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Together We'll Be All Right: The Intersection Between Religious and Political Conservatism in
American Politics in the Mid to Late 20th Century

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the History Department

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Religious fervor is a common theme in the American narrative. From the Puritans and Pilgrims settling in the New World to escape alleged religious persecution in England to the “The God We Trust” inscribed on modern currency, the stories America tells about itself are often inherently entwined with demonstrated exhibitions of belief. In truth, America’s religious history is endlessly complex and has great political implications. From the 1940s into the end of the 20th century, the Religious Right built upon public fear and unease. Their social and political positions were deliberately curated for political, not theological, impact. This resulted in the Religious Right accumulating power through a network of dedicated supporters who were motivated by the wedge issues their leadership informed them of.

In order to discuss this subject with any level of specificity or accuracy, terms must be defined in advance, because every historical or religious movement has decades if not centuries of build-up that are simply out of the scope of this thesis to fully explore. In the opening of prominent religious historian Randall Balmer’s 1989 book *Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory: A Journey to the Evangelical Subculture in America*, Balmer places a note called “A Word About Word.” This note rather succinctly describes the difficulty of being both precise and accurate when defining terms in the fiddly realm of personal religious expression.

...any discussion of the terms *evangelical*, *fundamentalist*, *charismatic*, and *pentecostal* should steer a middle course between an extended, technical treatment and the kind of dismissive description suggested by Potter Stewart’s attempt to define pornography a few years back. “I can’t define it,” the Supreme Court justice acknowledged, “but I know it when I see it.”¹

Fortunately, only two of these terms will be prominent in this thesis, evangelical and fundamentalist. Historian and journalist Frances Fitzgerald summarized the use of the term evangelical as

¹ Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, (New York, Oxford University Press: 1989). vix-xii

The word 'evangelical' comes from the Greek 'evangel,' meaning the 'good news' or 'the Gospel.' While the word could be claimed by all Christians, evangelical became the common name for the revivals that swept the English-speaking world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The term evangelical's association with revival-style evangelism will later be a key point. This term took on explicitly conservative bent in the modern sense with Rev. Billy Graham, who used it to mean "a conservative Protestant who had been 'born again.'"² The active personal relationship with God as signaled by deliberate acceptance of Him became one of the key defining traits of this movement along with holding the Bible as the ultimate religious authority, a focus on "Christ's redemption of mankind on the cross," and sharing the faith with others.³ Fundamentalism has a shorter history, with the name coming from a series of pamphlets from the early 20th century called "The Fundamentals."⁴ These essays were an explicit rejection of modernism and liberal theology. Some tenets fundamentalists espoused were biblical literalism and "Christ's imminent return to earth," and many religious groups associated with fundamentalism eschewed elements of common worldly life they found suspicious, such as vanity in the form of cosmetics and alcohol in general.

Finding the exact line between someone defined as an evangelical or fundamentalist is like trying to find the exact point on a gradient color wheel blue becomes green, yet those falling under either or both definitions will still find the terms links to them objectionable at some point. Says Balmer when speaking about the subjects of his book, "I can think of several people in the pages that follow who would be embarrassed, even outraged, to appear in the same book as some of the others listed here." Essentially, the lines are blurred to the point that even those within the movement being discussed would be offended at the similar terminology.

² Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, (New York, Simon & Schuster: 2017), 5

³ Ibid., 637

⁴ Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober, *Religion and the New Majority: Billy Graham, Middle America, and the Politics of the 70s*, (New York, Association Press: 1972). 86-97

Fundamentalism as a concept was birthed in southern California, which was well on its way to becoming an important center of the conservative evangelical religious movement. The religious energy of the region got a boost with WWII, an instigation event for much of the first section of this thesis. Population migration and economic recovery from the Great Depression through wartime industry allowed for social mobilization in numerous political and religious directions. California's popular evangelical religiosity merged with its new technological boom to allow the advent of televangelists, a modern form of revival preacher who could reach millions with a sermon instead of mere thousands. Exposure to a wider world of possibility bolstered civil rights movements for Black and LGBTQ+ Americans, conservative reactions to which quickly became a reactionary force that would later be harnessed to gain wider political support from Americans made uncomfortable by the social changes. Global geopolitics after WWII led to an omnipresent fear of communism that peaked with the Red Scare associated with Senator Joseph McCarthy as a potent demonstration that reactionary political strategies could have even greater effects on the power of the leaders utilizing them while instilling a belief in many Americans that the opposite of communism was old-fashioned Christianity with an addition of individualist fiscal policies.

The cultural changes of the 1940s and 1950s became the cultural unrest of the 1960s and 1970s. The Civil Rights Movement and Sexual Revolution continued and grew in an atmosphere charged with a potent need for better conditions made more pressing by small victories quickly growing larger. Every action has an equal opposite reaction, however, and the threat of a changing status quo away from a white nuclear Christian family as the bedrock of American existence made subscribers of that ideal very uncomfortable. That discomfort was harnessed by schemes promising to relieve it. Desegregation of schools became a connection point for white

people who hated the idea of their children being educated in the vicinity of nonwhite students and religious leaders who offered whites-only private schools. It was not the only connection made through evangelical leaders towards political goals, though. Rev. Jerry Falwell Sr. began the Moral Majority, an organization dedicated to influencing American political life by activating the viewers and followers of his televangelism ministry. This organization was sufficiently powerful that presidential candidate Ronald Reagan courted their favor. With his victory, they had clear evidence that appealing to voters through religious means was incredibly successful.

With the confidence of those wins, Religious Right leaders became more prominent. One key organization was radio ministry Focus on the Family and its sister lobbying group the Family Research Council, both created by radio psychologist James Dobson, which advocated for traditional cisheteronormative family values. The message of straight marriage with firm gender roles as salvation for the American way of life found fertile soil because previous efforts did not quash the sexual revolution. LGBTQ+ people were more visible in the 1980s than ever before, which made them political targets. The timing of this demonization was unfortunate because it coincided with the onset of one of the most dangerous disease outbreaks in history. The AIDS crisis led to further attacks on the character of AIDS patients from a terrified public and religious leaders who saw it as a natural consequence of defying God. At the same time, the Reagan White House the Religious Right supported did nothing to assist those suffering due to the disease for several years, providing an absence of leadership as a way to promote lower government expenditures in the area of public health, a common theme for that administration. Behind the scenes there was a massive legal push for looser homeschooling regulation, important in that it represented a continuation of previous schooling plots combined with the economic

principles Reagan and many of his adherents preferred as a way to continue educating future voters in the Religious Right's ideals.

As a political group, the Religious Right necessarily included a more social perspective to their political actions with the notion that certain elements of American society were morally dangerous or on their way to be and looking to the government to correct these flaws. It was by this mechanism- the personalization of politics- that the religious right grew. These tactics breathed new life into otherwise arcane economic principles and introduced new wedge issues to direct public debate to follow the path they chose.

Section One: Strong Roots

WWII reshaped the landscape of American society. America, left far less damaged than her enemies or allies, suddenly surged in economic and political power. Its foreign policy goals shifted from fighting the Axis Powers toward preventing the spread of communism domestically or abroad. At the same time, exposure to new ideas due to wartime deployment and migration sparked renewed determination to fight for civil rights for all. These powerful forces, each championing their own version of freedom, were put into conflict as fear met dignity. Into this fraught social environment came religious revival strengthened by new technologies. The dynamics of the 1940s and 50s represent the shifting experiences of a changing world.

The 1930s and 40s were formed around the mold of the Great Depression and WWII. Both events caused population shifts towards cities, especially those with wartime industry. California is a great example of this.

Those who migrated to California, whether fleeing tough economic times in the 1930s or searching for wartime jobs in the 1940s, brought their culture with them. Land was plentiful enough that communities of commonalities could crop of. Some 250,000 migrants came from the western regions of the American South alone. These people often came with little but their faith. A prominent tradition carried with migrants was that of revivals, popular religious meetings often held in temporary structures intended to convert audience members to born again Christianity through the use of passionate speeches and rousing songs. This was no means a unique or isolated tradition to the South. On the contrary, revivals had been mainstay in the North for so long that parts of New York state had been termed the “burned over district” for how often the fires of religious fervor burned through in the 1800s. These fires still burned on in the South in the early 20th century and were a notable cultural touchstone for migrants to

California, both as a taste of home and as a chance to evangelize to the many new people around them. According to historian Darren Dochuk, “the ultimate success of a church’s revival was judged by how many new converts were brought into the fold.”⁵ In California, this was generally achieved by an annual weeks-long revival preceded by fervent mass letter-writing campaigns and ads taken out in local papers to draw attention to whichever traveling evangelist or sermon was most notable.⁶ Revival meetings were a time of religious renewal and conversion, making them a mainstay in California Evangelical churches.

The spectacle of the revival meeting flourished in California, land of glitz and glamor, shock and awe. Soon this culture of emotive religious servicing to gather a flock merged with the famous local technology of California and took to the screen, specifically the small screen. World War II rationing and the subsequent prosperity in the United States led to an economic phenomenon known as pent-up demand, an unusually strong desire to buy products formed by the inability to do so for too long. One consumer good that sparked quick popularity was the television. In 1950 there were 3,880,000 television sets in the United States, representing about 9% of Americans. By 1959, there were 43,950,000 television or about 85.9% of Americans total.⁷ Every year, more Americans bought television sets, introducing increased demand for programming. Combining popular worship styles with popular media proved to be a winning combination, not surprising considering its predecessor of religious radio broadcasts. This allowed evangelists to reach a wide audience in the comfort of their own homes.

⁵ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011.) 23-25.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Number of TV Sets in America: 1950-1978,” *The American Century*, accessed April 3, 2023, <https://americancentury.omeka.wlu.edu/items/show/111>.

Soon preachers like Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Bob Jones Sr., and Jerry Falwell Sr. became household faces. Their sermons ranged in content and the men themselves reflected the individualistic nature of the Evangelical movement. The most popular televangelist of this era was Billy Graham. His speeches emphasized the importance of personally accepting Jesus, a primary tenant of decision theology. One classic Graham sermon was titled “The Danger of Waiting to Make a Decision for Christ,” clearly stating what type of theological message was important for audiences to hear, namely that putting faith in things other than Christ would send one to hell without any of those other things. Other sermon topics included “What’s Your Excuse for Ignoring Christ” and “In the Midst of Suffering, God is There.”⁸ Notably Graham was also insistent that segregation and racism was a violation of God’s will and started refusing to speak at segregated revivals, physically taking down the rope barriers that would have enforced race-based seating.⁹ Billy Graham’s theology was generally a standard message of Christian hope delivered by a particularly charismatic preacher with a conservative bent- Graham believed that systemic or legal solutions to society’s ills would be unsuccessful as “society will be changed for the better only when individuals accept Christ as savior” and let that changed their hearts, as Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober put it in their study of Graham’s politics.¹⁰ This belief in potential societal change through personal conversion suggests that Graham’s religious messages were intended to apply to all aspects of modern life.

Other televangelists had more distinctive messages though. Oral Roberts, another particularly popular face, emphasized the potential practical benefits of converting to his strain of

⁸ “Billy Graham, “The Danger of Waiting to Make a Decision for Christ,” Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, February 15, 2022. <https://billygraham.org/video/billy-graham-the-danger-of-waiting-to-make-a-decision-for-christ/>

⁹ “Billy Graham on Racism,” Billy Graham Library, January 8, 2018. <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/billy-graham-racism/>

¹⁰ Lowell D. Streiker and Gerald S. Strober, *Religion and the New Majority: Billy Graham, Middle America, and the Politics of the 70s*, (New York, Association Press: 1972). 42

Pentecostal-influenced Christianity as well as the spiritual. Early in his preaching career, Roberts was drawn to the second verse of the Third Epistle of John, which read, “I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”¹¹ Roberts interpreted this to mean that God wanted his followers to be rich, if only they believed correctly. The process by which this occurred by his reckoning was detailed in his 1970 book *The Miracle of Seed-Faith*, putting to print what Roberts had been teaching for decades. In this book, Roberts details his life circumstances as a young married man with very little money with which to cover his and his wife’s expenses. He decided to give away that money instead of asking God for providence and was soon miraculously given “a sum seven times more than I had given!” from a local farmer who was overcome with the need to do so and is quoted as saying, “I know by experience that the yield I get from my land is in direct proportion to the seed I plant... Brother Roberts, this is just seed I’ve been needing to plant for a long time.”¹² Roberts encouraged his congregants to do the same as that farmer, “plant” their money as an expression of faith and expect it to grow like the mustard plant from the bible the term “seed-faith” alludes to. Roberts also had a strong teaching of faith healing, inspired by his Pentecostal Holiness background. The ritual by which faith healing worked could only be taught by Roberts, whether directly or by his books, and involved steps like “[u]se a point of contact for the release of your faith” and “[cl]ose the case for victory.” Roberts’s whole ministry can be summarized with one specific teaching: “You will be in a great position to have health and success if your relationship with God your source is right.”¹³ The “health and wealth” or “prosperity” gospel was not Roberts’s invention but he

¹¹ Christopher Reed, “Oral Roberts Obituary” *The Guardian*, December 15, 2009.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/15/oral-roberts-obituary>

¹² Oral Roberts, *The Miracle of Seed-Faith*, (Tulsa: Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association, 1970).

