

Conservative Movement

How did the conservative movement, routed in Barry Goldwater's catastrophic defeat to Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential campaign, return to elect its champion Ronald Reagan just 16 years later? What at first looks like the political comeback of the century becomes, on closer examination, the product of a particular political moment that united an unstable coalition. In the liberal press, conservatives are often portrayed as a monolithic Right Wing. Close up, conservatives are as varied as their counterparts on the Left.

Indeed, the circumstances of the late 1980s -- the demise of the Soviet Union, Reagan's legacy, the George H. W. Bush administration -- frayed the coalition of traditional conservatives, libertarian advocates of laissez-faire economics, and Cold War anti-communists first knitted together in the 1950s by William F. Buckley Jr. and the staff of the *National Review*. The Reagan coalition added to the conservative mix two rather incongruous groups: the religious right, primarily provincial white Protestant fundamentalists and evangelicals from the Sunbelt (defecting from the Democrats since the George Wallace's 1968 presidential campaign); and the neoconservatives, centered in New York and led predominantly by cosmopolitan, secular Jewish intellectuals.

Goldwater's campaign in 1964 brought conservatives together for their first national electoral effort since Taft lost the Republican nomination to Eisenhower in 1952. Conservatives shared a distaste for Eisenhower's "modern Republicanism" that largely accepted the welfare state developed by Roosevelt's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal. Undeterred by Goldwater's defeat, conservative activists regrouped and began developing institutions for the long haul. Many of the new right leaders -- Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, Ed Feulner -- got their start in politics with the Goldwater campaign. And surprise! so did a few people not widely identified with the Right -- including Dave Foreman, founder of Earth First! and San Francisco's Harvey Milk, the country's first openly gay elected public official -- and even Hillary Clinton.

The conservative comeback got momentum in 1966 when a group of conservative businessmen, remembering Reagan's effective endorsement of Goldwater, convinced him to run for governor of California. Building on backlash to the 1960s campus turmoil (particularly at UC-Berkeley) during the anti-Vietnam war movement and civil disorders (in Watts and other cities), Reagan's victory over Pat Brown highlighted the vulnerability of the Democratic coalition. Kevin Phillip's "southern strategy" pointed the way for Richard Nixon to take advantage of the backlash to civil rights and pull away "George Wallace Democrats" from Hubert Humphrey, resulting in Nixon's 1968 presidential victory. Although conservatives were unhappy with Henry Kissinger's detente with the Soviet Union, Nixon's vice president Spiro Agnew, with his virulent attacks on student activists and war protesters, appeased the Right. Labor's defection from McGovern in 1972 made Nixon's reelection easier. Nixon's second term crisis over Watergate, however, slowed the shift of southern whites and northern ethnics from Democrats to Republicans. By running Jimmy Carter, an evangelical Southerner, against Gerald Ford in 1976, Democrats further postponed an electoral realignment.

The Revolution That Wasn't. The Reagan victory in 1980 was partly a result of Carter's failures -- rampant inflation and the Iranian hostage crisis foremost among them. It was also the product of a smoothly orchestrated campaign to exaggerate the Soviet threat, and a well-mobilized religious Right. The Reagan administration accomplishments from the conservative agenda were, in retrospect, remarkably few: a tax cut that strongly benefited the wealthy; a Pentagon build-up that left huge deficits, and the appointment of a conservative federal judiciary. Taxes were subsequently made more progressive again during President Bill Clinton's administration, and the military budget declined in proportion to GNP, leaving only the conservative federal judiciary and Supreme Court and a vast national debt (which some conservatives call "Reagan's third term") blocking an expansion of social programs by the Democrats. Reagan's military Keynesianism buoyed the economy for several years, but the impact of years of budget and trade deficits led to a recession by 1991. Deregulation of the banking and savings industries led to catastrophic bail-out programs that further crippled the economy during George H.W. Bush's presidency. Divided over domestic and foreign policy, conservatives had difficulty designing a positive program for governance.

Conservatives are not only divided ideologically, they have sharp personal rivalries and organizational weaknesses that get less public airing than those of progressives. "The Left has an advantage," Paul Weyrich said in an interview, "they're more collectivistic, while the Right is more individualistic. They just don't cooperate as well." "The conservative mindset" requires someone to guide and inspire, Weyrich told *New Republic* editor Fred Barnes. "Liberals, I'm sorry to say, are more attracted to ideas and ideology. They're willing to work together without an authority figure."

