

THE PERFECT STORM:
SOCIAL CHANGE, PARTISAN REALIGNMENT, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF
MODERN TEXAS CONSERVATISM, 1963-1980

By

SEAN P. CUNNINGHAM

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2007

© 2007 Sean P. Cunningham

For Laura—my wife and my love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No project of this magnitude can be completed alone. Throughout the course of my graduate career, numerous individuals have contributed wisdom, insight, encouragement, support, assistance, and time—all of which has enabled me to produce what I hope is a solid piece of original research.

I would like to begin by thanking my dissertation advisors Brian Ward (now at the University of Manchester, UK) and William A. Link, Richard J. Milbauer Professor of History at the University of Florida. Any graduate student would be lucky to work with either one of these mentors; I have been fortunate to work closely with both. My doctoral experience at UF was far better than I ever could have hoped for and this, I believe, is a credit to the scholarly wisdom, patience, communication skills, and dedication of these two men. I have also had the pleasure of working with several other professors at both the University of Florida and Texas Tech University, where I received my M.A. in 2002. Among those professors are George Esenwein, Joseph Spillane, Robert McMahon (now at Ohio State University), Donald Walker, Alywn Barr, Randy McBee, Paul Deslandes (now at the University of Vermont), Lynda Kaid, and Spiro Kiouisis. These men and women all contributed to this project in unique and important ways. My sincerest thanks go out to each of these scholars.

Numerous historians, archivists, and librarians across the country also contributed to this effort. Specifically, I would like to thank the archivists and staff at the Southwest Collections at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, George Schultz at the Cushing Library at Texas A&M University in College Station, Robert Bohanan at the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, Georgia, William McNitt at the Gerald Ford Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the entire staff at the Lyndon Johnson Library in Austin, Texas, Brenda Gunn and Stephanie Malmros of the Center

for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, Jennifer Mandel of the Ronald Reagan Library in Simi Valley, California, Dan Santamaria of the Seeley G. Mudd Library at Princeton University, Kathryn Stallard of the John G. Tower Library at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, and Carol Leadenham and the entire staff at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University. I extend my sincerest thanks to each of these men and women.

While professional and academic support was obviously necessary for a project such as this one, just as necessary was the encouragement, love, and support I received from friends and family. First, I would like to thank my grandfather, J. Pat Cunningham, who in 1980 became the first Republican County Commissioner elected in Potter County, Texas, and gave me my first taste of just how powerful the Reagan tidal wave of the 1980s was. My grandfather passed away just two months before I completed the first revised draft of this dissertation and I regret that he never had the chance to review it, though I imagine he might have disagreed with a few of my conclusions. I would also like to thank my parents, both of whom have no doubt shaped my life in too many ways for me to even notice sometimes. My mother, Kay, and father, Kirk have each taught me a great deal about life, love, service, and sacrifice—and are in large part responsible for the man I am today. Each of these people, along with the support of my brother Eric and sister-in-law Averil, grandmothers, friends, church family, and colleagues, provided uniquely to my pursuit of graduate education in history and thus contributed to my ability to complete this project.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wonderful wife Laura. Laura has been with me through the duration of this project and no individual has endured more of my daily grind than she has. Laura sacrificed her own academic and career ambitions to serve me as

I progressed throughout my graduate career at the University of Florida. She gave of herself willingly and always joyfully, and supported and endured my numerous research trips, many of which took me out of town for weeks at a time. Simply put, I could not have done this without Laura and will be forever grateful. She is the love of my life and I thank God for bringing the two of us together during my time in Gainesville.

This work is dedicated to her.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	8
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	9
2 MARKETING IDEOLOGY IN LBJ'S TEXAS, 1963-66	37
3 DISMANTLING TEXAS'S NEW DEAL COALITION, 1967-70	92
4 SCANDAL, MOBILIZATION, AND ANTI-LIBERALISM, 1971-74	142
5 CIVIL WAR, 1975-76.....	187
6 THE GATHERING STORM, 1977-78	239
7 TEXAS AND THE REAGAN REVOLUTION, 1979-80	293
8 EPILOGUE	349
LIST OF REFERENCES	355
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	366

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

THE PERFECT STORM:
SOCIAL CHANGE, PARTISAN REALIGNMENT, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF
MODERN TEXAS CONSERVATISM, 1963-1980

By

Sean P. Cunningham

August 2007

Chair: William A. Link

Cochair: Brian Ward

Major: History

This study investigates the relationships between political transformations and social changes in Texas between 1963 and 1980, with a focus on the rise of modern conservatism. In Texas, the death of the Democratic New Deal coalition coincided with the birth of a new conservative Republican coalition, the elements of which were not fully evident until the end of the 1970s. The study argues that modern Texas conservatism must be understood as a complex coalescence of various factions, united under a broad and encompassing ideological rhetoric, and that analyses which do not fully incorporate the wide array of regional variances, issues, tensions, and traditions are not necessarily representative of national political culture. In Texas, the deconstruction of the one-party system and subsequent construction of two-party politics was the most visible manifestation resulting from a combination of factors including race, religion, economics, anticommunism, scandal, and a heightened emphasis on image. By illustrating how these forces collectively influenced political change in Texas, this study contributes nuance to the historiography on Southern conservatism, bridges a long-standing disagreement over the national versus local origins of conservative rhetoric, and reexamines the regional identities and political culture in the understudied post-war American West and Southwest.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In May 1968, less than two months after announcing to the world that he would not run for re-election, Lyndon Johnson remained desperate to understand the convergence of political events that had so decisively unraveled his presidency. Perhaps surprisingly, no state puzzled Johnson more than his home state of Texas. In seeking to understand the changing political climate of the state that had first sent him to Washington as a representative, then as a senator, Lyndon Johnson charged George Reedy, his former press secretary and recently re-hired special counsel, to prepare an analysis of Texas politics that could be used to benefit the Democratic Party in the upcoming general election. Reedy titled his report, “Forces at Work in Texas.” “The political problems of Texas are complicated by the vast amount of territory that is covered,” Reedy wrote. “The state ranges over so much of the nation that it comprises areas which differ in their geography, economy, history, and social outlook. The treaty of annexation authorizes Texas to divide itself into five states and the problems of Texas political leaders would be greatly simplified if this should happen as they could then deal with relatively homogenous populations.” Reedy went on to detail the demographic, social, and economic nuances across the various regions of the state, and discussed the impact of urbanization as well as the growing disconnect between Texas liberalism—which he said was actually populism confused with liberalism—and the growing national liberal establishment. Among his many conclusions, Reedy warned that Texas, despite circumstances that differed from other Southern states, could potentially become a bastion of conservative Republicanism in the coming decades.¹

¹ Memorandum, May 23, 1968, For: Ernest Goldstein, From: George E. Reedy, Box 70, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX.

Fast forward almost four decades to 2004. That year, the platform of the Texas Republican Party reaffirmed the United States of America as a “Christian nation,” denounced the “myth of the separation of church and state,” demanded the inclusion of abstinence-only sex education for public schools, and called for the elimination of, among other things, the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Internal Revenue Service, the income tax, the gift tax, the inheritance tax, the capital gains tax, the payroll tax, and various state and local property taxes.² That same year, as Texas Republicans held all 27 statewide elected offices, the Republican and former Texas Governor George W. Bush won his second term as President of the United States, carrying over 61 percent of his home state’s vote, further evidence, as if any was needed by 2004, that George Reedy’s predictions had been proven correct.

Only two Texans, (three if you count George H. W. Bush, who struggled throughout his career against the image that he was a Yankee interloper), have served in the White House as President of the United States. The corollaries between these two Texans—each of whom presided over controversial wars in distant parts of the globe, and each of whom sustained tremendous home state support despite national criticism—offer a stark contrast to the ideological and partisan affinities also ascribed to the two men. Johnson’s home state support was primarily based on the fact that he was a Democrat. Bush’s home state support was primarily based on the fact that he was a conservative. Situated in the narrative precisely between the administrations of Johnson and Bush was the career of modern conservatism’s preeminent icon, Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s popular support in Texas throughout the 1960s and 1970s suggests something important about the images that attracted Lone Star State residents

² Kevin Phillips, *American Theocracy: The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century* (New York: Viking Press, 2006), 233, 249.

during this time. That support further shows how such images translated into political loyalties and behaviors. Despite the state's prominence in shaping national politics throughout the final decades of the twentieth century—not to mention the first decade of the twenty-first century—the history of conservatism and party politics in post-World War II Texas has, to this point, escaped the attention of most scholars attempting to understand the relationships among local, regional, state, and national politics. Additionally, despite an abundance of fresh, provocative literature and a renewed zeal among historians in recent years to understand the diversity and complexity of its adherents, the history of modern American conservatism remains incomplete. These two problems are not unrelated. It is, in large part, the reconciliation of these two historiographical shortcomings that lie at the heart of this study.

This study argues that the death of the New Deal coalition coincided with the birth of a new conservative coalition, the elements of which were not fully evident in Texas until the end of the 1970s. It is a further argument of this study that modern Texas conservatism must be understood as a complex coalescence of various factions, united under a broad and encompassing ideological rhetoric, and that analyses which do not fully incorporate the wide array of regional variances, issues, tensions, and traditions are not necessarily representative of national political culture. In Texas, the deconstruction of the one-party system and subsequent construction of two-party politics was the most visible manifestation resulting from a combination of factors including race, religion, economics, anticommunism, scandal, and a heightened emphasis on personality and ideological iconography. By illustrating how these forces collectively influenced political change in Texas, operating together almost as a “perfect storm,” it is my hope to contribute nuance to an already thriving historiography on Southern conservatism, bridge a long-standing disagreement over the national versus local origins of conservative rhetoric, as well as

encourage a scholarly reexamination of regional identities and political culture in the understudied post-war American West and Southwest. This is a story of modern conservatism as it evolved in one of the nation's largest and most politically important states during the tumultuous seventeen-year period between John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas and Ronald Reagan's ascension to the presidency in 1980.

Put more succinctly, the story of modern American conservatism cannot be told without understanding the central role that Texas played in its evolution. There are two key reasons why the exploration of Texas is vital to moving historians closer to a more complete understanding of post-war politics and modern conservatism. The first of these reasons seems the more obvious of the two. Texas, through its sheer size and presence, has commanded a national stage and exerted national influence for decades. Yet, this influence has dramatically increased since the early 1960s. The most visible manifestation of this influence has been the persistence of Texas political leaders operating with national power. From Lyndon Johnson to John Connally and Lloyd Bentsen, from John Tower to James Baker and Tom DeLay, from George Bush to Dick Cheney to George W. Bush, no state has contributed as heavily to the images and transformations of post-war American politics as has Texas.

Power, though, comes in many forms. To properly understand post-war American conservatism, one must explore more than just top-down traditional politics—though such a focus remains important. Rather, the development of modern conservatism must be understood in Texas because the narrative of post-war American politics necessitates a balanced exploration, not simply between traditional political history and the new political history of the grassroots, but also between the various sources from which power was derived. Therefore, the second reason why Texas stands as such a vital cog to the historical understanding of post-war American

politics is less obvious than the first, yet just as important. Situated centrally in what the former conservative political strategist Kevin Phillips once coined in the late 1960s as the new American “Sunbelt,” Texas has stood not only at the heart of post-war America’s ideological, economic, demographic, and social development, but has also existed as a bridge connecting the political traditions of the South with the rugged frontierism and individualistic ethos of the American West. Texas has been at the forefront of national urbanization, suburbanization, and even exurbanization. During the last decades of the twentieth century, Texas was home to four of the nation’s top ten largest and fastest growing cities, embraced and benefited from the Rust Belt to Sunbelt migration of industrial workers, and established itself as the nation’s energy nucleus—particularly through the emergence of the ever-expanding and influential 1970s oil industry. Texas was also central to the rise of the military industrial complex, boasted the most vibrant economy in the country for much of the 1970s, and became an operations hub for the emerging evangelical Christian Right. Furthermore, Texas offers a multifaceted setting which both mirrors and simultaneously contradicts traditional interpretations of race in the 1960s. Texas was, generally, a less-heated front for the African-American civil rights movement and yet fierce racism and segregation was palpable in several sections of the state. Yet at the same time, Texas’s demographics reflect a racial dynamic far more complicated than most areas of the South, where racism was focused more directly on blacks seeking integration and a political voice. In Texas, a significant Hispanic population—one that was larger than the black population of the state—altered the political sensibilities of both candidates and citizens pertinent to broader notions of white supremacy and even definitions of whiteness itself.³

³ See, for instance, Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

Therefore, to a large degree, this study is just as concerned with what a majority of Texans perceived to be at the heart of state and national politics in the 1960s and 1970s as it is with the reality. In the age of mass media and popular culture, reality was increasingly confused with, and at the very least informed by, perception. This often made the ability to communicate a desired image among the most potent political weapons available to local, state, and national candidates whose primary goal was to win votes. Political communication in the age of mass media does more to entrench or solidify pre-existing values, attitudes, and beliefs than it does to overturn such ideas. In Texas, political communication through various forms of media bolstered a majority of Texans' ideological connotations, but also undermined the powerful roadblocks of loyalty and tradition—two complementary themes that allowed for the endurance of conservatism while also obstructing the rise of modern Texas Republicanism.

For much of the twentieth century, these loyalties and traditions meant that Republicans had little chance of succeeding in Texas, regardless of what issues or ideas the party chose to champion at any given time. At the state and local level, Texas remained solidly Democratic until the close of the 1970s, though it was not until the close of the 1990s that a complete shift from Democratic to Republican dominance was made. At the national level between 1945 and 1990, only Richard Nixon in 1968 managed to win the presidency without carrying Texas. From a wider and slightly different vantage point, only Herbert Hoover in 1928, Dwight Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956, and Richard Nixon in 1972 managed to carry Texas as a Republican presidential candidate between the years of 1876 and 1976. Yet not a single Democratic presidential candidate has carried Texas since 1976. These trends have not gone unnoticed, but the most common explanations have failed to fully explore the critical existence of the state as a bridge

not simply connecting various regions of the country, but actually spearheading the formation of a new regional identity, with new political characteristics, loyalties, and personalities.

This dissertation argues that the “perfect storm” which eventually engulfed the Lone Star State by the late 1970s, precipitating the emergence of not only a viable and powerful Texas Republican Party, but also ideological coalescence and partisan realignment, was fueled from six major sources. Three of these sources existed as individual strands of a diffuse and nascent mid-century conservative intellectual revival, those being a movement of anti-New Deal libertarian and free-market capitalists, traditional moralists influenced intellectually by the works of Edmund Burke and C. S. Lewis (among others), and zealous anticommunists, including both those who prioritized the threat of domestic subversives as well as those whose focus was concentrated on not simply containing, but rolling back the Red Tide of global communism. In Texas, the first and third of these strands functioned with deeper roots and wider followings than did the intellectual movement, which remained most influential on university campuses and think tanks in the Midwest and Northeast United States. Nonetheless, the fusion of these three conservative strands was essential to the formation of a new political alliance both in Texas and the nation—a coalition built upon ideological rather than partisan loyalties and through the fracturing of a national two-party system that allowed for the consolidation of left and right wings under Democratic and Republican tents respectively.⁴

Fusion, however, did not happen overnight. Nor was it the result, solely, of top-down influences emanating from state and national party headquarters. The growth of modern conservatism was greatly affected by the attitudes, issues, perceptions, and mobilization of individuals in more local settings. Instead of seeing the conservative ascendancy of the 1960s

⁴ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1996).

and 1970s as either the result of top-down national strategies or grassroots mobilizations, a more proper view seeks balance.

In Texas, the impetus for this fusion of conservative factions had two primary sources, each of which necessitated a cooperative dynamic between top-down political strategists and grassroots mobilization. The first was a redefined sense of patriotic Americanism that engulfed Texas conservatives from each of the above three strands through issues and events that, thanks to the growing ubiquity of mass media and mass culture, not simply prioritized the national over the local, but actually transformed the national into the local. For instance, during much of the 1960s, few Texans witnessed first-hand the anti-war protests, racial turmoil boiling over into the streets, rising crime rates, or general chaos and violence that, according to images being broadcast into citizens' homes on a nightly basis, was being experienced in other parts of the country. Yet successful candidates running in Texas for offices ranging from the city council to the state legislature to governor almost uniformly emphasized the need to deal swiftly and strongly with each of these problems. During the 1970s, as oil shocks crippled national energy policy and economic shifts brought large chunks of the Northern manufacturing sector to a grinding halt, the Texas economy exploded. Houston thrived as a mecca for the nation's oil and gas industry, while sharing with Dallas the benefits of a rapidly proliferating real estate and finance market. Other cities in Texas experienced similar economic growth, yet by 1980, Ronald Reagan had convinced the state that Jimmy Carter's economy was an unmitigated liberal disaster.

The ability of Reagan and other skillful conservative politicians to communicate national problems as local concerns for Texas is a reflection of the second source providing an impetus to the fusion of conservative factions in the 1960s and 1970s—image. More specifically, the

construction of political iconography through broadcast media, the connection of that iconography with political ideology, the association of political ideology with party politics, and the redirection of state traditions and loyalties, created an image of liberal and Democratic weakness, failure, and un-Americanism. At the same time, this process amplified a corresponding image of conservative strength and Republican respectability, perhaps the GOP's most daunting obstacle in Texas since the end of Reconstruction in the late 1870s. Republican respectability came in many forms. In the mid-1960s, many Texans were attracted to the GOP's stand against the civil rights movement, not by advocating racial violence or overt white supremacy, but rather by championing a vision of color-blindness and local control that prioritized both economic considerations as well as the perceptions that Americans outside of Texas would have of the Lone Star State. The GOP became a more respectable alternative in Texas as Lyndon Johnson's Democratic Party was seemingly ready to abandon numerous centuries-old traditions. One decade after Johnson first took the presidential oath of office while aboard an airplane parked on a Dallas runway, conservatism generally remained strong, even as the issues Texans were debating, such as race, changed. By the mid-1970s, the imminent threat was not race per se but a declining morality and the perceived loss of Christian values, most of which centered on issues of gender and sexuality.

Running alongside these impulses was a cornucopia of other issues, most significantly a parallel stream whose current channeled anticommunism, anti-statism, and anti-liberalism into one mighty river of discontent and social anxiety. Social anxiety in Texas was fostered thanks in large part to a reciprocal dynamic whereby political parties communicated an imagery which sought to redefine ideologies and recast loyalties, while the grassroots responded to and informed political parties about exactly what concerns needed to be emphasized and images targeted.

What is perhaps most striking about the Republican Party's ability to manipulate media-communicated images in such a way as to transform century-old public perception is the fact that much of its technique was borrowed from Lyndon Johnson's 1964 presidential campaign during which he skillfully used the media to undermine the conservatism of Barry Goldwater as "dangerous and extreme." Modern Texas conservatism was as influenced by perception as anything else.

In a related development, the sixth and final component to this "perfect storm" was the mobilization of a suburban grassroots, which both responded to and influenced the decision-making process and direction of the state and national Democratic and Republican Parties. The politics of the modern suburb has been a growing concern for historians in recent years, and with good reason. Coexisting with the literature on modern suburbia is an analysis which places the politics of race, and more specifically mobilized white opposition to the civil rights movement, at the core of modern conservative development. However, while the racial origins for post-war suburban growth might be similar across much of the nation, too great and singular a connection has been drawn between these origins and the overall political culture, awareness, and nature of white suburban dissatisfaction. The new suburban history has coincided with a revived focus on the tenets and peculiarities of modern American conservatism. What this new suburban history has convincingly illustrated is that the origins of modern conservative rhetoric in the South can be traced back, in various forms, to the narrative of "white flight"—the white suburban response to inner-city racial tensions, expansion, and desegregation of public accommodations. Southern white resistance to the African-American freedom struggle was more complex, this history argues, than the stereotypical and simplistic image of poor, rural, segregationist Klansmen decrying any and all challenges to white supremacy. Rather, as the plantation economy around

which racial dogma had long been anchored was plowed under by bulldozers making way for new shopping centers, public schools, golf courses, businesses, and backyard swimming pools beyond the reach of integration, Southern white suburbanites accommodated much of the civil rights agenda. This accommodation included the integration of public places while reconstructing a new spatial hierarchy which they hoped would be impenetrable to the shots being fired by black integrationists and other liberal progressives against Jim Crow. In the world of Southern Suburbia, socially unacceptable racial extremism was replaced by a more color-blind rhetoric, attractive to relocating industries and public relations advisors from Georgia to Louisiana and from Virginia to Florida—and to Texas.

Nonetheless, a persisting problem limits the broader application of these historical analyses that identify race at the very center of modern conservatism's evolution. While no doubt applicable across the South, too many historians apply regional conclusions to the national context, without fully taking into account the demographic and cultural distinctions that make various regions distinct. In Texas, the empowering of the politically active white suburban voter was no doubt the result, partially, of racial tensions and opposition to desegregation and civil rights—an opposition far more nuanced than simple massive resistance. Yet, while the language of property rights, freedom of assembly, anti-federal encroachment, and social and moral decline can in some places, including places in Texas, be traced back to the politics of race, more attention needs to be given not simply to the origins of such a discourse, but also to the far more complex ways in which that discourse evolved to encompass the spectrum of issues and impulses that allowed for a broad-based conservative coalition by the close of the 1970s.⁵ In other words,

⁵ Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

race played a crucial role in shaping modern conservatism in Texas, as it did in the rest of the South. But because hard-line massive resisters were not as prevalent or as active in Texas as in other parts of the South, race is but one of several important factors shaping the state's conservative and partisan realignments in the 1960s and 1970s.

The “perfect storm” approach to understanding the development of modern conservatism in Texas—as well as the parallel narrative of the rise of modern Republicanism—necessitates an examination that pays attention to both the primacy of local grassroots mobilization, as well as top-down strategies influential in shaping partisan realignments and ideological redefinitions. Top-down influence and grassroots origins are not mutually exclusive theories. Modern American conservatism was far too complex for explanations which ignore one or the other of these approaches. Additionally, because the recent scholarship on modern conservatism has failed to acknowledge the profound importance of television and broadcast media on the shaping of popular opinion and perception, this study's focus on electoral politics becomes more necessary as a tool for understanding the critical dynamic between image and behavior.

It is, perhaps, important at this point to examine in greater detail how the existing historiography reflects, complements, and inspires the locus of this particular examination into modern American conservatism in Texas and how this study might also contribute to a deeper understanding of the state's regional identity, ideological heritage, and late twentieth-century political transformations. A number of scholars have, in recent years, turned their attention to the post-war American South in the hopes of explaining the political transformations of that region and their impact on national politics since the 1960s. A recent trend among many of these scholars is to move beyond studies of the segregationist rhetoric of extreme racism in order to consider the development of a more subtle, nuanced, and purportedly color-blind and suburban

dialogue. For instance, Matthew Lassiter's 2005 book *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, argues that suburban middle-class whites in Atlanta and Charlotte were at the forefront of rejecting the segregationist extremism that, in these people's views, threatened to undermine the economic development of Southern cities. Also published in 2005, Kevin Kruse's book *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* draws conclusions similar to those espoused by Lassiter, arguing that the formation of modern conservative rhetoric—the rhetoric of individualism, property rights, and federal encroachment—evolved first in the Deep South as a more nationally palatable statement of opposition to African-American civil rights. Joseph Crespino's 2007 study, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*, analyzes how the white citizens of Mississippi responded to the popular resistance against black civil rights by reformulating the public discourse within which various strands of anti-liberalism matured and then intersected with religion and other cultural movements. Many white Mississippians responded to these social transformations with both extreme violence and accommodation, through which the dialogue of race was slowly incorporated into a larger discussion of socialism, communism, and liberalism. Crespino acknowledges that different states behaved differently than Mississippi, and effectively illustrates how Southerners redirected liberal social critiques to Northern metropolises in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a way to deflect federal targeting of de jure segregation in the South. In Crespino's analysis, modern conservatism in Mississippi evolved out of hard-line segregationism to encompass broader critiques against government expansion and national liberalism.⁶

Still, at the heart of these historians' arguments is the permeating politics of race. In Lassiter's account, the formation of the famed "Silent Majority" can be directly tied to the

⁶ Ibid.

organization of white middle-class parents uniting against busing laws. For Kruse, the origins can be found even earlier and for more broadly conceived opposition to desegregation. For Crespino, whose narrative stretches from the late 1950s to 1980, conservatism's roots can be traced back to the segregationist impulses that intersected with, were altered by, and conformed to a broader and more respectable national discourse which prioritized religion, suburban protectionism, and color-blindness, asserted as critiques against liberalism's nagging for continued agitation on the path toward egalitarianism and social, cultural, and economic integration. For all three, the origins of modern conservative rhetoric are also found at the local level. What these three excellent monographs do not account for, however, are the ways in which other regions of the country diverged from the Deep South when it came to the formation of political rhetoric and partisan loyalties.⁷

Lassiter, Kruse, and Crespino all cite Lisa McGirr's 2001 book, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* as a crucial salvo into the study of white suburban politics and modern conservatism. McGirr focuses her study on Orange County, California from the late 1950s through the initial rise of Ronald Reagan in 1966. In this analysis, far greater attention is given to the fusion of libertarians and anticommunists into what McGirr calls the "birth of populist conservatism"—a brand of conservatism empowering the people not against corporate America, but against their real enemy, government. For McGirr, race is but one of several important factors affecting the formation of conservative rhetoric. This dissertation regards McGirr's work as an important standard, yet also acknowledges that McGirr's conclusions are more valuable as a contribution to a fuller understanding of modern American conservatism when studied in tandem with research on other regions, such as that offered by Lassiter, Kruse, and Crespino. Similarities no doubt existed between Texas suburbs and those in other parts of

⁷ Ibid.

the South and West, but Texas had a socioeconomic and political climate that uniquely affected the way such spatial developments informed the public's political perceptions and behavior. The stereotypical narrative of modern Republicanism's ascendancy, and the one that the recent literature has sought to redress, understands the GOP's ability to attract Dixiecrat segregationists as the key to its success. Such efforts were at the heart of Nixon's famed "Southern Strategy." What recent scholarship suggests, however, is that this narrative lacks complication and intuitively dismisses racism in only its crudest and most disrespectful form. The new suburban history has recaptured the nuances of racism and shown how complex white responses to civil rights actually were, yet have also created an image of conservative Republicanism that intuitively dismisses or inappropriately convolutes the broader narrative of social, political, religious, and cultural changes evolving in the 1960s and 1970s. The homogeneity of white, middle-class suburbia did not, in all cases, transcend regional traditions and variations, which is why further local and regional studies are needed.⁸

Several historians have also contributed to the historiography of modern American conservatism through biographies. Perhaps the most well-known example is Dan T. Carter's 1995 book, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*. In studying Wallace, Carter finds a legacy of conservative continuity connecting the segregationist politics of the Deep South with the eventual Republican takeover of that same region. Carter discusses what he calls, the "Southernization of American Politics"—a thesis he shares with other historians such as Bruce Schulman. Though a sometimes caustic biography, Carter's study of Wallace offers conclusions that, similar to those offered by Lassiter, Kruse, and Crespino, overextend the reach of Southern influence into other areas of the

⁸ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

nation, particularly as he casually incorporates the South into the Sunbelt without fully making sense of how the distinctive political cultures of Southwestern states informs his thesis.⁹

Another biography, Donald T. Critchlow's 2005 study, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, does much to correct the assertion among many historians that the regional genesis of modern American conservatism had a purely Southern accent. Instead, Critchlow argues that the history of modern American conservatism must incorporate more focused studies beyond the issues of race and region. Whereas historians of the modern American South have interpreted the development of a color-blind conservative rhetoric as evidence in support of the well-known "code words thesis," Critchlow finds that anticommunist conservatives in much of the rest of the country not merely prioritized issues other than race, but were in some cases relatively sympathetic to the need for improved race relations. The research of recent Brown University Ph.D. Dan Williams concurs with this assessment, by studying the influence of Northern and European evangelicals on shaping and influencing Southern religion in the late 1970s, culminating with the dramatic, fundamental, and politicizing shift within the Southern Baptist Convention in 1979.¹⁰

Several other biographies, including Rick Perlstein's 2001 book *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, Robert Dallek's 1991 book *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960*, James Reston's 1989 study of the life of John Connally, and John Knaggs's 1986 book, *Two-Party Texas: The John Tower Era, 1961-1984*, each contribute great insight into the political culture and changes in the American

⁹ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Daniel K. Williams, "From the Pews to the Polls: The Formation of a Southern Christian Right," Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 2005.

Southwest and in Texas. Yet none of these biographies has managed to combine their analysis with both the precision of professional history and an incorporation of the recent historiography of suburban and grassroots political studies, though Dallek's work comes closest. Professor William A. Link's upcoming biography of Jesse Helms will likely be a major contribution in this regard, but is still unlikely to address the peculiarities of Southwestern politics, particularly in Texas.¹¹

In fact, with only a few exceptions, it is striking that Texas, in this discussion of the influence and breadth of the historiography dealing with modern American conservatism, has received so little scholarly attention. Few historians have paid close attention to post-war politics in the Lone Star State, with Roger Olien's 1982 book *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* and Don Carleton's 1985 study *Red Scare!: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* standing as notable exceptions. For Texas to receive so little attention is puzzling and should be corrected. It is my hope that this dissertation, by studying a state that is simultaneously Southern, Western, Southwestern, American, and altogether unique while examining a range of events, issues, and problems, might fill a major gap in the existing historiography of modern American conservatism and encourage future scholars to think broadly when defining something as amorphous as political ideology.

Already, however, some are beginning to take notice. In 1969, Kevin Phillips, then an emerging Republican strategist, authored the highly influential book, *The Emerging Republican Majority*—out of which came the basis for Nixon's "Southern Strategy." By 2006, Phillips, like so many conservatives, had distanced himself from the GOP, angry over what he termed the

¹¹ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John R. Knaggs. *Two Party Texas: The John Tower Era, 1961-1984* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001); James Reston, *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harpers and Row, 1989).

“Bush Dynasty’s betrayal” of traditional conservative values. In 2006, Phillips published his book *American Theocracy* in which he describes the late twentieth-century transformations in American politics as “Texification” rather than “Southernization.” Such a shift in terminology may very well be appropriate.¹²

Before going any further, a comment needs to be made on both the method of this study as well as the meaning of the various and often slippery political terms that pepper the narrative. It makes sense to begin by explaining how the terms “conservatism” and “conservative” will be used. The biggest problem for historians commenting on conservatism is that no singular definition exists, even among conservatives. Largely because of the widespread factionalism of its adherents, definitions of conservatism often fail to provide historians with a neat framework. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this dissertation conservatism will be defined as one in general accordance with the plethora of definitions offered by its many adherents, rather than as a singular, coherent political or social ideological doctrine. In other words, conservatism refers to different traits in different people. Additionally, this dissertation will attempt to avoid applying regional connotations to the larger definition. In other words, definitions of conservatism in post-war America, in some ways, depended upon where the word was being used. Many historians have understood conservatism only in the context of a particular region, but the totality of historiography on the subject illustrates that conservatism was complex, fluid, and not confined to only one section of the nation. Therefore, this dissertation will generally refer to someone as conservative as long as that someone referred to themselves as conservative, though

¹² Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare!: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1985); Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982); Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969); Phillips, *American Theocracy*.

in some cases an issue, individual, or movement may also be referred to as conservative if that issue, individual, or movement was referred to as such by its contemporary opposition.¹³

As the socioeconomic and political culture in Texas evolved through the 1960s and 1970s, the public's understanding of its own conservatism also changed. Typically, conservative Texans identified themselves—or were identified by others—as such for any number of reasons. Some continued to equate conservatism with support for capitalism, free enterprise, and libertarianism. Others viewed their conservatism as an expression of hostility toward the federal government. Many Texans grew more conservative, in this regard, beginning in the late 1930s when opposition to “radical” unionization, increased tax burdens, unbalanced budgets, and federal encroachment typically characterized a growing opposition to the New Deal.¹⁴ Conservatism can also be applied to many (but not all) anticommunist impulses, general opposition to civil rights, and the rise of the Christian Right.

In referring to the Christian Right—the resultant rise of evangelical influence in American politics—it becomes necessary to define the terms “Right” and “Left.” These terms will be used from time to time, most often as an alternative for terms like conservative and liberal. However, when necessary—and it is often necessary—this dissertation will distinguish between ideological strands operating as factions within a political organization or party. For instance, Donald Critchlow distinguishes between what he calls the Old Right and the New Right, operating in competition within the GOP during much of the 1940s and 1950s. For Critchlow, the “old” was that which was narrowly committed to anti-socialism and isolationism,

¹³ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement since 1945*.

¹⁴ David M. Kennedy, *The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 338-340.

and the “new” was that which incorporated a broader anticommunist worldview into critiques against “collectivism,” “liberalism,” and “moral relativism.”¹⁵

To the point of party factionalism, another term which often finds its way into the narrative and, therefore, must be defined, is the concept of “Establishment.” Generally speaking, references to “the Establishment” were made by political leaders seeking to isolate and distinguish between operations that were “of the people” and those that were “of elites.” Increasingly throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, populist-conservatives, such as those described by Lisa McGirr in her book on Southern California, also employed the term “Establishment” to denigrate the moderate and liberal influences within the Republican Party. Very often, but particularly in the 1970s, Texas conservatives referred to the “liberal Establishment” as synonymous with “liberal elites” or “liberal Eastern Wing.” In fact, the term “liberal Eastern Establishment” came to signify a power base in both the Republican and Democratic Parties that populist-conservatives identified as an almost conspiratorial, hegemonic, and corrupt source of anti-traditional and anti-American elitism. Whether or not a “liberal Eastern Establishment” actually existed or how it operated is less important to this study than the fact that many grassroots Texans heard these phrases, generally accepted them, and applied their own definitions and emotional responses to them. In other words, contradictions that existed between one conservative’s application of the term “Establishment” and another’s understanding of the term does not undermine the importance and power that such terminology had in shaping public opinion and transforming the visceral responses to such labels.¹⁶

Populism is another term that needs clarification. David M. Kennedy has defined early twentieth-century populism as a “voice to the fears of the powerless and the animosities of the

¹⁵ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*, 34-35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, CH 2; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, Introduction.

alienated.” Populists, Kennedy asserts, endured poverty, servitude, and barbarism, but would not endure aristocracy. Existing in opposition to the “shadowy elites whose greedy manipulations oppressed the poor and perverted democracy,” populist ire began to shift in more conservative ways during the second half of the twentieth century, seeing government rather than big business as the monolithic source of elitist oppression. There are few locations better than Texas in which to study the political implications and applications of populism. Having been, in some ways, born out of a central Texas farmers’ alliance, the populist movement of the 1880s and 1890s contributed much to the state’s enduring political legacy. Though most of the specific goals and platform points of Texas populists have changed since 1890, the motivational impulse to strike a blow for freedom against tyranny meshes well, at least rhetorically, with the state’s persistent kinship to more romantic images of the open range, the frontier, and boundless opportunity. It was to this romantic impulse that many conservative Republicans used populist rhetoric to attract new constituents in Texas, predominantly but not exclusively through a white middle-class that felt it had been forgotten by the national Democratic Party. Regardless of whether or not conservatives actually practiced populism according to one or any definition, this dissertation will apply the term most often as a means of illustrating a style and particular message, most effectively used by conservative Republicans in the 1960s and 1970s, whereby the rallying together of the grassroots in opposition to Big Government provided a powerful and unifying rhetorical weapon.¹⁷

Liberalism, too, must be defined. In a simple way, this dissertation refers to as liberal those who defined themselves as liberal. This dissertation also, however, spends a great deal of energy illustrating how the term liberal became a source of conflict and competition between Texans grappling with the implications of a changing political culture. On the one hand,

¹⁷ Ibid.; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 235.

therefore, liberalism will be viewed as it existed at the time, as a philosophy which sought to maximize civil liberties for the individual and championed civil rights and racial egalitarianism, largely through the powerful employment of federal resources. On the other hand, liberalism will also be viewed as it was redefined and recast, particularly by Texas conservatives, as a frightful step on the evolutionary ladder toward socialism, collectivism, and even communism. The relationship between anti-liberalism and anticommunism is a crucial one, and deserves greater analysis. Conservatives in post-war America not only saw continuity between liberalism and communism because of a shared willingness to use government to solve social problems, or because of the political loyalties liberals enjoyed from labor unions and other working class organizations, but also because many worried that liberals did not fear communists as much as they should and were, therefore, naïve and dangerously soft in their diplomatic dealings with the Soviet Union.¹⁸

Because it plays such a vital role in the overall thrust of this study's argument, a definition also needs to be provided for the terms "icon" and "iconography." I have chosen to identify as icons those individuals who served as widely accepted symbols or targets for the various ideological or emotional impulses present both nationally and in Texas during the 1960s and 1970s. Lyndon Johnson, for instance, is referred to as a liberal icon primarily because so many conservatives vilified Johnson's Great Society as the quintessential example of government expansionism run amok. To refer to Johnson, therefore, as a liberal icon is to suggest that certain images of liberalism came to conservatives' minds when they thought of Johnson—or, conversely, images of Johnson came to mind when they thought of liberalism. Jimmy Carter is also referred to as a liberal icon, but for different reasons. It became clear by the late 1970s that Texas conservatives found the practice of linking Carter to images of failure,

¹⁸ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement since 1945*, 94-96.

weakness, and malaise quite useful. To this extent, Carter came to represent what was wrong, in the conservative mind, with the nation. Ronald Reagan is also referred to as an icon, largely because so many of his supporters identified their own political ideologies against the backdrop of their affinity for the former Hollywood actor. Simply put, then, icons are referred to as such as a way of communicating the ability those individuals possessed—or were made to possess by their opponents—for personifying either a political or ideological impulse. The term “iconography,” therefore, is used to explain the broad application and influence created by linking either a political party or candidate with certain public figures who were generally seen as representative of a larger body of ideas, philosophies, and stances.

To be certain, variations existed. What constituted an icon in Texas did not necessarily constitute an icon in other parts of the nation—or in the nation as a whole. Nonetheless, for a great many Texans, certain individuals no doubt came to symbolize larger themes, ideas, and movements.

This dissertation will also frequently distinguish between various regions of the state. Most typically, references will be made to five regions: East Texas, North Texas, South Texas, Central Texas, and West Texas. Several basic assumptions can be gleaned simply from these geographic distinctions, but much more can still be said about the unique characteristics, demographics, and socioeconomics of each section. Such an understanding is necessary for any study of the state’s political culture. For instance, only in East Texas—the region bordering Louisiana and extending not quite to present-day Interstate 45—did the presence of a large concentration of African Americans contribute to a political climate similar to that in much of the Deep South. Yet, racial diversity was by no means limited to East Texas. In fact, far greater racial diversity existed in South and Central Texas, where high concentrations of Hispanics

created a very different sociopolitical dynamic. Class tensions ran high in these regions, particularly in South Texas where a small but powerful number of conservative land owners typically controlled the economy in which large numbers of Spanish-speaking peoples attempted to forge a living. Settled predominantly by German immigrants, Central Texas was an early bastion of Western frontierism and rugged individualism, and arguably still embraces the state's heritage of independence and tradition more tenaciously than any other section. The economy of West Texas has long been based on oil and natural gas, and much of the state's energy wealth is derived from the oil fields of the Permian Basin. This region, which is also the largest cotton-producing area of the state—and one of the largest in the nation—had a sparse African-American population and mirrors, demographically, the American Southwest far more than it does the American South.¹⁹

Variations also existed within each of these regions. Major urban metropolises like Dallas and Houston complicated the political culture of North and East Texas respectively, while San Antonio and Austin became eclectic hubs for sources of political conservatism, moderation, and liberalism in South and Central Texas. Austin, in particular, forged an identity as one of the nation's fastest growing and dynamic cities, welcoming the relocation of numerous industrial, technological, and even entertainment enterprises. The religious makeup of the state also varies by region. The state's heavy Baptist influence and traditional anti-Catholic impulses have, for instance, necessitated a political reckoning with the overwhelmingly Catholic and Hispanic population of South and Far West Texas.

To understand the political and social culture of Texas is to see that demographic, economic, cultural, and racial distinctions combined with the vast expanse of its land to create a

¹⁹ Memorandum, May 23, 1968, For: Ernest Goldstein, From: George E. Reedy, Box 70, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX.

state that defies easy regional identification. Furthermore, it should not be merely assumed, but actually stated that Texas was, by and large, a conservative state in 1963, when this story of modern conservatism begins. Conservatives of all stripes enjoyed influence in Texas, though what this dissertation illustrates is that no conservative movement—the unification of all disparate strands of the conservative persuasion into an actual political power—existed until the close of the 1970s, when the movement finally aligned itself with a Republican Party willing to fully embrace new constituents and new leadership. Texas liberals, meanwhile, existed not so much on an ideological fringe, but as an aging band of New Dealers whose time had largely past them by. Younger progressives certainly rallied behind a new liberal agenda, including the Great Society and various civil rights movements, but were generally less influential and not politically mobilized. Minority voters in 1963, both blacks and Hispanics, were predictably participating in lower percentages than they would in the coming years, a change that hastened the liberalization of the state Democratic Party and the emergence of a new conservative GOP. Broadly and more to the point, the Lone Star State’s very complexity, coupled with its political heritage and national prominence, makes it a fruitful venue in which to conduct historical research on the origins, nature, and transformations of modern American conservatism.

In terms of structure, this dissertation is divided into two parts, each of which contains three chapters. Part One, entitled “Deconstructing One-Party Texas,” seeks to explain the shifts in race relations, the changing applications of marketing technology and conservative rhetoric, the importance of intra-party factionalism, and the resultant shifts in Texans’ perceptions of political ideology and party politics between 1963 and 1974. Chapter Two examines how John F. Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas in November 1963 altered the political landscape in Texas and contributed to the development of anti-extremist marketing campaigns. The chapter also

explores the enduring quest to gain political advantage by either shaking and / or ascribing various ideological labels to oppositional parties and candidates. Chapter Three delves more deeply into divisions within the Texas Democratic Party between 1967 and 1970, with the political campaigns of 1968 providing much of the contextual framework. Chapter Four illustrates how local, state, and national scandals involving political figures and elected officials undermined partisan loyalties in Texas and increased the salience of a populist-conservative rhetoric that emphasized government as the true enemy and obstacle of the people.

Part Two, entitled “Constructing Two-Party Texas,” seeks to explain how loyalties to political ideology combined with populist-oriented rejections of the federal status quo to overcome the tradition of the “Yellow-Dog Democrat” in Texas, culminating with Ronald Reagan’s ascension to the White House in 1980. Chapter Five details perhaps the most significant political battle to take place in Texas in the post-war era: Ronald Reagan’s 1976 challenge to Gerald Ford for the GOP presidential nomination. This contest transformed the Republican Party in Texas, allowing for the embrace of a conservative grassroots coalition working on behalf of both Reagan Republicans and Reagan Democrats in Texas. Chapter Six analyzes the socioeconomic conditions operating in Texas during the late 1970s and how those conditions contributed to the coalescence of conservative grassroots organizers and political candidates under a newly strengthened Republican tent. Also critical to the analysis of Chapter Five is the maturation of anti-liberal rhetoric, used effectively by several candidates and not so effectively by others, which provided the state GOP with a better sense of how to manipulate public opinion through the use of ideologically oriented rhetoric. Finally, Chapter Seven explores the ultimate fusion of conservative factions, the maturation of image-management strategies, and the mobilization of a conservative Texas grassroots working together on behalf of

Ronald Reagan's campaign to oust the man who in 1976 was a born-again Southern moderate, but who in 1980 was cast as the epitome of liberal weakness and failure.

In the conclusion of his 2007 book on the making of modern conservatism in Mississippi, Joseph Crespino challenges future scholars to "remain sensitive to the multiplicity of causes and the complex intersections of various categories of analysis [that have shaped our understanding of post-war American politics]. Only by doing so will we begin to have a more complete understanding of historical continuity and change in the American South and the role that white southerners played in the making of modern conservatism."²⁰ This study has attempted to do just that, though it does not seek to create a new paradigm for the study of modern conservatism. Neither does this study claim to provide the level of depth and nuance that each individual issue, event, or personality, in many cases, no doubt will ultimately deserve. In several cases, an issue that may have been vitally important to the understanding of a larger theme has been covered in minimal detail. Race, for instance, which has been discussed in this introduction more than any other factor, is given less attention throughout the following chapters than it may otherwise deserve simply because that narrative has been covered in substantial detail in other texts. Limits of space and time precluded a fuller assessment, though this author concurs with the essential premise that modern conservatism's roots did, in many cases and in many areas, extend back to the politics of both massive resistance and white flight.

It is not the intent of this author to challenge those interpretations, but rather to spend greater time on those impulses which have received less treatment, either individually or in a larger context. Such is the unfortunate nature of a study that seeks to advance the thesis that change is a result of a multiplicity of forces and can only be understood in a properly wide context. Thus, it is a goal of this dissertation to illustrate to future scholars the importance of

²⁰ Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 278.

understanding political change in the broad context of state, regional, and national milieu.

Texas, because of its own diversity, provides an opportunity to see how the various explanations for political change in the 1960s and 1970s might be applied nationally. Yet, understanding how the forces of change came to foment partisan realignment and the construction of a Republican-dominated two-party political system in Texas is, in and of itself, an important contribution to the understanding of national political change—even if the way in which change happened in Texas is not perfectly analogous to the way it happened in the nation as a whole. Either way, it is the hope of this author that a contribution has been made.

CHAPTER 2 MARKETING IDEOLOGY IN LBJ'S TEXAS, 1963-66

The story of modern Texas conservatism is largely a story about the tenuous balance between change and continuity. That story, which parallels the growth of the modern Texas Republican Party, began in earnest in 1964 with the landslide election of a liberal Democrat. That year, Texans joined the vast majority of American voters by casting a ballot for Lyndon Johnson for President of the United States. Yet, even as the majority of these Texans cast their ballots for LBJ, very few considered themselves to be a liberal. This apparent contradiction was embodied by the very man for whom the majority of Texans had voted, for Lyndon Johnson was both a Texan and a liberal. He was not, however, a liberal Texan. The distinction here lies in an understanding of how politics was marketed in Texas during much of Johnson's career. Political marketing, however, began to change at about the same time that Johnson became president on a November, 1963 afternoon in Dallas.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, notions of conservatism and liberalism, particularly Texans' understanding of the relationship between political ideology and partisan politics, were redefined. This process had roots in the 1950s and early 1960s as Texans wrestled with issues like civil rights, communism, and violence. However, many Texans ultimately came to understand the process of social and political change not as a struggle against any particular issue, but as one of broad philosophical disagreements. Longstanding ideas about what it meant to be conservative or liberal no longer seemed as reliable as numerous social changes collided in a state where political power was dependent on loyalty and tradition. Between 1963 and 1966, Texans wrestled with the meaning loyalty and tradition, while also ascribing greater importance to image and personality. Slowly, political parties become more inextricably linked to national issues, ideological perceptions, and icons.

One such icon was Lyndon Johnson. Johnson's shadow hovered over national politics in the 1960s much as it had in Texas throughout his early career. Johnson emerged as a major political presence in Texas as a New Deal liberal, but was perfectly willing throughout his career in the House of Representatives and the Senate to adjust his ideological leanings to the context of his times. Johnson was, for the most part, a pragmatist. Texans during this time were, by and large, also pragmatists. Texans were also, however, fiercely loyal to the Democratic Party. This political culture first began to change in the 1950s with the advent of a more active and assertive media, television in particular. The dawn of the television age contributed to the reprioritization of image as crucial to political fortunes. Along with this heightened emphasis on image came the need to define oneself in such a way as to be effective on a national scale. All of this required that political parties, at both the state and national levels, adjust their priorities to account for these new realities.

LBJ had long boasted that his agenda was Texas's agenda. But Texas politics began to change almost as soon as Johnson first took the oath of office. By the end of his presidency in 1969, Lyndon Johnson had come to personify 1960s liberalism in much the same way that Ronald Reagan eventually came to personify conservatism. As an icon against which conservatives could define their own political beliefs, Johnson stands as a central figure in the rise of modern conservatism.¹ The rise of modern Texas conservatism began in the context of a complex political culture in which liberals often voted Republican, Republicans courted both conservatives and minorities, factions warred with one another within both parties, and ideologies sought iconographic representation through a new and more vibrant media presence. This is the story of how the rise of modern Texas conservatism began.

¹ John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* (New York: Penguin, 2004), CH 2.

Fuzzy Ideologies and Yellow Dogs

Lyndon Johnson notwithstanding, Texas was still a conservative one-party state in the early 1960s. Conservatism in Texas was multifaceted. Anticommunists, anti-New Dealers, fiscal conservatives, isolationists, and other strands of conservative ideology each had their followings. Because it was multifaceted, however, conservatism was also hard to define in Texas in the early 1960s—and there seemed to be little urgency to do so. The reason? Politics was power, and power rested with the Democratic Party. Party politics in Texas was not multifaceted. Most Texas Democrats were generally conservative, but to a large degree, early 1960s conservatism in Texas was primarily about maintaining power. This is not to say, however, that Texas was utterly devoid of liberals. Liberalism in Texas during the early 1960s was also diverse and ill-defined. Most Texas liberals would not have identified themselves as having much in common with Kennedy's Harvard-saturated cabinet. Rather, most Texas liberals were populists who cared less about whether or not the New Deal had been a step on the road toward socialism than they simply cared about food, shelter, electricity, and relief. These liberals actively supported farm subsidies, social security, and many other programs which originated during the New Deal and continued to popularly endure. In 1964, LBJ's liberalism also continued to speak to the common man with promises of better opportunities, while reminding everyone that the Republican Party was the party of the wealthy and the elite.²

Texas liberals, however, were still a minority. In Texas, liberalism's biggest enemy was the same political party through which that minority was attempting to operate—the Democratic Party. Established power structures negated opportunities for liberal influence at the state level. Texas liberals' problems did not stop there. In 1963, Texas ranked 44th nationally in adult literacy and 50th in per capita expenditure for child welfare services. Higher education was also

² James Reston, *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1989).

a major problem. Among University of Texas graduates who later sought graduate degrees, 86 percent did so out of state. Faculty salaries at the University of Texas, the state's flagship institution, were less than those at Chico State University in California, while faculty salaries at Texas Tech and Texas A&M were less than those at Bemidji State College in Minnesota. The state of New York produced five times as many Ph.D.s as did the state of Texas and the number of impoverished Texans was the largest in the nation.³

Though a minority faction largely unable to foment real change, Texas liberals used these and other socioeconomic shortcomings to make political waves in Texas and drew strength largely but not exclusively from the national Democratic Party. Ronnie Dugger was perhaps the most outspoken Texas liberal during the LBJ-era. Dugger was a classic Texas populist-liberal and, in 1954, became the first editor of the new and influential liberal periodical, the *Texas Observer*. Though it received more heralding outside of the state than it did inside—where its circulation hovered around 10,000—Dugger, through the *Observer*, promised to maintain a spirit of independence and quested to expose graft, corruption, and privilege where such things ought not to have existed. Dugger was an outspoken critic of elitist “establishments” and maintained a long-standing feud with Lyndon Johnson over the issues of power abuse, though the two shared similar progressive goals. Dugger also represented a faction of Texans clamoring for greater influence within their home state, but prevented from realizing that influence by the established state party infrastructure—which in the late 1950s and early 1960s meant conservative Democrats.⁴

In 1964, Dugger, dismayed over how national characterizations of political philosophies in Texas were being shaped, was the most outspoken among a faction of Texas liberals

³ Ibid., 289

⁴ *Houston Chronicle*, June 26, 1964, Box 4C512, Harris County Democratic Party Records, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Hereafter cited as CAH).

increasingly aware of the importance of perception to political success. Most of all, Dugger lamented that liberals had been forced into defending big government rather than recognizing that, “True liberals” understood that “big government can be a menace to the person, can be impersonal, and can be confused.” Dugger was not campaigning against big government, but rather against liberals’ acquiescence to conservatives’ agenda-setting, whereby public debate had been recast as an ideological struggle rather than one in which the focus was on finding practical solutions to social problems. In one sense, therefore, Dugger’s observations portended the populist-conservative backlash against government that became a staple of Republican politics in the following decades. In a much larger sense, however, Dugger was pleading with national progressives to avoid giving into the temptation to defend liberalism and federal involvement at the expense of a more profitable discourse, one in which Texans’ attention would be shifted toward the rampant inequalities and injustices that plagued their everyday lives. Dugger worried that an association between “socialism” and “liberalism,” though misguided in his mind, was beginning to take deeper roots in Texas and threatened to undermine reform at both the state and national levels. Texas liberals like Dugger advocated social justice, racial equality, and the continuation of federal programs designed to transfer opportunity away from the privileged and toward the masses. Texas liberals, however, were also firmly aware that in order to have the kind of voice that could champion such initiatives with authority, the state party power structure would need to be restructured.⁵

Like many Texas liberals, Dugger also believed the answer to these problems was in the development of a strong Republican Party. Until anti-government conservatives were forced out of the Democratic Party, liberals would have no voice there. Without a foundation of progressive optimism or the moral high ground that often provided the rationale for reform,

⁵ Ibid.

Dugger believed that conservative Texas Democrats would eventually break with their increasingly liberal national party. The consequences of this break, Dugger began to tell his liberal friends, would be a more viable state Republican Party, the consolidation of conservatism within that party, and a weakening of the Democratic establishment in Texas. In time, Dugger's prognostication proved prescient.

