

## ABSTRACT

### GETTING HISTORY RIGHT: CONSERVATISM AND THE POWER OF THE PAST IN THE LONG CULTURE WARS (1992-2010)

by Adam Bruno

This paper explores the power of history in the rhetoric of conservative politicians, historians and media figures during the Long American Culture Wars (1992-2010). Throughout these years, the content of historical rhetoric remained generally consistent and emphasized four essential ideas: the 1960s as a moment of national declension, a national history of neoliberalism, the Christian tradition in America, and general opposition to multiculturalism. Throughout these 18 years, conservative rhetoric grew progressively more hostile in three distinct sub-eras, “The Contract With America” era (1992-2000), the “With Us or Against Us” era (2002-2006), and the “Tea Party” era (2007-2010). The rhetoric of conservative figures demonstrated this paper’s central argument – that history was an essential tool for conservative elites to defend their policies and values, while simultaneously attacking those of their liberal opponents.

GETTING HISTORY RIGHT:  
CONSERVATISM AND THE POWER OF THE PAST IN THE LONG CULTURE WARS  
(1992-2010)

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-Bruno

## **Introduction: Getting History Right**

*We have an extraordinarily instructive text by which to guide ourselves—our own history. As I will show, becoming more aware of our own history and recovering part of our lost heritage promises a solution to many of our problems.*<sup>1</sup>

-Newt Gingrich

In his dystopian novel, *1984*, George Orwell wrote “He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past.”<sup>2</sup> America in the Culture Wars was not an Orwellian society, but his words aptly illustrated the era’s deep partisan conflicts around past and present narratives. Patrick Buchanan’s 1992 “War for the Soul of America” convention speech introduced the nation to the Culture Wars – two decades that expanded the opportunity to define the present with the past.<sup>3</sup> History provided a great deal to a conservative movement that, in the words of Russell Kirk, placed “faith in prescription... custom, convention, and old prescription are checks both upon man’s archaic impulse and upon the innovator’s lust for power.”<sup>4</sup> History and power merged in a post-eighties society to become a powerful conservative tool to defend the Right and attack the Left.

Progressives and traditionalists engaged in rhetorical battles over the nation’s present and past throughout the Long Culture Wars. Historians and political scientists debate the periodization of this era, but in this thesis, I define the Long Culture Wars as the years between 1992 and the 2010 election.<sup>5</sup> Three distinct sub-eras existed within this period each of which draws its name from a significant event, group or phrase essential to that era: the “Contract With America” era from 1992 to 2000, the “With Us or Against Us” era from 2002 until 2006 and the “Tea Party” Era from 2007 until 2010.<sup>6</sup> Four themes were consistently central to the Right’s historically-based rhetoric: the opposition to the 1960s and its role in ‘national declension’; the

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<sup>1</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Renew America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 25.

<sup>2</sup> George Orwell, *1984* (London: Harvill Secker, 1949).

<sup>3</sup> In its entirety Patrick Buchanan’s quote reads “There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America” Buchanan, Patrick J. “Address to the Republican National Convention.” August 17, 1992. Houston, TX. Text obtained from Buchanan.org.

<sup>4</sup> Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Chicago: Regnery Books, 1953), 9.

<sup>5</sup> While this work delineates 2010 as the end of the Culture Wars, I do not believe 2010 actually marked the end of the Culture Wars. Forces similar to those described in this work continue to dominate contemporary politics and society and thus I believe that future scholars will extend the Culture Wars well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>6</sup> 2000 and 2001 are excluded from this work. This exclusion was intentional to avoid relitigating of the contested 2000 election and because there existed a brief moment of national unity in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy. In the wake of 2001 and 2001 Culture Wars hostilities resumed with renewed vigor and drew upon these years for rhetorical ammunition.

importance of small government and neoliberal values; a belief in Judeo-Christian values as inherent to America's past; and the conviction that traditionally western values superseded multiculturalism in the past and present. These historically-backed ideas reflected the way that core conservative values generally remained consistent throughout the Long Culture Wars.

The Right's historical themed point of emphasis changed conditional on the Long Culture Wars sub-era unfolding around them. Newt Gingrich and company's 1994 "Contract With America" generally represented the Right's views of society from 1992 until 2000 and the past was a tool of resistance to Bill Clinton's liberalization of society. Conservative powerbrokers exerted greater political-historical capital on economic rather than social factors in their years outside the White House. "Contract with America" era historically-backed rhetoric primarily defended conservative policies and values as fundamentally correct and castigated liberal ones as generally incorrect. George Bush returned the GOP to the White House in 2000 and ushered in a string of Republican electoral success that lasted until 2006 – a four-year span where the phrase "you're with us or against us" applied to more than just the global fight against terrorism. Historical rhetoric increasingly became a tool to cast political opponents as outside of the past and present mainstream. The nation's Christian tradition and the opposition to multiculturalism received the most considerable amount of historical focus with a Republican in the White House. The final episode of the Long Culture Wars encapsulated the GOP's fall from power in 2008 and its revitalization two years later with the Tea Party. High profile conservatives exerted equal effort to defend economic and social positions with history – a product of their widespread frustration with the Obama administration. History's role also expanded to attack the Left's 'un-American' nature, incompetency and lack of integrity. Conservative rhetoric grew more hostile with each passing era and culminated in 2010 with a level of aggressiveness emblematic of contemporary America. The past consistently defended conservative values throughout the Long Culture Wars but became an increasingly attack-driven historical device throughout the 18 years in question.

I argue that history played a central role in the rhetoric and worldview of Culture Wars conservative politicians, historians, and media figures. More specifically, the past provided the Right with a powerful tool to defend conservative policies and values, and in turn attack the ideas and ethics of their opponents on the Left. Essential to this argument is that the predominant

role of the past changed over these 18 years. Historical rhetoric primarily focused on the nation's practice of neoliberal style government in the "Contract" era, transitioned to rhetoric centered on the religious tradition in the "with us or against us" era, and culminated with the equal emphasis on small government, Judeo-Christian values and opposition to multiculturalism in the "Tea Party" years. The primary focus of each of the three sub-eras in the Long Culture Wars changed, but the importance and centrality of these ideas did not. The most substantial and consistent change was the increasing vitriol of this rhetoric in each sub-era. Another critical point was the presence of a strong echo chamber effect amongst politicians, academics and media figures, where the ideas of each group mutually reinforced those of the others. The conservative echo chamber provided powerbrokers on the Right with a strong defense for their policies in a contentious and ever-changing moment.

### **Historiography, Methodology, Primary Sources**

Culture Wars were not a novel phenomenon in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some historians and political scientists argued that the 1990s and 2000s were merely another flashpoint in the nation's long, complicated and frequently divided history. To sociologists like James Davison Hunter and Robert Putnam, it was clear that American society was more divided and socially stratified than at most other moments in its history.<sup>7</sup> In *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* James Davison Hunter named the young era and argued that "America is in the midst of a culture war that has and will continue to have reverberations... the personal disagreements that fire the culture war are deep and perhaps unreconcilable."<sup>8</sup> Hunter maintained that America's partisan conflict was not about policy or party identity, but un-comprisable convictions essential to a person's character.<sup>9</sup> Hunter's case revolved around a Culture War purely driven by discord over social issues. This thesis builds upon Hunter's ideas and also posits that conflicts over economic issues were as personal and vitriolic as those over social values.

Political scientist Morris Fiorina issued a data-driven refutation to Hunter's work in *Culture Wars? The Myth of a Polarized America*. Fiorina claimed there was "little evidence that

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<sup>7</sup> For their most notable books about the Culture Wars and polarization see the following two works. James Davison Hunter. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991). Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> James Davison Hunter. *Culture War*, 34.

<sup>9</sup> These include social policies such as, but not limited to: LGBTQ rights, abortion, separation of church and state, and generally change over the time.

Americans' ideological or policy *positions* are more polarized than they were two or three decades ago.”<sup>10</sup> Voting patterns confirmed Fiorina's assertion that American's electoral choices during the late 1990s and early 2000s were no more partisan than in earlier eras.<sup>11</sup> America's differences in the Culture Wars revolved more around growing mutual hostility than their actions at the ballot box – in the 1990s, and 2000s people acted as if the country was more polarized even if their votes did not, thus there was great polarization than Fiorina noted. Fiorina tangentially acknowledged this phenomenon when he stated that the “political figures Americans evaluate are more polarized. A polarized political class makes the citizenry appear divergent, but it is largely that—an appearance.”<sup>12</sup> Fiorina's analytics made the case that division was only an appearance, but his work also acknowledged the power of Americans' perceptions of polarization – particularly the level of disagreement amongst the nation's elites. Given that this research is about societal elites, Fiorina's emphasis on media and political-class polarization was consistent with the broader aims of this analysis.

While Fiorina was skeptical about tangible forms of a contemporary Culture War, his research corresponded to an essential aspect of Hunter's discussion on the power of the press and public sphere. Hunter asserted that America's “differences are often intensified and aggravated by the way they are presented in public.”<sup>13</sup> This statement foreshadowed the way that mass media drastically exacerbated existing divides and contributed to the Culture Wars. The national feeling of the division was as significant as tangible electoral polarization. The media and public leaders played an outsized role in the creation of unique partisan-driven perceptions of truth. America was divided because elites were divided – a view taken by Fiorina and Hunter and essential to a work about elite conservatives, not the ordinary voter.

Hunter and Fiorina provided excellent political and sociologically insights early in the Culture Wars. Andrew Hartman's *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars*

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<sup>10</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson, 2006), 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Fiorina and company utilize election data from the 2004 Bush v. Kerry election to demonstrate that, at least in that election, liberals and conservative views of the world were generally not that far apart. Fiorina, *Culture Wars?* 46-51.

<sup>12</sup> Fiorina, *Culture Wars?*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Hunter, *Culture Wars*, 34.

provided a comprehensive and historical study of the 1990s iteration of the Culture War.<sup>14</sup> The Culture Wars, he said, was a story that began in the 1960s, grew from the neo-conservative backlash and then manifested itself in the debate about the nature of these events. The book's extensive background provided important context for the Culture Wars of the 1990s. Hartman's study also verified that the Culture Wars were a topic of historical research. He made the bold claim that "this book gives the culture wars a history – because they *are* history."<sup>15</sup> Hartman further argued that the 21<sup>st</sup> century Culture Wars were "less poignant and more farcical... cultural conflict persists, but it does so in a different register, shaped by a different logic."<sup>16</sup>

This work slightly disagrees with the idea that the Culture Wars ended in the late 1990s. Instead this paper makes the case that the sentiments that drove the 21<sup>st</sup> century Culture Wars were the same, and more exacerbated than those of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Hartman's extended history of the Culture Wars provides a useful backdrop for any work about this era.

Boston University Religion professor Stephen Prothero argued that Culture Wars were consistently a part of American life. In *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When They Lose Elections)* Prothero made the case that it was "difficult to find moments when U.S. politics were not roiled in clashes of religious and moral commitments... so culture here was always been hotly contested."<sup>18</sup> The book's argument predicated itself on the idea that liberal values won the long term cultural battles, even if they lost in the short term. Prothero's general argument had merit for its own sake, but the book's more relevant contribution for this paper stemmed more from his Culture Wars criteria. These conditions were as follows: "first they are

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago, University Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 285.

<sup>16</sup> Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 285.

<sup>17</sup> In a 2018 interview Hartman somewhat reversed his opinion that the Culture Wars were over. "I think I was partially wrong. There is a second edition of the book coming out, and I'm writing a new conclusion as you know. I'm going to make some qualifications; I don't think I'm entirely wrong. During the '80s and '90s, our political culture was defined by the culture wars. It's not entirely the same now. When I make that argument, I am not saying that we are not divided. There is evidence that we are more divided than ever. If people want to call that the culture wars, I'm fine with that because we are more divided than ever. And some of the logic that informed our divisions in the '80s and '90s still applies. The terms of the debate are ever so subtly shifting. At least that is the argument I'm trying to make. It's a qualified defense of my original conclusion. I was intentionally provocative in my conclusion. I just like conclusions that end with a bang. I guess I should have known many, many reviewers would focus on that. At times, it was frustrating, but it garnered attention for the book." Andrew Hartman, interview by Kevin Bersett, News Illinois State, September 12, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Prothero, *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When They Lose Elections)* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016), 6.

public disputes recorded in such sources as presidential speeches,” second, they extend beyond economic questions of taxing and spending to moral, religious, and cultural concerns, which are typically less amenable to negotiation and compromise,” “third, they give rise to normative questions about the meaning of *America* and who is and who is not a true *American*,” “fourth, they are heated, fueled by a rhetoric of war and driven by the conviction that one’s enemies are also enemies of the nation.”<sup>19</sup> These standards encapsulated the sentiments of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Culture Wars. The third and fourth criteria about American identity and the hatred of one’s political enemies are particularly useful in this context. These ideas provide a solid underlying framework for this thesis.

The Culture Wars were fundamentally about national identity, and the past effectively informed who and what defined America. Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt’s edited work, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* described the controversy over history and the role of historians during the 1990s iteration of the Culture Wars – a phenomenon they examined through the case study of the Smithsonian Enola Gay controversy.<sup>20</sup> Several historians in this book argued that history served as “stand-ins for more profound elusive threats... and so are likely to take it on the chin – not just from right-wingers and various cultural warriors but from the media in general.”<sup>21</sup> Linenthal and Engelhardt’s work provided important background about history’s place in conservative Culture Warrior’s rhetorical arsenal.

Michael Sherry’s chapter in *History Wars*, “Patriotic Orthodoxy and American Decline,” contributed insight on the importance of history for the political Right. The idea of Patriotic Orthodoxy emerged from the Cold War dichotomy and into a similarly hostile domestic environment. Sherry argued that the Right used this idea to “defeat perceived foes at home and advance its vision of American cultural purity.”<sup>22</sup> Patriotic Orthodoxy neatly summed up conservative powerbrokers’ desire to protect an idealistic and exceptional narrative about

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<sup>19</sup> Prothero, *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> In 1994 the Smithsonian began work on an exhibit about the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. In the museums efforts to show the nuances of the event they drew the ire not only of conservative politicians, lobbying groups and media, but from the “liberal mainstream media” as well. Under heavy pressure from these groups the exhibit was eventually scrapped in January 1995 because of the accusations that it painted the nation’s role in World War II in too negative of a light.

<sup>21</sup> Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, ed. *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 5.

<sup>22</sup> Michael S. Sherry, “Patriotic Orthodoxy and American Decline,” in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, 114.

America – one with a consistent and clean history that upheld traditional values in the present. Sherry’s chapter provided a broader basis for history from the Right, which is an essential part of this thesis.

*History Wars* provided a foundation for conversations about history’s power that Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree and Ross E. Dunn supplemented in *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*.<sup>23</sup> Nash and company unfolded the long history of American education controversies to inform reasonable discussion about the much-maligned 1994 history standards. *History on Trial* examined the opposition to these standards from conservative figures like Patrick Buchanan, Lynn Cheney and Rush Limbaugh.<sup>24</sup> Cheney argued that these standards pursued a “revisionist agenda and no longer bothered to conceal their great hatred of traditional history.”<sup>25</sup> *History on Trial*’s account epitomized the political and media firestorms that stemmed from controversial history in the public sphere. This insight also provided a larger example of history’s power in policy debates.

*History Wars* and *History on Trial* detailed the way that history became a political weapon in the early years of the Long Culture Wars. The ideas central to these works extended beyond the first sub-era in the 1990s and into the rest of the Culture Wars. This work takes the notions of ‘Patriotic Orthodoxy,’ public history and rhetoric about the past and applies them to the entirety of the Long Culture Wars.

The story of the conservative ascendancy ultimately undergirds this work’s narrative on history and the Long Culture Wars. There is extensive literature about conservatism from the 1950s to the 1980s.<sup>26</sup> Considerably less historical research exists about post-Reagan era

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<sup>23</sup> Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History of Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Buchanan is perhaps best known for his inflammatory brand of 1990s conservatism and his “war for the soul of America” speech at the 1992 Republican convention. Lynne Cheney was the former Chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities and future Second Lady while married to Vice President Dick Cheney. Rush Limbaugh was, and continues to be, a major player in conservative talk radio. The diverse backgrounds of these figures illustrates the vast conservative opposition to these history standards.

<sup>25</sup> Nash et. al, *History on Trial*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> A plethora of books describe factors critical to both the ascendancy and cultural factors that result in the strain of conservatism during the Culture Wars, these include but are not limited to: Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: Origins of the American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: Making of Christian*

conservatism, an absence that stems from the recent nature of these events.<sup>27</sup> Thomas Frank's 2004 book *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* provided one historically based study of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century conservatism. Frank placed cultural factors at the center of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century conservatism; "it is the carefully cultivated derangement of places like Kansas that has propelled their movement along. It is the culture war that gets the goods."<sup>28</sup> Frank was a journalist, and his work was primarily a polemic against conservatism, but his book still provides useful background for any work on the Right in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This discussion on hot-button social issues and political rhetoric make this a notable work for this thesis.

In addition to the sources that make up this work's historiography, several other secondary works contributed to its methodological approach. James Banks' article "The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education" delineated frameworks for education, particularly in history and social studies, and clarified the core differences between multicultural and western traditional views of history. Banks stated that traditionalists "initiated a national effort to defend the dominance of Western civilization in the school and university curriculum" while multiculturalists "believe that the school, college, and university curriculum marginalized the experiences of people of color and of women."<sup>29</sup> Banks' study provided an important framework to approach different conceptions of history and provided a lens to understand conservative historical rhetoric. This thesis incorporates Banks' definitions of western traditionalism into its discussion of conservative values and the Right's opposition to multiculturalism. Banks' differentiation of the Right's and Left's views on history also support ideas of historical interpretation essential to this work.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* provided this thesis with an important methodological framework around history's representation

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*Free Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jason Stahl, *Right Moves: Conservative Think Tanks in American Political Culture Since 1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

<sup>27</sup> This is not to discount the tremendous body of work on conservatism from political scientists and journalists, many of whom frequently write about it in its late 1990s and early 2000s context. It is also likely that historians will write more works on the conservative ascendancy in the Long Culture Wars over the next few years.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 11.

<sup>29</sup> James A. Bank, "The Canon Debate, Knowledge Construction, and Multicultural Education," *Educational Research* 22, No. 5 (June-July, 1993): 4.

and misrepresentation.<sup>30</sup> Trouillot's insights into historical production are of great utility to any work on the power of historical narratives. This book's approach provided a broader guide for discussions about the past's reconstruction. *Silencing the Past* posited that history is as much about those who write about the past as those who act within in it. "History is always produced in a specific historical context. Historical actors are also narrators, and vice versa."<sup>31</sup> This idea took on particular salience when highly charged political narratives were involved. Trouillot further posited that; "what history is changes with time and place or, history reveals itself only through the production of specific narratives. What matters most are the process and conditions of production of specific narratives."<sup>32</sup> The past's dependence on the present increased when controversial political or social narratives were at stake. Trouillot's and Banks' ideas provide ideas necessary to understand the politically charged historical rhetoric of the Long Culture Wars.

History of such recent events requires the historian to utilize 21<sup>st</sup> century sources. The primary sources for this thesis are books written by its subjects. This approach allowed me to efficiently comprehend these academics, politicians and media figures views about history. Politicians, academics and media figures included in this work are those who significantly influenced or represented late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century conservatism. The politicians chosen were ones who occupied positions of power either in Congress, the White House, and occasionally the state house on their way to presidential runs. Historians who featured in this work were those whose works had a wide (or at least broad by academic terms) public appeal. Media figures are those with strong name recognition in their medium of choice (radio, tv, print, etc.). There are undoubtedly figures left out of this thesis whose works greatly influenced the conservative movement in these years. These exclusions are the result of MA thesis space constraints and the accessibility of their public sources.

### **An Echo Chamber of Victimization**

One of the factors that drove conservatives of the late 1990s and early 2000s was a perception of victimization and ostracization. The purpose of this section is to briefly illuminate

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<sup>30</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 25.

the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of conservative victimization in the academy and the media. These pages also demonstrate the way that perceptions of the past interacted with power to increase polarization in the Long Culture Wars. The forces of ostracization and a quest for power created an echo chamber of victimization where powerbrokers on the Right mutually reinforced one another's thoughts on society and history. The following pages briefly explain the creation of this echo chamber by exploring academic bias, media bias, power, and perception, before illustrating them in one high profile 1994 story. The first part of this story begins where most things do, in school.

### **Objective History?**

Conservative accusations of liberal bias in the academy existed long before the Culture Wars of the 1990s and 2000s. These feelings merit a brief discussion since they were essential to the conservative echo chamber. Elites on the political and social Right typically viewed American colleges and universities, particularly top-tier ones, as bastions of liberalism. Daniel Flynn, the author of *A Conservative History of the American Left*, voiced this sentiment; “when I looked up the partisan affiliation of college professors... at I believe Cornell, Dartmouth and UNC-Chapel Hill, and Stanford... For history department it was... 137 Democrats to 3 Republicans... the Kremlin was more diverse than that!”<sup>33</sup> These historians felt shunned in mainstream academia, but still found homes in conservative spaces such as Hillsdale College, Liberty University, the Mises Institute and a scattering of other schools and think tanks that promote conservative ideas.

William F. Buckley's outspoken 1951 book *God and Men at Yale: The Superstition of "Academic Freedom"* provided a strong, early conservative counterpunch against liberalism's dominance in the academy.<sup>34</sup> The future father of *National Review* criticized Yale's educational policies and claimed that the school; “derives its moral and financial support from Christian individualists and then addresses itself to the task of persuading the sons of these supporters to be atheistic socialists.”<sup>35</sup> Buckley highlighted a general 20th and 21st century conservative frustration; that while the University system was grounded in traditional values, their actions

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Flynn, interview by Adam Bruno, March 23, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Men at Yale: The Superstition of Academic Freedom*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Press, 1951).

<sup>35</sup> Buckley, *God and Men at Yale*, lix-lx.

were generally antithetical to these principles.<sup>36</sup> From their mid-20<sup>th</sup> century frustrated roots, conservative figures responded to the liberal academy with historical interpretations much more aligned with their worldviews.

Conservative professors and students' actions came with a level of perceived risk that further contributed to their feelings of victimization. Ben Shapiro lamented that the “few professors who *are* conservative are unable to ‘come out of the closet’ for fears that they will be targeted by their colleagues and the university administration.”<sup>37</sup> Shapiro’s work intended to provoke a degree of outrage towards the academy. His observation of bias against the Right was indicative of many conservatives’ views of higher education, particularly within the humanities fields where instances of bias were much more apparent.<sup>38</sup>

Historians on the Right responded to liberal narratives with conservative and ‘American values’ driven based histories – ones that promoted a purer and more positive version of the nation. These works did not appear consistently throughout history and instead heightened at moments of real or imagined crises. Sociologist Neil Gross spoke of this; “conservative intolerance, for radical academics or anyone else, rises when the country is perceived to be under threat, as in the post-9/11 period.”<sup>39</sup> In the Culture Wars, when both sides consistently felt a threat from the other, this sentiment was steady and considerable. Therefore, when conservative actors returned rhetorical fire, they reasonably claimed: “they are standing up to what amounts to corruption in higher education and upholding high professional standards for academic work.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dr. Marvin Olasky echoed Buckley’s view of the university’s strong Christian tradition in a April 20<sup>th</sup> oral history interview. In a discussion about what makes America a great place he said, “Christians have historically been the leaders in education...just about every leading college in early America had a Christian base and grew out of a commitment of founders and professors and donors to that Christian commitment.” 7:10

<sup>37</sup> Ben Shapiro, *Brain Washed: How Universities Indoctrinate America’s Youth*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 6.

<sup>38</sup> On page 55 of *Why are Professors Liberal* Neil Gross noted that several studies put college faculty at approximately 50-60% on the political left. He also stated that liberals tend to cluster within social sciences and the humanities. There are a higher percentage of conservatives within business and the sciences departments than in the social sciences and humanities. Neil Gross, *Why are Professors Liberal and why do Conservatives Care?*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2013)

<sup>39</sup> Gross, *Why are Professors Liberal*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Neil Gross, *Why are Professors Liberal*, 14.

Consequently, historians on the Right saw themselves not as political actors, but merely as defenders of truth in an unfairly liberal academy.<sup>41</sup>

Historians on the Right pushed for a history that upheld traditional interpretations of the past. Conservative academics frequently lamented the changes to the historical profession. Greg Schneider voiced this sentiment when he said; “what I noticed with the OAH, with their panels, most of them tended to be more activist-oriented and less history oriented, and that’s disappointing... I don’t think the profession’s declined, but it changed.”<sup>42</sup> Academics on the Right also defended traditional ‘great men’ history and not the Left’s ‘agenda driven’ version of history.<sup>43</sup> Larry Schweikart posited that such changes endangered the profession: “History departments are collapsing, I think, and certainly the history profession is collapsing into trivial nothingness.”<sup>44</sup> Schweikart’s concern stemmed not from hatred of the academy but out of concern for the future of their chosen profession.

The Right’s anger at the liberal academy did not stand alone in the narrative of conservative victimization. Conservative elites expanded their frustration from the classroom and towards the media and their ‘slanted coverage.’

### **Does the Media Actually Hate Conservatives?**

The American mainstream media traditionally presented itself as a neutral arbiter of truth. The nation’s liberals generally stood behind this theory, while conservatives consistently refuted this idea and charged the press with partisan bias. Political satirist Stephen Colbert joked about this at the 2006 White House Correspondents Dinner and said that he and the President both knew that the “polls are just a collection of statistics that reflect what people are thinking in

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<sup>41</sup> For more on the ongoing perception of conservative victimization and the Right’s aim to fix this problem see the following article. Frederick Hess and Brenden Bell, “An Ivory Tower of Our Own,” *National Affairs* 39 (Spring 2019) <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/an-ivory-tower-of-our-own>.

<sup>42</sup> Greg Schneider, Interview with Adam Bruno, April 6, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> This approach to history generally reflects the 1950s approach of consensus history, for more on this see Peter Novick’s chapter “A Consensus Culture” in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession*, (New York: Cambridge University, 1988).

<sup>44</sup> Larry Schweikart, Interview with Adam Bruno, March 14, 2018.

‘reality.’ And reality has a well-known liberal bias.”<sup>45</sup> While this was a joke for Colbert, for many on the Right, this was no laughing matter.<sup>46</sup>

Liberals with power tended to dismiss complaints of bias in the mainstream press, and there was valid evidence on both sides of this issue. In *Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Media* George Mason political economist Tim Groseclose supported the idea of victimization with research from the Media Research Center’s Freedom Forum. This research found that of “139 Washington bureau chiefs and congressional correspondents... seven percent said they’d voted for George H.W. Bush, 89 percent said they’d voted for Bill Clinton.”<sup>47</sup> The lack of ideological diversity, particularly amidst the already partisan Culture Wars gave the Right more reasons to discredit the media as overtly liberal. Former CBS reporter Bernard Goldberg brought this to light when he sarcastically noted that media executives would thank him for “agreeing with Roger Ailes of Fox News that the media divide Americans into two groups—moderates and right-wing nuts.”<sup>48</sup> The more the Right felt shunned by the media, the further it drove them from the center.

Conservative critics of the media insisted that the problem was long-standing – a feeling that a 1981 study of major newspapers seemed to prove. Tim Groseclose cited earlier surveys that how in the elections of “1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976, the journalists reported voting for the Republican at rates, respectively, of 6, 14, 19, and 19 percent.”<sup>49</sup> Virginia Tech, Professor of journalism Jim Kuypers, echoed the idea of a biased press and claimed that the “post-objective phase press existed virtually unchallenged from the 1960s to 1980...liberals dominated the news media for more than 25 years, during which time journalists became entrenched in their

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<sup>45</sup> Colbert was referring to President George W. Bush’s low approval ratings. The President’s approval ratings were in free-fall in the wake of mismanagement of Hurricane Katrina, frustration at the Iraq War, amongst a host of other factors. Stephen Colbert, Remarks at the White House Correspondents Dinner, Washington DC, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Center-Right Washington Post commentator Jennifer Rubin provided context on the rise of conservative victimhood in the Culture Wars. Rubin framed her argument around 2008 vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin’s referral to the mainstream media as the “lamestream media.” Jennifer Rubin, “Conservative Victimhood,” *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.) Sept. 17, 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Tim Groseclose, *Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Media* (New York: St. Martins, 2011), 99.

<sup>48</sup> Bernard Goldberg, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Groseclose, *Left Turn: How Liberal Media Bias Distorts the American Media*, 100. Groseclose cites a 1981 study from Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman.

reportorial practices.”<sup>50</sup> Kuypers and Groseclose promulgated the idea that the Left’s control on the press stacked the cards against the nation’s conservatives.

Eric Alterman countered this idea and posited that this idea was merely a convenient bogeyman for the Right. “Social scientists talk about “useful myths,” stories we all know are not necessarily true, but that we choose to believe anyway because they seem to offer confirmation of what we already know.”<sup>51</sup> Thus, the entire idea of liberal bias was just an opportunity for conservative victimization, even though “the entire case is a lie, and yes, in many instances, a slander.”<sup>52</sup> Despite his arguments to the contrary, the matter of media bias was as much a matter of perception as it was about reality.

The Right’s feeling of ostracization in the media joined with similar sentiments about the academy. These frustrations gave conservative powerbrokers a powerful tool in the Culture Wars – a weapon they frequently utilized in the fight for power and control over historical narratives.

### **Power, Perception, Polarization**

The relationship between history and power grew throughout the Culture Wars because of the politicization of all issues. Michael Rolph-Trouillot discussed this intersection; “power does not enter the story once and for all, but at different times and from different angles. It preceded the narrative proper, contributes to its creation and its interpretation.”<sup>53</sup> The choice to engage with historical narratives reflected an active decision about power and narrative creation on the part of influential figures. Statements about the past grew in influence conditional on the speaker and in what context they spoke. High profile politicians, media figures, and even some academics were tremendously influential, and thus their opinions about history carried a great deal of weight amongst Americans. The more that ideas about history reverberated around the echo chamber, the more historical narratives were re-written to support one’s ideological views. Partially true stories gained momentum in the echo chamber because of the perception that

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<sup>50</sup> Jim A. Kuypers, *Partisan Journalism: A History of Media Bias in the United States* (Lanham MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Alterman, *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 1.

<sup>52</sup> Alterman, *What Liberal Media?* 3. The use of the term “slander” to describe conservative attacks on the “liberal news media” is a reference to Ann Coulter’s 2002 attack on the mainstream media by the same name.

<sup>53</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 28-29.

reality only existed on the Right; consequently, conservative versions of history were always and undeniably correct.

