

The Last Family Men: Independent Firms, Anti-Unionism, and Right Wing Politics in
Twentieth-Century Wisconsin

By

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Abstract

The Last Family Men: Independent Firms, Anti-Union Mobilization, and Right Wing Political Organizing in Twentieth-Century Wisconsin

Unique regional, economic, political, and cultural conditions in Wisconsin created a right wing independent business class that became central to the objectives of the twentieth century conservative movement. Rigid family hierarchy, the realities of industrial production, and limited access to credit and capital in comparison to their eastern counterparts were contributing factors to its development. The Wisconsin Right existed outside the politically moderate norms of their fellow conservatives of the era and in rabid opposition to unions, the Progressive Party, the New Deal, and beyond. From this position of relative exile among their conservative peers arose an organized and strategic cadre of activists that went on to play prominent roles in shaping the subsequent conservative movement's organizational structure and aspirations.

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Most of all, this dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Stacie Hitt, my brother Daniel, and to the memory of my father, Thomas

INTRODUCTION

There is a separate Middle Western culture. And I think everyone who knows it, and who knows the nation, is profoundly aware that it is becoming the dominant American culture.

– Bernard Devoto¹

“From the outside... Wisconsin was the greatest Progressive state in the Union... [but outsiders] had never realized that it has always been nip and tuck between progressivism and the forces of reaction... It was a constant battle.”

– Isabel Bacon LaFollette²

Years before founding the John Birch Society (JBS) in 1958, *Sugar Daddy* candy manufacturer Robert Welch articulated a “New Americanism” that, among other things, lauded the small manufacturer as both economic backbone and moral arbiter of the country. While Welch and his brother made their fortune peddling caramelized children’s confections, he was also paranoid after years of disappointment and betrayal politics. For Welch and other industrialists, the postwar accord signified the end of independent producers—and their innate virtue—as markets expanded and borders were opened to promote a peaceful postwar order.

In this period, small and mid-sized businessmen pitted their own Tocquevillian self-perceptions as totems of an authentic, rugged Americanism against the creeping “effete eastern attitudes” of their coastal Atlantic business rivals. After all, it was the indifference of cavalier easterners that paved the way toward unchecked liberal statism of the New Deal.³

Welch’s producer state isolationism was considered fringe by most and drowned out by competing visions of the postwar world as liberal optimism energized a depression and war-weary nation. In 1941, *Time Magazine* publisher Henry Luce lauded the arrival of the United

¹ David S. Brown, *Beyond the Frontier: The Midwestern Voice in American Historical Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

² Isabel Bacon LaFollette, *If You Can Take It*. (Unpublished Manuscript, WSHS). 222.

³ “Fred Young of Young Radiator Co., Racine, WI to Thomas Coleman,” July 12, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, WHS. Young’s quote targeted precisely the corporatist relationship between eastern businesses and the Republican Party.

States as “the most powerful and the most vital nation in the world,” labeling this new epoch “The American Century.” Blending corporate liberalism—an integrated global marketplace tied to democratic political structures—with an aggressive imperial project, the United States was poised to replace the exploitation and war of a previous era with consumer exports. He envisioned America at the nexus of a “world state,” ushering in a project of global prosperity, uniting under “one world, fundamentally indivisible.”⁴

As optimistic as Luce’s vision was for the best of the American Century, critics to his left saw nothing exceptional about the corporation and imperialism—what Sven Beckert has since described as “war capitalism.”⁵ A cadre of scholars, including University of Wisconsin history faculty William Appleman Williams and his advisee Martin Sklar, linked the country’s postwar expansion to its legacy of slavery, Native American genocide, and white supremacy as justification for both Manifest Destiny at home, and interventionism abroad. Sklar tied this interpretation of global political economy to the rise of the corporation, coining the phrase “corporate liberalism”—the engine that not only made imperial expansion possible, but necessary.⁶ For scholars on the left, the corporate liberalism Luce anticipated would unite the world, actually perpetuated violent, racist interventionism abroad, not in the name of spreading democracy but by emotionless capital expansion through statecraft.

Wisconsin industrialists shared Welch’s worldview, believing the American Century disregarded the country’s need for defined structures of nation and family. Reliance on a global marketplace increased the country’s vulnerability to foreign influence and also put independent

⁴ Eric Foner, ed., “Henry R. Luce’s ‘The American Century,’” in *Voices of Freedom: A Documentary History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 193–95.

⁵ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. (Vintage: New York, 2015).

⁶ William Appleman Williams and Greg Grandin, *The Contours of American History*, Second Edition edition (London ; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2011); Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

businesses at a competitive disadvantage to their publicly-traded competition. Mass politics, be it public corporations or popular democracy, challenged the virtue of the independent manufacturer and they grew concerned about maintaining the established social order. In 1955, speaking to the University of Wisconsin School of Banking (now the Wisconsin School of Business), industrialist William Grede argued that unchecked popular voting was the road to totalitarianism: “there is nothing more autocratic than majority rule” he told the students—“it would destroy our society of personalities and the dynamic spirit that has made us great.”⁷ Arguing in favor of voting restrictions, Revilo P. Oliver, a University of Illinois faculty member and Grede’s fellow JBS co-founder, also pointed out that the word “democracy” was nowhere in the Constitution and was therefore not an inalienable right.

In addition to problem of excessive freedom, the American Century posed threats to Wisconsin industrialists’ financial position and privileged local status. Global trade increased competition and also put them at a disadvantage to coastal companies, both publicly traded and having established relationships with lenders. They believed international markets would ultimately undermine the country, allowing unfeeling agents of global capital to pilfer the nation’s wealth and compromise its institutions—the “world state” Luce predicted. Even after the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, independent industrialists associated transnationalism, be it fluid capital, ideologies, or immigration, with Jewish intellectuals and a broader plot of world domination at every level. This viewpoint was succinctly articulated by one Republican over his concern that the opportunistic LaFollettes had “filled the Statehouse with jews [sic] and Reds” in the 30s.⁸

⁷ UAW 833, “Kohler Strike Bulletin (Kohler Company President Lyman Conger Mailed to William Grede on February 7, 1956),” May 1955, William Grede Papers, WHS.

⁸ David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005). 37.

Because they embodied the existential threat of economic and ideological erasure, Welch and his associates saw organized labor and immigrants—two mostly overlapping demographics at the time—as equally complicit in the declining moral quality of the country as the international corporation. Across Wisconsin cities and industrial towns, financial internationalism, communists, socialists, and international labor solidarity threatened the individual fiefdoms these families created and handed down to their descendants. Even after New Deal protections, unions were not tolerated by the most influential Midwestern industrialists who interpreted representation as subversive Bolshevik political gamesmanship manipulating an unskilled and uneducated rank-and-file that was resistant to assimilation.

These challenges to the independent businessman's freedom were regularly communicated by Welch via his newsletter *One Man's Opinion* where he outlined “The New Americanism's” nativist, family-owned, industrialist counter to Luce's “world state”. Renamed *American Opinion* after it became the official voice of the John Birch Society, Welch's publication churned out narratives celebrating the virtuous, independent businessman-activist who embodied the “aggressive campaign for ever more individual freedom and responsibility” on the American right. Singling out foundry owner William Grede in the third installment of his “New Americanism” series, Welch profiled the Wisconsinite for his leadership in the fight to “reduce the size and strength of government” and for using his company for “social progress promoting growth.”⁹

Family and Wisconsin industry often overlapped, as sons took over for fathers and challenges to this model posed multiple threats. Just as Welch and Coleman saw their America at risk, Grede likened his opposition to unionization to patriotic duty: “Our struggle against

⁹ Robert Welch, “‘The New Americanism:’ Salute to William Grede,” *One Man's Opinion*, 1957, Winter, WHS.

unionization” Grede recalled, “was for the protection...of all people”¹⁰ For the Wisconsin Right, opposing unions was the vanguard fight in a broader war to defeat the expanding state, corporate liberalism, leftist politics, and all other threats to a vision of America that acknowledged the independent business owner’s supreme authority.

I

Following Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential victory, historian Rick Perlstein wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* calling for a reassessment of scholarship on conservatism in the 20th century United States: “The professional guardians of America’s past,” he argued, “advanced a narrative of the American right that was far too constricted to anticipate the rise of a man like Trump.” Criticizing journalists who “played down the sheer bloodcurdling hysteria” fueling Trump’s base, Perlstein urged scholars to take seriously history’s “political surrealists and intellectual embarrassments, its con artists and tribunes of white rage.” Calling for a broader interpretation of the conservative movement, Perlstein saw a historiography that was too forgiving, too narrow in focus: “Future historians won’t find all that much of a foundation for Trumpism in the grim essays of William F. Buckley, the scrupulous constitutionalist principles of Barry Goldwater or the bright-eyed optimism of Ronald Reagan.”¹¹ In making this argument, Perlstein understates the influence of the radical right on moderates and more mainstream conservatives.

¹⁰ William Grede, “Speech to Los Angeles John Birch Society” (Undated), Grede Files, Wisconsin Historical Society.

¹¹ Rick Perlstein, “I Thought I Understood the American Right. Trump Proved Me Wrong.,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/11/magazine/i-thought-i-understood-the-american-right-trump-proved-me-wrong.html>; John Kaufman, “A Response to Rick Perlstein’s ‘I Thought I Understood the American Right . . .,’” *The Pacific* (blog), April 12, 2017, <https://thepacific.blog/2017/04/12/a-response-to-rick-perlsteins-i-thought-i-understood-the-american-right/>. Perlstein’s recent claim was met with a similar response by historian John Kaufman who made a similar argument as Ribuffo, even citing Perlstein’s own work.

As for Wisconsin, Trump's election launched a cottage industry of reflective think pieces asking how experts "could have gotten the country drastically wrong." One journalist travelled to the state, calling it going "On Safari in Trump's America" hoping to correlate specific regional values with decisions at the ballot box. Many in the professional pundit and policy world could not confront their own preconceived notions of "a Midwestern voter" in seeking a deeper understanding of Trumpism and its origins, coloring conclusions to fit their hypothesis.¹²

Before Trump, professional historians had their own internal discourse on the positioning of conservatism in the field, most prominently with David Brinkley's 1994 "The Problem of American Conservatism". Like Perlstein would decades later, Brinkley argued for a more concerted interrogation of the right to understand its durability in the post-New Deal world and rapidly globalizing marketplace. The chief respondent to Brinkley was Leo Ribuffo who pointed out that Leonard Liggio, Daniel Bell, and himself were some of the earliest professional scholars to take the political right seriously, dating back to the middle of the twentieth century.¹³ "The scholarship on American conservatism and the Far Right is both more extensive and better than [Brinkley] suggests," countered Ribuffo responding this familiar critique.¹⁴ For Ribuffo, the problem was not historians missing the mark, but the "failing to mainstream the copious good scholarship that already exists."¹⁵ Scrutiny of American conservative history has intensified in

¹² Molly Ball, "On Safari in Trump's America," *The Atlantic*, October 23, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/10/on-safari-in-trumps-america/543288/>. Ball concluded that the Third Way think tank researchers she followed as they interviewed various demographics in Wisconsin were too colored by their own bias or concern over losing corporate funding to reach an accurate depiction of an ideologically divided state.

¹³ Leonard Liggio, "A New Look at Robert A. Taft," 1973; Daniel Bell, *The Radical Right The New American Right Expanded And Updated* (Nabu Press, 2011). Bell's original publication was 1963.

¹⁴ Leo P. Ribuffo, "Why Is There so Much Conservatism in the United States and Why Do So Few Historians Know Anything about It," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (April 1, 1994): 438–49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2167283>.

¹⁵ Ribuffo.

recent years, including *The Journal of American History* dedicating its December 2011 issue to the field's implications and trajectory.¹⁶

While more must be done, the barriers separating the fringe right and the broader historiography are diminishing. Making a case for understanding the right within that discourse, Tula Connell's case study of postwar Milwaukee titled *Conservative Counterrevolution* (published months before Trump's victory) argued that historians have long been "pinpointing a trend toward far-right extremism" in America that is "deeply disturbing."¹⁷ While Trump may have come out of nowhere for scholars focusing on the rhetoric and behavior of mainstream conservative figures, embedded scholars understood that the alliances forged across the twentieth century under the umbrella of "conservatism" eventually led to Trump and worse.

The Wisconsin Right explores how the unique and changing political economy of the industrialized Upper Midwest shaped competing twentieth century right-wing ideologies and strategies at the center of contemporary mainstream politics: anti-unionism, nativism, protectionism, and anticommunism (broadly defined). Emerging in opposition to early twentieth-century progressive reform, independently-owned businesses led the way with

¹⁶ Lisa McGirr, "Now That Historians Know So Much about the Right, How Should We Best Approach the Study of Conservatism?," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 2011): 765–70; Donald T. Critchlow, "Rethinking American Conservatism: Toward a New Narrative," *Journal of American History* Volume 98, no. Issue 3 (December 2011): 752–755.

¹⁷ Quote taken from Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution*, p.7. To list a few of the monographs analyzing the role of the Right: Ribuffo; Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 723–43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jar430>; Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, 1 edition (New York: Liveright, 2014); Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*, *The Working Class in American History* (University of Illinois Press, 2016); George H. Nash, *Reappraising the Right: The Past & Future of American Conservatism*, 1 edition (Wilmington, Del: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2002); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017); Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*, 1st Printing edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

experimental, hardline anti-union practices in a region historically associated with dense unionization. Of course, the right's response to Progressivism and the re-emergence of nationalism and anticommunism in the United States was not restricted to one region, but the Midwest was a cradle of independent industrialists—the primary activists and architects of anti-Progressive/New Deal retaliation.

The Midwest had its own brand of conservatism, distinctive from the more recognizable origin narratives of southern segregation, elite-centered “Buckleyism,” or the grassroots suburban organizing of Orange County. By focusing on the Midwest, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of how regional differences informed the movement building and identify formation that led to the contemporary American conservatism—in this case through the eyes of wealthy independent industrialists and their ideological progeny within the broader national movement. It argues for the strategic importance of a Wisconsin Right in leading a long-term project to transform political norms, culminating (but not stopping) with the conservative turn in the late-1970s. Where other studies of conservatism have focused on eastern business¹⁸, the role of southern segregationists¹⁹, or a grassroots upheaval²⁰, Midwestern independent industrialists drive this particular narrative depicting themselves as their own unique class: right wing activists in the most densely unionized region of the country.

¹⁸ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*, 1st ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009).

¹⁹ Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010); Ken Fones-Wolf and Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie*, 1st Edition edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

²⁰ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2002); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1987); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).

In understanding twentieth century business activism, I subsidize Rosemary Feurer and Chad Pearson's observation that "[f]ew historians have portrayed employers as actively constructing themselves as a class or as engaged in social movements."²¹ As a caveat, I also acknowledge that no class has ever been monolithic in its goals and actions and business was no exception. Regional frictions existed with significant strategic and ideological differences, and as historian Larry Gerber pointed out, smaller firms were "more vehement in their opposition than the corporate giants of the economy."²² While Feurer distinguishes smaller businesses as "retrograde" in labor relations, I argue the smaller business tactics, assumed to be draconian by mid-century, became the standard for managerial treatment of unions across the country by the end of the twentieth century.

Independent Midwestern businessmen were fueled by a regional exceptionalism in both their position within the Republican Party and their close proximity to the most harmful challenges to freedom in the United States: organized labor, immigration, and subversive politics. Larger corporations could never understand the challenges America faced, because according to foundry owner William Grede, "anything beyond Milwaukee was considered to be a foreign nation by many Easterners." This divergence of experiences among businesses permeated the shape and contours of their political activism. Taking into account the concerns of a regionally-specific identity, the political organizing these business-activists undertook helps us understand how their ideas moved from the political wilderness to engrained in establishment.

²¹ Rosemary Feurer and Chad Pearson, eds., *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

²² Larry G. Gerber, "Shifting Perspectives on American Exceptionalism: Recent Literature on American Labor Relations and Labor Politics," *Journal of American Studies* 31, no. 2 (August 1997): 253–74.

The Midwest-Atlantic division among business was also an issue of competitive scale. Historian William Thompson showed how insufficient access to Eastern capital mandated that Wisconsin businesses adopt a conservative financial and organizational structure that also stoked regional resentment.²³ Midwestern firms had minimal access to the same capital Atlantic manufacturers enjoyed and would not until near the end of the twentieth century. The unique economic positioning of Midwestern small manufacturers contributed to their conviction that they were the torchbearers for the most authentic Americanism. Depicting Eastern corporations as unaware of, or complicit in, encroaching regulations, unions and leftist subversion, a regional rift in the corporate landscape impacted the shape of business conservatism in the twentieth century.

Wisconsin industrialists became the bedrock for a regionally distinct counterweight to the politics of Progressivism and the New Deal. The iconic photo of Chicago-based Montgomery Ward chairman Sewell Avery carried from his anti-New Deal “sit-in” captured the attitude of Midwestern industrialists but obscures the deep organizing already underway for decades—Wisconsin Right resistance was more creative and more widespread than Avery’s singular act of defiance. Forced to organize as a response to LaFollette Progressives, these businessmen coordinated well before the New Deal, their activism evidence of a longer legacy of coordination that informed anti-New Deal business opposition nationally.

Compared to other regions, the union density of the Midwest also prompted coordination among industrialists, particularly in labor-intensive areas. In the minds of these businessmen, they possessed a unique independent entrepreneurial spirit and patriotism that would save the nation; a moxie their more corporatized eastern counterparts did not possess. In the 1950s,

²³ William F. Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965: History of Wisconsin, Volume VI*, 1 edition (Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1988). 180.

Coleman summarized this regional dissonance describing the Eisenhower Administration as having “a great lack of Midwestern influence and understanding” in the president’s refusal to break both with the New Deal and corporate liberalism.²⁴ It was the inaction of these “Eastern men,” the “gentile WASPS with their inner-directed egos,” that posed a serious threat to the United States.²⁵

Wisconsin business leaders were advocates of undisputed managerial control over their shop floors and engaged in direct conflict with organized labor as a badge of national duty. No matter the rule of law, they believed unions were antithetical to democracy and private firms were under no obligation to recognize them. These leaders in the Wisconsin Right shared tactics among their group while educating the majority of less-brazen businessmen.

This project highlights some of the unheralded activists who were central in shaping the modern conservative movement. Neither uniformly a grassroots movement nor C. Wright Mills’s “Power Elite,” these subjects occupied a coordinating role as business leaders and organizers, dedicated to redirecting the country’s political economy away from the corporatism of the New Deal and towards vision of a unilateral dominion of independent businessmen. These understudied figures promoted issues, wrote policy, and shaped the institutions that allowed the right wing to both survive the apex of liberal statism and thrive during its decline, developing the structures, ideas, and leadership that dictates much of the country’s political right to this day.

For comparison, scholars focusing on unsung coordinators and activists have been critical to deconstructing parallel political movements of the era. Recent research on the black freedom movement re-centers the focus toward lifelong grassroots activists like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella

²⁴ “Fred Young of Young Radiator Co., Racine, WI to Thomas Coleman.”

²⁵ Greg Grandin, *Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman*, First Edition edition (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2015). 11.

Baker, and Bayard Rustin, to name a few.²⁶ These actors developed local strategies and solidified homegrown undertakings when more heralded public figures of the movement followed the national spotlight. This dissertation attempts to begin a similar analysis of less examined, but nonetheless foundational figures on the American right.

Examining the Wisconsin Right in this new perspective reveals common threads throughout the different periods of the movement. Madison industrialist Tom Coleman's efforts contributed to Midwestern and southern Republicans uniting on the national Party's periphery in the 1950s, despite incongruent goals. The conflict between these activists and the GOP leadership directly contributed to the formation of the John Birch Society which, in turn, became a training ground for a younger generation of conservative activists with ties to the Wisconsin Right. By the end of the 1960s, activists trained in the JBS began the process of building the institutions the right needed to compete with unions and the New Left, and eventually overtake them as the predominant movement of the twentieth century.

These businessmen's efforts to preserve outmoded right-wing economic concepts were also bonded to their understanding of social order. Nativist and anti-Semitic resentments were a feature of business opposition to the Progressives and progressivism in the Midwest. In his efforts to dislodge the LaFollette family from Wisconsin politics, Republican leader Tom Coleman was accused by the *Capital Times* of espousing "Political Aryanism" as he orchestrated a campaign of ethnic and ideological politics of exclusion at the state level.²⁷ At the height of

²⁶ Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, New edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (University of Illinois Press, 2000); William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights*, (W. W. Norton & Company, 2013); John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, (University of Chicago Press: 2004); Jeanne Theoharris, *The Rebellious Life of Rosa Parks* (Beacon Press: New York, 2014)..

²⁷ Roger T. Johnson, *Robert M. La Follette, Jr. and the Decline of the Progressive Party in Wisconsin* (Madison: Archon Books, 1970). Quoted from article in *The Capital Times*, April 4, 1946.

McCarthyism, Coleman organized Milwaukee businesses into “the McCarthy Club,” as a vehicle for industrialists to use the Senator’s populist appeal in opposing “minimum wages...and labor unions.”²⁸ This legacy continued decades later when Wisconsin native Paul Weyrich, the so-called “organizational genius behind the religious right,” called for the return of the House of Un-American Activities Committee to investigate possible communist infiltration in American life and institutions, also reviving a phrase popularized in Nazi Germany: “cultural Marxism”—a variation from Kulturbolschewismus, or, “cultural Bolshevism”.²⁹

McCarthyism remained a lasting ideology beyond the Red Scare and provided a blueprint for right wing populism in the Midwest. McCarthy’s financial backers made possible the effort to uproot subversives and “lavender lads” from federal government posts during the Red Scare of the 1950s. “Boss” Coleman was at the center of all these efforts, while providing the financial support for his protégé to expose “the queers” in the State Department.³⁰ Appreciative of McCarthy’s red-baiting message a decade after the disgraced senator left office, Alabama Governor George Wallace launched his 1964 presidential campaign in McCarthy’s birthplace of Appleton, Wisconsin.

²⁸ Michael O’Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin* (University of Missouri Press, 1980). 69. Some of the founding businessmen were active in Coleman’s 1949 attempt to take over the national Republicans and were later active in the John Birch Society.

²⁹ “Remembering Paul Weyrich,”; “Race, Not Abortion, Was the Founding Issue of the Religious Right.” Quote attributed to chair of Dartmouth University Department of Religion, Randall Ballmer. Nazis coined the term “Cultural Bolshevism,” or *Kulturbolschewismus*, in describing both Jewish and communist influence in degrading German society. The phrase “Cultural Marxism” followed the Frankfurt School to the United States as universities provided asylum for Jewish intellectuals fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe. Weyrich returned the phrase to mainstream discourse in the 1990s to describe what he perceived to be the decline of Western culture in the media and Hollywood. In present day social media, Cultural Marxism is associated with the hashtag #whitegenocide used by radical right groups on social media.

³⁰ *Ibid.*; David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Claiming that the Upper Midwest was “populated by non-Anglo Saxon lesser breeds,” the Alabamian traveled to Wisconsin praising McCarthy as “ahead of his time.” Unable to restrain his excitement that he, a segregationist, could capture 34% of the primary vote in a supposedly progressive northern primary, Wallace donned “a feathered Winnebago war bonnet,” and conducted a mock war dance through the halls of his Milwaukee headquarters.³¹ Wallace’s performance illustrated his own campaign’s surprise that a white nationalist message could garner traction in “progressive” pockets of the country. For aspiring conservative politicians, the implications of the Wallace campaign demonstrated that a southern segregationist could be competitive in the industrial North by following the model provided by McCarthy.

Contrary to stereotypes of rural resentment fueling a political backlash in Wisconsin, nearly every position of influence in Wisconsin Republican leadership was held by a wealthy industrialist or independent business owner. Despite Wallace’s populist rhetoric, a 1966 *Public Opinion Quarterly* study concluded that while the Alabama governor had a strong showing in the city of Milwaukee (38.6%) indicating an ethnic white base, most of his support in Wisconsin came from the state’s upper-and-middle class suburbs (66% of primary votes in the Milwaukee suburb of River Hills, for instance).³² While Wallace showed well in white ethnic Milwaukee, it was industrialists and suburbanites who voted to uphold the white nationalist vestiges of anti-modernism in the name of preserving their own class-status.

A decade later, deindustrialization, and Vietnam upended voting norms opening the door for neoliberals into decision-making positions in government. However, libertarians in government was not a political movement and former Nixon staffer Kevin Phillips recalled that

³¹ Richard C. Haney, “Wallace in Wisconsin: The Presidential Primary of 1964,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 61, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 259–78. For “lesser breeds” comment, see p. 268; for war dance depiction, see p. 259.

³² Michael Rogin, “Wallace and the Middle Class: The White Backlash in Wisconsin,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (March 20, 1966):100-102, <https://doi.org/10.1086/267384>.

“nationalism was far more important to the New Right than laissez-faire purity.”³³ Practicing “leaderless resistance,” the movement came into national focus with the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and has since moved into online forums.³⁴ In rural demographics with limited job prospects little hope for a better life, Paul Weyrich saw opportunity to expand the New Right’s umbrella.

The Modern Intellectual Genealogy of American Conservatism

Historians of modern conservatism have not reached a consensus on what encapsulates a “conservative” ideology or how disparate strains fused into a cohesive movement. For example, intellectual historian George Nash summarized the mid-twentieth century conservative landscape as “scattered voices of protest, profoundly pessimistic about the future of the country.”³⁵ While these scattered voices attempted to coalesce at the 1952 Republican convention, they were ultimately thwarted in controversial fashion paving the way for Eisenhower’s nomination and eventual election.

Inspired by the 1952 GOP convention, Russell Kirk published the *The Conservative Mind* (originally titled *The Conservative’s Route*), connecting a broad and diverse conservative lineage in American history. Kirk gave a disillusioned right wing an identity and history they could use to grow their movement.³⁶ Historian Gary Nash, a self-identifying conservative, mapped key

³³ Aif Tomas Tonnessen, *How Two Political Entrepreneurs Help Create the American Conservative Movement, 1973-1981: The Ideas of Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 219. This probably also explains the explosion of domestic paramilitary groups in the 1970s.

³⁴ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018).

³⁵ Gregory L. Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*, 2nd Edition (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2006). Schneider quotes Nash on p. 3.

³⁶ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*; Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Regnery Publishing, 2001).

postwar figures and ideas in his *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*. First published in 1976, it remains a foundational text, particularly in its mapping the fusion of free enterprise and traditionalist interpretations of conservatism.³⁷ In recent years, scholars have introduced intersections of white supremacy and libertarianism, by outlining the connection between “public choice theory”—the concept that individuals in the marketplace will behave in self-interest—and attempts to restrict individuals who qualify to vote.³⁸

Most contemporary scholars view conservatism not as an elitist guise for more power and wealth, but as a collection of principles and worldviews irrespective of class. Political scientist Cory Robin observes the Burkean intellectual genealogy (that it was not solely an elitist realm) while also observing conservatism as inherently ruling class ideas couched in populist appeal—what he called “the politics of reaction”—resisting multiple deviations from period norms, economically and socially. For Robin, the conservative movement cannot be understood through pinpointing positions on a political spectrum, rather through continued ruptures against the establishment.

The quest to reconcile this “fusionism”—or “consolidated conservatism”—of uniting multiple schools is attributed to two main figures: Frank Meyer and his protégé, William F. Buckley, Jr.³⁹ (It is worth noting the *National Review* was originally financed by two major sources—the Allen-Bradley Company in Milwaukee and the Buckley family’s personal endowment.) The magazine unified diverse viewpoints under a single umbrella attempting to remedy “the aimless, uncoordinated, and inconclusive” efforts of the early 1950s conservatives.

³⁷ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*.

³⁸ Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*. In *The Right and Labor in America*, see Joe McCartin & Jean-Christian Vinel, ““Compulsory Unionism”: Sylvester Petro and the Career of an Anti-Union Idea, 1957-1987.”

³⁹ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 60.

With its mass readership, it became a unifying adhesive that granted legitimacy all of these diverse conservative interpretations, a mouthpiece for disparate ideologies ranging from free enterprise, “traditional” protestant values, anticommunism, and white supremacy.⁴⁰

For historian Greg Schneider and the purposes of this dissertation, the “protean character” of the *National Review* demands a reprioritization of “fusionism” in the 1950s. Buckley and Meyers’s work did not culminate in a grand conservative synthesis, but they did create something that was “more of a *tactic*, a means for reconciling seemingly disparate intellectual positions” (italics added).⁴¹ Examining the broader conservative movement building spanning the twentieth century, it becomes clear there was never a definitive cluster of demographics or issues that could be categorized as a conservative bloc.

As issues arose or declined in importance, it was their organizers’ duty to find ways to incorporate new ones or risk the movement’s sustainability. As early conservative organizers, the Wisconsin Right was integral in providing practical tasks for the increasing number of grassroots activists, beginning with cultivating local volunteers through the Republican Voluntary Committee, giving projects to local Bircher chapters, attracting new people (and money) into the movement through single-issue groups like the Committee Against Foreign Entanglements, and other opportunities through the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress. Ideas alone did not constitute the movement and these groups served as a clearinghouse for activist pools that fueled the conservative turn.

⁴⁰ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*; Frank S. Meyer, *In Defense of Freedom: A Conservative Credo* (H. Regenery Company, 1962); Schneider, *The Conservative Century*; Kevin J. Smant and M. Stanton Evans, *Principles and Heresies: Frank S. Meyer and the Shaping of the American Conservative Movement*, First Edition edition (Wilmington, Del: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2002).

⁴¹ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 59.

Midwestern Historiographical Interventions

The Midwest is a relative orphan in the historiography of conservatism despite its cultural and economic significance in the twentieth century. Joshua Freeman described the Midwest as “a bellwether” for the rest of the country, important “not only in its centrality but also in the size of its population and its economic prowess.”⁴² The paucity in scholarship on conservatism in the region could be attributed to its historical legacy as a stronghold for organized labor, Progressives, Socialists, and Democrats. At the height of unionization in the decades following the New Deal, Midwestern states stood out, having nearly double the union density of “the South, the Western Plains, and Intermountain West; all had politically-weak labor movements.”⁴³ In the face of well-organized labor and left-leaning legislatures, business opposition was disjointed, ineffective, and, at times, counterintuitive in its goals.⁴⁴ Business’s disorganization and their apathy toward politics throughout the twentieth century was an oft-repeated gripe of the conservative activists studied within.⁴⁵

Historians now agree a tenuous postwar labor peace “Treaty of Detroit” or “liberal consensus” never existed. It was the comparative strength of unions holding capital at bay. While anti-unionism would become standard operating procedure for business in subsequent decades, a handful of firms never agreed with this consensus. Their primary tactic entailed

⁴² Joshua B. Freeman, *American Empire: The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home, 1945-2000*, 1st ed. (Penguin Books, 2012).

⁴³ David Myrwin Anderson, “The Battle for Main Street, United States of America: Welfare Capitalism, Boosterism, and Labor Militancy in the Industrial Heartland, 1895--1963” (Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002).602-603.

⁴⁴ For instance, until the 1980s, businesses equated political participation to funding the party in power (Democrats), giving fractions on the dollar to Republicans and almost completely ignoring the GOP’s right wing. The clumsiness of business in the political arena was one of Paul Weyrich’s motivations for creating the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress in the early 1970s.

⁴⁵ To name a few examples, Midwestern businessmen voiced frustration about their peers rather going to cocktail parties than organize against the Eastern Establishment or get involved in local politics. John Birch Society leadership frequently noted their frustration with the general political climate among businessmen, and, as noted above, Paul Weyrich created his own fundraising apparatus in the 1970s because business would not stop giving to Democrats.

cultivating regions favorable to free enterprise through legislating workers and limiting corporate taxes. Midwestern and Northeastern companies relocated to these warmer climes.⁴⁶ While some Wisconsin companies opened additional factories in the South or West, historian William Thompson has argued relocation was not their primary strategy into the 1980s, it partially for ideological reasons, believing doing so was a kowtow to international interests.⁴⁷

Other companies opted to challenge unions directly, launching public relations campaigns that buttressed hardline negotiating tactics at the bargaining table—what became known as “Boulwareism,” after General Electric Vice President and University of Wisconsin graduate Lemuel Boulware. Kim Phillips-Fein depicts a burgeoning postwar conservative resistance, consisting of a “network of business leaders...who shared its basic worldview and aims.”⁴⁸ This network of “business-activists,” she argues, anticipated and participated in the rollback of regulations that occurred by the end of the twentieth century. These activists were a small percentage—a militant minority—of total business leadership and Boulware’s anti-unionism in the East stood out as an outlier in a region where postwar corporations had indeed tacitly accepted a unionized workforce.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (University of Illinois Press, 1995); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*, 1st ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); Jefferson R. Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (The New Press, 2001); Tami J. Friedman, “Exploiting the North-South Differential: Corporate Power, Southern Politics, and the Decline of Organized Labor after World War II,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (September 1, 2008): 323–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/25095621>; Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, “Origins of the Conservative Ascendancy: Barry Goldwater’s Early Senate Career and the De-Legitimization of Organized Labor,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (December 1, 2008): 678–709, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27694376>.

⁴⁷ William F. Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965: History of Wisconsin, Volume VI*, 1 edition (Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1988).

⁴⁸ Kim Phillips-Fein, “‘If Business and the Country Will Be Run Right:’ The Business Challenge to the Liberal Consensus, 1945–1964,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 72, no. 1 (October 2007): 192–215, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547907000610>. 193.

While Phillips-Fein focuses on eastern corporations, Nancy MacLean’s 2017 *Democracy in Chains* makes explicit the divergent ideologies and levels of personal investment between “entrepreneurial” and “corporate” businesses—the former more independent, family companies, the latter publicly-shared entities.⁴⁹ Distinctions aside, businesses endorsed the advancement of “public choice theory”—that the market can solve problems inherent in democracy—and the Wisconsin Right is no exception. Where MacLean locates the roots of contemporary conservatism in antidemocratic strains of libertarian intellectuals, think tanks, and policymakers, this dissertation focuses on political organizers, sometimes at odds with MacLean’s board room libertarians.

Other scholars of the Midwest explore labor-management relations beyond the shop floor by including the broader ideological contests over urban spaces and public-versus-private development. David Anderson’s examination of the 1955 Perfect Circle strike in New Castle, Indiana is one of the few works to examine Midwestern manufacturers’ opposition to postwar labor-liberalism. Anderson describes a “heartland consensus” of a “conservative civic identity,” comprising a blend of free-enterprise propaganda, education, welfare capitalism, and anti-unionism.⁵⁰

Because of Wisconsin’s labor-intensive industries and independence from shareholders, industrialists’ opposition to unionization and state regulations were more pronounced. Despite regular unionization attempts as early as the 1920s, Wisconsin foundry owner William Grede boasted that none of his twelve plants were ever gained representation. On the rare occasion where Grede sat at the bargaining table with union representatives, it was merely a perfunctory

⁴⁹ MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*.

⁵⁰ Anderson, “The Battle for Main Street, United States of America”; Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*; Eric Fure-Slocum, *Contesting the Postwar City: Working-Class and Growth Politics in 1940s Milwaukee*, 1 edition (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

gesture to remain compliant with the Wagner Act—he never actually engaged in negotiations. It was a tactic borrowed by Herbert Kohler during the 1954 Kohler strike: a decade-long strike that unified national business against “the labor monopoly” at the workplace and in the government (discussed in Chapter Three).⁵¹ While still exceptional even in the Midwest, these hardline anti-union positions and strategies were disseminated in outreach to other business leaders, speaking tours and political organizing particularly in response to the Kohler strike.

West Coast Bias in the Historiography

Beyond the Midwest, twentieth-century conservatism is primarily rooted in the in the “Sunbelt Coalition” of the South and Southwest. In the 1930s, thousands of southerners migrated to Southern California, taking with them the traditionalist evangelical worldviews that by the 1960s had become integral to the region’s ideological conservatism.⁵² Uniting against the New Deal, the right attacked state power in an alliance Kevin Kruse labeled “Christian libertarianism” combining scripture with business-funded anti-communist propaganda.⁵³ Bethany Moreton expanded on the intersection of commerce and religion, highlighted the how Christian enterprise manipulated traditional gender roles to maximize profit and control.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “WHBL Radio’s Weekly CIO Broadcast” (Kohler, WI, February 3, 1956), William P. Grede Papers, Box 18, Folder 5, WHS; Walter Henry Uphoff, *Kohler on Strike: Thirty Years of Conflict* (Beacon Press, 1966). UAW union representatives dedicated one of their radio programs to linking Grede’s well-known anti-unionism to Kohler’s own hardline negotiating tactics. Grede also terminated business relations with any supplier who signed a union contract.

⁵² Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010).

⁵³ Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, Reprint edition (Basic Books, 2016); Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise*; Ken Fones-Wolf and Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie*, 1st Edition edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

By the 1950s, conservatives across the country established organized opposition to desegregation and the Civil Rights movement. After the Civil Rights Acts, this resistance manifested itself in less explicitly racist terms in market-based opposition to property taxes and zoning. In southern state and civil society, traditionalist and white nationalist strains expressed themselves in elections through opposition to civil rights protections and New Deal redistributive mandates.⁵⁵

In the West, subsidized by Texas oil money, Billy Graham cultivated his flock to harbor “hostility to organized labor” that was “matched by [Graham’s] dislike of government involvement in the economy.”⁵⁶ “With their conservative brethren elsewhere in the South and West,” Lisa McGirr writes of activists in Orange County, California, “they recast the party of Lincoln from the moderate Republicanism of the eastern Wall Street establishment into a southern and western mold of a more conservative bent.”⁵⁷

By the mid-1950s, Midwestern-heavy right-wing organizations like the John Birch Society drew membership primarily from white Wisconsinites concerned with communism, taxes, urban decay, and civil rights movement upheaval. Middle-class conservatives in the Northeast and Midwest self-segregated to the suburbs and innovated new methods of preserving race and class lines in the face of civil rights reforms in less explicit ways.⁵⁸ Forming what

⁵⁵ Katznelson, *Fear Itself*.

⁵⁶ Kruse, *One Nation Under God*. 38, 50.

⁵⁷ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 5.

⁵⁸ Kruse, *White Flight*; Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, 49709th edition (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Thomas J. Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, Revised (Princeton University Press, 2005); Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Cornell University Press, 2004); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2009); Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American*

became the New Right, “dog-whistle” racism like discriminatory bank lending practices perpetuated racial divisions, restricting economic mobility for blacks.⁵⁹ Debates over public school busing threatened the cohesion of working-class blacks and whites, while continued backlash over civil rights protests contributed to a “politics of rage” that fueled conservative white political mobilization.⁶⁰

The slow pace of social reform in the late-1960s wore thin the black freedom movement’s patience as aspects of the Left took more militant stances, alienating cold war liberals who drifted to the right. By the 1970s, funding for the Vietnam War limited the domestic impact of the Great Society and questions over Stagflation—slow growth, inflation, and high unemployment—shifted public focus from social to economic issues. Seeking alternatives to the recessions of the 1970s, conservatives who rose to power through the breakdown of the Great Society and divisions on the left implemented market programs designed to overtake Keynesianism as the dominant economic approach of the late-twentieth century.⁶¹

In the early 1970s, the Nixon-Agnew administration opened the White House doors to “an ambitious generation of young, conservative insiders” who spearheaded the internal work of neoliberal economic policy implementation in the face of the 1973 energy crisis. Once considered fringe, libertarians were now in charge of the national economy. They worked to

Politics, 2 Sub (Louisiana State University Press, 2000); Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963--1994*, Revised edition (Baton Rouge u.a.: LSU Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Harvard University Press, 2010); Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, Reprint edition (Basic Books, 2016); Ken Fones-Wolf and Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Struggle for the Soul of the Postwar South: White Evangelical Protestants and Operation Dixie*, 1st Edition edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*; Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise*.

⁶⁰ Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New Press, The, 2012); Self, *American Babylon*; Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014); Gregory L. Schneider, *The Conservative Century: From Reaction to Revolution* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009); Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*.

⁶¹ Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets since the Depression* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012); Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*; Fure-Slocum, *Contesting the Postwar City*.

repeal state regulation in the economy and workforce, as well as consumer protections in exchange for policies to control inflation—according to historian Meg Jacobs, this trajectory was “anything but inevitable.”⁶² This youth movement in Washington was connected to the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) and Vice President Spiro Agnew’s incorporation of young activists into the Administration. Wisconsin YAF co-founder, UW-Madison alumnus David Keene, was one who found a home in the Nixon administration after devoting his college years right wing activism.⁶³ A virulent anti-communist and anti-unionist, the Wisconsin YAF’s first public protest was in support of preserving the Taft-Hartley Act. Keene went on to become president of both the American Conservative Union and the National Rifle Association (NRA).

For the purposes within, I focus on a handful of Wisconsin industrialists and activists uniting, first, against LaFollette Progressivism, unions, and state regulations to create their own nationalist interpretation. Ostracized by Eastern leadership, this Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos created its own institutions, the John Birch Society among them. Remaining on the political fringe, but gaining a widespread following, anti-unionism and McCarthyism endured within the New Right and the contemporary conservative movement. In tactics, rhetoric, and ideas, Midwestern businessmen contributed to both the manner in which modern conservatism has developed and its vision of national identity.

⁶² Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America : Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2011); Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2016); Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*; Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*.

⁶³ Gregory Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: NYU Press, 1998).

II

Discussion of Sources

Access to official businesses records is a famously tricky task for scholars and the meticulous archival preservation of the Wisconsin State Historical Society (WSHS) is the main reason this dissertation topic was possible. Traces of business political activism across the Midwest are embedded in personal correspondence of William Grede, Thomas E. Coleman, the Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce, and the Kohler family. The Grede and Coleman papers provided a framework for understanding the opposition faced by the LaFollettes in Wisconsin, Wisconsin businesses' role in financing the Red Scare, and the broader fight against Establishment Republicans. The WSHS also houses records from conservative elected officials, Robert Kasten and Melvin Laird. The University of Wisconsin's Steenbock Library was helpful in tracing the campus conservative movement including the Wisconsin Conservative Club Records and the Young Americans for Freedom in the 1960s. Primary documents buttressing the John Birch Society chapter draw from the Grede papers (WSHS), the Paul Weyrich collection at the American Heritage Center in Laramie, Wyoming, and Allen Ruff's personal collection of Birch Society pamphlets donated to the author. The chapter documenting the John Birch Society's influence is drawn primarily from Joanne Ricca's personal archives. Mrs. Ricca was a longtime staff member of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO and built an extensive (and well-organized) collection on the conservative movement's increased militancy in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to Ricca's collection, discussions with Milwaukee-based investigative journalist Bruce Murphy were useful in understanding the evolution of the Bradley Foundation from conservative philanthropic organization in the 1980s to central entity of the contemporary conservative movement.

Definition of Terms

Each chapter's arc is grounded in familiar figures, organizations, and historical moments, but instead of focusing on, for instance, the LaFollette family or Joseph McCarthy, this project examines historical actors who typically operated beyond public scrutiny. I use "fringe right" and "far right" interchangeably and although their goals and composition changed depending on era, they refer to committed activists deemed, even by their likeminded contemporaries, as dogmatic in their conservatism. I define "Wisconsin Right" as a cross-section of politically engaged independent industrialists, headquartered in states typically defined as "the Midwest" or "Upper Midwest," particularly Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Because of Wisconsin's exceptional history as the birthplace of LaFollette Progressivism, Milwaukee's socialist legacy, and dense unionization, I treat conservative business reaction in the state as the epicenter for a broader regional brand of conservatism.

Also in Chapter One, I apply the term "Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos" to describe the ethical and ideological underpinnings of anticommunism, anti-unionism, nativism, and managerial prerogative in the workplace and community. On status within the business world, these avowedly anti-union industrialists viewed themselves as the lone torchbearers of opposition where most company heads in positions of national influence chose not to confront the "labor monopoly" and perceived domestic communist infiltration.

In Chapters Two and Three, the term "Colemanite" refers to the fringe right within the Wisconsin Republican Party. Led by Madison industrialist Thomas E. "Boss" Coleman, a small cadre of (mostly) business leaders opposed LaFollette Progressivism on ideological grounds, while it was also in their financial best interest to do so. Colemanites envisioned a rightward

shift in state politics and created the organizational political structure that became known as the Wisconsin Plan (discussed in Chapter Two) to make it so.

In Chapters Four and Five, I differentiate between proponents of “Political” strategy and backers of “Educational” and policy solutions in highlighting the rupture that took place among the far right in the late 1960s. Divisions arose between advocates of continued political participation (not limited to electoral politics) and those who pursued a course of educating the public on the social merits of libertarianism, rather than participating in what they perceived to be a broken system. Welch expelled the latter from the John Birch Society creating a division on the fringe right that is discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Descriptions

This dissertation is divided into three parts. **Part I** provides a survey of twentieth century labor-management relations in Wisconsin, outlining their interaction in factories, electoral politics, and broader society. Within these conflicts, contestations over “Americanism” influenced ethnic and race relations, claims of citizenship, and expectations of workers’ ability to dictate their own quality of life. **Part II** and **Part III** represent the inside-outside relationship of political movements regarding electoral politics. The two chapters comprising **Part II** examine the Wisconsin Right’s efforts to take control of the Wisconsin Republicans from the Progressives in the early twentieth century and their role in the movement to take control of the national GOP after WWII. The final two chapters of the dissertation (**Part III**) follow the maturation of the Wisconsin Right after their failed power grab at the 1952 Republican Convention.

Chapter One briefly surveys the history of labor-management relations in Wisconsin across the twentieth century. I argue that Progressivism and a (comparatively harmonious) labor movement prompted business in the state to develop a coordinated opposition in the 1920s that remained influential throughout the century in shaping the regional business-labor climate. Manufacturers networked among themselves and experimented with legislative, shop floor, and educational tactics, while advancing an interpretation of American ideals that privileged the native, independent businessman. Industrialists who were veterans of the anti-Progressive movement became key advisors in the labor disputes and electoral contests of subsequent decades. This bedrock forged by early activists became the baseline for future industrial disputes including the second Kohler strike in 1954.

Chapter One provides a general outline while the subsequent chapters examine key activists and events in different periods of the conservative movement's development. Responding to the emergence of the Progressives as a lasting electoral challenger, Chapter Two focuses on Thomas "Boss" Coleman, an independent businessman who held key positions in the Wisconsin Republican Party. I argue that Coleman taking the lead of the state party's Republican Voluntary Association (RVA) enabled the conservative wing of the Republicans to effectively challenge the Progressives. As the RVA's political strategy, known as the Wisconsin Plan, bore fruit, other state parties, including Illinois and Alabama, studied their approach to take back to their home states.

In Chapter Three, I argue the anti-Progressive leadership and strategies that emerged in Wisconsin emboldened Colemanites in their attempt to overtake national Eastern Establishment leadership after Truman's defeat of Thomas Dewey in the 1948 presidential election. This culminated in an open rebellion at the 1949 RNC convention—what *Time* Magazine referred to

as the “Battle of Omaha.” The Coleman-led Midwestern opposition made headway in dictating national campaign strategy (which they intended to model after the Wisconsin Plan), pushing fiscal aspects of the GOP platform to the right on taxation, and moving the 1952 Convention from Florida to the more geographically-advantageous location of Chicago.

The Establishment Republicans’ controversial delegate counting at the convention led to future John Birch Society founder Robert Welch to call Eisenhower’s nomination “the dirtiest deal in American political history.”⁶⁴ The result of Eisenhower’s indifference toward rolling back New Deal reforms and investigating communist subversion launched a right-wing exodus from party politics as figures like Welch and Phyllis Schlafly set up their own non-partisan, autonomous organizations.

Chapter Four examines the John Birch Society (JBS) as a creation of the Wisconsin Right. I argue that the John Birch Society was both a political refuge for far-Right businessmen after the 1952 RNC and a crucial networking device for far right businessmen who could also utilize the local chapter meetings for direct messaging to the broader grassroots membership. With a handful of exceptions, scholars dismiss the John Birch Society as a fringe organization, more associated with accusing President Eisenhower of being a communist sympathizer than having a tangible impact on national conservatism.

Three Wisconsin industrialists were among the Society’s eleven charter members when it was founded in Indiana in 1958. Because of the JBS’s secrecy, it is difficult evaluate the direct impact of the group on the conservative movement. Much of their work was accomplished by infiltrating other organizations and establishing single-issue front groups. For sources, I rely on

⁶⁴ D. J. Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism, and the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014). 7.

internal correspondence among the Leadership Council as well as transmissions from leadership to regional organizers.

Chapter Five focuses on one of the two primary activist/intellectual strains that emerged from ideological divisions within the John Birch Society in the late 1960s and its gradual reunification in the early 1980s. The first group, which I term the “Educational” wing, describes libertarian figures like Robert LeFerve and his protégé Charles Koch who advocated libertarian-based instruction over engaging in political organizing.⁶⁵ Authors including Nancy MacLean and Daniel Schulman have examined the role of these figures in institutes of higher education and think tanks.

The second faction, the “Political” wing, is the less-examined of the two and the topic of this chapter. I argue the individuals and ideology cultivated in the Midwestern conservative milieu discussed in earlier chapters inspired the development and shape of key institutions that became central to the national conservative movement of the 1970s. Conceived of by former Wisconsin Bircher Paul Weyrich, among these were the Moral Majority, the American Legislative Exchange Council, the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, and the Gun Owners of America (a right wing counter to the then-relatively politically moderate National Rifle Association).

In the Epilogue, I reiterate my general argument of the Midwest’s strategic centrality in the broader development of a politically-relevant national right wing in the twentieth century. By the end of the century, the region’s development as conservative engine was outlined in a *New York Times* article titled “Conservative ‘Outsiders’ Now at Hub of Power” which discussed

⁶⁵ An allusion to Charles Koch’s 1970s manifesto “The Struggle for Social Change” in which he argues the conservative movement’s best chance at reshaping national culture begins in education reform and financing libertarian institutes.

how fringe groups organizing outside of traditional political institutions were quietly shaping the national political landscape from their Midwestern home.⁶⁶ According to Bradley Foundation President Michael Joyce, Milwaukee in the 1980s offered a “blank canvas,” for right wing groups to “more than double [conservative philanthropy’s] impact” by putting the New York-based Olin Foundation’s “theoretical level” policy ideas into practice in a “manageable-sized city.”⁶⁷

Relating this conservative mobilization to the contemporary political environment, I rehash the strategic significance of the Midwest in the 2016 election of President Donald Trump. On Trump’s post-election “Victory Tour,” then-House Speaker Paul Ryan told the West Allis crowd that “the Midwest finally saw the light of day” while tying this success to decades of intense conservative organizing in the region.⁶⁸ In a post-election requiem, former NRA president David Keene credited Racine native Reince Preibus’ work as national RNC chair for improving a national grassroots network since he took the position in 2013. On stage at a CPAC convention Keene said of his home state of Wisconsin that “our state was a blue state, but it’s not anymore.” Shaking Preibus’ hand, he told the crowd “this guy had a lot to do with it. This is a guy that gets it.” Preibus finished Keene’s thought, adding that the path to victory needed both “great mechanics and great candidates.”

⁶⁶ Neil A. Lewis, “Conservative ‘Outsiders’ Now at Hub of Power,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1991.

⁶⁷ Elisabeth S. Clemens and Doug Guthrie, *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America’s Political Past and Present* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁶⁸ *Free Video Watch: Full Speech : Trump THANK YOU Rally in West Allis, Wisconsin (12/13/2016) Donald Trump Rally*, accessed December 21, 2016, http://player.mashpedia.com/player.php?q=1ZEBYdTY4_g.

PART I

**OVERVIEW of WISCONSIN'S LABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS and
POLITICAL ALIGNMENT in the EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

CHAPTER ONE

FROM LUMBER TRUSTS TO THE BRADLEY FOUNDATION:
A Century of Coalition-building, Political Realignment, and Labor-
Management Disputes in Wisconsin

I

Writing in a show of support to the Kohler Company during their 1954 strike, an anonymous Iowan thanked Milwaukee industrialist William Grede for his public advocacy on behalf of the company during the United Autoworkers' (UAW) drive for representation. The Iowan equated Kohler to his own experience forty years earlier, fighting the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). He recounted that “the city council refused to take action” against IWW organizers, so “business advertised for paid mercenaries” and they assembled a “private army larger than the police” to deal with the agitators. The armed mob “arrested” hundreds of strikers and lynched two IWW organizers, which “cured the trouble fast,” underscoring business’ extralegal ability to engage in violence and murder in their communities. The IWW was “not very tough” the author recalled, but “we were.” Urging Wisconsin businessmen to follow suit, he wrote; “There is too damned much...appealing to the public and not enough proving...that the law can and will be enforced” when it came to disciplining labor.⁶⁹

Lynching as a recommended prescription for asserting control over the Kohler workforce reveals how ownership rights trumped the lives of labor in the early 20th century. When threatened by ideologies misaligned with established social order, it was business—above all other forms of state and civil society—that had the final say in protecting property, free enterprise, and safeguarding their specific interpretation of Americanism.

⁶⁹ Anonymous, “Letter to William Grede,” Undated, WHS. The letter writer may have been referring actions surrounding the 1914 Sioux City free speech fight but his identifying Polk County as the site of the lynching indicates a lesser-known labor conflict, possibly in Des Moines.

Challenges to this supremacy were interpreted as attempts to subvert the country, denying them their afforded right to lead their local fiefdoms. Their wealth was an *a priori* indicator of their superiority; their inherited credentials often justified their right to act as community leaders and to export these expectations. The IWW executioner from Polk County had no misgivings about murdering in the name of protecting local business owners. Quite the opposite, he argued their circumvention of state enforcement was a duty—a necessary extralegal step in protecting social order from those that sought to subvert the status quo in Iowa. Lynching gave way to alternative forms of managerial retribution, but the notion that independently-owned business defined the American standard drove (and continues to drive) a significant fraction of political activists on the right.

As a contest over postwar union representation within private firms, the Kohler strike was a significant unifying event for politically active businessmen, but business's first modern intervention was in response to Wisconsin Progressives in the late-19th century. Responding to Bob LaFollette's emergence on the political stage, Midwestern businessmen first engaged in coordinated political activism in the early 20th century on two broadly-defined fronts: First, challenging both unions and state regulation at worksites and in communities, and second, by unifying diverse business interests into a coordinated electoral strategy. These dual strategies were rooted in what they saw as their own role in preserving the nation—even over personal profit—creating a a Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos. The following sections of this chapter first couch the Midwestern experience in the broader historiography of twentieth century labor-management relations, and then analyze the ethos in practice on shop floors and in the electoral realm.

II

A Brief Historiography of Business Opposition to Unionization in the 20th Century Midwest

For much of the twentieth-century, the American business right was dismissed as “paranoid” and fringe against a solidly unchallengeable postwar liberalism. The post-WWII conservative movement was “little more than local groups reading the same books, newsletters and congressional reports,” with no concrete political strategy.⁷⁰ While isolated, conservative cadres did exist and were relatively active at state and local levels, both inside the Republican Party and out.

The narrative that conservative opposition was disjointed until after the New Deal is a testament to the durability of the “Treaty of Detroit” labor-management periodization. Until recent decades, consensus among labor historians on the New Deal and World War II was that these events forged a tacit truce among unions, business, and the state. This Treaty was derived from the prominent role played by the automobile industry’s collective bargaining agreements. All other major industries treated the automobile agreements as the baseline for their own—pattern bargaining. Frances Fox Piven described the 1930s as a period when even “[t]he biggest and most virulently anti-union corporations in America were suddenly ready to recognize unions, in return for the regularization of production that they hoped unions would ensure.”⁷¹ Contemporary scholars have since conceded the Treaty was not multilaterally recognized, with a handful of business never fully accepting unions.⁷² America’s unionized workforce was at its

⁷⁰ Nicole Hoplin and Ron Robinson, *Funding Fathers: The Unsung Heroes of the Conservative Movement*, First Edition edition (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2008). 69.

⁷¹ Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Haymarket Books, 1969). Piven’s Introduction, xiv. {Check citation format here - I think its Frances Fox Piven, Introduction to Irving Bernstein, ...

⁷² Feurer and Pearson, *Against Labor*.

peak in the postwar decades and few big corporations were willing to expend the energy and risk political connections to clear them from shop floors.

In Wisconsin, businessmen's deeply held belief in their right to shop floor and community control were on display in towns like Kohler, Cudahy, and West Allis. These towns were the locus for Americanization of immigrant workforces, seeking to impart employers' interpretation of morality on both a captive audience, extending to their families. These fiefdoms of near-total managerial prerogative formed the bedrock in shaping conservative the Wisconsin Right's political and ideological mindset in subsequent decades.

There has been little scholarly focus on Midwestern industrialists as political actors, but David Anderson's case study of the Perfect Circle strike in Indiana is one comprehensive example of the Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos in action. Management simply ignored Wagner Act stipulations on labor's right to organize in a town where business and community were so interlinked it "made class hierarchies irrelevant." Advocating for local control (the company's) and small town common sense to handle their own affairs, "neither management nor labor could be 'forced by laws' to accept these simple rules."⁷³

Anderson finds the benefit in studying the Wisconsin Right because "the business assault on labor and liberalism in the 1950s, shows that...the roots of the New Right lay as much with anti-labor employers as they do with elite intellectuals, college conservatives, or Sun Belt suburbanites."⁷⁴ Anderson's argument is an important theme in this dissertation and I expand on his case study by tying the evolution of Midwestern anti-labor sentiment to arguments over national identity as well as the Midwest's strategic position in the broader conservative movement.

⁷³ Anderson, "The Battle for Main Street, United States of America." 108.

⁷⁴ Anderson. 104.

Steven Meyer's case study of UAW Local 248 shop floor militancy at Allis-Chalmers displays how the communist-led union "successfully challenged and curtailed managerial control" despite a coordinated antiunion campaign from the company that included the local press in an antiunion public relations campaign. The buildup to this moment, and Allis-Chalmers general counsel Harold Story's broader contribution to the national antiunion movement, couches Midwestern business-activists as both vital participants in the Red Scare and significant in the more expansive legacy of antiunion campaigns in America.⁷⁵

Although focusing more on electoral, legislative, and public relations strategies than shop floor contests, Tula Connell's study of conservative opposition to Socialist-led Milwaukee helps explain the unraveling of the liberal consensus in the years following WWII as Milwaukee businessmen united to halt enduring socialism in the state's largest city. Eric Fure-Slocum's similar urban study of Milwaukee displays how business branded individual rights messaging to market the benefits of capitalism as a counter to postwar liberalism.⁷⁶ Both studies' focus on Milwaukee does not account for the broader sociopolitical atmosphere throughout the state, nor the political give-and-take between rural and urban areas, treating Milwaukee as an isolated case study.

A focus on labor-management relations and the inherent competing ideologies, displays how worker suppression, even in the densely unionized Midwest, contributed to both a diminished labor movement and a rightward political creep. This dissertation focuses on the behind-the-scenes coordination that occurred among Midwestern employers and aspects of that mobilization that informed the national conservative movement in subsequent decades.

⁷⁵ Stephen Meyer, *Stalin over Wisconsin: The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950* (Rutgers University Press, 1992).

⁷⁶ Fure-Slocum, *Contesting the Postwar City*.

Midwestern worksites were regularly contested terrain with union organizing drives, progressive ideological strains, and public support for unions. The tactics, strategy, and networks these industrialist-activists innovated became formative in the development of the economic right's anti-union and anti-statist stance, elevating them to key figures in the broader conservative movement and reinforcing wealthy white elites' definition of "Americanism."

III

A Brief Overview of Business & Organized Labor in Wisconsin, 1893-1935

Wisconsin's unique industrial economy shaped both the Wisconsin Right's creation and goals, but also a uniquely stout labor movement. Since at least the creation of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor (WSFL) in 1893 Wisconsin's independent businessmen organized to oppose unions and their ability to support Progressives, Socialists, and Communists seeking positions at every level of government. One year after WSFL's creation, the board was overtaken by a faction of well-organized socialists who revised the constitution, including language advocating "[c]ollective ownership for the people of all means of production and distribution."