Many national conservative organizations have been structured around charismatic individuals and may not survive their departures. The established think tanks -- American Enterprise Institute, Hoover Institution, Hudson Institute -- are the most stable, but most of them are tilting pragmatically toward the center under neoconservative administrators. Of the newer groups, the Heritage Foundation is best institutionalized (even though Ed Feulner has been its only chief executive, it thrives on his entrepreneurial and administrative skills, not his charisma). Weyrich's Free Congress Foundation is less so, but it could survive him. The American Conservative Union, a membership organization, is stable if weak, and dependent on David Keene. On the other hand, it's hard to imagine Eagle Forum without Phyllis Schlafly, or the American Family Association without Don Wildmon. Concerned Women for America, on the other hand, has survived the retirement of Beverly LaHaye, and maintains its chapter structure. When Rev. Jerry Falwell turned to other matters, his Moral Majority and Liberty Federation were disbanded in 1989. Falwell's Liberty University survived his death in 2007. The National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), the nemesis of Democratic Senators in the 1980 campaign, collapsed after its founder Terry Dolan died of AIDS in 1986. Howard Phillips set aside his personal project, The Conservative Caucus, to develop the U.S. Taxpayers Party, from which he launched a minor party presidential campaign in 1992.

Despite gains in the Reagan years, some conservative leaders worry about the Right's failure to develop structures at the grassroots. "Many conservatives are monarchists at heart," Weyrich writes in *Policy Review*, "They love the Presidency. They think that if you own the Presidency, that is all that really counts." Quoting Chicago's late Mayor Daley that "In the final analysis, all politics is local," Weyrich reminds conservatives that to have power means "holding territory" at the local and state level. Conservative and libertarian policy think tanks are up and running in dozens of states and associated through The Madison Group, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) connects conservative state legislators.

Conservatives has developed several structures that can mobilize individuals on the local level -- fundamentalist church networks, religious radio and television networks, and campaigns around issues like opposing abortion, gay marriage, and gun control. Conservatives also mobilize local chambers of commerce, and business associations to compete with the liberals' ability to call upon the leaders of labor unions and black and Hispanic organizations to mobilize their members as campaign workers. On the other hand, conservatives have little comparable to the progressives' community organizing networks, door-to-door canvass campaigns, public foundations that fund grassroots groups, or internet bloggers and other groups that raise funds to support candidates..

Conservative leaders sometimes have been more adept at making money for themselves and their mailing houses than at getting money they raise into practical politics. As young conservative Amy Moritz writes in Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*, "conservatives claim seven of the top 14 money-raising political action committees but only two of the top 14 PAC campaign contributors." According to Moritz, the conservative movement suffers from a "Jim and Tammy Bakker Syndrome -- an unwillingness and/or ability to police itself in the matter of ethical fund-raising practices.

Bill Clinton's victory over George H. W. Bush in the 1992 Presidential election was a setback to conservatives, but they rallied to keep a constant attack on President Clinton for his alleged financial scandals and his extramarital affairs. This "vast right-wing conspiracy," as Hillary Clinton called it, went as far as an unsuccessful effort to impeach Clinton. Republicans regained control of the Congress in 1994, and put forth House Speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America" as a multi-point program. Assuming a conservative mandate that did not in reality exist, Gingrich overstepped his actual public support with a budget battle that briefly shut down the Federal Government, starting a decline in his power leading to his resignation from Congress in 1998.

The scandals surrounding Clinton probably led to the close defeat of his Vice President, Al Gore, in the 2000 Presidential election by George W. Bush. Although he was strongly supported by conservatives, Bush gave little attention to their causes after the attack on New York's World Trade Towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Bush's "War on Terrorism" received strong support from conservatives, including both the wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and helped Bush win a second term over Democrat John Kerry in 2004. But within a year the fiasco of Federal response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in August 2005 and the increasing chaos of the Iraq War led to a persistent

drop in Bush's popularity. Traditional conservatives began to criticize the neoconservative architects of Bush's foreign policy.