While Dugger focused his efforts on articulating a liberal message in Texas, the state's conservative voice—or at least of Republican conservatism—was John Tower. Tower made his first foray into politics in 1938, handing out leaflets for Ralph Yarborough, the liberal New Dealer then running for state attorney general. It was not until 1951 that Tower began to identify himself as a Republican, a decision he said was based on his economic philosophy of limited government, free-market capitalism, and anticommunism. The son of an East Texas clergyman, Tower quickly worked his way through the GOP ranks and in 1952 served as Sergeant-at-Arms at the tumultuous Republican National Convention of that year.⁶ After shocking the political world in 1961 by becoming the first Republican to win a Senate seat in Texas since Reconstruction, Tower used his elevated status to discuss political philosophy. He grew fond of “proving” that classical liberalism was the legitimate ancestor to modern American conservatism. “Modern American conservatism,” Tower wrote in November 1963, “is the antithesis of authoritarianism.” According to Tower, liberalism was the new gateway to authoritarianism and meant more bureaucracy and less control for Texans. “The conservative would leave as much to popular control in the area of public decision as possible,” Tower wrote. “He is essentially ‘liberal’ in the more classical definition of the term.”⁷ If Tower and Dugger

⁶ Transcript, John Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX (Hereafter cited as LBJL).

⁷ Ibid.; “Conservatism Unashamed,” By John G. Tower, January 1963, Folder 1, Box 17, Press Office, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX (Hereafter cited as JTP).

had one thing in common, it was this: both represented people typically excluded from political power in Texas.

During the early 1960s, Texans were wrestling more with their own ideological definitions and political heritage. It was against this backdrop of political and ideological deconstruction that Lyndon Johnson began his presidency. Being the site of the assassination of a popular president embarrassed many Texans. Dallas had been stigmatized as a bastion for the Radical Right prior to November 22, 1963, and certainly wanted no part in left wing conspiracies or the likes of Lee Harvey Oswald. With the perpetrator dead, much of the nation's ire was redirected toward the venue of the assassination. John Tower described the nation's attitude toward Texas and Dallas in the wake of Kennedy's death as laced with "hostility and even hatred," and always recalled the tragic events of November and December 1963 as the "grimmiest experience" of his life.⁸ Texas could not shake what it was, nor could it purge ideologues. It could however, try to soften its image in the wake of a national tragedy. In the months following Kennedy's death, Johnson's popularity grew in proportion to his ability to appear stable and moderate. Eric Jonsson, the architect of Texas Instruments—the electronics corporation that eventually landed Jonsson a spot in *Fortune Magazine's* "Business Hall of Fame"—ran for mayor of Dallas after the Kennedy Assassination in part to implement a national public relations campaign to get people's minds off of the gruesome tragedy that had taken place in Dealey Plaza.⁹ In much the same way, many Texans saw Johnson as the embodiment of an opportunity to rebuild their state's image at the national level.¹⁰

⁸ Transcript, John Tower Oral History Interview II, 9/22/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJL.

⁹ *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 111, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA (Hereafter cited as HI).

¹⁰ "American Conservatism Defined," by Senator John G. Tower, in "The Conservative Tide: A Student Journal of Fact and Opinion." November, 1963. Folder 7, Box 17, Press Office, JTP.

Johnson used Kennedy's martyrdom to his political advantage in 1964, both nationally and in Texas. Race was more greatly affected by this political advantage than any other issue, and no piece of legislation relied on the events of November 1963 more than the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Understanding how race affected the political culture in Texas during the mid-1960s is a key to understanding the regional identity of the state. Though some Texans recoiled at the thought of their native son president pushing through such a transformative piece of legislation, the majority of white Texans, unlike whites in much of the Deep South, were either resigned to the new social realities or relatively ambivalent.¹¹

One of many respected conservatives in Texas, the Reverend Billy Graham, himself a member of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, recalled Johnson's attitude toward civil rights as sincere and not at all politically motivated—a characterization he believed stemmed from a “different mentality” toward race in Texas—one which “generally allowed people to care for one another.”¹² In 1962, the noted author John Bainbridge spoke of Texans' attitudes toward race in the context of reactions to the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision:

The reaction of Texans to the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision declaring school segregation unconstitutional has been typically American, and then some. Depending mainly on the section of the state, it has run all the way from anger, resentment, and all-out opposition, through calm detachment and resigned acceptance, to reluctant approval and, here and there, genuine endorsement. In contrast to other Southern states, where the decree was everywhere met with open defiance, sixty-five school districts in Texas voluntarily ended segregation within a year after it became illegal, and sixty-nine more did the same in 1957.¹³

While still hostile to the public accommodation measures contained in the legislation, most Texans were rather more moderate on civil rights than were many of their white Southern

¹¹ Letter from Mrs. Charles B. Quinn to Denison Kitchel, August 17, 1964, Box 4, Denison Kitchel Papers, HI.

¹² Transcript, Billy Graham Oral History Interview, Special Interview, 10/12/83, by Monroe Billington, Internet Copy, LBJL.

¹³ “The Super-Americans” by John Bainbridge, 1962, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

neighbors.¹⁴ Johnson's stand on civil rights temporarily gave Republicans a boost in the South, but the GOP received little such boost in Texas.¹⁵

This helps to explain why, in 1964, Texas Republicans were so dejected to be running a presidential campaign against Johnson rather than Kennedy. Texas Republicans believed Kennedy would dump Johnson from the ticket in 1964. Instead, like a battalion rallying to the cause of a wounded comrade, conservative Democrats—beginning at the very top of the state Democratic Party—began to publicly embrace Johnson and solidify the state's Democratic base. Former Texas Governor and conservative Democrat Allan Shivers, who gained national fame for his repeated endorsements of Eisenhower and Nixon, was among the first of many Texas conservatives to endorse LBJ.¹⁶

Johnson's 1964 public relations strategy in Texas rested on loyalty and tradition. Publicly, the Texas Democratic Party rallied behind its native son. Privately, division was rampant. Nowhere was this division more bitter than in the growing divide between Texas Governor John Connally and the liberal faction attempting to operate within the state party. Much of Connally's political career was spent in LBJ's shadow and this was certainly true in 1964. Connally, still recovering from the wounds he suffered while riding in Kennedy's vehicle at the time of the November assassination, reacted with stunned anger as Houston liberal Don Yarborough announced his candidacy for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Having been wounded in what some early conspiracy theorists were arguing may have been a botched assassination attempt against Connally rather than one aimed at just Kennedy, the Texas

¹⁴ Texas Issues, Undated, Box 52, Series II, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL.

¹⁵ *New York Daily News*, October 21, 1964, Box 337, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL; Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 231.

¹⁶ Transcript, John Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJL; Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1982), 188.

Governor viewed Don Yarborough's candidacy as a slap in the face. In retaliation, Connally recruited several conservatives to potentially challenge the liberal Ralph Yarborough (no blood-relation to Don) for the U.S. Senate. However, when Johnson ordered Connally to stop this maneuvering in the hope of maintaining a united front and a much needed liberal vote in the U.S. Senate, the Texas governor reluctantly acquiesced.¹⁷

Though Connally easily defeated Don Yarborough in the Democratic Gubernatorial Primary, his relationship with Texas liberals reached a new low in 1964, while his friendship with Johnson also suffered. Though he had initially agreed to Johnson's request that he cease efforts which could potentially undermine party unity, Connally waffled that summer and covertly organized multiple conservative challenges to the liberal delegations from San Antonio and Dallas attempting to be sat at the state party convention that summer.¹⁸ When the liberal delegations offered to compromise with Connally and split the seats equally among conservatives and liberals, Connally rejected the offer. "To hell with 'em," Connally told the emissary relaying messages between factions. After succeeding in the removal of liberal delegations from the convention, Connally poured salt in his opponents' wounds by appointing Marvin Watson as head of the Texas Democratic Party. Watson was also directly tied to "Democrats for George Bush," an organization in support of Ralph Yarborough's Republican opponent for the U.S. Senate.¹⁹

As Johnson tried to publicly promote party tranquility, he privately scrambled to keep intra-party factionalism—much of it the effect of Connally's covert actions—to a minimum. In

¹⁷ Reston, *The Lone Star*, CH 7; *Texas Monthly*, November 1979, "The Truth About John Connally."; Transcript, John Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJL.

¹⁸ The liberal delegations from these two cities existed, in part, as a show of respect to Kennedy's memory and the wishes of the national party.

¹⁹ *Texas Monthly*, November 1979, "The Truth About John Connally."; Transcript, John Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJL.

Texas, Johnson decided that the best way to avoid squabbles was to avoid issues that polarized the ideological factions within the party. Specifically, Johnson tip-toed around the Great Society in Texas in the hopes of avoiding ideological labels and discussions of “big government”—issues on which conservatives and liberals could generally not agree in Texas. When it came to the issue of Cold War anticommunism and foreign policy, however, Johnson charged into Texas like a stampeding bull.

Johnson might not have cared as much about his reputation as a credible and capable diplomat, or as a tough-minded and resolute anticommunist Cold Warrior, had his opponent for the presidency in 1964 been anyone other than Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater emerged as the GOP nominee after an intra-party struggle that virtually destroyed his campaign before it even started. This struggle, significant since the late-1940s, pitted ardent anticommunist and libertarian conservatives against the more moderate wing of the party. GOP conservatives often viewed moderate Republicans as liberals and viewed this wing of the party as their chief obstacle. At the same time, party liberals fancied themselves as principled moderates and viewed their chief struggle as a need to purge the GOP of conservative “extremism”—a label actively employed but vaguely defined.²⁰ This national dynamic manifested in Texas in similar ways and paralleled the liberal struggle to find a voice within the state Democratic Party. Ultimately in both cases, these divisions would contribute to ideological coalescence and partisan realignment.²¹

No significant Goldwater movement emerged in Texas in large part because no significant Republican Party yet existed in Texas. John Tower’s victory as a Republican in 1961

²⁰ “Extremism in the Defense of Liberty,” by D. Kitchel, Draft Copy, Box 5, Denison Kitchel Papers, HI.

²¹ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), CH 4; Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1964* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 98-129; George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996).

had been dismissed as an oddity, the result of peculiar voting behavior in a special election to fill Johnson's abandoned seat. Isolated GOP successes in smaller races were exactly that—isolated, few, and far between. In 1964, with a Texas Democrat atop the presidential ticket and the JFK assassination in Dallas still fresh on everybody's minds, the state was simply inhospitable to new movements or to change. Another reason for the lack of a grassroots Goldwater movement in Texas, however, was the Senator's inability to capitalize on the state's populist heritage. While Goldwater's campaign has been noted as seminal in the rise of populist conservatism, in Texas the lack of any party support mixed with the instinctive loyalty many Texans gave to LBJ to prevent Goldwater from effectively drawing on animus against big government or so-called "Eastern Establishment" liberalism.²²

Though it did not enjoy widespread popularity as a grassroots movement in Texas until after 1964, this young populist-conservative insurgency did have some roots in the Lone Star State. The Dallas-based oil baron H. L. Hunt, for instance, was among Goldwater's earliest and most faithful campaign contributors. Hunt, however, never became a major power broker in Dallas because, as *Texas Monthly* magazine later put it, he was considered by many an "arch-conservative" on the "lunatic fringe of the Right."²³ Though devoid of tact and lacking in charm, Hunt's conservatism was similar to that of Dallas's Bruce Alger, who, in 1954, earned national recognition when he became only the second Republican to win a U.S. Congressional seat in Texas. Alger's surprise victory in Dallas helped to organize small coalitions of grassroots conservatives, but, alone, was not enough to make any major impact on the state's political establishment.

²² January 27, 1964, Press Release, Box 3H516, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, CH 4; White, *The Making of the President, 1964*, 98-129.

²³ *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 111, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

Two Texans, however, contributed more to Goldwater's conservative crusade than any others: John Tower and Peter O'Donnell. Tower did so more publicly. In 1961, Tower garnered national attention and became a Republican darling by simply winning a campaign in Democratic Texas. Tower added necessary credibility to the state GOP. By 1964 Tower was using his elevated platform to promote a new vision of Republican conservatism. He stressed individual liberty, limited government, and what he called a "diffusion of power." He spoke of a "government with a heart" whereby he noted that Republicans "recognize and support the concept of equality of opportunity under the law" yet "support strict adherence to the spirit and letter of the Constitution."²⁴

Using such language to rally Texans to conservatism was easy, but rallying them against the Democratic Party was more daunting. Still, Tower believed that in order to make the GOP a viable entity in Texas, state conservatives would have to abandon the Democratic Party, something that could only happen, he thought, if conservatives no longer felt as though they could control the Democratic Party. In such a scenario, conservatives would be forced to choose between their ideology and their party, with, Tower believed, a liberalizing national Democratic Party in the backdrop.

As much as anyone else, John Tower began the process of dismantling Texans' loyalties to the Democratic Party. Tower asserted in speeches and through literature distributed across Texas, that the national Democratic Party was the real "establishment"—the home to liberal elites who could not be trusted to protect the popular conservative majority in his state. Still, Tower was careful not to alienate state Democrats. As the effectual head of the Texas GOP,

²⁴ "A Declaration of Republican Principle and Policy," Undated, Folder 2, Box 442, Tower Senate Club, 1964 Goldwater Presidential Campaign, JTP.

Tower sought to attract the support of conservative Democrats by blaming the national party not individuals within that party.²⁵

Tower's status and efforts in Texas on behalf of the conservative agenda earned him the seconding speech at the 1964 GOP convention in San Francisco. Knowing that he had the attention of Texans whom he would ask to re-elect him in two years, Tower spoke with force. His message was not about why Barry Goldwater should be president, but why Republican conservatism was the solution for a nation plagued by Democratic weakness. "We are faced with a growing menace to our security and sovereignty as a free nation, in the form of a Godless ideology, based in the Kremlin, and possessed by men determined to wreak their will on the whole world," Tower said. He continued:

We are faced with a new foible in our society, caused in part by moral decay, which effective political leadership could overcome. Consider ... for a moment ... this terrible tragedy: We've come to the point when people can be mauled and beaten and even killed on the streets of a great city with hundreds of people looking on, and doing nothing about it. We have come to the point where, in many cases, the lawbreakers are treated with loving care... while those who uphold and champion the rule of law and order are looked upon in some quarters as suspect. I submit that this is the direct result of the gradual reduction of our people to a status of dependency on government, to an erosion of our sense of individual responsibility, and a departure from the biblical admonition that we are our brothers' keepers.²⁶

Tower's speech certainly foreshadowed the powerful infusion of social conservatism into the state Republican Party. It also no doubt affirmed the intellectual affinity that many Christians had toward anticommunism and anti-liberalism. Tower's speech did not necessarily cause these Texans to reevaluate the links between liberalism and communism, but did reflect the feeling among many Christian conservatives that liberals did not fully appreciate the ramifications of big government in the context of the Cold War. Goldwater himself never made

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Seconding Speech to the Nomination of Barry Goldwater, Folder 12, Box 442, Tower Senate Club, 1964 Goldwater Presidential Campaign, JTP.

much of an effort to court evangelicals. A major reason for this was that in 1964, no organized religious conservative movement yet existed. Even among ill-organized portions of the religious community in Texas, Goldwater's campaign not only failed to rally support, but was actually rejected and denounced. For instance, in Dallas, which was home to the largest Southern Baptist, Methodist, and Southern Presbyterian congregations in the nation, as well as over 800 churches in Dallas alone, Goldwater's appeal was lukewarm at best.²⁷ Texas clergy were typically just as loyally Democratic as any other constituency in the state, while many pastors publicly criticized Goldwater's conceptions of economic justice and world peace.²⁸ Though Goldwater tried to portray his campaign as a crusade, saying that "the real war liberals fear is a holy war—a war of the faithful for their long-lost self respect and dignity—a war for individuality waged on the spiritual plane of ideas and principles, the re-awakening of hope and faith," his efforts were minimal and ineffective.²⁹

If John Tower was the public face of populist conservatism in Texas, Peter O'Donnell was its life blood. O'Donnell was an investment broker from Dallas. Having entered conservative grassroots politics in the mid-1930s, O'Donnell successfully ran Bruce Alger's re-election campaigns in 1958 and 1960, and also managed campaign efforts in Dallas for the Nixon-Lodge ticket in 1960, where he achieved the largest Republican plurality of any metropolitan area in the nation. In 1961, O'Donnell earned national attention as the mastermind behind Tower's ascension to the U.S. Senate. O'Donnell's success rested largely on his prioritization of conservative ideology ahead of partisan loyalty, though in later years his

²⁷ "The Super-Americans" by John Bainbridge, 1962, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

²⁸ "The Goldwater Candidacy and the Christian Conscience: The Response of Protestant Theologians," Pre-Election Material – September, Box 6, Office Files of Bill Moyers, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, LBJL.

²⁹ "Citizens for Goldwater-Miller: Victory Manual," September 7, 1964, Box 3H513, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH.

priorities would shift. Whether in public or in private, O'Donnell was adamant in his support for "true conservatism" and threatened to bolt the GOP if New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller or Michigan Governor George Romney received the 1964 nomination. Privately, O'Donnell dreamed of turning the Republican Party into the only suitable and reliable home for conservatives.³⁰

Whether it was Tower, O'Donnell, or Goldwater himself, the nascent conservatism in Texas was almost synonymous with an emboldened anti-liberalism. "Liberals have taken us too far to the left for the good of the nation, particularly when we find ourselves in a worldwide struggle with the forces of the extreme left," Goldwater wrote Tower in 1963. "They have deserted the lessons of history and perverted the real meaning of the word liberal."³¹ Liberals, not communists were to blame for the nation's weakness, he argued.³² Texas Republicans, though small in number and lacking significant influence, used Goldwater's 1964 campaign to highlight what the Republican National Committee (RNC) called the "Big Lie of Big Government."³³

In 1964, Texas Republicans hoped to alter their state's political culture. In order to do that, the public would need to see their ideological convictions as under assault from an outside force. This was exactly what the state GOP hoped to accomplish as it asserted connections between Johnson, Democrats, liberalism, communism, and the Cold War. Despite its best efforts, however, the Texas GOP failed in 1964 to achieve its goals. Instead, ideological labels would be used most effectively against, rather than for, the Republican cause. Emphasizing

³⁰ "Secret: For a Free People," National Republican Convention: Platform Committee, July 1964, Folder 13, Box 442, Tower Senate Club, 1964 Goldwater Presidential Campaign, JTP.

³¹ "Liberalism has Failed," by Barry Goldwater, in "The Conservative Tide: A Student Journal of Fact and Opinion," November, 1963, Folder 7, Box 17, Press Office, JTP.

³² Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, CH 4.

³³ "Barry Goldwater Speaks Out on the Issues," Box 3H514, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH; "Speaker's Handbook," Box 3H513, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH.

ideological integrity over partisan loyalty would eventually drive the Republican Party's growth in Texas. Such an emphasis would ultimately transform voter loyalties in the state. In 1964, however, the tables quickly turned as party loyalty, tradition, and Lyndon Johnson waged unmitigated warfare against the dangers of extremism.³⁴

Race, Morality, and Extremism

Rarely is Barry Goldwater remembered for his successes in the 1964 presidential campaign. In much of the South, however, success is exactly what he achieved. This region's shift away from the Democratic Party only months after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is typically not seen as a coincidence.³⁵ Without much analysis, the conclusion that the South rallied behind Goldwater on the issue of race seems highly plausible. The South's vote for a Republican candidate, however, was just as much a repudiation of Johnson as it was an embrace of Goldwater. As white Southerners grew disgruntled with the Democratic Party, black Southerners began to wholeheartedly embrace it. Yet, the vast majority of white Texans, unlike the majority of white Southerners, also rejected Barry Goldwater in 1964. Why? Texas certainly had its fair share of race-baiters and hostility toward civil rights in Texas was not uncommon. Was it simply that Texans were so loyal to their native son that they would have voted for Johnson regardless? In what ways did the debate over civil rights alter Texans' understanding of political ideology? The answers to these questions are complex and reveal much about the political culture and regional identity of the Lone Star State.³⁶

Barry Goldwater's early political career included efforts to desegregate public schools in Phoenix. Most who knew him regarded him as a genuinely nice person without a racist agenda.

³⁴ October 28, 1964, letter from William F. Erwin, Box 4C512, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

³⁵ Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, CH 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, CH 11, 19.

Privately, Goldwater wanted to avoid the issue of race altogether.³⁷ He was not enthusiastic about turning his campaign over to those who wanted to exploit racial tensions for votes in the South. But Goldwater was also an ideologue and a visionary who desperately wanted to extend his conservatism into the South. Goldwater's attempt to find a suitable balance between his principles and his vision cost the Republican Party its credibility on race relations. Goldwater cringed at the thought that his campaign would be waged as a battle against civil rights.³⁸ Though he tried to avoid specific discussions of race, his support for "states rights"—regardless of his intent—earned him favor in regions where sentiment against "government centralization and collectivism" ran strong.³⁹ The level of support he received in individual states is also indicative, however, of the differing levels of importance those states assigned to particular issues.

Texans did not assign the same level of importance to race that much of the rest of the South did. When John Tower said in the summer of 1964 that he did not believe that race was as big a factor in Texas as in other parts of the South, he was speaking not as a politician, but as an observer of Texas political culture.⁴⁰ Unlike the stereotypical response of most white southerners, a great many Texans who otherwise might have objected more strenuously to the central tenets of the 1964 Civil Rights Act rationalized and then accepted LBJ's push for de jure racial equality. By the summer of 1964, Texans who opposed civil rights measures were increasingly inclined to give Johnson the benefit of the doubt as he pushed the Civil Rights Act

³⁷ K.H. Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 208-215; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, CH 19; Jonathan Schoenwald, *Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 148.

³⁸ *Chicago Sun-Times*, June 29, 1963, Box 48, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL; "Goldwater for President Committee: Issue Papers: Civil Rights," Box 3H513, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH.

³⁹ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South: 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), CH 4; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 133.

⁴⁰ *Austin American Statesman*, July 17, 1964, 1A.

in Washington. Most Texans explained Johnson's support for this measure as an obligation or debt to the slain Kennedy, rather than an indication of long-term policy or ideology.⁴¹ Several polls commissioned by the state Democratic Party in the summer of 1964 showed that those Texans identifying themselves as most conservative also cared the least about civil rights, while voters who cared the most about civil rights were far more varied in how they self-identified their ideological affiliation. These same polls indicated that twice as many Texans considered themselves more conservative than liberal.⁴²

As a very popular and conservative Texas Democrat, John Connally's response to race in Texas not only reflected attitudes in the state, but also, to some degree, helped shape them. Connally was publicly critical of the Civil Rights Act for many of the same reasons that Goldwater and other conservatives denounced the act—as an unwelcome expansion of federal authority. At the same time, Connally was dogged in his criticism of several Deep South governors, Ross Barnett of Mississippi and George Wallace of Alabama most notably, for their handling of black protestors in their respective states. Connally believed that massive resistance had emboldened the civil rights movement and agitated the federal government to the point that federal intervention could no longer be justifiably withheld. Furthermore, Connally felt that Johnson's civil rights bill was being thrust upon the rest of the nation—Texas included—because states like Alabama and Mississippi had created such a stir as to force Washington's hand. Responsible conservatives, according to Connally, understood the value of compromise and accommodation. While Governor, Connally even viewed the civil rights turmoil in the Deep

⁴¹ General Correspondence, Box 71, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, LBJL; "Texas Attitudes toward Kennedy and Johnson," August 1963, Confidential Report of Results of a Statewide Survey of Voters," Louis, Bowles and Grace Research Consultants, Box 9, Office Files of George Reedy, LBJL; "A Statement Relative to the Civil Rights Bill," By Senator John Tower (for Life Magazine), Folder 10, Box 17, Press Office, JTP.

⁴² Opinion Surveys in Four Districts of Texas, March 1964: Confidential, Box 4zd517, Ralph Yarborough Papers, CAH; Support for and Opposition Against Civil Rights Bill, 1964, Box 6, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL.

South as warranting federal intervention, as did many conservatives in Texas. At the same time, much of Connally and other conservative Texans' support for racial progress was motivated less by a concern for racial equality than out of deep desire to avoid similar federal interventions in their state.⁴³ Connally spent a great deal of time as governor shaping Texas's image as a racially moderate Southwestern state. He viewed himself as a racial progressive and openly promoted Texas's heritage of racial and ethnic diversity, often speaking of a "Texas bloodline" comprised of 26 distinct ethnic strands. Movements of massive resistance were few and far between in Texas, even at the height of the civil rights movement.

The civil rights issue aided Goldwater in states like South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, but not in Texas. Goldwater's biggest problem in Texas, however, was not the perception that he was conservative, but that he was considered an extremist. Had Goldwater simply been seen as a conservative, it seems likely that more Texans would have supported him. For numerous reasons, though, Goldwater's ideology was seen as dangerous, reckless, and extreme—not conservative. This perception was largely the product of a concerted effort to frame Goldwater this way, first by his opponents in the GOP primary and then by Johnson. In Texas, these efforts resulted in a profound shift in attitudes toward the Arizona Senator. And because the Arizona Senator had been anointed as the best representation of the nascent populist conservative movement, shifts in attitudes toward Goldwater meant a shift in the public relations needs of conservatism itself.

Such a conclusion is born out through polling data. In October 1963, Peter O'Donnell was given the results of a public opinion survey he had commissioned on Texans' attitudes toward Barry Goldwater. The results, especially when contrasted with Texans' attitudes toward Goldwater a year later, were striking. Among other things, the study concluded that in Texas,

⁴³ Reston, *The Lone Star*, 294-317.

“neither Republicans nor Democrats identify Goldwater as part of the radical right, but both would like to see him repudiate it in so many words.” Referring specifically to charges initiated by Rockefeller that Goldwater was being controlled by the John Birch Society, the study quoted a Democratic survey participant who said that Goldwater would “be out of his mind if he had anything to do with them.”⁴⁴ The study showed that Texans identified Goldwater as a conservative and not with any particular issue or cause. Furthermore, Texans found “strong appeal in Goldwater’s desire to reduce heavy government spending.” The study warned, however, that without a strong repudiation of the extreme right, there was considerable danger that the Texas public would disassociate itself and its own brand of conservatism from that of Goldwater. Lastly, the study offered a prophetic conclusion:

[Texas] Voters actually like Goldwater as a man better than they like LBJ. But, they are afraid of Goldwater to varying degrees because of the bad, frightening things they have heard about him from the Demos and because of the lack of constructive statements he himself has made. In other words, there appears to be a large group of people who are just waiting for reasons to vote for Goldwater. If they are not given these reasons, they will probably vote for LBJ as the lesser of two evils (if they are afraid of BG) OR as the man they already know something about.⁴⁵

Goldwater’s campaign organizers in Texas should have paid closer attention to this study as their candidate was not portrayed in Texas as a conservative, but as an extremist. Allan Shivers’ refusal to endorse the Republican candidate was based both on Johnson’s native son status as well as Goldwater’s extremism.⁴⁶ Throughout the summer of 1964, Rockefeller painted

⁴⁴ Edwin Diamond & Stephen Bates, *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on Television* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 124.

⁴⁵ “Texas Attitudes toward Kennedy and Johnson,” August 1963, Confidential Report of Results of a Statewide Survey of Voters,” Louis, Bowles and Grace Research Consultants, Box 9, Office Files of George Reedy, LBJL; “The Public Image of Senator Barry Goldwater: A Pilot Study,” Conducted for Mr. Peter O’Donnell, Jr., Opinion Research Corporation, Research Park, Princeton, NJ, October 1963, Folder 14, Box 443, Tower Senate Club, 1964 Goldwater Presidential Campaign, JTP.

⁴⁶ Letter from Peter O’Donnell, Jr. to “Texas Editors,” October 23, 1964, Box 3H516, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH.

Goldwater's conservatism with the brush of radicalism.⁴⁷ During the Republican National Convention in San Francisco, as the nation saw what appeared to be a hostile takeover of the GOP initiated by Goldwater conservatives, Rockefeller Republicans used the media to disparage their political brethren as dangerous, further polarizing the party's already estranged wings. Goldwater was aware that his opponents were prepared to fight the campaign on these grounds when he addressed the convention floor with his famous line, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."⁴⁸ Attacks subsequently came from almost everywhere. *The New Republic* published a special magazine entitled "1189 Psychiatrists say Goldwater is Psychologically Unfit to be President!" The AFL-CIO published literature in various forms trying to link Goldwater to radicalism by charging that the Republican nominee was a "provocateur of hate." These and similar charges were made reasonably by linking Goldwater to the John Birch Society, and outrageously by asserting that Kennedy had been murdered by the same hate virtually endorsed by the Republican candidate.⁴⁹ Whether accurate or ridiculous, they were effective. Even oil and business leaders in Texas, who had initially provided Goldwater with his strongest base of support in the state, began to shy away from the GOP nominee in the wake of reports outlining Goldwater's position on nuclear weapons and foreign affairs.⁵⁰

Goldwater did as poor a job of repudiating the charges of extremism as he did in marketing his own brand of conservatism. Whereas conservatives in the coming years made use of specific issues as a means of defining their political ideology, Goldwater often avoided specific issues—and was criticized heavily for doing so. In Houston, for instance, Goldwater championed his campaign theme of "peace through strength, progress through freedom; purpose

⁴⁷ Diamond & Bates, *The Spot*, 125.

⁴⁸ White, *The Making of the President, 1964*, 190-220.

⁴⁹ "The Extremists," AFL-CIO Committee on Public Education, Box 52, Series II, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL.

⁵⁰ *Austin American Statesman*, July 18, 1964, 1A.

through Constitutional order”—yet spoke of a vague philosophy without mention of any practical application.⁵¹ Goldwater was most successful in Texas when he attacked liberalism as an ideology. He often disparaged Johnson’s running mate, Minnesota Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, as a liberal “radical” while at the same time accusing Democrats of offering a “soft deal for communism.”⁵² Many Texans enjoyed the rhetoric for a time but found no application for it in specific issues and were far more influenced by the public relations campaign which labeled Goldwater as dangerous and extreme.

At the same time, Johnson was cautious not to expose his own liberalism to political debate in Texas. On campaign swings through Texas, Johnson shied away from labels like conservative and liberal. Johnson also understood Texans’ traditional distrust of federal encroachment and largely saved the rhetoric of his crusade against poverty for states where big government was less of a political liability.⁵³ Johnson spoke with optimism and hope, in contrast to what he called Goldwater’s “doom and gloom.” He even quoted Robert E. Lee on the importance of unity and loyalty.⁵⁴

In the end though, knowing that he could not honestly portray himself as a Texas conservative, Johnson adopted a national media strategy to capitalize on and extend the depiction of Goldwater and his followers as extremists. Privately, Johnson lamented the power of the media to create false images. This did not stop him, however, from using the media to position

⁵¹ Campaign Speech at the Colt Stadium, Houston, Texas, October 15, 1964 by Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican Candidate for President of the US, Office Files of Bill Moyers, LBJL; Memorandum. To: Pam Rymer, From: Jody Baldwin, Subject: Summary of “trend” reports for the week of Sept. 27 – Oct. 3, Polls, Box 3H516, Stephen Shadegg Papers/Barry Goldwater Collection, CAH.

⁵² Campaign Speech at National American Legion Convention, Memorial Auditorium, Dallas, TX, September 23, 1964 by Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican Candidate for President of the US, Office Files of Bill Moyers, LBJL; Campaign Speech at Colt Stadium, Houston, Texas, October 15, 1964 by Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican Candidate for President of the US, October 15, 1964, Office Files of Bill Moyers, LBJL.

⁵³ Memorandum, October 13, 1964, “Preparation for a Debate,” Box 11, Office Files of Richard N. Goodwin, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, LBJL.

⁵⁴ Remarks of the President at the Dedication of John F. Kennedy Square, Texarkana, Texas-Arkansas, September 25, 1964, Box 24, Office Files of Bill Moyers, LBJL.

himself in every conceivable contrast with his opponent.⁵⁵ Johnson also used public relations in Texas to negate the potential appeal of Goldwater's frontierism and cowboy persona.⁵⁶ Johnson dictated the when, where, and how of virtually all his photo ops in Texas and was often pictured on his ranch, riding his horses, with boots shining and cowboy hat doffed. Johnson privately obsessed with his desire to be seen as a "local hero."⁵⁷ Johnson also spoke often of the loyalty and tradition of Texas Democratic politics. Though each candidate attempted to embrace a rugged frontier image, only Johnson was successful in Texas.⁵⁸

Despite all his advantages in Texas, neither Johnson, nor his staff, nor the loyal Texas Democrats committed to holding their state for their native son, rested. During the final weeks of the campaign, Bill Moyers—one the President's top strategists (and member of LBJ's "University of Texas" answer to Kennedy's Harvard brain trust)—believed that Goldwater was capable of a last-minute charge on the issue of morality and wanted to cut that possibility off at the pass.⁵⁹ One confidential memorandum encouraged the president to avoid disparaging Republicans without, at the same time, referring to extremism as the reason why the GOP could not be trusted. "A lot of people support [Goldwater] for a reason," one Johnson aide concluded. "They somehow feel that the government no longer belongs to the good, solid, church-going, property-owning citizen. It could be at least partly our fault. In any case, we must not alienate them."⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the Texas Democratic Committee distributed pamphlets across the state with the slogan, "For a Decent Home in a Decent Neighborhood—Johnson/Humphrey for the

⁵⁵ Hart, *Verbal Style and the Presidency*, 119.

⁵⁶ Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press., 1995), 306.

⁵⁷ Roderick P. Hart, *The Sound of Leadership: Presidential Communication in the Modern Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 164.

⁵⁸ *Austin American Statesman*, July 19, 1964 - July 28, 1964, 1A.

⁵⁹ Memorandum, October 16, 1964, To: Bill Moyers, From: Fred Dutton, Office Files of Bill Moyers, LBJL.

⁶⁰ Personal - For the President: Points on Campaign Strategy, 1964, Box 71 (1 of 2), Confidential File: Political Affairs, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, LBJL.

USA.” Another such brochure was emblazoned with the slogan, “Johnson/Humphrey must be elected - The alternative is frightening”—with an arrow connecting the word “frightening” to a menacing photo of Goldwater. Yet another brochure featured a picture of an unsmiling Goldwater, with arms stretched out, and the slogan, “In these hands—the hope of America’s Children and Youth. The stakes are Too High for you to Stay at Home.”⁶¹

The Johnson campaign’s fears of a late Goldwater charge did not take into consideration the ineptitude of Goldwater’s strategists. Barry Goldwater made five separate visits to Texas during his bid for the White House. During those trips, he managed to rally sizable crowds, hostile to four more years of, what he called, “Kennedy-Johnson liberalism.” One rally in Wichita Falls, Tower’s home town, drew over 12,000 supporters.⁶² Yet, his campaign did such a poor job of providing local and state media with advance schedules that most of his rallies in Texas were never captured on film. Goldwater also inexplicably avoided Dallas, where conservative sentiment was very strong, and West Texas, which was arguably the region of the state most tightly connected to the Western populist ideals he hoped to champion.⁶³

Whether Goldwater’s campaign underestimated its level of support in these regions or overestimated its supporters’ loyalty is unclear. What is clear is that during each visit, the Texas media consistently pushed Goldwater onto the defensive. His speeches failed to deflect charges of extremism. In fact, Goldwater was so brazen in his rhetoric that his opponents often used the Arizonian’s own words against him. When Goldwater had chances to attack Johnson, he shifted attention to Hubert Humphrey instead. Almost fearful of attacking a Texan in Texas, Goldwater deferred to Johnson, and tried to convince apathetic audiences to support such proposals as Social Security privatization. It was not so much that Goldwater advocated such change which

⁶¹ Pamphlets, Stickers, Records of the Texas State Democratic Committee, LBJL.

⁶² Transcript, John Tower Oral History Interview III, 11/1/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJL.

⁶³ *Austin American Statesman*, November 2, 1964, 1A.

made him dangerous and ineffective, though many Texans saw Social Security privatization as a benefit to the GOP's traditional northeastern base of elites. Still, that Goldwater even broached a specific issue was music to the ears of many of his campaign advisors. The larger problem was the fact that, when given a small window of media opportunity, Goldwater consistently failed to make news, let alone sound bites—nor did he rebuke the charges of radicalism. Like Johnson, Goldwater did not like the media. Unlike Johnson, however, Goldwater did not understand its power.⁶⁴

Goldwater's supporters blamed their candidate's disastrous performance on liberals in the media. Liberals, they argued, had manipulated the media to build fear in the minds of voters that the GOP was reckless. This criticism downplayed the vital role of public relations in the campaign. It is difficult to tell the story of the 1964 presidential campaign without discussing race, radicalism, or the media. The story of Ronald Reagan's emergence must be included as well—and that story, more predictably than ironically, began on television. Before a national TV audience on October 27, 1964, Ronald Reagan delivered what came to be remembered as “the Speech”—a blistering attack on Johnson, liberals, and the Washington establishment. It was a “thoughtful address” (as it was introduced) about the Goldwater campaign, but really benefited Reagan far more than the man whose credentials he was trumpeting. Subsequently, Texas Republicans became increasingly enamored with Reagan who became one of the most anticipated and frequently courted guests for statewide GOP fundraisers throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Reagan's speech helped make him an icon of the conservative movement and began a longstanding relationship between the former Hollywood actor and Texas conservatives.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “A Time for Choosing,” Speech Transcript, by Ronald Reagan, October 27, 1964, Office Files of Bill Moyers, LBJL.

What does Reagan's popularity in Texas, especially when compared to the beating Goldwater received there in 1964, say about the state's political culture and ideological predilections? To some degree, Reagan's popularity appears to validate early campaign literature and polling data which showed support for many of Goldwater's ideas throughout Texas. Most Texans were in favor of limited government and even distrusted Washington as an establishment in the same populist vein as they had traditionally distrusted big business (and big labor). It also indicates the paramount importance of personal image in campaigning. Reagan's smile and affinity for the camera softened the framing of the conservative message, while avoiding a softening of the message itself. Texans who wanted to connect with the energy of the conservative movement were reluctant to do so with Goldwater at its head. Furthermore, Reagan could criticize Lyndon Johnson and liberalism in Texas without running the risk of forcing Texans to vote against their native son in an actual election. Goldwater, of course, could not. Lastly, Reagan's appeal also shows the importance of timing. The fact that Kennedy had been killed in Texas in 1963 helped Johnson win Texas in 1964. Loyalty and a Democratic tradition also helped Johnson in Texas. However, over the next several years, these obstacles to conservative GOP progress were minimized or eliminated.

The emergence of Ronald Reagan notwithstanding, the 1964 elections were not kind to Republicans in Texas. The liberal Democratic incumbent Senator Ralph Yarborough won re-election against his Republican challenger from Houston, George Bush. During the campaign, Yarborough rarely used the word liberal, but enthusiastically talked about his populism and agenda for the working men and women of Texas. When he was not disparaging Bush as a privileged Northeastern Connecticut Republican, Yarborough tried to link his campaign to that of Johnson's. He campaigned as a Texas Democrat in a state loyal to Democrats. On the issue

of civil rights, Yarborough openly courted minority voters.⁶⁶ His team's research indicated that while some white districts were generally opposed to civil rights for blacks, many more were simply apathetic. Far more helpful to Yarborough were Johnson's coattails and Goldwater's bad public image.⁶⁷ Yarborough campaigned as a populist and lambasted Bush as a "darling of the John Birch society"—which was wholly inaccurate, but in the wake of Goldwater's campaign, more believable. Yarborough's strategy put Bush on the defensive and, like the head of the GOP ticket, prevented Bush from mounting an effective campaign.⁶⁸

Johnson's 63-37 percent landslide in Texas produced a ripple effect for Democrats across the state. Still, Bush carried over 100,000 more votes in Texas than did Goldwater, indicating that many Johnson supporters had opposed Yarborough. Elsewhere across the state, Republicans fell by the wayside. Bruce Alger lost in Dallas as did the only other GOP congressman in Texas, Ed Foreman of Odessa. Johnson's 26 percent margin was also the largest pro-LBJ margin in the greater South. Comparatively, Johnson barely carried Florida, by just over 2 percent, won by 13 percent in North Carolina, and only 6 percent in Virginia. The Deep South, in contrast, overwhelmingly sided with the Republican. Goldwater carried Georgia by 8 percent, Louisiana by 13 percent, South Carolina by 18 percent, Alabama by 29 percent, and Mississippi by an eye-popping 74 percent.⁶⁹

The political atmosphere in Texas during 1964 provided Lyndon Johnson with an almost perfect set of conditions in which to campaign. Texas was still overwhelmingly Democratic and loyal to their native son. It was also a state seeking redemption in the wake of a tragedy. Texans

⁶⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1964, 5A.

⁶⁷ Opinion Surveys in Four Districts of Texas, March 1964: Confidential, Box 4zd517, Ralph Yarborough Papers, CAH.

⁶⁸ Bass and DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 312; *Dallas Morning News*, October 28, 1964, 5A; James A. Leonard to George Bush, June 2, 1965, Box 5, George Bush Senate Campaign File, Waggoner Carr Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Hereafter cited as SWC).

⁶⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, November 4, 1964, 1A.

were especially fearful of extremism—or of being perceived as extreme—and Johnson’s campaign solidified the importance of stability and moderation, while convincing the public that Goldwater was dangerous. In Texas, Goldwater’s extremism was most definitely a vice. The Republican nominee had his followers in Texas, but could not rally them in the face of such obstacles. He failed to mount an effective media campaign and could not prevent the barrage of extremist darts aimed in his direction from hitting their target. As these favorable conditions dissipated in the coming months, the repackaged ideology of populist conservatism—of smaller government, anti-communism, and morality—received a face lift in Texas and paralleled an attack on the meaning of liberalism, reconstructed within the context of weakness.

Strategizing the New Conservative Image

In May of 1966, NBC broadcast a special portrait of the nation’s 36th president and his home entitled, “The Hill Country: Lyndon Johnson’s Texas.” Hill Country residents were ebullient at receiving such national attention and gave thanks to Johnson personally for the good publicity. The special emphasized the region’s friendliness and natural beauty, with Johnson as the chief tour guide. It was an almost tranquil portrait of a man embroiled in the most un-tranquil of times. For Lyndon Johnson’s Texans, the television respite was much needed relief. Such sympathetic media attention was rare in the mid-1960s.⁷⁰ Friendliness, beauty, and tranquility were not typically associated with Johnson and did not routinely bump crime or violence from the front pages of the daily newspapers or, as was becoming increasingly important, nightly news broadcasts. By the mid-1960s, people everywhere were aware of the nation’s rising crime rates, sporadic violence, and chaos in the streets. The important question to ask is not whether these images and stories affected the political climate in Texas. Rather, the

⁷⁰ General Correspondence, Hill Country, Lyndon Johnson’s, Box 371, White House Central Files: Public Relations, LBJL.

important question to ask is how these images and stories of crime and violence affected that climate. Did such images and stories make Texans' more conservative? This would have been difficult to accomplish considering that in the mid-1960s, well over half of all Texas voters who classified themselves as Democrats also simultaneously classified themselves as conservatives. The number of Republicans in Texas who considered themselves conservative was, predictably, even higher.⁷¹ In view of this, what impact did images of crime and violence have on shaping Texans' political ideology?

In Texas, race, crime, and "Law and Order" worked together to affect change, but not in a monocausal way. During the mid-1960s, one of the most important elements in what would later become the "perfect storm" through which a multiplicity of issues would collide by the late 1970s was introduced to Texas in the form of shifting ideological perceptions and political marketing strategies. It is important to recognize differences between these efforts in Texas because much of what stereotypically characterizes the "Southernization of American Politics" certainly also holds true in Texas.⁷² Much, however, does not. Much of what characterizes the "suburban origins" thesis also holds true in Texas. Much does not.⁷³

One particular hot-bed of Republican marketing angst was Harris County, the largest and most politically influential county in the greater Houston area. After Goldwater's defeat in 1964, the Harris County Republican Party erupted into a fight between two wings—one labeled "extreme" because of its endorsement of Barry Goldwater during the previous year and another that sought moderation and party growth. The voice of the Right was a collection of local

⁷¹ The Belden Poll, September 1967, Box 178, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, LBJL.

⁷² Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995). Carter's book popularized the "Southernization" thesis, but conflicts with some studies of conservatism in suburbia.

⁷³ Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.

grassroots elements, not party leadership.⁷⁴ The message of the Right was anticommunism—plain and simple. On such Houstonian Right Winger was Edwin Walker, a retired Major General in the United States Army and prominent anticommunist. While Walker’s rhetoric often tangentially dealt with race in a less-than tactful way, the bulk of his writing in 1964 and 1965 stressed the broad dangers of communistic influences in places like Texas public schools, where he argued desegregation was one of only several liberal assaults threatening white America’s children.⁷⁵ Walker’s writings reflected a growing association among conservatives in the mid-1960s between “encroaching socialism and communism” and liberalism, even going so far in public appearances as to equate these philosophies. Though his temperament and lack of tact kept Walker from gaining much public credibility, and even harmed conservative efforts to distance their ideology from notions of extremism, Walker’s popularity in Texas suggests a growing audience of sympathetic ears. While many white Texans were attracted to Walker’s hard line on racial segregation, others were more attracted to his broader anticommunism. Similar to messages from grassroots conservatives in the Midwest, where organization was far more advanced in the mid-1960s, Walker stressed the dangerous liberalism of the national Democratic Party and urged Texans to find a new home in the GOP rather than seek to rehabilitate the Democratic Party.⁷⁶

Hoping to mitigate the backlash that he knew was sure to come from party moderates and liberals who blamed extremism for the disastrous outcome of 1964, Peter O’Donnell supported Harris County’s moderation efforts, claiming that winning elections was more important than

⁷⁴ *Houston Chronicle*, September 9, 1966, Box 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH; Newspaper Clippings, November 1966, Box 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

⁷⁵ “The American Mercury: To Bear Witness to the Truth,” Summer-September 1965, Box 14, New Left Collection, HI; “Christian Crusade” Collection, Box 15, New Left Collection, HI.

⁷⁶ “The American Mercury: To Bear Witness to the Truth,” Summer-September 1965, Box 14, New Left Collection, HI; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

ideology.⁷⁷ Many agreed. George Bush, for instance, was intricately involved in the fight for a more moderate Republican platform in Harris County. Following his unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate, Bush was angry over charges that had surfaced during his campaign that he was a “Bircher.” Bush detested labels and his agenda prioritized specific state issues, minimized ideology, and even gave vocal support to civil rights for African-Americans and Mexican-Americans. Having been associated with Goldwater extremism in 1964 convinced Bush that the future of the Texas Republican Party was not in fighting an ideological struggle. He downplayed liberal-conservative debates, claiming that those terms were outdated and relative, based on where you lived. Bush, like many other Texas Republicans between 1964 and 1966, struggled to redefine his own conservatism in a Texas political culture that was already conservative, but did not want to see itself as extreme. In 1966, George Bush sold himself as a supporter of free enterprise who was also eager to solve issues like poverty and urban decay.⁷⁸

Nationally, Republican moderates, almost all of whom viewed factionalism as a primary factor in the landslide defeats of 1964, were less unified on what to do about the Right of their party. Though much of the Eastern Establishment wanted to purge the party of the most conservative ideologues, others in the RNC viewed the problem as one of public perception, which overstated both the strength of extremism and of the Right Wing.⁷⁹ In 1965, the RNC decided to test a new public relations and marketing campaign in Texas, where, it believed, the political culture was conservative enough, Southern enough, and yet suburban enough to reflect growing trends in the national culture. The first issue the RNC prioritized in Texas was the

⁷⁷ *Houston Chronicle*, October 2, 1966, Box 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH; Newspaper Clippings, November 1966, Box 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*; *Houston Chronicle*, May 6, 1965, Box 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

⁷⁹ “Remarks by Kentucky Senator Thruston B. Morton: Republican National Committee, January 22, 1964, Chicago, IL,” Papers of the Republican Party [microform], ed. Paul L. Kesaris, Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1987, George Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Part I, Series B, Reel 4, Frame 518-520. (Hereafter cited as PRP).

reconstruction of conservative ideology. Historian Jonathan Schoenwald has argued that between 1964 and 1966, the Republican Party—regardless of localized efforts to minimize ideology—used a broadly based and reconstructed conservatism as the “mortar that held together the sometimes uneven building blocks that comprised the party platform.” The most effective aspect of the new marketing campaign was its subtlety. Rather than making conservatism the linchpin of Republican appeal, the RNC chose to use conservatism as a mechanism for girding together the sometimes dissident factions that existed within the party structure.⁸⁰ While only marginally successful in unifying dissident factions, the RNC’s efforts did manage to keep the anticommunist grassroots loyal to the party without subjecting candidates to charges of extremism. The first and most important step taken on the path toward repackaging conservatism was to aggressively define and pejoratively label their opponents’ liberalism. The process of deconstructing liberalism began in the aftermath of Barry Goldwater’s defeat and was a concerted effort by the GOP to do to liberalism what the “extremist” caricature had done to conservatism in 1964.

In 1966, Texas Republicans under the guidance of the RNC, hoped to reunify their party and extend Republicanism’s appeal by initiating an ideological war using the principle weapons of welfare reform, big government, loss of local power, and anticommunism. These themes were carefully selected as the most advantageous framework for a reconstruction of the conservative image and simultaneous deconstruction of the Democratic Party. Virtually any issue—local, state, or national—could be spun to fit into one of these themes. At the same time, while vague in the abstract, these themes could also be used as segues to more specific issues, allowing concrete and relevant examples to be used within an ideological framework. These themes also provided the basis of a uniform message. Regardless of which “faction” of conservatism a voter

⁸⁰ Schoenwald, *Time for Choosing*, 219.

might align him or herself with, local politics could easily be couched within this ideological framework. Republicans who disagreed with one another on specific issues could still espouse similar overarching beliefs. Under the banner of conservatism—which itself was broadly defined with reference to an anti-liberal philosophy—these factions found common cause. By rallying around a new marketing strategy, the Republican Party slowly began to detach the stigma of extremism from conservatism and undermine the unity of its Democratic opponents.⁸¹

Race and Electoral Politics in 1966

On Tuesday, November 8, 1966, members and supporters of the Dallas County Republican Party gathered together at a dance club on the notoriously rambunctious Greenville Avenue section of downtown Dallas. They gathered around television sets to watch, and they hoped to celebrate, the evenings' electoral returns. The biggest cheer of the evening came at the announcement of Ronald Reagan's landside victory over the incumbent Democrat, Edmund G. "Pat" Brown in the California gubernatorial race. The next day, copies of the *Dallas Morning News* greeted readers across Texas with the story it considered most significant—that of Reagan's election in California. Reagan's public service career in California officially began that night, but his political popularity in Texas was already strong. Following his landslide victory, Reagan received a commendation from the Ripon Society, a nationally active moderate Republican organization. The Ripon Society congratulated Reagan for winning his campaign without resorting to ideological warfare. Rather, Ripon asserted, Reagan's victory was a testimony to the power of a positive media message in which the people, not ideas, were championed.⁸² However, the moderate Republican organization's celebration of Reagan's

⁸¹ "The State of the Republican Party as of February 1965: Report by RNC Chairman Dean Burch," PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 4, Frame 733.

⁸² *Dallas Morning News*, November 9, 1966, 12A-13A; A Ripon Society Press Release, November 13, 1966, Box 48, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL; Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment*:

victory did not prevent that same society from pointing out a noticeable shortcoming: black voters had not contributed to the victory. The Ripon Society believed the future of Republican electoral success hinged on appealing to black voters. Reagan's victory in California without such support was impressive, they argued, but also anomalous. Other candidates, particular Republicans in the South, would not be so fortunate.⁸³

The Ripon Society was hardly alone in this assessment. While the RNC labored to create a uniform message that appealed to voters on the basis of a theme-oriented and anticommunist conservatism, it also debated what role African Americans should play in the new strategy. While some Republicans publicly believed that they would never win in the South unless they appealed to black voters, many more reaffirmed their conservatism as not about race, but rather, the heavy swell of opposition to the welfare state, communism, foreign aid, and federal spending.⁸⁴ Some argued that, if for no other reason, winning black votes was a critical step toward undermining the Democratic Party's growing base. Only 6 percent of African Americans supported Republican candidates in 1964. In Dallas, black Republican voting decreased from 41 percent in 1956 to only 3 percent eight years later.⁸⁵ By 1968, 90 percent of blacks felt that the Democratic Party was more interested in issues of race than was the GOP. At the same time, 62 percent of African Americans generally favored Democratic candidates, whereas only 3 percent favored Republicans. Most blacks simply doubted the sincerity of Republican efforts on civil

Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

⁸³ "RNC Executive Committee, Executive Session, January 21, 1965, Chicago, IL," PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 4, Frames 363-367. Republicans at this meeting debated which constituency in the South was more for the taking – blacks or conservative whites. One notable idea was that the GOP should market itself to the *Beverly Hillbillies* crowd, meaning conservative whites. In 1965, the *Beverly Hillbillies* was among the most popular shows on television.

⁸⁴ *New York Journal-Americans*, July 15, 1964, Box 337, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL.

