulated the hypocrisy of the New Right’s effort to defund the left. One Sunday strip from early 1982 involved a character watching a news report on the New Right’s “Pro-Family Agenda” for the year. In the second to final panel, Reagan was quoted as saying “for too long, the federal government has been subsidizing anti-family

values…whatever happened to the teaching of a family? Whatever happened to saying no?” The final panel shows the reporter commenting that “the twice-married Reagan, whose four children have three divorces among them, declined to elaborate.” Another strip ridiculed the Hatch-Denton chastity bill introduced to discourage teenage sex. In the final panel, Zonk, one of the main characters, asked his friend, “I thought the Republicans were trying to get government off our backs” to which he replied “Apparently, that wasn’t quite the problem.” The premises of these two examples reflect the callous nature of the New Right’s attempts to define traditional values and legislate personal behavior.346

**Defunding Planned Parenthood**

Abortion was one issue where the New Right and Moral Majority sought to impose their religious beliefs on American society. The New Right used both state and federal means to try and end the practice. Perhaps more than any other liberal causes, abortion and Planned Parenthood showed this overreach by the New Right. Abortion became a focal point for New Right activism despite its failure to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*. It pursued its own agenda despite lacking full White House support. The New Right and its congressional allies advocated a Human Life Amendment that would protect the unborn. One organization, the Life Amendment Political Action Committee (LAPAC) sought to remove pro-choice members of Congress from office. It wanted to go even farther by devising its “Ten-Point Program for the Protection of the Family” that would

be tied to any bills that “supplie[d] funding to anti-life agencies like Planned Parenthood.” This program included eliminating sex education, teaching about contraception and family planning, discussing homosexuality in a positive way, or anything “which would have the effect of countering parental authority at home.”

Outside of special interest groups, in Congress, New Right Senators Jesse Helms and Orrin Hatch promoted their own legislative agenda. The abortion issue divided the New Right due to the intensity of each senator’s legislative offering. Hatch introduced a constitutional amendment to ban abortion altogether and Helms proposed legislation that stated life began at the moment of conception. Weyrich, while supportive of Helms and Hatch, needed to keep each side “from destroying themselves” and realized that neither senator had the votes to pass their amendments. The Senate, led by Republican Bob Packwood of Oregon and six other senators, filibustered both measures. This action effectively ended the chances of passing these New Right measures in the Senate.

The White House understood the fervor of the pro-life movement. With the defeat of the Hatch and Helms amendments, Reagan promised religious leaders that he still supported ending abortion in the United States. After the upheaval over the Sandra


348 Washington Post reported in January that New Right leaders were divided on how to address ending abortion whether through legislation of constitutional amendment. Bill Peterson, “Worries for New Right: Group Thwarted on Social Policy, Badly Split Over Abortion Tactics,” 2/16/82, A4.

Day O’Connor nomination, James Baker met with Paul Weyrich, Pat Robertson, and other conservative leaders in July 1981. The meeting focused on nominating C. Everett Koop to the post of Surgeon General and also dealt with legislative matters concerning abortion. The New Right supported Koop, but the hostility towards the White House remained palpable. The New Right was not sure how the administration ultimately would respond to its desire to see concrete action taken on abortion. *The New Right Report* noted after the meeting that the event “will be viewed as simply another hand-holding operation intended to placate rather than accommodate.”350 This statement reflected another instance of perceived symbolism from administration officials instead of substantive action. Reagan, despite his public rhetoric, was not going to spend political capital to outlaw abortion. *National Review* admitted that “no national consensus exists in favor of such a ban” and that such a move would not be a political win for the president.351

While it could not end abortion through legislative action, the New Right had more success at the state level for its pro-life policies. In the 1981-1982 legislative sessions alone, states introduced a host of anti-abortion laws that restricted a woman’s access to this procedure. For example, several states instituted waiting periods to have an abortion, restricted funding, and required informed consent. Alabama went as far as to include IUDs and the morning-after pill as forms of abortion. In addition, seven states

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called for a constitutional convention on adding a right-to-life amendment to U.S. Constitution. These laws highlighted how state governments advanced a key aspect of the New Right social agenda that the administration or the Congress could not in any meaningful way. This state-centered agenda reflected the reality that on a national level, serious change to federal abortion laws would not be forthcoming.

The Coalition for Better TV

A second New Right target involved the content of television programming. The 1980s saw the rise of cable television that competed with the three broadcast networks of NBC, ABC, and CBS for movies, sports, and news. When HBO, ESPN, and CNN debuted, the burgeoning industry had advantages over the main networks. FCC deregulation policies after the late 1970s expanded the market and the use of satellites improved the quality and capabilities of cable television. On the main networks, the situation comedy and the primetime soap opera dominated the decade. Sitcoms with catchy theme songs such as Family Ties, Cheers and The Cosby Show were hugely popular with American audiences. The primetime soap, notably Dallas, appealed to a male and female demographic by creating intricate storylines that kept viewers tuned in each week. The quintessential episode “Who Shot J.R.?” garnered national attention and record ratings. According to historian Graham Thompson, Dallas became “the working model” for other dramas in the eighties. Options for the American public continued to expand with the advent of additional cable channels that marketed to certain audiences.