The interpretation of historical occurrences smoothly transitioned into the power of perception in the Culture Wars. In a hyper-polarized society views of the past were as crucial as the historical realities they represented. The portrayal of events instrumentally shaped the way American's perceived the societal divisions around them. Morris Fiorina discussed the media's role in this and claimed that "rather than draw the conclusion that America has split into two distinct camps from a systematic look at a broad array of data, the media often reverse the process, selecting unusual but colorful examples to fit the prior conclusion that the country is deeply split."<sup>54</sup> One of the central tactics of conservative powerbrokers was that they frequently cited one of two provocative historical instances that upheld their worldview. The echo chamber then enhanced the size and scope of the story. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella argued that "conservative media create a self-protective enclave hospitable to conservative beliefs. This safe haven reinforces the view of these outlets' like-minded audience members, helps them maintain ideological coherence, protects them from counterpersuasion, reinforces conservative values and dispositions."<sup>55</sup> This idea also applied to the broader conservative echo chamber and should also include the rhetoric of politicians and academics as well. The echo chamber of victimized politicians, scholars and media protected conservative ideas from a perceptibly hostile society.

Humans by nature tend to self-sort themselves, and a tribal society reinforced this tendency. Conservative powerbrokers of the Long Culture Wars isolated their message from the mainstream and created an even stronger feedback loop. The echo chamber also grew because of the emotional style appeals endemic to the Culture Wars. Fox News CEO Roger Ailes highlighted this practice; "When emotion is positive and genuine, there is no more constructive

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<sup>54</sup> Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson, 2006), 25.

<sup>55</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella, *Echo Chamber* (New York: Oxford, 2008), X.

and powerful force of persuasion.”<sup>56</sup> This model of sentiment-driven news was at the core of the framing of news around history, which by their nature are frequently highly emotional.<sup>57</sup>

The emotionally driven nature of the echo chamber was compounded by those within it who used conservative victimization to claim that only they understood their viewers. This concept was perhaps most evident in the talk radio world where Randy Bobbitt noted that hosts “convince their listeners that talk radio represents their *only* outlet for unbiased information.”<sup>58</sup> This idea was not unique to talk radio or conservative powerbrokers. High-profile figures more generally employed this to gain influence. Jamison and Cappella extended this argument and stated that “conservative outlets feature instances of bias on the other side. This process builds a storehouse of evidence available to conservatives when challenged about their beliefs.”<sup>59</sup> The more those in the echo chamber convinced their constituencies of attacks from liberal outsiders, the more their message resonated with their base. The emotions and “us against them” sentiment of conservative powerbrokers contributed to the Rights’ move further from the center – an action that corresponded with the perceived shrinking of the “Overton Window.”

The “Overton Window” is a convenient measuring stick that dictates the sort of rhetoric that is politically palatable among the electorate.<sup>60</sup> This political science concept divides speech into three categories: the acceptable, the unacceptable and speech with which the speaker disagrees. The problem with the Overton Window for many Culture Wars conservatives was that liberals drastically shrunk it throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ben Shapiro voiced his frustration over this and alleged that the Left “separates discourse into the acceptable and the unacceptable” and that this would “result in the utter polarization of politics in the worst possible ways.”<sup>61</sup> Shapiro’s larger argument was that the Left aimed to make all conservative speech

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<sup>56</sup> Roger Ailes, *You are the Message: Secrets of the Master Communicators* (Homewood IL: Dow Jones-Orwin, 1988), 76.

<sup>57</sup> Media framing of an event is described with “certain keywords, metaphors, concepts, and symbols; they work by highlighting some features of reality over others. In short, they make some facts rather than others more salient or relevant to the person exposed to the frame.” Jim Kyupers, *Press Bias and Politics: How the Media Frame Controversial Issues* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2002), 198-199.

<sup>58</sup> Bobbitt, *Us Against Them*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Joseph N. Cappella, *Echo Chamber*, X.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the Overton Window see the following tribute article to its originator Joe Overton. Nathan J. Russell, “An Introduction to the Overton Window of Political Possibilities,” *Mackinack Center for Public Policy*, January 4, 2006, <https://www.mackinac.org/7504>.

<sup>61</sup> Ben Shapiro, “‘The Atlantic’ Fires Kevin Williamson. This Is How You Got Trump. Really.,” *The Daily Wire*, April 5, 2018.

unacceptable. This frustration appeared overblown to many on the Left, but regardless of its validity it had real-world consequences. The more that moderate conservatives faced accusations of rhetorical equivalence with their extreme colleagues, the more their orations moved to the Right. Consequently, much of the Right pulled rhetorically further from the ideological center – a significant problem as a smaller Overton window resulted in less bipartisan dialogue.

Political issues around power, perception, and polarization allowed powerbrokers of the Right to enhance their powerful echo chamber around a common set of conservative values. The combination of the echo chamber and conservative victimization (in the academy and media) were on full display throughout the Long Culture Wars, and rarely more clearly than in the following story.

In a 1994 *Wall Street Journal* Op-ed, former chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities Lynne Cheney made a bold assertion. She claimed that the “1992 presidential election unleashed the forces of political correctness... ‘pursuing the revisionist agenda’ no longer bothered to conceal their ‘great hatred for traditional history.’”<sup>62</sup> Cheney’s claim highlighted the common conservative frustration about political correctness and the liberal ‘demonization’ of American history. Cheney’s irritation over this election was not the end of this story, nor was the apex of its national importance. Talk radio host Rush Limbaugh brought this story national notoriety when he proclaimed a similar message to his substantial radio audience. Limbaugh left little doubt on his opinion of the historians who he said “‘bullied their way into power positions and academia’ in order to indoctrinate students with the message that ‘our country is inherently evil.’”<sup>63</sup> Gary Nash later discussed Limbaugh’s goal in this fight and said that he [Limbaugh] hoped that the “millions on American parents would bear this history lesson in mind and agree that the National History standards were radioactive enough to damage their children’s minds.”<sup>64</sup>

Lynne Cheney and Rush Limbaugh existed in very different spheres – one an educational policy maker and wife of a future Vice President, the other a shock jock talk radio host. Both

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<sup>62</sup> Lynn Cheney, “The End of History,” *Wall Street Journal* (New York, New York), Oct 20, 1994. It is important to note that within this quote from Cheney’s article the additional quotations are Cheney citing an anonymous source.

<sup>63</sup> Rush Limbaugh Show, 24 Oct. 1994 in Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 6.

<sup>64</sup> Gary Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn. *History of Trial*, 6

incorporated similar rhetoric as they attacked a leftist society they saw as oppositional to their traditional values.<sup>65</sup> This story illuminated several critical points about the echo chamber of conservative victimization. First, the rapid changes to American society led many conservative elites to react in a victimized and often hostile manner. Second, this interaction demonstrated the echo chamber nature of conservatism where media figures, politicians and academics (in this case directly) mutually reinforced one another's thoughts. Finally, the more that conservative powerbrokers felt that their ideas were attacked by the Left, the more they moved right.

### **Chapter Breakdown: Three Eras, Three Issues, One History**

The long history of conservative victimization was a consistent underlying factor for the Culture Wars. The combination of a perception of ostracization, with a quest for power in an era of uncertainty, made the echo chamber noteworthy. Throughout the ensuing three chapters it is clear that conservative powerbrokers in the academy, media, and politics explicitly or inexplicitly relied on the thoughts of those in different spheres of influence. Not only did these figures rely on one another's ideas about the past, but their mutual outrage contributed to the rise of hostilities throughout the Culture Wars. The past became 'credibly' pro-conservative and anti-liberal in a rapidly changing present. Working within the conservative echo chamber; politicians supported policy with history; academics gave it intellectual credibility; and powerful media voices spread historically backed conservative messages to the nation.

The Culture Wars of the 1990s and 2000s marked a high point for domestic discord unseen within since the 1960s. The 18 years covered in this work were prime years for the political Right to harness the power of the past to support their version of the present. The following chapters break down chronologically: 1992-2000, 2002-2006 and 2007-2010. Within each chapter, politicians, academics, and media figures receive time on their terms, albeit with a comparison to previously referenced powerbrokers. Within each sub-section (politicians, academics, media) the structure is also the same – discussion of the level of historically-themed hostility, a conversation on the negative impact of the sixties, the national history of neoliberalism, a Judeo-Christian religious tradition, and finally the opposition to multiculturalism. The Right at times simultaneously emphasized Judeo-Christian tradition and

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<sup>65</sup> For a more detailed account of the 1994 history wars over the national history standards see the aforementioned *History on Trial*.

their opposition to multiculturalism. The baseline arguments and overview of important people included in these chapters appear below.

Chapter one, “Contract with America” era, centers around the out of power GOP, and the rising influence of conservative media. In these years conservative actors laid a baseline of hostility and focused their historical rhetoric on the history of small government more than on the Christian tradition or opposition to multiculturalism. The essential political figures of these years were those indispensable to the Contract with America – headlined by Newt Gingrich, but also with strong support from Dick Armey, Bob Dole, Jack Kemp, and Trent Lott. These figures received academic backing from the works of Marvin Olasky, Harvey Mansfield, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Edward Shapiro. Finally, the media contingent included Rush Limbaugh, Dinesh D’Souza and George Will. These politicians, academics, and media figures provided a basic understanding of the GOP’s views on the past in this first series of years.

In Chapter Two, the “You’re With Us, or Against Us” years, conservative historical rhetoric shifted from predominately about the history of neoliberalism to the nation’s Christian tradition and opposition to multiculturalism – a move accompanied by a rise in the hostile nature of the language. Featured politicians of this era included President George W. Bush, Chief of Staff Karl Rove, John McCain and Rick Santorum. The academic grounding of this era came from Larry Schweikart, Michael Allen’s, and Tom Woods. The media figures that gave voice to these ideas were featured radio, and television hosts Sean Hannity, Bill O’Reilly, Michael Savage, Judge Andrew Napolitano, and Ann Coulter. The rhetoric of powerbrokers from different subsets of conservatism shaped an increasingly aggressive, but ideologically similar tone to that of their 1990s colleagues.<sup>66</sup>

The “Tea Party” era of chapter three marked the height of the Right’s rhetorical hostility and a moment when the history of neoliberalism, Judeo-Christian tradition, and opposition to multiculturalism generally received equal focus from these powerbrokers. The core politicians of this era were John McCain, Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, Eric Cantor, Kevin McCarthy, Paul Ryan, and the return of Newt Gingrich. The essential historians of the day were Larry Schweikart (again), Dan Flynn, and two authors of *Politically Incorrect Guides*, Robert Murphey

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<sup>66</sup> There were some minor changes in the values expressed by some of these powerbroker groups, but these are explained in this chapter’s sub-sections.

and Anthony Esolen. Finally, the media in these years featured Glenn Beck, Laura Ingram, Mark Levin, Jonah Goldberg, Dinesh D’Souza and Bill O’Reilly.<sup>67</sup> Taken together, these voices from each of the powerbroker groups contributed to a vocal and aggressive “Tea Party” era conservative movement that frequently claimed their political opposition was un-American in their values and actions.

The conclusion discusses the way that these rhetorical practices have continued in the years since the Tea Party wave. This section articulates the importance and ongoing frequency of the ideas presented throughout this work. The conclusion ends with a brief commentary on the overall power of historical rhetoric and the way that it could serve a positive social purpose.

### **Authors Note**

Throughout this work, I attempted to assume the best intentions of these powerbrokers and viewed them as people working towards a political goal in a polarized nation. I consistently aimed not to charge anyone within this work as being nefarious. However, when an incorrect or biased historical point appeared, I contextualized statements and corrected misinformation. I did not do this out of malicious intent or ill-will towards the person, but out of respect for the truth and the historical profession. I understand that people on either side of the political aisle may take issue with my analysis or people that were or were not included in this work. I welcome any disagreements and only hope that this work leads to a more effective conversation between people of different political backgrounds. In sum, I hope and look forward to all civic discourse this sort of work can provoke.

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<sup>67</sup> When figures returned in a later era their rhetoric generally aligned with that of their peers in that sub-era. This is not to say that these people drastically changed their entire outlook. Their rhetoric did however frequently adjust in accordance with predominant values and level of hostility of smaller sub-era.

### **A Baseline of Rage: The Contract with America Years (1992-2000)**

*“We must reassert and renew American civilization. From the arrival of English-speaking colonists in 1607 until 1965, there was one continuous civilization built around a set of commonly accepted legal and cultural principles... Since 1965, however, there has been a calculated effort by cultural elites to discredit this civilization and replace it with a culture of irresponsibility that is incompatible with American freedoms as we have known them.”<sup>1</sup>*

-Newt Gingrich

#### **No Power? No Problem**

After twelve years of political power under Reagan and Bush, the GOP found itself out of power for the first time since the Carter administration. In this most concerning of times, high-profile leaders on the Right elevated their rhetorical game to new heights. Republicans were outside of the White House after 1992, but they were far from weak. Newt Gingrich and congressional Republicans instituted a “Contract” with the people; Rush Limbaugh led a conservative takeover of the airwaves; and historian Arthur Schlesinger warned the nation of a “Disuniting of America.”<sup>2</sup> Conservative powerbrokers created a foundation of historically-themed rhetoric that countered a rapidly changing society in the first stanza of the Culture Wars. These three powerbroker groups acted within the echo chamber to defend their policies and attack liberalism – actions that laid a foundation for the future of the Long Culture Wars.

Conservative powerbrokers heavily emphasized the nation’s tradition of small government and low taxes – a result of their congressional power and opposition to the ‘big government liberal’ Bill Clinton. These figures also highlighted social issues such as the religious tradition and disdain for multiculturalism – but these issues did not receive the same amount of historical capital as neoliberalism – additionally, the media, in particular, conceived of the 1960s as a moment of national declension.

History provided a consistent political weapon in the Culture Wars, but the 1990s were unique in the open nature of historically-driven conflicts. Gary Nash explained that “history is unceasingly controversial because it provides so much of the substance for the way a society defines itself and considers what it wants to be.”<sup>3</sup> In 1995, the National Air and Space Museum’s created an exhibit about the Enola Gay that turned into a full-fledged historical controversy that

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<sup>1</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Renew America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Each of these three figures feature prominently in this chapter. Newt Gingrich was the Speaker of the House, Rush Limbaugh was the most powerful talk radio voice for much of the 1990s and 2000s, and Arthur Schlesinger was the once liberal Democratic Party affiliated historian who later turned to the right

<sup>3</sup> Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History of Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 7.

roiled the nation. Individuals and associations on the political Right charged that the museum was un-American in its presentation of the bomb's dropping.<sup>4</sup> The Air Force Association (a military lobbying group) exemplified this rage and claimed that the museum's curators had "hijacked history; they were 'anti-American'; they were practicing 'politically correct' curating; they were projecting the 'countercultural values' of the Vietnam era onto America's last good war."<sup>5</sup> The fight illustrated the national conflict over history's role in society. This exhibit demonstrated the national drift away from the "real history" and towards a Howard Zinn esque interpretation of the past.<sup>6</sup> The standout controversy illuminated the power of historical ideas and narratives in the "Contract With America" era.

### **A Contract for Partisanship? Politicians in the Age of the Contract**

Politicians of the 1990s fully introduced the Culture Wars into the bright lights of Capitol Hill. The influence of nearly undiluted partisanship was rarely more evident than in the GOP's 1994 'Contract With America.' This plan promised to "renew the American Dream by promoting individual liberty, economic opportunity, and personal responsibility, through limited and effective government, high standards of performance, and an America strong enough to defend all her citizens against violence at home and abroad."<sup>7</sup> Newt Gingrich and company's plan appealed to voters, and in 1994 midterm the GOP flipped fifty-two House and Eight Senate seats.<sup>8</sup> When the next session began, the GOP held majorities of 230-204 in the House and 53-47 in the Senate.<sup>9</sup> Political scientist Gary Jacobsen argued that the "only reason this election brought divided government rather than unified Republican control is that Bill Clinton was not on the

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<sup>4</sup> It should also be noted that many traditionally moderate, and some left-wing groups also opposed the Smithsonian exhibit.

<sup>5</sup> Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, ed. *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Banks, "The Canon Debate," 10. As examples of this, Banks notes, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, Gary Nash's *Red, White and Black: The Peoples of Early America*, Henry Louis Gates Jr's *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, among other to demonstrate these sorts of works. A 'Howard Zinn' interpretation of history refers to a Marxist and frequently multicultural interpretation of the past. These historical works highlighted the experiences of economically and socially marginalized groups and generally assumed negative economic motivations on the parts of societal elites. For more on this approach to history see Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, "Marxist Historians," in *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in History and Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> For a list of all the Republican candidates who signed the Contract see *Contract With America: The Bold Plan by Rep. Newt Gingrich, Rep. Dick Armey and the House Republicans to Change the Nation*, ed. Ed Gillespie and Bob Schellhas (New York: Random House, 1994), 5. 169-180. This extensive list illustrates the conservative movement's total buy in to Gingrich's bold new plan.

<sup>8</sup> The GOP also picked up an extra seat when Alabama Senator Richard Shelby flipped from the Democrats to the Republicans in the wake of the election.

<sup>9</sup> Vermont Independent Bernie Sanders rounded the House of Representatives numbers out to 435.

ballot.”<sup>10</sup> The nation’s conservatives now had their leverage with President Clinton. Speaker Gingrich promised to send President Clinton some “things he can sign while he is vetoing others.”<sup>11</sup> His promise ended up generally unfulfilled, and the era’s ultimate legacy was more partisanship not unity.

The policies of the “Contract With America” largely defined conservatism in the 1990s and the GOP’s “agenda of the first hundred Republican-controlled House of Representatives in more than four decades. It represents the first substantive steps on the road to a smaller government with lower taxes and regulations.”<sup>12</sup> The limited government and a traditional values-based platform was generally consistent with conservative principles. The “Contract” simultaneously vaulted Newt Gingrich’s aggressive brand of politics and rhetoric into the national spotlight.

The Contract’s more considerable significance was the GOP’s aggressive application of its proposed policies. Conservative thought-leader Newt Gingrich personified the more hostile nature of 1990s politics. Journalist Ronald Brownstein later noted that “what truly set him [Gingrich] apart was his capacity to formulate a long-term plan for redefining both parties, and his willingness to pursue almost any means necessary to advance it.”<sup>13</sup> Gingrich and congressional Republican’s lack of remorse for their actions was not unique to them, as their counterparts in the academy and media echoed this style. The “Gentleman from Georgia’s” open hostility was strong enough that even members of the party like Trent Lott took note of it. “He jumped onto every scandal he could unearth... he made hay with both the congressional banking scandal and a handful of sex scandals.”<sup>14</sup> The rhetoric of Gingrich and his GOP laid a foundation of hostility that grew exponentially in the ensuing two decades. *The Atlantic*’s McKay Coppins described Newt Gingrich in a 2018 article: “Gingrich’s career can perhaps be best understood as a grand exercise in devolution—an effort to strip American politics of the civilizing traits it had

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<sup>10</sup> Gary C. Jacobson, “The 1994 House Elections in Perspective,” *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 2 (1996), 203.

<sup>11</sup> Newt Gingrich in Adam Clymer, “The 1994 Elections: Congress the Overview; G.O.P Celebrates its Sweep to Power; Clinton Vows to Find Common Ground,” *New York Times* (New York, New York), Nov. 10, 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Newt Gingrich, *Contract With America*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Brownstein, *The Second Civil War: How Extreme Partisanship has Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 138.

<sup>14</sup> Trent Lott, *Herding Cats: A Life in Politics* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 126.

developed over time and return it to its most primal essence.”<sup>15</sup> The harsh historical rhetoric of the day most prominently featured in the Right’s defense of small government.

In the words of then-President Bill Clinton, “it’s the economy, stupid” – a slogan that provides an apt place to begin a conversation of conservative politicians and history. The GOP mainstay policies of small government and low taxes received the greatest amount of historical capital in the 1990s. The Right’s ideas of government size received support with questionable comparisons of Reagan and Carter; the claiming of the Founding era for conservatism; and a general dismissal of 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal-progressive governments. The groundwork laid by these political figures was essential to a continuation of these ideas by those in other high-profile spheres – where historians’ research supported it, and the media trumpeted it. Newt Gingrich strongly voiced this Republican party centerpiece; “Americans hardly rebelled against King George’s taxation without representation in order to create our own tax inquisition.”<sup>16</sup> The former history professor’s claim was grossly hyperbolic but represented the broader conservative idea that anything short of an idealized Reagan-era tax rate was adversarial to the American spirit.

Recent history also promoted the argument that small government was essential to the country’s identity. This case frequently hinged on the comparison of the strong GOP icon Ronald Reagan and his supposedly weak and ineffectual predecessor Jimmy Carter. The 1996 Republican ticket of Bob Dole and Jack Kemp articulated this idea: “When Ronald Reagan ran for President in 1980, America was in economic ‘malaise.’ Under President Carter, America faced double-digit interest rates, double-digit inflation, and no sign of prosperity in sight.”<sup>17</sup> Dole and Kemp portrayed themselves as Reagan’s heirs – the man who shepherded the nation through nearly unparalleled national success. Their interpretation was only partially correct. The conservative-leaning Hudson Institute refuted the 1996 Republican ticket’s claim and pointed out that the nation’s GDP grew at rates of 3.3% and 3.5% under Carter and Reagan respectively – a very minimal difference.<sup>18</sup> It was convenient for Republican presidential candidates to look at

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<sup>15</sup> McKay Coppins, “The Man Who Broke Politics,” *The Atlantic*, (November 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Gingrich, *To Renew America*, 215.

<sup>17</sup> Bob Dole and Jack Kemp, *Trusting the People*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 67.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffery H. Anderson, *Economic Growth By President*, “Hudson Institute- Research,” August 8, 2018, <https://www.hudson.org/research/12714-economic-growth-by-president>.

Reagan through an idealized political lens, but the historical reality was more complicated than they claimed.

Dole and Kemp also viewed Clinton as the heir to the weak and ineffectual Carter. “From 1979 to 1980, real median income dropped...and like today, each problem fed on the other... in the same sad chain of cause-and-effect, we’re seeing in today’s low-growth economy”<sup>19</sup> They claimed that Democratic governance resulted in suffering for America’s ordinary families, while Republican leadership promoted strength, growth and overall success. Republican victory in 1996 would turn a weak Carter-esque government, into a strong one reminiscent of the Reagan years. This was an excellent political promise, but it ignored the economic downturn at the end of the Bush administration that cost him the election before it rebounded under Clinton – a politically astute silence given that it would otherwise harm their case.

The 1996 Presidential ticket expanded upon their opposition to the nation’s liberal government they charged that Clinton’s economics were so bad that its practitioners lied about the past for self-preservation. The “Clinton Administration has tried to rewrite history. They want us to remember the Reagan administration as a period of despair and economic failure.” They countered this idea with their own interpretation of the past: “The truth is, by every objective standard of economic health, the 1980s brought good news to American taxpayers and family.”<sup>20</sup> This claim also supported the GOP’s idea that Clinton and the Democrats would rather have power than do what is best for the nation. Such a position also accused Democrats of dishonesty and highlighted the aggressive nature of 1990s conservatism. The combination of increasingly hostile views of liberal economic policies helped Republican candidates attack the character values of their Democratic opponents. While Dole and Kemp used the past to take a “moral high ground” over their liberal opponents, the American people disagreed with this elections GOP and Clinton-Gore easily won a 379-159 electoral college victory.<sup>21</sup>

The tradition of small government also drew heavily on another hallmark of conservatism, local control. Newt Gingrich advocated against the big governments of the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dole and Kemp, *Trusting the People*, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Dole and Kemp, *Trusting the People*, 67-68.

<sup>21</sup> For a total vote and state by state breakdown of the 1996 election see the following website. “1996 Popular Vote Summary,” *Federal Election Commission*, last updated October 1997, <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe1996/summ.htm>.

century and said that “freedom starts by maximizing local initiative and local resources.”<sup>22</sup> House Majority Leader Dick Armey quoted American revolutionary icon Thomas Paine to defend similar ideology.

There are two distinct classes of men in the Nation... those who pay taxes and those who receive and live upon taxes’... This would be a rather elegant way of describing today’s struggle for power between modern Washington and the taxpayers of America. But the same lines of force are at work, lines roughly corresponding to the Beltway that circles our capital. On the one side are those who benefit from big government and high taxes. On the other are those who pay the bills.<sup>23</sup>

Armey insisted that the highly centralized and expansive government of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was inconsistent with the nation’s traditions because America’s success was conditional on its adherence to a traditional small government. This idea did not consider the Founders’ contentious debate over the size of the Federal government – which made it clear that a small Jeffersonian style government was no foregone conclusion.<sup>24</sup> The claim also made a dubious claim that only those inside the beltway benefited from federal taxes when in reality this money dispersed throughout the country via a variety of programs.<sup>25</sup> These small government proposals were consistent with conservative principles and good political selling points but lacked nuanced historical analysis.

The practice of tightly following the ideas of the Founders also expanded to constitutional originalism.<sup>26</sup> The vision of the founding documents as unchanging was even more pronounced when the Right compared it to government expansions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The GOP attacked a vast array of 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal eras that included the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the Great Society. Dick Armey claimed that it was a “seldom-recalled fact that the Constitution itself, before the Sixteenth Amendment was adopted, forbade imposing a graduated

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<sup>22</sup> Gingrich, *To Renew America*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Dick Armey, *The Flat Tax: A Citizen’s Guide to the Facts on What it Will do for You, Your Country, and Your Pocketbook* (Alexandria VA: Ballantine, 1996), 87.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the federalist vs. anti-federalist debate see Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty: An American History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2017), 270-274.

<sup>25</sup> The center on budget policy priorities provided a breakdown for 2017 taxes that while not completely accurate for 1995, but the figures provide at least partial insight. “Policy Basics: Where Do Our Federal Tax Dollars Go?” Center of Budget Policies and Priorities, Last Accessed February 28, 2019. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-budget/policy-basics-where-do-our-federal-tax-dollars-go>.

<sup>26</sup> For a brief discussion on the history of originalism, and its idea founder, the Federalist society see. Evan Mander, “Why There’s No Liberal Federalist Society,” *Politico* (January 23, 2019), <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/01/23/why-theres-no-liberal-federalist-society-224033>.

income tax on the people.”<sup>27</sup> Armeý’s originalist case also exemplified the lengths that some in the GOP would go to in the interest of lower taxes and small government – all the way to the criticism of one of the nation’s 27 Amendments. Mississippi Senator Trent Lott made a far more common case about these ideas. “The welfare system spawned by the New Deal sixty years earlier and overhauled in the 1960s, had been an abject failure... [it] generated fraud and encouraged misuses of the billions that flowed into the system.”<sup>28</sup> This basis of this argument was that if the state’s actions did not align with their vision of the Founding, then failure was imminent.<sup>29</sup>

Armeý and Lott’s had valid critiques of 20<sup>th</sup> century government expansion, but their selective opposition was hypocritical given the way government also expanded under Republican administrations. Ryan McMaken of the conservative economic thinktank Mises Institute wrote about government expansion from Nixon to Obama. “As hard as it is to believe, there are still some people who think that Reagan cut the size of government, although Reagan was a big spender and laid the groundwork for the immense national debt we live with today.”<sup>30</sup> This article contradicted the GOP’s general position of Reagan as a consistent fiscal hawk. While high-profile politicians claimed that liberalism was to blame for the ballooned federal government, the historical reality reflected high levels of spending by both political parties.

Economic ideas were the primary focus of the 1990s GOP historical rhetoric, but the nation’s religious roots remained essential to Reagan Coalition Culture Warriors. Newt Gingrich promoted this idea. “From the Jamestown Colony and the Pilgrims to the very founding of the nation, the centrality of God and religion is unmistakable. All of our rights come from our Creator.”<sup>31</sup> Gingrich and other high-profile GOP figures stressed that the nation grew from Christian principles – a tradition the country no longer upheld. Bob Dole spoke of this 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Armeý, *The Flat Tax*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Lott, *Herding Cats*, 136. Lott wrote about this in his memoir. Which, while a good account should always be taken with a grain of salt and an understanding of the way politicians are attempting to promote a certain legacy. It is also worth noting Lott’s history of racially questionable remarks. Most notably at a 2002 event commemorating the life and legacy of former Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond.

<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that many of the Founding Fathers argued for a larger and stronger central government. This included Federalists led by Alexander Hamilton who Armeý also quotes in defense of this flat tax.

<sup>30</sup> Ryan McMaken, “If You Want Bigger Government, Vote Republican,” *Mises Institute*, February 9, 2016, <https://mises.org/wire/if-you-want-bigger-government-vote-republican>. It should be noted that the Mises Institute is named for Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises – a favored economist for many conservatives and libertarians.

<sup>31</sup> Gingrich, *To Renew America*, 34.

century decline and argued that our “schools... aren’t allowed to pray in the classroom. Illegitimacy is epidemic, but our tax code penalizes marriage, while a decrepit welfare system drives away fathers.”<sup>32</sup>

Dole exemplified the way that the Right saw an ailing society; teenage pregnancy seemingly rose, rap music ‘threatened’ society, and sex scandals rocked Congress and the White House – all the while liberals in power did little to fix them.<sup>33</sup> Social ills compounded by a bloated federal government required big solutions. Newt Gingrich turned to the nation’s younger days for solutions to the country’s contemporary sickness.

In America, the fact that God, not the state, has empowered us puts an enormous burden on our shoulders... When the Founding Fathers pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor they meant it literally. The consequence of defeat would be an ignoble hanging. Compare that level of personal commitment and self-assumed responsibility with the self-pity of the whiners we so often hear today.<sup>34</sup>

The nation moved away from its fidelity to God and America’s culture, and social fabric generally weakened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Citizens then became less reliant on the church, or their own merits, and instead turned to the state. Gingrich articulated that the secularization of society broke down a common, unified America. These problems were solvable with a return to traditional values. The major problem with such a claim was that many of the nation’s founders were not ardent Christians, but deists. Christianity was not unimportant in the national tradition, but it was likely not as essential as these politicians claimed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dole and Dole, *Unlimited Partners*, 344-345.

<sup>33</sup> For more on teen pregnancy rates by decade see Trends in Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing, “Office of Adolescent Health,” *Health and Human Services*, last visited February 28, 2019, <https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/reproductive-health-and-teen-pregnancy/teen-pregnancy-and-childbearing/trends/index.html>. For more on the ‘threat’ posed by rap music see Tipper Gore’s 1990 Washington Post column about the evils of the genre. Tipper Gore, “Hate, Rape and Rap,” *Washington Post* (January 8, 1990), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/01/08/hate-rape-and-rap/b4c16c35-4e96-4dec-8866-68ff6c1350f4/?utm\\_term=.9fb4d9d0dc2b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/01/08/hate-rape-and-rap/b4c16c35-4e96-4dec-8866-68ff6c1350f4/?utm_term=.9fb4d9d0dc2b).