The message resonated in Milwaukee and industrial centers in other parts of the state, but the Federation "had no possibility of selling socialism" in areas that distrusted and disliked new immigrants entering factories. WSFL opted for a less ambitious electoral strategy outside of industrial strongholds, promoting messaging distilled of leftist rhetoric.⁷⁷ Historian Paul Buhle argues this rural-urban political divide was "xenophobic and nativist at its core" a foreboding of

⁷⁷ Robert W. Ozanne, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin: A History* (Wisconsin Historical Society, 1984). 37. Socialist John McBride added duplicate language to the to AFL's mission later that year.

the impact changing state demographics and engrained resentments would have on politics in the coming century.⁷⁸

Immigrants flooded Midwestern factories seeking cheap, unskilled labor, setting up clashes with native whites. In the words of one Wisconsinite of the time, most of these new workers constituted “ignorant European emigrants coming...to spread their foolish Socialistic doctrines.”⁷⁹ Traces of this engrained Midwestern nativist sentiment persisted in anti-union, anti-leftist arguments throughout the twentieth century, proving easily exploitable in the political realm by both prominent figures like Joe McCarthy and lesser-known state-level candidates. These reactionary vestiges remained in enough numbers to be politically relevant across the Midwest and were ripe for mobilization as they “clung to an earlier vision of politics and life.”⁸⁰

In the Midwest, family firms transformed into independent fiefdoms where companies manipulated both the work and leisure habits of their new immigrant employees. In one instance of collective action against this arrangement, in the 1880s, J. I. Case was both mayor and owner of the largest company in Racine, Wisconsin. He swiftly faced impeachment after seeking to outlaw the German practice of family time in Sunday saloons.⁸¹ In another example, after the 1897 strike, Kohler established restrictive covenants giving the company sole control over all property in town with the first opportunity to purchase back from workers selling their lots. Buildings were not permitted for “immoral purposes,” singling out taverns where immigrant families often gathered. Kohler had final say over any deviation from residential properties. This was advantageous during the strike where village officials were granted total immunity in

⁷⁸ Paul Buhle, ed., *History and the New Left: Madison, Wisconsin, 1950-1970*, First Edition (Philadelphia: Temple Univ Pr, 1990).

⁷⁹ “Mrs. Grundy,” “Beware of Nationalists!,” *Eau Claire Daily Leader Letters to the Editor*, July 11, 1889.

⁸⁰ Buhle, *History and the New Left*. 14.

⁸¹ David P. Thelen, *The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900*, First Edition (Columbia: Univ of Missouri Pr, 1972). 13.

dealing with strikers who violated village law. Case and Kohler's efforts to reform working class behavior revealed their own "duty" as independent businessmen to educate their fiefdoms in the American way, even if it impacted their companies' balance sheets. .

Historian William Thompson attributes the exceptionally cautious and conservative management style of Wisconsin businesses to insufficient access to operating capital and lenders. Many of the original Wisconsin industries began with a core workforce of family members, hiring on extra help during busy seasons. As business expanded, proximity to local suppliers and local officials cultivated a strong sense of civic involvement as the needs of these businesses interwove with the health of small towns. These regional dynamics, explain "in part the generally cautious and conservative management that characterized many of Wisconsin's largest industrial and financial firms."⁸²

With a preponderance of family industries with thin profit margins, state politics with regard to manufacturing sectors were both personal and practical in manufacturing sectors. With limited resources and little ability to absorb surplus, firms were forced to operate with minimal allowable overhead. Most family companies refused investors, running solely on their own profit surplus and shallow rainy day funds. While this "lean and mean" model limited vulnerability to market fluctuations, it also increased susceptibility to material shortages and restrained their ability to expand output, capping their influence.

World War I revived both radical politics and unions on shop floors where worker aims revolved around what Joseph McCartin called a struggle for "industrial democracy."⁸³ In short,

⁸² Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 180. This incestuous relationship included local finance like First Wisconsin Bank (later Marshall & Isley) where many of these same industrialists sat on the board of directors, deciding which businesses merited operating capital. At times these boards would limit the amount of operating capital allotted to an organized plant.

⁸³ Joseph McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy & The Origins of Modern Labor Relations* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1998).

advocates for industrial democracy were emboldened by WWI mass-production which led to increased clout among workers. Organizing on the shop floor increased workplace conditions and strengthened corporate welfare benefits, even though these were not exclusively union-led initiatives. Blacklisting organizers and “subversives” was common practice among businesses in a weak labor movement and the modest aims of “industrial democracy” reflect the anti-left atmosphere. One whistleblower of the era called the National Association of Manufacturers “the most powerful organization in the world,” claiming membership shared union busting techniques and used NAM connections to circulate blacklists.⁸⁴

Pre-New Deal Worker “Americanization” Efforts

Managerial control was part-and-parcel with business’ agenda to reform and assimilate a workforce still carrying the taint of European socialism. In every industrial town, immigrant labor was in high demand but jobs came with the expectation that management retained not only universal control in all facets of the workplace, but involvement in their workers’ lives. Beyond company sponsored bowling teams, towns named after companies like Kohler and Cudahy were symbolic reminders of industry’s supervisory influence including a moral barometer that extended beyond the factory. There was also economic incentive for this oversight. Kohler, for instance, reduced worker hours during recessions but granted themselves the right to garnish worker wages for mortgages held by the company-owned Kohler Building & Loan Association.⁸⁵ This early 20th century landscape set the groundwork for the manner in which independent businesses and organized labor in manufacturing-heavy Wisconsin would interact.

⁸⁴ Anton Kinch, *Charge It to the Navy* (A. Kinch, 1945).

⁸⁵ Hardy Green, *The Company Town: The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills That Shaped the American Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). 194.

As a means of rehabilitating immigrants, businesses sponsored the immigration of Russian Czarists to Milwaukee where the newcomers founded the Americanization League of America in 1930. Their newsletter, *Melting Pot*, carried the byline “Moulds United States Patriotism.”⁸⁶ Outside of Milwaukee, Walter J. Kohler also “spent much time and effort Americanizing his men” holding special ceremonies for those who received their citizenship and housing most single workers in a massive compound near the factory called the American Club.⁸⁷ The Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos funded and orchestrated the assimilation of immigrants into good workers who, it was hoped, would replicate the behavior of the native white population.

Kinch vs. The Falk Corporation

The contradictory nature of Midwestern business’ dependence on immigrant labor and Americanization programs is embodied by the Anton Kinch whistleblower controversy at the Milwaukee-based Falk Corporation. Kinch, a Russian immigrant and unskilled laborer, caught Falk engaging in a longstanding practice of falsifying Navy contracts since WWI. In his memoir, *Charge it to the Navy*, Kinch made it clear he believed it to be his patriotic duty to turn Falk in but, as he came to learn, neither the company nor government agreed.

For background to the Kinch situation, in 1935, Senator Robert LaFollette, Jr. proposed an addendum to the First Vinson Act, a bill allocating increased Navy funding. The addendum would have made income tax returns for all companies accepting government contracts public. The addendum would have exposed corporate fraud going back to WWI at a number of

⁸⁶ Issues of *Melting Pot* are housed at the Milwaukee County Public Library Central Storage, v. 1 no 6 (Aug. 1934)-v. 34, no. 8(Sep. 1967).

⁸⁷ Uphoff, *Kohler on Strike*. 9-10.

businesses and LaFollette, Jr.'s addendum was removed by the House, once again keeping business tax returns out of public eye.

As a response to the hollowing of the Vinson Act, Kinch went public, accusing his employer, Falk, of accepting work orders from both private contractors and the state, but only fulfilling orders for business. Kinch tied this to Falk's treatment of labor, where it was also skimming. To adhere to National Recovery Act standards, Falk was also required to pay workers \$1.20 per-hour. With no way for a third party to monitor these wages, Falk paid less than half that amount their (largely immigrant) unskilled workforce.⁸⁸ Falk received advance payment for federal work orders to help the war effort two months prior to beginning. Instead of hiring more workers or paying the federally-mandated \$1.20-per-hour, they outsourced jobs to smaller factories not covered by the agreement, keeping the bulk of the government payment and calling it profit. Falk also exploited local government subsidies by hiring Milwaukee Vocational School and Marquette University apprentices—"overwhelmingly minors"—to avoid paying living wages.⁸⁹

Kinch noted the hypocrisy of businesses claiming to be the torchbearers of Americanism while forcing their workers to break the law. He chastised the immigrant "straw bosses and foremen that obtained their own American citizenship fraudulently" by exploiting lack of federal oversight. These men who purported to love America "stood witness in the naturalization proceedings of others that knowingly...were defrauding the very government they were trying to become a part." Falk stole from the government they purported to love because without being American citizens, they could "make their men do anything short of murder."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Kinch, *Charge It to the Navy*.45.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*. 124-125.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*. 124-125.

After his termination for whistleblowing and participating in the “Works Council,” Kinch spent seven years unemployed for which he blamed the National Association of Manufacturers. Kinch believed that it was common knowledge among workers that “every employer used the same application format designed by NAM; same questions” and “[i]f you haven’t been a faithful and obedient servant...to all brother members of the Association” you were blacklisted.⁹¹ In 1942, the Department of Justice awarded Kinch \$12,715.30 in back wages but issued no punishment for the company. Kinch estimated it cost him approximately \$23,000 to fight Falk over the seven years of his unemployment.⁹²

IV Pre-New Deal Electoral Politics

Political Parties & Internal Factions in Wisconsin

In the first half of the twentieth century, factions within the Wisconsin Republicans included both some of the most progressive and right-wing politicians of the era. To clarify which industrialists controlled the right wing and its implications on the larger state GOP, this section briefly diagrams the internal party factions over its formative decades. Founded by a coalition of abolitionists, Whigs and, Free-Soilers in 1852, the Republican Party of Wisconsin grew to become the largest party in the state by the Civil War. After 1865, business interests reorganized Wisconsin Republicans into a political organ for railroad and timber interests and it remained so until the LaFollette takeover in 1900.

Historian David Thelen notes that before the Panic of 1893 there was nothing exceptional in Wisconsin politics to predict the LaFollette dynasty. The economic insecurity caused by the panic shook the majority of Wisconsinites still voting along religious and ethnic patterns into an

⁹¹ Ibid. 32, 97.

⁹² Ibid., 97.

“issue based” realignment along class lines.⁹³ The widespread corruption contributing to economic instability led Wisconsin’s legislature to pass the 1895 Corrupt Practices Act that limited campaign contributions while nominally ending the business practice of coercing employees to vote for a candidate. Internal divisions between those in favor of the Act and others deeming it “too radical” split the party into Progressive and Stalwart factions.⁹⁴

Because of the rise of progressivism in Wisconsin, in the 1890s, investigative journalist Lincoln Steffens selected the state as one of a handful he chose to examine for a book exploring the impact of state-level legislation on the nation.⁹⁵ Attending the 1896 Wisconsin Republican convention as an observer, he anticipated that he would expose gubernatorial nominee Robert LaFollette, Sr. as both a “charlatan and a crook.” With no prior contact, Steffens believed Progressives to be cynically peddling a narrative of public good, concealing their true ambitions of power and personal financial gain. To these ends, Steffens assumed LaFollette’s growing coalition of farmers, state workers and unions, was simply patronage masquerading as quasi-progressive populism.

At the convention in Milwaukee’s Pfister Hotel, Steffens witnessed corruption in plain sight as lobbyists intentionally lost poker games to delegates visiting from distant rural districts. Legislators bought valuable deeds for railroad land at basement rates. Steffens speculated that perhaps back home these representatives were honest men but faced with temptation in Milwaukee, “they ceased to represent” their rural constituencies.⁹⁶ Between 1901 and 1906,

⁹³ Thelen, *The New Citizenship*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁵ Lincoln Steffens, *The Struggle for Self-Government: Being an Attempt to Trace American Political Corruption to Its Sources in Six States of the United States* (McClure, Phillips & Company, 1906).

⁹⁶ Steffens, 115, 117.

Wisconsin had twelve aldermen, nineteen other minor elected officials, and one state senator indicted on corruption charges.

During his time in Wisconsin, Steffens came to see LaFollette not as con artist, but potential safeguard against corporate interests run amok. “After what I have seen,” referring to the graft he witnessed at the GOP convention, “I almost am persuaded that no honest official in power can meet the expectations of great corporations; they have been spoiled like bad American children, and are ever ready to resort to corruption and force.” For Steffens, LaFollette came to embody “the heroism it takes to fight in America for American ideals.”⁹⁷ LaFollette won the 1900 governorship by over 100,000 votes running on an anticorruption mandate, and laying the foundation for the Progressives to assert themselves as “what amounted to a party within the Republican Party” for over two decades.⁹⁸

LaFollette was an early advocate for child labor laws and worker protections which became an issue in the state after lumber companies replaced hundreds of skilled woodworking jobs with juvenile boys and girls as a cost-cutting measure.⁹⁹ In these early years taking on corporate interests and graft, LaFollette became an icon reform, crisscrossing Wisconsin speaking with “forceful, emphatic and fascinating” speeches, uniting a tenuous coalition of farmers, public employees, and organized labor concerned about the influence of money in politics.¹⁰⁰ At the turn of century, Wisconsinites were increasingly troubled by the unfettered acquisitiveness of corporations and LaFollette saw both the possibility for both real reform and political opportunity.

⁹⁷ Steffens. 99-106; 108-119.

⁹⁸ Isabel Bacon LaFollette, *If You Can Take It* (Wisconsin Historical Society Rare Books Collection: Unpublished Memoir, 1944). 240.

⁹⁹ Ozanne, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin*. 22.

¹⁰⁰ Kades, “Incumbent Without a Party: Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. and the Wisconsin Republican Primary of 1946.” 113.

From 1900s until the end of the LaFollette Dynasty in the 1940s, progressives were the *de facto* left-leaning party in Wisconsin while state Democrats remained a political afterthought. Two Republican blunders kept Democrats somewhat relevant: First, in the 1890s, national Republicans passed a high tariff which pushed many Midwestern farmers towards the Democrats. Second, was the 1889 Republican-led passage of the Bennett Law, which mandated public schooling as both an assimilation method and a way to exempt school age children from the labor pool. A nativist “English only” provision in the curriculum was widely despised by the German immigrant population from which the Republicans depended, triggering an ethnically-based backlash at the ballot box. Both the sitting Republican governor and then-Congressman Robert LaFollette lost their elections.¹⁰¹

Despite Steffens’ portrayal of an incorruptible LaFollette, the future governor was not a reformist at the beginning of his career, only shifting as the Republican spoils system prevented his own political advancement.¹⁰² In 1896, “public opinion,” according to Thelen was “rapidly becoming more potent than the will of princes [party bosses]” breaking down traditional voting blocs, post-Panic of 1893. LaFollette had “long ignored reform issues” and was now opportunistically riding “upon the crest of the wave of public opinion” as these issues gained traction among the electorate. LaFollette was the first to observe the breakdown and fill the void by creating an “issue-based” constituency. Ideas that became fundamental to the Progressive platform, argues Thelen, materialized from the ether of existing concepts that “friends and enemies alike agreed...had been popular long before he espoused them.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Robert Booth Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes: An Electoral History* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2008). 66.

¹⁰² Fowler. 76.

¹⁰³ Thelen, *The New Citizenship*. 84.

Despite LaFollette's reformist positioning, he never fully broke with corporate interests, even counting employers he criticized on the campaign trail as colleagues. Future Governor Emanuel Philipp was a Stalwart and railroad executive who served in LaFollette's cabinet until his resignation, only resigning after the administration pushed anti-railroad trust legislation. LaFollette also remained a friend of lumber magnate and state senator Philetus Sawyer, the figure who LaFollette made notorious by accusing of bribery. It was Sawyer, LaFollette told audiences on the campaign trail, who offered him cash in an attempt to buy his loyalty during LaFollette's stint as Dane County attorney general. LaFollette used the incident to launch his anticorruption crusade but personally apologized to Sawyer on the campaign trail, excusing his use of the anecdote because it "riled up the animals [voters]."¹⁰⁴ Beyond personal relationships, "LaFollette and his lieutenants held several conferences with [Republican Chairman and Stalwart leader] Henry Clay Payne and railroad executives in 1900 to assure their opponents...he was not as radical as he sounded."¹⁰⁵

Businessmen viewed LaFollette as not only disloyal to the party that supported his early career, but a hypocrite when he accepted \$500,000 from Wisconsin lumber baron Isaac Stephenson in 1908. LaFollette also raised eyebrows by moving his family to the conservative Madison enclave of Maple Bluff to live among the same wealthy Madisonians who resented him, including Coleman. The Coleman family harbored a deep personal animosity toward the LaFollettes that was articulated through ad hominem attacks in the press and in personal correspondence to his associates. On the night McCarthy defeated "Young Bob" LaFollette in 1946, Coleman announced it to be "the greatest night of his life."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 302.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 302-303

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 459.

What About Bob?: Baby Steps Toward Ousting Progressives From the GOP, 1900-1925

After LaFollette's 1900 gubernatorial victory, Stalwarts formed the Republican League in 1903 with the singular objective of rooting the Progressives out of the GOP. Their first major conflict occurred in the months before the 1904 Republican Convention when the Stalwart delegates set up a ghost convention at a Madison opera house. At the alternative convention, the Stalwarts selecting their protest candidate, former governor Edward Scofield, the tested campaigner and proven entity. Progressive and Stalwart factions of the Republicans met for the convention at the University of Wisconsin's "Red Gym," in what became "the most desperate and dramatic of all state contests in which LaFollette figured."¹⁰⁷

As Progressive delegates entered the Red Gym, Stalwarts cordoned off the stairwell to the convention floor with barbed wire. The Progressives clawed their way to the floor only to find hired UW-Madison football players deputized as sergeants-at-arms who began issuing beatings before they could take their seats.¹⁰⁸ Once seated, the convention was conducted within a steel fence to prevent official delegates from losing their seats to impostors. After another particularly violent physical altercation the next day (May 18), anti-LaFollette delegates staged a walkout. In spite of the beatings, "Fighting Bob" won the 1904 nomination and in a 1906 special session he forwent his third term as governor, appointing himself Senator, launching an eighteen-year career.

Stalwarts remained at bay until LaFollette's first major political misstep of being anti-interventionist during WWI. On the cusp of United States entry into WWI, LaFollette was one of six "Nay" votes to Woodrow Wilson's 1917 Declaration of War. This vote was repeatedly used against both he and his sons for the entirety of their careers. In speeches around the Upper

¹⁰⁷ "Thrice Elected as Governor: New Era Is Ushered in by LaFollette," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 19, 1925.

¹⁰⁸ La Follette, *Adventure in Politics*. 12.

Midwest, LaFollette risked political retribution for taking an isolationist stance and also publicly opposing the Palmer Raids, a state crackdown on immigrants, communists, black market commerce, and all others deemed subversive. On Madison's campus, students and faculty burned LaFollette in effigy and many Progressive allies distanced themselves from the family, including influential progressive faculty members John Commons and Charles Van Hise.¹⁰⁹ In Wisconsin, a heavily German constituency provided some cover for the LaFollettes, and a robust Midwestern neutrality/arbitration movement for the United States (dubbed the "Wisconsin Plan" with no relation to Coleman's) also placed him in the good graces of many middle and upper-class reformers.¹¹⁰

Business' influence in media outlets reframed LaFollette's neutrality as borderline treasonous, implying he was conspiring with Germany. Focusing in on a specific speech LaFollette gave in St. Paul, the *Wisconsin State Journal* labeled him a "traitor" and the board of directors at the Madison Club, an opulent hideaway on the outer ring of Madison's downtown Capitol Square, expelled him in 1917 for being a "disloyal citizen." (The Madison Club became a regular meeting spot for Republican leadership during Coleman's tenure and the *Capitol Times* called it the "real" Statehouse.¹¹¹) Despite conservatives raising questions of loyalty, LaFollette was victorious in his third, and final, 1922 senatorial term, winning 80% of the vote.¹¹² After dying in 1925, Robert, Jr. completed his term in 1925 and held his father's seat until losing to McCarthy in 1946.

¹⁰⁹ Isabel Bacon LaFollette, *If You Can Take It*. 1.

¹¹⁰ Michael Kazin, *War Against War: The American Fight for Peace, 1914-1918* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017).

¹¹¹ Coleman and the RVA would meet regularly at the Madison Club for decades, perhaps for this reason.

¹¹² This is not to be confused with Roosevelt's 1912 Progressive party, which LaFollette refused to join. Despite his absence from Teddy's party, that version of the Progressive party was almost wholly driven by the ideas of the Wisconsin Progressives, according to historian Richard Hofstadter.

A New Generation of LaFollettes, 1925-1946

The political scene settled after the turbulence of WWI and the LaFollette Dynasty survived to place both of Robert's sons in a position to continue his legacy. Robert, Jr.'s brother Phil was elected governor in nonconsecutive terms, for the first time in 1931, and again in 1935, building upon his father's anticorruption platform. He also rejuvenated two state agencies the Stalwarts had previously stripped of authority: the Railroad Commission and the Public Service Commission. Modeled after his father's 1911 Workmen's Compensation law, LaFollette pushed through an Unemployment Compensation law holding firms monetarily accountable for terminated employees, thereby reigning in reckless hiring and firing cycles and providing a baseline of support for out-of-work Wisconsinites. This law became the skeletal structure for the first New Deal's national unemployment compensation law with one key difference being no individual employer accountability, thereby omitting the central thrust of the Wisconsin version. In 1939, Pope Pius XI in 1939, bequeathed a "special commendation for Wisconsin's leadership" upon Philip LaFollette for his work passing the first unemployment compensation law, no small accolade in catholic-heavy Wisconsin.

In the first thirty years of the twentieth century, Wisconsin Progressives "altered institutions, attacked social conventions, and changed laws in a manner heretofore unachieved in American history."¹¹³ According to Theodore Roosevelt, the state was "literally a laboratory for wise experimental legislation aiming to secure the social and political betterment of the people as a whole."¹¹⁴ Wisconsin earned the moniker as "America's Laboratory of Democracy" by

¹¹³ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 6.

¹¹⁴ Charles McCarthy, *The Wisconsin Idea* (Andesite Press, 2015); Vernon Carstensen, "The Origin & Early Development of the Wisconsin Idea," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 39, no. 3 (n.d.): 181–88. Roosevelt was paraphrasing the statements of visiting British Ambassador Lord Bryce, who described how states served as low risk-high reward laboratories where successful legislative experiments had the potential to benefit the nation at-large, while failures were confined within state boundaries.

exploring novel solutions to issues of the day: “Many of the best things in the New Deal,” according to a prominent 1930s Democrat, “came out of the minds and imaginations of the men and women in Madison.”¹¹⁵ At Philip LaFollette’s funeral in 1965, his former staffer Gaylord Nelson contextualized gravity of the LaFollettes’ impact on the twentieth century: “the New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society...had their roots in the progressivism that grew out of the soil of Wisconsin.”¹¹⁶

Hamstrung by the Corrupt Practices Act, few promising candidates and no vision for attracting new voters, the Stalwarts were unprepared to counter the Progressive upsurge of the early twentieth century. Progressivism, by every indicator, was the course for future of American government and society. While most businessmen begrudgingly accepted the reality that the state mandated their accountability to workers, a small minority sought to reverse the course through radical internal reorganization of the Wisconsin Republicans.

Early Broad-Based Anti-Progressive Business Mobilization

Setting up their own organizations outside Republican influence, business focused their resources on public relations and focusing on the state legislature. In the 1920s, the Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce urged a rollback of regulations on the basis that “90% of of all laws affecting business are of state enactment” in the Progressive led state legislature.¹¹⁷ From the 1920s, expanding to at least the 1970s, Wisconsin had “the reputation of being a radical state”

¹¹⁵ David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 36-37.

¹¹⁶ “Gaylord Nelson’s Eulogy of Philip LaFollette,” *The Progressive Magazine*, October 1965.

¹¹⁷ Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce, “Bulletin to Chambers of Commerce and Trade Associations,” August 17, 1929, Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce Files, Box 1, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

but was also home to “very conservative business” within.¹¹⁸ If this business could organize politically, they had the opportunity to alter the course of the state.

The first Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce (1920) formed as a means to unify businesses during election season against the Progressive-dominated state legislature. Implementing a strategy of organizing farmers and rural voters, Governor Emanuel Philipp, a Stalwart and railroad executive (who earlier resigned from Robert LaFollette’s cabinet his over targeting railroad trusts) believed farmers were ripe for a conservative transformation as the Progressives failed to live up to their promises for rural voters. When unions attempted to organize creameries and cheese makers, Progressives failed to act, leading to a break with many farmers, feeling betrayed.

Seeing no conflict of interest in his dual standing as a leader in the Chamber of Commerce while serving as governor, Philipp envisioned the Chamber as becoming “an organization for the benefit of farmers.” He “expected business men and manufacturers to finance it” by having the foresight to understand the long-term ramifications of this shift.¹¹⁹ Philipp appointed a new graduate of UW-Madison’s agricultural school to become head of the state chamber, but the plan failed to gain traction with most businessmen who remained either politically lethargic or did not see the value of such a strategy. The first Chamber of Commerce collapsed soon after.

The second attempt to form a Chamber was successful as twenty-seven trade associations and area chambers of commerce, representing a total of 12,000 Wisconsin businessmen, convened in July 1929 to discuss reshaping Wisconsin’s political economy. Individuals paid \$25 in annual dues and each corporation gave \$100 to subsidize an annual budget between \$100,000

¹¹⁸ Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce., 4.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.2.

to \$150,000, focusing on public relations and membership development. Formed at the zenith of Progressive power in Wisconsin, they complained that government controlled the “whole structure of our business, social, and private life,” a role previously held by companies.¹²⁰ Appealing to workers’ notions of consumerism and the perils of taxation they argued progressivism would only “retard economic and social progress and prosperity.” Both workers and owners should stand tall against taxation with the understanding that “what hurts business hurts you.”¹²¹

Implying that Progressives inhibited growth through conservationist protections, the Chamber gushed about latent, untapped resources available for economic exploitation, writing that “few states have as much to sell as our state.” Wisconsin’s regional location “near the center of the continent” as well as its “advantageous natural resources,” among other benefits offered “particularly good opportunity” to be “prosperous beyond the ordinary.”¹²²

Pre-New Deal Midwestern industrialists had no singular strategy for defeating Progressives in the early decades of the twentieth century. Their multifaceted approach included overcoming personal differences and closing ranks against a common enemy within the Republicans. Opposing alternative conceptions of “Americanism” business also played up divisions within the Progressive Party coalition as well as among their workers. This practice of dividing workers became an even more vital for the Wisconsin Right after unions were granted legitimacy under the 1935 Wagner Act.

¹²⁰ Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce.

¹²¹ E.H. Krueger, “Why a Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce?,” Undated, Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce Files, Box 1, Folder 1, WHS.

¹²² Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce, “Bulletin to Chambers of Commerce and Trade Associations.” 2.

Applying Progressive Era Lessons to Resisting the Wagner Act

The intent of the 1935 Wagner Act was to help correct a failing economic system by reducing competition between firms, pump priming the economy through increased wages, and establishing safeguards to alleviate constant labor unrest. Despite incorporating input from business when designing the Wagner Act, small and independent companies particularly resented the new workplace regulations believing it put larger firms, who had more of a say on the bill's design, at a competitive advantage. In Wisconsin, the Progressives dedicated their final term in power (1937) to strengthening a state-level version in the CIO-backed Wisconsin Labor Relations Act.¹²³ This “Little Wagner Act” prohibited spying, strengthened organizing rights, protected workers from discrimination, and, ostensibly, blacklisting. Isolated from broader labor-management trends toward accommodation in the New Deal era, Wisconsin industrialists Harold Story, Harry Bradley, and William Grede provide three distinctive, but overlapping approaches to opposing Wagner Act stipulations at the legislative, community, and shop floor levels—each drawing on tactics and messaging previously applied to fighting the LaFollettes at their apex of power.

Another issue for business was that organized labor in Wisconsin was also relatively united when compared to bitter rivalries between AFL and CIO in other states. The Wisconsin State Federation of Labor (WSFL) played a mediating role that limited raids between the two competing federations, outlined clear jurisdictional parameters, and identified initiatives the two groups could work on together.¹²⁴ However, there remained stark demographic differences

¹²³ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. Progressives actually had 48 of 100 Assembly seats and 16 of 33 Senate but peeled off some Democrats and Republicans.

¹²⁴ Ozanne, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin*. 78-70. According to Ozanne, the lengths organized labor went to display a united front is on display when the editor of the Kenosha Labor Press noted that he used a ruler to ensure both AFL and CIO received equal coverage in the paper.

between the two federations and at Allis-Chalmers, Harold Story explored both shop floor and legislative methods of dividing this solidarity by emphasizing differences in race, ethnicity, and skill-level among his own workforce.

A lawyer by trade, Story excelled in the legislative arena writing aspects of anti-union labor law that remain in practice nationwide to the present. Giving a lecture at the University of Wisconsin Law School, Story outlined his interpretation of what an equitable labor law would look like—a first draft of what became the Wisconsin Labor Peace Act of 1939. This 1939 law in turn became inspiration for the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act that rolled back what constituted legal strike activity, allowed open shops, and prohibited direct political contributions from unions to candidates.

Story's motives for seeking legislative solutions to what he perceived to be overreach on behalf of organized labor were rooted in preventing a popular majority from dictating union affiliation, driving a wedge between skilled and unskilled trades. The lecture he gave at UW Law titled "The Modern Labor Problem from the Employers' Viewpoint" argued that the Wagner Act was undemocratic, particularly Section 7(a) which mandated employers bargain in good faith with the union selected by the majority of workers Story countered that this "subjects the minority group...to the wishes of the majority." Comparing organized labor to a mouse threatening an elephant, he argued "the elephant of industry has made important concessions to labor [without legislation] as a whole which it would not otherwise have done."¹²⁵ The Wagner Act tipped the scales toward labor in a way that would "likely be destructive." Providing an example of communists in the CIO being critical of the AFL's relative inaction on labor rights,

¹²⁵ Harold Story, "Lecture to UW Law School: "The Modern Labor Problem from the Employers' Viewpoint"," July 18, 1935, Harold Story Papers, Miscellaneous Correspondence File, Milwaukee Historical Society.

Story waxed nostalgic for pre-New Deal relations he recalled being a “FRIENDLY relationship” with “FREEDOM from labor disputes.”¹²⁶

The same elephant metaphor appeared in the language for “The Plan for Industrial Peace” bill proposed in January 1937 indicating Story’s participation in writing it. It was essentially an employer-friendly version of the Wagner Act at the state level, restraining unions’ rights to organize. Story argued Wisconsin had the opportunity to be the vanguard “in industrial enterprise and social legislation,” offsetting the “destructive” aspects of the Wagner Act that gave too much power to unskilled labor in an oft-repeated argument against majority rule.

Using this logic, Allis-Chalmers invested in dividing workers by what Story called “simultaneously endorsing both collective and individual bargaining.” He argued “a true open shop policy” must allow individual freedom of each worker to bargain independently with management to their own worth.¹²⁷ It was a transparent attempt to divide solidarity among the skilled trades and more interchangeable jobs in the factory. When negotiating contracts, Story also included language favoring skilled, native white AFL workers he believed would side with management in the case of a strike.¹²⁸ Unskilled workers and the CIO, Story argued, did “not believe in craft unionism” and skilled white unionists should be wary in forming alliances or they would be targeted for replacement by the largely ethnic unskilled workers.¹²⁹

To counterbalance the purported treachery by unskilled workers, Story’s version of industrial peace called for an “appropriate unit” of representation between skilled and unskilled workers in bargaining. “Since in the average manufacturing plant the unskilled workmen are the majority,” Story argued, “it would mean that the skilled workmen would probably not be able to

¹²⁶ Meyer, *Stalin over Wisconsin*. 34.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*. 49.

¹²⁸ Harold Story, “Speech to Wisconsin Assembly”; Meyer, *Stalin over Wisconsin*. 65.

¹²⁹ Meyer, *Stalin over Wisconsin*. 37.

elect any representatives.” Affirming management’s loyalty to the predominantly white, native AFL, he called the arrangement “utterly intolerable to the skilled minority group” encouraging native whites to leave the bargaining unit and deal directly with management.¹³⁰

Unable to pass the 1937 Plan for Industrial Peace, Story caught a break with the gubernatorial election of Julius Heil in 1939 and the GOP sweep. With the help of Tom Coleman’s Wisconsin Plan, the Milwaukee industrialist defeated Philip LaFollette and ushered a Republican majority into the legislature. It was no coincidence it passed during the Heil administration, someone who so transparently cared more for business than running the state as governor. Heil, was handpicked by the Wisconsin Right GOP leadership to challenge LaFollette because of his right wing industrialist background, but after election he rarely travelled to Madison and became what amounted to an absentee governor. So disappointing was Heil that Coleman and others resigned from their party committees rather than support his reelection campaign.

Beyond legislation, Story also opposed unions in more direct way, viewing the UAW’s organizing at Allis-Chalmers as a contest for America’s future. “A small but well organized group” Story warned “is working strenuously to promote legislation in the various states along the lines of the European system.”¹³¹ Story equated the Wisconsin CIO (and UAW) with disloyal immigrants and communists so he hired private investigators to build a “Communism File.” Compiling data on possible communist ties within the UAW he planted stories in the Milwaukee press (sometimes personally writing them) and also used it during his Congressional testimony speaking in favor of Taft-Hartley in 1947.

¹³⁰ Harold Story, “Joint Hearing on Wisconsin Legislature on Bills 1-A and 6-S,” January 28, 1937, Harold Story Papers, Miscellaneous Correspondence File, Milwaukee Historical Society.

¹³¹ Harold Story, “Speech to Wisconsin Assembly,” undated, Harold Willis Story Papers, Box 2, Folder 29, Speeches, Milwaukee Historical Society.

Story argued UAW Local 248 “was formed for a communist purpose. It was conceived, born, and midwived in the Milwaukee downtown office of the Communist Party.”¹³² While Eugene Dennis moved the Communist Party USA headquarters to Milwaukee after being elected general secretary in 1945 (long after the creation of 248) and Wisconsin’s broader labor movement was indebted to the foundational work of a number of socialists and communists, but during the Cold War the accusation carried new weight. Story’s primary target was the lead organizer at Allis-Chalmers, a skilled worker named Harold Christoffel, who became the first union leader to be jailed during the second Red Scare, serving three years in federal prison.

Story was masterful in innovating new methods of demobilizing organized labor through the legal process but also in direct conflict with Allis-Chalmers workers through skill level and ethnicity. He went on to become a pro-segregationist board member of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) in the 1960s, but his legacy also must also include the new procedural avenues of hindering post-Wagner Act union organizing, most recognizably as the state-level author for what became the Taft-Hartley Act. Although aspects of his dream labor-management agreement never materialized (e.g. weighted voting for skilled workers in union elections) his state-level contributions to defeating, and reversing policies of the LaFollette-led legislature link the Wisconsin Right’s early twentieth century battles to the broader anti-unionism of the modern conservative movement.

¹³² Stephen Meyer, *Stalin over Wisconsin: The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). 4, 9, 12, 78.

The 1953 Fantus Report, the 1955 Catlin Act and Right-to-Work Attempts

Unrelated to Harold Story and Allis-Chalmers, there were three milestone legislative challenges to the post-New Deal arrangement, directly targeting the rights of unions. In the postwar years, Wisconsin businesses marketed the state's progressive history as a detriment to economic growth, citing the state's legacy of restrictive legislation. Business painted a fiction that more tax breaks and restraints on union organizing were necessary to compete both regionally and nationally. This fiction was described by one state report as a "gulf between attitudes and reality" comparing talking points used by Wisconsin business for more advantages and the extensive pro-business climate the state had created in the decades following WWII.¹³³

In 1953, the Wisconsin Manufacturers' Association (WMA), a National Association of Manufacturers state unit, sought a third party to document what they perceived to be the state's unfair treatment of business. They commissioned the Fantus Factory Locating Service to conduct a study on Wisconsin's positioning in the rest of the Midwest's. The Fantus Report concluded that Wisconsin was last in growth among Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa since WWII, and held a gloomy prognosis for future development.¹³⁴

Founded in 1919, Fantus conducted research that businesses used as expert justification for opposing closed shops while leveraging the threat of relocation to garner favorable terms with local governments and at the bargaining table. Historian Tami Friedman has displayed how the Chicago-based Fantus contributed to the rise of the Sunbelt by encouraging plants to depart the Northeast and Midwest.¹³⁵ For instance, in Wisconsin, Fantus argued their analysis proved

¹³³ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 186. Second quote in footnotes cited in a 1979 "Wisconsin Business Climate Study" as well as in the Wisconsin State Journal, April 19 & 22, 1984.

¹³⁴ Thompson. 195.

¹³⁵ Friedman, "Exploiting the North-South Differential." 327.

the state's economic growth was limited by a saturated industrial market, aging factories, and the "unusually high proportion" of businesses requiring modernization by the 1950s.

Because many major employers were independently owned by local businessmen, labor-management relations were personal. Unlike their eastern counterparts, "decisions about whether to invest...in new facilities in Milwaukee were made, not in New York, Chicago, Houston, or Los Angeles, but in board rooms along Wisconsin Avenue and on [Milwaukee's] South Side."¹³⁶ If the political climate was to tilt pro-business, Wisconsin industrialists needed to advocate for themselves. Wisconsin was their home and many of these firms opted to remain in-state during the wave of plant relocations from the 1950s-1980s, challenging both union and the state encroachment.

As a response to the Fantus Report, Wisconsin formed the Division of Industrial Development (DID) to gather statistics on the state's business climate while promoting the state as open for business to prospective employers (it was the DID's creativity that conjured the succinct catchphrase "Wisconsin: We Like It Here!"). The Report often successfully swayed public sentiment in business's favor, contributing to a frustrated Republican Governor Vernon Thompson to exclaim that the men who "make the most noise about the unfavorable atmosphere in the State for industry" are the same men who "made their fortunes in Wisconsin industry."¹³⁷

The Fantus Report became an oft-cited reference conservative leadership in the Wisconsin Manufacturers' Association, Chambers of Commerce, and the conservative Hearst-owned *Milwaukee Sentinel* when they made arguments for tax cuts and reigning in unions. It was cited as late as the 1980s as a means for justifying plant relocation when the Chamber of

¹³⁶ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 198.

¹³⁷ Ibid., *Continuity and Change*, "Memo to Governor Vernon Thompson from Allis-Chalmers VP Bob Stevenson and GOP Staffer Chet Wanvig," n.d., 198.

Commerce complained that the Democrat-led state legislature was “anti-business” and “pro labor.”¹³⁸ In reality, Wisconsin’s taxes on business were “relatively low compared to other states in the Upper Midwest and even in comparison with fast-growing states in the South and elsewhere.”¹³⁹ Some experts on tax policy came to believe business’ assault on on the state “would never subside, short of abandoning completely all taxes on business.”¹⁴⁰

Postwar industrialists also sought legislative methods for hamstringing the influence of unions in politics. The controversial 1955 Catlin Act, named after the bill’s author, Assemblyman Mark Catlin, Jr., prohibited unions from contributing to political parties, committees, or candidates for state and local office. Considered a profoundly conservative bill at the time, even many Republican appointees refused to enforce it around the state for fear of union reprisal. The transparent targeting of unions and the opposite effect of the Act’s intention, triggering a spike in non-union contributions to Democratic candidates while Secretary of State Robert Zimmerman refused to pursue charges against violations of the law. The Catlin Act was repealed in 1959 because of lack of enforcement.

Historians sometimes use right-to-work legislation as a barometer for evaluating business’s influence at a specific region or time. Although typically associated with southern states, right-to-work was introduced three times in Wisconsin’s history, finally passing in 2015, while unsuccessful attempts were made in 1958 and 1969. Historically rooted in preventing interracial unionism in Texas and the South, right-to-work laws gained traction at the state level after Taft-Hartley Act (1947). Section 14(b) of the Act permitted states to vote independently on

¹³⁸ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 182, 202-203.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 184.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 186. Second quote in footnotes cited in a 1979 “Wisconsin Business Climate Study” as well as in the Wisconsin State Journal, April 19 & 22, 1984.

allowing closed shops. Historians have described how conservatives sold right-to-work as a continuation of the New Deal, promoting it as increased choice for workers.¹⁴¹

Kansas businessman (and John Birch Society member) Reed Larson was an early supporter of state legislation, founding the National Right-to-Work Committee in the late-1950s. Their Indiana chapter was the first to bring right-to-work to the Midwest with a successful 1957 campaign becoming one of nineteen states to pass laws. A Wisconsin attempt followed in 1958 in the form of a statewide referendum backed by the conservative California-based DeMille Foundation (founded by anti-union actor Cecille B. DeMille). While the Foundation provided support, the referendum was driven by city officials in Milwaukee and surrounding conservative suburbs of Wauwatosa, Ozaukee, and Washington (WOW) counties, who sought greater autonomy in worker negotiations. Overestimating voters' desire for right-to-work, the referendum fell flat.

Tom Coleman, the Madison industrialist and GOP party boss—one of the most active anti-union individuals in the state—chastised the attempt as reckless. Coleman believed “a few men messed it up in good shape...and I am afraid that they fixed it for some time to come” now that unions were on heightened alert and could now mobilize in opposition.¹⁴² The disorganized attempt would only serve as a rallying cry for filling opponents' political coffers as a response. Lamenting the failed attempt and businessmen's' general lack of commitment to political projects, Coleman dismissed these half-hearted attempts by men who “start something, then drop it.”¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹⁴² Thomas E. Coleman, “Letter to Donald MacLean of DeMille Foundation,” March 3, 1959, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 6, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

A right-to-work proposal was again floated in the 1969 Wisconsin Labor Committee, described by one Assembly Democrat from Racine as “a vicious one that would have damaged the entire labor movement.”¹⁴⁴ Like the first attempt in 1958, it was unpopular and rejected unanimously by Republicans and Democrats in committee. Digging deeper, it became clear the bill was never intended to become law, but a savvy fundraising maneuver by Republicans. Where the first was poor planning, the 1969 version was nothing more than “a political gimmick” so Republicans in union-dense areas could vote it down, currying favor (and funding) from unions in their districts.¹⁴⁵

While right-to-work was an aspiration of the postwar Wisconsin Right, leadership understood broader political will was absent for such a drastic step. The state and labor’s role in American life was too engrained for the concept of right-to-work to be a priority for most voters, regardless of political ideology. Additionally, in the context of the 1950s Republican Party, many businesses abandoned electoral and legislative solutions in favor of local mobilization projects and educating via independent groups like the JBS, discussed in Chapter Four.

Allen-Bradley Company Community Outreach

Business conservatives feared the Wagner Act gave unions too much power to dictate the terms and conditions of their own employment and put them in a position conspire to commandeer the American political system. Even moderate Republicans like Wisconsin Senator Alexander Wiley warned that unions were “setting up political stewards shop-by-shop” and it

¹⁴⁴ “Right To Work GOP Gimmick Bown Claims,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 27, 1969.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

was the mission of business to take the lead in maintaining “our republican form of government” by cultivating “a comparable organization down to the very grassroots.”¹⁴⁶

In Milwaukee, the Allen-Bradley Company established itself as an influential pillar in opposing Progressivism and the New Deal through building community support and exporting company culture. A-B was willing to spend huge sums of money in cultivating a conservative grassroots, particularly around Milwaukee that included mandatory participation in the Republicans for employees, workshops hosted by national figures on the right, and, most famously, their eventual founding of right wing philanthropic financier the Bradley Foundation.

Allen-Bradley management demanded a specific ideological loyalty from middle management that extended into the community. In addition to the aforementioned mandatory participation in local Republican chapters, workers and managers in 1957, the company “recommended” management attend a two-day political training course conducted by early right-to-work innovator and political strategist Cliff White who warned of the dangers in allowing the militant United Electrical Workers’ union (UE) to organize.¹⁴⁷ Political activism was a requisite for employment, particularly in management to the point that personnel manager Sam Hay marveled at the company’s ability to stock “so darn many A-B people holding posts in the Republican Party that it got to be embarrassing.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Senator Alexander Wiley, “Letter to Industrialist Fred Young ‘RE: Antidoting Labor’s Political Setup,’” July 6, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, WHS.

¹⁴⁷ John Gurda, *The Bradley Legacy: Lynde and Harry Bradley, Their Company, and Their Foundation* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, 1992); Kim Phillips-Fein, “‘As Great an Issue as Slavery or Abolition’: Economic Populism, the Conservative Movement, and the Right-to-Work Campaigns of 1958,” *Journal of Policy History* 23, no. 4 (2011): 491–512. For more information on the right-to-work activism of Cliff White, see Nelson Lichtenstein’s *The Right and Labor in America*.

¹⁴⁸ Gurda, *The Bradley Legacy*. 114-115.

For Allen-Bradley the ideology of the Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos trumped even profits, refusing to contract directly with the federal government believing it to be a road to socialism. World War I was a boon effort for Wisconsin industrialists, bolstering their profits tenfold. Significantly, Allen-Bradley also benefitted from the war despite refusing federal building contracts citing ideological conflict.¹⁴⁹ In an instance of fighting federal infrastructure spending, Bradley also spearheaded efforts to prevent the expansion of a seaway for easier access to Mesabi iron range, despite the opportunity to directly profit from its creation.¹⁵⁰ A-B management saw themselves as torchbearers for the only authentic version of Americanism and his exceptionalism came to a head when a New York bank hosted Soviet diplomat Anastas Mikoyan. Harry Bradley responded by calling him a “Soviet murderer” and closed Allen-Bradley’s account in protest.¹⁵¹

In local community involvement efforts, many in A-B upper management were active in the far right John Birch Society, including Harry Bradley and his most trusted staffer, president Fred Look. “No one believed more fervently in the ‘Allen-Bradley family’” than Fred Look according to one historian. Both men were “devout believers in free enterprise and personal liberty” and “deeply troubled by the expansion of the federal bureaucracy since the New Deal.” In a 1952 memo to all employees, Look lamented that “at the rate our government is spending, it won’t be long before all money in excess of bare living will be taken away from us in taxes.”

Look joined the company at eighteen years old but fired by Harry Bradley early in his career. Despite his dismissal, Look continued to show up at work in what must have been a shock to his coworkers. Look’s moxie caught the eye of Bradley’s top management who re-

¹⁴⁹ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 189.

¹⁵⁰ Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*. 140.

¹⁵¹ Gurda, *The Bradley Legacy*. 115.

hired him with a promotion, moving him to sales. From sales he rose to general manager and finally president in 1947. “Delegation was completely foreign to [Loock],” who, according to historian John Gurda, micromanaged to the point of reviewing all company copy and personally assigning parking spots.¹⁵² Looking for a motivational edge, Loock opened sales meetings brandishing a whip, baseball bat, and shotgun. As president, Loock instituted a policy where new employees received pajamas and a tie, graduating to shoes or a shirt before senior management earned the three-piece suit.¹⁵³ A form of corporate welfare, the discipline-and-incentive program also reinforced a caste system within the company.

Hierarchy was constantly reinforced at Allen-Bradley and this spilled out into the community where the company was essential to the John Birch Society’s early survival. Harry Bradley personally funded much of the Society’s promotional advertisements, including an anti-communist video, which was a six-minute vignette depicting Allen-Bradley as “a shining example of what our free-enterprise system can do for Americans at all levels of education, ability, income and ambition.” The film compared the daily lives of workers at their Milwaukee plant to the “known plight” of those who toiled in the USSR.¹⁵⁴ Linking communism to postwar federal spending and repression of religion in Soviet Russia, Allen-Bradley took out a two-page newspaper advertisement across the country asking readers if they would “be able to celebrate Christmas in the future?”¹⁵⁵ The ad continued: “We [Allen-Bradley] are trying to sell you nothing except the importance of holding fast to your American freedoms including the freedom to live, the freedom to worship your God, and the freedom to work as you choose, which

¹⁵² Gurda. 109-110.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 112-113.

¹⁵⁴ “John Birch Society Annual Report,” 1959, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

¹⁵⁵ Gurda, *The Bradley Legacy*. 116.

freedoms are still here in America, but have disappeared over a great part of the rest of the World.”¹⁵⁶

That independent companies were a bulwark for a tenuous American freedom was a message Allen-Bradley exported as one of the first patrons for the Manion Forum radio show, hosted by fellow-Bircher Clarence “Pat” Manion. A-B was also an initial contributor to the *National Weekly* (later re-named the *National Review*) and the John Birch Society. Paraphrasing the theme of Friedrich Hayek’s The Road to Serfdom, Loock warned his workers they were on the cusp of becoming “slaves of the state” and that the postwar political economy portended “the end of Free Americans” in the form of the New Deal.¹⁵⁷ Loock invited several conservative figures to captive audience talks for A-B workers including Birch founder Robert Welch, Robert Taft, and Barry Goldwater. To Bradley workers, Loock also disseminated John Stormer’s 1964 *None Dare Call it Treason*, and other anti-communist conspiracy works, gushing that “these books ought to be required reading” for all concerned Americans.¹⁵⁸

William Grede’s Zero Tolerance for Unions

Where Allis-Chalmers pursued legislative and political solutions and Allen-Bradley sought a measure of ideology over their communities a militant subsection led by William Grede, of Milwaukee-based Grede Foundries, challenged unions’ their right to exist. Grede “successfully quelled every attempt of his employees to organize a bona fide labor union,” became a key figure in building a postwar anti-union business movement, becoming an advisor for the Kohler family during the second strike.¹⁵⁹ Grede’s control over his own worksites made

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 117.

¹⁵⁷ Gurda, 114.

¹⁵⁸ Gurda, 114-117.

¹⁵⁹ UAW 833, “Kohler Strike Bulletin (Lyman Conger Mailed to William Grede on February 7, 1956).”

him a natural ally and advisor to the Kohler family during the 1954 strike. Grede was also one of the first to recognize the value of expanding conservative messaging in the suburbs. Founding a conservative bookstore and newspaper in Wauwatosa, Grede coordinated John Birch Society expansion into suburban areas ripe for recruiting right wing activists.

Like most Midwestern industrialists, Grede saw corporate welfare as one aspect of deterring unionization. In a speech on the “American Opinion Speaking Tour” titled “The Virtue of Profit,” William Grede asked the crowd, “[d]o you see a halo over my head?” when discussing his company’s welfare programs. Using a metaphor of farmers and cows to his Wisconsin audience, Grede listed the various modernization practices that the dairy industry implemented for the betterment of their livestock. Management were the dairy farmers and his employees the cows: “it was in the farmer’s best interest to have happy cows, and “those cows never had a union!””

Similarly, recalling the time he purchased and immediately closed a Michigan plant as a means to flush out the union, he told reporters that unions were “not needed by the employees of a man who knows the American Way.”¹⁶⁰ At the height of the New Deal’s strength, Grede combined his zero-tolerance policy toward unionization drives with a broader project of defending America from unions and immigrants. In doing so, he set an example for other employers on dealing with both their workforces and union drives.

In a 1950s profile of Grede, *Time Magazine* described him as a “ruggedly free businessman” who dedicated his life to evangelizing the merits of free enterprise. Dropping out of UW-Madison at the age of twenty-four, Grede’s industrialist father provided the startup capital for his son to purchase his own foundry. Over the ensuing decades Grede expanded his

¹⁶⁰ Grede, “Speech to Los Angeles John Birch Society.” Emphasis on the word union is Grede’s.

holdings into a mid-sized empire that included six more foundries, employing around 1,600 workers around the Upper Midwest, and a handful of smaller businesses. Grede was later appointed as director of the J.I Case Company, Kingsford Charcoal, and three other smaller Midwestern-based companies.

Grede's zero-tolerance anti-unionism was ideologically driven and his businesses were a fiefdom to this belief, his workers, happy and loyal as long as he protected them from subversive organizers and the leftists he believed were deeply embedded in state agencies. "Our struggle against unionization was for the protection...for all people" he later reflected in an interview. "It was not always pleasant" but the workers repaid him "a hundred fold" for his benevolence indicating his ability, like most right wing businessmen, to differentiate unions from workers.¹⁶¹ An outspoken advocate for corporate welfare, Grede started a group insurance program in 1924, paid vacations in 1926, health and accident insurance a year later, and incorporated a profit-sharing program during the Great Depression.

Foundries, like many Midwestern industries, produced durable goods through batch production contracts that did not require broad consumer appeal to be profitable. This allowed Grede to indulge his passion for fringe right politics because he did not run "a dominating corporation," nor did he sell "a brand name product" allowing him anonymity not afforded to a company like Kohler, which sold bathroom fixtures directly to consumers. As a "closely held private corporation...there [was] no opportunity to develop dissent among the shareholders," a privilege many Eastern corporations did not enjoy.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Grede, "Speech to Los Angeles John Birch Society." Third person language used in the second quote from Robert Welch who introduced Grede at the event.

¹⁶² William Grede, "Letter to Joseph Majerskey," July 10, 1967, William P. Grede Papers, Box 18, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

During the strike, Kohler looked to Grede for both counsel in fighting the UAW and assistance in helping rally the business community to their cause. Grede innovated a number of antiunion tactics in the 1920s and 1930s that looked familiar to veterans of the labor movement when they reappeared during the 1954 Kohler strike. Grede and Kohler were “birds of a feather” according to the United Steelworkers: “The tactics which Grede used” in their failed 1937 organizing drive at his Milwaukee foundries, were the “same tactics being used against Kohler strikers today [1956]” he observed. “I don’t know who taught who, but the pattern is the same.”¹⁶³ In 1955, a UAW Local 833 organizer in Kohler accused Grede of giving Kohler the idea to “impose its dictatorial ideas upon the public” through a well-funded discrediting campaign of the union.¹⁶⁴

Tactics ranged from rewarding company loyalty to punitive measures for joining the union. After Wagner Act mandates, Grede refused to meet any union at the bargaining table, closing a Michigan plant when the Steelworkers’ campaign went public in 1943. Grede’s favored inoculation tactic was raising wages during an organizing drive, later issuing a production speedup to compensate for the lost profits after the union threat subsided.

Adherence to antiunion ideology also impacted Grede’s business relationships. In 1959 he cut ties with the Kaiser Steel Corporation because they failed to “maintain a united position” on opposing the United Steelworkers. He wrote to management: “We at Keystone Pipe [a Grede company] were shocked by the lack of firmness...in entering into a separate agreement with the USW [Steelworkers] union,” Grede wrote. “You have seen fit to sever your connection with the other...companies at the bargaining table, and in good conscience we can no longer represent

¹⁶³ “WHBL Radio’s Weekly CIO Broadcast.” Transcript.

¹⁶⁴ UAW 833, “Kohler Strike Bulletin (Lyman Conger Mailed to William Grede on February 7, 1956).”

your company...Please consider this letter as a notice of discontinuance of Kaiser Aluminum pipe as a product we buy or sell.”¹⁶⁵

Apart from direct obstruction of unions, Grede proselytized the free market, blending religious piety with individual accountability. Serving as a board member for Spiritual Mobilization (a group of midcentury libertarian Christian businessmen who advocated for the elimination of the welfare state) and as chairman of the YMCA he argued that withholding charity would be character-building for those in poverty. Singling out Mexican immigrants in Milwaukee, his suburban Wauwatosa newspaper supported a proposed residency requirement in order to qualify for welfare assistance: “the Good Samaritan gave temporary help; he didn’t become his brother’s keeper for life.”¹⁶⁶

Grede also served as a fringe right voice on on Truman’s Tripartite War Labor Board, the Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce, and the Milwaukee Employers’ Association. As a member of the latter, whenever the body ruled in favor of a closed shop, Grede demanded they attach his dissenting rider calling unions “un-American.”¹⁶⁷ As part of the 1952 Morningside Heights compromise that brought Taftites into the Eisenhower administration, Grede served on Ike’s Labor-Management Council until his John Birch Society affiliation complicated his position. (Birchers accused Eisenhower of being a communist sympathizer.) Like Harry Bradley and other right wing industrialists, Grede was also a charter patron of the Mont Pelerin Society, the group of intellectuals including Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, who brought libertarianism and free market ideology to think tanks and college economics departments around the country.

¹⁶⁵ William Grede, “Letter to Kaiser Steel Corporation,” October 28, 1959, William Grede Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

¹⁶⁶ Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*. 110.

¹⁶⁷ Tula Connell. 129.

Grede was a nationally respected industrialist, at different times serving as president of the National Association of Manufacturers, the Wisconsin Manufacturers' Association, the Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. In 1958, Grede co-founded the John Birch Society with his longtime NAM friend Robert Welch. A leader in providing a voice to the conservative Milwaukee suburbs, he founded the Bircher-linked American Opinion Bookstore in Wauwatosa and published the *Wauwatosa News-Times*, which was almost solely dedicated its pages to questioning both the legality and benefit of unions.¹⁶⁸

Grede was more cynical in the utility of electoral politics than some of his peers like Bircher colleague Clarence Manion. Manion asked him to join the “Draft Goldwater Committee of 100”—a group of conservative leaders from around the country advocating that the Arizona senator enter the 1960 presidential race. Grede did not accept, instead focusing his activism in other directions. For Grede, the difference between his Bircher activism and the Republicans was that “the Birch members work at it,” where Republicans use the party as a vehicle for personal professional advancement. Despite his criticisms of the party and electoral politics in general, Grede remained a donor to the Republican Party of Wisconsin and considered GOP boss Thomas E. Coleman a friend. Although solicited, Grede never sought political office, deflecting inquiries with the joke that his “wife doesn’t want [him] to live in the White House.”¹⁶⁹

As Grede’s reputation grew as nationally-renowned antiunion force, other businesses sought his expertise. The decade after the Supreme Court ruled against the Racine-based J.I. Case’s appeal of the Wagner Act’s closed shop requirement (*J.I. Case vs NLRB*, 1944), Case’s president wrote to Grede regarding the company’s need for “an expert on labor relations to assist

¹⁶⁸ Tula Connell. 49.

¹⁶⁹ “Foundryman Hasn’t Wavered From His Beliefs,” Undated Newspaper Article, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, WHS.

in dealing with the union.”¹⁷⁰ Grede joined Case’s board sometime in the 1950s because each of his worksites remained unorganized “and god knows all unions...have tried” according to the UAW.¹⁷¹ Case carried a deficit of \$170 million dollars and 91 lenders agreed to defer payment on the condition Grede was given full control over the company. Named Case’s president in 1960, Grede wrote to John Birch Society president Robert Welch that “major responsibilities” in fighting the UAW would limit his devotion to the Birchers in the face of another strike.¹⁷²

Brought in to break UAW Local 180’s representation at J.I. Case, Grede again refused to meet at the bargaining table against all public sentiment in favor of the union and even Democratic Governor Gaylord Nelson’s public admonishment for management’s refusal bargain. Local 180 presented Grede with an eighteen-point list of demands, each of which categorically rejected by Grede. Once again, the union at Case filed a grievance with the NLRB.¹⁷³ At the state level, the Nelson Administration arbitrated a resolution to the strike in September of 1960. According to historian Naomi Williams, Local 180 “did not win workers a union shop or dues check-off, but it did get improvements in insurance benefits, better piece-work payments, and seniority.” Grede preserved his unblemished record in preventing a closed shop.

In mind and action, William Grede embodied the fundamentalism of the Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos. Although on the ideological fringe nationally, his status as a successful businessman and his willingness to engage in activism allowed him access to both presidential administrations, business associations, and elite halls of power, as well as the living rooms of far right John Birch Society members. His leading role in selling management’s side of the Kohler

¹⁷⁰ Tula Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*. 129.

¹⁷¹ “WHBL Radio’s Weekly CIO Broadcast.”

¹⁷² William Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” February 3, 1960, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

¹⁷³ UAW Local 180 Collection, WPR, Box 6, Folder 15, letter to members 20 April 1960.

strike as a threat to not only business, but the United States, brought his fringe concepts to the national business community in the decades following WWII.

Mob Rule or Democracy?: The Broader Ramifications of the Grede-Kohler Alliance

The Kohler strike (1954-1960) was certainly a contest over distribution of company revenues and flashpoint for Midwestern industrialist principles, it was also a milestone in a much longer conflict over democracy and representation in the altered postwar landscape. Companies like Grede Foundries chose to obviate the New Deal regulations they saw as not just intrusive, but as running counter to American values and the same debate was playing out on the picket lines and demonstrations around the town of Kohler. Having dispatched a New Deal era organizing attempt in 1934 by establishing a company union, this second 1954 attempt by UAW became a test case for the postwar arrangement, specifically the NLRB's position as moderator.

Businesses across the nation paid close attention to the Kohler strike in 1954, concerned that "[a] very dangerous precedent [was] being set in Wisconsin," according to the head of the national Committee for Constitutional Government, in both the impudence of organized labor and state's tolerance of it.¹⁷⁴ Transmitting telegrams across the country, right wing leaders encouraged Kohler and its allies to hold the line against what they interpreted as mob rule by UAW Local 833 in their fight for representation.