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This growing market made it increasingly difficult for activists to halt many shows deemed offensive.\(^{353}\)

In response to the new television landscape, the New Right attacked both the major networks’ programming and cable television. These critics claimed many programs shown during primetime contained too much sex and violence or promoted homosexuality. Their primary recourse was to boycott the products from the sponsors of these shows or call for certain stations to be taken off the air. Rev. Don Wildmon’s National Federation for Decency (NFD) and Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority spearheaded the creation of the Coalition for Better TV (CBTV). CBTV formed on February 2, 1981, established its headquarters in Tupelo, Mississippi and claimed “to represent 400 conservative organizations.” Wildmon was more extreme than Falwell in his denunciations of network television. Wildmon’s frequent columns in *Conservative Digest* highlighted programs that promoted adult subject matter or disparaged the Christian religion. He criticized shows like *Saturday Night Live* for supposedly mocking Christian values. He also claimed “Hollywood Hates God” because it wanted “to preach their godless secular humanism in their programs.” Falwell described his activism as “citizenship, not censorship” and believed “it’s the public’s right to support the programs it finds acceptable.” Both Wildmon and Falwell believed the “pornography industry” and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) targeted them for their outspokenness on TV programming. In fact, the ACLU financed a campaign against the Moral Majority in major media outlets including *Playboy* magazine. Richard Viguerie took his crusade

against cable television further than just a boycott of network programming. Viguerie called for legislation to ban cable shows that “portray[ed] explicit sexual conduct, erotic nudity, or violence with erotic overtones.” CBTV had more success in its boycott efforts than Viguerie’s desire to ban cable programs that he deemed too erotic or sexual.354

CBTV sought sponsors of certain programs to pull their funding as a way to force the industry to change its shows. The group used 4000 volunteers to “monitor prime time programs during March, April, and May” in order “to identify those programs and sponsors which encourage constructive values and those which promote destructive values.” Members were told to fill out questionnaires and return them to the coalition. The ultimate purpose was to mandate “a one year nationwide boycott of the products marketed by the chief sponsors of destructive values” and to “buy the products of the chief sponsor of constructive values.” Time reported the “least constructive” shows at the time were “Taxi, Three’s Company, Laverne & Shirley and The Dukes of Hazzard.” Wildmon even attacked rather innocuous eighties TV shows such as Diff’rent Strokes over the episode where Mr. Drummond invited his girlfriend to stay the night as a prime example of “Christian values” taking “a real beating.” These companies did not like the negative publicity from vocal opponents that could potentially influence other people. A

potential boycott brought many sponsors into compliance with the group despite attacks from the media and Hollywood elites over CBTV’s threats.355

The major networks and cable television owners struck back against Wildmon and his group. They saw CBTV as intrusive and detrimental to its programming. The media on the political left saw these threats as a new form of censorship on the right.356 One media executive called Wildmon “Hitler with his hit list.”357 Famed producer Norman Lear, formed “People for the American Way” to counter the claims of the CBTV. It ran ads advocating support for “diversity” on television. In 1982, ABC showed the “I Love Liberty” special produced by Lear and included stars from Martin Sheen to Barbara Streisand. The program’s overt patriotism counteracted the religious right claims of Hollywood immorality and political leftism.358 Critics called Wildmon hypocritical for not boycotting daytime soap operas that contained sexual content. In addition, detractors questioned the accuracy of Wildmon’s study because those involved with the CBTV remained unknown. The ACLU, while supporting the right to protest, believed that Wildmon’s crusade infringed on the free speech rights of the industry. The Nation editorialized that the real issue was censorship. It warned, “We should not overestimate


the power of the coalition—nor underestimate the timidity of advertisers and broadcasters who scramble for their dollars.” Harkening back to the blacklists of the 1950s, the editorial noted how “we have a sex and violence scare” that threatened to derail programs that are deemed too controversial and worried that “a business-conservative-religious alliance” could “infuse programming with its values, whether moral, political, or economic.”

Hollywood stars also spoke out against the Moral Majority for its extremist views. Actor Lionel Stander of the television show *Hart to Hart*, told *TV Guide* that he deplored Falwell’s actions; “They are neither moral nor a majority,” Stander explained. As someone called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1953, Stander noted,” It’s like the ‘50s all over again. HUAC, Communist witch hunting. It gives me a frightening sense of *déjà vu.*” He noted that Falwell should create his own shows using money he “gets from suckers” who watch his program and “compete in the free marketplace.” In response, *The New Right Report* criticized Stander’s evocation of the free market due to “his long-standing membership in the Communist Party.”

Wildmon also argued that Hollywood, not his group, censored Christians on their shows by portraying them in a mocking way. This interpretation of how Hollywood treated

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Christians was not censorship. Rather, Wildmon’s belief that certain television shows demeaned his religious values allowed him to justify his outlandish statements.