¹³ Thomson K. Mathew, “Oral Roberts’ Theology of Healing: A Journey from Pentecostal “Divine Healing” to Charismatic ‘Signs and Wonders’ to Spirit-empowered ‘Whole Person Healing,’ *Spiritus* 3, 2 (2018): 303—323 <http://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/spiritus>

popularized it immensely in the mid twentieth century by merging it with television media, creating an empire that touched the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Jerry Falwell Sr. took what could be considered a middle route between these two. Pastor of Thomas Road Baptist church, which he himself founded, Falwell soon built his church into a booming congregation by knocking on a goal of 100 local homes a day to give invitations. He quickly got the idea to make his services a radio broadcast that morphed into the television program “Old-Time Gospel Hour.”¹⁴ At this point in time, Falwell was exactly as he believed he needed to be: a minister free from the baser actions of the normal world. He said as much when referring to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1964, saying “Preachers are not called to be politicians, but soul winners.” He also said in 1958 that “If Chief Justice Warren and his associates had known God’s word and had desired to do the Lord’s will, I am quite confident that the 1954 decision would never have been made,” referring to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that led to desegregation, discussed later.¹⁵ Jerry Falwell was a charismatic speaker who could grow his flock with impressive speed but the messaging of his sermons emphasized some of the petty grievances of the world he claimed to be above.

There are important similarities between these men. All were charismatic speakers who took advantage of tv media to rocket up in popularity as ministers. However, their interpretation of that description varies widely and is representative of the many and varied sub-strains of Fundamental Evangelical Protestantism in America in the mid 1900s. Their popularity meant that their specific trademarks in preaching became common among other evangelists and accepted by the worshippers in the general public. Televangelists led the charge of the new

¹⁴ Peter Applebome, “Jerry Falwell, Moral Majority Founder, Dies at 73,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2007. <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/16/obituaries/16falwell.html>

¹⁵ Max Blumenthal, “Agent of Intolerance,” *The Nation*, May 16, 2007. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/agent-intolerance/>

religious revival meeting, bringing their values- self-described as “old time”- into the modern era with television. This gave them massive impact and their beliefs echoed through their followers, making them a good reference point for what types of religious thought were circling in the United States for the common person.

Keeping young people in the faith was a primary concern for Evangelicals at this time. Younger people would become the church leaders and congregants of the future. Should they be swayed away from Evangelical conservative Christianity at the critical chokepoint of university education, the future of the movement would be much less effective. One way to prevent students from leaving the faith was to set up faith-specific universities as an alternative to secular ones. This was neither new nor isolated to the time period of this section; Graham briefly attended Bob Jones University, which was founded in 1929, and both Roberts and Falwell would go on to found their own colleges in 1963 and 1971 respectively. Plenty of other believers and evangelists would do the same through the mid 20th century.

One prime example of such a college was Pepperdine University in Pasadena, California. Though technically founded in 1937, this university truly gained steam through the 1940s due in large part to the GI Bill to become a prominent and forward-leaning university in a region with plenty of stiff competition. Pepperdine University, named after its founder George Pepperdine, claims in its founding mythology the desire to avert “the alarming rate at which Christian young men and women lost interest in their faith after going on to higher education.”¹⁶ In order to create a place where such worldly influences could be avoided, Pepperdine was set up so students could receive a liberal arts education focusing on Business Administration from a Christian perspective while also having a chance to work off part or all of their tuition. This approach was meant to

¹⁶ “History,” Pepperdine University Website, Pepperdine University, Accessed April 2, 2023.

provide both conservative religious and economic education to produce students who valued hard work and industriousness. By 1960, the college was enrolling over a thousand new students each year.¹⁷ The confluence of two different strains of “conservative” values proved to be a productive enterprise.

Christian colleges were not the only target of religious education in this time period either. Bill Bright was a young evangelist new to California when he founded Campus Crusade for Christ in 1951 with his wife Vonette. The term “crusade” in this name refers to the types of stadium revival meeting known to be associated with the likes of Bright’s personal friend Billy Graham.¹⁸ The purpose of this parachurch group was to attempt to get young people to make the decision to be “saved” through the tenets of their stripe of conservative Christianity in order to shape future social leaders and decision makers at a pivotal time in their lives. Instead of trying to prevent college aged young adults from leaving the faith, Bright’s group added new members to their numbers. This tactic began at University of California, Los Angeles and was successful enough to expand to hundreds of other colleges across the nation and eventually abroad as well, with members explicitly believing it their duty to attempt to convert others.¹⁹ The push of this organization in more secular schools as well as increased support for and creation of Christian colleges shows that conservative Evangelicals of this time period recognized educational institutions as pivotal in shaping future adults and thus the world they would live in. It is within the realm of education that racism- in the form of separate educational facilities specifically- is

¹⁷ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011.) 66-74

¹⁸ Adelle Banks, “Campus Crusade for Christ changes name to ‘Cru’; keeps evangelical mission,” *Washington Post*, July 20, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/campus-crusade-for-christ-changes-name-to-cru-keeps-evangelical-mission/2011/07/20/gIQA54PMQI_story.html

¹⁹ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011.) 178-179

demonstrated as being enshrined as an almost religious virtue in many corners of the United States.

The push for racial equality got a massive boost with WWII. African Americans were put into important roles both abroad and domestic support roles to fight the Axis power. At the same time, they were treated as second class citizens, unable to access higher levels of civil defense training, placed in segregated units, and even attacked while in uniform. The dissonance between the role African Americans knew they were playing in the war effort and the way they were treated for it was jarring. As activist C.L.R. James boldly put it,

Why should I shed my blood for Roosevelt's America, for Cotton Ed Smith and Senator Bilbo, for the whole Jim Crow, negro-hating South, for the low-paid, dirty jobs for which negroes have to fight, for the few dollars of relief and the insults, discrimination, police brutality, and perpetual poverty to which negroes are condemned even in the more liberal North?²⁰

James echoed the complaint of his comrades who also grew to wonder what the point of being an American was without being treated as an American. The mistreatment and the anger it caused gave rise to the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Desegregation was one major battleground on which the fight for civil rights played out. Due to the 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v Ferguson*, separate facilities for people of different races was legal. *Brown v. Board of Education* was one of numerous challenges to legal segregation since *Plessy v Ferguson*. Prominent attorney Thurgood Marshall argued the case on behalf of the Brown family and the other plaintiffs who had been folded into the case. After arduous hearing, the decision was ultimately passed down that "...in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no

²⁰ "The Double V Victory," National WWII Museum, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/double-v-victory>

place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. . .”²¹ This was an important win for the Civil Rights Movement, but there was still much fight left to be had.

With *Brown v. Board*, the Supreme Court ordered that schools be desegregated “with all deliberate speed.” Many segregated schools, especially in the South, followed that timeline literally, moving at a pace best described as deliberate.²² There was, of course, additional pushback to the concept of desegregation. Some of this came in the form of protests and threats against Black students entering formerly all-white schools. Famous examples include the Little Rock Nine needing police to escort them to school to avoid a rioting racist mob numbering over a thousand and William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans emptying out in hatred of six-year-old Ruby Bridges.²³²⁴ Too many white Americans decided opposing desegregation was worth their decency and dignity.

A more subtle and insidious resistance to desegregation was so-called “segregation academies.” The *Brown v. Board* ruling pertained to public schools, as that is the purview of the government. An easy, obvious solution to this situation from the perspective of segregationists was to remove white students to newly-created private schools that conveniently did not admit any Black students, leaving public schools to integrate in term only. In some cases public schools were abandoned by local government officials altogether and fines “imposed ‘upon anyone caught inducing others to attend integrated schools.’”²⁵ This was not an issue quickly resolved

²¹ “History - *Brown v. Board of Education* Re-enactment,” United States Courts, accessed April 1, 2023. <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/history-brown-v-board-education-re-enactment>

²² “‘With All Deliberate Speed’,” *Separate is Not Equal: Brown v. Board of Education*, Smithsonian Museum of American History, Accessed April 2, 2023.

²³ Mary Louise Kelly, Elena Burnett, Mallory Yu, and Courtney Dorning, “Ruby was the first Black child to desegregate her school. This is what she learned,” NPR, September 7, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/07/1121133099/school-segregation-ruby-bridges>

²⁴ David Smith, “Little Rock Nine: the day young students shattered racial segregation,” *The Guardian*, September 24, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/24/little-rock-arkansas-school-segregation-racism>

²⁵ Andrew J Coulson, “Market education : the unknown history,” Internet Archive (Bowling Green, OH: Social Philosophy & Policy Center, 1999) <https://archive.org/details/marketeducationu0000coul/page/275/mode/2up>

either. Estimates on the number of white students pulled from public schools to avoid sharing those schools with Black students hover around half a million between 1964 and 1975 alone.²⁶ These schools were generally associated with a church or religious denomination for support, providing explicitly religious instruction as the basis for their being private schools. The most famous example of this was Jerry Falwell's Liberty Christian Academy in Lynchburg, Virginia.²⁷ The creation of segregation academies under the auspices of Christian faith shows that the churches involved considered racism to be a positive virtue to uphold.

While WWII was the turning point around which America swung into war, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan's subsequent surrender was the point where that war pivoted from direct armed conflict with the Axis powers to a cold war of threats and information with the USSR. Likewise, while WWII profoundly and irrevocably made an American culture based around total war, the Cold War and its ideologies set the mindset of the mid-20th century. With the onslaught of the Cold War, the looming communist threat weighed heavy on the minds of the American public.

The beginning of junior Senator Joseph McCarthy's time in Congress is described by the United States Senate website cuttingly as "[f]or the next three years, McCarthy searched for an issue that would substantiate his remarkableness."²⁸ And, indeed, he made himself unforgettable with his 1950 speech ostensibly to celebrate Abraham Lincoln's birthday where he said "In my opinion the State Department, which is one of the most important government departments, is thoroughly infested with communists. I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, (New York, Simon & Schuster: 2017), 303

²⁸ "'Communists in Government Service,' McCarthy Says," United States Senate.

<https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/mccarthy-hearings/communists-in-government-service.htm>

appear to be either card-carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy.”²⁹ With those immortalized words, McCarthy would prove he was remarkable indeed by heading the House Committee on Un-American Activities. His investigations would ravage intellectual circles and stoke public fears into a frenzy.

Similar to McCarthyism, the Fundamentalist way of thinking was very much one of good versus evil. This way of thinking shaped their perception of their place in the world as Christians and citizens of the United States. Historian Robert P. Erickson wrote in 1999 that “simply put, this view sees America as a place of goodness, perhaps even a source of salvation for the modern world. America’s role since 1945 in their view has been to exercise this goodness to save the world from the forces of darkness, and McCarthyism, for all its hysteria, becomes a component of this crusade.”³⁰ This analysis sums up Fundamentalists’ interpretation of McCarthyism nicely. If America represented goodness and godliness, then any opposed to it was of the devil. The notably atheist USSR in particular fulfilled the role as anti-Christian villain fully.

McCarthy appealed to this Christian philosophy from the very beginning with his initial speech. He positioned his new crusade as “Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity. The modern champions of communism have selected this as the time.”³¹ This speech continues to use the framework of the “Christian world” of the United States in contrast with the “atheistic world” of the communist bloc, especially the

²⁹ Joseph McCarthy, “Senator Joseph McCarthy's Speech on Communists in the State Department (excerpts),” 1950, archived on Digital History, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3633

³⁰ Robert P Erickson, “The Role of American Churches in the McCarthy Era.” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 3, no. 1 (1990): 45–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43750635>.

³¹ Joseph McCarthy, “Senator Joseph McCarthy's Speech on Communists in the State Department (excerpts),” 1950, archived on Digital History, https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=3633

USSR. McCarthy deliberately tied his anticommunist crusade to a Christian message in order to garner support from conservative Christians.