<sup>34</sup> Gingrich, *To Renew America*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> The claim of the Founders as deists, not overtly Christian is discussed by Darron Staloff in *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*. Staloff discussed founders like Washington, Jefferson and Adams, who he said “do not dispute the prevalence of Christian belief in the early Republic, they argue that the principal founders listed above did not share that belief, and that it was deistic and secular rather than Christian principles that informed the constitutional and political order they founded.” Darron Staloff, “Deism and the Founders,” in *Faith and the Founders of the American Republic*, ed Mark David Hall and Daniel L. Dreisbach (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 13.

The emphasis on America's religious tradition integrated with the Right's focus on the other critical social value of western traditionalism and opposition to multiculturalism. Bob Dole articulated that the "doctrines of political correctness should not dominate our school's curricula, assigning equal value to all cultures and lifestyles. In celebrating what makes us different from each other, we have come dangerously close to discarding whatever might bind us as one people."<sup>36</sup> Fears of western and American traditions "under siege" spoke to the victimization narrative within the conservative movement. Newt Gingrich argued the country was on the verge of losing its civilization: "we are at the edge of losing this civilization. You get two more generations of what we had for the last 20 years, and we're in desperate trouble."<sup>37</sup> Gingrich's rhetoric spurred a conservative call for a national re-emphasis on a common heritage that protected the nation from the forces of multiculturalism and political correctness (PC).

The frustration over multiculturalism frequently flared up in moments when the nation seemingly changed too quickly. Immigration from a diverse range of countries that did not clearly 'mesh' with American culture also sparked such sentiments in the Long Culture Wars.<sup>38</sup> The goal of this rhetoric was to discredit the 'open' 1990s version of immigration policy in favor of a more restrictive and antiquated system. Newt Gingrich argued for this policy.

Millions of immigrants who came through Ellis Island hoped to find happiness and give their children a better life, but it was hard work...today the counterculture left, and its allies profess to smooth the path for immigrants by setting up bilingual education programs... immigrants need to make a sharp psychological break with the past.<sup>39</sup>

The strength of the nation's system was in its singularity, not its diversity. Gingrich's more significant problem with the present was that immigrants had it too easy, and there was little motivation for them to assimilate like there was in the past. Immigrants of the past did assimilate, but often in the confines of local ethnic groups. This description also papered over the troubling aspects of American immigration quotas and restrictions that reverberated throughout early 20<sup>th</sup> century America. This is not to say that Newt Gingrich exclusively opposed immigration, but

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<sup>36</sup> Dole and Dole, *Unlimited Partner*, 345.

<sup>37</sup> Newt Gingrich in *Quotations From Speaker Newt: The Little Red, White and Blue Book of the Republican Revolution* (New York: Workman, 1995), 33. The original quote is from the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

<sup>38</sup> A Pew Immigration report showed major sparks in immigration during the 1990s. Additionally, the number of illegal immigrants rose at several points in this decade – a pair of facts that greatly irritated immigration hawks like Gingrich. "Rise, Peak and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992-2009," *Pew Research Center: Hispanic Center*, September 27, 2005, <https://www.pewhispanic.org>.

<sup>39</sup> Gingrich, *To Renew America*, 161.

such statements simplified the “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” of earlier times and narrowed what it meant to be an American – particularly when such rhetoric denigrated present-day immigrants.<sup>40</sup> The anger towards immigrants in the 1990s reflected a broader concern about a country that no longer looked like used to. Conservative politician’s embrace of an older form of immigration merged with the Right’s general antipathy towards a multicultural society ‘out of step’ with earlier values.

Gingrich wove his opposition to immigration into a broader criticism of multiculturalism. Bob Dole gave a more comprehensive political statement and contended that “in earlier days, Americans came together amid the adversity of economic hardship and global war. More recently, our unity has been shattered by moral and cultural relativism.”<sup>41</sup> Dole spoke of a purer America, one where the nation’s past appeared clean, united and without significant issue. This view of the country was an especially useful point of comparison for a politician running against children of the sixties, like Bill Clinton and his wife Hillary, whose actions and worldview were more morally relative. This version of America only remembers a simple version of history, not the complex and diverse one favored by multiculturalists.

History was a useful tool to promote major elements of GOP policy. The primary emphasis for Gingrich and company in these years was small government and low taxes. But they still defended the nation’s religious tradition and the importance of traditional western society. Newt Gingrich laid a final Republican claim to the past.

The history of the United States has been a history of encouraging new developments and inventors... the same spirit of democratic entrepreneurialism is alive in America today, but we do far less to encourage it. We have allowed mindless entertainment and liberal social issues to drive entrepreneurialism and invention from popular awareness.<sup>42</sup>

Gingrich’s statement firmly contrasted the GOP history backed stance with the morally and historically problematic one of Clinton. America could return to greatness with a whole-hearted embrace of “traditional” values of small government and social conservatism, or it could remain in the hands of Clinton and his moral relativism. Gingrich’s semi-apocalyptic rhetoric demonstrated the extensive political capital history had for the conservative politicians.

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<sup>40</sup> For more about the history of immigration restrictions see Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty*, 759-761.

<sup>41</sup> Dole and Dole, *Unlimited Partners*, 345.

<sup>42</sup> Gingrich, *To Renew America*, 59-60.

The ideological foundation laid by these figures was vital for the outspoken conservative media. Conservative media could trumpet their view to the nation because academic rationales also joined the fray.

### **Who ‘Rights’ History? Historians of the ‘90s**

The frequency of attacks on American historians demonstrated the past’s outsized role in national identity during the Culture Wars.<sup>43</sup> High profile moments in the 1990s were emblematic of reactionary conservatism’s defiant rebuttal of liberalism’s perceived power. Andrew Hartman wrote that the “humanities were more than a mere luxury. They were vital to higher learning. What Left and Right disagreed upon, often ferociously, was how to define and teach the humanities.”<sup>44</sup> Conservative historians provided an intellectual foundation for the values of their political and media colleagues. These explications were often more specific and occasionally about less-frequently discussed periods of history, but they promoted similar values.

Conservative historians voiced their opposition to the 1960s and the decade’s promotion of liberalism. For historians, the nation not only declined in this decade, but the history profession markedly deteriorated as well. Consequently, the reintegration of conservative values in the history field could, in theory, overturn the legacy of the sixties and save the present with the true nature of the past. Edward Shapiro’s 1992 article “Liberalism and the College History Textbook: A Case Study” defended conservative thought and simultaneously critiqued the left-leaning nature of the 1990s history profession. Shapiro stated that “surveys since the 1960s of the social, economic, and political attitudes of American academicians and intellectuals have consistently noted a marked sway to the port side.”<sup>45</sup> This interpretation of liberalism in the historical field reflected the Right’s distress about the diversification and multicultural shift of history in the sixties.<sup>46</sup> Shapiro followed this with a note about the conservative nature of the past. “This has been true of historians, even though history, perhaps more than any other discipline is inherently conservative... its lessons included the wisdom of gradual change.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For more on specific instances of anti-historian sentiment see *History Wars* or *History on Trial*.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew Hartman, Culture Wars and the Humanities in the Age of Neoliberalism,” *Raritan* 35, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 128. Hartman notes this idea of the late 21<sup>st</sup> century Culture War en route to a larger point about how the general acceptance of neoliberalism generally ended the Culture Wars in the humanities. This idea is one this thesis disagrees with and posits that the national crises over history continues into the present day.

<sup>45</sup> Edward S. Shapiro, “Liberalism and the College History Textbook: A Case Study,” *Continuity: A Journal of History* no. 16 (Fall 1992): 27.

<sup>46</sup> The 1960s marked what is generally known as the \_\_\_\_ shift of history. For more on this see

<sup>47</sup> Shapiro, “Liberalism and the College History Textbook,” *Continuity*, 27.

Such a depiction of events reinforced the Right's views of both past and present. History upheld conservatism because the past was indicative of slow and gradual change, a very Kirkian statement.<sup>48</sup> These values supposedly disappeared during the 1960s and with them, a proper understanding of the past. The conservative critique of the academy and society in the sixties supported their historical views and provided the Right with broader ammunition in their historical rhetoric.

With a 'big government liberal' president in the White House, conservative academics joined their political and media counterparts and pushed for a smaller government. Edward Shapiro made a positive case for the 'robber barons' – those of elite wealth and status in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The case for these years and their values hinged on a trickle-down style view of the economy. This article highlighted the way that the wealthy's actions benefited all people. He claimed that these years greatly helped the poor and those who he said "migrated to the industrial centers of America from the countryside of the United States and Europe and for the hundreds of thousands of women who found new economic openings, industrialization was not an 'ordeal' but an opportunity."<sup>49</sup> The idealization of big business was imperative for the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century neo-liberal ideology essential to 1990s conservatism.<sup>50</sup> The policies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 1920s were illustrative of the growth that small government stimulated for a country. These eras stood out for conservatives especially because they bookended the progressive era. Historian Greg Schneider promoted the Harding and Coolidge administrations as an era of "tremendous peace and prosperity... and the leadership that they focused on, of passivity was a necessary respite from progressivism."<sup>51</sup> Once again, the foundation of good governance was little government. The Gilded Age and Roaring 20s prompted great wealth, but

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<sup>48</sup> Kirkian statement refers to conservative thinker Russell Kirk and his tenets of conservatism, one of which was the idea of slow, gradual change. Kirk's 1954 *The Conservative Mind From Burke to Elliot* articulated principles essential to modern conservatism. His tenets of conservatism provide an excellent baseline for anyone interested in understanding the modern conservative intellectual movement. Russell Kirk. *The Conservative Mind*, 8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Shapiro, "Liberalism and the College History Textbook, 31.

<sup>50</sup> Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal of Reagan*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 263-265. Phillips-Fein discusses the history of conservatism's coalescing over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this work emphasizes the way that big business has had a major impact on conservatism's development.

<sup>51</sup> Greg Schneider, Interview with Adam Bruno, April 6, 2018.

they also led to vast income inequality, and the twenties can reasonably receive blame for the Great Depression.<sup>52</sup>

Marvin Olasky promoted the history of small government in conjunction with a national religious tradition in *The Tragedy of American Compassion*. Olasky described the American past as a place defined by small government and private charity – one that modeled local assistance as the solution for the public welfare of the 1990s.<sup>53</sup> Small government and public welfare cutting ideas coincided with proposals of House Speaker Newt Gingrich who also distributed this book to Republicans in the 1994 House of Representatives. This overlap provided one of the more explicit examples of the power of the conservative echo chamber. Olasky heavily advocated for the benefits of a decentralized welfare and charity system and claimed it was “better to do things on a local and state level than to try to set up one universal rule coming out of Washington, but there are, there are inherent difficulties, in governmental action at all levels.”<sup>54</sup> Olasky’s long history of American charity described an American past defined by small government ideology. This position was open to criticism’s that it ignored the gaps in aid inherent in private welfare, even as it laid a historical foundation around small government and private charity.<sup>55</sup>

Inherent in Olasky’s work was the importance of a national religious tradition – a proposal fully displayed in *The American Leadership Tradition*.<sup>56</sup> Olasky wrote this in the aftermath of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal that threw the nation’s moral traditions into question.<sup>57</sup> In an era of high-profile sexual impropriety, America’s moral and leadership tradition

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<sup>52</sup> Many on the Right claim that Hoover’s ‘over-intervention’ did not allow markets to correct themselves, and thus his mistake was too much government intervention, not too little. For more on Hoover’s response to the Great Depression see Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty*, 814.

<sup>53</sup> Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Press, 1992), 4-5.

<sup>54</sup> Marvin Olasky, Interview with Adam Bruno, April, 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Consistent historical focus on private charity also overlooked the long existence of government subsidies that created a robust middle class. Ta-Nehisi Coates discussed the aid to middle-class families in the form of public education and health from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the post-WWII GI bill. Ta-Nehisi Coates, “A Brief History of Welfare for Middle Class Americans,” *The Atlantic*, January 6, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/01/a-brief-history-of-welfare-for-middle-class-americans/68991/>.

<sup>56</sup> Marvin Olasky, *The American Leadership Tradition: Moral Vision from Washington to Clinton* (New York: The Free Press, 1999). Olasky discussed Presidents: Washington, Jefferson Jackson, Lincoln, Cleveland, Theodor Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, Wilson and Kennedy. As well important non-presidential figures: Henry Clay, Booker T. Washington, John D. Rockefeller.

<sup>57</sup> The concern with open sexual immorality, and the damage it may cause the nation was warranted in this era. However, Olasky admits to an over-emphasis on the sexual morality of earlier leaders to prove his point, saying “un-trustworthiness in one area can carry over into not being trustworthy in private matters can come over and can spill over into not being trustworthy in public manners still think that’s true, but I probably overdid it because I was so conscious of it then.” Olasky demonstrated impressive self-reflection in this admission of current event’s influence

was in worse condition than ever. Olasky pivoted from this event and discussed the “links between religious beliefs and policy decisions, and also the links between lying about adultery and lying about other matters.”<sup>58</sup> Olasky’s connection between good character and governance exemplified the height of Christianity’s power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative movement.<sup>59</sup> Olasky praised George Washington and his “control of his impulses; Americans came to demand at least that appearance in their leaders. It seems that he acted in such a virtuous way primarily because he loved God... whatever the reason, the public result was magnificent.”<sup>60</sup> This religious interpretation of a Founding Father also attached contemporary conservatism to a great American figure. While Washington may have been more moral than other Founders, his upright actions do not necessarily make him an example of the Christian tradition’s role in the nation’s founding.<sup>61</sup>

Olasky highlighted the Christian tradition inherent in the founding, and hedged this with the idea that not all the Founders were as morally righteous as George Washington. This recognition allowed him to argue good morality equaled good governance and vice versa. America’s publicly less religious, and privately less moral figure Thomas Jefferson provided Olasky his first significant example; “concerning Jefferson... I wanted to believe that man who penned such noble words.... Lived up to them in his life. But Jefferson had a private life and set of beliefs not consistent with the public image he liked to present.”<sup>62</sup> Jefferson’s lack of morality nearly doomed the young nation – a fate narrowly avoided because of the nation’s strong moral

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on his work of history, but this does not ignore the work’s reactionary nature. Marvin Olasky, Interview with Adam Bruno, April 2018. In 1998 Clinton was impeached for lying to a grand jury about his relations with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, although he was ultimately acquitted in the Senate trial. Much of the impeachment was catalyzed by Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, a man who has since endured his own set of sex scandals.

<sup>58</sup> Olasky, *The American Leadership Tradition*, xv.

<sup>59</sup> An excellent work that discusses the rise of Christianity in 21<sup>st</sup> century American politics is Kevin Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York, Basic Books, 2015). As well as Darren Dochuk’s 2011 book *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. In this book, Dochuk tells the story of the rise of the Religious Right from the 1940s through its coalescing in the Reagan years of the 1980s.

<sup>60</sup> Olasky, *The American Religious Tradition*, 22.

<sup>61</sup> The moral question of the Founders’ slave ownership is an oft-discussed historical point. George Washington did free his slaves at the time of his wife’s death, but slave ownership is not excusable and is a mark of a complex man in a different time. However, it is wholly unfair to mark him as completely immoral and evil simply on these grounds. One new work of scholarship further complicates Washington’s legacy. Erica Dunbar’s 2017 book *Never Caught: The Washington’s Relentless Pursuit of a Runaway Slave* discussed George and Martha Washington’s relentless attempts to recapture one particular runaway slave. This story throws into question more of Washington’s legacy as he was consistently viewed as more moralistic than other slave owning founders such as Jefferson. Dunbar’s story should now be taken into account when contemplating Washington as a moral figure. Erica Dunbar, *Never Caught: The Washington’s Relentless Pursuit of a Runaway Slave* (New York: Atria, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Olasky, *America’s Religious Tradition*, 23.

structures. Olasky noted that “Jefferson’s career provides an important example of how even a leader who scorned any Scripture... and implemented policies contrary to biblical teaching, did not quite wreck a country with a decentralized government and a citizenry committed to preserving both liberty and virtue.”<sup>63</sup> Olasky drew a direct link between spirituality and conservative policies. This argument provided firm foundations for traditional values – it did, however, somewhat undercut the pro-Harding argument around economic policy given that his personal behavior was generally less than respectable.<sup>64</sup> This version of history provided the Right a powerful connection in an era where a morally problematic liberal was in the White House.

Olasky also expressed further faith that the American Christian tradition could overcome a national lack of morality. This confidence did not mean all was well in America, a nation in spiritual decline since the 1960s; “Bill Clinton is the political beneficiary of a recent lowering of expectations...Clinton’s well-known admiration for John Kennedy provides the incumbent with political points both ways; our tendency is to say, the adulterer wasn’t such a bad president.”<sup>65</sup> While the nation was grounded in a religious tradition that upheld morality, its non-religious and morally negligent leaders harmed these traditions. Essential to Olasky’s ideas was the idea that if the nation remained in the Jeffersonian, Kennedy and Clinton moral tradition, then great harm would befall the republic.<sup>66</sup>

The Christian tradition also fell in line with the Right’s social views around opposition to multiculturalism. Harvey Mansfield’s *America’s Constitutional Soul* framed conservative historians’ views around traditionally western ideas.<sup>67</sup> Mansfield ardently defended American exceptionalism with his interpretation of the Constitution and asserted that “we are induced to forget that constitutional democracy is better democracy—both safer and nobler—and that it is

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<sup>63</sup> Olasky, *America’s Religious Tradition*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the scandal-ridden Presidency of Warren Harding see Russell Berman, “Warren G. Harding’s Terrible Tenure,” *The Atlantic*, August 14, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/08/warren-g-harding-nan-britton-affair/401288/>.

<sup>65</sup> Olasky, *America’s Religious Tradition*, 266.

<sup>66</sup> To Olasky’s credit, in a 2018 oral history interview he discussed the prevalence of morality scandals on both sides of the political aisle.

<sup>67</sup> Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., *America’s Constitutional Soul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991). Mansfield is not necessarily an avowed conservative, but his focus on the importance of the nation’s Western traditions and values makes him an important contribution to any work on the Right’s views of the past and present.

better because it has an order, or structure, or form.”<sup>68</sup> The emphasis on order reflected a traditional focus on the nation’s unified and glorious past rooted in the Founding and established social order.<sup>69</sup>

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.’s *The Disuniting of America* also exemplified the Right’s warning about the pitfalls of multiculturalism.<sup>70</sup> His societal critiques were perhaps most in-line with Gingrich’s. Schlesinger claimed that the “impact of ethnic and racial pressure on our public schools is more troubling... if separatist tendencies go on unchecked, the result can only be the fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life.”<sup>71</sup> Like Gingrich, Schlesinger argued that America’s unity and strength resulted from a commitment to its formative values that existed before a sixties style fragmentation. Schlesinger’s argument around American values and unity closely echoed those of politicians and media figures. His arguments provided important intellectual validation for a conservative movement deeply concerned about a national fragmentation. Without this intellectual backing from victimized conservative academics, the ostracized media could not thrive as they did in these years.

### **‘Rush’ing to the Past**

Conservative politicians like Newt Gingrich grew in power throughout the nineties – a level of success aided by their contemporaries in the media. The 24-hour news cycle slowly took charge in the 1990s and allowed the media to play a genuinely outsized role in national politics.<sup>72</sup> The media’s role in politics was on full display in a 1993 healthcare debate, during which President Bill Clinton invited a group of talk radio hosts to the White House. If the administration did not recognize this media group’s influence before the event, they certainly did after. In *Us Against Them*, Randy Bobbitt discussed the post-meeting reaction from White House

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<sup>68</sup> Mansfield, *America’s Constitutional Soul*, ix.

<sup>69</sup> As lauded conservative thinker Russel Kirk notes of conservatism One of Kirk’s conservative canon is the “conviction that civilized society requires order and classes, as against the notion of a “classless society.” Thus, Mansfield aligns with traditional conservatism still present amongst many thinkers of the day. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, (Chicago: Regnery Books, 1953), 8.

<sup>70</sup> It is worth noting that Schlesinger Jr. began his career as a more center-left figure. However, by the 1990s works such as the *Disuniting of America* demonstrate his move towards the Right or at least ideas more in-line with the conservative movement.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 23.

<sup>72</sup> The news media rises exponentially with the rise of cable news: CNN in 1980, Fox News in 1996 and MSNBC in 1996. This along with talk radio’s explosion in the wake of the Fairness Doctrine’s repeal in 1987 make the news media an even larger influence of thought.

staffers, who remarked about the “power that the new Limbaugh-led industry could wield, Clinton’s aides began referring to talk radio as the ‘fourth branch of government.’”<sup>73</sup> Conservative media, led by hosts in talk radio, charged full-throatedly into the last decade of the 2000s.

Rush Limbaugh and his bombastic rhetoric laid a foundation of hostility that enhanced an attack-based style of oratory broadcast to massive swaths of the nation.<sup>74</sup> While intentionally hubristic, the “Godfather of talk radio” claimed, “everything in this book is right, and you must be prepared to confront that reality. You can no longer be an honest liberal after reading this entire masterpiece.”<sup>75</sup> This sort of unapologetic conservatism was a prime example of the increasingly intense rhetoric of Culture Wars politics.<sup>76</sup> Limbaugh had company from Dinesh D’Souza and his unique brand of politics which he exemplified in *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society*. In this book, he argued that “as a ‘person of color,’ I enjoy an ethnic immunity that enables me to address topics with a frankness that would be virtually impossible on the part of a white male.”<sup>77</sup> D’Souza imitated Limbaugh’s style of aggressiveness that manifested itself in strong anti-multicultural rhetoric. These men’s forms of angry populism tightly aligned with a similar sentiment throughout the Culture Wars conservative movement.

Not all the conservative movement took such a hard line in this era. George Will called for a calmer more traditional brand of conservatism; “so conservatives must drop their populist rhetoric about making government more ‘responsive.’ And they must abandon their populist posture, which has them living with their ears to the ground.”<sup>78</sup> Will illustrated a fidelity to the message and tone of the traditional conservative values of slow change and small government. This restraint was much less prevalent in an era dominated by the bluster of Gingrich and

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<sup>73</sup> Randy Bobbitt, *Us Against Them*, 168.

<sup>74</sup> Limbaugh’s target audience in the 1990s (and into the present) is largely “white, middle class men who were feeling beset by government programs.” Limbaugh gives voice to those in “middle America” who feel left behind and outside of the American mainstream. The quote is from Walter Goodman, “Television Review; What Makes Rush Limbaugh Tick So Loudly,” *The New York Times* (New York, New York, 1995).

<sup>75</sup> Rush Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought To Be*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), X. Limbaugh’s nickname as the “The Godfather” is discussed in: Randy Bobbitt, *Us Against Them: The Political Culture of Talk Radio* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2010), 3-4.

<sup>76</sup> Limbaugh’s style was clearly very popular as he reached upwards of 4.5 million people on his daily show and was given a ‘majority makers’ pin by the House Republicans in 1994. Kevin Merida, “Rush Limbaugh Saluted as a ‘Majority’ Maker,” *Washington Post* (Washington D.C.), December 11, 1994.

<sup>77</sup> Dinesh D’Souza, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), viii.

<sup>78</sup> George Will, *The Leveling Wind: Politics, the Culture and Other News, 1990-1994* (New York: Viking, 1994), 110.

Limbaugh like figures.<sup>79</sup> Despite the harder-edged tone of most in this era, the rhetoric of Will demonstrated a political environment still in its early days of hyperpolarization.

The newly aggressive conservative media turned to their first historical boogeyman, the tumultuous 1960s.<sup>80</sup> These years were significant enough that historian Stephen Prothero once claimed that the “contemporary culture wars began in the fight over the sixties, not in the 1960s themselves. And that fight did not begin until the Right started to protest”—a description confirmed by conservative media’s account of the decade.<sup>81</sup> Academics, and particularly politicians, generally only made a frustrated reference to the sixties, the media thoroughly attacked the decade and its legacy.

Conservative media generally conceived of the decade under a broad umbrella of national declension. Rush Limbaugh emphasized that the sixties still haunted the 1990s because the contemporary Left embraced the “attitude of cultural radicalism carried over from the 1960s. Theirs is an anti-American credo, which abhors American political and governmental institutions and this nation’s capitalistic economy.”<sup>82</sup> Media powerbrokers frequently reiterated the sentiment that the decade damaged the nation both economically and socially. George Will stated that the “sixties were, and the unending rhapsodizing about that decade is, a sustained exhortation to a four-word ethic: ‘Do your own thing.’”<sup>83</sup> Major conservative media figures claimed that the nation’s social responsibility disappeared in this decade and with it a sense of American greatness. This declension narrative aligned closely with politicians like Gingrich and historians like Schlesinger, it was a contentious interpretation given that the era significantly open society to scores of people previously living in a restrictive country.

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<sup>79</sup> While figures like Will (and Will himself) continued to write in the later years of the Culture Wars their opinions did not carry the same weight as their more bombastic counterparts.

<sup>80</sup> This is not to say that earlier conservative media figures were not firebrands. For example, Clarence Manion was instrumental in taking managements side in the 1954 Kohler strike in Wisconsin – a move that landed him in trouble with the Fairness Doctrine. For more information on the vitally important contributions of early conservative media figures Henry Regnery, Clarence Manion and William F. Buckley; men who made Rush Limbaugh and company possible see – Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2016).

<sup>81</sup> Stephen Prothero, *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When they Lose Elections)* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016), 184.

<sup>82</sup> Rush Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be* 261.

<sup>83</sup> Will, *The Leveling Wind*, 66.

The values and coalitions of political parties changed throughout American history, and in the 1960s the left-wing of the Democratic party grew in size and influence.<sup>84</sup> Rush Limbaugh stressed this; “remember 1968? That was the year Tom Hayden... and the rest of the gang disrupted the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.”<sup>85</sup> Despite this, and to the pleasure of moderates everywhere (at least according to Rush Limbaugh) the more centrist former vice-president Hubert Humphrey won that year’s Democratic nomination. The triumph of the liberal middle was brief, and Limbaugh mourned the fact that “Humphrey was to be the last of his kind ever to be nominated by the Democratic Party... Humphrey was a liberal, all right. But not as we define that term today. He was anti-communist. He was pro-American.” Limbaugh uttered this not to praise Humphrey but to juxtapose what the Democrats supposedly became – a party dominated by a far-left that he said made it “not only possible for a fringe candidate to capture the nomination; they very nearly made it impossible for a traditional, mainstream Democrat to win without catering to a long list of special-interest groups.”<sup>86</sup> Bill Clinton’s centrism was in reality as leftist as the radicals of the 1960s.<sup>87</sup> Limbaugh’s was a questionable claim given that Clinton was in actuality a centrist Democrat who worked on middle of the road policies such as welfare reform and “tough on crime” policies that were far from radically leftist.<sup>88</sup> Limbaugh’s statements served the larger purpose of equating liberalism with un-American values – a practice that grew considerably throughout the Culture Wars.

George Will summarized the right’s problems with the decade when he stated that “conservatives are not happy because they sense the primacy of cultural forces and feel that the culture is still shaped by the forces that have lost in the electoral politics: that the social order is an infringement on freedom rather than freedom’s foundation.”<sup>89</sup> In the 1960s the right lost its grasp on cultural power, and in the 1990s, after 12 years of Presidential power, they again felt political power slipping away. Will’s remark aptly synopsisized the Right’s view on a decade

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<sup>84</sup> For an excellent and easily digested history of American political party changes see the American History Tellers Podcast on Political Parties, particularly episode 5 “The New Deal Coalition” and episode 6 “The Reagan Revolution.” Lindsay Graham, *Political Parties – The New Deal Coalition*, (2018, Wondery), Podcast. No, this is not Senator Lindsay Graham of South Carolina.

<sup>85</sup> Rush Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So* (New York: Pocket, 1993), 36.

<sup>86</sup> Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 38.

<sup>87</sup> Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 39.

<sup>88</sup> For more information on the foundation of ‘New Democrats’ and Bill Clinton moving the party to the center see, John F. Hale, “The Making of the New Democrats,” *Political Science Quarterly* 10, no. 2, 1995.

<sup>89</sup> Will, *The Woven Figure*, (New York: Scribner, 1997), 71.

when liberal values superseded ‘real’ American values. The sixties consistently provided conservative figures with a convenient historical boogeyman to underscore their opposition to liberalism.

The anti-1960s rhetoric laid a foundation for the traditional conservative policy of a small government, low taxes and fiscal responsibility. This practice largely stemmed from the right’s hostile reaction to Bill Clinton’s ‘liberalization of government,’ which many conservatives said was far from its advertised 3<sup>rd</sup> way centrism.<sup>90</sup> Limbaugh frequently denigrated the policies of the New Deal and Great Society as ‘failures’ of liberal economics. These figures also frequently juxtaposed interpretations of the 1970s and 1980s as prime examples of the differences between liberalism and conservatives. Such critiques stemmed from the charge of liberal ignorance of American history. Rush Limbaugh contended that “liberals... have no idea how America works; what success is; how it happens what it means; and just how common and accessible it still is in this country... without government help!”<sup>91</sup> Limbaugh’s view on public aid was much more aggressive but ideologically similar to those in Marvin Olasky’s influential work, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* as both men stressed a long tradition of American individualism and opposition to government aid. This emphasis on rugged individualism ignored the significant role of the federal government in helping Average Americans – via programs such as the GI Bill and private-public partnerships.<sup>92</sup>

One of the core conservative economic critiques of the era was that 20<sup>th</sup> century liberalism removed the nation from its early days of small government. George Will voiced the danger of big government; “since the New Deal, the government has been steadily more ambitious. But Americans have not become steadily more content with their government. In the 1990s... they talk a fierce game of Slay the Federal Dragon.”<sup>93</sup> Will’s words reflected the small government conservative platform of the 1994 Contract with America and its opposition to the expansive government bureaucracy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rush Limbaugh also claimed that

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<sup>90</sup> For a concise summary of Clinton’s “3<sup>rd</sup> way” see the following article on this policy in terms of welfare reform – a policy that aptly represented parts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> way ideology. Brendon O’Connor, “Policies, Principles, and Polls: Bill Clinton’s Third Way Welfare Politics 1992-1996, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 48, no. 3 (2002), 396-411.

<sup>91</sup> Rush Limbaugh, *See I Told You So*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> For more on the history of small government conservatism in a place heavily influenced by government contracts, see Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors*.

<sup>93</sup> George Will, *The Woven Figure*, 19.

“Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson look like pikers compared to this. Clinton’s highly touted ‘Putting People First’ plan is, in actuality, putting government first.”<sup>94</sup> Limbaugh discredited the liberalism of his day with the conservative boogeyman of the New Deal and Great Society. Despite Will’s claims otherwise, the people twice elected “Big Government Clinton,” who did not drastically expand government. The lack of governmental bloating, despite the Right’s claims otherwise, illustrated the reactionary nature of a nineties-era conservative movement afraid of losing more power.