The position of the television industry or the media did not change how some companies responded to Wildmon’s potential boycott. CBTV claimed success and noted that companies, such as Proctor and Gamble, made an effort to contact the organization concerning its funding of certain programs. In one instance, Proctor and Gamble told CBTV officials that it ceased sponsorship of fifty shows due to “excessive sex, profanity, and violence.” Other sponsors relayed to CBTV that they wanted to promote their products on “clean shows.” The New Right saw these responses as evidence of a winning issue. Viguerie explained, “The subject of sex in the media is probably going to be the No. 1 issue that conservatives are going to be concerned with after you get past President Reagan’s economic and defense programs.” Viguerie’s statement seemed overly optimistic due to the long term inability of the New Right and its allies to “clean up” television. In the end, this capitulation by Proctor and Gamble was only a strategic retreat until the situation changed.362

The challenge of a nationwide boycott presented some problems for this New Right organization in 1981. Initially, Ted Turner of CNN tried to organize a debate between the network executives and Falwell over the role of CBTV. The major three networks decided not to participate although Falwell agreed with Turner’s proposal.363


July, CBTV held its first major national press conference to list the names of companies targeted for the boycott. Phyllis Schlafly, Falwell, and Wildmon represented the group at this event. The event did not transpire as planned. Wildmon stated that CBTV would not present a list of sponsors because “most of the leading advertisers had agreed to clean up their collective act.” In response, the group would “wait and see” if programming changed in the fall of that year. Wildmon said his efforts were a success because the sponsors had satisfied his demands. Some media outlets, however, saw this press conference differently. *Time* reported that the group lacked the influence many believed they had accumulated. The article noted, “Studies conducted for ABC and NBC weeks ago concluded that CBTV and the Moral Majority had substantially overestimated national viewer support for their TV cleanup campaign.” In addition, “CBS News found that 30% of the member groups claimed by Wildmon denied that they belonged to the coalition.” Moreover, an ABC poll showed that the majority of respondents did not endorse the goals of CBTV or want to see drastic changes in programming.364 Even groups sympathetic to Wildmon disagreed with boycotting as a tool. Peggy Charren of the Action for Children’s Television described CBTV efforts as censorship and dangerous because it “rarely stops where it should.” The industry’s response to Wildmon

seemed a symbolic gesture, similar to the White House and the New Right on social issues, to placate the group instead of altering the way they did business. 365

When all of the posturing and vitriol had subsided, not much had changed in television content. Despite concerns among many on the left about censorship, free speech, and the power of the religious right, CBTV had mixed reviews. The group’s initial success in 1981 forced sponsors to at least acknowledge threats made by Wildmon concerning a national boycott of their products. Companies and studio executives met with Wildmon to address his concerns and promised to make their shows more acceptable to general audiences. Others, however, saw Wildmon as irrelevant. James Rosenfield, president of CBS, explained, “Wildmon’s effectiveness has literally disappeared as our advertisers have sensitized themselves to the ridiculousness of his operation—and its danger. The companies have concluded that the threats of boycotts are not real at all; moreover that they won’t be whiplashed by self-appointed guardians of public morality.”366 The long term results, however, did not stop Americans from watching what CBTV called the “jiggle shows” and advertisers still paid money for spots on successful programs. One reporter aptly noted, “advertisers are not likely to stop buying commercials on Dallas, lusty as it is, so long as it remains on top.” Neither a religious nor an ideological determinant decided how advertising and programming

interacted to the benefit of sponsors and networks. Other networks took Lionel Stander’s criticism seriously and created their own shows. Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) made its own family friendly soap opera, *Another Life*. According to CBN, this show gives its viewers “love instead of ugliness, hope instead of despair, solutions instead of nothingness.” The show lasted until 1984. This act by CBN highlights an instance where broadcasters appealed to its select demographic outside of the main networks by using genres found in popular culture.

By 1983, Wildmon’s CBTV still listed companies such as RCA, Anheuser Busch, and others as continuing to sponsor shows filled with sex and violence. He decried the rising acceptance of homosexuality on television and the rise of cable channels that offered pornography. He pointed to episodes of the network television shows *Hill Street Blues, Dynasty, Cheers* and *Gimme a Break* in which the main characters encounter a homosexual and change their outlook or fears on a person’s individual sexual preference or lifestyle. TV shows, Wildmon explained, always presented Christians as a negative stereotype. He reserved his harshest criticism for the NBC show *Love, Sidney* starring Tony Randall as a gay man. Wildmon pointed to a study that showed the “homosexual lobby” as the most influential group in Hollywood. “Homosexuality has maneuvered itself into the mainstream public consciousness,” Wildmon noted, which it “could never

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have accomplished without positive media coverage given in print, movies, television, and stage.” Wildmon also singled out the *Playboy Channel* for its adult content and main sponsors. He called for a boycott of Warner Communications and American Express for their sponsorship of *Love Ya’ Florence Nightingale* featuring porn sensation Marilyn Chambers. In addition, the reverend decried the lack of inaction by the FCC to regulate Playboy and other cable stations. In 1983, Wildmon again targeted companies that initially agreed to stop sponsorship of certain shows. The National Federation of Decency deemed Proctor and Gamble, American Motors and American Home Products as “the leading sponsors of anti-Christian television programs.” Such hyperbole, however, did not carry the same threat from two years earlier leaving Wildmon to lament that television had an “anti-Christian bias.” Wildmon’s rants on homosexuality and pornography, and lack of evidence that his threats worked, reflected the reality that major networks, and viewers for that matter, ignored his tirades.\(^{370}\)

**“I Want My MTV!” Heavy Metal, Satanism, Punk Rock, and Comic Books**

The music industry’s profits shrank with the decline of record sales in the late 1970s, Competition from video games systems and home videos in the early 1980s added to the industry’s problems. The 1980s brought about dramatic changes with the introduction of the compact disc (CD) and Music Television (MTV), which started under Warner Communications. When MTV first aired on August 1, 1981, music fans across

the nation now had a network that appealed to them. Playing music videos twenty-four hours a day, MTV added a new visual component to contemporary pop music. The channel provided a new way to experience the popular music and culture of the 1980s. This network changed how the record companies marketed their artists. Companies “began to see it was in their own interests to provide better and more elaborate videos to promote their artists.” It became a cultural phenomenon. The ubiquitous nature of MTV to the American teenager made it a target for conservatives and parents who decried hyper-sexualized images and lyrics found in the videos.371