⁸⁵ "The 1964 Elections: A Summary Report with Supporting Tables: October 1965," PRP, Part II, Reel 4, Frames 427-429; "The 1966 Elections: A Summary Report with Supporting Tables: September 1, 1967," PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 5, Frame 81; "Political Profiles of the States, 1968: March 1, 1968," PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 5, Frame 424.

rights, but were still only loosely tied to the Democratic Party—predominantly because, in the South, the Democratic Party was the only party in town and home to some of the nation’s most ardent segregationists.⁸⁶

Outside of the South, the vast majority of anticommunist conservatives, both in intellectual circles and at the grassroots, rejected the politics of massive resistance that seemed to characterize the racial discord in much of the South. William F. Buckley, for instance, spoke of racial division as a communist weapon and encouraged conservatives across the nation to unify against communism, not blacks. These conservatives were engaged in their own battle for the heart and soul of the Republican Party and hoped to appeal to newly enfranchised black voters through a message of Americanism, assimilation, and democratic freedoms. Such a conservative viewpoint offered little practical assistance to the African-American freedom struggle, and may very well have been an obstacle by way of passive complicity, but it was not the direct and more immediate obstacle which barricaded blacks in their path toward reform. Though racial hostility and civil rights resistance was often recast in Texas as part of a larger struggle against communism, socialism, and liberalism, significant pockets of anticommunist thought and activity also operated on the periphery of such impulses and allowed many Texans to embrace their anticommunist commonalities with similar thinkers in other parts of the country where racial discord was less of an issue and, it was hoped, would remain that way. Rather, grassroots anticommunist conservatism functioned in most of Texas much as it did in the West and Midwest—with race operating in the shadow of issues like federal growth, national security, and moral laxity—collectively espoused under a growing anti-liberal rhetoric.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ “Political Profiles of the States, 1968: March 1, 1968,” PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 5, Frame 424, 465-185.

⁸⁷ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*; Schoenwald, *Time for Choosing*, 252-253.

This is not to say that opposition to civil rights did not exist in Texas. It certainly did, though for a complex set of reasons. Yet only in pockets of East Texas, with its heavy concentration of African-American residents, did the “Negro Issue” typically make its way to the very top of most candidates’ agendas.⁸⁸ In the rest of the state, opposition to civil rights, while present and important, existed not as massive resistance but as a blending of racial fears and ideological convictions, primarily over the expansion of federal power and seemingly radical protests spilling over into the streets. The complexity of opposition to civil rights in Texas illustrates how the rise of modern conservatism in America manifested differently across disparate regions of the country, despite historical assessments which characterize the movement as inherently “Southern” or even “suburban.”⁸⁹

Republican conservatives in the North, like Buckley or Phyllis Schlafly for instance, were far less motivated by race. Not all, but many conservatives in Texas behaved similarly.⁹⁰ Some of this behavior can be explained through an understanding of the socioeconomic transformations affecting the state as early as the mid-1960s. The economic transformations that shaped Texas and refashioned much of the Sunbelt as the new home for industrial growth, particularly military defense industries, contributed to the migration of Northerners with traditional Republican leanings into defense and energy hubs like Dallas and Houston.⁹¹ Industrial growth, especially defense manufacturing, provided new jobs not just for migrating Northerners, but for working-class Texans and minorities. Each of these factors contributed to a

⁸⁸ General Correspondence, Box 5, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

⁸⁹ Gerard Alexander, “The Myth of the Racist Republicans,” *The Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy: Claremont Review of Books* (Spring 2004); Carter, *The Politics of Rage*; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Kruse, *White Flight*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*.

⁹⁰ Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*.

⁹¹ Bruce J. Schulman, *From the Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); “Meeting of the Republican National Committee, January 31, 1966: Trends in Public Opinion – Thomas W. Benham,” PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 5, Frames 77-97.

redefined populist ethos in Texas in which the tenets of anti-elitism, distrust of establishment entities, and strict adherence to individual rights generated the framework for modern conservatism in Texas, thus providing a stimulus for the rise of the Texas GOP.

Demographics and geography also played a role in the way race worked as a political issue in Texas. Unlike states in the Deep South, the African-American population in Texas was comparatively small. It was also more isolated to the eastern fifth of the state, which, in a state as vast as Texas, meant that many white Texans did not have as much daily contact with African Americans as did whites in the Deep South, even before the restraints of de jure segregation were torn down. Even in cities like Dallas, Houston, and Beaumont, where the black population was higher than average, suburbanization efforts which aimed to replace de jure with de facto segregation, went largely unchallenged and therefore contributed to the public perception that race was not the urgent political issue that it was elsewhere in the South.⁹² Such trends, however, were not necessarily prescriptive for other cities like Amarillo, Austin, El Paso, Lubbock, or San Antonio—nor were these trends predictive of how the rural or exurban voters behaved. In the mid-1960s, radical organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and even the John Birch Society no longer functioned in Texas by the mid-1960s with the same gusto as they operated with in other parts of the South, a reflection among other things of the state's general aversion to extremism in all forms. With most candidates in Texas avoiding race altogether, the confrontation between massive resistance and middle class moderation that characterized racial politics in the suburban South was far less influential, necessary, or apparent in Texas—at least through the mid-1960s.⁹³

⁹² Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*; Kruse, *White Flight*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*.

⁹³ *Dallas Morning News*, July 3, 1964, Section 4, 1; *Dallas Morning News*, August 7-11, 1965, Section 4; Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics*, 1990; "An Indictment of the Democratic Party, 1961-1968," PRP, Part II, Reel 7, Frames 209-210; *New York Journal-American*, February 12, 1964, Box 48, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL; Support for and Opposition Against Civil Rights Bill, 1964, Box 6,

Race was one of several issues that made the 1966 campaign for Senate interesting. It was a campaign which revealed much about the nature of anti-liberalism in Texas, the success of the GOP's new marketing strategy, and the destructive power of intra-party factionalism. The incumbent, John Tower was, once again, an underdog in 1966. Many Texans viewed Tower's election to the United States Senate in 1961 as a fluke and Democrats were confident they would regain the seat when Tower came up for re-election. His opponent was Waggoner Carr, who had served as the state's attorney general and gained some notoriety for a small-scale independent investigation into the Kennedy assassination. Assumptions about Carr's appeal and Democratic dominance in the state triggered early press predictions of a potential landslide and forced the incumbent Tower to assume the position of underdog challenger. On September 7, 1966, Carr opened his campaign with a rally in his hometown of Lubbock. It proved to be an inauspicious beginning. Overconfident and unprepared, Carr attracted less than 2,000 supporters. Earlier in the week, Carr's campaign had made public its expectation that over 10,000 supporters would attend. Adding to the embarrassment were statewide television and newspaper reports that those in attendance were unenthusiastic and had to be repeatedly prompted to cheer by Carr campaign staffers holding up "cheer" signs.⁹⁴

Because he was a Democrat in a heavily Democratic state and had served under John Connally's popular governorship, Carr was, to the dismay of both Republicans and liberal Democrats, heavily favored by political observers in Texas. Carr, however, did not enjoy unified support within his party. In 1966, Texas liberals chose the Carr candidacy as the perfect opportunity to take a stand against a conservative Democrat, in the hopes of sparking realignment and subsequent two-party reform. Liberals had long believed that without a viable

Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL; Support for and Opposition Against Civil Rights Bill, 1964, Box 6, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL.

⁹⁴ *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, September 8, 1966, 1A.

Republican Party, liberal leadership would never overtake the conservative establishment that dominated the Texas Democratic Party. These Democrats denounced the conservative Carr as “entirely un-Democratic”—proclaiming that their definition of Democratic meant a far friendlier atmosphere for liberalism in Texas. They did not assume that their support would turn the tide of the campaign, but did see their refusal to toe the party line as a symbolic gesture of defiance.⁹⁵

Tower benefited from the liberal response to Carr. The Republican Senator had built a respectable conservative record during his tenure in the upper chamber. At the same time, many conservative Democrats failed to rally behind Carr for two reasons. First, Carr did not foster a great deal of enthusiasm, whether because of his personality or mixed record. Second, many conservative Democrats simply did not pay much attention to the race, either out of ambivalence or over-confidence in their candidate’s prospects. Meanwhile, Texas Republicans also worked hard to appeal to Hispanic voters in 1966. The GOP’s strategy for appealing to Hispanics was based on what El Paso County GOP Chairman Hilary Sandoval, Jr. called “a moral obligation to sell ALL Americans on Republican principles.” In researching Hispanic communities across Texas, Republicans began to successfully market conservative principles in the state as uniformly “American” and color-blind in appeal.⁹⁶ The biggest aid Republicans like Tower received however, came not from the rewards of their own research but from liberal Democrats deliberately encouraging Hispanic voters to vote against Carr. This strategy illustrates an important reality about how race and politics functioned in Texas during the 1960s. Whereas the manifestation of conservative politics was greatly affected by the grassroots response to the African-American civil rights movement operating in much of the Deep South, the politics of

⁹⁵*Texas Observer*, October 28, 1966, 7; *Texas Observer*, December 9, 1966, 24, Folder 11, Box 63, Press Office, JTP; Unidentified 1966 newspaper article, Folder 7, Box 63, Press Office, JTP.

⁹⁶ “How to Canvass and Win the Latin-American Voter of Low Income,” El Paso County GOP, Box 2, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

race was far more affected by the state's abundant Hispanic population. If Hispanics could be convinced not to vote for Carr, they would either stay home or might be convinced to vote for Tower, not because he convincingly represented their values, but as a protest vote against the conservative Democratic establishment and a means toward a healthy and competitive two-party political culture.⁹⁷

Hispanic leadership desperately wanted a political voice and the establishment of a truly liberal Democratic Party was a necessary first step toward increasing opportunities for Latino political participation.⁹⁸ Throughout the first six decades of the 20th century, Hispanics in Texas had been segregated by the same customs, traditions, and laws that prevented African Americans from enjoying the benefits of a fully integrated society. The customs and traditions that allowed for de facto segregation between Hispanics and Whites, however, began to break down in the 1960s.⁹⁹ As the Hispanic population in Texas grew, expectations of political inclusion also grew. Tejanos were a noticeable force in John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign and even organized "Viva Kennedy" clubs as a means to greater political organization and participation.¹⁰⁰ Yet Hispanics were not satisfied with merely being acknowledged as a political constituency. Three years after Kennedy's death, Mexican-American leaders, particularly in South Texas, shifted their focus away from garnering inclusion—a demand often met with token appointments or superficial declarations of equality—to a demand for greater influence legal rights. Once Mexican Americans were recognized and even courted as a unique and important bloc in 1960, their expectations were heightened. By 1966, Mexican Americans were not satisfied with token

⁹⁷ Memorandum, April 25, 1966, To: Senator John Tower, From: James A. Leonard, Subject: Ethnic and Liberal Groups, Folder 1, Box 711, Austin Offices, JTP.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ April 20, 1966, Radio Address Transcription, Box 28, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

¹⁰⁰ Ignacio M. Garcia, *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans in Search of Camelot* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 166, 179-180.

recognition or superficial inclusion. They wanted to be more fully incorporated into the body politic and see the rhetoric of white Democrats practically and actively applied. In 1960, Kennedy's efforts, however, nominal, had been seen as a step in the right direction. In 1966, Waggoner Carr's efforts to court Mexican-American voters were not viewed as sincere, legitimate, or involved enough to overcome that voting bloc's displeasure with the candidate's record as attorney general.¹⁰¹

Part of that record included a rather ugly incident involving Carr, the Democratic establishment in Austin, and the Mexican-American community in South Texas. In August, farm workers in the Rio Grande Valley staged a march to Austin to protest unionization obstacles. John Connally, openly in support of Carr's campaign, ordered the marchers dispersed. He justified this order by saying that the marchers were interrupting vehicular traffic along State Highway 10. The result was a violent confrontation between the Texas Highway Patrol and the Texas Rangers on one hand and the marching farm workers on the other. When the marchers requested a meeting with the Governor, Connally refused. In the weeks following the confrontation, some of the workers compared their march to the more famous one in Selma, where African-American marchers had been met with violent resistance from Alabama law enforcement officials. As Texas's attorney general, the workers felt Carr did nothing to assist them in their efforts to unionize or seek justice in the wake of their interrupted march. Connally's response to the marching farm workers cost him considerable support among Mexican Americans in Texas—support he had enjoyed on the basis of his administration's distribution of over \$25 million in education grants designed to help the 71,000 Hispanic school children enrolled in Texas public schools, and despite the fact that over 3300 Mexican Americans were gainfully employed in state government positions. The goodwill enjoyed by

¹⁰¹ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 208.

these actions vanished after the incident with the marching farm workers and Carr, too closely aligned with Connally's decision, saw his already negligible support among Mexican Americans evaporate.¹⁰²

As Carr struggled to maintain liberal and minority support, political pundits dismissed these problems as irrelevant. Meanwhile, Tower—in tandem with state liberals—aggressively courted minority voters.¹⁰³ The Republican incumbent sought the endorsement of prominent Mexican-American leaders, but did so by trying to sell his conservative platform to Hispanic voting blocs. His strategy with Hispanics in Texas was among the first attempts by a GOP candidate to employ the strategy constructed by the RNC between 1964 and 1966. At least to a small degree, the strategy worked. At the same time, Tower avoided labels of extremism by doing something Goldwater had refused to do two years earlier; he denounced the John Birch Society, saying that the organization was too divisive.¹⁰⁴ As the campaign progressed, polls indicated that the only reason Tower was not the favorite going into his race with Carr was the fact that he was a Republican. National pollster Louis Harris went so far as to say that “If Tower were running under the Democratic symbol, he would have little difficulty winning a second term.” Harris also critiqued Tower's positioning in Texas as a reflection of statewide attitudes on political ideology:

[Tower] is thought to have done just as good a job as Senator as Connally has done as Governor. Of all candidates, he is felt to be closely aligned with the conservative philosophy of Texas voters. Yet Tower has skillfully differentiated between being a conservative and a right-wing Bircher. This is the major accomplishment of his campaign.

¹⁰² Ibid., 210-211; Reston. *The Lone Star*, 301-302, 314.

¹⁰³ Bert W. Thompson to Waggoner Carr, March 21, 1966, Box 2, 1966 Senate Campaign Correspondence File, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

¹⁰⁴ *Houston Chronicle*, October 18, 1965, Box 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

The Goldwater debacle, by appearing radical and dangerous, harmed the conservative cause in Texas to the point that conservatives had no choice but to disavow some of the grassroots support which had fueled the movement's popularity in the first place. That disavowal did not necessarily mean a loss of grassroots support. Over the next decade, the fear of extremism, and the association of populist-conservatism with extremism, seemed less tangible and less credible. In 1966, however, they were very real and Tower was smart enough to try to distance himself from any such associations.¹⁰⁵

Tower's campaign strategy in 1966 reflected six lessons for future political campaigns in Texas and indicated an important shift in the way conservatives marketed themselves in the state. First, Tower emphasized the importance of having a viable second party in the state. In doing so, he made the existence of a competitive Republican Party in Texas an important issue to conservatives fearful of losing influence at the state and national level as well as to liberals hoping for greater influence in the Democratic Party. Second, Tower emphasized the principles of small government, repeatedly invoking the name of Thomas Jefferson throughout his campaign. Conservatism embraced and then redefined a new populism in Texas and, according to Tower, could even be linked to the nation's Founding Fathers. Tower's campaign made conservatism seem patriotic and traditional, not radical or extreme. Third, Tower blamed liberals in Washington for the nation's problems with crime, violence, and immorality. In doing this, he made national issues paramount and tangible to Texans. Fourth, Tower promised to return "local and state control" to Texas, though this promise was vague and not applied to any specific agenda or issue, thus allowing individuals to let the promise mean whatever they pleased. Fifth, Tower adamantly supported retaining Texas' right-to-work law. The "Americanism" of the new

¹⁰⁵ Louis Harris and Associates, Inc., Report prepared for Walter Cronkite, *CBS News*, Box 2M750, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH.

industrial culture of Texas did not have room for “Yankee” obstructions to free enterprise, namely “Big Labor.” Finally, Tower addressed the problem of race in Texas in a way that few other Southerners could; he called for “a moderate and sensible civil rights program for Texas.”¹⁰⁶

Simply put, Tower subtly communicated anti-liberalism while still running a successful and positive campaign. His advertising largely avoided direct attacks against Carr and was generally viewed as upbeat and optimistic. Prior to the election, Tower took a high-profile trip to Vietnam where he gained national attention for his staunch support of the troops and of the war effort.¹⁰⁷ Tower also thought creatively with regards to ad placement. The Tower campaign placed advertisements in *Texas Football* magazine—a widely distributed and very popular periodical that provided readers with in-depth coverage of Texas high school, college, and professional football. The ad consisted of his gaining endorsements from such Texas football heroes as Donny Anderson (Texas Tech University, Green Bay Packers), Tom Landry (head coach, Dallas Cowboys), and Bob Lilly (Texas Christian University)—among dozens of others. The ad also ran in *Game Day* programs at college football venues across the state. Carr was furious that Tower had monopolized advertising to the “football crowd” and was disappointed in his staff for missing such “an obvious opportunity.”¹⁰⁸ Not to ignore the power of television, Tower also one-upped his opponent by airing a 30-minute documentary called, “The John Tower Story.” The film was broadcast across the state and then redistributed to local neighborhoods, where watch-parties were organized for additional screenings.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ “A Look at John G. Tower: Candidate for the United States Senate,” Folder 4, Box 814, Campaign/Political: Washington Office, JTP.

¹⁰⁷ Vietnam Trip, Folders 19-20, Box 63, Press Office, JTP.

¹⁰⁸ Letter To: Jim Leonard, From: Lance Tarrance, Subject: Texas Football Ad, October 19, 1966, Folder 9, Box 710, Austin Office, JTP.

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum, From: Jerry Kamprath, To: Tower Chairmen, July 27, 1966, Folder 21, Box 711, Austin Office, JTP.

The Tower campaign was so effective that Carr charged it was being run by Ronald Reagan's California team—the implication being that Tower needed out-of-state help in order to build his own image. Additionally, the charge illustrates the early respect given to Reagan's public appeal and campaign skill. Tower denied the charges and records strongly indicate that Reagan was not involved.¹¹⁰

Still, nothing Tower could do to his opponent was as effective as what Carr had already done to himself. Nor was Tower's strategy as effective as the negative coverage Carr endured from the Texas press. *The Texas Observer*, for instance, ran photographs of Carr attending a White Citizens' Council meeting in 1957 with other segregationists.¹¹¹ If Carr's fragile support among minorities in Texas was dwindling, it was non-existent after that controversy.

Furthermore, on the eve of the election, television stations across the state reported that Carr maintained a comfortable 10-point lead over Tower in the latest Belden Poll. These numbers quelled the urgency of the race. The next day, various election-day polls showed Carr holding only a three-point advantage. At the end of the day, the only poll that mattered was the one at the ballot box. In that poll, the decision of Texans' was loud and clear; John Tower won a shocking 56.7 percent of the vote—a comfortable victory and easy re-election.¹¹²

The lessons of the 1966 senate campaign in Texas were abundant though not always clear. Carr garnered the endorsement of a popular conservative governor and even drew Lyndon Johnson's public support. Yet, these endorsements did not help and in fact, in the case of LBJ—whose liberalism seemed more apparent to Texans with each stroke of his Great Society pen—

¹¹⁰ Tower Topics, October 8, 1966, Folder 20, Box 711, Austin Office, JTP.

¹¹¹ Letter From: Marvin Collins, To: Peter O'Donnell, Jr., October 10, 1966, Austin Office, Folder 11, Box 711, JTP.

¹¹² Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 209; *Dallas Morning News*, November 8, 1966, 1A.

might have hurt. An important question is how much Tower's courting of the Hispanic vote, or Carr's fumbling of it, changed the outcome of the election.¹¹³

Depressed voter turnout is the most likely answer to this question.¹¹⁴ Tower's campaign emphasized the importance of decreasing voter turnout, particularly among the most traditionally reliable constituents of the Democratic base.¹¹⁵ Republicans knew that when two conservatives ran against one another in Texas, Democrats almost always prevailed. Tradition and loyalty gave many their only reason to show up. The GOP wanted to obliterate that tradition either by forcing realignment, or in the short run, giving both conservatives and liberals no reason to vote at all. Mexican-Americans were more disillusioned with Carr than they were enamored with Tower and stayed home in large numbers. Liberal Democrats in Texas had long been a minority, but they had also traditionally rallied to the party during the general election. In this case, they did not.

Soon after their candidate's defeat, Carr's supporters organized an early public relations effort designed to undermine and eventually unseat the liberal United States Senator Ralph Yarborough, whose re-election was still four years away. This corps of conservative Democrats began to publicly express dissatisfaction with the Johnson administration, and emphasized the ineptitude and weakness of liberalism at the state and federal level.¹¹⁶ Not wanting to be left out of the anti-liberal parade, John Connally once again entered the anti-Yarborough fray, publicly linking the liberal Texas senator to radicalism, revolution, and lawlessness. The not-so-subtle

¹¹³ W.N. Dorsett to Waggoner Carr, November 28, 1966; John W. Key, Jr. to Waggoner Carr, November 29, 1966, Box 2, 1966 Senate Campaign Correspondence File, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

¹¹⁴ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 206-211.

¹¹⁵ Candidate Strategy for 1968: Confidential (First Draft), March 6, 1967, Folder 3, Box 639, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

¹¹⁶ W.N. Dorsett to Waggoner Carr, November 28, 1966, Box 2, 1966 Senate Campaign Correspondence File, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC; John W. Key, Jr. to Waggoner Carr, November 29, 1966, Box 2, 1966 Senate Campaign Correspondence File, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

implication was that Yarborough's liberalism was extreme and dangerous.¹¹⁷ No doubt tradition and loyalty still mattered in Texas, and the Democratic Party was by no means dead. But, it was becoming apparent that attacking liberals might yield electoral success and shape new perceptions of political ideology. The animosity that had fractured the GOP nationally in 1964 seemed to be fracturing the Democratic Party as early as 1966. The power and longevity of the New Deal coalition—nationally as well as in Texas—was being threatened by a renewed emphasis on the marketing of political ideology, the importance of public perception, and Republican efforts to undermine Democratic loyalties by linking conservatism with the GOP. Democratic factionalism was also intensified by the belief among conservative Democrats that liberal disloyalty was costing them elections. Liberals wanted conservatives out of their party. Republicans wanted all the conservatives in theirs. Both would eventually get their wish.

Violence, Law & Order, and Anti-Liberalism

Two years after failing to unseat John Tower from the United States Senate, Waggoner Carr tried and failed to win his party's nomination for governor. Carr's strategy was to strenuously position himself as the "Law & Order" candidate—stressing harsher sentences for criminals and an end to street violence and the general chaos of protest movements, confrontations, race riots, and widespread challenges to the traditional social peace.¹¹⁸ It was a winning strategy—just not for him.

Carr was not alone in using crime as a major issue in the late 1960s. In and out of Texas, the idea that America was slipping into a violent abyss seemed all too real, thanks in large part to the routine coverage incidents such as race riots and protests received from national and local media. Conservatives in both parties jumped on the opportunity to connect liberalism with such

¹¹⁷ Press Memorandum, Office of the Governor, March 8, 1966, Box 41, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

¹¹⁸ Radio Spot Text, 1968 Gubernatorial Campaign Files, Box 5, Waggoner Carr Papers, SWC.

examples of chaos, all veiled under a cloak of weakness and no doubt aided by racialized conceptions of crime and disorder which were simultaneously fueled by the growing militancy of the national civil rights and early black power movements. These factions dividing segments of the black community destabilized the majority of white Texans' slow progression toward accepting reform and buttressed stereotypical connections between race and crime. Multiple congressional campaigns across Texas reflected these efforts. For instance, in 1966 Joe Pool ran for re-election as a Democrat from the 3rd congressional district near Dallas. His campaign was clearly intended to capitalize on a still-fervent anticommunism by linking those sentiments with the fear and paranoia of violence and crime by way of liberal policies emanating from Washington. Liberalism, it was charged, was placing white Texans at risk. Though Pool's campaign did not directly take advantage of the race issue in the same way that his colleagues in more segregationist states did, the effect was the same. Pool easily won re-election.¹¹⁹

Johnson's response to increasing crime rates gave conservatives more ammunition in its battle to equate liberalism with weakness. Johnson did not see crime as a local problem. Stronger law enforcement at the local level would not help, White House aides argued. Rather, crime had to be attacked at its root level—poverty and the desperation that came with destitution and discrimination. As early as 1964, the White House tried to avoid direct linkages between race and crime, other than to argue that racial discrimination had contributed to poverty, and therefore crime. Crime, the White House argued, was a national problem and required a national solution. Johnson personally downplayed the problem of crime when he spoke publicly on the subject, dismissing the Law & Order rhetoric of conservatives as a “scare tactic.” Regardless of who was in the right, the public almost uniformly wanted action—not at the federal level, but on their local street corner. Whether crime was threatening their local neighborhood or not, a

¹¹⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, November 7, 1966, 18A.

growing contingent of middle-class Texans feared that without stronger local security, Johnson's long-term national solution would lead to more immediate local violence.¹²⁰

Conservative Republicans tried hard to undermine the notion that poverty and crime were somehow linked. In doing so, Republicans smoothly segued to hostile diatribes about the failures and dangers of big government—specifically the War on Poverty. These efforts to undermine the Democratic administration, the War on Poverty, and the legacies of New Deal bureaucratic liberalism aided the party's appeal to anti-big government conservatives in Texas.¹²¹ Republicans reminded the public that crime had increased 88 percent since John F. Kennedy first took office and attacked the liberal “poverty equals crime” thesis, arguing that:

Fighting crime primarily by fighting poverty [was] designed to hide the Administration's refusal to attack the principle causes of crime—which [were] moral and philosophical—and to sell Americans on a program of social welfare which many would reject if offered on its own merits.¹²²

Republicans were not afraid of magnifying the gravity of the crime situation and equated Democratic responses to crime with liberalism, liberalism with extremism, and extremism with danger:

The fostering of a ‘permissive society,’ uncalled-for restrictions on police investigatory powers, the failure of the Federal government to mount an effective attack on the barons of organized crime—these and countless other factors contribute [to] the American ‘crime equation.’ Only a recognition of these factors, combined with the determination and leadership to combat them, will return ‘ordered liberty’ to a nation threatened with anarchy.¹²³

By the end of 1966, conservatism in Texas had strengthened its ideological roots in anticommunism by stressing the global Soviet military menace. On social issues however, the

¹²⁰ Memorandum for the President, September 23, 1964, Through Walter Jenkins, From: Bill Moyers, Subject: Release of the FBI Report on Riots, Box 4, Office Files of Bill Moyers, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, LBJL; Draft: Crime Message, March 6, 1965, From: Bill Moyers, To: President Johnson, Box 4, Office Files of Bill Moyers, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, LBJL; Speech Draft, September 14, 1968, Box 56, Office Files of Harry McPherson, LBJL.

¹²¹ “Political Profiles of the States, 1968: March 1, 1968,” PRP, Part II, Reel 5, Frame 457.

¹²² “An Indictment of the Democratic Party, 1961-1968,” PRP, Reel 7, Frames 37-44.

¹²³ Crime and Delinquency, June 1968, PRP, Part II, Reel 6, Frame 451.

anticommunist strand that stressed the dangers of domestic communism was being transformed into an anti-liberal rhetoric that equated lawlessness and weakness with liberalism—an equation that was effective in Texas because, in the mid to late 1960s, it remained bipartisan.

Conservative Texas Democrats generally received more favorable feedback from constituents on the need for “Law & Order” than they received on any other issues.¹²⁴ Though conditions in Texas generally did not lend themselves to potential race riots—or even rising crime rates—fears were not placated. The reality did not matter. What mattered was the perception that such violence could erupt and that greater protection and harsher sentencing was needed. Most Texans blamed liberalism, not African Americans, for what they feared was the manifestation of potentially revolutionary racial discontent.¹²⁵

Images of violence and discord—race-related or otherwise—became all too common by the late 1960s. On August 1, 1966, Charles Whitman reminded Texans that their state, less than three years removed from the JFK Assassination in Dallas, was not immune to violence. Early that morning, after stabbing his mother with a bayonet before fatally shooting her in the head, Whitman returned to his Austin apartment where he stabbed his wife repeatedly as she slept. Between 9am and 10:30am, Whitman drove to a local hardware store and purchased a .30 caliber rifle, clips, and some ammunition. He then went to Sears and, on credit, bought a shotgun. He then loaded his Marine Corps footlocker a multitude of items, including several cans of Spam, toilet paper, water, 700 rounds of ammunition, a .30 caliber carbine, a 6mm Magnum, a .35 caliber Remington pump, a .30 caliber reconditioned carbine, a .357 caliber Magnum pistol, two 9mm Luger pistols, and one sawed-off shotgun. Posing as an employee of the State Highway

¹²⁴ Personal Correspondence, 1967-68, Box 615, Preston Smith Papers, SWC; *Nation's Business*, Feb. 1968, Box 435, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

¹²⁵ Policy File: Riots, Box 376; File: Out of District – Civil Rights, Correspondence, Box 376, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

Department, Whitman obtained a parking permit and drove directly toward the Main Building—a 307 foot tower that stood as the signature building on the University of Texas campus.¹²⁶

Dressed in overalls and hauling his footlocker, Whitman took an elevator to the 27th floor before climbing the remaining floor to the 28th story observation deck. There, Whitman immediately killed the receptionist before fatally shooting two tourists. At 11:45am Whitman, a marksman and sharpshooter in the Marines Corps, began taking aim at students, faculty, and other individuals passing by some 300 feet below. Poor communication between the University Police Department (UTPD) and the Austin Police (APD), along with several ill-advised retaliations by students and faculty who happened to be carrying guns on campus, allowed Whitman's shooting spree to last 99 minutes. Whitman was finally killed by two APD patrolmen, but not before sixteen people had been killed, with another 31 wounded. It was the largest mass-murder in American history to that date. As they had in November 1963, Texans once again faced national shame over an outburst of violence.¹²⁷

The Whitman murders contributed to many Texans' feelings of helplessness, paranoia, and victimization. Just days after the shootings, an editorial in the *Daily Texan*, the student newspaper at the University of Texas, compared Whitman to a "Viet Cong terrorist, killing without mercy and without discrimination. The University truly lived through a hell comparable to that which the South Vietnamese endure. The University Tower, for many, has stood as a symbol of learning. The Tower now conjures up new images of death and horror." Such viewpoints were common across the state. As Austin joined Dallas as unenviable hosts to two of the centuries most famous shooting sprees, Texans were afraid, ashamed, and sensitive to what

¹²⁶ Memorandum for W. Marvin Watson, August 1, 1966, Box 368, White House Central Files: Public Relations, LBJL.

¹²⁷ *Austin American Statesman*, August 2, 1966, A1; Gary M. Lavergne, *A Sniper in the Tower: The Charles Whitman Murders* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1997).

they perceived to be the declining safety, morality, and traditional lifestyle that they as Texans, but more importantly as Americans, had for so many years taken for granted.¹²⁸

Conclusion

In 1964, Barry Goldwater failed to spark a conservative revival based on anticommunist principles and free-market libertarian economics. Such a philosophy was derided as extreme and only in the Deep South, where the issue was almost entirely about race, did Goldwater garner significant support. The Republican Party learned and applied valuable lessons from the Goldwater debacle. Chief among the alterations to partisan strategy were efforts to reshape the Republican Party as the national party of middle class American values. As Matthew Lassiter has suggested, Republicans marketed themselves neither as defenders of civil rights, nor demagogues of white supremacy, but rather as the party of middle class “suburban protectionism.”

In much the same way, by the mid-1960s, surrounded by race riots and civil rights unrest, student protests of every kind, and challenges to the perceived moral order, conservatism was redefined in Texas as being more ordinary and “of the people” than was liberalism. Texans were already a generally conservative lot, but the urgency and substance of their conservatism was changing—as were their perceptions of political ideologies in general. Liberalism became the defender of big government and conservatism gained a more populist tinge. Barry Goldwater’s anti-government message—rejected in 1964 as extreme—was beginning to seem more relevant, urgent, and necessary as the decade progressed.¹²⁹

The Texas GOP desperately wanted to be seen as the conservative voice of its state. At the same time, television nationalized much of the state’s political culture. Viewers could see

¹²⁸ Alwyn Barr, Interview by Author, June 22, 2000, Lubbock, TX; *The Daily Texan*, August 5, 1966, “The Tower Massacre.”

¹²⁹ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 232.

the nation's problems in their living rooms. Where these things were happening mattered little; it all appeared dangerously close. Thus, Texas Republicans capitalized on issues that were taking place in other states, buttressed their own conservative credentials, undermined the Democratic administration in Washington, DC, and did so without necessarily appearing partisan—for it was liberalism, they said, that was ultimately to blame.

While some Republicans tried to paint Democrats as the source of liberal failure, both Republicans and conservative Democrats in the 1960s gained far more by connecting the nation's ills with liberalism than to a political party. This allowed conservative Texas Democrats to remain popular throughout the rest of the decade, but keeping the public from connecting liberalism with the Democratic Party eventually became a difficult proposition. The stability of the Texas Democratic Party was under assault and the fissures created between the state and national party hierarchy ultimately contributed to many Texas Democrats switching parties in the coming decades.

The war in Vietnam exacerbated all of these dynamics in Texas. As early as 1965, many conservative Texans from both sides of the aisle began to speculate that Johnson's administration would be incapable of securing victory in Southeast Asia. Rather, only Republican leadership, unencumbered by the domestic weight of the Great Society, could wage the all-out war that would be needed. Conservative Texas Democrats, almost all of whom took hawkish positions on the war without resorting to nuclear recklessness, typically sided with Republicans over liberals in their own party. This was true particularly as liberalism came to be connected with the anti-war movement. In this sense, conservatism overcame some of the dangerous connotations of extremism by earning credibility within the context of Cold War anticommunism.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, August 14, 1965, 1D; *Dallas Morning News*, November 7, 1966, 6A.

The ascendancy of conservative Republicanism in Texas required the conflagration of numerous events, movements, issues, and cultural changes—acting together to foment change. This was a complex process—one that experienced many ups and downs. One major component to this “perfect storm” would be the iconographic associations between individual leaders and broad ideological strands. And it was in this political culture in Texas that national leaders like Ronald Reagan—even more than local leaders like John Tower—came to personify ascendant modern conservatism. As Reagan equated failures in Vietnam with the failures of liberalism, and made conservative Republicanism more respectable in Texas, he emerged as a popular icon.¹³¹ As television transmitted images from across the globe into individual Texans’ homes, image gained a new level of political importance. The political culture in Texas changed between 1963 and 1966 as parties dealt with the need for better marketing strategies and public relations, while issues and events slowly began to expose ideological polarities within political parties. Between 1967 and 1970, the conservative image, to most Texans, would seem safer and more familiar than anything liberals could offer.

¹³¹ Transcript: Town Meeting of the World as broadcast over the CBS Television and Radio Networks, May 15, 1967, Box 368, White House Central Files: Public Relations, LBJL; Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), CH 19; Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980* (New York: Prima Publishing, 2001), 140-150.

CHAPTER 3 DISMANTLING TEXAS'S NEW DEAL COALITION, 1967-70

On March 26, 1968, Ben H. Carpenter, then president of the Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association, delivered a speech at the organization's Annual Membership Convention. Carpenter used the occasion to describe what he considered the slippery slope of American moral decline. He delivered a fourteen-page address on the dangers of "liberal moral relativism" that had "permeated and threatened to destroy society." "We pussyfoot among a lot of high-sounding names," Carpenter told his audience. "We call drunkards 'alcoholics,' ... homosexuals 'deviates,' slackers 'pacifists,' ... and criminals 'victims of society.' ... I think the time has come when we should and must draw a line separating compassion from softheadedness, permissiveness and timidity." Citing Edward Gibbon's study of the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, Carpenter compared America's decline with the dissolution of "the great political force which had held the civilized world together for more than 500 years." Where did the Roman Empire go wrong? Its decline resulted from excessive government spending, an unwillingness of the young men to bear arms in defense of their country, widespread sexual immorality, the spread of effeminacy, and a social and cultural disregard for religion. Carpenter warned of rising crime rates, particularly rampant rape, and said that regardless of the "liberal" perspective, America had not always been "that way."¹

Carpenter's speech reflects numerous themes that would continue to pepper conservative political rhetoric over the next several decades. Understanding liberalism as not only a threat to American individual liberty, but also as the political embodiment of weakness, altered Texans' perceptions about the relationship between party and philosophy. The hyper-masculine

¹ March 26, 1968, Address by Ben H. Carpenter, President, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association at its Annual Membership Convention, "Speeches," Box 613, Dolph Briscoe Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Hereafter cited as CAH).

posturing of men like Carpenter also grew out of notions of white Southern honor and the impulse to protect family, home, and tradition against “invasion.” Much of what Carpenter referred to in this speech, rising crime rates and rampant rape for instance, was somewhat less true in much of Texas than it was in other parts of the nation. National figures indicate that between 1960 and 1968, the number of reported violent crimes per 100,000 people nearly doubled, from 161 to 298. Nationally, the number of forcible rapes per 100,000 increased from 10 to 16. Similar increases were reported on the number of burglaries and other forms property crime. In Texas, violent crime and property crime increases were slightly less, though still significant.² Regardless, just as vital to the shaping of average Texans’ trepidations were the images of crime being broadcast and discussed by conservative politicians on radio and television. The reality of rising crime rates mixed with the powerful imagery of isolated riots and other manifestations of violence fueled the potency of conservative rhetoric as the decade approached its close.³

Four months after delivering his speech to the Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association, Carpenter—a visionary in the Dallas business community and the man almost single-handedly responsible for the development of the Las Colinas suburban magnet for corporate relocation into the DFW Metroplex—was tapped to head the Texas Democrats for Nixon campaign. According to business leaders like Carpenter, liberalism had poisoned the nation’s social and cultural climate. The blending of civic responsibility and political activism was crucial to the moral and economic survival of city, state, and nation. Though debate as to which political party was best suited to solve the nation’s ills continued through the late 1960s,

² U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Crime, State Level, State-by-State and National Trends, 1960-1980.

³ Michael J. Robinson, “Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of the ‘Selling of the Pentagon,’” *American Political Science Review*, 70 (1976), 409-432.

in Texas, the Republican Party welcomed disgruntled conservatives like Carpenter who used anti-liberalism to lend public respectability to the GOP and encouraged partisan realignment.⁴

Though the intellectual heritage of modern American conservatism stretched back to the period before World War II, the emergence of modern conservatism as a viable and marketable grassroots political philosophy began in earnest in 1964. Between 1964 and 1966, conservatives struggled to maintain a voice in a Republican Party where the established leadership was convinced that Goldwater's brand of conservatism was a losing ideology. The GOP would struggle with factionalism at both the state and local level for several years to come, but for a brief time in 1968, a small measure of temporary unification was achieved.

Better marketing was the first improvement made by Republicans on their path toward unity, second-party viability, and conservative coalescence, particularly in Texas. Encompassed within new political marketing strategies was the re-definition and application of anti-liberalism to very tangible social, cultural, and economic "problems." In 1968, more effective marketing strategies combined with widespread disillusionment over a range of national issues to pave the way for Richard Nixon's election to the presidency of the United States. Nixon's election was largely a credit to those whom he referred to as "forgotten Americans." These forgotten Americans were predominantly the white, middle-class, churchgoing taxpayers who supported the war in Vietnam and detested the rampant crime increasingly flooding American streets. Within the next two years, this constituency would more famously be dubbed the "Silent Majority."

Texas was full of such forgotten Americans, and yet Nixon failed to carry the state in 1968. Despite the anti-liberal venom being spewed by men such as Ben Carpenter, conservative

⁴ March 26, 1968, Address by Ben H. Carpenter, President, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association at its Annual Membership Convention, "Speeches," Box 613, Dolph Briscoe Papers, CAH; *Dallas Morning News*, March 3, 2006.

Texans in both parties struggled as much as ever with the definition of their political philosophy and the extent to which their partisan loyalties seemed at odds with their ideological convictions.⁵

The New Deal coalition had dominated Texas politics since the 1930s. At its most basic level, this coalition existed as a partnership between economic populists who were also socially conservative, and liberals, whose desire to participate in the political process in Texas essentially left them no choice but to do so within a conservative Democratic Party. Between 1967 and 1970, this coalition barely survived in Texas. Enduring intra-party factionalism, social anxieties, and challenged loyalties, the Democratic Party continued to win elections in Texas through the end of the decade. By 1970, however, the processes of Democratic demise and Republican ascendancy, both trends which manifested in Texas as a result of ideological coalescence, began to show signs of maturation.

Image had never been more important to American politics as it was in 1968. When Texans watched their nightly news broadcasts, they saw images of a nation being torn apart. They saw a nation where chaos and lawlessness triumphed over order, stability, and traditional mores. They saw rising crime rates, a seemingly impotent American military, and a growing base of disaffected youth, minorities, and other constituents challenging the status quo of American cultural tradition. For many Texans' flashpoints like civil rights, race riots, expanding government influence, socioeconomic debates, and general violence lent credence to the words of men like Ben Carpenter. Though the New Deal coalition proved stronger in Texas than it did elsewhere, the political culture of the late 1960s illustrates simultaneous resilience and tenuousness of partisan loyalties and traditions.

⁵ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Tradition in America Since 1945* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1996).

Vietnam and Credibility in Texas

Perhaps the most important issue of the 1968 campaigns was the war in Vietnam.⁶

Vietnam had not been a major issue in the 1964 campaign. Nonetheless, the broader context of the Cold War continued to cast a shadow over politics both nationally and in Texas.⁷ Generally speaking, attitudes toward the Vietnam War were overwhelmingly hawkish in Texas.

Conservative Texas Democrats supported Johnson while criticizing the President's war strategy as lacking the vigor needed for a quick and decisive victory. Many conservative politicians in Texas defended and advanced their hawkish stances by contrasting their viewpoints with the organized hostility toward the war being expressed on the home front through anti-war demonstrations.

While criticism from politicians and their constituents was occasionally directed at Johnson's Vietnam policy, most Texas conservatives paid far more attention to what they considered to be the "cowardice" of the anti-war Left. The connections Texans drew between the anti-war Left, liberal intellectuals, and the Democratic Party contributed to new conceptions of elitism—conceptions which fueled conservative realignment in the coming decade. Into this mix was an evolving definition of liberalism, increasingly defined by Texas conservatives as the ideological cousin of moral relativism and subsequent moral decline. Some conservatives even argued that liberalism had pushed America dangerously close to collectivist socialism.⁸

⁶ "Support Governor Reagan for President," Brochure, Campaign '68, Box GO152, Governor Ronald Reagan Papers, 1967-1975, Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, CA (Hereafter cited as RRL); Opinion Research Corporation: Issues and Forces in 1968 Presidential Election, Box 2M752, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH; "The New Conservatism," *Atlas World Press*, March 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford, Inc. Papers, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA (Hereafter cited as HI).

⁷ Memorandum for Mr. Bundy, Subject: President Johnson's Foreign Policy Positions as developed in the 1964 Election Campaign, October 29, 1964, Box 41, National Security File: Subject File, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX (Hereafter cited as LBJL).

⁸ Media Appearances, 1967, Transcripts; General Correspondence, Box 435, George Mahon Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Hereafter cited as SWC); Letter from Ronald Reagan to Barry Goldwater, May 27, 1971, Box 2, Denison Kitchel Papers, HI.

There were reasons beyond ideological conservatism and anti-liberalism that help to explain Texas's hawkish political culture. Foremost among these was the economic boom in the American Sunbelt that resulted from the rapid expansion of the military industrial complex in that region. With the possible exception of Southern California, nowhere was that economic and population explosion more tangible than in Texas.⁹ The development of the Sunbelt's military industrial complex fueled urban growth in Texas and encouraged Northerners (many of whom carried with them a Republican family tradition still foreign to most native Texans), to migrate to the Lone Star State for employment. In 1962, Texas firms had military contracts totaling \$1 billion. In 1963, that number increased to \$1.2 billion. Each subsequent year witnessed even greater surges in military contracts for Texas defense manufacturers and in 1966 the state enjoyed \$2.3 billion in defense business—7.2% of all American military contracts. Cities such as San Antonio, which was already home to a thriving military community, certainly benefited, but not to the extent experienced in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. By 1967, eight of the ten largest prime contractors in Texas were based in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Between 1950 and 1970, 1.2 million men, women, and children moved into Texas from other parts of the nation. Among Southern states, only Florida experienced a similar upsurge in raw migration totals. Critics of the war often noted that while continuing involvement in Southeast Asia cost American lives, ending the war would cost Texas defense manufacturers billions of dollars.¹⁰

The construction of a vast military industrial complex in Texas not only contributed to the state's economic prosperity, its growing political significance, and booming population, but also made it a relatively safe haven for pro-war rhetoric. Such a culture attracted conservatives

⁹ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ *Texas Observer*, March 3, 1967, 8; Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 502

of all stripes, including intellectuals, who during the 1960s, began to bridge gaps between high-minded conservative philosophy and grassroots anti-liberalism. Few conservative intellectuals had as far-reaching an impact on shaping the ideological convictions of both politicians and the grassroots as William F. Buckley, Jr. In March 1967, Buckley, the founder of the influential conservative political magazine *National Review*, spoke to an audience of conservatives in Houston on a subject he dubbed “The Dilemmas of Liberalism.” Buckley viewed the war in Vietnam as an ideological crusade in the global war against communist dictatorship. Gracefully dismissing charges that the conflict in Vietnam was a neocolonial or imperialistic effort, Buckley defended the war to his Texas audience as inherently conservative, defined as both a moral and pragmatic crusade against global communism. Buckley denied any credit to LBJ, praising instead the military for its effort and overall strategic planning.

Buckley also dismissed charges that the war in Vietnam was being sustained for the economic benefit of those with defense manufacturing contracts or other financial stakes in the war, a message unmistakably written for his audience in Texas. Many Texans benefited financially from the war in Vietnam, but few, if any, were willing to cite that benefit as a legitimate reason to support the war, regardless of whether it was or not. Rather, supporting American soldiers in a fight against communist totalitarianism was characterized not as an economic matter, but rather a matter of patriotism, which many conservatives argued was antithetical to the anti-war demonstrations being associated with liberalism. The good financial fortune brought to Texas as a result of the Vietnam War was welcome, but it was the state’s anticommunist, anti-liberal, conservative heritage that drove the public’s stated support for American soldiers and aims.¹¹

¹¹ *Texas Observer*, May 12, 1967, 10.

Buckley's speech resonated with hawkish Texans who bristled at the association of their fiscal windfall with soldiers dying halfway across the globe. For Texans indirectly benefiting from the economic expansion rooted in military defense contracts, supporting the troops was an obligation and an act of patriotism, making Buckley's speech applicable across class lines. According to conservatives in Texas, patriotism was a conservative virtue, and with numerous military bases providing a substantial percentage of the ground force in Vietnam, no Texan wanted their wealth to come at the price of their neighbor's blood and grief. By shifting criticism away from those capitalizing financially on the war and toward those whose activity undermined the war effort, Buckley's speech affirmed in many Texans' minds the connections between liberalism, weakness, anti-war activism, and the national Democratic Party.¹²

Pro-war rhetoric was found in abundance in Texas during the late 1960s. Many vocal conservatives shared Buckley's sentiment, but not always his style. For instance, the conservative Joe Pool of Dallas, who campaigned and won re-elections to the U.S. House of Representatives on platforms of vague yet virulent and muscular anticommunism, drew noticeable public support for his advocacy of a formal Congressional declaration of war in Vietnam. Pool admitted that his support for such a declaration was based on the hope that it would allow for the legal prosecution of anti-war "peaceniks" under various loyalty, sedition, and treason statutes. Dr. W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas—the world's largest Southern Baptist congregation, boasting by the early 1980s some 25,000 members—preached that anti-war demonstrators were "half-brains" and "left-wingers." Criswell, whose congregation included Billy Graham and the conservative oil baron and early Goldwater contributor H.L. Hunt, further commented in public that Martin Luther King should be among

¹² Ibid.

those imprisoned for their opposition to the war, then added, “I’d like to be the judge who tried them.”¹³

While opposition to the war grew in other parts of the nation, the same cannot be said of Texas. Anti-war protests in Texas were rare. Those that did take place were not as well-attended or pronounced as such events were in other parts of the country. A few anti-war protests were held on the outskirts of LBJ’s Ranch, though, according to even liberal commentators, these were organized not by Texans but by so-called “outside agitators.” Only a handful of protests, typically poorly attended, took place on the state’s various college campuses. Military installations across Texas endured more active and well-attended protest rallies, but even these were smaller in scale and impact than similar demonstrations held in other parts of the nation. Grassroots anti-war activism in Texas was rare.¹⁴

That most Texans were hard liners on Vietnam, communism, liberalism, and passivity was no secret. Yet the war in Vietnam exacerbated factional tensions in the Democratic Party and heightened points of stress that already existed between the state and national leadership. Though the overwhelming majority of the state’s elected officials publicly supported the war, a very small minority of liberal Democrats saw the growing division as an opportunity. These liberals exploited the division and rancor that existed between ideological factions in the hopes of sparking substantive partisan (and ideological) realignment. Texas liberals continued to push for a viable two-party Texas in which they would have a significant presence in a state Democratic Party they hoped would one day mirror the philosophical and legislative impetus of the national party. When it came to the issue of Vietnam, conservatives and liberals within the Texas Democratic Party each hoped to purge its opposition from the party.

¹³ *Texas Observer*, May 26, 1967, 8.

¹⁴ *Texas Observer*, November 10, 1967, 11.

Two of the more prominent Texas liberals using the Vietnam War as means to ideological and partisan realignment were Bob Eckhardt and Henry B. Gonzalez. In April 1967, at a speech given to the Texas Young Democrats' state convention in Austin, Congressman Bob Eckhardt of Houston became the first high Texas officeholder to attack directly the premise of American involvement in Vietnam by calling for unilateral de-escalation.¹⁵ That summer, Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio was the only congressman from Texas to vote against a 4-year draft extension. Gonzalez also voted against a draft-extension, he and Eckhardt were two of only sixteen congressmen to oppose a bill making the desecration of the United States flag a federal crime.¹⁶ Texas liberals like Eckhardt and Gonzalez represented the state's minority and working class populations, segments of society that seemed to be paying a disproportionately high price in blood during the war. While many Texas families chose to honor their fallen sons by supporting the war effort and maintaining an anticommunist outlook, Texas liberals tried to communicate the injustices of the war to those who were paying the greatest price and receiving the least financial benefit. Though successful among local constituents, liberals like Eckhardt and Gonzalez had difficulty spreading their message to the rest of the state. The actions of political leaders like Bob Eckhardt and Henry B. Gonzalez emboldened the state's liberal contingent, but also emboldened conservative Texas Democrats who began to view even small pockets of opposition to the war as a potential source of intra-party factionalism and a possible threat to the state's political status quo.¹⁷

Throughout 1967 and 1968, Lyndon Johnson endured attacks coming from seemingly every direction. In the midst of those attacks, he hoped to find solace in the Democratic loyalties of his home state. That Johnson still viewed Texas as safe ground, despite strife within the state

¹⁵ *Texas Observer*, April 28, 1967, 8.

¹⁶ *Texas Observer*, July 21, 1967, 13.

¹⁷ *Texas Observer*, November 24, 1967, 5.

Democratic Party, is a testament to exactly how fractured and divided LBJ's party was at the national level during the late 1960s. For the nation's commander-in-chief, maintaining popularity in his home state, which had become increasingly difficult as the onslaught of Great Society legislation, to many Texans, smacked of federal expansionism and socialism, was a prioritized goal and a political necessity.¹⁸ In Texas, the war in Vietnam actually helped to solidify Johnson's stature when it otherwise might have faltered.

It was also during this time that Johnson began to worry more about his own image and legacy. Seeking counsel from political strategists and tacticians, Johnson slowly came to the realization that the nation's political culture had passed him by. Television had not been a friend to him and his public credibility was rapidly falling. At the same time, the Solid South was experiencing a demographic facelift—one that was also prompting reconsiderations of ideological conviction and partisan loyalty.¹⁹ Johnson's advisors worried that the influx of young suburban professionals in urban centers like Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston were coalescing into a potentially formidable voting bloc that would not be persuaded by the folksy and rural populism Johnson had used to rise to power in Texas in the previous decades.²⁰

Still, Johnson's biggest problem both nationally and in Texas was his growing "credibility gap."²¹ While Texans supported Johnson out of loyalty and many out of a hawkish agreement with overall war aims, federal policy on Vietnam was not above criticism in Texas,

¹⁸ Memorandum, From: Jerry Hursh, To: Doug Bennet, Re: Texas, October 15, 1968, Box 178, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, LBJL.

¹⁹ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Republican Research Report: The Crisis in Credibility, June 9, 1966, Papers of the Republican Party [microform], ed. Paul L. Kesaris, Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1987, George Smathers Libraries, University of Florida (Hereafter cited as PRP), Part II, Reel 4, Frames 606-626.

²⁰ "A White Paper for the President on the 1968 Presidential Campaign: CONFIDENTIAL," By Lawrence F. O'Brien, September 29, 1967, 1968 Campaign Reference File, LBJL; Undated Q&A Preparation, By George Christian, White House, Box 4Ad27, George Christian Papers, CAH; Undated Brownwood speech, Box 4Ad27, George Christian Papers, CAH.