The conservative re-interpretations of the New Deal and Great Society rose to greater significance around the idea that liberalism’s policies were also generally dishonest. George Will argued that his contemporaries on the Left pursued a New Deal-style government for social control. “The 1930s were happy days for liberals... because the Depression heightened Americans’ feelings of dependency. But six decades later, a leader of liberalism (Hillary Rodham Clinton) still insists ‘it takes a president’ to raise a child.”<sup>95</sup> Will posited that the Left was not just the heirs of America’s big government, but also of the oppressive communist and fascists regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – groups who implemented cradle grave indoctrination. Rush Limbaugh furthered this New Deal interpretation; pronounced its programs a failure; and attacked those who supported it. “It wasn’t the New Deal that ended the Depression it was World War II. There’s so much revision of history going on today. It’s not just the liberals behind this. The media are either willing accomplices or unwitting dupes.”<sup>96</sup> While their tone differed, both men made it clear they saw the New Deal as a failure and dangerous to the nation. Limbaugh and Will’s claims of government expansion were accurate, but the trope of government control was overblown. The Right’s framing of the New Deal as liberal overreach primed audiences to see all liberal policies in a negative light.<sup>97</sup> The charges of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century liberal overreach provided a historical foundation for more recent ‘liberal economic malfeasance.’

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<sup>94</sup> Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 36.

<sup>95</sup> Will, *The Woven Figure*, 199.

<sup>96</sup> Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 131. Limbaugh was not incorrect to note WWII’s role in ending the Great Depression, as the conflict required virtually full employment. However, the New Deal brought a great many people out of the abject poverty of the Depression. For competing viewpoints on the New Deals’ effectiveness see a pro-New Deal account in Steven Conn, “Guess What? The New Deal Worked,” *Origins*, February 16, 2009. For an anti-New Deal argument see Stephen Moore, “What Really Ended the Great Depression?” *The Heritage Foundation*, October 15, 2014.

<sup>97</sup> There is a certain irony to these criticism given the way that many of these programs helped parts of the country that were bastions of anti-federal government sentiment. For example, the TVA drastically aided rural Alabama,

In contrast to the Great Society and New Deal, Ronald Reagan and his presidency were the epitome of conservative economic success and 20<sup>th</sup> century American greatness.<sup>98</sup> Limbaugh noted that a “review of income and inflation figures during both the Carter and Reagan years reveals how much the American people prospered under Reagan, and how much they suffered financially under Carter.”<sup>99</sup> Much like their political counterparts, media members frequently compared Carter and Reagan to demonstrate conservative strength and liberal weakness. This tactic took on substantial power for the right as they hoped to emulate Reagan’s ouster of Carter with a corresponding defeat of Clinton.

Even without Carter as a foil, the right promoted all aspects of Reagan’s economic policies; “all income groups paid less taxes as a percentage of their income during the Reagan years, but the poor received the most relief... Further, the rich paid a greater share of all taxes paid in the 1980s than in the Carter years.”<sup>100</sup> Limbaugh not only promoted conservative success but also refuted the idea that conservatism only benefited the wealthy – a major selling point for a conservative movement in need of a larger tent. Limbaugh closed the conversation on economics with a level of hyperbole unseen in the rhetoric of political or academic conservatives. “Bill Clinton may be the most effective practitioner of class warfare since Lenin.”<sup>101</sup> Limbaugh’s point was clear; liberalism was more akin to communism than true Americanism – from FDR and LBJ to Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, the economic policies of the Left were not dissimilar from the authoritarianism of Lenin and Stalin.

In the spirit of good Culture Warriors, conservative media figures also promoted a history of traditional social values. George Will claimed that the nation was “founded by liberal gentlemen who made a conservative revolution.”<sup>102</sup> This position argued that the nation’s

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Mississippi and Tennessee. For a brief amount of the TVA see “Valley of the Damns: The Impact and Legacy of the Tennessee Valley Authority,” *National Archives of Atlanta*, accessed March 27, 2019.

<sup>98</sup> Reagan is such a popular and polarizing figure that hundreds of biographies exist about the man. For the most complete list of these see the Wikipedia page here [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliography\\_of\\_Ronald\\_Reagan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliography_of_Ronald_Reagan). While I acknowledge Wikipedia is not a credible site of historical research, this list showcases the extensive interest in the nation’s 40<sup>th</sup> president.

<sup>99</sup> Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be*, 69

<sup>100</sup> Limbaugh, *See I Told You So*, 115.

<sup>101</sup> Limbaugh, *See I Told You So*, 54.

<sup>102</sup> Will, *The Woven Figure*, 80. It should be noted, that when Will refers to liberal gentlemen, he is referring to 18<sup>th</sup>-century classical liberalism, not its 20<sup>th</sup> century iteration.

original values were those Christian values and gradual change.<sup>103</sup> Powerbrokers consistently returned to the First Amendment's protection of religion; "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."<sup>104</sup> Rush Limbaugh discussed this idea and claimed that the "Founding Fathers sought to avoid state tyranny in the name of religion and religious oppression of any kind... The Declaration of Independence acknowledged the existence of a Divine Creator"<sup>105</sup> The Founders defended the presence of religion less for high-minded Enlightenment reasons than out of reverence for a higher power. Limbaugh's generic defense of religious principles was not uncommon, but it differed from the standard conservative emphasis on a national Judeo-Christian bedrock.

Rush Limbaugh contended that more than Enlightenment ideas of Locke and Montesquieu kept the nation together. "The founders knew they were bestowing upon us not only an ingenious political system of checks and balances, limited government, and a legacy of human and civil rights... but it would only work, they warned... if the society was girded on a bedrock of solid values and Judeo-Christian principles."<sup>106</sup> The country only lived out its checks and balances when it did so with a Christian tradition in mind. Limbaugh claimed that liberals misrepresented the Constitution when they "forcibly remove religion from not just our classrooms but all government institutions and to dilute the religious content of much of American life."<sup>107</sup> Morality disappeared in this post-modern society primarily because of the disappearance of the historically evident religious roots of the nation.<sup>108</sup>

Limbaugh echoed his conservative brethren in the academy and attacked the history field with the claim that "history books purposely conceal the fact that these notions were developed by communities of devout Christians who studied the Bible."<sup>109</sup> Limbaugh was correct to assert the power of the church in the early republic but overemphasized its role. The Church was

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<sup>103</sup> The nation's Founding is perhaps the most commonly cited time-period of American history for political purposes – and of exceptional utility across the political spectrum. For more on this phenomena see Joseph Ellis, *American Dialogue: The Founders and Us* (New York: Knopf, 2018).

<sup>104</sup> The Bill of Rights, 1787. Retrieved [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United\\_States\\_of\\_America\\_1992](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United_States_of_America_1992)

<sup>105</sup> Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be*, 279.

<sup>106</sup> Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 76.

<sup>107</sup> Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be*, 277.

<sup>108</sup> Post-modernism, and its close cousin in history, poststructuralism is seen as "the system is not closed and never can be. Absolute truth therefore does not exist." Given that there is no absolute historical or societal truth, there is no set of values. For more on this see, Green and Troup, *The Houses of History*, 290.

<sup>109</sup> Rush Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 73.

crucial in this society, but many of the Founders were deists, as well as men who advocated for religious openness. The feeling of persecution on the right was strong enough that Conservative Catholic talk radio host Hugh Hewitt needed pre-American history to show the depths of victimization. Hewitt said that “the Roman Emperor Julian ought to be their [liberal cultural elites] hero. More than sixteen hundred years ago he attempted to reimpose paganism... he liked the old system, but the rise of Christianity had crushed it beyond recovery.”<sup>110</sup> The victimization of Christians in 20<sup>th</sup> century America was near the level of historically victimized groups. While he may have been intentionally hyperbolic, given the freedoms of the country, his statements highlighted the vast sense of victimization within the conservative movement.

Dinesh D’Souza expanded this persecution story and co-opted the Civil Rights narrative to make it more about religion than race; “King’s genius was that he attacked racism with religious and political principles that many of the Southern racist themselves professed. These were not black principles but American principles, rooted in the nation’s Christian and constitutional tradition.”<sup>111</sup> He was correct to highlight the role of the church in Civil Rights, but his version of events postulated that Christianity, more than racial equality triumphed. This approach generally diminished the larger influence of Civil Rights actors and their broader struggle for black equality in both the past and present.<sup>112</sup> Jeanne Theoharis discussed this practice, arguing, “by holding up a couple of heroic individuals separate from the movements in which they were a part... creates a distinction between the people we have today— too loud, too angry, too uncontrolled, too different— and the respectable likes of Parks and King.”<sup>113</sup> Theoharis’s explanation was correct, as the narratives around Civil Rights all too frequently became tailored to a group’s message instead of the actual struggle for freedom.

The assimilation of Civil Rights into the Christian tradition supported the persecution narrative amongst evangelical conservatives. This idea also upheld the conservative notion of historical values as synonymous with the nation’s and the defense against what Marilyn Young

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<sup>110</sup> Hugh Hewitt, *The Embarrassed Believer: Reviving Christian Witness in an Age of Unbelief* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 25.

<sup>111</sup> D’Souza, *The End of Racism*, 197.

<sup>112</sup> It should be noted that Christianity and non-violence played a major role in the Civil Rights movement. Therefore, I do not intend to discount this fact but merely point out that D’Souza’s portrayal of this as a largely Christian triumph discounts much of the racial struggle that defined this movement.

<sup>113</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 18.

described as a “fragmentation of national identity that occurred during the Vietnam War” and “has proved retroactively contagious.”<sup>114</sup> Rush Limbaugh summarized the role of the Church when he noted that the country was “founded as a Judeo-Christian country...monuments, such as the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials know the inscriptions have been carved in stone. You cannot read one without finding the word *God* in it somewhere.”<sup>115</sup> The nation’s soul and all of its great moments had a religious grounding that the Clintons and contemporary secularists could not shake. There was nothing inherently problematic with the emphasis of this Christian tradition. However, in a moment where politicians like Gingrich cried foul about the slip of western culture, the proverbial door opened to dangerous and divisive rhetoric.

The final element of nineties conservatism and one that aligned closely with the nation’s religious tradition was the opposition to multiculturalism. Rush Limbaugh expanded on the work of academics, and said that liberal academic bias was “being taught under the guise of multiculturalism is worse than historical revisionism; it’s more than a distortion of facts; it’s an elimination of facts.”<sup>116</sup> Limbaugh complained of curriculums designed by the Left to thoroughly distort the actual truth of the nation.<sup>117</sup> Given that conservative politicians like Gingrich upheld the necessity of western civilization over almost anything, such rhetoric was key to the historically based tropes of the day. Rush Limbaugh pointed out the malicious nature of multicultural liberals. “Anti-American radicals have bullied their way into power positions in academia. And while they preach about the evils of ‘cultural imperialism,’ they themselves are, ironically, the ultimate practitioners of it.”<sup>118</sup> In a time when much of society (i.e., *Enola Gay* controversy and historical standards) seemingly turned Left, Limbaugh and the right, returned the attack. The echo chamber effect was on full display as the media tightly reiterated the views of their political and academic peers.

Dinesh D’Souza openly railed against ‘multiculturalism’s’ fracturing of the nation’s traditions; “‘Eurocentrism,’ becomes the newest form of racism. Multicultural advocates argue that the Eurocentric curriculum inferiorizes other cultures and injures the self-esteem of minority

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<sup>114</sup> Marilyn B. Young, in Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, ed. *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 208.

<sup>115</sup> Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be*, 274.

<sup>116</sup> Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be*, 204.

<sup>117</sup> For more on these educational battles see Nash et. al, *History on Trial*.

<sup>118</sup> Limbaugh, *See, I Told You So*, 66.

students.”<sup>119</sup> D’Souza saw racism perpetrated not by whites but against them – a phenomenon that underscored the ideas of conservative and white victimization. George Will intellectualized D’Souza’s populism, and, argued that to the Left “individualism is egotistical and egoism, rather than anything more noble, defines Western Civilization.”<sup>120</sup> This complaint of academic and leftist bias circled the entirety of the right’s echo chamber, from politicians to academics to the media. Conservatives in the press provided the most direct case for western values in a decade when western values holidays, commemorations and schools were seemingly under siege.

Rush Limbaugh set forth a more questionable defense of western civilization. “We are told that because George Washington and Thomas Jefferson held slaves, and because Jefferson supposedly had a sexual relationship with one of his female slaves—which is a lie, to begin with— the constitutional system of government that they created is tainted.”<sup>121</sup> Jefferson undoubtedly had non-consensual relations with his female slaves, most notably Sally Hemmings.<sup>122</sup> Elites on the Right felt that ‘their’ history and worldview were under attack and thus exercised a good deal of political capital around a ‘pure’ version of American history. The Left’s version of history was not inclusive but generally un-American. The conservative media’s incorporation of the past provided the strongest and most provocative defense of western civilization and conservative principles. This sort of rhetoric only expanded throughout the ensuing decade as the media’s power and influence grew.

### **An End... For Now**

The 1990s ended and the next millennium began with presidential scandal and electoral controversy. Consequently, any chance that the Culture Wars would slow down in the new millennium was unlikely. In the “Contract with America” era the powerbrokers on the Right began an escalation of rhetoric that laid a foundation for the future of conservatism. Given the out of power nature of the GOP, the focus of the 1990s was primarily on small government economics – a value that the Right ardently defended with historical examples of liberal big government failure. The economic focus did not distract from the social ideals of the past, as

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<sup>119</sup> D’Souza, *End of Racism*, 20-21.

<sup>120</sup> Will, *The Woven Figure*, 140.

<sup>121</sup> Limbaugh, *The Way Things Ought to Be*, 212.

<sup>122</sup> Jefferson’s plantation of Monticello goes so far as to openly acknowledge that Jefferson fathered at minimum 6 children with Sally Hemmings. Limbaugh’s dismissal of this is not only historical fallacy but also an intellectually dishonest attempt to whitewash the past. For more on this visit the Monticello website Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: A Brief Account, *The Jefferson Monticello*, accessed October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Newt Gingrich and company saved the Christian and western traditions in politics, with considerable aid from the academy and media. This decade demonstrated the power of the echo chamber as these three distinct groups highlighted similar themes and cases.

The 1990s set many important precedents for the future of the Long American Culture Wars. They also stood powerfully on their own as a distinct and divisive cultural moment – a decade where conservatism ‘rebelled’ against the power of their liberal opponents. The tightly compact, and influential echo chamber of victimization, that largely began in these years, laid a foundation for future Culture Warriors in the Bush and Obama administrations. Two distinct eras where history’s role in conservative policy grew alongside increasingly hostile rhetoric, but similar policy. The millennium and Clinton’s presidency ended, but the power of historical rhetoric in the Culture Wars was only growing.

## **Hostility Rising: “You’re With Us Or Against Us” (2002-2006)**

*Liberals flat-out reject the Founders’ belief that we were ‘created and ‘endowed by our Creator’ at all, much less with unalienable rights. To teach children that we were ‘created equal’ requires teaching them that we were created in the first place. And teaching children that there is a Creator – and all-powerful, supernatural God – is abhorrent to the Left. This was routine in public schools prior to two Supreme Court decisions in the early 1960s.<sup>1</sup>*

-Sean Hannity

### **Power. We’ve Got it, Right?**

The new millennia began with an electoral margin of fewer than six-hundred votes in Florida and a hotly contested Supreme Court case.<sup>2</sup> This contentious election set the tone for another decade of increasingly nasty partisan politics.<sup>3</sup> The conservative movement’s political landscape drastically changed in the new millennia: Republicans gained control of Washington’s levers of power in 2000; President Bush laid the groundwork for the global War on Terror; and cable news reached new political and social power. These factors combined with existing Culture Wars tensions to set the tone for the nation’s political present and future.

In these contentious and conservative-led years, the right did not diminish its victimization narrative or aggressive rhetoric. Political and social decorum continued its breakdown in the second stanza of the Long Culture Wars. At the center of this breakdown was conservative rhetoric’s shift from primarily defensive uses of history and towards a weapon used to attack the Left as fundamentally un-America. The past still defended conservative policies, but it more frequently attacked liberalism than it had in the 1990s. Members of the political, academic and media conservative establishment maintained their focus on the history of small government, the centrality of a national religious tradition, and the opposition to multiculturalism in the past and present. While these core areas remained the same, the right’s powerbrokers shifted their historical centers of focus from economic to social values – a product of their new control in Washington and concerns over a rapidly changing social landscape. In the “With Us or Against Us” era conservative ideology and general policy changed minimally, but the focus

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<sup>1</sup> Sean Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty Over Liberalism*, (New York: ReaganBooks, 2002), 138.

<sup>2</sup> The court ultimately ruled that Florida’s recount procedure was unconstitutional and that all recounts halt immediately. This halt of recounting ultimately threw the election to Republican George Bush who lead Democrat Al Gore after the initial recount. For more on this case see "Bush v. Gore." Oyez. Accessed November 24, 2018. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2000/00-949>.

<sup>3</sup> While this chapter largely excludes 2000 and 2001 because of the frequently rehashed nature of the 2000 election, as well as the momentary national unity that followed 9/11. This is by no means to downplay or forget the events of 9/11, but it is excluded because it did temporarily halt the partisan nastiness of the Culture Wars.

shifted from economic to socio-cultural issues – all the while, the level of hostility increased throughout the first half of the first decade of the 2000s. The rhetoric of these years built on the foundations of the previous decade and transitioned the conservative movement into the highly contentious second half of the decade.

### **Who Exactly is With Us? Politics and Otherwise from 2002-2006**

The 2002 midterm election was politically unusual as George W. Bush's GOP gained two Senate and eight House seats.<sup>4</sup> In the wake of the vote, a *Politico* article noted, "it was only the third time since the Civil War that the president's party gained seats in a midterm election — the other two came in 1934 and 1998 — and the first time this occurred with a Republican in the White House."<sup>5</sup> The increased Republican majorities of 51-49 and 229-204 gave the GOP a greater political mandate than they initially possessed in Washington.<sup>6</sup> The general feeling of victimization and frustration, however, remained for many of the nation's elite conservative despite their return to political power. The idea of "you are with us, or you are against us" became more than an appeal for international support in the global fight against terror<sup>7</sup> This sentiment reflected the inhospitable partisan mood of a divided nation – one where the political middle ground grew smaller every year and intensified pre-existing partisanship.<sup>8</sup> Because of the

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<sup>4</sup> This was out of the ordinary given that the President's party generally loses seats in their first midterm election. For more on the frequency with which President's lost seats in these election see Niall McCarthy, "Historically, The President's Party Performs Poorly In The Midterms [Infographic]." *Forbes* (October 9, 2018), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2018/10/09/historically-the-presidents-party-performs-poorly-in-the-midterms-infographic/#78cfd696732>

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Glass, "GOP Makes Gains in Election," *Politico*, Nov. 5, 2002. 1934 was FDR's first midterm election after the nation horribly soured on the Republican Party. In 1998 the GOP drastically overplayed its political hand in the Bill Clinton impeachment attacks.

<sup>6</sup> Two Independents rounded out the 435-person house, Vermont at-large Representative Bernie Sanders and Bob Goode from Virginia's 5<sup>th</sup> district. Sanders generally caucused with the Democrats while Goode did the same with Republicans, and officially became a Republican that same year. It should also be noted that President Bush's shepherding of the nation through 9/11 also aided the good will voters showed his party in this round of elections.

<sup>7</sup> The phrase "you're with us or you're against us" comes from a November 2001 speech where President Bush said of the situation regarding the Iraq War, "Over time it's going to be important for nations to know they will be held accountable for inactivity," he said. "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror." George W. Bush in 'You are either with us or against us,' CNN.com/US, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>.

<sup>8</sup> The Pew Research Center tracked the partisan difference on key political issues (i.e. role of government, environment, race, immigration, etc.) and found that between 1994 and 2007 the difference between Democrats and Republican grew 15 points over this 13-year span. This growth included an uptick from a 17 to a 26 point difference between 2004 and 2011. This Pew study confirms the work's claims of an extended Culture War and the idea of a heightening of hostile rhetoric in its second and third stanzas. Carroll Doherty, "Key Takeaways on Americans' Growing Partisan Divide Over Political Values," *Pew Research Center*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/05/takeaways-on-americans-growing-partisan-divide-over-political-values/>.

uncertainty at home and abroad, the right's adherence to its view of patriotic orthodoxy increased, and the past became even more unadulterated, pure and united.

The nation drifted politically apart throughout the early 2000s, but the 9/11 tragedy momentarily halted these hostilities. This unity was doomed to a short existence as patriotic and progressive orthodoxies quickly superseded feelings of a cohesive country. Ann Coulter acrimoniously noted that even liberals agreed that "Bush was a magnificent leader. In a moment of crisis, the truth overcame liberal naysaying," but, as she lamented, the "bipartisan lovefest lasted precisely three weeks. That was all the *New York Times* could endure."<sup>9</sup> Coulter expressed the partisan frustration of the day and the cynicism typical of Culture Wars conservatism.

Political scientist David B. McDonald refuted Coulter's argument and claimed the hard right employed the tragedy for political gain. "Dinesh D'Souza was clear that liberal leftists were primarily to blame for inciting the 'Muslim rage' which caused 9/11... Bin Laden and Noam Chomsky, al Qaeda and Affirmative Action were metaphorically and practically linked."<sup>10</sup> D'Souza was intentionally provocative but indicative of a 2000s Culture Wars mentality where opposition to one's political views was 'dangerous' to the nation.<sup>11</sup> These sort of views were extreme, but they also showed how quickly the country returned to hostile partisanship.

Republicans briefly continued their political success in the early 2000s. President George W. Bush won reelection in 2004, and the GOP gained an additional three seats in both houses of Congress – the final positive result for national Republicans until 2010. Two years later the GOP suffered major losses in the 2006 "blue wave" as Democrats picked up 5 Senate and 31 House seats – a result that gave Democrats a 233-202 House and a 49-49 Senate split.<sup>12</sup> Despite the poor electoral outcome in 2006, a poor omen for the next era, this era was generally electorally decisive for the nation's conservatives.

### **Bush and Beyond: Politicians and the Past**

The GOP of the early 2000s controlled the present, but the past still provided important validation for their actions. Conservative politicians of the day demonstrated a unique manner of

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<sup>9</sup> Ann Coulter, *Slander: Liberal Lies About the American Right*, (New York: Three Rivers, 2002), 4.

<sup>10</sup> David B. McDonald, *Thinking History, Fighting Evil*, (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 105.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that D'Souza's views were an over-statement of any sort of connection between liberal policies and the reasons for the 9/11 attacks.

<sup>12</sup> Independent Senators Joe Lieberman and Bernie Sanders rounded out the 100-person congress both of whom generally caucused with the Democrats.

hostility, that contained a subtle form of partisan bitterness and pushed their political opponents outside of the national moral and political mainstream.

Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum espoused traditional conservative values and subtly attacked liberalism. Santorum claimed that the “difference between liberals and conservatives lies with ‘character.’ We view character as our founders did. Character is the fruit of a long process of self-discipline... that is why Martin Luther King’s words were so powerful, so convicting: they resonated with the deepest moral traditions of the American people.”<sup>13</sup> This sentiment emphasized that the Right inherited the nation’s most celebrated traditions – a verbal barb that defended his movements values and simultaneously kept liberalism out of the nation’s moral and religious traditions.<sup>14</sup> Part of the past’s greatest utility for conservative politicians was that it illustrated the moral differences between morally relative liberals and righteous conservatives. Santorum’s style of language allowed conservatives to cast the Left as politically nasty while simultaneously engaging in similar practices.

Instead of attributing simply policy differences some accused the Left of impractically and nefariousness. Rick Santorum vigorously charged that liberalism was “completely at odds with that of our nation’s founders and with the views of most Americans today. Liberalism is an ideology; conservatism is common sense.”<sup>15</sup> This interpretation promulgated the idea that liberalism was not just a view he disagreed with, but one fundamentally at odds with American values. This language lacked the open hatred of Gingrichian oratory, but Santorum’s charges of anti-Americanism were even more potent than Gingrich’s direct anger. This ambiguity, however, did not stop the right from looking to the past as evidence for liberalism’s anti-American nature.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Rick Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, (Wilmington DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2005), 213

<sup>14</sup> Santorum’s oratory about the past bears special mention given his position as the chair of the Senate Republican Conference whose goal is to “helps senators communicate their priorities directly to the American people through a wide variety of communications resources, including television, radio, web technology, social media, graphic design, and Spanish language services, among others resources.” This direct communiqué between politicians and press make him integral to a study on that sort of phenomena. “About SRC,” *Senate Republican Conference*, Accessed December 11, 2018, <https://www.republican.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/about-src>.

<sup>15</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> This claim was also difficult to validate from a historical perspective as aspects of both parties’ platform appeared in the Founder’s ideals. The Founders would likely be disgusted with the tribal nature of Culture Wars politics. James Madison warned against this in Federalist 10 where he supported the Constitution as a check on the dangers of factions. James Madison, “The Federalist 10,” *American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1786-1800/the-federalist-papers/the-federalist-10.php>.

Santorum extended his previous ideas and claimed that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century liberals also ruined the nation's court system country. "A generation ago, liberals figured something that most conservatives couldn't have dreamed of in their worst nightmare. A few well-positioned autocrats can... change the Constitution to mean whatever they want it to mean."<sup>17</sup> Santorum also claimed that liberal hubris rejected the Founders. He supported this with the claim that leftists argued "never mind the clear intent of the Constitution's writers and signers; never mind two hundred years of judicial interpretation... we are much wiser today than our predecessors. Or so goes the liberal boast."<sup>18</sup> Santorum charged that the Left's lust for power superseded their love of country and Constitution. Leftists manipulated the Courts and Constitution throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century to create policies that they politically they could not. In a shift from 1990s political anger, top GOP figures instead attacked liberals as fundamentally un-American in their present and historical actions. In a post-9/11 environment, where patriotism was at the national forefront, these charges grew in scope and influence.

Conservative politicians of the early 2000s also viewed the 1960s as the catalyst for America's contemporary social, political and economic ills. President Bush spoke of this decline; "During the more than half century of my life, we have seen an unprecedented decay in our American culture, a decay that has eroded the foundations of our collective values and moral standards."<sup>19</sup> Bush articulated the way that the sixties sparked the social ills of the day; high rates of legalized abortion that stemmed *Roe v. Wade*; gay marriage from pro-homosexual movements (i.e., Stonewall); a declining religiosity from the decade's rebellion against authority; and big governments that grew from LBJ's Great Society.<sup>20</sup> These phenomena were not solely the result of the sixties, but the decade was an opportune historical moment to blame for contemporary societal problems.

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<sup>17</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 221.

<sup>18</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 222

<sup>19</sup> George Bush, *A Charge To Keep*, (New York City: Morrow, 1999), 229. Bush wrote this in 1999, which by its date would put it in the previous chapter that spans from 1992-2000. However, given that Bush's influence was strongest in the early 2000s his rhetoric in the run-up to his election merits inclusion in the context of the era that he was President in.

<sup>20</sup> The Supreme Court ruled on *Roe v. Wade* in 1972, however the issue of abortion grew in national prominence throughout the 1960s. Consequently, it is an issue easily included with the larger societal decline of the 1960s. For more on this case see "*Roe v. Wade*." *Oyez*. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1971/70-18>. Massachusetts legally recognized same-sex marriages in 2004 and set off a trend for the ensuing years. Additionally, only 44-46% of Americans said they attended religious services "once a week" or "almost once a week," according to a Gallup survey. "Religion," *Gallup*. Accessed December 12, 2018. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>.

President Bush's Chief of Staff Karl Rove defended the GOP's morality-based opposition to the decade. "Bush's experience... was one reason he became convinced that some of the values of the '60s – a rebellion against social and parental authority that emphasized moral relativism... had undermined communities and families."<sup>21</sup> This decade of sexual liberation and rebellion were highly problematic for a Republican Party that prided itself on family and traditional values.

Part of the problem with the sixties was the way the years meshed economic and social ills. Karl Rove posited that the "60s resulted in growing dependence on government through a collapse of the family and, along with it, the habits of responsibility, initiative, and hard work that give people dignity and self-worth."<sup>22</sup> This statement postulated that big government created a cycle of dependency that damaged the American family. Rick Santorum summarized the administration's sharps critiques of the 1960s arguing that "unfortunately, most liberal government expansions from the 1960s on have failed the very people they intended to help. They have failed by every sociological and economic measure."<sup>23</sup> Santorum echoed the essential neoliberal idea that social and economic freedom were tightly interconnected.<sup>24</sup> This criticism of the government, ignored outside forces such as deindustrialization that also damaged many American communities.<sup>25</sup>

The social and economic declines of the decade gave the right a historical moment of liberal-induced national declension. Rick Santorum called for the Right to fix the Left's mistakes; "since the 1960s... conservatives have been trying to make the case for a more moral and decent America while trying to repair and heal the broken families and lives that that era wrought."<sup>26</sup> This statement illustrated the way that tumultuous decade was a barrier and a cudgel

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<sup>21</sup> Karl Rove, *Courage and Consequences: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight*, (New York: Threshold, 2010), 83.

<sup>22</sup> Rove, 83.

<sup>23</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 66.

<sup>24</sup> This idea emulated those laid out by Milton Friedman in his 1962 work *Capitalism and Freedom* when he linked economic and social freedoms. For more on this common neoliberal argument see, Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1962).

<sup>25</sup> Even the great 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative icon Ronald Reagan spoke frequently of aid to those who suffered through no fault of their own. The other major problem with this critique of social programs is that it too closely resembles the racially charged language of the 1964 Moynihan Report – a report that many at that moment and beyond also criticized for its racially charged language. For more about the Moynihan Report see Anthony E. Cook, "The Moynihan Report and the Neo-Conservative Backlash to the Civil Rights Movement," *Georgetown Journal of Law & Modern Critical Race Perspectives* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1-38.

<sup>26</sup> Santorum, 211.

to attack the Left, not a moment where positive social and economic reform occurred.<sup>27</sup> The negative umbrella of the 1960s was evident throughout early 2000s conservative political rhetoric and frequently undergirded their historically-based policy. This distaste for the sixties first translated into a promotion of neoliberal economics.