The music channel had detractors on both the right and left. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop believed MTV could harm impressionable children. The Parents’ Music Resource Center (PMRC), a group consisting of concerned parents and congressional spouses, including Tipper Gore, joined the debate against what they deemed “porn rock.” The organization targeted heavy metal bands and attacked female artists like Madonna and Cyndi Lauper for their overt sexuality. In 1985, the PMRC succeeded in forcing record companies to place warning labels on their products. Critics on the left charged that MTV had “sold out” and was too mainstream for the rock and roll ethos. MTV also was accused of racism for promoting and playing only white artists. This changed in 1983 with Michael Jackson’s Thriller album that garnered heavy rotation on the channel. Despite the criticism, MTV was a successful enterprise in the United States and

eventually throughout the world. \(^{372}\) MTV’s videos offered much of the same sexual and violent imagery that religious groups saw as dangerous to the American family.

The rise of “hair metal” and heavy metal bands dominated the music scene of the decade. The Moral Majority and other religious groups targeted both types of metal music for their content and lyrics. Critics argued that bands like Metallica, Judas Priest, Twisted Sister, Slayer, and Ozzy Osborne encouraged teenagers to have sex, kill themselves, and experiment with drugs, Satanism, or the occult. These claims were not new to the eighties. The Beatles, by the late 1960s, embraced using LSD, practiced Eastern mysticism, and showed an appreciation of the growing counterculture evidenced by their 1967 *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* album. The outward appearance and drug use among popular bands continued to worry parents and religious leaders. The fear of rock music increased by the 1980s when some individuals claimed that when certain records were played backwards, satanic messages could be heard. Psychologists Stephen B. Thorne and Philip Himelstein argued how detractors of rock music believed that “backward masking,” as it was called, gave the ‘listener…the capacity to decipher the meaning and then will accept the message uncritically and act accordingly.” Such accusations made national headlines when in 1990 the parents of two fans sued members of Judas Priest after their teenage boys committed suicide. They blamed the band for “a subliminal message on its 1978 album *Stained Class*” that drove these troubled young

men to take their own lives. The defendants won the case because the prosecution failed to show how the music’s contents forced the boys to commit suicide. The criticism of heavy metal music did not diminish its appeal. By the middle of the decade, MTV’s *Headbanger’s Ball* highlighted the success of the genre nationally. The rising popularity of metal exacerbated the fears of the right concerning the dark imagery in the music.373

The 1980s witnessed increased public paranoia over Satanism. Fundamentalists used this fear to stigmatize music and artists they found objectionable. The rise of Satanism began in the late 1960s when Anton LaVey, a former crime photographer and organist at adult strip shows, formed the Church of Satan in California. LaVey’s church became fashionable among artists and actors. His followers included actress Jayne Mansfield and others Hollywood luminaries. In the 1969 movie *Rosemary’s Baby*, LaVey even appeared as Satan at the end of the film. News and talk shows in the eighties discussed the rise of satanic cults across rural and small town America. Supposed “experts,” including many evangelical preachers, traveled the country giving presentations to highlight the growing evil of the Devil through cults and heavy metal music. According to one sociologist, “many fundamentalists have found that the satanic cult scare affirms their belief that Satan’s evil influence is behind much of the moral corruption they see in American society.” Religious leaders could make the case that Satanism, like Communism before it, appealed to Hollywood elites. Such notions

reinforced the idea that contemporary film and music could potentially influence impressionable minds.\textsuperscript{374}

The idea of satanic messages in music became a source of mockery for popular comic strips and musicians. Berke Breathed’s strip \textit{Bloom County} followed the lives of a cast of characters that included both humans and animals, most notably Opus the penguin and Bill the Cat. One particular strip featured a two-day story arc on backward messages. The crux of the storyline involved a concerned citizen trying to convince Milo, a main character and local newspaper reporter, that the new Debbie Boone single when reversed stated, “Devil Bunnies… I snort the nose, Lucifer! Banana! Banana!” Such humorous exaggeration revealed how many critics had overblown the portrayal of rock and metal music as containing secret occult messages. In 1983, the rock band Styx released its concept album and feature film “Kilroy was Here,” which envisioned a world in which Majority for Musical Morality (MMM) outlawed rock music. The religious right accused the band of promoting Satanism through backward masking. To mock these ridiculous attacks, the outside cover of the album contained the warning, “By order of the Majority for Musical Morality, this album contains secret backwards messages.”\textsuperscript{375}

The satanic imagery and lyrical content of many of the top selling artists increased the hysteria. Ghoulish album covers, artists and fans flashing the “devil horns”


with their hands, and outlandish stage acts contributed to this outrage from parents and preachers. Detractors, however, went too far in their attempts to find the Devil lurking behind every metal album. For example, fundamentalist pastor Mike Adams of Tulsa, Oklahoma traveled to churches with his presentation on how “Satan is attempting to capture the souls of our youth through rock and roll music.” Adams’s assertions even included soft rock artists like John Denver whom he accused “of serving Satan’s cause, because Denver says that all religions have some good in them.” These evangelicals who denounced rock music made a name for themselves exaggerating the fear of satanic influence in contemporary American youth culture. Heavy metal bands, however, could rely on these denunciations to increase their record sales. Ronnie James Dio, the former lead singer of the 1970s group Rainbow, noted that the Moral Majority would continue to claim that his lyrics promoted an evil message no matter what he said to the contrary. “I’m not looking for a fight with them [Moral Majority],” Dio said, but he understood the negative reaction his music caused among the religious right.376