One of the longest strikes in national history, it served as a launching pad for conservative Wisconsin manufacturers to both promote their ideas nationally while developing networks among a larger pool of businessmen. Among business conservatives, the strike catalyzed the need for increased cooperation among their ranks, exchanging methods of

¹⁷⁴ Edward Rumely, Executive Secretary, Committee for a Constitutional Government, Inc., "Letter to W.C Reiss of Reiss Coal Company," n.d., William Grede Papers, Kohler Files, WHS.

opposing unions, and participation in national speaking tours—what the United Autoworkers derided as “Kohlerism.”

For these industrialists, Local 833’s closed shop drive was un-American because “‘democracy’ and ‘majority rule’ did not appear in the Constitution,” argued University of Illinois Professor Revilo P. Oliver. “America” he proselytized “was a Republic” for the very purpose of preventing mob rule through democratic voting. Other prominent conservatives scorned the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) as complicit in perpetuating violence in the town of Kohler and by labor sympathizers around the state. Majority rule, implicitly supported by the government’s regulatory apparatus were delivering America to collectivism was popular thought in the minds of right wing manufacturers who viewed themselves as torchbearers in protecting their country from subversives.

Under the banner of Kohler management, Grede was instrumental in mobilizing the resistance at both the state and national levels. Shrewd marketing and rhetoric depicted Kohler as a glimpse toward a dystopian future that all business would eventually confront, but Grede also offered these concerned independent businessmen the antidote of unconditional resistance no matter public opinion or impact on the bottom line. In other words, Kohler was a battle of ideologies; a contest over the future of American democracy. These ideas were articulated by Grede who became a proxy for the company’s position (likely because of the family dynamic between Governor Walter Kohler, Jr. and his cousin, company president Herbert). When Governor Kohler publicly took a moderate stance in proclaiming his desire for quick arbitration to end the strike, Grede lashed out in a message stating that “we will not yield to any pressure to make a ‘peace at any price’ settlement or we can ‘look forward’ to more unions.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ William Grede, “Letter to Walter Kohler, Jr.,” July 9, 1954, William Grede Papers, Kohler Files, WHS.

Tactics in the Battle for Public Opinion

As the strike became of national note, in 1955 Kohler executives conducted a nationwide speaking tour, articulating their perspective and motivations in refusing to recognize UAW Local 833. Dubbed Freedom Forums, and later, with the Birch-coordinated American Opinion Speakers Tour, other prominent conservatives including Grede and Indiana-based radio host (and fellow Bircher) Clarence “Pat” Manion joined the public relations offensive. Many companies required employees to attend these speeches that often came with classroom-style homework. Promoting conservative viewpoints, these tours were a method for directly engaging small businessmen around the country and countering the UAW’s media campaign.

For the union’s part, the CIO held a weekly radio broadcast in the Sheboygan market, urging all pro-union Americans to counter the aggressive public relations campaign launched on behalf of the company: “the press, as usual, is lined up behind this vicious employer” argued Walter Burke, director of the United Steelworkers of Wisconsin. Manion’s 1957 interview with company president Herbert Kohler was the first time his nationally syndicated radio show drew pushback from a corporate sponsor. His parent company, Mutual Broadcasting, refused to air the exclusive interview because Manion would not give UAW president Walter Reuther equal airtime, a man he suspected of being a communist.

Local Mobilization

Local and state division over the Kohler strike has been well documented by previous scholars and authors but this animosity also contributed to a lesser-examined unification of national business opposition.¹⁷⁶ The UAW’s call for a national boycott of Kohler products

¹⁷⁶ Uphoff, *Kohler on Strike*; Sylvester Petro, *The Kohler Strike: Union Violence and Administrative Law* (Ludwig von Mises Institute, 1961).

frightened many businesses to the point of action. At his own expense in 1955, Grede began mailing the company paper, *The Kohler News* to hundreds of businesses across the country, urging them to get involved in opposing the union. In confidential correspondence, industrialists like the Sheboygan-based Reiss Coal Company became “actively interested” in organizing a campaign against the strike. Businesses developed an opposition to the UAW, while Michigan Republican Representative, Clare Hoffman, informed Grede he was “ready to go to bat in congress” for, what he considered, marginalized independent producers in the Midwest. Local leaders resolved to broaden their educational campaign to “build public opinion...in all small town and rural” areas across Wisconsin.¹⁷⁷

The increase in business cross-coordination is exemplified in their response to the clay boat affair of 1954, when a supply ship, the M.S. Fossum, attempted to unload clay in Sheboygan. Out of civilian boats, a makeshift “UAW Navy” blockade diverted the Fossum to Milwaukee where unionists refused to unload in solidarity and the CIO threatened a citywide strike should Mayor Frank Zeidler order the ship to be unloaded. In a gesture of international solidarity, Montreal longshoremen also resolved refuse shipping supplies from any striking plant.

Grede spearheaded efforts to unload the clay in Milwaukee demanding Mayor Zeidler “get Milwaukee officials to fulfill their duties” or “must we [businessmen] threaten violence?” Implying Zeidler was not representing the will of the people, he complained to the mayor, “your office responsibility demands service to the whole community, not just a vocal minority.”¹⁷⁸ He also complained to another alderman that most Milwaukee officials were “under control of union goons.” In the face of labor displaying solidarity across trades and countries, they were able to

¹⁷⁷ Edward Rumely, Executive Secretary, Committee for a Constitutional Government, Inc., “Letter to W.C Reiss of Reiss Coal Company.”

¹⁷⁸ William Grede, “Telegram to Mayor Frank Ziedler,” n.d., William Grede Papers, Kohler Files, WHS.

prevent local government intervention, displaying to businesses their vulnerability to organized labor's coordinated tactics.

In a "Letter to Wisconsin Businessmen," Grede saw the clay boat affair as a "very dramatic example of the power of the labor union monopoly." Many manufacturers around the state joined Grede's call to fight this "monopoly" by refusing to negotiate with their unionized workforces, instead waiting for the Kohler resolution to establish a new precedent for pattern bargaining around the state.¹⁷⁹ Grede told Wisconsin businessmen that the Kohler Company had "courageously stood their ground" and preservation of their way of life depended on the collective action of businessmen, lest they lose "the right to operate their plants and the right of their workmen to be free Americans."

Grede's message of a united, proactive business offensive gained attention from a right wing group called the Committee for a Constitutional Government and other small out-of-state industrialists like Texas printer J.H. Gipson. He wrote to Grede that "hundreds of thousands of Americans" were watching Kohler "with the gravest interest." Echoing Grede's high praise of Kohler management, Gipson lauded them for their "courage that has given encouragement to every thoughtful American who desires to preserve this republic."¹⁸⁰

As the strike wore on, a conservative intellectual named Sylvester Petro shined more national attention on the strike by promoting the UAW's actions as an example of union self-interest at the expense of their members' lives. In 1959, the libertarian lawyer authored a brochure that became a 1961 book titled *Kohler: Union Violence & Administrative Law*, arguing the strike was the quintessential example of anti-democratic union practices seeking to benefit

¹⁷⁹ 230.

¹⁸⁰ Herbert Kohler, "Letter to William Grede," August 18, 1959. Copy of Gipson's letter included in this correspondence.

themselves rather than the workers they supposedly represented. Herbert Kohler introduced Grede to Petro's books who in-turn bulk ordered copies to give his employees. Kohler saw Petro as useful because "he says some things which we ourselves might hesitate to say because they would seem self-serving." Grede was less impressed, but conceded that Petro confirmed "what most of us in the Wisconsin Manufacturing Association knew to be true" regarding union as self-serving parasites at the expense of workers, owners, and the American way of life at-large.¹⁸¹

Herbert Kohler's refusal to allow a closed shop made him a national hero among many disparate swaths of the broader conservative movement. Connecting aspects of the Wisconsin Right to the blossoming New Right, in 1961, William F. Buckley's newly-established Young Americans for Freedom awarded Kohler their Lifetime Achievement Award in front of "4,000 excited college students" for his work in fighting unions and communism.¹⁸² A few years later in 1964, Oklahoma conservatives evoked Kohler's hardline stance as the inspiration for passing a right-to-work law earlier that year. State representatives also urged Oklahomans to purchase Kohler products to offset losses incurred during the boycott.

The strike was resolved by an NLRB ruling in 1960 and eventual restitution to striking workers in 1965 but the national impact on a national business-led movement was threefold. First, the company's stance tested both union rights in the workplace and the NLRB's strength in enforcing arbitration—the role of the state in high-profile labor disputes. Second, Kohler became a beacon for right wing industrialists and politicized many more businessmen increasingly concerned that a union could maintain a decade-long strike. (Discussed in the next chapter, the strike and the perceived collusion of the state with unions triggered an increase in

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Young Americans for Freedom, "Lifetime Achievement Award to Herbert Kohler," 1961, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 3, WHS.

political activism among employers in the 1950s, notably the John Birch Society which was funded and led by Midwestern industrialists.) Third, the formation of the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in Labor and Management (the McClellan Committee) to investigate union corruption at Kohler became a green light for aspiring right wing politicians like Barry Goldwater, that an anti-union stance was an acceptable position for a portion of the national public.

Seeking to make a name for himself, Goldwater, the ambitious junior senator from Arizona was markedly more aggressive in his McClellan Committee interrogation of UAW president Walter Reuther than others called to testify. Over the year-long investigation, Goldwater railed against the improprieties of organized labor—perceived and real—he believed threatened American democracy. Originally a congressional investigation into the role of organized crime in business and organized labor, the hearings made Jimmy Hoffa a household name. However, with mafia connections of his own in Arizona, Goldwater pivoted the investigation to focus on Walter Reuther and the United Auto Workers' role in the Kohler strike.¹⁸³

The McClellan Committee found no wrongdoing by either the international UAW or Kohler Local 833. The single budget item that Goldwater had argued was the smoking gun indicative of embezzlement was actually funds to supply beer and brats for the striking Wisconsinites. Reuther's eloquent defense for strong unions famously embarrassed the unprepared Goldwater and his moderately less anti-union assistant counsel Robert Kennedy. Despite both company and union spending millions of dollars on their respective campaigns,

¹⁸³ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (University of Illinois Press, 1997); Uphoff, *Kohler on Strike*; Dave Wagner, *The Politics of Murder: Organized Crime in Barry Goldwater's Arizona* (Tempe, Arizona: Gracenote Books, 2016).

countless acts of vandalism, and a community divided, the decade-long strike was mostly interpreted as evidence that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) could resolve even the most complex and contentious cases. In short, it was a victory for the postwar liberal order and a call to arms for its opponents on the right.

Goldwater's public anti-unionism and transparent ambition caught the eye of conservative radio personality Clarence "Pat" Manion at Notre Dame Law School. In Goldwater, the host of The Manion Forum saw a new icon for the right, possibly capable of unifying a diverse movement. Manion was indispensable in cultivating Goldwater, who was already known in the Southwest, a new figurehead for pro-free market, anti-communist, anti-union conservatism in the Midwest.

While it is widely known that Clarence Manion formed the "Committee of 100 to Draft Goldwater," it was Manion's idea that Goldwater hire Brent Bozell to ghostwrite what became the Arizonian's foundational tenets, *Conscience of a Conservative*. Goldwater maintained close correspondence with Manion and he edited at least six drafts and even conceived of the famous title.¹⁸⁴ In 1959, the Notre Dame Law School dean also lent the senator \$1,000 to establish a front name The Victor Publishing Company, while the actual printing was by a small trade magazine publisher in Kentucky.

Manion, one of only two Birch Council members who earnestly still believed in electoral politics after 1952, used his position to steer resources toward candidates, especially Goldwater.¹⁸⁵ The book transformed Goldwater's 1964 run into a "conservative crusade" acquiring twice the number of volunteers over Johnson. As Conscience gained mainstream

¹⁸⁴ Hoplin and Robinson, *Funding Fathers*. 106, 107.

¹⁸⁵ William Grede, "Letter to Robert Welch," December 31, 1963, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society.

traction, Manion paid for every new member of Young Americans for Freedom to receive a copy upon joining.¹⁸⁶ Manion also used his position on the John Birch Society's Leadership Council to ship a free copy to every member of NAM courtesy of one Bircher front group, the American Mailing Committee.

Goldwater personified the principles outlined by the Manion-led brain trust of thinkers, becoming an icon for a rapidly diversifying and expanding coalition of conservatives in the 1960s. Under Goldwater, "law and order" rhetoric that attracted southern and suburban voters, fell under the same umbrella as small businessmen and independent industrialists troubled by the Kohler strike and McClellan Committee hearings. This resulted in a regional unification with the financial, intellectual, and institutional power of the Wisconsin Right melding with the populism of southern conservatives, finding a place in mainstream electoral politics. The Wisconsin Right's influence on East Coast conservatives is discussed in the next section.

Lemuel Boulware & Taking Midwestern Tactics East

For General Electric Vice-President Lemuel Boulware, trips to Madison were a homecoming. The man who "successfully demonstrated to the American business community that it was possible to beat back unions" came-of-age at the University of Wisconsin's Business & Management school.¹⁸⁷ In 1912, Boulware, an incoming freshman, met first-year law student Harold Story (Allis-Chalmers) and the two remained in close correspondence throughout their careers. Boulware famously made a name for himself in New York, while Story became the figurehead for Red Scare anti-unionism in his efforts to discredit the communist-led UAW 248 at

¹⁸⁶ Hoplin and Robinson, *Funding Fathers*. 115.

¹⁸⁷ *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). 251.

the Allis-Chalmers plant outside Milwaukee.¹⁸⁸ Wisconsin Republican Party leader Thomas “Boss” Coleman considered “Lem...a good friend” and underwrote return visits in the late-1940s and 1950s to speak to the Wisconsin Young Republicans at the UW-Madison campus on multiple occasions.¹⁸⁹ What Boulware brought to the heights of national corporate practice in the 1950s was practiced for decades by his lesser-known peers in Wisconsin. Like Coleman and Story, Boulware “never believed that the working class was inherently liberal or Democratic” and the latent conservatism of untapped demographics across the country could revolutionize the country.¹⁹⁰

Compared to their eastern counterparts, midcentury Wisconsin business-activists saw themselves as exceptional because of their stand against both Progressivism and dense unionization. On the front lines against trade unions, Midwestern industrialists pushed back against the “[t]imidity, defections, indifference, and incompetence in our own ranks which have often been disheartening.” They were the militant few—“a small group of determined, unselfish, and fairly able men” who were “beginning to be conscious of the lengthening shadows of the afternoon sun”—in reference to the rising threat of communism. Wisconsin businessmen proclaimed that “WE have put our hands to the plough, and we shall not turn back!” regarding their vanguard role in fighting unions and the left.¹⁹¹ In ideology and messaging, Midwestern industrialists saw themselves as the template for defeating national progressive forces.

¹⁸⁸ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Meyer, *Stalin over Wisconsin*.

¹⁸⁹ Lemuel Ricketts Boulware, “Letter to Tom Coleman,” July 27, 1954, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 5, WHS; Lemuel R. Boulware, “Letter to Harold Story,” 1946, Harold Story Papers, Miscellaneous Correspondence File, Milwaukee Historical Society.

¹⁹⁰ Phillips-Fein. 108.

¹⁹¹ Hugh Corbett, Secretary of LaCrosse County Chamber of Commerce, “Letter to R.L Rote of Lavin Rote Company, Monroe, Wisconsin,” September 7, 1943, Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce Files, Box 1, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Boulware took seriously the lessons learned from his Wisconsin compatriots and Boulwarism borrowed the lessons learned in the Midwest for opposing the United Electrical workers at GE. Boulwarism, or as he called it, “a firm, fair offer” entailed the company refusing to compromise over wages and benefits during contract negotiations (as was the norm) and simultaneously launching a media campaign to discredit the union in public opinion. The NLRB ruled that Boulwarism was in violation of the company’s obligation to bargain in 1964, however Boulware’s implementation of this tactic at General Electric proved too irresistible for other businesses to ignore, and it set a national precedent replicated by other unionized companies in future decades.

Boulware continued correspondence with Wisconsin industrialists the remainder of his professional life, pushing the Midwesterners to take their political machine national. Boulware would urge Coleman, who chaired Robert Taft’s unsuccessful 1952 presidential run, to split with the Republicans and form a business friendly, southern conservative “North-South Horse-Sense party” in 1954.¹⁹² Boulware admired Coleman’s political acumen and urged him to oppose Eastern GOP leadership who refused to challenge the postwar New Deal Order: “see if you can’t do a job on this demagogy nationally the way you did it to the LaFollettes in Wisconsin.”¹⁹³ This interaction suggests a regional fracture among conservatives, pitting Midwestern industrialists and southerners disillusioned with Democrats against the more temperate Eastern Establishment leadership.

Boulware’s “new” style of postwar negotiation was a radical departure from the accommodationist stance taken at the bargaining table by most corporations. Among Wisconsin independent industrialists, unions were rarely, if ever, participants in a postwar accord and it was

¹⁹² Lemuel Ricketts Boulware, “Letter to Tom Coleman.”

¹⁹³ Ibid.

Boulware's years on Madison's campus where he likely first learned the practice of defiance to both unions and the state were possible. While the concept of offering unions one final "firm, fair offer" coupled with a robust public relations campaign was considered a radical departure among the larger East Coast corporations, it was fairly standard practice for a number of Wisconsin industrialists in the early 20th century and remains a tenet of contemporary (now mainstream) antiunion practices.

From Allen-Bradley to the Bradley Foundation: A Postindustrial Conservative Think Tank

The Bradley's subsidized the aforementioned conservative endeavors including the John Birch Society and the *National Review*, but they were also early innovators in seeking ways to institutionalize their substantial capital in more permanent conservative undertakings. In 1946, they founded the Allen-Bradley Foundation as a family tax shelter but it soon took on the additional role as financier of conservative causes like the Christian Anti-Communist Crusade, the Manion Forum, and Committee for Constitutional Government. Blending activism with philanthropy, the Allen-Bradley Foundation mostly took on local initiatives and remained a minor player in funding conservative causes until the 1980s when it became the largest conservative donor in the country. By the early twenty-first century, the Bradley Foundation established itself as a fearless conservative institution, willing to take controversial positions on issues including school vouchers and race-based pseudoscience.

Shifting from the Allen-Bradley Corporation to the Bradley Foundation in 1986, the philanthropic group was originally intended to be a golden parachute for embattled Allen-Bradley president I.A. "Tiny" Rader as he was being forced out of the company. President since 1970, Rader preempted his termination by arranging a \$1.2 billion sale of Allen-Bradley to Rockwell Automation International with a portion allocated to the Foundation. Overnight, the

Bradly Foundation's endowment jumped from \$14 million to \$290 million making it the largest conservative philanthropic donor in the country as Rader transitioned from president of the company to president of the Foundation.

It was a homecoming of sorts for Rockwell which, coincidentally, had moved from Milwaukee to Orange County on the advice of the Fantus Factory Relocating Service after a string of labor disputes in the 1950s. Absorbing defense contracts, Rockwell was a "symbol of military industrial complex gone bezerk" according to the *Los Angeles Times*, escalating even more under Reagan's defense spending.¹⁹⁴ Purchasing Allen-Bradley diversified Rockwell's defense-heavy portfolio.

The Bradley Foundation was initially influential in Milwaukee's art and culture scene, with no real influence in the broader conservative movement until the late 1980s. The transition came with the hiring of Michael Joyce from the New York-based Olin Foundation. Replacing Rader as president, Joyce touted the Bradley Foundation as "Olin West." Milwaukee offered a blank canvass to "more than double [conservative philanthropy's] impact" by putting Olin's "theoretical level" ideas into practice in a "manageable-sized city."¹⁹⁵ Joyce, the man President George H.W Bush called the "godfather of compassionate conservatism," saw the Foundation as a fulfillment Harry Bradley's dream: to "promote conservative values on a large enough scale to make an impact across the country."¹⁹⁶ Entrenching itself in American politics by the end of the twentieth century, the Bradley foundation was the culmination of a century of lost battles, small

¹⁹⁴ "Maligned B-1 Bomber Now Proving Its Worth," accessed April 7, 2018, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/org/news/2001/011212-attack02.htm>.

¹⁹⁵ Clemens and Guthrie, *Politics and Partnerships*.

¹⁹⁶ Elisabeth S. Clemens and Doug Guthrie, *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America's Political Past and Present* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 138. In 1985, Rockwell Automation purchased Allen-Bradley for \$1.2 billion. Terms of the purchase included the Bradley Foundation was allowed to continue its advocacy for conservative causes. The Foundation's endowment also jumped from \$14 million to \$290 million making it the largest conservative philanthropic donor in the country.

victories, and of organizing and political by Wisconsin's far right businessmen. Of his motive for relocating to the Midwest, Joyce told the interviewer "if we don't do great things [in Wisconsin], it will be our own fault."¹⁹⁷

Under Joyce, the Bradley Foundation's approach mirrored the bombastic, emotive personality of their president. By his own admission, Joyce embodied a "style of the toddler and the adolescent: fight fight fight, rest, get up, fight, fight, fight."¹⁹⁸ His headline-grabbing ability originally brought the Foundation desired attention and according to controversial political scientist Charles Murray, Joyce was an "intellectual among activists, and an activist among intellectuals."¹⁹⁹ When Joyce retired in 2001, Murray gushed that it was "difficult to recall a single, serious thrust against incumbent liberalism that did not begin or end with Mike Joyce."²⁰⁰ For Joyce's part, he saw the Foundation as a fulfillment of Harry Bradley's lifelong activism to "promote conservative values on a large enough scale to make an impact across the country."²⁰¹ An excited Joyce told the interviewer "if we don't do great things [in Milwaukee], it will be our own fault."²⁰²

The Bradley Foundation also opened their substantial coffers to established right wing institutions around the country, while creating new ones. In Wisconsin, Bradley quietly founded a research policy group, the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (WPRI), to counter what they considered biased policies produced by the supposedly liberal-leaning University of Wisconsin

¹⁹⁷ R. T. Roth, "Sowing the Seeds of Social Change: Michael Joyce Builds Bradley Foundation Influence; Grants Promote Welfare Reform, Educational Agenda," *Corporate Report Wisconsin*, 1992, Bradley Foundation Folder, Joanne Ricca Personal Papers.

¹⁹⁸ Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2016), 103.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 103. Mayer quoting Ralph Benko.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 114.

²⁰¹ Elisabeth S. Clemens and Doug Guthrie, *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America's Political Past and Present* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 138.

²⁰² Roth, "Sowing the Seeds of Social Change: Michael Joyce Builds Bradley Foundation Influence; Grants Promote Welfare Reform, Educational Agenda."

LaFollette School of Public Policy. WPRI promoted studies that supported conservative claims on the benefits of a school voucher program and other proposals.

Bradley Foundation donations were (and remain) important in supporting the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) which pushed many state level projects in Wisconsin during the 1980s and 1990s. One of ALEC's early board members was Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson who advocated for two major ALEC initiatives in Wisconsin: school voucher programs and the W-2 unemployment training program. Referencing ALEC's assistance to his political career, Governor Tommy Thompson gushed, "I always loved going to their meetings because I always found new ideas. Then I'd take them back to Wisconsin, disguise them a little bit, and declare that it's mine."²⁰³

By 1986, ALEC claimed 2,500 legislators as members but still evaded widespread scrutiny for their activities. In 2000, ALEC had written over 70 model "Tough On Crime" model bills for conservatives pushing a mandatory minimum sentencing penalty for first offenders.²⁰⁴ As of 1993, the Bradley Foundation provided WPRI with \$1.2 million, ALEC with \$50,000, and the American Enterprise Institute \$2 million. Paul Weyrich, the subject of Chapter Five, had multiple organizations partially funded by the Bradley Foundation, most prominently the Heritage Foundation \$2.1 million and Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress \$895,000, respectively.

Playing on Wisconsin's legacy as a progressive bastion, Joyce promoted the Bradley Foundation as both a continuation of and an improvement upon the "Progressive Wisconsin"

²⁰³ Thompson's statements are from a speech at the 2002 ALEC conference. The comments have been cited in Bill Moyers' television special *The United States of ALEC* and in a number of articles online, including "The Man From ALEC" by Steve Schuster & Ricardo Torres in *Urban Milwaukee* on November 5, 2012. Wisconsin founding members of ALEC included Thompson, Assembly Speaker Ben Branchel, and Assemblymen Mike Ellis, Rep. Stephen Freese, Rep. Steven Foti, as well as state senator Robert T. Welch (original ALEC state chair)

²⁰⁴ Becky Young, "ALEC In Wonderland," *Money, Education & Prisons* 3, no. 3 (May 2002).

narrative. Joyce criticized the “Wisconsin Idea” as “an exhausted progressivism” and an “intellectual lost cause,” that hindered the state’s entrepreneurial potential to innovate for social uplift. Joyce was critical of University of Wisconsin President John Bascom’s emphasis on legislative mandates and state-funded solutions to early 20th century Wisconsin. He argued the early Progressives hamstrung an “energized civil society” that could have more capably dealt with child labor, homeless widows, and political corruption that defined the Gilded Age.

Joyce’s solution for these social ills was on display in the volunteerism he saw during the assumed grassroots upsurge of the Tax Revolt in California and school choice programs of Wisconsin—examples, he gushed, that more clearly embodied “Tocqueville’s helpful teachings” for the nation’s trajectory.²⁰⁵ For Joyce, it was the conservative’s mission to usurp the “tired” New Deal with a “New Citizenship” that emphasized free market solutions and volunteerism linked to one’s faith, more aligned with a future William Grede would have aspired to create, than Robert LaFollette.

The Foundation’s ostentatious style drew national criticism for promoting an alleged white supremacist with their financial support for political scientist Charles Murray. Originally popularized by the Heritage Foundation, the Bradley Foundation made Murray a household name by providing the necessary funding for widespread publication of Murray, and co-author Richard Herrnstein’s 1994 book *The Bell Curve*.²⁰⁶ A eugenicist, Murray argued “intelligence” had become the greatest indicator for predicting personal wealth, professional success, and social standing. For Murray, poor people of color were so because they were intellectually inferior and

²⁰⁵ Michael Joyce, “The Legacy of the Wisconsin Idea: Hastening the Demise of an Exhausted Progressivism,” *Wisconsin Interest*, Winter (1994): 9–14; Aside from Bush, the nickname “godfather of modern philanthropy” was given to him by his mentor (but by this time, also financial benefactor) Irving Kristol. See Clemens & Guthrie, 145.

²⁰⁶ Mayer, *Dark Money*. 111.

this gap would only continue to grow as gene pools increasingly segregated by social class.²⁰⁷

Murray's argument, which remains widely-held on the right, essentially believes that state intervention to level this inequality is, by definition, a coercive form of genetic miscegenation. *The Bell Curve* was widely condemned and became the Foundation's first national public relations gaffe. In recent years Murray's popularity has been reenergized with invitations to speak on college campuses and mainstream media outlets while his ideas remain solidly in the realm of mainstream conservative orthodoxy.

Locally, the Bradley Foundation guided those Wisconsin Republicans willing to embrace its philanthropy, providing institutional backing for a mutually beneficial agenda. A prominent example of this was Governor Tommy Thompson's Welfare-to-Work (W-2) program for instituting required job training programs and minimum quota of job applications-per-week for those seeking unemployment assistance. W-2, a program conceived of through the Bradley-funded ALEC, was criticized for, at best, unevenly burdening working mothers and policing job seekers, rather than addressing root causes of unemployment and underpayment. At worst, it was a cynical method of purging those in need from welfare rolls, saving tax dollars in the process. After its successful implementation, Thompson's model went national under President Bill Clinton's Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).²⁰⁸

By the early 1990s, the Bradley Foundation's financial largesse "in a manageable-sized city" led to bold attempts to challenge the existing state apparatus. Their exacting power over local politics was none clearer than their mission to rollback public education, replacing it with a private school voucher system. The purpose of which was to discredit the already financially

²⁰⁷

²⁰⁸ For a detailed account of the AFDC's policy flaws from a perspective inside the Clinton Administration, read "The Worst Thing Bill Clinton Has Done - The Atlantic," accessed July 18, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1997/03/the-worst-thing-bill-clinton-has-done/376797/>.

starved Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and introduce legislation to allow taxpayer-funded credits for students who wished to instead attend private schools. Joyce challenged voucher program doubters in a 1992 *Milwaukee Journal* op-ed: "Is it misleading to call school choice progressive?" he asked. On the contrary, it was "a fulfillment—not a usurpation—of that distinguished tradition."²⁰⁹ In taking this public stance, Joyce took the common late-twentieth century neoliberal trope that deregulation was inherently populist and linked to it to regional Progressive nostalgia.

Many Milwaukee Democrats, even veteran activists from the northern civil rights movement, were solicited to join the chorus for school vouchers in Milwaukee, with members of the black community becoming its chief spokespeople. Dr. Howard Fuller, a veteran of the civil rights movement and longtime proponent of education reform in Milwaukee openly endorsed the program because it offered the possibility for substantive education reform for MPS and its shrinking Milwaukee tax base. He was not an advocate for the school choice version passed in 2013 which, in his opinion, did little to alleviate racial and class inequality in Wisconsin public schools.²¹⁰ Democratic Mayor John attended ALEC meetings as a guest of Paul Weyrich and became a vocal proponent of vouchers in Milwaukee as well.²¹¹ Democratic Assemblywoman Polly Williams of the predominantly black Milwaukee's 10th District also embraced the program and became the bill's most vocal proponent before reversing her position, arguing that the Bradley Foundation "hijacked" the movement by reneging on their promise to solely apply vouchers to poor, inner city families.²¹² Vouchers failed every time they were taken to a

²⁰⁹ Michael Joyce, "Private Initiative to Expand Choice Follows Best Progressive Tradition," *Milwaukee Journal*, June 21, 1992, sec. Editorial.

²¹⁰ "Howard Fuller Gets off the School Choice Bus," Uppity Wisconsin, accessed February 18, 2014, <http://uppitywis.org/blogarticle/howard-fuller-gets-school-choice-bus>.

²¹¹ Scott Kerr, "Neocon John? Strange Bedfellows," *Shepherd Express*, May 19, 1994.

²¹² Priscilla Ahlgren, "Williams Disturbed by School Proposal," *Wisconsin State Journal*, January 6, 1993; Felicia Thomas-Lynn, "School Choice Pioneer Chafes at Her Status," *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, June 29, 1998.

referendum in Milwaukee, but a provision in the 2013 state budget created a statewide program.²¹³

After the early success of W-2 (and the near-success of school vouchers, since passed by Scott Walker in 2012) the Bradley Foundation was quietly becoming a major player in conservative philanthropy. Despite these successes, the Foundation's board voted to replace Joyce in part due to his personal struggles with alcohol. Replacing Joyce in 2001 was Milwaukee-based attorney and board member Michael Grebe. Unlike his bombastic predecessor, Grebe advocated a stealth approach to politics.

Quietly building institutions and funding initiatives, Grebe opted to keep the Bradley Foundation out of the spotlight until they were powerful enough to immunize themselves from shifts in public opinion. Referencing a favorite offensive set from Green Bay head coach Vince Lombardi, Grebe wanted the Bradley Foundation to reach a point where they could run the "Packer Sweep" on their opposition: "We're going to run off tackle, right over there, and we're telling you we're going to run there and we're going to knock you on your butt and carry the ball down the field...there are no surprises."²¹⁴

Not the first conservative philanthropic organization (also known as the Third Sector), the Bradley Foundation was prolific financier, indirect lobbyist and policymaker while cultivating new conservative endeavors, repackaging old ideas in new ways. The Foundation exemplifies decades of far right activism grounded itself in an institution durable enough to

²¹³ "Column: Impact of Private-School Vouchers : Tomah Journal," La Crosse Tribune, accessed April 10, 2013, http://lacrossetribune.com/tomahjournal/news/opinion/editorial/columnists/column-impact-of-private-school-vouchers/article_dbbff8de-a08f-11e2-acc0-0019bb2963f4.html; "Vouchers on the Move: Return to School Segregation?," PR Watch, April 28, 2015, <https://www.prwatch.org/news/2015/02/12730/segregation-school-vouchers>; "ALEC Admits School Vouchers Are for Kids in Suburbia," PR Watch, July 22, 2015, <http://www.prwatch.org/news/2015/07/12869/alec-school-vouchers-are-kids-suburbia>.

²¹⁴ Jason Stein and Patrick Marley, *More Than They Bargained For: Scott Walker, Unions, and the Fight for Wisconsin* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). 35-37.

withstand shifting political climates and transported their ideas into the mainstream like the W-2 program and school vouchers. Some of the most notable conservative institutions of the past thirty years partially owe their existence to Bradley Foundation funding. Excluding the aforementioned recipients, other primary benefactors of the 1980s and 1990s included the American Enterprise Institute, Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Harvard University, and the University of Chicago.

Many of the initiatives the Bradley Foundation promoted would look familiar to an activist from the 1940s or 50s: eliminating rights of organized labor in public and private sectors, welfare reform, government rollback at the national, state, and local level, among their aspirations. At the end of the twentieth century, the threat posed by union and state interference to managerial authority was more an effective rhetorical argument than authentic threat after decades of defunding and deregulation. Although foundations and nonprofits proliferate the contemporary conservative landscape, the Bradley Foundation was the first to aggressively alter state and national politics, serving as an anchor for projects and organizations.

Conclusion

Heated contests with unions over the shop floor and community control gave birth to the template that Midwestern family owned businesses followed to make their imprint on the American Right. While “the virtue of profit” was central to the Midwestern entrepreneurial ethos, these businessmen-activists regularly invested in ideological projects, with no evident monetary returns, seeking only to perpetuate their core beliefs over who should rule America. Their conscripted management class became lieutenants in the fight against never clearly defined definitions of both state interference in markets and communism.

Weaving company loyalty, business conservatism, and nationalism into a unifying call to defend America from subversion this small group of business-activists. In rhetoric and action, the Wisconsin Right can be linearly traced from emerging in opposition to the LaFollette Progressives, the New Deal, civil rights movement and, by the 1980s, into the relative permanency afforded by the institutionalization of the Bradley Foundation and other major spending and strategy organizations. Their strategies, obstacles, and milestones of victory, are the subjects of the next four chapters.

PART II

ORIGINS OF THE “WISCONSIN PLAN” AND THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT NATIONAL TAKEOVER (1900-1952)

CHAPTER TWO
THE ANTI-PROGRESSIVE ORIGINS OF THE WISCONSIN RIGHT
“NEITHER COLEMAN NOR COMMUNISTS”²¹⁵:
Fighting the LaFollettes in the Electoral Realm, 1900-1946

²¹⁵ John Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism” (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1960). 75. Quoting Robert LaFollette, Jr. The “Young Bob” commented on America’s political climate in 1945, believing that “[i]f our nation is going to be destroyed it won’t be by outside ‘-isms’...but disgust of the people with public officials.”

*“People who do not know Wisconsin have never understood the hostility of the press and the bitterness of people of wealth toward Progressives and progressivism.”*²¹⁶ – Philip LaFollette

*“The Progressive party did not die...the LaFollettes killed it.”*²¹⁷ – Thomas E. Coleman

I

Introduction

In the months preceding the 1946 Wisconsin Republican Senatorial primary, *Capital Times* correspondent Aldrec Revell predicted that “if the election were held tomorrow, [Robert, LaFollette, Jr.] would give Joseph McCarthy the soundest drubbing for higher political office ever received in decades.”²¹⁸ So assured was Senator LaFollette that he rarely returned from Washington to campaign in person. McCarthy, a smiling, self-proclaimed Catholic on the campaign trail, announced that he was a true man of the people but the joint-AFL and CIO newspaper, *Union Labor News*, was one of the few outlets to see through McCarthy’s charming veneer. Past the folksy campaign rhetoric, organized labor criticized the candidate’s few stated positions because they “embraced Coleman’s branch of the Republican Party and [he was] smiled on by the National Association of Manufacturers.”²¹⁹ Tireless campaigning and wealthy backing made McCarthy the first serious challenge to Bob, Jr. since taking office. As election day neared, LaFollette, Jr.’s advisors warned him the race was narrower than anticipated, but it was already too late. A right wing mobilization, underway for at least a decade prior, claimed

²¹⁶ Philip La Follette, *Adventure in Politics: The Memoirs of Philip LaFollette* (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970).

²¹⁷ Thomas Coleman, “Confidential Letter to an Unnamed Individual,” October 19, 1953, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 4, WHS.

²¹⁸ Michael Kades, “Incumbent Without a Party: Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. and the Wisconsin Republican Primary of 1946,” *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 80, no. 1 (Autumn 1996): 16.

²¹⁹ Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism.” 181.

victory over the LaFollette Dynasty, effectively ending the remnants of the Wisconsin Progressives.

The Wisconsin Right is typically associated with prominent names like Joseph McCarthy and Ohio Senator Robert Taft, carrying water for the pro-business, nativist wing in an ideologically diverse postwar Republican Party. Beyond these well-known individuals was a robust grassroots network that operated for decades before the 1946 election of Joseph McCarthy. During these years, right wing industrialists reinvented themselves to meet the ideological challenge represented by the LaFollettes. They did this by centralizing political strategy and fundraising while also expanding local-level organizing. Their strategy reorganized campaign spending to attract rural voters who were disillusioned by the perceived cosmopolitan elitism of Progressivism while minimizing the electoral impact of union strongholds and industrialized areas.

The frameworks and strategies conceived in Wisconsin to challenge the LaFollettes became staples of conservative organizing in electoral politics for decades to come. Conservatives' innovation in grassroots organizing efforts is an understudied factor contributing to both the rise of the Wisconsin Right in the broader national conservative milieu and their ability to successfully implement aspects of their long-term agenda. These Midwestern businessmen plotted a course that allowed politically peripheral viewpoints to become a viable opposition to the Progressive wave through an organizing model known as "The Wisconsin Plan." In large part through the Wisconsin Plan, actors once written off as relics of a bygone era became the dominant force in state politics by the 1940s.

The "Coleman" that *Union Labor News* referred to above was Thomas E. "Boss" Coleman, the undisputed leader of the early twentieth-century conservatives in Wisconsin.

Reflecting on Thomas E. Coleman's legacy, his son, also a Madison industrialist and former Bradley Foundation board member, J. Reed Coleman (Madison-Kipp Company), recalled his father being a soft-spoken but influential tastemaker on Wisconsin's political right. Radicalized by the emergence of the LaFollette Progressives, the elder Coleman became an activist on the right not "to be in the history books...but because it was the right thing to do." Thomas Coleman "put people who shared his principles in office and sought no further glory," while also fulfilling his lifelong vendetta to oust the LaFollette brothers from Wisconsin politics.²²⁰

To Coleman, the LaFollettes were con artists and interlopers attempting to personally gain by taking over the Wisconsin Republicans from the established business class in the state; those who had proven their worth in the world by rising to the top of society. In 1946, when Coleman was finally on the verge of ending the LaFollette Dynasty during the Republican primary election, Senator Robert, Jr. reassured his supporters that "neither Coleman nor Communists" could keep him from re-election.²²¹ In "the most examined senatorial primary in American history" the younger Robert LaFollette misjudged the right wing threat, losing his seat of over twenty years.²²² Basking in the accomplishments of his life's work to that point, Coleman said of McCarthy's historic upset, it was "the greatest night of my life."²²³

In the 1940s, the Wisconsin Plan was a path for a small minority of right wing industrialists to remain relevant during the Progressive wave, but it became a campaign lynchpin for Coleman and his acolytes, nationally. It was emulated by both Republican and Democrat state parties across the country and endured into the 1970s with a version of it fueling then-

²²⁰ J. Reed Coleman, Interview with Author, December 3, 2014.

²²¹ Steinke, "The Rise of McCarthyism." Coleman was McCarthy's campaign chairman who coordinated an aggressive messaging campaign linking the LaFollettes to accusations of corruption and communist ties.

²²² Kades, "Incumbent Without a Party: Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. and the Wisconsin Republican Primary of 1946."

²²³ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 459.

congressional hopeful Robert Kasten's campaign against a well-funded moderate Republican. Discussed in Chapter Five, the "Kasten Plan's" efficacy and grassroots focus caught the eye of Paul Weyrich's Committee for the Survival for a Free Congress (CSFC) who adopted it into the campaigns of his own stable of right wing candidates across the country. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I focus on the Plan's early twentieth century conception, its advocates, their motives, and impact.

II

Mobilizing the Anti-LaFollette Opposition

The Origins of the Republican Voluntary Association

Progressive control over formal Republican Party structures forced the Stalwarts to explore creative new methods of retaining power. By the mid-1920s, the Progressive faction in the Republicans had surpassed both Stalwarts and Democrats in total membership numbers across the state.²²⁴ Controlling the Republican statutory committee gave the LaFollettes power over committee appointments, funding allocation, and platform. The 1895 Corrupt Practices Act also restricted the business-centric Stalwarts by capping fundraising and, ostensibly, ending the practice of employers mandating political campaign labor from their employees on behalf of their favored candidates. Reasserting industrialists' advantage in political expression became the primary objective for a handful of politically-active businessmen in Stalwart leadership.

In 1925, lumber baron and University of Wisconsin Regent, William Campbell founded the Republican Voluntary Association (RVA) as a means of circumventing Republican statutory

²²⁴ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*.

committee fundraising limits. This minority group of industrialists was originally called the “Oshkosh Movement,” after Campbell’s hometown. They also formalized a procedure for disciplining Stalwarts to unify behind a single candidate instead of splitting votes, which frequently allowed Progressives to win primaries.²²⁵ A fifteen seat executive board coordinated “voluntary” fundraising strategy, wrote the Stalwart platform and made pre-primary endorsements all outside of the official party structure. Where statutory party rules allowed fundraising and campaigning to begin in October, no such restrictions existed for contributions to the RVA. Towards this amplified legal dexterity flowed business influence and the RVA became the Stalwarts’ best chance at relevancy during the LaFollette years.

“Fighting Bob’s” explosive ascent led Campbell to form the RVA to preserve conservative clout under questionable ethical grounds, but it was Tom Coleman who transformed the RVA into a political weapon. Before leading the RVA, Coleman’s first major position of responsibility in the party was chairing Walter Kohler, Sr.’s 1928 successful gubernatorial campaign. After Kohler’s victory, Coleman was granted a seat on the Association’s board. Over the next two decades Coleman expanded RVA responsibilities, transforming it into the dominant political force in the state and his personal vehicle for becoming the party boss. For context on Coleman’s impact on the RVA from 1929-1950s, at the 1952 Wisconsin GOP Convention, an alarmed William Campbell (the founder) lobbied unsuccessfully to dissolve the RVA and return authority to the statutory party. By then Coleman had solidified his control over all aspects of the Wisconsin Republicans.

²²⁵ Statute 5.36 of the Wisconsin Constitution mandates that all nominees for the top five state offices from all parties, as well as Assembly and Senate (138 total), convene in Madison to adopt their respective platforms. The RVA followed a similar pattern where delegates were elected by regional units who then met in Madison and voted on a chairman—essentially a shadow delegation operating outside constitutional parameters.

A Brief Biography of Thomas E. Coleman

Thomas “Boss” Coleman, in the words of historian William Thompson, “remains one of the most fascinating and enigmatic figures in modern Wisconsin politics.”²²⁶ Between the 1930s and 1950s, Coleman was “the acknowledged chieftain of the victorious Wisconsin Republican Party,” charting the course for how the Wisconsin Right would defeat the Progressives and challenge the New Deal. Coleman is the figure singularly most responsible for conceptualizing an organized Wisconsin Right at the moment they were on the brink of relegation to the political fringe. According to one journalist, “the Democrats were happy when he retired” in the 1950s.²²⁷

On the labor question and the state’s role in the economy, Coleman was a firebrand, proud to be ideologically “to the right of Calvin Coolidge” in the 1920s. He was particularly intolerant of moderates and liberals within his own party, who came to feel “the bitter anger he directed toward Republicans who disagreed with him on important tactics or issues.”²²⁸ Coleman’s distaste for moderate conservatism in Wisconsin bubbled over into the national stage in 1949, spearheading an attempt to overtake the Eastern Establishment at the Republican National Conference in Omaha, discussed in Chapter Three. This confrontation was the opening salvo in a battle for the heart of the Republican Party, pitting the Wisconsin Right against the Eastern Establishment at the 1952 Republican National Convention, where Ohio Senator Robert Taft’s campaign (chaired by Coleman) lost the nomination to Dwight D. Eisenhower.

²²⁶ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 414.

²²⁷ John Wyngaard, “Coleman Is Still Revered In State Republican Circles,” *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, October 23, 1957.

²²⁸ Michael O’Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin*. 57.

Wisconsin's legacy as the vanguard for progressivism has concealed Republican domination of state politics in the formative years between 1938 and 1959. In that window, Coleman's wing controlled both the governor and lieutenant governor seats, and attorney general (which the Democrats briefly held between 1948-51). The Republicans held over 70 of 100 State Assembly seats for over a decade and over 20 of 33 State Senate seats between 1941 and 1973, with comparable ratios for Congress during those years.²²⁹ The 1932 election cycle was the last where Progressives held a majority as conservatives reasserted themselves under Coleman's leadership. Democrats did not hold another statewide office until Henry Fairchild was elected attorney general in 1948 and did not hold the governorship until Gaylord Nelson in 1959.

Despite Coleman's influence on state and national conservative politics, none of Robert, Jr., Sr., or Phillip's autobiographies acknowledge him, nor does the most recent study of the rise of the right in Wisconsin.²³⁰ Historian Michael Bowen's *The Roots of Modern Conservatism* mentions Coleman's work as Taft's floor chairman, but dismisses him as the sore loser of the 1952 Republican Convention, guilty of "lashing out in a childish smear campaign" against the victorious Eisenhower contingent.²³¹ A handful of historians treat Coleman beyond footnote status, focusing on his role as campaign manager for either McCarthy or Taft without examining his pioneering work in creating a regional political power through party reorganization and grassroots organizing.²³²

²²⁹ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 408, 409.

²³⁰ Dan Kaufman, *The Fall of Wisconsin: The Conservative Conquest of a Progressive Bastion and the Future of American Politics*, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018).

²³¹ Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party*, Reprint edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

²³² Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*; Kades, "Incumbent Without a Party: Robert M. LaFollette, Jr, and the Wisconsin Republican Primary of 1946"; Michael O'Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin*; Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, 1 edition (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998);

The son of a wealthy industrialist, Coleman’s worldview was shaped by antipathy toward Progressives and this defined his early activism in the GOP. His father moved from Rochelle, Illinois to Madison’s East Side in 1902 after purchasing the machine lubricant manufacturer, the Madison-Kipp Company. Tom became involved with the company in 1914 around the time federal contracts for casting bullet components allowed the company to expand during WWI. Educated at the University of Chicago, Coleman returned Madison to take over the company in 1925. Like many right wing industrialists, Coleman boasted that Madison-Kipp had never been organized by a union. Aged in his early 30s, “the deadly serious young Republican leader” quickly climbed Stalwart ranks where he would remain for decades.

Coleman’s brand of conservatism was more divisive than the established business interests from which he learned. For background, the Stalwarts, though heavily influenced by business, “represented a huge portion of the Wisconsin electorate, one that cannot be correlated with any income level.”²³³ Since the Stalwart-Progressive split, the two sides had their fair share of hostility, but also instances of tenuous cooperation in the legislature and members of both factions remained personally friendly with the others (including the LaFollettes). By the late 1920s, the younger, militant “Colemanites” ended this practice of forbearance, taking an oppositional approach, distinguishing themselves not only from Progressives, but any Republicans not unconditionally in their corner. Colemanites also carried a nativist message, including hostility to unions and the immigrant labor manning shops in Milwaukee and other industrial centers—a position so exclusionary and tight knit one journalist referred to it as “Political Aryanism.”²³⁴

Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism”; Johnson, *Robert M. La Follette, Jr. and the Decline of the Progressive Party in Wisconsin*.

²³³ Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*. 89.

²³⁴ Michael O’Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin*.

Coleman's personal distain for the LaFollettes likely began during his work on Calvin Coolidge's 1923 presidential campaign. Coolidge was a family friend who spent summers fishing in Wisconsin with Coleman's father and other industrialists. Just as LaFollette split the state Republicans in the 1890s, "Fighting Bob" did the same nationally by announcing his candidacy for president. What appeared to be a clear path to the White House for Coolidge against Democrat John Davis became more convoluted and a public embarrassment for Coolidge's Midwestern industrialist core. Managers at small manufacturing firms across the state encouraged workers to form "Coolidge Clubs" according to Philip LaFollette's memoir. Those who participated received preferential treatment, and as an added incentive, employees found thinly veiled threat stapled to their November pay slips: "Don't come to work after Election Day if Coolidge is not elected."²³⁵ (It is possible Philip, who recalled this incident in his autobiography was making a case for his campaign finance reform platform after the fact.) Coolidge won the presidency, but LaFollette took Wisconsin, embarrassing Coleman and the business community in the process.

From this success Coleman's taste for politics overtook his desire to manage the machine lubricants plant and he immersed himself in state party politics. Coleman became an active member in the RVA, expanding its mission and scope in the late-1920s. Although he did not officially chair the Wisconsin Republicans until 1942, Coleman took the party on a hard right turn immediately and with success winning elections in the 1930s. The RVA, as Coleman liked to remind fellow Republican insiders, became the first statewide political organizing apparatus in the nation and other states took note. The Illinois Republicans attempted to replicate the

²³⁵ La Follette, *Adventure in Politics*. 97.

Wisconsin Plan in the 1940s, and the Alabama Democrats travelled to Madison to learn from Coleman in 1958.²³⁶

Coleman's improvements to the RVA boasted the following changes: First, the party headquarters in Madison became the coordination center for all campaigns across the state, improving communication on strategy, messaging, and policy, while improving efficiency. Second, they focused on more efficient funding allocation. Instead of county parties raising funds for their own candidates, the RVA instilled a year-round fundraising apparatus with all contributions pooled in Madison. Third, Coleman's RVA emphasized identifying potential new party leadership around the state—a farm system of new talent that created many local leaders and future governors. Fourth, this network routinized polling and messaging, allowing targeting of specific demographics at the county and precinct level. Fifth, by 1944, Republicans were organized enough to place candidates and challengers in every vacant or uncontested race across the state, enabling them control of many local level positions (and local resources) that otherwise would have gone unfilled. This strategy also forced lesser-funded Democrats and Progressives to extend recourses, as Colemanites opened campaigns in previously ignored campaigns.²³⁷

²³⁶ David Battle, "Letter to George Greeley, Wisconsin GOP," June 10, 1958, WHS.

²³⁷ Republican Party of Wisconsin, "Wisconsin Plan of Precinct Organization to Arthur Summerfield," n.d., Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society; Robert W. Glasgow, "The Republican 'Wisconsin Plan': Small County Shows State How Effective Organization at Precinct Level Succeeds," *The Herald Tribune*, June 7, 1950.

The RVA's Grassroots Strategy

The RVA ended the practice of farming out local organizing to county parties, but remained used them to expand volunteer pools and voter turnout. Under the new RVA plan, regional leaders were tasked with meeting voter turnout quotas, surveying local voters, and reporting directly to the RVA in Madison. The feedback collected in Madison assisted in crafting future campaigns and also determined which local candidates merited RVA endorsement (with substantial accompanying resources). Taking the input of residents seriously, the RVA built a vast network of local volunteers and curated messaging that proved more effective than the decentralized county-led campaigns.

Coleman's son recalls RVA dinners at his Maple Bluff lakefront manor where party leaders attending included Joseph Heil, son of Julius, the former governor and president of the Heil Company, future GOP chairman J. Wayne Hood, and F.J. Sensenbrenner, chairman of the Kimberly-Clark paper manufacturers and president of the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents. Over drinks and dinner, each member was assigned a fundraising jurisdiction and put in touch with a local leaders' network to begin fundraising for the next cycle.²³⁸

The RVA also established the first "farm system" where elected officials were expected to pay their dues holding lesser offices, working up party ranks. Many Young Republicans first volunteered in their local precinct, seasoning their skills before running for municipal and local positions. If a local candidate showed promise, Madison leadership would groom them for incrementally more important state offices. Future Republican governors and congressmen including Warren Knowles, Vernon Thompson, and Glenn Davis each took this rite of passage.

²³⁸ Coleman, Interview with Author.

The RVA's Winning Strategy: Avoid Unions

In response to organized labor in industry-heavy areas of the state, Coleman also overhauled the GOP fundraising apparatus to simply ignore union-dense areas. This seemed counterintuitive for many industrialists who sought support for conservative candidates in their own districts. Facing this pushback, Coleman's job was to convince these industrialists they were not being abandoned; that the long term durability of the party lay in controlling poorer rural areas. To fund this rural offensive, Coleman proposed using county-by-county corporate taxes as the new metric for campaign contributions. Despite receiving zero state support in Socialist-dense areas like Milwaukee, Coleman convinced these industrialists to pay even more than they had been—now tasked with raising half of the entire RVA political funds—in a leap of faith to retake the entire state.

Coleman's bold reorganization paid off and the Stalwarts slowly took back the state through each election cycle. Where Coleman's plan blended centralized decision-making with grassroots engagement, it also streamlined fundraising process for greatest statewide efficiency. Coleman's logic was, despite Milwaukee industrialists holding deep pools of cash, the GOP wasted resources in attempting to take on the unions and Milwaukee Socialists directly. By withdrawing funding from Milwaukee and other industry-heavy areas and reallocating it to rural races, business money could fuel a Republican takeover across the state instead of exhausting resources campaigning in highly competitive urban races.

RVA Chair Becomes the True Seat of Influence

The Wisconsin Plan was paying dividends, and at the height of conservative dominance, the RVA's dramatic reshaping of party processes often pitted Colemanites against other Stalwarts as internal friction and "strong personalities and egos" clashed. Of Republican conventions, "ordinarily, two-thirds of our time is taken up with family quarrels..." wrote one RVA member.²³⁹ Despite internal sniping, Republicans could not challenge the success of Coleman's program in checking Progressive rivals, nor could any individual replicate his leadership and fundraising ability.

Although Coleman was not yet party chair, his dominance over the Republicans became obvious to all after the Julius Heil gubernatorial re-election controversy. After the 1938 Republican sweeps, in which Heil defeated Philip LaFollette, members of the statutory party complained that the RVA did little to consult the official elected leadership on campaign strategy. Friction between the stated and actual seat of party power arose again when it became clear Heil, the Milwaukee industrialist, had little interest in the responsibilities that came with the governorship. His term was not a complete loss, because the new Republican majority passed the 1939 Labor Peace Act, restricting activities of organized labor, later becoming a template for the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. Nevertheless, Heil refused to move to Madison, and remained an absentee governor, despite his father's party work and relationship to Coleman. Most Stalwarts were content with having a figurehead business advocate in the Statehouse and Progressives on the run at long last. But Coleman and his trusted associates had a vision for an authentically right wing party and Heil's apathy was an insufficient gratitude after the RVA's investment in him—he was to be made an example.

²³⁹ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 416.

The Heil problem climaxed when all Colemanites in the RVA resigned *en masse* at the 1941 GOP convention, protesting the very candidate they had pushed to elect in the last cycle, but also to the jealousy and sniping directed at the RVA from the statutory party. If the Republicans did not like the RVA's methods, they could run election campaigns themselves. Stalwarts hastily assembled a makeshift RVA in time for the election, replacing Coleman with a dentist from Appleton who did not share his predecessor's political instincts. In 1942, Republican voters "sat on their hands," in the words of Thompson, as the ineffective and absentee Heil lost to Progressive Orland Loomis. Coleman's gamble paid dividends as he was welcomed back to his position the following cycle, this time the uncontested party leader. Later that year, delegates made "Boss" Coleman official, electing him chair of the RVA, and placing him in "undisputed command of the party organization."²⁴⁰

Coleman also challenged entrenched moderates, developing a rivalry with former Governor Walter Goodland who had ties to the older Republican guard that cooperated with the LaFollettes. For his part, Goodland, nicknamed "The Tough Old Codger" disliked Coleman and his crew, calling them "a few playboy politicians" who "want to run the show."²⁴¹ Goodland's distain may also be rooted in his resentment for the tactics employed by Coleman, costing him the 1928 governorship. According to Coleman's son, in the primary between Goodland and Walter Kohler, Coleman (Kohler's campaign manager) knew Goodland's campaign manager had a drinking problem and used it to lure him away from the convention floor minutes before delegate voting rolls were called. Coleman arranged for Goodland's manager to be invited to a bar where he missed the delegate count, giving Kohler the nomination.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Thompson. 426.

²⁴¹ Ibid. 423.

²⁴² Coleman, Interview with Author.

In the decades that followed, Coleman and Goodland maintained a chilly working relationship and when the latter was eventually elected Governor in 1943, he blocked Coleman's proposed 1946 "Fence-Me-In Bill" which would have prevented the Wisconsin Progressives from re-entering the Republicans after their party disbanded. After privately assuring Coleman he would back "Fence-Me-In," Goodland made a public about-face stating that he did "not believe in such tactics" and that "the selection of leaders is the prerogative of the voters."²⁴³

In another surprise move targeting Coleman, Goodland announced he would seek re-election at 83 years old, a maneuver the *Capital Times* speculated "smacks strongly" of a backroom deal uniting moderates with incoming Progressives to end Coleman's reign. Progressive assemblyman Leonard Schmitt accused the Colemanites of being "a crime and a fraud," running the party like a dictatorship: "Tom Coleman can't claim omnipotence" Schmitt lectured the delegates, "if you want an honest label you should call your convention by its own name and say this is the...anti-La Follette section of the party."²⁴⁴ In the words of Progressive State Senator Charles Madsen, "Coleman knows that if we come into the Republican Party, he is done."²⁴⁵

Coleman survived Goodland's surprises in large part because of his strategic necessity to the GOP in winning elections. The relationships he cultivated around the state with delegates and local leaders had made him indispensable to fundraising and campaigning. It was widely believed among the Colemanites that the Progressives had grown complacent after decades in control of the party and could not survive a competitive race. The moderates could not mobilize enough members to create an alliance with the Progressives and the potentially history-changing

²⁴³ Steinke, "The Rise of McCarthyism." 16.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

²⁴⁵ Thompson., 25.

moment was lost. The following section outlines the comparative organizing deficiencies among rival factions to Coleman.

Progressive “Saviors” Stunned Upon Arrival to the Midwest

In the early decades of the 20th century, Progressives attracted aspiring staffers from across the country, only to be disheartened by the level of conservative control over the state. Phil LaFollette’s wife Isabel recounted how young, college educated progressives arrived envisioning themselves saviors of the people of Wisconsin from clumsy but powerful reactionary forces. In particular, one “amusing, irritating, pathetic” Harvard graduate announced to Philip LaFollette’s office that he “had been brought up from birth to be a leader.” He soon came to the realization that Progressives were not universally loved by all Wisconsinites and were also continually under attack in the press by Coleman’s campaigns. He left Wisconsin “shortly after” his pronouncement of leadership.²⁴⁶

The cult of personality surrounding the LaFollettes both defined the Progressives and limited their prospects of building a lasting infrastructure. The family refused to share the spotlight as instanced by longtime LaFollette loyalist Herman Ekern running for governor in 1928 . After announcing Ekern was pressured to withdraw after Philip eventually decided to seek election. Falling back in line, Ekern joined LaFollette’s ultimately unsuccessful campaign and while there is no evidence Ekern would have fared any better than Phil, this example of deference to the LaFollette name is emblematic of the Progressives’ own lack of vision in diversifying beyond aesthetics and name recognition as their base diminished by the 1930s. Contrasting this to the RVA’s expanding umbrella, historian William Thompson points out that

²⁴⁶ Isabel Bacon LaFollette. 223.

“none of [the LaFollettes] worked to build the party at the county and local level or had made provisions to bring young Progressives up through the ranks to assume the leadership at some time in the future.”²⁴⁷ After losing to Heil in 1939, Philip did not again seek elected office and he took a conservative turn late in life, becoming an advisor for Douglas MacArthur’s presidential run.

The disciplined structure of The Wisconsin Plan deliberately expanded right wing power internally within the Wisconsin Republicans and geographically into new organized conservative strongholds in rural Wisconsin. The Coleman faction withstood both assaults from the Republican moderates and Progressives, and ineptitude from candidates. Entering the 1940s, they were visibly the ascendant faction among all major political groups in the state. RVA support became requisite for any aspiring office seekers and the most well-known candidate to benefit from its dominance was an unknown circuit judge named Joseph McCarthy.