Support for the aggressive strain of anticommunism that McCarthy relied on was not as simplistic as the fundamentalist worldview of all that was godly and American set valiantly against the satanic commies. For example, Christian members of the Civil Rights movement did not share the sentiment that McCarthy's investigations were good, in large part because the Civil Rights Movement was under strong investigations from bodies that fed into McCarthy's crusade like the FBI. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had already come under the FBI's racial matters program as early as 1956 and that scrutiny would only grow.³² Additionally the Communist Party was the only party advocating for desegregation in some regions for decades, meaning that some civil rights activists actually had affiliation with the Party.³³ The increased scrutiny and suspicion was unhelpful for the movement, and there was a notable overlap between fervent anti-communism and suspicion of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement.

Another group considered concerning by anti-communist crusaders was the burgeoning LGBTQ+ community. While queer people have always existed and been a part of history, open expression of that was considered taboo. Once again, WWII changed American culture. Screening questions for military recruits during World War II had the unintended consequence of bringing knowledge of same-sex attraction to those who may have previously never heard of it. Additionally it brought young people far away from their communities of origin and their inherent social repression to a convenient location for socialization and experimentation. Gay sub-communities formed both of those individuals who completed military service and those

³² "Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University. <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/federal-bureau-investigation-fbi>

³³ "How 'Communism' Brought Racial Equality To The South," Heard on Tell Me More, NPR, February 16, 2010, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123771194>

who were not accepted or removed due to open expressions of queerness. Ports of debarkation such as New York City and San Francisco became a residence for many military and support industry members during and after the war. Those who left the armed services often stayed in those locations, far from those who might have known them in the past.³⁴

However, the military was fundamental to the creation of an LGBTQ+ identity so it stands to reason that many such individuals stayed under the cover the military provided. For gay men, the hyper-masculine image of a soldier combated the effeminate stereotype of a gay man. For gay women, it averted the societal demands of marriage to a man followed by having his children. In the pursuit of national security, the goal of the state became identifying and removing LGBTQ+ individuals similar to the identification and removal of communists. Queer people were seen as dangerous both on an ideological level as running counter to American ideals of family and faith and because the stigma surrounding queer identity could be used to blackmail an individual into treason.³⁵ Unlike rampant communists, there were numerous LGBTQ+ people in the military and it was a more concrete case for accusers to prove. The Lavender Scare made it more dangerous for people to be queer on the basis that it would improve national safety.

McCarthy's downfall was caused by the same thing as his rise to power: his insatiable thirst for more bombastic anti-communist efforts to launch him to power. When McCarthy had already gone through the State Department and Hollywood in search of communists lurking about, he turned his attention to the Army. This was a less popular set of trials from the start

³⁴ Leisa Meyer and Helis Sikt, "Introduction To Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, And Queer History (LGBTQ History) In The United States," in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016)

³⁵ Steve Estes, "LGBTQ Military Service," in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016)

because it begun with the Army accused McCarthy of “seeking special treatment for a former staff member,” which caused him to step down as chair, though he was still allowed to continue questioning witnesses in the intervening trials.³⁶ He also continued his blunt interrogation style against the Army members he questioned, which took on a very negative light when aired on television. In the process of the trial, McCarthy accused one of the aids of opposing council Joseph Welsh of communist ties, prompting Welsh to say “Until this moment, Senator, I think I never really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness... Let us not assassinate this lad further, senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency?” As a man whose power was built solely on his reputation and the fear of what he could do, any weakness was devastating to McCarthy. This one allowed a foothold for his fellow Republicans in Congress to formally censure him, which he took with all the grace of a man who has none. According to the United States Senate website, “overnight, McCarthy's immense national popularity evaporated. Censured by his Senate colleagues, ostracized by his party, and ignored by the press, McCarthy died three years later, 48 years old and a broken man.”³⁷ However, the anti-communist fervor he rode to power on, though not as iron-clad as when he first wielded it, still loomed a threat over American life.

World War II left an enormous imprint on the society of the 1940s and 1950s. From the migration patterns of Americans to what Americans feared to a push to break the status quo and gain equality, the war left an indelible mark. At the same time, new technologies came into existence, especially televisions. Conservative Christian Evangelicals used all of these new

³⁶ “The Censure Case of Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin (1954),” United States Senate, Adapted from Anne M. Butler and Wendy Wolff. United States Senate Election, Expulsion, and Censure Cases, 1793-1990. S. Doc. 103-33. Washington, GPO, 1995.

https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/censure_cases/133Joseph_McCarthy.htm

³⁷ “Have You No Sense of Decency?” United States Senate, <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/mccarthy-hearings/have-you-no-sense-of-decency.htm>

changes in the world to have an audience receptive to their messages. World War II was the beginning of many things that would stretch into the latter half of the 20th century.

Section Two: Rising Action

Domestic Politics

The 1960s and 1970s crackled with change, political, religious, and social. But this change did not sit comfortably with all Americans. Both liberal and conservative Americans protested for what they thought was right, especially students. Higher-level politicians used those protests as talking points. The Civil Rights movement caused controversy among those who thought it was moving too fast and those who thought it was going the wrong direction entirely. Advances in reproductive rights opened public conversation into sexuality, a new and oftentimes uncomfortable direction that pushed against taboos about sexual morals. These two forces combined thunderously to unleash new political movements. The discomfort, distaste, and agitation that were created as a response to the new social forces of the 1960s and 1970s fed into the formation of the Religious Right as a political entity.

Anticommunist sentiment as a political force remained despite the downfall of McCarthy himself, though its potency was weakened. While the threat of the Soviet Union and communism in general loomed, not everyone was content with the careful social stasis that came as a result of anticommunism efforts. The ongoing and strengthening Civil Rights movement often was smeared with charges of communism.

The Civil Rights Movement and African American desire for legal equality was almost immediately tarred as being the work of Communist agitators. This continued into the 1960s, with leaders including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. being investigated by the FBI's Racial Matters and Communist Infiltration Programs for suspected "subversive" communist ties. Despite this, the movement for equality kept growing. With the successes of the late 1950s, such as *Brown v.*

Board and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, more and more African Americans began to believe that better life conditions were not only possible, but achievable.

New phases of the Civil Rights Movement began in the 1960s with college student activists in the South. On February 1, 1960, four college students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and asked to be served lunch. They were all African American students and this store was segregated, as they well knew, so their request was denied. The students sat at the lunch counter all day until close and then came back the next day with more protesters. This protest concept of sit-ins spread among college students in the South, with hundreds of students participating.³⁸ Despite threats and violence from local white supremacist groups like the KKK, or because of the sympathy aroused in white outsiders who saw the unbalanced attacks, many of the lunch counters quietly desegregated that year.

Organizers of the Civil Rights Movement and those who responded to them often involved religious overtones and justifications in their arguments. Many Christian ministers, especially of Black churches, used their position from the pulpit to organize their congregations and congregants used church halls as meeting places to organize themselves. The language used to promote civil rights from these leaders was thus often religious, identifying Christian practice as something shared both by many protesters and those who opposed them. In King's "A Letter from Birmingham Jail, King charged white evangelicals with being too moderate in the face of racism, calling it a betrayal and saying "Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is

³⁸ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.) 30.

much more bewildering than outright rejection.”³⁹ King was frustrated that even those Christians that ostensibly supported civil rights wanted to do so subtly and slowly so as to appease bigots instead of openly supporting the Civil Rights Movement.

Not all Black resistance to segregation and oppression was part of the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement. Groups like the Nation of Islam and people like Malcom X advocated for Black separatism, with violence as needed, and the Black Panther Party of California was known to openly carry firearms to intimidate police into keeping traffic stops from becoming attacks on Black motorists.⁴⁰ There were also instances of uncoordinated violent incidents in poor Black communities, the most famous of which was the Los Angeles Watts Riot of 1965, which resulted in 63 deaths, over \$1 billion in property damage, and thousands of federal troops deployed⁴¹. This uprising was widely publicized and was quite controversial. Some, especially liberals like King, pinned the cause of the riots on rampant poverty in deeply segregated communities. Billy Graham was of the opinion that it could be resolved through conversion efforts. One fundamentalist Baptist preacher blamed racial tensions on “the lawlessness of Martin Luther King and others, and the pussyfooting politicians who want the Negro vote.”⁴² These events represented deviancy from the proper social order for many Americans and heightened the anxieties surrounding desegregation and race relations.

Politically, the Johnson administration found it more advantageous to work with civil rights leaders like Dr. King than against them, for example implementing anti-poverty measures

³⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” August 1963, https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/_assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf

⁴⁰ Isserman and Kazin, *America Divided*, 39-42

⁴¹ Morgan Jerkins, “She Played a Key Role in the Police Response to the Watts Riots. The Memory Still Haunts Her—But Black History Is Full of Haunting Memories,” Time, August 3, 2020. <https://time.com/5873228/watts-riots-memory/>

⁴² Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, (New York, Simon & Schuster: 2017), 246

in Los Angeles after the Watts riots in accordance with Dr. King's suggestion.⁴³ Johnson had previously passed the Civil Rights Act merely a month before the Watts Riot broke out and was working on the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was created to "prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age in hiring, promoting, firing, setting wages, testing, training, apprenticeship, and all other terms and conditions of employment."⁴⁴

The Voting Rights Act was intended to remove any "voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure... to vote on account of race or color."⁴⁵ Both of these acts were monumental and changed the lives of African American citizens forever, but as he signed the Civil Rights Act, Johnson is quoted as saying, "I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come."⁴⁶ By this Johnson was referring to conservative southerners colloquially referred to as Dixiecrats, a strong faction within the Democratic Party, who tended to support segregation more firmly than the other elements of the Democratic Party platform. While the passage of these civil rights laws represented a point in time when there was enough social acceptance for Civil Rights that they could come into existence, they also became a rallying point around which those in opposition could and did rally.

⁴³ "Watts Rebellion (Los Angeles)," The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/watts-rebellion-los-angeles>

⁴⁴ "Civil Rights Act of 1964: P.L. 88-352," United States Senate, July 2, 1964. <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/CivilRightsActOf1964.pdf>

⁴⁵ "Voting Rights Act (1965)," Milestone Documents, National Archives, August 6, 1965, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act>

⁴⁶ Michael Oreskes, "Civil Rights Act Leaves Deep Mark On The American Political Landscape," The New York Times, July 2, 1989, <https://www.nytimes.com/1989/07/02/us/civil-rights-act-leaves-deep-mark-on-the-american-political-landscape.html>.

Johnson was not wrong about the political backlash to the Act. Indeed, the Civil Rights Movement and other actions taken in the pursuit of justice as a whole were controversial. For all that some white voters had sympathy for activists attacked on camera during such actions as the Children's Crusade or lunch counter sit-ins or felt stirred to action by Dr. King's Letter from Birmingham Jail, there was also widespread racial anxiety about the potential for desegregation. More conservative members of society were concerned that desegregation would change the moral fabric of America, and conservatives involved in politics knew that these laws threatened to upset the balance of power in previously solid conservative strongholds. Violence surrounding the quest for civil rights, whether clashes with police on scheduled marches or race riots like in Watts, also muddled the political sentiment the majority of the country held about the changes desegregation brought.

Southern Democrats, specifically, did not approve of the Civil and Voting Rights Act and chose to split with Johnson's party over that. Their belief in the government's role in race relations was best described by Alabama Governor George Wallace's famous phrase from his inaugural address, "segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever."⁴⁷ The passage of civil rights legislation inevitably alienated white Southern voters from the Democratic Party. This presented a massive opportunity for Republican politicians: openly accept these political exiles and get a boost in the polls.⁴⁸ However, this needed to be carefully negotiated. As demonstrated by the failure of the Goldwater campaign for president in 1964, overt, brash bigotry did not win national elections. The new Republican strategy was cruel in its simplicity.

⁴⁷ "'Segregation Forever': A Fiery Pledge Forgiven, But Not Forgotten," Transcript of radio broadcast episode of All Things Considered, January 10, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/01/14/169080969/segregation-forever-a-fiery-pledge-forgiven-but-not-forgotten>.

⁴⁸ "'Segregation Forever': A Fiery Pledge Forgiven, But Not Forgotten," Transcript of radio broadcast episode of All Things Considered, January 10, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/01/14/169080969/segregation-forever-a-fiery-pledge-forgiven-but-not-forgotten>.

Instead of openly stating the bigotry of the public conscious, politicians would just imply it. This was explained in harsher language by infamous Republican campaign consultant Lee Atwater in 1981.