²¹ Polls Folder, Box 38, National Security File: Subject File, Presidential Papers of Lyndon B. Johnson, LBJL.

where many Republicans believed the national Democratic leadership was no longer capable of achieving military success in Southeast Asia. Johnson's credibility gap opened an important door for Texas Republicans seeking to unite conservatives. Buoyed by Johnson's failures and the increasing association of liberalism with those failures, Republicans linked the credibility gap with issues of honesty, integrity, trust, and morality. In tandem with the social anxiety expressed by men such as Ben Carpenter, national issues and iconic failures combined to create a potent conservative force in Texas. Over the course of the next decade, the linkage between morality, trust, anticommunism, and anti-liberalism became a bread-and-butter strategy for conservative Republicans.²²

Vietnam contributed to several broader problems for Johnson, both nationally and in Texas. The appearance that Vietnam had become a mess, that the mess was in some way Johnson's fault, and that liberals within Johnson's party were undermining the war effort, demanded the attention of White House aides and fellow Texans Bill Moyers and George Christian, who tried to revitalize their boss's image first by appealing to the media and then by appealing to Texas Democratic loyalties. Neither strategy worked.²³ Instead, it was conservatives first in the Texas GOP and then in both parties who used the media to connect failures in Vietnam with images of dangerous riots, looters, lack of law enforcement, and unsafe neighborhoods—all of which, it was argued, was the result of an inadequate and ill-conceived government bureaucracy which not only failed to prevent such chaos, but directly contributed to it.²⁴ While the state Democratic Party struggled to maintain a united front or balance its loyalties

²² Republican Research Report: The Crisis in Credibility, June 9, 1966, PRP, Part II, Reel 4, Frames 606-626.

²³ Memorandum to the President, From: Ben Wattenberg, January 16, 1967, "Image Problem," Box 56, Office Files of Harry McPherson, LBJL; Miscellaneous Speeches. Box 4Ad29, George Christian Papers, CAH.

²⁴ "A White Paper for the President on the 1968 Presidential Campaign: CONFIDENTIAL," By Lawrence F. O'Brien, September 29, 1967, 1968 Campaign Reference File, LBJL.

with criticisms of how the nation had devolved under Johnson's leadership, LBJ seemed under attack from multiple directions. In Texas, however, Johnson's home state advantage seemed to be dissipating primarily because of attacks from within.

John Connally and Democratic Factionalism

No conservative Democrat possessed a more loyal following in Texas than John Connally. In 1966, then in his second of three terms as governor, Connally was among several conservatives who, at the Texas State Democratic Party Convention, attempted to strike a preventive blow against any potential liberal insurgency that seemed to threaten the conservative stronghold in the state. Connally's weapon of choice was a rhetorical call to ideological arms, couched as a patriotic duty to the independence and frontier spirit of his state, under assault from encroaching federalism. "Greatness is not an attribute of government, but of the people who create them and are their masters," Connally reminded those in attendance. "If this era is to be remembered as a time of greatness, it must be because the people stood taller, rather than because their government grew larger."²⁵ Despite its economic dependence on federal military contracts, the general attitude of conservative Texans toward government ranged from reluctance and suspicion to aversion and hostility. Such sensibilities reflected both the historical legacies of populism in the state, as well as populism's changing nature.

In addition to its populist heritage of anti-elitism and rural political awareness, Texas also had strong conservative underpinnings. Traditionalists and grassroots conservatives had begun to consider the social and political uproar of the 1960s as evidence of a national crisis. In the midst of that crisis, Texas conservatives recognized the growing importance of communicating and codifying ideology in such a way as to unify the grassroots. These conservatives, active in

²⁵ Program, Texas State Democratic Convention, September 20, 1966, Austin, TX, Box 615, Preston Smith Papers, SWC.

both parties, recognized the importance of ideological coalescence, though they predictably disagreed on how achieving that coalescence should affect partisan loyalties. Texas Democrats sought conservative unity in the context of partisan tradition, whereas Texas Republicans wanted realignment based on ideology. This battle was fought on the grounds of a new conservatism—one that harkened to a populist tradition and gave voice to both anti-government and anti-communist sentiment.

Predictably, these Republicans and liberal Democrats differed in their opinion as to how best go about solving these problems. More important to the state's political culture, however, was factionalism within the Texas Democratic Party. Despite efforts by Texas conservatives like Connally to use rhetoric as a means of preserving the state's Democratic status quo, factionalism and division had noticeably worsened when Texas Democrats assembled for their state convention in June 1968.²⁶ In the wake of Johnson's decision to withdraw from the race and Robert F. Kennedy's assassination earlier that month, two factions of Texas liberals—one supporting the presidential candidacy of Vice President and former Minnesota Senator Hubert H. Humphrey and another supporting Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy—contributed to the sense of acrimony permeating the convention halls. At the same time, some conservative Democrats refused to embrace either candidate and instead backed John Connally. The heralding of Connally as a presidential candidate reflected the sincere desires of many grassroots conservatives in Texas, in addition to much of the state party's established high command. However, promoting Connally was also a calculated effort to increase the odds of having a Texan (and more importantly, a conservative) on the national ticket.²⁷

²⁶ Letter, May 31, 1967, To: The President, From: J.P. Coleman; Dallas Times Herald, October 27, 1968, Box 70, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, LBJL.

²⁷ James Reston, *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1989), 344, 370-371.

Connally's popularity in Texas was unquestioned. He had gained a certain aura in the aftermath of the JFK assassination, during which he sustained and survived potentially life-threatening wounds. To a small degree, but one that grew more evident in the coming years, Connally embodied the redemption of Texas in the aftermath of Kennedy's death in Dallas. Numerous conservatives across the state began to reinterpret recent electoral history, citing Connally's popularity and coattails as the main reason for Johnson's overwhelming victory in the state four years earlier. Re-writing their own history so as to distance themselves from Johnson, many conservatives even claimed to have been driven to the polls in previous years out of their support for Connally's campaigns for governor, rather than out of their enthusiasm or loyalty to Johnson. Johnson himself lent some credibility to these assertions when he withdrew from the presidential race the previous March. Insiders believed Connally's decision not to run for re-election in Texas was the nail in Johnson's political coffin. Without Connally's coattails, Johnson feared the embarrassment of losing his home state to any number of conservative alternatives.²⁸

Johnson was not the only one concerned that Texas might swing Republican in 1968. State and local races, most of which featured incumbent conservative Democrats, featured strategies similar to RNC efforts to localize issues like crime, excessive government, and hawkish anticommunism. The Texas delegation's commitment to Connally, and only secondarily to Johnson's vice president, fueled the efforts of conservative Democrats who wanted to make a stand against the left of their party at the national convention in Chicago.

Many conservative Texas Democrats felt as though they were under siege in the summer of 1968. In addition to fending off the liberalization of their national party, they further struggled to deflect a barrage of challenges to the established party leadership and to the

²⁸ Ibid., CH 15, 342-343.

Connally delegation's legitimacy in Chicago—both challenges led by the populist (or liberal, depending on who was describing him) Ralph Yarborough. In response to Yarborough, conservatives across the state initiated a full-scale public relations campaign, targeting local party offices, blanketing the grassroots with material designed to induce fears that without Connally's presence on the national ticket, the Democratic Party would succumb to the liberal Eastern Establishment's assault on the traditional values and integrity of the state party.

Connally's goals at the Chicago convention were two-fold. First and foremost, he hoped to block the efforts of Yarborough's liberal insurgency to gain even the slightest bit of credibility with the national party, particularly in the context of shaping the national platform. Second, Connally hoped to block the nomination of a liberal to head the Democratic presidential ticket. He was perfectly fine with the prospect that in order to do this, he might have to secure the nomination for himself—or at the very least earn the second spot on the ticket.²⁹

Throughout the convention, Yarborough acted as a thorn in Connally's side. Yarborough's efforts were almost successful, thanks to an increase in liberal and minority participation within the national Democratic Party. Conservative fears that their place within a liberalizing national party were being threatened seem, in retrospect, largely justified. Liberal influence was most certainly on the rise, particularly as the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had exponentially increased African-American participation in the South by over 50 percent. For conservative Texas Democrats, these threats to the political status quo via minority voting participation and intra-party factionalism were only overshadowed by the chaos that was erupting on the streets of Chicago and outside the convention hall. On consecutive nights during

²⁹ Ibid.; Memorandum, November 30, 1967, by Marianne Means, Box 70, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, LBJL.

the convention, members of the Texas delegation found themselves under attack from protesters who gathered outside their hotel rooms.³⁰

At the convention's close, Johnson's vice president and not Johnson's longtime political ally found himself the nominee of his party for president. What especially irked conservative Texas Democrats, though, was that Connally had also been denied the second spot on the ticket. Despite, thwarting Yarborough's efforts and helping the convention to avoid nominating a more liberal candidate, Connally's experience in Chicago left him permanently embittered toward the liberal wing of his party. He believed Johnson had betrayed him by floating the possibility of the vice presidency in exchange for his support of Humphrey. The forces of loyalty and tradition kept Connally in check for the general campaign, but the long-term damage had been done.³¹

Strange Victory

Nominated in the midst of a tumultuous convention and a divided party, Hubert Humphrey lost his bid for the presidency in 1968. Many political observers then and later viewed the 1968 elections as a referendum on the Johnson presidency. This is not, however, how the story played out in the Lone Star State. Though defeated by Richard Nixon in a very narrow three-way national race that included Alabama's George Wallace, Humphrey still managed to carry Texas—the only Sunbelt state carried by the Democratic candidate that year. Humphrey's victory in Texas raises a number of interesting questions as to the nature of Texas political culture in the late 1960s.³²

John Connally's position atop the Democratic Party's campaign efforts in Texas was arguably the biggest factor in Humphrey's success there. Connally's commitment to the Humphrey campaign, despite his being snubbed at the nominating convention in Chicago, was

³⁰ Bass and DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 41-56.

³¹ Reston, *The Lone Star*, 366-371

³² *Ibid.*

indicative of just how binding the culture of tradition and loyalty was in Texas throughout the 1960s. Connally's support had several motivations. Through August, he maintained hope of being added to the Democratic ticket as the party's vice presidential nominee. At the same time, Connally actively opposed the other Democratic contenders, whom he considered far too liberal. When the vice presidential nomination went to Edmund Muskie instead, it was not until Connally's loyalty to the party had already been publicly tested at the convention. Connally remained loyal and was, in fact, among a handful of Texas Democrats who endorsed and organized Humphrey's campaign efforts—the only serious efforts organized by any Democrats on behalf of Humphrey in any Southern state. In the early months of the campaign, Connally's trust and popularity among Texans was strong enough to keep Humphrey afloat, though unenthusiastic campaigning resulted in a miniscule \$150,000 in campaign donations—less than a tenth of what had been raised for Johnson in Texas four years earlier.³³

Connally's most effective strategy was to avoid mentioning Humphrey as much as possible. Rather, the efforts on Humphrey's behalf focused on LBJ and the state's tradition of and loyalty to the Democratic Party. Texas Democrats rallied to Johnson, anti-Republicanism, and tradition far more than they did to Humphrey or the national Democratic Party. As conservative Democratic candidates across the state jumped on board with Humphrey, many constituents followed suit. In the months immediately following the Chicago convention, many conservative Democrats in Texas rallied together to unite the party around the issues of loyalty, tradition, and many of the same populist strategies Republicans were also trying to use to their benefit.³⁴

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980: The Story of the South's Modernization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 396; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965-1970), Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968, 963.

These successful efforts aside, Humphrey was not without his problems in Texas. Connally was the recognized leader of the Texas Democratic Party and his support for Humphrey encouraged others to do the same. Connally, however, could not hide his tepid enthusiasm. As the fall campaign progressed, the united Democratic front began to weaken. When Humphrey gained national momentum by “going dove,” Connally’s support wavered—as did Johnson’s. During a campaign trip to Houston, Humphrey focused on his proposed “de-Americanization” of the war in Vietnam. These remarks were coupled with a not-so-subtle critique of Johnson’s handling of that conflict. Most Houstonians were not amused. Letters to the editor flooded Houston-area newspapers, linking Humphrey with Northeastern liberalism, the anti-war crowd, and inherent weakness. Humphrey’s liberalism was increasingly difficult to hide from the Texas public as the campaign wore on. The Democratic nominee openly rejected the Law & Order rhetoric that most conservative Texas Democrats had adopted, repelled criticism that he was failing to listen to or even cared about the majority of Texans’ stands on both economic issues and on the war, and refused to establish an official party headquarters in the state, instead milking the funds and energy of the state party.³⁵ Republicans capitalized on the negative press and charged that Humphrey was disrespecting Texas voters and caving into the left wing of his party.³⁶

Humphrey again visited Houston in late-September, this time for a Democratic fundraiser, where he eagerly joined Ralph Yarborough in multiple photo-ops, referring to both he and Yarborough as a pair of “bone fide liberals.” Humphrey’s association with Yarborough at the dinner prompted Connally to reject an invitation to introduce Humphrey, which had been

³⁵ Opinion Research Corporation: Issues and Forces in 1968 Presidential Election, Box 2M752, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH; The Humphrey Handbook for the 1968 Presidential Campaign, PRP, Part II, Reel 5, Frames 589-642.

³⁶ *Houston Chronicle*, September 22, 1968, Box 4C515, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

extended to him personally by the Democratic nominee. Humphrey's cozy new relationship with Yarborough irked Connally and further chilled to the Texas Governor's already lukewarm support. By October, Johnson was personally and very actively intervening in Texas on behalf of Humphrey and the national Democratic Party, though his influence over Connally and other conservatives—even those who were publicly loyal to the president—privately waned.³⁷

Like Connally, Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate and ardent conservative Preston Smith, declined an invitation to appear alongside Humphrey at the Houston fundraiser.³⁸ Though he shared Humphrey's partisan identification, it was clear from his campaign strategy that Smith shared little else with the Democratic presidential nominee. Smith, who had served as Connally's Lieutenant Governor since 1962, wanted to disassociate himself from all things “liberal” and both Humphrey and Yarborough seemed to be just that.

Smith's campaign would have made any Texas conservative proud. Though not especially media savvy, he was smart enough to consult numerous public relations and advertising firms in a concerted effort to construct a conservative image tailored to the Texas heartland. At the epicenter of these efforts was a blunt anti-liberalism used to distance Smith from the chaos of the national party. Smith's advertising campaign reflected these efforts. During the fall of 1968, he ran 60-second television commercials in which he derided liberals as “defeatist and negative.” He labeled himself a traditionalist, a loyalist, and a conservative. His commercials promised that he would never “leave any of you alone to face riots in the streets of Texas.” He vilified special interest groups, big government, and equated liberals to both. Smith, who by 1970 found himself under the tutelage of former Goldwater and Reagan campaign advisor F. Clifton White, even championed his “heritage of individualism” and claimed a

³⁷ Reston, *The Lone Star*, 372-374; Remarks of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey to the Houston Area Labor Leaders, September 11, 1968, Box 281, Series I, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL.

³⁸ *Houston Chronicle*, September 10, 1968, Box 4C515, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

populist high-ground—one that affirmed him as truly “of the people.” The conservative Texas press trumpeted Smith’s candidacy as right for Texas on the issues of crime and taxation, but Smith’s success was about more than just issues. It was also about not letting a liberalized national party drown a conservative Democrat running for governor in Texas.³⁹

Even in the midst of a divided national party and reluctant support from the state party leadership, both Smith and Humphrey walked away victorious when Texas went to the polls in November. What can be said to explain this? One explanation is that Smith and other conservative Texas Democrats were successful in 1968 because they ran as conservatives. These Democrats won for the same reasons they had always won.

But what about Humphrey’s win? To a large degree, Humphrey carried Texas because of conservative coattails and Democratic loyalties, particularly to Johnson. Humphrey’s margin of victory, however, was very slim. Undoubtedly, many conservatives chose to split their ballots once they entered the voting booth. Not every explanation for Humphrey’s win in Texas in 1968 goes back simply to the behavior and activity of state Democrats. As Texas Democrats struggled to maintain the status quo, the Texas GOP grew stronger as it strove for ideological coalescence and partisan realignment. In 1968, the Texas GOP coordinated with the national party to communicate a specific image on issues of crime and war.

Though unsuccessful at the electoral level, these efforts so neatly paralleled the conservative impulse of many state Democrats that the ideological coalescence sought by Republicans seemed more legitimate, viable, and achievable. The demise of the New Deal

³⁹ “The Candidate’s Guide to Radio,” February 16, 1968, Memorandum, From: MLS, To: Harold; General Text, Television Spot, Box 615, Preston Smith Papers, SWC; Advertisement Copy, May 24, 1968, Box 615, Preston Smith Papers, SWC; General Correspondence, Box 615, Preston Smith Papers, SWC; Letter from F. Clifton White to Preston Smith, October 12, 1970, Box 625, Preston Smith Papers, SWC; Letter from Mike McKinnon to George Mahon, May 18, 1971, Box 435, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

coalition in Texas was largely the result of Democratic factionalism, but that factionalism was exacerbated by a renewed energy coming from within the state GOP.

Strange Defeat

Not surprisingly, Republicans, both nationally and in Texas, benefited from the factionalism that threatened to tear apart the New Deal coalition. Yet, while the factious nature of the Democratic Party was arguably the more attention-grabbing story in 1968, Republicans continued to labor for a conservative coalition of their own. Aiding this process in Texas was a population influx, the source of which was rooted in the very Sunbelt suburbia that befuddled Johnson and his old-guard populist style. This new dynamic altered partisan loyalties and perceptions in Texas, as was also the case in Florida and Virginia—all states that experienced a surge in population thanks to the migration of Northern workers into the thriving Sunbelt economy.⁴⁰ Though this was true enough in 1968, the changes wrought by this migration had yet to reach full maturity. This was evident, as was the fractiousness of Texas Republican politics, in the 1968 GOP gubernatorial campaign of Paul Eggers.

Eggers entered the political scene as tax attorney, Republican leader in Wichita Falls, and a friend of John Tower. In fact, it was after Tower's 1966 senate victory over Waggoner Carr that Republicans first began to consider seriously the possibility of winning the governorship. While his credentials superficially appeared to be just the recipe for attracting the needed coalition of Republicans and anti-establishment Democrats (both conservative and liberal), early reactions to Eggers were lukewarm. This can partially be explained by understanding that Eggers's campaign was a surprisingly low priority for the state GOP. The Texas Republican Party had long existed not as a viable electoral organization in the state, but rather as a patronage machine, whereby state-level benefits depended on the national party's success and generosity.

⁴⁰ Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, 429.

Quite simply, the established leadership within the Texas Republican Party owed quite a bit of loyalty to the national party. This, in essence, was the GOP's own little tradition in Texas. In keeping with this tradition, the Texas Republican Party prioritized Richard Nixon's presidential campaign above all other efforts. At the same time, a number of conservatives within the Republican Party found themselves far more enamored with the conservative Democrat Preston Smith than with the moderate Eggers. The result was a poorly financed and poorly supported campaign on Eggers's behalf.⁴¹

Eggers earned the Republican nomination for governor on the backs of the party's moderate wing—those who, in the aftermath of 1964, lamented their association with extremism and magnified the importance of winning elections over conservative proselytizing of the unconverted. Though they actively tried to distance themselves from the national GOP's Eastern Establishment, moderate Texas Republicans irritated conservatives, leaving Eggers without a unified base. There were several reasons for conservatives' displeasure with Eggers. For one, moderate Texas Republicans whose first goal was party building, not ideological dogma wanted a candidate who could take liberal votes away from Democrats. Eggers was such a candidate and attracted a sizable number of liberal Democrats, most of whom were convinced that without genuine two-party reform in Texas, liberals would never have an opportunity to shape public policy. In voting for Republicans like Eggers and Tower, liberal Democrats annoyed conservatives within their own party, but also annoyed conservative Republicans who used Eggers's attraction of liberals as evidence of his unacceptability as a bone fide conservative.⁴²

⁴¹ *Houston Chronicle*, November 27, 1966, November 10, 1968, Box, 4C514, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

⁴² Hawkins Henley Menefee, "The Two-Party Democrats, The Study of a Texas Political Faction," MA Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, January 1970, Box 1, John Knaggs Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

Eggers's campaign was further undermined by a small cadre of Texas Republicans whose power had long been contingent not upon party building but on patronage from the national GOP. Fearing that Eggers's moderation in the face of Smith's conservatism would play into the hands of liberals seeking to foment two-party reform in Texas, many of these Texas Republicans shunned Eggers as a danger to the state's conservative balance. At the same time, conservative Republicans attempting to spark realignment were disgruntled over the prospects of touting a moderate against Preston Smith's tough-nosed law & order. In a chaotic political culture in which the Eggers nomination was viewed almost like a pawn in a larger chess match over the future of state party politics, Eggers struggled to find conservative supporters in Texas and utterly failed to mobilize conservative Democrats against Smith.⁴³

Eggers was also ineffective in his efforts to attract conservative support via radio or television and, instead, took to the highways where he spent the summer of 1968 not only courting conservatives, but also minorities, labor leaders, and liberals—to all of whom he argued a viable second party was critical. Among liberals and minorities, Eggers was surprisingly successful and even earned the endorsement of the notably liberal political periodical, the *Texas Observer*. The Republican's appeal to moderate and liberal Democrats matured in part thanks to a series of effective campaign speeches dealing with the long-held populist notions that Austin politics was a “good ‘ole boys club” and inherently corrupt. Along these lines, Eggers attempted to draw connections between the conservative Texas Democratic establishment and the credibility gap problems of Lyndon Johnson's White House.⁴⁴

⁴³ Candidate Strategy for 1968: Confidential (First Draft), March 6, 1967, Folder 3, Box 639, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁴⁴ *Texas Observer*, October 18, 1968, 1-4; “Republican Research Report: Is the Democratic Party Fit to Govern? May 15, 1968,” PRP, Part II, Reel 6, Frame 328.

While Eggers's strategy earned him the support of some liberals and only few conservatives, Richard Nixon seemed more aware of the political winds blowing through Texas in 1968. More importantly, Nixon's campaign team understood those winds and attempted to channel that energy into a public relations campaign designed to localize national issues and win support in disparate regions through a purposefully vague conservative rhetoric. In some ways, Nixon's 1968 campaign strategy reflected lessons learned from his previous political defeats. In 1960, Nixon promised to visit all fifty states during his campaign. Eight years later, his experience told him instead to concentrate on targeted audiences. Nixon's ability to secure the Republican nomination was in many respects an indication of his ability to do at the national level what Eggers could not achieve in Texas—unify conservatives and moderates under the same party. For Nixon, this meant a strategy focused on winning conservatives in the South, winning moderates in the North, and convincing both sides that he was really one of them.⁴⁵

Nixon's strategy, however, was not initially as effective in Texas as he hoped. Prior to his securing of the nomination in Miami, Nixon's chief rival for conservative affections in Texas was Ronald Reagan, who had burst onto the national scene as a result of his charismatic support for Goldwater in 1964. Over 63 percent of voting Texans had rejected Goldwater in 1964. Few notable grassroots organizations had operated on his behalf. By 1968, however, Reagan began establishing pockets of influence in the state in conjunction with his first campaign for the presidency. Texans saw Reagan very differently than they had seen Goldwater. Nearly fifty percent of Texans had found Goldwater too "radical" to risk a vote on in 1964, but only a tenth of Texans felt the same way about Reagan in 1968. Unlike Goldwater, Reagan maintained support among the state's business community while simultaneously appearing to be a rank-and-

⁴⁵ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 68-71.

file populist conservative without an extremist agenda but with media savvy. Reagan also benefited from George Wallace's campaign in 1968, which absorbed the brunt of Texans' hostility to radical extremism and gave Reagan breathing room against similar attacks. In a sense, Wallace absorbed the extremist labels that Reagan, as a Goldwater disciple, might have been expected to bear in Texas.⁴⁶

Though the 1968 campaigns are generally remembered as a three-way contest between Nixon, Humphrey, and Wallace, in Texas, the emergence of Ronald Reagan as a presidential candidate was equally as significant and perhaps more so, particularly if analyzed through a long-term lens. With charm and charisma, Reagan used the Texas press in 1968 to endear himself to the state's conservatives and establish a substantial grassroots base.⁴⁷ Reagan, who publicly opposed the candidacy of George Wallace and whose personal relationship with Goldwater deteriorated when the Arizona Senator privately lectured the California governor on his duty to support Nixon, launched an unofficial campaign for the GOP presidential nomination with a summer barbecue fundraiser in Amarillo, Texas.⁴⁸ As Reagan attempted to distance himself from Wallace on race while appealing to similar positions on anti-government hostility and anticommunism, he also made great strides among Republican conservatives in Texas who had been reticent to support Nixon, whom they viewed as the choice of the party's Eastern Establishment.⁴⁹ Reagan's appearances in Texas blended partisan attacks with conservative appeals. He tried not to alienate conservative Democrats in Texas and actually attempted to

⁴⁶ July 26, 1968, Note to Editors, Congressional Quarterly Service, Box 2M752, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH; September 8, 1967 Memorandum, From: Fred Panzer, To: The President. White House Name File: Ronald Reagan, LBJL; The Belden Poll, September 1967, Box 178, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, LBJL; Statewide Poll, September 29, 1967, Box 70, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, LBJL.

⁴⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, August 7, 1968, 5A; *Dallas Morning News*, August 6, 1968, 1A.

⁴⁸ Press Release, November 13, 1967, Box GO152, Governor Ronald Reagan Papers, 1967-1975, RRL.

⁴⁹ Transcript: Gov. Wallace on the Joey Bishop Show, Box 281, Series 1, Records of the Democratic National Committee, LBJL; Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 263-265. Reagan also distanced himself from the issue of abortion in 1968; Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

befriend them as “God-fearing and patriotic” and not in keeping with the leftward swaying of their national party, to which, he always reminded his Texas audiences, he had also once belonged.⁵⁰

Texas Republicans enjoyed rare momentum leading up to the 1968 campaigns and much of this was credited to Reagan’s regular presence in the state. Reagan was the Texas GOP’s top headliner and was invited to speak at multiple Republican fundraisers across the state. Twice in 1967, Reagan headlined a conservative all-star cast at fundraisers in Dallas. The former Hollywood actor did not disappoint. Reagan’s speeches in Dallas combined hard-hitting assaults on Robert F. Kennedy, Ted Kennedy, and LBJ with sporadic comedic breaks and a charm that forced the liberal *Texas Observer* to lament, “This man is no Goldwater.” Reagan’s ability to frustrate his liberal rivals further endeared him to conservatives.⁵¹

In comparing Johnson’s Great Society to a second-rate “rehash of the dark, dismal days of the past,” Reagan also set a standard for LBJ-bashing in Texas. While tactically avoiding any criticism or mention of John Connally, Reagan directly attacked LBJ as an enemy of populist conservatism. In doing so, Reagan contributed to the process of dismantling the dominance of tradition and loyalty among Texas conservatives. Reagan’s critiques of Johnson were, for the most part, limited to the Great Society. On the issue of Vietnam, Reagan ardently supported a continued, but stronger war effort against communism across the globe, thereby placing him in accord with conservative Texas hawks in both parties. Reagan also attacked big government as having been set up in opposition to the vast majority of Americans’ interests, linked this to Johnson’s widening credibility gap, and even blamed LBJ’s social policies for the fomentation of

⁵⁰ Speech, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX, October 26, 1967, Tape 296, Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Audiotape collection: 1965-74, RRL.

⁵¹ “Town Meeting of the World: “The Image of America and the Youth of the World” with Sen. Robert F. Kennedy and Governor Ronald Reagan,” As Broadcast over the CBS Television Network and CBS Radio Network. Monday, May 15, 1967, 10:00-11:00 pm EDT, Charles Collingwood, Host. TRANSCRIPT SOURCE: RRL.

radical leftist splinter groups. LBJ-bashing in Texas was a fine art and one that could only succeed by prioritizing Johnson's liberalism while calling upon LBJ to do more, not less, to win the war in Vietnam. Nobody was better at this balancing act than Ronald Reagan.⁵²

Reagan's speeches in Texas charmed his conservative audiences. He deftly used humor, told stories, but transitioned sharply to measured diatribes against big government, "the planned economy," and the "moral laxity and crime in the streets" that accompanied it—all while characterizing the Republican Party as the more populist, future-oriented, and modern party. Reagan's rhetoric was simple, to the point, and had a populist tinge and appeal. Yet the roots of Reagan conservatism also lay in the intellectual tradition of conservative thought revived by pundits and academicians since World War II. In branding the fusion of libertarianism and moral conservatism as anticommunism, anti-liberalism, and populist conservatism, Reagan engendered tremendous grassroots support in Texas.⁵³ He proclaimed himself to be on a "Crusade for the people" and skillfully set conservative Republicanism in Texas apart from liberal, intellectual, and collectivist elitism.⁵⁴

Throughout the earliest months of 1968, Reagan was the only Republican candidate to consistently out-perform LBJ in public opinion polls across the South. In Texas alone, Reagan ran stronger against Johnson than did any other candidate.⁵⁵ In the summer of 1968, Reagan's grassroots supporters in Texas found themselves at the center of a factious Republican

⁵² *Dallas Times Herald*, October 27, 1967; *Texas Observer*, December 22, 1967, 2; Press Conference, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX, October 26, 1967, Tape 296, Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Audiotape collection: 1965-74, RRL.

⁵³ Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Tradition in America Since 1945*.

⁵⁴ Speech, Rice Hotel, Houston, TX, October 26, 1967, Tape 296, Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Audiotape collection: 1965-74, RRL.

⁵⁵ July 26, 1968, Note to Editors, Congressional Quarterly Service, Box 2M752, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH; September 8, 1967 Memorandum, From: Fred Panzer, To: The President. White House Name File: Ronald Reagan, LBJL; The Belden Poll, September 1967, Box 178, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, LBJL; Statewide Poll, September 29, 1967, Box 70, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, LBJL; General Correspondence, Box 4, Kathryn R. Davis Papers, HI.

controversy. At the Texas GOP Convention in June, over 300 Reagan grassroots supporters unexpectedly filed into the Corpus Christi convention hall waving placards in support of a Reagan White House bid. These conservatives hope to sway enough delegates from Nixon to give Reagan a strong Texas following and momentum as the national convention in Miami approached.

To some degree, Reagan's supporters succeeded. The intensity and persistence of the Reagan backers in Corpus Christi, a throng comprised largely of middle class white suburbanites from various locales across the state, prompted the national party establishment to consider Reagan as a potential running mate on the Nixon ticket.⁵⁶ Ultimately, though, Reagan's grassroots support was not enough to trump the state party hierarchy. Though Reagan was an appealing candidate for many Texas conservatives, the state GOP leadership was reluctant to endorse a candidate who stood in direct opposition to the Republican Eastern Establishment and thereby threatened, in their estimation, the party's ability to make the GOP viable in Texas. Though enamored with Reagan's brand of conservatism, the collective will of the Texas GOP hierarchy stood behind the choice of the national party—Richard Nixon.

Two months later, Reagan supporters flooded Miami and courted the 56-member Nixon-pledged Texas delegation. Their efforts to generate support for the California Governor included the sponsorship of an all-night Reagan movie marathon on the evening prior to the convention's first day. The attention Reagan received from his Lone Star State supporters grabbed the majority of print space in Texas newspapers' coverage of the Republican meeting. The *Dallas Morning News* consistently ran three to four stories on Reagan, his wife, and his supporters for every one they ran on Nixon or any other candidate. One reporter noted, "The enthusiasm of the

⁵⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, June 12, 1968, 1A.

Reagan followers has been perhaps the most spectacular feature of an otherwise lackluster pre-convention period.”⁵⁷

On the convention’s first day, Reagan met with the California delegation, formally announced his candidacy, and attempted (via a team of strategists and campaign workers) to sway Texas delegates’ votes. Many delegates entertained the argument that a vote for Reagan would increase the likelihood of his being asked to join the Nixon ticket and fifteen delegates did, for that reason, switch their vote. When approached by reporters in the coming days, each of the remaining Nixon delegates openly supported Reagan’s candidacy in the press, but deferred their vote to Nixon, they said, solely on the basis of his substantial advantage in foreign affairs experience.⁵⁸

Though unsuccessful in their bid to capture Texas on behalf of the conservative cause, the exuberance of Reagan’s Lone Star State support intrigued Nixon, who both detested and was fascinated by the power of conservative Texas Democrats like John Connally. Nixon’s frustration over his inability to secure the loyalty of Texas conservatives eventually contributed to his selection of Connally as a cabinet member, but also forced a reckoning among like-minded moderate-conservatives who understood the political power of Texas frontierism, but not necessarily its nature. Shortly after accepting the Republican nomination, Nixon made appeals to Texas conservatives by referring to the state as unique and “not Southern” while embracing, by name, Ronald Reagan as an icon of Texas frontier populism.⁵⁹

Reagan had a rhetorical impact on Nixon’s campaign against Humphrey, but also set Nixon up for comparisons with Reagan in Texas. Both Nixon and the RNC waged an aggressive

⁵⁷ *Dallas Morning News*, August 5, 1968 – August 9, 1968, section A.

⁵⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, August 7, 1968, 5A; *Dallas Morning News*, August 6, 1968, 1A.

⁵⁹ “Meeting of the Republican National Committee, August 9, 1968: Remarks by Richard M. Nixon,” PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 7, Frames 52-66; Reston, *The Lone Star*, 372-376.

campaign against Humphrey and liberalism, associating the two with chaos, weakness, incompetence, untrustworthiness, and divisiveness. Nixon was particularly fond of blaming the federal government and liberalism for failing to address the nation's rising crime rates and obstructing law enforcement. In reciting crime statistics and using images of lawlessness, Nixon claimed Humphrey was not strong enough to be president and portrayed the Democratic nominee as more concerned with the "rights of the guilty" than with the "rights of the victim."⁶⁰

Nixon attracted supporters in Texas through emotional appeals that reflected a variety of preconceived prejudices and ideological convictions, ranging from libertarian anti-statism to overt racism. The reception of Nixon's message depended on the audience, which is, in large part, what made it effective. Suburban whites did not have to hold racist beliefs in order to find common ground with Nixon's call for safer neighborhoods. Rural whites, particularly those in East Texas where racial fears had traditionally been the strongest and the population was most diverse, did not have to live in a suburban neighborhood to see race riots as evidence of social and racial instability, brought on by outside agitators, liberals, and the federal government. By using the power of broadcast media to manipulate images of crime and violence for political effect, Nixon touched on issues that conservative Texas Democrats were also using to great effect, thus advancing his own credibility in the state as a populist conservative rather than the moderate Republican the state had seen him as in 1960.

As the fall campaign progressed, it was clear that Nixon enjoyed several advantages over Humphrey in Texas. Between the state's anticommunist hawks who feared liberal passivity in Vietnam and a growing suburban middle class for which the mantra of "Law & Order" offered hope that future political leaders might protect them against rising crime rates and violence, the

⁶⁰ Meeting of the Republican National Committee, August 9, 1968: Remarks by Richard M. Nixon," PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 7, Frames 589-642; Memorandum for R. Nixon and S. Agnew, Sept. 20, 1968, Box 15, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

Nixon campaign succeeded in Texas in many places where Goldwater's had fallen flat. Nixon was particularly effective in linking failures in Vietnam to anti-war protests and unchecked crime in the streets, government interference with the rights of private citizens, and bureaucratic inefficiency.⁶¹

Early polling in Texas indicated numerous other advantages, as well. Nixon supporters showed greater enthusiasm and party loyalty than did Humphrey backers, though neither figure indicated significant loyalty; sixty percent of Texas Republicans were committed to voting for Nixon, whereas only 40 percent of Texas Democrats said the same of their candidate. Of course, such statistics are misleading if not balanced with an understanding of the overwhelming advantage Democrats still enjoyed in Texas when it came to partisan identification. Yet, the source of Democratic disillusionment remained important and could be traced back to the national convention in Chicago where, among other things, many Texas Democrats reacted with stunned horror to Humphrey's selection of Muskie over Connally as his running mate. Additionally, most Texans saw Nixon as more "presidential" than Humphrey. Lastly, polls showed that the independent candidacy of George Wallace cut more deeply into the Democratic base than it did the Republican one. In other words, polls showed that, in Texas, Wallace actually took more votes away from Humphrey than he did from Nixon, a significant aspect to the larger story surrounding Wallace's campaign in Texas.⁶²

Despite all of these advantages, however, Nixon still lost to Hubert Humphrey in Texas, still lost to George Wallace in the South, and yet won the general election. Such an outcome speaks volumes to Texas's regional identity, ideological positioning, and political culture in the late 1960s. To a great extent, Humphrey's victory in Texas was a testament to the resilience of

⁶¹ Letter from Nixon for President Committee, White House Name File: Richard Nixon, LBJL.

⁶² The Texas Poll, October 13, 1968, Box 178, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, LBJL.

the New Deal coalition in Texas—or probably more accurately, the loyalty that Texas Democrats paid to what they recalled as the New Deal coalition in Texas. Put yet another way, the tradition of the “Yellow-Dog Democrat” was outliving its political rationale. Explaining why Texas went for Humphrey and Preston Smith in 1968, while rejecting both Nixon and Paul Eggers and snubbing its collective nose at George Wallace, can also be explained, in part, through a study of exactly how race worked in Texas at this time.

Whereas many working class and rural conservatives in the South embraced the fire-eating rhetoric of Alabama’s George Wallace, most Texas conservatives hoped not for a hard line on civil rights but for a conservative who represented a broader array of conservative values.⁶³ As such, Texas conservatives were utterly dissatisfied with the selection of Maryland Governor Spiro T. Agnew to be Nixon’s running mate.⁶⁴ In a decision that seemed to lend credence to the notion of a “Southern Strategy” based on race-baiting, Nixon chose Agnew largely because of his conservative reputation on civil rights. Though he was a moderate on other domestic and economic issues, Nixon predicted that Agnew’s stance on race—which mirrored the RNC’s national strategy for appealing to African Americans through the concept of “black capitalism” and calls to do away with “government paternalism”—was enough to lure Southern support for the GOP ticket without alienating moderates in other parts of the nation.⁶⁵

In selecting Agnew, Nixon believed he had appeased the South’s greatest concern—namely, that civil rights progress needed to be slowed down. Once the South was placated by the Agnew selection, Nixon felt greater freedom to push for various moderations to the GOP platform that did not involve a stance on civil rights. That push for moderation, initiated that

⁶³ The dynamic between Wallace’s third party candidacy and the campaigns of Humphrey and Nixon is fleshed out in greater detail later in this chapter.

⁶⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, August 9, 1968, 1A.

⁶⁵ Memorandum for R. Nixon and S. Agnew, September 20, 1968, Box 15, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

summer during the national convention in Miami, re-ignited charges among conservative Republicans that, despite basing his campaign rhetoric on Law & Order, Vietnam, anticommunism, and anti-liberalism, Nixon was actually a pawn of moderate to liberal Republicans of the Eastern Establishment who looked to regain whatever control it felt it had lost during the Goldwater debacle of 1964. A moderate platform that accepted federal interference with the economy, however subtle, antagonized many Texas conservatives, particularly in the Republican Party and particularly at the grassroots.⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, much of this antipathy was ideological, rather than practical. Most Texas conservatives, at least those with influence, did not advocate a wholesale withdrawal of federal influence. Such a withdrawal would have been impractical and conservatives largely understood the need to strike a balance between practical politics and ideological rhetoric. Yet, even if Agnew's selection was found marginally acceptable by the state party hierarchy, among the most ideologically dogmatic libertarian and anticommunist conservatives, Agnew's moderation on broader economic and social issues validated many Texas conservatives' concerns that Nixon's conservatism not only lacked sincerity, but might in fact be nonexistent.⁶⁷

Evidence of a more moderate racial climate in Texas than other parts of the South can also be found in the responses of Texas minorities of all ethnic backgrounds to racial conditions and attitudes in their state. Polls published by the *Dallas Morning News* in 1968 showed that a majority of Texans believed African Americans should be given a "fair shake" and that they should have equal chances to be educated and receive promotions based on talent and hard work. The story quoted one Mexican-American male included in the survey: "I don't ever hear anyone

⁶⁶ U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965-1970), Lyndon B. Johnson, 1968, 963.

⁶⁷ Roger Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982), 214-218.

mention racial trouble around here ... I think [violence] is caused by individualism rather than racism. I'm an American, but I'm also a Mexican [and] I don't feel any racism along the border."⁶⁸ Because Lone Star State conservatism meant much more than a hard line stance on civil rights—and in fact minimized the role of race in political rhetoric—Nixon failed to carry Texas not just by joining Humphrey in losing votes to Wallace, but also by failing to overcome the loyalty of Texas Democrats who, without a clear conservative choice, defaulted their vote to partisan loyalty and tradition. The poor reaction Agnew received among Texas conservatives is but one indication of many Texans' reluctance to support Nixon. It is also indicative of what Texas conservatives actually desired. Populist conservatives distrusted Nixon, who had spent the years leading up to 1968 working as an attorney in New York City. Rejected as a moderate and a tool of the Eastern Establishment, many Texas conservatives gazed West, not South, in search of a new standard-bearer.⁶⁹

At the same time, just because Nixon lost Texas does not mean that his overall campaign strategy was a complete failure. As it did in the rest of the nation, Nixon's message in 1968 earned him some limited pockets of support among Texas conservatives. However, Nixon's patchy support in Texas had more to do with what he said about his opponents than what he said about his own ideas. Nixon was popular among his supporters in large part because of an effective campaign, initiated by the RNC against George Wallace and Hubert Humphrey, as well as liberalism according to the GOP's definition of the word. The Nixon staff was especially successful in its efforts to undermine Wallace's conservatism. Undermining Wallace's conservatism necessitated an understanding of it. During the 1968 campaign, Nixon's staff

⁶⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, April 1, 1968, 8A; File: Out of District – Civil Rights, Correspondence, Box 376, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

⁶⁹ "An Indictment of the Democratic Party, 1961-1968," PRP, Part II, Reel 7, Frame 103.

analyzed the issues for which Wallace's support seemed to be derived. One Nixon-Agnew campaign memorandum described Wallace's appeal this way:

Governor Wallace is usually thought to derive most of his strength from those who oppose the moves of recent years to admit Negroes to a greater share of America's progress and to give them the political voice that is the birthright of every American. But it is becoming apparent that many Americans who harbor no ill-will toward Negroes whatever, who are happy to see the generations of discrimination and inequality come to an end, are also intrigued by the other aspects of Wallace's appeal. Those aspects, briefly, are respect for the constitution, reliance on local government, reduced federal spending, and increased emphasis on law and order.⁷⁰

In order to succeed among Wallace conservatives, Nixon undermined Wallace's claim to being a true champion of conservative values, even disparaging the Alabama Governor as a liberal in conservative clothing. Wallace's record in Alabama reflected some affinity for government intervention, just not on issues of race and integration specifically. The Nixon campaign distributed, to great effect, information on Alabama's increased crime rate, higher taxes, and expanding bureaucracy since 1962. Nixon's attempt to paint the Wallace campaign as deceptively liberal was also a concerted, though not entirely successful, effort to distance his own candidacy from the same charge. In addition to conservative attacks on Wallace's latent liberalism, Nixon also used Texans' fear of being pinned with the extremist tag as a means of undermining Wallace's support. Nixon emphasized that Wallace's preaching of "repression and retrogression in race relations" was divisive and antithetical to conservative values of individual and meritocratic achievement, whereas Nixon was for "greater opportunity for all Americans, justice for all, renewed respect for law, and peaceful resolution of conflicts that mar our society."⁷¹

⁷⁰ George Wallace—Southern Liberal: A Profile in Political Description, Box 16, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

⁷¹ Memorandum for R. Nixon and S. Agnew, Sept. 20, 1968, Box 15, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

Even by 1968, when Wallace's race-baiting had toned down to sound more like a vision for individual rights and middle-class protectionism, the rhetoric for which Wallace had first made a name for himself remained fresh in voters' minds. Yet, in Texas, Wallace's campaign was far less appealing than in other parts of the South. Wallace's failed campaigns and lack of appeal among Texas conservatives is one indication of the state's divergence from the Deep South. Among conservatives in the West and Midwest, Wallace's political roots in segregation reflected a dangerous diversion from Americans' real enemy—atheistic communism and liberal government. While Wallace's rhetoric appealed to some Texas conservatives, he did not.⁷²

What can be said, however, about Wallace's supporters in Texas—however few they may have been? Wallace's appeal was largely isolated to East Texas, where many whites were angry with Johnson because of his staunch support for civil rights. Most Wallace voters in Texas identified themselves as politically "independent." They were farmers and were, for the most part, Protestant. Only 8 percent of Catholics supported Wallace, while only 9 percent of college-graduates did so—numbers which were significantly lower than Reagan's support among voters in each demographic.⁷³ A national Harris Poll released in September 1968, identified Wallace's support as Southern with a few pockets of solid support in the North. Wallace's influence in the West was negligible—by far his weakest region.⁷⁴ Whatever backlash manifested in response to civil rights in places like Alabama or Mississippi did not, on the whole, manifest in the same way in Texas.⁷⁵ Rather, Texas's relative moderation on race relations, at least with regards to the lack

⁷² Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), Preface, CH 11; Isserman and Kazin, *America Divide*, CH 11-12.

⁷³ The 1968 Elections: A Summary Report with Supporting Tables, PRP, Part II, Reel 8, Frame 186; Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 214-218.

⁷⁴ Memorandum to the President, September 17, 1968, From: Fred Panzer, Subject: Advance Harris for Tuesday, September 17, 1968, Box 27, White House Central Files: Political Affairs, LBJL; The Texas Poll, September 29, 1968, Box 178, Office Files of Frederick Panzer, LBJL.

⁷⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, August 9, 1968, 1A.

of credibility given to massive resistance, mirrored the suburban integration and open-schools movements that characterized Sunbelt politics as well as the color-blind and defense-minded anticommunist conservatism voiced in the most urbanized parts of the South and much of the Midwest.⁷⁶

Looking at Wallace's support on a state-by-state basis is further enlightening. Wallace garnered 66 percent of the vote in Alabama and 63 percent of the vote in Mississippi. His support hovered between 39 and 48 percent in Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana. Even in Border South states like Florida and Virginia, Wallace received as much as 28 percent of the total vote. Comparatively, however, Wallace barely took 19 percent of the vote in Texas. This share of the vote was only slightly higher than Wallace's national averages.⁷⁷ While Wallace's brand of populist conservatism dominated much of the South, it was Reagan who came to embody it in Texas.

Race and Anti-Liberalism at the Dawn of a New Decade

Many of the issues that dominated campaigns in 1968 continued to evolve as the 1960s came to a close. Race was among the issues that resonated in new and important ways in Texas after 1968. One source of Texans' awareness of racial and ethnic discord was the grassroots Chicano movement that gained momentum and organization in South Texas. Of particular note was the establishment in early 1970 of La Raza Unida Party—a third party movement born in Crystal City, Texas with the intent of mobilizing Hispanics into the largest third party in the state. The origins of La Raza stretch back to the mid-1960s, but it was not until after 1968 that the party's formal organizational efforts began in earnest. Though La Raza targeted the American Southwest for membership—primarily Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California,

⁷⁶ Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Critchlow. *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism*.

⁷⁷ The 1968 Elections: A Summary Report with Supporting Tables, PRP, Part II, Reel 8, Frames 187, 189.

Nevada, Utah, and Colorado—its primary source of membership was in Texas. Founded in large part by José Ángel Gutiérrez and Mario Compean, both of whom had been involved in Chicano activism in Texas since just prior to the 1968 elections, La Raza first gained attention in the state's political establishment as a major threat to minority and liberal support of the Texas Democratic Party. La Raza spoke, according to most conservative whites in the state, as a voice of radicalism—of Mexican-American economic, social, and political self-determination.⁷⁸

By April 1970, La Raza was already winning local races in South Texas—fifteen to be exact—and existed as a majority on two school boards. Hispanic participation in Texas public education via La Raza coincided with two landmark court decisions, both of which altered the racial landscape of many public schools and brought the issue of busing, so salient among suburban parts of the South, into Texas.

The first of these cases was the United States Supreme Court case *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District*, which was decided in 1970. Two years earlier, a coalition of Mexican-American parents living in Corpus Christi filed suit against the city's school district, charging that their children had been discriminated against by a de facto segregation system. Prior precedent in the state had allowed for the evolution of similar “dual-school systems” in places like Corpus Christi on the argument that Hispanics, and in this case Mexican Americans specifically, were not legally identified as a separate race but merely “other white.” Arguments on behalf of the Mexican American parents rested upon many of the same principles of identity politics and Chicano activism that characterized the impetus of La Raza's founding. Citing identifiable and distinct cultural, religious, physical, and linguistic distinctions, the Supreme Court sided with the parents, thus giving Mexican Americans the legal recognition they had been

⁷⁸ La Raza Unida Party, Box 17, New Left Collection, HI.

previously denied. The court ordered the Corpus Christi school board to institute majority-to-minority busing.⁷⁹

In November 1970, another court case altered the racial and political landscape of Texas. In response to litigation initiated in East Texas courts where local school districts had been noncompliant in moving to integrate a number of African American schools, United States District Court Judge William Justice, a liberal appointed to the bench during Lyndon Johnson's final months in the White House, provided a new outline for more rapid public school integration in his decision *United States v. Texas*. The case, originated after investigations by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) deemed desegregation efforts in some East Texas districts to be deficient. HEW then deferred jurisdiction in the case to the Department of Justice, which named the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and the state as complicit in delaying appropriate integration in the state. Justice's decision forced the noncompliant school districts in East Texas to cease their practice of segregated bus routes and consolidate all area school districts without using race as a factor. TEA was charged with the responsibility of conducting annual compliance reviews and imposing sanctions, including the denial of accreditation, to schools where integration was deemed to have been unnaturally delayed or circumvented.

The case received virtually zero press coverage until the decision was announced, at which point denunciations poured in from state political leaders and disgruntled area whites. Though the impact of Justice's decision was felt most dramatically among East Texas communities, particularly in and around the town of Marshall, the aftermath of *United States v. Texas*, in technically altering the policies of over 1000 school districts with over two million

⁷⁹ Ibid.; Ron Tyler, Ed., et. al., *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 1996).

students, reignited the issue of race and federal encroachment on state and local rights, particularly in Texas where civil rights activism of the 1960s had been cooler than in other parts of the nation.⁸⁰

It is when studying school integration and busing policies in the late 1960s and early 1970s that Texas seems most “Southern.” Nixon typically considered Texas to part of the South only when discussing school administration policies, but even then distinguished in conversations between Houston, South and East Texas, and the rest of the state. For most Texans, the issue of racial integration was less heated than the specific solution proffered in busing. Scholars like Matthew Lassiter have chronicled the suburban reactions to busing in places like Charlotte and Atlanta and have found the coalition of moderate suburban whites, working within local politics to protect what was often referred to as assembly and property taxpayers’ rights, at the forefront of new political responses to race issues.

Such coalitions were certainly operating in Texas. For instance, Dr. Mitchell Young of Texas helped organize the United Concerned Citizens of America (UCCA)—an anti-busing league dedicated to maintaining consistent desegregation standards nationwide. Young represented a faction of suburban whites in the South who resented being targeted and reprimanded differently, as they saw it, than other noncompliant school districts in other parts of the nation.⁸¹

As John Connally had argued in the mid-1960s when he criticized the massive resistance politics of Alabama and Mississippi, many Texans had hoped to avoid federal intervention even if it meant compliance with school desegregation. While some Texans believed they had been more than compliant, many also resented the noncompliance of East Texas districts that they

⁸⁰ Tyler, Ed., et. al., *The New Handbook of Texas*.

⁸¹ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 225.

believed had forced federal intervention upon the rest of the state. Organizations like the UCCA tapped into this resentment and helped unite middle-class white Texans on the grounds that they were being treated unfairly.

Suburban organizations like the UCCA were typically viewed as a more respectable voice of white middle-class concerns in Texas. There were, however, a handful of radical grassroots manifestations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of which used busing as a springboard for organizational growth, but not as a direct focus. In Houston, Wickliffe B. Vennard, Sr. founded the Americans for America, an organization primarily concerned with promoting the idea that liberals in the United States government were conspiring to erode citizens' economic rights in order to eventually make everyone so utterly dependent on government as to enable a total seizure of dictatorial power. Arguing forcefully against the Federal Reserve System as an entity controlled by Northeastern and International bankers, while actively equating liberalism to socialism and a slippery slope toward communist tyranny, organizations like Americans for America helped to bridge the gap in Texas between racial discord and a larger spectrum of anti-liberal, anti-government hostility under a banner of traditionalism and "Christian values." Such organizations were commonly hostile to moderates and liberals in both parties and called into question the tenuous balance between ideological convictions and partisan loyalties.

Though not yet powerful enough to upset the political balance in Texas, such trends had been evolving for some time. In 1968, Nixon was distrusted by many Texas conservatives as part of the liberal Eastern Establishment. Texans' distrust of Nixon in this regard only grew in the early years of his presidency. This view of Nixon among certain pockets of the grassroots gained popularity in Texas less because of issues like race and busing than because of issues of

federal expansion and moderate, neo-liberal economic policies. Still, the complexity and diversity of issues typically worked together to foment hostility. As grassroots organizations similar to Americans for America earned small yet vocal followings in Texas by equating liberalism, socialism, communism, and slavery, a few even began to link social issues like abortion into the same general conversation about the nation's moral compass.