Progressive Indifference Toward Political Organizing

Of his competition in the electoral arena, Coleman bluntly stated that Progressives were “never good at getting anyone elected outside the LaFollettes” because they refused to invest in a lasting institutional framework like the party’s right wing. Academics focusing on the period agree: “Fighting Bob’s” greatest limitation was “his demand for excessive loyalty and his concomitant inability to share power with others” according to one political scientist.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 406. Philip lost the governorship to Walter Kohler, Jr.—of which Coleman was the campaign chairman. The RVA’s superior funds and Wisconsin business owners’ willingness to use employees on political campaigns was beyond toleration: “[Progressives] had talked—no, more shouted in words of wrath—about the wickedness of the lavish, corrupt use of money in politics. Now it had happened in the Kohler campaign. It smelled so badly you could not ignore it.” Just as the LaFollettes were the incentive for Coleman to enter politics, he shaped the younger LaFollette’s political worldview who went on to strengthen corrupt practices legislation when he won the governorship the following term. Quote is from *Adventure in Politics*, p. 127.

²⁴⁸ Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*. 89.

LaFollette's refusal to delegate and tight inner circle hamstrung the Progressives in ways that exposed themselves during his sons' attempts to continue his work after his death in 1925. As the second generation of LaFollettes began their respective political careers, the Progressives were already relying too much on name-recognition and personal networks to build an enduring program.

The flimsy infrastructure Progressives relied upon was dismissed by Philip LaFollette, who blamed his 1938 loss to Heil on voters who were "seduced into forsaking the Progressives who have given them the greatest and most efficient government in this nation."²⁴⁹ By the end of the 1930s the RVA had been running the Wisconsin Plan in each district across the state for nearly a decade. Compare this level of involvement with the Progressives, which, in Philip's own estimation, campaigning spanned only "eight or ten weeks, with four or five speeches during the day and a fifth or sixth one at night."²⁵⁰ Progressive organizers in the Madison headquarters were responsible for covering the entire state outside of Milwaukee and rarely did they travel further north than Green Bay or Lacrosse. "A sound political campaign" for the Progressives, prioritized industrial centers of Milwaukee, Kenosha, and Racine, and relied on union votes. Mentioned above, the RVA strategically conceded these fronts, pursuing a Fabian Strategy of retreating from Progressive strongholds to win the countryside.

As the RVA invested in the countryside, Progressives relied on their legacy, name recognition, and a dwindling pool of volunteers. Outreach was limited to a single "little black book kept by the inner [party leadership] circle" containing the names of approximately 4,000 party volunteers. These core four thousand loyalists were trotted out each election cycle as "the

²⁴⁹ Donoghue, James R., *How Wisconsin Voted, 1848-1972* (University of Wisconsin, Institute of Governmental Affairs, 1974); Fowler, *Wisconsin Votes*; La Follette, *Adventure in Politics*.

²⁵⁰ La Follette, *Adventure in Politics*. 129.

backbone of the progressive movement in Wisconsin,” according to Philip.²⁵¹ As they removed themselves from political work or died off the urgency to replace them with new blood did not match the RVA’s program and likely contributed to LaFollette’s unsuccessful 1938 bid for re-election.

Early 20th Century Wisconsin Democrats

Until the 1960s, Democrats occasionally played Progressive spoiler but were largely a non-entity in the state compared to the Progressive and Stalwart Republicans. It took until 1949, twenty-three years after the creation of the RVA, for Wisconsin Democrats to build their own version: the Democratic Organizing Committee (DOC). Like the RVA, the DOC energized the party’s younger ranks and produced their next generation of leadership including James Doyle, Gaylord Nelson (a former Progressive), and William Proxmire.²⁵² Even at the height of the New Deal Wisconsin Democrats comprised a mere 15% of the legislature’s seats in the 1930s. They briefly held the governorship through Albert Schmedeman from 1933-35 but would not again until Gaylord Nelson’s 1959 victory.²⁵³

As spoilers, Democrats played a supporting role in Coleman defeating both LaFollette brothers by syphoning votes from the Progressive coalition. For the 1938 governor’s race, a lifelong LaFollette opponent and businessman name Robert K. Henry ran in both Democrat and Republican primaries. After winning the Democratic nomination, he withdrew and urged

²⁵¹ La Follette. 130.

²⁵² Michael O’Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin*. Like the RVA, the DOC originated from an internal ideological split. Democrats Robert Tehan and Charles Green feuded after the latter won a national committee appointment while he was also head of the statutory party. Just as the RVC came to represent the Republicans’ hardline right wing, the DOC proclaimed itself the Democratic liberal wing. The fact that it formed shortly after the dissolution of the Progressives is likely not a coincidence as left-leaning Progressives sought a new political home.

²⁵³ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965.*, 404.

supporters to back Julius Heil against Philip. In the 1946 race for Senate, former UW-Madison economics professor, Howard McMurray, ran as a Democrat conceding that “I can’t beat [LaFollette, Jr.] but can make sure he does not win.”²⁵⁴ Noting the rise of Coleman’s business right, McMurray urged Progressives to forego their own party and endorse Democrats “straight across the board” or risk losing their “enviable tradition of liberalism” by splitting votes and giving Wisconsin back to “the forces of reaction.” Previous researchers have examined the role of Wisconsin Democrats in ending the LaFollette Dynasty, and presciently or not, McMurray’s comments are indicative of waning support for LaFollettes as populism shifted rightward.

III

“The Northern Huey Long”: Conservative Populism of Joseph McCarthy

Regimented organizational discipline met visionary strategic planning to transform the Republican Voluntary Association into a power amid an era associated with progressive politics—with one exception. The career of the unpredictable, unstudied Joe McCarthy was a glaring departure from the RVA’s measured planning and was originally met with reticence from all corners of the Wisconsin Republicans. McCarthy forced his way onto the 1946 senatorial primary ticket but soon demonstrated his worth on the campaign trail. His populist appeal was a missing ingredient in Coleman’s recipe for right wing domination, leading to an effective partnership between the aspiring politician and the seasoned party boss. The mutualistic relationship lasted only ten years but produced positive results for the Colemanites, taking the

²⁵⁴ Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism.” 85.

Wisconsin Right to national relevancy and gaining a foothold in the national party that contributed to the GOP's slow break with the New Deal Order in the early 1950s.

In Wisconsin, “the McCarthy people practically bludgeoned their way into the camp of the Colemanites” according to the *Milwaukee Journal*, reporting on infighting within the Republicans. Prior to McCarthy’s ambitious plan to become a senator, he was a Wisconsin circuit court judge as well as a Catholic who contrasted in both demeanor and appearance from the neatly pressed suit-wearing businessman who dominated the party. The Appleton native refined his signature, self-styled persona of disheveled, folksy, plain-spoken WWII veteran with a personal touch when engaging potential voters. His opponents viewed McCarthy’s presentation as a façade—a slippery, insincere demeanor paired with lofty promises—prompting Milwaukee Mayor Frank Zeidler to christen him the “northern Huey Long.”²⁵⁵

Entering politics as a New Deal Democrat, McCarthy transitioned to the Republican Party after the USSR’s invasion of predominantly Catholic Poland in 1939. (Germany also invaded Poland in 1939, but McCarthy’s concern remained focused on the Soviets.) McCarthy gave himself the nickname “Tailgunner Joe” after receiving a commendation for setting an Army record for most discharged ammunition rounds by unloading his magazine into local shrubbery while on base during the Korean War. McCarthy was ideologically for sale according to Ed Aschenbrener, who lost his circuit court seat to McCarthy when he confided to Coleman that the man had no loyalty to anyone but his own career: “He would campaign on the Socialist ticket if it would facilitate his election to public office.”²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*. 160. In his book *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, historian Thomas Reeves speculates McCarthy likely forged this “commendation” from Army.

²⁵⁶ Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism.” 41-42.

McCarthy was a formidable campaigner but no policy wonk, according to his best friend and confidante, Urban Van Sustren (whose daughter, Greta, became a well-known news correspondent). Van Sustren recalled the Senator being, “remarkably uncurious about the world beyond his immediate ambitions and physical needs,” adding that “as far as I know...Joe looked at only one book in his life. That was *Mein Kampf*.” He qualified this statement by noting that “lots of people read *Mein Kampf* in Appleton. Hitler had support here.” Van Sustren also believed McCarthy’s focus on the Nazis was strategic. For McCarthy, reading *Mein Kampf* “was like one politician comparing notes with another.”²⁵⁷ Appleton local and then-Lawrence College president, Nathan Pusey, alleged McCarthy carried a copy of *Mein Kampf* at all times, “quoting his favorite sections in the barber shops and boarding houses around Appleton.”²⁵⁸

Hitler’s appeal in late-1930s Wisconsin is indicative of a longer strain of regional German nationalist sentiment and a broader national embrace of what would be called white supremacy in the present. *Mein Kampf* provided McCarthy both a tactical and rhetorical road map for success. Wisconsin voters chose McCarthy for myriad reasons as documented by many other historians, but Hitler’s thematic undercurrents were undeniable aspects of his campaign from its origin.²⁵⁹ While there is no evidence Coleman was ideologically attached to *Mein Kampf*, David Oshinsky noted his comparing LaFollette rule to “packing the Statehouse with Jews and Reds.”

²⁵⁷ Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*. 29. Oshinsky’s description of McCarthy setting the ammo record can be found on p. 32.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 322.

²⁵⁹ Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*; Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*; Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism”; Michael O’Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin*.

There is no comparable figure to McCarthy in the broader history of the Wisconsin Republicans, particularly in his persona being larger than the RVA and his ability to intimidate unmatched. Coleman had no prior relationship with McCarthy and had intended to run Walter Kohler, Jr. for LaFollette, Jr.'s seat. To clear the field, McCarthy intimidated Kohler, Jr. from running by threatening to make the wealthy toilet scion's divorce proceedings (which McCarthy presided over) a campaign issue. This would have embarrassed and discredited his Kohler in the densely Catholic Wisconsin. McCarthy wondered aloud to Kohler if he really wanted that kind of publicity, considering his family's reputation as one of the state's largest employers.²⁶⁰

After Kohler recused his name from consideration, Coleman met the would-be candidate McCarthy at the Madison Club a block from the Capitol where the latter showed up strategically disheveled and untucked to the upscale Republican haunt, an exclusively coat-and-tie establishment. After this initial cordial dinner failed to dissuade McCarthy's candidacy, Coleman scheduled a formal one-on-one meeting a few weeks later. According to meeting minutes, Coleman spoke first: "Joe, you're a nice guy and I like you. But you're a Johnny-come-lately in Republican politics. You just don't have a part in the senatorial picture for next year. If you work as hard as you have been working and gain more support you may have a chance some time in the future." McCarthy replied, "Tom, you're a nice guy and I like you. But I got news for you. When that convention is over next year, Joe McCarthy will be the Republican endorsed candidate for US Senator!" According to accounts, Coleman leapt from his seat and headed toward the door, shooting back "What you need is some self-confidence!"²⁶¹ For his part in

²⁶⁰ Steinke, "The Rise of McCarthyism." 47.

²⁶¹ Steinke. 44

upsetting RVA control, McCarthy vowed to oppose any other candidate Coleman tried to nominate “displaying the party’s dysfunction for the rest of the state to see.”²⁶²

McCarthy was actually Coleman’s fourth choice to run for the seat but after all others demurred his overtures the “Boss” had no alternative but to back the upstart. Unaware of the backdoor politicking, the press immediately mocked the selection, writing that “Coleman was too intelligent to believe that McCarthy can carry the Republican Party to victory...[he] laid an egg.”²⁶³ But McCarthy proved to be unexpectedly dynamic on the campaign trail, energizing new demographics to vote Republican, particularly Catholics, farmers and union members. Historians Donald Crichtlow, Kevin Kruse and others have displayed the political value of linking Americanism and Catholicism in the postwar years and McCarthy appealed to “prosperous German burghers and farmers” as well as “scattered Czechs, Irish, and Belgian” Catholics who were “hostile to the liberal and reformist policies of the national New Deal.”²⁶⁴

In courting rural Catholics, McCarthy manipulated a growing rift in the New Deal-Progressive coalition. By the mid-1940s, many farmers believed New Deal Democrats and Wisconsin Progressives favored the interests of organized labor at the expense of agriculture (a cleavage the RVA had invested resources in expanding since at least the 1930s). In the eyes of the many farmers who identified as small business owners, their differences with organized labor became insurmountable after unions launched organizing drives on dairy cooperatives and in bottling plants across the state. McCarthy championed “farmers’ economic freedom” through federal farm subsidies bettering the lives of real people, unlike union dues enriching only the “labor bosses.” Contradicting his advocacy for increased farm subsidies, McCarthy believed he

²⁶² Ibid. 41. The Milwaukee Journal was the only newspaper to disclose the early Coleman-McCarthy feud.

²⁶³ Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense.*, 41.

²⁶⁴ Donald T. Crichtlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965.* 403.

spoke to rural Wisconsinites “tired of New Deal bureaus” as he crossed the state making the case of keeping big government, unions, and business at bay.²⁶⁵

Prior to the Red Scare, McCarthy followed the typical talking points of cold war conservatives when soliciting union votes. McCarthy’s criticism did not target the union rank-and-file, nor their right to organized as a collective body, but rather their greedy, compromised leadership. Aping the paternalistic arguments of the Wisconsin industrialists who came before him, he did “not blame labor for strikes and work stoppages” but on “the few shortsighted political labor bosses who use the workingmen and the unions for personal power.”²⁶⁶ On workers’ rights, McCarthy on the campaign trail was “not concerned with the rights given to labor,” focusing instead on the exploitative powers of “labor bosses.”²⁶⁷

Just as “Fighting Bob” made his name exposing corruption in government and politics, the RVA hammered his eldest son, “Young Bob,” on how he acquired substantial interest in a Milwaukee radio station. It was on this corruption charge that Coleman made his sole public appearance during the campaign. Noting that the LaFollettes profited about \$200,000 annually on the station, a left-wing Progressive, Thomas Amlie, actually sided with the Colemanites that the LaFollettes had no business amassing such wealth as a public servant. On the campaign, McCarthy used the LaFollette radio holdings as the epitome of how corruption and the “Communist-New Deal” went hand-in-hand. McCarthy depicted LaFollette, Jr. as both a communist profiteer and an elitist, referring to him in speeches as the “Senator from Virginia” as a way to highlight his forgotten roots and absenteeism from Wisconsin.

²⁶⁵ Steinke, “The Rise of McCarthyism.” 156.

²⁶⁶ Steinke. 156.

²⁶⁷ Steinke., 156.

So elitist had “Younger Bob” become, according to McCarthy, that “he permitted a negro family to live until 1946” at his Virginia home—a salacious and damning accusation he repeated on the campaign trail.²⁶⁸ LaFollette, Jr. responded by denying the charge through a pamphlet his campaign distributed to voters that included photographic evidence of a shack behind his Virginia estate. The pamphlet reassured Wisconsin voters that the shack had “no heat, no plumbing, and the roof leaks.” Instead of a family, only a single “aged Negro lives there rent-free. Bob has never spent a night in the place.”²⁶⁹ Both the LaFollette campaign’s refusal to challenge McCarthy’s use of open racism and the decision to print the booklet clarifying the situation provides a window into white the supremacist attitudes of the Wisconsin electorate in 1945.

Writing before McCarthy’s threat to the LaFollette Dynasty was truly realized, Progressive-turned-journalist Kenneth Traeger noted that “Young Bob stayed in Washington, thinking the McCarthy campaign a joke.” Some Progressive loyalists in rural areas, however, saw firsthand the new politics of Wisconsin’s countryside. Before the primary, one Progressive leader in Shawano County “begged Jack Kyle [La Follette’s campaign manager] to do something...they laughed at him.”²⁷⁰ The victor in the 1946 Republican primary came down to one final county with Robert M. LaFollette, Jr. falling 5,000 votes short. He would be the last LaFollette to ever hold a major office.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 77.

²⁶⁹ Patrick J. Maney, *Young Bob: A Biography of Robert M. La Follette, Jr.* (Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2002). 240.

²⁷⁰ Steinke. 77.

Conclusion

McCarthy's victory represented both a bookend to the LaFollette Dynasty and, to that point, the pinnacle of "the Republican surge to power," cultivated on the right since the late 1920s.²⁷¹ The "Laboratory of Democracy" that produced the most comprehensive public service infrastructure was also a locus for organized right wing opposition at the state level. The Wisconsin Plan infrastructure Coleman built culminated in McCarthy's election at the state level but also legitimized the Wisconsin Right in national conservative politics. In Wisconsin, where state politics had been determined by one family since 1900, Young Bob's defeat was indicative of a political sea change underway, energized by superior organizing. It was also the product of Progressive complacency when it came to political organizing, as well as irreconcilable personal and political differences between Progressives and New Dealers, and finally, strategic missteps by the LaFollette, Jr. campaign.

The Colemanites' legacy as conservative innovators engaged remote areas of the Wisconsin countryside, transitioning them from isolated enclaves to strategic keystones in the state's slowly growing conservative movement. The Wisconsin Plan laid the infrastructure while making incremental gains each election cycle. Discussed in the following chapter, the Colemanites' early success became a beacon for a growing number of disillusioned state parties who modeled their own growth along the lines of the Wisconsin Plan. Similarly, from McCarthy's political peak and long after his decline, McCarthy remained an icon of the Wisconsin Right—those who would be exiled for extremism in the coming years.

²⁷¹ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 465.

CHAPTER THREE
The “Wisconsin Plan” Gains a National Audience, 1946-1952

“I think the National Committee ought to be organized and financed all year round...and organize every state...on the pattern of Wisconsin.” –Frank J. Sensenbrenner, President, Kimberly-Clark Company

“[T]here is a great lack of Midwestern influence and understanding in the Eisenhower Administration.” –Thomas Coleman

*“See if you can’t do a job on this demagogy nationally the way you did it to the LaFollettes in Wisconsin.”*²⁷² – Lemuel Boulware to Coleman

In 1949, Thomas E. Coleman authored a pamphlet titled “What Does the Republican Party Stand For?” under the pseudonym “A Republican Worker.” It was an accessible document encouraging Wisconsinites to imagine a world beyond LaFollette Progressivism and the New Deal. It emphasized the importance of the 1950 midterm elections in preventing such Democratic pet projects as “compulsory socialized medicine,” “Communists in our government,” and “being told how to vote” by special interests.²⁷³ Coleman’s “Republican Worker” had enough of “power crazy men,” be they “political, labor, or business bosses” interfering in “his” simple way of life. The folksy prose concealed Coleman’s identity as a prosperous manufacturer and the most influential political leader in the state. Ironically, all his “worker’s” concern over oligarchic elite control, opponents knew full well “Boss” Coleman held iron-fisted mastery over all aspects of the Wisconsin Republican Party by 1949.

For Midwestern businessmen, the postwar strike waves across the nation underscored the importance of resolving the union question. Eastern Establishment leadership refused to interpret organized labor’s postwar strength as a threat to the GOP’s survival, causing a “factional split” with the more conservative state chapters in the Midwest and South. As the rift morphed into a

²⁷² Lemuel Ricketts Boulware, “Letter to Tom Coleman.”

²⁷³ A Republican Worker, “You Ask Me: What Does the Republican Party Stand For?” (The Republican Party of Wisconsin, 1949), Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 4, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society.

power grab, the Eastern leadership took extraordinary measures to prevent ceding any clout to the Midwest. Coleman and the other far right members of the party reacted by launching a stealth campaign that became public at the 1949 Republican leadership meeting dubbed “The Battle of Omaha” and only temporarily resolved itself within party boundaries at the landmark 1952 Republican Convention in Chicago.

The Wisconsin Right’s influence expanded as others in the Republican Party assumed conspiracy, according to historian Donald Critchlow, who argued that the Midwestern dissenters at the 1952 convention “firmly believed that insider forces at work denied the democratic expression of the party faithful in order to promote an internationalist agenda that served the interests of Wall Street.”²⁷⁴ This chapter explains the manifested paranoia and anti-Eisenhower sentiment in 1952 by linking it to a longer regional cleft and the organizing work on the party’s right that began in Wisconsin before moving into the national party in the mid-1940s.

Leading up to the 1952 convention showdown, Coleman was Joseph McCarthy’s chief patron and strategist for his upset 1946 victory over Robert LaFollette, Jr. The upset even raised Coleman’s status into being a possible contender for the Republican National Committee chair after Dewey’s loss to Truman in 1948. But for a faction within the GOP, McCarthy’s victory served as proof that not only could a conservative candidate find a route to victory in the postwar New Deal era, but a conservative trajectory was the only course for long term Republican solvency. No state had more success in both opposing progressive candidates and fending off internal opposition of moderates than Wisconsin under Coleman.

²⁷⁴ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*. 46.

In 1952, the Establishment moderates retained the nomination with Eisenhower, but the result catalyzed a northern-southern alliance that scholars argued was impossible. Two years before the fateful convention historian Richard Hofstadter published a piece arguing the industry-heavy northern Republicans would never ally with the Dixiecrats for fear of losing the northern black vote. This was partly true: Atlantic industrialists did not, but independent businessmen in the Midwest were eager to ally with southern Democrats. This alliance resulted in odd bedfellows and a lasting legacy of Midwest-South cooperation, to be discussed in future chapters. In more immediate outcomes, other state parties from the South travelled to Madison to train in the Wisconsin Plan. Sensing a unique moment in the postwar confusion, Lemuel Boulware wrote to his friend and mentor Tom Coleman urging him to form a “north-south Horse Sense Party,” cutting out the Eastern Establishment.²⁷⁵

Between 1948 and 1952, conservative Republicans at the state level openly lobbied for the national party to adopt “The Wisconsin Plan” in an effort to replicate local-level grassroots success. Embarrassed after losing to the seemingly vulnerable incumbent Harry Truman, the tightly-knit moderate Establishment Leadership ultimately blocked these attempts, fearful of ceding any power to the conservative wing. These divisions ultimately led to activists deserting the party or dropping out of electoral politics altogether after Eisenhower’s controversial presidential nomination in 1952.²⁷⁶

Leading up to this exodus, the right flank’s confidence grew to brazen levels after McCarthy’s victory, spilling over into the national debate over the future of the Republican Party. While the political organizing of the two campaigns was the subject of the last chapter,

²⁷⁵ Richard Hofstadter, “From Calhoun to the Dixiecrats,” *Social Research* 16, no. 2 (1949): 135–50; David Battle, “Letter to George Greeley, Wisconsin GOP”; Lemuel Ricketts Boulware, “Letter to Tom Coleman.”

²⁷⁶ Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*.

this race has been “subjected to perhaps more analysis that [sic] any other election in modern Wisconsin political history.” Because of this previous focus, the individuals are of secondary importance in this chapter.²⁷⁷ By de-centering both McCarthy the politician and the “-ism” that bears his name, I reprioritize concentration on the themes he used to garner political currency—communism, the institutionalization of unions, and a compromised elite Republican leadership—and how they became replicated on the national scene even after his death.

The Wisconsin Right explored three avenues for redirecting the GOP post-McCarthy. The first was a direct challenge for party leadership through official nomination channels and committee appointments. Second, in 1949, they attempted to seize control Republican campaign strategy in an effort to attract more conservative voters, as they had in Wisconsin, in hopes of wresting the 1952 nomination away from the moderate Establishment leadership. Falling short of these two goals, Midwestern industrialists thirdly leveraged their monetary contributions to the party in an effort of attaining the most favorable conditions at the upcoming 1952 convention.

These approaches were ultimately unsuccessful but caused enough infighting to acquire a handful of new committee appointments and nominal control over broader campaign strategy. The right’s sole gain from working within the party system was a more conservative 1952 platform on issues of taxation and federal spending. Without a substantive increase in control over party trajectory many Midwesterners initiated a self-imposed exodus from the Republicans after 1952, taking with them both a pool of activists and their grassroots organizing tactics. From these, the Right created its own network and groups outside the contained vision of the GOP.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*. These are among the most thorough works constructing both McCarthy’s career arc and the global conditions surrounding his career in Senate.

Coleman himself, retired shortly after the split, concerned with what he perceived to be the perilous moderation of the “Eastern Men” who led the party. Like Coleman, most on the right lost faith in the reformative potential of the Republican Party to advocate for the interests of the Midwestern conservative. New organizations like the John Birch Society (subject of the next chapter) took up the task of beginning to organize right wing demographics ignored by the Republicans focusing on the very same touchstones emphasized by McCarthy—communists, unions, and potential threats to American sovereignty like the United Nations.

The Wisconsin Plan in 1946 and Beyond

The Wisconsin Plan’s emphasis on empowering new demographics and apathetic voters contributed to broader cooperation among state GOP parties. Following the advice of the Minnesota Republicans, Coleman revamped the dormant Young Republican as a volunteer pool across the state. During this period Coleman also “traded” with the Minnesota Republicans for S.I. Olson and Victor Johnson who were effective advisors for Minnesota Governor Harold Stassen and helped defeat the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party that dissolved in 1944. In return, Coleman and the RVA backed Stassen’s 1948 presidential primary against General Douglas MacArthur, Thomas Dewey, Earl Warren, and Robert Taft—ultimately delivering him Wisconsin in the competitive race. Both Olson and Johnson, who Coleman appointed RVA Executive Secretary, brought creative ideas that melded well with Coleman’s \$75,000 campaign spending on the McCarthy compared to LaFollette’s \$13,000.

To reach new demographics on campus, Coleman funded a new core of Young Republican leadership of first generation students entering campus via the GI Bill. These veterans were recruited to the campaign trail and also helped with campus organizing, statewide

campaigning, assisting the state legislature, and hosting a bevy of conservative speakers including Coleman's friend and GE labor-management relations executive Lemuele Boulware, economist Ludwig von Mises, Allis-Chalmers labor-management executive Harold Story, and McCarthy himself on multiple occasions. In preparation for the 1946 election, the Colemanites dispatched organizers to campuses around the state, training local chapters to be key ground troops for McCarthy in anticipation of 1946. When endorsement time came, the YR's swelling volunteer pool endorsed the Coleman-backed McCarthy without even listening to the recorded message Republican Governor Walter Goodland had sent them on Bob, Jr.'s behalf.

The decision to revamp the Young Republicans complimented the new emphasis on face-to-face organizing across every district and these college students provided the new blood to achieve it. The RVA coordinated "Paul Revere Rides" dispatching 300 cars across the state in weeks leading up to the primary, targeting every town in the state with over 500 residents.²⁷⁸ Each Young Republican was paired with local precinct captains, intentionally placing volunteers outside familiar neighborhoods in an effort of limiting lengthy conversations as they went door-to-door. On Election Day, Johnson and Young Republican coordinator Loyal Eddy commandeered three airplanes, dubbed "The Flying Badgers," that were also paired with 208 cars, and nearly 1,000 volunteers. Coleman estimated the spectacle alone of the "Flying Badgers" buzzing small towns generated about 5,000 new votes for McCarthy.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Johnson recruited volunteers for these rides by advertising them as "secret missions" for the campaign. Apparently the mystery created enough curiosity to draw in willing "riders."

²⁷⁹ Steinke, "The Rise of McCarthyism." 58. By 1949, according to Tom Coleman, the RVA had a country club in each county designated as the "Republican Party of Wisconsin Volunteer Organization" to collect funds and recruit more foot soldiers.

Especially after Dewey's loss, what made the McCarthy win and Wisconsin Plan particularly fascinating to other regions of the country was the RVA's ability to mobilize a state-level campaign at that scale. While Republican turnout fell across the country in 1948, the drop was nowhere near as precipitous in Wisconsin. Focusing on Wisconsin's Vilas County in one case study, not only was Republican turnout equal that of 1944, but Dewey actually *won* by over six-hundred votes. To increase turnout, the RVA eliminated their direct mailing program, replacing it with face-to-face organizing conversations. Each precinct in the state was assigned at least eight organizers charged with organizing and assessing their particular jurisdiction.²⁸⁰ Wisconsin party candidates nearly swept every race in 1948, further stoking Coleman & Company's rage at national party management.

Dewey Fails to Energize Republican Voters

The slow process of reconversion to a peacetime economy was compounded by a postwar recession opening a window of opportunity for Republicans to retake the White House. Returning veterans flooded a stagnant labor market as living evidence that the Democrats were unprepared to lead this transition—1948 seemed to be the Republicans' to lose. After WWII, Truman's popularity hit at an all-time low of 35% and a Wisconsin straw poll conducted just weeks before the election predicted Dewey would take the state by a margin of 53.5% to 41.7%.²⁸¹ Truman famously upset Dewey, leading to the iconic photo of the President hoisting the "Dewey Defeats Truman" *Chicago Daily Tribune* early edition headline.

²⁸⁰ Robert W. Glasgow, "The Republican 'Wisconsin Plan': Small County Shows State How Effective Organization at Precinct Level Succeeds."

²⁸¹ "General Election Straw Poll," 1946, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 7, Folder 3, Wisconsin Historical Society; Marrs McLean, "Letter to Fitzhough Scott," January 21, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

After his victory, the President's observations further stoked division among the GOP by conceding a Midwestern Republican candidate could have won. Ohio Senator Robert Taft, in particular, he observed, had "plenty of labor support...in Ohio for Senate. He would be a very much tougher opponent for me than Governor Dewey," despite co-authoring the anti-union 1947 Taft-Hartley Bill.²⁸²

In other words, the Wisconsin Right had reason to be optimistic about the potential of electing a non-establishment candidate, but chose not to challenge Dewey's nomination. Quoting one conservative activist of the time, voters chose "the original New Deal rather than the copy" in 1948 because they had no alternative.²⁸³ They fell in line behind what Coleman called "lesser-New Dealism" for what would be the last time. National Chairman Hugh Scott became the figure most blamed for poor campaigning and shallow messaging that came to be the calling card of the Dewey-Rockefeller East Coast wing. As RNC head, he represented liberal Republicanism and campaign ineptitude, as well as the ham-handed party rule his clique enforced—as historian Michael Bowen put it, "Dewey's desire for total freedom in shaping the party to his political identity."²⁸⁴ Midwestern state chapters, particularly, resented selecting a weak Dewey candidate when industrialists—the GOP's Midwestern core—believed they were fighting for their survival against emboldened unions and postwar recession.

Midwestern frustration with the "lesser-New Dealism" leading the party to obsolescence became associated with union's enduring power; as one problem in the same. Over the years, these industrialists had given substantial sums of donations to the Republican Party, so when the

²⁸² Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*. 44.

²⁸³ Frank Doherty, Title Insurance Printing (Los Angeles), "Letter to Tom Coleman," November 10, 1958, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 6, Folder 4, WHS.

²⁸⁴ Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*. 68.

Dewey-led leadership simply accepted the institutionalization of unions as party of the postwar economy, Midwestern industrialists took it personally.

The Party of McCarthy or Dewey?

McCarthy's victory in Wisconsin became juxtaposed with the national Republicans' mismanagement of Dewey and, I argue, became the catalyst for what Bowen called "the more gradual, lasting embrace of conservatism in the party and among its members" behind the scenes in nominating the moderates Dewey and Eisenhower in 1948 and 1952.²⁸⁵ By focusing on candidates instead of the role of internal partisan coalitions, "most historians ignore the rampant factionalism and mischaracterized critically important developments in the Republican Party through their tendency to limit the narrative of the 1950s to either McCarthy or Eisenhower or Nixon."²⁸⁶ Colemanite mobilization against the Progressives contributes to understanding GOP infighting post-Dewey loss.

While acknowledging the pent up resentment, Bowen dismisses the Wisconsin Right as a significant force—deriding Coleman specifically—as "ambitious political partisans who lost a power struggle and lashed out with a childish smear campaign against their opponents."²⁸⁷ In doing so, Bowen overlooks conservative mobilization leading up to 1952—an effort that put Coleman close to taking control of the national Republican Party.

McCarthy's narrow victory in 1946 was not a mandate for a rightward turn, but the product of years of intensive organizing and preparation. Galvanized by Coleman's example in Wisconsin, a cluster of Midwestern and southern state party chapters began the process of

²⁸⁵ Bowen. 12.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. 11.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. 92.

attempting to take over the RNC in 1948. “Dewey,” Texas state chair, oil magnate, and Coleman ally Marrs McLean reasoned, “just New Dealed the Republicans...into not voting for him” and Wisconsin exemplified a new path forward.²⁸⁸

The Texan also spoke to a fundamentally deeper ideological contradiction within the party by chastising the vanilla tenor of Dewey’s campaign. Leadership’s campaign “seemed to have been based on not saying anything controversial.” Industrialists were on the front lines against creeping union control and were furious Republicans ignored their most significant issue. The Republicans and Dewey “shied away from ever using ‘Taft-Hartley,’ ‘Labor Boss,’ or even ‘Labor Leader’ during the campaign.”²⁸⁹ As discussed in Chapter One, McCarthy’s campaign against LaFollette in 1946 was unafraid of attacking unions and their leadership, careful to differentiate them from the rank-and-file votes they solicited. Based on feedback collected during grassroots program, Colemanites found political currency in lumping unions in with big business and government, framing them as distant and unconcerned overlords. It was on tact to differentiate the two parties, that the Dewey faction was unwilling to risk.

For Wisconsin refrigerator manufacturer Fred Young, eastern corporations lacked the chin for necessary labor-management conflict needed to salvage the GOP’s chances in 1950: “I do not like to be called a rugged individualist but we have the guts to fight.” Where most of the country viewed the New Deal through a fatalistic lens of inevitability, never realizing their potential as activists: “some of the big shots around here...are so badly missing when it comes to do [sic] something... except for a round of cocktails and a semi-yearly meeting they do not come to the front.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ McLean, “Letter to Fitzhough Scott.”

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Fred Young, “Letter to Thomas E. Coleman,” July 12, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Anti-unionism was a crucial unifier among industry-heavy state chapters from Wisconsin to Texas that pushed the national Republicans to take it seriously as part of a revamped political strategy at the 1949 RNC convention in Omaha, held a few months after Dewey's loss. Like the McCarthy Club formed by Coleman in Milwaukee, this conservative caucus pushed the national party to be more aggressive linking communist subversion in government and unions to a threat to American society that a conservative Midwestern-led national party could combat. While ultimately unsuccessful in overtaking the GOP in the 1950s, the strategies and talking points used to defeat the LaFollettes became central tenets of right wing organizing that emerged outside the GOP in the 1960s and beyond.

Coleman's Rise as a National Figure

McCarthy brought Coleman an unexpected notoriety the summer after his election. Coleman's son, J. Reed, recalled sitting in their home on the banks of Lake Mendota hearing tourist-packed duck boats single out his house for photographs. Newspaper columnist Drew Pearson speculated that Coleman was "angling for national chair" (he was not), but "thought Coolidge was a bit radical," applying journalistic hyperbole to the notion that the Wisconsin finance chair was ideologically to the right of the conservative former president.²⁹¹ If McCarthy was "the man who buried the LaFollette Dynasty," Coleman dug the grave. Similar to his role in

²⁹¹ James F. Dewey, "Letter to Thomas E. Coleman," June 9, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society. The Pearson column, discussed between Dewey and Coleman, in this correspondence made the latter laugh because he had never revealed any interest in running for national chairman. Pearson later wrote a critical piece on Joe McCarthy which prompted the well-lubricated senator to confront the columnist in a restaurant coat check area and knee him in the groin. Coincidentally, Coolidge vacationed at Coleman's northern cabin, often meeting with industrialists there.

reforming the Wisconsin Republicans, Coleman carried the banner for a more cogent national campaign strategy that shrouded his deeper agenda of party takeover from the moderates.²⁹²

After Dewey's loss, Midwestern industrialists both vented at leadership's incompetence and exchanged ideas over how a national takeover could be accomplished. Emphasizing the regional animosity within the party, Racine-based refrigerator manufacturer, Fred Young wrote "it is true anyone with simple horse sense would have known that Candidate Dewey with his effete eastern attitude was going to get beat."²⁹³ An Iowa party leader lamented that Republicans had "lost the confidence of the people. We are the subject of ridicule on every street corner. We are the laughing stock, because we didn't fight." The lack of urgency concerned him and he predicted that "if we endorse [the Dewey-Scott] campaign [for 1950 midterm elections], the party will just evaporate from any position of importance in this country."²⁹⁴ Reflecting after the defeat years later another activist reasoned "there is nothing more poisonous nor deadly than Dewey's influence in a...political party...If we could pay the Democrats to take him, it would be well worth the cost."²⁹⁵

Ideological conviction and electoral success were intertwined for the Wisconsin Right, but framing their intentions around the latter made it more palatable for Establishment leadership to consider allowing outside voices. The outspoken Texan Marris McClean charged that poor candidate selection left too many conservatives sitting on their hands during election season: "If we had given [the conservative base] Taft in 40, Bricker in 44, or Taft in 48 we would have won." There was a growing consensus among the Colemanite coalition that "lesser-New

²⁹² Kades, "Incumbent Without a Party: Robert M. LaFollette, Jr, and the Wisconsin Republican Primary of 1946."Page?

²⁹³ Young, "Letter to Thomas E. Coleman."

²⁹⁴ "The Battle of Omaha," *Time Magazine* 53, no. 6 (February 7, 1949): 16.

²⁹⁵ Frank Doherty, Title Insurance Printing (Los Angeles), "Letter to Tom Coleman."

Dealism” was not a winning strategy among the majority of American voters saw a “Liberal Republican and Liberal Democrat as the same thing.” Eastern leadership was too far removed from everyday Americans and too close to the mantle of state power, corporate finance, and the United Nations’ internationalist agenda.²⁹⁶

The solution could be as simple as turnout accomplished through an isolationist, anti-union, anti-big government platform, paired with improved campaign strategy. Citing a survey commissioned leading up to the 1948 general election, Colemanites believed Dewey’s soft message alienated approximately 6-8 million voters who chose to stay home on Election Day. The moderate Republican strategy of peeling off disaffected partners from the New Deal coalition downplayed issues of encroaching internationalism, communism, and the influence of organized labor. Citing poll results that Taft would have won in 1948, Texas Chair Marris McClean called for Republicans to confront the New Dealers within the party as a way to “arouse the interest of the stay-at-home vote...[with] candidates who will fight as oppositionists to Liberals, whether such Liberals are known as either Democrats or Republicans.”²⁹⁷ For McClean and other industrialists on the outside of central Republican leadership, the facts justified the need for factional party conflict before the next presidential election in 1952.

A number of state party leaders agreed with Texas, including Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin, and the decision was made to take a confrontational stance. By promoting the Wisconsin Plan, they could dictate that discussion would center on winning campaigns and not over ideological differences or wresting power from the East. The state chapters chose the 1949 RNC meeting in Omaha for the conflict, in what became the opening salvo in a struggle for the future of the Republican Party, culminating at the 1952 GOP convention in Chicago.

²⁹⁶ McLean, “Letter to Fitzhough Scott.”

²⁹⁷ McLean.

“The Odds are on Coleman” at the “Battle of Omaha”

“Back in ‘49,” Coleman recounted years later, “it was quite generally understood that the defeat of Dewey might eliminate the influence of [Establishment Republicans] in the decisions influencing the selection of presidential candidates.” Notoriously secretive and cliquish, the Dewey-Scott circle held total control of the party apparatus. Under their structure, state chapters paid dues and collected votes but had little say in the national election process. In the context of mounting losses, even when the Democrats were vulnerable, the arrangement appeared more about leadership’s self-preservation than furthering any Republican ideology. The Dewey wing’s measured secrecy on most matters allowed their growing list of adversaries to define them as nothing more than “experts in intra-party maneuvering, but certainly no experts when it came to winning campaigns.”²⁹⁸

In this context, the Wisconsin Plan as a national proposal could serve as the Wisconsin Right’s vehicle for entering GOP decision-making. First proposed in confidential correspondence leading up to the 1949 RNC meeting in Omaha, Coleman and his allies plotted their confrontation by framing it simply as a more effective campaign strategy. Wisconsin-based paper manufacturer Kimberly-Clark President Frank J. Sensenbrenner argued that the Wisconsin Plan “has proved very successful and has enabled us to win every state election from 1938-1948.” Sensenbrenner, whose son would become an influential Republican congressman, wrote to other state chapters that “I think the National Committee ought to be organized and financed all year round and organize every state in the union on the pattern of Wisconsin.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Thomas E. Coleman, “Confidential Letter to Edward B. Simmons of Standard-Times Newspaper (Bedford, MA),” August 22, 1958.

²⁹⁹ Frank J. Sensenbrenner, “Correspondence with Thomas Coleman,” January 6, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

As the opposing factions met in heated dialogue one *Time Magazine* reporter in attendance used hyperbole, dubbing the meeting “The Battle of Omaha.” For the angry state chapters, the Dewey calamity and most attendees vented frustration at leadership from the meeting floor. *Time* described the first night’s meeting as “a rebellion in the [RNC] and the rebels were out to get [party chair] Hugh Scott.”³⁰⁰ The tone was set when the Colemanites nominated a self-proclaimed “country politician” Roy Dunn from Minnesota to challenge Scott for National Chair. During the open floor segment, attacks on Scott became personal as angry speakers called the Dewey campaign one of “stupidity, arrogance and cockiness.” Another singled out Scott as “a symbol of the ineptitude and of the betrayal of the Republican Party. He was only a ghost wandering around looking for a campaign to haunt.” West Virginia party leader Walter Hallanan decried that state chapters “have been mere puppets” to Establishment Republican leadership beholden to big government and business.³⁰¹

Scott opted not to take ownership of the failed campaign strategy and instead spread culpability around the room. Armed with what the *Times* called a “secret weapon” of telephone recordings he played for the room clips of state leaders approving the Dewey selection and praising Scott’s transparency. Sensing the brewing coup attempt, Scott accused his detractors of being “a clique of scheming men,” who preferred “going back to Garfield” rather than “forward to victory.” After nearly five hours of parliamentary procedure, Scott retained the party chair, 54-50.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

As most delegates chose the direct approach of publicly flogging leadership in Omaha, Coleman remained on the wings. His cadre had fallen short in their scalpel approach of rooting out the top leadership, but they still could take power the way they had in Wisconsin by taking over campaign leadership. In an attempt to assuage critics, Scott created the Organization Policy Committee (OPC) and appointed Coleman chair. Coleman was tasked with advising the also newly-formed Republican Strategy Committee (RSC) (chaired by Scott) on campaigns. Coleman would then also serve as vice-chair of the RSC, beneath Scott. Ostensibly, the OPC was to be the liaison between state chapters and leadership.

Despite the veneer of concessions to the Midwesterners, RNC leadership delayed further appointments to both OPC and RSC for three months. Suspecting his appointment was symbolic, Coleman publicly resigned under protest. Penning a public castigation, he reprimanded leadership that their “long delays in appointing members has caused a loss of several months of working time” before midterm elections. “Frankly, I do not wish to spend the time to take the responsibility for a committee that is not moving along. That responsibility must be yours.” In a calculated dig at the national party’s futility during election season, he added “State organizations are doing the work anyway, thankfully.”³⁰³ Years later, Coleman reflected on his resignation that he found operating within the committee “absolutely useless to try to work in that capacity” because of “very strong prejudices of the members of the National Committee who felt that their prerogatives were being pretty badly clipped.”

³⁰³ Thomas E. Coleman, “Letter to Chairman Fitzhugh Scott,” June 27, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

In Coleman's resignation, the insurgents had a martyr to rally around. Alienated Republicans praised his defiance: "Your resignation from the RSC is indeed bold and empathic moving trying to get Hugh Scott off his stumps," wrote one admirer.³⁰⁴ Another wrote "allow me to congratulate you on the grand and courageous work you did in bringing things to a head."³⁰⁵ Name-calling and accusations at a private RNC event was one thing, but Coleman's public resignation exposed the deep the divisions for all to see. Already a cult hero among the right wingers for defeating the LaFollettes, Coleman was now risking his political career to save the GOP from "lesser-New Dealism."

"I don't know whether my shock treatment is going to do the job" Coleman wrote to his admirers, "but there are a few of us that are going to follow it up with everything we can to straighten out our national Republican situation as soon as possible" indicating the calculated measure in his resignation.³⁰⁶ "Whatever I did," Coleman said of his tactic, "was pretty well planned out with some of our good Republican leaders."³⁰⁷ "It's better to have a blow up right now than it would be to have it come along several months later [pre-midterms] as it surely would have."³⁰⁸ By only losing three months, the Colemanites hoped to salvage what they could ahead of the 1950 midterms with ambition to take over the entire Republican Party by 1952's general election.

GOP leadership underestimated both the Wisconsin Right's boldness and coordination in planning the negative publicity. Scott immediately resigned as RSC chair but retained his narrowly-won RNC chair for a few more months. With the coup now national news, one

³⁰⁴ G.B. Duffield, "Letter to Thomas E. Coleman," July 5, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

³⁰⁵ Thomas E. Coleman, "Letter to Harvey L. Harris," July 7, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

observer wrote that “GOP circles in Washington last week gave full credit to Tom Coleman, Wisconsin Republican finance chair, for having provoked the resignation of Hugh D. Scott as chair of RSC. There are still many top-drawer Republicans who would like to junk Scott entirely (who is still national chairman).” Should the Midwestern insurgents take on the Establishment for party control, the author predicted, “the odds are on Coleman.”³⁰⁹

Coleman as Scott’s successor never materialized and New Jersey statesman Guy Gabrielson was named the new chair. It is unclear if Coleman ever lobbied for the position, but he publicly expressed disinterest. The GOP’s right wing had a hero in Coleman and urged him to “consider running for national chair in the future,” a sentiment shared by the emerging political right around the country. Coleman made clear he had no intention of doing so: “[f]rankly, I have never wanted to be [RNC chair] and don’t want to be now.”³¹⁰

Selling “The Wisconsin Plan” to the National Republicans

By resigning under protest, Coleman gave the GOP an ultimatum: democratize decision-making or risk splitting with the men you depend upon to carry the Midwest. While new RNC chair Gabrielson was still more politically moderate than the Midwest, the new Strategy Committee chair was handpicked by Coleman. The selection was Michigan party leader and Flint-based “high-volume Chevy dealer,” Arthur Summerfield. This Wisconsin Right loyalist was now responsible for the entire Republican electoral strategy for 1950 midterms and the 1952 general election. The Dewey wing accepted Summerfield because he was “the GOP’s link to the

³⁰⁹ Andrew Biemiller, “We’ll Hear More from Tom Coleman,” *A Letter From Your Congressman*, July 16, 1949, Vol. 1, No. 26 edition, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society.

³¹⁰ Dewey, “Letter to Thomas E. Coleman”; Thomas E. Coleman, “Letter to Stanford Stanton,” October 8, 1951, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 4, Wisconsin Historical Society. Correspondence urging Coleman to explore running for national chairmanship included industrialists from every corner of the country, from both voters and party members and leaders.

auto industry and therefore a man not to be trifled with,” but ideologically, Summerfield was in lock-step with Coleman.³¹¹ He was Coleman’s literal proxy in Washington, DC and referred most decisions to Wisconsin in confidential correspondence.

Pressed for lost time after Scott’s post-Omaha delay tactics, the Colemanites began the process of reshaping party strategy in the mold of the Wisconsin Plan before 1950. In December, 1949, Wisconsin GOP Executive Secretary John Rouse flew to Washington to debrief Summerfield on the intricacies and expectations of a national Wisconsin Plan. Nicknamed “Operation Bird Dog,” it was essentially a repackaged Wisconsin Plan for the national level, sans the fundraising aspect which remained under national Finance Committee purview. Rouse outlined the new RSC’s four primary objectives. First, “we intend to use every effort to organize counties down through voters in advance of 1950.” Departing from the former national model of pouring large sums of cash into select districts, the Wisconsin Plan required labor-intensive, grassroots organizing. In other words, the model simply could not function with the current secretive leadership and required trusting local parties; even ceding some decision-making power to the states.

The hectic pace of the Wisconsin Plan demanded staffers and volunteers to schedule three events per-day in different counties leading up to the midterms. Second, going door-to-door (in addition to the town halls) organizers surveyed each household on issues. Taking the door-to-door polling data, organizers scheduled local listening sessions for local candidates around these issues. Local GOP candidates “heard feedback” from constituents and used the meetings to garner face-to-face interaction with voters without having to personally canvass.

³¹¹ Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*. 77. Documented in Oshinsky’s *A Conspiracy So Immense*, Summerfield became one of McCarthy’s only allies in the Eisenhower administration and backed the Senator until his early death.

From these local races, party operatives then identified the best candidates to groom for future positions of greater status. “Where they are worthy” Rouse told Summerfield, the Party should “build up” their reputation in the media. County leaders provided status updates to be reviewed by the RSC board in Washington. In this new model, candidate selection was of secondary importance to accumulating data, solidifying grassroots connections, and cultivating candidates who could be competitive on a larger stage.

Coleman also sent Summerfield a memo about incorporating a novel tactic successfully implemented by Pennsylvania Republicans in the 26th District titled “The Power of a Single Issue Aggressively Sold to Voters.” The nine-step process highlighted the efficacy of shrewd and repeated messaging in defeating an attempt to pass what they labeled “Socialized Medicine” by moderate Republicans in the district. After the 1952 exodus of right wingers from the party, architects of the New Right refined the tactic as a way to grow membership outside the GOP. By the 1970s it became one of the party’s regularly implemented programs as a method to tether unrelated constituent interests under the umbrella of a broader movement.

As RSC chair, Summerfield clearly defined the differences between the Republicans and Democrats that had blurred since the New Deal. In his first address as chair, Summerfield complained that “over-financed Democrats” would easily outmatch the GOP. Republicans had to out-organize, because they could not out-spend. Pointing to special interests, he criticized the Democrat-labor alliance noting that “the AFL has opened new 47 state offices,” for the purpose of “political education.” He also singled out the Americans for a Democratic America (ADA), a union-led political action committee that contributed \$800,000 annually to Democratic candidates.³¹² The new GOP messaging was a beacon for the everyday American concerned

³¹² “Republican Strategy Committee Minutes,” December 13, 1949, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 7, Folder 4, WHS.

about promises being made to special interests in exchange for political donations—a stark departure from “lesser-New Dealism” of campaigns past.

It turned out that Summerfield need not worry about the Democrats as much as he should the RNC. In a confidential pre-election memo, Gabrielson made clear his intent to abolish all committees, unifying party decision-making to his seat and the board before 1952.³¹³ His decision to end all alterations to past practices was likely affirmed by the good showing in the 1950 midterm elections: Republicans gained five seats in the Senate and 28 in the House. These were more due to the Korean War’s unpopularity than any widespread constituent warming to the East Coast’s moderate conservatism.

The RNC refused to expand Strategy Committee infrastructure (correctly) fearing it had the potential to take control of the party just as the RVA had in Wisconsin. Coleman was brazen enough to unsuccessfully lobby for a separate office Strategy Committee office outside the central RNC offices.³¹⁴ Despite the Summerfield appointment and Scott’s departure as RNC chair, the Wisconsin Right fell short of implementing lasting reforms. Summerfield resigned over health reasons four months before Election Day and after Eisenhower’s nomination, the car salesman who was also “an avid stamp collector” accepted a Cabinet position as Postmaster General.³¹⁵

³¹³ Guy Gabrielson, “Confidential Memo,” June 19, 1950, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 3, Folder3, WHS.

³¹⁴ Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*. 89.

³¹⁵ Summerfield joining Ike’s cabinet—along with William Grede joining his labor-management board—was part of the post-convention Morningside agreement to assuage Taft supporters to back Eisenhower in the general election.

Wisconsin The Exception in 1950

Despite Wisconsin Republicans' consternation over the national party's long term solvency, they continued their dominance at home during the 1950 midterm elections. Coleman reported that "we now have every state office, two senators"—Joe McCarthy and Alexander Wiley—"and nine out of ten congressmen." The payload of added congressional seats was "about as far as we could go considering the [remaining majority Democrat/Progressive holdovers]" implying they had reached their realistic zenith of state control. Illinois party leader G.A. Vollmer, allies with his northern neighbors after adopting the Wisconsin Plan in 1949, wrote to Coleman hoping he "could feel very satisfied with the results." Contrasting the national situation with Wisconsin's, he believed the results "indicate conclusively that you have done a magnificent job."³¹⁶

Aside from Truman's re-election in 1948, Wisconsin increased its hold to controlling 70% of the state legislature, electing a Republican governor, and eight of ten possible congressmen. The 1940s was a tale of two GOP's: the Wisconsin Republicans had recast their image as one attuned to the needs of Wisconsin voters while the national party imagined themselves as slightly more fiscally responsible Democrats. Answering "What does the Republican Party Stand For?" Coleman argued it should be neither "a workers' party, a management party or a farmers' party" independent of "special favors." Linking communism to big government, The Republican Worker was tired of hearing about "the evils of big business" and believed that Republicans should stand for "the rights of the individual and family."³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Thomas E. Coleman, "Letter to G.A. Vollmer," November 10, 1950, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 3, Wisconsin Historical Society; G.A. Vollmer, "Letter to Coleman," November 9, 1950, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 3, Wisconsin Historical Society. The Illinois Republicans were also celebrating their candidate, Everett Dirksen, winning a seat in the Senate after adopting the Wisconsin Plan from their northern neighbors.

³¹⁷ A Republican Worker, "You Ask Me: What Does the Republican Party Stand For?"

Victories in other states in the 1950 midterms were made possible through informal expansion of the Wisconsin Plan among state parties. For example, Illinois party leaders credited Coleman for helping elect Senator Everett Dirksen. The success of the plan attracted other states throughout the 1950s. Alabama Democrats sent a delegation to Madison to explore the benefits of the Wisconsin Plan “for the conservative faction of the Democratic Party.” Conservatives took the majority of seats on the Alabama Democratic Committee and “had a renewed interest” in Wisconsin’s “type of organization set-up.”³¹⁸ Overtures from other states spoke to the efficacy and reputation Wisconsin’s model had, nationally. The Alabama connection signified a link between conservatives across party and regional lines.

Opening New Fronts: Beyond the RSC’s Failure

Charting a new course at the national level, Coleman’s alternate plan was to take the fight to the Republican’s bankbook. After committees were abolished, “we...are looking ahead” Coleman wrote to another Midwestern party leader, “and we feel that unless things are handled right between now and then the Republican Party can again fall flat on its face.”³¹⁹ Gabrielson’s termination of the RSC redirected the Midwestern insurrection to the one spot where they still held influence: the Finance Committee. Both Arthur Summerfield and Marris McClean had positions in the Committee and the sentiment was that if leadership would not relinquish control over campaigns, the Midwest could pressure the Republicans through withholding funds.

The “factional split,” as Coleman put it, pitted his cadre against “a tight little group” of loyalists, including Finance Chair Sinclair Weeks from Massachusetts. Coleman wrote to Weeks

³¹⁸ David Battle, “Letter to George Greeley, Wisconsin GOP.”

³¹⁹ Thomas E. Coleman, “Letter to G.A. Vollmer,” November 9, 1950, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 3, Wisconsin Historical Society.

that the rift “has been serious enough to hamper [the finance committee’s] effectiveness” and “it might well account for the repeated failures of the Party in national [elections]” compared to the “success for our party in our state [Wisconsin] elections.”³²⁰ Coleman concluded his correspondence by noting that his Midwestern crew was “sick and tired of pouring money down a rat hole [RNC] and getting no results.”³²¹

To further antagonize the Finance Committee, Wisconsin Republicans held a June Founder’s Day fundraiser in Milwaukee and invited Weeks. After raising over \$200,000 in plain sight of RNC Finance Committee leadership, Weeks assumed he would be presented with at least a portion of the earnings “with the intention of taking care of the national committee.” He was advised no such payments would be made until the Colemanites were assured “the [1952] convention would be someplace other than...in the South.”³²² Soon after it was agreed that Chicago would be the new location for the 1952 GOP Convention. In December of 1951, the final deadline for quarterly contributions to the RNC, Wisconsin finally met their fundraising quota to remain in good RNC standing.

Holding national funds hostage was not a new tactic for the Wisconsin Republicans. Coleman, with the urging of fellow McCarthy Club co-founder Frank J. Sensenbrenner, threatened withholding funds since as early as 1944 to protest a national rules change that would have supported the Dewey wing state party candidate Edward Bacon over Coleman’s hand-picked party chair Cyrus Philipp. Coleman gave the national party an ultimatum: “the wishes of the organization should be followed if the candidate and his followers expect our organization to

³²⁰ Coleman, “Letter to G.A. Vollmer,” November 10, 1950; Thomas E. Coleman, “Letter to Sinclair Weeks,” February 1, 1951, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 9, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

³²¹ Vollmer, “Letter to Coleman.”

³²² Coleman, “Letter to Sinclair Weeks.” In 1951, Southern Republicans were still much more in-line with the Establishment. The Democrats were much more conservative and the Dixiecrats had not yet gained control of the GOP in the South following their departure from the Democrats in 1948.

collect the money and do the work.”³²³ The disparity of labor between state and national parties in delivering Midwestern votes was a source irritation but also a point of leverage for Coleman’s coalition.

Internal correspondence among state leaders exposes their collective resentment towards the Dewey-Scott leadership’s hypocrisy and favoritism. Coleman pointed out that Wisconsin raised more money than “Sinclair Weeks’ Massachusetts, Doug Stuart’s Illinois, and much higher than Guy Gabrielson’s New Jersey” yet they were persona non grata at national meetings. To Colemanites, it was galling that leadership gave no thought to party outreach except when the time came to collect funds. It encapsulated the disconnect between leadership and the grassroots that “spent their time pushing on getting money in and have not created an atmosphere which makes people want to send money to them” according to Coleman.

In their final act of defiance ahead of 1952, Colemanites, again, held the national GOP hostage by delaying party payments as the two factions prepared for an explosive convention. Led by Wisconsin, a handful of dissident parties contributed 51% —the minimum allowable quota—until the following terms were met: One, Gabrielson was to “make no further moves to interfere with or abolish other committees.” Two, that committee appointees “become representative of the states that elect Republicans to office and provide substantial funds.” Third, that the free-spending RNC “cut down on off-year expenses” and that these funds be spent in ways “that will be more usable and effective for state organizations.” From then on, state chapters ought to “have recognition in all of the affairs.”³²⁴

³²³ Thompson, *Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*. 427.

³²⁴ Coleman, “Letter to Sinclair Weeks.”

Communicating through RNC general counsel Robert Gates, the Wisconsin delegation also demanded 1952 committees “headed by someone other than a person from a southern state,” the region still considered beholden to leadership pre-Dixiecrat integration into the party. Each of these committees should be “controlled in a way that all states will get an absolutely fair allotment of facilities at the National.”³²⁵ A far cry from the fundamental party restructuring in Omaha 1949, by late-1951, the Wisconsin Right was reduced to negotiating favorable terms ahead of the convention, remaining on the periphery of decision-making.

But Scott’s 1949 proclamation that some radicals were seeking a reversion to “the party of Garfield,” ignored the growing postwar popularity for an authentically conservative party. Fallout from the 1952 convention laid this bare for both Scott and the rest of the leadership. Although 1952 is recognized as the point when radicals were either exiled or left the Republicans, the mobilization of the right wing can be linked to opposition to the Wisconsin Progressives via Thomas Coleman.

The Colemanites at the Convention

Successful only in relocating the convention to a more favorable turf in Chicago, Coleman set out to sway other industrialists. Most were not ideologically inclined to take on both the Republican Establishment and unions in the early 1950s. Attempting (unsuccessfully) to sway Ernest Weir of the Pittsburgh-based National Steel Corporation to support Taft, Coleman hammered the point that the Ohio Senator was the toughest on the encroaching power of labor: “Is it not Robert A. Taft the one who comes out publicly and flatly against such an outrage [of striking workers]?” asked Coleman. Listing the lesser nominees when it came to business

³²⁵ Robert Gates, “Telegram to WJ Campbell Enclosed in Letter from Coleman to J. Wayne Hood,” July 28, 1951, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 9, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

interests as he saw them, Coleman concluded that “I’ve seen nothing in the papers that would indicated [these candidates] have indicated any willingness to state where their candidate stands on [labor unrest].”³²⁶ An early innovator in reducing government, Coleman also reminded Weir it was also Taft who cut federal expenditures from 60 billion to 39 billion between 1946-1947 from the Senate.³²⁷

In August of 1951, Coleman resigned from his position as Wisconsin finance committee chair to serve as advisor and floor chair for Ohio Senator Robert Taft’s presidential campaign. Taft, despite openly backing his friend Bob LaFollette, Jr. against McCarthy, held Coleman in high esteem, personally and professionally. The feeling was mutual and Taft’s years as one of the few opponents of labor and “small government” in Senate earned him the nickname “Mr. Republican.”³²⁸

Despite Taft supporters outnumbering the moderates in Congress and at the RNC, the 1952 convention dissolved into an orgy of Robert’s Rules maneuvering while distrust and tension mounted between the two sides, even becoming physical at times. Between votes, speeches urged Eisenhower and Taft not to concede as both sides proclaimed victory. Senator Everett Dirksen, who partially owed his political career to Coleman, addressed the delegates, reminding them that conservatives “fell in line” in both 1944 and ’48 for Dewey to their, and the Party’s, detriment. “We followed you before” crowed Dirksen, “and you took us down the road to defeat.”³²⁹ Illinois responded by delivering their delegates to Taft 59-1.