You start out in 1954 by saying, “N*gger, n*gger, n*gger.” By 1968 you can’t say “n*gger”—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like, uh, forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff, and you’re getting so abstract. Now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites.... “We want to cut this,” is much more abstract than even the busing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than “N*gger, n*gger.”⁴⁹

Clearly at this point in American history, racism was a strong political motivator that was entwined with and concealed by stances considered more benign to the American public. While the conservative voters who were swayed by this type of argument likely would not be flattered by this portrayal, its continued use suggests that racism was imbedded into white American culture as a value.

The Civil Rights Movement was not the only area in American society that found new unrest in the 1960s. On a smaller scale, college students, as a group, often chafed at the high level of control that universities had over students’ lives, particularly over their political expression.⁵⁰ This came to a head at the University of California, Berkeley campus in 1964. Students with more radical opinions, such as strong support of desegregation and voters’ rights for Black voters, began to push back against the boundaries UC Berkeley laid out. With several student leaders of this protest who had been involved in the Civil Rights Movement and were inspired by nonviolent protest tactics like sit-ins and walk-outs, UC Berkeley’s Free Speech

⁴⁹ Rick Perlstein, “Exclusive: Lee Atwater’s Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy,” *The Nation*, November 13, 2012, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/>.

⁵⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.) 160.

Movement became an active and visible force on campus in the 1960s.⁵¹ This quickly spread to other campuses and pivoted to include protests for connected issues, such as the Vietnam War.

Obviously, disruptive political protests on college campuses were not universally popular. Then California gubernatorial candidate Ronald Reagan called the protests “the mess at Berkeley,” pointing the finger at administrators and government officials like his opponent Pat Brown for allowing the situation to get to that point.⁵² It became a political talking point, especially among conservative politicians in California, who also charge Democratic governor Pat Brown with being too lax on the situation. This put Brown at a disadvantage in the 1966 race, which he ultimately lost to Republican opponent Reagan. Using the agitation of the day, in this case University of California, Berkley’s Free Speech Movement, allowed Reagan to posit himself as the calm and steady lighthouse in a sea of unrest.⁵³

Conservative college students followed the lead of their political influences. Many long felt marginalized by the teachings of their liberal professors and the actions of their liberal classmates. One group formed to oppose this was Young Americans for Freedom (YAF). Its early founders and members were young supporters of presidential candidate Barry Goldwater. The membership rallied around conservative leaders like Goldwater and influencers like William F. Buckley, who started the conservative magazine *The National Review*. Buckley himself hosted the conference where the YAF’s organization and philosophy was chartered. This

⁵¹ Karen Aichinger, “Berkeley Free Speech Movement,” *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, 2009, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1042/berkeley-free-speech-movement>.

⁵² Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011), 295-297

⁵³ *Ibid.*

founding document was called the Sharon Statement after the location of the Buckley family estate in Sharon, Connecticut.⁵⁴

The Sharon Statement declared the definition of the conservative movement as YAF understood it and is useful as an example of popular conservative principles in the beginning of the 1960s. This document was largely about secular matters, though did include “[t]hat foremost among the transcendent values is the individual’s use of his God-given free will.” The general priorities center around limiting power to the federal government by strictly defining its role as a force to “protect those freedoms through the preservation of internal order, the provision of national defense, and the administration of justice.” Free market economics is elevated to being an element of “the moral and physical strength of the nation” as “the single economic system compatible with the requirements of personal freedom and constitutional government.” The Sharon Statement also defines “international Communism” as “at present, the greatest single threat to these liberties.”⁵⁵

This code of values was in line with the conservative movement, echoing some of the primary domestic planks of major conservative Republican candidates including Reagan, Nixon, and Goldwater. Reagan’s 1967 gubernatorial speech included a statement champion more power given to state and local governments, “[w]e will work also to make the state an effective bulwark between the people and an ever-encroaching Federal government. That government is best which remains closest to the people...”⁵⁶ The Republican national platform for 1960, with which Nixon

⁵⁴ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.) 202-204.

⁵⁵ “The Sharon Statement,” Young Americans for Freedom, September 11, 1960, <https://www.yaf.org/news/the-sharon-statement/>.

⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, “April 1, 1967 Address of Governor Ronald Reagan to California Republican Assembly, Lafayette Hotel, Long Beach,” Transcript of speech delivered at Long Beach, California, April 1, 1967, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/april-1-1967-address-governor-ronald-reagan-california-republican-assembly>

ran an unsuccessful first campaign for president declared that “[t]he only effective way to accelerate economic growth is to increase the traditional strengths of our free economy—initiative and investment, productivity and efficiency.”⁵⁷ Goldwater, when accepting the Republican nomination for president in 1964, boldly proclaimed that “[t]he good Lord raised this mighty Republic to be a home for the brave and to flourish as the land of the free-not to stagnate in the swampland of collectivism, not to cringe before the bully of communism.”⁵⁸ The notions of modern conservatism on domestic policy in the 1960s frequently included language about the importance of federal noninterference in local matters, greater freedom for market forces of supply and demand, and rejection of communism as a movement and ideology. This came both from state and national political leaders and those taking a keen interest in politics from their own homes.

Domestic Conflict

While much of the political discourse of this era was on “hard” policy, with topics like foreign affairs and economic regulation, there was also growing focus on more personal issues like female reproductive health and how it affected the relationships women had with partners and employment. As the feminist rallying cry went, the personal became political. In 1960, the first oral contraceptive, Enovid, was approved by the FDA. Reactions to this were mixed. Originally, the birth control pill had been approved by the FDA in 1959 as a therapeutic treatment for female menstrual cycle with a convenient side effect of preventing pregnancy for which it had been created and tested. This was to avoid morality laws in various places across the

⁵⁷ Republican Party Platforms, “Republican Party Platform of 1960.” Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273401>.

⁵⁸ Barry Goldwater, “Goldwater's 1964 Acceptance Speech,” Transcript of speech given at the 28th Republican National Convention, 1964, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwaterspeech.htm>.

United States that prevented distribution, and sometimes information, of contraceptives. After some success, creators brought it to the FDA specifically as a contraceptive.⁵⁹

As anticipated, there was some backlash, both from religious and legal sources. Enovid, more simply known as the Pill, was considered a pivotal part of the sexual revolution in the United States, allowing women to have sex with a lower chance of pregnancy. Some organizations, like the dominant factions of the Catholic Church, opposed it stringently, with Pope Paul IV saying “each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life.”⁶⁰ In contrast, Evangelical groups like the Southern Baptists were more ambivalent. Albert Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests that the allowance of individual control of the Pill was attractive to his denomination. In a 2010 interview, he said, “We bought into a mentality of human control. We welcomed the polio vaccine and penicillin and just received the Pill as one more great medical advance.”⁶¹ Mainline Protestant denominations like “United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the American Baptist Church, and the Episcopal Church” even had clergy encourage married couples to use birth control measures like the Pill by using “[r]esponsible parenthood language.” This was the notion that there was “Christian moral agency” in controlling when to have children.⁶² In any case, many women

⁵⁹ “A Timeline of Contraception.” *PBS American Experience*.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/pill-timeline/>

⁶⁰ Paul IV, “*Humanae Vitae*,” (Encyclical Letter, The Vatican, 1968.) https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html

⁶¹ Nancy Gibbs, “The Pill at 50: Sex, Freedom and Paradox, *TIME Magazine*, April 22, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1983884-5,00.html>.

⁶² Samira K. Mehta, “Family Planning Is a Christian Duty: Religion, Population Control, and the Pill in the 1960s,” in *Devotions and Desires: Histories of Sexuality and Religion in the Twentieth-Century United States*, ed. Gillian Frank, Bethany Moreton, and Heather R. White (Chapel Hill, NC, 2018; online edn, North Carolina Scholarship Online, 20 Sept. 2018), <https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469636269.003.0009>.

decided to take the Pill regardless of criticism from religious authorities because of the benefits that control over reproduction could bring their domestic lives or employment.

Birth control is not always 100% effective, especially in its primitive form. With the cultural softening towards contraception came more desire for safe and legal abortion. That came with pushback from conservative groups, especially when *Roe v Wade* was ruled. This Supreme Court ruling decided that women had an expectation of a particular level of privacy with their doctor, a type of implied shadow right not explicitly stated but supported by the Constitution. As such, a woman should legally be allowed to seek an abortion up to twenty weeks of pregnancy, at which point the fetus would need to be considered in the decision. This ruling was unprecedented but opened American women's option surrounding reproduction immensely.

In the ensuing years of the early 1970s, more grassroots support of anti-abortion causes were formed. They were notably composed of both Evangelicals and Catholic activists, putting aside their traditional distrust of one another.⁶³ This brought some level of political power in some parts of the country, notably Kansas, where a pro-life group did a literature drop about Representative William Roy, the Democratic candidate for Senate and doctor who had performed abortions in the past. This swayed the election in favor of his opponent, incumbent Senator Dole.⁶⁴ The anti-abortion coalition sway the election in favor of an anti-abortion politician, hinting at the power that could be harnessed should they ally on a larger scale.

Still, this power was limited and nuanced. In states like Minnesota, there was already presence of religious moderate groups that prevented a void being created for the abortion

⁶³ Allan J. Cigler, Mark Joslyn, and Burdett A. Loomis, "The Kansas Christian Right and the Evolution of Republican Politics," in *The Christian Right in American Politics*, ed. John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003)

⁶⁴ Ibid.

movement to gain full potential strength.⁶⁵ Not even all religious organizations across the country believed that abortion was inherently evil in all instances. For example, the Christian Medical Society and Christianity Today made a statement that abortion was reasonable for reasons including “individual health, family welfare, and social responsibility” and the Southern Baptist Convention of 1971 advocated to allow it “such conditions as rape, incest, clear evidence of severe fetal deformity, and carefully ascertained evidence of the likelihood of damage to the emotional, mental, and physical health of the mother.”⁶⁶ While the anti-abortion movement was important for demonstrating the combined power of Catholic and Protestant political pressure, it was not the galvanizing issue to form a national coalition.

This was particularly disappointing to men like Paul Weyrich. Weyrich, a Christian conservative political activist was looking for a way to forward a pro-business and pro-Christian agenda at the national level. Weyrich, himself a “deacon in the ultra-conservative Melkite Greek Catholic Church,” sought to achieve his goal of a moral free-market America by uniting religious conservative leaders with their political and economic conservative counterparts.⁶⁷ Previous influential connections made included the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank dedicated to “fighting antibusiness and anti-Christian sentiments in order to widen the wedge for conservatism” that was funded in part by the Coors brewing company.⁶⁸ Weyrich was also involved in the creation of Christian Voice, a California-based advocacy group known for “mailing ‘moral report cards’” about political candidates to “thousands of churches” in the area

⁶⁵ Corwin E. Smith and James M. Penning, “The Christian Right’s Mixed Success in Michigan,” in *The Christian Right in American Politics*, ed. John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003)

⁶⁶ Randall Balmer, “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” *Politico*, May 27, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133/>.

⁶⁷ Bruce Weber, “Paul Weyrich, 66, a Conservative Strategist, Dies,” *The New York Times*, December 18, 2008. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/19/us/politics/19weyrich.html>

⁶⁸ Dochuk, *Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 339-340

to influence their voting decisions.⁶⁹ Through these organizations, Weyrich realized that issues he or others around him had previously been involved with, from abortion to still-present fears of communism to the sexual revolution, provided an abundance of dry political kindling. He just needed the right issue, the right person, to spark it ablaze.

The chosen spark was “religious liberty.” That is, religious liberty to create and maintain segregated grade schools and colleges. After the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*, many white parents were scared of their children going to school with African American children. The solution for these parents was religiously-affiliated grade schools that did not admit African American students.⁷⁰ Many of the Evangelical versions of these schools were linked in some way to conservative Christian colleges which were also segregated, allowing the children in question to go their entire educational careers without sharing a classroom with a student or teacher who was African American. This loophole did not go unnoticed, however. As schools affiliated with religious institutions, segregation academies were tax-exempt. The 1971 Supreme Court case *Green v. Connally* ruled that racially discriminatory private schools did not qualify for tax-exempt status from the IRS. Similar court cases followed against schools that maintained segregation after this ruling.⁷¹

One major case was that of *Bob Jones University v. United States*. Bob Jones University did begin to allow the admission of African American students to the school, but maintained a strict set of anti-miscegenation rules. As a result, they lost their tax-exempt status and sued to try

⁶⁹ Ibid., 384

⁷⁰ Rebecca Onion, “The Stories of “Segregation Academies,” as Told by the White Students Who Attended Them,” *Slate*, November 7, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/11/segregation-academies-history-southern-schools-white-students.html>.