The Christian Right argued Satanism contributed to societal decay and feared its appeal among young people. New Right advocates wanted to bring back prayer in school and attacked textbooks for their anti-Christian biases. The religious right’s obsession with Satanism, however, went too far. One specific example involved criticizing a particular school text. Don Wildmon’s American Family Association, James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, and Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum joined together in a crusade to censor

Impression, a curriculum used at the time in elementary schools, for promoting “occult practices, Satanism, violence, cannibalism, and relativism.” The evidence given by these detractors involved literature from Focus on the Family that claimed in an article how a police officer who was also an “occult crimes expert” said the text contained Satanic images and had “children sit in a circle and chant or prepare a spell that would sent them somewhere or change them into something else.” This article led a few parents in Lakewood, New York to complain. However, the local school board disagreed and kept the text in the classrooms.\(^{377}\) This critique of Impression was part of a larger effort by the New Right and Moral Majority to show how textbooks had embraced a modern, secular philosophy at odds with Biblical teachings, especially with evolution. Falwell noted, “For our nation, this is a life-and-death struggle, and the battle lines for this struggle is in the textbooks.” In another high profile case, fundamentalists accused Proctor and Gamble of promoting Devil worship because of its company logo that contained a half moon and stars. Falwell countered this claim with a statement that the company was not “associated in any way with Satanism or Devil worship.” Even Don Wildmon dismissed such a claim as “a vicious, unfounded rumor” and that consumers should “continue using P&G’s fine products.\(^ {378}\)

Satanism, like abortion and metal music, gave the New Right and the Moral Majority issues that relied on fear and misinformation. They could place the blame for

\(^{377}\) Victor, Satanic Panic, 156-160.

society’s ills on supposed dark forces that sought to enslave young, impressionable minds. These notions fit the evangelical and fundamentalist worldview of the inerrancy of the Bible and the continued need to “save the souls” of the uncommitted. These efforts to reclaim traditional values would cleanse the United States of its secular depravity and bring America back to its original, Christian heritage. The problem that both groups encountered during this time was that a “one size fits all” mentality towards religious faith and practice created a backlash against them both as radical forces in the country.

Punk rock musicians were more explicit in their political feelings towards the president and the Moral Majority. The punk rock music of the early 1980s, also called “post punk” or hardcore, took the genre in a different direction as many of the 1970s punk bands became mainstream acts. Groups of the time, such as Black Flag and Minor Threat, became intensely political. For example, in 1983, top punk bands went on the “Rock Against Reagan” tour. Punk music portrayed Reagan’s America in a dystopian fashion. Themes in many of the songs included fear of nuclear war, a rising police state, government conspiracies, and fundamentalist religion. Reagan and the Moral Majority were seen as intolerant and dangerous. On their 1983 album *Suicidal Tendencies*, the California band by the same name attacked Reagan in the song “I Shot the Devil.” The song started with a cry of “I Shot Reagan!” and continued with “You’re gonna rot in heaven…You’re too bad for hell, although it’s your first choice.” This song attracted the attention of the federal government. The FBI met with the band over the original title for

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the song “I Shot Reagan,” which was later changed to “I Shot the Devil.” The Dead Kennedys, in their 1984 song “Moral Majority,” presented Falwell and the New Right as extreme in their attempts to impose their morality on the country. The song’s lyrics included:

Trying to rob us out, but we’re going to survive
God must be dead, it you’re alive
It’s the new dark ages with the fascists toting Bibles,
Cheap nostalgia for the Salem Witch Trials…
Blow it out your ass Jerry Falwell…
Blow it out your ass Jesse Helms…
Blow it your ass Ronald Reagan…
Blow it out your ass Terry Dolan…
Blow out your ass Phyllis Schlafly…

The band The Circle Jerks in their song “Moral Majority” made many of the same charges as The Dead Kennedys. The song began “first there was biology, then pornography, so says the Moral Majority...Telling you and me what we can watch and read.” The New York punk group Reagan Youth saw the president policies as instituting a fascist state. In “Reagan Youth,” the lyrics exclaimed, “We are the unawakened…let’s start an inquisition…We are the Reagan Youth, Reagan Youth. Reagan Youth, Sieg Heil!” Although these punk groups represented a subculture, these criticisms, although presented in fast, stripped down music, reflected the larger problems many people saw with religious extremism and Reagan’s presidency. Punk rock musicians did not rely on flashy album covers or androgynous costumes to sell records. Instead, their image and
lyrics were political. These songs did not see the early Reagan years as “Morning in America” or a renewal of national strength, but rather a step backwards.\textsuperscript{380}