³²⁶ Coleman, Thomas E., “Letter to National Steel President Earnest Weir,” April 15, 1952, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 4, WHS.

³²⁷ Hoplin and Robinson, *Funding Fathers.*, 94.

³²⁸ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism.* 47.

³²⁹ Critchlow. 46.

Leading up to the final vote, Eisenhower challenged the seating of Texas and Louisiana delegates for Taft and accused Coleman of “stealing the South.” In a maneuver he later described as “losing the skirmish to win the war,” Taft surrendered Louisiana delegates but the Eisenhower camp pushed further, claiming these state parties refused to seat pro-Ike delegates.³³⁰ Eisenhower then called for a “Fair Play” resolution, essentially flipping delegates pledged to Taft in a number of southern states to Ike. With the new southern delegates, Eisenhower defeated Taft 595-500, and officially 845-280 after horse trading among all five nominees.

The manner in which Eisenhower took the nomination infuriated Taft supporters, believing they were once again cheated by parliamentary procedure and the internal deal-making of Establishment leadership. They saw enemies at all fronts, like California Governor Earl Warren who allegedly pledged his delegates in exchange for a seat on the Supreme Court—a move that made him an enemy of the Right that came to a head during the John Birch Society’s “Impeach Warren” campaign after the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board* ruling two years later. Senator Richard Nixon became Eisenhower’s vice-presidential nominee in a move that the Right also interpreted as traitorous.

So enraged was the Taft faction after the bitter convention that they refused to campaign on behalf of the Republican nominee. In a private September meeting in Morningside Heights, New York months after the convention, Taft and Eisenhower compromised on a signed document for the Taft faction’s support under the conditions that he would appoint several conservatives to positions in his administration and that he would “fight creeping domestic socialism.” The Morningside Heights compromise was a tentative truce to win the general

³³⁰ “Vote Gives Georgia to Ike; Fine Gets Behind General,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 10, 1952, Vol. 23, No. 293 edition.

election against Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson, but did nothing to mend wounds or unite divergent ideologies within the party.

Aftermath of 1952

In 1952, Eisenhower was so popular he “probably could have been elected by either party,” is the apparent consensus among historians.³³¹ The right wing, however, had finally taken over the RNC and Arthur Summerfield had replaced Gabrielson as party chair, and they moved the 1952 platform rightward, but Taft was simply “more popular with GOP officials than he was the rank-and-file voters.”³³² It was Taft’s third unsuccessful attempt to claim the Republican presidential nomination and that Establishment used backroom deals to defeat the increasing political clout and procedural acumen was no moral victory. Defenders of Eisenhower suggested Taft forfeited any chance he had when he engaged a British ambassador on the merits of isolationism. The debate “killed his chances with the leading Republican professionals” speculated one insider.³³³

As in after Omaha, some observers rationalized the right’s efforts by noting the inroads made pushing the platform in a more conservative direction. Taft “had pledged to cut expenditures and cut taxes. People really paid attention.” Spending was suddenly a point of weakness for the Establishment so “Dewey and Ike also pledged this but we all know they paid no attention... [the] general public is convinced that the Republican Party is no different from the Democrats.”³³⁴

³³¹ Kruse, *One Nation Under God*; Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*. 229.

³³² Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*. 230.

³³³ Roger Faherty, “Letter to Thomas Coleman,” n.d.

³³⁴ Frank Doherty, Title Insurance Printing (Los Angeles), “Letter to Tom Coleman.”

The Wisconsin Right lost hope for a takeover of the national GOP similar to the one they achieved in Wisconsin. Anticipating the moderate Nelson Rockefeller's impending presidential candidacy in 1960, Colemanites saw no end in sight, calling him just another New Dealer. The Wisconsin Right's efforts translated to some tangible wins within the GOP, particularly the September Morningside Heights meeting where select Taft backers received cabinet positions, Arthur Summerfield, among them, who also replaced Gabrielson as RNC Chair that year. Milwaukee industrialist William Grede took a position on Eisenhower's Labor-Management Board.³³⁵ The virulently antiunion Grede also served on NAM's board and was present at the pivotal 1945 Labor-Management Meeting "when NAM proved able to dominate the proceedings" and took control from unions.³³⁶ With Grede and other hardline economic right wingers, the Eisenhower Administration pushed the National Labor Relations board in a conservative direction, restoring management's right to hold captive audience meetings with their workers to inoculate them from union organizing techniques.³³⁷ Larger corporations still benefited the most from the Wisconsin Right's efforts to push the Administration in a more pro-business direction as executives from General Motors, Chase bank and others received cabinet positions leaving some to wonder if "Republicans had changed direction from the New Deal a bit *too* abruptly."³³⁸

³³⁵ He would later offer to resign when asked to choose between his loyalty to Eisenhower or leadership in the John Birch Society. The Administration never formally accepted his resignation.

³³⁶ Andrew A. Workman, "Manufacturing Power: The Organizational Revival of the National Association of Manufacturers, 1941-1945," *The Business History Review* 72, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 279-317, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3116279>.

³³⁷ Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*, 1st ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009). 105.

³³⁸ Kruse, *One Nation Under God*. 85.

While some chose to remain in the party and continue the uphill climb against Dewey and the Establishment, a number of nonpartisan right wing organizations emerged, including the John Birch Society. The 1952 convention in the opinion of Robert Welch, the JBS founder, was “the dirtiest political deal in American History.” This animosity extended to a number of others who lost faith in the Republican Party as a vehicle for change. In Phyllis Schlafly’s 1964 *A Choice, Not an Echo*, featured a chapter on the 1952 convention titled “The Big Steal,” describing how the “kingmakers” thwarted popular will through parliamentary tricks and deception. Instead of addressing the encroaching communist threat, the leaders chose personal survival.

As Coleman put it Ike’s “victory at any cost” at the convention, “greatly affected the ethics of operation in our party affairs.” GOP party leadership was perceived as political opportunists willing to send the nation on the path toward communism in exchange for short term political power. Eisenhower, while not aligned with the corrupt Establishment, mistakenly lent his military stature and “outsider” popularity to preserving their power. It was Eisenhower’s perceived foolishness in allowing his credentials to preserve a corrupt system that prompted Welch to write *The Politician*. In it he accuses Eisenhower of being a communist sympathizer and a tool for the impending communist takeover.

Remaining as an advisor, Coleman retired from politics in the mid-1950s, opening space for moderates to reemerge in party decisions. Kept at bay by “Boss” Coleman’s near-dictatorial control, his abrupt retirement created a leadership vacuum, contributing to rejuvenated intraparty factionalism as conservatives and moderates vied to define the Wisconsin GOP’s identity.

Noting his remarkable legacy in state politics, the Green Bay Press-Gazette noted that, “nearly

five years since [Coleman] retired from active participation in Wisconsin Republican politics...he remains one to conjure with for many politicians.”³³⁹

After his retirement, the Wisconsin GOP had trouble replicating the success of Coleman’s grassroots network and fundraising acumen. Comparing Coleman to Mark Hanna, an industrialist and former national RNC chairman who oversaw President William McKinley’s career, one reporter observed “no local [Hanna] has shown up behind the scenes to take the place of Tom Coleman, the soft spoken, tough minded Madison industrialist who for years beat the politicians’ heads together with on hand and filled the party coffers with the other.”³⁴⁰

Few among the Wisconsin Right thought this to be the case, and in fact believed Eisenhower simply ignored the conditions of the Morningside Heights memo, entirely. When asked about the memo six years later, Coleman told the reporter “I suggest you read that agreement and compare it with the actual procedure that Ike has followed.”³⁴¹ Figures on the right including Phyllis Schlafly and future John Birch Society founder Robert Welch each acknowledged the 1952 convention as the definitive moment when they lost faith in the GOP, instead devoting their energy to non-electoral right wing causes.

The “North-South Horse-Sense Party”

After 1952, powerful allies encouraged Coleman to abandon the Republicans to build a legitimately anti-union, small government “Horse-Sense party,” as GE labor-relations executive Lemuel Boulware suggested. “Lem,” a Wisconsin alumnus, brief UW faculty member, and confidante of Coleman’s, urged his friend to unite conservative factions of the GOP divided by

³³⁹ John Wyngaard, “Coleman Is Still Revered In State Republican Circles.”

³⁴⁰ Doris Fleeson, “Coleman Proving Difficult to Replace,” April 1957.

³⁴¹ Coleman, “Confidential Letter to Edward B. Simmons of Standard-Times Newspaper (Bedford, MA).”

regional differences: “I wish you would organize a North-South” party to overtake entrenched Republicans. For Boulware, Coleman had already proven his value as a conservative savior: “see if you can’t do a job on this demagogy nationally the way you did it to the LaFollettes in Wisconsin.”³⁴² The National Committee for Political Realignment formed in 1951 to channel Midwestern Taftites into an alliance with Southern Democrats, but it failed over jurisdictional disputes and lack of investment from the national party. Nevertheless, Coleman and other less party-entrenched conservatives were beginning the process of uniting right wing northern businessmen with southern Republicans.

The perception that the GOP was saturated with career politicians, operating the party in self-interest, fueled the desire for a third party of-and-for industrialists. “We are sadly in need of some leaders among top business men of the country,” another booster wrote to Coleman, “Why don’t you get together such a group?” Like Coleman’s refusal to run for party chair, he relished the cover afforded by remaining behind the scenes and by the time many on the right had grown disillusioned with the GOP, Coleman was an old man. Even at the peak of his frustration with the party, he never called for leaving it behind. A lifelong Republican in the party’s state-of-birth, it is also possible his sense of loyalty to the party’s legacy was not something he was prepared participate in its undoing.

³⁴² Lemuel Ricketts Boulware, “Letter to Tom Coleman.”

Monuments to a Dying Republicanism

Taft's sudden death in 1953 became a symbolic bookend for the Wisconsin Right's activism within the Republican Party. While McCarthy remained, he was not held in the same esteem among as "Mr. Republican" Robert Taft. Coleman speculated that even though Taft would have died in the White House, "at least he would have had time to reestablish the fundamentals of American Government into our national operation." Referring to Eisenhower and others who abetted the preservation of the status quo: "We would not be in the hands of a few Eastern politicians who have used some well-meaning, but stupid people to take things over completely." Years after the convention, Coleman brooded about what might have been had state parties trained delegates on parliamentary procedure: "If we had produced from states in certain sections of the country even a moderate, respectable number of delegates, that convention would have been won...instead" the plan was disturbed and "the balance had to be obtained from uninstructed delegations."³⁴³

As a curious and subversive tribute to his deceased ally, Coleman created the Taft Memorial Committee to design and fundraise a permanent edifice in the nation's capital. Raising over \$1.2 million, the committee assembled a massive bell tower along Constitution Avenue in downtown Washington, DC, close to the Capitol. President Herbert Hoover was the first to speak at the ribbon cutting, concluding his message with a call for vigilance for Americans to "see that the state is the servant of its people, and that the people are not the servants of the state."

³⁴³ Thomas E. Coleman, "Confidential Letter to Edward B. Simmons of the Standard-Times in Bedford, MA," August 22, 1958, Wisconsin Historical Society.

The carillon also included a statue of Taft with selected engraved quotations along its base, but most significantly, the bells were set to toll every quarter-hour. They strategically built the monument as close to AFL-CIO headquarters as possible and it was Coleman's hope the frequency of their chiming agitated union staff in Taft's honor from beyond the grave.³⁴⁴ Frequency of the Taft Memorial's bells became a congressional issue with Democrats voting to silence the bells, and when Republicans had a majority, voting to chime them again.

"To say that Coleman was bitter" at the state of midcentury Republicans, wrote one Wisconsin political analyst five years later, "would not be to exaggerate."³⁴⁵ The reverberations of 1952 shook Coleman's confidence in the possibility of reform through elections and with moderate Republicans again emerging in his own state, he began to accept the permanency of the New Deal. He lamented "a great lack of Midwestern influence and understanding" within the Eisenhower administration. While never as vitriolic toward the GOP as some other dyed-in-the-wool radicals like Schlafly and Welch, he questioned his lifelong political philosophy of compromise and accommodation and became more issue-based, attacking the larger political structure, than internal party reform.

Joseph McCarthy: The Blunt Instrument of the Wisconsin Right

McCarthy's ongoing investigations were costly and Coleman perpetuated them through constant fundraising at sometimes hundreds of dollars a month in exchange for certificates reading "honorary card-carrying anti-Communist."³⁴⁶ While it is unclear if Coleman gave McCarthy the idea to campaign as a "Red Hunter" he often repeated in the 1940s, the Democrats

³⁴⁴ Coleman, Interview with Author.

³⁴⁵ John Wyngaard, "Coleman Is Still Revered In State Republican Circles."

³⁴⁶ Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*. 160.

were too weak on communism and it would hurt them politically. When the Wisconsin GOP Strategy Committee formally endorsed McCarthy's crusade, Coleman was proud of his party: "we may get rid of many Communist sympathizers and queers who now control policy..." he predicted.³⁴⁷

Aside from keeping McCarthy in the spotlight, the investigations offered a foothold in an otherwise moderate Republican Party. At the time, it was a single-issue they could use to attract conservatives to their right wing platform. When alive, Taft was one of several fellow conservatives who harbored animosity for the hard drinking, boisterous McCarthy (he even endorsed LaFollette in 1946) but also was an early supporter of the Wisconsin senator's investigations as one way to attack the State Department he was attempting to dismantle through spending cuts.³⁴⁸

When Truman entered Korea, many predicted the end of red hunting, including Coleman who interpreted as Democrats finally taking seriously the spread of communism, but the opposite happened. Writing to McCarthy, he stated "I have been trying to figure out what the future holds in your particular activity... am inclined to think that contributions will cease to come in."³⁴⁹ Moving beyond a domestic security issues, the issue expanded into an anti-globalist/internationalist sentiment among conservatives. Just as McCarthy overplayed his hand in the Army-McCarthy hearings attacking decorated generals, Coleman reconfigured McCarthy's reelection campaign to focus on opposing the United Nations in an ultimately unsuccessful campaign.

³⁴⁷ Oshinsky. 161.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 133.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 167.

McCarthy died of complications related to alcoholism in 1957 and others carried the torch of ridding America of of foreign entanglements. McCarthy's only mistake, according to one of his chief admirer's, John Birch Society founder Robert Welch, was to "go it alone" in confronting communism—a misstep Welch kept in mind when developing the structural apparatus for his Society discussed in Chapter Four.³⁵⁰ The Birchers later moved their headquarters to McCarthy's birthplace of Appleton, WI as a tribute to the late-senator and to draw upon the Midwest's fertile pool of anti-internationalist Birch sympathizers.

Since his death, the Right had undergone a process of redeeming McCarthy's name as a "vandalized and victimized" hero.³⁵¹ In a testament to the continued traction of anti-communism in American life, the year after McCarthy's censure, there were approximately 185 anti-collectivist organizations and 135 publications that organized independently of the McCarthy effort across the country.³⁵² Hailed as a hero by businessmen during the 1950s who belonged to McCarthy Societies and McCarthy Foundations, anti-communism remained a vibrant undercurrent in American politics and society.³⁵³ In a 2014 interview, with Tom Coleman's son J. Reed, the Madison-based industrialist and former Bradley Foundation board member noted that McCarthy did important work "at the beginning" of his career before going against the military and succumbing to paranoia brought on by alcoholism.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ Mike Newberry, *The Fascist Revival; the Inside Story of the John Birch Society.*, 1st Edition edition (New Century Publishers, 1961). 38.

³⁵¹ Coleman, Interview with Author. Former Bradley Foundation board member and son of Thomas Coleman noted that he viewed McCarthy's reputation was sullied by unfair attacks and that the work he did in the early 1950s was very important to preserving American democracy.

³⁵² Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism.* 70.

³⁵³ Schrecker, Oshinsky, and others note McCarthy's core support during the hearings from business. Phillips-Fein in *Invisible Hands* notes that Sears Roebuck's president said "McCarthy is doing a job that had to be done to put traitors and spies out of our government.", 58.

³⁵⁴ Coleman, Interview with Author.

The Bricker Amendment: Organizing Fodder for the Exiled Right

After McCarthy's death, Indiana congressman William Jenner and a few others attempted to continue the work of purging subversives, but political traction on the topic had worn thin. As American foreign policy became politicized during the cold war particularly surrounding alliances with other nations, the role of NATO and the United Nations, conservatives embraced it as investigating subversive activity in the state lost currency, post Army-McCarthy hearings.

What qualified as "the Bricker Amendment" altered as several different iterations were introduced in different congressional sessions, but its growing currency as a rallying point helped build the grassroots of the exiled right, building its own institutions. An issue that indicated a specifically right wing ideological proclivity, the contact information collected contributed to expanding the right wing network. The John Birch Society, for instance, first used names collected during Bricker Amendment campaigns as a primary way to build local clubs around the country. Within the JBS, one of the first single-issue groups they established was the Committee Against Foreign Entanglements (CAFÉ), so while no constitutional amendment ever passed, the orchestrators were successful in building their ranks outside of the Republicans.

One article critical of conservatives engaging in the Bricker fight signaled Coleman specifically as leading "a coalition of traitors" and "Republican extremists" who were the strategists "behind the scenes in the present fight... Vast sums of money have been poured out for propaganda."³⁵⁵ It is unclear how much influence Coleman had in promoting the Bricker Amendment fight, but other activists found the article to be "considerably amusing" considering the Bricker Amendment fight was created by "a small group including [JBS Council member]

³⁵⁵ Tom Coleman, "Letter to Joseph Alsop," February 23, 1954, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 5, WHS. Alsop had written an article titled "Trial of Strength" pitting Coleman against Eisenhower.

Pat Manion...which did actually organize and finance a national education organization to support the Bricker Amendment.”³⁵⁶

Anti-internationalist sentiment emerged at the grassroots level across the country like the Oshkosh-based Vigilant Women for the Bricker Amendment. They knocked doors, and raised money to help challenge “internationalism”—the federal government was becoming overly intertwined with foreign states, they argued.³⁵⁷ The Vigilant Women were concerned these treaties had potential to draw the United States into a foreign conflict for the benefit of a global elite and at the expense of everyday Americans.

Barry Goldwater: A New Hope

Arizona senator Barry Goldwater caught the eyes of the Wisconsin Right during the McClellan Committee hearings relating to union corruption—specifically, unsuccessfully attempting to prove UAW Local 833 in Kohler, Wisconsin was stealing funds during the decade-long second Kohler Strike. Indiana conservative Clarence Manion, specifically, saw promise in Goldwater enough to edit six different drafts of his book while suggesting he use the title *Conscience of a Conservative*. Selling Goldwater to a Midwestern conglomerate who lost faith in party politics proved to be difficult. As Manion organized a “Committee of 100 to draft Goldwater” neither Coleman nor JBS co-founder William Grede agreed to join when he asked.

Approaching 1960, Coleman backed Nixon for the presidency but expended none of the resources he did for Taft in 1952. He admitted Goldwater was “right on the ball on this labor question” comparing his virulent anti-unionism to his friend Calvin Coolidge’s. He recalled how

³⁵⁶ Robert Bassett, “Letter to Tom Coleman,” February 27, 1954, Thomas E. Coleman Papers, Box 5, Folder 5, WHS.

³⁵⁷ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*. 85.

as governor of Massachusetts, Coolidge made a name for himself with “his stern treatment of the Boston police strikers.” His reputation as tough on unions elevated him to the vice-presidency in 1920, according to Coleman who also added, “[Goldwater’s] from the West and carries no taint of New York or Tom Dewey.”

Even in 1959, the Establishment remained in control of the party and Coleman reasoned while “it would be marvelous to have a man like Barry Goldwater as President...I do not see at the present time any probability that he could be nominated...” Coleman knew Goldwater even before he ran for Senate and while he openly backed Nixon, he quietly became a Goldwater advisor on convention protocol and campaign organizing. Learning from 1952, he confided to Goldwater that tending to delegates was a full-time job and had to begin at least one year ahead of the convention.

Although Goldwater fell short of the nomination in 1960, he won it in 1964 just a few months after Coleman died of cancer. Although he had “retired” in the mid-1950s he remained active in politics up until his death. Factional battles within the Wisconsin Republicans alienated him from decision-making power, with Democrats taking advantage of the split. At the time of his death and he remained skeptical about the future of the national Republicans but found hope in the burgeoning single-issue fringe groups mobilizing around anti-communism and anti-unionism.

Conclusion

In 1953, a disillusioned young conservative named Russel Kirk articulated what he assumed would be a eulogy for conservatism. Titled *The Conservatives' Route* (later changed to *The Conservative Mind*), Kirk found a publisher in the Chicago-based Regnery. Kirk synthesized an American conservative intellectual history and “breached the wall of liberal condescension” among accepted intellectual engagement.³⁵⁸ By identifying a noble intellectual lineage as forbearers to the conservative movement, Kirk “made it respectable for sophisticated people to identify themselves as men and women of the right” and gave ““an amorphous, scattered’ opposition to liberalism ‘an identity.’”³⁵⁹ Before tracing the lineage, conservatives were dismissed as businessmen fueled not by a vision for America, but greed. Kirks’s book (and later Buckley’s publications) became the anchor for the droves of disillusioned conservatives cast away from the Republicans in the 1950s.

From 1946 to 1952, a surge to the right seemed increasingly possible, mobilizing against the losing candidates of the moderate Eastern Establishment and riding a wave of growing cold war insecurities. In this window, Tom “Boss” Coleman’s career arc covers major milestones in Midwestern conservative development. The Wisconsin Right appeared best poised to define what a new direction for the Republican Party. They defeated the LaFollette Progressives, expanded the Wisconsin Plan to new pockets around the country, and pushed the Republican platform further right. Their vision of creating an anti-union, anti-spending, isolationist GOP fell short in Omaha, but the manner in which their ambition was thwarted at the 1952 convention, left many activists to question if party politics could act as the conduit for change they hoped.

³⁵⁸ Nash, *Reappraising the Right*. 76.

³⁵⁹ Nash. 77. As Kirk’s star grew, he resigned from his recently acquired faculty position at Michigan State in 1953 to protest the “dumbing down of educational standards.”

In March of 1964, prominent Republicans from across the country gathered in Ripon, Wisconsin to pay homage to the late Thomas E. Coleman, the Madison industrialist who launched the careers of many in attendance. The most prominent of which, Senator Joseph McCarthy, had already died of liver complications. On the steps of the “Little White Schoolhouse,” where the Republican Party was founded almost exactly a century earlier. Speakers eulogized Coleman by unveiling a portrait of Ohio Senator Robert Taft. Although a native Ohioan, his likeness was commissioned to be permanently displayed on the schoolhouse walls as a monument to his former campaign advisor, Coleman. Without familiarity of Coleman’s political life, the tribute of hanging another person’s portrait (from a different state) may seem like an unorthodox canonization. Taft was Coleman’s conservative ideological archetype, if lacking McCarthy’s populist appeal on the campaign trail. Taft was the politician, Coleman his strategist: together, they participated in a project of redefining the principles of the Republican Party, gaining a foothold for a conservative shift. Eisenhower’s controversial 1952 presidential nomination over Taft ultimately derailed the conservative project of internal party reformation, leading to the dissolution and departure of many on the Right. By 1964, the right was on the verge of taking control of the party they disavowed over a decade earlier.

Departing the Republicans through resignations and protest, the Wisconsin Right refocused around single-issues like communist subversion in American life and the institutionalization of organized labor in policymaking. This emboldened and alienated right drew satisfaction from McCarthy’s anti-communist crusade upending the GOP, also linked to industrialist mobilization against the 1954-65 Kohler strike. By 1954, as anticommunist fervor declined in popular life, an anti-internationalist movement concerned with preventing the cession of U.S. autonomy to the perceived threats of the United Nations and NATO. Emerging as a new

rallying cry for the Right, it coincided well with the Midwestern industrialists' skepticism of larger Eastern international conglomerates loyalties and commitment to "American" principles. From these conditions emerged new right wing groups, mobilizing outside the Republican Party, notable among them for Midwestern industrialists was the John Birch Society, the subject of the next chapter.

PART III

FROM THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY TO HERITAGE FOUNDATION

CHAPTER FOUR

“LENIN’S USEFUL TEACHINGS”³⁶⁰
The John Birch Society in Wisconsin

I

³⁶⁰ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. Welch quoted on page 139.

The GOP's moderate trajectory proved too weak for many state leaders after Robert Taft's failed presidential bid. Many of his primary supporters concluded the country's salvation would come beyond the constraints of conventional electoral politics. Outside the Republicans' purview, many of these former party activists invested their collective resentment into building new organizations and addressing the threats to the nation the party would not. As a foundational ethos among these new groups, McCarthyism not only continued, but flourished outside the public eye as the John Birch Society (JBS) sought to battle communism in its own way. Across the country, the JBS carried the torch for McCarthy's nativism and xenophobia, tied to the rights of business as they groomed a next generation of right wing activists.

JBS founder Robert Welch accused the Eisenhower campaign of collusion calling the 1952 Republican National Convention "the dirtiest deal in American political history."³⁶¹ For the industrialists who backed Taft, the opaque manner in which their candidate was defeated confirmed that party leadership sought only power and self-preservation and not an authentic debate over issues. The Eisenhower administration was unprepared to take seriously the threat of encroaching communism in American life, so the onus became their self-appointed burden.

The John Birch Society is the institutional embodiment of the right's backlash against Republican Party indifference toward threat of socialism in America. Advances in civil rights, the loosening of traditional social norms, and the combined redistributive power of Keynesian economics and organized labor, faced opposition from wealthy elites and a new, growing class of postwar suburban whites. Outlining the Society's goals, strategy, and structure illustrate how a small group of fringe right industrialists and political exiles impacted national conservative politics from outside the Republican apparatus, planting seeds for future growth. Against the

³⁶¹ Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society*. 7.

manifold expressions of communism's influence in America, Robert Welch assembled his cadre of "political moralists...unwilling to accept ambiguity" on the communism question, who for the first time, could operate free of Republican Party dictates.³⁶²

As a white middle class solidified in postwar American suburbs, Birchers offered alternative venues for community interaction outside of ethnic enclaves or union halls. For many who moved from unionized waged work to salaried, mid-level positions in an expanding managerial class, the JBS provided new social outlets. By hosting weekly reading salons and workshops on how subversives in government and the civil rights movement drove communist plots, the organization filled a social vacuum for newly transplanted suburbanites while radicalizing new activists. At the grassroots, historian Leonard Liggio argued the importance of Midwestern Bircher chapters being the liaison between business leaders and conservative postwar protestants, isolationists and Catholics.³⁶³ The Midwest, particularly Wisconsin, had a dense German-American population which tended to support a foreign policy of isolationism. Midwesterners who joined the JBS feared both a robust, centralized state and the influx blacks in urban centers. Birchers welcomed new white working class demographics into the conservative umbrella of respectability through including Midwestern Catholics and European immigrants.

Society leaders viewed their work as a continuation of Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy's anticommunism crusade but with a sophistication and durability the Senator lacked. Wisconsin claimed the most founding members of any state (three of eleven total) and added at least two more during the first Council meeting held in Milwaukee in February 1959, two months after its founding. These viewpoints were tied to longstanding anxieties of uprooting

³⁶² Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face: Organizing the American Conservative Movement 1945-65* (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2002). 197.

³⁶³ Leonard Liggio, "A New Look at Robert A. Taft," 1973.

domestic communism—broadly defined—and, promoting a traditional Americanism tethered to interests most aligned with the small family firm: anti-unionism, nativism, and dismantling of New Deal-Great Society institutions.

The foundational moment for the John Birch Society came at National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) committee meetings in the mid-1950s. Welch sat on NAM's board of directors and was also a regional vice-president before resigning in 1956 to focus on the Society that would emerge two years later. As Welch's public appearances tarnished the Society's reputation, a silent coup created a three-man "Strategy Council" in 1964 controlling both media appearances and agenda moving forward. The Strategy Council, comprised of industrialists William Grede (Milwaukee), who served as chairman, Bob Stoddard (Oregon), and Fred Koch (Wichita), ran day-to-day operations in the Society and approved all public relations appearances. Grede also owned the suburban Chicago office building where the JBS Midwestern headquarters was located. With the support of the Council, this core triumvirate shifted Society toward pragmatic, business-centric initiatives, downplaying the paranoid reputation that which Welch had branded them.

Birchers modeled the Society's internal structure on communist organizations. As early as 1955, would-be leaders networked at NAM meetings and suburban cookouts, building committees in the vein of what Welch called "Lenin's useful teachings."³⁶⁴ Aping communist tactics, the JBS tapped into NAM resources and recruitment opportunities while using its meetings as a platform for espousing ideology. From their core Council, the JBS focused on

³⁶⁴ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. 139.

grassroots mobilization, replicating Vladimir Lenin’s “dedicated few” or “militant minority” conception of a tight-knit, disciplined leadership.³⁶⁵

As the conservative movement blossomed in the 1960s on college campuses, in churches, bookstores, and neighborhood clubs, many JBS members utilized their training to guide strategy within the movement. However, as it diversified in the late 1960s, internal Society rivalries intensified as key leaders were pulled in different directions. These factors contributed to the Society’s diminished significance by the 1970s, while leaving a legacy as formative in the development as conservative thinkers and activists who populated key positions in the conservative movement in decades to come.

II

Historiography

Popular in the Midwest, but neither southern segregationist nor Eastern corporate elite, Birchers occupy a blind spot in the broader field of conservative political history—a mediator between wealthy donors and grassroots activists. Avoidance of electoral politics has also contributed their obsolescence in historical accounts as political scholars tend to assess change through election results. Midwestern businessmen offered newly-suburban whites an entryway to greater social distinction and community through institutionalized conspiracy peddling that were also tied to concrete political programs.

Contextualizing the JBS’s position in the conservative movement, historian Michelle Nickerson noted that “few Americans know what the John Birch Society is” much less understand its impact on conservatism in the twentieth century. Academics have ignored the

³⁶⁵ Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society*. 10.

“significant but troublesome institution” within the larger conservative movement, treating the vocal conspiracy theorists as fringe elements who stoked communist paranoia decades after McCarthyism diminished in mainstream influence.³⁶⁶

Contrary to the Society’s relegation to the fringe, many wealthy and influential industrialists made its mission their lives’ work. Combining organizing concerned Americans in the country’s suburbs with a blend of tabloid material, race-baiting, and communist paranoia the Society quietly expanded into nearly every sector of politics and life.³⁶⁷ The field acknowledges both JBS contributions and agitation to the postwar American Right, but never as central players in the movement’s broader interests and long-term trajectory.

The first critical analyses of the JBS were conducted by labor unions, socialists, and anti-fascist watchdog groups, all treating the organization as an immediate threat to democracy.³⁶⁸ Published in the early 1960s, these works depicted the Birchers as an ambitious stealth group comprised of fascists, anti-Semites, and white nationalists.³⁶⁹ D.J. Mulloy’s *The World of the John Birch Society* (2014) was the first contemporary historical work to focus exclusively on the JBS, arguing they “played a crucial role in conservatism’s revival” by serving as the extreme right flank, allowing Goldwater to appear as a moderate. Mulloy assessed that Birchers “would never again come close to the potential level of influence—and notoriety—it had in the years 1963 and

³⁶⁶ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. 167, 169.

³⁶⁷ John Savage, “The John Birch Society Is Back: Bircher Ideas, Once on the Fringe, Are Increasingly Commonplace in Today’s GOP and Espoused by Friends in High Places. And the Group Is Ready to Make the Most of It,” *POLITICO Magazine*, July 16, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/07/16/the-john-birch-society-is-alive-and-well-in-the-lone-star-state-215377>.

³⁶⁸ Newberry, *The Fascist Revival; the Inside Story of the John Birch Society*.; Michael Newberry, “The John Birch Society and the National Association of Manufacturers: Political Bedfellows and Offspring,” *The Worker*, May 21, 1961.

³⁶⁹ G. Edward Griffin, *Life and Words of Robert Welch: Founder of The John Birch Society*, First Thus edition (Thousand Oaks, Calif: American Media, 1975); Claire Conner, *Wrapped in the Flag: A Personal History of America’s Radical Right* (Beacon Press, 2013); Newberry, *The Fascist Revival; the Inside Story of the John Birch Society*.; Russ Bellant, *Old Nazis, the New Right, and the Republican Party: Domestic Fascist Networks and Their Effect on U.S. Cold War Politics*, 3rd edition (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1991).

1964.”³⁷⁰ While their rise in the public eye is linked to the Goldwater campaign, this chapter refutes the Society’s demise by 1964, expanding its influence, even as it went underground.

Countering early interpretations of the JBS as politically counterproductive extremism, Scandinavian historian Niels Bjerre-Poulsen questions whether they were an “extremist” organization at all, arguing they never engaged in law-breaking and are simply defined by their making outrageous claims about compromised elected officials and subversives in control of state power.³⁷¹ Whether it was campaigning for Goldwater’s 1960 and 1964 campaigns, cultivating the New Right stronghold in Orange County, or anti-civil rights backlash in the South, Birchers were “intent upon thwarting” what they interpreted as “any US-Soviet cooperation, withdrawing America from the United Nations, exposing Communists in the federal government, and impeaching Chief Justice Earl Warren.”³⁷² Moving beyond its polarizing public rhetoric, this chapter documents the Society’s programmatic and political achievements and their incorporation into the modern conservative movement.

Orange County, California had the greatest density of Bircher chapters, resulting in the expected majority of scholarship to focus on membership in the southwestern region of the country. Emphasizing the central position stay-at-home women had in day-to-day political work, Michelle Nickerson describes these “kitchen table activists” as the key demographic in building the grassroots in California, Arizona, and other “Sunbelt” states. Using their homes as meeting spaces for planning and recruiting, these conservative women worked on lowering taxes, challenging local schools’ curriculum, and chastising social unrest over jobs and racial discrimination they interpreted as misplaced. Refocusing the lens toward contributions made by

³⁷⁰ Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society*. 104.

³⁷¹ Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face*.

³⁷² Thomas Thomas Mallon, “A View from the Fringe,” *The New Yorker*, January 11, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/11/a-view-from-the-fringe>. *The New Yorker*, January 11, 2016.

Midwestern industrialists, more long term goals within the Society take center stage, particularly their anti-union, deregulatory advocacy and the continuation of reformulated Red Scare intimidation in communities and workplaces. This altered regional focus also provides needed depth to JBS demographic makeup, internal divisions, motivations of leadership, and legacy.

As both white nationalism and conspiracy theories return to mainstream discourse, the John Birch Society demands a re-examination as more central to American conservative historiography and right wing political strategy than previously considered. This chapter explores the origin of the JBS and particularly their activities in the Midwest. Challenging working-class solidarities forged over decades of struggle, Birchers courted white American workers as they moved to the suburbs by manipulating the same fissures around race and social status exploited by McCarthyism in the early 1950s.

Scholars and journalists seeking a historical lineage for the conspiratorial and xenophobic backbone of Donald Trump's 2016 presidential victory have re-discovered the Birchers. In a 2016 article, journalist Thomas Mallon called the John Birch Society "the most robust political fringe group of its day, intent upon thwarting any U.S.-Soviet cooperation, withdrawing America from the United Nations, exposing Communists in the federal government, and impeaching Chief Justice Earl Warren."³⁷³ The *New Republic's* Jeet Heer argues their "barely hidden" racist and xenophobic views as a lasting ideological strain within American culture that Trump cultivated into an electoral base strong enough to deliver the presidency.³⁷⁴ Heer locates white supremacist and anti-Semitic dog whistles in Trump supporters' reinvigoration of the once-

³⁷³ Thomas Mallon. "A View From the Fringe: The John Birch Society and the Rise of the Radical Right." *The New Yorker*, January 11, 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/01/11/a-view-from-the-fringe>

³⁷⁴ Jeet Heer, "Donald Trump's United States of Conspiracy," *The New Republic*, June 14, 2016, <https://newrepublic.com/article/134257/donald-trumps-united-states-conspiracy>.

obscure term “cultural Marxism”—the idea that communists infiltrated popular culture—a commonly used phrase among Birchers in the mid-20th century.³⁷⁵ It was former Wisconsin Bircher and “Godfather of the New Right” Paul Weyrich’s popularizing the use of “cultural Marxism,” in the 1980s and 1990s that returned the phrase to popular right wing lexicon. While debates over “culture” would become a primary organizational tool for the right from the late 1970s to the present, the development of the John Birch Society finds its origins linked to more tangible issues in the early 1950s, discussed in the next section.

III

Origins within the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)

The John Birch Society built its leadership network and early recruitment pool from the ranks of the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). At the 1955 NAM convention in Hot Springs, New York, Welch treated his fellow manufacturers to a three-hour presentation outlining his vision for a new direction within NAM. From this meeting, he identified a core committee of loyalists, proactive in opposing communists. The issues Welch highlighted were familiar—dangers of an encroaching state, communists at home and abroad, reckless union power, and the need for a more nativist America. At its conclusion, several attendees requested Welch speak to their local chambers of commerce, while a Pennsylvania industrialist lauded Welch’s “crusading urge,” and encouraged the candy manufacturer to expand his pro-American, pro-free market sermons beyond the gates of NAM.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Jeet Heer, “Trump’s Racism and the Myth of ‘Cultural Marxism,’” *The New Republic*, August 15, 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144317/trumps-racism-myth-cultural-marxism>.

³⁷⁶ F.E. Masland, “Letter to William J. Grede,” September 23, 1955, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, WHS.

In 1955, both Welch and William Grede served on NAM's Education Department where they prioritized expanding the organization's community outreach, targeting local clergy and universities. Campus lectures and sermons had the capacity to reach a vast audience and the duo worked to get professors and priests aligned with their message. NAM representatives held informational sessions with religious leaders, outlining the pitfalls of communism in America and the impact on Christianity.³⁷⁷ Guest speaking at universities, Welch lamented that leftist professors failed to teach "economics from the conservative point of view," and in correspondence recommended that NAM members use their personal networks to influence curriculum at nearby colleges in their respective jurisdictions. He mentioned the necessity to infiltrate political science and economics departments, in particular.³⁷⁸

Welch suggested Council members network with their local university trustees, imparting on them the necessity to include works like vanguard libertarian intellectual Leonard Read's *Government: An Ideal Concept* (1954). Welch encouraged his early acolytes to fund these projects by offering free copies of Read's magnum opus to university employees and students.

Read's personal life was one of entrepreneurial spirit that would have resonated with the growing NAM contingency. A former World War I pilot, Read returned to his home state of Michigan to launch a chain of grocery stores that ultimately failed. He left Michigan, accepting an administrative position in with the Burlingame, California Chamber of Commerce where he launched the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE) which served as inspiration for the creation of the Mont Pelerin Society. Devoutly religious, Read combined libertarian economics and "spiritual ideal" to justify the piety of capitalism in opposition to the market controls of the

³⁷⁷ Kruse, *One Nation Under God*. 17.

³⁷⁸ Robert Welch, "Letter to NAM Board of Directors," January 10, 1955, William Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, Wisconsin Historical Society.

New Deal. Read authored dozens of similar books, joining the holy with the free market.

Government argued the state's role was in "providing justice, not pity" safeguarding the nation against anarchy (with force, if necessary) but with no further intrusion.³⁷⁹ Both Read and Grede were active in the 1930s pro-business and Christianity group "Spiritual Mobilization," an early 20th century cross-pollination of religious and libertarian strains created to challenge the popularity of the "Social Gospel" and New Deal.

Beyond these target audiences of community leaders, there was enough popular interest in Welch's speaking engagements to support a newsletter. Welch rounded up a group of "outstanding men" committed to halting the "frightening progress of the world-wide Communist conspiracy," in May, 1957. Asking William Grede to join the editorial board for his mailer titled *One Man's Opinion* (later *American Opinion*, and presently *The New American*) the board also included future John Birch Society founder and former NAM president, Wisconsin industrialist Cola Parker (Kimberly-Clark Paper Company). Rounding out Welch's editors were figures who became icons of the of twentieth century conservatism, including Clarence Manion, Ludwig Von Mises, and A.C. Wedemeyer, the popular retired anti-Truman general who assisted in the invasion of Normandy and was an vocal supporter of Chiang Kai-Shek in China.³⁸⁰

Welch resigned from NAM leadership in 1956 to focus solely on his future organization, believing he had the backing of enough prominent figures to disrupt the conservative status quo. At the 1957 Hot Springs NAM convention Welch called a meeting with Grede, Parker, Oregon industrialist Ernest Swigert, and Wedemeyer. On the invitation, details of the meeting were

³⁷⁹ Leonard E. Read, *Government-an Ideal Concept*, First Edition edition (The Foundation for Economic Education, 1954). The origins of the contemporary arguments for funding the police and military while cutting public funding can be found in Read's arguments.

³⁸⁰ Robert Welch, "Letter to William J. Grede," May 17, 1957, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, WHS; Robert Welch, "Confidential Letter to All Members of the Editorial Advisory Committee of One Man's Opinion," June 25, 1957, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, WHS. Parker was also an "American Employer Delegate" at the International Labor Organization (ILO) in Geneva, Switzerland.

vague, simply noting “an issue of significant importance” with “nothing directly to do with NAM.”³⁸¹ Two years later, a socialist newspaper connected this small meeting to the birth of the JBS in an article titled “the John Birch Society and NAM: Political Bedfellows and Offspring.” Fear of organized labor was the topic among the Birchers, suggesting the Democratic nominee would either be UAW president Walter Ruether or “one of Ruether’s stooges” like John F. Kennedy.³⁸²

Welch identified seventeen men of having a “proved ability as well as fervent patriotism” to co-found his new organization.³⁸³ Of these solicited seventeen, only eleven “men of high caliber”³⁸⁴ could attend the Indianapolis meeting on December 8 & 9, 1958. Charter members with Midwestern ties ran deep, including St. Louis industrialist W.B. McMillan and retired Indiana Chamber of Commerce president Louis Rothenberg. Founding members from Wisconsin included Parker, Grede, and Milwaukee-based architect Fitzhugh Scott (who designed the iconic Allen-Bradley clock tower). Other notable charter members included T. Coleman Andrews, a former Internal Revenue Services commissioner, libertarian, and vocal *Brown v. Board* opponent and Lawrence Bunker who served as Douglas MacArthur’s aide and spokesman. Industrialists not from Wisconsin included Robert Stoddard and Ernest Swigert, as well as University of Illinois-Champaign Classics Professor Revilio P. Oliver. Oliver became the subject of criticism after penning an article titled “Marxmanship in Dallas” shortly after the

³⁸¹ Welch, “Letter to William J. Grede.” In subsequent correspondence between presentation attendees Grede and Swigert, it appears the new organization’s level of participation in national politics was discussed in preparation for the 1960 election with a rift forming between Nixon and Goldwater. All agreed Goldwater to be the superior candidate they did not want to risk splitting votes, guaranteeing Rockefeller.

³⁸² Newberry, “The John Birch Society and the National Association of Manufacturers: Political Bedfellows and Offspring.”

³⁸³ Robert Welch, “Invitation to Founding JBS Meeting in Indianapolis,” November 4, 1958, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, WHS. In a handwritten subscript, Welch noted his desire to keep NAM unaware of this new group, reflected by only inviting former two NAM members, Ernest Swigert and Grede. Later the circle was expanded.

³⁸⁴ “William Grede Explains Birch Society Makeup,” n.d.

JFK assassination speculating that the government colluded with communists in the killing. Notably, Nickerson documented only one woman was present at the JBS charter signing: Marguerite Dice, an assistant who served coffee.

Assured of their duty to the country, years later, an admiring Bircher cadet wrote to Grede predicting that these “elite” Americans “very well may... go down in history, along with the signers of the Declaration of Independence” as the country’s most indispensable patriots.³⁸⁵ Although Council members were uniformly wealthy (an unspoken requisite for membership) and racially homogenous, differences still arose. Developing a national, agreed upon charter brought up issues including the centrality of racial segregation, religion, and even temperance as the skeletal structure of the Society molded to their needs.

Council meetings could be stoic affairs—Welch and others were proud teetotalers, although Wisconsin members opted for drinks. At the Milwaukee meeting, a Texas businessman was taken aback by the level of alcohol consumption, later complaining to Welch that “Christ drank wine at the wedding feast,” but potables described by the 18th Amendment as “intoxicating liquors” had no place in a group aspiring to be the country’s moral leadership. Another Council member later resigned because the Society’s mission statement did not explicitly make reference to Jesus Christ.

Contrary to popular thought, neither Fred Koch (Koch Industries, Wichita) or Harry Bradley (Milwaukee-based Allen-Bradley) were founding Council members. Harry Bradley and company president, Fred Loock, joined at the second Council meeting held in Milwaukee, January 1959. Koch joined in January of 1961 after Oregon industrialist and co-founder, Ernest Swigert resigned in protest, November 1960 due to the *Politician* scandal. (Welch accused

³⁸⁵ CJ Humphries, “Letter to William Grede from Iowa Organizer CJ Humphries,” January 24, 1973, William J. Grede Papers, Box 17, Folder 3, WHS.

President Eisenhower of being a “Communist Sympathizer” in his monograph *The Politician* in the mid-1950s.)³⁸⁶

Internal Dynamics & Early Growth

From its conceptual seedlings in NAM, Welch ran the Society like a dictator, fearing that democracy left the Council vulnerable to “infiltration, distortion and disruption.”³⁸⁷ The name “John Birch” was an homage an American Baptist missionary-turned-military operative who was killed by Mao’s forces in China. Welch first published *The World of John Birch* in 1954, interweaving a biographical account of Birch and larger themes of personal ethics, religion, and the state. For Welch and the Council members, the most authentic patriots were the unsung casualties of communism, a narrative they rehashed to justify their behind-the-scenes activism as necessary acts for national preservation. To the Council, Birch was the first casualty in a larger postwar clash of civilizations, and communism was winning. Their martyr Birch embodied the notion that “cultural traditions and ethical forces” were still strong enough to counter encroaching subversive practices at home and abroad.³⁸⁸

As for finances, despite Mulloy’s assertion the JBS’s apex of influence was 1964, its budget increased into the 1970s, and according to other financial statements, they were rarely hurting for funding, even profitable. At the end of the Society’s first full year in existence, they had a total income of \$71,225.80 with expenses of \$69,673.73. In 1962, the Society had a budget of \$825,376. By 1963 the JBS spent \$35,000-per-week on 40 field organizers which,

³⁸⁶ Robert Welch, “Letter to the Council,” July 3, 1961, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 4, WHS.

³⁸⁷ Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society*. 10.

³⁸⁸ Robert H. Welch, *The Life of John Birch* (Boston: Western Islands, 1954). 2.

including volunteers, comprised of 119 employees—roughly the size of a statewide union.³⁸⁹ By 1965, their balance sheets indicated \$1,379,743 in total income and by 1969, they brought in \$3,731,870, supporting eighty-two chapters, nationally. In 1973, the Society employed 86 full time organizers and continued to add staff until the 1980s. The decline in the 1980s was likely due to increased competition from other conservative organizations (discussed in the next chapter) and more likeminded elected officials in office (reduced need).³⁹⁰

Continuing McCarthy's Mission

The John Birch Society replicated McCarthy's anticommunist work with a sophistication and long-term vision the Senator lacked. Despite being only a few years removed from the Red Scare, a 1961 internal JBS membership survey indicated a majority of rank-and-file Birchers thought McCarthy "did not go far enough" in exposing the communist threat. Where McCarthy read *Mein Kampf* for ideas on strategy, Welch learned from McCarthy's hubristic decision to "go it alone" without "building a grassroots, national machine" and his failure to do so "was his downfall." Welch wanted a critical mass of allies and his new Society was "intent on remedying these past errors" by mobilizing grassroots hostility to communism into a unified movement.³⁹¹

Birchers had hundreds of chapters around American towns and suburbs throughout the 1960s and 70s, but they also infiltrated other organizations—American Legions, veterans' organizations, even bowling leagues—in an attempt to influence local level decision-making. Other organizations openly welcomed the participation of Birchers like the Christian Anti-

³⁸⁹ "John Birch Society Annual Report"; Welch, "Letter to the Council"; Robert Welch, "Report to the Council," June 11, 1963, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6, WHS.

³⁹⁰ John Birch Society, Inc., "Statement of Income and Expenses and Deficit," Various dates, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, Wisconsin Historical Society.

³⁹¹ Newberry, *The Fascist Revival; the Inside Story of the John Birch Society*. 38.

Communist Crusade, appreciating the Milwaukee and Chicago Birchers as “the leaders and hardest workers” in setting up “schools” for conservative education and organizing workshops.³⁹²

Birchers in Wisconsin

High per-capita family income combined with traditional conservative ideals to make predominantly white Orange County, CA ripe for Bircher activity and the same was true for many Midwestern suburbs during its industrial heyday. Wealthy Wisconsin industrialists were vital to JBS financing and programmatic planning; well represented, Wisconsinites sat three of the eleven founding Council members. After the initial Indianapolis meeting in December 1958, the second took place in Milwaukee two months later, adding even more Wisconsin-based activists to the Society’s ranks. The Council seats expanded to twenty-eight in Milwaukee and at least six of them were Milwaukee-based industrialists or close allies: Grede, Edward Hamilton, Parker, Scott, Harry Bradley, and Fred Look. of the most influential activists were regional industrialists like the Racine-based Fritz Rench, owner of the flooring company, Racine Industries. Rench became a crucial bridge connecting the former Dixiecrats with Midwestern industrialists as the movement grew comfortable as an entrenched interest in Washington, DC.

Ten years after its founding, enough Milwaukee-based industrialists and community leaders were involved in the John Birch Society to explore the possibility of creating a “Blue Ribbon Chapter” combining their extensive resources into a unified task force of the city’s elites. That same year, the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) union newsletter, *The Packinghouse Worker*, warned its membership that the John Birch Society’s actual purpose was

³⁹² Kruse, *One Nation Under God*. 156.

to eliminate unions. The article noted that fourteen of the twenty-four Council members were “industrialists with long records of fighting unions” while “all or most” of their collective employees worked in open shops.³⁹³ Milwaukee was the Bircher’s second home, holding a School for Anti-Communists weekend training seminar at Milwaukee’s Pfister Hotel there a year later with attendance of over 750 people. It is unclear if a Blue Ribbon Chapter ever materialized in Milwaukee, but eliminating union influence in the state remained top priority.

Independent industrialists in the state were the ones to do it. They held a unique advantage over larger corporations in their ability to remain comparatively anonymous. Of his own foundry business, Grede observed that while “Milwaukee is a larger community...my company is not the dominating corporation here.” Nor did he, “make or sell a brand name product” that could be boycotted after his anti-worker practices became public. The freedom granted to him “as a closely held private corporation” allowed “no opportunity to develop dissension among the shareholders. Because of this it was not as difficult [to engage in radical politics] as it might have been for some.”³⁹⁴

Grede may have had the dilemma of Council member Ed Hamilton of Hamilton Manufacturing in mind because of the pushback he received after Welch’s condemnation of Eisenhower as a communist sympathizer. Angry stockholders questioned Hamilton’s position in the Society prompting him to write Welch, begging him to tone down conspiratorial rhetoric and accusations toward Republicans. Hamilton wrote that “bad publicity will kill the whole program” and that “the [JBS] is already hurt and seriously so” but he also included a statement of deference to Welch asking that “it is my hope that you will not think I have gone soft.” Addressing *The Politician* scandal directly, Hamilton asked “by what stretch of the imagination

³⁹³ no author, “Birchers Oppose Labor Unions,” *The Packinghouse Worker*, November 1967. 10.

³⁹⁴ Grede, “Letter to Joseph Majerskey.”

you can consider a man a communist who has given his entire life to the service of his country. [sic]”³⁹⁵ Hamilton’s appeal to Welch reflects internal fracturing at the highest levels of the Society only a year after its formation—a rift that would soon lead to a reorganization of JBS leadership and goals. That he did not want Welch to think he’d “gone soft” implies that Welch remained a respected, even feared, figure before his diminished internal credibility in the mid-1960s.

Milwaukee was exceptionally fertile ground for the John Birch Society in both rank-and-file membership. The membership rolls for the metro area alone reveal the breadth of JBS traction among bank executives, brewers, ministers, and members of the Wisconsin Manufacturers Association (WMA). Not to be confused with Coleman’s “McCarthy Club” of anti-union Milwaukee industrialists in the 1950s, the 1968 Joseph R. McCarthy Foundation, Inc., fundraised to pay “tribute to McCarthy” while also seeking to “expose the communist menace” across the country. The McCarthy Foundation, Inc. was founded by an attorney from the town of Kohler at the height of the UAW strike at the plant and Welch often spoke at their fundraisers while Grede sat on the board.³⁹⁶ In a letter to Grede, a grateful Welch thanked his longtime friend for his dedication to building the Wisconsin chapters, noting that he had a “feeling we are taking the city.”³⁹⁷

Bircher anti-unionism in Wisconsin extended beyond industrial centers and suburban hubs, opposing organizing efforts among immigrant farmhands. In 1966, the agricultural worker union, Obreros Unidos, marched one hundred miles from Waushara County to the capitol of Madison publicizing substandard wages and working conditions in the Wisconsin agricultural

³⁹⁵ Lloyd Fitzgerald, “Letter to E.P. Hamilton of Hamilton Manufacturing Company,” August 1, 1960, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

³⁹⁶ No Author, “Joseph McCarthy Unit to Hear Robert Welch,” *The Capital Times*, April 5, 1968.

³⁹⁷ Robert Welch, “Letter to William Grede,” February 3, 1960, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

economy. Event organizer Jesus Salas recalled the barrage of unfavorable press surrounding the march and “immediately understood [the marchers] were going to face difficulties.” According to Salas, *The Waushara Argus* newspaper published multiple anti-immigrant and anti-union articles in the weeks leading up to the march, all with familiar talking points. “They [Wisconsin JBS chapters] must have made contact with California Birchers,” Salas deduced, “because they used the same language” as opponents of the United Farm Workers’ (UFW) grape strike.³⁹⁸

Bircher agitation around the state prompted Wisconsin Republican Congressman Melvin Laird to publicly criticize the Society in the national press. Laird, a Wisconsin conservative and future Secretary of Defense under Richard Nixon, was quoted in a January 1965 newspaper column by conservative journalist Robert Novak, as directing constituents concerned about communism away from JBS projects, toward party structures. Criticizing them for “their irresponsible and rash actions” that “split ranks” Laird confided in Novak that he much preferred volunteers for Republicans over the JBS. Conservatives should redirect back to “the road of the Founding Fathers” by working “through an established party.”³⁹⁹ That by 1965, members of the GOP were concerned about Bircher activism diluting the party is indicative of the Society’s success in centering more polarizing issues Republicans were unwilling to address a decade earlier.

Public blowback in Wisconsin over Laird’s stance was swift and his office was inundated with constituent letters defending the Society’s anti-migrant/anti-union stance. Among the offended parties was “an optometrist who appeared to be on a personal witch hunt for

³⁹⁸ Jesus Salas, Sergio Gonzalez, PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Interview, Digital Recording, October 27, 2016, In author’s possession. For more information on Obreros Unidos organizing in Wisconsin, see Gonzalez’s book *Mexicans in Wisconsin* (2017) and his dissertation titled “‘I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me’: Latino Immigration, Religion, and Community Formation in Milwaukee, 1920-1990,” PhD diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2018.

³⁹⁹ Melvin Laird, “Letter to Larry Keester,” October 1, 1965, Melvin Laird Papers, Box 42, Folder 27, Wisconsin Historical Society.

communists” around his hometown of Shawano and dozens of other aggrieved letter writers. Challenging Laird’s accusation that the Society was considered a “splinter” group, a concerned Wisconsinite wrote, “why do Republican big wigs feel it necessary to denounce” them? All Birchers he interacted with were all “upright citizens and outstanding patriots.”⁴⁰⁰ There was nothing “extremist” in awakening the public to “the almost complete communist encirclement of our country.”⁴⁰¹ Despite these public consternations, Laird had an amicable relationship with individual Birchers such as Grede Publishing company management which kept an autographed headshot of Laird on their showroom wall.

Evidence that the Society filled an organizing opportunity left open by moderate Republicans is reflected by their steady membership numbers, participation levels and correspondence to leadership. Rank-and-filers shared leadership’s high hopes for the JBS in Wisconsin: “It is indeed good to belong to an active, directed unit of a growing army in this struggle with the Communists” wrote a “working mother,” who was “deeply grateful for the superb quality of the strategy, direction and dedication provided by your leadership,” she wrote to Grede.⁴⁰² Milwaukee had enough supporters to hold the first official “John Birch Day” on November 13, 1964 (a week after Goldwater’s landslide loss to Lyndon Johnson). Around this time, Wisconsin’s field organizer complained to leadership that membership had “grown rapidly so much that we can’t keep up the contacts and give the new chapters the supervision that they require.”

⁴⁰⁰ Daniel Oliver, “Letter to Melvin Laird,” October 5, 1965, Melvin Laird Papers, Box 42, Folder 27, WHS.

⁴⁰¹ Walter Raucher, “Letter to Melvin Laird,” October 4, 1965, Melvin Laird Papers, Box 42, Folder 27, WHS.

⁴⁰² “A Working Mother,” “Letter to William Grede,” May 17, 1960, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

The combination of Milwaukee's rapidly expanding suburbs and segregation were an ideal reservoir for cultivating a base of members ideologically aligned with these issues. Investing in media messaging around Milwaukee, Grede purchased a newspaper and publishing company in the Milwaukee suburb of Wauwatosa in 1955 and renamed it the Grede Publishing Corporation. Grede's brother ran the publishing company while his daughter ran the Bircher-franchised American Opinion Bookstore (also in Wauwatosa). (Allen-Bradley gave seed money to William F. Buckley to start the *National Review* and, at the local level, provided money to the Bircher stealth group, The Committee Against Foreign Entanglements.) Other conservative-leaning newspapers in suburban Milwaukee enclaves included *The Wauwatosa New-Times*, the *Brookfield News*, and the *Elm Leaves* (Elm Grove, WI).

Midwestern Birchers also contributed to forming the Henry Regnery Publishing Company (Chicago) and Victor Publishing Company (Shepherdsville, KY). The latter was the brainchild of Indiana Bircher Pat Manion's and established for the purpose of publishing Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative* to disassociate it from the usual stable of conservative publishing houses. In the 1960s, an anticommunist group called "The Truth, Inc." emerged out of Wisconsin's largest evangelical church (Elmbrook Church based in the Milwaukee suburb of Brookfield) coordinated with the Marquette University High School Political Science Club. The Truth, Inc. published a weekly educational reader called *The Truth About Communism* featuring articles with titles like "From Democracy to Mobocracy," which listed the growing number of countries on the path to communism around the globe.⁴⁰³ The group's international headquarters is still in operation in Milwaukee, now known as "Telling the Truth, Inc." and is a fundamentalist evangelical organization.

⁴⁰³ Marquette High School Political Science Club, "From Democracy to Mobocracy" (The Truth, Inc., No 1963), In author's possession.

Wisconsin Birchers spearheaded the effort to push the national headquarters in Belmont, MA towards engaging shop floor issues that would have only appealed to business owners. The Society's call to dissolve the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a federal agency that mandated (and enforced) safety regulations on worksites, would not have happened otherwise. Jerry Kuplack, who became the Bircher's anti-OSHA committee coordinator personally thanked the Wisconsin Birchers for "finally [getting the Society] into the ballgame" of fighting state interference in the workplace.⁴⁰⁴ On businesses conforming to OSHA requirements, Grede argued safe conditions were also in the best interest of ownership and regulation was unnecessary. Comparing workers to a farmer's cattle, Grede was of the opinion it was in the best interest of the farmer to maximize the comfort of those cows for the best yields. "Those cows never had a union" Grede argued in speeches, nor did they need state interference for a good life. To Grede, the beauty of the free market allowed workers the freedom to find a new job if they felt unsafe, while also incentivizing ownership to provide the best conditions for the best yields. A likely additional motive for attempting to repeal OSHA was to obscure safety violations from public record when it was time for companies to bargain with unions.