⁷¹ United States Internal Revenue Service, “I. Update on Private Schools,” 1982 EO CPE Text, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/eotopici82.pdf>.

to get it back on the basis of infringement on “religious liberty.” The case went up to the Supreme Court, which ruled that the IRS’s decision to revoke tax-exemption status was correct.⁷²

For Weyrich, this was the issue he needed. According to Dr. Randall Balmer, Weyrich had told him in private conversation that

I tried everything, I tried the abortion issue. I tried the women's rights issue, I tried the pornography issue. I tried school prayer issue. Nothing got their attention until the Internal Revenue Service began challenging the tax-exempt status of racially segregated evangelical institutions.⁷³

The term Weyrich- and others arguing about the case- used for this incident was “religious liberty.” By portraying the issue of the IRS determining tax policy based on an evaluation of the contribution of the schools in question as an attack on some vague religious liberty, the case could take on a more righteously indignant cant. Interestingly, when asked about that religious liberty in an interview with Larry King in 2000 on the day the rule on interracial dating was dropped, Dr. Bob Jones III, the president of that school, did not have specific Biblical justification. Instead he said “No, we can't back it up with a verse from the Bible. We never have tried to, we have never tried to do that. But we have said there is a principle here...” and “we are not going to the Supreme Court fighting for our rule and our -- we are fighting for our right to it. There is a religious freedom issue, that's all we ever fought for.” He also says that the interracial dating is part of a larger belief structure (opposition to a “one world church”).⁷⁴ This is another example of racism being a value, and in this case it is connected by the speaker to his religious beliefs.

⁷² "Bob Jones University v. United States." Oyez. Accessed November 15, 2022. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1982/81-3>.

⁷³ Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, (New York, Simon & Schuster: 2017), 304

⁷⁴ Bob Jones III, “Dr. Bob Jones III Discusses the Controversy Swirling Around Bob Jones University,” Interview with Larry King, *Larry King Live*, March 3, 2000, <http://www.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0003/03/lk1.00.html>.

Segregated schools were a commonality between Bob Jones and fellow popular minister Jerry Falwell Sr. founded what would become Liberty University and its attached K-12 school, Lynchburg Christian School as one of the thousands of private schools across the South that taught strong religious principles and did not admit African American students.⁷⁵ He is quoted as being very frustrated with the new rules regarding creating Christian schools, complaining that it was “It’s easier to open a massage parlor than a Christian school.”⁷⁶ He was a prime candidate as a figure for the movement Weyrich wanted unleashed, being a charismatic minister who agreed with Weyrich on all the other stances he tried to get national momentum for.

In 1979, the Moral Majority, a political action group, was founded with Jerry Falwell Sr. at the helm. The Moral Majority believed in smaller government, including in areas like schools, along with abortion legislation, family values, and opposing the Equal Rights Amendment. With Falwell’s fame in Christian circles and the fertile ground for the seeds of his message to land on, the Moral Majority soon claimed “70,000 pastors” and “1,000,000 church workers”.⁷⁷ They joined with other conservative Christian groups, including but far from limited to the Heritage Foundation and Christian Voice, to push legislation and candidates who supported their beliefs. Together, this loose mobilized political coalition forms the Religious Right, the intersection between conservative Christian religious belief, pro-business free market economic principles, and anti-communist zeitgeist.

The proving ground for this new movement on the national stage was the 1980 presidential election. The Moral Majority and Religious Right backed candidate Ronald Reagan.

⁷⁵ Frances Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals: the Struggle to Shape America*, (New York, Simon & Schuster: 2017), 286

⁷⁶ Randall Balmer, “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” *Politico*, May 27, 2014, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133/>.

⁷⁷ Harry Covert. *1980-03-14 Moral Majority Report*. Documents. Moral Majority Report, 1980. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32207752>.

Reagan was an ideal candidate for this movement, despite his previous divorce and occasional past legislation as governor that ran counter to some of the beliefs the Moral Majority professed. For one, he was a strong candidate in general, an affable former governor with a good head for public speaking. For another, he actively courted the Religious Right in return. This is best exemplified in his appearance at the National Affairs Briefing of the Religious Roundtable in Dallas, Texas, in 1980.⁷⁸ He was featured alongside such names as firebrand evangelist James Robison and “antifeminist leader of the Stop ERA movement” Phyllis Schlafly.⁷⁹ In his own speech, he mentioned keeping the federal government “out of the school” and notably said the famous phrase “You can’t endorse me, but I endorse you.”⁸⁰ With this, Reagan assured the Religious Right that he understood their position as technically politically neutral for tax purposes, so he would deliberately align himself with their political interests without having to be told. Reagan’s oratory skill, political maneuvering ability, and mutual desire for Religious Right support made him a both a likely candidate to win and a good proof of concept for the coalition as a whole.

Indeed, Reagan was a successful candidate in the 1980 presidential election. On January 20, 1981, Ronald Reagan was sworn in as the 40th president of the United States, swearing to bring national economic policy in line with the principles he and the business side of the Religious Right shared. He also briefly mentioned the religious element surrounding him, saying

I’m told that tens of thousands of prayer meetings are being held on this day, and for that I’m deeply grateful. We are a nation under God, and I believe God

⁷⁸ Dochuk, *Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 392-393

⁷⁹ Kathy Sawyer, “Linking Religion and Politics,” *Washington Post*, August 24, 1980, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/08/24/linking-religion-and-politics/3d68ea8c-ed85-4d5d-94da-8b429f911a96/>

⁸⁰ Dochuk, *Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, 393

intended for us to be free. It would be fitting and good, I think, if on each Inaugural Day in future years it should be declared a day of prayer.⁸¹

With this success, the Religious Right began to plan their next steps for political progress.

The 1960s and –70s were a tumultuous time, both for America as a whole and for the conservative movement. Groups like the Civil Rights Movement and Free Speech Movement upset the status quo in very public ways, especially garnering the support of younger activists. At the same time, their opponents reacted to this by utilizing the racist fears of the white populace to gain votes. As the sexual revolution kicked off, this only appeared to conservative observers as the continuation of the destruction of society. The Religious Right, headed by visible groups like the Moral Majority, offered an alternative to that. They urged Americans to vote with their values. By offering themselves as the commonsense opposition to the frightening changes seen in the world, the Religious Right could garner power easily.

⁸¹ Ronald Reagan, “Inaugural Address 1981,” January 20, 1981, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/inaugural-address-1981>

Section Three: When On High

The Religious Right seemed to burst onto the scene in the late 1970s. Their quick rise to power and rapid success encouraged them to continue to try and shape America in a more godly image. While Reagan had sometimes overlapping and sometimes diverging priorities, the Religious Right also had grassroots efforts to change things they found important right in their more local communities. As their positions in American politics became entrenched, members of the Religious Right continued to wage their moral crusades against new issues and old, transforming as time progressed to stay relevant to the trends they saw in the world around them.

Spurred on by new electoral victories and with the inertia of the growing movement behind them, members of the religious right with an interest in national policy began to create organizations to lobby congress for the interests of the religious right. Jerry Falwell, for example, continued to be part of the ongoing struggle to shape America's political landscape. While his televangelism, public speaking, and overt endorsements of political candidates are most well-known, his Moral Majority also had a more subtle wing dedicated to "providing adequate legal defense for individuals, families, and pro-moral organizations who are attacked by the godless, amoral forces of humanism" called the Moral Majority Legal Defense Foundation. This was apparently in reaction to actions by the American Civil Liberties Union, as a pamphlet written to recruit pastors to the Moral Majority cause claims the Legal Defense Foundation was "designed to be the pro-moral counterpart of the humanist-American Civil Liberties Union."⁸² The goals of the Religious Right had come to encompass not just getting politicians they supported elected but also legally attacking laws passed by politicians they did not.

⁸² *Your Invitation to Join the Moral Majority* (Washington DC, Moral Majority Inc.)

Similarly on the West Coast, Reverend Robert Grant's Christian Voice served similar function of countering the systems of a less "moral" world. Briefly mentioned previously, this organization was formed parallel to the Moral Majority in 1978 but had a quieter start. While Falwell was a televangelist in his own right, able to create his own publicity, Grant took a more intimate approach to activism. Christian Voice relied on local clergy, to whom "special mailings go to... alert them to important legislative battles." Clergy members would then tell their congregants who could mobilize as aggressive force. In addition to issue-based mailers, they also sent "moral report cards" on the different candidates running so that voters could use their churches to decide which candidate better fit with their values. This allowed the pastors involved at the head of Christian Voice to skirt laws related to political activism in churches, as there was not public record of these smaller ministers campaigning. Another wing of this group was their political action committee, which allowed donations to be collected in return from those same congregants and redistributed to political candidates without concern for most campaign finance laws.⁸³ Christian Voice's efforts to mobilize pastors as a intercessory political leadership to get votes and funds through the 1980s meant that when new moral issues arose, his group could act quickly and with great force.

New faces emerged in this field as well, including prominent administrators of private guidance. One prominent Religious Right member to do this was James Dobson. James Dobson was a name, if not a face, well known to the Christian fundamentalist community. A child psychologist from a proudly religious family, he had a popular radio program and a 1970 book titled *Dare to Discipline* which sold millions of copies. By 1989 Dobson ranked second only to Billy Graham in a survey of "Protestant denominational clerics" about "influential conservative

⁸³ Robert Zwier, *Born-Again Politics: The New Christian Right in America* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of the United States, 1982), 19

church leaders” without even being ordained.⁸⁴ Dobson was politically active as an individual, appointed as an officer of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, co-chairman of the Citizens Advisory Panel for Tax Reform, and “member and late chairman of the United States Army's Family Initiative” at various points throughout the 1980s.⁸⁵

Dobson’s primary goal was the proliferation of what he saw as Judeo-Christian family values. He founded two prominent organizations to accomplish that. The first, Focus on the Family, was described by the Los Angeles Times in 1995 as a “\$100-million-a-year Christian broadcasting and publishing empire” with a weekly audience in the millions, an impressive rate of growth since its founding in 1977. This branch of his organization encompassed his famous radio show, letter writing activities associated with it, family values workshops emphasizing the importance of a nuclear heteronormative family, and Dobson’s own books.⁸⁶ Focus on the Family was even contracted by the US military in 1984 to provide copies of Dobson’s famous *Where’s Dad?* Lecture, which focused on the importance of “strong bonds between fathers and their children” and formed the basis of the US Army’s Family Action Plan. Approximately 780,000 active-duty soldiers were expected to view this recording.⁸⁷ Through Focus on the Family, Dobson gained ardent followers through advice about parenting while also preaching the importance of the nuclear family and gender roles within it as the bedrock of American society.

⁸⁴ Peter Steinfels, “No Church, No Ministry, No Pulpit, He Is Called Religious Right's Star,” New York Times, June 5, 1990. <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/06/05/us/no-church-no-ministry-no-pulpit-he-is-called-religious-right-star.html>

⁸⁵ Mark Barna, “Timeline of James Dobson's career,” The Gazette, February 25, 2010.

https://gazette.com/news/timeline-of-james-dobsons-career/article_7e7e2ac1-e349-50c1-a23b-0583caba5508.html

⁸⁶ Larry B Stammer, “A Man of Millions: Broadcaster James Dobson Has Become a Leading Name in Evangelical Circles--and the Politicians Have Noticed,” Los Angeles Times, November 2, 1995.

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1995-11-02-ls-63874-story.html>

⁸⁷ “All Active-Duty U.S. Soldiers Are Expected to See Dobson Film,” Christianity Today, October 5, 1984.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1984/october-5/all-active-duty-us-soldiers-are-expected-to-see-dobson-film.html>

The second, Family Research Council, was more specifically focused on political lobbying, to the point that the organizations “severed ties” in 1992 to “free” the Family Research Council “from restraints on lobbying imposed by Focus on the Family’s nonprofit status.” This was a purely political organization, which was why it was separate from the main Focus on the Family, though Dobson headed both.⁸⁸ Family Research Council used Dobson’s reputation, money, and connections to forward a socially conservative political agenda with key issues like abortion, pornography, and homosexuality being common legislative topics⁸⁹. A major part of that agenda was producing studies that supported Dobson’s view of the world. These organizations worked in conjunction to forward a vision of America that James Dobson favored through Focus on the Family’s ability to talk to citizens directly and the Family Research Council’s contact with prominent conservative politicians.