The impact of such small political organizations tying together economic, racial, religious, and ideological issues under a banner of traditionalism and conservatism contributed to the decline of the New Deal coalition, much as third party movements and intra-party factionalism had also done.⁸² Yet, whereas race had been the predominant factor in shaping conservative suburban politics in other parts of the South as early as the late 1950s, similar manifestations hit Texas with force only in the late 1960s and as part of a conglomerate of issues, all of which worked together to foment notions of liberal weakness, encroaching socialism, and a perceived loss, among mostly suburban whites, of individual "right."⁸³

Yarborough, Bentsen, and Bush

In the late 1960s, Democrats in Texas fought amongst themselves over ideological thrusts and the control of state party power. At the same time, state Republicans fought amongst themselves over what the future of their party should look like and to whom their loyalties should be offered. A growing division within the Texas Republican Party between committed conservatives and those who prioritized party building and national unity threatened to undermine the quest for ideological coalescence. Active in both parties was the rhetorical device of anti-liberalism, which could be used as an effective weapon on issues ranging from Vietnam to crime to race and parts in between. In 1970, the all-permeating existence of anti-liberalism in

⁸² *The Texas Eagle*, Collected Editions, 1970-71, Box 17, New Left Collection, HI.

⁸³ "Americans for America," Collected Editions, 1969-1970, Box 14, New Left Collection, HI.

Texas finally caught up with Ralph Yarborough. In fact, few events so keenly illustrate the ideological dynamic that shaped Texas politics in this period than the 1970 race for the U.S. Senate.

After eighteen years of service as a populist-leaning liberal, Yarborough was defeated in the 1970 Democratic Primary by conservative Houston businessman, Lloyd Bentsen. Born in 1921, Bentsen flew B-24 combat missions in Italy during World War II, before working his way up the ladder of Houston's financial sector. Bentsen defeated Yarborough in 1970 on the strength of a blatantly anti-liberal campaign, made far more salient in the context of what many saw as continued national dysfunction. Bentsen's campaign against Yarborough was quintessential anti-liberalism. Yarborough was vilified as an "ultraliberal" and a "peacenik." Primarily but not exclusively in East Texas, Bentsen hammered Yarborough as a busing advocate and a radical integrationist. He attacked Yarborough's support of Supreme Court decisions outlawing prayer in public schools and ran television advertisements associating Yarborough with Vietcong-flag waving anti-war protesters. In short, Bentsen neutralized Yarborough's record of working on state-level issues and, instead, made the campaign a referendum on the national Left.⁸⁴

Yarborough's campaign strategy indicates that Texas liberals were either stubborn in their commitment to left-leaning ideologies, or may not have been fully aware of exactly how potent such critiques were and would continue to be in future campaigns. While Yarborough tried to focus his campaign on his experience and record while steering clear of the "liberal" label, he also shunned his staff's suggestions that he identify himself in more conservative ways. His platform was based on stereotypically populist and working-class economic initiatives and

⁸⁴ Bass and DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 313; Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 222-226; Reston, *The Lone Star*, 378.

failed to engage Bentsen on the very subject matter used most effectively against him—namely, national issues surrounding the war in Vietnam, crime, race, and moral relativity. As a result, Yarborough did very poorly among middle-class whites. Yarborough spent far more energy rallying state minorities, which presumably confirmed in many Texans' minds some of Bentsen's attacks. Yarborough's appeals included advocating bilingual education in South Texas school districts while dismissing arguments that non-English speaking residents should be encouraged to learn the language of the majority. Broadly, Yarborough's campaign was a mix of antiquated Texas populism and post-Voting Rights Act liberalism—a political style outdated in much of the urbanizing and suburbanizing Sunbelt.⁸⁵

The same cannot be said of Bentsen's campaign, which did attract a substantial number of middle-class white conservatives. Bentsen was so overwhelmingly anti-liberal that many state liberals, including those in organized labor, refused to endorse or support the Democratic nominee during the general election. That honor went to the Republican nominee, George Bush, who had hoped for a rematch with Yarborough during which he wanted to employ the same anti-liberal strategy that Bentsen had already successfully used. Instead, Bush found himself inheriting the support of state liberals and organized labor, which further undermined his palatability among conservative Republicans and only reinforced Bentsen's popularity among conservative Democrats. Though Bush would eventually get the best of Bentsen, defeating both he and Michael Dukakis in the 1988 presidential election largely on the strength of anti-liberalism, in 1970 it was the Republican who seemed a shade too far to the left. With both Bush

⁸⁵ Letter from Jimmy Wisch, to James A. Turman, March 17, 1970, Press Release, April 1, 1970, General Correspondence, "Here is what Ralph Yarborough has done to help [your] county," Box 4zd552, Ralph Yarborough Papers, CAH.

and Bentsen hoping to wage the general campaign on the grounds of conservatism and anti-liberalism, the defaults of tradition and loyalty once again took center stage in Texas.⁸⁶

Bentsen's victory over Yarborough confused Bush's campaign strategy. Instead of running as the conservative option in a race with the liberal Yarborough, Bush had to repackage himself as an alternative to the conservative Bentsen. These efforts were largely awkward and unsuccessful, and rekindled intra-party factionalism. Bush actively tried but failed to connect his opponent with the vilified "liberal establishment." On the other hand, Bentsen employed the same strategy against Bush, but to a much greater level of effect. Desperate, Bush, instead of aligning himself with state conservatism, more regularly attracted moderate and liberal support by coming out in favor of things like women's rights issues, including a pro-choice statement on abortion and approval of the Equal Rights Amendment, which in 1970 appeared to be on the brink of passage in the House of Representatives. By November, popular opinion showed Bentsen to be the more conservative of the two candidates, the more "anti-hippie" of the two candidates—which was a particularly important asset in rural Baptist counties in East and Central Texas—and the candidate more likely to remain hawkish in the face of dovish pressures.⁸⁷ Bentsen had effectively characterized his opponent as the liberal option and maintained the support of conservative Democrats across the state.

⁸⁶ Reston, *The Lone Star*, 378.

⁸⁷ CBS Memorandum, December 24, 1967, To: Jay Levine, Fr: Martin Plissner, Box 2M752, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH; *Houston Chronicle*, September 13, 1970, *Houston Post*, November 6, 1970, Box 4C517, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH; Lloyd Bentsen – Texas. November 19, 1970, PRP, Part II, Reel 9, Frames 356-357, 376; Edward Kennedy – Massachusetts. November 19, 1970 – February 4, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 9, Frames 356-357, 376; "A Research Proposal Presented to the Honorable John Tower, For the 1978 Senatorial Campaign," June 1977. Folder 19, Box 542, Tower Senate Club, JTP; Five Reasons to Vote for George Bush for United States Senator, August 6, 1970, Bush 1970 Campaign Files, Box 11, John Knaggs Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX; George Bush's Answers to Some of the Questions People Ask, August 1970, Bush 1970 Campaign Files, Box 11, John Knaggs Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX; Direct Mailing, From: Bush for Senator Headquarters, Bush 1970 Campaign Files, Box 11, John Knaggs Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX; Bush 1970 Campaign Files, Box 11, John Knaggs Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

Bush's defeat was not, however, for lack of assistance—or at least attempts to help—from Nixon and the RNC. Nixon personally helped raise millions for Bush's campaign on the hopes of securing a conservative vote in the Senate, though Bush's congressional record indicated agreement with Nixon only 64 percent of the time—a significant percentage, but not an overwhelming one. Bush also took steps to associate himself with Nixon in advertisements featuring images of the two working together and even attending the famous 1969 “National Championship” college football game between the University of Texas and the University of Arkansas, a game famous for Nixon's declaration of Texas as national champions in the midst of the Longhorns' post-game locker room euphoria.⁸⁸ Ironically, however, Bush's association with Nixon ultimately did him more harm than good, at least in the short term. Nixon made multiple campaign appearances with Bush during the 1970 campaign. During trips to Dallas and Longview, Nixon spent most of his time attacking school busing programs. Clearly intended to rally middle class white voters, Nixon's strategy did little more than alienate liberal and minority voters who, refusing to support the candidate of the conservative Texas establishment, had chosen to support Bush. That support wavered following each Nixon visit. Following Bentsen's victory, Nixon and Agnew each publicly declared victory for conservatism in Texas, saying that the real success had come with the ousting of Ralph Yarborough.⁸⁹

Conservative Democrats maintained strength in Texas through the 1970 midterm elections. At the same time, Democratic Party dominance seemed to be dissipating. Electoral contests were far more competitive in most portions of the state and Democratic success depended on maintaining a conservative image. In fact, disassociating one's self from the

⁸⁸ *Texas Monthly*, July 1973, “The Big Thicket Tangle”; Draft for TV Ad, Bush '70 Senate Campaign Material, Box 11, John Knaggs Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

⁸⁹ November 6, 1970, *Houston Post*. Box 4C517, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press), 2001; Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 225-226

national party became essential for conservative Texas Democrats. Those who succeeded benefited greatly from the state's penchant for rallying behind the Democratic Party if, for no other reason, than out of tradition and loyalty. Bush likely would have defeated Yarborough in the general election if Yarborough had managed to get through the primary. The agenda around which Texas voters understood their own political leanings was far different in 1970 than it had been in 1964. National issues gained in prominence and the Democratic Party seemed, in the public's mind, to be slipping more rapidly into the abyss of liberalism. During the early 1970s, the issue of corruption and scandal in government would add a new dimension to Texans' voting habits.

Conclusion

In December of 1967, Walter Cronkite, the anchor of the *CBS Evening News*, was briefed on the differences between factionalism in the Republican Party and factionalism in the Democratic Party. The analysis he was given suggested the following:

Factionalism in [the] GOP tends to be ideological, in [the] Democratic Party regional. Unity in [the] Democratic Party consists in linking up its Dixie division every four years with that in the rest of the nation. In [the] Republican Party, two main factions exist in substantial numbers in the majority of states and are often reflected in the makeup of individual delegations.⁹⁰

GOP Factionalism was indeed ideological and factionalism in the Democratic Party was certainly regional. However, if Texas politics at all reflects the nation as a whole, then the above description is only partially true, for factionalism in both parties was kin to ideology and regional variations. The political war waged in Texas was to determine whether ideological or partisan loyalties would ultimately reign supreme in the state. Republican efforts to tap into what Nixon, by 1970, had begun referring to as the nation's "silent majority" were undermined by Democratic

⁹⁰ CBS Memorandum, December 24, 1967, To: Jay Levine, Fr: Martin Plissner, Box 2M752, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH.

efforts in Texas to do virtually the same thing. Conservative Democrats' ability to play to the emotions in Texas that Republicans so effectively used to rally the masses against Northeastern elites, liberalism, and government in general, helped maintain the strength of the New Deal coalition in Texas long after that same coalition had already fractured irreparably in other parts of the nation.

Lyndon Johnson famously commented after he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that, politically, he had just signed over the South to the Republican Party for at least a generation. By the close of 1968, however, the South was not yet a bastion of Republicanism, but the West was. Historian Matthew Lassiter has argued forcefully against the "Southern Strategy" explanation for political realignment in the American Sunbelt. In his estimation, backlash politics against racial progress resulted in very few successes. In contrast to the South, Republicans by 1970 had, for the most part, won the West and done so on the strength of a reinvigorated populist rhetoric whereby liberals had been transformed into elitists and government was an obstacle standing between hard-working honest Americans and the traditional freedoms upon which, men like Ben H. Carpenter believed, the nation had been founded upon. Simply put, GOP success in the American West stemmed from an ability to market a conservatism that spoke to the ideals held dearest by that region—ideals of rugged individualism and anti-Big Government populism. This Western image played well in Texas.⁹¹

Still, GOP success was more limited in Texas than it was in either the South or the West. Where then does the political history of Texas in the late 1960s fit in to this narrative? The simple answer, and the one which actually makes the most sense, is that it did not. In Texas, the strength of the Democratic Party was enough to overcome national discord, internal factionalism, and a far more adept program of anti-liberal critiques emanating from Republican circles. In

⁹¹ Lassiter, *Silent Majority*, 275

fact, critiquing liberals was a very bipartisan enterprise in Texas. Though Texans more often than not voted out of loyalty and tradition, most were also keenly aware of the ideological positioning of candidates running for public office. Texas did not fit the mold of a Southern state, nor did it entirely fit the mold of a Western state. Pockets of Texas seemed to conform to different regional interests, though the state as a whole remained conservative. By the close of the 1960s, Texas was still a bastion of conservative Democratic dominance. At the same time, however, liberal factions, a growing dissatisfaction with the political status quo, a reinvigorated populist conservatism, a new Western standard-bearer in Ronald Reagan, and an understanding of ideology that placed the blame for the nation's problems on "liberal weakness" all came together to make the 1970s the decade Texas Republicans had long waited for.⁹²

⁹² "General Election Results, 7th District," November 15, 1968, Box 12, Folder 12, General 66-72, James A. Baker Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

CHAPTER 4 SCANDAL, MOBILIZATION, AND ANTI-LIBERALISM, 1971-74

On January 22, 1973, Lyndon B. Johnson died. The next day, newspapers across Texas carried banner headlines announcing the death of the only native Texan to serve in the White House to that point. Johnson spent much of the last decade of his life at the center of a political storm—one through which he had witnessed the decline of the New Deal coalition in Texas. During that time Johnson also came to symbolize the ideological confusion and aging loyalties that characterized the Lone Star State throughout the 1960s. Newspapers in Texas also reported another significant story that day. Typically buried at the bottom of page one on most statewide newspapers was the story of the United States Supreme Court's landmark decision on abortion rights, *Roe v. Wade*—decided on the same day as Johnson's death. The confluence of these two events on a single day, each surrounding issues of death and life, conservatism and liberalism, offers a striking image of the contrast and chaos that typified Texas politics in the early 1970s. Between 1971 and 1974, Texans endured a wild ride that saw the pace of changes to political ideology quicken, the infusion of new, diverse, and increasingly controversial issues of morality and God, the more rapid breakdown in the public's faith in government, intensified challenges to partisan loyalties, and mass confusion and intra-party factionalism at the national, state, and local levels. Though the processes of change had been maturing for almost a decade, several sudden events hastened that maturation process in the early 1970s.

This was a crucial period in the story of Texas's changing political culture and the corresponding emergence of modern conservatism. During this time, traditional Democratic allegiances were further loosened as ideological convictions continued to replace partisan loyalties and national campaigns created sweeping connotations that connected certain partisan or ideological factions with individuals and events. Of particular import in the early years of the

new decade was the simultaneous maturation of anti-liberal and anti-government animus, the two impulses which provide the main focus of this chapter.

In October 1972, less than two weeks before Richard Nixon would soundly defeat George McGovern and be re-elected as President of the United States, the *Dallas Morning News* ran an editorial which spoke to Texans' intensifying hostility toward liberals and anyone else who favored the use of the federal government to solve people's problems. The collective fury which many Texans felt over coexisting with a federal government that demanded bureaucratic "life and death control over every phase of American life" was fueled by specific alterations to the social and political landscape. This fury manifested not in a refortification of partisan defense, but rather as an ideological offensive, in which party increasingly took a back seat.¹

If the 1960s, therefore, provided the ignition to America's social and political upheavals of the late twentieth century, then the 1970s saw Texans adjust to these new realities.² Scandals involving elected officials undermined the public's faith in government, issues like abortion slowly began to replace issues of race atop the state's social agenda, grassroots political activity mobilized a citizenry unconvinced that either party had their best interests in mind, and a presidential campaign so polarized ideological factions within the Democratic Party as to render the New Deal coalition all but obsolete and, certainly, ineffective. In Texas, the story of the early 1970s begins—and ends—with scandal.

The Politics of Scandal and Corruption

Throughout the early 1970s, images of bribery, theft, tax evasion, conspiracy, election fraud, hush money, and an array of investigations undermined Texans' faith in government, politicians, and the civic process in general. The declining faith in government among Texans

¹ Dick West, editorial, *Dallas Morning News*, October 29, 1972, Box 435, George Mahon Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Hereafter cited as SWC).

² *Dallas Morning News*, January 23-24, 1973, 1A.

did not begin in the early 1970s, but it did rapidly mature. At the same time that distrust in government seemed to be on the rise, the ubiquity of scandal and corruption contributed to a statewide reconsideration of partisan loyalties, opened the door for liberal advancement within the state Democratic Party, and lent credence to the most central tenet of populist conservatism—that government had replaced big business as the chief obstacle standing between the American people and honest opportunity. In short, the politics of scandal and corruption hastened ideological reconsiderations in Texas, confused the public’s partisan loyalties, and contributed mightily to the breakdown of the established leadership in both parties.

Outside of Watergate, the scandals that most Americans remember from the early 1970s were, first, former State Department employee Daniel Ellsberg’s leaking of the so-called “Pentagon Papers” to the *New York Times* in 1971 and, second, the resignation of Vice President Spiro T. Agnew in 1973 following his conviction for tax evasion. Texas Republicans, even those close to the Nixon White House, took opportunities like these to bolster their own credentials as honest politicians. “I detest graft and corruption,” John Tower wrote in the *Dallas Times Herald* in October 1973. “I have no patience whatsoever with those who violate their public trust and use public office for private gain.”³ Nonetheless, national scandals, though highly influential, were only partly responsible for Texans’ growing distaste for all things political in the early 1970s. There were plenty of scandals deep in the heart of Texas to bring the issue closer to home.

The most famous of these corruption tales became known as the Sharpstown Stock-Fraud Scandal. In January 1971, attorneys for the United States Securities and Exchange Commission

³ Draft of Op-Ed for *Dallas Times Herald*, by John Tower, October 1973, Folder 38, Box 17, Press Office, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX (Hereafter cited as JTP); Undated *Houston Chronicle*, Box 4C519, Harris County Democratic Party Records, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Hereafter cited as CAH).

(SEC) filed a lawsuit through federal court in Dallas, alleging that former state Attorney General Waggoner Carr, former state Insurance Commissioner John Osorio, and Houston-area banker Frank Sharp had conspired to commit stock fraud. Over the next several months, the tawdry details dominated the media's coverage of Texas politics and threatened to stain virtually the entire conservative wing of the state Democratic Party. What the Texas public essentially learned throughout the reporting on this scandal in 1971 and 1972 was that Frank Sharp, the chief executive of the Houston-area Sharpstown State Bank, had illegally granted over \$600,000 in loans to state officials, who then used that money to buy stock in another of Sharp's holdings, the National Bankers Life Insurance Corporation. Sharp then agreed, through various illegal means, to artificially inflate the value of the stock, allowing investors to reap profits in excess of \$250,000. The case's bombshell, however, came when the SEC revealed that Texas Governor and Democratic Party head Preston Smith had actually been bribed by Sharp into manipulating a special session of the Texas legislature in 1969 during which legislation favorable to Sharp and his corporate holdings was passed.⁴

The immediate impact of the Sharpstown scandal appeared to be a boon for state liberals. As the sordid details permeated the state's political culture in the early 1970s, liberals took the opportunity to champion reform legislation, including bills requiring state officials to fully disclose all sources of income. Texas liberals, though reticent to go so far as to call for federal intervention, did articulate a belief that the "good 'ole boys" club in Austin had grown far too corrupt to govern effectively and needed dismantling.⁵ The earliest responses to the scandal in

⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, March 25, 1972; Sharpstown Stock Fraud Scandal – Clippings, Folder 11, Box 758, Austin Files, JTP; Sharpstown Stock Fraud Clippings, Box 4C518, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

⁵ Transcript, *Firing Line*, hosted by William F. Buckley, February 25, 1973, telecast on PBS, Audiovisual Collection, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA (Hereafter cited as HI).

Texas came from liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans—both on the outside looking in at their respective state party leadership. These responses slowly grew more varied and, by early 1973, it was clear that the biggest losers in the Sharpstown scandal were incumbent, conservative Texas Democrats. In effect, the Sharpstown scandal so undermined the public’s faith in the status quo of Texas politics that it allowed liberals to assert far greater influence in the state Democratic Party while, at the same time, boosting the respectability of anti-government populist conservatives operating at the grassroots and at the fringe of state-level Republican leadership.⁶

As a result of his involvement with Sharp, Preston Smith—twice elected Governor of Texas—failed to win the nomination of his party for re-election in 1972. Smith was the most visible political casualty of the scandal. The man who defeated Smith was Dolph Briscoe, a businessman and wealthy rancher from Uvalde, a small town in south-central Texas which proudly boasted itself as the home of former Speaker of the House and Vice President John Nance Garner. Briscoe, a conservative Democrat, succeeded in 1972 in an atmosphere inhospitable to the conservative Democratic establishment—or Democrats in general, for that matter. Projecting a populist image complete with blue jeans and cowboy hats, Briscoe’s strategy was simple and foretelling. The rancher from Uvalde hammered Smith as an agent of the elite, the establishment, and the corrupt political leadership that needed to be overhauled in Austin. At the same time, he adopted the bulk of Smith’s platform and agenda, highlighting tough stands on crime and his support for better training facilities for state law enforcement.⁷ Briscoe often spoke about Texans’ “value of independence” and reinforced the notion that the government should work for the people, not the other way around. Another of his catch-phrases

⁶ Sharpstown Stock Fraud Scandal – Clippings, Folder 11, Box 758, Austin Files, JTP.

⁷ “Crime in the Streets,” Law and Order File, Box 613, Dolph Briscoe Papers, CAH; *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 112, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

was, “better government, not more.”⁸ Briscoe routinely infused Frank Sharp’s name into speeches on Smith, government corruption, and the need to clean up Austin. He invited the support of state minorities, environmentalist lobbies, and other liberals, not by addressing specific issues of concern to those constituents, but by rallying a collective and shared animosity against established authority.⁹ Smith’s feeble and ineffective response was to blame his misfortune on the media, often communicating anger over how television in particular had portrayed him unfairly.¹⁰

Briscoe was also keenly aware of intra-party factionalism, particularly the growing discord between national liberals and state conservatives. During the general election of 1972, he adamantly refused to campaign with the presidential nominee of his party, George McGovern. Instead, Briscoe expressed utter dissatisfaction with the liberalizing national Democratic Party. Though Briscoe counted on the support of conservative Democrats in his state, a clear message was, nonetheless, sent to Texas voters. Party loyalty, though not yet dead, was in demise.

The politics of scandal permeated the Texas political culture of the early 1970s, but whereas national observers have typically identified this era’s backlash against political scandal with Watergate and a temporary setback for the Republican Party, no such strict associations were made in Texas thanks to Sharpstown. As officials in both parties seemed mired in illegalities, Democrats were, in the public’s mind, just as guilty of dishonesty as were Republicans. Thus, what came to command the loyalties of most Texas voters in the early 1970s was a reinvigorated anti-government populism that embraced sound economics, strong and traditional values on things like crime and foreign policy, and the projection of an image that was

⁸ Press Release, September 24, 1971, Box 659, Dolph Briscoe Papers, CAH.

⁹ Speech, July 9, 1971, Ben Kaplan Associates, Announcement, Speech, July 21, 1971, Elgin, TX, Speech, August 26, 1971, Jacksonville, TX, Box 659, Dolph Briscoe Papers, CAH.

¹⁰ Press Release, April 5, 1972, KRAN Country Music Radio, April 11, 1972, Box 589, Preston Smith Papers, SWC.

altogether incompatible with the various constituents being drawn to the liberalizing national Democratic Party.¹¹

Grassroots Mobilizations

The Texas political zeitgeist of the early 1970s was complex and confusing. Within the context of scandalous government, a variety of social, economic, and cultural issues provoked previously unmobilized segments of the state into greater civic activism and created a political atmosphere which perplexed many Texans. Though the New Deal coalition exhibited greater resiliency in Texas than it did in other parts of the South, cracks were becoming far more difficult to traverse by the early 1970s. It was in this climate that Texas political leaders, the vast majority of whom were still conservative Democrats, began to hear more frequent calls from their constituents to consider what steps they would be willing to take in order to protect the future of the state. At the heart of most Texans' concerns was the integrity of their elected officials' conservatism. The basis for this concern was almost always national politics. No matter how local a particular candidate could spin his or her credentials, the growing disconnect between local and national values very often trumped specific issues of local or state concern when it came to the Texas voting public's political behavior and avowed loyalties.¹²

One common response offered by conservative Texas Democrats was to distance their positions from those of the national party. Indeed, many conservatives ceased aligning themselves with party and, instead, directly aligned themselves, not so much with issues, but to national debates through which certain issues were growing in importance.¹³ A major

¹¹ Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social & Political Consequence Since 1945* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 313; *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1972, 1A.

¹² Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Owl Books, 2004). Frank describes a very similar process gripping Kansas during the 1990s.

¹³ General Correspondence, Box 376, Letter to Mrs. Jim Sexton, from George Mahon, George Mahon Papers, SWC; General Correspondence, Box 407, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

consequence of this strategy was the discrediting of the national Democratic Party as a voice for conservative Texans. As more state Democrats refused to align themselves with the national party, the national party became less attractive to many conservative Texans. Conservative Texas Democrats took steps to distance themselves from the national party in several ways, including outright repudiation of the national agenda and their refusal to endorse or appear with liberal national candidates. Removing the benefit and appeal of being a Democrat in Texas was a major step on the path toward realignment.¹⁴

Many of the issues that would come to define the state's political restructuring in the 1970s had been largely secondary in importance during the 1960s. On no front was this truer than on social issues and issues of religiosity and morality, though initially this process was a slow one. Abortion, for instance, played virtually no role in state or local campaigns in 1970 or 1972.¹⁵ Yet by the end of the decade, pro-life advocates had developed a major voice in conservative politics, both nationally and in Texas. *Roe v. Wade*, a case which had originated in Dallas County, was a spark for many social conservatives whose personal dissatisfaction with liberal Supreme Court rulings had been growing since the early 1960s, but had not yet inspired significant political involvement. In 1974, grassroots activists concerned with social issues like abortion began to mobilize. Organizations like Texas Right to Life and Birthright—each of which actively lobbied for the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and for restrictions to be established at the state level—gained recognition. Under the executive leadership of Mary Jane Phelps, Texas Right to Life exhibited tremendous organization and reach in Texas, appealing to a broad interest group of white middle-class suburban churchgoers and spiritually minded ethnic minorities. Within one year of its founding, Texas Right to Life had distributed at least one comprehensive

¹⁴ Lynda L. Kaid, Interview by Author, November 7, 2006, Gainesville, FL. Kaid served as a campaign worker for Paul Eggers gubernatorial campaign in 1970 and John Tower's senate campaign in 1972.

¹⁵ Ibid.

packet about the sin of abortion and its broader consequences for morality and ethics to every pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in the Lone Star State.¹⁶

The fundamental politicization of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in the late 1970s had its roots in grassroots organizations like Texas Right to Life, which communicated the need for churches to exercise a political voice—something the SBC was reluctant to do in the 1960s and 1970s. A similar process dealing with the issue of prayer in public schools was already underway prior to the *Roe* decision. The Supreme Court outlawed prayer in public schools in the early 1960s, but it was not until the early 1970s that Texas congressional representatives began to hear concerns from their constituents over this issue in significant numbers. Single-issue grassroots organizations quickly realized in the early 1970s that a fusion of interests on the grounds of morality, ethics, and Christian protectionism would allow for greater exposure and attract larger bases of support.¹⁷

If the most important outcome of modern conservatism's ascendancy was the establishment of the Republican Party as the ideology's recognized and viable home, then understanding how that process happened must acknowledge that one of the most critical components to that ascendancy—the rise of politically active evangelicals—was a phenomenon born in the early 1970s, not the early 1960s. Conservatism in Texas may have begun its development around issues of anticommunism, economics, and race, but it matured in the 1970s through the infusion of a much wider array of issues and impulses. As social issues like abortion and school prayer gained momentum, issues like civil rights and race did not entirely fade, but did seem less urgent. In many cases, the infusion of a wider array of social issues facilitated a growing mutual appreciation and cooperation between evangelical conservatives and

¹⁶ *Texas Monthly*, March 1974, "Abortion in Texas."

¹⁷ Questionnaire on Church and State, Box 376, George Mahon Papers, SWC; "Abortion File," Box 659, Dolph Briscoe Papers, CAH.

anticommunists or other conservatives who prioritized older and, by the early 1970s, seemingly less urgent or provocative issues. The formative success of modern conservatism in Texas can be credited, in part, to its ability to bridge older and newer issues through a language that transcended both time and specifics.¹⁸

Again however, rarely did religious issues, prior to 1974, have a direct impact on Texas politics through campaign strategies and agendas. Throughout the early 1970s, Richard Nixon, who often bragged about his co-sponsorship of this legislation in 1951, joined many of his party brethren, including Texans George Bush and John Tower, in supporting passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). In July 1971, even the Republican National Committee (RNC) overwhelmingly voted to endorse ERA and in March of the following year, the Texas state legislature ratified the amendment.¹⁹

Eventually, Texas conservatives joined Republican conservatives in other parts of the country in using religious issues like abortion, school prayer, and homosexuality to attract evangelical Christians roused into political activism. The early 1970s was a crucial time for nascent grassroots mobilization around such issues, but was hardly a time that witnessed the infusion of such issues into the mainstream of political rhetoric. Still, by 1974 polls indicated that Texans' concern with social issues, declining morals, and the protection of traditional Christian values had significantly intensified. Throughout the early 1970s, school prayer and abortion coincided with national movements for women's rights and homosexual rights. Isolated, none of these issues was likely to garner the attention of state Republicans or conservative Democrats. Taken as an aggregate representation of challenged family values,

¹⁸ "To keep our people safe and free," Campaign literature, 1970, Box 69, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

¹⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, March 23-25, 1972; Republican National Committee, July 22, 1971, Denver, CO, Papers of the Republican Party [microform], ed. Paul L. Kesaris, Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1987, George Smathers Libraries, University of Florida (Hereafter cited as PRP), Part I, Series B, Reel 8, Frame 570; Equal Opportunity for Women, April 27, 1973, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 436.

however, these social and religious issues seemed far more menacing, subversive, and in need of a response. Texans were more concerned over these issues by 1974 than they had been at any point in the previous decade, though the state itself—with its population constantly in flux partly because of Northern in-migration—also looked very different than it had a decade earlier.²⁰

The political tumult of the early 1970s, and particularly the focus on issues with a religious emphasis such as gay rights, school prayer, and abortion, coincided with, and some cases sparked, greater political activism among Mexican Americans in Texas. In 1972, an organization known as Mexican American Republicans of Texas (MART) was established as an official operation of the state GOP. MART's primary founder and early leader was businessman and self-proclaimed "Washington outsider" Lorenzo Trevino of Dallas. Trevino was among a number of Mexican Americans at the grassroots in Texas who, since the mid-1960s, had been cooperating with the state Republican Party's efforts to attract Hispanic voters to conservative causes by way of convincing them that voting Democratic only contributed to the maintenance of one-party dominance and establishment power.²¹

The Republican Party's success among Texas Hispanics can be traced to a number of issues. For one thing, Texas Republicans had, since the early 1960s, been just as active in courting Hispanic voters at the local level as had the Democratic Party. A major difference between the GOP's strategy for appealing to Hispanic voters and that of the Democratic Party was that Texas Republicans, following the advice of the RNC, tried to win support among ethnic

²⁰ Decision Making Information: A Study of National Attitudes, Prepared for Governor Ronald Reagan, July 1974, Box 57, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI; "The Book of Dallas," *New York Times*, 1976 Op-Ed. Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI; Jonathan Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 252; Lou Cannon. *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), CH 16; Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), CH 13; Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), CH 4, 164.

²¹ Ignacio M. Garcia, *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans in Search of Camelot* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Ronald Tyler, ed., et. al., *The New Handbook of Texas* (Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 1996).

minorities on the basis of their sameness—their fundamental Americanism—rather than through more cultured appeals.²² Perhaps more than anyone else, John Tower helped bring Hispanic voters into the Republican sphere of influence. MART organizers in the early 1970s specifically pointed to Tower’s support for job-producing defense contracts in the 1960s as a major factor in shaping a GOP that appealed to Hispanic voters. The Texas GOP also attracted Hispanic voters by openly questioning the state Democratic Party’s sincerity when it came to minority issues, thus using intra-party factionalism and the conservative-liberal divide to suggest that the party establishment had no legitimate interest in appealing to minorities. Texas Republicans further gained Hispanic support by characterizing the state Democratic Party as a “political machine,” arguing that until two-party politics became a reality in Texas, Hispanics would continue to be denied a political voice. Eventually, the Republican Party began to attract more Hispanic voters not by appealing to the constituency on the basis of race or ethnicity, but rather on the basis of their typically Catholic sensibilities. Beginning slowly in the early 1970s, conservatives attracted Hispanic support in Texas through the use of social and religious issues.²³

The roots of what many eventually came to call the Religious Right can, to some degree, be traced back to evangelical activism in Texas. However, Texas was also a hotbed for another strand of conservative thought - libertarianism. Issues other than school prayer, abortion, and gay rights routinely sparked grassroots political mobilization throughout Texas during the early 1970s. In Dallas, one such issue was the proposed canalization of the Trinity River, which stretched from the Gulf of Mexico just east of Houston all the way to the northern-most suburbs of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex (DFW).

²² Lynda L. Kaid, Interview by Author, November 7, 2006, Gainesville, FL. Kaid served as a campaign worker for Paul Eggers gubernatorial campaign in 1970 and John Tower’s senate campaign in 1972.

²³ Tyler, ed., et. al., *The New Handbook of Texas; Albuquerque Journal*, February 13, 1972, Box 47, New Left Collection, HI.

In 1965, Lyndon Johnson authorized a \$1.6 billion construction project designed to transform the Trinity River into a major canal, thus enabling Dallas to compete with Houston for trade and shipping enterprises in and out of the Gulf of Mexico. For years, the project had received little short of the wholehearted support of DFW residents, as they eagerly awaited full federal appropriation. But in 1973 the project was suddenly killed by a grassroots coalition led by anti-government libertarian conservatives from Dallas standing in opposition to the area's business community.²⁴ The story of the Trinity River Canal Project speaks to both the impulses of a reinvigorated grassroots as well as the growing anti-liberalism and distrust of government that defined Texas in the early 1970s.

During the spring of 1972, Alan Steelman, a young Dallas Republican aspiring to win a seat in the United States House of Representatives, was introduced to a small, household-based organization committed to defeating the Trinity River Canal Project when it was presented to Congress for funding in the upcoming legislative session. The name of the grassroots organization was Citizens Organization for a Sound Treaty (COST). COST organizers had been unsuccessfully trying to rally opposition to the bill for years, but with the legislation soon to come before Congress, time was of the essence and efforts doubled in the early part of 1972.

Steelman's political ambition placed him in opposition to the incumbent conservative Democrat from the Northeast Dallas district, Earl Cabell. Cabell, who was Dallas's Mayor at the time of the Kennedy Assassination, had won a seat in Congress in 1964, ending the conservative Republican Bruce Alger's career in elected political office. Cabell's 1972 campaign had been waged on the promise to bring the canal to Dallas, thereby improving its place as a potential hub for new enterprises and industrial trade. Hoping to find an issue upon which he could distance himself from Cabell, Steelman latched onto the Trinity River Canal Project, arguing that with the

²⁴ *Texas Monthly*, June 1973, "The Unholy Trinity Incident."

construction of a new international airport to be located between Dallas and Forth Worth, (eventually called DFW International Airport), canalization would be an outmoded duplication of shipping transit capacity, an unnecessary waste of federal tax dollars, and bring only crime and pollution into the region. Steelman began to argue that Dallas citizens would be much better served if the money allocated to the canal project were refunded in tax breaks. Calling the project a “billion-dollar ditch,” he managed to take the ideas of COST and translate them into practical concerns for Dallas citizens. Steelman won the GOP primary.²⁵

Despite Steelman’s success, grassroots opposition throughout the DFW Metroplex remained embryonic until October 1972 when the canal project manager naively told a reporter that while the federal government was footing the bill for the project’s construction, some start-up costs would have to be incurred by area citizens. For the first time, Dallasites were told that they would have to pay for the initial phase of the Canal Project through an additional \$150 million property tax hike. The result was a prioritization of the Canal Project as an issue in the general election. The established Dallas business community, for whom the project was considered most important, began to organize their own operations in support of the canal. But their timing was off. A majority of Dallas citizens had already grown concerned that the canal project was wasteful, particularly as national inflationary problems captured headlines and forced wage and price controls, when the space program—based in large part in Texas—had seen cuts in its funding, and when being a good steward of tax dollars was becoming a far more salient concern.²⁶

In November, with the Canal Project issue as a major backdrop, Steelman easily won a seat in Congress, upsetting Cabell with an astonishing 56 percent of the vote. For the canal

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

project's opponents, however, Steelman's election was only the beginning of the fight. Seeing that a bond election in Dallas would be a necessary first step on the path toward the canal's construction, COST shifted its focus away from Washington, DC and back to more local avenues of influence. Sensing that momentum was on its side, COST closely aligned itself with environmental engineers in Dallas who began to leak reports to the press that the canal would result in deforestation and the pollution of several area lakes around which a number of DFW suburbs had been developed.

While the Dallas business community tried to convince the area populace that "what is good for downtown is good for them," suburban residents balked. In early 1973, COST exposed a report showing that eight of the twenty-four River Authority directors owned land in the Trinity River watershed, meaning that those business leaders most ardent in their support for canalization would also benefit most directly. The expanding suburban middle class in Dallas immediately objected. At this point, as middle-class animus against the city's business elite was growing in the context of a tax war, the Dallas business community began to panic. Hoping to reinvigorate support, members of the community's business elite poured over \$500,000 into a pro-canal public relations campaign, including a lavish gala celebration in support of the project. Every congressman from the area attended the gala except one—Alan Steelman.²⁷

COST organized its own public relations effort in the weeks leading up to the March 13 bond election. With the slogan, "your money, their canal," COST rallied anti-tax conservatives and populists in both parties who had previously considered canalization a worthwhile and profitable endeavor. COST also welcomed the support of La Raza Unida, which rallied Hispanic voters against the canal through populist messages and anti-tax, anti-government diatribes. In early March, John Tower entered the fray on the side of business, trying to use his conservative

²⁷ Ibid.

credentials to rebuild credibility for the canal among suburban voters and Hispanics. Tower's decision was not only a mistake in that it led to a decline in his own popularity among both constituencies, but also because it placed him on the losing side of an argument based on the principle that the federal government could not be trusted to do the right thing for local citizens. In the spring of 1973, just one year after COST organizers had been meeting in a living room with only a handful of participants, the Trinity River Canal Project went down to a staggering defeat.²⁸

The story of the Trinity River Canal Project is an interesting one because it depicts a successful grassroots campaign operating with the support of a young Republican leader overcoming the economic power of Dallas big business on the basis of anti-government, anti-tax, anti-elitist rhetoric. This conservative grassroots first attracted white suburbanites, but was eventually popular among Hispanics distrustful of a Democratic Party which it believed was all talk and no action when it came to helping their community. COST even attracted pockets of local environmentalist activists who, along with other Texas liberals, viewed the state Democratic Party—not the GOP—as their primary obstacle on the road to political inclusion. What transpired in Dallas because of this issue does not necessarily equate to a broader pattern of anti-liberalism and Republican growth at the grassroots, but it does indicate the variety of issues around which white suburban grassroots conservatives mobilized, as well as the instability of conservative Republican organization.

Texans on the fringe of political power began to assert themselves with more tenacity in the early 1970s. Issues like school prayer and abortion slowly entered the mainstream of political discourse while the state's abundant Mexican-American population also increased its involvement in Texas politics, and through a more diverse array of channels. Suburban whites

²⁸ Ibid.

rallied in opposition to federal intrusions that would seemingly benefit their area's economy—objections made almost solely on the basis of taxation issues. It was in this tumultuous political context that the 1972 presidential campaign helped to crystallize these political impulses as evidence of liberalism run amok.

The 1972 Campaigns

On December 6, 1969, less than a year since his inauguration, Richard Nixon made his way into the visiting locker room of the University of Arkansas's football stadium. There, much to the dismay of Penn State fans who were convinced that their undefeated Nittany Lions were the best team in America, Nixon presented the University of Texas football team with a plaque, signifying his proclamation of the top-ranked Longhorns, having just defeated second-ranked Arkansas 15-14, as college football's national champions for 1969. Five years later, during a commencement address at the school he worked for, Penn State Head Coach Joe Paterno famously wondered how Nixon could "know so much about college football in 1969 and so little about Watergate in 1974." Nixon's actions in Fayetteville that December day did not earn him any friends in Pennsylvania, but they certainly earned him friends in Austin, Texas—and Nixon desperately wanted to be liked deep in the heart of Texas.²⁹

Richard Nixon's popularity across the South soared in the early 1970s, primarily through his appeal for support from America's "Silent Majority." What many of the white Southerners in this Silent Majority really appreciated was the tough stand that Nixon was taking on public school integration measures like busing.³⁰ Nixon also earned points in the South by continuing his pledge to address issues of crime and lawlessness through a reinvigorated commitment to

²⁹ Miscellaneous Newspaper Clippings, Box 117, Folder 6: Clippings, James A. Baker Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ (Hereafter cited as SGML).

³⁰ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

bulking up the nation's law enforcement capabilities. By 1972, Republicans across the nation took pleasure in bragging that while serious crime rates had increased by as much as 19 percent during the last years of LBJ's administration, similar figures had virtually flatlined under Nixon. Projected against a backdrop of the 1960s, a decade which saw African Americans agitate against status quo discriminations in the South, messages of Law & Order often resonated with Texas whites, fearful that such chaos might be extended into their state. There is little doubt that the increases Nixon enjoyed in his popularity among Southerners during the early 1970s can be traced to the same issues that won him support among conservatives in that region, indeed across the nation, in the late 1960s—namely, issues of race.³¹ That story has been well-documented, but the story does not end there.³²

Still, Nixon's rising popularity in Texas was the result of much more than just his stands on busing, crime, or civil rights. On the one hand, of course, Nixon had never been all that popular in Texas, a reality which made even small increases to his favorability ratings substantial and noticeable. Despite his best efforts to be seen as a man of the people in 1968, many conservative and even some populist-leaning liberals dismissed Nixon, identifying him as a deceptive voice for the hated Eastern Establishment. Nixon, thanks in part to popular stands on issues like busing and crime, made great strides in unraveling this stereotype during his first years in office. On the other hand, Nixon benefited from an atmosphere of social and cultural change that transcended the monocausal. Issues like busing gave Nixon momentum in Texas, but no more or less than other issues which coalesced into a message that, in the coming years,

³¹ *Washington Post*, May 15, 1972, Box 777, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; "Crime File," Box 779, George S. McGovern Papers, SGM; 1972 Campaign Factbook, PRP, Part II, Reel 11, Frame 39; Crime, October 12, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 154.

³² Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

was perfected as a new wave of anti-liberalism. With Vice President Spiro T. Agnew serving as a very capable hatchet man, the Nixon White House established a consistent presence in Texas during the early 1970s. This presence was one through which messages were tailored to conservatives' distaste for civil disobedience, anti-war protests, student uprisings, and a growing fury targeted at elites, particularly in the academic world and in the mass media, but not excluding elites such as those in the Dallas business community whose partnership with the federal government on issues like the Trinity River Canal Project compromised their identification with the middle class.³³

In a very large sense, then, Nixon's growing popularity in Texas during the early 1970s, and the seeming rise of Republican respectability during that same time, can just as easily be explained as statewide displeasure over the perceived liberalization of the national Democratic Party. In fact, it was not so much that the Democratic Party was liberal, but that the Democratic Party seemed, to many Texans, to be radically and quickly moving to the far left. Gareth Davies has understood this as a period in which liberalism came to be redefined as a philosophy of entitlement, rather than opportunity—a period when identity politics and civil rights seemed less extricable from the Democratic liberalism and more about seeking special rights rather than equal rights.³⁴ Critically important in this timeline was 1972. That year, Vietnam remained a tough issue for Nixon, even in hawkish Texas. Polls indicated that the public's trust in Nixon on Vietnam was fading, that patience was wearing thin, and that many Texans actually preferred a new Republican nominee. Some conservatives in Texas even began preliminary efforts to organize a base of campaign operations for Ronald Reagan, peppering the California Governor

³³ Schulman, *The Seventies*; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1974), Richard M. Nixon, 1972, 888-893; "Managing Public Opinion" April 11, 1970, Amarillo, TX, TX Library Assoc., Box 4Ad27, George Christian Papers, CAH.

³⁴ Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

with pleas to enter the race while gathering pockets of momentum in traditionally Republican strongholds like suburban Houston. Reagan always rejected such pleas, but not without citing areas of disagreement between him and the President. Nonetheless, a small but vocal number of Texas Republicans grew enchanted with the prospect of unseating the incumbent figurehead of the party with the icon of conservative populism in the West.³⁵

Clearly, the source of Nixon's popularity in Texas, which really began to spike only in late 1972, was not Nixon himself. Nixon lost Texas in 1960; he lost again in 1968. Both defeats were to liberal Northern Democrats who managed to convince the state that they were, in fact, moderate and not really all that different from the Republican nominee. The lesson: Texans, by and large, revert to Democratic traditions and loyalties when they are not presented with a clear ideological distinction. Nixon would not make the same mistake for a third time. In 1972, Nixon made sure that Texans saw the difference between him and his opponent. Nixon's ability to do this successfully was mainly, however, a credit to the Democratic Party's nomination of George McGovern for President of the United States.

Put another way, McGovern made Nixon's job in Texas much easier. By the eve of the Republican National Convention in August, polls indicated that Nixon's advantage over McGovern in Texas had reached a near 30 percent.³⁶ This comfortably wide margin for the same man who had lost Texas just four years earlier cannot be explained as the result of any single issue, nor can it be explained as a collective change in Texans' hearts. Nixon's favorability ratings rose slightly in Texas during his first two years in office, with busing issues providing inroads into white suburban communities in places like Dallas, where school integration and

³⁵ Republican National Committee, July 22, 1971, Denver, CO, PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 8, Frames 552-569; *New York Post*, July 5, 1972, "GOP Credibility Problem," Box 779, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; Form Letter from Ronald Reagan, January 1972, Political File, 1967-1972, Box 17, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

³⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, August 20, 1972, 13A.

suburban expansion seemed to be happening most rapidly. By mid-1972, however, despite the fact that busing remained a topic fresh on the minds of many Texans, Nixon's popularity began to dip. Nixon tried to stand on his diplomatic achievements—particularly his visits to China and the Soviet Union—but such efforts were only marginally effective in what was still a virulently anticommunist state. Nixon also championed economic issues like revenue sharing, a policy designed to send federal tax dollars into state coffers in order to subsidize state and local government. This was conceived as a way to curry favor with state's rights advocates, but actually angered some conservative Texans who openly preferred federal tax breaks to revenue sharing. Nixon even tried to appeal to South Texas Hispanics and went out of his way to publicly thank Mexican-Americans for their contributions to national culture. Yet none of these efforts accomplished for Nixon what having George McGovern as an opponent could.³⁷

McGovern was unpopular in Texas for a variety of reasons. He was hardly a friend to the state's oil conservatives and was harshly criticized for his rather vague calls to "eliminate all tax loopholes," which were routinely then coupled with diatribes against the oil industry.³⁸ Aside from his stance on Vietnam, which openly appealed to the anti-war left wing of his party, McGovern's various other stands on foreign policy also troubled Texas conservatives. McGovern could not, despite frequent pressure to do so, articulate a reasonable position on America's alliance with Israel or Middle East policy in general. At the same time, his advocacy for a reduced nuclear arsenal and a stabilization of second strike defense growth contributed to many Texans' growing association of liberalism (and simultaneously, the Democratic Party) with, if not weakness, then certainly with reductions in strength. His suggestion that newly

³⁷ Remarks of Charls E. Walker, November 29, 1972, Dallas, TX, Box 16, Charls E. Walker Papers, HI; 1972 Campaign Factbook, PRP, Part II, Reel 11, Frame 391; .S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1974), Richard M. Nixon, 1972, 888-893; Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement*.

³⁸ "Economy File," Box 784, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

appointed judges spend 10-15 days in jail in order to “see what it was like” was also not met with much enthusiasm in the Lone Star State. Neither was his defense of marijuana users, of whom he said jail time was inappropriate unless the user was also acting as a dealer.³⁹ Of particular disdain to conservatives in Texas was McGovern’s open association with “long-haired hippies.” In fact, frequently throughout the campaign, McGovern was derided as a friend to such constituents as a way to undermine his acceptability to traditional Democrats. Such images speak to the power of perception in shaping ideological associations made between voters and candidates, as well as to gendered notions of strength and respectability—both characteristics that changed in importance with respect to political culture in the 1970s.⁴⁰

Although difficult to quantify, qualitative evidence suggests that among conservative Texas Democrats who supported Nixon in 1968, most were ready to abandon the GOP ship in 1972, but refused to support McGovern on the basis of his liberalism. Conservative Texas Democrats’ displeasure with McGovern began before he garnered the nomination. As the Democratic National Convention approached, the Texas delegation leaned toward Hubert H. Humphrey. Texas Democrats’ support for Humphrey, particularly in light of the fact that McGovern was seen as unacceptable, indicates an important divergence between factions within the party. Before the nominating convention, Humphrey was frequently recalled as a loyal follower of Lyndon Johnson, whose public image many Texans were hoping to rehabilitate. Humphrey ran a populist campaign during the primary, championing himself as “the People’s Democrat” who “cared about the street where you live.”⁴¹ Texas Democrats largely responded well and went into the convention hoping to secure the former vice president with his second

³⁹ Campaign Files, Box 782, 784, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; *Life Magazine*, “Face to Face on the Issues,” undated, Box 779, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁴⁰ General Correspondence, Letter from Lawrence A. Carpenter, to George McGovern, June 15, 1972, Box 631, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁴¹ Media Strategy, March 9, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 11, Frames 890-899.

straight nomination. McGovern's support in Texas was weaker and far more attuned to national displeasure over the war in Vietnam. Many of McGovern's supporters in Texas, including a pair of young campaign workers named Hillary Rodham and Bill Clinton, believed their candidate could offer the nation hope and optimism—something for which virtually every poll indicated Texans desperately yearned.⁴²

But McGovern's attempts to rally a Democratic base of support in Texas failed miserably. In 1968, the popular John Connally had organized all statewide campaign efforts for Humphrey, despite the fact that Connally disagreed with Humphrey on a number of issues—the war in Vietnam, most notably. Connally's support and loyalty in 1968 contributed to Humphrey's win in Texas. In 1972, Connally, following an appointment to Nixon's cabinet as Secretary of the Treasury, chaired the Texas Democrats for Nixon organization. Connally's willingness to abandon the Democratic ship inspired many other conservative Texas Democrats to do the same and was a crucial moment for the state GOP. As Connally's support lent significant respectability to the Republican Party in Texas, McGovern's failures in the state had profound consequences for the perceptions of the Democratic Party. An examination of each campaign's manipulation of image and media reflects this failure.

Richard Nixon's campaign strategy in Texas was based on efforts to connect McGovern to dangerous and irresponsible weakness, particularly with regard to Vietnam. Nixon often spoke in Texas of McGovern's willingness to "surrender" Southeast Asia to the communists. Nixon claimed that McGovern would roll back all of the current administration's foreign policy achievements and reduce the nation's arms holdings to a level "less than before Pearl Harbor." Sensing an opportunity, many Texas Republicans jumped on the bandwagon they hoped would

⁴² General Correspondence, Box 600, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; *Washington Post*, May 15, 1972, Box 782, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; *Dallas Morning News*, February 3, 1972.

fix an association among grassroots conservatives between weakness and the Democratic Party. Coordinated Republican campaign efforts across Texas routinely emphasized McGovern's liberalism ahead of local or state issues, even in local and state races. Texas Republicans constantly used the words McGovern and surrender in the same sentence, spoke often of Democratic weakness, and jumped at the chance to use the word liberal as the quickest and easiest descriptor of all such attitudes.⁴³

While McGovern became a major focus for conservative Texans, Texas was not a major focus for McGovern. This was evident particularly in August, when McGovern scheduled a visit to the LBJ Ranch to confer with the former president and receive his endorsement. During his visit, McGovern tried to emphasize a number of similarities with Johnson. McGovern first established a rapport with Johnson on the basis of their having experienced similar paths on the rise to public office. McGovern also tried to find common cause with Johnson's own quest for peace in Southeast Asia, a strategy designed to shift the blame for American involvement in Vietnam from the Democrat Johnson to the Republican Nixon. McGovern also highlighted Johnson's insistence on larger roles for women in his campaigns, noting that LBJ was the first Texan to make such an insistence. Lastly, the Democratic nominee portrayed himself as sharing with Johnson a "deeply felt populist hostility to big business and to 'the interests.'" ⁴⁴

Although the event received considerable press coverage, McGovern's strategists were under no illusions that the meeting would boost their candidate's support in Texas. The discussion between the two public figures was scripted prior to the actual meeting and certain topics were deemed inappropriate and potentially dangerous. For instance, McGovern's staff

⁴³ Memorandum to: State and Local Staffers, from: Frederic V. Malek, October 20, 1972, Box 117, Folder 13: Committee for the Re-Election of the President, James A. Baker Papers, SGML; McGovern Manual, PRP, Part II, Reel 10, Frames 653-778.