To defend neoliberal economic ideals, politicians on the right frequently attacked the Johnson administration as a failure (and kept some anti-Carter rhetoric as well), highlighted Reagan's strengths, and spoke of the historical closeness of liberalism and socialism. Conservative politicians attacked the 'dependency culture' created by FDR's policies and exacerbated by LBJ. Bush discussed his war on the War on Poverty and noted how as Texas Governor he; "began to change 'welfare as we know it' and replace dependency on government with work and charitable choice."<sup>28</sup> The Great Society negatively juxtaposed Bush's small-government philosophy. He also portrayed his economic vision as beneficial for the nation's economic and moral soul – policies that built strong government and lives through the individual's hard work. Conversely, he looked at Johnson's politics of the past as ones that made people lazy. Bush was within his rights to criticize Johnson, but his statements gave little credit to the anti-poverty gains of the Great Society.<sup>29</sup>

Conservative politicians of the early 2000s also contrasted Johnson's "ineffective" economic policies of the sixties with the positive ones of 1980s and its free markets, low taxes, and small government. The eighties provided the political right with a rationale for their low tax policies, particularly in the wake of tax cuts in 2001 and 2003. Karl Rove claimed the "Bush years witnessed the longest period of economic growth since President Reagan... Labor

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<sup>27</sup> Highlights of this decade include: Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment outlawing poll taxes, Medicare and Medicaid. While many of these policies are ostensibly positive for many people the existence of some of these and what they stand for is anathema to ideals of conservatism. The decade undoubtedly had problems, but it largely did spark greater equality and rights for many different traditionally marginalized groups.

<sup>28</sup> George Bush, *A Charge To Keep*, (New York City: Morrow, 1999), 169.

<sup>29</sup> In support of Bush style policies, the conservative Heritage Foundation noted that the 22 trillion dollar created a safety net, not a helping hand. "Instead of promoting the growth of healthy families, the welfare system discouraged them. A single mother could receive larger payments by remaining single than by marrying the father of the child. Conversely, a 2015 *Politico* article noted that "one hundred thirty million people – roughly 40% of the country rely on it for health care. Thirty million children rely on it for school meals – 20 million families for nutritional assistance. To pull the rug out on so large a population without a viable alternative is both cruel and precipitous. Edwin J. Feulner, "Assessing the Great Society," *Heritage Foundation*, June 30, 2014, <https://www.heritage.org/poverty-and-inequality/commentary/assessing-the-great-society>. Joshua Zeitz, "What Everyone Gets Wrong About LBJ's Great Society," *Politico*, January 28 2018, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/28/lbj-great-society-josh-zeitz-book-216538>.

productivity increased an average of 1.5 percent annually, faster than in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s.”<sup>30</sup> Rove boldly proclaimed that Bush’s policies, much like those of the previous two Republican administrations (Reagan and H.W. Bush) experienced unprecedented levels of success.<sup>31</sup> These claims did not grapple with the economic downturns that followed both Bush administrations.<sup>32</sup> Despite the potential pitfalls of unbridled capitalism, ardent conservatives supported neoliberalism with examples from the past where these values promoted economic growth and general freedom.

Conservative politicians furthered their historical case for free markets and low taxes with scare-tactics about communism. This tactic took the form of attacks on liberal Keynesian style government as well as the defense of tax cuts and reforms. These two strains of rhetoric worked in tandem to promote robust capitalism against potential liberal opposition. President Bush argued this point; “in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some imagined that the central planning and social regimentation were a shortcut to national strength.”<sup>33</sup> Bush broadly emphasized that without robust capitalism in the past, communism could have come to America. To make anti-big government historical arguments more concrete, Bush returned to the Reagan era as the ideal historical moment. Bush argued that the “U.S. government will collect twice as much income tax revenue in 2001 as it did in 1981. Enough is enough, folks. It’s time to give our folks some tax relief in America.”<sup>34</sup> Bush sold his tax cuts on the back of Reagan’s policy – a sensible strategy given the 40<sup>th</sup> president’s continued popularity among the conservative base.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Karl Rove, *Courage and Consequences: My Life as a Conservative in the Fight*, (New York: Threshold, 2010), 236.

<sup>31</sup> A bureau of labor statistics report from 2014 conformed this claim with a study of labor productivity growth by decade. The results were as follows: 1973-’79 (1.3% growth), 1979-’90 (1.7% growth), 1990-2000 (2.7% growth), 2000-’07 (2.7% growth). Rove’s statement ignored that Bush inherited a booming economy from Clinton in 2000. Shawn Sprague, “What can Labor Productivity Tell Us About the U.S. Economy,” *Bureau of Labor Statistics* 3, No. 12 (May 2014), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-3/what-can-labor-productivity-tell-us-about-the-us-economy.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> An economic downturn at the end of the George H.W. Bush’s presidency was a major factor in his 1992 loss to Bill Clinton. While the end of George W. Bush faced the start of the Great Recession at the end of his second term in office. The similarities in the politics of these downturns was noted in Edmund Andrews, “It’s the Economy Again, and Some See Similarities to 1992,” *New York Times* (New York: New York), February 4, 2008.

<sup>33</sup> George W. Bush, *George W. Bush on God and Country: The President Speaks Out About Faith, Principle, and Patriotism*, ed. Thomas M. Freiling (Allegiance, 2004), 141.

<sup>34</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 176.

<sup>35</sup> This appeal to Reaganomics ignored the fact that Reagan raised taxes on multiple occasions. According to a Brookings article “Congress undid a good chunk of the 1981 tax cut by raising taxes a lot in 1982, 1983, 1984, and 1987. Tax cuts may have lined up with conservative values and provided an attack on liberalism as socialism, but historical reality showed that tax cuts were frequently followed by increases. David Wessel, “What We Learned from Reagan’s Tax Cuts,” *Brookings*, December 8, 2017.

Conservative politicians also continued their historical juxtapositions of Carter and Reagan throughout these years. President Bush reflected this sentiment.

When I looked at Washington under President Jimmy Carter and the Democratic Congress... they had plans to raise taxes... substitute federal spending for private-sector job creation. I worried about America drifting left, toward a version of welfare-state Europe, where central government planning crowded out free enterprise.<sup>36</sup> The Carter administration's ideas of 'big government' were inconsistent with those of the Reagan administration and thus those of the present-day Bush government. This idea upheld a claim generally consistent with neoliberal policies and American exceptionalism grounded in economic and social freedom.<sup>37</sup> Bush emphasized Milton Friedman style politics that countered the Keynesianism and 'socialist' style policies of Jimmy Carter.<sup>38</sup> While this idea set forth one plausible interpretation of economic policy, it downplayed the possibility of freedom in non-ultra-free market societies like the 'socialist' Nordic countries.<sup>39</sup> Bush's statements also attacked Carter and liberal economics as outside 'national norms' of by small government conservatism.

Historical instances of small government also combined with ideas of traditional social morality – a practice essential to the Reagan Coalition.<sup>40</sup> Senator Rick Santorum linked these issues in concrete historical terms with the hot button issues welfare and abortion.

The so-called sexual liberation of the late 1960s took hold in society, I believe, because of two principal factors: the legalization of abortion, which started in the late 1960s and culminated with *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, and – for low-income women – the availability of abortion plus the financial safety-net provided by government welfare... Welfare pre-1996 was all about subtle economic incentives that not only enabled women not to work and to have children out wedlock, but also gradually removed the social stigma attached to such behavior. The fact that entitlement welfare failed is beyond dispute.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> George Bush, *Decision Points*, (New York: Crown, 2010), 38.

<sup>37</sup> Some of this claim's power emanated from a comparison of Carter to government dependency (in this case the welfare state) and the equivocation of liberal policies to European central planning – a concept tightly linked to the communism of the only recently deceased Soviet Union.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Rove emphasized this thought process "economics came on my radar screen when I was twelve or thirteen, when someone gave me a copy of *Capitalism and Freedom*, by Milton Friedman, one of the greatest defenders and advocates of capitalism. 'Government power must be dispersed. If government is to exercise power, better in the county than in the state, better in the state than in Washington'" (Rove, 7). A statement that enforced the belief in small government and low taxes essential to neoliberalism.

<sup>39</sup> Bush was correct and incorrect in his assessment of freedom and large centralized government. A 2010 Freedom House study noted that 19 of the 27 former Soviet bloc countries were 'free' – a positive sign of anti-Communism as good for freedom. All of Western Europe was ranked as free despite their robust social welfare style policies. Bush' statement was partially true. "Freedom in the World," *Freedom House*, 2001.

<sup>40</sup> For an excellent case study about the intersection and creation of Christian free-market conservatism see Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Rick Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, (Wilmington DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2005), 128.

Santorum compared the 1960s with the 1994 “Contract with America.” This contrast provided a baseline to defend historically-based small government and Christian family values. Santorum’s remark also critiqued the ‘culture of dependency’ of the sixties and seventies.<sup>42</sup> This historical idea furthered the claim that big government attacked traditional family values.<sup>43</sup> President Bush echoed Santorum’s anti-abortion ideas; “Thomas Jefferson wrote that ‘the care of human life and happiness and not their destruction is the first and only legitimate object of good government.’ President Jefferson was right. Life is an inalienable right, understood as given to each of us by our Creator.”<sup>44</sup> The statement began as a general defense of human rights, but it quickly pivoted to a historically-driven defense of the pro-life position. Bush furthered this point; “consistent with the core principles about which Thomas Jefferson wrote, and to which the Founders subscribed, we should peacefully commit ourselves to seeking a society that values life – from its very beginnings to its natural end. Unborn children should be welcomed in life and protected in law.”<sup>45</sup> Bush’s statement linked the historical Christian defense of humanity with pro-life values in the broader national debate around abortion. The Founding was a critical policy defense based on an interpretation that contemporary conservative values were synchronic with those of the Founders.

The small government Catholic Santorum was a near living embodiment of the Reagan coalition, and his rhetoric consistently spoke to the historically-based nature of these values.<sup>46</sup> Santorum argued that the “greatness of this country, [Ben] Franklin believed would be found in the economic realities that made possible the cause of the generation of multitudes, by the encouragement they afford to marriage”<sup>47</sup> Santorum tightly linked a thriving nation with one

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<sup>42</sup> It does merit noting that the link between social welfare and long-term familial dependency is questionable at best. While these values are important, there is much more that contributed to the family decline. Santorum’s interpretation ignores the vast de-industrialization of the “rust belt” that took place from the 1960s until the time Santorum wrote in the early 2000s; nor does it take into account the uptick in arrests of non-violent crime offenders instigated by the tough on crime bills of the 1980s and 1990s (these bills while initiated by the GOP led became generally bi-partisan under Clinton). The combination of “rust belt” de-industrialization, tough on crime, and a host of other factors worked in tandem with social welfare policies to create the society Santorum lamented about.

<sup>43</sup> This charge echoed that of Hayek who argued that state interference in government damaged a nation’s familial and social structures.

<sup>44</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 65.

<sup>45</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 66.

<sup>46</sup> I am aware that Reagan coalition is comprised of Evangelical. However, the Christian social values of Santorum made him a good representative of this group despite his open Catholicism.

<sup>47</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 119.

based in traditional Christian marriages – a vision he claimed the Founders also adhered to.<sup>48</sup> He also applied this idea to the conservative founder of capitalism Adam Smith, who he said “linked prosperity to the strength of marriage and fertility of the family,” thus both “were making the same point: the health of the family is tied to economic opportunity.”<sup>49</sup> The argument aligned a robust capitalist economy with similar traditions in the past. Santorum did not explicitly mention Christian families, but the historically themed defense strictly followed the Judeo-Christian values of the Right.<sup>50</sup>

President Bush also interpreted the Founding to support broader moral issues essential to conservatism. In a 2002 speech, President Bush stated that “religious freedom is a cornerstone of our Republic, a core principle of our Constitution and a fundamental human right,” a remark generally consistent with Christian conservative principles of the day.<sup>51</sup> It was notable that Bush’s statement was not expressly about America’s Christian tradition, but a general defense of religious freedom – an important remark about religious tolerance in a post 9/11 environment.<sup>52</sup> The President and his party still frequently highlighted Christianity’s historically central role in the national tradition. Bush recognized the nation’s trepidations about the War on Terror in 2003 and used the national hero Lincoln to promote his Christian message and Iraq War policies. “So many of great events in our nation’s history were shaped by men and women who found strength and direction in prayer... Our 16<sup>th</sup> president, Abraham Lincoln, knew that his burdens were too great for any man, so he carried them to God in prayers.”<sup>53</sup> This strategy, much like that of his

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<sup>48</sup> While the Founders may have espoused values of virtuosity many of them did not live up to these proposed values of strong and virtuous marriages. Franklin was a notorious womanizer, Hamilton had a highly public affair, and as Jefferson was known to have “relations” with many of his female slaves. Consequently, Santorum’s emphasis on the historical basis for a Christian nuclear family was not as evident in the Founders as Santorum advertised.

<sup>49</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family* 119-120.

<sup>50</sup> For an account on the way the Christian Right promoted a family values agenda see Seth Dowland’s article where he discussed the way groups like the Eagle Forum and Moral Majority put opposition to abortion, feminism and gay rights at the center of their rallying cry in the 1970s and ‘80s. This idea and article set major foundation for the social aspects of the Culture Wars. Seth Dowland, “Family Values and the Formation of the Christian Right,” *Church History* 78, no. 3 (Sept. 2009): 606-631.

<sup>51</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 131.

<sup>52</sup> In the wake of 9/11 the nation saw an uptick in anti-Muslim sentiment that at its worst turned violent and even when it fell short of that still resulted in discrimination and hatred towards many in the Muslim community. Consequently, Bush’s reassurance to the nation that all faiths were accepted was an important step towards reestablishment of national unity and decorum.

<sup>53</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 69.

counterparts in the nineties incorporated great American victories of the past into a conservative vision of America.<sup>54</sup>

President Bush and other conservative politicians cited the long history of the church in American life.

America's founding documents give us religious liberty in principle... religious liberty is more than the right to believe in God's love; it is the right to be an instrument of God's love... so today I call on the United States Congress to pass laws promoting and encouraging faith-based and community groups.<sup>55</sup>

President Bush argued that the Founder's initial vision was of a Christian society and that its contemporary leaders ought to follow this tradition in trying times. The words of Dr. King 'supported' Bush's views when he stated that "not every reformer in our history has been religious, but many have been motivated by a scriptural vision in which 'justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.'"<sup>56</sup> For Bush, much of the nation's growth and glory resulted from its citizens' fidelity to Christianity. Rick Santorum cited John Adams to reiterate the necessity of a nation of God-fearing people: "'let them revere nothing but Religion, Morality, and Liberty'... Adams was voicing the nearly unanimous view of the other founders from every section of the new nation... America's greatness lay in a good, a moral, and a *virtuous* people."<sup>57</sup> The Founders ideas of virtue needed to return to contemporary relevance. Santorum further argued that "the framers of the Constitution believed that the government they had devised would be naturally supportive of the efforts of families and churches in this vital area of moral cultivation."<sup>58</sup> Conservatives in these years felt that their movement was under siege by a rapidly changing and secularizing society, but that the country's early fidelity to Christian could save the country.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> It is however worth noting that Lincoln's Christian faith is still a historical question. For more on this see, Dan Gilgoff, "Abraham Lincoln's Religious Uncertainty," *U.S. News Civics* (Feb, 12, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 192.

<sup>56</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 193.

<sup>57</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 198

<sup>58</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 200.

<sup>59</sup> These changes were highly visible in high-profile court cases around homosexual marriage and abortion. In 2001 *Stenberg v. Carhart* overturned the criminalization of partial birth abortions using precedent set in *Roe v. Wade*. In 2003 *Lawrence v. Texas* stated that Texas' ban on homosexual intercourse violated the Due Process Clause and thus legalized this. The most high profile of all of these was Massachusetts' 2003 legalization of gay marriage after the State Supreme Court ruled in *Goodridge v. Massachusetts* that the ban on this violated individual autonomy and equality under the law. These cases represented major changes to traditional conservative values. For more on these see abbreviated case briefs: "Stenberg v. Carhart," *Oyez*, Accessed March 26, 2019; "Lawrence v. Texas," *Oyez*, Accessed March 26, 2019; "Massachusetts Case Legalizing Gay Marriage," *Mass.gov*, Accessed March 26, 2019.

The religious tradition provided a solid foundation for history's role in the Right's opposition to multiculturalism. Conservative antagonism manifested itself in two distinct forms; an idealized version of the country's traditions, and a view of liberalism's multiculturalism as oppositional to real national values. Rick Santorum concisely summarized the opposition to multiculturalism when he claimed that "sometime in the 1980s, universities began to champion the importance of 'diversity' as a central educational value... multiculturalism included an explicit relativist premise: that all cultures are equal – equally worthy of esteem, and equally worthy of study."<sup>60</sup> The conservative claim was simple; multiculturalism kept the American tradition from its rightful place on a pedestal.

The nation's history was one of peace, strength, and unity. George Bush pondered the journey of American freedom from the Founding to the present and claimed that the "Founders would be pleased to see that we have respected this right of people and the limitation on the government. They knew what dangers can follow when government either dictates or frustrates religion."<sup>61</sup> Bush proposed that the nation's smooth history reflected a consistent adherence to its highest values. This view of the country cast aside times when mistakes happened, and principles fell by the wayside.

Conservative politicians of the early 2000s also needed this a clean and united history to justify the righteousness of American policies.<sup>62</sup> Senator John McCain highlighted the greatness of America and its most esteemed Presidents like Ronald Reagan and his "trust in our historical exceptionalism, the shining city on the hill he invoked so often, in which I heard the echoes of my great political hero Teddy Roosevelt."<sup>63</sup> This reference to the more non-partisan hero Roosevelt supported a broad view of the country's exceptionalism. McCain's praise of these influential leaders promoted the idea that those in the present must continue the glory of a simple past.

Politicians on the right also claimed that multicultural social policies discrimination promoted intolerance. To protect these values, they incorporated glorious moments like the Civil

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<sup>60</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 406.

<sup>61</sup> Bush, *On God and Country*, 189-190

<sup>62</sup> These causes largely centered around issues regarding the Iraq War such as the Patriot Act, "enhanced interrogation" (torture), and the war itself. Consequently, justification of America's traditional unity, and these actions as maintenance of American glory were key. The defense of American exceptionalism and traditionalism repudiated those of multiculturalism that many on the Right frequently saw as unnecessary attacks on the nation.

<sup>63</sup> John McCain, *Worth the Fighting For: The Education of an American Maverick, and the Heroes Who Inspired Him* (New York: Random House, 2003), 85.

Rights movement into the conservative cause. Rick Santorum's version of Civil Rights posited that "despite the lip service paid to the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, the rule the village elders [liberal Washington elites] really go by is something like this: we should judge a man not by the color of his skin, *nor* by the content of his character; we should not judge him, his words, or his deeds at all."<sup>64</sup> Santorum translated MLK's words into an attack on moral relativism and intersectionality – a view that castigated the Left as oppositional to the true nature King.<sup>65</sup> Santorum highlighted King's values as more akin to conservatism as opposed to social justice.<sup>66</sup>

John McCain took a similar tactic to Santorum's; "TR [Teddy Roosevelt] denounced what he called 'hyphenated Americanism,' immigrants who gave greater importance to political and cultural affinities with the nation of their origin than to their values, responsibilities, and customs of their American citizenship."<sup>67</sup> It is true that Roosevelt said this, it is however taken out of context. McCain better qualifies this statement than most, as he recognized that Roosevelt did not intend to discriminate with his account, but far too frequently the phrase was used to push away ethnic minorities in America. Instead, Roosevelt called for assimilation, but did not generally push for open discrimination.

Both McCain and Santorum seemed to argue that older, less diverse standards defined America and its citizens. The nation's commonalities, not its differences made it healthy – the more cohesive the United States was, the better. This political move maligned contemporary and historical multiculturalism in favor of 'patriotic' values of early 2000s conservatives. McCain again referenced Roosevelt who he said "opposed ethnic voting blocks, schools that used any language but English to teach immigrant children... he believed immigrants must be quickly and thoroughly Americanized, professing allegiance to one flag only and of the republic it represented."<sup>68</sup> McCain specifically referenced that while the country was one of immigrants, it was more proverbial melting pot than salad bowl – an essential aspect of Culture Wars conservatism. These emphases on the importance of assimilation and more narrowly defined American values was likely the product of post 9/11 fears. In the wake of these atrocities, the

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<sup>64</sup> Santorum, *It Takes a Family*, 214.

<sup>65</sup> The Right's version of intersectionality was that liberalism only places people into a hierarchy of victimhood, not a recognition of the individual.

<sup>66</sup> This argument is obviously problematic as King rapidly changed society and promoted Civil Rights and rapid changes towards equality.

<sup>67</sup> McCain, *Worth the Fighting For*, 316.

<sup>68</sup> McCain, 316.

country upped its ‘patriotic orthodoxy’ and general fears of outsiders increased to a considerable degree.

Conservative politicians of this era continued with many of the general themes from the 1990s but also honed their historical rhetoric given the circumstances of these years – a moment when the right needed a pure version of the past to justify controversial actions such as the War on Terror and the Patriot Act. The “With Us or Against Us” era also brought conservative politicians into political power for the first time since the first Bush occupied the White House. Given this power, these figures placed less emphasis on historical neoliberalism, and more on the nation’s religious traditions and to an extent the opposition to multiculturalism. These politicians laid a series of policy foundations that their colleagues in the academy and media supported and boosted throughout these years.

### **Historically, We’re Right**

Historians of the “With Us or Against Us” years provided an intellectual grounding for their political and media counterparts. These academics continued their more nuanced interpretations of the past, as they had in the 1990s, but many of these historians became more openly partisan in the early 2000s.<sup>69</sup>

Conservative academics reflected the aggressiveness of the early 2000s in multiple ways, most visibly in the branding of their books. Regnery Publishing led this movement with the first book in their Politically Incorrect Guide Series, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*.<sup>70</sup> The conservative opposition to Politically Correct language (PC) was not a new phenomenon in the early 2000s, but critiques of it grew throughout the first half of this decade.<sup>71</sup> The book’s title was a clear challenge to the liberal academy’s ‘revisionist’ version of history

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<sup>69</sup> It should be noted that some provocativeness from the academic Right was likely a result of publishing requests. Regnery Publishing, one of the leading conservative book publishers exemplified this with their *Politically Incorrect Series* – which, in branding alone, challenged liberal academy. Additionally, Regnery Publishing was never shy about its political leanings, “since Henry Regnery founded the company back in 1947, we’ve focused on publishing books that challenge the status quo, books that spark a debate, and books that get people talking about the issues and questions we face as a country.” Thus, while Regnery remained ideologically consistent, they signaled in interest in driving a more provocatively conservative tone in the early 2000s. Regnery Press, “Our Story,” Regnery Publishing, last modified 2018, <https://www.regnery.com/about/>.

<sup>70</sup> Tom Woods, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Political Correctness is loosely used to define any sort of language that gives any offense to a minority group – the phrase became and grew as an anti-liberal catchall amongst the Right throughout the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. While Encyclopedic definitions like this generally are not the strongest forms of evidence, the following definition from Encyclopedia Britannica provides a baseline understanding of political correctness. Cynthia Roper, “Political Correctness (PC),” Encyclopedia Britannica, Last Updated November 16, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-correctness>.

that conservative historians openly resented. Woods began the book provocatively and argued that the “story of American history that most students have encountered... amounts to a series of drearily predictable clichés: the Civil War was all about slavery, antitrust laws saved us from wicked big business, Franklin Roosevelt got us out of the Depression and so on.”<sup>72</sup> The work challenged the rest of the academy and “aimed in particular at those who find the standard narrative of the typical textbook unpersuasive or ideologically biased.”<sup>73</sup> He claimed that his book would correct the intentionally incorrect versions of history prevalent in schools and textbooks.<sup>74</sup>

*The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* stood ideologically alongside Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen’s popular tome *A Patriots History of the United States*. This work pushed back against the multicultural narratives of the liberal academy such as Howard Zinn’s 1980 work *A People’s History of the United States* – a Marxist interpretation of history that ‘contradicted’ the country’s true values and ‘real history.’<sup>75</sup> Larry Schweikart discussed this phenomenon in an interview with Rush Limbaugh. “We say that if you just tell the story of America’s past honestly, you can’t help but be proud of this country. But over the last 40 years, people have told the story of this country’s past dishonestly. They have over-exaggerated racism and sexism.”<sup>76</sup> Schweikart’s statement was indicative of the work and a rebuttal of the ‘anti-American,’ and ‘intentionally false narratives’ of the leftist academy. The title, *A Patriot’s History* also reflected the tactic of patriotic orthodoxy where great moments of patriotism and history became part of the broader conservative narrative. Allen and Schweikart signaled to their readers that their message was pro-American – an essential political and marketing move for a book written in a moment where the Right heavily emphasized such values. While historians of

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<sup>72</sup> Woods, *A Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, xiii.

<sup>73</sup> Woods, xiv.

<sup>74</sup> Woods’ historically incorrect claims cannot stand without challenge. The Civil War was about slavery, a host of documents from state secessionist papers and Confederate leaders all reference the threat to slavery as essential to their decision to leave the Union (i.e. Alexander Stephen’s Cornerstone Speech and the Mississippi Secession Statement explicitly point to slavery as essential to their decision to leave the Union). Anti-trust laws, while controversial did in fact do a great deal to limit some of the strangleholds of runaway crony capitalism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. While, FDR’s New Deal, while at times problematic and slow, did at the very least aid the nation in climbing out of the financial and social Hell of the Great Depression. Woods was generally accurate in his work, but instances like this exemplified the way partisanship interfered with accurate historical interpretation.

<sup>75</sup> For more on Marxist interpretations of history. Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, “Marxist Historians,” *The Houses of History: Critical Reader in History and Theory* (Manchester: Manchester, 2016), 47-71.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Allen and Larry Schweikart. *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, (New York: Sentinel, 2004), xiv. Schweikart’s interview with Limbaugh served as the book’s introduction. To say racism were ‘exaggerated’ are somewhat willingly ignorant, but in-line with earlier Culture Wars conservative ideas.

the 1990s merely interpreted and highlighted the past differently than the predominately liberal academy, those in the early 2000s actively challenged it.

Woods, Schweikart, and Allen, provided an intellectual yet provocative basis for the 1960s declension narrative of their political counterparts. Allen and Schweikart presented a nuanced and critical analysis of the decade; the “‘fractured decade’ of the sixties brought some needed social reforms, but also saddled the nation with long-term problems stemming directly from the very policies adopted during the period.”<sup>77</sup> Allen and Schweikart did not wholly discount the sixties but generally opposed the long-term results of these years. *A Patriots History* further argued that the nation’s societal problems stemmed from the “‘legislative blitzkrieg’ that, in the process of the next two decades, would reenslave many poor and minorities into a web of government dependency.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly to their political counterparts, Allen and Schweikart linked the national decline to the combination of big government and poor values seemingly emblematic in sixties liberalism.<sup>79</sup>

Tom Woods joined in the anti-sixties’ commentary and argued that the “dramatic expansion in welfare spending, along with aggressive propagation of the ‘welfare rights’ philosophy... undermined what Murray calls ‘status rewards.’ The working poor family, which had once had the dignity of knowing that they were supporting themselves and not being a burden on their... neighbors, now seemed foolish.”<sup>80</sup> The idea that welfare created a lazy and dependent culture was difficult one to accurately measure but was consistent across the echo chamber. The more significant problem with Woods’ claim was that he based it in the work of Dr. Charles Murray, which while popular with many social conservatives in this era, frequently received charges of racial bias or outright racism.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, Woods’ frequent use of

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<sup>77</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriots History*, 667.

<sup>78</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriots History*, 687.

<sup>79</sup> This claim had several interesting claims that merit discussion. First, the basis of this argument echoed a similar one about the New Deal as over-burdensome. Second, its focus on the idea that Great Society ‘reenslaved minorities’ was odd given that the New Deal largely excluded minorities because it needed to appease southern factions of FDR’s New Deal coalition. For more on the importance of the inclusion of African Americans into the Great Society see the following excerpt from *Prisoners of Hope: Lyndon B. Johnson, the Great Society and the Limits of Liberalism*. Randall B. Woods, “How the Great Society Reforms of the 1960s were Different from the New Deal,” *Time*, April 5, 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Woods, *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, 224

<sup>81</sup> For more on accusations of Charles Murray’s questionable statements on race see the following article from the Southern Poverty Law Center. Murray once stated “The professional consensus is that the United States has experienced dysgenic pressures throughout either most of the century (the optimists) or all of the century (the pessimists). Women of all races and ethnic groups follow this pattern in similar fashion. There is some evidence that

Murray left his work open to valid questions about motivations and the sort of research that went into his book.<sup>82</sup>

The critique of the sixties gave historians on the right an opening to attack big government. Tom Woods expressed this in a manner reminiscent of Marvin Olasky in the 1990s and claimed that “despite what people have been led to believe, however, the poor had done relatively well in securing health care before Medicaid.”<sup>83</sup> This critique of Johnson closely reflected similar opposition to his ‘big government’ predecessor FDR. Michael Allen and Larry Schweikart expanded pro-small government rhetoric and rejected the traditional textbook version of the 1920s: “Little of this mythology is true. Consider the notion that the stock market was one gigantic speculative bubble: there is virtually no evidence for that in numerous studies by economic historians.”<sup>84</sup> Allen and Schweikart’s reinterpretation of the decade promoted the very laissez-faire policies of those years. While politicians and media figures generally ignored this decade, the conservative academy viewed it as a prime example that the best government was a small one.

Tom Woods similarly praised the two 1920s presidents; “Harding and Coolidge did not establish a Square Deal, a New Deal, a New Frontier, a Great Society, or a New Covenant. For the most part, they simply stayed out of the economy and out of people’s lives.”<sup>85</sup> This message of small government, albeit in a different historical package, closely reflected the values of most Culture Wars conservative powerbrokers. The positive nature of the 1920s existed in stark contrast to the progressive era’s vast social change and a big federal government. *A Patriot’s History* argued that progressives introduced a “significant danger to American life, especially

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blacks and Latinos are experiencing even more severe dysgenic pressures than whites, which could lead to further divergence between whites and other groups in future generations.”

—The Bell Curve, 1994 “Charles Murray,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, Date Accessed, December 12, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/charles-murray>.

<sup>82</sup> This is not to imply racism on the part of Woods, but merely to point out potential and real problems when they appear in these publication. Although it is notable that the trope of laziness, welfare cheats and welfare queens is an old dog whistle. For an account of the power of dog whistle politics see Ian Hanley López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York: Oxford University, 2015). For more on the way that these values found their way into conservative rhetoric see Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> Woods, *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, 218.

<sup>84</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriots History of the United States*, 533.

<sup>85</sup> Woods, *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, 137.

through the hidden growth of the federal government.”<sup>86</sup> These figures frequently focused on these lesser-known eras of small government, but with ideas that backed politicians’ views of small government and low taxes.

Conservative historians of this decade joined their contemporary Culture Wars colleagues and promoted the importance of a virtuous citizenry. Allen and Schweikart argued that the nation’s religious tradition stemmed from the idea that the “‘separation of church and state’ meant freedom *to* worship, not freedom *from* worship. It went back to that link between liberty and responsibility, and no one could be taken seriously who was not responsible to God.”<sup>87</sup> The nation did not just have a religious tradition, but its very core lay within the church. These men reiterated that “over the long haul, the Republic required virtuous leaders to prosper.”<sup>88</sup> Allen and Schweikart noted that there were American leaders without virtue, but the nation’s Christian roots overcame these immoral men.