Aside and beyond from the previously mentioned abortion controversy and educational issues discussed later in this chapter, the talking points of these organizations, among others, was the perceived upheaval of the social order that had begun in the 1960s and 70s. Along with the previously mentioned Civil Rights Movement, activists of a vast variety of stripes came together to demand equality and an end to mistreatment. Two of the most prominent in this narrative are the second wave feminism and gay rights movement.

Second wave feminism, so named because it built on the activism of the suffragettes in the early 1900s, is generally considered to have been influenced into being by *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Frieden in 1963. Frieden was inspired to write her book after a class reunion

⁸⁸ Peter Steinfels, “No Church, No Ministry, No Pulpit, He Is Called Religious Right’s Star,” New York Times, June 5, 1990. <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/06/05/us/no-church-no-ministry-no-pulpit-he-is-called-religious-right-s-star.html>

⁸⁹ Mark Barna, “Timeline of James Dobson’s career,” The Gazette, February 25, 2010. https://gazette.com/news/timeline-of-james-dobsons-career/article_7e7e2ac1-e349-50c1-a23b-0583eaba5508.html

where many of her female classmates expressed secret dissatisfaction with the life path most encouraged of women, housewifery. The book became an immediate hit and the waves it made allowed space to bring up other common grievances of women of the time.⁹⁰ As discussed previously, this overlapped with medical advances like the birth control pill, which gave women greater bodily autonomy and financial control over their lives. Many women made the choice to enter the workforce, which raised more concerns about workplace sexual harassment and equal pay. Unlike first wave feminism, which was largely about women's legal right to vote, second wave feminism was about alleviating discrimination in other parts of a woman's life.

Tied into sexual liberation was the gay rights movement. As mentioned in section one, there were growing queer populations in major cities especially and this only continued through the 1980s. Queer people organized around businesses like bookstores, bars, and bathhouses in these urban enclaves. Sex was a significant part of many queer spaces due to the unifying factor of them, with bookstores selling erotic novels while bars and bathhouses served as safe spaces for sexual congress. While still representing a tiny minority of the population, even the queer population, out queer people were becoming more known about as the decades wore on. At the same time, most queer people kept their sexualities relatively quiet in order to avoid condemnation, rejection, and violence.⁹¹ This led to queer people being both visibly divergent from expected social norms and secretly hiding among "normal" people and visibly following those same norms.

⁹⁰ Jacob Muñoz, "The Powerful, Complicated Legacy of Betty Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique,'" Smithsonian Magazine, February 4, 2021. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/powerful-complicated-legacy-betty-friedans-feminine-mystique-180976931/>

⁹¹ Jen Jack Giesecking, "LGBTQ Spaces and Places," in LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016)

This duality- and both components of it- caused pushback. Part of that was governmental, a continuation of the Lavender Scare long after McCarthy's downfall. Coordinated government efforts taught the public to identify and have disdain for gay people. One such campaign is recorded in *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida*, a 1964 educational leaflet condemning homosexuality. This pamphlet, nicknamed the Purple Pamphlet, was based on an investigation by the state legislature seeking to examine "infiltration" of facets of Floridian life by "practicing homosexuals." It portrayed gay men specifically as most dangerous sexual predators than child molesters, who ensnared teenage boys and seduced them into becoming sexual deviants themselves. These claims were illustrated with images of young teenagers in states of undress and even bondage, purported to be from "a homosexual's collection."⁹² This is just one example of the pervasive myth of homosexuality being tied with sexual exploitation of minors, with LGBTQ+ people posed as an enemy that threatens American life via the children. Moreover, it posited queer people as secret predators that the public should be wary of at all times, lest their own children be converted to deviance as well.

Queer activists faced harassment from fellow citizens and police officers alike. Spaces known to be queer were raided and patrons assaulted. In 1969, patrons at the Stonewall Inn, a "popular gay bar" in Greenwich Village New York, resisted efforts by the police to force them out of their own domain. The result was a "three-day riot" that, despite garnering "only minimal local news coverage," became a chief rallying point for the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. From this riot, activists continued to fight against discrimination in areas like housing,

⁹² Homosexuality and citizenship in Florida: a report of the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee. (Tallahassee, Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, 1964), University of Florida Digital Collections, <http://palmmm.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/uf%3A35645#page/cover1/mode/1up>

employment, and representation.⁹³ While this fervor pushed ahead important advocacy for queer people, it also opened them up to criticism for existing and made them a clear and obvious target for hatred.

This divergence from the social norm of the nuclear family was profoundly disturbing to many on the religious right, and the societal changes activists were fighting for were considered destructive to the society those on the Religious Right prized. The notions of women in the workplace or able to divorce easily promised to break down their illusion of perfect Christian nuclear families as the bedrock of American society. James Dobson, for example, wrote books like *Love Must Be Tough* and *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, which spoke about how to get a marriage back on track with heavy emphasis on reconciling everything but adultery after both parties are born again and the inherent differences between men and women that neither party could possibly have in common. A Baltimore Sun reported quoted a “Republican presidential hopeful” as saying, “Almost every problem we have in this society can be attributed to the breakdown of the marriage-based, two-parent family.”⁹⁴ As a whole, the conservative movement was heavily influenced by notions of “family values” and went to great lengths to pressure all American families into fitting that ideal mold.

The Equal Rights Amendment was a target of particular anti-feminist ire. Leading that campaign was activist Phyllis Schlafly. Schlafly got her start in the right-wing spotlight supporting Goldwater with the book *A Choice Not An Echo*, firmly cementing her into the

⁹³ Leisa Meyer and Helis Sikt, “Introduction To Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, And Queer History (LGBTQ History) In The United States,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington DC: National Park Foundation and National Park Service, 2016)

⁹⁴ Diana Hochstadt Butler, “Romanticizing the family,” The Baltimore Sun, May 26, 1995.
<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1995-05-26-1995146214-story.html>

conservative ecosystem of the 1970s.⁹⁵ However, her best known contribution to the American discourse was her whole-hearted grassroots coordination against the ERA. Schlafly insisted that the ERA would force women out of the home and into the workplace, even though, in her words, “Women find their greatest fulfillment at home with the family.” She and her supporters would gather around the Capitol with baked goods as a representation of the potential losses caused by women being recognized as equal citizens under law before Schlafly herself would travel across the country to give a talk to a local antifeminist women’s organization to promote her views that way.⁹⁶ The conflict surrounding women’s rights hinted at a deeper agitation with the nation’s status quo in regard to gender. Schlafly used her platform to support and maintain that status quo, making herself out to seem like a beacon of reason amongst the noise of women who wanted equal protection under the law. After all, if the nation fully admitted its discrimination based on sex and attempted to fix it, that would cause massive change. Schlafly erased that fear in the minds of her followers.

Organizations like Anita Bryant’s Save Our Children found more appalling “the homosexual agenda.” Bryant, a former beauty pageant winner, present orange advertisement model, and singer became associated with the anti-gay movement after her home county of Dade County, Florida, passed a gay rights bill in 1977. This bill was meant to prevent “discrimination against homosexuals in such areas as employment, housing, labor unions and private education.”⁹⁷ Bryant and her husband started the Save Our Children campaign because they

⁹⁵ Tanya Ballard Brown, “Conservative Icon Phyllis Schlafly Dies At 92,” National Public Radio, September 5, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/09/05/492748832/conservative-icon-phyllis-schlafly-dies-at-92>

⁹⁶ Douglas Martin, “Phyllis Schlafly, Conservative Leader and Foe of ERA, Dies at 92,” New York Times, September 5, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/06/obituaries/phyllis-schlafly-conservative-leader-and-foe-of-era-dies-at-92.html>

⁹⁷ John Tanasychuk, “How Anita Bryant fought -- and helped -- gay rights,” South Florida Sun Sentinel, June 4, 2007, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-2007-06-04-0706030236-story.html>

believed the allowance of gay people to be openly gay would allow them "to provide 'role models' for the impressionable - that is, the right to tell all society, especially our youth, that homosexuality isn't wrong, just 'different' and, of course, 'Gays.'"⁹⁸ The danger of this was that "Homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they must recruit."⁹⁹ This recruitment was strongly implied to be sexual contact between an adult man and a previously "normal" child, despite the fact that there was little in the way of evidence that openly gay people were any danger to children in that way. Bryant went out of her way to imply that homosexuality was a type of social disease, not an inborn quality of a person, echoing and guiding anti-gay thought at the time. Bryant's opposition to the law was successful and it was repealed soon after. Importantly, this marked a case where the notion of queer people as inherent predators affected public policy crossed with the increased visibility of queer people.

Part of the reason that the notion of covert abuse- so subtle that no parent had even seen it happen- occurring on a widespread basis was believable to the American public was because it was delivered into a society that was already rocked with allegations of heinous Satanic ritual abuse. Briefly put, the Satanic Panic began in 1980 with the book *Michelle Remembers*, which detailed alleged Satanic ritual abuse uncovered in the repressed memories of a former victim. This sparked a fury that only intensified with the McMartin Preschool Trial, where preschool children, through questioning by their parents or investigators, gave wild testimony of bizarre abuse from a Satanic cult. The fervor from these incidents launched similar investigations into other daycares, with parents, mental health professionals, and law enforcement being trained to

⁹⁸ Jay Clarke, "Gay Rights Fight Shaping Up in Miami," *The Washington Post*, March 27, 1977, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1977/03/27/gay-rights-fight-shaping-up-in-miami/e4f596c1-f8e0-4785-b528-599077a478ba/>.

⁹⁹ John Tanasychuk, "How Anita Bryant fought -- and helped -- gay rights," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, June 4, 2007, <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-2007-06-04-0706030236-story.html>

identify this insidious form of abuse based on little evidence¹⁰⁰. Despite the fact that no videos or photographs of the incidents were found, those prosecuting the case insisted that there were such images of the outlandish claims “because so many children talk about being photographed on so many occasions.” Cases like the McMartin Preschool trial were discussed in newspapers alongside actual cases of child sexual abuse like the trial of Allan Licht, in whose home was found forty thousand photographs of boys aged twelve to fifteen having sexual contact with each other or adult men.¹⁰¹ The conflation of abuse between real cases against otherwise-normal people with such obvious evidence and baseless claims against satanic cults with no further evidence than a preschooler’s word fed into an environment of deep suspicion and mistrust surrounding satanic ritual abuse.

The hysteria surrounding purported Satanic influences in the lives of innocent Americans was not limited to repressed memories or small children. A variety of new popular cultural fascinations came under fire. Moral panics cropped up around the recently released tabletop roleplaying game Dungeons and Dragons as well as around new music released, especially that with lyrics that were sexually explicit or morally dubious.¹⁰² Police officers were heavily trained in recognizing cult crimes seen primarily in the public imagination.¹⁰³ This type of panic lent credibility to the notion of strange anti-normal forces lurking in the shadows and infecting young people with dangerous ideas that might have serious physical consequences. As a result, Bryant’s type of charge against gay men was finding root in the fertile soil of the minds of those primed to

¹⁰⁰ Alan Yuhas, “It’s Time to Revisit the Satanic Panic, New York Times, March 31, 2021.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/31/us/satanic-panic.html>

¹⁰¹ AP, “Los Angeles Pressing Inquiry Into Sexual Abuse Of Children,” New York Times, April 1, 1964.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/01/us/los-angeles-pressing-inquiry-into-sexual-abuse-of-children.html>

¹⁰² Deflem, M. Popular Culture and Social Control: The Moral Panic on Music Labeling. *Am J Crim Just* **45**, 2–24 (2020). <https://doi-org.wu.opal-libraries.org/10.1007/s12103-019-09495-3>

¹⁰³ Robert D. Hicks, “Police Pursuit of Satanic Crime,” *Skeptical Inquirer* Volume 14, Spring 1990, 276-286.

<https://cdn.centerforinquiry.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/1990/04/22165231/p64.pdf>

believe that some differences were decidedly dangerous, and the Religious Right was reminded of the cultural power that comes from being on the right side of fear in a population.

Into this fraught social environment came a devastating new epidemic. In Los Angeles, California, a total of “5 young men, all active homosexuals” were found to have a rare form of pneumonia that generally affected those with very weakened immune systems.¹⁰⁴ There was no known contact or sexual partner linking the men. Within a few months, there were cases cropping up in other cities across the country. Doctors rushed to uncover the particulars of this strange new disease as more and more cases became known. Throughout the 1980s, doctors and medical researchers found that Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) spread through bodily fluids like semen and blood, but likely not spit or casual contact. The virus attacked immune cells to prevent the patient’s body from fighting off the infection. An infected patient could go without symptoms for years but suddenly become beset by opportunistic infections when the immune system was so depleted that anything could take over. And, in the 1980s, HIV/AIDS was considered 100% fatal.