⁴⁴ Memorandum for Milt Gwertzman, August 17, 1972, Box 329, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

strongly discouraged their candidate from even mentioning Ralph Yarborough's name for fear that the association with such a liberal would permanently end any hopes they had for carrying Texas. This was a curious strategy considering that Texas liberals had encouraged Yarborough to run for Governor in 1972 as a way to help McGovern. However, McGovern was also told not to mention John Connally who, despite having successfully organized the Humphrey campaign in 1968 in the midst of rampant intra-party discord, had angered LBJ in 1972 for organizing the "Democrats for Nixon" operation out of Texas. Johnson was slowly surrendering associations with the conservative wing of his party and Connally's own personal wrestling with partisan affiliation foreshadowed a conservative grassroots undercurrent that came to envelope the state over the next eight years. "I see relatively little immediate value in trying to relate the meeting to the political situation in Texas," one frustrated McGovern strategist wrote of the press op with LBJ.⁴⁵

Shortly after his meeting at the LBJ Ranch, McGovern was advised to pull all campaign monies allocated to television advertising in Texas. Strategists working in the McGovern campaign, upon reexamination of national political realities, divided states into two categories: needed or not-needed. Their analysis showed that 55 percent of McGovern's advertising expenditures were being wasted on states "not-needed." Seeing no chance of carrying Texas, McGovern's campaign announced plans to funnel virtually all advertising expenditures into states he "needed," including California, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. Practically no effort was made by the McGovern campaign to change voters' minds in Texas or other parts of the South.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Letter from George S. McGovern, to Elizabeth Doremus, August 26, 1971, Box 600, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; Letter from Lawrence A. Carpenter, to George McGovern, June 15, 1972, Box 631, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; Letter from Charles Guggenheim to George McGovern, "TV Advisors, Inc,"

What little media exposure McGovern was able to generate and control in Texas came through national channels, where his anti-war message, hostility to the oil industry, commitment to reducing the size of the military, and open appeals to civil rights and feminist activists contributed to a collective image of liberal entitlement rather than equality, opportunity, or certainly Texas-style anti-elitism. McGovern's style caused him problems as well. His speeches were often riddled with technicalities and he was regularly criticized for sounding like a professional economist, though his training was as an academic historian. He appeared passive and struggled to master the art of looking the camera or people in the eye. McGovern missed multiple opportunities to connect with middle class whites in Texas, a failing which played perfectly into Nixon's strategy whereby the Democratic Party had become the party of weakness, surrender, and Eastern Establishment elitism.⁴⁷

McGovern did appeal to the state's racial and ethnic minorities, even taking time to speak to the state's Native American population. McGovern appealed to black Texans and liberals by supporting "100 percent" the policy of busing—saying that he favored "busing children, busing teachers, and busing money." Whereas most Democratic candidates typically campaigned in East Texas hoping to earn white votes, McGovern campaigned in East Texas with the hope of earning the unwavering loyalty of the region's African American population. McGovern told crowds of East Texas blacks that George Wallace and the conservative wing of the Democratic Party stood directly between them and greater political freedom. He also told audiences in Texas that Nixon had failed to improve the nation's safety because he had failed to see that the root of criminal activity was white racism, drugs, and poverty. He told Texans that the solution to these

August 22, 1972, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; Letter from TV Advisors, Inc., September 7, 1972, Box 874, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁴⁷ Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement*; Campaign Files, Box 784; Memorandum, To: George McGovern, From: Don O'Brien, Re: California Campaign, June 9, 1972, Box 329, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

issues was greater racial equality, gun control, and even suggested taxing toy guns and toy soldiers at a 50 percent clip as a way to discourage parents from conditioning their children to violence.⁴⁸

McGovern often spoke about having a “constituency of the disaffected.” Certainly, racial and ethnic minorities fit into this category, as did, in his estimation, America’s youth. Having come from an academic world, McGovern felt comfortable reengaging students and faculty at colleges and universities. McGovern’s opponents derided his 1972 campaign as a “AAA” appeal to the youth of the American Left on issues of “acid, amnesty, and abortion.” He tried to sound like a populist when he spoke of the nation suffering from “Nixonism—which gives aid and comfort to the banks and big business at the expense of the little man,” but rarely, if ever, targeted these messages to rural and working-class Texas Democrats.⁴⁹

Whatever appeal McGovern made in Texas differed little from his appeals to the anti-war left wing of his party. McGovern promised to end the war in Vietnam within the first ninety days of his administration. When given a chance to talk about local economic issues, he made comments such as, “everybody is talking about high prices and boycotting the supermarkets. I say, the price of the war is too high and we should boycott the war!” McGovern’s only effective strategy in Texas, and the one he had the best opportunity to use in order to make inroads into the populist-leanings of both state conservatives and liberals, was to hammer the issue of corruption and government dishonesty.⁵⁰ McGovern criticized Nixon for misleading the nation by failing to

⁴⁸ “Material for Senator McGovern,” from Hal Goodman, March 31, 1972, Incomplete FCC Correspondence, May 31, 1972, Box 329, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; Letter from George S. McGovern, to Juanita Ahtone, August 26, 1971, Box 600, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; General Correspondence, Report on the Conference of American Associates of Political Consultants,” March 11-13, 1972, Box 631, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; Address by Jesse Jackson, March 18, 1972, Box 777, “Blacks,” “Untitled Speech on Crime,” Box 779, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁴⁹ H. W. Brands. *The Strange Death of American Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Incomplete FCC Correspondence, May 31, 1972, Box 329, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁵⁰ General Correspondence with “Professors from Texas,” Box 600, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

reveal his “secret plan to win the war” during the 1968 campaign, yet rarely managed to touch on issues of government corruption and dishonesty without doing so in the context of the Vietnam War. Thus, McGovern overshadowed a potentially fruitful campaign issue in Texas by indirectly emphasizing the very issues that Nixon had successfully used to paint the Democratic nominee as an agent of the far left—replete with images of surrender, weakness, and communist appeasement.⁵¹

In November, though voter apathy resulted in the lowest turnout for a presidential election since 1948, Nixon trounced McGovern. Nationally, Nixon captured over 60 percent of the vote, compared to McGovern’s 37 percent. In Texas, the margin was even greater, with Nixon winning 66 percent of the vote, compared to McGovern’s 33 percent. Nixon carried 246 of 254 Texas counties, became the first GOP candidate in history to win a majority of the state’s Catholic vote, which he carried 56-33, and won 59 percent of Texas blue-collar workers.⁵² This success translated even more heavily in the state’s two largest cities. In Houston, Nixon won both of the city’s Jewish precincts by more than 60 percent, won the blue-collar vote 68-31, and carried the youth vote 60-40. McGovern dominated among Houston blacks, 97-3, and won the Mexican-American vote 68-32, but the small population and low turnout rendered these successes electorally insignificant.⁵³ In Dallas, Nixon carried an overall vote of 70 percent. He carried youth voters by as much as 84-16 in some precincts, blue-collar voters by an overall margin of 77-23, senior citizens—the most yellow of the yellow-dog Texans—78-22, and upper-class white voters by an astounding 89-11 percent.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Material for Senator McGovern,” from Hal Goodman, March 31, 1972, Box 329, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; “Corruption File,” Box 779, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; “Vietnam, misc. File,” Box 800, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁵² 1972 Election Report: The Polls, November 22, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 171.

⁵³ 1972 Election Report: The Cities – Houston, November 29, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 182.

⁵⁴ 1972 Election Report: The Cities – Dallas, December 11, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 206.

Nixon had finally won in Texas, carrying the state by a 2-1 margin. Nixon's landslide helped Texas Republicans gain seven seats in the State House of Representatives but only one additional seat in the State Senate. These gains were significant, but not overwhelming. In the weeks following the election, pundits and analysts in Texas assessed the fallout from the campaign and determined that Nixon's success was almost solely the result of McGovern's liberalism. Nixon was considered a moderate by most Texas conservatives while those same voters viewed McGovern as a liberal "extremist." Democrats maintained control in most local and state races, while Nixon's attempt to remove himself from partisanship alienated Texas Republican insiders. Virtually all political observers concluded that while the Texas GOP was making strides, it was not yet a two-party state; Nixon's support there was little more than an utter rejection what they defined as McGovern liberalism.⁵⁵

McGovern's liberalism also benefited John Tower, though Tower began to squander some of that benefit in Dallas in early 1973 during the battles over the Trinity River Canal Project. Tower's previous two senate campaigns had both been considered significant upsets. Texas Democrats hoped 1972 would finally be the year that their party regained the Senate seat lost in 1961 and rested much of that hope on a belief that Tower was vulnerable on the very issues that seemed to be sparking the new populist-conservative revival. More specifically, conservative insiders in the Texas Democratic Party formulated a generic campaign strategy to defeat Tower based on the Republican Senator's record on crime, taxes, economics, and failure to, as they began to put it, "work for the common man."⁵⁶ In order to succeed, however, conservative Texas Democrats needed to distance themselves and their partisan identity from

⁵⁵ *Austin American Statesman*, June 13, 1972, 1A; *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, November 9, 1972, 1A; *Texas Observer*, December 1, 1972, 4-6; "Texas Still Not a Two-Party State," *Houston Chronicle*, November 19, 1972, Box 117, Folder 6: Clippings. James A. Baker Papers, SGML; 1972 Election Report: Editorial Reaction, December 6, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 226.

⁵⁶ 1972 Election Report: The Cities – Dallas, December 11, 1972, PRP, Part II, Reel 13, Frames 860-955.

McGovern. Extricating themselves from that liberal quagmire proved difficult. Conversely, Tower, whose organizing theme was to “make Texas a true Two-Party State,” based his campaign squarely on ideological grounds.⁵⁷ Tower lost some support when his opponent, Harold “Barefoot” Sanders—a former Assistant Attorney General and Legislative Assistant to President Johnson—defeated Ralph Yarborough in the Democratic primary. Without Yarborough to worry about, many Texas Democrats believed they could successfully run an honestly moderate and populist-leaning Democrat against Tower.⁵⁸

Texas Democrats underestimated, however, the potency of using ideological loyalties as a foundational context for waging a statewide campaign. In June 1972, Tower began to associate Sanders with McGovern and a nationally liberalizing Democratic Party. Prior to the Democratic convention, Sanders, unlike the Democrats’ gubernatorial candidate, Dolph Briscoe, made the mistake of announcing that he would faithfully support the presidential nominee of his party, no matter who that turned out to be. Virtually overnight, Sanders favorability ratings declined—almost in perfect alignment with the number of Texas voters who perceived Sanders as liberal. Between June and November, Texans collectively characterizing Sanders as “somewhat liberal” increased 10 percent. The number of Texans characterizing Sanders as “very conservative” decreased 10 percent. Even more importantly, the number of Texans characterizing Sanders as “middle of the road” declined, by 6 percent. Sanders knew that McGovern was the source of his unpopularity. In response, Sanders refused to make any public appearances with McGovern, despite offers to do so from the national campaign.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “There is a Difference,” Folder 5, Box 639, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁵⁸ “A Research Proposal Presented to the Honorable John Tower, For the 1978 Senatorial Campaign,” June 1977, Folder 19, Box 542, Tower Senate Club, JTP. Yarborough had been encouraged to run for governor by many state liberals, but decided, instead, to try and regain a seat in the United States Senate

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; Bass and DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 313; *Dallas Morning News*, July 15, 1972, 1A.

The proof that ideological associations with the liberal McGovern directly contributed to Tower's victory in 1972 is in the proverbial pudding. Among voters who saw Sanders becoming more liberal, Tower won 57-33 percent. Among voters who saw Sanders staying conservative, Sanders won 50-40 percent. The problem for Sanders was that, according to statewide polling, there was a 20 percent swing in the number of voters identifying the Democratic Senate nominee as increasingly liberal versus those who saw him staying conservative. Tower carried self-identifying conservative Texans at a rate of three to one, broke even with Sanders among moderates, and only lost among self-identifying liberals. Tower became the first Texas Republican to win a plurality of Hispanic voters, even outdoing his own impressive 1966 performance among that ethnic minority.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, Tower's support fell short of Nixon's in Texas. Why? Tower was widely seen as among the most vocal opponents of busing in the entire United States Senate. Yet Tower's support was lower than Nixon's, and significantly so in cities where white suburban angst over busing was among the most intense in the state. Political observers at the time, arguing that Tower's victory was the result of McGovern's unpopularity, also noted that the Republican Senator was no longer viewed as a strong advocate for conservative values, particularly as social and religious issues had slowly made their way into the public's political consciousness.

In Houston, for instance, Nixon won easily when directly compared to McGovern. Tower also carried Houston, but with less enthusiasm, likely because his campaign only indirectly contrasted to McGovern. In other words, voters easily rejected McGovern in favor of

⁶⁰ "A Research Proposal Presented to the Honorable John Tower, For the 1978 Senatorial Campaign," June 1977, Folder 19, Box 542, Tower Senate Club, JTP; Decision Making Information Polls, Sept. 1974, Folder 16, Box 638, Tower Senate Club, JTP; Election '72: The Mexican American Vote in Texas, February 1973, Folder 6, Box 454, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

his opponent, but had to actively make the connection between Sanders, liberalism, and McGovern before casting a vote for Tower. At the same time, Houston boasted some of Ronald Reagan's earliest centers of support and many local pundits speculated that Tower had alienated the populist-leaning conservatives in Texas by aligning himself, at least as far as his public image was concerned, with the Eastern Establishment.⁶¹ One conclusion seemed certain: for both Richard Nixon and John Tower, their opponents' image was everything—and that image was liberal.

The early 1970s anti-liberal backlash in Texas was consequential in several ways. For state Democrats, intra-party divisions were exacerbated as conservatives found themselves increasingly at odds with the liberalizing national party. Though conservatives were still the dominant majority in Texas, the strength of the national liberal movement emboldened the liberal Texas minority trying to operate within the Democratic Party.⁶² This emboldening intensified the animosity felt between ideological factions in Texas and coincided with the Republican Party's growth through the addition of religious and social conservatives and ideologically minded conservative libertarians and populists.

Yet the intra-party factionalism at work in both parties had distinctly different results. For Democrats, the divisions seemed to be tearing the formerly dominant national party apart, while for Republicans the divisions, though tumultuous at times, allowed for growth. Bruce Schulman has argued that by the early 1970s, "American conservatism was emerging from a slow, painful transformation. As the geographic locus of conservative politics had moved South and West, the nation had changed; it became more populist, more middle-class, more anti-

⁶¹ *Austin American Statesman*, June 13, 1972, 1A; *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, November 9, 1972, 1A; *Texas Observer*, December 1, 1972, 4-6; *Washington Post*, October 13, 1972, Box 777, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; "A Research Proposal Presented to the Honorable John Tower, For the 1978 Senatorial Campaign" June 1977, Folder 19, Box 542, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁶² *Houston Post*, February 6, 1971, Box 4C518, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

establishment.” McGovern’s nomination in 1972 alienated large segments of the moderate and conservative population and forced many Texans to reexamine their political loyalties in light of the increasing estrangement between conservatism and the Democratic Party.⁶³

It was also in the early 1970s that the word “liberal” became much more synonymous among conservatives with the word Democrat. Research reports conducted for the RNC in 1972 indicated that most Americans associated liberalism with individualism, advocacy for the underprivileged, and a free-thinking hostility toward special interests. With the expressed intent of undermining this definition, the RNC funneled strategy papers to state and local campaigns within which a concerted effort was made to link liberalism with weakness, permissiveness, and relativistic amorality. By painting McGovern as a weak, bleeding-heart liberal, conservatives both nationally and in Texas managed to undermine the perceived ideological traditions of the Democratic Party.⁶⁴

The strategy of coupling Democratic liberalism with a host of pejoratives collectively intended to redefine liberalism as a philosophy of entitlement and weakness was most effective against McGovern, but was not limited to him. During the 1972 campaign, Texas Republicans openly questioned George Wallace’s persistent candidacy for national power as a threat. Some Texans even viewed Wallace as an “advocate of dangerous and collectivist welfare state politics.”⁶⁵ Among many volunteers working for Republican candidates in Texas, George Wallace, whose name among many Republicans connoted extremism and unprofessionalism, was simply not a name they wanted their campaign to be associated with.⁶⁶ Similar but more

⁶³ *Dallas Morning News*, February 3, 1972, Box 589, Preston Smith Papers, SWC; Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 251-265; Schulman, *The Seventies*, 113-14.

⁶⁴ McGovern Manual, PRP, Part II, Reel 10, Frames 653-778; Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement*.

⁶⁵ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 252.

⁶⁶ Lynda L. Kaid, Interview with Author, November 7, 2006, Gainesville, FL. Kaid served as a campaign worker for Paul Eggers gubernatorial campaign in 1970 and John Tower’s senate campaign in 1972.

benign criticisms were also commonly levied against Nixon, whose willingness to maintain high levels of federal spending to support domestic programs rankled conservatives disgruntled over the disconnect that they claimed existed between Nixon's words and his actions as president. Criticizing Nixon was certainly not an expressed part of the RNC's plan to redefine liberalism, but was an outgrowth of concerted efforts on the part of conservatives to aggressively label their opponents for political benefit. The quest to label Democrats as dangerous and out of step with American values was always a prime goal, but for many grassroots conservatives, purging the Republican Party of closet liberalism was equally imperative. The 1972 campaigns served as a monumental stepping stone, not so much on the road toward Republican respectability, but certainly on the path toward burying the New Deal coalition and destroying the state's "yellow-dog" loyalties.⁶⁷

Switching

Grassroots conservatives mobilized around a variety of issues in the early 1970s. The 1972 presidential campaign strained partisan allegiances and made ideology a more visible qualifier for support in Texas. As these conservatives reconsidered their partisan allegiances and redefined their ideological convictions, they also mobilized around social issues, economic issues, and anti-liberal hostility toward the national Democratic Party. There was a feeling among many Texans that the time was nearing when ideological polarization would necessitate partisan realignment. This feeling intensified in May 1973 when John Connally announced that he was leaving the Democratic Party to become a Republican. Connally's announcement shook the political world in Texas to the point that state newspaper editorials began to envision a scenario by which a Connally presidential campaign might be the necessary link connecting state

⁶⁷ James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), CH 23.

conservatives with the Republican Party.⁶⁸ Just months earlier, Connally had eulogized his long-time political ally and friend, Lyndon Johnson from the same pulpit used that day by Billy Graham. Connally's eulogy triggered national recollections of John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas less than ten years earlier and closely linked Connally to the two major icons of 1960s liberalism. Though Connally had served in Richard Nixon's administration as Secretary of the Treasury and chaired the Democrats for Nixon operations in 1972, few Texas conservatives received the news of his switch as anything less than significant.⁶⁹ Members of both parties characterized Connally as the quintessential rugged Texan—conservative, tough, and in possession of an important key to the conservative vote in Texas.⁷⁰

Yet at the same time, Connally also appeared far more polished than did some of his conservative brethren. Connally biographer James Reston once described the former Texas Governor's presence in his home state as almost "regal." Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, Connally masterfully utilized the media in Texas to communicate, as Reston put it, grace and charm, particularly as he refused to "spew race venom" as other Southern governors were accustomed to doing. John Connally's Texas was the Texas of the space age—of skyscrapers, technology, and beginning in May of 1973, Republicanism.⁷¹

Connally's decision to switch reflected what was becoming a much more common impulse among conservative Texans. After all, Connally's career had been marked by Democratic loyalties. He was born in 1917 in a small town south of San Antonio and served as

⁶⁸ *Texas Monthly*, September 1973, "John Connally Between the Acts," Undated, *Houston Chronicle* clipping, Box 4C518, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH.

⁶⁹ Press Release, "Democrats for Nixon," October 31, 1972, Box 782, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML; *Dallas Morning News*, August 21, 1972, 1A, 8A; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1974), Richard M. Nixon, 1972, 893-901; James Reston, *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally*. (New York: Harpers & Row, 1989), 443-444.

⁷⁰ "Issues and Answers" – Transcript, June 4, 1972, Box 777, George S. McGovern Papers, SGML.

⁷¹ *Texas Monthly*, May 1973, "Farewell to LBJ: A Hill Country Valediction"; *Texas Monthly*, September 1973, "John Connally Between the Acts"; Reston, *The Lone Star*, 321-322.

student body president at the University of Texas at Austin before joining the United States Navy during World War II, where he survived numerous close encounters with enemy combatants. Following the war, Connally worked closely with Lyndon Johnson's 1946 congressional campaign and was instrumental in securing Johnson's 87-vote win, (whether by legitimate or illegitimate means remains a mystery), in the infamous senate campaign of 1948. Taking a bullet from the same rifle that assassinated John Kennedy catapulted Connally into a position of national prominence, as did his subsequent gubernatorial elections in 1964 and 1966. Connally agreed to head Hubert Humphrey's Texas campaign after his good friend Lyndon decided not to seek the Democratic Party nomination again in 1968, but rivalries within the state party and liberalization at the national level, particularly on the issue of Vietnam, pushed Connally increasingly close to the Republican side of the aisle.⁷²

Connally's association with the Republican Party was not all, however, of his own initiative. Republicans like John Tower leaped at the opportunity to align himself with a conservative Texas icon the magnitude of Connally and such courtships certainly flattered the former governor.⁷³ Nobody, however, was more enthralled with the notion of rubbing elbows with Texas power than the President of the United States. Wanting desperately to win the hearts of Texas conservatives, not simply on the basis of McGovern's—or any other opponent's—liberalism, but on his own merit, Richard Nixon often obsessed about Texas. Befriending John Connally was one way, Nixon believed, to bolster his own credentials there. After appointing Connally as Secretary of the Treasury in 1971, Nixon often consulted LBJ's former confidant on political decisions and told his staff to maintain close contact with Connally on major decisions.⁷⁴ Nixon was fascinated by the kind of power Connally and LBJ had, at various times, wielded in

⁷² Reston, *The Lone Star*.

⁷³ Watergate Speech (Draft), 1974, by John Tower, Folder 1, Box 20, Press Office, JTP.

⁷⁴ Handwritten Notes, February 15, 1971, Box 2, John Ehrlichman Papers, HI.

Texas. Connally's aura as a man with deep political connections—someone who “knew where all the bodies were buried”—drew Nixon to Connally as much as Connally was drawn to the Republican Party.⁷⁵ Nixon admired Connally so much that, in early 1972, he seriously considered asking Agnew to step aside in order to make room for the former Texas Governor on the national ticket. Only Connally's Democratic affiliation and personal reluctance to accept such a nomination prevented a post-Watergate Connally administration.⁷⁶ In later years Nixon wrote that Connally was “the only man in either party who clearly had the potential to be a great president.”⁷⁷

But the political winds never blew exactly in Connally's direction. That does not mean, however, that the wind was not blowing. In fact, throughout the early 1970s, one particular wind blew harder and more often than any other—and contributed a powerful source of energy to the gathering political storm in Texas. The wind that ripped through the Lone Star State with more fury than any other, including broadly defined anti-liberalism aimed at the national Democratic Party and the likes of George McGovern, was the wind of scandal and corruption. The politics of scandal and corruption had grown potent in Texas through the Sharpstown Stock Fraud Scandal that tore through the halls of the state capitol in Austin between 1971 and 1972, laying waste to many in the conservative Democratic establishment. The politics of scandal and corruption were revived in 1973 and 1974, though this time the focus was on the White House.

Watergate

Though not the only scandal on the minds of Texas voters in the early 1970s, Watergate no doubt contributed heavily to the paranoia, distrust, and pervasive dissatisfaction citizens felt

⁷⁵ Reston, *The Lone Star*, 378-380.

⁷⁶ Memorandum, August 22, 1972, Committee for the Re-Election of the President, Box 117, Folder 13. James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

⁷⁷ Reston, *The Lone Star*, 443-444.

toward politics and government. Historians have debated the effect of Watergate in the context of modern conservatism's national growth in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Some, like Jonathan Schoenwald, see Watergate as a stumbling block on the road to national Republican dominance. Others, like Bruce Schulman, see Watergate as enabling a GOP takeover by the Reagan-wing of the party.⁷⁸ James T. Patterson has argued that Watergate simply brought to a head the growing animus against government which had been building for a decade. Vietnam, a sagging economy, and corruption in multiple forms provoked a wave of anti-government stands in the early 1970s. Both nationally and in Texas, the number of individuals identifying themselves as independent, rather than affiliated with either party, increased during the early 1970s. If a citizen, therefore, rejected both parties as untrustworthy, but refused to drop out of the political process entirely, he or she could take an anti-statist or populist stand and maintain (and even increase) their own respectability and sense of political legitimacy.⁷⁹

Simply put, anti-statist attitudes helped tear down traditions and partisan loyalties both nationally and in Texas. By the beginning of 1975, with Gerald Ford's pardon of Nixon still fresh on people's minds, over sixty percent of Americans believed that government leadership was worse than it had been a decade earlier. Certainly, Americans' distrust in government did not begin with Watergate and the various associated scandals. Polls in 1958 indicated that nearly eighty percent of the American public trusted their government to "do the right thing" when called to act. Those numbers began to decline in 1964 during Lyndon Johnson's administration and continued to weaken steadily until the Watergate scandal allowed for a flooding of anti-government animosity and paranoia into the mainstream discourse of American politics. Though

⁷⁸ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing*, 220; Schulman, *The Seventies*, 43-48, 51; Craig Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign that Started it All* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Current, 2005), CH 2.

⁷⁹ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Watergate did not cause the decline in people's trust in government, it did lend credibility to and fuel anti-establishment personalities.⁸⁰

In Texas, it seems clear in hindsight that Watergate, though certainly not a starting point, was a necessary step on the path toward a legitimate and competitive two-party political culture. As conservative Democrats had an increasingly difficult time distancing themselves from the perceived liberalization of the national party, established Texas Republicans unsuccessfully tried to juggle their personal loyalties to Nixon with the public's seemingly pervasive disdain for corruption. In many ways, Watergate was another salvo in the decline of John Tower's viability as a spokesperson for Texas conservatives. Though Tower's anti-government rhetoric became far more vitriolic in the aftermath of Watergate, his unflinching loyalty to Nixon during the scandal invited criticism in Texas.⁸¹ Between 1973 and 1974, Tower seemed embroiled in a war of words with members of the Texas press, which he believed had unfairly misrepresented Nixon and the entire affair. Privately, Tower feared that Watergate would turn Texans away from the GOP, thus stalling or destroying gains he and other party leaders had made on the path toward two-party politics in the state.⁸²

In reality, Tower's fears were only partially warranted. Many Texans did temporarily turn away from the GOP in the aftermath of Watergate, but voting for Democrats was certainly nothing new in Texas and did not necessarily represent a backlash. At the same time, however, conservative Texans were also turning away from the Democratic Party. As they bolted, state liberals eagerly jumped in and enhanced their presence and influence in Austin and in the state

⁸⁰ Memorandum to Governor Reagan, from Peter D. Hannaford, July 3, 1974, Box 1, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI; Poll Reports, PRP, Part II, Reel 12, Frame 986.

⁸¹ "The Hidden Tax of Government Regulation," by John Tower, September 1975, Folder 53, Box 17, JTP; Draft Letter, August 8, 1975, by John Tower, Folder 51, Box 17, Press Office, JTP.

⁸² Draft of Op-Ed for *Dallas Times Herald*, by John Tower, December 1973, Folder 40, Box 17, Press Office, JTP; 1974 Draft of Op-Ed, Folder 41, Box 17, Press Office, JTP; Watergate Speech (Draft), 1974, by John Tower, Folder 1, Box 20, Press Office, JTP.

Democratic Party.⁸³ On the other side of the aisle, the state Republican Party, by 1976, would be in the middle of a civil war between the established party leadership—whose loyalty to Nixon bordered on the irrational—and the populist-leaning conservatives whose champion was a former Hollywood actor and governor of California.⁸⁴

Scandals like Watergate contributed to the breaking apart of the established political status quo in Texas. The result was a tumultuous campaign culture in which more political organizations began to operate in and through the grassroots. The birth and development of such groups reflected the urgency and angst motivating many Texans. Another important result, and perhaps a more tangibly felt one, was the Democratic wave that swept most elections across the state in 1974. Yet it was clear to many conservative Texans, even at the time, that the Democratic successes in 1974 had little to do with the Democratic or Republican Parties and much to do with Richard Nixon and Watergate. Richard Nixon had never been popular in Texas and he knew it, which is what drove his obsession to curry favor in that state during his presidency. Nixon's 1972 triumph had been a rejection of McGovern, so when Texas conservatives had a legitimate reason to turn against Nixon, the turn was easily made.

In 1974, most candidates in Texas, the majority of whom were still Democrats, ran overt campaigns dealing with issues of corruption in Washington, DC, while state GOP establishment regulars, still trying to maintain loyalty to Nixon and the new Ford administration—loyalty based on patronage and decades of tradition whereby the national party was the only thing keeping the state GOP afloat—struggled to reconcile their party loyalties with a growing conservative populist fervor.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Texas Monthly*, April 1974, "Bob and George Go to Washington or The Post-Watergate Scramble."

⁸⁴ *Houston Post*, May 8, 1974, Box 4C519, Harris County Democratic Party Records, CAH; *Newsweek*, November 24, 1975, Box 2, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁸⁵ Brands, *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*, 132; Cannon, *Governor Reagan*, 386.

Ronald Reagan, however, was not one of those state party regulars. It is, therefore, not surprising that the California Governor and aspiring presidential candidate made a strong showing in Texas throughout 1973 and 1974. Though Reagan publicly acknowledged his support for Nixon and the party, his rhetoric betrayed an agenda that was thoroughly anti-Washington, anti-government, and appealed to disaffected Texans angry over political corruption in both parties. In November 1973, Reagan visited Houston, billing himself as a “Crusader for the Disaffected.” Reagan’s speech lambasted corrupt politicians in both parties and demanded that the voice of the people be heard, listened to, and respected.⁸⁶

Reagan cannot be singularly credited as a visionary who spoke instinctively to the needs of Texas voters. Rather, Reagan’s team of political strategists began informing their boss as early as 1973 that the possibility existed to make a splash in places like Texas, which was “entering a period of rapid and possibly irreversible change about the way people feel toward institutions.” Reagan’s advisors added that, “the public is currently angry, mean, and in a frustrated mood” and encouraged Reagan to take advantage of this mood by highlighting government’s failures, misrepresentations, and incompetence, while at the same time using his skill and charm as a political communicator to bring a sense of hope and optimism to those who had neither.⁸⁷ Reagan certainly capitalized on this collective anger and frustration, especially in Texas, which he had already identified as a potentially major base of operations for future presidential campaigns. During the spring of 1974, Reagan spoke at both Texas Republican fundraisers—where the established leadership knew he was sure to draw a large turnout—and before local civic organizations unconnected to either major party. In February, for instance, he

⁸⁶ Ibid.; November 19, 1973, *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1, Box 92, Issues Office, Noel Sterrett Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA.

⁸⁷ Memorandum to Governor Reagan, from Peter D. Hannaford, July 3, 1974, Box 1, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

spoke to the Dallas Crime Commission about the need for stronger law enforcement, while at the same time linking criminal activity, disorder, and chaos to the incompetence and false-promises of big government. Reagan made numerous other appearances in Texas between 1973 and 1975 and during each, prioritized his courtship of the conservative grassroots, most of which still claimed Democratic loyalties.⁸⁸

Many Texas conservatives, regardless of party, saw Reagan as a solution to the “corruption of the Washington Establishment.” Reagan attracted middle class suburbanites and rural voters alike, and many of these individuals donated small sums to the Citizens for Reagan operation. Many, in donating to Citizens for Reagan, openly proclaimed that they preferred to give their money straight to Reagan than to see it contribute to the state Republican Party. For many Texans, trust was offered first to Reagan, and only later to Reagan’s party. Another direct outgrowth of Reagan’s appeal in Texas was the adoption, at the 1974 Texas GOP Convention, of several resolutions highly critical of the Ford administration. Though mostly symbolic, these resolutions surprised some state party regulars who had pledged support for the administration in large part because of the heavy presence that Texans like George Bush, Dick Cheney, and James Baker were playing in that administration.⁸⁹

Watergate, in and of itself, was a major story in Texas, but was also—perhaps more importantly—another link in the chain that connected anti-statist and populist conservatives with political credibility and power in the Texas Republican Party. The scandal undermined the established leadership of the GOP, encouraged new blood in the party through the rallying

⁸⁸ *Dallas Times Herald*, February 12, 1974; *Washington Post*, October 21, 1973; April 28, 1974, Press Conference and Speech, Houston, TX, Tapes 547, 548, Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Audiotape collection: 1965-74, RRL.

⁸⁹ General Correspondence, 1974-75, Texas, Box 45, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Roger Olien. *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982), 236-238.

together of grassroots elements already being mobilized by social and economic issues, and thoroughly discredited liberalism because it was a philosophy dependent upon trusting the very government that evidence revealed could not be trusted.

Conclusion

In 1973, a new magazine designed specifically for Texans hit newsstands across the state. Marketing itself as a commentary on all things Texas—social, political, cultural - *Texas Monthly*, in one of its earliest issues, reflected the state's anti-government political winds by publishing its first annual list of the "Best and Worst Texas Legislators." That year each of the ten best legislators included in the magazine's list was praised for their honesty, loyalty, open minds, and work ethic. Conversely, each of the ten worst legislators was cited for corruption, incompetence, and obstructionism. The emphasis given to integrity in compiling these lists is not surprising, particularly given the political context.⁹⁰ This was no doubt still the case one year later when, on August 9, 1974, Richard Nixon became the first president in American history to resign from office. That same month, *Texas Monthly* published a feature story on a growing fad in the Lone Star State. This fad lionized the "redneck" as a respectable, if new addition to the social and political culture in Texas:

Of late the Redneck has been wildly romanticized; somehow he threatens to become a cultural hero. Perhaps this is because heroes are in short supply in these Watergate years, or maybe it's a manifestation of our urge to return to simpler times: to be free of computers, pollution, the urban tangle, morally bankrupt politicians, shortages of energy or materials or elbow room, and other modernist curses threatening to make our lives increasingly grim ... Since 'Necks have long been identified with overt racism, we may be embracing them because we tired, in the Sixties, of bad niggers who spooked and threatened us and of laws busing our white children to slum schools; perhaps the revival is a backlash against hippies, peaceniks, weirdos of all stripes ... Anyway, a lot of foolishness disguised as noble folklore is going down as the 'Neck is praised in song and story.⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Texas Monthly*, July 1973, "The Ten Best (And Sigh, the Ten Worst) Legislators."

⁹¹ *Texas Monthly*, August 1974, "Redneck!."

Throughout the 1970s, rednecks, bikers, and other traditionally anti-establishment, anti-authority, and anti-liberal groups were inculcated into the political process in ways that would have been unpredictable a generation before. By the end of the decade, most of these constituents had found common cause, (at least rhetorically), with the white, middle-class Texas suburbanite.

Hollywood also joined the fray in the 1970s and contributed to this growing anger toward government and authority. The most common portrayal of politicians or government officials in film was one of corruption and negativity. Political dramas regularly fostered distrust toward politicians and championed the little guy for typically taking on and defeating the establishment. Political campaigns grew dirtier in the early 1970s, with negative ads becoming the norm in most elections.⁹²

By 1975, Americans had grown very tired of the political status-quo and began to demand change. They demanded to be heard and many Texans began to hasten the arduous process of loosening the political traditions and loyalties that no longer seemed as appropriate in the mid-seventies as they had in prior decades. Add to this dissatisfaction a growing perception in Texas that the Democratic Party was embracing the concerns of the few at the expense of the many, had liberalized beyond the point of workable cohabitation between ideological factions, and a belief that a conservative voice for the disaffected and forgotten American did, in fact, exist, and the result was the makings for what would later become known as the Reagan Revolution.⁹³

The established leadership within the Texas Republican Party would fight against this revolution, not because it necessarily disagreed with the tenets of populist conservatism, but

⁹² Terry Christensen. *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from Birth of a Nation to Platoon*. (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1987), 7-11.

⁹³ "The New Conservatism," *Atlas World Press*, March 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford, Inc. Papers, HI.

because, more than anything else, it wanted to win. It would take a civil war within that party, fought between its established leadership and a Reagan-inspired grassroots, to clarify for the state GOP exactly what direction it would need to take in order to make Texas a truly two-party state.

CHAPTER 5 CIVIL WAR, 1975-76

Conservative Texans had been struggling to balance their ideology with their partisan loyalties for decades, but with particular earnest since 1964. During that same time, the chasm between the national and state Democratic parties seemed to widen, and the New Deal coalition in Texas appeared to be on its death bed. Corruption and scandal contributed to a growing animus against government in the early 1970s, while George McGovern's candidacy forced many conservative Texas Democrats to vote for a man that they had, in previous elections, rejected. Though still a minority, liberals—like many of their Republican counterparts—yearned to make Texas a truly two-party state and had high hopes for doing just that as ideologically based political realignment no longer seemed inconceivable.

This process took a crucial step forward in 1976, as modern conservatism in Texas reached a critical turning point. That year, a civil war broke out within the Texas Republican Party. The basis for the war was a split between the established party leadership, which was committed, above all else, to making Texas a two-party state, and a grassroots energized by anti-liberalism, hostility toward government, and the emergence of new and politically active conservative interest groups. Since Barry Goldwater's disastrous performance in 1964, the national Republican Party had stressed unity. Watergate undermined that quest for unity and in 1976 the GOP seemed, for the first time in over a decade, more splintered than its opposition. For Texas Republicans, this civil war resulted in short-term defeat. In November 1976, state conservatives once again rejected the GOP and rallied behind Democrats in races from city council to president of the United States. Most did not realize it at the time, of course, but Texas would not give its electoral votes to another Democratic presidential candidate for the rest of the twentieth century.

The perfect storm that eventually engulfed the state and brought with it GOP respectability, power, and control, while at the same time ripping apart the Democratic New Deal coalition, gained steam in 1976, as political ideologies became inextricably linked with national issues and icons. Between 1975 and 1976, the established leadership of the Texas Republican Party tried to stress the Democratic Party's liberalism at the national level as a means of undermining loyalties to that party in Texas. At the same time, the state GOP tried to avoid any and all potential repeats of the 1964 Goldwater disaster. As the party would learn, however, the state's political culture was far different in 1976 than it had been in 1964. Texas Republicans wanted their party to be seen as the party of the mainstream—of the Texas majority. It feared that candidates like Ronald Reagan would rekindle memories of Goldwater extremism and deflate any chance it had for moving into that mainstream and, thus, achieving second-party status. The state GOP would eventually come to dominate conservatism in Texas, but not before internal divisions were reconciled with a growing grassroots conservative movement that seemed to alter the perception of what the mainstream of Texas politics actually was.¹

“God is Very Big in Dallas”

On July 23, 1975, the Fifth Circuit Court ruled that a desegregation plan, adopted in 1971 by the Dallas Independent School District (DISD), was inadequate. The DISD had adopted this desegregation plan, known as the “Confluence of Cultures” plan, four years earlier after United States District Judge William Taylor ruled that a dual school system, resulting in de facto segregation, still functioned in Dallas. A majority of the city's white citizens were disgruntled, not only over these decisions, but also because of the entire series of events that had led to them. The logic of the original case had been that DISD had failed to meet standards provided by the

¹ Background Paper for Democratic Platform Committee – 1976, “Education,” prepared by Joseph Duffy, Chariman, Task Force on Education for presentation, January 31, 1976, Box 404, George Mahon Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Hereafter cited as SWC).

Brown decision in 1954, an opinion not shared by the city's middle class white community, most of whom believed they had cooperated fully with desegregation mandates and were being unfairly targeted for further abuse and federal encroachment in the area of public education. John Tower was among those Texans whose blood boiled over the busing issue. In September 1975 editorial in the Dallas Times Herald, Tower wrote that if "the road to Hell is paved with good intentions, then speeding down that road is a fleet of yellow school buses. Forced busing is immoral, undemocratic, inherently racist, ineffective and counterproductive. Never has so tawdry a means been applied to so noble a purpose."²

Despite Tower's, and others' objections, by March 1976, as a watershed in the history of Texas Republicanism neared, the DISD announced plans to bus over 20,000 students during the following academic year, a measure that would be paid for by an increase in the property taxes levied primarily against the very middle class white conservatives whose children would be bused. Dallas's white community was not prone to massive resistance, at least not in the mid-1970s. Still, busing became only one of several issues around which a new conservative agenda was framed and communicated in Texas.³

At the same time that conservative Dallas whites began to feel the pressure exerted upon their community by federal court orders in the area of desegregation and public education, other social issues began to more inextricably link religion and politics in the city and surrounding suburbs. As issues of race cooled in the mid-1970s, issues of gender, sexuality, and morality captivated a growing segment of evangelical Texans who found entrées into the state's political

² Draft Op-Ed, *Dallas Times Herald*, September 21, 1975, Folder 55, Box 17, Press Office, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX.

³ U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1262; *Dallas Morning News*, March 13-14, 1976, A; Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, MI (Hereafter cited as GFL).

climate by way of national issues. Much of Dallas's growing attraction to religion in the mid-1970s, specifically Protestant evangelical Christianity, can be attributed to disillusionment with government. State and federal corruption weakened existing political associations and many conservative whites responded by identifying themselves first and foremost by their religion rather than their political party.⁴

In the mid-1970s, both the state and national GOP leadership hesitated to infuse religious issues into its party's conservative agenda. The party found it increasingly difficult to strike a balance between libertarians, states' rights advocates, and moral traditionalists who were calling for government protection of Christian values. The call to protect Christian values was being driven by a collection of social issues, including busing, abortion, school prayer, and homosexuality, which had grown in importance among middle class parents and evangelicals who were increasingly distraught over the liberalization of the national Democratic Party. On abortion, for instance, Republicans struggled to bridge the chasm between those calling for federal intervention to protect the rights of the unborn and those hostile to any federal intervention into the everyday lives of individual citizens, regardless of the situation. In Texas, as in much of the South, this chasm was bridged thanks to the peculiar nature of suburbs, which fostered a climate of individualism, anti-government hostility, and traditional morals advocated by the rapidly expanding presence of evangelical churches in suburban enclaves.⁵

Evangelical Christianity did more than simply mobilize suburban conservatives through the rhetoric of morality. In Dallas, a city becoming an economic and financial powerhouse, (nine of the state's twenty largest corporations, with combined annual sales of \$15.8 billion, were

⁴ "The Book of Dallas," *New York Times*, 1976 Op-Ed. Box 9, David Stoll Collection, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA (Hereafter cited as HI); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵ Memorandum to the Governor, From Lyn Nofziger, October 2, 1975, Box 1, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

based in Dallas), religion was, as the *New York Times* described it in 1976, “big business.” One anonymous poet even described the influence of religion in Dallas through verse:

God is very big in Dallas,
Just about everybody talks about God.
I don't think you could ever amount to much in Dallas,
If you went around bad-mouthing God.⁶

By the mid-1970s, as Texas enjoyed the fruits of a suburbanizing Sunbelt and became home to a proliferating middle class conservatism, religion became a form of identification, particularly as a substitute for politics, which many eschewed in the wake of national scandals, failures, and general disillusionment. For many white middle-class Texans, political traditions and loyalties were being replaced by faith. In Dallas, Evangelical Protestant Christianity became the new identifier, not simply of one's spiritual condition, but of one's acceptability in the new economic, political, and social climate.⁷

This change in the political culture allowed for redefinitions of political ideology and the application of that ideology to economic and social causes. The result was an acute awareness of philosophical factionalism within parties already struggling to maintain unity.⁸ Traditional GOP politics in Texas reflected the primacy of federal patronage and big business to a party long-relegated to insignificant status. The nature of this existence meant that the state GOP was often little more than a tool of the national organization. As such, conservative Texas Democrats had long attacked the GOP as the party of Northeastern elitism incapable of meeting average Texans' needs. In the mid-1970s, however, many Texans began to associate Northeastern elitism with social liberalism rather than economic conservatism. In cities such as Dallas, where libertarian grassroots activism was already challenging partisan traditions, the emergence of a thriving,

⁶ *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 74; Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

⁷ “The Book of Dallas,” *New York Times*, 1976 Op-Ed. Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

⁸ *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 107, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

though still nascent hotbed of religious conservatism, added a new dimension to the state's political climate and challenged both parties to adjust their political agendas in order to address the concerns of Texas voters. The rise of politically active evangelicals in the mid-1970s also opened the door for significant alterations to the state's political culture.⁹

Reagan Country

With the possible exception of John Connally, Ronald Reagan was the most popular advocate for conservative causes in Texas. Throughout 1975, Reagan could be found crisscrossing the state, making numerous public appearances and speeches before a variety of businesses and politically active organizations and civic groups. Reagan had maintained a heavy speaking load in Texas since the late 1960s, but the frequency of his trips to the Lone Star State increased as the 1976 campaign season approached. Reagan's frequent visits to Texas fueled a rise in his popularity there. As Reagan's popularity in Texas grew, his name recognition and favorability ratings correspondingly climbed as well. Simply, Reagan's popularity in Texas functioned as a fuel unto itself. Put yet another way, Reagan's popularity in Texas contributed to the construction of an iconography that made the former California governor appear larger than life and simultaneously heightened his stature and visibility.

On January 14, for instance, the Dallas Chapter of the Texas Manufacturers Association Annual Banquet billed Reagan, their keynote speaker, as a "phenomenon."¹⁰ The next day he was introduced to the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce as an "evangelist to spread the doctrine of the Free Enterprise System."¹¹ In June, Reagan spoke to the Texas Society of Certified Public Accountants (TSCPA) during their Annual Meeting in El Paso. The TSCPA

⁹ Chandler Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 17-18.

¹⁰ Texas Manufacturing Association, Dallas, TX, January 14, Box 92, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

¹¹ Telegram to Governor Reagan, Western Union, November 25, 1974, Chamber of Commerce, San Antonio, TX, January 15, Box 92, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

promoted Reagan as a man of law and order whose political ideology was drawing widespread support among Texas Republican “insurgents and American conservatives.” The TSCPA succeeded in drawing a great deal more press coverage for their meeting than was the norm, but Reagan was the real winner, as was often the case when other organizations in Texas undertook similar advertising campaigns. Between May and December of 1975, Reagan continued to make appearances before sales and marketing executives in Houston, Veterans and Prisoners of War in San Antonio, GOP fundraisers in Dallas and Beaumont, women’s organizations in Dallas and Wichita Falls, the National Soft Drink Association in Dallas, and the Association of Builders and Contractors in Houston.¹²

During appearances in Texas not directly sponsored by the Republican Party, Reagan typically emphasized his affinity for speaking to non-political audiences. Before businessmen in Houston, for instance, he expressed relief at being able to speak before business leaders and not politicians. He told the National Soft Drink Association in Dallas that he had agreed to speak because he valued a chance to mingle with small business owners—a core component, he proclaimed, of the American free enterprise system.¹³ Reagan often constructed his speeches in such a way as to remove himself and his audience from the sense that they were there for political reasons at all. Reagan, who fancied himself a citizen-politician, managed to mobilize both social and economic conservatives in Texas without seeming to have made a political overture of any kind. His popularity as a speaker in Texas grew so rapidly that, by early 1976,

¹² Texas GOP Fundraiser, Dallas, TX, June 20, 1975, Box 93, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Sales and Marketing Executives of Houston, TX, May 28, 1975, Box 93, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Texas GOP Fundraiser, Dallas, TX, June 20, 1975, Box 93, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Texas GOP, Beaumont, TX, June 21, 1975, Box 93 Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; P.O.W. Reunion, San Antonio, TX, June 28, 1975, Box 93, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; National Federation of Republican Women, Dallas, TX, September 12, 1975, Box 94, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Assn., Builders & Contractors, Houston, TX, November 14, 1975, Box 96, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Woman’s Forum, Wichita Falls, TX, November 18, 1975, Box 96, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; National Soft Drink Assn., Dallas, TX, November 19, 1975, Box 96, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Southern Rep. Conference, Houston, TX, December 13, 1975, Box 96, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

¹³ National Soft Drink Assn., Dallas, TX, November 19, 1975, Box 96, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

Reagan was speaking to football banquets, Christian educators, real estate agents, fraternal lodges, journalists, university students, churches, advertising clubs, cable TV associations, and dozens of other groups and organizations across the state.¹⁴

Reagan's popularity in Texas was also encouraged through the use of newspapers and radio. In 1976, Reagan's political commentaries were syndicated in eleven major newspapers in Texas and two dozen radio stations—more than in any other state except California.¹⁵ For common budgetary reasons that routinely plagued local radio stations, many radio stations throughout Texas frequently added, dropped, and added programming, Reagan's commentaries included. These inconsistencies were frequently met with letter-writing campaigns initiated by mobilized grassroots conservatives demanding that Reagan's commentaries continue to be broadcast. Reagan's conservative base grew in Texas because he appealed to almost every sector of the state, and did so in multiple formats. He connected personally during public appearances and ideologically through the mass media. Among a growing and increasingly unified following of disaffected Texas Democrats and anti-establishment conservatives, Ronald Reagan was becoming a statewide champion.¹⁶

One of the “Gipper's” closer friends from his years in California was John Wayne. The connection some Texans even subconsciously made between Reagan and cowboys, the West, and rugged frontier individualism, indicates the extent to which iconography shaped the relationship that developed between Reagan and conservatives. Garry Wills has noted parallels between Reagan's appeal and that of “the Duke.” For instance, Texas has long been remembered nostalgically as a land of cowboys and the open range—the frontier that became

¹⁴ Sales and Marketing Executives of Houston, TX, May 28, 1975, Box 93, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Speech Invitations, Texas, Box 19, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

¹⁵ Newspaper Clients of Ronald Reagan, November 30, 1976, Radio Stations with RR Broadcasts, Box 106, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

¹⁶ Support Letters, July 1975, Box 84, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

home to one of the most potent iterations of the American Dream. Just as John Wayne had done on the silver screen, Ronald Reagan captured on the political speaking circuit an aura of the cowboy spirit.¹⁷ Reagan's oratory was often nostalgic, harkening back to "the wisdom of our founding fathers" who fought for "maximum freedom for the individual." Reagan also spoke to fears of America's "weakened military posture" and the "threat of Communist imperialism." Without appearing to contradict himself, Reagan managed to cast himself as a citizen-candidate, angry about government corruption and incompetence, nostalgic for frontier and free-market individualism, a champion for strength in the face of liberal weaknesses, and an advocate for traditional values.¹⁸

Not surprisingly, as Reagan worked to perfect his rugged cowboy and maverick persona during a variety of public appearances across the state, popular support for a Reagan White House bid intensified significantly in Texas throughout 1975 and 1976. Incoming financial support is but one indicator of the state's enthusiasm for Reagan. Texas Citizens for Reagan, the primary campaign organization for Reagan in the state, enjoyed an enormous influx of campaign contributions as the 1976 campaign approached. Most contributors in Texas identified themselves as self-employed workers in areas ranging from agriculture to medicine to education to middle management. Most only gave small amounts - \$5 to \$20 typically. Some more ardent supporters went further, contributing advice along with money. In 1975, one Texan, a 52-year old former attorney named Merritt D. Orr, proclaimed to the Reagan campaign that he was so disgusted with the "liberal decline" of America that he was ready to leave the country, but not before he attempted to fight for conservative causes through the donation of ten percent of the

¹⁷ Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

¹⁸ Draft Letter, Reagan for President: Citizen for Reagan, Box 1, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Craig Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign that Started it All* (Nashville, TN: Nelson-Current, 2005), 92.

earnings from his small business—a quasi-tithe to the state’s growing church of Ronald Reagan.¹⁹

Reagan was popular in Texas among the suburban middle-class, evangelicals, free-market libertarians, and disgruntled observers of political scandal and partisan bickering. He also attracted a substantial following among Texas hunters and weapons enthusiasts. In September 1975, *Guns & Ammo Magazine* published an article lauding the former California governor’s record on second amendment rights and reminded readers that “when dictators come to power the first thing they do is take away people’s weapons.” Guns ensure, the article continued, “that the people are the equal of their government whenever that government forgets it is servant and not master of the governed.” Though edgy, such language paralleled Reagan’s rhetoric—directly quoted in this article—of individualism and smaller government.²⁰ In the aftermath of the *Guns & Ammo* article, Reagan received a wave of letters from Texans pledging their support. Many closed their letters by either saying “you are in our prayers” or “we are praying for you.”²¹

Reagan’s vision for America dovetailed nicely with the political climate of mid-1970s Texas. Reagan received so much support from Texas conservatives that issues specific in nature to the state began to direct a larger portion of his national agenda.²² Reagan’s advisors viewed Texas as a cornerstone for their future campaign ambitions and allowed Lone Star State issues to inform the shaping of its national platform. At the same time, many of Reagan’s supporters in Texas expressed as much concern over the nation’s health as they did about state and local

¹⁹ Campaign Contributions to Texas Citizens for Reagan, April 1976, Box 3, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; November 28, 1975, letter from Merritt D. Orr, to Joseph Coors, Box 5, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

²⁰ *Guns & Ammo*, September 1975, Box 38, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

²¹ General Correspondence, 1975, Box, 20, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

²² *Dallas Morning News*, March 18, 1976, 8A, March 20-21, 1976, 11A, 36A; Support Letters, September 1975, Box 84, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

issues. At the heart of this concern was anger over the perceived moral decline that had gripped the nation since the 1960s and seemed to be manifesting in issues dealing with sexuality, government corruption, and federal expansion.²³

Texas in the mid-1970s was ripe for Ronald Reagan, who seemed to speak on the right side of issues ranging from foreign policy and morality to economics and individualism. If Reagan had a problem in Texas, it was not a lack of support among the state's "Silent Majority" but rather that he lacked support among the state GOP leadership, which was eager to use Reagan as a means for fundraising, but which was reluctant to embrace the candidacy of anyone other than the incumbent president and head of the national party, Gerald Ford. The state's Republican leadership hoped to grow its respectability in Texas and capture conservative Democrats whose partisan loyalty seemed on the brink of collapse. To do this would require avoiding mistakes of the past—such as allowing Democrats to label the GOP as extreme and dangerous. The mistake the state leadership should have learned from, however, was that while most Texans detested extremism they also appreciated conviction, conservatism, and anti-liberalism. Only one Republican candidate in 1976 would give conservative Texans what they yearned for.