On other workplace regulations in Wisconsin and elsewhere, Birchers were involved in opposing state-level attempts to pass variations on the Equal Rights Amendment. These proposals designated women a protected class, providing safeguards against workplace discrimination while also equalizing pay. In Wisconsin, the "Equality of Sexes Amendment" went to statewide referendum in April, 1973, falling short 520,936 to 447,240 votes. According to Grede, the Birchers were integral to the defeat: "If you dig into the background of the stunning, last minute defeat of the Equal Rights referendum in Wisconsin in April," he wrote a

⁴⁰⁴ Jerry Kuplack, "Letter to William Grede," November 20, 1972.

friend “you will find that the JBS had a decisive, if not dominant, role in its defeat...[which] we hope will be a precedent for future attempts.”⁴⁰⁵

The most famous anti-ERA activist, Phyllis Schlafly, solicited the assistance of Wisconsin Birchers for her St. Louis-based organization. Schlafly, author of *The Big Steal*, which outlined how “kingmakers” had stolen the 1952 nomination from Taft was “ideologically lock-step with the JBS” according to Grede but they declined to provide her with funding based on an undisclosed “problem with her strategy.”⁴⁰⁶ It is unclear if Schlafly and her husband were Birchers, but they were active in a Catholic-specific, ideologically aligned sister group, the Cardinal Mindstenzy Organization (CMO).

In 1989, Birchers moved their headquarters to Appleton, WI, for the symbolism associated with moving to Joseph McCarthy’s hometown and also to consolidate costs from previous bicoastal locations.⁴⁰⁷ The headquarters remains in Appleton, serving as a reminder of the deep lineage conservative politics has in the region. Although current membership is unknown, Birchers continue to remain one aspect of the modern conservative movement.

Expanding in the Midwest: Incorporating Catholics

The assumption that the Birchers was an exclusively Protestant realm is contradicted by their recruiting across denominations, including Mormons (in the West) and Catholics (in the Midwest).⁴⁰⁸ Catholics were increasingly amenable to conservative politics, after the USSR’s invasion of Poland in 1946.⁴⁰⁹ Conservative historian Leonard Liggio has argued for the

⁴⁰⁵ William Grede, “Letter to Anonymous,” Undated, William Grede Papers, Box 17, Folder 3, WHS.

⁴⁰⁶ William Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” February 3, 1960, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS. 120.

⁴⁰⁷ Associated Press, “Birch Headquarters to Move,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1989, p. A19.

⁴⁰⁸ Father Francis Fenton, a catholic priest and one of the first Birchers speculated that in 1967, 40% of total Bircher membership was Catholic.

⁴⁰⁹ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 70.

Birchers' central position in incorporating Midwestern Catholics into the broader conservative movement. The JBS also collaborated with Phyllis Schlafly's St Louis-based Catholic Cardinal Mindstenzy Organization. The CMO linked anticommunism to responsible Catholicism while also serving as a liaison between Catholic churches and local JBS chapters.⁴¹⁰

By wooing Catholics with an anticommunist message, the JBS emphasized the need for members to act on their beliefs or lose everything to communism: Catholics should develop a "dual responsibility" of both faith and activism, meaning political organizing should have a role in any church. As one church wrote to Robert Welch, Catholics "had a very beautiful tradition called the 'Spiritual Bouquet'" of faith, but the JBS fighting against nonbelievers had laid bare the necessity for Catholics to engage in the "Work Bouquet" of political duty against institutional subversion as well.⁴¹¹

In suburban Milwaukee across the 1960s, clergy like Reverend Donald Lamberson of Waukesha's Faith Bible Church called for "dual responsibility," urging his 300 member congregation to become active in the John Birch Society.⁴¹² One Wisconsin chapter formed three front groups to conduct a "very active and successful campaign" to win school board seats. Reflecting on their work in a letter to Robert Welch, the chapter dedicated "this list of accomplishments at the local level to you and your efforts at the national level."⁴¹³ Welch reprinted this note in *American Opinion*, promoting the church-chapter partnership as the recipe for success.

⁴¹⁰ William Grede, "Letter to John McBroom," April 23, 1973. It appears Schlafly also made a financial appeal to the JBS at some point in the early 1970s in her effort to repeal the ERA, and although they viewed her organizing as "very impressive" they chose not to subsidize her "probably unsuccessful" endeavor noting their policy of not taking on projects where "chances of victory [seemed] hopeless or the method clearly wrong."

⁴¹¹ Anonymous Catholic chapter reprinted in *American Opinion*, "Anonymous Letter to Robert Welch," 1962, William J. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 7, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁴¹² Richard Feyrer, "Big Push Seen Here to Recruit Birch Members," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 28, 1969.

⁴¹³ Anonymous Catholic chapter reprinted in *American Opinion*, "Anonymous Letter to Robert Welch."

A close partner of the JBS, the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade (CAC) conducted travelling events and workshops throughout the Midwest in the 1960s and solicited to conservative demographics by appealing to their sense of religious duty. The CAC cited scripture in their mission to defend the country from communism. Addressing the Texas legislature, the CAC argued that communism “was the literal fulfillment of Psalm XIV” referencing a passage linking godlessness to immorality. Communists, the speech claimed, were “[t]he fool” who “hath said in his heart, [t]here [sic] is no God. They are corrupt. They have done abominable works.”⁴¹⁴

Mobilizing Catholics as part of a broader initiative to expand into new demographics and dispel the notion the JBS was exclusively Protestant. Conservative Catholics were necessary to gain a foothold in the Midwest, as were Mormons further west. Ezra Taft Benson and David McKay, then-president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were both offered Council seats in 1963, although both declined. Ties to churches were essential to recruitment in the 1960s, and the Society prioritized expansion, diversification, and victories over religious exclusivity.⁴¹⁵ Expansion among community leaders was central to the Society’s aspiring growth.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ Rev. Fred Schwarz, “‘The Disease of Communism’ Letter to Texas Legislature,” n.d.

⁴¹⁵ In *Dark Money* Jane Mayer reported that in 1968 Fred Koch advocated running a slate of Benson and Strom Thurmond, indicating that some in JBS leadership either believed a far right platform, combining two untapped voter demographics could 1) win post-Goldwater in ’64, and 2) use elections to publicize issues and promote the Society.

⁴¹⁶ An August 1963 memorandum urged Council members to engage in a “confidential campaign” to recruit more “prestigious business heads” to JBS leadership. Members were encouraged to “use your own company letterhead” protecting the Society. Among the notable figures solicited in 1963 were Ezra Taft Benson and Strom Thurmond. It is unclear whether Thurmond ever joined the JBS (neither he nor Benson joined the Council) but in 1968, Fred Koch urged both to run for president on a pro-segregation and no income tax platform.

Religious groups were tax shelters for the Society and the Milwaukee chapter claimed at least two. The organization “Freedom Clubs, Inc.” was a post office box in Milwaukee to be “used for special situations and some of our larger contributors” according to Grede. One of these was the Sawbuck Club which donated \$32,000 in a single deposit in 1964. Grede also requested that Christian Echoes Ministries file all tax receipts “without mention of my name.”⁴¹⁷

Structure & Scale of the John Birch Society in the 1960s

According to Michelle Nickerson, hierarchy within the John Birch Society was dictated by individual occupation, wealth, and gender.⁴¹⁸ Following a Leninist organizational model, when a chapter exceeded 25-30 attendees it divided membership into two local sister chapters. By the end of 1959, the JBS had nine state chapters orchestrating dozens of local units each.⁴¹⁹ Birchers’ emphasis on stealth engagement complicates the task of quantifying their scope and influence in the 1960s. The national headquarters in Belmont, MA published literature, paid regional staffers, and delegated orders to regional, state, and local groups. Speculation on the JBS’s total membership rolls typically puts them around 100,00 at their peak in the early 1960s. This, however, is also incomplete because it does not account for the dozens of “single issue” organizations secretly founded by the Society. States had numerous local working chapters overseen by paid organizers who handed down detailed directives, even down to meeting structure and topics, from Belmont, MA (and, after 1989, Appleton, WI).

⁴¹⁷ William Grede, “Letter to Mr. & Mrs. Tom Ireland,” January 1963, William J. Grede Papers, Box 17, Folder 6, WHS; William Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” March 24, 1964, William J. Grede Papers, Box 17, Folder 6, WHS.

⁴¹⁸ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. 139.

⁴¹⁹ Robert Welch, “Letter to a Good American,” Mailer to Potential Members, October 5, 1958, William P. Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 8, WHS.

Living room gatherings were designed to be informal and enjoyable—meetings typically began with a Christian prayer and a salute to the American flag. Meeting hosts were a preselected pairing of one male and female—dual gender representation was important to Welch—to create a dynamic that “accommodated the mixed-gender composition of the movement he envisioned.”⁴²⁰ However, like most mid-twentieth century movements, female activists were at the bottom of the hierarchy, operating as the day-to-day face of the JBS while also burdened with providing the hidden labor requisite for these gatherings.

Women Birchers organized programs, sent bulk mailings, and completed the menial-yet-necessary duties that come with maintaining an organization. While conducting these functions, the Society stressed that they should be well-dressed, avoid wearing slacks, greet all guests immediately at the door, and serve simple refreshments. When hosting meetings, one Maryland-based organizer emphasized the centrality of the women in selling the Society—it was “an asset” for female Birchers to exude “feminine charm, liberally sprinkled” because “soft-sell is the rule.”

Schlafley was an admirer of the JBS organizing model and her main organization, the Eagle’s Forum, copied JBS organizing tactics, hosting living room meetings. When membership reached a predetermined critical mass, the local groups would , and creating single-issue advocacy groups like the Coalition Against Drafting Women which pushed to exclude women from Selective Service.⁴²¹

Beyond the veneer of casualty, these gatherings were the foundation for movement building and were planned with meticulous detail. Program leaders were instructed to not even

⁴²⁰ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. 141.

⁴²¹ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*.

bring up joining for at least the first five programs.⁴²² Even then, Birchers only targeted attendees with specific attributes and should not “waste time on conservatives who have become diseased. An example would be one who is very vocally anti-Semitic or anti-Negro.” Stressing tact and public refinement in finding prospects, ideology was also important and they were not to “waste time bringing the village liberals. Usually, they are not worth the effort.”

Wives of more renown JBS leaders also played a role beyond planning house meetings, particularly in fundraising. Harry Bradley’s second wife was a respected figure in the Society and an essential link between them and Milwaukee’s high society donors. Even as late as the mid-1970s, she was active in signing up members, continuing the work of her husband who died in 1965. Her daughter, Jane Bradley Petit, married David Vogel Uihlein, Sr., a Schlitz Brewery heir, and the two also became famous philanthropists. The Bradley-Uihleins were (and remain) active in right wing politics and are the topic of a number of articles.⁴²³ Their son, David Vogel Uihlein, Jr. served as vice chair of the Bradley Foundation as of 2019 and is considered to be one of the top contemporary right wing donors, nationally.

With so many high profile individuals in membership, JBS members typically remained anonymous in their activism. Birchers quietly ran for city councils, PTAs, school boards, filled local Republican positions, and joined local police forces. In Milwaukee, JBS members built membership by listening to conservative radio programs and hunt down callers who expressed similar positions. In 1961, the JBS called upon members to “take over the PTA” in a push to remake public school curriculum. When the tactic came to light in the greater Milwaukee area,

⁴²² The first six in-home gatherings were part of a series focusing on a different threat: Communism in 20th century, Civil rights movement, United Nations, National Council of Churches, the Federal Government (2 parts), and “What you can do for for the John Birch Society.

⁴²³ Stephanie Saul and Danny Hakim, “The Most Powerful Conservative Couple You’ve Never Heard Of,” *The New York Times*, June 12, 2018, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/07/us/politics/liz-dick-uihleins-republican-donors.html>.

an unapologetic Grede took the accusations of conspiracy in stride, arguing that “Birch members speak up at meetings...and soon they get elected chairman.” As a rule, it was “the responsibility of every society member to be active in every meeting they are part of” Grede told the paper. There was nothing illegal or immoral about Birchers being engaged citizens even if they did not advertise their alliance to far right causes.

Birchers also pursued more direct approaches in reaching a younger generation through Welch’s “Youth Needs Truth” (YNT) initiative in the early 1960s. YNT was a JBS version of Young Republicans, reaching out to conservatives in high schools and colleges. Three chapters sprung up in suburban Milwaukee, led by a seventeen year-old senior at Wauwatosa East High School, named Brian Pemper who aspired for a career as either a minister or physicist. Pemper was an “accomplished amateur magician,” who caught the JBS’s eye after conducting a letter writing campaign “in support of Vietnam.” Pemper acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting his peers, many of whom were wary of the JBS and actively opposed to the Vietnam War.

Pemper savored the “dual responsibility” of being a churchgoer and Bircher: “I was not a true Christian until I joined the John Birch Society” he told the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. Of his left-leaning classmates, Pemper made the familiar morality argument, vowing to “have no fellowship with the forces of evil.”⁴²⁴ In 1961, Birchers also set up an essay contest for teens, asking the question, “Why does Chief Justice Earl Warren Deserve to be Impeached?” and offering a monetary scholarship to the best answers.⁴²⁵ The recruitment of teenagers in high schools deserves further study and likely resulted in a small, but passionate intake of new members.

⁴²⁴ Feyrer, “Big Push Seen Here to Recruit Birch Members.”

⁴²⁵ Louis Ruthenburg, “Speech to Evansville Kiwanis Club,” August 17, 1961, Grede Papers, Box 55, Folder 4.

Single-Issue Campaigns

To the general public, issue-specific organizations were a more palatable alternative to joining the controversial Society and its broader accompanying dogma. “Front groups,” as Welch called JBS single-issue organizations, provided an entrée to right wing activism but remained tied to the broader JBS agenda. Front groups also attracted activists from demographics that were either unaware of the Society’s role in these organizations or individuals who would not publicly affiliate with the Birchers. For instance, the board for the Committee Against Summit Entanglements (CASE) included Welch and several JBS Committee members, including Fred Koch, T. Coleman Andrews, Grede, Parker, Oliver, Manion, and Look. The degree of separation provided by CASE also attracted more respected conservatives of the day, including Pierre S. du Pont, III, Ludwig von Mises, and Barry Goldwater. To assuage the apprehension of potential new activists, flyers for these separate initiatives included the clause: “endorsement of [project] does not necessarily mean endorsement of any other program.”⁴²⁶

One of the first front groups was the 1961 Committee to Protest the Firing of Medford Evans. Evans was a faculty member at Northwestern State College in Louisiana, terminated for activities related to his dual membership in the Birchers and White Citizens Councils. Southern Bircher chapters and White Citizens Councils often cooperated, but northern (and national) Birchers were uncomfortable with the explicit white supremacy and apartheid solutions sought by their compatriots in the South. The Committee to Protest the Firing of Medford Evans was a way for the national Birchers to support the activities of their southern chapters without being openly linked to the public acts of violence perpetrated by southern whites.

⁴²⁶ No Author, “Tax Reform Immediately Movement (TRIM)” (John Birch Society, 1975), William J. Grede Papers, Box 17, Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society.

One of the most well-known front groups was the Bircher response to Khrushchev's 1959 diplomatic convoy to the United States: The Committee Against Summit Entanglements. The right viewed Vice-President Richard Nixon's attempts to normalizing relations with the Soviet Union as a national security threat. CASE accused the Soviets plotting to "ruin our currency, wreck our economy, and steadily increase the control of a centralized bureaucratic power over the lives and actions of us all."⁴²⁷ CASE had hundreds of members, but by predicting that improved diplomatic relations would have deleterious effects on business and the global market, the JBS appealed to the upper middle class and elites they often courted for donations; men with time and resources available to dedicate to conservative causes.

Further appealing to independent entrepreneurs, CASE linked the globalist agenda of international elites impacting the small businessmen's bottom line. They painted Nixon as a patsy for "left-wing labor bosses" who was "blackmailing the steel companies into" accepting the union's terms. They also accused Eisenhower appointed Secretary of Labor James P. Mitchell of having "pro-Communist past connections," and the NLRB as being unfairly biased towards unions. In its first year of existence, CASE received \$58,617.82 in contributions, none of which appeared on official JBS accounting records.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ "Report on the Committee Against Summit Entanglements," n.d., William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

⁴²⁸ "Committee Against Summit Entanglements Annual Report," August 1959, WHS.

Speaking Tours

Promoting aforementioned single issues Birchers agitated at county fairs, chamber of commerce events, and evangelical preacher tents. Although industrialists like Grede and Koch had their own speaking tour as a public relations measure during the Kohler strike, Birchers organized many others including the American Opinion Speakers Bureau, the Conservative Speakers Exchange, and the Conservative Civil Rights Movement Tour. For suburban whites the JBS's conservative civil rights tour provided a moral cover their southern counterparts did not enjoy by spreading the "Society's Truth about Civil Turmoil" across multiple states.

The Society funded twenty speakers annually with messages as diverse as their backgrounds, featuring individuals like Tom Hollingsworth, a former Green Beret who took the stage adorned in fatigues warning the audience that the United States was "already in WWII because the communists are determined to rule the world." Others included libertarian economists, conservative authors, and "reformed" leftist Ken Granger, who marched with both Caesar Chavez and James Meredith. Granger told audiences about the lifestyles of "the hippies" as well as of intimate communist links to the Civil Rights Movement.⁴²⁹

FBI informants, and converted former civil rights activists comprised slots on speaking tours as a way to provide firsthand accounts of conspiracies in the state and progressive causes. The Birchers proposed an alternative—described in promotional flyers as the "Conservative Civil Rights Movement"—mirrored many characteristics of the actual one: opportunities for grassroots organizing, targeted messaging, supporting black conservative politicians, and building through a core leadership.

⁴²⁹ William Grede, "Letter to Robert Welch," December 31, 1963.

In the same manner that the JBS cultivated a sense of martyrdom around the killing of Baptist missionary John Birch by Maoists in China, Welch identified Manning Johnson as the domestic comparison: “a great American, a colored man...who had once been a Communist” but had since repented for his participation in the CPUSA. Johnson, who became an FBI informer and John Birch Society spokesman, was “mysteriously struck by an automobile in San Francisco” and was, according to the JBS, assassinated by communist conspirators. The Society capitalized on this narrative to both emphasize the colorblind nature of the fight against communism and that the guerrilla war against the Reds was already underway in America.

Speakers were an effective method of reaching huge swaths of a community while retaining a personal connection with potential activists and donors across the country. Similarly to their media messaging and grassroots organizing campaigns, Welch believed controlling the speaking tour message was “another game at which we ought to beat [the Left] hands down.”⁴³⁰

Marketing & Electoral Campaigns

Ostracized by mid-twentieth century Republicans, Goldwater’s two presidential runs gave the right renewed optimism, opening doors for new tactics in the electoral realm. On Goldwater’s 1964 presidential nomination, political scientist Willmoore Kendall saw opportunity: “[i]n election after election for nearly thirty years, the American people have been denied the opportunity to vote for – nay even listen to – a conservative candidate for the presidency.”⁴³¹ For those who identified on the right, Goldwater’s campaign brought aspects of their worldview into the public eye. His campaign represented renewed possibilities for a return from the wilderness as well as an opportunity to increase their own membership.

⁴³⁰ Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. 138.

⁴³¹ Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right Face*. 209.

For Goldwater, Midwestern Birchers fundraised, crafted aspects of the platform, and molded Goldwater's image as the candidate, none more so than Clarence Manion. The Indiana Bircher and conservative radio host famously spearheaded "The Committee of 100 to Draft Goldwater" (asking both Grede and Wisconsin party boss Thomas E. Coleman to participate, although both declined). It was Manion's idea for Goldwater to outline his beliefs before running for president, and he read at least six drafts (of the book ghostwritten by *National Review* editor Brent Bozell). It was also Manion who gave Goldwater's manifesto its title, *The Conscience of a Conservative*.⁴³²

Manion was an Indiana Democrat and dean at the Notre Dame School of Law who was deeply involved in the early twentieth-century isolationist movement, America First. Remaining a Democrat, Manion came to admire the Midwestern Republicans in Congress for leading the effort of dramatically cutting federal spending following WWII. In the pivotal 1952 GOP presidential nomination, Manion lobbied hard for Robert Taft because he "admired Taft's ability to bring an anti-Socialist agenda to the forefront and attract conservatives to the polls who were willing to invest financially in the ideas the candidates advocated."⁴³³ After the convention, Manion pivoted to Eisenhower and then founded the Democrats for Eisenhower organization. By the late-1950s, he was one of many who grew disillusioned with both parties' blasé stance toward the communist threat, becoming a leader on the JBS Leadership Counsel. He remained one of the few who did not lose faith in electoral solutions.

⁴³² Hoplin and Robinson, *Funding Fathers*.

⁴³³ Hoplin and Robinson.100.

While Manion was a vocal advocate for an electoral strategy, most Birchers in leadership questioned the practicality of participating at all, still nursing the betrayal of 1952. Even as conservative ideology was reemerging as viable political grounding in the early 1960s, Grede observed that while “much of Goldwater campaign money comes from [general membership]” only a few leaders including Manion and “[T. Coleman] Andrews” were “politically minded, more than the rest of us [the Council].”⁴³⁴

Grede was mostly correct, but after Goldwater’s nomination in 1964 local Bircher chapters flooded right wing candidates with donations, raising \$12 million for congressional candidates in 325 districts across the country the following year. The upsurge prompted one journalist to speculate that the “paranoid” John Birch Society was seeking to neutralize campaign contributions from unions: “conservatives now feel they can match, or at least make a dent in, the liberal muscle of labor money.”⁴³⁵ Instead of fighting this grassroots trend, the Council urged them to focus on midterm elections due to the fact voter turnout declined by 15% from presidential years, maximizing their impact.⁴³⁶

As leadership warmed to electoral participation in the late-1960s and 1970s, the Council speculated that campaign involvement could also work in their favor, leading to as many as 1,000 new JBS members in each district where members canvassed. In Wisconsin, the JBS worked with “Wallace for President Committees,” continuing this partnership after the Alabama Governor’s strong 1964 primary turnout in Wisconsin. From those energized JBS-Wallace

⁴³⁴ William Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” February 1962, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society. Although not personally active in election cycles, Grede was a booster for both the Wisconsin and Milwaukee Republicans.

⁴³⁵ Karen DeYoung and Harold J. Logan, “Exempt Campaign Gifts Flowing Free of Reporting Law,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 1976.

⁴³⁶ “They’re Playing for Keeps” (AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1965), William J. Grede Papers, Box 55, Folder 5, WHS.

“dual-carders” emerged the American Party of Wisconsin formed to advocate on behalf of issues relevant to their nationalist base and white nativism in southeastern Wisconsin.⁴³⁷

After *The Politician* scandal in 1960 and Goldwater’s 1964 nomination, the Birchers transitioned from secret society to household name, becoming involved in national marketing campaigns. According to the AFL-CIO, before 1964 the JBS targeted 500 domestic markets with approximately 6,000 broadcasts. Two years later, broadcasts jumped to 10,700 in more than 1,000 markets. According to one Wyoming Democrat, liberals were under “constant bombardment” by JBS-sponsored advertisements in the mid-1960s.⁴³⁸ Fighting for airtime, Wisconsin Birchers challenged the Fairness Doctrine statutes (repealed in 1987) that mandated equal coverage on political issues. This led to a chance partnership in Milwaukee when one station’s favorable coverage of the United Nations irked local Birchers like Grede. To push an anti-UN counter program, Grede worked with a television producer at Milwaukee’s CBS affiliate named Paul Weyrich. Weyrich’s station manager was already frustrated with his routinely booking of conservative guests but once it was revealed Weyrich was a Bircher, the station fired him.

Grede inquired the national JBS inquiring about hiring Weyrich as their Midwestern organizer. Weyrich was so unknown to the local Bircher leader, the notes from his phone call with Belmont Headquarters misspell his name as “Paul M. Weyrick” scratched out and beneath used the corrected spelling “Weyrich,” his current address (1452 North 48th St., Milwaukee), and assumedly the agreed upon dollar amount (\$250/week). Despite Grede’s appeal, JBS field director Thomas Hill opted not to hire Weyrich believing Wisconsin to be comparatively strong compared to other Midwestern states. “I realize that we might miss the opportunity to do so

⁴³⁷ Feyrer, “Big Push Seen Here to Recruit Birch Members.”

⁴³⁸ “They’re Playing for Keeps.” 3. Senator Gayle McGee (D-WY).

because of the problems at the television station...I will certainly keep his name in mind," Hill ended the letter.⁴³⁹

Weyrich, who is the central figure of the next chapter, fled employer persecution in Wisconsin for his Bircher affiliation. He went on to become one of the most integral figures in the contemporary conservative movement but regularly returned to his home state. Weyrich founded the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, American Legislative Exchange Council, and many other groups. It is unclear if Grede assisted Weyrich's move to Colorado shortly after his firing, although the Milwaukee industrialist sat on the Board of Trustees for the Colorado Springs-based libertarian Rampart University which is where Weyrich moved after Milwaukee.

The Society's broader political engagement should not be measured by either their participation in electoral politics or increasing role in marketing campaigns, but both were facets of their anticommunist work. While not uncommon for JBS rank-and-filers to participate in election campaigns, the Society's leadership Council was disinterested in pushing resources toward the electoral realm, save for Andrews and Manion. The Wisconsin Bircher's participation with the Wallace primary (and offshoots of this partnership) were tied to long-term goals of expanding membership and rooting communists out of the civil rights movement through preserving policies of white supremacy and segregation in housing, education, and employment around the state. The following section details Wisconsin Bircher anti-civil rights activism in the context of the Society's broader domestic anticommunist agenda.

⁴³⁹ William Grede, "Letter to Thomas Hill, Head of National JBS Organizing," April 1, 1965, William J. Grede Papers, Box 7, Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society.

IV

During the 1960s, the John Birch Society was the most influential and effective white supremacy activist group outside of the South. While southern Bircher chapters were directly oppositional to the Civil Rights Movement by partnering with White Citizens' Councils and the Klu Klux Klan, other regions outside the nexus of struggle did what they could both to roll back protected class status for marginalized groups and mobilize opposition in the name of fighting communism. Despite these regional differences in approach, in 1964, the Council recommended that General Edwin Walker become Welch's successor two years *after* his arrest at the University of Mississippi for opposing James Meredith's enrollment. This is just one prominent example, making explicit the broader organizational link between the northern Bircher's anticommunist/free market rhetoric and the preservation of apartheid in the United States. In another localized tactic seeking similar ends, by the late-1960s, as protests increased in northern industrialized areas, Birchers moved to control cities through partnerships with local police forces, resulting in a cross-pollination of affiliations among conservative advocacy and law enforcement.

Council members privately detested civil rights activism, genuinely believing it to be a communist plot to disrupt the country, but the strategic decision was made to downplay their beliefs in public. National Bircher messaging on civil rights conceded that racial inequality existed but sought to dodge any governmental intervention in the remedy. A 1965 pamphlet asked "What's Wrong with Civil Rights?" and concluded that "The answer is nothing! A huge majority of Americans both black and white now give their support to civil rights and their excellent intentions must be realized."⁴⁴⁰ The JBS's official stance was that American race

⁴⁴⁰ No Author, "'What's Wrong With Civil Rights?' Pamphlet," August 6, 1965, William J. Grede Papers, Box 55, Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society.

relations were imperfect but the problem was “exaggerated” by communists seeking to exploit the fracture. That the actual civil rights movement pushed the right wing to even concede inequality and establish competing programs is a testament to the movement’s aptitude in penetrating mainstream opinion and impact on marginalized groups.

A number of historians have unpacked how the process of suburbanization in the postwar decades led to homogenously white, conservative enclaves that economically strangled city centers. In Milwaukee, for instance, heightened racial tensions played out in conflicts over schooling and housing in the 1960s.⁴⁴¹ While it was certainly true most Birchers would not (and did not) accept blacks into their own neighborhoods, there was no reason they could not have their own suburbs. Birchers offered market-based solutions for correcting racial inequality, addressing affordable housing and public safety while making their own critique of the civil rights movement. In short, Birchers offered a third way, more palatable to Americans uncomfortable with both civil rights protest politics and the South’s heavy handedness..

Melding conservative rhetorical lynchpins of individual responsibility and religious piety with a less antagonistic alternative to sit-ins and boycotts, the John Birch Society developed a variety of strategies to dissuade people of color from participating in the movement while setting themselves apart from southern conservatives. “There are injustices to our Negro citizens and they should be eliminated” conceded the JBS while also arguing that “both blacks and whites” were reaching unprecedented levels of quality of life in the American economic system.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform in Milwaukee* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2004). 12. Although Mulloy’s is intended to be a survey of the entire Society, by his own admission his methodology centers on better known Birch enclaves of California, Oregon, Texas, and the Deep South.

⁴⁴² No Author, “‘What’s Wrong With Civil Rights?’ Pamphlet.”

Developing a program of character assassination of movement leaders, Birchers also spearheaded the false accusation that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a communist while lashing out at perceived attempts to discredit their own organization. “The Communists and liberals” argued one Bircher “are trying to make the general public believe that we are against civil rights and the negroes. Their efforts are causing many good people to be reluctant about joining.” While taking “no official position” on desegregation, the JBS crafted a narrative that racial inequality could be resolved through individual responsibility to improve one’s stature and light tinkering with civil society without state intervention.⁴⁴³

The JBS viewed the movement’s leaders and tactics of nonviolent disobedience as dangerous tools of communist subversion with ties to organized labor, particularly the Highlander Folk School and key former-communist figures in leadership like Bayard Rustin, Hunter Pitts Odell, and Stanley Levinson. To Birchers, SCLC, SNCC, CORE, and other civil rights organizations were pawns in a larger Soviet globalization project leading to the long-term detriment of whites and blacks alike. Birchers saw themselves as the saviors for black Americans on a slippery slope toward total dependence on the state. “For it is not too late” the JBS wrote; “to restore order, and good will and the gradual progress we were all making—before the communists began their insidious destruction—towards a still better framework for human life on the part of individuals of all races, colors, and creeds.”⁴⁴⁴

A Bircher front group calling themselves “The Blanktown Committee to Preserve the American Republic” operating out of “1122 Main St., Blanktown, Any State” predicted that the 1964 Civil Rights Act “was the last nail in the coffin for American democracy.” MLK and the broader movement had formed a partnership with communists equal only to “the Hitler-Stalin

⁴⁴³ William Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” March 24, 1964, William J. Grede Papers, Box 17, Folder 6, WHS.

⁴⁴⁴ No Author. “What’s Wrong With Civil Rights?”

pact.” The expansion of federal hiring and firing practices was oppressive to “whites and blacks alike” and only addressed “10% civil rights” and a “90% extension of raw federal power.”⁴⁴⁵

After the Act’s passage, while George Wallace campaigned for president in Wisconsin, the Alabama governor told an overflow crowd at UW-Whitewater that “communists were behind the civil rights bill.” In South Milwaukee’s Serb Hall, Wallace was greeted by a Polish-sung rendition of “Dixie” followed by the Governor warning the ethnic white union members in attendance that the Act’s passage portended the end of seniority clauses in their contracts.⁴⁴⁶ Even in private correspondence among Bircher leadership, the Society predicted an imminent “brutal totalitarian police state over the American people.”⁴⁴⁷

In the early 1960s, the South was still the face of the civil rights movement and testimonials from southern Birchers circulated among the national Council, revealing their sense of victimhood at the hands of federal authorities. Three weeks before the Freedom Summer murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner the head of the Laurel, Mississippi JBS chapter wrote Welch complaining that that FBI questioned only white counter-protesters at a voting rights rally in May of 1964. Birchers cited FBI intimidation for “miserable turnout” and expressed frustration that more people did not see the Soviet agenda behind the voting drives of 1964. In returning America to its former glory, the author lamented that only the Birchers “could see beyond the present day and...be determined to band together as Christian citizens...to stem the tide, weather the storm, and help change things in our great country.”⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ The Blanktown Committee to Preserve the American Republic, “The 1963 Civil Rights Act Is the Last Nail in the Coffin For American Democracy,” Undated, William J. Grede Papers, Box 55, Folder 5, WHS.

⁴⁴⁶ Richard C. Haney, “Wallace in Wisconsin: The Presidential Primary of 1964.” Whitewater quote 267 and speculation on union seniority p. 268, 270.

⁴⁴⁷ Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” March 24, 1964.

⁴⁴⁸ Laurel, Mississippi John Birch Society, “Letter to Robert Welch,” May 21, 1964, William Grede Papers, Box 16, Folder 2, WHS.

Forced enrollment of black students into historically white universities infuriated one Bircher (and mother of a sixteen-year-old) because she believed that “Negroes have three times the chance to go to College that [sic] an Englishman has!” In her mind, federal authority over local police empowered black Mississippians to reveal their true selves, informing the Council that she witnessed “a Negro deliberately [running] a red light the other day.” The driver “slammed into a white man’s truck, pulled a knife, and dared him to do something about it!” She heard rumors that any national guardsmen or retired military who intervened on behalf of whites “would have their retirement benefits withheld.”⁴⁴⁹

Southern Bircher chapters sought assistance from Belmont, spreading accounts of “Negroes jumping lawmen...increasing in the state.” Seeking answers, the JBS member concluded that “it makes me wonder how much support the Negroes are going to have...and how little aid the Whites can expect.” As Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organizers across the country travelled to Mississippi that summer, the challenge they posed to established southern patriarchy took on a familiar sexualized refrain based in rumor: “I would a heap rather get ready just in case the Negroes DO mean it when they say (as they have in Jackson recently) that they will bring in enough outside Negroes to rape every white woman in the state!” Although the historical record reveals no reports of Freedom Summer activists engaging in a campaign of sexual assault against southern whites in Jackson, the woman begged the Council for “advice as to how the civil rights of whites can be protected.” Punctuating the severity of the situation, the Bircher finished with “We need help, we need advice, and we need it now!”⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

V

Most Birchers did not openly endorse the explicit white supremacism, instead constructing arguments that focused on the deleterious effects of federal overreach. They attempted to provide practical alternatives to federal intervention congruent with mainstream conservative thinking of the era. These market-based solutions were designed to reward volunteerism and individual initiative among people of color. On the issues facing black America, the vast majority of Bircher brainstorming focused on individual material improvement, rather than addressing the broader, systemic rationale for continued inequality. For instance, while many Birchers opposed school desegregation, black high school seniors could submit essays in their chance to win a \$1,000 “Manning Johnson Scholarship,” named after the conservative black conservative activist they believed was assassinated by communists in San Francisco.

On the verge of Congress passing the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, JBS Leadership Council toyed with the idea of creating something called The Booker T. Washington Committee for Home and Apartment Ownership. The Committee would serve the dual purposes of promoting “the idea of home ownership to Negroes by making a free market available to them.” Birchers would do this by disseminating pamphlets on financial literacy and setting up competitive loan rates through a clearinghouse, connecting aspiring homeowners of color to lenders. The plan called for purchasing advertising space in *Ebony* Magazine with copy reading: “NEGROES!” in bold. “If you want to own your own home or apartment, we will try and help you.” Ultimately, the Council conceded they did not have the “means, staff, nor the competence” to make the Booker T. Washington Committee for Home Ownership an actual program. Grede, conceded that the project did not advance any structural change, only

replicating the existing issues in needs-based mortgage lending because the program would rely on philanthropy and “not be profitable.” In creating a program to relieve the financial burden on prospective homeowners, Birchers would only be providing handouts to people of color and “fighting the symptoms of communism with the causes.”⁴⁵¹

Birchers assembled “civil rights training kits” for local chapters instructing them on how to set up front groups. The kits instructed each chapter to “Choose a front name such as “Parents for Racial Harmony” or “Citizens for Understanding Civil Rights.” Emphasizing respectability politics, organizers were instructed to appoint “a prominent community member whose record is unassailable to act as the figurehead.” Each event should showcase testimonials from black conservatives such as disillusioned former members of the Popular Front or the civil rights movement itself, often times former FBI informants. Emphasizing these voices from those who had been exposed to the alleged communist plot among civil rights leadership would, they hoped, inoculate moderates from sympathizing with the cause, while offering an alternative.

JBS leadership advocated for programs that would cultivate a more racially inclusive Society, but were often at odds with their suburban grassroots base in the 1960s. For instance, their Midwestern organizer, Tom Selk, set up speaking tours around his jurisdiction, showcasing a conservative black reverend, John T. Witherspoon, whose beliefs turned out to be insufficiently aligned with the Birchers for some audience members. After a talk in Sheboygan, members of that chapter wrote to Milwaukee asking why the JBS was “spending money on some negro activist?” while calling for Selk’s termination.⁴⁵² Reverend Witherspoon’s tour was cancelled after Sheboygan.

⁴⁵¹ William Grede, “Letter to John Henry Norton,” August 31, 1964, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁴⁵² Robert Welch, “Letter to Bob Reiss,” November 16, 1968, William Grede Papers, Box 18, Folder 1, Wisconsin Historical Society.

A similar clash occurred at one suburban Milwaukee residence when a black Republican congressional candidate tried to attend a local JBS chapter meeting. Robert Taylor, who recently lost to incumbent Democrat Henry Reuss in a bid for the 5th District congressional seat (then Milwaukee's western suburbs) was invited to speak at the meeting by a Bircher friend.⁴⁵³ The defeated Taylor wished to personally thank local Birchers who backed his campaign, but the hostess, Maxine Graham, physically blocked the doorway to her home, preventing Taylor from entering. She accused Taylor of being an undercover civil rights activist and only after a lengthy conversation with others in attendance begrudgingly allowed Taylor to enter her residence through a side door.

The incident became a topic among chapters around the city and represented a moment of internal reflection for many regarding the role of race in the JBS. In the weeks that followed Graham chastised the state chapter for not warning her in advance that a black man was invited to her home: "The only courteous thing for Birch leadership to do in inviting a negro" the woman complained, "would have been to call the hostess first." Upon learning of her complaint to the state headquarters, the white member who invited Taylor sarcastically replied that if members are going to pick and choose which allies they permit to enter their homes, she might as well hang a "No colored, please!" sign in her yard to avoid future confusion. Tensions over the level of inclusion Birchers wished to give black Americans remained an open question between a Council that wished to publicly distance itself from the South and an incredulous grassroots who viewed the Society as a proud white supremacist group.

⁴⁵³ A seat currently held by Republican Jim Sensenbrenner, son of former Kimberly-Clark president and party leader Frank Sensenbrenner, discussed in Chapters 2 & 3. This district is nationally renown in the present for voting Republican in greater numbers than any other congressional district in the country.

This tenuous balancing act between the reality of JBS composition and attempting to garner enough popular legitimacy to be taken seriously is best embodied by the “Conservative Civil Rights Movement” speaking engagements the Society held around the country. The headline figure for these events was George Schuyler, a well-respected former editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, former civil rights leader, and former communist. By the late 1950s, Schuyler was the most prominent (and vocal) African American anticommunist, who was disturbed by what he perceived as Soviet influence and questionable tactics including nonviolent civil disobedience by King and others.

As with Sheboygan and Wisconsin’s 5th Congressional district, promoting black conservatives was met with hostility by the Bircher’s grassroots. Racial tension at these events got to the point where Welch thought it was “undoubtedly a mistake” to tour Schuyler “even in Northern cities where he might be more effective” because crowds would react with hostility, many not wishing to contribute to an interracial group.⁴⁵⁴ However, Welch personally held Schuyler in high regard because he embodied the redemption narrative Birchers imagined for the disgruntled blacks. Schuyler had “come around...on one former blind spot,” according to Welch, becoming a biting critic of MLK and the movement. When King received the Nobel Peace Prize, at the height of his popularity, Schuyler wrote an essay titled “King: No Help to Peace,” suggesting “the Lenin Prize would have been more appropriate” for the SCLC chairman. According to biographer Jeffrey Leak, Schuyler’s denigration of King was so “disturbing” that even most conservative newspapers refused to print it, outside of the Bircher’s *American*

⁴⁵⁴ Robert Welch, “Letter to William Grede,” July 1, 1965, William Grede Papers, Box 16, Folder 3, WHS.

Opinion. By 1964, Schuyler’s attacks on the movement had relegated to the status of a “political outcast in African American political communities” according to Leak.⁴⁵⁵

Other speakers included former communist Leonard Patterson, researcher Allan Stang, former undercover FBI agent Julia Brown, and former FBI informant of six years, Lola Holmes, who was also a union activist. As the civil rights movement surpassed labor unrest as the most topical (and visible for organizing purposes) issue facing the Birchers, conservatives welcomed black anticommunists like Schuyler. For the JBS, both issues were the byproducts of encroaching communism in the fabric of American institutions. Schuyler embodied the restorative power of nationalism and had the added perks of being an intellectual and a reformed black communist—living proof there was an alternative to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s movement.

Enforcing Northern Apartheid: The Birchers & Local Police in the 1960s and 70s

“Some people hate the police [but] the Birch Society has the answer—it is the only hope for the world!” – Anonymous New York City Policeman

As the civil rights movement grew both increasingly militant in late 1960s and headed to northern cities, local police in the Midwest and East Coast anticipated the possibility of an imminent race war. Midwestern Birchers like Grede feared local law enforcement (much like independent businessmen) were on the verge of defeat at the hands of internationalists who controlled federal forces and global corporations. Grede saw the National Guard’s enforcement of the Civil Rights Acts in towns across the South as a dangerous conspiracy to “discredit, neutralize, and undermine our local police forces, so that they could be replaced with a brutal

⁴⁵⁵ George S. Schuyler and Jeffrey B. Leak, *Rac(E)Ing To The Right: Selected Essays George S. Schuyler*, 1st edition (Knoxville: Univ Tennessee Press, 2001).

Gestapo of a central government such as Robert Kennedy sent to Oxford, MS” in reference to the riots during James Meredith’s attempt to enroll at the University of Mississippi.⁴⁵⁶

This paranoia of global conspiracy arose alongside increased calls for civilian review boards after widespread accounts of police brutality in American cities. Community groups, calling for increased accountability and oversight, organized city councils to establish a number of these boards, but they too, were interpreted as an infringement on the autonomy of local law and order by police and Birchers. Rigid hierarchies, similar ideologies, and a shared sentiment of being the last bastion of Americanism, united the John Birch Society and local police forces in the mid-to-late 1960s.

Many on the Right interpreted urban uprisings across the country as evidence enough that communists successfully infiltrated black communities. Milwaukee, Watts, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit and many others were so frequent that two *American Opinion* reporters speculated that “[t]his thing had to be planned.” In their expose on Watts, lazily titled “Hell in the City of Angels,” the reporters argued that “things like this don’t go on...unless there is political ideology involved.” The JBS correspondents located their culprit in DuBois Clubs who were picketing LAPD headquarters. Named after W.E.B. DuBois, these comparatively small groups followed a variation of black liberation/communist ideology but were not connected to the Soviet Union.

As activists for the John Birch Society, they chose not investigate unemployment, housing costs, police brutality, and overall social inequality as the catalyst for the uprisings, the authors stated that “law and order are non-negotiable”—the Watts riot was the handiwork of the Soviets seeking to discredit the American way of life. The two reporters continued the article by

⁴⁵⁶ William Grede, “Letter to David McKay,” February 21, 1967, William Grede Papers, Box 14, Folder 5.

ridiculing the appearances of Watts residents who looked poor, suggesting appearance made them unemployable. Both confessed that “neither of us had the courage to ask...who on earth [sic] would hire someone who looks like a wild man?” The two reporters concluded that Watts was a “rehearsal for nationwide revolution.”⁴⁵⁷

Both crime and civil disobedience became conflated into a single issue and Birchers capitalized by leading the call for law and order in this period. Around 1964, Birchers launched a “Support Your Local Police Force” public relations campaign and soon began recruiting officers into the Society en masse. The *Progressive* magazine believed Bircher efforts had “little, if anything, to do with a sincere interest in supporting the police” and was primarily a recruitment tool and a way to agitate for new members using the left’s call for civilian review boards in police shootings.⁴⁵⁸

The specter of civilian review boards in many northern cities triggered intense pushback by local police. The policemen’s union, the Policeman’s Benevolent Association (PBA) allied with the JBS, sending speakers to the “American Opinion Town Hall” to discuss the danger of civilian review boards. As anti-civilian review board sentiment grew across the country, local police and their allies staged rallies, the largest of which was in New York City where approximately 5,000 policemen took to the streets. Linking the call for review boards directly to Soviet conspiracies, the NYPD marched through the city chanting “fight the Reds!” and carrying signs with messages including “What About Civil Rights for Cops?”⁴⁵⁹ The JBS stoked the right wing radicalization of police who believed they were under attack, primarily from communists.

⁴⁵⁷ Gary Allen & Bill Richardson, “Los Angeles: Hell in the City of Angels,” *American Opinion*, September 1965. Also discussed in Mulloy, 31.

⁴⁵⁸ Arnold Forester, “John Birch on the Police Force,” *The Progressive*, October 1965. 15. Forester expanded upon this article into a book *John Birch in Uniform* (1966).

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 18.

By the mid-1960s the *Wall Street Journal* reported the John Birch Society had infiltrated almost every department in the country. In larger cities, dual Bircher-policemen numbered upwards of 500 known members in single departments.

While the *WSJ* article led to investigative hearings to focus on this possible conflict of interest, little changed in departments themselves. Local police and Birchers depicted themselves as portraits of authentic national loyalty. “We Birchers,” a New York policeman reasoned during the hearings, “favor a nation of laws that protects the minority from being run roughshod over,” while also protecting “the majority from being oppressed by the minority.” Another outed Bircher-policeman testified that he affiliated with the group because he feared for his “son’s future” and the alliance of the groups combined “best friends everywhere of anti-communists.” Another officer expressed his loyalty to the conservative experiment, admitting that “some people hate the police, [but] the Birch Society has the answer—it is the only hope for the world!”⁴⁶⁰

Birchers organized right-wing caucus within already traditionally conservative police unions and often had members in high ranking positions. Overlooking their traditional disdain for unions, they viewed local police as a crucial defense against the National Guard that had recently displayed its willingness to disregard local autonomy in the South. In response to calls for greater oversight of police behavior in Santa Ana, CA, police chief, Edward J. Allen, proposed moderate internal reforms after the City Council released a report that the department was falsifying arrest statistics “to make the department look better than it is.”⁴⁶¹ Birchers within his own department launched “a mysterious campaign of harassment” to force his resignation.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15-18.

⁴⁶¹ No Author, “Santa Ana Crime Statistics Falsified, Investigator Says,” *The Long Beach Independent*, April 10, 1965 (Long Beach, CA): 10.

Chief Allen was not a Bircher but considered himself to be on the right and he was active early in the “Pro-Life” movement before it even became a Republican organizing tool in the 1970s.⁴⁶² An all-police JBS sleeper cell made itself known in Southern California as a response to Allen’s proposed reforms. Known as QXTZ, the police chapter circulated pamphlets questioning the Chief’s character, called his home phone number at all hours, sent fire trucks to his house at night, stole his badges, and removed his photo from headquarters. When the harassment campaign was unsuccessful, there were enough QXTZ members in policeman union leadership (all but one) to alter bylaws allowing the union’s Grievance Committee to permit secret testimony that could be used against Allen anonymously. Ultimately unsuccessful in removing the Chief, the matter eventually faded but it remains an example of coordinated right wing activity embedded in local, public institutions.

Departments in larger cities handled Bircher infiltration on a case-by-case basis, with rulings typically depending on whether the police or elected officials decided their fate. In Philadelphia, fifteen officers were placed on limited duty due to Bircher affiliation. Mayor James Tate did not mince words that the Birchers were a white supremacy organization: “Lets not be ridiculous” the mayor told a newspaper, “this is a situation where [the JBS] are not attuned with law enforcement problems” and simply had a mission to suppress “certain groups in the big cities.” Conversely, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) permitted Birchers to serve because they were “not on the subversive list” prohibiting members of fringe groups from holding government jobs. Using the same application of the subversive list, the LAPD suspended an officer who volunteered for the Congress for Racial Equity (CORE), a comparatively moderate civil rights organization at the time, because it was listed.

⁴⁶² Thuan Le, “Former Santa Ana Police Chief Allen Dies: Longtime officer became a critic of court practices and was jailed once in connection with an anti-abortion protest,” Los Angeles Times, January 7, 1990.

In Wisconsin, both Birchers and conservative clergy united to oppose civilian control of the police during the increasing civil disobedience of the mid-1960s. The NAACP's Youth Council led by Father John Groppi, an ethnic Italian priest from South Milwaukee, became the face of a multifaceted campaign to oppose police brutality, school segregation, welfare, restrictive housing ownership, and the black freedom movement in northern cities at-large. The Youth Council called for greater federal oversight in bank lending and eliminating covenant restrictions that prevented persons of color and Jews from owning homes in suburban Milwaukee.

After a particularly violent confrontation between the Youth Council and 8,000 white counter-protesters on Milwaukee's 16th St. viaduct, clergy told newspapers Groppi and the movement were trying to accomplish "doubtful objectives through immoral means" because the issue of private/public property was in no way linked to Christian morality. After another action targeted the Milwaukee suburbs, historian Patrick Jones noted KKK rallies in Wauwatosa and a "significant uptick in hate literature" received by universities, radio and television stations, possibly linked to a JBS letter-writing campaign.⁴⁶³ That same year, a Bircher front group purchased bus advertising calling to "Support Your Local Police" on 656 buses across Greater Milwaukee—the entire fleet.

After Groppi invited SNCC leaders Stokeley Carmichael and H. Rapp Brown to speak at a rally in Milwaukee, the Birchers upped their character assassination attempts toward the activist priest bringing in their own speaker, Father Francis Fenton. Father Fenton was a member of the JBS (possibly on the Council at some point) and a fundamentalist Catholic. In a Milwaukee speech he conceded instances of "grave violation[s] of Christian charity and justice"

⁴⁶³ Jones, 127-130. Jones also gives a thorough account of the decline of community-police 149-161 culminating in the 1967 riot.

toward northern black populations, but did not “believe it can be effectively legislated.” Fenton accused Groppi of “being abusive” to local police by intimating violence if public protests did not work and questioned Groppi’s “genuine-ness” as a man of God by bringing militant secular radicals like Carmichael and Brown to speak.⁴⁶⁴ From his residence in Connecticut, Fenton was also the founder of the Orthodox Roman Catholic Movement, partnering with Mexican and South American fundamentalist Catholics, post-Vatican II, to mobilize their own right wing caucus within the church.⁴⁶⁵

Fighting to oppose community oversight, the Milwaukee Police Department (MPD) depended on the Birchers to be their militant mouthpiece in public relations. Found in Grede’s JBS file is a flyer for a Bircher-backed front group emerged, the Committee On Police Support (COPS), that mailed thousands of letters opposing federal funding for community oversight groups, threatening it “would result in federal control of local departments.” Asked how the group acquired a list of so many personnel, the Bircher spokesman replied that they had been “working with” departments across Wisconsin for many years. In doing so, “you can acquire a lot of names.”⁴⁶⁶

By the late 1960s, the internal sentiment among leadership of the John Birch Society’s prospects as a viable anticommunist and anti-civil rights organization were positive. They had infiltrated a number of other organizations, had a robust suburban core, and had solicited a number of wealthy donor-activists to sit on the Council. In 1967, Welch assessed that Walter Reuther, his rival and figurehead representing the progressive wing of the AFL-CIO, was “losing out to [the more conservative George] Meany in their battle for supremacy in the American labor

⁴⁶⁴ Eugene Horn, “Priest Active in Birch Society Thinks Civil Rights Movement Part of Red Plot,” *Catholic Herald Citizen*, October 14, 1967. 5.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁶⁶ no author, “Group Opposes Police Proposal,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 28, 1970, sec. Part I, Page 11.

movement.” Writing to a friend, Welch also noted that “M.L. King is becoming more widely recognized as an over-inflated Comsymp; and Saul Alinsky’s professional riot productions have remained in the planning stage.”⁴⁶⁷ From the fringe of the conservative movement, the Society successful in many of their programs, and mainstream sentiment was slowly creeping rightward. Internally, however, the Society had been in conflict among leadership since at least 1964.

VI

Internal Friction & The Society Declines in Influence

Welch Cedes Control to the Council Strategy Committee

The Society’s rapid expansion on multiple fronts made them critical and relatively hidden force within the broader American right, providing volunteers, projects, and funding. Birchers shaped mid-twentieth century conservative activism and ideology in ways that are just now being uncovered. Simultaneously, and from the Society’s very conception, internal conflict among founding members was also reshaping JBS strategy, public relations, and legacy. These conflicts continued into the 1960s and by 1968 (after ultimatums by Welch) a younger generation of Birchers split into two distinct factions that informed the shape of American conservatism to the present.

Issues began with the Society’s most well-known controversy based on an unpublished manuscript of Robert Welch’s, titled *The Politician*, accusing President Eisenhower of being both communist sympathizer and gullible tool for the forthcoming Soviet takeover of the United States. Welch’s accusations were motivated by the Eisenhower campaign’s defeat over the

⁴⁶⁷ Robert Welch, “Letter to James McKay,” February 25, 1967, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 5, Wisconsin Historical Society. Comsymp is a contraction for “communist sympathizer”—a term created by Welch as a device to stop short of accusing powerful people of being communists. For instance, Welch accused President Eisenhower of being a Comsymp.

Welch-backed Robert Taft in 1952. The *Milwaukee Journal* first uncovered *The Politician* running a front page story with headline reading “Group branding Ike as Red has 10 Wisconsin Chapters.”⁴⁶⁸ Notably, the Birchers were not yet widely-known enough to be named in the headline. The next day, the *Chicago Daily News* picked up the story, making the John Birch Society a household name.

The *Politician* controversy—the first in a string of Welch public relations gaffes—caused an internal shakeup as factions formed on the Council, that moved toward neutralizing Welch’s unilateral decision-making. In a letter to the Eisenhower Administration, in which he served, Grede called the accusations “absurd” and believed most Council members felt the same.⁴⁶⁹ Confidence in Welch was waning by the week, and “factionalism,” a Council member wrote in confidence to Fred Koch, was destroying the Society. He pleaded with Koch to accept that the time had come to “replace Bob Welch” and “legitimize” the John Birch Society.⁴⁷⁰

While not yet a Council member, Fred Koch wrote to his friend Welch on the necessity for the leader to begin delegating so he “could get some much needed rest.”⁴⁷¹ It was no secret Welch was overworked, dedicating nearly all waking hours to the Society. The combination of Welch’s overwork and unilateral decision-making had been a problem for Council members since its founding. Koch, Grede, Stoddard, and Manion were Welch’s biggest backers on the Council but their confidence would wane in coming years.

In Wisconsin, the *Politician* drew unwanted attention from local state officials alarmed by the uptick in right wing activism. Milwaukee mayor, Frank Ziedler, appointed a committee to

⁴⁶⁸ No Author, “Group Branding Ike Red Has 10 Wisconsin Chapters,” *Milwaukee Journal*, July 31, 1960, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

⁴⁶⁹ Grede, draft of letter to Secretary of Commerce, Fredrick H. Mueller, August 24, 1960, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.

⁴⁷⁰ Knight resigned two weeks later when it was clear the Council would protect Welch.

⁴⁷¹ Fred Koch, “Letter to Robert Welch,” January 15, 1960, William J. Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 1, WHS.

investigate the distribution of hate literature around the city, reporting that “about 85% Bircher mailings” fell under this category.⁴⁷² Grede and other Wisconsin Birchers dismissed the report as a witch hunt, and issued company-wide memorandums to their employees arguing as much.

Exposed as either a secret society, fascist group, or both, individuals who comprised the Council began requesting that their names be removed from official letterhead, while others simply quit. In a conference call among Welch, Stoddard and Wisconsinites Grede and Cola Parker (Kimberly-Clark), all agreed that resignations en masse from the Society was essentially pleading guilty to accusations of conspiracy. Grede, who sat on Eisenhower’s Labor-Management Committee (he was appointed as a concession to the Wisconsin Right, along with the appointment of auto dealer Arthur Summerfield as Ike’s Postmaster General) offered his resignation to Secretary of Commerce Mueller “as a matter of honor” to the Society but the Administration did not remove him.⁴⁷³

Post-*Politician* damage control soon turned into a blessing, according to Grede, and “shortly, the public was curious about the JBS.” Many Americans seemed to agree with the Birchers and soon had “more invitations than [he] could fill to speak at luncheon clubs...especially from the suburban areas.”⁴⁷⁴ The Society went on the offensive, printing full page ads and redoubling education programs on the JBS and their ideology. Welch never officially apologized or retracted his accusation that Eisenhower was a communist sympathizer. In fact, he bragged that the controversy was the Society’s greatest recruitment tool—many

⁴⁷² William Grede, “Letter to Robert Welch,” December 31, 1963.

⁴⁷³ Grede, draft of letter to Secretary of Commerce, Fredrick H. Mueller, August 24, 1960, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.

⁴⁷⁴ Grede, “Letter to Joseph Majerskey.” Majerskey was writing a profile on Grede’s time in the JBS for the News Tribune, Inc.

conservatives had not forgotten Eisenhower's deal-making in 1952 and remained frustrated with the political status quo under his administration.

By 1962, Welch employed a staff to ease his workload but refused to tone down his ill-advised attacks on other potential allies on the right. In an *American Opinion* essay titled "The Neutralizers" Welch argued that any approach other than JBS goals and methods did more harm than good, specifically accusing William F. Buckley of being too soft on communists. Buckley was furious and wrote a confidential memo to his many associates on the Council: "get out before ship goes down."⁴⁷⁵ Soon after, all John Birch Society members in Buckley's organization Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) were purged from their rolls by Indiana University student and YAF chairman Tom Huston. Even Goldwater, while privately appreciative of JBS support in his 1960 campaign, was candid with Welch that he would not support the Society's agenda and that he planned to publicly distance himself from the JBS before running in 1964.

The conservative intellectual vanguard of William F. Buckley, Frank Meyer, and Russell Kirk covertly convened ahead of the 1964 Republican convention to discuss the Bircher question in relation to Goldwater's campaign. Opting to distance the conservative movement as much as possible from the JBS, the *National Review* publicly ostracized them in a scathing 5,000-word editorial, penned by Buckley, insinuating all members were personae non-grata at the upcoming convention. Years later, Buckley recounted this purge as in Goldwater's best interests, again emphasizing the need to paint the JBS as a virus within, and not an aspect of, the conservative movement.⁴⁷⁶ The Republicans attempted to set the convention's tone as a plea for centrism

⁴⁷⁵ William F. Buckley, "Letter to Grede & Company," January 1962, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁴⁷⁶ Jr. Buckley William F., "Goldwater, the John Birch Society, and Me," *Commentary* 125, no. 3 (March 2008): 52–54. Russell Kirk described Robert Welch "a man disconnected from reality" to Buckley as the two conservative

when the first evening’s keynote speaker, Mark Hatfield a liberal Republican Senator from Oregon, lashed out at extremist groups “who spew forth their venom of hate...like the Communist Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and the John Birch Society.”⁴⁷⁷

Many inside the Society were embarrassed by Welch and discussions began in earnest to not only replace him but rebrand the Society under a new name. Welch had given a particularly uncomfortable “Meet the Press” appearance followed by a disastrous Walter Cronkite interview where he refused to proclaim outright that President Eisenhower was not a communist. On the Council, Grede, Koch, and Manion were the core Welch defenders, rationalizing that while his comments were intentionally incendiary, Welch was not the problem.

For Grede, it was the moderates who refuse to get their hands dirty. These were the same conservatives who appreciated Bircher volunteers and funding “but not Welch”—these meek conservatives were the same moderates ten years earlier who agreed with Taft but refused to help his campaign because he was too extreme to win, according to Grede. If communism was to be defeated in America, the right must think and act with uncompromising boldness and that formula included the Society’s founder and president.