For obvious reasons, the general public was terrified. Noted and acclaimed infectious disease specialists like Dr. Anthony Fauci were alarmed and understood very little information of this “novel” disease, and the public had access to even less. Said Fauci, “I had no idea what it was, but the way it was acting was strongly suggestive of it being a communicable disease... So I felt first something a little vague, a little confusing, and then a feeling of some significant anxiety about what the heck was going on here.”¹⁰⁵ With even the method of transmission unknown, people were afraid to touch or interact with people infected with HIV. This even

¹⁰⁴ “Pneumocystis Pneumonia --- Los Angeles,” *Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report*, Center for Disease Control, June 5, 1981.

¹⁰⁵ “Interview: Anthony Fauci,” *Frontline: The Age of AIDS*. PBS, 2006.

extended to medical professionals who might be called to treat patients infected with HIV. In one poll reported in the Boston Globe in 1988, 15% of surveyed doctors said they “would refuse to treat a patient with AIDS” and approximately 50% believed that they had that right as medical professionals.¹⁰⁶ While heavily associated with gay men and intravenous drug users, other populations soon became infected as well. For example, the United States blood supply was contaminated, leading to high infection rates in hemophiliacs who relied on it. These victims were often younger than those infected through other means due to the low life expectancy of hemophiliacs from complications of their disorder. Children found to be infected with HIV were often forced out of school or only allowed to attend under dehumanizing conditions. The Ray family, who fought a legal battle over this denial of their rights, had their house burned down in a targeted attack.¹⁰⁷ They were far from the only victims of AIDS to face violence in addition to and because of their conditions. Terrified people lashed out at the most visible reminder that a deadly and horrifying virus was painfully killing in a way that was hard for the general public to understand.

In the face of this terror and the aggression it caused among the general public, White House was notably silent for much of the early phase of the epidemic. While doctors, medical researchers, and activists from the gay community put a great deal of time and effort into understanding this new plague, there was little response by or on behalf of the president. What was mentioned about AIDS was in dismissal, even humor, such as a press briefing from 1982 when Press Secretary Larry Speakes was asked if there was any talk of the epidemic in the White

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell Silver, “The Morality of Refusing to Treat HIV-Positive Patients,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (1989): 149–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24353380>.

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Kastor, “Blood Feud: Hemophiliacs AIDS,” *Washington Post*, May 10, 1993. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/05/10/blood-feud-hemophiliacs-aids/d29c660e-9d8d-467a-ab2a-e66b2232f879/>

House. Not only did Speakes deny it, he did so with a series of jokes where implied homosexuality were the punchline.¹⁰⁸ It took until 1987 for Reagan himself to address the topic. By that point, more than 28,000 Americans had been diagnosed as infected, and over 24,000 had died.¹⁰⁹ Reagan's silence on the matter of AIDS allowed paranoia and cruelty to fester among the American people.

All the while, leaders of the Religious Right loudly proclaimed who was responsible for the epidemic: gay people, for being gay. Jerry Falwell said that "AIDS is a lethal judgement of God on the sin of homosexuality and it is also the judgement of God on America for endorsing this vulgar, perverted, and reprobate lifestyle."¹¹⁰ The Moral Majority Report for July 1983 ran a headline saying "AIDS: Homosexual Diseases Threaten American Families" around a photograph of a presumably all-heterosexual nuclear family in medical masks with an article that concluded that the reason the government had not moved quickly in response to the epidemic was legislative fear of "the homosexual lobby."¹¹¹ Reagan White House staffer and Religious Right activist Pat Buchanan said "The poor homosexuals. They have declared war on nature, and now nature is exacting an awful retribution."¹¹² The Religious Right had decided who was to blame for the mass paranoia of the AIDS crisis and that was the people affected by it most and first. After all, the fact that they were suffering showed they deserved to.

¹⁰⁸ Larry Speakes, "Press Briefing," Speech, Washington, DC, October 15, 1982.

<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cohen/aids/5571095.0487.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

¹⁰⁹ "Snapshots of an Epidemic: An HIV/AIDS Timeline," amFAR, accessed April 2, 2023.

¹¹⁰ Mark R. Kowalewski, "Religious Constructions of the AIDS Crisis," *Sociological Analysis* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 91-96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711343>

¹¹¹ Harry Covert. *1983-07 Moral Majority Report*. Documents. Moral Majority, 1983. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32207850>.

¹¹² "Pat Buchanan's Greatest Hits," Washington Post, Accessed April 2, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1987/02/04/pat-buchanans-greatest-hits/416e2224-f7cd-4271-8e9d-0712712df6f3/>

They also resisted strategies intended to reduce the spread of AIDS on homophobic bases. Phyllis Schlafly insisted that attempts to educate students on how to avoid catching AIDS was an attempt “to force a teaching in the public school classroom of the acceptability of promiscuous or homosexual lifestyles with the use of condoms” and called it “teaching safe sodomy.” Pat Robertson said that the solution to the AIDS crisis wasn’t government spending in support of a cure or education but “the self-restraint of the people...The homosexuals are saying, 'Spend more government money, find a cure so we can continue our aberrant lifestyle.' And I don't think that is a proper request.”¹¹³ The leaders of the Religious Right were very clear: gay people were being stricken with AIDS due to the judgement of God for the sin of being gay and the solution was to minimize sexuality, especially same-sex expression of homosexuality, as a way to protect the poor innocent straight people who were caught in the crossfire.

By utilizing the widespread antipathy toward the gay men and drug users initially affected by HIV/AIDS, Reagan was able to ignore the problem for years without any widespread backlash. It was only once the crisis had begun to be sympathetic, through the activism of such people as Ryan White and Magic Johnson, that Reagan addressed the issue at all. Even still, he did not increase funding to the CDC.

This was a common refrain to Reagan’s approach to domestic spending: when the victims of a social ill were somehow marginalized, he could use the stereotypes against them to remove assistance funding. For example, one of the areas of domestic spending Reagan intended to cut was welfare, specifically aid from government programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Part of his campaigning against this aid was the promotion of a “welfare queen” figure. This figure was implied to be Black, poor, and popping out babies while unmarried with no

¹¹³ Mark R. Kowalewski, “Religious Constructions of the AIDS Crisis,” *Sociological Analysis* Vol. 51, No. 1 (Spring 1990): 91-96. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711343>

reason but to bilk easy money from the government. In a radio address on welfare reform in 1986, he claimed that “a teenage girl who becomes pregnant can make herself eligible for welfare benefits that will set her up in an apartment of her own, provide medical care, and feed and clothe her” so long as she “not marry or identify the father.”¹¹⁴ He also frequently told an anecdote about Linda Taylor, a Chicago resident who was considered African American and was found guilty of large-scale welfare fraud.¹¹⁵

There's a woman in Chicago... She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands... And she's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over \$150,000.

This was an exaggeration of a case of welfare fraud that existed as part of Linda Taylor's crimes with her name removed. The implication of the telling was that if the unnamed woman in question could do it, she was far from the only one. Reagan's storytelling about the terrible crime against taxpayers of potential welfare fraud was pared with bragging about the number of people he had removed from California's welfare rolls as governor.¹¹⁶ This was to incite disgust and mistrust against those who received welfare by portraying them as potential fraudsters to prevent further questions about the effects his policies would have on people in poverty. Reagan made the issue of welfare and social safety nets an “us vs. Them” battle between his constituents and recipients of welfare, reducing empathy and using emotional manipulation to leverage support to cut funding in that area.

¹¹⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform.” Accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/radio-address-nation-welfare-reform>.

¹¹⁵ Josh Levin, “The Welfare Queen,” *Slate*, December 19, 2013. https://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2013/12/linda_taylor_welfare_queen_ronald_reagan_made_her_a_notorious_american_villain.html

¹¹⁶ “‘Welfare Queen’ Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign.” February 15, 1976, sec. Archives. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/02/15/archives/welfare-queen-becomes-issue-in-reagan-campaign-hitting-a-nerve-now.html>.

This was also true of Reagan's expansion of the War on Drugs. Declared in 1971 by President Nixon, the War on Drugs' stated purpose was to reduce the incidence of dangerous addictive substances on the streets. However, Nixon's domestic policy advisor, John Ehrlichman, declared in 1994 that

The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.¹¹⁷

Bearing that in mind, Reagan's continuation and expansion of the War on Drugs can be read as a continuation of that justification, especially since the mandatory minimum sentence his administration set for the type of cocaine associated with African American communities was many times longer than the type of cocaine associated with white communities, despite no real difference in effect. Nancy Reagan was also involved in the simultaneous fight against drugs and condemnation of drug users with her First Lady "Just Say No" campaign, which positioned drug use and abuse as a choice one could easily walk away from. At an address to the nation in 1986 which both Ronald and Nancy Reagan spoke at, Nancy said that "There's no moral middle ground. ... We want you to help us create an outspoken intolerance for drug use. ... I implore each of you to be unyielding and inflexible in your opposition to drugs." This mentality fed into the punitive nature of the War on Drugs, which sought more to put drug users behind bars than prevent them from using in the first place. That same address had Ronald Reagan announce that "these proposals will bring the Federal commitment to fighting drugs to \$3 billion."¹¹⁸ The

¹¹⁷ Dan Baum, "Legalize It All," *Harper's Magazine*. <https://harpers.org/archive/2016/04/legalize-it-all/>

¹¹⁸ Ronald and Nancy Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Campaign Against Drug Abuse," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, September 14, 1986. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-campaign-against-drug-abuse>

commitment of funds to the War on Drugs in contrast with the cuts to welfare programs, indicate that this was an area of notable priority for the Reagan administration.

The economic impact of various federal programs strongly indicates the Reagan administration's priorities because a great deal of Reagan's platform was economically based. This was a campaign talking point he followed through with. Reagan's primary allegiance in office was to his economic policy, called supply-side economics, "trickle-down economics" or even "Reaganomics" for his championing. Supply-side economics is a direct opposition of demand-side economics that was prevalent in the American federal government from the 1930s on, where the government bolstered the demand for products in an effort to prevent economic depression. Reagan came into office during an economic crisis, so this claim seemed dubious to him. Instead, supply-side economics believed that the solution to economic woes was to "ensure soundness on the supply side" by cutting taxes to producers while cutting government spending as much as possible. The Laffer curve, for example, was used as theoretical justification for the concept that "reducing tax rates could increase tax revenues by stimulating economic activity." These concepts made perfect sense to Reagan, who based the economic policy of his administration on it.¹¹⁹ The result of supply-side economics was a reduction in both corporate taxes and social safety nets, which made him especially popular among voters who favored the ideal of individualism.

Reagan's interests in deregulation of industry, lowering corporate taxes, and minimizing domestic spending both matched the goals of and were supported by the Religious Right. As previously mentioned, the Religious Right preferred nuclear families and tax exemption for any purportedly religious association regardless of actions. For example, Reagan's pet talking point,

¹¹⁹ Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011.) 260

the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program was also a target of the Moral Majority, because they felt that it broke up the family unit and encouraged separation of parental partners.

They want deregulation, they want lower taxes for themselves, and they want their churches to be the pillars of social support instead of the government. For example, the April 1980 edition of the Moral Majority Report included opposition to a bill that would federally fund domestic violence shelters, with arguments that “domestic violence, as a local problem affecting the health of families, is not a legitimate concern of the federal government” while also complaining that domestic violence centers tended to try to get battered women to permanently leave their abusive situations.¹²⁰ By making domestic violence a local concern instead of a federal one, they would have been able to side step any outside opinion on what the proper way of treating partners fleeing domestic violence should be.

However, Reagan also was not willing to spend money or political capital toward the Religious Right priorities to the extent they craved. For all that the Religious Right was a loud and active group, and one “enjoying unprecedented access to the presidency and the White House” they were still only a faction within the Republican Party, and one with particularly polarizing views.¹²¹ For example, Reagan’s Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, a conservative Christian, drew heavy criticism when he argued that conservation efforts were useless because “I do not know how many future generations we can count on before the Lord returns.” Watt was encouraged to resign, demonstrating that the image of a zealot president was not one Reagan or his staffers wanted.¹²² In pursuit of a more moderate, generalist image, “Reagan’s key advisors

¹²⁰ Harry Covert. *1980-04-11 Moral Majority Report*. Documents. Moral Majority Report, 1980. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32207733>.

¹²¹ Matthew Avery Sutton, “Reagan, Religion, and the Culture Wars of the 1980s,” 204-216.