The Right’s concerns of the oppression of religious people came to life in a 2003 court case where Alabama Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore lost his seat over his refusal to take down a statue of the 10 Commandments.<sup>89</sup> Moore stated, “I’d do it all the same all over again... I said it back then and I’ll say it again now. God is the basis of our law and our government. I cannot and will not violate my conscience.”<sup>90</sup> Moore became a rallying cry for many conservatives in the academy, media and the general public. The year after Moore lost his very public fight, Tom Woods mounted a historical defense of the former judge.

A lengthy debate ensued over whether the Framers had been religious men, and what they would have thought of the Ten Commandments hanging in a state supreme court building. It was irrelevant. The Framers would have been unanimous in holding that the question was up to the citizens of Alabama and that First Amendment restrictions did not apply.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, 507.

<sup>87</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, xxiii.

<sup>88</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, xxiii.

<sup>89</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the 10 Commandments statue violated the Establishment Clause because it was overtly religious. For a short case brief on this see “Glassrot v. Moore,” Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs,” *Georgetown University*, Accessed Marcy 28, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Roy Moore Quoted in: Jeffrey Gettleman, “He’d Do It Againt, Says the ‘Ten Commandments Judge,’” *New York Times* (New York, New York), Nov. 10, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/13/us/he-d-do-it-again-says-the-ten-commandments-judge.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Woods, *A Patriots History of the United States*, 23.

Woods articulated that from the earliest moments of the country's past, its core values supported religious liberties, not just in theory but also in practical instances like the Moore case.<sup>92</sup> Woods' ideas are a rare moment where historians overtly jumped into contemporary political fights.

Historians of the early 2000s also utilized their work to challenge the ideas of multiculturalism. Allen and Schweikart voiced this opinion "we utterly reject 'my country right or wrong' --- what scholar wouldn't? But in the last thirty years, academics have taken an equally destructive approach: 'My country, always wrong!' We reject that too."<sup>93</sup> Allen and Schweikart represented the Right's view of America's past as generally positive and pure. Tom Woods expanded to this argument with the claim that America's history was not diverse but uniform: "First basic fact: the colonists were *not* paragons of 'diversity.' The vast bulk of them came from one part of Europe, spoke a common language, and worshiped the same God."<sup>94</sup> Woods emphasized that from the start, the country was one of generally unchanging similarity, not a diverse and evolving society.<sup>95</sup>

Anti-multicultural historical views also went beyond interpretation, and into a critique of policies that promoted it. Tom Woods argued that the "affirmative action programs started in 1971... were accompanied by an improvement in the condition of blacks at the higher end of the earning spectrum, while those least advantaged lagged further behind."<sup>96</sup> This statement ardently opposed affirmative action and the liberal Johnson government that implemented it. Woods proposed that when people worked on merit alone greater individual achievement was more

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<sup>92</sup> In an oral history from April 2018 Dr. Marvin Olasky made a similar point in discussing what makes America great, saying that the "Christian understanding or tradition that has long been influential" is one of the major values that contribute to the nation's historic goodness and values. It should also be noted that discussing the words and actions of Moore, Woods and Olasky I do not intend to assume any personal links between these men. I make this note in light of recent accusation and actions surrounding Roy Moore that do not align with the values of either Dr. Woods or Dr. Olasky.

<sup>93</sup> Allen and Schweikart, *A Patriots History of the United States*, xxi.

<sup>94</sup> Woods, *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Woods was not incorrect to argue that many of the nation's earliest European settlers came from England. However, he undersold the array of different faith groups, and eventually country's of origins that brought people to the soon-to-be American colonies. This also failed to grapple with the nation's original sin of slavery which forcibly brought people from Africa. Nor did it think through the Christian diversity in the colonies, most notably the Catholic haven of Maryland.

<sup>96</sup> Woods, *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History*, 206.

likely. In turn, Woods' argument absolved the country of responsibility for its historical sins that preceded the need for affirmative action-style policies.<sup>97</sup>

Conservative historians of the “with us or against us” years professed more overt partisan opinions than their counterparts in the “contract” era. These historians also supported the policies of their political counterparts with strong pro-conservative language that frequently attacked liberal policies and interpretations of the past.

### **Historical and Balanced(?)**

The conservative media in the “With Us or Against Us” era followed their political and academic colleagues and heightened their history-based hostility towards liberalism and its policies. Media figures were generally more critical of the Left than their political or academic colleagues – a phenomenon that further increased because of the 24-hour news media. Simultaneously, media outlets gained more influence because of the internet's continued growth.<sup>98</sup>

The nucleus of conservative media was the cable powerhouse Fox News that Rupert Murdoch founded in 1996 and first topped the charts in January 2002.<sup>99</sup> Brian Anderson argued that Fox News gave conservatives a place to offer “meaningful quotations, skepticism voiced about environmentalist doomsaying, pro-life views given airtime, and much else they would never find on other networks.”<sup>100</sup> Fox News, talk radio, and the rest of the media Right provided the conservative movement with more power in the media and political worlds.

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<sup>97</sup> This view does not take into account the way that whites were given an affirmative action style leg-up in the 30 years before the Great Society. For more on this argument see Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).

<sup>98</sup> The internet already played a role in 1990s conservatism, exemplified by Drudge Reports breaking of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. This instance, however, paled in comparison to the internet's size and scope in the early 2000s and especially in the years that followed. One of the first internet sensations on the Right, Matt Drudge, noted this, “in the same way Gutenberg's Bible hastened the End of The Church's stranglehold on fifteenth-century Europe, in the same way, Thomas Paine rallied troops to fight King George... the internet is liberating the great unwashed.” With this vast array of powerful options, conservative politicians effectively employed the past to defend the policies of the GOP's present. Matt Drudge, *Drudge Manifesto* (Washington D.C.:NAL Hardcover, 2000).

<sup>99</sup> As a 2018 TVNewser article said “Another month, another monthly ratings victory for Fox News. If you're counting at home, that's 194 months, since January 2002, as the most-watched cable news network.” A note that also illustrates the long-lasting power of the conservative outlet. A.J. Katz, “Feb. 2018 Ratings: 16 Years and Counting at No. 1 for Fox News,” *TVNewser*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.adweek.com/tvnewser/february-2018-ratings-fox-news-marks-194-consecutive-months-as-the-most-watched-cable-news-network/358292>.

<sup>100</sup> Brian C. Anderson, *South Park Conservatives*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Press, 2005), 52.

More than any other powerbroker group of this era, the historical rhetoric of conservative media members attacked their political opposition. Bill O'Reilly set this tone: "I have chosen to jump into the fray and become a warrior in the vicious culture war... And war is exactly the right term."<sup>101</sup> In this metaphorical conflict, O'Reilly claimed to lead the "armies of the traditionalists like me, people who believe the United States was well founded and has done enormous good for the world."<sup>102</sup> O'Reilly's statement delineated the sides and tone of this cultural battle, and his enormous popularity brought this message to vast swaths of the country.<sup>103</sup> The always provocative Ann Coulter joined O'Reilly and incorporated historically-themed rhetoric against liberals. "Whether they are defending the Soviet Union or bleating for Saddam Hussein, liberals are always against America. They are either traitors or idiots... Fifty years of treason hasn't slowed them down."<sup>104</sup> O'Reilly and Coulter charged that their political opponents possessed a generally in-American worldview

Bill O'Reilly took aggressive rhetoric to new historically-themed heights. He argued that secular-leftists, "mentally separate children from their parents – that has been practiced by totalitarian governments all throughout history... I'm not saying these people are little Adolfs; I am saying they have adopted some totalitarian tactics in their strategies."<sup>105</sup> This exaggerated claim demonstrated the way history became a weapon to promote the Left's values as incompatible with those of America. O'Reilly, who frequently posed as a historian, demonstrated that in the Culture Wars, objective historical truth mattered less than power.<sup>106</sup>

Conservative media figures, like their Culture Wars colleagues across disciplines and eras, pointed to the 1960s as a central moment in the country's decline. Bill O'Reilly summed up the general conservative sentiment to this decade "the sixties changed everything. All of a sudden it was 'do your own thing' ... greedy boomers rushing to embrace the philosophy of

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<sup>101</sup> Bill O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), 1-2

<sup>102</sup> O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 2.

<sup>103</sup> O'Reilly's ratings are worth noting as an example of the massive influence he and other conservative media figures possessed in this era. A microcosm of this is evident in 2002, a year where O'Reilly averaged over 2 million viewers on his nightly television show. Cara DiPasquale and Drew Sottardi, "O'Reilly Winning the Ratings Game," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Feb 20, 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Ann Coulter, *Treason: Liberal Treachery From the Cold War to the War On Terrorism*, (New York: Crown Forum, 2003), 16.

<sup>105</sup> O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 123.

<sup>106</sup> For more on O'Reilly's belief in his historical ability see his long-running "The Killing Series" which can be found on his website here <https://www.billoreilly.com/c/The-Killing-Series/1/174.html>.

abundance soon overran the passive hippies.”<sup>107</sup> O’Reilly was clear; the decade changed the country too quickly and created a negative culture of irresponsibility declension.

Sean Hannity, at the time a rising tv host, attacked liberalism, the 1960s, and the Left’s destructive nature around the educational system in a move that spoke to several conservative boogeymen at once.<sup>108</sup> Hannity argued that “modern liberal elitists, since the 1960s, have largely taken control of our educational establishment” the result of which was “where fair-minded students of history see America as a grand and noble experiment, they see it as racist, sexist, homophobic, and unjust.”<sup>109</sup> This statement claimed that the sixties and accompanying big government perverted the nation’s schools; consequently, students received a dishonest education about America. Radio host Michael Savage added to this story with a broader attack on the lasting influence of the sixties. The “Democrat train included the anti-war car filled with disgruntled, street crazies from the 1960s who had now become professors and back-room media personalities”<sup>110</sup> Savage built on Hannity’s claim about the residual effects of the sixties that appeared in the form of contemporary socialists, internationalists and members of the Kerry campaign. The sixties harmed the nation 40 years earlier and, its values and practitioners remained at the national levers of power in the early 2000s. Savage’s ideas were hyperbolic but represented the bombastic opposition to the lingering sixties.<sup>111</sup>

While the frequency of their historically themed rhetoric around taxes and government size decreased in this era, conservative media still defended the neoliberal values of the GOP-led government. With this neoliberalism also came concern over government overreach into citizens private lives – a position that strongly appealed to the conservative base.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Bill O’Reilly, *Who’s Looking Out for You?*, (New York: Broadway Book: 2003), 20.

<sup>108</sup> Hannity, at the time, appeared on the Fox News show Hannity and Colmes which provided a “point-counterpoint” approach to the news and opinion – a very different approach from Hannity’s future solo-shows that generally provided only a conservative talking point.

<sup>109</sup> Sean Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, 69.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Savage, *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder*, (Nashville: WND, 2005), xxi.

<sup>111</sup> This hyper-negative interpretation of the decade ignored the way many groups won basic Civil Rights in these years.

<sup>112</sup> Fears of oppressive government and its overreach are a long-standing part of the conservative grassroots base. This concern was perhaps best expressed by Phyllis Schlafly in 1964 in her Barry Goldwater campaign manifesto *A Choice Not an Echo* which contained frequent reference to sinister government plots and intrusion to people’s lives. Ideas of small government and expanded freedom are traditional neoliberal ideas. Friedrich Hayek argued that economic and social freedom were linked – therefore free-markets, small governments and a free society must all go together. For more on this combination see Nicholas Wapshott’s *Keynes-Hayek-The Clash The Clash That Defined Modern Economics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 199.

Fox News host Judge Andrew Napolitano articulated views on small government in conjunction with Constitutional originalism. “This [Amendment] clearly implies that the founders recognized that freedom of religious worship and freedom of speech come from some source other than the Constitution. The First Amendment, thus, is... a restriction on government, preventing it from infringing on the rights the people already have”<sup>113</sup> Napolitano contended that from the earliest years, the country’s leaders emphasized lives free from government, not ones regulated by the government. Napolitano further argued that the “greatest and gravest threat to personal freedom in this country... [is] the government violates the law while busily passing more legislation to abridge our liberties.”<sup>114</sup> The nation’s past was one of great personal freedom because the government originated from principles of limited federal action. Consequently, the country needed to return to this form of government, not its present-day one of excess and waste.

While Napolitano spoke against the expansive federal government, others within the conservative media reiterated the idea that big government created a culture of dependency. Bill O’Reilly criticized government welfare; “remember, the S-Ps [secular-progressives] believe that the government has an obligation to *provide* Americans with prosperity and happiness. This philosophy is, of course, in direct conflict with the vision of the Founding Fathers. They did not want government to provide, they wanted it to get out of our way.”<sup>115</sup> O’Reilly’s words, like Napolitano’s, echoed the traditional conservative view that less government was best. These arguments demonstrated the continuation of similar small government values espoused by 1990s media figures like Rush Limbaugh.

Rhetoric about the history of small government also expanded to attack federal largesse and its partner liberal corruption. Bill O’Reilly promoted this idea with Scottish historian Alexander Tytler’s 1787 statement: “A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves largess from the public treasury... the majority always votes for the candidate promising the most benefits from the public treasury.”<sup>116</sup> O’Reilly attacked Hillary Clinton with this quote, under the guise that this was the basis of her policy platform. Clinton, he argued has “one and only one chance to

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<sup>113</sup> Andrew Napolitano, *Constitutional Chaos: What Happens When the Government Breaks its Own Laws*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), xv-xvi.

<sup>114</sup> Napolitano, xvii.

<sup>115</sup> O’Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 114-115

<sup>116</sup> O’Reilly, *Who’s Looking Out for You*, 68.

achieve the power she craves so much: She can open the treasury to those who support her. And make no mistake about it – if this woman is elected President, she will.”<sup>117</sup> O’Reilly strongly insinuated that Clinton, and many of her Democratic compatriots, was only interested in governing to further her power.<sup>118</sup> This statement also possessed greater emotional power given its origins in 1787 which sparked ideas of freedom and liberty for many people.

History driven critiques of government dependency also transitioned into a defense of low taxes. Sean Hannity argued that President Kennedy “proposed reducing the top marginal tax rate from a suffocating 91 percent in 1963 to 70 percent in 1965... guess who went on to pass the Kennedy tax cuts? Lyndon B. Johnson and the Democrat-controlled Congress”<sup>119</sup> Yet, Hannity did not promote mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Democrats purely because of their values, but also to attack the contemporary Left. “Kennedy was right about tax cuts. He understood that they create prosperity for all Americans by rewarding saving, investing, and working. Yet the current leadership of the Democratic Party... rejects his pro-growth economic legacy”<sup>120</sup> Hannity’s reference promoted the larger goals around a set of low-tax, neoliberal policies that countered ‘big government’ Democrats.’ While he advocated for older Democrats, he ignored the idea that taxes in the early 2000s were nowhere near as high as those in the sixties. Thus, the Kennedy era tax cuts were very different than the ones in the Bush Administration. The rhetoric around neoliberal economics became much more accusatory while it remained ideologically consistent in the early 2000s.

Right-leaning media joined the GOP and conservative academy in their concern over a changing social landscape. These years offered the Right a prime opportunity to enhance their aggressive rhetoric against the Left’s actions and values. Roy Moore’s legal fight was a significant cause for concern in the media, as it was for politicians and academics. Michael Savage referred to those who opposed Moore and Christian monuments as “neo-Bolsheviks” who saw the 10 Commandments as “worse than vile pornography.”<sup>121</sup> Savage also claimed that people “are not free to rewrite history... James Madison, the author of the First Amendment,

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<sup>117</sup> O’Reilly, *Who’s Looking Out for You*, 68.

<sup>118</sup> Historical-backed accusation of Democratic dishonesty (particularly around the Clintons) were reminiscent of the ones Bob Dole and Jack Kemp leveled at Bill Clinton in the 1996 campaign.

<sup>119</sup> Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, 225.

<sup>120</sup> Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, 225.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Savage, *The Enemy Within: Saving America From the Liberal Assault on Our Schools, Faith, and Military*, (Nashville: WND, 2003), 147.

argued forcefully *on behalf of the Ten Commandments*. He couldn't imagine a nation that wasn't governed and 'sustained' by them."<sup>122</sup> Savage extended Madison's 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to unquestionably defend all religious speech on private or public property – a misinterpretation of what Madison actually wrote in the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment.<sup>123</sup>

The Roy Moore case was only one example of the right's perception of a court system biased against religious people. Bill O'Reilly expressed his frustration about the status of the Left and the courts. "The American Civil Liberties Union, along with secularists like Supreme Court justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and John Paul Stevens, are using the Constitution to bludgeon any form of public spirituality."<sup>124</sup> With these 'un-American' contemporary figures in mind, O'Reilly drew upon the country's founders for support.

There is no question that Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and most of the other framers encouraged spirituality in our public discourse... Time after time in debating the future of America, the Founders pointed out that only a 'moral' and 'God-fearing' people could meet the demands of individual freedom.<sup>125</sup>

O'Reilly argued that the Church was essential to the history of the nation. This claim linked virtue and leadership to conservatism and brought America's glories into the values of the Right.

O'Reilly further expressed his frustration about the courts' liberals and the general decline of America's religiosity. "President Madison knew, as did all his founding brothers, that a precise moral code was necessary to set boundaries for everyday life. Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her pals want to erase those boundaries and allow those in power to govern solely by manmade law."<sup>126</sup> The nation needed to stay true to religious and Godly principles, as the Founders had, or great harm would befall the nation. Michael Savage more aggressively tied the nation's religious tradition with concerns about government overreach. "Just as the Founding Fathers sought independence from British tyranny, today you and I must seek independence from the judicial tyranny of the Supreme Court. The Stench from the Bench has stepped in it once again with an

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<sup>122</sup> Savage, *The Enemy Within*, 149.

<sup>123</sup> Madison's views on freedom of religion are discussed by his estate at Montpelier. Madison "wrote an influential petition called 'Memorial and Remonstrance,' which clearly laid out his arguments against government support of churches. Madison emphasized that religion was a matter of individual conscience and could not be directed by the government in any way." "James Madison and Religious Freedom," James Madison's Montpelier, Accessed March 28, 2019.

<sup>124</sup> O'Reilly, *Who's Looking Out For You*, 113.

<sup>125</sup> O'Reilly, *Who's Looking Out For You*, 113.

<sup>126</sup> O'Reilly, *Who's Looking Out For You*, 117.

endorsement of moral degradation.”<sup>127</sup> Savage was exceptionally bombastic but spoke to the right’s concerns about institutional threats to America’s religious traditions. His words highlighted the Right’s fears of big government; America’s moral and spiritual declension; and the way populist conservatives viewed themselves as the heirs to the nation’s rebellious founders. These claims spoke to the Right’s larger fears about a changing America where long-standing values like those around issues like ‘traditional marriage’ changed at the state level.

In a calmer tone than Savage, Bill O’Reilly connected Martin Luther King and the Western and Christian tradition, “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a traditionalist. In almost every public statement he made, he called upon God to inspire him and deliver justice.”<sup>128</sup> O’Reilly’s argument contained elements of truth given that Dr. King and his SCLC were grounded in themes of Christianity. However, O’Reilly’s referral to a man who actively fought against established orders as a traditionalist was a historical stretch. O’Reilly also incorporated Dr. King’s reference to Christian ideals in *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* as an attack on liberalism “Martin Luther King Jr.’s words are more important than ever, because the S-P movement not only scorns Judeo-Christian philosophy, some of its members even deny America has a heritage based on that philosophy.”<sup>129</sup>

O’Reilly conceived of MLK as a conservative hero to refute liberalism, and the ‘Republicans are racist’ ideas of some Democrats. His words also reiterated the common conservative practice of incorporating all moments of America’s success into their movement. The problem with O’Reilly’s statement was that he turned Dr. King’s message of unity and equality into one of aggressiveness – a practice contradictory to the values of King.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, O’Reilly spoke of Dr. King’s legacy as a generally religious fight and not one of broader social and racial equality. MLK’s Christianity was critical and a significant part of his oratory, but not the central part of his fight. This appeal closely mirrored Dinesh D’Souza’s in the 1990s when he referred to Dr. King as victorious over the oppression of Christians.

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<sup>127</sup> Savage, *The Enemy Within*, 7.

<sup>128</sup> O’Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 145.

<sup>129</sup> O’Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 145.

<sup>130</sup> O’Reilly’s discussion of Dr. King is rather disingenuous given that Dr. King appealed to the bible and God to promote justice, non-violence and the equality of all people. Dr. King’s actions around the Church were not same as O’Reilly’s who seemingly sought to incorporate the great Civil Rights leader to further his own agenda.

Sean Hannity illustrated liberalism's 'weakness' in the past and its potential dangers in a contentious present. "They [liberals] mocked Reagan for denouncing the Soviet Union as the Evil Empire, rather than condemning the Soviet Union for *being* an evil empire"<sup>131</sup> Hannity claimed that liberals were more concerned about imagery and political points than America's morality and toughness. Reaganesque strength and goodness were the values that mattered over all others, particularly when the Global War on Terror replaced the Cold War in terms of international existential crises.<sup>132</sup>

Michael Savage further critiqued the Left's supposed aversion towards foreign conflict by comparing modern liberals to WWII General Patton who "barked, 'The Nazis are the enemy. Wade into them. Spill their blood. Shoot them in the belly'... Does that sound scandalous to your modern ears?"<sup>133</sup> Savage defended these strong and true American values seen in the past with those of weak PC liberals in the present and claimed that the "mental disorder of liberalism has hoodwinked America into embracing the fairyland view of resolving conflict articulated by singer Sheryl Crow."<sup>134</sup> While Savage was more aggressive than many others in the conservative movement, his argument articulated the views around the inherent validity of different American values. In a time when the nation needed morality, strength, and virtue, the conservative media saw the past as a profitable alternative to the present.<sup>135</sup>

Bill O'Reilly like many on the right accused 'PC' liberals as generally weak.

All clear-thinking Americans *should* become opponents of the S-P movement for the simple reason of self-preservation. If the secular-progressives ever come to power in America, and remember, Howard Dean got close, their policies would put you and your family in grave danger... In the 1930s, Adolf Hitler had a blast with Neville

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<sup>131</sup> Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, 7.

<sup>132</sup> A December 2001 Brookings Article foreshadowed the way that the U.S.'s preparation for the Global War on Terror closely mirrored its strategy and participation in the Cold War. Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "Nasty, Brutish and Long: America's War on Terrorism," *Brookings*, December 1, 2001.

<sup>133</sup> Savage, *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder*, 8.

<sup>134</sup> Savage, *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder*, 8.

<sup>135</sup> It must be noted that in the months and years after 9/11 there was an uptick in anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence. There were 93 aggravated assaults in 2001, and 34,33, and 36 in 2002, 2003 and 2004 respectively – at least according to numbers reported to the FBI. Katayoun Kishi, "Assaults Against Muslims in U.S. Surpasses 2001 Level," *Pew Research Center*, November 15, 2017. This is not to accuse the Right of anti-Muslim bias, and George Bush referred to Islam as a 'Religion of Peace' in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. However, Michael Savage also stated, in regard to Iraq, "we haven't razed any major area of the country; we're far too concerned about chipping a flake of paint off of the dome of a Mosque than crushing the terrorist crustaceans cowering inside." His language must be discussed in the context of anti-Muslim actions given its potentially dangerous consequences. Savage, *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder*, 7.

Chamberlain, the appeasement-supporting prime minister of Great Britain. That historical lesson might be worth revisiting in the culture war between the traditionalists and the S-  
Ps.<sup>136</sup>

O'Reilly argued that the Chamberlin-like liberals would give up the Middle East equivalent of 1930s Austria and Czechoslovakia – an attack predicated on the ideas of the Left as un-aggressive and weak. He further suggested that the nation needed a conservative government or risk a potentially dark future. Savage and O'Reilly exemplified the way that 'patriotic orthodoxies' expanded in moments of high-profile foreign policy crises – a set of views seen in opposition to multiculturalism and broader attacks on all liberal and PC values. Conservative media reached back to moments of America at its strongest to attack weak liberals. O'Reilly concisely articulated that "history has demonstrated time and time again that disciplined, just societies prevail, while weak, utopian systems crash and burn... The world is, and always has been, a struggle between good and evil."<sup>137</sup> O'Reilly proposed that a dangerous world required a conservative and ordered society.<sup>138</sup>

Sean Hannity provided a final broad critique of multiculturalism and argued that liberals "teach our children multiculturalism rather than American culture, revisionist history rather than American history, the thinly disguised religion of secular humanism and extreme environmentalism rather than capitalism"<sup>139</sup> Hannity used a broad array of conservative values to attack liberalism and multiculturalism, most pertinently his opposition to "revisionist history." Conservative opposition to liberal revisionism of the past was a common thread across powerbroker groups throughout the Culture Wars, and Hannity was no exception.

Conservative media of the "with us or against us" years proposed similar historical narratives to other powerbrokers of the 1990s and 2000s. These media elites built upon the policies of their political compatriots and the intellectual foundations of those in the academy. The baselines created by these other groups supported the significant voices of those in the conservative media.

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<sup>136</sup> O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 112-113.

<sup>137</sup> O'Reilly, *Culture Warrior*, 116.

<sup>138</sup> This sort of conservative interpretation is again grounded in Russell Kirk's tenets of conservatism "conviction that civilized society requires orders and classes, as against the notion of a 'classless society.'" While O'Reilly may not have intentionally alluded to Kirk his rhetoric undoubtedly related to this traditional value of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative movement.

<sup>139</sup> Hannity, *Let Freedom Ring*, 9.

## **Conclusion**

The early 2000s were an essential set of years in the Culture Wars – a half-decade where the newly dominant GOP used the past to protect its present power. In these years, the powerbrokers in the conservative movement increased the hostility of their rhetoric primarily because of the increased power of the day. Given their political power, conservative actors of this decade referenced the past more about religious and multicultural issues than economic ones. These years continued the societal conflicts of the Culture Wars and laid a foundation for the continuity of such hostilities into the end of the 2000s – a series of years that created the contemporary society of the 2016 world and beyond.

These years were a critical transition period in the Long Culture Wars. Conservative powerbrokers of these years demonstrated many of the hyper-aggressive tendencies that cast their opponents as ‘un-American’ – rhetoric central to the second half of the decade. These years also gave historically-based social issues the same level of rhetorical-capital as the 1990s afforded to economic values. This change also set a foundation for the way the Right in the “Tea Party” era discussed social and economic issues at a near equal rate. These years intensified the hostility of rhetoric, emphasized social issues over economic ones, and demonstrated a conservative moment strongly reacting in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Conservative rhetoric escalated in the first half of the decade while they were in political power, and only grew nastier in the wake of devastating losses in 2006 and 2008.

### **Hostility Peaked: The Tea Party Era: 2007-2010**

*The Modern Liberal believes in the supremacy of the state, thereby rejecting the principles of the Declaration and the order of civil society, in whole or part. For the Modern Liberal, the individual's imperfection and personal pursuits impede the objective of a utopian state. In this, Modern Liberalism promotes what French historian Alexis de Tocqueville described as a soft tyranny, which becomes increasingly more oppressive, potentially leading to a hard tyranny.*<sup>1</sup>

-Mark Levin

On Election night 2008 Barack Obama became the first African American president in the country's history. The election exacerbated the GOP's decline in power as Democrats increased their majorities to 236-199 in the House and 59-41 in the Senate. The Republican Party was not locked out executive and legislative power for an extended period of time. This tremendous downturn in political power catalyzed the right-wing of the party and brought about the 2010 Tea Party wave. The wave midterm election at the end of the decade brought about a significant swing right as the GOP gained 61 House and 6 Senate seats – electoral victories that gave them a 240-191 House majority and shrinking the Democratic Senate lead to 53-47. Sarah Palin responded to these results and tweeted that the election sent a “Very clear message to President Obama: we’ll send our representatives to DC to stop your fundamental transformation of America. Enough is Enough.”<sup>2</sup> In an era that began in electoral disappointment and ended with triumph, the GOP's right flank grew in power in their quest to recreate a seemingly lost traditional version of America.

The nation's conservative powerbrokers viewed America as a society in free-fall – a moment when their movement's most cherished values faced a young president and his “radical” coalition of Democrats. History became an even more powerful tool for a conservative moment in need of a rebuttal to a changing present.<sup>3</sup> Historian Daniel Flynn claimed that “for most of American history, I think, economically and socially, conservative values have sort of been the default position.”<sup>4</sup> 2007-2010 was not the first time in the Culture Wars that the GOP was out of power, but this moment sparked a more visceral reaction than the 1990s – a product of extensive media coverage and the Right's perception of Obama as a grave existential threat. While the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny: A Conservative Manifesto* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Palin, Twitter Post, November 2 2010, <https://twitter.com/SarahPalinUSA/statuses/29539526089>.

<sup>3</sup> The name “Tea Party” being the most obvious example of conservatism incorporating the past into their contemporary rhetoric – as they claimed to take up the revolutionary mantle of the historic Boston Tea Party.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Flynn, Interview with Adam Bruno, 42:30.

world changed around them, conservative elites went to the past for ammunition in their anti-progressive resistance.<sup>5</sup>

In the second half of the 2000s, none of the central history-backed conservative values superseded the others. Economic and social issues received equal historical capital in these years as the Obama administration seemingly threatened neoliberalism, the Christian tradition and western values. The combination of an economic downturn and outsider in the White House made each of these policy positions essential. The national history of small government and socially conservative interpretations of religious and western traditions refuted an uncomfortable present. Conservative powerbrokers in the “Tea Party” era espoused values ideologically consistent with that of the previous two eras, but drastically intensified their rhetoric. Rhetoric in the “Tea Party” era went beyond the accusations that the Left was un-American, and charged that Obama era liberals were corrupt, ineffective and the antithesis of American values. These charges drew strength from the idea that the Obama administration was dishonest, did not know how to run a country and endangered the survival of the nation. This ideological continuity, increased hostility, and even spread of historically-driven rhetoric defined the “Tea Party” era of Culture Wars conservatism.

### **Tea Parties, Past and Present**

Republican politics of the “Tea Party” era was in a significant moment of transition – a phenomenon perhaps best demonstrated by the 2008 Presidential ticket combination of old-guard conservative John McCain and populist outsider Sarah Palin. McCain’s selection of Palin as his 2008 running-mate raised a host of questions, as one Time Magazine article stated “John McCain needs to persuade swing voters that he’s willing to take on the Republican establishment. He needs to persuade conservatives that he isn’t squishy about social issues.”<sup>6</sup> Palin represented many ideas that McCain did not and foreshadowed the GOP’s future – a party of very socially conservative figures. Philosophically the party looked more like John McCain and upheld its

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<sup>5</sup> In a 2010 interview with the National Journal Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell famously said, “the single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term president.” Thus, by this moment was clear that politics had devolved to a nearly all time in its nastiness. A point Daniel Flynn makes likely began on both sides during the Clinton administration but drastically intensified in the Obama years. Quote from: David M. Herszenhorn, “Hold On to Your Seat: McConnell Wants Obama Out,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), October 26, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Grunwald and Jay Newton-Small, “Why McCain Picked Palin,” *Time*, August 29, 2008, <http://content.time.com/time/politics/article/0,8599,1837510,00.html>.

historically-guided values: neoliberal government, a national religious tradition, and opposition to multiculturalism. Rhetorically the party was much more Palin, a conservative movement defined by hyper-aggressive politicians who openly questioned the Americanness and honesty of the ideological opponents.