Resentment with moderate Republicans persisted, but the issue came to a head as Welch prepared for another media round. Upon hearing the news, an alarmed Clarence Manion interrupted his vacation in Spain to telegram Grede his belief that “Bob should not appear on Meet the Press.” It would only bring more harm to the JBS and “could be the worst thing that could happen to the Society in the country at this critical time...please help stop this” was his

leaders discussed how to politically disarm the JBS. Other conservatives at this 1962 meeting in Palm Beach were Barry Goldwater and William Baroody, Jr.

⁴⁷⁷ John C. Skipper, *The 1964 Republican Convention: Barry Goldwater and the Beginning of the Conservative Movement* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2016).

final plea to Grede.⁴⁷⁸ Welch's supporters were outnumbered and Council members moved forward to remove him from any major role within the Society of his creation in 1964—only six years after its founding.

An opposition to Welch caucus on the Council emerged—comprised of Tom Anderson, Dan Draskovich, Bob Love, Pat Manion, and Revilio Oliver—and submitted a formal list of grievances to the larger body. They argued a “63-year-old man working eighteen hours a day” was no way to run an organization the size of the JBS. They recommended, first, Welch should begin training a replacement immediately, suggesting General Edwin Walker, famous for his arrest protesting James Meredith's integration at the University of Mississippi and taken off active duty for spreading right wing propaganda among his troops. Welch could take an honorary chairmanship before retirement.⁴⁷⁹ Second, increased control over JBS-endorsed publications was necessary to prevent one individual from speaking for the group. The controversial “Neutralizers” pamphlet that attacked other right wing groups was written by a paid staffer in California named Edward Griffen and Welch was the only other set of eyes to review it before publishing. They argued the article was “seriously diminishing our prestige through...grossly inaccurate statements of fact...and highly improbable accusations” accusing allies of being communist sympathizers. On numerous occasions, Welch was warned to be judicious in his targets for accusation and “The Neutralizers” was the last straw. The dissenting faction called the essay “ideologically unacceptable to...our oldest and staunchest members” and they recommended Welch cede editorial control of *American Opinion*.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Clarence Manion, “Telegram to William Grede,” February, 1962, William Grede Papers, Box 15, Folder 6, WHS.

⁴⁷⁹ was also an officer in WWII and the Korean War who was reprimanded for trying to influence the votes of his troops. He drew criticism for calling Eleanor Roosevelt and Harry Truman “pink.”

⁴⁸⁰ Multiple Authors, “Memorandum on the Creation of the Council Strategy Committee,” March 31, 1964, William Grede Papers, Box 16, Folder 2, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Internal criticism of Welch's public relations strategy (or lack thereof) reached its apex after *American Opinion* published an op-ed by Council member and University of Illinois Prof. Revilio Oliver. Addressing the recent Kennedy assassination, his essay titled "Marxsmanship in Dallas" speculated that communists within the federal government coordinated the assassination of the President. Public blowback over the article and internal fury on the Council was swift. Outside of Society discipline, Oliver nearly lost his tenure at a hearing in front of the University of Illinois Trustees, an unusual test case over academic freedom.⁴⁸¹

Council members were mindful that the majority of the general public did not believe the wave of high profile assassinations in the 1960s were communist conspiracies and only Oliver and Welch were the exceptions in making public statements. Behind closed doors, however, many of these same men believed the communists were behind the assassinations of both Kennedy and Martin Luther King. In the week following MLK's assassination in Memphis, Grede and Welch exchanged correspondence on possible suspects and motives. Welch concluded that King had always been a useful idiot for the Soviets: "Were the communists willing to have MLK assassinated, because he would be worth much more to them as a 'martyr' than he was any longer worth alive?", Welch asked Grede, "Who knows?"⁴⁸² Due to an effort to rehabilitate his public appearance and internal disputes on the Council, Oliver resigned from the John Birch Society in 1966.

⁴⁸¹ Texas Birchers had also welcomed Kennedy's 1963 visit to Dallas with newspaper ads stating his visit came in "the spirit of Moscow."

⁴⁸² Robert Welch, "Letter to William Grede," April 10, 1968, William Grede Papers, Box 16, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society.

Taking issue with the Society's general trajectory, the dissenting cadre stated that monthly bulletins had become "notably deficient" in keeping up with current events and with projects being undertaken by chapters. In blunt terms, "present inadequacies at Belmont" were impeding rapid growth and the efficacy of speaking tours: "We have suffered serious losses in membership" for reasons ranging from "sheer boredom to expulsion for improper thoughts" from the rolls and the group recommended that the JBS's renowned selectivity be dropped for a broader popular appeal. The vast pool of even potential donors and members see the JBS as "a one man show." "understandably...they question...the stability, the permanence of any one-man show. One of our reasons for being is that we do not believe in the omniscience of any mortal being." The opposition group described a "crying need...for a strategy, i.e. a plan and concept how to proceed...Lack of strategy has always hampered the growth of the JBS."⁴⁸³

The decision to liberate decision-making from solely Welch began in March of 1964, when Grede was named head of the newly-formed Council Strategy Committee (CSC), rounded out by positions held by Koch, and Stoddard. Welch did not attend Strategy Committee meetings and John Roussetot assumed the role of public relations director, becoming their media strategist for the next decade. This new organizational structure essentially placed Midwestern industrialists at the center of all John Birch Society decisions. There as a call to move Bircher headquarters "to the Midwest, likely Chicago" while the Strategy Council assuaged the "urgent need for a management team...to take real responsibility."

Where historian D.J. Mulloy argued the 1964 Goldwater campaign was the Society's high-water mark, evidence suggests the newly-formed Strategy Committee intentionally reigned in ostentatious public displays but remained an effective organization. Departing from

⁴⁸³ Multiple Authors, "Memorandum on the Creation of the Council Strategy Committee."

controversial public statements on issues ranging from communist hunting to their disappointment with the state of the conservative movement in America, the Society remained active across a wide range of issues including opposing the civil rights movement, government regulation, and labor union power. Despite making fewer national waves, they never fully lost the stigma of Welch's bombastic comments in the Society's early years. Additionally, as the Society reached its decade-long anniversary, deeper philosophical and strategic differences among a younger generation of members were about to disrupt both the Society and shape the trajectory of the broader conservative movement into the 1970s and beyond.

“Retreatism” Versus Political Activism Divides the Society

“...I feel a compelling urge to continue my work in the John Birch Society and in the political arena...I cannot remain on both sides of what seems to have developed...into opposing ideologies.”

-William Grede on why he could no longer support the libertarian Freedom Schools and Rampart University

In 1975, Bob Stoddard and Robert Welch exchanged letters reflecting on the JBS's legacy, lamenting that they were “the only organization left with any size and standing, that is even pursuing a course which has any chance of stopping these pro-Communist forces...Nobody else is even fighting the enemy.”⁴⁸⁴ Richard Nixon, the Bircher nemesis going back to his abandonment of Taft in a deal to become Eisenhower's Vice President in 1952, had vacated the White House in disgrace, only to be replaced by Establishment Republicans Gerald Ford and Nelson Rockefeller as Vice President. Instead of moving rightward, Republicans seemed resigned to postwar liberalism. Instead ramping up opposition to global communism, the

⁴⁸⁴ Robert Stoddard, “Letter to Robert Welch,” September 17, 1975.

American mainstream seemed content in sharing the world with two communist superpowers in the Soviet Union and China. As casualties in Vietnam mounted, a younger generation of Bircher leadership divided over the question of sending troops to contain communism in southeast Asia.

Aside from the Vietnam War, disagreement over domestic political strategy divided the Society as the younger generation grew attracted to libertarianism in the mid-1960s. The generational divide between older Birchers, who recalled fighting actual communists on their shop floors, and the new wave, unexposed to domestic communism and preferring more diverse intellectual pursuits, became a lingering issue. It is evident in the comments of one American Opinion Bookstore operator who complained she “sure sells a lot of Ayn Rand junk..I don’t think any of it should be in the store” but “the college kids eat it up.”⁴⁸⁵ Despite concerns over Rand’s hostility toward religion, the Objectivist had an admirer in Fred Koch’s son Charles, whose growing fascination with libertarianism would soon conflict with Welch’s plans in grooming him to become a future leader within the Birchers.

Despite recommendations that Welch should mentor a successor in 1964, it took him almost another decade before finding a suitable one in Charles Koch. Fred Koch died on December 7, 1968, but in lieu of flowers he requested donations be made to *American Opinion*, indicative of his regard for the Society’s cause, and, while Charles shared his father’s commitment to anticommunism he was more fascinated with libertarianism, like many of his generation. Some scholars have speculated that Charles only joined the JBS as an expression of fealty to his father, but later in life, long after Fred’s death, he did express admiration for the Society, particularly their organizational structure. Additionally, he also remained a Bircher for two years after his father’s death.

⁴⁸⁵ Marjorie Morse, “Letter to Robert Welch,” May 29, 1966, William Grede Papers, Box 3, Folder 4, WHS.

A battle for Charles's allegiance (and accompanying fortune) erupted between Welch and longtime Koch business partner, Wichita Bircher Robert Love. Love, too, was moving toward libertarian educational projects and Welch was concerned it was diverting energy from the Society. After Love and Koch announced their joint resignation from the Society, Welch wrote Charles a twenty-two-page letter urging him to reconsider. Challenging Love's integrity, Welch implied that Love was a plant: "How sure are you that Bob Love is really on our side?" he asked Charles. Internal disputes were "the surest and easiest way for the communists to destroy...the Society." In a character assassination campaign Welch was famous for, he confided in Charles that not only had Love been conspiring against him from his first appointment to the Council (which Welch claimed he only did as a favor to Fred), but that he "planted in the minds of both Koch and Oliver that [he] had grown old and senile." Welch concluded his note with a stiff directive and plea to retain the younger Koch: "You belong with us in this fight, Charles, and we need you."⁴⁸⁶

Love move toward libertarianism was not exactly Welch's concern—many Birchers dabbled in radical free market philosophy—but he was losing both momentum and focus of the membership as the conservative movement grew and diversified in the late 1960s. Even as early as 1947, Grede co-financed the creation the Mont Pelerin Society, a pet project of postwar classical economists, while both he and Love sat on the board of the newly-formed libertarian Freedom School. Freedom Schools, located in Colorado, were run by the self-described anarcho-capitalist Robert LeFevre, and, through Love, Charles Koch also became a disciple of LeFevre. According to Koch biographer Daniel Schulman, "by his late twenties, Charles had become a full-throated libertarian evangelist." The cut-throat businessman, Charles, who was

⁴⁸⁶ Robert Welch, "Letter to Charles Koch," November 4, 1968, William Grede Papers, Box 16, Folder 6, Wisconsin Historical Society.

born into an industrial empire once gushed, “[e]very time I hear of an entrepreneur going out of business I cheer...He did not serve the consumer and for that he should be a janitor or a worker.”⁴⁸⁷ By the late-1960s, both Charles and his brother David were regular attendees at the Freedom School retreats and fully under LeFevre’s influence.

A longtime anti-unionist and anticommunist, LeFevre spoke at universities, town fairs, chamber of commerce, and JBS meetings, typically connecting organized labor to the Soviet Union’s agenda. Before becoming a professional libertarian educator, LeFevre was a landlord and restaurateur and drew from these experiences to make the link between unions, tenants’-rights organizations, and Moscow. Where LeFevre radically broke with the political activism of the Birchers was by postulating the virtues of 1) not voting and 2) refuting political activism of any kind, believing these acts only legitimized the state. Originally, Birchers loved him and his flamboyant presentation of free market education, but over time friction developed as he pulled activists away from the Society’s political work toward education and individual internal growth at his Colorado outpost.

Freedom School retreats and John Birch Society meetings could not have contrasted more in their appeal to a younger demographic. An early iteration of blending 1960s counter culture and libertarian economics—what Rod Dreher termed “Crunchy Conservatives”⁴⁸⁸—Freedom Schools allotted time for students to hike, barbeque, and generally frolic before returning to intermittent classes and reading groups. John Birch Society meetings were rigid, formal affairs, mostly comprised of men in their 60s or 70s. For Charles, the future was libertarian and he

⁴⁸⁷ Daniel Schulman, *Sons of Wichita: How the Koch Brothers Became America’s Most Powerful and Private Dynasty*, Reprint edition (Grand Central Publishing, 2015). 94.

⁴⁸⁸ See Rod Dreher, *Crunchy Cons: How Birkenstocked Burkeans, Gun-Loving Organic Gardeners, Evangelical Free-Range Farmers, Hip Homeschooling Mamas, Right-Wing Nature ... America*, First Edition edition (New York: Crown Forum, 2006).

joined Rampart University's board of trustees, joining Grede and Love. Skeptics of libertarianism within the Koch camp like George Pearson (director of philanthropy for Koch Engineering Co.) questioned LeFevre's motives, stating "I think LeFevre knows exactly what he is doing and our people are being led into a trap."⁴⁸⁹

By 1968, Welch, who viewed LeFevre as a competitor, gave Birchers involved in libertarianism an ultimatum: choose the Freedom Schools or the Society but no longer both. Grede, a longtime Welch loyalist chose the Birchers and his resignation letter to LeFerve adroitly summarized the internal rift between political activists and LeFevre disciples within the Society. These new libertarians were "preaching a 'non-active' political policy" unlike the JBS activists who "practiced an 'aggressive resistance' to the enslaving encroachment of government." For Grede, the difference was a matter of "political effort and resistance or aggression" against practicing only personal consciousness-raising. Only through those principles will conservatives find "our way to the ultimate goal of freedom." Libertarians, anarcho-capitalists, and the younger generation, he observed, "just withdraw from the political scene, live alone, and watch the parade go by thinking Utopia is at hand...they get lost in the struggle for freedom feeling safe in the confidence that government will just go away."⁴⁹⁰

There is a debate among historians on whether or not Charles Koch was ever committed to the John Birch Society or simply remaining in the good graces of his father. On the JBS, Jane Mayer notes that Koch saw the same problems with the organization that many of its most important members saw: Welch's headline-grabbing and penchant for conspiracy theories. An associate from his younger years speculated that Koch thought the JBS was "bullshit" and that he

⁴⁸⁹ Schulman contends that Pearson and Charles were more ideologically aligned than this quote seems; even bringing LeFevre to Wichita as a guest of their joint-libertarian supper club.

⁴⁹⁰ William Grede, "Letter to Robert LeFevre," July 26, 1966, William Grede Papers, Box 16, Folder 5, WHS.

was only involved to ensure his claim to his father's inheritance. It is true that Koch remained active in the Society for two years after his father's death, and, according to Mayer, would later in life imitate the Society's structure as "a model for [the Koch brothers' future enterprise]" in organizational strategy, donation network, and grassroots political engagement.⁴⁹¹

Scholars can only speculate the course of the conservative movement if the Kochs and other libertarians did not retreat into the woods (literally) during the 1970s. In the words one architect of the New Right, Richard Viguerie, the Kochs "weren't even on my radar" until the 1980s.⁴⁹² It is clear that by 1978 Koch had reversed back to Grede's call for political engagement, writing an article in *Libertarian Review* in which he argued "Ideas do not spread by themselves...which is why we need a *movement*" (italics Koch's).⁴⁹³ This timeline aligns with libertarians' general re-engagement in politics in historian Nancy MacLean's account of a 1978 Mont Pelerin Society meeting in Hong Kong where the group's president, economist Georg Stigler recommended transitioning from education to working to develop "political institutions and policies that allow us to pursue our goals..."⁴⁹⁴ Discussed in the next chapter, former Birchers who remained politically active in the 1970s played a significant role in the shape and goals of the New Right, as well as the broader maturation of the conservative movement to the present.

⁴⁹¹ Mayer, *Dark Money*. 55.

⁴⁹² Richard A. Viguerie, "The Heritage Foundation And Jim DeMint: Both Vital To The Conservative Movement," *ConservativeHQ.com*, May 3, 2017, <http://conservativehq.com/node/25594>.

⁴⁹³ Mayer, *Dark Money*.43. For quote in *Libertarian Review* see p. 54.

⁴⁹⁴ MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*.

Conclusion

In popular memory, the JBS remains synonymous with paranoia, conspiracy theories, and the charismatic oration of Robert Welch. While these features remain aspects of American political zeitgeist, this generalized depiction of the Society overshadows their dedication to pragmatic initiatives, particularly business interests and the preservation of nativist and white nationalist aspirations. By innovating new ways to subvert state regulation, labor unions, and the civil rights movements of the 1960s the John Birch Society preserved the ethos of the Wisconsin Right, deemed too extreme for conventional Republican policies in the 1960s and 1970s. The subsequent chapter discusses how these ideas moved to the center of Republican politics.

While the JBS was famously secretive about membership numbers, the true extent of their influence should be measured in positions of influence. Most figures place peak membership at 100,000 but quantity was secondary to an engaged core with heightened influence in both the state and civil society—an extension of Welch’s admiration for Lenin’s “militant minority” structure. With a desire to quietly pursue the tenets of McCarthyism instead of Welch’s ostentatious attention-grabbing, Midwestern industrialists took control of the JBS from its founder in 1964, reducing public exposure to the group.

The next major disruption in the Society came in the late 1960s as diversifying ideologies among Council members created a fissure over direction. Libertarians argued that directly challenging the labor-liberal alliance in control of the state was a poor use of resources and departed both Birchers and political activism for a decade. As the nation’s political spectrum moved rightward amid the economic and social turmoil of the 1970s, it became a question of which groups could organize the disillusioned the most efficiently. Concepts like opposition to organized labor, market based solutions to racial inequality, and increased distrust of the state

moved mainstream. New organizations and leaders arose that better achieved the Wisconsin Right's agenda in the 1970s, but the central role of the John Birch Society in this next generation's work, discussed in the next chapter, is evident.

CHAPTER 5

“Control the Countryside...the Capital Will Fall”⁴⁹⁵:
Paul Weyrich & the New Right

⁴⁹⁵ David Grann, “Robespierre Of The Right,” *New Republic*, October 26, 1997, <https://newrepublic.com/article/61338/robespierre-the-right>.

“I am struck by the fact that we [conservatives] have lots of people who want to be nicer than God. If you read the scripture, Jesus was not some sort of Milquetoast person with supreme charity. He cut people in two.” – Paul Weyrich⁴⁹⁶

I

In 1968, Frederic “Fritz” Rench, an unknown conservative activist and commercial carpet cleaning mogul from Racine, flew to Washington, DC as a guest of South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond. Set up in Thurmond’s office for two weeks, Rench developed the organizational framework for what became The Heritage Foundation in 1972. Rench, a Midwestern Bircher and anti-communist and Thurmond, the Dixiecrat segregationist and icon of postwar political realignment, convened at the behest of their mutual friend, Paul Weyrich, who had risen from local Wisconsin Bircher agitator to national figure on the right. For two weeks, Rench toiled in Senator Thurmond’s Capitol office, hashing out the mission and business plan for the new Foundation. The summit both symbolically and literally united the political aspirations of the Wisconsin Right with southern conservatives while creating a new counter to both the New Left and moderate conservatives.

All three were conservative leaders for decades before this meeting, each contributing their own learned expertise in fighting communism as a broadly defined catchall. Weyrich met Rench ten years earlier as younger members of the John Birch Society’s Racine chapter and regarded the carpet cleaning magnate as a savvy strategist, logistical expert, and loyal consultant in Wisconsin.⁴⁹⁷ Thurmond interacted with Weyrich when the latter was a senatorial staffer for Colorado Senator Gordon Allott. It is unclear if Thurmond ever secretly joined the Birchers dozens of other conservative officials, but by the 1960s the “temperate conservative southerner

⁴⁹⁶ Grann.

⁴⁹⁷ Paul Weyrich, “Letter to Fritz Rench,” December 20, 1976, Paul Weyrich Files, “Correspondence” Box, American Heritage Center.

was joining the John Birch Society in droves”⁴⁹⁸ and JBS Chairman Robert Welch (unsuccessfully) offered both Thurmond and Mormon leaders Ezra Taft Benson and David McKay seats on the JBS Leadership Council in 1963.⁴⁹⁹

The Heritage Foundation and its accompanying cluster of sister institutions are outlined in this chapter as both the symbolic and physical unification of the varied regional conservative ideologies that became enshrined in policy and national strategy through a cohesive national movement. As discussed in Chapter Four, where the Wisconsin Right previously found the overt segregationist stance of southern conservatives politically unpalatable, Southern political leadership moved from outright racial hostility toward indirect, *de facto* methods of suppression and segregation more in-line with Midwestern segregationist practices of the late-1960s.⁵⁰⁰ The New South’s understated racism opened doors for for broad-based cooperation within a growing right wing movement in need of broader grassroots coalition the South could provide.

At the same time the postwar labor-liberal alliance was fracturing in the 1970s, a grassroots strategy on the right was just beginning to convalesce. The efficacy of the right’s political organizing provides a concrete explanation for its emergence and Reagan’s narrow victory in 1980.⁵⁰¹ According to conservative activist Richard Viguerie, the national movement owed its growth to a handful of leaders: “Along with Barry Goldwater, Bill Buckley and Ronald Reagan,” Paul Weyrich was “most responsible for the launching and the success of the

⁴⁹⁸ Crespino, Joe, *Strom Thurmond’s America* (Hill and Wang, 2012).

⁴⁹⁹ Additionally, in *Dark Money*, documents Fred Koch’s attempt to create a 1968 presidential slate of Benson and Strom Thurmond.

⁵⁰⁰ Jones, *The Selma of the North*; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*.

⁵⁰¹ Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (University of Illinois Press, 2008).

conservative movement.”⁵⁰² A trailblazer in institutionalizing the New Right, the organizations Weyrich built demarcate the fringe right’s slow creep toward national recognition.

Armed with responsive policy think tanks, right wing candidates and growing activist networks the right came to challenge establishment conservatives in (but not exclusively in) the electoral realm for the first time since the failed attempts to nominate Taft and Goldwater in 1952 and 1964. However, Weyrich’s attempt in the 1970s differed in that instead of running a national presidential candidate through party channels, they replicated strategies conducted by both the left and the John Birch Society, aimed at “control[ing] the countryside” by overtaking established local organizations along with making new ones, running local candidates, and challenging Republicans in the House of Representatives.⁵⁰³ Once the countryside was won, Weyrich paraphrasing Chairman Mao Zedong, “the Capital will fall.”⁵⁰⁴

The Wisconsin Right contributed to the developing national conservative movement of the 1970s in three ways. First, continuing the language articulated by earlier Midwestern business-activists, Weyrich emphasized the right’s outsider position, especially after the Powell Memorandum of 1971 when politically-engaged businesses unevenly contributed to establishment politicians over right wing candidates. Self-identifying as anti-establishment, the Wisconsin Right’s built new coalitions by attracting disaffected voters towards the convalescing right wing. Second, Paul Weyrich relied heavily on his Midwestern network when establishing his stable of institutions, especially the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC), and the Heritage Foundation.

⁵⁰² The Washington Times <http://www.washingtontimes.com>, “Weyrich Cast Long Shadow in Conservatism,” The Washington Times, accessed May 9, 2018, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/dec/19/weyrich-cast-a-long-shadow-as-conservative-movement/>.

⁵⁰³ Grann, “Robespierre Of The Right.”

⁵⁰⁴ Grann.

Contextualizing Weyrich’s organizing approach to the broader political landscape in the 1970s, the fringe right “lost nearly every battle” and when “many...in Washington were afraid to identify themselves as [right wing].”⁵⁰⁵ An outsider, Weyrich prioritized building power in non-urban areas by espousing Judeo-Christian values to a population alienated by failed liberalism and societal subversion at the hands of elites, a concept he called “cultural Marxism” popularized by the John Birch Society in the 1960s⁵⁰⁶ Perpetuating a narrative of societal collapse through economic, moral, and ideological breakdown, Weyrich also offered recovery through political activism, unifying the distressed fringe against elites in power.

Traveling the country, Weyrich linked the economic desperation of many white Americans in the 1970s to moral depravity—a lack of adherence to traditional American values, absence of sexual restraint, and the diminished role of religion in American life. Most Americans left behind by global economic realignment would find no sanctuary in joining the Democrats or Republicans because both parties were compromised by business, labor, and international elite interests. Weyrich saw a new future through institutions of his own creation, made possible through cooperation and organizing. It was, in the words of former National Rifle Association (NRA) President David Keene, the right’s “Leninist phase”—they were maturing together, slowly gaining national relevancy while remaining on the political fringe.⁵⁰⁷ Weyrich offered disaffected Americans targets for their rage by calling out entrenched Washington elites, he depicted as uncaring or compromised by special interests.

⁵⁰⁵ Richard A. Viguerie, “The Heritage Foundation and Jim DeMint.”

⁵⁰⁶ Although the etymology of the term is rooted in the right’s depiction of 1930s Jewish academics fleeing European fascism (the Frankfurt School), Birchers evoked it to describe Jews and leftists on college campuses and in popular culture in the 1960s. It was Weyrich who popularized its use among the right during the 1980s culture wars. He used the phrase in speeches at the Free Congress Foundation, and is credited for coining the term, “cultural Marxism” it was Weyrich assigned William Lind to write about the Cultural Marxism.

⁵⁰⁷ Gregory L. Schneider, David Keene Telephone Interview, September 28, 1994, In author’s possession.

Wisconsin was a prime location for Weyrich's new institutionalization projects because of the connections he made growing up in the state and because of the social conditions impacting the state in the closing decades of the 20th century. Animosity toward the civil rights movement and the corporate merger movement followed by deindustrialization alienated many white voters toward both political parties. Wisconsin was also home to a base of cold war Catholic fundamentalists of which Weyrich himself was a member. Demographics of ethnic whites, unnerved by the increased role of the state, articulated by Senator Joseph McCarthy's drawing from Wisconsin's substantial Catholic population, espousing traditionalist values and anticommunism.

New political organizations like the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC) (1974) were founded for the explicit purpose of political organizing in economically demoralized regions, targeting voters alienated by both parties. To find them, the "core of the [CSFC's] campaign strategy" relied on the "Kasten Organizational Precinct Program"—a near-replica of Thomas Coleman's "Wisconsin Plan" originating in the 1930s and discussed in Chapters 2 & 3.⁵⁰⁸ In 1972, the "Kasten Plan" caught the eye of Weyrich after propelling longshot candidate Robert Kasten to a surprise victory in the Wisconsin State Senate who appropriated the model nationally for similar races, making the CSFC what *TIME Magazine* called "one of the three most important ultraconservative organizations making up the New Right."⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Aif Tomas Tonnessen, *How Two Political Entrepreneurs Help Create the American Conservative Movement, 1973-1981: The Ideas of Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009). 260. Throughout his book, Tonnessen repeatedly cites the Kasten Plan as the primary reason right wing candidates had surprising success defeating better funded moderate Republicans or Democrats.

⁵⁰⁹ "Nation: The New Right Takes Aim," *Time*, August 20, 1979, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,947346-1,00.html>.

For conservatives entering politics in the middle of the twentieth century, the right's continued obsolescence was a far safer bet than a resurgence. Figures Weyrich admired like Robert Welch were either culled from Republican politics or willingly leaving. A fundamentalist Catholic, Weyrich entered politics an orphan—too traditionalist for Cold War Democrats and born without the necessary pedigree for acceptance among Establishment Republicans. Like his Wisconsin Right predecessors Coleman and Grede, Weyrich believed major parties overlooked large swaths of national demographics, wasting latent political power. He set out to organize them with the same veracity and desperation of an insurgent military campaign: “My view is Maoist,” he philosophized in a 1997 *New Republic* interview, “I believe you have to control the countryside and then the capital will eventually fall.”⁵¹⁰

II

Paul Weyrich, the John Birch Society & the New Right

Through Catholicism and the Red Scare, Paul Weyrich entered politics a staunch opponent of the corrosive impact the postwar social order had on American life. A throwback, the “fat and sassy former newsman,” as one journalist later described him, arose from a penurious upbringing into one of the most formidable political organizers of the 20th century.⁵¹¹ He was born in 1942 at Racine's St. Mary's Catholic Hospital, where his father, Ignatius, worked for fifty years in the boiler room. Ignatius also took night work at a foundry for added income and his wife could maintain childcare responsibilities. In a later tribute to his father, Weyrich recalled that “[h]e never played a game of baseball with me...never took me fishing” but “no

⁵¹⁰ Grann, “Robespierre Of The Right.” This quote also circulated in a number of New Right watchdog documents published by unions.

⁵¹¹ Richard Bradee, “Crusader for ‘little Guys’ Baffles Other Conservatives,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, December 4, 1981, Weyrich Files, Joanne Ricca Personal Papers.

man was more revered and respected” more than Ignatius. Weyrich also reflected that his father could “be moved to tears by the sound of German Christmas carols.”⁵¹² In times of severe poverty, Ignatius convened a family circle, and prayed that God would provide enough coal to endure another Wisconsin winter.

Weyrich’s parents followed voting patterns of many Midwestern ethnic whites, supporting Franklin Roosevelt before turning to the more conservative Alf Landon in 1940. Republicans in South Racine were rare (Weyrich claimed there were only six in his district that year) while Democrats were predominantly Catholic, pro-McCarthy anticommunists. Like most Midwestern conservatives, by 1952 the Weyrich family supported Taft against Eisenhower in the Republican primary election.⁵¹³

Weyrich was a traditionalist Catholic, who married his childhood sweetheart and had five children with her. As a college student at UW-Madison, Weyrich worked odd jobs to pay tuition and support his wife who did not work, but transferred to UW-Racine (now Parkside) after his wife gave birth to their first child. Weyrich had a frenzied and insatiable appetite for model trains, an outspoken advocate for national railroad investment, rare for conservatives. Posing wearing a train conductor’s hat, Weyrich invited disciples like Grover Norquist and other aspiring politicians to participate in a week long train ride from Washington to Wisconsin.

Through activism, Weyrich advanced both his family’s traditionalist Catholic anticommunism and his self-perception as being an outlier in the broader conservative milieu. Joining the Racine Young Republicans, he rose to vice-chairman by the end of his first year but always felt out of place among the “country clubbers” who paraded him like a “useful ornament”

⁵¹² Paul Weyrich, “A Tribute to Ignatius Weyrich,” n.d., American Heritage Center, Biography folder.

⁵¹³ “Republicans Who Think as Does Jack Danforth,” March 18, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120318104221/http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/weyrich/050401>.

demonstrating the club's inclusivity. Weyrich believed the Racine Young Republicans had no interest in expanding their rolls with members from "the wrong side of the tracks," the very ethnic, religious white demographic he would mobilize in the coming decades.⁵¹⁴

Alienated, and without a political home, once back in Racine, Weyrich joined both the John Birch Society and the Racine Republicans. A young leader in Wisconsin's First Congressional District, he charted voting demographics (claiming to be the first to ever do it in the district), mobilized coalitions, and contributed to party messaging. Parlaying the networks he made in this position, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* hired him as the "suburban governments" reporter. Later, he diversified into radio and television broadcasting and production. In his spare time during the evening, he managed publicity and speechwriting for a handful of conservative Republican candidates.

Weyrich's personal politics caught up with him in 1965 with the station manager of CBS-Milwaukee (WISN-TV) discovered he was a Bircher, firing him as political editor.⁵¹⁵ Milwaukee industrialist and John Birch Society co-founder William Grede knew of Weyrich through the Birchers and his support for a JBS-sponsored anti-United Nations program that aired on CBS the previous year. After learning of the termination, Grede attempted to hire him as the Society's Midwestern regional organizer but the position had already been filled.

In 1966, Weyrich moved his family Denver taking a job as news director for the 4KQXI television station, but was soon hired by Republican Senator Gordon Allott for the position of press secretary where he co-founded the Senate Republican Public Policy Committee (SRPP), an

⁵¹⁴ "Republicans Who Think as Does Jack Danforth."

⁵¹⁵ William Grede, "Letter to Thomas Hill, Head of National JBS Organizing." In Grede's writing, scribbled on a yellow notepad is the name "Paul M. Weyrick" [sic] and underneath is the corrected spelling "Weyrich," his address at the time (1452 North 48th St., Milwaukee, and assumedly the agreed upon dollar amount for working for the JBS (\$250/week).

internal congressional policy clearinghouse. In 1973 Weyrich left Allott for longtime Nebraska Senator and anti-New Dealer Carl T. Curtis. Under Curtis, Weyrich co-founded the 140-member House Republican Study Committee, the Senate Steering Committee, and the non-partisan Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress.

In both his prior work and in developing organizations to hone Republican messaging, Weyrich was a disciple of the “Political” approach to conservative activism discussed in Chapter Four. The previous chapter describes how Birchers divided over two major issues in the late-1960s: the Vietnam War and the Society’s strategic vision. Frustrated by libertarian educational projects that he believed circumvented direct political activism, Bircher president Robert Welch gave Council members Charles Koch, Bob Love, and William Grede an ultimatum: remain loyal to the Bircher project or resign. Grede displayed his loyalty to Welch by quitting a number of boards’ of trustees while Koch and Love refused. In his resignation letter, Grede outlined the ideological fissure among the Birchers and his conviction toward maintaining “an ‘aggressive resistance’ to the enslaving encroachment of government” compared to libertarianism’s “preaching a ‘non-active’ political policy.” In finding “our way to the ultimate goal of freedom” Grede could not “just withdraw from the political scene, live alone, and watch the parade go by...in the confidence that government will just go away.”⁵¹⁶ Even in the 1960s, when the Bircher’s fight against liberalism seemed unwinnable, direct political activism remained a battlefield the right was unwise to cede.

⁵¹⁶ William Grede, “Letter to Robert LeFevre.”

This internal debate among John Birch Society members magnified an understudied division among the New Right between “Political” and “Educational” camps, that unfolded predominantly along elite versus non-elite lines. The Koch brothers and libertarian allies opted to fund intellectuals and college departments who advocated viewpoints sympathetic to the goals of free enterprise and those entrenched in power, documented in Nancy MacLean’s *Democracy in Chains* (2017). The “Political” disciples sought an inclusive movement of varied ideological strains, available to non-intellectuals. Reflecting on the right’s ascent into the early 1980s, Weyrich’s partner, Richard Viguerie, observed that the Koch brothers “weren’t really on my radar” in those years, bit players until recently.⁵¹⁷ Author and former Nixon staffer Kevin Phillips made a similar statement, recalling the 1970s as “nationalism” being “far more important to the New Right than laissez-faire purity.”⁵¹⁸

After moving to Washington, Weyrich brought a fundamentalist moral barometer rare for the nation’s capital at the time. The outsider, Weyrich’s “well scrubbed appearance and soft voiced, tedious logic,” wrote journalist Richard Starnes, masked “one of Washington’s best developed instincts for the political jugular.”⁵¹⁹ Of (the additional) formerly controversial beliefs that became mainstream were the notion that United States should formally declare a “war on drugs” where incarcerated suspects charged with intent to distribute would be “treated as a prisoner of war [with] no legal rights beyond those in the Geneva Convention...no right of habeas corpus or of trial and...imprisonment would last...until the war is over.” Weyrich urged

⁵¹⁷ Mayer, *Dark Money*. 58.

⁵¹⁸ Aif Tomas Tonnessen, *How Two Political Entrepreneurs Help Create the American Conservative Movement, 1973-1981: The Ideas of Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 219.

⁵¹⁹ “Paul Weyrich: A Brief Narrative Biography,” undated, Paul Weyrich Papers, Biographies, American Heritage Center.

the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to “contaminate” drug batches and re-enter them into circulation with a “substance that makes users wretchedly ill.”⁵²⁰

By the 1970s, Weyrich had broken with the John Birch Society because of their “inept handling of things,” pointing specifically to the public manner in which they opposed OSHA in 1970. For Weyrich, they “failed to realize they were liabilities” and with Rosselout being “politically ineffective” in public relations. Despite this criticism, both the JBS and Heritage Foundation, shared multiple individual donors in the 1970s. One Heritage donor testified in a 1975 Senate Commerce Committee hearing that he contributed to the JBS and remained supportive of select projects, he did not support the entire Bircher agenda and some Heritage Foundation people also attended JBS workshops throughout the 1970s.⁵²¹ For their part, the JBS “expected ten Birchers to be elected to Congress in 1976 and viewed themselves as the true vanguard of the Right.”⁵²² The JBS’s conspiratorial rhetoric and blunt force approach to politics did not appeal to the CSFC’s tested, cerebral campaigning, particularly as they prioritized appealing to working class voters.

An August 1978 issue of *Conservative Digest* labeled Weyrich “the single most important conservative in America today” and outlined his role in “thinking up legislative strategy...holding meetings with wavering members of Congress...cleverly recruiting new allies into the fight,” the paper summarized his leadership in “basically running the show.”⁵²³ Once an outcast, Weyrich built a home for other alienated members of the Right in a world he saw as

⁵²⁰ Scott Kerr, “Neocon John? Strange Bedfellows.”

⁵²¹ Charles Baker, “Letter to Institute for American Democracy,” November 21, 1975, Paul Weyrich Files, American Heritage Center.

⁵²² Paul Weyrich, “Memorandum for Files: Meeting with Georgia Congressman MacDonald,” January 21, 1975, Paul Weyrich Files, “Correspondence” Box, American Heritage Center.

⁵²³ No Author, “Biography of Paul Weyrich,” Undated, Paul Weyrich Papers, Biographies, American Heritage Center. What appears to be Weyrich’s biography when he was 39 years old lists a number of quotes lauding his work over the 1970s, of which this is one. That said, Weyrich had a recurring column in the *Conservative Digest*.

debated by liberalism. The enduring persistence of rights-based liberalism, leftist politics on college campuses, and a government disinterested in helping Americans left behind by the changing economy was part-and-parcel with what some on the right interpreted as symptoms of a country in decline. Weryich channeled these sentiments into a political movement of his own.

III

Learning from the Left

As a Bircher, Weyrich was exposed to their emphasis on grassroots structure and foresight in building a movement his time as a congressional aide expanded on his abilities to accomplish this. Participating in a bipartisan congressional “civil rights strategy session” as Congressman Gordon Allott’s 1969 press secretary, Weyrich marveled at civil rights organizers’ ability to “literally put together a battle plan right before my eyes...it was a beautiful thing,” he recalled twenty years later. Each attendee played a role: “the columnist said he would write a favorable article, the Brookings [policy institute] man promised to publish a study in time to affect the debate. The blacks agreed to provide street demonstrations at the right moment...[I] decided to try it myself.”⁵²⁴

Improving on the left’s political program became Weyrich’s refrain into the late twentieth century, viewing himself as “a Japanese mechanic of the New Right, copying—and hopefully making a little better—the operations of the Left” playing upon the racial tensions tied to the emerging foreign automobile industry.⁵²⁵ In the words of his fellow co-founder of the New Right, Morton Blackwell, “Paul looked at the powerful liberal coalition of academics, think tank

⁵²⁴ Rochelle L. Stanfield, “Organizing A Revolution,” *National Journal*, March 18, 1989.

⁵²⁵ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right; Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82,” *Conservative Digest*, July 1981, Paul Weyrich Files, American Heritage Center. 8.

analysts, members of Congress, White House aides, interest-group officials, and journalists running America and wondered: ‘Why can't we put together an operation like that?’⁵²⁶

Like many family entrepreneurs, Joseph Coors, a second-generation brewer, was frustrated with Republican apathy towards subversives. The disillusioned Coors embodied business’ revolt against postwar liberalism and the entrenched labor-left, circulating John Birch Society pamphlets at the University of Colorado, where he was a regent. As a strategist, Coors lacked the political imagination to lead the movement, as Weyrich and others reflected years later. The entrepreneur knew very little of the legislative process or popular attitudes around the country. Those who led the new right’s development had “never met a man as politically naïve as Joe Coors.”⁵²⁷ He was, however, wealthy and willing to fund untested projects at a time when, as Heritage Foundation staffer put it, “business people have been notoriously apathetic in the political field.” Weyrich would “provide [Coors] a vehicle” to “do his political work for for a price.”⁵²⁸

The Heritage Foundation

The impetus for creating the Heritage Foundation was a means to “provide the intellectual shock troops of the conservative revolution” in the 1970s.⁵²⁹ Joseph Coors, the longtime Birch Society sympathizer, if not a member, was the primary financier for many of Weyrich’s pet projects and Heritage was their method of supplanting what they perceived as an ineffective conservative intellectual class in Washington. For the right, one of the primary

⁵²⁶ Richard A. Viguerie, “The Heritage Foundation And Jim DeMint.”

⁵²⁷ Mayer, *Dark Money*. 77.

⁵²⁸ Frank Walto, “Letter to Lester L. Logue (Weyrich and Viguerie Cc’ed),” November 16, 1976, Paul Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center.

⁵²⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Harvard University Press, 2011). 1.

examples of the right's failure to gain ground was the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) which unsuccessfully attempted to compete against the New Deal before moving to the political center. Founded in 1938, as a conservative policy counter to the New Deal, the AEI was deeply entrenched in establishment politics by the 1960s, opting for self preservation over risqué conservative policy, or as one AEI member and CEO complained, it took "about twenty years for a research paper at Harvard to become a law."

The AEI, Weyrich argued, produced "too scholarly" and "not timely" papers that "sat on the shelves of congressional offices."⁵³⁰ Reluctant to engage in legislative fights, the AEI feared "losing its nonprofit status" and, in the words of former AEI President William Baroody, "it was obvious to Weyrich that some other policy venue was needed in order to influence the direction of conservative politics."⁵³¹ Baroody credits Weyrich for his commitment to creating a new kind of policy network, serving dual purposes as "the repository of its conservative beliefs" but also an "activist think tank...separate from Congress and not officially connected to any political party."⁵³²

Using \$250,000 in Coors seed money the Analysis and Research Association (ARA), the ARA supplanted the AEI as the leading conservative policy institute. Soon after formation, the ARA was rebranded under the less wonky-sounding moniker of Heritage Foundation (Weyrich's choice). Where AEI was apprehensive in publishing conservative policy papers for fear of alienating legislators in power, the Heritage Foundation gained a reputation for aggressive, at

⁵³⁰ Lee Edwards, "Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in '82," *Conservative Digest*, July 1981; Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*, 1st ed. (W. W. Norton & Company, 2009). Phillips-Fein provides detail on AEI's inadequacies, pp 171-173.

⁵³¹ Mayer, *Dark Money*; Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. For quote on AEI's reluctance, see Mayer, 77. For Baroody quote see Schneider, 125.

⁵³² Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 125. Schneider gives an example of Weyrich wondering aloud if there was any policy paper supporting a specific piece of legislation he wanted and an AEI representative noting that, indeed they produced one several months prior but they did not make it public.

times controversial advocacy on issues including welfare reform, school choice, religion in public spaces, and unions' destructive impact on the economy. The Heritage Foundation quickly became the centerpiece for Weyrich's "constellation of richly endowed centers and publications" formed with the intent of moving national discourse rightward. As Weyrich hoped, he had created the right's own "sound chamber...that made the proposals appear not simply plausible but inevitable."⁵³³

In 1975, Heritage Foundation leadership discussed the possibility of restructuring the organization "from policy paper mill to on the lines of a Shadow Government." Each corresponding government department would have a corresponding "desk" staffed with experts "familiar with policies and alternate policies" to them. The benefit being that "in the event of the formation of a conservative government, you have people ideally suited to move directly into their real counterpart roles."⁵³⁴ This pursuit of a "shadow government" produced policies across a number governmental facets. By the 1980s, the Heritage Foundation moved beyond policy papers, becoming "the intellectual nerve center of the Reagan revolution" according to the pioneering historian of conservatism George Nash.⁵³⁵

The Heritage Foundation played a necessary role in justifying the New Right's economic agenda that the AEI neglected, and also nudged their competitor to the right; soon there were no substantive differences between the two organizations. According to Kim Phillips-Fein, the two also shared many of the same corporate donors. While the New Right "may have a new style, it still drew its money and its personnel from the old cadres of the business right."⁵³⁶ Weyrich also

⁵³³ Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (Harper Collins, 2009).

⁵³⁴ "WSL," "Letter to Weyrich Titled 'Heritage and 'Shadow Government,'" November 24, 1975, Paul Weyrich Files, "Correspondence" Box, American Heritage Center.

⁵³⁵ Nash, *Reappraising the Right*. 341.

⁵³⁶ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*. 172, 173. Corporate donors included Mobil, Pfizer, General Motors, and Sears. Weyrich associate and fellow Wisconsin Bircher, "Fritz" Rensch was also an early Heritage donor.

believed Heritage’s tax-exempt status hamstrung the Foundation “from doing conservative things” in the political realm.⁵³⁷

The Powell Memorandum Reconsidered

Lewis Powell’s 1971 memorandum to the national Chamber of Commerce titled “The Attack on the Free Enterprise System” is routinely cited as a factor for Coors’s and other businessmen’s increased political involvement, but upon reexamination may have hindered right wing activism. Known as the Powell Memo, the then-Chamber general counsel was concerned that “broad-based attacks” by the left targeted “respectable elements of society”—colleges, churches, media, and Congress—and pushing the country toward a communist future. Powell called upon businesses to fight for their own survival, particularly including political contributions and the judicial system.⁵³⁸

As of its writing in 1971, the staunchest advocates of free enterprise had no response to the “legal liberalism” increasingly shaping their world: “businessmen had ‘responded—if at all—by appeasement, ineptitude, and ignoring the problem.’”⁵³⁹ At face-value, the Memo accomplished its goal: The Chamber of Commerce urged corporations to establish political programs and contribute to PACs. Between 1974 and 1978, Chamber-affiliated businesses operating their own political wings increased from 89 to 650. In 1974, business contributed \$2.5

⁵³⁷ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.” 4.

⁵³⁸ Lewis Powell, *Powell Memorandum: “Attack on American Free Enterprise System,”* 1971, <http://archive.org/details/PowellMemorandum-AttackOnAmericanFreeEnterpriseSystem>; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents*, First Edition edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2007); MacLean, *Democracy in Chains*.

⁵³⁹ Lewis Powell, *Powell Memorandum*.

million, attempting to offset the \$6 million spent by organized labor. By 1978 business outspent unions for the first time in the post-New Deal era.⁵⁴⁰

The issue was not that business ignored Powell's warning, but that they comprised a combination of political inexperience and centrist (if not apathetic) politics. Corporate ineptitude in the political arena actually hindered the CSFC's efforts toward "Defeating 100 Liberals." As a rule, the CSFC backed only non-incumbent candidates vetted as appropriately conservative and soon came up against moderates funded by both unions and business.⁵⁴¹ Instead of backing the fringe conservative CSFC candidate, businesses donated to either incumbents or candidates with that appeared to be safe bets to win. An exasperated Weyrich found irony in the fact that the CSFC gave "even more support than the business groups" to free market advocates running for office.⁵⁴² Powell himself anticipated this problem, conceding in 1971 that most businessmen were ill trained to conduct "guerrilla warfare" against practiced opponents.⁵⁴³

Business support of moderate candidates was not an issue that slowly corrected itself over the course of election cycles with increased political experience. As late as 1978, a *Washington Star* article titled "In Political Shift, Business Giving More to Democrats" disclosed that 73% of business contributions went to incumbents, the majority of which were Democrats. Post-Powell Memo business donations to Democrats dwarfed those made by the AFL-CIO by \$20 million compared to \$9.3 in 1978.⁵⁴⁴ Another article noted that, while Republicans distrusted the New Right's popular arrival as they syphoned potential funds, based on percentages, groups like Weyrich's CSFC were the only groups giving *more* to the Republicans

⁵⁴⁰ Andrew Millison, "Business Groups Outspend Labor In Political Field," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, September 3, 1979, Paul Weyrich Files, "Correspondence" Box, American Heritage Center.

⁵⁴¹ By the late 1970s, they changed this position and funded loyal incumbents they had helped elect. Chuck Grassley became one example of an incumbent who solicited CSFC support and received it.

⁵⁴² Andrew Millison, "Business Groups Outspend Labor In Political Field."

⁵⁴³ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*. 172.

⁵⁴⁴ Lance Gay, "In Political Shift, Business Giving More to Democrats," *Washington Star*, October 10, 1978.

than businesses. In 1978, 59% of business, 96% of union, and 79% of farmer contributions went to Democrats while “advocacy” money going to Republicans, amounted to only \$352,000.⁵⁴⁵

As much as the CSFC preferred they were a threat as of 1976, the idea was laughable to them. In 1976, Weyrich sent CSFC members a *Wall Street Journal* article titled “Right-Wing Donations Flow Heavily to Friendly Congressional Candidates” where he included a sarcastic handwritten remark that of course “right wingers are just pawns of the corporations...which is why we received such a friendly notice from the Wall Street Journal.”⁵⁴⁶ Two years later, Weyrich called upon the Republican National Committee to terminate their Corporate Activity Division: “Democrats received the majority of corporate donations” as late as 1978 and he could better serve their needs.⁵⁴⁷

Corporations cared little for the cultural values of Republican candidates, so Weyrich offered an appealing alternative. One conservative Republican was shocked to learn that that his “friends” at Fortune 500 companies had financed his past opponents’ campaign more than his. A Nevada Republican Congressman articulated his betrayal saying “when you push water for [business] as long as we have...that’s a little hard to swallow.” Another California Republican put it more curtly: “corporate managers are whores...they don’t care who’s in office.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁵ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*. 77.

⁵⁴⁶ WSJ Capital Bureau, “Right-Wing Donations Flow Heavily to Friendly Congressional Candidates,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 15, 1976, Eastern edition, sec. Weekly Washington Wire. Weyrich attached a personal note to the board of the CFSFC joking “Everyone knows we are just pawns...which is why we received such a friendly notice in the Wall Street Journal, implying the paper’s traditionally conservative political bent. The article pointed out that both CSFC and the ultra-right Gun Owners of America each gave \$1 million in 1976 and Weyrich was either already, or would become president of both organizations.

⁵⁴⁷ Andrew Millison, “Business Groups Outspend Labor In Political Field.”

⁵⁴⁸ Alan Ehrenhalt, “Rightists in Congress Are Critical of Big Business,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 17, 1978, Paul Weyrich Files, “Correspondence” Box, American Heritage Center.

The Powell Memorandum served as a symbolic milestone for business mobilization but it lacked a concrete strategy. Corporate leaders were apprehensive to fraternize with the fringe right to the detriment of their own political aspirations and possibly delaying the right ring takeover of both the Republicans and mainstream politics by a decade. When it came to the fringe right, major companies did not seek their lasting partnership until after the 1980 election when they had already established themselves as important players in establishment politics.

IV

Taking the Wisconsin Plan National: The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress

Grassroots engagement and avant-garde tactical experimentation were missing from early Powell Memo practitioners and the Heritage Foundation was hamstrung from entering the realm of political advocacy as a non-profit. As a remedy, Weyrich formed a new PAC, the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC) in 1972.⁵⁴⁹ Starting with a \$5,000 grant from Coors it was an immediate success, raising \$500,000 for candidates during its first full year of operation. The CSFC's program promoted "the free enterprise system" unrestrained by "government, taxes, harassment, federal and state intervention, federal control, labor unions and socialism."⁵⁵⁰

Putting the CFSC's fringe positioning in broader context of post-Powell Memo business activism, aside from Coors, their 1975 Business Advisory Board included a tar distributor, family-owned chemical company, and sign maker. Instead of New York or Boston, board members lived in Indianapolis and Toledo, all small and mid-sized business owners. Major corporations were simply not moved to take risks, even post-Powell Memo and Weyrich's vision

⁵⁴⁹ Later renamed the Free Congress Foundation (FCF), and currently named the American Opportunity Foundation.

⁵⁵⁰ Frank Walto, "Letter to Lester L. Logue (Weyrich and Viguerie Cc'ed)."

of institutionalizing the fractured right was “not terribly welcome in some of those [mainstream] circles.” Whenever Weyrich shared his vision of organizing the forgotten in an inherently conservative nation, ripe to be tapped, he recalled how “they look at me and say ‘we don’t know what you’re talking about.’”⁵⁵¹

Establishment Republicans and businesses were content fielding what Weyrich called “Chamber of Commerce candidates walking around with Mobil Oil signs strapped to their backs.” He was of the belief that these candidates were unelectable in small Midwestern towns where they solicit votes by “talking about capital formation” to people who “frankly wouldn’t like it if they did understand it” because of the deleterious impact of deindustrialization on their lives.⁵⁵²

Weyrich personally undertook the vetting process for aspiring CSFC-backed candidates. In 1974, he traveled to thirteen states and interviewed over forty prospects. Now common practice, the CSFC required potential candidates to answer a 72-item questionnaire “to test if he is a real conservative.” Even if a prospect proved adequately conservative, the CSFC only then invested in candidates challenging swing seats they were able to determine by analyzing voting patterns from previous elections, strength of opponent, and whether the candidate possessed “a winning attitude” during the interview process.⁵⁵³ Of the CSFC’s first wave of candidates in 1972-74, twenty-four took seats in Congress (twenty representatives and four senators), most notably Chuck Grassley in the House in 1974. In 1976, the CSFC seated twenty-seven congressmen and six senators, most recognizably Orrin Hatch and future Vice-President Dan Quayle.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ Richard Bradee, “Crusader for ‘little Guys’ Baffles Other Conservatives.”

⁵⁵² Weyrich quote in *Conservative Digest* (Falls Church, Va: Jefferson Communications, 1979), 15.

⁵⁵³ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.”⁵

⁵⁵⁴ Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right; Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.” 4.

The New Right's Wisconsin Connection

“We’re not a serious movement because we have failed to organize at the state level and at the local level where things really happen.” – Paul Weyrich⁵⁵⁵

The Kasten Organizational Precinct Program

Weyrich’s Wisconsin connections shaped the formation of the movement, particularly around future senator Robert Kasten who was “as deeply involved with...the CSFC as any other person in the country.”⁵⁵⁶ Kasten won his Republican primary after being outspent 20-1 and, like Coleman’s Wisconsin Plan from the 1930s, his campaign engaged the grassroots (and re-engaged disillusioned non-voters) in a systematic manner. The focal point of the Victory Workshops was increasing candidate buy-in for the Kasten Precinct Organizational Plan in their home districts. Also called the Kasten Strategy or Kasten Plan, it was a near duplicate of Coleman’s Wisconsin Plan in goals. Kasten replaced longtime Colemanite Glenn Davis for the congressional seat representing Milwaukee’s suburbs, now known as the “WOW” counties (an acronym for Waukesha, Ozaukee, and Washington).⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁵ Aif Tomas Tonnessen, *How Two Political Entrepreneurs Help Create the American Conservative Movement, 1973-1981: The Ideas of Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich*. Quote from a 1988 speech located in Joanne Ricca’s private files.

⁵⁵⁶ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.”

⁵⁵⁷ The WOW counties became integral to the conservative movement in Wisconsin, producing a number of leaders and a dependably “red” foundation. During the 2004 election, the WOW counties voted proportionately Republican than any other counties in the country. Relating to the 9th District seat, specifically, after Kasten defeated Nelson for Senate, the son of Colemanite Fred Sensenbrenner and heir to the Kimberly-Clark fortune, Jim Sensenbrenner assumed the seat.

“Victory!” Workshops

Concerned over the quality of right wing campaigns across the country, Weyrich expanded the CSFC’s reach into direct campaign assistance and staff training through week long “Victory Workshops” in Milwaukee. Held in at Milwaukee’s Red Carpet Inn in December, 1972, the free program attracted aspiring candidates and their staffers across the country. Registrants brought their campaign outline, demographic data and congressional election results, and a physical map of their district. Each candidate received individual attention and step-by-step instructions for improving their campaign and maximizing turnout in a way advantageous to them.⁵⁵⁸ A Los Angeles-based pollster group was also on hand as a resource.

Workshops showed campaigns how to “set up schools and intense training” for precinct chairmen who were charged with “a specific voter turnout goal.”⁵⁵⁹ If each precinct chairman met or exceeded their voter turnout quota, a victory was ensured. As Victory Workshops grew in popularity, regional versions expanded around the country. By the 1980 election, the CSFC estimated they had trained approximately 7,000 candidates, staffers, and volunteers.⁵⁶⁰

Along with Barry Goldwater, Kasten cosponsored the 1975 Welfare Reform Act strengthening work requirements for unemployment payments and also raised hurdles for needs-based assistance. Kasten also co-sponsored “The Civil Rights Act of 1977” drafted to “repeal a number of existing civil rights laws, including most of the Civil Rights act of 1964 and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act,” bundling approximately fifty civil rights laws into one massive new law. Chances of Kasten’s reform passing were considered “uncertain at best” but his actual

⁵⁵⁸ Form Letter, “Victory Workshop Invitation to Clem Scalzitti (Running for Congress in Erie, PA),” October 27, 1975.

⁵⁵⁹ Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right; Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.” Also similar to Coleman’s centralization of campaign funding allocation, the CSFC stopped the process of cash grants to campaigns and instead funded trained, salaried organizers allowing them more direct control.

⁵⁶⁰ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.”

intent was to begin the process of eliminating agencies and omitting backlogged discrimination grievances covered by the Civil Rights Acts. Kasten sought to erase enforcement without addressing root causes of discrimination.

Lastly, a callback to the Bricker Amendment anti-globalism of the 1950s, Kasten, supported amending a foreign aid bill that would "end direct aid to any country in the UN that is 'engaged in a consistent pattern of opposition to the foreign policy of the United States.'" Attacking the United Nations had long been a staple cause of the John Birch Society over fear of international influence on the United States and because it resonated among prospective conservative voters. Weyrich identified foreign spending as the key issue that led to Kasten's surprise victory over the popular Gaylord Nelson.⁵⁶¹

In 1980, polls predicted Gaylord Nelson "winning easily" over Kasten. Nelson was a former staffer for Philip LaFollette, Wisconsin governor, and incumbent senator, but Kasten increased voter turnout among previously disillusioned conservatives in Republican-heavy areas by focusing on the aforementioned issues. The victory that was "a source of tremendous satisfaction for the CSFC" because Kasten had been "deeply involved with the growth development and success" of the young organization. Kasten's ascent from fringe right primary challenger in the early 1970s to upsetting the established progressive icon, Gaylord Nelson in 1980 embodied the broader shift of the New Right from outcast to mainstream.

⁵⁶¹ Richard Bradee, "Crusader for 'little Guys' Baffles Other Conservatives."

“Take the Kasten Plan National”

Some of the most influential conservative organizers in the country celebrated the nation’s 1976 bicentennial at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin’s Abbey Hotel to discuss next steps in advancing their cause. Weyrich hosted the meeting where, according to Friedrich “Fritz” Rensch, the Racine industrialist and John Birch Society associate of Weyrich’s, “all the right people were there” to make the vision a reality.⁵⁶² Without identifying specific individuals, Rensch’s meeting notes indicate a cluster of both businessmen and activists, which likely included Weyrich’s core group of Ed Feulner, Richard Viguerie, and Morton Blackwell. These “Big Four” activists held living room meetings that essentially dictated the trajectory of the New Right every Wednesday, beginning in 1975, and continued to do so for the next ten years.⁵⁶³

They all agreed the Victory Workshops were productive and decided to “make the Kasten Plan national,” while expanding their offered program to include “sophisticated technical advice” for political novices in state and local campaigns.⁵⁶⁴ Of the meeting, Weyrich agreed with Rensch, stating “I have been through many conferences large and small with conservatives. None has ever been so successful as the Geneva talks...God willing, the next two years will reflect these talks.”⁵⁶⁵

After the 1976 meeting in Lake Geneva, the CSFC quickly expanded, hiring staff around the country, becoming directly involved in dozens of elections. Of the twenty-two CSFC candidates who lost in 1976, according to the CSFC’s own post-election review process, it was because they had “failed to carry out the organizational principles the committee had taught

⁵⁶² Fritz Rensch, “Personal Notes from Lake Geneva Meeting,” December 1976, Paul Weyrich Files, American Heritage Center.

⁵⁶³ Richard A. Viguerie, “The Heritage Foundation And Jim DeMint.”

⁵⁶⁴ Fritz Rensch, “Personal Notes from Lake Geneva Meeting.”

⁵⁶⁵ Paul Weyrich, “Letter to Fritz Rensch.”

them” because staffers had been overworked.⁵⁶⁶ The CSFC continued expanding into 1978, by that election cycle, employing six Washington staffers and nine field organizers.