Varieties of Conservatism. Sociologist Peter Berger (who half-jokingly refers to himself as the last Hapsburgian monarchist) made a playful suggestion in *Commentary* that since most conservatives view history as a decline from a better time in the past, one might classify types of conservatism by the periods they identify as the golden age and the onset of decline. For the traditional conservatives the golden age is the Middle Ages - 13th Century for Roman Catholics, 17th Century for the Anglican version. Southern Agrarian paleoconservatives obviously look to the antebellum South. Libertarians would choose the 19th Century of the robber barons, while the New Right populists prefer the 19th Century of small town America. And neoconservatives date decline only from the mid-1960s -- clearly a different vision from the traditionalists. Dan Himmelfarb, writing in *Commentary* on "Conservative Splits," identifies the differing philosophic grounding of neoconservatives in liberal-democratic modernity (valuing liberty, self-government and equality of opportunity) and paleoconservatives in medieval Christian theology (valuing belief, hierarchy, and prescription). On anti-Communism, the glue in the fusionist formula, Himmelfarb writes, "Neoconservatives are anti-Communist because Communism is the enemy of freedom and democracy, paleoconservatives because it is the enemy of religion, tradition, and hierarchy."

Traditional conservatives: Before William F. Buckley, Jr., ideological conservatives seemed to be a cranky crowd saying "No!" to the 20th Century. Russell Kirk, author of *The Conservative Mind* (1953) was one of its few respected representatives. Buckley and his circle at *National Review*, founded in 1955, developed a contemporary conservatism through the "fusion" of three streams of thought: Burkean traditionalism, free market libertarian economics, and anti-Communism. Several former Communists, including Whittaker Chambers, were close to the magazine -- and the editorial board included ex-Communist Frank Meyer and former Trotskyists James Burnham and Willmore Kendall. Buckley and the *National Review* circle made conservatism intellectually respectable, and brought it into the political mainstream.

Buckley hosted the founding meeting of the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) in 1960 at his home in Sharon, Connecticut, helping Stanton Evans author YAF's declaration of principles known as the Sharon Statement. Buckley also joined in founding the American Conservative Union (ACU) in 1964 following Goldwater's defeat. Buckley worked with ACU long enough to insist that John Birch Society members be kept off the board, and then withdrew -- preferring to play, as his biographer John Judis writes, "a catalytic but not an organizational role." Buckley continued to insist during the 1960s that the Birch Society be rejected as outside the "respectable right," as he also did with Willis Carto's Liberty Lobby in the early 1980s, suing its newspaper *Spotlight* for libel and winning a modest judgment.

ACU continues as the membership and lobbying vehicle of traditional conservatives, and its annual Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), co-sponsored with YAF, remains an important get-together -- although the New Right groups set up the rival

Conservative Leadership Conference in 1990. YAF has always been a loose cannon; governed by a shifting board elected at each convention, it tends to be the personal machine of whoever gets control of the organization. *Human Events*, the weekly newspaper owned and edited by Thomas Winter and Allan Ryskind, has taken a more populist direction, supporting the social issues of the New Right and enjoying Pat Buchanan's challenge to George H.W. Bush. Despite Buckley's efforts for an ecumenical respectable conservatism, the *National Review* retains a flavor distinctly Roman and Anglo-Catholic, Ivy League, and Manhattan upper class. In recent years Buckley has settled into Tory libertarianism, refusing Far Right ventures into minor party campaigns, favoring some degree of drug legalization, and chastising Pat Buchanan for making anti-Semitic statements. Traditional conservatives of the old school, tiring of Buckley's fusionist cocktail, are reclaiming their territory as paleoconservatives.

Libertarians: To progressive critics like *In These Times*, it's "anarchy with mutual funds and hot tubs," but to its advocates, *laissez faire* as an economic and social philosophy is the true path to freedom. Libertarianism is built around the work of such economists in the classical liberal tradition as Friedrich von Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and their noted followers like Nobel laureate Milton Friedman. Libertarians celebrate free markets and condemn all forms of state control, regulation or intervention. As anarcho-libertarian Murray Rothbard put it, "simply think of the State as a criminal band, and all of the Libertarian attitudes will logically fall into place." Rothbard labels three types of libertarians: "hippies" (who favor decriminalization of drugs and victimless crimes), "rednecks" (who hate taxes, love guns, and want to ride motorcycles without wearing helmets), and "preppies" (think tank policy mavens).