The most notable change of this era was the increased hostility of conservative politicians – a product of enhanced media access and more openly aggressive characters. Newt Gingrich, the architect of the 1994 Contract with America, personified this with his return to mainstream national prominence.

This is a book I never expected to write. After the victory of freedom over Communist tyranny, of religious liberty over secular police states, and of American pride over the malaise and cynicism of the 1970s, I fully expected to follow an upward curve of consistent improvement. I did not expect the Left to ignore the lessons of history and move further into ideological extremism. I did not expect them to reach to their meager popular support by seeking to impose a corrupt, Chicago-style political machine on the entire country.<sup>7</sup>

The entire basis of Gingrich's book was a backlash against the "change" brought on by the Obama Administration. Gingrich also highlighted a host of points essential to early 21<sup>st</sup> century conservatism from religious liberties and small government, to the time-honored conservative principle of continuity and slow change. Even more fundamental to Gingrich's point was the idea of a historically corrupt and un-educated Democratic Party – a political movement he said had no respect for history or their fellow Americans. The reference to the 'corrupt Chicago-machine' politics was no doubt a reference to the Chicagoan Obama, and more importantly, reflected the Right's opinion of President Obama's party.<sup>8</sup> Gingrich's statement laid a foundation both the policy views and the brand of politics essential to "Tea Party" era conservatism.

Combative politics worked for Gingrich in the 1990s and again boded well for conservatism from 2007-2010. Sarah Palin recalled Gingrich's work in the 1990s to defend herself from ethics charges and in turn attack Democratic corruption. Palin 'emulated' Gingrich's 'courage' against liberalism and claimed that "one of the left's favorite weapons is

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<sup>7</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Save America*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2010), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Charges of Democratic corruption in Chicago were not new on the Presidential level. Richard Nixon issued similar complaints against JFK in the wake of the 1960 election. For more on the 1960 election as an example of corrupt Chicago see Edmund F. Kallina, *Courthouse Over Whitehouse: Chicago and the Presidential Election of 1960* (Orlando: University of Central Florida, 1988).

frivolous ethics complaints. That's what they used to down the architect of the 1994 'Republican Revolution,' Newt Gingrich." The complaints occurred because of his success as a conservative, which "to the left, that meant one thing: he had to be eliminated."<sup>9</sup> This statement also illustrated the way that conservative politicians of the era viewed themselves as a movement under siege from a corrupt opposition – another example of increased hostility in these years. Palin's choice to connect her 'oppression' to Gingrich's was also questionable given that the complaints against the "Gentleman from Georgia" were generally valid, particularly around issues of sexual impropriety.<sup>10</sup>

These aggressive attacks on liberal "corruption" in Washington were not unique to Palin and Gingrich. Congressman Paul Ryan used the more distant past to attack the Left: "but business in Washington these days isn't being conducted the way our Founders envisioned – and certainly not in a manner that respects the consent of the governed."<sup>11</sup> This statement spoke to the GOP's growing mistrust of the federal government – a feeling that carried more weight for the out of power conservative movement. Ryan, much like his colleagues in the first half of the decade also charged that his political opposition acted in a generally anti-American manner. These statements also claimed that the current Obama Administration was broadly corrupt and untrustworthy.

Ryan also incorporated political movements of the past as evidence of contemporary liberalism's failure and general ineffectual nature. These included the comparison of Obama's Democratic Party to early 20<sup>th</sup> century progressives whose views he claimed were un-American

Liberals didn't just dream up the term 'Progressive.' Progressivism is actually an old political movement in America... Progressivism marked the point at which some politicians and intellectuals began for the first time to question the meaning of the Constitution and the self-evident truths of the American founding.<sup>12</sup>

Ryan pointedly argued that the progressivism of these years, like its earlier cousin in the Wilsonian era, actively refuted the values of the Founders. Such ideas generally stemmed from

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Palin, *Going Rogue*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 363-364.

<sup>10</sup> For more on these Gingrichian issues see: Jake Tapper, "Gingrich Admits to Affair During Clinton Impeachment," *ABC*, Accessed March 29, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Cantor, Kevin McCarthy, and Paul Ryan, *Young Guns: A New Generation of Conservative Leaders*, (New York, Threshold, 2010), 94. Ryan's statement referred specifically to the healthcare debate but this sort of charge was frequent in these years.

<sup>12</sup> Cantor et. al, *Young Guns*, 131.

the more significant concern of progressives rapidly altering society – a similar set of actions to Obama’s proposed plans.<sup>13</sup> Conservative Culture Warriors previously argued against liberal governments, but this idea of liberals as openly opposing the Constitution represented the new heights of conservative frustration.

In the tradition of Long Culture Warriors, these politicians also saw the 1960s as a watershed moment in the country’s declension. Mike Huckabee articulated this view; “the world didn’t change completely in a year, but in 1968 the shift in our society became too apparent to miss... there was a total loss, not just of innocence, but of a sense of community and wholesomeness.”<sup>14</sup> Huckabee was not incorrect to assert that 1968 was a cataclysmic year on a national and international level. Huckabee further noted that since the sixties the nation existed in the “age of the birth control pill, free love, gay sex, the drug culture and reckless disregard for standards.” The result of which was a society that “no longer did we live the standards of God; it became ‘You defined your standard I’ll define mine, and everybody will be happy.’”<sup>15</sup> This statement addressed many issues, some of which were only objectively negative to the party’s base. These condemnations of loosened standards certainly appealed to a base concerned about the lack of social order and morality. The most significant omission from this view was that it failed to deeply grapple with the expansion of rights for vast swaths on the country, particularly minorities who earned many fundamental rights in these years. The nation’s culture certainly opened post-1968, but to say it recklessly destroyed the country was a very narrow view of that year and decade.

Newt Gingrich argued a point similar to Huckabee’s and blamed contemporary social ills on the decade’s anti-religious values. Gingrich posited that the “move toward secularism has harmed American society. Look at the problems affecting today’s teenagers, compared to the same data for 1963, the year the Supreme Court banned school prayer. Drug addiction is up. Teenage pregnancy is up... The display of disrespectful attitudes is up.”<sup>16</sup> There existed a clear connection between the explosion of sixties liberalism and the morally broken society of the

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<sup>13</sup> The Progressive era’s implemented the income tax and direct election of Senator’s amendments – two targets of small government traditionalists within the movement.

<sup>14</sup> Mike Huckabee, *Character Makes a Difference*, (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 145.

<sup>15</sup> Huckabee, *Character Makes a Difference*, 145.

<sup>16</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Save America*, 40.

2000s.<sup>17</sup> Gingrich argued that the sixties only catered to the nation's worst instincts.<sup>18</sup> These were the years when baby boomers unleashed and a rebellious spirit overtook the calm *Leave it to Beaver* America of the fifties – a series of changes that deeply concerned the Right.<sup>19</sup>

The nation's history of neoliberalism made up a core section of the GOP's historical rhetoric – a practice that actively refuted 'Obama's socialism.' Politicians on the right varied their appeals to the past with commonplace references to small government eras and to much more specific and technical ideas of economic history.

Politicians, like House minority whip Kevin McCarthy, critiqued President Obama's fiscal policies with the ideas of 20<sup>th</sup> economic theorists; "the President's team were fervent believers in the economic theories of a British economist called John Maynard Keynes, whose theories were developed in the early-to-mid-twentieth century... the idea is that government can be counted on to spend more wisely than the people... or so the theory goes."<sup>20</sup> McCarthy rejected the administration's plans that supposedly focused more on government intervention than individual liberty. He refuted this idea and argued that "you don't have to look any further than history – both American history and history of countries with more expansive government – to see that government that works is *limited* government."<sup>21</sup> McCarthy utilized a range of historical ideas to postulate that prosperity and success stemmed from small government. He further supported with Winston Churchill's idea that "some see private enterprise as a predatory target to be shot, others as a cow to be milked, but few are those who see it as a sturdy horse pulling the wagon." Count me among Churchill's 'few.'<sup>22</sup> Churchill's point was somewhat abstract but reasonably clear; the best government was one that harnessed the power of free

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<sup>17</sup> Gingrich's remark about teen pregnancy did not match up with reality. When Gingrich wrote in 2009 teen births were at just under 38 out of every 1,000 which was part of a general downward trend of teen births. "Trends in Teen Pregnancy and Childbearing, Teen Births," *Office of Adolescent Health, HHS*, last updated March 28, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> For a brief and informative account of the sixties upheaval and end of innocent see: Kenneth T. Walsh, "The 1960s: Polarization, Cynicism, and the Youth Rebellion," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 12, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> The fifties were filled with upheaval as well and there were early social movements and backlash that people tend to forget. For example, when Little Rock High School was desegregated President Eisenhower had to send in the National Guard to allow African American students into the school.

<sup>20</sup> Eric Cantor, Kevin McCarthy, and Paul Ryan, *Young Guns: A New Generation of Conservative Leaders*, (New York, Threshold, 2010), 46-47.

<sup>21</sup> McCarthy, *Young Guns*, 42-43.

<sup>22</sup> McCarthy, *Young Guns*, 43.

enterprise, not one that reigned it in. Given that much of the Right saw Obama's presidency as nearly socialistic, such statements deftly illustrated their views.

McCarthy provided an unorthodox defense of neoliberalism that differed from most of the Right's praise of Reagan and the Founding. 2008 Republican Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin praised Reagan's candor with the American people and his cost-cutting economic programs. She stated that it was "difficult to explain how we're going to pay for it all [social programs] and to explain why social programs that were supposed to help the poor have ended up hurting them, became unsustainable financial liabilities for all of us. Ronald Reagan was the last president to really explain this to us."<sup>23</sup> Palin posited that it took a real leader like Reagan to clearly explain why the 'everyone gets free stuff' policies of the Left were so negative. Reagan provided a model of economics and attitude well worth emulating. These values supported Palin's ideas of the need for small government and minimal social programs. Traditional small government Reaganomics remained in vogue even as populist conservatism increased its power in these years.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich echoed Palin on the topic of Reagan and praised his policies.

Tax cuts to restore incentives for economic growth... spending reductions, including a \$31 billion cut in 1981... anti-inflation monetary policy emphasizing the value of the dollar and restraining money supply growth... deregulation, cutting red tape, and reducing bureaucracy saved consumers an estimated \$100 billion per year in lower prices."<sup>24</sup>

Gingrich also claimed that under Reagan "the rich got richer, and the poor got richer too."<sup>25</sup> This discussion about Reagan supported the idea that small government conservative policies helped all people, not just the wealthy. These claims of success for everyone, while politically astute, did not account for some of the growth of income inequality throughout the Reagan years – a result that countered Gingrich's claim that everyone got richer in these years.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sarah Palin, *Going Rogue*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 386.

<sup>24</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Save America*, 158-159.

<sup>25</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 164.

<sup>26</sup> The CBPP points to a very different story. One where starting in the eighties the wealthy got rapidly wealthier and the bottom 80% improved at the same rate as before. The results of which was that the top 1% grew 273% from 1979 to 2007, and everyone else's wealth grew only 48-72 %. Gingrich was technically correct but not to the level that he claimed since only the wealthy experienced substantial gains in wealth. Chade Stone, Danilo Trisi, Arloc

The Reagan years were joined with the Right's claims' that the nation's founding principles supported their small-government vision of America and not Obama's big government policies. Paul Ryan argued against Obama's ideas of "change."

We have a tremendous opportunity to present a different vision of change, one guided not by the soft despotism of European-style social welfarism, but by the timeless truth on which our nation was founded. We have a deep attachment and enduring faith to the Constitution and the principles of freedom that were given to us by our Founders... The miracle of America is that, through our openness and entrepreneurialism, our nation is always new; we remake ourselves every day.<sup>27</sup>

Ryan endorsed the idea that America's greatness lay in its original founding values of small government and innovation, not contemporary platitudes of 'change.' This claim also critiqued Obama era government as un-American – a charge that contrasted Ryan and the Right's supposed close adherence to the nation's earliest years. Ryan claimed that instead of exuding American values, Obama's policies more closely resembled a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century socialist state without true American freedoms.<sup>28</sup>

Newt Gingrich more explicitly equated small government conservatism with the positive parts of the nation's past; "Americans historically came to this continent to escape from intrusive, expensive, overbearing European governments. They created an American model (stated quite explicitly by Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson) comprising small government, low taxes, and enormous incentives for hard work."<sup>29</sup> Gingrich and Ryan fiercely argued that when one looked at the nation's history, they would see a history of limited government. Newt Gingrich argued that for "two hundred years that model has made America the envy of the world in income, productivity, innovation, and the overall standard of living."<sup>30</sup> The difference in values could not be more apparent – small government conservatism supported America's oldest

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Sherman and Roderick Taylor, "A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, updated December 11, 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Ryan, *Young Guns*, 133-134.

<sup>28</sup> Such a statement avoided openly discussing Medicare and Medicaid, which begs the question of if Ryan did not want to touch the 3<sup>rd</sup> rail of entitlement cuts despite his normal affinity for these sorts of policies and rhetoric.

<sup>29</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 21.

and most cherished values, and Obama's big-government liberalism was an insult to these ideas.<sup>31</sup>

Opposition to the 'big government' of Obama existed in tandem with the Right's objection to a supposed downturn in national moral and religious values. These historical references almost exclusively took the form of attacks on the secular Left or defended abstract values – rarely did these claims defend concrete policy proposals. The problem of the nation's spiritual decline was not a natural change but the result of secular liberalism. Sarah Palin broadly defended these ideas and claimed that "at its most basic level, conservatism is a respect for history and tradition, including traditional moral principles."<sup>32</sup> Palin proposed a simple of view of the nation's traditions that aligned conservatism with traditional conceptions of morality. Paul Ryan also highlighted these morals as a fundamental part of the nation's history and values.

I believe in the fundamental decency and wisdom of the American people and their ability to govern themselves under a Constitution, now well over two hundred years old, that limits political power... that secures our natural God-given rights to live, be free, and fulfill all of our human potential."<sup>33</sup>

This statement harkened to a long tradition of American faith and values that simultaneously linked religion to small hands-off government. Culture Warriors of the second half of the 2000s highlighted a combination of social and economic freedoms – a tried and true neoliberal argument. Ryan underscored the necessity of early American values in a moment when there appeared to be in danger from government secularists.

Newt Gingrich continued the conversation about America's religious tradition with his connection of the nation's roots in Christianity to ones in the present; "the forerunner of the Declaration was signed over a century a half earlier in 1920. The forty-one families who signed the Mayflower Compact knew their very survival would depend on their ability to rely upon each other and God."<sup>34</sup> For Gingrich, the nation's Christian roots were older than just the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This interpretation was one-sided and ignored the power of government funded projects. There were strong examples of American innovation that resulted from public-private partnerships (i.e., much of the space and military industries. Therefore, not all American success stories were the result of small government and the private sector.

<sup>32</sup> Palin, *Going Rogue*, 385.

<sup>33</sup> Cantor et. al, *Young Guns*, 127

<sup>34</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 265.

Amendment. He further claimed that liberals were un-American in their opposition to this basic principle.

America, however, was founded on Judeo-Christian principles with a *limited* national government that upheld the individual's rights of conscience. Therefore, it is necessary for the secular Left to keep citizens ignorant about their history, their heritage, the Judeo-Christian roots of American culture, and even their Creator if they are to impose their secular-socialist agenda on this nation.<sup>35</sup>

Gingrich used his point about Christian values to claim that the Left disrespected American history because it did not fit their pre-established secular narrative.<sup>36</sup> He also claimed that it was in liberals' best interests to keep the people in the proverbial dark about their roots. This rhetorical tactic promoted the newer practice of accusing liberals of corruption and a lack of understanding about the world. Gingrich's historical ideas predominately portrayed only the Judeo-Christian beliefs, and not the Enlightenment roots of the country as essential to the country's roots.

One of the major problems of the Culture Wars was the Left's supposed removal of Christian values from society. Mike Huckabee argued that liberals hated America's values and brought "doubt to what used to be confidence, denial to what used to be faith, death to what was life. I think that is what has happened."<sup>37</sup> Huckabee further claimed that liberals instigated a crisis of confidence previously unseen in America even in its darkest historical moments. "During the Depression, people were poor, hungry, and out of work. Yet they didn't engage in the kind of gang violence we have in schools... Dishonesty was still considered wrong and thieves were despised."<sup>38</sup> The nation could repeat this good behavior it remained true to its first Christian principles. Newt Gingrich reiterated Huckabee's principles and opposition to liberal values because liberals claim that it is "okay to be religious as long as the religion has no meaning. It's fine to be vaguely spiritual as long as you don't try to translate it into some kind of historic religion, especially Christianity."<sup>39</sup> The Left not only minimized Christianity's influence throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also demonized those who chose to practice that faith. Gingrich

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<sup>35</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 268.

<sup>36</sup> There are some challenges to the story of a pious and devout founding era. Steven Green argued that this idea of a Christian America was little more than a popularly created myth based only in a loose interpretation of facts from the Founding era. Steven K Green, *Inventing A Christian America* (New York, Oxford University, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Huckabee, *Character Makes a Difference*, 109

<sup>38</sup> Huckabee, *Character Makes a Difference*, 109

<sup>39</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 29.

enhanced his point with the classic political move of anointing positivity only to an older iteration of his opposition, “the Left originally appealed for tolerance for minority views. Now they demand obedience for these minority views.”<sup>40</sup> Gingrich’s argument ultimately returned to the established victimization trope to attack the Left’s position towards religion while he simultaneously accused them of nefarious intentions.<sup>41</sup>

The rapidly changing society of the “Tea Party” era opened the gates for conservative opposition to multiculturalism. Moments of historical greatness rebuffed the larger national ‘declension’ brought upon by the actions of the Obama Administration. John McCain articulated these views and connected modern conservatism, Ronald Reagan and true American values. McCain said that to Reagan it was “beyond dispute that liberty, equal justice, and free markets – the American creed indispensable to successful societies.”<sup>42</sup> McCain emphasized that Reagan’s values were at the core of America and guided the country through difficult times like the Cold War. These values provided core ideas about America as a baseline for what many on the Right argued liberalism and multiculturalism removed from the country – a sense of reverence for the nation’s past and present glories. This sort of grand rhetoric again aligned conservatism with the grand American tradition as it did throughout the Culture War.

Eric Cantor highlighted the way many on the Right saw the Left’s moves towards multiculturalism and intersectionality. Cantor altered what a diverse and unified America looked like: “Not the corrupted notion of diversity that is fashionable today, which says that we are all in racial or ethnic straightjackets from which we can’t escape. I mean the American notion of diversity expressed by those words ‘E Pluribus Unum’ – Out of many, one”<sup>43</sup> Cantor incorporated the old phrase to claim multiculturalism’s incompatibility with America. This idea also stated that the Left’s emphasis on individual group identity could not coincide with traditional ones of a united country.

Newt Gingrich hyperbolically summed up conservative politicians’ conception of multiculturalism’s danger; “for the first time since the Civil War, we as Americans have to ask

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<sup>40</sup> Gingrich, *To Save America*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> The other problem with Gingrich’s argument was that to promote that religious of a society potentially conflicted with the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment’s Establishment Clause.

<sup>42</sup> John McCain and Mark Salter, *Hard Call: The Art of Great Decisions*, (New York: Hatchett Books, 2007), 122.

<sup>43</sup> Cantor, et al. *Young Guns*, 36.

the most fundamental question possible: Who are we?... Most of us know who we are. We know that America is an exceptional country with a unique genius for combining freedom and order strength and compassion, religious faith and religious tolerance.”<sup>44</sup> Gingrich highlighted that American Exceptionalism stemmed from a series of strong and traditional values. This idea of American values allowed him to cast the Left as ideologically outside the national and historical mainstream. He also proposed that Culture Wars America was as divided as when it went to war with itself – a bold assertion about his views on the nature of his political opponents. Gingrich insinuated that liberals were as much of a threat as a group that actually seceded from the Union. Gingrich highlighted values consistent with those of earlier Culture Warriors but did so in a much more aggressive and apocalyptic manner than others. He supported this view with concerns about a changing nation; the “America in which we grew up is vastly different from the America the secular-socialist Left want to create. And that’s why saving America is the fundamental challenge of our time. The secular-socialist machine represents as great a threat to America as Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union once did.”<sup>45</sup> Gingrich returned to the trope of multiculturalism and Leftists as un-American and dangerous. Earlier Culture Wars conservative rhetoric also pushed the Left outside the mainstream, but the second iteration of Gingrich claimed that multiculturalism would tear the country apart.

Politicians of the second half of the 2000s argued for their historically-based policy with new-found vigor. These policies generally remained ideologically similar to those in previous years but postulated that the rapidly changing society endangered the country’s survival. These GOP members, like their forefathers, received strong support from a small cadre of intellectuals and a hyper-aggressive media.

### **Hostile Historians**

Conservative historians of the “Tea Party” era generally emulated the challenging rhetoric of their compatriots in the first half of the decade and did so with even greater vigor. These historians also continued the trend of discrediting the liberal academy while promoting traditional conservative tropes about the past.

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<sup>44</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Save America*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Newt Gingrich, *To Save America*, 4.

Larry Schweikart's *48 Liberal Lies About American History (That You Probably Learned in School)* highlighted the opposition to the liberal academy<sup>46</sup> Schweikart repeatedly attacked liberalism as out of step with the nation's values in the past and present arguing that "if those who read history are grounded in truth, bias will reveal itself in no time. And once that happens, the market for politically correct, agenda-driven textbooks will dry up and blow away like the marijuana leaves at Woodstock."<sup>47</sup> This statement reflected the argument of politicians who also charged liberals with fundamentally incorrect worldviews. Daniel Flynn expanded on this idea of delusional leftism and said that "rather than a laundry list of complaints and wishes, an attitude better captures the Left. It is, in its simplest form, scorn for what is and hopes for what could be. The ideology's appeal exists in neither the experienced past nor the concrete present, but in the imagined future."<sup>48</sup> Flynn and Schweikart postulated that leftism was at its best confused and at worst downright dangerous and disingenuous. These ideas upheld the "Tea Party" era spirit of liberal values as un-American, corrupt and ineffective.

President Obama's actions and policies provided a convenient boogeyman even for ivory tower conservatives. Robert Murphey exemplified this view in his 2009 book *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Great Depression and the New Deal* when he argued that the "'history' on which the federal government's power grabs are based is simply a myth... it was big government – in alliance with some members of big business – that fueled the 1920s stock market boom and made the 1929 crash inevitable."<sup>49</sup> Murphy clearly explained the right's animosity towards big government and its danger for contemporary society. "What happened in the 1930s is repeating itself in our times, with a growing chorus calling for a 'new New Deal.' Only if enough citizens learn the truth in time will America avoid an even greater Depression."<sup>50</sup> Murphey articulated that an expansive federal government would again cause Great Depression levels of national catastrophe.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Larry Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies About American History (That You Probably Learned in School)* (New York, Sentinel, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies About America*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Dan Flynn, *A Conservative History of the American Left*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Murphey, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Great Depression and the New Deal* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2009), 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Murphey, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Great Depression and the New Deal*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting that 'big government' programs like the TARP Bailout began under Bush, not Obama. "TARP Programs," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, November 15, 2016.

The more openly provocative historians from 2007-2010 also continued the criticism of the sixties as a cataclysmic decade. These historians critiqued the decade for its economic and social liberalism – a tactic similar to that of their compatriots throughout the Culture Wars. Dan Flynn gave a much darker view of sixties leftism than others had.

Such is the historiography of the sixty's leftists. A Communist kills the president. They blame the CIA instead. Liberals launch a war in Southeast Asia. The Left later imagines it the work conservatives. Black Muslims assassinate Malcolm X. They charge a white racist conspiracy. Democrats stand athwart civil rights legislation. They record Republicans as the chief obstacle. Politicized people dismissed what made sense logically to believe what made sense politically.<sup>52</sup>

Flynn made several claims about the Left and the 1960s negative impact on Americas. There were numerous problems with Flynn's claims, but the general problem was that he blamed the Left for all of the decade's troubles even though both sides influenced these issues.<sup>53</sup> Larry Schweikart provided an additional overarching message with his critique on public welfare, and its effects on social and economic health "AFDC [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] said to any woman who received it, 'You don't need a man in the house. You can do better on your own'... the pressures put on women by AFDC to 'kick the bum out' proved irresistible."<sup>54</sup> Schweikart argued that these policies resulted in more illegitimate children, crime, and economic problems.<sup>55</sup> Other factors contributed to these familial problems such as deindustrialization and the War on Drugs – issues that Schweikart emphasized less than government welfare programs. The sixties, primarily catalyzed by LBJ's Great Society sent the country into a tailspin, at least in the conceptions of historians like Schweikart.

The economic and social problems created by the sixties provided a moment of negative comparison for most other historically themed ideas. The most straightforward comparison was the juxtaposition of the sixties with the glories of Reagan in the eighties – a move that set the tone for economic history's role in these academic works. Robert Murphey demonstrated this

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel J. Flynn, *A Conservative History of the American Left*, 316.

<sup>53</sup> The War in Vietnam started with Eisenhower sending 'advisers' and support for soon to be dictator Ngo Dinh Diem. Edward Cuddy, "Vietnam: Mr. Johnson's War – or Mr. Eisenhower's?" *The Review of Politics*, October 1, 2003. Thus, the war was something much more to blame on bipartisan errors. There are also a good deal of reports about COINTELPRO and its surveillance and opposition to leaders of Civil Rights groups. Flynn's claims about Malcolm X are also questionable.

<sup>54</sup> Larry Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 223.

<sup>55</sup> This also grossly misrepresented this program which provided aid for children whose fathers were "dead, are incapacitated, or have deserted their families." "Social Security in America," *Social Security Reports and Studies*, Accessed, March 31, 2019.

comparison and claimed that the “government social programs such as the War on Poverty were considered a way to reduce urban riots. Such programs increased sharply during the 1960s. So did urban riots. Later, during the Reagan administration, which was denounced for not promoting social program, there were fewer urban riots.”<sup>56</sup> Murphey contrasted two very different eras to prove the effectiveness of conservative policies around issues of small government and minimal social programs. However, correlation does not equal causation, and more broadly this critique was generally incorrect. Urban riots were not caused by the Great Society, but by the horrendous conditions people faced in many cities. People rioted because of racial oppression, lack of job opportunities and police brutality. While Murphey sought to blame rioting on the Great Society these programs aimed to fix the root causes of the rioting.<sup>57</sup>

The conservative academy’s critiques of big government also stood alongside the promotion of the American Christian tradition and Right’s opposition to multiculturalism. These social positions frequently appeared in tandem around positions of pure American culture and ones centered around Christianity. Larry Schweikart connected these ideas in a discussion of the 13 Colonies and stated that “*whatever* the documents intended by ‘religious freedom,’ they never in any way shape or form intended the state to interfere with Christian religious expression.”<sup>58</sup> Schweikart added to this idea with a more overt assertion about the country’s original heritage; “the simple fact is that the new United States was so overwhelmingly Christian in its outlook that there was never any considerations to non-Christian groups such as Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists in the deliberations about the law of constitutions.”<sup>59</sup> Schweikart clearly articulated that the country’s bedrock principles were Christian.

These historians heavily emphasized the way the nation’s traditions, particularly its religious ones were vital for the country’s strength. The merger of the country’s most significant moments with conservative values was socially-politically astute and in-line with the values of Patriotic Orthodoxy. In the *Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization* Anthony Esolen further promoted the necessity of western reason and beliefs. “If Europe continues to pursue the path of secular liberalism, and America follows a few steps behind, it will find the road leads not

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Murphey. *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Capitalism*, 124.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the actual problems in the city see Tom Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996).

<sup>58</sup> Larry Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 72.

<sup>59</sup> Larry Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies*, 72.

to an unprecedented age of reason, but to one or another all-familiar age: another age of Lenin and Stalin, or another age of Mohammed.”<sup>60</sup> Esolen’s work nicely recapped “Tea Party” era conservative powerbrokers’ views on western civilization and Christianity – an opinion that upheld them as a cultural necessity to avoid a dark and dangerous future. These historians provided a clear conservative rationale for a country that tightly adhered to traditional Christian and western values. The Right felt the increasing marginalization of their views and the past demonstrated the importance of a western tradition. The past and the glories of America’s conservative Christian tradition provided a strong united version of America. This belief was particularly necessary during the ongoing war on terror and the fact that many on the Right saw Obama as leading a “worldwide apology tour.”<sup>61</sup>

Conservative academics, like their peers in politics and media, reached the apex of their open challenge to liberalism in the “Tea Party” era. Much of their rhetoric actively sought to discredit liberal interpretations of the past as incorrect and dangerous for the future of the nation. The ideas of these figures provided the sort of intellectual certainty about history that their compatriots in other fields needed in these uncertain times.

## **No Fox Given**

The power of conservative media increased in the “Tea Party” era, and standard bearer and conservative television sensation Fox News remained at the helm of the movement. Reuters discussed the power of the network and stated that “2008 was Fox News’ highest-rated year in total day and primetime. It averaged 2 million viewers in primetime, compared with 1.3 million for CNN and 918,000 for MSNBC.”<sup>62</sup> Even more important than pure numbers was Fox’s enormous sway over its audience. Researchers at Stanford University found that in terms of Presidential elections, Fox “predicted effect increases in 2004 and 2008 to 3.59 and 6.34 percentage points, respectively. This increase is driven by increasing viewership on Fox News as

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<sup>60</sup> Anthony Esolen, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Western Civilization* (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2008), 309.

<sup>61</sup> For a brief rundown on Obama’s foreign policy see Kedar Paugi, “Barack Obama’s Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy*, November 17, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> Paul J. Gough, “Cable Makes Big Headlines in 2008,” *Reuters* (London, United Kingdom), Dec. 30, 2008.

well as increasingly conservative slant.”<sup>63</sup> The network’s influence went beyond shaping hearts and minds, and into the voting booth itself.

These two studies illustrated conservative television’s substantial growth throughout the “Tea Party” era. Conservative media’s power in this era reflected an inverse relationship with the GOP’s electoral success – as Republicans lost seats in Washington, conservatives in the press upped their rhetorical tone.