The Kasten Plan in Local and Rural Campaigns

Across the country Weyrich believed conservatives too often neglected organizing the countryside to their detriment: “We have been far too presidentially focused and far less focused on state and local conservatism, which is where it ought to begin, he wrote.”⁵⁶⁷ The right’s opportunity for growth laid precisely in the obscure, relatively insignificant races to the elections of the day. For instance, the CSFC assisted a young Wisconsin lawyer (and closeted homosexual) named David Prosser to win an obscure race for attorney general in Outagamie County in 1976. After the victory, Prosser made it clear to the CSFC his ambition sought higher office. Prosser, specifically sought to challenge Father Bob Cornell a Catholic priest and first Democrat to hold Wisconsin’s 8th District’s seat in thirty years. In promoting Prosser, CSFC organizer Bill Sullivan left a handwritten note for Weyrich tapping the new attorney general as a rising star and “likely challenger to Cornell in 1978.”⁵⁶⁸

Although Prosser did not challenge Cornell (who opted to not seek re-election) after the Vatican called for decreased political participation of clergy, Prosser’s correspondence displayed how even conservative candidates in remote counties were emboldened with the confidence that

⁵⁶⁶ Aif Tomas Tonnessen, *How Two Political Entrepreneurs Help Create the American Conservative Movement, 1973-1981: The Ideas of Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich*. 138.

⁵⁶⁷ Paul M. Weyrich, *Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority* (Heritage Foundation, 1993). 2.

⁵⁶⁸ David Prosser, “Letter to Bill Sullivan, Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress,” December 10, 1976, Paul Weyrich Files, “Correspondence” Box, American Heritage Center. Republican Tobias Roth successfully challenged Cornell in 1978 with Prosser taking his seat in Wisconsin State Assembly. Prosser would later be appointed to the Wisconsin Supreme Court by ALEC member Gov. Tommy Thompson and cast a number of decisive votes, upholding Gov. Scott Walker’s conservative first term agenda as Chief Justice. A controversial figure until his retirement in 2016, other justices accused him of both verbal and physical abuse. It is possible that Weyrich did not do more to advance his career because his homosexuality was an open secret in Wisconsin.

the CSFC backed them. Prosser went on to become an associate justice on the Wisconsin Supreme Court, playing a critical judiciary role in the decision that validated much of Governor Scott Walker's reform agenda in the 2010's.

Democrat success in state and local judicial placement was a continuing concern for New Right organizers in the 1970s. These judges could (and did) block conservative legislators' attempts repeal aspects of the New Deal/Great Society reforms at the local level. As a counter, Weyrich founded the Judicial Reform Project for the purpose of getting conservative judges elected, noting that the judicial branch would be "a major area of concentration...for years to come"⁵⁶⁹ In 1976, Weyrich led the campaign of a young conservative named John Ashcroft to the position of Missouri attorney general, drawing accolades from the National Association of Manufacturers.⁵⁷⁰ Ashcroft went on to become U.S. Attorney General under President George W. Bush. Focus on the state and local judiciary through elections and appointments remains a key strategy for conservatives in both expanding and preserving their agenda.

Weyrich launched dozens of similar pet projects in the 1970s, but the Kasten Plan was "the heart of CSFC's training effort" as they looked to taking over the Republicans in the 1970s. Daniel Hales, a lawyer and leader among Illinois's Republican conservatives, wrote to Weyrich that would henceforth be organizing campaigns "completely around Bob's [Kasten's] approach, and it seems to be working well." He "happily" reported his campaign accomplished "the first lag [sic] of the 'Kasten Strategy'" compiling voting analysis and would continue to apply what he learned "spending the day with Bob and his staff in Milwaukee."⁵⁷¹ After attending the

⁵⁶⁹ Paul Weyrich, "Summary of Free Congress Research and Education Foundation Projects," n.d., Paul Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center.

⁵⁷⁰ D.E. Marable, NAM President, "Letter to Paul Weyrich," December 8, 1976, Paul Weyrich Files, "Correspondence" Box, American Heritage Center.

⁵⁷¹ Daniel B. Hales, "Letter to Paul Weyrich," December 15, 1975, Paul Weyrich Files, "Correspondence" Box, American Heritage Center.

training, Oklahoma Republican Don Nickles claimed it helped him build “one of the finest precinct organizations I have ever seen in a statewide campaign” after he won 70% of the vote despite being significantly outspent.

VI

“We Wanted him to Run, but Not to Win”: Defying The Republican Establishment

The same year as the Lake Geneva meeting, the Republican Party openly questioned their tactic of focusing on alienated working class whites. One strategist in Washington criticized the group’s “whole tactic” of “stirring up an intense vocal minority” that, he conceded, was useful for advocating specific pieces of legislation “but when you do that on the election level, you have basic contradictions.” For instance, “the New Right wants blue collar votes, but one of its prime money raising tactics is to send out union busting letters.” These prospective voters would not be fooled by CSFC hypocrisy wooing workers while being paid by management: “if a candidate tried [appealing to blue collar votes on an antiunion platform], he would be found out.”⁵⁷²

Weyrich and leadership retained antiunion views but they circumvented this direct challenge by embracing a broader range of issues. To fill this void, the New Right pursued a blend of traditionalist, religious issue-building, while remaining ancillary linked to national economic health. Weyrich co-founded and became president of Coalitions For America, a 501(c)(3) lobbying PAC uniting 110 “free-enterprise, pro-defense, pro-family groups” and hired Laszlo Pasztor to serve as CFA’s president. During WWII, Pasztor was a Hungarian fascist and

⁵⁷² Andrew Millison, “Business Groups Outspend Labor In Political Field.”

“convicted Nazi collaborator” whose political party, Arrow Cross, held majority control of Hungarian parliament during Nazi occupation.⁵⁷³

Unions were the first to raise alarm over “the threat from the radical right wing” that began holding conferences across the country in the late-1970s. In 1979, Jacob Clayman, president of the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, observed that “we have more right wing candidates” in the 1979 cycle than he could ever remember. This new right wing awakening, he warned, would “make the Republican Party a reactionary party, and, as sure as night follows day, the Democratic Party will then become more conservative.” In a prophetic statement, Clayman warned that “unless labor and liberals wake up...a wave of defeats lies ahead.”⁵⁷⁴

Dividing Democrats by Mainstreaming Abortion as a Political Issue

In 1975, Weyrich wrote a confidential letter to Richard Viguerie on the political opportunities available to conservatives by running as anti-abortion candidates. In the early 1970s, even evangelicals considered abortion a private matter unlike fundamentalist Catholics like Weyrich. Highlighting abortion as a single issue could also divide Democrats in select districts. “More and more,” wrote Weyrich, “I see opportunities to support conservative Democrats, especially in primaries.” Running a right wing Democrat in the primaries who focused solely on the abortion issue “muddies up the waters” in advance of the general election. Republicans could then calculate the percentage of primary voters who would either not vote or

⁵⁷³ “Paul Weyrich: A Brief Narrative Biography”; Scott Kerr, “Neocon John? Strange Bedfellows.” Coalitions for America was three groups, uniting their members into one: the Kingston, Library Court, and Stanton Groups.

⁵⁷⁴ Andrew Millison, “Business Groups Outspend Labor In Political Field.”

switch parties in the general, a number he speculated would redirect “25-30% of the vote in a given election” in favor of the Republicans.⁵⁷⁵

Exposing a Democrat as weak on abortion in the primary would become the difference needed for an underdog Republican to win office. In most cases, “without a conservative Democrat on the scene the number of alienated voters would not be sufficient to make the difference in November [general elections]” speculated Weyrich. The other outcome was even more beneficial to the New Right: “there is always the remote chance that such a conservative Democrat would score an upset victory in which case we would be face with a choice between our candidate and our candidate.” To attract aspiring pro-life Democrats to the right wing CSFC, Viguerie sought to “remedy that somewhat by getting a couple of Democrat Advisors on our board.”⁵⁷⁶

In practice, Viguerie’s idea was most prominently put to the test in the middle of the country against formal presidential nominee, South Dakota Senator George McGovern. In the 1980 Senatorial primary, the CSFC challenged McGovern with a conservative Democrat Larry Schumaker who ran on a dual-issue platform of Right-to-Work and Right-to-Life. The CSFC sought to to identify approximately 30% of the Democratic voting pool who “would be easy votes to transfer [to Republicans] in the fall [general election]” with Weyrich adding “[w]e wanted him to run, but not to win.” Schumaker surpassed the CSFC’s expectations by taking 38% of the primary vote. Following the trail blazed by Schumaker’s primary campaign highlighting select issues, Republican James Abdnor was able to defeat McGovern 59.6 to 40.4%

⁵⁷⁵ Paul Weyrich, “Confidential Letter to Richard A. Viguerie,” October 3, 1975, Paul Weyrich Files, “Correspondence” Box, American Heritage Center.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

in the 1980 general election.”⁵⁷⁷ Abortion became a secret weapon for right wing candidates in remote states to gain an electoral advantage.

Suddenly, longshots willing to take a “pro-life” position became contenders. Iowa Congressman Chuck Grassley was a long shot to win the 1980 GOP senatorial primary. His more well-known opponent, Tom Stoner, outspent his opponent, \$1.2 million to \$700,000, leading Grassley to cut a deal with the CSFC to take over his campaign. Weyrich replaced Grassley’s manager and maintained daily contact with the candidate who reduced his talking points to critiquing federal spending and “Right-to-Life.” Stoner’s advantages as an established figure and Grassley’s circumspect foreign policy in the House melted away: Grassley trounced Stoner 65-35%.

Grassroots “pro-life” fundamentalists moving mainstream is a recent and dynamic aspect of the modern conservative movement’s historiography and right wing activists capitalized on its ascent as an issue in creative ways. [add books]. Historian Donald Critchlow notes it was around the late 1970s that “abortion became a central grassroots mobilizing issue” for the New Right.⁵⁷⁸ In September of 1979, the National Pro-Life Political Action Committee announced their “1980 Elections Start Now!” campaign would begin by sending fourteen “specially selected” organizers to Milwaukee for “week long day-training” to learn “every aspect of political management.”⁵⁷⁹ The Kasten Plan, once only for aspiring politicians, expanded to include issue-based activists and organizers from around the country.

⁵⁷⁷ Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right; Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.” 6.

⁵⁷⁸ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*. 264.

⁵⁷⁹ Critchlow. 264.

The “Pro-Life” Debate on the Right

As Weyrich repeated in interviews, abortion post-*Roe vs. Wade* was a useful issue, but not the political unifier the right sought. Unlike Grassley, some lawmakers on the Republican Right were uncomfortable pushing abortion despite the CSFC’s data showing its efficacy as flagship issue that could float a campaign. Illinois congressman Phil Crane had hired Ed Feulner, Weyrich’s Heritage Foundation co-founder, as a staffer and in return Feulner assisted in Crane in his bid for the presidency.

Crane, a vocal member of the Republican’s right flank, served as Ronald Reagan’s 1976 campaign chair but after two lackluster campaigns the former actor was leaning towards not running in 1980. Former CIA director George H.W. Bush was considered too moderate, and John Connally, while also a moderate, had conservative Scaife Foundation backing. Both the fringe and Establishment had concerns over Reagan’s appeal as a candidate and ability to lead the Executive Branch should he win.⁵⁸⁰

In early 1979, Crane ran as a placeholder for the right, promising to drop out if Reagan opted to run a third time. Previously a historian at Bradley University, Crane won Donald Rumsfeld’s congressional seat after the future secretary of defense joined the Nixon administration in 1969. Thanks, in large part, to the Kasten Plan, Crane won several previously Democrat precincts in Illinois and the CSFC visited his campaign ten times from June to November.⁵⁸¹ Crane was elected chairman of the then 300,000 member American Conservative Union (ACU) in 1978 and was the principle sponsor of the National Right-to-Work bill that year

⁵⁸⁰ David Keene, “Phil Crane, a Positive Force of Modern Conservatism,” *Illinois Review*, accessed May 4, 2017, <http://illinoisreview.typepad.com/illinoisreview/2014/11/ready-phil-crane-a-positive-force-of-modern-conservatism.html>.

⁵⁸¹ Aif Tomas Tonnessen, *How Two Political Entrepreneurs Help Create the American Conservative Movement, 1973-1981: The Ideas of Richard Viguerie and Paul Weyrich*.

and was the only candidate in 1980 election to openly support it. Reagan eventually decided to run for a third time but Crane was having enough success that he reneged on his promise to withdraw. The two friends met privately and agreed they would not campaign negatively against each other.

In 1979, Weyrich paved a path for Crane to both define the Republican presidential primary's right flank and win the nomination by announcing his campaign as a pro-life and pro-gun rights. Similar to Grassely's Iowa primary, Crane's campaign was running out of money and his chances were sinking against the ascending Reagan and Connelly so the CSFC offered assistance. Weyrich took over running on issues of small government and low taxation and redirected him to hammer home the issues of "abortion, gun control, and Panama."⁵⁸² Crane would not in good conscience run on these issues and Weyrich quit in frustration.⁵⁸³ For his part, Crane assumed he had the support of his 300,000 member American Conservative Union and could win by "focusing on economic questions which are bothering so many people."⁵⁸⁴ Before Crane withdrew his candidacy, Weyrich lashed out at his campaign, calling it an "image-type operation" for "another smiling, friendly face we can elect"—an accusation that Crane was unprincipled and running for selfish reasons. It was a criticism Weyrich later levied against once-promising conservative icons Newt Gingrich and Trent Lott after, in Weyrich's estimation, they became members of the Washington Establishment.

⁵⁸² Inside Washington, "Phil Crane Splits with 'New Right,'" *Human Events*, May 5, 1979, sec. Newspaper Clipping, Paul Weyrich Files, Phil Crane File, American Heritage Center; Mary Russell, "Crane, Beset by Debts, Los of Support of New Right, Fires Top Campaign Aide," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1979.

⁵⁸³ The organization Gun Owners of America was a primary donor to the Moral Majority. The GOA positions itself to the right of the National Rifle Association, which they considered to be overly accommodationist gun control. The same way Heritage pushed AEI to the right, the GOA forced the NRA to take gun owner advocacy positions when its prior purpose was predominantly gun safety education.

⁵⁸⁴ Mary Russell, "Crane, Beset by Debts, Los of Support of New Right, Fires Top Campaign Aide."

White Nationalists & The Gun Owners of America (GOA)

Slowly making strides toward empowering “pro-life” activists under the New Right’s purview, Weyrich had long fantasized about doing the same with firearms advocates and white nationalists. His aspiration since the early 1970s, he predicted there would come a day when the CSFC would be “able to deliver the gun people to the movement...maybe some day [sic]” he wrote in 1975. That year, California State Senator H.L. Richardson resigned from the National Rifle Association (NRA) board in protest over his peers’ refusal to militantly oppose the Gun Control Act of 1968.⁵⁸⁵ Along with Indiana native Larry Pratt, the executive director of the American Conservative Union, they co-founded the Gun Owners of America (GOA) in 1975.⁵⁸⁶

Pratt, like Weyrich, linked mainstream conservative institutions to elements of the fringe right. He also served on ALEC’s board, co-founded the nativist lobbying group English First, and was forced to formally step down from Pat Buchanan’s presidential campaign after ties to white supremacist militia groups were disclosed. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) speculates Pratt may have “brought the concept” of citizen militias to white nationalists in the United States after studying militant anticommunists the Philippines and Guatemala.⁵⁸⁷ In addition gun rights lobbying, GOA also funded radical grassroots advocacy groups, such as donating \$3,000 to St. Trinian’s Sewing Circle, a Chicago-based pro-police organization, and to the Citizens’ Committee for the Right to Keep & Bear Arms, a libertarian gun lobby. The role of

⁵⁸⁵ Paul Weyrich, “Memorandum to Charles Moser,” August 11, 1975, Paul Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center. Emphatic underlining of “deliver” is Weyrich’s.

⁵⁸⁶ Paul Weyrich, “Paul Weyrich - The Lord Giveth, The Lord Taketh Away,” Townhall, accessed July 5, 2017, <https://townhall.com/columnists/paulweyrich/2006/08/08/the-lord-giveth,-the-lord-taketh-away-n1400189>.

⁵⁸⁷ No Author, “False Patriots,” *Southern Poverty Law Center: Intelligence Report*, no. 2001 Summer Issue (May 8, 2001). Former ACU president and Wisconsin associate of Weyrich’s, David Keene, became president of the NRA in the early 1980s.

white power groups as a response to economic and cultural shifts of the 1970s is just now beginning to be explored.⁵⁸⁸

Pratt and Richardson appointed Weyrich as chairman of the GOA, lobbying for for gun rights at a pace and militancy described by the SPLC as “eight lanes to the right of the NRA.”⁵⁸⁹ Former congressman Ron Paul described the GOA as “the only no compromise gun-lobby in Washington,” a shot at the NRA (which shifted rightward in 1977 after Harlon Carter’s takeover of the Board at the Revolt in Cincinnati). In the same way the Heritage Foundation forced the AEI rightward, the GOA contributed to the NRA’s shift from gun safety education, training, and maintenance to Second Amendment advocacy.

Deindustrialization, the Midwest and “Society in Decline” Rhetoric on the Right

The CSFC’s emphasis on issues including the pro-life movement and Second Amendment advocacy were newly-introduced aspects of a broader initiative to enfranchise and empower a disillusioned right wing in the United States. Across rural America, Weyrich observed widespread misery and neglect that deindustrialization wrought upon small towns, reinforcing his belief in the countryside holding the key to controlling national politics.

Christian Coalition Executive Director, Ralph Reed, articulated a similar sentiment in a 1993 issue of the Heritage Foundation’s *Policy Review*. Reflecting on the Christian right’s formative years in the 1970s and 1980s, Reed argued that he found pornography and school prayer adequate organizing issues, but that church-goers were more driven to the polls by economic waste and “the deficit.” The right’s desired “target constituency” (Reed’s words) of

⁵⁸⁸ Belew, *Bring the War Home*.

⁵⁸⁹ No Author, “False Patriots.”

rural Americans needed to be enticed through economic, material betterment to offset their current status as forgotten demographics, nonessential to the rest of the nation.

When it came to both parties addressing the impact of plant closures, Weyrich saw only half-measures and they approached the issue in ways that were “ultimately irrelevant” to “individuals [who] see society in decline,” he argued.⁵⁹⁰ Attempts by mainstream Republicans to attract these potential voters through “tax rates” were insufficient: “The problems faced by these real people are beyond the conservatives in DC,” he argued. They “do not understand what problems are facing real people in real communities...the only reason I am reasonably sane after 26 years [in Washington, DC] is because I travel most of the time...and I see what is going on.”⁵⁹¹

The 1970s was not the beginning of abortion, homophobia, gun control, and “society in decline” rhetoric as political fodder, but between 1975 and 1980 coordinators on the right began articulating ways of incorporating them into a broader political coalition. The CSFC’s embrace of these issues was, above all, an electoral strategy to benefit relatively unknown and underfunded aspirant candidates in geographically remote areas of the country. Cobbling together single-issues under the aegis of “the right” proved tactically effective in specific races, but was inadequate in expanding numbers on a scale necessary to seize control of Washington. If the right were to take the Capital in the 1980s, they needed “the troops that weren’t there in the 1964 election” according to Weyrich.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ Weyrich, *Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority*.

⁵⁹¹ Paul Weyrich, “Letter to Fritz Rensch.”

⁵⁹² Rochelle L. Stanfield, “Organizing A Revolution.”

Weyrich believed a brighter economic future was attainable through rebelling against the status quo, the restorative powers of moral living, “traditional culture” and rehabilitating “dysfunctional families.” The right could not settle for simply “publishing some theoretical paper” that “does not mean anything to real people” wrote Weyrich.⁵⁹³ The CSFC should craft a message containing “traditional cultural Judeo-Christian values” because his fieldwork indicated it was an “argument that works best” for disenchanted Americans in the 1970s.⁵⁹⁴ In practical terms, the CSFC pushed right wing candidates toward issues that could be considered morality-based while CSFC governance networked with leaders in other aspects of society.

The Return of “Cultural Marxism”

In the economic and social turmoil of the late 1970s, Weyrich became convinced his project had transformed from simply building a right wing coalition into preserving a white, Christian global nation—what right wing watchdog Chip Berlet calls “Global Christian Dominionism.”⁵⁹⁵ Predicting a “cultural collapse of historic proportions” Weyrich sought transnational alliances with likeminded groups. The CSFC may have been involved in supporting global right wing militias financially or otherwise, but definitely “monitored” the activities of anticommunist “freedom fighter” guerillas around the globe. Weyrich noted the importance of “taking the lead on issues which no one else is willing to take” because it “sets us apart” from more moderate Republicans.⁵⁹⁶ Although there is no direct evidence the CSFC aided right wing militias beyond updating conservatives in America of their activities, others

⁵⁹³ Weyrich, *Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority*. 3

⁵⁹⁴ Weyrich.

⁵⁹⁵ Christopher Stroop, “Global Christian Dominionism » Chip Berlet’s Blogsite: Research for Progress,” *Chip Berlet’s Blogsite: Research for Progress*, <http://www.researchforprogress.us/topic/41173/global-christian-dominionism/>.

⁵⁹⁶ Paul Weyrich, “Summary of Free Congress Research and Education Foundation Projects.”

evangelicals like his ally Pat Robertson were later tied funding genocide in Guatemala in the 1980s.

Weyrich became convinced an internationalist strategy was underway in the United States to subvert the nation through media (particularly Jews in Hollywood), popular culture, and higher education. He revived an obscure term from the 1930s—“Cultural Marxism”—to describe this phenomenon. The phrase is rooted in the influx of Jewish intellectuals seeking asylum from Nazi-occupied Europe in the 1930s. All well-respected university professors, known as the Frankfurt School, most received positions at Columbia University upon arriving. By the 1950s, the Frankfurt School became a clear target of the right as they became increasingly vocal over parallels they saw between the rise of Nazism in 1930s Europe and the proliferation of McCarthyism in American politics. The phrase became obsolete with the decline of McCarthyism, but was used in right wing circles like the John Birch Society throughout the 1960s.⁵⁹⁷ Weyrich revived the phrase in the 1970s to describe the erosion of traditional values he witnessed in American life. This fundamentally anti-Semitic phrase is now common parlance on the right to describe aspects of society that diverge from a traditionalist, free market presentation of America.

In “Cultural Marxism” Weyrich had a rallying cry for those seeking the survival of western civilization. It articulated a nation, not limited by physical borders, but by shared racial religious and moral identities. Berlet’s research has shown how this Global Christian Dominionism transcends even traditionally “Western” capitalistic powers, to include Russia and former Soviet satellite states. The American future Weyrich dedicated his life to creating was one of intense loyalty to a traditionalist Christian version of god and a society run by those

⁵⁹⁷ Heer, “Trump’s Racism and the Myth of ‘Cultural Marxism.’”

dictates. After successfully unifying the Moral Majority and being central to the Reagan Revolution, Weyrich set out to find the missing pieces for his vision.

VI

Guns, God, and Gingrich: Envisioning A New America in the Next Millennium

At the 1960 Republican National Convention, the right defaulted into what Weyrich called a “defensive strategy” because they abandoned Goldwater’s superior grassroots support. They stood silent as their candidate was portrayed to be beyond the pale of Republican values. To prevent this wilting from the national stage, the CSFC solicited new demographics—the “ground troops” as he called them. He found them in a coalition of political and religious groups he called “the Moral Majority.” Weyrich was successful enough in recruiting new religious activists that by the 1980s Republican National Convention, one Michigan National Committeeman joked the convention floor resembled “the Cantina Scene in *Star Wars*” with the amount of nontraditional and evangelical delegates taking seats.⁵⁹⁸

In the conservative religious unification of the late-1970s, Weyrich saw himself as being “sort of the operations people,” couching leftist guerrilla tactics within nationalist totems of Christianity and community engagement via congregations. Like businesses after the Powell Memo, churches were inexperienced in formal “beltline” politics and “[i]t has been our job” said Weyrich years later, “to tell them [religious leaders] what to do.”⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁸ “CPAC 2013 - NRA President David Keene, YouTube.

⁵⁹⁹ Dudley Clendinen, “‘Christian New Right’s’ Rush to Power,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1980, sec. Metropolitan Report, B7.

The CSFC provided messaging, polling data, strategy, even candidates and, in return, these congregations became the face of the right in towns across America. Weyrich, a Wisconsin Catholic, envisioned a unified, cross-denominational coalition capable of uniting around single-issues of common ground. Uniting disparate, anti-elitist, anti-secular ideologies, he tempered their infighting to a level where cooperation was possible and directed them toward specific, tangible political benchmarks.

The first attempt at unification was unsuccessful because of Weyrich's uncompromising messaging and conflict over the trajectory of a political-religious organization. Christian Voice (CV), a California-based advocacy group was given office space in Washington, DC in the Heritage Foundation's office. CV, "the nation's oldest conservative Christian lobby" was founded by Robert Grant, a Baptist from Illinois in 1974. To Weyrich, the organization was everything he was looking for. Not only did CV merge faith with politics, but their leadership was amenable to working with other denominations in a united religious front. For Grant, the move into Heritage Foundation's office came with unforeseen compromises and after a falling out over the organization's direction, Grant left the group he founded, describing it as "a sham" organization subverted by "three Catholics and a Jew."⁶⁰⁰

⁶⁰⁰ Melissa L. Rossi, *What Every American Should Know about Who's Really Running America: And What You Can Do about It* (Penguin, 2007). PAGE.

The Moral Majority & the CSFC

*“It has been our job...to tell them [religious leaders] what to do.”*⁶⁰¹ -Paul Weyrich

Although Weyrich’s first attempt at melding religious groups into his networks was unsuccessful, the idea remained a priority. A second chance arose in Kanawha County, West Virginia in 1974, when a minister’s wife named Alice Moore won a school board seat running on an anti-sexual education platform. Moore quickly spearheaded a coalition of concerned community members beginning a censorship campaign targeting assigned readings they considered subversive, radical, or unpatriotic, Eldridge Cleaver’s Soul on Ice and Amiri Baraka’s poem “Black People!” among them. The group faced pushback from teachers and administrators and the question of jurisdictional rights over curriculum went to court.

In an act of solidarity, the Heritage Foundation involved themselves into the conflict, sending two lawyers to assist Moore’s defense. The protest expanded, dividing the community, with most backing Moore. The county’s United Mine Workers’ local garnered national attention when rank-and-file voted to go on a solidarity work stoppage until the books were removed. Schools, factories, and public transportation also shut down in solidarity with Moore’s opposition group. The case was finally settled with the stipulation that Kanawha County vetted curriculum through an advisory committee from which the school board could choose texts from the approved list. According to the *Times*, materials were “carefully chosen with the textbook protest in mind” for years after.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ Dudley Clendinen, “Christian New Right’s Rush to Power,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1980, sec. Metropolitan Report, B7.

⁶⁰² Special To The New York Times, “Drive to Ban Textbooks Succeeds,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 1978, <http://www.nytimes.com/1978/12/03/archives/drive-to-ban-textbooks-succeeds-protest-was-kept-in-mind.html>.

The Heritage Foundation’s tactical philanthropy began “a process of unification between the New Right and what would soon be labeled the ‘religious Right’” according to historian Gregory Schneider.⁶⁰³ Previously a New Deal Democrat stronghold, West Virginia, and the broader Allegheny and Appalachian region, were losing ground to other regions of the country economically and the problems were beyond a quick-fix policy: rural America’s very way of life and value system were erased by the economic decline in the 1970s. The political organizing wing of the New Right understood that the shoddy social, cultural, and economic life for most in rural areas were deeply intertwined. The CSFC offered hope to a pool of potential grassroots organizers through faith and accompanying religious principles linked to political pragmatism.

Continuing appeals to organized religion—evangelicals, Baptists, and Catholics—Weyrich founded the Christian School Action group in 1978 as a response to the threat of losing tax-exempt status. The private, evangelical Bob Jones University was the first to draw attention from the Internal Revenue Service in 1972 due to possible violations of the Civil Rights Act, having forbade interracial dating and not admitting a black student until 1971. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter’s IRS investigation of private Christian schools’ tax-exempt status in the South, according to historian Joseph Crespino, displayed how private schools were both tax shelters and means of perpetuating segregation.⁶⁰⁴

In the IRS’s investigations of private schools, Weyrich finally tapped the necessary vein to mobilize religious conservatives. Expanding the CSA, ministers and right wing organizers convened at a Lynchburg, Virginia Holiday Inn to discuss next steps. Weyrich picked the location, invited participants and urged evangelical television personality Jerry Falwell to take a leadership role at this meeting. Learning from previous mistakes, Weyrich did not dominate

⁶⁰³ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 138.

⁶⁰⁴ Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*.

discussion, speaking only a pithy message, urging the clergy to look past “geographical and denominational differences” and find a “moral majority” to counterbalance subversive forces seeking to destroy the country.⁶⁰⁵ Previously, evangelicals had supported Carter who was one of their own, but “millions” said Weyrich, “have been politically awakened by...voluntary prayer in school, pornography, the ERA, abortion and direct governmental influence on the family.”⁶⁰⁶ Borrowing Weyrich’s phrase, it was at the Holiday Inn where Falwell christened the new organization the Moral Majority.

Most religious leaders dismissed abortion as “a Catholic issue” according to Jerry Falwell, who was soon convinced by the CSFC this opinion was a political misstep.⁶⁰⁷ In 1978 the Moral Majority successfully lobbied to include pro-life language in the Republican platform and came close in incorporating similar language in the Democrats’ as well. Many conservative Democrats supported Carter in 1976 under the auspices that he would ban federal funds for abortion, by implementing a clause in the Hyde Amendment and soon changed parties. While Democrats successfully blocked the language from entering their platform the Moral Majority encouraged churches to post both platforms side-by-side so congregants could see, as Weyrich put it, that “the radical feminists had taken over the Democratic Party.”⁶⁰⁸

A pro-life/anti-feminist mantra became an effective lure for droves of religious devotees and nontraditional Republicans to flow into the program of the New Right which acted on the interest accordingly. According to a *Conservative Digest* article, around this time Weyrich personally flew to Atlanta, implementing a Kasten Plan for southern Christians by training 200

⁶⁰⁵ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 138.

⁶⁰⁶ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.”⁶

⁶⁰⁷ “Has the Moral Majority Strategy Failed?,” *WND* (blog), accessed March 4, 2018, <http://www.wnd.com/2018/03/has-the-moral-majority-strategy-failed/>.

⁶⁰⁸ “Republicans Who Think as Does Jack Danforth.”

pastors who in-turn taught their congregations. In Georgia alone, the Moral Majority distributed training videos to 400 rural churches. From February to November of 1980, the MM estimated their message reached approximately 70,000 people directly in churches and trained 7,000 new organizers thanks to the MM opening its doors CSFC organizing metrics.⁶⁰⁹ At their peak, the Moral Majority tallied 400,000 members and Falwell, already recognizable from his 1976 “I Love America” tour, became an icon of conservatives.⁶¹⁰ In 1980, conservative historian Lee Edwards estimated 5 million new voters registered Republican through channels connected to the Moral Majority.⁶¹¹ Established Republicans did not know what to do with these newcomers, which Weyrich and his lifelong crusade against the Party elites likely relished. In 1981, these efforts contributed to not just Reagan’s presidency, but thirteen new GOP seats in the Senate.

Establishment Republicans and their allies in corporate America were apprehensive toward incorporating religious fundamentalists into movement. Fritz Rensch, the Racine industrialist, former John Birch Society member, and architect of the Heritage Foundation, commissioned a “market study” of Wisconsin business’ receptiveness to religious fundamentalists entering politics. Most independent businessmen surveyed (including Sheldon Lubar (Lubar & Co.) and Fred Stratton (Briggs & Stratton) perceived of Falwell and company through a “mostly negative” lens except for their “ideas on free enterprise and national defense.”⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁹ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.” 6.

⁶¹⁰ Story and Laurie, *The Rise of Conservatism in America, 1945-2000*. 115.

⁶¹¹ Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.”6.

⁶¹² “Moral Majority Survey Commissioned by Fritz Rensch,” November 30, 1981, Paul Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center.

Through the CSFC, Weyrich personally conducted more on-the-ground research than most conservatives and his precinct mapping and surveys convinced him Republicans did not have the grassroots numbers to compete. Despite the protestations of independent businessmen, the fringe right simply did not have sufficient power to change the country without the churches. Reflecting on the divisions within the New Right years later, Weyrich argued that the creation of the Moral Majority was no decision at all, rather a requisite for survival. Speculating that Gerald Ford could be the last Republican president for a generation, he bluntly stated, if [the Religious Right] refused his invitation, “the Republican Party will be dead.” To business conservatives upset with the inclusion of religious fundamentalists, he posed an ultimatum: “Those who want to return to that era are welcome. I prefer victory.”⁶¹³

Weyrich’s gamble of recruiting churches into his growing stable of affiliates became central for the fringe right’s entrance into mainstream politics. Public figures including Falwell, evangelist Pat Robertson, and former Nixon speechwriter Pat Buchanan had their fringe ideas on race, church and state, and nationalism legitimized by the organizational foundation of the Moral Majority. The latter two would run for president in the 1980s and 1990s, proliferating their ideologies on a national scale. The Moral Majority’s most tangible success was providing the necessary support for Ronald Reagan’s presidential victory in 1980, setting the stage for an administration that *Conservative Digest* argued was on “the verge of putting an end to New Deal liberalism.”⁶¹⁴

⁶¹³ “Republicans Who Think as Does Jack Danforth.”

⁶¹⁴ John F. Stacks, “It’s Rightward On,” *Time Magazine*, June 1, 1981; Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.” 8.

The Heritage Foundation Enters the White House

The newly-organized base of religious right voters catapulted Reagan into the White House, but it soon became clear the President had no substantive first term agenda. As discussed in the Heritage Foundation section above, their “ghost cabinet” was busy writing model policy for each federal agency since the mid-1970s. In 1980, they delivered these ideas to the White House in a 1,100 page *Mandate for Leadership*. Becoming the foundation for many of the Administration’s domestic and international policy decisions, one political correspondent described the *Mandate* as “a blueprint for grabbing the government by its frayed New Deal lapels and shaking out 48 years of liberal policy.”⁶¹⁵ The *Mandate* outlined 2,000 recommendations for the incoming president, of which Reagan accomplished 2/3rds according to Richard Viguerie, most dealing with reducing the government and militaristic foreign policy.⁶¹⁶ The relationship between the Reagan Administration and Heritage Foundation as more master-servant than mutualistic: “everyone in Washington knows Heritage runs the administration...they had the program already written for the new president to go with.”⁶¹⁷ (The next president to receive a *Mandate for Leadership* from the Heritage Foundation was President Donald Trump in 2017, available on the Foundation’s website.)⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ Don Mantooh, “The Mantooh Report,” December 1986, Paul Weyrich Files, “Correspondence” Box, American Heritage Center.

⁶¹⁶ Richard A. Viguerie, “The Heritage Foundation And Jim DeMint”; Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*. 147, 250. As Rodgers and Ferguson’s *Right Turn* points out, cutting government was a politically unpopular move in the early 1980s and nearly cost him re-election. This reinforces the mutualism between Heritage Foundation and Administration where the President followed the Heritage program and trusted organizers on the Right to locate paths to re-election.

⁶¹⁷ Don Mantooh, “The Mantooh Report.” In 2016, the Heritage Foundation produced an updated “Mandate for Leadership” for the Trump Administration available here: <http://www.heritage.org/budget-and-spending/report/mandate-leadership-comprehensive-policy-agenda-new-administration>.

⁶¹⁸ <http://www.heritage.org/budget-and-spending/report/mandate-leadership-comprehensive-policy-agenda-new-administration>.

The Mandate carried with it a more long term goal articulated by Richard Viguerie as an “implicit and explicit criticism of the policies of the establishment Republican leaders.”⁶¹⁹ The outsiders had arrived in Washington and they had the President’s ear. The Mandate explicitly called out establishment figures House Minority Leader Bob Michael and Senate Leader Howard Baker, informing them that compromise with Democrats or moderate Republicans was no longer an acceptable party practice. For Viguerie, the *Mandate* became the turning point in the assault on moderates in leadership which would no longer be tolerated by the organizations of the New Right.

Generally loyal to the Heritage Foundation and Moral Majority delegation, Reagan’s own moderate leanings contributed to a feeling of distrust among his right wing advisors. The fringe right had flooded the 1980 RNC with evangelical, pro-life, and pro-gun delegates, explicitly to deliver Reagan the nomination and they expected equitable compensation in the form of influence within his Administration. In office, Reagan failed to submit a balanced budget, appointed a moderate to the Supreme Court in Sandra Day O’Connor, and selected George H.W. Bush, as a running-mate even after Weyrich, Falwell, and Phyllis Schlafley each strongly advised the President that Bush was insufficiently conservative for a position in the Administration.⁶²⁰ At the end of 1981, Weyrich assessed Reagan first year in office as a “C-plus” grade given the President’s perceived indifference in pursuing a fringe right agenda.

The Heritage Foundation and other New Right organizations had the President’s ear like no other predecessor but Reagan also surrounded himself with many elites and Washington insiders. According to Weyrich, Reagan’s cabinet had a “wealthy orientation” that did not represent the “blue collar” vote that swept him into the White House. Harkening back to the

⁶¹⁹ Richard A. Viguerie, “The Heritage Foundation And Jim DeMint.”

⁶²⁰ Clendinen, ““Christian New Right’s’ Rush to Power.”B5.

Wisconsin Right's original core independent entrepreneurial ethos, Weyrich chastised Reagan's first budget, observing that "[t]here's something wrong about cutting aid for the 'little guys' while giving the wealthy tax cuts."⁶²¹

Weyrich, the Catholic, Midwestern outsider saw himself as the voice for "the people on the other side of the tracks...which makes Republicans uncomfortable." He grew increasingly outspoken against Reagan and "big contributors...[who] can't quite understand why he is criticizing the administration and the members of Congress he helped put in office."⁶²² Reagan's first term was a major milestone in the fringe right's decades of mobilization, but it was also a moment of realization that their vision for empowering rural areas deemed nonessential to capital's interests could still be manipulated to serve the status quo. There was more work to be done.

"A New American Consensus": Moving Beyond Reagan in the 1980s

Even as *Time Magazine*, proclaimed 1980 "a new American consensus" that was "conservative as everyone has long expected," Weyrich was less optimistic toward its durability. Reagan's loyalty to the Establishment was one of Weyrich's two primary concerns—his organizers were "at best lukewarm on Reagan in '76" with little changing in 1980. Second, Weyrich believed Reagan's victory was a condemnation of established politicians, not an endorsement of a new direction they offered: "in 1980, the public didn't embrace us; they rejected liberalism" claimed Weyrich.⁶²³ Their purpose should then shift to building a critical mass of demographics that could build on Reagan's important but insufficient first step for the

⁶²¹ Weyrich, *Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority*. 3.

⁶²² Richard Bradee, "Crusader for 'little Guys' Baffles Other Conservatives."

⁶²³ Lee Edwards, "Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in '82." 2.

right. In Weyrich's words, they needed to "stop running against the New Left and start pushing conservative ideas."⁶²⁴

Before the election, Weyrich told journalist William Rusher that "whether Reagan is nominated and elected or not, the conservative movement in this country is very shortly going to need new and younger leaders and spokesmen."⁶²⁵ He used this logic to justify backing CSFC loyalist Phil Crane over Reagan in the primary (despite their eventual falling out) because running a tested loyalist was an investment in the movement's future and a beacon for the right.⁶²⁶ Large corporate donors, lobbyists and Washington insiders were incredulous toward the strategy of challenging Reagan and the newly won Republican congressional majority from the right, but Weyrich's work was just beginning.

Purging Moderates & Cultivating The Next Generation of Right Wing Leadership

Beyond individual candidates, Weyrich prioritized the broad political landscape and called for redoubling efforts in the countryside. Despite sweeping national victories, "the liberals survived precisely because they were so well entrenched...in the state legislatures, in the city councils and all these other places were they could put the breaks on the so-called Reagan Revolution."⁶²⁷ The CSFC's push to "Defeat 100 Liberals" in the 1970s was effective in shifting Congress rightward but at the expense of attending to local elections. The CSFC needed to redouble efforts in state and local races if they were to create "something of long-term significance" capable of empowering a future conservative Executive Branch with the

⁶²⁴ Edwards, "Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right; Fighting for Conservative Victory in '82." 2.

⁶²⁵ William A. Rusher, "Crane's Candidacy a Healthy Step," *National Review*, n.d.

⁶²⁶ Richard Bradee, "Crusader for 'little Guys' Baffles Other Conservatives."

⁶²⁷ William A. Rusher, "Crane's Candidacy a Healthy Step."

“infrastructure of real people behind him.”⁶²⁸ If the right could win these races, the CSFC could cultivate the authentically conservative “president that we all want to see elected,” completing Reagan’s insufficient work of dismantling liberalism and remaking America in a traditionalist vision.⁶²⁹

After Reagan’s victory, Weyrich believed the right devolved into complacency; that they had “lost all sense of self discipline,” many even cooperating with moderates in the House. lacking loyalty to the “Four Principles” of limited government, free enterprise, strong defense and traditional values that led them to power. The CSFC could not replicate Reagan’s optimistic charm on the campaign trail, but could identify candidates with greater conviction to the principles. “Reagan would never submit a balanced budget” complained Weyrich, “he talked about de-funding a lot of liberal programs yet they virtually all remained intact at the end of his Administration.”⁶³⁰

Immediately after the Reagan Revolution of 1980, SCFC began the work necessary for pushing an even more extreme agenda: “What I’m looking for” Weyrich wrote in 1982, “is a Roosevelt in reverse.”⁶³¹ Crane’s candidacy “was an opportunity for the younger generation to stretch their legs” and visibly promote the CSFC’s mission in races while the national Kasten Plan networks served as a farm system for tapping and cultivating young talent.⁶³²

The promise of a new generation of conservatives was personified in the candidacy of Newt Gingrich, a history professor from Georgia who attended the Milwaukee Victory Workshops in the mid-1970s. Gingrich co-founded a Young Republican chapter at Emory

⁶²⁸ William A. Rusher.

⁶²⁹ Weyrich, *Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority*. 6.

⁶³⁰ Rochelle L. Stanfield, “Organizing A Revolution.”

⁶³¹ No Author. “Paul Weyrich: A Human Glimpse,” American Heritage Center, Paul Weyrich Papers, Biography Files; Lee Edwards, “Paul Weyrich: Conscience of the New Right Fighting for Conservative Victory in ’82.”

⁶³² William A. Rusher, “Crane’s Candidacy a Healthy Step.” 3.

University in the 1960s and scored well on the 72 question CSFC survey upon deciding to seek office as a member of the right.⁶³³ Gingrich admired the CSFC for its “good job in fighting to balance the drive of the labor unions” and sought Weyrich’s help in shaping his “philosophical statement” of conservatism and talking points. Throughout his career, Gingrich sent Weyrich his talking points, requesting that his mentor “feel free to analyze and criticize freely and bluntly.”⁶³⁴

After unsuccessfully challenging twenty-year incumbent Democrat Jack Flynt for a Georgia congressional seat in 1974, he prepared for a second attempt by training in Milwaukee. Despite cutting the margin to approximately 5,000 votes, Gingrich still lost in 1976 before becoming a six term congressman and becoming a fixture of the party’s right wing vanguard, becoming both Speaker of the House and icon for New South “conservative populism” as he put it, in 1994.⁶³⁵ In office, Gingrich quickly elevated in ranks, utilizing many of the networks and talking points afforded to him through his relationship with the CSFC. As Speaker of the House, Gingrich became the mouthpiece for a return a culture of traditionalism and “family values.” In 1994, Gingrich, along with Dick Armey, founded the Contract With America Created as a conservative response to Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders’ creation of the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) in 1991. Contract With America was literally a mouthpiece and political proxy for the ideas produced in the Heritage Foundation.

⁶³³ Schneider, *The Conservative Century*. 185.

⁶³⁴ Newt Gingrich, “Letter to Paul Weyrich,” August 30, 1975, Paul Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center. Grann’s article also notes the relationship between Weyrich and Gingrich blossoming at political trainings in Milwaukee, although he uses the 1978 date. It is entirely possible Gingrich returned before every campaign for re-training.

⁶³⁵ John K. Wilson, *Newt Gingrich: Capital Crimes and Misdemeanors*, 1st Edition edition (Monroe, Me: Common Courage Press, 1996).

Weyrich “recognized Gingrich’s potential and his willingness to work with the religious conservatives” despite his obsession of “third wave Alvin Toffler nonsense” referencing the neoliberal futurist intellectual Gingrich admired.⁶³⁶ Originally a dutiful servant to the CSFC, as Gingrich’s status rose in the House it became clear to Weyrich the Georgia congressman was not Reagan’s successor. Gingrich was instead “an experiential conservative,” holding few convictions while reshaping his ideology as the social situation called. On abortion, Gingrich “does not have a deeply held philosophy” switching his position depending on audience, observed Weyrich.⁶³⁷ On trade, “initially he was ambiguous...and then he became protectionist” but as libertarians entered politics in the 1980s, the “big [political donations] in free traders changed his position” to align with neoliberals.⁶³⁸ By the time Gingrich reached Speaker of the House in the next decade, Weyrich had fully turned on his former protégé.

Weyrich set out “to ‘denounce’ party members who compromised on even the most obscure GOP commandments” according to the journalist. A vengeful Weyrich turned on the insufficiently conservative products of his creation: “I have spent thirty years of my life working in Washington, working on the premise that if we simply got our people into leadership that it would make a difference...And yet we are getting the same policies from them that we got from their [Establishment] Republican predecessors.”⁶³⁹

⁶³⁶ Ibid. 156.

⁶³⁷ Ibid. 193.

⁶³⁸ Ibid. 7.

⁶³⁹ Grann, “Robespierre Of The Right.”

Mike Pence & Returning to the Midwestern Grassroots

"The fact is conservatives have seized the majority, shifted the direction of the country and redefined the agenda. We are winning. Unfortunately, too many of my friends are determined to claim defeat out of the jaws of victory."

- Dan Meyer, Gingrich's former chief of staff and GOP lobbyist

After thirty years of organizing a politically relevant right wing, Weyrich became disillusioned with his candidates' quick comfort inside Washington, DC's beltway, so he arranged a bloodletting. Criticizing one of the CSFC's first electoral victories, Weyrich suggested Senate Judiciary Chairman, Orrin Hatch had "psychological problems" and voiced disappointment with his longtime friend and partner Robert Kasten over Kasten's alleged transformation into a Washington insider.

Weyrich reserved the most vitriol for his former favored sons, Trent Lott and Newt Gingrich, declaring in an open letter "I can't have friends who sell out their country." After Senate Majority Leader Lott supported a chemical weapons treaty, Weyrich confided to a reporter that Lott was "the greatest disappointment of my life. I really thought at heart that he was a patriot...I was wrong."⁶⁴⁰ Incensed with Gingrich's amenability to working with House Democrats, Weyrich stated he was "struck by the fact that we have lots of people who want to be nicer than God" questioning the House Speaker's commitment to pushing the right's agenda should they conflict with personal relationships. "If you read the scripture, Jesus was not some sort of Milquetoast person with supreme charity. He cut people in two."⁶⁴¹

A *New Republic* profile of Weyrich compared the division on the right to "battles of the old left, with Leninists killing Stalinists killing Maoists; or, in this case, Friedmanites killing Buckleyites killing Burkeans."⁶⁴² The CSFC cut ties with these now-Establishment Republicans,

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

and, without prospects for the next great conservative leader, Weyrich returned to cultivating new leaders as part of the CSFC's increased focus on state and local races.

At a training in Indianapolis, Weyrich had an interaction with an Indiana attorney named Mike Pence who's rigidly traditionalist interpretation of Christian values immediately appealed to Weyrich. Weyrich was also impressed with the young Pence's nearly formulaic understanding of, and adherence to, the CSFC's "Four Principles" outlined above. Where Gingrich and Lott were politically ambitious, Pence was reluctant to compromise his faith with necessary compromises of holding elected office. Weyrich saw the future in Pence: an authentic religious and ideological zealot, without the "experiential conservative" flexibility of Gingrich. "Nobody is perfect," Weyrich wrote of Pence's promise as a candidate, "but he comes pretty close...He is what I've been waiting for in terms of leadership."⁶⁴³

Weyrich's influence on a second wave of right wing office-seekers was embodied by Pence, who feted his mentor at the "21 Gun Salute to Paul Weyrich" event. The ceremony was held at the Four Seasons, Washington, DC in September of 2008, a few months after it was disclosed that Weyrich's complications with diabetes were terminal. Pence told the audience it was Weyrich who convinced him to seek office; that "to follow Christ and contend in the public square are not mutually exclusive." Pence kept it brief when addressing the dying 68-year-old Weyrich directly: "I love you and I carry a debt I can never fully repay. You persuaded me to pursue my convictions with an eye on the long view."⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴³ Jason Deparle, "Star of the Right Loses His Base at the Border," *The New York Times*, August 29, 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/29/washington/29pence.html>.

⁶⁴⁴ "Paul Weyrich - YouTube," accessed May 4, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

Pence had a convulsive start to his political career, first running for Indiana's 6th District congressional seat but losing in 1988 and again in 1990 but made a name for himself on the right by his willingness to implement questionable campaign tactics. Controversy arose after running a negative ad featuring a caricature of an "Arab" implying his opponent helped finance terrorists because he did not take seriously America's dependence on Middle Eastern oil. Later apologizing for the advertisement, Pence spent the next decade as a conservative talk radio host in Indianapolis before winning a congressional seat in the 2nd District in 2000.

While common for politicians of both parties in the 1980s and 1990s to hold anti-homosexual positions, Pence took hardline stances in-line with Weyrich's early anti-homosexual movement counter-activism. For context, in the early 1980s, Weyrich politicized the AIDS epidemic when the Free Congress Foundation distributed an anti-LGBTQ pamphlet, titled "Gays, AIDS, and You." The pamphlet included a depiction of protester with the caption "this [gay rights activist] wants his 'freedom' so bad he's ready to let America die for it."⁶⁴⁵ As a congressman, and later, governor of Indiana, Pence rolled back homosexual rights and protections won by the gay rights movement, and also campaigned on an explicitly anti-homosexuality platform.

For the "pro-life" movement, Pence was also an anti-choice candidate who not believe in condom use, was anti-stem cell research, and sought to formally change the legal definition of rape to "forcible rape," shifting the onus of proof to the victims to display evidence of physical resistance.⁶⁴⁶ Remaining in Congress until winning Indiana's governorship in 2013, Pence is currently Vice President of the United States as of the 2016 general election.

⁶⁴⁵ Scott Kerr, "Neocon John? Strange Bedfellows."

⁶⁴⁶ Richard North Patterson, "Opinion | Richard North Patterson: Mike Pence and the Rise of Mediocrity - The Boston Globe," *BostonGlobe.com*, April 3, 2017.

Pence was among the wave of conservative Midwestern governors swept to power between 2010 and 2014 with ties to this right wing network created by Weyrich. Others included his predecessor Mitch Daniels, Scott Walker, John Kasich, and Rick Snyder. His rabid anti-homosexual agenda caught the nation's attention in 2015 while passing the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that allowed private businesses to withhold services based on sexual orientation. Pence also championed state funding for controversial practice of "conversion therapy" for homosexuals. Opponents have criticized him for lacking charisma, but he has a reputation for being an effective fundraiser from wealthy conservatives, notably Charles Koch. Pence has also created two new political groups called America First Policies and America First Action and is rumored to be positioning for a presidential run in 2020.⁶⁴⁷

Conclusion

From the conflicts among wealthy, right wing activists in the late-1960s John Birch Society emerged two likeminded but independent paths of the modern conservative movement: Educational and Political. Embodying the Political strain, Paul Weyrich became "The Godfather of the New Right" by building dozens of stand-alone institutions—the infrastructure and networks that comprised the New Right, many remaining active in the present. He did so by organizing in areas of the country ignored by both parties, building power through tested political organizing techniques, cultivating deep roots state legislatures in Wisconsin and the Midwest. Hunting for the right formula of single issues and groups to incorporate into his network, Weyrich made strides in uniting a diversified and chaotic movement, first through the

⁶⁴⁷ Kenneth P. Vogel, "At Private Dinners, Pence Quietly Courts Big Donors and Corporate Executives - The New York Times," July 9, 2017; "Is Mike Pence the Next President? Vice President Distances Himself From Trump's Camp in New Statement," accessed July 11, 2017, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/mike-pence-next-president-vice-182048207.html>.

Heritage Foundation and Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, and later through the Moral Majority. These groups combined the organizational and strategic knowledge of the Wisconsin Right with the messaging and appeal of the southern movement in the 1970s—all without the assistance of major corporate donations. The Educational strain under LeFerve and Koch would later manifest itself in funding department chairs at universities establishing policy think tanks.

The new networks under Weyrich's purview were unafraid of pushing then-controversial ideas in the name of overtaking the established political order. Opposing subversives—however defined—was a foundational tenet of the right, at the same time they opened their doors to religious fundamentalists and white nationalist militias in an effort to push the Republicans rightward. The anti-Semitic/anti-intellectual dog whistle of “cultural Marxism” that originated in the 1930s and was popularized by the John Birch Society, found its way into the everyday lexicon of Weyrich who used the term for the next thirty years to describe his enemies. Weyrich's forty years of political organizing had as many foibles as victories, and he died bitter toward many whose careers he had created and concerned about the future of the movement. Now Vice-President Mike Pence might have provided solace to his mentor by reminding him of his own advice: the fringe right was playing “with an eye on the long view.”

CHAPTER SIX
EPILOGUE

Locating the Legacy of Wisconsin Conservatism in Contemporary Politics

I

The Milwaukee suburb West Allis was included on President Donald Trump’s post-election “Victory Tour” where then-House Speaker Paul Ryan told the crowd that “the Midwest finally saw the light of day.”⁶⁴⁸ For the first time since 1984, a Republican won Wisconsin in a presidential election (the last one being Ronald Reagan’s historic 49 state victory over Walter Mondale). Trump’s victory was the product of intensive organizing already done in areas of the country overlooked by the other party. Trump praised a coalition nicknamed “The Cheesehead Mafia,” a contingent of House Speaker Paul Ryan, Governor Scott Walker, and incoming Chief-of-Staff Reince Priebus for being the face of the state’s political transformation.⁶⁴⁹

In a similar post-election requiem, former NRA president David Keene credited Priebus’ work as RNC chair since 2013 in building a national grassroots network that became the difference in 2016. On stage at the 2016 CPAC convention, Keene said of his home state of Wisconsin that “our state was a blue state, but it’s not anymore.” Shaking Priebus’ hand, he told the crowd “this guy had a lot to do with it. This is a guy that gets it.” Priebus finished Keene’s thought by adding that his grassroots infrastructure needed “great mechanics and great candidates.”

Priebus’ refined his national mobilizational strategy working as state chair in Wisconsin. At the state-level, the Wisconsin Right took aim of what remained any postwar Democratic coalition, penetrating the so-called “blue firewall” states of Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan—formerly considered tenuously Democratic strongholds presidents could rely on in a

⁶⁴⁸ *Free Video Watch: Full Speech : Trump THANK YOU Rally in West Allis, Wisconsin (12/13/2016) Donald Trump Rally*, accessed December 21, 2016, http://player.mashpedia.com/player.php?q=1ZEBYdTY4_g.

⁶⁴⁹ Molly Ball, “The Cheesehead Mafia: Paul Ryan and the Rise of Wisconsin Republicans - The Atlantic,” n.d., <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2012/08/the-cheesehead-mafia-paul-ryan-and-the-rise-of-wisconsin-republicans/261727/>.

close race.⁶⁵⁰ This initiative bore fruit in the 2011 elections, seating governors Scott Walker (Wisconsin), John Kasich (Ohio), and Rick Snyder (Michigan). Indiana Republican Governor Mike Pence also succeeded fellow right winger Mitch Daniels in this cycle. These governors quickly passed a series of controversial laws that rolled back the vestiges of the labor-liberal alliance, ostensibly facilitating future Republican victories by eroding the labor-liberal alliance through restrictive voting legislation.⁶⁵¹

It is clear these fundamental changes to the political landscape were quietly, slowly taking place in the states surrounding the Great Lakes, often referred to as the Rustbelt, for decades. A 1991 *New York Times* article titled “Conservative ‘Outsiders’ Now at Hub of Power” outlined how fringe groups organizing outside of traditional political institutions were quietly shaping the American political landscape from the Midwest.⁶⁵² By the late-20th century, Milwaukee offered a blank canvass, according to Bradley Foundation President Michael Joyce, to “more than double [conservative philanthropy’s] impact” by putting the New York-based Olin Foundation’s ideas at a “theoretical level” into practice in a “manageable-sized city.”⁶⁵³ Midwestern “flyover country” had become both a vital cross-section on the presidential electoral map and opportune region for political experimentation and figured prominently in 2016’s results.

⁶⁵⁰ “Why the USC Dornsife/L.A. Times Presidential Poll Is Unlike Other Polls | USC News,” n.d., <http://news.usc.edu/109339/why-the-usc-dornsife-l-a-times-presidential-poll-is-unlike-other-polls/>; David Lauter, “The Man behind the USC/L.A. Times Poll That Predicted Trump Winning: ‘To Be Honest, I Was Surprised,’” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-trump-polls-20161109-story.html>.

⁶⁵¹ “Donald Trump Won Midwest States: A New Red Wall? | National Review,” accessed February 9, 2017, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/442365/donald-trump-won-midwest-states-new-red-wall>; Kenneth R. Mayer & Michael G. DeCrescenzo, “Supporting Information: Estimating the Effect of Voter ID on Nonvoters in Wisconsin in the 2016 Presidential Election” (University of Wisconsin Madison, September 25, 2017), <https://elections.wisc.edu/news/voter-id-study/Voter-ID-Study-Supporting-Info.pdf>.

⁶⁵² Neil A. Lewis, “Conservative ‘Outsiders’ Now at Hub of Power,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1991.

⁶⁵³ Elisabeth S. Clemens and Doug Guthrie, *Politics and Partnerships: The Role of Voluntary Associations in America’s Political Past and Present* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

Likely taking a page from Weyrich’s call to unite the “society in decline” demographic—those forsaken by American economic policy—Trump advisor Steve Bannon attributed 2016 to Trump’s ability capitalize on what he called an “economic hate crime” doled out by elites onto America’s working class. Bannon tied his favorite targets of those in media and Wall St. as propagators of Cultural Marxism. By stumping for Democratic challenger Hilary Clinton, these internationalists ignored the harsh reality that “the industrial base in this country has been eviscerated.” Labeling Clinton a cynical manipulator of “identity politics” Bannon asked, how she could pile on those who lost the most in the last thirty years by “calling [those impacted by deindustrialization] racist?”⁶⁵⁴ Bannon himself was no champion of racial justice, as his recent biographer pointed out, noting his subject’s fascination with the 21st century rise of European nationalism and believed the same would work if manipulated in the United States.⁶⁵⁵

II

In both geography and proximity to power, the Wisconsin Right was an outlier and outcast for most of the twentieth century’s mercurial conservative movement. While speaking in 2013, then-NRA president and UW Madison graduate, David Keene said as much at the CPAC convention. “Our movement” he began, “and the Republican Party are not the same. The Republican Party is the vehicle we’ve chosen to push our political and policy goals.” As if channeling his forefathers of Coleman, Grede, and Weyrich, he offered his audience a simple choice and call to action: “Political movements are either growing or dying” and if the party

⁶⁵⁴ “Breitbart’s Steve Bannon Declares War on the GOP - CBS News,” accessed September 14, 2017, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-breitbart-steve-bannon-declares-war-on-the-gop/>.

⁶⁵⁵ Joshua Green, *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017).

activists who gathered at CPAC opted for exclusivity in participation, “we, too, do not deserve to grow.”⁶⁵⁶

Right wing influence in contemporary American politics, in both formal and informal capacities, was never an inevitable stage of capital consolidation, nor was it the byproduct of an uneducated populous voting against their interests. It is the story of imaginative and patient activists who suffered more losses than victories, but soon developed a movement through mobilizing the ignored. Paul Weyrich, by his own admission, recalled how the Republican Party had little use for his younger self, a working class fundamentalist Catholic, so he operated outside of the formal apparatus through the support of the Birchers. By the time of his passing, the question was no longer how the right could attain relevancy, but “How to Unite the Conservative Majority” as conservatism returned to the mainstream at the dusk of the twentieth century.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ “CPAC 2013 - NRA President David Keene - YouTube,” accessed June 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

⁶⁵⁷ Weyrich, Paul, “Ideas and Strategies to Unite the Conservative Majority,” *Heritage Foundation*, Heritage Lecture Series, no. 430 (January 28, 1993): 1–9.

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