¹²² Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2011) 451-452

generally tried to insulate the president from religious activists.”¹²³ The Religious Right may have been a group with enough power for Reagan to actively court, but that does not mean they had unlimited access to him or power over him. The interests of Reagan and the Religious Right often collided, bringing more impact to their results, but Reagan also prioritized his own goals in the White House.

On the other hand, the point of the Religious Right was not just advising the president. They were first and foremost a collective of grassroots activism. One of the most impactful areas of grassroots politicking was education, which served as a connection point between many of the issues the religious right publicly campaigned. Since the beginning of the Moral Majority, the education of children as future Christians and voters, was a major priority. Prayer in school was an issue of the Religious Right since 1962 when the Supreme Court decided *Engle v. Vitale*, a case over the constitutionality of school-sponsored prayer in which school-sponsored prayer was deemed impermissible.¹²⁴ This was an outrage to people who believed that the whole community, schools included, should be involved in their child’s spiritual education. The issue of the tax exemption status of religious private schools was another. Some religious parents had issues with more medically accurate sexual education or other education topics perceived as leading children astray. The Family Protection Act, advocated for in the April 1980 edition of Moral Majority Report, included provisions allowing parents and community members to “inspect” and influence the purchasing of school textbooks and “[insure] the IRS cannot be

¹²³ Matthew Avery Sutton, “Reagan, Religion, and the Culture Wars of the 1980s,” 204-216.

¹²⁴ David L. Hudson, Jr, “*Engle v Vitale* (1962),” Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, 2009. [https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/665/engel-v-vitale#:~:text=the%20Associated%20Press\)-,In%20Engel%20v.,clause%20of%20the%20First%20Amendment](https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/665/engel-v-vitale#:~:text=the%20Associated%20Press)-,In%20Engel%20v.,clause%20of%20the%20First%20Amendment).

arbitrary and capricious in its actions” toward private schools.¹²⁵ The Religious Right had many strong concerns about the public school system and who decided what was taught in it.

However, one of the biggest controversies the Religious Right played on was about the teaching of creationism or evolution within public schools. Natural selection and evolution were fraught concepts for some religious groups since its conception, but the 1968 *Epperson v. Arkansas* case brought it to the forefront of popular opinion. This Supreme Court case ruled that an Arkansas law forbidding public school or college instructors from “teach the theory or doctrine that mankind ascended or descended from a lower order of animals” or use any textbook to that effect was unconstitutional. This was so ruled due to the law’s “conflict with the constitutional prohibition of state laws respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”¹²⁶ This case did not forbid the teaching of creationism but instead merely banned it from being required, but that was still enough to anger those who decided to believe it was a concept that should be taught as science. In the years following that case, the Religious Right promoted the idea that schools should teach a “balanced perspective” on the matter, with teachings about scientifically based evolution countered with religiously based creationism. This culminated in the 1987 Supreme Court case of *Edwards v Aguillard*. This case was over a 1981 Louisiana law called the Balanced Treatment Act, which required teaching of creationism in public schools any time evolution was taught. Science teacher Donald Aguillard sued, and the case made its way up to the Supreme Court. They decided that the Balanced Treatment Act had

¹²⁵ Harry Covert. *1980-04-11 Moral Majority Report*. Documents. Moral Majority Report, 1980. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32207733>.

¹²⁶ Kristine Bowman, “*Epperson v. Arkansas* (1968),” *The First Amendment Encyclopedia*, Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, 2009. <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/265/epperson-v-arkansas>

to secular purpose and constituted preferent treatment for a religious belief by the state, violating the First Amendment.¹²⁷

Members of the Religious Right found the regulations about what could be taught in schools, in addition to increased regulation on the schools themselves, to be stifling and “hostile” to the “booming Christian school movement.” The previous quotation is from one Baptist minister Rev. Herman “Buddy” Frankland in regard to a Maine regulation that required all teachers at approved schools in the state be required to have taken formal classes on how to teach effectively.¹²⁸ Faith Christian School in Nebraska was forced to close its doors because that state required registration of Christian Schools along with certified teachers, an approved curriculum, and specific books in the library. Rev. Carl Godwin, pastor of a related school, said that licensing was avoided as “that would be saying that we acknowledge the state’s authority over the church.”¹²⁹ Members of the Religious Right supported a style of education that required more spiritual conviction amongst educators than pedagogical prowess as a way to eschew what they saw as state control over education, which was a function of the church.

One popular scheme to reduce this pressure and widen the possibility of what could be taught was the charter school voucher plan. This concept was based on the free-market capitalism ideals of economist Milton Friedman. In 1980, Friedman his wife Rose, also an economist, aired a program called “Free to Choose” on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS). The Moral Majority Report encouraged followers to tune in to the program, which featured the argument that a free market style of educational would allow greater competition between

¹²⁷ Timothy J. O’Neill, “Edwards v. Aguillard (1987),” The First Amendment Encyclopedia, Free Speech Center at Middle Tennessee State University, 2009. <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/264/edwards-v-aguillard>

¹²⁸ Harry Covert. *1980-04-11 Moral Majority Report*. Documents. Moral Majority Report, 1980. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32207733>.

¹²⁹ Harry Covert, Moral Majority, Harry Covert, Deryl Edwards, Lori Davis, Jan Vissers, Jerry Falwell Sr., et al. *1981-09-21 Moral Majority Report*. Documents. Moral Majority, 1981. <https://jstor.org/stable/community.32207754>.

schools and would “reform” them to be more responsive to the desires of parents involved.¹³⁰ It is no wonder that this concept became popular with Religious Right leaders who could use this to both ensure more children were educated with conservative ideals and get funding from the federal government with less oversight.

Some felt that interaction with public school systems or private school choice was not enough to support the religious education of their children. They felt that parents should have dominion over their child’s education in its entirety. The solution for this was homeschooling. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) was founded in 1983 by lawyer and Baptist minister Michael Farris.¹³¹ Farris, a former “state executive director of the Moral Majority” in Washington tied his and his organization’s in the right to homeschool directly to their Christian faith.¹³² The HSLDS “What We Believe” page still states that “everyone employed by HSLDA is a Christian” and that “We believe that God has given all parents—no matter their religious beliefs or form of spirituality—the right and the responsibility to direct the upbringing and education of their children,” though not all organization members are required to be Christian themselves.¹³³ Further, Farris blamed the flaws he saw in the American public school system on common Religious Right targets of “drugs, sex education programs and deficient basic education instruction has created chaos in the state’s public schools.”¹³⁴ This is an organization with a strong background of Evangelical Christianity whose interests strongly

¹³⁰ “Milton Friedman on Vouchers.” MSNBC, Inc. 2003. <https://www.edchoice.org/who-we-are/our-legacy/articles/milton-friedman-on-vouchers/>

¹³¹ “History of HSLDA.” Get to Know HSLDA, last modified September 18, 2019, <https://hsllda.org/post/history-of-hsllda>.

¹³² “Michael Farris, state executive director of the Moral Majority,...,” UPI, April 1, 1981, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/04/01/Michael-Farris-state-executive-director-of-the-Moral-Majority/6288354949200/>

¹³³ “What We Believe.” Get to Know HSLDA, last modified April 22, 2020, <https://hsllda.org/post/history-of-hsllda>.

¹³⁴ “Michael Farris, state executive director of the Moral Majority,...,” UPI, April 1, 1981, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/04/01/Michael-Farris-state-executive-director-of-the-Moral-Majority/6288354949200/>

overlapped with conservative political interests. It was borne of the same cultural zeitgeist that was influenced and in turn influenced the likes of Jerry Falwell and Ronald Reagan. Clearly there was some recognition within conservative Christian circles that education played a formative building block in the morality of future citizens and voters.

There were hurdles in place to Farris's goal, namely that homeschooling was not strictly legal in most states. This is where the HSLDA came in, as the primary group organizing legal challenges to homeschooling restrictions in many states. For example, Texas required all children aged seven and older to attend public school a minimum number of 170 days per year. The exception to this was "any child in attendance upon a private or parochial school which shall include in its course a study of good citizenship." This meant that private and Christian schools were allowable, but homeschooling was not. A group of plaintiffs supported by the HSLDA sued. The result of this case, *Texas Education Agency v. Leeper*, was that Texas no longer forbid homeschooling.¹³⁵ Many other states followed suit to avoid costly lawsuits over the issue. According to HSLDA, Texas now is designated a "no notice, low regulation" state, meaning that parents can remove their children from school with very little to no oversight about teaching style, curriculum, or if children are being taught at all.¹³⁶ The efforts of the HSLDA, among other homeschooling activists, was very successful in this state as in many others. The Chalcedon Foundation, another Christian homeschool advocacy group, claims that homeschooling is a "long-term strategy for regenerating America's culture, church, business, and politics" into a Christian worldview.¹³⁷ Thanks to legal advocates of homeschooling education as a way to avoid

¹³⁵ "Texas Educ. Agency v. Leeper," Texas App. 1991, Casetext. <https://casetext.com/case/texas-educ-agency-v-leeper-1>

¹³⁶ "Find Your State Homeschool Law," Homeschool Legal Defense Association, 2023. <https://hsllda.org/legal>

¹³⁷ Lee Duigon, "Homeschooling's Greatest Courtroom Victory," *Chalcedon Foundation*, April 23, 2012. <https://chalcedon.edu/resources/articles/homeschoolings-greatest-courtroom-victory>

public school subjects they disagreed with, the Religious Right could continue to shape young minds for the cultural battleground of the future.

The increased interest in education was a sign that the Religious Right was interested in securing the minds of the future. Their impact in this area, as in many others, remained strong into the future. In the final decades of the 20th century, the Religious Right clearly and deliberately had confirmed their placement in the American social fabric. They had political groups campaigning against oversight of schools and gay rights while politicians like Reagan used their strength and the same dark impulses in the American public to shift America's economic landscape. The conflict within American society was used as a wedge to further drive apart their constituents from their neighbors because this had long proven an effective political mobilization strategy. The result of this in the end of the 20th century directly led to many of the political situations Americans faced for the decades to come.

Conclusion

By the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Religious Right had firmly entrenched itself as a political and social landscape of the United States. The careful political maneuvering that led to such a position developed deliberately over generations. During much of the mid to late 20th century, political activists identified and utilized the more personal matters that could become public policy in order to coalesce a driven and determined political following.

The underpinnings of the Religious Right began to emerge in the 1940s and 1950s as World War II dramatically changed the character of life in the United States. Televangelists began to become major household names with reach and sway as economic and technologic effects of the war created a new market of television viewers. At the same time, the Civil Rights Movement started to threaten the stability of the racial hierarchies that the social order was based upon to a large extent. All the while, communism loomed as a dark specter over the nation. For many, the anxieties of a changing world were answered by the comfort of religious tradition. For the first time, this comfort could be from the same man nationwide, creating an incredibly powerful platform.

The social unrest of the previous decades only amplified into the 1960s and 1970s as new and existing social changes altered the lives of ordinary Americans. The Civil Rights Movement picked up steam on a national level. Protests for civil rights were often met with violence that further the movement's message but also became a point of unease for many white Americans. The birth control pill in 1960 and the national legalization of abortion in 1972 opened up options for women to explore their sexuality with fewer potential consequences, initiating a sexual revolution. The results of both social movements had both social and political implications as both value trends and laws changed. Conservative political activists capitalized on the

discomforted energy that resulted, explaining new trends as a result of immorality and offering followers the chance to stand against it. Through organizations including Jerry Falwell Sr.'s Moral Majority, conservative Christian faction leaders could bring attention to those issues that would most galvanize their congregant-constituents to vote and campaign for candidates who would most allow for their long-term political gain.

One such candidate was Ronald Reagan, who saw the opportunity presented by the Religious Right and campaigned for their favor. After his election in 1980, there was enormous growth for the conservative Christian figures who supported him. Figures like James Dobson and Phyllis Schlafly rose to fame by supporting strict gender and sexuality roles at a time when norms in these areas were changing. When the AIDS crisis reared its ugly head in the mid 1980s, the White House was silent for the early part of the epidemic, allowing the voices of the Religious Right to echo louder over an agitated populace at a national level. Reagan's desire for reduced governmental economic interference worked in the favor of conservative religious activists. Activism on a more local basis also was in play, especially with issues of education. The increased campaigns for more freedom of subject matter in education through a variety of means signaled that the Religious Right intended to pass their beliefs along to future generations.

Notably, the causes the Religious Right supported were manifestations of the public fears of their time. The dangerous element invoked by these fears evolved from communism to civil rights activists to LGBTQ+ individuals who bucked the roles society established for them. For the Religious Right, the theological backing for their causes was less important than their political capital, and that political capital was infinitely valuable.

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