Ayn Rand inspired many young libertarians with her novels *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). Rand developed a philosophy of economic individualism called "objectivism," which celebrated selfishness (her heroine's symbol is the dollar sign). Among her circle of youthful followers, led by psychologist Nathaniel Brandon, was economist Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve Board from 1987 to 2006. Rand's atheism put her beyond Buckley's boundary of respectable conservatism. Libertarianism gained a more respectable grounding in social philosophy in Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, the State and Utopia* (1974), a response to John Rawls's utilitarian defense of the liberal welfare state in *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

The Libertarian Party grew out of a 1969 split in the Young Americans for Freedom, when the Libertarian Caucus pushed a plank on drug legalization. YAF traditionalists denounced the libertarians as "lazy-fairies," and following a near-riot, purged them from the organization. The Libertarian Caucus regrouped, gathered in some disaffected anarchists from SDS and one-time followers of Ayn Rand to form the party in 1971. The party ran John Hospers as its first presidential candidate in 1972; he received 6,000 votes and one electoral vote from a renegade Republican elector. That elector, Roger MacBride, became so celebrated in libertarian circles that he was nominated as the Libertarian candidate in 1976. The best showing came in 1980, when ARCO attorney Ed Clark and David Koch ran on the Libertarian ticket, receiving 920,000 votes (1.1% of the ballots cast). The Libertarian ticket was headed by David Bergland in 1984, and Texas

Republican congressman Ron Paul in 1988. (Ron Paul was again causing consternation in Republican ranks by his dissenting run in the 2008 Republican Presidential primary debates). Andre Marrou was the presidential nominee in 1992. Libertarians have drawn a substantial minority of votes for state or local offices here and there, and have elected an occasional local official and state legislator. Although they are in truth the "third" party, they are too far behind the Republicans and Democrats to encourage many libertarians.

By 1976 Ed Crane was disillusioned with the Libertarian Party, and more impressed with the power of think tanks to influence policymakers. From a start in San Francisco in 1977, Crane's Cato Institute moved to Washington with the backing of entrepreneur Charles Koch. Bob Poole's Reason Foundation stayed on the West Coast, and has developed *Reason* magazine as the most popular vehicle of libertarian thinking. Manhattan Institute in New York City has provided a home to several noted libertarian writers, including Charles Murray and George Gilder. Although they have differences, the think tanks have succeeded in popularizing their ideas on free market economics, social tolerance, and a military designed for self-defense and non-intervention abroad. Libertarian gadfly and godfather Murray Rothbard has long abandoned his quest for allies on the Left, and is now courting an new alliance with paleoconservatives.

New Right: The New Right was constructed by young veterans of the Goldwater campaign -- Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips -- who wanted a populist approach to rally a majority conservative coalition, constructed around social issues, not free market economics. They wanted to engage the George Wallace voters -- not only the low and moderate income Southern whites, but also the Northern middle class who had followed Senator Joseph McCarthy, and the blue-collar ethnic Democrats, the Catholics whose parents had listened to the radio broadcasts of Father Charles Coughlin in the 1930s and were not permanently won to the Democrats by John Kennedy. The New Right faulted traditional conservatives for their elitism and their failure to get their hands dirty in practical politics. Kevin Phillips, who coined the term "New Right" in 1975, mocked Buckley and his circle as "Squire Willy and his Companions of the Oxford Unabridged Dictionary" and denounced the *National Review* as primed with "cast-off Hapsburg royalty, Englishmen who part their names in the middle, and others calculated to put real lace on Buckley's Celtic curtains."

The Richard A. Viguerie Company (RAVCO) pioneered direct mail fundraising for the right with the Goldwater campaign mailing list, which helped build several organizations (and nearly destroyed several as well, by over-mailing when responses declined). Viguerie tried to buy the weekly newspaper *Human Events* from the traditional conservatives; rebuffed, he set up a rival magazine *Conservative Digest* in 1975. Losing money, Viguerie sold *Conservative Digest* in 1985; after going through two more owners and two new formats (including an effort by Paul Weyrich and former Birch Society editors), the magazine went out of business in 1989. By 1987 Viguerie was so far in debt he sold his office building for a reported \$10 million to Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, whose American Freedom Coalition had become one of Viguerie's leading direct mail clients. Weyrich helped found Heritage Foundation as a new variety

of activist think tank, and went on to form his Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress. Howard Phillips set up The Conservative Caucus, and in the mid-1980s was touting a "Freedom Fighters International" consisting of leaders of Nicaragua's Contras, Angola's UNITA, Mozambique's Renamo, and Afghanistan's mujahedin. Nothing more was heard of this by 1991, when Phillips set The Conservative Caucus aside in a quixotic effort to build a new minor party, the U.S. Taxpayers' Party.