Since the 1970s, comic books had become darker in tone and dealt with subject matter such as drugs, violence, and nuclear war. With the onset of the graphic novel in the 1980s that appealed to adults with mature content, national media attention focused on the changing industry. In 1986, Frank Miller’s \textit{The Dark Knight Returns}, told the story of an older and disgruntled Bruce Wayne as Batman. Miller’s work re-imagined a character that had become synonymous with the campy 1960s television show. In 1987, Alan Moore’s \textit{Watchmen} was released to critical praise as well. It detailed the mysterious deaths of former superheroes who retired after the U.S. government had outlawed them in 1977. Both Miller and Moore’s works contained similarities indicative of the decade. According to one historian, “both novels are set against the backdrop of impending nuclear war…in both superheroes are only allowed to function with government consent…and both focus largely on the actions of characters labeled vigilantes.” The criticisms of Reagan as bellicose and out of touch infused the tone of these comics. In the \textit{Watchmen}, Richard Nixon had remained in office by changing the constitution. Reagan, however, was mentioned tangentially in the background as the individual pushing Nixon to act more forcefully against the Soviets. Miller portrayed Reagan as a distant and aloof figure who was not in total command of his faculties. These views of

Reagan and the tensions of the decade reflected the notion that America’s future looked grim and one could blame the president for this decline.381

Captain America, the embodiment of American values, dealt with the contradictions of serving his country during the 1980s. Stories such as whether or not Captain America voted for Reagan, or if he should follow orders given to him such as going “to Nicaragua to help the Contras,” provided more depth to this character. Historian Mike DuBose surmised that such questioning made Captain America and Batman the quintessential eighties heroes. He noted the “perhaps what makes a hero...was the ability to follow morals while not necessarily working either outside the system or within in, but to transcend the system.” This faith in working outside the system contrasted with the traditional “law and order” notions of Reaganism. On a more fundamental level, the Reagan who believed that “America was losing faith in itself” saw himself “a hero to make them [the American public] believe in themselves again.” However, the president’s policies and scandals called into question this belief, “the true nature of this new American hero became increasingly questionable.” In one particular issue of Captain America, he confronted the Coalition for an Upstanding America that spoke “out against the erosion of moral values in our country.” Captain America rebuked

the group because he did not align himself with one faction. One could interpret this rejection as a slight against the New Right and Moral Majority. The industry challenged its readers to assess the state of the nation and used its most popular characters to highlight the moral quandaries in which many people found themselves in at the time.\footnote{Mordecai Richler, “Batman at Midlife: Or the Funnies Grow Up,” \textit{New York Times} May 3, 1987, BR35; Mike S. Dubose, “Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America,” \textit{The Journal of Popular Culture}, Vol. 40, No. 6, 2007, 915-935; Matthew J. Costello, Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books & The Unmasking of Cold War America,” (New York: Continuum, 2009), 159-161.}

Pop culture responded to the ongoing cultural debate concerning who had the monopoly on morality. Many cultural mediums connected Reagan with the New Right and Moral Majority and believed they all supported the same extreme policies. Many comics, music artists, and television shows portrayed the religious right as hypocritical and out of touch with mainstream America. While these attacks were not new to the eighties, they nevertheless showed the reactions among different sections of American society to religious fundamentalism. Punk rock critics saw Reagan as dangerous and not fully engaged in dealing with the country’s problems. The portraits presented in Miller and Moore’s work showed the president as aloof, unresponsive, and not entirely in control of his faculties. The New Right and Moral Majority were mocked as well. Opponents of these two groups called them racist, homophobic, and intolerant. The continuous lampooning of their beliefs and practices relegated the Moral Majority and New Right to caricatures of extremism and hypocrisy. For example, Falwell’s crusade against pornography failed. Falwell lost two high profile cases against \textit{Penthouse} magazine for publishing an interview with him, and Larry Flynt, publisher of \textit{Hustler}, for
libel. Nevertheless, the visceral response to Falwell enhanced his stature among fundamentalist Christians despite the animosity he provoked among many Americans.  

The alliance between the New Right and the Moral Majority did not last as internal problems shattered the religious right. In the latter half of the eighties, televangelists like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggert were caught in sex scandals. The public was also appalled by their lavish lifestyles. Detractors criticized the large amount of money that Falwell’s Thomas Road Baptist Church brought in from contributors. Such events triggered charges of hypocrisy and disgust for many of the religious right leaders. Historian Graham Thompson points to Pat Robertson’s 1988 presidential run as detrimental to the evangelical movement. Robertson embellished his military record and “alienated fundamentalists, like Falwell, who supported George Bush, Sr.” The result of this division, according to Thompson, was “the religious Right coalition evaporated as a formal political force.” The New Right, on the other hand, had its problems as well. Terry Dolan, head of the NCPAC and closeted homosexual, died in 1986 from complications from AIDS at the age of thirty-six. No doubt, such an event proved embarrassing to New Right leaders. In addition, the New Right saw the Supreme Court strike down many of their state efforts dealing with abortion, creationism and prayer in schools.  

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383 Mike Barnicle, “Leave us be, Jerry Falwell,” Boston Globe, 6/22/81, 1; “Around the Nation; Penthouse Wins in Court Against Falwell Suit,” New York Times, 8/7/81, A8; “Jury Finds Magazine Publisher Innocent of Libel in Falwell Case,” Boston Globe, 12/9/84, 2 [no author given].