Former Republican Speaker of the House John Boehner spoke candidly about “Tea Party” era media’s detrimental influence in a 2017 *Politico* interview. Boehner somewhat defended former President Obama from conservative critiques that he [Obama] divided the nation and instead turned such criticisms on the conservative media.

I always liked Rush [Limbaugh]. When I went to Palm Beach I would always meet with Rush and we’d go play golf. But you know, who was that right-wing guy, [Mark] Levin? He went really crazy right and got a big audience, and he dragged [Sean] Hannity to the dark side. He dragged Rush to the dark side. And these guys—I used to talk to them all the time. And suddenly they’re beating the living shit out of me.<sup>64</sup>

The divisive oratory of people like Mark Levin was a hallmark of “Tea Party” era rhetoric, and provocative voices heightened an already polarized political world.<sup>65</sup> Levin frequently articulated the difference between conservatives and liberals to simultaneously defend the Right and attack the Left; “for the conservative, the civil society has as its highest purpose its preservation and improvement. The Modern Liberal believes in the supremacy of the state, thereby rejecting the principles of the Declaration.”<sup>66</sup> Levin portrayed conservatives as the rightful heirs of America, and liberals as antithetical to the nation’s values. This brand of rhetoric promoted a clear message of which political movement was inherently virtuous – a practice that demonstrated the way rhetoric grew nastier in the “Tea Party” era.

Glenn Beck, one of the core Tea Party media activists, illuminated much of the conservative worldview and anger of these years; “as John Adams once said, revolutions take

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<sup>63</sup> Gregory J. Martin and Ali Yurukoglu, “Bias in Cable News: Persuasion and Polarization.” Stanford University Study, April 5, 2017.

<sup>64</sup> John Boehner in Tim Alberta, “John Boehner Unchained,” *Politico*, November/December, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/29/john-boehner-trump-house-republican-party-retirement-profile-feature-215741>.

<sup>65</sup> This also demonstrated the way that some on the father edges of the Right, particular in the media, turned on one another and referred to anyone who was remotely centrist as a ‘RINO’ (Republican in Name Only).

<sup>66</sup> Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 4.

place in the hearts and minds of the people. To win that battle we have to usher in a revolution of thought... to one about individual rights, equality of opportunity, and God's role in our success."<sup>67</sup> Beck's statement echoed earlier Culture Wars conservatives' values of small government and America's religious tradition with a unique emphasis on the 'revolutionary' aspect of the Tea Party era. Bill O'Reilly made similarly pointed remarks about the way he saw the nation's commander in chief. "President Barack Obama is perhaps the most polarizing chief executive since Abraham Lincoln. Yes, opinions about Bill Clinton and Bush the Younger divided the country, but not in the way views about Mr. Obama have."<sup>68</sup> O'Reilly seemed to recognize that everyone played a role in social polarization but conceived of Obama as a figure as polarizing as an actual Civil War-era president.<sup>69</sup> These men both articulated a worldview where Obama and the Left stood well outside the national and acceptable mainstream.

*National Review* editor Jonah Goldberg also contributed to this style of conservatism; "now, I am not saying that all liberals are fascists... what I am mainly trying to do is to dismantle the granite-like assumption in our political culture that American conservatism is an offshoot or cousin of fascism."<sup>70</sup> Goldberg turned the charge of conservatives as fascists back on liberals. This move accomplished the dual purpose of defending the Right from the Left and portraying liberalism as an inherently un-American set of beliefs. The aggressive oratory of "Tea Party" era media figures demonstrated the way liberals became not only un-American but incapable, corrupt and dangerous to the nations.

These media figures continued the Long Culture Wars trend and broadcast the 1960s as a moment of terrible national declension. Jonah Goldberg noted the long-lasting, and negative influence of these years; "unlike many liberal Democrats who were products of that time, [Howard] Dean is admirably willing to admit that he was decisively shaped by the decade." Goldberg commended such actions on the part of Dean and in-turn criticized the "Clintons and John Kerry, who were vastly more influenced by radical politics, insist on pretending that the

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<sup>67</sup> Glenn Beck, *Broke: The Plan to Restore Our Trust, Truth and Treasure*, (New York: Mercury Radio Arts, 2010), ix.

<sup>68</sup> Bill O'Reilly, *Pinheads and Patriots*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 3.

<sup>69</sup> O'Reilly's statement also spoke to the growing trend of presidential delegitimization by the losing side that started with Bill Clinton's presidency.

<sup>70</sup> Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 8-9.

1960s was little more than movie playing in the background.”<sup>71</sup> The sixties again provided conservative media figures with a significant moment in American history to cudgel liberal politicians and their policies.

The Right’s pursuit of small government, low taxes, and general fiscal responsibility grew exponentially in the Obama years because of his perceived socialism.<sup>72</sup> This urgent need for small government and fiscal responsibility came courtesy of the Great Recession and accompanying Bush and Obama bailouts. President Obama signed a 787 billion dollar spending bill in 2009 that promised to “save millions of jobs and bring the country back from the brink of economic catastrophe.”<sup>73</sup> The passage of this bill drew the ire of many on the Right for its high cost and low job creation, and “many Republicans said it was short on cutting taxes and the spending measures.”<sup>74</sup> This bailout and other ‘big government expenditures’ led fiscal hawks on the Right to look to the past to argue against the present day federal largesse.<sup>75</sup>

The defense of a small government came from two distinct eras – a love of the Founding era and the opposition to government expansions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aversion to contemporary big government drew a frequent comparison to significant centralized growth under FDR and LBJ. Mark Levin noted that the big government of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was “tyranny’s disguise. These are not rights. They are the Statist’s false promises of utopianism, which the Statist uses to justify all trespasses on the individual’s private property.”<sup>76</sup> This argument held particular salience in 2009 when President Obama ‘expanded government’ with bailouts and a new national healthcare plan. The opposition to these sorts of expansionist policies also combined with ones that liberals were historically dishonest. Mark Levin claimed that “Johnson, like Roosevelt, understood the import of deceiving the American people by packaging Medicare’s potential costs in the lies of Insurance.”<sup>77</sup> The accusation of dishonesty within these

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<sup>71</sup> Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> For more on the makings of the economic side of conservatism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009). To understand the power of neoliberalism in the creation of this within Republican politics see Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> “Obama Signs \$787 Billion Stimulus Package,” *Fox News*, Feb 17, 2009, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/02/17/obama-signs-billion-stimulus-package.html>.

<sup>74</sup> “Obama Signs \$787 Billion Stimulus Package,” *Fox News*, Feb 17, 2009.

<sup>75</sup> The other obvious expansion of big government was Obamacare.

<sup>76</sup> Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 42.

<sup>77</sup> Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 103.

historical contexts drew comparisons to the ‘ills’ of contemporary liberalism.<sup>78</sup> These charges of previous liberal administrations as deceitful undermined the credibility and trustworthiness of present-day ones. Levin’s point made sense from a political and marketing standpoint, but it was difficult to see pure unadulterated historical truth in the criticisms of these men. Johnson and Roosevelt, like all politicians, exaggerated the truth, but to say that government healthcare programs were a cover for tyranny is undoubtedly a partisan exaggeration of the facts. This attack also reflected the growing conservative view of liberals as anti-American and generally disingenuous.

Glenn Beck echoed these ideas and criticized the extravagance of Obama’s Keynesianism economics, stating that “frugality ignites freedom. America *must* rediscover that. Following this path means rejecting Keynes... it does mean that we have to understand how those who founded our country viewed economics.”<sup>79</sup> This statement reflected traditional conservative critiques of Keynes and claimed that true American values opposed the ‘tax and spend’ British economist. Beck conceived of the early republic as a place of small government policies and values; “James Madison, the author of the Constitution, also understood the serious long-term problems debt could pose for the new nation... If Madison could see us now.”<sup>80</sup> He further channeled Jefferson’s ideas that Americans would not want to pay taxes to cover the nation’s debts.<sup>81</sup> Beck spoke of a version of American government dominated by limited size and minimal debt – one entirely different from those of contemporary America.<sup>82</sup>

Talk radio host Laura Ingram contributed to these views with her promotion of a small federal government – a vision that she claimed terrified the Left. Ingraham argued that “liberals are generally indifferent to arguments that involve the Founders... Why should we some dead white guy tell us how to organize our government.”<sup>83</sup> Ingram’s remark promoted conservative small government and simultaneously demonstrated the Right’s attacks on liberalism and

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<sup>78</sup> For a brief history on Medicare and its costs over time see “Medicare: 50 years and Counting,” *Kaiser Family Foundation*, March 24, 2015.

<sup>79</sup> Beck, *Broke*, 21.

<sup>80</sup> Beck, *Broke*, 25.

<sup>81</sup> Beck, *Broke*, 25.

<sup>82</sup> Jefferson’s vision of government and bank size were a part of his debates with Alexander Hamilton. Beck spoke in favor of this plan, but Hamilton’s version was an equally important potential vision of the country. For more on this and the history of government size see “Views of Finance in U.S. History,” *Congressional Research Service: Reports*, November 14, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Laura Ingram, *Power to The People*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery, 2008), 138-139.

multiculturalism. This statement also showed the way that even when it came to something as standard as the Constitution, conservatives were on the attack against liberalism.

The government expansion of the day also supposedly led to more government control and less individual freedom. In the wake of Obama's 'big government takeover,' Mark Levin criticized FDR for his views that closely aligned with those of Obama. Levin stated that during the "Great Depression, the Statists successfully launched a counterrevolution that radically and fundamentally altered the nature of American society"<sup>84</sup> Big government of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provided a guide to the dangers and un-American nature of liberalism that Jonah Goldberg critiqued as "the economic ideas of Bill and Hillary Clinton... are similar to the 'Third Way' ideologies that spawned fascist economics in the 1920s and 1930s."<sup>85</sup> Goldberg also continued his hyperbolic claim against leftism and referred to it as the "cargo cult of the New Deal" that was "enough to place modern liberalism in the family tree of fascism."<sup>86</sup> The crux of these arguments centered around the idea that a bigger government resulted in a less free America. These anti-New Deal assaults also provided many in the conservative media with anti-Obama government fodder in a moment of extensive victimization from an out of power movement.<sup>87</sup>

Media figures on the Right also frequently upheld their values as those of the founders, while claiming the Left's were totalitarian based. This form of historical interpretation reflected the Right's consistent connection of conservatism with American exceptionalism.<sup>88</sup> Conservative concerns about a liberal takeover of the economy also expanded to similar ones around religious oppression. Some on the Right's fringe elevated their critiques with conspiratorial theories that President Obama was a secret Kenyan Muslim, but most did not go this far.<sup>89</sup> These conspiracies

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<sup>84</sup> Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, 18.

<sup>86</sup> Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, 18.

<sup>87</sup> This is a curious case to make against the New Deal given that it was frequently compared to socialism – a major enemy of Nazism. This case generally revolved around the idea that Nazism, socialism and the New Deal all expanded the government. However, this is still a very flimsy case that lacks very little historical accuracy, especially since FDR never became dictatorial and the country rejected fascist ideas from figures like Father Coughlin and Huey Long.

<sup>88</sup> Michael S. Sherry, "Patriotic Orthodoxy and American Decline," in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, ed. Edward Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, 114.

<sup>89</sup> Joel B. Pollack, "The Vetting – Exclusive – Obama's Literary Agent in 1991 Booklet: 'Born in Kenya and raised in Indonesia and Hawaii'," *Breitbart News*, <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government>. These claims provided an insight into a movement that contained hyper-aggressive fringes so terrified of chance that they went to great lengths to slander their opponents.

illustrated many conservative's fears of a society slipping away from them. The escalation of rhetoric about America's Christian roots was imperative to this era of the Culture Wars.

While Obama provided one foil, the Right's concerns over moral decline superseded one man's actions and existence. This fear largely sprang from conservative concerns around liberalism's 'assaults' on the church's traditional power in society.<sup>90</sup> In 2007, Jonah Goldberg charged that Hillary Clinton wanted to substitute the church with a cult of progressivism.<sup>91</sup> Goldberg argued that like many of her progressive forefathers Clinton replaced the Church with a "politics of meaning," and her values were a "fundamentally religious vision hiding in the Trojan horse of social justice that seeks to imbue social policy with spiritual imperatives."<sup>92</sup> Clinton, he said, acted on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century morals of the "God-state Progressivism of John Dewey, Richard Ely, Herbert Croly, and Woodrow Wilson and other left-wing Hegelians."<sup>93</sup> Progressives and their church of the state were a consistent conservative foil throughout the Culture Wars – as the Right opposed the Left's combination of 'big government and anti-religiosity.'

Goldberg's fears combined with broader concerns of big government taking over the free exercise of religion. Glenn Beck addressed the necessity for small government and traditional Judeo-Christian values. He noted that in the Constitution only "five words were capitalized: Creator, Rights, Life, Liberty, and Happiness...our rights come from our creator, and those rights."<sup>94</sup> This statement emphasized that the nation's tradition was not in government, but in its ever-present Christian roots. He also claimed that the government did more to endanger than protect the rights of religious Americans. He further added that "our Founders own experiences with England made them understand an important truth... the greatest violator of individual rights in the history of the world is the government."<sup>95</sup> These words upheld conservative values as those of real Americans who respected the Church and the time-tested idea of small

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<sup>90</sup> This included the continued legalization of gay marriage in states across the nation in the wake of the 2003 Massachusetts decision. For a timeline of this see "A Timeline of Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S.," Georgetown Law Library, January 24, 2019.

<sup>91</sup> It should not be forgotten that when Goldberg released this book in 2007 Hillary Clinton was the presumed frontrunner for the 2008 Democratic Presidential nomination.

<sup>92</sup> Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, 330.

<sup>93</sup> Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism*, 330.

<sup>94</sup> Beck, *Broke*, 220.

<sup>95</sup> Beck, *Broke*, 220.

government.<sup>96</sup> Like his predecessors in other parts of the conservative movement, Beck claimed that small government and religious freedom clearly coordinated throughout America's past. These interpretations also expanded to the Right's concerns about Court decisions and Christianity.

Mark Levin expressed a great deal of frustration with Supreme Court decisions he thought infringed upon individual liberties. Levin argued that the Supreme Court overstepped in religious cases from the 1947 *Everson v. Board* case, through more recent ones about 10 Commandments in courthouses.<sup>97</sup> Levin employed this history to warn social conservatives of their consistent persecution by the courts; "yet even these *passive* expressions of religious liberty, which represent a community's dominant religion or religious denomination, must, according to the Secularist and the Court, be abandoned."<sup>98</sup> Levin posited that much of the nation was fundamentally Christian and the liberal government should cease its opposition to these values. The broader nature of the past juxtaposed the proper Christian values of early America with their devolution throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Society continued to change as it had in the first half of the decade and the presence of 'big government-secularist' Obama in the White House caused even greater concern for the Right.

Like their counterparts in other realms, conservative media saw multiculturalism in the past and present as antithetical to America's values. There was some change to this concept as much of it centered around the idea of who was an American.<sup>99</sup> Notions of western traditionalism clearly established the Right's views of American identity.

The societal changes of the Barack Obama presidency escalated anti-multicultural rhetoric. Bill O'Reilly noted these changes; "in this age of Obama, all that you take for granted is

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<sup>96</sup> This emphasis on government taking away rights likely referred to cases such as *Engle v. Vitale* in 1962 which banned mandatory school prayer. The case *Lemon v. Krutzman* also said that public funding could not go towards non-public, non-secular schools. The notable thing here is that such strong arguments in favor of religious exercise in schools and other public places would in turn violate the rights of those who practiced other religion.

<sup>97</sup> Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 31-33. The *Everson* decision created a "high wall of separation" between the Church and State while his comments about the 10 commandments on the court house steps likely refer to Alabama Supreme Court justice Roy Moore's removal from office over not removing the 10 Commandments from the State Court House after federal courts ordered him to do so.

<sup>98</sup> Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Throughout this section it is once again important to keep in mind that multiculturalists emphasize the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups. Conversely, western traditionalists focus on the greatness of western civilization.

changing, yet many American's have no clue."<sup>100</sup> The America that many traditional conservatives, like O'Reilly, once knew, rapidly 'changed,' and not for the better. Ideas of a traditional and familiar American past became more important than ever particularly when President Obama stood in for multiculturalism. Provocative conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza most overtly made this case in his book *The Roots of Obama's Rage*. He stated that he was "not suggesting that Obama is anti-American. On the contrary, he seeks a radical change in America's policies because he considers those policies bad for America and bad for the world."<sup>101</sup> D'Souza reproached Obama's anti-colonialism and the 44<sup>th</sup> President's apologetic Americanism that did not always highlight the country's exceptionalism.<sup>102</sup> D'Souza exemplified the Right's irritation at a society of leftists in government that apparently did not respect the nation's strengths, values or traditions.

The critique of Obama was only a portion of the broader conservative criticism of multiculturalism. Ideas of who was an American became another essential function of the multicultural critique. Mark Levin cited George Washington's 1796 Farewell Address not to show the nation's historic unity, but to exclude certain groups: "Citizens, either by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has the right to concentrate your affections. The name of American, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations."<sup>103</sup> Levin took Washington's moment of unarguable American unity and twisted it into a tool for his political values. "For more than two centuries, individuals with diverse backgrounds have come together to form a national 'melting pot'... sustained by allegiance to the country and its founding principles."<sup>104</sup> Washington's legacy, at least for Levin, limited the scope of America and opposed the "open-ended mass migration, coupled with the destructive influences of biculturalism, multiculturalism," that he said if "unchecked, the nation will ultimately cease to exist."<sup>105</sup> The

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<sup>100</sup> O'Reilly, *Pinheads and Patriots*, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, *The Roots of Obama's Rage*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Press, 2010), 176.

<sup>102</sup> Many on the Right frequently charged that Obama's actions abroad too frequently consisted of him apologizing for American greatness – a move that consequently embarrassed the nation. In 2009 the Heritage Foundation compiled a report of 10 of these moments. Nile Gardiner and Morgan Lorraine Roach, "Barack Obama's Top 10 Apologies: How the President has Humiliated a Superpower," *Heritage Foundation*, June 2, 2009.

<sup>103</sup> George Washington, "Farewell Address to the People of the United States," in Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 160.

<sup>104</sup> Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 160.

<sup>105</sup> Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 160-161.

country's founding was only interpretable in one pure version of America – a time when the nation was unitary and non-diverse. This version of America's history contrasted contemporary America's frequent and rapid changes. Levin looked at America's past a simple place without diversity and where American values only looked one way.<sup>106</sup>

Laura Ingram struck a similar tone with the rhetoric of another Mt. Rushmore figure, Teddy Roosevelt, who she claimed “believed that every immigrant should learn English within years or be deported” a value that “despite how reviled these views would be today in certain... circles, I would bet that most of the rest of us are close to Roosevelt on immigration.”<sup>107</sup> Ingram and Levin idealized a whitewashed and traditional past – when America's presidents stood up for the rights and liberties of real Americans, not the equivocating one of the nation's contemporary leaders. This view of America lacked much ethnic or racial diversity and did not promote societal openness or much immigration. Both commentators mistook their historical subjects and twisted their words to support views that were not a far cry from xenophobia. While the past may have been less pro-immigration than the present, these views dramatically ignored the ‘give me your poor’ message of the State of Liberty.<sup>108</sup>

These claims from Levin and Ingram illustrated a worldview steeped in a questionable interpretation of traditional western history. Expanded immigration was not only bad policy, but antithetical to the roots of the nation – an interpretation that presented the United States, not as an open, multicultural society, but a more closed and insular country. Marc Levin utilized Alexander Hamilton to claim that the “well-being of society depends ‘essentially on the energy of a common national sentiment.’”<sup>109</sup> This misinterpretation of Hamilton calling for general national unity helped Levin state that “immigration can contribute to the well-being of society,

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<sup>106</sup> The other unfortunate misinterpretation of this speech is that Washington sought to unite a country filled with differences, not otherwise people because of them. The National Constitution Center analyzed this address and in their fourth point discussed the importance of uniting a country and audience. Scott Bomboy, “Five Lessons We Can Learn from George Washington's Farewell Address,” *National Constitution Center*, September 19, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Laura Ingram, *Power to the People*, 44. These references to Teddy Roosevelt were not new, as politicians of the early 2000s also discussed Roosevelt as an attack against increased immigration. Ingraham's charge went further in its connections between Americanness and even the opposition to immigration policy.

<sup>108</sup> The U.S. had a host of immigration acts from the 1790 Naturalization Act, through the Immigration Act of 1891, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and a host more. Many of these occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and thus this era somewhat supported calls for imitated immigration. However, in the process it is impossible to not discuss the high levels of racism and xenophobia at the center of these years and policies. The Pew Research Center provided a timeline of these acts. D'vera Cohn, “How U.S. Immigration Laws and Rules Have Changed Throughout History,” *Pew Research Center*, September 10, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 172.

but it can also contribute to its demise. The social contract is a compact between and among Americans, not Americans the world's citizens."<sup>110</sup> The social contract for these figures only worked in an insular community where values were uniform and without influxes and significant changes. Levin posited that any interpretation of the nation as multicultural was fundamentally incorrect. This worldview allowed him, Ingram, and others to argue that expansive immigration harmed the broader national society.

The end of the 2000s marked the apex of conservative media's generally aggressive tone. In these years of rapid change under Obama, the past was a stable constant for an even more powerful conservative press. While the Right's values of small government and fiscal responsibility, the importance of the Christian tradition in America, and the dangers of multiculturalism in history and present-day society remained the same the composition of attacks did not. These years unleashed a historical assault that identified liberal views of history as immoral, ineffective and dangerous to the nation's real values. Conservative media promoted a more limited view of America that ever more closely linked what it meant to be an American with conservative ideals and values.

### **Conclusion: History Sets a Tone**

The final four years of the 2000s were instrumental in the Culture Wars for a pair of reasons. First, conservative powerbrokers accelerated their aggressive attacks beyond where they were even in the "With Us or Against Us" era of 2002-2006. These years marked the culmination of the Right's values and anger towards the Left. While the conservative movement moved towards extreme rhetoric and hostile language, it largely remained true to its political values. These years laid a foundation for the highly contentious elections of 2012 and 2016 where rhetoric was even more directly antagonistic. This thesis concludes its study with the Tea Party in 2010, issues of governmental size, religion's role in the nation's history, and who is an American remain integral to American politics in the never-ending Culture Wars.

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<sup>110</sup> Mark Levin, *Liberty and Tyranny*, 172.

### **Conclusion: To a Historical Future**

*The past is never dead. It's not even past.*<sup>1</sup>

-William Faulkner

When the dust settled after the 2010 election and the Tea Party wave fundamentally changed Washington, the Long Culture Wars continued. The GOP gained 14 Senate seats, 69 seats in the House and 9 Governors mansions over the Obama years and by the 2016 election Democrats held “fewer elected offices nationwide than at any time since the 1920s.”<sup>2</sup> One could argue that from a purely electoral position Obama was the best thing to happen to the GOP in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, if the 2016 election and the years since showed anything, it is that the nation’s conservative powerbrokers were far from content with the state of the country.

The Long Culture Wars never really ended; they merely changed. Conservative commentator Ben Shapiro discussed this in the context of the 2016 election and noted that “one of the reasons people voted for Trump is the cultural blowback, it’s because Trump is a Cultural Warrior.”<sup>3</sup> History’s power for conservative powerbrokers continued in the years after the Tea Party wave. The most high-profile example of this was the 2016 campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” – a very close reference to GOP legend Ronald Reagan’s 1980 slogan “Let’s Make America Great Again.”<sup>4</sup> The Culture Wars rolled into the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and history’s role did not diminish from its place in the 1990s and 2000. The following pages articulate two important ideas. First, that history remained essential to the conservative movement in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and promoted a similar set of values. Second, these pages argue that history should take on a more positive role in political discourse – an idea that indirectly calls for a future society defined more by dialogue than partisan strive and pandering.

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<sup>1</sup>William Faulkner, *Requiem for A Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951).

<sup>2</sup> Mara Liason, “The Democratic Party Got Crushed During The Obama Presidency. Here's Why,” *NPR Politics*, March 4, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/03/04/469052020/the-democratic-party-got-crushed-during-the-obama-presidency-heres-why>.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Shapiro, “505: Roseanne is Back,” March 28, 2018, in *The Ben Shapiro Show*, Produced by Daily Wire, podcast, 15:30, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://www.dailywire.com/podcasts/28775/ep-505-are-we-watching-end-journalism>. Shapiro specifically spoke to a feeling of cultural alienation many Trump voters felt in the 2016 election, and in this context referred to a specific episode of the Roseanne Barr show.

<sup>4</sup> According to a 2017 Business Insider article President Trump did not realize this close reference to another Republican nominee’s slogan. However, the close connection of the two slogans was likely not lost on many Reagan and Trump devotees. Pamela Engel, “How Trump came up with his slogan 'Make America Great Again',” *Business Insider*, January 18, 2017.

Conservative powerbrokers, post-2010 continued their emphasis on the same core values of Culture Wars historically-based policies – a history of small government and neoliberalism, the nation’s religious tradition and the opposition to multiculturalism. President Trump’s 2019 State of the Union upheld neoliberal values when he contrasted socialism with America’s history of capitalism.

Here, in the United States, we are alarmed by new calls to adopt socialism in our country. America was founded on liberty and independence – not government coercion, domination, and control. We are born free, and we will stay free. Tonight, we renew our resolve that America will never be a socialist country.<sup>5</sup>

President Trump’s oratory continued the practice of his Culture Wars predecessors and promoted a version of economics that connected America’s small governments of the past with its traditions of social freedom. This statement upheld a version of American history that also opposed the new wave of Bernie Sanders Democratic-Socialists. Conservative powerbrokers of these years continued their emphasis on American freedoms based in a government free of regulations and interference.

The Right also continued their emphasis on social values in these years. Conservative podcast and radio host Ben Shapiro promoted western civilization and Judeo-Christian values as essential to the success of the nation. Shapiro argued that “our freedoms are built upon the twin notions that every human being is made in God’s image and that human beings were created with reason capable of exploring God’s world.”<sup>6</sup> This claim echoed those of previous Culture Warriors, and Shapiro emphasized the importance of these values. “Jerusalem and Athens were the foundations of the Magna Carta and the Treaty of Westphalia; they were the foundations of Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s Letter from Birmingham Jail.”<sup>7</sup> Shapiro’s book followed the Culture Wars conservative position and posited that America’s greatness stemmed from Christian and western values. The nation achieved these great heights because its historical values were similar to those of the contemporary Right – an appeal for the continuation of such ideals.

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Trump, “State of the Union.” Washington D.C. February 6, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Shapiro, *The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great* (Northampton MA, Broadside, 2019). Citation from the Amazon description of the soon to be released book.

<sup>7</sup> Ben Shapiro, *The Right Side of History*.

The persistence of this historically themed rhetoric into the era of Trump was unsurprising given the way conservatism prides itself on tradition and slow change.<sup>8</sup> Despite the discussion on the ways that the Right utilized the past to defend the present, this is not the most important part of this conclusion. Early in the Culture Wars, Gary Nash discussed the controversial nature of the past.

The culture wars, though unnerving and nasty, offer the public a grand opportunity to talk with historians and history teachers about how history is written, how research has changed in recent decades, and how arguments about the past illustrate a democracy at work.<sup>9</sup>

Nash wrote at a moment when historians faced attacks in educational and public spheres, but the message still possessed a layer of hope – an underlying belief that history could unite America and breed a stronger democracy and nation.

If these pages demonstrated anything, it was that history was more frequently a force to promote partisan power and division. Historically themed rhetoric will likely continue to match the unpleasant atmosphere of Culture Wars America. Some claim that when they speak of a ‘united’ history, it is to bring the country together, but even that usually possesses an unfortunate level of partisanship in 2019. Consequently, history will likely look more like Dinesh D’Souza’s 2018 film *Death of a Nation* that claimed: “Lincoln was elected to unite a country and stop slavery. Democrats smeared him; went to war against him; assassinated him. Now, their target is Trump.”<sup>10</sup> This claim had few elements of truth.<sup>11</sup> D’Souza demonstrated the most likely future of rhetoric about history – a convenient and often generally improperly utilized political tool. Not all historical references are this clunky or provocative, but D’Souza’s film was a sign of a politically turbulent time.

History does not need to be a divisive force in American political life. Instead, the past could be a force for unity that emphasized the goodness of the nation. Not the whitewashed past

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<sup>8</sup> This is despite the populist ideals of people like President Trump and Tucker Carlson. Many of the policies of the mainstream GOP are still quite similar to those of their peers earlier in the Culture Wars.

<sup>9</sup> Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History of Trial*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Dinesh D’Souza, *Death of a Nation*, Dinesh D’Souza, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The parties of 1865 were very different than they are in 2019 and the old claims that Democrats are still the party of slavery is worn out, particularly because of actions like LBJ’s Great Society and Civil Rights legislation. The comparison of President Lincoln is over the top and almost exclusively incorrect. There are very few actions a president could take that would come close to the actions of Lincoln’s – despite D’Souza’s unfortunate believe otherwise.

where the country's growth was always clean and everything was positive. American history could demonstrate the power of compromise and growth – a past that represented the stories of all people without marginalizing those on one side of the political aisle of the other. The “goodness” of history could be in its power to promote conversation between those on different sides of the aisle, not whether or not it supported a red or blue version of America. Historical truths must always receive recognition and then discussed in a way that showcases the nuances of a complex past, present and future.

If the nation's conservative and liberal powerbrokers cannot agree on even basic elements of the nation's past, how can they create a unified present and future? America's history was not perfect, but it deserves credit for its growth – a story to admire for its moments of greatness and with an eye towards reconciliation around its negative aspects. Instead of brushing past instances of injustice as outside the country's ‘real’ story or highlighting them as emblematic of a system corrupt to its soul, the past could exemplify the nation's collective ability to grow and change – an example of what we need for a better tomorrow. Historical discussions could be an intellectual and political practice field, where the nation's powerbrokers went to better understand a complicated nation and one another. History can and should teach us about who we collectively are. It should be a topic of discussion over what defined all of us for the better, not just our increasingly dissimilar political tribes. This great nation has overcome a great deal, and this should inspire hope for a less divided and angry future. Only when we realize that our history shows how we are more similar than different, can we begin a journey towards a better and more openminded American future.

At the outset of the Culture Wars, the term's originator James Davison Hunter said that America's grand narratives of the past “compensated for this lack of a long national history through the construction of great myths about its origins and even loftier visions of its calling in the future.”<sup>12</sup> America needs its great myths, not ones shaded in red or blue, but ones that tells the history of a great nation. Our history has the power to bring us together for a better future, but only if society decides we are ready for a non-partisan, calm version of the past. With that,

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<sup>12</sup> James Davison Hunter references this contested past on page 61 of his seminal work *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, saying

here's to assuming best intentions of all people and discussing history in a civilized, productive manner.

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