The Battle that Transformed Texas Politics

The 1976 Republican presidential primary was a watershed event in the political history of Texas. The struggle between Reagan and the incumbent president Gerald Ford intensified the intra-party factionalism that had gripped the GOP since 1964. For twelve years, competing definitions of conservatism inhibited the national party's efforts to broaden its appeal, while ideological division between conservative populists and moderate Republicans stunted party growth in Texas. For state Republican leaders, whose very existence had long been tied to the

²³ Support Letters, Box 84, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

direction of the national party, being forced to choose sides was a particularly daunting proposition. Backing the national party's incumbent president was the expected play for Texas party regulars, despite the fact that many of these leaders personally favored Reagan and certainly valued the voting power of Reagan's constituents.²⁴

At the same time, intra-party factionalism was personified in 1976 through the campaigns of easily recognizable and identifiable figures, an aspect of modern politics that, in the coming years, gained in importance. As the emerging icon of populist conservatism, Ronald Reagan served as a catalyst for the eventual coalescence of various conservative factions under the Texas Republican tent. Reagan operated as a catalyst in this process not only because he managed to exude a confidence and optimism that escaped many politicians during the dreary 1970s, but also because his image was crafted in such a way as to simultaneously appeal to seemingly disparate conservative factions without contradiction. The growing importance of broadcast media, television in particular, added a dimension to the state and national political culture that was tailor-made for a former Hollywood actor.²⁵

Reagan's image as a citizen-candidate and rugged frontier individualist was enhanced in Texas by campaign strategists who labored to contrast that image directly with Ford's stiff and less charming demeanor, as well as with the perception that the new president was a moderate and untrustworthy tool of the corrupt Nixon and the liberal Eastern Establishment. Ford struggled with the image that he had conspired with Nixon during Watergate, negotiating his way to the vice presidency—and ultimately, the Oval Office—in exchange for an eventual pardon. Whereas cynicism, suspicion, and indifference typically characterized Texans' response

²⁴ Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982).

²⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, March 24, 1976, 22A; *Washington Post*, March 26, 1976, Box 63, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

to Ford, Reagan was consistently viewed as affable, positive, and honest. Reagan scored more points with Texas conservatives on the issue of honesty in government, openness with the American public, and opposition to “Big Government,” than he did with any other issue. Reagan even used this issue to revive the public’s fear of communist subversion of the national intelligence agencies, arguing that under Ford’s watch, the Soviet Union had increased its use of spies.²⁶ Reagan’s ability to turn the public’s suspicion and distrust of government into an advantage was an ironic twist on Watergate’s immediate political ramifications. In Texas, Reagan benefited mightily from the perception that he was the rugged Western antithesis to Ford’s moderation, a perception anchored in both inherent advantage and concerted efforts by conservative strategists to construct such a perception.²⁷

Ford responded poorly to his image problem in Texas. Through much of 1975 and 1976, Ford strategists tried to position the President in Texas as a conservative in Reagan’s mold but without Reagan’s extremist baggage. Unlike Reagan, Ford did not see Texas as crucial to his nomination and election and, thus, minimized the importance of the state to his overall campaign efforts. While Reagan’s popularity soared in Texas thanks to numerous public appearances there, Ford’s support in Texas was stagnant. Reagan also did a better job of fundraising in the state than did Ford, particularly through direct mail, which produced far more in the way of small donations and grassroots support than did any of Ford’s similar attempts.²⁸

²⁶ How They Stand / Presidential Candidates’ Positions – Edition III / May 1976, Box 6, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1066, 1262-1269.

²⁷ “Possible Carter Campaign Strategy: Attack Ronald Reagan,” Box 92, Issues Office, Noel Sterrett Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA (Hereafter cited as JCL).

²⁸ Shirley, *Reagan’s Revolution*, CH 4; *Dallas Morning News*, March 16, 1976, 7A; *Dallas Morning News*, March 24, 1976; *Dallas Morning News*, April 11, 1976, 14A; *The Political Animal*, January 23, 1976, issue # 131, Box 19, Richard Cheney Files, 1974-77: Campaign Subject File, GFL; Letter from Walter Keith, State Senate District 7, April 9, 1976. Folder 11, Box 638, Tower Senate Club, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX (Hereafter cited as JTP).

Despite smooth sailing in Texas, the early months of 1976 were not kind to Reagan's national campaign. In primary after primary, Ford used the power of the national party to discredit Reagan's insurgent challenge and take command of the race for the GOP nomination. The Texas Republican primary, scheduled for May 1, appeared to be headed for irrelevancy until Reagan finally won a dramatic and surprising victory in the North Carolina primary on March 23. Reagan could credit the win in North Carolina to Jesse Helms's substantial and influential political machine there. Of more specific benefit, however, was Helms's ability to communicate the necessity of using issues like the proposed Panama Canal treaties, whereby the United States would eventually relinquish sovereignty over the vast Central American shipping waterway, as a channel for communicating Ford's weakness, moderation, and inability to directly meet the needs of America or the majority of its citizens. The North Carolina primary in late March allowed the Texas primary to matter. Reagan approached April with the Texas primary in view and Ford's image as a strong and capable leader severely undermined.

One of the first major battles fought between Ford and Reagan in Texas was for the endorsement of the man *Texas Monthly* referred to in April of 1976 as "THE man in Texas," former Texas Governor John Connally.²⁹ Though he had only narrowly escaped the stain of scandal and corruption that so powerfully gripped a host of other Nixon administration officials, Connally was, in 1976, still a preeminent power broker in Texas. As a result of his high standing and credibility among conservative Texans from both parties, Connally's endorsement was prized by both Reagan and Ford. For Connally, the competitive courtship was a boost to his national credentials. As the sitting President of the United States and former Governor of California lobbied Connally for an endorsement, the former Governor of Texas coyly played

²⁹ *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 108, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

hard-to-get and, instead, used his high profile to establish himself as a potential Republican presidential nominee for 1980.³⁰

Throughout April, Connally refused to endorse either candidate, but took advantage of the public spotlight. Press coverage of the candidates' pursuit of Connally's endorsement afforded the former Texas governor opportunities to reestablish bipartisan credibility by criticizing establishment politics and declining party ethics. Connally positioned himself as a non-candidate voice of reason, seeking to save the Republican Party nationally and spark greater levels of GOP acceptability in Texas.³¹ He gave numerous speeches throughout 1976 on the need for his party to repackage itself and stressed the importance of television as a tool for communicating agendas with the public at large. Connally also tapped into the reservoir of anti-liberal and anti-government hostility, speaking often in Texas of the need to "clean up" the incompetence and corruption that plagued the federal government. Offering endorsement to no candidate or much in the way of specifics about his own remedies for America's ills, Connally's message nonetheless resonated with those Texans drawn to Reagan's assessment of the problems of Big Government.³²

Ford coveted Connally's endorsement more than Reagan did and appeared desperate in his pursuit. Reports surfaced that Ford even offered to appoint Connally Secretary of State in exchange for an endorsement. Polling conducted on Ford's behalf less than a month prior to the election found that a Connally endorsement would result in a 29 percent jump in the President's pledged support in Texas.³³ Though post-election analysis contradicted these earlier reports and

³⁰ August 8, 1976, *New York Times Magazine*, Box 2M449, Phillip Scheffler Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Hereafter cited as CAH).

³¹ *Dallas Morning News*, March 11, 1976, 3D.

³² *Dallas Morning News*, March 12, 1976, 1A, March 13-14, 1976, A; March 18, 1976, 8A; March 20-21, 1976, 11A, 36A.

³³ *Dallas Morning News*, April 16-17, 1976, 8A, 11A, 1A.

revealed that a Connally's endorsement would not have swayed voters to the extent that Ford predicted, the courtship of the former Texas governor reveals much about the nature of Texas politics in 1976. For many conservative Texans, Connally represented the heritage and pride of Texas Democrats and the principled conservatism that many in the state valued even above partisan loyalty. As Connally stood at the forefront of partisan realignment in Texas, his role in the 1976 Republican primary also reflects the significance of ideology and public perception, not only in the minds of voters, but in the minds of candidates seeking to align themselves with individuals and certain images in Texas.³⁴

As a former conservative Democrat and Lyndon Johnson loyalist, John Connally was no stranger to factionalism in Texas. Existent in a variety of forms, factionalism played a key role in the formation of new partisan loyalties and shifting conceptions of political ideology in Texas during the 1976 primary. For decades, the Texas Republican Party had fought for second-party status. During that time, however, much of the state's established party leadership also became inextricably linked to the directives of the national party. Party leaders like John Tower, who had stuck with the GOP through the embattled aftermath of the Goldwater campaign of 1964 and Watergate, insisted on maintaining partisan unity above all other concerns. The consequence of this decision was the association, in the public's mind, between state party officials and the White House.³⁵

Texas Republican leaders feared disunity to the point that many failed to hear the rumblings of Reagan's grassroots momentum over the groans of such trepidation. This disconnect between party leaders and the grassroots, reflected in the state leadership's support of

³⁴ Market Opinion Research: Texas Statewide Study, Box H6, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

³⁵ Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL; Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution*, CH 16; *New York Times*, April 29, 1978, Box 37, James A. Baker Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ (Hereafter cited as SGML).

Ford despite Reagan's overwhelming popularity, gave credence to the perception of Reagan and his backers as anti-Establishment renegades and fostered a sense of maverick rebelliousness among many of Reagan's conservative Texas followers. Ironically, this loyalty and quest for party unity, though founded on the experience of conservatives who knew firsthand the dangers of intra-party factionalism, backfired. Texas Republicans' dogmatic loyalty to the national party contributed to their identification among many Texas conservatives as part of the Establishment.

Texas GOP leaders tried to resist the division that many had seen ruin the party's electoral prospects in 1964. Tension mounted as 27 members of the party's executive committee defiantly began to provide financial support to Texas Citizens for Reagan.³⁶ Texas Citizens for Reagan chapters were supervised by Ernest Angelo, Jr. and Ray Barnhart, who served together as Co-Chairman for Reagan's Texas campaign. Angelo and Barnhart took directives from Reagan's Texas Campaign Chairman Ron Dear, who understood that divisions between the GOP Establishment in Texas were ironically fueling his candidate's support. Dear, Angelo, and Barnhart worked together in 1976 to encourage the notion that they were spearheading a renegade political campaign which had spoken to the souls of thousands of disaffected Texas conservatives who no longer wished to identify themselves with the establishment politics of either party.³⁷

Thus in 1976, party elders who feared a repeat of 1964 and, as a result, supported Ford over Reagan under the aegis of party unification, actually became the target of grassroots conservatives' anti-establishment ire. The division between the Texas Republican establishment and the growing grassroots support for Reagan can also be viewed through the lens of anti-liberal animus. Texas Citizens for Reagan, for instance, undermined the Ford administration's alleged

³⁶ "Reasons for Reagan: Texas Citizens for Reagan Primary News," Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

³⁷ Memorandum to Peter Hannaford, from Jeff Bell, re: Texas Issues, April 12, 1976, Box, 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI; Undated Press Release, Box 31, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

commitment to conservatism by invoking the names of Nelson Rockefeller, Elliott Richardson, Bill Scranton and other GOP moderates whose reputation in Texas was that of liberal appeasers and conservative turncoats. Campaign literature derided this triumvirate of Ford White House officials as “moderate” and insinuated that such moderation was closely akin to Democratic liberalism.³⁸ Reagan conservatives in Texas hoped to purge the state GOP of such moderate and liberal influences and believed that in order to do so, the established leadership of the state and national Republican Party would have to be ousted.

Ford’s struggles in Texas can also be blamed on inaccurate polling and research. As early as 1975, Ford’s campaign became convinced that businessmen, particularly in the Texas oil industry, would stay loyal to the Democratic Party and not be a factor in the primary. Ford allowed Reagan to court the state’s business community through a language of free-market capitalism and deregulation. Ford, on the other hand, overemphasized the importance of moderate Republicans in Texas, believing that most Texas Republicans were new arrivals, having migrated from the more moderate North in search of jobs in the thriving Sunbelt economy. Though partially true, Ford’s belief that such Republicans would reject Reagan once they got to Texas was flawed.³⁹ Ford’s team further misinterpreted their candidate’s approval ratings among Texas Republicans, which hovered in the low 70s, as a positive. Dismissing numbers which showed 30 percent of Texas Republicans disapproving of Ford’s performance in the White House, Ford’s team rested upon a belief that “New Texans” who had flocked to the Sunbelt during the oil boom would overwhelmingly support the incumbent President, while business leaders would continue to vote in the Democratic primary. They were wrong on both

³⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, April 25, 1976, 1A – 13A; “Reasons for Reagan: Texas Citizens for Reagan Primary News,” Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

³⁹ Market Opinion Research: Texas Statewide Study, Box H6, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76; Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL.

counts. Instead, intra-Republican Party factionalism meshed with conservative Democrats' disillusionment to create a politically poisonous atmosphere for the incumbent moderate.⁴⁰

The same poisonous atmosphere also nearly destroyed John Tower's career. By April 1976, Tower's signature appeared at the bottom of virtually every piece of direct mail sent to Texas voters on behalf of the President Ford Committee. These letters stressed Ford's leadership in the immediate aftermath of Watergate and noticeably mirrored, though with less aggressive rhetoric, Reagan's general sentiment on defense and government growth.⁴¹ Tower's leadership of the Ford campaign in Texas illustrates the effect that factionalism had on the state's political culture. In August 1975, prior to accepting his role at the head of Ford's Texas campaign, Tower offered a letter of unsolicited advice to Reagan's national campaign manager, John Sears. In that letter, Tower cast a vision for Reagan's campaign in Texas—a vision that became a blueprint for conservative politics in Texas, but one which also returned to haunt its author. "Whatever the issue," Tower told Sears, "Governor Reagan should be portrayed as the courageous helmsman who can take command of a ship of state drifting aimlessly on stormy seas, cast overboard villains who cut the anchor cable, and, after consulting the moral compass prepared by our forefathers, sail the ship confidently forward to new and brighter horizons." Tower's advice indicated his keen awareness of the political climate in Texas. He continued, saying:

By making himself a proud and unapologetic spokesman for traditional middle class values, Governor Reagan can win support from voters not wildly excited about Republican economics. He should make it clear he believes in God and that—Betty Ford to the contrary notwithstanding—that the Ten Commandments have not yet been repealed. He should praise honesty, thrift, and the work ethic, wax rhapsodic about family life, condemn 'liberated' lifestyles, and object strenuously to liberal affronts to Christian morality in textbooks, television, etc.

⁴⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, April 25, 1976, 1A – 13A; Market Opinion Research: Texas Statewide Study, Box H6, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

⁴¹ Pro-Forma Letter from President Ford Committee-Texas, April 3, 1976, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

Tower's final piece of advice to Sears was, perhaps, a tremendous capstone to the earliest and most well-articulated vision of the modern conservative rhetoric in Texas. "Governor Reagan should direct his rhetorical fire at the Four Horsemen of the Liberal Apocalypse ...," Tower said. "... Big Government, Big Labor, Big Business and Big Media—who have ridden roughshod over the political and economic liberties of the common man." Tower's advice to the Reagan campaign speaks volumes to the Senator's ability to tap into the conservative mindset in Texas. Tower's ability to personally benefit from that mindset, however, was not nearly as prescient.⁴²

John Tower's decision to direct Ford's 1976 campaign in Texas was a poorly calculated political move. Instead of positioning himself and the Texas GOP at the forefront of the insurgent movement he so clearly identified in his letter to Sears, Tower instead chose to stand in opposition to it. Tower's leadership of the Ford campaign shifted his perception in the state from that of conservative to one of establishment "Washington moderation." For most Texas conservatives, Tower's strident support for Barry Goldwater in 1964 appeared, just twelve years later, to be a distant and faded memory. Some grassroots conservatives believed Tower's support for Ford in 1976 was "selfish" and the result of personal ambition. Reagan conservatives believed that Tower and older Texas Republicans were afraid of losing power and that the biggest threat to that power was Reagan's loyal following. Thus, out of their own loyalty and even a sense of obligation, the established Texas Republican leadership, with Tower at the helm, backed the Ford campaign, thereby setting the Reagan campaign apart as the only perceived voice of the conservative grassroots.⁴³

⁴² August 22, 1975, Letter from Mike Kelly, on behalf of John Tower, to John Sears, Box 5, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁴³ Sears Correspondence, May 1976, Box 71, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

Reagan's direct assault on both Tower's and Ford's honesty and credibility acted as a nail in the coffin in which the hopes of the established Texas GOP leadership were about to be buried. Reagan, who privately belittled Tower's height during meetings and through memos to staff, and undermined the Senator's respect even among his own Texas conservative volunteers, hammered Tower as often as he did Ford throughout the campaign in Texas. In order to align himself with the Ford campaign, Tower had reversed course on issues such as immigration. Reagan's team subsequently labeled the Senator from Texas a "flip-flopper." The Texas Citizens for Reagan campaign organization distributed brochures and ran advertisements throughout the spring citing numerous examples of Ford and Tower dishonesty as an effort to undermine each politician's credibility. Ford was criticized for saying that "no prospects" existed for the establishment of diplomatic relations with North Vietnam, despite the fact that he had sent diplomatic correspondence to Hanoi just weeks earlier and that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was appealing to the North Vietnamese embassy in Paris to discuss normalizing relations.⁴⁴

Texas Citizens for Reagan also publicized previously made statements by Ford that he would not relinquish the Panama Canal, when documentation showed otherwise. The Texas Citizens for Reagan took advantage of the growing perception that Tower was either dishonest or spineless in his support of Ford with press releases such as the following:

When we began following Mr. Tower around Texas, we considered our description as a "truth squad" more or less a jest. We regret that the performance of Messrs. Ford and Tower on issues of vital national security has made the need for truth all too apparent. We also find it shocking that the President's state campaign chairman, Senator Tower, could travel around this state saying that Mr. Ford has no intention of giving up US sovereignty and control over the Panama Canal. The facts are clear from sworn

⁴⁴ Miscellaneous Campaign Files, Memorandum, to Governor Reagan, from Peter Hannaford, subject: Texas Events, April 13, 1976. Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

congressional testimony. As Mr. Tower well knows, the President has issued written orders ... directing a total giveaway of the canal.⁴⁵

Because Tower echoed statements concerning American sovereignty over the Panama Canal yet continued to back Ford, he was seen as complicit in dishonesty.

Tower was certainly not blind to the fact that Reagan had tremendous support and opportunity for success in Texas. Tower was also not blind to his own need to bolster his credentials among the ever-heightening power of the state's social conservatives and evangelicals. Early in 1976, just months before the primary, Tower noticeably began to make more references to his own religious heritage, stressing his father's ministry in the Methodist Church and associating freedom and patriotism with Big Government and the nation's perceived "loss of religion." "Today, I think the greatest enemy of freedom, the greatest enemy of liberty," Tower said to a Seminar on Christian Citizenship in March of 1976, "is the steady growth of big government ... I think that really big government can potentially be anathema to religion." Tower understood the value of relating issues of government to issues of religious morality and tradition. He further understood that, in 1976, the public's distrust of the government could be related to liberal tax policy, which he called a "subtle form of Big Brotherism." Tower hoped to translate this emotion into support for Ford, but Reagan's campaign made those efforts appear insincere and actually magnified the divisions between the two conservatives.⁴⁶

Tower also recognized but underestimated the alterations to the conservative landscape wrought by the infusion of Texas Baptists into Republican spheres of influence. Neither Tower nor Goldwater was Baptist and neither was ever embraced by that denomination, much of which had been as loyally Democratic as any other constituency in the state. Rural Texas Baptists,

⁴⁵ Press release by Reagan State Co-Chairman, Ray Barnhart and Barbara Staff, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁴⁶ "Conscience of a Conservative-1976," Speech by John Tower, to Seminar on Christian Citizenship, March 22-24, 1976, Folder 19, Box 20, Press Office, JTP.

among the key components in Texas's populist heritage and anti-elitist leanings, had long distrusted Republicans as the party of the Eastern Establishment. Between 1976 and 1978, no interest group was as vocally critical of Tower as Texas pro-life Baptists, who specifically cited Tower's opposition to Reagan and support of Ford in 1976 as the reason for their opposition to the state's senior Senator.⁴⁷

National issues like abortion, homosexuality, and the Equal Rights Amendment also emboldened the political activism of social conservatives in Texas. At the same time, Ronald Reagan's courtship of evangelicals helped eventually to cement a partnership that, in the 1980s and 1990s, reshaped the landscape of modern American politics. Anti-government libertarian conservatives had never fully embraced the politics of religious conservatism, in part because religious conservatives seemed to value ethical standards above freedom from government. Goldwater, for instance, was a staunch pro-choice advocate throughout his term in the United States Senate, on the basis that the government had no right to interfere in the decisions of individual Americans. By the mid-1970s, the tension between evangelicals and libertarians was replaced with cooperation. This cooperation was largely the result of conservatives, Reagan foremost among them, fusing the concerns of these two factions through emotional and fervent patriotic nationalism.

At the local level, Texas conservatives in both parties learned to use social and religious conservatism in new and successful ways in the mid-1970s. For instance, the former New Dealer and long-term Democratic Congressman from the nineteenth district, George Mahon, ran his entire re-election campaign not on the basis of his experience in Washington, but rather his

⁴⁷ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 246; *Dallas Morning News*, May 4, 1976, 5A; *Dallas Morning News*, May 5, 1976, 14A; A Study of Political Attitudes in the State of Texas, Prepared for Senator John Tower, March 1977, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 10, File 18, William Clements Papers, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX (Hereafter cited as WCP); Reagan Dinner, June 20, 1975, Folder 55, Box 1258, Bill Keener Files, JTP.

experience as a Sunday School teacher at a Lubbock United Methodist Church, his advocacy for the Death Penalty, and his generally conservative agenda that included tougher crime laws and the elimination of federal welfare programs. Candidates across Texas used a similar combination of platform points to bolster their image amongst both rural and urban conservatives of both social and libertarian persuasions. Conservatism, as a result, came to be identified more readily with both economic and social policies. The theme these two divergent strands of conservatism shared in common was hostility toward the federal government and the corruption produced therein. Politicians like Mahon legitimized social conservatives' agenda by linking those agendas with more established conservative issues and a pandemic distrust of government that had spread across the nation in the wake of Watergate.⁴⁸

As local candidates began to employ Reaganesque qualities in their own campaigns, Reagan himself was most the most effective weapon conservatives could use to attract social conservative support in East Texas, where rural Baptist Democrats—the only constituency in the state ever to show George Wallace any semblance of a loyalty—lived in a cultural atmosphere that mirrored the Deep South. Reagan's staff initially differentiated between East Texas and the rest of Texas. While social issues, including those involving race, consolidated Reagan's conservative support by the close of the campaign, initial forays into the region were spearheaded by a local grassroots which spoke to area residents first on an economic front. The East Texas economy, less diversified than other parts of the state, was still dominated by oil in 1976—as it had been for decades. More than 80 percent of the oil used by Allied forces in World War II had been supplied by East Texas oil fields, a fact of which the citizens of the region were quite proud. Before Reagan made campaign stops in East Texas, during which his

⁴⁸ General Correspondence; Letter to Dan Hanna, member, Board of Christian Men, from George Mahon, September 2, 1976, Box 376, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

assault on Ford was based on crime and morality, Reagan supporters in East Texas peppered the region with a plethora of grassroots-produced literature denouncing the Ford administration as responsible for the “worst Energy Legislation in History” and the “total mess” of welfare, whereby the American principle of an “honest day’s work for a day’s pay” was being destroyed. This literature summarized Ford’s leadership in Washington by sarcastically charging that the Commander-in-Chief had been “infected with Potomac Water on the brain.”⁴⁹

Painting Ford as a failure and a liberal made Reagan’s critiques of the president all the more potent and credible, particularly when the focus shifted from economic issues to social ones. Reagan’s personal appearances in East Texas emphasized his identification with the region’s religious heritage. He attacked Betty Ford for televised comments in which the First Lady professed a belief that premarital sex was “okay.” Reagan championed his wife, Nancy, as a better “First Lady”—a housewife, mother, and strong supporter of her husband—womanly virtue personified. The fact that Nancy was Reagan’s second wife and that the couple’s first child had been born only seven months into the marriage was never used by Ford as a weapon to undermine Reagan’s credibility on issues of tradition, morality, and social conservatism. Neither did Ford use Reagan’s sporadic church attendance against him.⁵⁰

With Reagan always on the offensive, his credibility on issues of tradition, morality, and social conservatism were buttressed thanks to his simultaneous and popular stances on crime and busing. Particularly popular in East Texas, where social conservatism easily trumped libertarianism, was Reagan’s support for a constitutional amendment outlawing busing. Not

⁴⁹ For Governor Reagan: East Texas Economy, Issues Pertinent to East Texas, April 7, 1976, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁵⁰ “Reasons for Reagan: Texas Citizens for Reagan Primary News,” Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI; April 27, 1976, “Ronald Reagan on Equal Rights for Women,” Box 38, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1262.

wanting to distance himself from the support of Northeastern moderates, Ford sidestepped direct questions on busing in Texas while Reagan used the issue to attract the support of both rural and middle-class white parents. Validating white hostility to busing was easy in rural East Texas, where the state's black population was most abundant. Reagan's approach in Texas suburbs was more subtle, as he validated hostility toward busing not so much as a violation of parental sovereignty and states' rights, but rather as a violation of individual property taxpayers' rights. In either case, Reagan used busing to rally white conservatives to an issue that could either be social or libertarian in nature, depending on the audience and the locale.⁵¹ Reagan also revived law and order strategies in Texas during the 1976 campaign and accused Ford of treating the safety of Texas citizens as an afterthought. Citing crime statistics that painted a rather bleak picture of national and state urban centers, Reagan presented himself as the only candidate to combat crime as a social evil rather than the result of structural poverty. Reagan belittled as liberal the notion that crime problems must be addressed through economic means rather than tougher sentencing and more police protection on the streets. Ford responded in April with a speech devoted solely to the issue of crime prevention in Texas—a speech given at Texas Stadium in Dallas during which establishment Texas Republicans introduced a new “get tough on crime” prevention policy.⁵²

Ford's extension of the Voting Rights Act, which was signed into law with particular sanctions against Texas that did not apply to most other states, also placed him on the defensive in Texas. Many felt as if Ford had unjustly singled out the state as noncompliant, while many more recalled John Connally's successful attempts to keep the federal government out of Texas

⁵¹ Issues Pertinent to East Texas, April 7, 1976, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1262.

⁵² U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1057.

during the tumultuous 1960s and indignantly compared Ford to the liberal encroachment of that era. When Ford attempted to justify the Texas provisions of the Act, Reagan supporters in San Antonio organized a small protest in which Ford was denounced for leading a “new wave of carpetbaggers” into Texas in order to “look over the shoulder of your local officials,” while trying to establish “Reconstruction, just as in 1865.” Such language reflected the web of emotion and tradition influencing Texas political culture in 1976. For many Texas conservatives, regardless of partisan affiliation, Reagan captured a sense of both rebellion and crusade, allowing many to embrace an ideology of smaller government, individual rights, Christian ethics, and a nostalgic American past.⁵³

Foreign policy further bolstered Reagan’s reputation in Texas and, at the same time, reinforced anticommunism and national security as a major tenet of modern conservatism. Reagan’s handlers in Texas used a variety of foreign policy issues to paint Ford as weak and disingenuous. Reagan couched Ford’s policy toward decolonization in Africa, as well as his dangerously poor diplomatic relations with Angola and Cuba, as weaknesses in the broader Cold War with the Soviet Union. Reagan told Texans that the United States had, in the age of détente, become a “second-rate military power.” On April 20, reports were leaked from the Pentagon which indicated that Ford was waffling between a pledge to expand the Navy by either 500 or 600 ships and had decided to wait until after the Texas primary to make his decision. A loss would mean a greater commitment to national defense; a win would mean that no such move was necessary. Conservatives charged that Ford was playing politics with national security.⁵⁴

Even Ford’s response to these critiques worked to Reagan’s advantage. The more Ford cited statistical references to complex tonnage figures and firepower comparisons, the more

⁵³ Issue Memo from the desk of Earl Lively, Undated, Box, 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁵⁴ *Corpus Christi Caller*, April 20, 1976; Press release by Reagan State Co-Chairman, Ray Barnhart and Barbara Staff, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

Reagan's emotional plea for unquestioned military supremacy resonated in Texas, which enjoyed more ties to the United States military than any state in the nation. While campaigning in San Antonio, Ford equivocated, admitting that even if the United States did fall behind the Soviets militarily, America's secure borders limited the need for increased military might—an argument that did not mollify conservative Texans' concerns.⁵⁵ Ford's muddled explanation contrasted Reagan's more marketable call for increased military might and dovetailed nicely with criticisms of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the very concept of détente.⁵⁶

In 1964, Barry Goldwater's anticommunism was portrayed and subsequently seen in Texas as extreme and dangerous. In 1976, by contrast, Reagan's anticommunism was an asset, despite Ford's attempt to label him as dangerous and extreme. As Reagan warned Texans of an impending "World War III" with the Soviet Union and the potential that under Ford America's military would not be prepared, he was viewed as strong rather than extreme.⁵⁷

Though Reagan certainly benefited from the ongoing culture of the Cold War and Americans' nagging inferiority complex in the context of that war and Vietnam more specifically, greater benefit was enjoyed on the issue of the Panama Canal treaties. Negotiations for the transfer of sovereignty over the Panama Canal had been well underway for years prior to 1976, but when Reagan discovered the issue as an effective weapon in the North Carolina primary, Ford came to be viewed as quietly willing to backpedal on promises he had previously made to never renegotiate sovereign American territory. To his credit, Ford responded to the challenges directly, and tried to use the Panama Canal issue as a means for labeling Reagan as

⁵⁵ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), CH 6; "Possible Texas Speech," April 26, 1976, David Gergen Files, Texas Speeches, GFL.

⁵⁶ Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL; Speech Excerpts and Press Releases, April 1976, Box 29, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁵⁷ Speech Excerpts and Press Releases, April 1976, Box 29, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

irresponsible and extreme. More often than not, however, he found himself, rather than Reagan, on the defensive for potentially destabilizing Latin America and opening the door for increased communist influence in the Western Hemisphere.⁵⁸

On issues such as the Panama Canal, Ford's advisors badly miscalculated the importance in Texas of anticommunism and foreign policy, often couched through appellations of strength and weakness. Ford's strategists refocused the President's campaign away from foreign policy and national defense in Texas and toward economic and agricultural issues. While it is clear that economic and agricultural issues were important to Texans, ignoring foreign policy, thereby allowing Reagan the opportunity to monopolize the issue, severely hampered Ford's chances in the state. Conversely, Reagan's campaign capitalized on the state's fervent anticommunism and used conservative Texans' demand for strong national defense and tougher Cold War foreign policy as a bridge connecting social and fiscal conservatives. Libertarians and evangelicals in Texas did not always agree on how best to handle abortion, law enforcement, or taxes, but they could almost always agree that the United States was in a life-and-death struggle with communism and that failure in that struggle would almost certainly contribute to the already declining moral fiber of a nation riddled by liberal weakness since the 1960s.⁵⁹

Reagan's ability to capture the populist mantra in Texas was among his most impressive political feats in 1976. As a champion of "average Americans," Reagan was forced to walk a fine line between his support for big business—particularly the Texas oil industry—and his appeal to the state's middle class. By using Ford's policies to his own advantage, Reagan drew

⁵⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, March 18, 1976, 8A; *Dallas Morning News*, March 20-21, 1976, 11A, 36A; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1066; Texas Correspondents Interview, April 21, 1976, Box 53, Ron Nesson Papers, 1974-77, GFL.

⁵⁹ Letter from William J. Casey to Gerald R. Ford, July 29, 1976, Box 37, Presidential Handwriting File, GFL.

connections between the federal government's energy policy, the wishes of big oil in Texas, and public demands for better economic conditions and greater freedom from government control. Ford mistakenly believed that the majority of Texans would consider "populist" only those candidates who attacked big business. Though Ford's calculation that anti-corporate sentiment could provide him with an important entree into the Texas middle class was not wholly inaccurate, it was so emphasized to the exclusion of other strategies as to discourage the state's conservative power brokers, in addition to anti-government middle class conservatives in Texas who had benefited from the oil economy of the 1970s. In the end, Ford's strategy opened the door for Reagan to redefine populism as a much broader and more conservative political appellation.⁶⁰

Reagan redefined populism in his own image and identified himself as a champion of the middle class by way of several other issues, as well. On divestiture, for instance, Reagan forcefully presented himself as opposed to the break up of Texas oil companies, saying that such a move would decrease efficiency, productivity, and result in higher gas prices for middle class consumers.⁶¹ Reagan also critiqued Ford for his signing of the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (EPCA), which established price controls on oil companies, a regulatory measure that fueled the already tense relationship between Texas oil companies and the federal government. In fact, among many Texas oil barons, particularly those who had become permanent fixtures at GOP fundraisers, Ford's signing of the EPCA was viewed as a stab in the back. More so than in any other state, the EPCA became a major issue in Texas. Reagan attacked Ford's position on

⁶⁰ Memorandum For: Bo Calloway, From: Robert Teeter, December 5, 1975, Box B2, Marik File – Market Opinion Research, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL; Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL.

⁶¹ "Ronald Reagan on Oil Company Divestiture." May 13, 1976, Box 39, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Memorandum For: Bo Calloway, From: Robert Teeter, December 5, 1975, Box B2, Marik File – Market Opinion Research, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

EPCA, positioning himself as the only declared candidate in either party to say that he would have vetoed the legislation. In addition to the obvious political benefit such a stand gave Reagan in Texas, the Republican challenger focused his objection to the EPCA on three principles. First, Reagan argued that price controls in the United States would increase dependence on foreign sources of oil. Second, Reagan claimed that price controls were a disincentive for domestic producers and fundamentally un-American. Finally, Reagan argued that price controls conflicted with conservationist goals because fixed prices encouraged, rather than discouraged, consumption.⁶²

Ford's popularity plummeted in Texas in the immediate aftermath of his signing of the EPCA in late 1975. As his popularity continued to decline steadily in Texas throughout 1976, Ford and his campaign staff became convinced that the EPCA was the predominant source of Reagan's support in Texas and subsequently discounted evidence that suggested that Reagan backers had either been attracted by a combination of the EPCA and several other issues, or supported Reagan for entirely different reasons.⁶³ While Ford's internal polling numbers suggested that the EPCA had indeed cost Ford support in Texas, the numbers clearly indicated that for many Texans, Ford's signing of the EPCA contributed not solely to fears about divestiture and price controls, but also significantly exacerbated broader fears about the expansion of government into the private sector, the manipulation of economic forces by the White House, and a growing sense that freedoms were being taken away from them by the federal government. Ford's myopia was costly. Rather than understand the Texas political climate as broadly hostile

⁶² Memorandum For: Bo Calloway, From: Robert Teeter, December 5, 1975, Box B2, Marik File – Market Opinion Research, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL; Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL.

⁶³ Memorandum For: Dick Cheney, From: Jerry H. Jones, November 20, 1975, Box 19, Richard Cheney Files, 1974-77: Campaign Subject File, GFL; Memorandum For: Bo Calloway, From: Robert Teeter, December 5, 1975, Box B2, Marik File – Market Opinion Research, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

to government action, Ford mistook his unpopularity in the state as the direct and sole result of the EPCA.⁶⁴

Texans' sense that Ford was an agent of expanding federal power grew in large part because of Reagan's Texas campaign. Across the state, Reagan pounded Ford on issues of government intrusiveness, citing the national debt, increased inflation, and government interference in numerous social issues. After a decade and a half of warfare, assassination, and scandal, Reagan's anti-government focus became a powerful campaign weapon both nationally and in Texas.⁶⁵

Two other decisions undermined Ford's popularity in Texas and contributed to the consolidation of Reagan's support, as well as to the popular perception that Reagan was the choice for populist conservatives. Both decisions were made well before the campaign had begun, but resurfaced in the context of Reagan's charges that Ford had failed to work for Texans' interests. The first of these episodes was a controversy between factions of the state Republican Party and the Ford administration involving the appointment of W. J. Usery, Jr. as National Director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Usery's appointment to this post in 1975 was immediately met with disdain among key Texas Republicans, Ray Barnhart in particular. Before serving as co-chairman of the Texas Citizens for Reagan in 1976, Barnhart served as Chairman of the Harris County Republican Party. In August 1975, while serving in that capacity, Barnhart had demanded to both John Tower and Gerald Ford that Usery be removed from his post. Barnhart's demand, which was initiated in cooperation with county Republican parties across the state, was based on the opinion that Usery's call to extend

⁶⁴ Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL.

⁶⁵ *Dallas Morning News*, March 18, 1976, 8A; *Dallas Morning News*, March 20-21, 1976, 11A, 36A; *Dallas Morning News*, April 11, 1976, 1A, 14A; Texas Issues Outline, April 3, 1976, Box 19, Presidential Briefing Book, GFL; U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1101.

collective bargaining rights to government employees threatened the economic climate in Texas, which by 1975 was considered the most vibrant economic climate in the country. Barnhart believed that Ford's endorsement of Usery would be construed in Texas as an endorsement of "big labor" and would destroy the President's chances for carrying Texas in 1976.⁶⁶ Barnhart even threatened to ensure Ford's defeat in Texas during the general election unless the President removed Usery from the post. Usery, who had served in the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations, was not removed and Barnhart's displeasure with Ford and the Republican Party grew. The fractious exchange between Barnhart, Tower, and Ford was an early but clear warning that divisions between the administration and conservatives in Texas were unlikely to be resolved.⁶⁷

The second decision made by Ford which undermined his support and credibility in Texas was his plan to close Webb Air Force Base in Big Spring, a small community in West Texas. Big Spring residents were extremely proud of Webb Air Force Base and feared the economic impact the closure would have on their community. Webb Air Force Base was in the midst of a \$2 million renovation campaign, designed primarily to upgrade the dormitory and living conditions on base, when Ford's closure decision was announced. Despite enjoying the highest number of clear weather days and greatest number of flying hours of all bases in the Air Training Command in 1975, Ford chose to close Webb on the basis of its outdated facilities and the fact that it had only two runways, whereas most other air force bases had three. In his decision, Ford also cited urban encroachment in the Big Spring area as contributing to logistical and economic problems that made continued operations at the base untenable. This rationale outraged Big Spring citizens, who saw Ford as disingenuous and unfair. Big Spring residents

⁶⁶ Letter From: Ray Barnhart, To: Gerald Ford, August 1, 1975, Folder 53, Box 1258, Bill Keener Files, JTP.

⁶⁷ August 29, 1975, Letter from Ray A. Barnhart, to Lyn Nofziger, Box 5, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

also viewed Ford's decision as a reflection of the President's fundamental misunderstanding of the area's economy. During the April campaign, conservative grassroots organizations working in tandem with Texas Citizens for Reagan campaign offices publicized Big Spring's hostile response to Ford's closure of the base as an indication that Ford was out of touch with average Texans and could not be trusted to keep the state's economic interests in mind.⁶⁸

On issue after issue and perception after perception, Reagan bested Ford in Texas. Reagan's momentum was, in one sense, self-perpetuating. In another sense, his momentum was substantially fueled by anti-Ford hostility at the grassroots and in the media. In both cases, Reagan played the role of conservative icon in a state built upon the platitudes of independence, individualism, and freedom. Throughout April, Reagan's campaign appearances in Texas consistently outdrew Ford's. Reagan typically appeared before large gatherings of enthusiastic supporters and spoke about putting God back into public schools, eliminating wasteful research grants to higher education institutions, improving law enforcement, the failure of busing, and Gerald Ford's inept energy policy. On each topic, Reagan infused anti-government animus and dire warnings of impending national insecurity. News coverage furthered this momentum, particularly as the media began to cast Reagan as a conservative who could attract support from both parties. The public's awareness of this appeal acted as a self-fulfilling prophecy, drawing even larger numbers of undecided conservatives into the Reagan tent.⁶⁹

Reagan's advertising and public relations campaign in Texas also enhanced his popularity in the state. Reagan utilized both print and broadcast media in order to create free publicity through the construction of news events and blend a variety of issues and ideological strands into one, cohesive conservative message. His radio spots in Texas blended a broad conservative

⁶⁸ Memorandum, to Governor Reagan, from Peter Hannaford, subject: Texas Events, April 13, 1976, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁶⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, April 14, 15, 1976, 7A, 1A.

ethos with issues ranging from busing and property taxpayers' right to send their children to neighborhood schools, to the potential industrial shutdown that would result in Texas should Ford's energy policies continue. Reagan used radio to speak address farmers and effectively tapped into the state's reservoir of anticommunist fervor, particularly in spots on the evils of the Panama Canal treaties. In each of these spots, voters were reminded not only of why they should vote for Reagan, but how they could do so. "The *only* way to make Governor Reagan president is to vote in the *Republican* primary on Saturday, May 1. For Texas, the choice is clear. Ronald Reagan—the conservative who can *win*." These messages magnified the importance that fomenting a united and coalesced ideological front played in shaping modern conservatism, both nationally and in Texas. These messages also targeted specific voters—conservative Texas Democrats.⁷⁰

Reagan's 1976 campaign in Texas demonstrated an effective use of targeted advertising among several other interest groups as well. He limited advertising spots directly focused on forced busing to Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio. He ran advertisements in Houston, Big Spring, San Antonio, and Corpus Christi which dealt exclusively with Ford's decision to close a series of air force bases in Texas, as well as issues of national security. In San Antonio, Houston, Austin, and various other parts of the Rio Grande Valley, the Reagan campaign purchased spots on excessive utility rate increases. Gulf Port cities were targeted with spots dealing with the renegotiations of the Panama Canal treaties, while Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio were targeted for messages on the impact of illegal Mexican immigrants on the local job market. Reagan's statewide spots dealt with the broader ideological conservatism being used to cast a wide net over all such issues. Each of these advertisements emphasized anti-bureaucracy messages, help for small business owners, what conservatives in Texas referred to as the

⁷⁰ Texas Radio Ad Transcripts, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

difference between “Gun Criminal Control and Gun Control,” and pornography’s impact on family values and tradition.⁷¹

Despite Reagan’s clear momentum, Ford’s strategists remained convinced through mid-April that their candidate would defeat Reagan in Texas by as much as 14 points. These strategists reassured their boss that the influx of Northern businessmen to the Sunbelt would more than make up for Reagan’s cross-over appeal to conservative Texas Democrats, which is what Ford’s supporters feared the most. These strategists were wrong on two fronts. First, they overestimated Ford’s appeal to the new Texans Republicans migrating from the North and underestimated Reagan’s appeal to the same constituency. Second, Ford’s campaign staff underestimated Reagan’s appeal to conservative Democrats in Texas. As such, on May 1, 1976, voters in Texas went to the polls in record numbers. Turnout was so high, that several polling locations ran out of Republican ballots by mid-afternoon.⁷²

When the votes were tallied, Reagan had won an astounding 67 percent of the vote, swept every district, and claimed every delegate. Ford’s strategists had calculated that they would need 140,000 votes to overcome Reagan’s appeal among conservative Democrats. Ford received 152,022 votes—exceeding his goal by over 12,000.⁷³ However, the Ford campaign grossly underestimated the potential Republican turnout in Texas, which gave Reagan over 310,000 votes. Notably, post-election analysis showed that Reagan would still have defeated Ford by over 58,000 votes even without a single Democratic cross-over vote. It was a massive and overwhelming rejection of Ford and a simultaneous embrace of Reagan.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Dallas Morning News*, May 1, 1976, 25A; “Capturing Texas: The Most Critical State,” Prepared by Chamberlain-Frandolig Inc., March 15, 1976, Box 31, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁷² Market Opinion Research: Texas Primary Survey, April 15, 1976, Box C11, MOR Texas Primary Survey Files, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

⁷³ *New York Times Magazine*, June 6, 1976, Box 33, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁷⁴ Certified Results of May 1 Texas Primary, May 18, 1976, Box C11, MOR Texas Primary Survey Files, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

For the next several months, Reagan and Ford continued to battle for the GOP nomination in primaries across the country. That August, Ford, after a long struggle, narrowly captured the nomination at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City. Nonetheless, Reagan's decisive victory in Texas had a profound and lasting impact on the resolution of intra-party factionalism in that state—a shift driven by the influx of grassroots support for Reagan and conservative causes that seemed to question the authority of established political power. Among grassroots conservatives in Texas, Reagan personified what Jim Hightower would refer to in 1980 as the “disgruntled maverick”—an iconic figure of heroic frontierism to which Texans could identify with and depend upon to stand up for the little guy in the fight against bureaucracy and big government. By encouraging initiative, self-reliance, individual freedom, and independence from government, Reagan tapped into the state's conservative impulse and then fueled its expansion.⁷⁵ With Jimmy Carter's successful campaign for the Democratic nomination being based on many of the same impulses, the 1976 primary became the turning point for partisan and ideological realignment in Texas and forced state Republicans to ultimately embrace “Reagan Republicanism” as the means by which significant two-party realignment would occur.⁷⁶

Reagan's support among the Texas grassroots was also grounded in the visceral. One couple in Lewisville—a suburb in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex—commented to Reagan that they appreciated being treated as “intelligent” and as “winners”—not as “stupid losers” as “elitist liberals” tended to treat them⁷⁷ Reagan's victory served as a justification for their conservative values—a legitimizing force which gave credence to the righteous indignation many felt toward

⁷⁵ Op-Ed Draft, by John Tower, *New York Times*, October 28, 1976, Folder 68, Box 17, Press Office, JTP.

⁷⁶ Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution*, Preface; News Release, March 16, 1978, San Antonio, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 9, File 15, WCP.

⁷⁷ General Correspondence, Letter from Bill and Mary Chaillot, July 7, 1976. Box 75, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

Washington and establishment politics. Small sum campaign contributions continued to pour into Reagan's coffers from Texans even after the May 1 primary. Many contributions were accompanied with exhortations to continue his crusade for conservatism—frequently defined as “American values.” One pastor in Galveston commented after the primary that he could not vote for Ford because Ford was a liberal. For this pastor, the “machinery”—as he put it—of partisan politics snuffed out his belief that change could be affected against, as he again put it, the “Democratic Party and the overwhelming Liberal Washington Establishment.”⁷⁸

The sentiment expressed in this overflow of letters and contributions suggests much about the state of party politics in Texas and the ideological associations Lone Star State voters made with established leaders and parties. One Texan, comparing Reagan to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, explained his support for Reagan this way:

Last May 1st, I voted Republican for the first time in my life. The reason? I am sick and tired of ‘party politics,’ of which the Democratic Party has more than enough. Now that I have switched, I am beginning to see the same sort of thing from ‘the fathers’ of the G.O.P. Take a lesson from the Democrats, don’t put political machinery ahead of what is best for the people. If the popular vote is behind a particular man, then put the party behind the man.⁷⁹

A Wichita Falls man wrote to Reagan that Texans like he were “sick, sick, sick and disenchanted with the whole picture in Washington. We want someone up there with the guts to buck the Establishment, clean house and make a really honest effort to reinstate an old-fashioned honorable government for the people.”⁸⁰ Such sentiment helps to explain Jimmy Carter’s popularity in Texas in 1976, as well. Other Texas conservatives likened Reagan’s cause to the

⁷⁸ Sears Correspondence, May 1976, Box 71, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; General Correspondence, Letter from Bill and Mary Chaillot, July 7, 1976, Letter from Pastor Robert Berry, to Mr. Reagan, July 15, 1976, Box 75, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; .U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977), Gerald Ford, 1976-77, 1066, 1262-1269; *Dallas Morning News*, March 24, 1976, 22A.

⁷⁹ Letter from Durwood Foote, to: Governor Reagan, Citizens for Reagan Hg., May 13, 1976, Sears Correspondence, May 1976, Box 71, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁸⁰ Sears Correspondence, May 1976, Box 71, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

protection of America from the “gluttony, degradation, and pleasure-seeking that destroyed the Roman Empire.”⁸¹ These Texans frequently prioritized social issues like abortion over high taxes and government bureaucracy, but did not refrain from including those targets in their secondary attacks.⁸²

Texas conservatives often spoke of liberalism and the “Establishment” as synonymous—referring regularly to the “liberal establishment” or “Liberal Washington Establishment.” Many came to the GOP with a preconceived notion that the “establishment” of both parties—both state and federal—was inherently “liberal.” Such views frequently reflected a belief that Reagan was the antithesis of establishment politics. This view was another crucial stepping stone in the process toward partisan realignment in Texas. Conservatives were initially reluctant to embrace the GOP, but could do so with less guilt if the man they were placing their trust in appeared to be just as hostile to established party leadership as they were.⁸³

Coinciding with anti-establishment animosity in Texas was a pervasive feeling that effective government and family traditions were inextricably connected. On July 6, Reagan gave a nationally televised speech during which he focused on the evils of “intrusive government.” He used words like “domineering” and “dictatorial” to describe the culture of Washington, DC, and told his audience that he was “not a politician by profession.” “I am a citizen,” Reagan asserted, “who decided I had to be personally involved in order to stand up for my own values and beliefs.” Reagan made direct appeals to Democrats, saying that he too had once been a Democrat, but the time came when he had to put his personal values ahead of party loyalty.

⁸¹ General Correspondence, Letter from Bert and Lorraine Clayton, to Governor Reagan, July 6, 1976, Box 75, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁸² Davidson, *Race and Class in Texas Politics*, 196.

⁸³ General Correspondence, Letter from Pastor Robert Berry, to Mr. Reagan, July 15, 1976, Box 75, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Sears Correspondence, May 1976, Box 71, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

“Vote not for a label,” Reagan exhorted, “but for values you faithfully believe in.”⁸⁴ One couple from San Antonio responded to the speech in a letter:

God bless you for your stand on moral issues ... Your talk on July 6, was inspirational, and gave the majority of the American people, (who we sincerely believe are honest and decent and believe in the fundamental values you spoke of) a ray of hope that at least they were being courageously and honestly represented by someone (the only candidate it seems) who sees and points out the extreme danger of the crumbling of the American family. Without this, our society can never endure.⁸⁵

Another supporter from Houston understood Reagan’s appeal this way: “Mr. and Mrs. Public want straight talk from the shoulder and want somebody to call a spade, a spade. They understand and want tough talk from a contender and they want an ‘Old Time Revival.’”⁸⁶ If nothing else, most Reagan supporters had one thing in common: they openly vowed to oppose Ford in November. Different conservatives reacted to the campaigns of 1976 in different ways, but very few had any loyalty to the Republican Party. Significant partisan realignment in Texas first manifested as loyalty to Reagan and not necessarily to the Republican Party.⁸⁷

At least three conclusions can be drawn from Texans’ response to Reagan’s 1976 campaign. First, Reagan’s campaign persona bridged a gap between local politics and national issues. Put another way, many conservative Texans embraced Reagan because they believed he stood for their values. Though many of these values came to be defined by issues that transcended local issues, Reagan and the populist conservative rhetoric effectively showed how such issues threatened to affect individual neighborhoods, homes, and families. Second, Reagan’s victory in Texas was so overwhelming that no conservative in the state could overlook it as an indicator of a changing political climate. In the coming years, Texas Republican leaders

⁸⁴ Text of Governor Ronald Reagan’s Nationwide Television Address, ABC, July 6, 1976, Box 121, Folder 6: Press Releases, 1976, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

⁸⁵ Letter from Michael and Sara Walsh, to Governor Reagan, July 6, 1976, Box 75, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁸⁶ Sears Correspondence, May 1976, Box 71, Citizens for Reagan Papers; Letter from WJ Martin, Jr. to Citizens for Reagan Committee, July 30, 1976, Box 75, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁸⁷ “Reasons for Reagan: Texas Citizens for Reagan Primary News,” Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

came to realize that Reagan *was* the path toward a two-party state. Third, Reagan's supporters in Texas rejected Ford in 1976 as part of the same liberal establishment that controlled the Democratic Party and appeared to be controlling the state GOP. These supporters charged in 1976 that "they"—meaning the faction of populist Reagan conservatives—had not had their values considered by Ford from the moment Nixon resigned in 1974, and many cited the selection of Nelson Rockefeller to the vice presidency as a prime indicator that Ford's GOP was a tool of Eastern Establishment liberalism.⁸⁸

As Ronald Reagan's values, concerns, and ideologies were increasingly identified with those of conservative Texans, many conservative Texas Democrats began to see themselves as marginalized within their own party. This sense of marginalization was a feeling long-shared by Texas liberals, though such concerns began to slowly dissipate in 1976 as liberals viewed Reagan's emergence in Texas as a gateway to for their own advancement within the state Democratic Party.⁸⁹

Texans for Jimmy

Though seemingly less divisive than the bitter rivalries that plagued the GOP, Democratic factionalism and image management still played a significant role in shaping Texas political culture in 1976. Texas Democrats began to fracture as early as that summer, when former Georgia Governor and 1976 Democratic Party presidential nominee Jimmy Carter used his own campaign's letterhead to advocate the re-election of Calvin Guest as Texas Democratic Party Chairman. Guest had been a loyal Bentsen and Dolph Briscoe supporter and was not

⁸⁸ Draft Press Release, Television News Inc., Undated. "Reagan reveals he was not consulted by Ford on VP; California Governor Issues Warning not to Ignore '72 Mandate," Box 13, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁸⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, April 21, 1976, 1A; Transcript, *Issues and Answers*, ABC News, May 2, 1976, Box 6, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI; Memorandum, From: Dick Bryan, to: Larry Uzzell, Re: Ford's Electability," June 10, 1976, Box 27, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; Memorandum For: Rogers Morton, From: Peter Dailey, May 14, 1976, Box B4, Hughes Subject File – Advertising Primary Campaign, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL.

popular among liberals within the state party. Many anti-Guest Democrats were furious upon receiving the letter and many threatened to (and some did) revoke their support for Carter as a result.⁹⁰ Just days prior to the letter being mailed from Carter campaign headquarters, Texas Land Commissioner Bob Armstrong, whose leadership in the state Democratic Party was paramount in 1976, publicly announced that he would not support the re-election of Guest to the state party chairmanship. Armstrong and his supporters were angry and embarrassed that the party's standard bearer for that year had, without consultation of the Texas membership, endorsed the controversially conservative Guest in opposition to a number of potential liberal options.⁹¹

The Guest affair was indicative of the underlying disunity that plagued the Texas Democratic Party. Liberal organizer Billie Carr was particularly angry over Carter's endorsement of Guest and, on behalf of liberals within the Texas Democratic Party, contacted the Carter campaign to demand an apology. Carr felt obliged to inform Carter that the fight for the state chairmanship dated back to factional squabbles in 1952 and that the infusion of an "official" endorsement was a major setback on the path toward ideological reconciliation and unity. Like many other Texas liberals, Carr supported a progressive agenda that prioritized greater attention to minority voters and could maintain working relations with black, Chicano, rural, and other progressive caucuses.⁹² In August, Hamilton Jordan, overwhelmed with letters from Texas liberals voicing their displeasure over Carter's "butting in" to state issues, issued an apology to the Texas Democratic delegation. At the same time, he blamed the use of Carter-Mondale letterhead for the endorsement of Guest as a mistake made by campaign aide Frank

⁹⁰ Miscellaneous Files, Box 11, Records of the Office of Congressional Liaison, Frank Moore Files, JCL.