The New Right and the Moral Majority would continue, but they could not recreate the society they wanted or return the United States to some mythic past. Many Americans reacted strongly against their agenda. The efforts of Don Wildmon, Jerry Falwell, and Richard Viguerie did little to change popular television, end abortion, institute prayer in public schools, or ban rock music. The entertainment industry continued to push the boundaries. The national political scene had changed as well. In many respects, Reagan no longer needed them for his 1984 re-election. As the economy improved, Americans naturally credited the administration, and not the religious right, for the change. The working classes who left the Democratic Party in 1980 to vote for Reagan would do so again four years later. The paradox lies in why, despite these setbacks, the New Right and Moral Majority’s social ideas endured. The lasting legacy of these cultural battles was that elements of the Republican Party remained wedded to social issues. Staunch conservatives like Jesse Helms remained in office during the 1980s and continued their campaign against what they saw as decadent American culture. Those Republicans who supported the New Right policies, such as Newt Gingrich, eventually came to control the party in the 1990s. This new leadership can be directly attributed to the efforts of the New Right and Moral Majority in changing the Republican Party and also conservative politics. It is this conservative wing of the party that dominates contemporary political discourse in the 2000s.

CONCLUSION: HORATIO AT THE GATES: THE LEGACY OF THE NEW RIGHT

At January 2010 Tea Party event in Dallas, Texas, Richard Viguerie, the keynote speaker, got on the stage and faced an audience of ideologically kindred spirits. The first words from Viguerie to the crowd were simply “Hi. Where have you been? Been waiting fifty years for you people.” The growing Tea Party movement emerged as a manifestation of populist anger over dramatic economic problems facing the country. The United States, fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, along with a crisis in housing and banking, saw its economy on the brink of disaster. Immediately after the 2008 election, president-elect Barack Obama’s economic team, in conjunction with the Bush administration, quickly had to make tough economic choices to stave off a depression. Their actions included massive bailouts for banks that were “too big to fail” and the auto industry. These bailouts became a source of Republican hostility towards the president and the Democratic Congress. Republicans blamed the growing deficit and burgeoning national debt on the White House and its allies. The Tea Party manifested this anger and fear at rallies and town hall meetings that called on the government to address the debt crisis.

Today, the New Right has been, in many cases, lost in history. Except for Viguerie, its leaders are dead or affiliated with other causes. Weyrich died in 2008 and Howard Phillips founded the U.S. Taxpayers Party in 1992, renamed the Constitution
Party in 1999, and ran for president that same year. Since the onset of the Second Iraq War in 2003, pundits have focused on who they called “neoconservatives” within the George W. Bush administration. The term, used pejoratively by critics of Bush appointees, described those who wanted to make the Middle East more democratic starting with Afghanistan and Iraq. The thinking also posits that September 11 provided the pretext to carry out such a mission. Such a description explains only part of the truth. George Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Condoleezza Rice did not fit the proper definition of neoconservative. These were not individuals who had started their careers on the political left only to be “mugged by reality” and then move to the right. Nor were these people the intellectuals, such as Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, one would associate with neoconservatism in its proper context. No doubt, they were conservatives. Cheney and Rumsfeld had worked in Washington either in the White House, in Congress, or within a key cabinet position since the Nixon years. By the 2000s, officials in the Bush administration wanted to see countries of the Middle East become more democratic. Thus far, their experiment in instituting these changes in the region has left mixed results.

This misconception goes to the larger point of this work to challenge the notion of a unified conservative movement that was heralded by the arrival of Ronald Reagan in 1980. It is my contention that no such unified conservative movement existed. The

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386 One example is James Mann’s *Rise of the Vulcans*, which traces the careers of several top officials in the Bush administration.
legacy of the New Right testifies to that idea. Instead what the historical record shows is rather a diverse set of conservative movements that vied for control. From the Moral Majority, to the New Right, to neoconservatism, to the Republican Establishment, each sought to shape the Republican brand. That is not to say that these movements did not work in tandem at various times to advance a cause or a candidate. But the idea that Ronald Reagan marched into the White House with legions of loyal followers who worked together to fulfill some distinct conservative vision is only partially true. The preceding chapters have shown that when divisions arose between the New Right and the administration, Reagan usually chose a more pragmatic path than to give in to his conservative base. The “symbolism” that Lou Cannon wrote about in 1981 was exactly what the New Right received in many cases for their support. These setbacks did not, however, preclude the changing of the Republican Party. As one historian noted, “It was the New Right that opened the door to the social issues activists and Christian evangelicals who now make up the Republican voter base.” The party would eventually come to mirror the New Right in style and substance in the coming decades.  

What had made conservatism unique during the 1980s was Reagan himself. Few will argue that Reagan did not transform American politics. What Franklin Roosevelt had been to liberalism in the 1930s, Reagan was to conservatism in the 1980s. The Republican Party became the vehicle for the growing conservative movement. After Reagan’s close defeat to Gerald Ford in 1976 for the Republican nomination, the New

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Right and other conservative groups spent the next four years honing their message and fundraising. The result, according to historian Craig Shirley, was that in 1980, “conservatives, led by Reagan, took over the GOP.” The primary debate among scholars is whether or not the American electorate had moved to the right by 1980 thus ensuring an inevitable victory for Reagan. John Ehrman posits that Reaganism mirrored “postwar liberalism at its most successful” and made conservatism a viable alternative. According to Ehrman, however, it was a deeply divided Democratic Party, and not a conservative shift that bought Reagan to office. In addition, the change occurred gradually over his two terms. By the time he left office, “conservatives not only had shown that they could govern successfully but also had established their movement as the dominant force in American politics.” As conservative historian Gerald Nash explained, “By the end of President Reagan’s second term, the American Right encompassed five distinct impulses: libertarianism, traditionalism, anti-Communism, neoconservatism, and the Religious Right.” What had made Reagan essential to the movement “derived from his embodiment of these impulses simultaneously.”