Religious Right: The Christian Right was active in politics long before the late 1970s -- recall from the 1950s and 1960s Dr. Fred Schwarz' Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, Billy James Hargis' Christian Crusade, and the Rev. Carl McIntire's 20th Century Reformation Hour radio network. The New Right televangelists all played on conservative themes to some extent, but Rev. Jerry Falwell and Rev. Pat Robertson took their viewers furthest into politics, Falwell creating Moral Majority and Robertson using his 700 Club audience as a base for a Republican presidential primary bid against George Bush in 1988. Each was pulled out of politics by the wake of the PTL scandal involving Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, and later Rev. Jimmy Swaggert's sex scandal and, to a lesser degree, the flap over Rev. Oral Roberts. Beverly LaHaye, wife of Rev. Tim LaHaye (co-author of the best-selling *Left Behind* series), managed to keep her Concerned Women for America network intact and relatively unscathed by the scandals.

The Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church has numerous front groups on the fringe of Right Wing activity, including the American Freedom Coalition, but his greatest impact has been through his triumvirate of conservative publications -- the daily newspaper *The Washington Times*, the weekly magazine *Insight*, and the monthly intellectual catalog *World and I*. During the early 1980s, Moon's anti-Communism seemed in tune with Reagan's conservative program; recently Moon's authoritarian religious agenda has been more in the open, particularly since he declared himself to be the Messiah at a San Francisco conference in August 1990. Recently he seems more interested in setting up factories in Russia, China and North Korea -- giving pause to his old anti-Communist allies. Conservative leaders backed away from Moon, and how much longer he will continue to absorb the substantial losses of his Washington publications is anybody's guess.

Neoconservatives: At times, neoconservatism seemed to be two New York families: neocon godfather Irving Kristol, his wife historian Gertrude Himmelfarb and son Dan; and *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz, his wife, writer and editor Midge Decter, and son-in-law Elliot Abrams. Kristol's *The Public Interest*, which ceased publication in 2002, was the definitive neoconservative source on domestic social policy, and *The National Interest* fills a comparable niche for foreign policy. Of course there are many others. Jeane Kirkpatrick won her job as Reagan's U.N. Ambassador for an article distinguishing between authoritarian and totalitarian societies. She argued that the former could be changed in a democratic direction while the latter could not (a theory that failed to anticipate collapse of Communism by the end of the decade, to say the least). Former Social Democrats USA executive director Carl Gershman became an assistant to Kirkpatrick at the U.N. and later director of the National Endowment for Democracy. Other SDUSA members were positioned in the AFL-CIO hierarchy. Prominent religious

neocons include Catholic theologian Michael Novak, and Lutheran turned Catholic Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. Some intellectuals and politicians who were offered the tag declined the honor, most notably sociologist Daniel Bell and New York Democratic Senator Patrick Moynihan.

Neoconservatives achieved their greatest influence during the first term of the George W. Bush administration. Seizing the window of opportunity presented by the 9/11 attack in 2001, neocons Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith worked inside the Bush administration with Vice President Dick Cheney to push war with Iraq, supported by outside advisors like Richard Perle and journalists and pundits William Kristol, Charles Krauthammer and Jonah Goldberg. By the second term of George W. Bush, the dismal prospects for the Iraq war had driven Wolfowitz and Feith out of government and greatly diminished the influence of the remaining neocons.

Paleoconservatives: Paleocons have a focus in Allan Carlson's Rockford Institute and its publication, *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, edited by Thomas Fleming, a New Left dropout who draws inspiration from the Southern agrarian conservatives -- and recruit columnists like southern regionalist John Shelton Reed. Patrick Buchanan, with his "America First" campaign, represents another aspect of this tradition, its ethnic Catholic isolationist, nativist wing.

Radical Right: Out on the conspiracy fringe, the John Birch Society survived founder Robert Welch's death in 1985, but is reduced from 100,000 members in its heyday around 1964 to a modest remnant today. After a series of factional disputes and splits, in 1989 G. Allen Bubolz moved the headquarters from Belmont, Massachusetts, to Appleton, Wisconsin, hometown of Senator Joe McCarthy. Veteran Birch writer and editor John McManus took over as chairman in 1991.

Out on the racist right, the Liberty Lobby led by Willis Carto became for a time what the Anti-Defamation League called "the most active anti-Semitic organization in the country." Its newspaper *The Spotlight*, founded in 1955, once had a circulation over 100,000, but went out of business in 2001. Several Liberty Lobby staff and associates started the Populist Party in 1982, and ran David Duke for president in 1984; the Party split in 1986 ejecting Carto's faction. By 1987 Duke was running as a Republican in Louisiana. After a long court battle, the Liberty Lobby's remaining assets were turned over to the Legion for the Survival of Freedom, the parent corporation of the Institute for Historical Review, which tries to disprove the Holocaust.

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