Conversely, another strand of thinking views Reagan as the culmination of a growing conservative movement in the country and shift to the right among many Americans that started after World War I. In his seminal work, *What’s the Matter with Kansas*, Thomas Frank examines his own home state of Kansas and the dramatic political


changes that occurred in his own lifetime. What Frank termed the “Great Backlash” of the 1960s allowed the Republican Party to join social issues with its pro-business positions. Thus, “cultural anger is marshaled to achieve economic ends.” The results were “a working class movement that has done incalculable, historic harm to working class people” that has fostered a climate of anti-intellectualism and no settlement of cultural issues.

Allan Lichtman traces the modern conservative movement back to the 1920s. Lichtman argues “at the core of right-wing politics in the 1920s and beyond was an anti-pluralistic ideal of America as a unified, white Protestant nation.” The subsequent conservative movements and grassroots efforts were essential to combat an increasingly secular and open American society that threatened the traditional view conservatives had of the United States and its past. The election of Reagan was a culmination of efforts on the part of conservative business, economic, defense, and religious groups that pushed their agendas in the 1970s. They were successful in portraying Carter as weak and ineffective and rallied to Reagan. As domestic and foreign policy travails unraveled Carter’s presidency, Reagan came to be seen as a viable alternative. Lichtman states that Reagan’s election in 1980 was not due to evangelicals or even conservatives but rather but the votes of moderate “Reagan Democrats” from blue collar backgrounds. The shift to the right was not seen in Congress in which Democrats still controlled the House of Representatives.


Reagan indicated a shift to the political right on some scale by select constituencies, but he was also helped by an activist right, a poor economy, and weakened incumbent president. To say that the American electorate moved to the right en masse is inaccurate and does not tell the whole story.

It is my assessment that modern conservatism grew as a result of the polarization of the 1960s and the divisions in the Democratic Party. The Republican Party became beneficiaries of Democratic disunity. The movement the New Right built in the 1970s expanded during the 1994 “Gingrich Revolution” when the New Right poster child Newt Gingrich assumed the speakership of the U.S. House of Representatives with a Republican majority. The current Republican leadership mirrors those early New Right members in Congress in both ideological and religious temperament. The Republican Party gradually changed as a result of New Right and Moral Majority influence and staunch support for social and cultural issues. Today the party moderates haunt the backbenches in Congress unlike their predecessors who once maintained control of the Republican brand. It is not that the country moved to the right, but the Republican Party gravitated to the extreme and became, in many ways, a new entity.

In the current Republican primaries for the party’s 2012 nomination, the candidates have sought to present their views and ideas as the most conservative. The result is a debate that has bordered on the outlandish and ridiculous. New Right efforts in the 1980s aimed at social change, which many Americans thought too extreme, are now commonplace in today’s political climate. Organizations like Planned Parenthood are again targeted by conservative candidates as a way to appease the pro-life segment of the
Republican base. No doubt, abortion serves as one of those “hot button” cultural issues that inflame passions on either side of the debate. Both sides deceive and stretch the truth to their political advantage. Conservatives continue to incorrectly make the case the Planned Parenthood uses state and federal dollars to promote and pay for abortions as its primary service to women. While Planned Parenthood provides abortion services that are not funded by taxpayers, it also is a place that low income women can go for procedures such as mammograms and health checkups. This attack on Planned Parenthood is not specific to the current election cycle. Conversely, many critics of the 2012 Republican field unjustifiably argue that the “current war on women” is unique to this time. New Right activists in the early 1980s made many of the same arguments against Planned Parenthood in its attempts to deny it federal and state assistance.

Richard Viguerie sees the legacy of the New Right within the context of the modern conservative movement as unfinished business. Viguerie traces this history of conservatism using the analogy of a four legged stool. The first two legs of the stool represent the old right of the 1940s with its focus on national defense and anti-communism. The third leg of the stool was social issues that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. The final leg of the stool, according to Viguerie, is the modern Tea Party which he views as the culmination and purest expression of conservatism. He laments that conservatives became an “appendage” of the Republican Party by the 1980s and appreciates that the Tea Party has not been entirely co-opted by the party. To Viguerie, the Tea Party will provide the necessary leadership for the movement and usher in a true conservative revolution. The New Right’s legacy, according to Viguerie, was
symbolized by the ancient legend of Horatio at the gates. This story comes from the days of the early Roman Republic in which Horatio, a Roman warrior, single-handedly held off an invading army from entering the city of Rome. His actions shamed the Romans for their lack of virility. While he admits that the New Right did not accomplish as much as he hoped, “we kept the flame going, we kept the movement going, so that we held off the left in a number of areas so that when Obama came along in ’09…the Tea Party could come and build on what we had already built.”393 How the Tea Party continues into the future remains to be seen. For his part, Viguerie still devotes time and energy to the conservative movement as he has done for the last four decades. He was an important leader in a larger insurgent movement that fundamentally changed a Republican Party that had become stagnant in the postwar period. Few at the time would have predicted the rise of the right or the dramatic changes in American political life over the last few decades. The achievements of conservatism today reflect the dedication of many groups and individuals who fought to implement their vision for America. The New Right was one of these key elements instrumental to the survival and expansion of the conservative movement.

393 Richard Viguerie, in discussion with the author, 10/13/11 and 11/16/11.
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