⁹¹ September 7, 1976, Letter from Billie Carr to Hamilton Jordan, "Texas Folder," Box 219, Issues Office, Rick Hutcheson Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

⁹² Ibid.

Moore and announced Carter's neutrality in the election of a new Texas Democratic Party Chairman.⁹³

Despite Carter's unwelcome intrusion into state Democratic politics that summer, Texas still eventually cast its electoral lot with the peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia when the November election finally rolled around. The Democrats' ability to win in Texas in 1976 can be attributed to several things, not the least of which was conservative populist ideology. Both prior to and during the 1976 campaigns, Jimmy Carter defined himself this way. Carter marketed himself, both nationally and in Texas, as new political blood, capable of helping the nation start afresh after a demoralizing decade of scandal and war. Carter stressed open and honest leadership, an end to lies and division, patriotism, and reflected hostility toward the Washington, DC "Establishment."⁹⁴

Carter's faith as a self-professed "born-again Christian" lent substantial credibility to his honesty-based populism in Texas. At the same time, however, Carter's Christianity was a source of division for many within his own campaign team. Among his closest advisors, enthusiasm for Carter had more to do with his Southern background than his spiritual one. "Redeeming the South for progressive liberalism" was a mantra on the minds of most Carter staffers, who often dreamily compared possible victory with the exuberance a woman or an African American might feel to have "finally elected one of their own." Several of his advisors even privately questioned the sincerity of Carter's faith and thought it was a hindrance to progressive reform.⁹⁵ Some even went so far as to argue with Carter over his infusion of faith into the campaign rhetoric. Carter

⁹³ Ibid.; "Revised Letter, August 1976," "Texas Folder," Box 219, Issues Office, Rick Hutcheson Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

⁹⁴ December 19, 1974 Letter, From: Ezra Wintz, To: Jerry Rafshoon, "Themes and Issues – April 1976," Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

⁹⁵ July 19, 1976, Editorial, *New York Times*, by Patrick Anderson, Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

needed to distance himself from religion, they argued, because it hurt him among liberals and “particularly Jews.” Others believed Carter needed to emphasize his belief in the separation of church and state, as John F. Kennedy had done to combat the stigma of Catholicism in 1960.⁹⁶ Evidence suggests that Carter wrestled with and considered these criticisms. He even placated his advisors by professing that “every religion is equally pleasing in the eyes of God” and “every person has the right ... to find God as he sees fit.”⁹⁷

Carter’s campaign in Texas was not without its bumps. Many of these bumps can be traced back to Carter’s failure to understand the state’s political climate, as evidenced by the Guest affair. Carter’s inability to understand that climate was an early indicator of the growing dissonance between national liberals and conservative Texans.⁹⁸ Carter recognized that he had another problem in Texas. Early on, he decided that if his opponent was Ford, he would run against Washington—calling himself an outsider and Ford part of the “old guard” corrupt establishment. In Texas, though, Carter had a rival for the hearts and minds of anti-government populism. Reagan’s popularity in the Lone Star State did not escape Carter, who was determined to avoid a populist popularity contest with Reagan in Texas and often tried to portray Reagan as an extremist and a potential national security threat. Eventually, however, Carter recognized that Reagan’s political support in Texas was so disconnected from the state party’s Republican establishment as to be unfit for an effective or useful attack.⁹⁹

The fallout from the struggle between Ford and Reagan left the GOP, both nationally and in Texas, divided and weakened. When the general campaign began, many Texans were

⁹⁶ May 3, 1976 Memorandum, To: Governor Carter, From: Stu Eizenstat. “Religion,” Box 27, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

⁹⁷ Letter from Jimmy Carter – DRAFT, “Religion,” Box 27, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

⁹⁸ “Themes and Issues – April 1976.” Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

⁹⁹ July 14, 1976, *Wall Street Journal*, Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

disillusioned with what they already viewed as another political defeat. The Republican Party struggled to find loyal adherents in the wake of the Watergate scandals.¹⁰⁰ Knowing this, the Democratic ticket capitalized on their opponents' division. They charged that Republicans' division over their nominee had been symptomatic of a larger problem—one of chaos, disorder, and failure.¹⁰¹

Texas was a critical swing state in 1976 and Ford's failure there ultimately contributed to his doomed campaign. Ford failed to convince many Texas conservatives that he shared their animosity toward big government. He also failed to convince conservatives, particularly evangelicals, that he shared their moral, religious, and social values. Part of this failure can be blamed on the fact that Ford did not, in fact, share conservatives' animosity toward government, other conservatives' views on religion, nor did he readily identify with the populism that amalgamated social and libertarian conservatism.

In another sense, Ford's failure can be tied to his ineffective advertising and public relations strategy—one that missed opportunities to capitalize on Carter's mistakes. In Texas, for example, Carter's famed interview with *Playboy* magazine, in which the Democratic nominee—quoting Christ's Sermon on the Mount—claimed that if the standard for adultery in God's eyes was mere lust, then he was an admitted adulterer, infuriated conservative Democrats, including the influential pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, W.A. Criswell.¹⁰² The response from Christian leaders to Carter's interview had less to do with the former Georgia Governor's interpretation of scripture than with his judgment in granting an interview to what

¹⁰⁰ Market Opinion Research: Texas Statewide Study, Box H6, President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76, GFL; *Dallas Morning News*, August 1, 1976, 21A; *Dallas Morning News*, August 3, 1976, 1A; *Dallas Morning News*, August 4, 1976, 4A.

¹⁰¹ *Dallas Morning News*, August 1, 1976, 21A; *Dallas Morning News*, August 3, 1976, 1A; *Dallas Morning News*, August 4, 1976, 4A.

¹⁰² Matthew 5:27-30

they considered a pornographic magazine. Criswell subsequently endorsed Ford over the Southern Baptist Carter. Even more problematic for Carter was the reaction to the article in the Hispanic communities of South Texas. For minorities, Carter's association of Lyndon Johnson as a liar on par with Nixon was disturbing and disagreeable. The fact that the Hispanic communities were also predominantly Catholic, and openly opposed to *Playboy* as a form of pornography, made the medium just as unsettling as the message.¹⁰³

In addition to upsetting South Texas Hispanics by agreeing to an interview with *Playboy*, then using that interview to vilify a former liberal president from Texas, Carter further angered Hispanic political leaders in Texas by failing to make direct and pointed appeals to that constituency. Following the Democratic National Convention, Leonel J. Castillo, a future Carter appointee to head the INS, contacted Chuck Parrish, the Carter Campaign's chief political advisor in Texas, and insisted "that the Carter-Mondale Campaign treat us and our constituents with the dignity befitting loyal sons, not as bastard children from some forgotten trust."¹⁰⁴ Castillo's passion reflected resentment among minorities in Texas, particularly among Hispanics, over Carter's inability to connect with their community. Ford, however, failed to take advantage of Carter's gaffes in Texas. He made little to no mention of it during public appearances in the state and after the election was highly criticized for these omissions.¹⁰⁵

The story of the 1976 presidential campaign, particularly in Texas, is not just a story of Ford's failure. It is also a story of Carter's positioning and skillful avoidance, despite some hiccups along the way, of the liberal stigma that would haunt both he and his future vice

¹⁰³ Miscellaneous Files, Box 316, Minority Affairs Coordinator, Raymone Bain Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

¹⁰⁴ Letter, From: Leonel Castillo, To: Chuck Parrish, September 15, 1976, Box 316, Minority Affairs Coordinator, Raymone Bain Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm MacDougall, "How Madison Avenue Didn't Put a Ford in Your Future," *New York Magazine*, February 21, 1977, Box 20, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

president during each of the next two election cycles. James Baker, Ford's chief campaign strategist in Texas, was regularly advised that Carter's strategy in the Lone Star State could be boiled down to the same old story of loyalty and the tradition of Republican-bashing.¹⁰⁶ Carter broached these themes through the issue of trust. In campaign stops across Texas, Carter reminded supporters that Ford and the Republican Party could not be trusted.¹⁰⁷

Still, Carter had more to say in Texas than simply that the GOP was evil and duplicitous. Carter's campaign is remembered for its emphasis on populism and government corruption. Carter is also well-remembered for promising that he would "never lie," but was discouraged from making that his predominant message because, his strategy team argued, the focus was on his honesty rather than his opponents' dishonesty. Instead, his speeches deployed phrases like "Republican mess," or simply "Republican" in an effort to evoke deeply-rooted animosities toward Ford, Nixon, and the GOP in general. They further made a point to include each of the following words or phrases in the vast majority of Carter's public speeches and Q&A sessions: "new," "fresh," "leadership," "unity," "hope and progress," "trust and confidence," and "mistakes of the Washington Establishment." It was the final phrase that rang most true in Texas. Anti-government sentiment, made more popular as a campaign issue by Reagan during the GOP primary, worked to Carter's and the Democrats' advantage during the 1976 general election.¹⁰⁸

At the same time, Carter was desperate to avoid having labels applied to him. He did not want to make conservatism or liberalism an issue in the campaign, in large part because he acknowledged it as a losing game. In Texas, Carter's running mate was one of the biggest

¹⁰⁶ Memorandum to: Jim Baker, From: Paul Manafort, re: "Political Activity in Texas Since the President's Visit," October 14, 1976, Box 126, Folder 8: Political Division, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹⁰⁷ July 14, 1976, *Wall Street Journal*, Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

¹⁰⁸ "9/8 Campaign Themes," Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

obstacles to avoiding a debate over political ideology. Walter Mondale’s “Minnesota liberalism” was not well-received in Texas and Carter struggled to redirect pointed questions regarding his running mate’s political ideology.¹⁰⁹ Texas Governor Dolph Briscoe, who had openly refused to even be seen with George McGovern in 1972, announced his endorsement of Carter in May, though his public enthusiasm was tempered when Mondale was selected as running mate.¹¹⁰ When Mondale’s voting record and public preferences became an issue, as it did regularly on the issues of abortion and gun control, Carter stressed his own stand on the issues—quickly countering that he was personally opposed to both. Carter never accused his opponents of being conservative, but instead always referred to them as “Republican.” Conservatism, they admitted, was popular and gaining popularity. The Republican Party, however, was not popular, and could easily become an obstacle for Ford, particularly in yellow-dog states like Texas.¹¹¹

Some issues, however, were simply too sensitive for Carter to redirect or manipulate. Busing, for instance, was unpopular in Texas, and Carter wanted to show sensitivity. He chose to empathize with the anti-busing crowd and often answered questions on the issue by recounting all the reasons why someone might oppose busing without resorting to racist motives. At the same time, however, Carter refused to dilute the importance of civil rights or his commitment to “breaking down all barriers.”¹¹² Even more controversial than busing, was Carter’s support for an amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which would extend civil rights to homosexuals. Carter also openly supported the pro-gay platform of the National Women’s Agenda. Under fire in Texas and other parts of the “Bible Belt” for his receptivity to homosexual rights, Carter was

¹⁰⁹ Debates – Briefing Material for Third Debate, Box 9, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL; *New York Times*, July 17, 1976, Box 2, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

¹¹⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, May 6, 1976, 1A, 6A; *Dallas Morning News*, May 16, 1976, 24A.

¹¹¹ Briefing – Tough Issues. Debates – Briefing Material for Third Debate, Box 9, Issues Office, Stuart Eizenstat Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

¹¹² “On Busing,” Box 31, Issues Office, Sam Bleicher Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

forced on multiple occasions throughout the primary and general campaign to come out against allowing gays in the military, for what he justified as “national security reasons associated with potential blackmail.”¹¹³

On November 2, Carter defeated Ford in Texas by a margin of 51-48 percent. Following the election, Carter insiders, who were well-aware of the divisions that still plagued their party and threatened their administration—particularly on ideological grounds, began to formulate new strategies for future elections. Six weeks prior to Carter’s inauguration, pollster Patrick Caddell submitted a report on political strategy in which he made a number of prescient conclusions. “In the end, the decline in the South that took place in October because of ideology was reversed only by regional pride,” Caddell wrote. “This has some disturbing implications, however, for the future.” Caddell continued, noting that, “Conservatives have become a larger and larger block of the electorate,” and determined that the Democratic Party was on the brink of being forced to form a new coalition, because its current one was “fading fast.” The essence of the report, written for Carter and his top advisors, was the debate and confusion surrounding which coalitions to approach, and a concern that the party could not win an ideological battle for the public’s hearts and minds. Democrats, he asserted, “must transcend ideology” because, for liberals, ideology was a losing game.¹¹⁴

Less than two weeks after his initial report, Caddell issued a follow-up, at Carter’s behest, in which he concluded that the, “Democratic Party is in serious national trouble—with a shrinking and ill-defined coalition. We need a new and broader political coalition that can attract new support. It would be a mistake, however, to try to create an all-inclusive coalition.” The

¹¹³ “Gay Rights,” Box 34, Issues Office, Sam Bleicher Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL; Transcript, March 19, 1976 – “NBC Tomorrow Show,” Box 34, Issues Office, Sam Bleicher Files, Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential): 1976 Presidential Campaign Files, JCL.

¹¹⁴ December 10, 1976, “Initial Working Paper on Political Strategy,” by Pat Caddell, Box 4, Press Office, Jody Powell Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

tenor of these reports no doubt seemed strange to many Democrats, still basking in the glow of their successful presidential campaign and the seeming demise of the GOP, still languishing in the wake of Watergate and the factionalism that had pitted Reagan against Ford.¹¹⁵ Yet, in places like Texas, where partisan division and rancor could still powerfully manifest even over the issue of campaign letterhead, the urgency of Caddell's assessment seemed quite relevant. Over the course of the next four years, the Democratic Party in Texas—at least as a familiarly functioning entity—slowly dissolved. What had once been the only legitimate political party in Texas was, by the end of the decade, on the brink of bankruptcy. By 1979, over 40 percent of Texans no longer identified themselves with either political party. Yet, polling showed that greater numbers of so-called “Independents” were punching tickets for the GOP at the ballot box.¹¹⁶

Carter made a number of trips to Texas during his four years in office and encouraged the state leadership to find common cause with the national party. In most cases, however, Carter avoided a direct discussion of ideology or others sources of division and typically tried to rally Texas Democrats solely by calling for an adherence to tradition and loyalty. For a new generation of “independent” conservatives, the appeal to tradition and loyalty left many feeling misunderstood and ignored.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Intra-party factionalism plagued the Republican Party's efforts to elect a president in 1976. As far as grassroots conservatives were concerned, the GOP's factionalism resulted in the party's nomination of the wrong candidate. Reagan's win in Texas exposed these divisions and suggested that partisan realignment might not simply coincide with ideological coalescence, but

¹¹⁵ Memorandum to: Gov. Carter, From: Patrick Caddell, December 21, 1976, Re: Additions to Dec. 10 “Working Paper,” Box 4, Press Office, Jody Powell Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

¹¹⁶ “Texas Overview” “3/24/79-3/25/79 Trip to Oklahoma and Texas,” Box 124, Staff Office Files: Office of Staff Secretary, JCL.

¹¹⁷ “Texas Trip 6/78,” Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

would actually depend on it. Yet, it was Jimmy Carter who seemed to benefit most directly from the state's political wrangling in 1976. Left without a clear choice between liberalism and conservatism, Texans reverted to the tradition and loyalty that had long kept their state solidly Democratic. Yet, Jimmy Carter would be the last Democrat to earn Texas's electoral votes in the twentieth century. The story of how the Texas GOP went from a factionalized collection of conservative interest groups to the state's recognized and respected home for conservatives of all stripes, united in a single cause against liberalism and the federal government, is the same story that explains how Jimmy Carter, by 1980, evolved into the icon of liberalism's failure.

Modern Texas conservatism reached a turning point in 1976, but became a more viable political force in the years immediately following. Ronald Reagan's efforts in the Texas primary served as a springboard for Texas conservatives who, in growing tandem with a state Republican Party optimistic about its mounting viability, endured the temporary Ford-Reagan fissure and slowly began to mobilize with greater freedom and power. If the 1976 campaigns were a springboard for Texas conservatives, issues and events in the years leading up to America's next presidential election provided that same grassroots with momentum, direction, purpose, and drive. In the aftermath of 1976, as Texas changed politically, it also changed demographically, economically, and socially. At play in the Lone Star State was a reciprocal dynamic whereby economics affected demographics and demographics affected economics, where social change motivated political activism and political change encouraged social activism, and where partisan realignment became less daunting to an older generation of loyal Democratic Texans, and was no obstacle at all to younger or recent migrants to Texas. It was the makings of a perfect storm.

Between 1976 and 1980, Texans experienced a host of demographic, social, and economic changes—all of which combined to alter the state's political culture. These changes

collided in 1977 and 1978 and resulted in a thunderous foreshadowing of the perfect storm that engulfed the state in 1980. If the experience of Texas is at all representative of a national experience, then the roots of modern American conservatism were expansive, multifaceted, and varied—and converged from multiple directions rather than evolving from a single stream. Between 1976 and 1980, the allegiance that most Texans' held toward the Democratic Party was destroyed and replaced with a loyalty to conservatism's icon and new home, the Texas Republican Party.

CHAPTER 6 THE GATHERING STORM, 1977-78

As the nation went in 1976, so went Texas. Intra-party factionalism, with its roots in ideological division, prevented the Republican Party from uniting behind a single national candidate. Conversely, the Democratic Party embraced the moderate populist conservatism of a former Georgia governor who promised to rid Washington of corruption and incompetence—much the same rhetorical thrust endorsed by Texas’s favorite national Republican, Ronald Reagan. Reagan’s inability to unseat an incumbent Republican president, coupled with Carter’s adoption of a moderate and populist agenda, left conservative Texans little choice but to vote Democratic in 1976. The state’s electoral history made it clear that the votes of conservative Texans almost always defaulted to the Democratic Party unless a clear choice between a conservative and a liberal forced them to vote Republican. Rarely had Texas conservatives been forced to make that choice at the state or local level prior to the late 1970s. Conservatives could certainly be found in both parties, but it was the Democratic Party that had always served as the state’s real power broker. To many Texas conservatives in 1976, Jimmy Carter represented redemption—of the South and of its Democratic Party. Carter’s popularity in Texas also reflected the hope of many Texas Democrats who had supported Nixon 1972—a hope that trends which had seemingly threatened to transform the Democratic Party into a collection of liberal interests had finally reversed course.

The state of Texas did not vote for another Democratic presidential candidate for the rest of the century. In the decades following Carter’s election, the Texas Republican Party emerged not only as a viable second party in what was once a state dominated by conservative Democrats, but also as a bedrock of national conservative Republicanism. To be sure, this process took time and began long before 1976. But it was in the fallout of the 1976 campaigns that partisan

realignment in Texas truly began to gain steam. This realignment originated at the national level and slowly seeped into the state and local political culture. The question remains, however, how did this happen? How could a state that had grappled with partisan ideology since 1964 and broken ranks with the Solid South in 1968, take the lead in transforming the Sunbelt from a Democratic-leaning region to a bastion of conservative Republicanism? Why, in 1976, was Carter seen in Texas as an acceptable Democrat and, by 1980, demonized as the embodiment of federal encroachment and liberal failure? What changed in Texas between 1976 and 1980?

The answer to these questions lies beyond the scope of monocausal explanations. Rather, the answer lies in an understanding of the gathering together of factors which, when they collided, created a blending of demographic, economic, social, and political changes, fears, and beliefs—all active in Texas for decades, but none of which could singularly affect change or had matured until the late 1970s. The partisan realignment that eventually gripped Texas and destroyed a century of political tradition descended upon the state as a fury of activity coming from multiple directions. This perfect storm had been building in Texas for decades, but reached maturity only in the late 1970s when a multiplicity of factors simultaneously collided, hastened change, and permanently altered most Texans' association of political ideology with partisan politics.

The Politics of Socioeconomics

An array of socioeconomic factors contributed to the state's changing political culture. One such factor was the state's changing demographics. It is particularly important to recognize the differences between Texas's racial makeup and that of states commonly studied in the context of modern American conservatism. One specific difference between Texas and the rest of the South was the heightened importance of Hispanics in the state, which, when coupled with

comparatively smaller percentages of African Americans, created a unique socioeconomic and racial climate. By the late 1970s, Hispanics comprised 18 percent of Texas’s legal population, compared with African Americans at just 12 percent. As a new decade approached, Texas Hispanics and African Americans shared many of the same barriers to social and economic integration. At the top of the list was the conservative Democratic Party machinery that had dominated state politics for much of the twentieth century. For years, restrictions like the poll tax or other burdensome obstacles, along with a primary system in which conservative incumbents were always more financially advantaged and could, thus, conduct more extensive media campaigns, worked together to discourage political participation among poorer Texans—of which both blacks and Hispanics comprised a disproportionate percentage. However, after 1965, but particularly by the late 1970s, political participation among ethnic minorities in Texas took on a new importance.¹

Race in Texas often had less to do with sheer bigotry than with the distribution and protection of political power. Maintaining power in Texas traditionally depended on fostering party loyalty, and, for many years, few states had as fiercely loyal a Democratic following as did Texas. Democratic power—long the only power in the state—had always been enhanced by liberal support from ethnic minorities, but was rarely dependent upon it. Elitist power and old money still controlled the Texas Democratic Party through the 1970s. Yet, as a collective group of businessmen and political leaders, “old money” began to appear past its prime, and many warned of an encroaching new power—the youthful emergence of grassroots conservative activism not necessarily loyal to the Democratic Party of their fathers and grandfathers. Lyndon Johnson’s power broker and campaign financier George R. Brown, for instance—once

¹ Political Brief: Texas, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, CA (Hereafter cited as RRL).

considered the most powerful man in the nation—was 80 years old in 1978, and typically walked the streets of Houston unnoticed and unrecognized. If Texas power was defined, as it was by many, as the “ability to get things done,” then by the late 1970s, the conservative Democratic establishment in Texas enjoyed significantly less power as each year passed.²

By the late 1970s, however, conservative Texas Democrats were not the only ones struggling to maintain the status quo. As factionalism at the national level promoted philosophical and limited partisan realignment, Texas liberals struggled to retain the loyalty of Hispanic voters, particularly as the state’s emerging Republican Party viewed minority voter participation not only as a threat to legitimate second party status, but also as an opportunity.³

While much of the state thrived economically during the 1970s, Hispanics were largely left out of the boom. Hispanics in Texas resented their economic plight for reasons that melded nicely with the growing social conservatism in the state. Culturally, the Catholic-dominated Mexican-American population in South Texas typically encouraged women to work at home as housewives and stay-at-home mothers. Economic realities often dictated otherwise, forcing some Mexican-American women to work against their families’ wishes. Proud, many Mexican American males were often reluctant to accept “handouts” or “charity,” creating an unwelcome tension between the need to provide for their family and the government welfare check that, in many cases, allowed them to do so.⁴ The vocal dissatisfaction among Texas Hispanics heightened their political importance and recognition. At the same time, small defections to the GOP, defections based largely on religious and social issues, hurt liberal chances in the state.

² *Texas Monthly*, April 1976, 73-74, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA (Hereafter cited as HI).

³ Political Brief: Texas, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

⁴ “Hispanic Issues,” Box 414, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

Seizing upon this opportunity, Texas Republicans appealed to Mexican Americans and other Hispanics by addressing their concerns over the cultural ramifications of America's progressive society. This strategy worked well for a party which had long-determined that its appeal to ethnic minorities would be based on "sameness" with the rest of the population, rather than racial distinction. Texas Republicans working at the grassroots, particularly in the South Texas districts which had provided Jimmy Carter his heaviest concentration of support in 1976, made small but significant inroads into Mexican-American communities in the first year of Carter's presidency by blending issues like inflation with a broadly defined morality ethos. For instance, in addition to connecting inflation and taxes with the need many families had for women to work, or contrasting welfare with cultural pride, Republicans also used private religious education to its advantage. Though most Mexican Americans in Texas could not afford to send their children to private schools, some were intrigued by a Republican argument that tuition tax credits for private schools, including Catholic schools, could benefit their community. By drawing connections between economics and morality, Texas Republican conservatives were, eventually, also more easily able to use issues like abortion and women's rights as a wedge between the state's liberals, ethnic minorities, and Catholics.⁵

Immigration reform in Texas exposed other tensions between Texas Hispanics and the Democratic Party. Thousands of Mexicans illegally poured into Texas at ever-increasing rates throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The most obvious reason for the increase in illegal migration was the population boom in Mexico, where a resident population of approximately 20 million in 1945 had ballooned to almost 70 million by the late 1970s—a figure the Mexican economy could not accommodate.⁶ In 1977, President Carter introduced and backed solutions to the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

immigration problem that centered on a “temporary resident alien status” in which Mexican workers would be given a watered-down variation of complete amnesty.⁷ Polls showed that 73 percent of the Texas population disapproved of Carter’s proposal.⁸ Many Hispanics in Texas adamantly opposed the measure as well, though for different reasons, saying that such a classification was a rehash of the old “Bracero Program” and reduced all Mexican-Americans to “second class citizenship.”⁹ Republican proposals in Texas were generally more popular, including the possibility of issuing work cards to aliens coming in from Mexico. This proposal required workers to obtain a Social Security number and pay taxes, a plan discussed and agreed upon by governors in the southwest border states. The measure was also supported by the Mexican government, but not Carter, who continued to push for a resolution more closely related to amnesty. In February 1977, Carter met with Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo to discuss these issues and the broader relationship between the two nations.¹⁰ Immigration, along with illegal drug trafficking and the devaluation of the Mexican peso, dominated talks between the two leaders, though no resolution on the immigration issue could be agreed upon.¹¹ The lack of progress on immigration upset conservative whites in Texas. Additionally, the lack of progress contributed to a growing perception among Texas Hispanics that Carter’s affinity for their minority bloc did not extend beyond expediency and convenient political benefit.

⁷ “Texas Trip 6/78,” Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat. Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA (Hereafter cited as JCL).

⁸ A Preliminary Report to the Clements for Governor Committee, V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, Box 10, File 21, William Clements Papers, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX (Hereafter cited as WCP).

⁹ “Texas Overview” “3/24/79-3/25/79 Trip to Oklahoma and Texas,” Box 124, Staff Office Files: Office of Staff Secretary, JCL. The “Bracero Program” was initiated as a joint venture by the US and Mexican governments in 1942. The program allowed for the contracting of Mexican labor into the United States, first for work with railroads, but later predominantly in agricultural sectors. The program was discontinued in 1964 in response to numerous allegations of human rights violations and ill-treatment of the Mexican workers.

¹⁰ Draft Policy Position: Visiting Workers from Mexico, Box 10, Fred C. Ikle Papers, HI; Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

¹¹ February 12, 1977, Memorandum for Jack Watson, from: Larry Bailey, Subject: Suggestions to Border State Governors on Talks Between President Portillo and Carter, Box ST-16, Subject Files, White House Central Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

Immigration and the dynamic interplay that resulted between Republicans and Democrats—and Texas whites, Hispanics, and alien workers—worked somewhat differently in places like El Paso than it did in South Texas. El Paso was, in some respects, a quintessential Sunbelt city. The city's economic base blossomed after World War II thanks to its proximity to giant military installations such as Fort Bliss and the White Sands Proving Ground. More so than the defense industry, however, El Paso was a bastion of low wage labor. Divided only by the typically dry Rio Grande River, El Paso's nearest neighbor, the Mexican city of Juarez, provided an almost unlimited supply of low wage labor for the agricultural industry of the state. By the end of the 1970s, over 50 percent of El Paso residents were of Mexican origin, though no accurate numbers existed on how many were there legally. Despite the Hispanic majority, whites still dominated the voting booth and the Democratic Party still dominated the district.¹²

In 1975, Mexican-American workers at El Paso's largest textile manufacturing plant, Farah Pants, successfully unionized. Soon after, the plant was hamstrung by a long and bitter labor strike, in which Catholic bishops in the city threw public support behind the Mexican-American workers. A chief concern was Farah's hiring practices. Mexican-American workers did not want to compete with Mexican immigrants flooding into the city. The influx of illegal aliens, Mexican-American workers argued, reduced the overall demand for labor, and arguably reduced the wage potential of the city's legal resident population. By the late 1970s, Farah Pants refused to hire Mexican labor with work permits, resulting in the plant's enjoyment of among the most harmonious labor-management relationships in the nation.¹³

¹² Political Brief: Sixteenth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

¹³ Political Brief: El Paso, September 20, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

Still, in other parts of the state, tension between Hispanic Texas Democrats and the Carter administration threatened the uneasy coalition of liberal interests. Hispanic leaders such as Joe Bernal and Leonel Castillo, both affiliated members of the Mexican American Democrats, a statewide organization founded in 1975 to combat the more radical influence and confrontational style of La Raza in Texas, were convinced that Carter did not truly appreciate Hispanics as a minority bloc.¹⁴ Bernal was concerned with a variety of issues, including the role Mexican Americans played in Carter's foreign policy, especially dealings with Latin America. However, Hispanic influence on United States foreign policy was a less pressing need to most South Texans than the issue of police brutality. Discriminatory practices and misconduct by South Texas law enforcement was prevalent throughout the 1970s, but was aggressively highlighted as an issue by Mexican-American grassroots activists in the region, beginning in 1977.¹⁵

Heavily concentrated between San Antonio and the Rio Grande Valley, Texas Hispanics had been passionately loyal to liberal Democrats for years. Without a significant liberal presence to choose from in Texas, Hispanic voters remained loyal to the Democratic Party in both national and state and local elections. However, in a political climate that included a state GOP attempting to undermine these loyalties, Hispanics grew increasingly impatient with the Carter administration's lack of attention to complaints of police brutality coming out of the region.¹⁶ Carter's ability to promote and implement change was, to Hispanics in South Texas, beside the point. More important to the political landscape was the perception that Carter was not even trying. Campaigns to curb police brutality in South Texas, however unorganized they may have been, magnified the growing discontent of Mexican Americans in the state and prompted the

¹⁴ Miscellaneous Files, Box 9, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Esteban Torres, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

¹⁵ "Texas Trip 6/78," Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat. JCL.

¹⁶ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

Houston Chronicle to editorialize that the coming decade might be defined by the rise of “Brown Power.”¹⁷

Texas’s African Americans shared many of the same general frustrations. Yet the issues around which political activism centered differed between the two minority groups. Despite some ongoing controversies in places like Houston, for instance, where the Department of Justice’s role in enforcing stricter busing policies was still being hotly debated, publicly, at least, issues involving race in Texas were handled differently in the late 1970s than in previous years.¹⁸ Much of this was due to the natural evolution of attitudes, expedited by a civil rights movement active nationally and influential in Texas because the power of mass communications made it relevant. Yet, in other ways, the issues surrounding black civil rights changed. Racial attitudes in the late 1970s were greatly affected by the recessed economy and debates over affirmative action. Early discord on the issue of affirmative action included debated changes in college admission policies, which recognized and attempted to correct the disadvantages minority students faced in gaining access to higher education.¹⁹

Though Texas was the nation’s largest right-to-work state, and had some of the country’s weakest unions, organized labor in Texas was vocal enough to make waves in the late 1970s regarding the issue of race and hiring. In places with heavier union influence, resentment toward affirmative action programs intensified racial discord.²⁰ Despite labor’s weakness in Texas, blue collar sentiment was affected by the national debate, and workers in Texas, regardless of union

¹⁷ *Houston Chronicle*, August 7, 1977, Box 9, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Esteban Torres, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

¹⁸ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

¹⁹ Political Brief: Texas, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

²⁰ Press Release, October 17, 1980. Box 134, Folder 9, James A. Baker Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ (Hereafter cited as SGML).

affiliation, began to shift allegiance to the Republican Party in the midst of these debates, particularly over the protection of “last hired, first fired” seniority rights.²¹

Texas Republicans, with Ronald Reagan’s rhetorical backing, also initiated efforts in the late 1970s to de-stigmatize conservatism as a racist ideology. The acceptability of Republicanism was, in many ways, aided by these efforts to distance conservatism from the segregationist racism of Deep South Democratic conservatism. Reagan publicly rejected the notion that calls for law & order were coded racism, stating on his radio program and in speeches in Texas that the implication that “law & order” was coded racism was, in itself, racist because it assumed that blacks were actually the source, rather than victim, of rising crime rates. “The truth is,” Reagan said in one radio address, “blacks in America are victims of crime far out of proportion to their numbers. They are roughly ten or twelve percent of our population, but more than half of all murder victims are black.”²² Reagan’s characterization of the racial climate in America was particularly effective in Texas because the percentages he cited, though national, were far more in accord with demographics in Texas than in much of the rest of the South. Texas Republicans joined Reagan in attempting to create a more color-blind party image, appealing to African Americans’ “sameness” and emphasizing that racial progress would come when blacks were no longer treated as a distinct voting bloc, but simply as part of the population as a whole.²³

At the same time, the state GOP did not see the smaller number of blacks in Texas as a significant threat to its emergence as a viable second-party, or as an especially valuable opportunity to undermine Democratic coalitions. Statistical realities meant that race operated as

²¹ James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²² Viewpoint with Ronald Reagan, “Law & Order,” Box 37, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

²³ Ronald Reagan News Summaries, 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford, Inc. Papers, HI.

a political force differently in Texas than in other parts of the South. Rather than addressing the concerns of a large African American constituency, Texas politicians juggled its agenda according to smaller percentages of black voters and the need to deal with both African Americans and Hispanics—two minority blocs that often competed for the attention of state liberals who were themselves struggling to overcome the conservative dominance within their own party.

Nowhere was the tension between races more dramatically felt in Texas during the late 1970s than in Houston, where the nation's largest Republican district shared a border with the nation's most Democratic one. Houston, thus, provides an insightful case study into the politics of socioeconomics in Texas during the late 1970s. Primarily, four distinct congressional districts competed for political clout in Houston. The eighteenth congressional district covered the central part of Houston and was home to the vast majority of the city's minority population. Nearly 50 percent of the district was black, and another 20 percent Hispanic. Living conditions in the eighteenth district were starkly different than those of its neighboring districts. Unpainted frame houses littered the heavily minority district and almost no residents enjoyed air conditioning. At the same time, the eighteenth district was the chief source of the city's low-wage labor supply. Political participation in the eighteenth district was as uniformly Democratic as any in the nation—98 percent in most elections throughout the decade. Some Texas political observers credited high turnout in the eighteenth district for Carter's victory in the state in 1976, though low turnout was a more traditional norm.²⁴

Life looked very different in Houston's seventh district. Whereas the politics of race dominated the overwhelmingly black and Hispanic eighteenth district, racial tension was largely

²⁴ Political Brief: Texas, Eighteenth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

an afterthought in west Houston's seventh district, where only 2 percent of the population was black and only 6 percent was Hispanic. By the late 1970s, the seventh district was the most uniformly Republican district in the nation. Gerald Ford won 74 percent of the district's vote in 1976, and as the 1980 presidential campaign grew closer, Houston's seventh district boasted not one, but two GOP candidates in George Bush and John Connally. Houston's thriving economy made it the fastest growing city in the United States during the 1970s. In 1960, the seventh district alone had a population of around 250,000. By 1978, its population approached 900,000. Houston's seventh district was also home to a higher percentage of white collar workers than all but two of the 434 congressional districts in the nation, though overall cost of living was significantly less than most areas on the East and West Coasts.²⁵ Evidence of the city's thriving economy was certainly most visible in this seventh district, where luxury trade mingled with an expansive sprawl of middle to upper income retail. In the midst of this suburban sprawl, the district's residents worked to create a comfortable environment; neighborhoods took advantage of the humid climate and created secluded enclaves through creative landscaping that made use of lush, and tall, greenery.²⁶

The seventh district's congressman was Bill Archer, a free market conservative and former Democrat who succeeded George Bush in 1970 and quickly became an articulate and influential member of the House Ways and Means Committee and champion of the Reaganesque ethos of smaller government. In 1978, Archer won re-election, carrying 85 percent of the district's vote. Two years earlier, no Democrat even challenged Archer's popularity in the district. The congressman in Houston's eighth district, however, was the liberal Democrat Bob

²⁵ Houston Chamber of Commerce Information Packet, Box 541, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Briefing Materials Files, RRL.

²⁶ Political Brief: Texas, Seventh District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

Eckhardt. He did not enjoy the same overwhelming popularity in his district that Archer enjoyed in the seventh, but had still managed to win re-election every two years since he first won in 1966. Eckhardt's success was due predominantly to his district's fervent loyalty to the Democratic Party. As such, the eighth district in Houston behaved in much more traditionally "Southern" ways. Unlike their affluent neighbors in the seventh district, or their uniformly minority neighbors in the eighteenth, residents of the eight district blended anti-establishment populism with racial tension and hostility. Though dominated by an industrial white working class, almost a fifth of the district's residents were African American and another tenth were Hispanic. Here, the manifestation of Houston's industrial and economic boom was more visible (or less so) in the rampant air pollution that plagued the district rather than through the presence of a Gucci or Tiffany's storefront.²⁷

Most of Houston's economic growth was built on the back of oil and gas. Despite the 1978 debut of *Dallas*, CBS's hit television drama, which popularly linked that city throughout the coming decade with Texas oil wealth, Houston actually served as the capital of Texas's oil and gas industry in the 1970s, while Texas, as a state, served as the nation's energy hub. Even before oil prices soared in late 1978, thanks to the international shock of the Shah's ousting in Iran and subsequent price hikes arising from supply shortages, the Texas economy boomed throughout the decade on the backs of oil and gas. Industry giants like Exxon, Shell, and Gulf moved their headquarters to Texas during the 1970s, bringing with them employees moving to Texas from across the nation. At the same time, thousands of companies found niche markets by producing drilling, piping, and mechanical production equipment, parts, and accessories.²⁸

²⁷ Political Brief: Texas, Eighth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

²⁸ Political Brief: Texas, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

Throughout the 1970s, the Texas economy thrived for many of the same reasons the rest of the nation struggled. This dichotomy had important consequences for the political transformations the state experienced and alters the overall understanding of how Texas reacted to and affected changes like partisan realignment and a renewed popular conservative philosophy based largely, in Houston at least, on smaller government and free market capitalism.

Jimmy Carter may have contributed to this dynamic political climate, but he certainly did not benefit from it in Texas. In 1978, with his approval rating in Texas below 40 percent and falling, Carter targeted Houston as a launching point for a renewed discussion on American energy.²⁹ The energy crisis of the 1970s contributed to the proliferation of Texas wealth during the same decade. Therefore, interest in potential changes wrought by Carter on the industry worried most Houstonians more than inflation or unemployment.³⁰ Two specific measures were of particular concern. First, energy-conscious Texans adamantly opposed Carter's support for a Windfall Profits Tax which would have coincided with welcomed price control deregulation but also would have imposed heavy taxes on profits reaped by production companies above pre-determined base prices. Texas oil leaders believed the answer to national energy woes lay not with such excise taxes, but with the increased domestic production they believed would result from deregulation. This had been the Republican position on the issue—and Reagan's position in 1976. Instead, however, Carter stressed techniques such as conservation and increased importation.³¹

²⁹ A Preliminary Report to the Clements for Governor Committee, V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, Box 10, File 21, WCP; "Texas Trip 6/78," Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

³⁰ "Texas Overview," "3/24/79-3/25/79 Trip to Oklahoma and Texas," Box 124, Staff Office Files: Office of Staff Secretary. JCL; A Preliminary Report to the Clements for Governor Committee, V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, January 1, 1978, Box 28, Folder 4, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

³¹ A Preliminary Report to the Clements for Governor Committee, V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, Box 10, File 21, WCP.

The second measure of concern to those Texans with a vested interest in the energy industry was Carter's Fuel Use Act of 1978. This act was designed to be the impetus that pushed power plants and other major consumers of oil and gas away from those energy sources and toward coal, with the ultimate intention that by 1990, no power plants in the United States would use natural gas. Included in the act was an allocation of \$4 billion for a select group of power plants in the Northeast. Texas power plants estimated their cost in capital outlays for this conversion to be in excess of \$30 billion. In 1978, the vast majority of the nation's power plants ran on some combination of gas and oil, with Texas being one of the major suppliers. Texans holding natural gas interests were especially concerned that the supplies they had been sitting on for years would go to waste.³²

Not surprisingly then, the majority of Texans supported measures to protect the status quo when it came to the oil and gas industries. By the late 1970s, nearly half of the state's revenue came from oil and gas companies. Already unhappy with the Fuel Use Act, many Texans also feared the unknown repercussions of the Windfall Profits Tax. The Texas Energy and National Resources Advisory Council hired the Interstate Oil Compact Commission to conduct a study on the potential economic impact of the Windfall Profits Tax in Texas and found that state producers would "lose and estimated 69.16 million barrels of unproduced oil" if the proposed tax were to be implemented. The study further projected that the Windfall Profits Tax would cost the state upwards of \$2.4 billion in crude oil revenue lost from the closure of a projected 3,385 marginal wells. The potency of this finding was widespread as marginal wells affected the vast majority of Texas oil businesses, not simply the larger and more well-known corporate producers. The study's doomsday scenario forecast the "premature abandonment" of over 13,000 oil wells nationwide and ten-year losses of 175 million barrels of unproduced oil,

³² Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

with an accompanied monetary loss of \$6.13 billion.³³ Needless to say, these forecasts heightened the state's sensitivity to proposed changes in energy policy during the late 1970s.

On June 23-24, 1978, Carter visited Houston, Beaumont, and Fort Worth, delivering speeches during a two-day trip almost exclusively focused on the issue of energy. Carter began preparing for the trip in early June. His organizing theme was that America was losing the “energy battle” and that this problem had dangerous ramifications for the nation's economic and military security. Carter's staff was less enthused about their boss's choice of theme. To contextualize a debate on energy as part of a larger battle was to create the image of winners and losers—a game in which Carter was already trailing in Texas, less than two years after barely eking out a win there.³⁴ In fact, Carter ignored much of the advice he received from his White House staff leading up to the Houston trip. He was encouraged to find a non-partisan voice on energy, inflation, and national defense and was told to keep his speeches brief. He was encouraged to stress the cooperative nature of his plan—to link Texas's prosperity to the rest of the country's. Lastly, Carter was strongly encouraged to avoid telling Texans that it was time to move beyond oil as a primary energy source.³⁵

Virtually across the board, Carter ignored the advice—and his speeches in Texas were subsequently not well-received.³⁶ Instead, Carter told audiences of Texas oil barons that the time to move beyond oil and gas had arrived.³⁷ Carter even announced in his speech that he was ignoring the advice of his White House staff, which had told him that Texans would not listen to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ June 7, 1978, Memorandum for the President, From J. Rafshoon, Subject: Energy Strategy, Box 8, Staff Office, Assistant to the President for Communications, Rafshoon Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

³⁵ Memorandum for the President, From George L. Bristol, Box 8, Staff Office, Assistant to the President for Communications, Rafshoon Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

³⁶ June 21, 1978, Memorandum for Jerry Rafshoon, From: Caryl Conner, Subject: Houston Speech, Box 8, Staff Office, Assistant to the President for Communications, Rafshoon Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

³⁷ “Houston Speech Text – Third Draft,” Box 8, Staff Office, Assistant to the President for Communications, Rafshoon Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

presidential calls to move beyond oil and into exploration of alternative fuels like coal. Not only did Texans with a vested interest in oil and energy production bristle at Carter's suggestions, but the style with which the administration's policies were presented contributed to the appeal of Republicans in the state.³⁸ Some in attendance during the Houston speech on June 23 recoiled at the didactic tone used by Carter, especially as he lectured Texans to "choose patriotism and the national interest over parochialism and self-interest."³⁹

Republicans, predictably, capitalized on the energy issue in Texas. John Tower, whose popularity in Texas suffered because of his refusal to support Reagan over Ford in 1976, jumped on the anti-Carter energy bandwagon, and reiterated commitments to "provide incentives, not penalties, to those who find and produce our oil and gas reserves."⁴⁰ Ronald Reagan asserted that American dependence on foreign sources of oil was a national security risk and strongly championed the acceleration of domestic exploration and production.⁴¹ At the same time, by connecting with the growing construction activity of nuclear power bases, including one in Dallas, Reagan managed to raise the appeal of alternative fuel sources without compromising his popularity in Texas.⁴²

In addition to the popularity of GOP stances on energy, Texans also responded to Republicans on more general economic issues, largely because the party was adept at linking multiple economic problems back to Carter and the heavy-handed government that, in their estimation, was stunting the laws of free-market capitalism. For instance, Republicans across Texas adopted Reagan's viewpoint that inflation was a "covert government tax" that affected

³⁸ "Texas Speeches – 6/23-24/78," Box 6, Hendrik Hertzberg Collection, JCL.

³⁹ "Texas Trip 6/78," Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

⁴⁰ Draft Copy, Op-Ed, by John Tower, Folder 68, Box 17, Press Office, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX (Hereafter cited as JTP).

⁴¹ Viewpoint with Ronald Reagan, "Oil and the Shah of Iran." Box 39, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁴² Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

people who could afford such a tax the least.⁴³ The argument put forth was that inflation was controllable, but out of control and was reducing consumer purchasing power. Inflation was then linked to taxes and both were subsequently linked to unemployment.⁴⁴ Almost without fail, all economic problems were linked back to government bureaucracy, waste, and incompetence. This message resonated in Texas and contributed to Carter's plummeting popularity in the state, as well as the faltering image of the Democratic Party, which was being increasingly identified with Carter and other icons of national liberalism.⁴⁵

Economic issues were used by conservatives in Texas in another important way—as a gateway to the growing infusion of morality and social conservatism into the state's political culture. At least among the state's wealthier business community, attitudes in Texas about economic growth blended much more seamlessly with values about family and God than attitudes did in places like the Northeast, where these Texans perceived that the impetus for charitable giving was wealth and guilt. Most middle and upper class Texans were confident, not only in the future, but in their own goodness and fairness. Their wealth was the result of honest and hard work and, they believed, a blessing from God.⁴⁶ In practice, both Republicans and Democrats took advantage of this climate and melded economic issues with stances on morality, and even anticommunism. In 1977, for instance, Karl Rove, a young but increasingly important political advisor in Texas, suggested to the Republican National Committee (RNC) that his party attack Carter's decision to cut guaranteed student loans to college students whose parents were of mid-level income as an affront to middle class families, a strategy appealing in Texas because of

⁴³ Ronald Reagan on Unemployment, Box 39, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁴⁴ "Ronald Reagan on Spiritual Commitment," Box 39, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁴⁵ A Preliminary Report to the Clements for Governor Committee, V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, Box 10, File 21, WCP.

⁴⁶ Political Brief: Texas, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

the high value placed on “family” and the fact that the vast majority of the state identified itself as “middle-class.”⁴⁷

Even some Democratic candidates, like the conservative George Mahon of Lubbock, fused economics with morality to firm up support. For instance, agricultural producers in Mahon’s nineteenth district who were also largely Southern Baptist and traditionally anticommunist, heard, out of the same mouths and during the same events, messages that spoke to both their displeasure with grain embargos against the Soviet Union and their support for measures to remove tax burdens from churches, citing the danger of government interference in spiritual matters.⁴⁸

Platform presentations like these—some carefully crafted, others not—magnified the salience of both economic and social concerns, and fused the two in Texas. Such a strategy seemed non-partisan yet conservative in philosophy, but was more beneficial to the Republican Party, which was suffering less from state-national factionalism on these issues and used the strategy to stabilize its coalition between free market libertarian conservatives and the growing pockets of traditional and politically active Christian evangelicals who prioritized social issues, but were additionally concerned with the state and management of the economy. Clearly, socioeconomic factors like race, suburbanization, energy, and broad economic issues contributed, both individually and collectively, to the declining popularity of Jimmy Carter in Texas, as well as to the labeling of Carter’s policies as liberal and the growing association of liberalism with the Democratic Party.

⁴⁷ Clements for Governor, Primary Campaign Plan, Final Draft, March 11, 1978, Prepared by V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 5, WCP; Republican National Committee, April 29, 1977, Chicago, IL, Papers of the Republican Party [microform], ed. Paul L. Kesaris. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1987, George Smathers Libraries, University of Florida (Hereafter cited as PRP), Part I, Series B, Reel 15, Frames 92-97.

⁴⁸ Questionnaire on Church and State, Box 376, George Mahon Papers, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (Hereafter cited as SWC); Texas Political Brief, October 26, 1980: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 25, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

Social and Religious Conservatism

The infusion of values, morality, and broader social issues into the state's political landscape only added to the potency of socioeconomic contributions to the growing storm of conservative Republicanism in Texas. Social conservatism had played an important role in Texas for decades. The state, much like the rest of the South, was predominantly Protestant and traditionally committed to churches and the Judeo-Christian ethics preached within. For years, though, the state's Democratic Party had been as much a political champion of these values as had any other organization in the state. The public's awareness of and reaction to social issues changed when the conflagration of particular issues in Texas reaching maturity in the late 1970s. This conflagration intensified the urgency of the perceived threat to particular values and heightened the need for state and local politicians to identify themselves with one side or another on these various issues.

Thus, social and religious conservatism in Texas changed and flourished during the late 1970s. The growing popularity of the Republican Party in Texas was not the result of a simple and uniform realignment of religious rural Democrats into the GOP tent. Republicans in north Dallas and west Houston, for instance, had little patience or interest for the teetotaling of rural Baptists. These urban and suburban Texans blamed government welfare for the rusting over of the Northeast and were typically more interested in maintaining private investment opportunities in their state than with the protection of Judeo-Christian ethics. Stereotypically, sophisticated Houstonians and Dallasites enjoyed fine wine and gourmet food, but had little taste for the philanthropy of Northeastern wealth, which was, as they saw it, insincere. Upper class Texans paid little attention to social problems throughout most of the 1970s, paying only lip service to civil rights. Yet, many affluent Texas conservatives also did not have any tolerance for the

countercultural moral relativism that seemed to be liberalizing the West Coast.⁴⁹ The threat that the economic consequences endured on the West Coast as a result, it was theorized, of amoral liberalism could creep its way into the Lone Star State worried affluent Texas conservatives who otherwise might not have cared about social or religious issues.

Social conservative activism coalesced in the late 1970s thanks to both the charisma of Christian personalities and the salience of certain issues. Texas's most famous churchgoer was also one of the nation's most well-respected men. Though born a North Carolinian, Billy Graham had, in many ways, made Texas home. Since 1953, Graham had been a member of Texas's largest Southern Baptist Church, the First Baptist Church of Dallas, whose pastor, W. A. Criswell, was the state's best-known preacher. Billy Graham influenced Christians in Texas in a variety of ways throughout the decade, including by way of a policy change regarding host cities for his crusades. Beginning in the mid-1970s, Graham began to select Southern and Western cities for his crusades more regularly than he had in the past, and with greater frequency than he selected cities from other parts of the country. This gave medium-sized cities like Lubbock the opportunity to play host to the world-famous Graham and heightened the city's regional and national awareness. The rationale for these decisions was largely a product of Graham's crusades being nationally televised and economic conditions in the Sunbelt offering low-cost production alternatives to the union-dominated labor supply and high production expenses of the Northeast. Nonetheless, Graham's presence in the state magnified the respectability and importance of social issues in Texas and made the state more fertile breeding ground for similar social and religious advances.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Political Brief: Texas. Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

⁵⁰ *Texas Monthly*, March 1978, "The Power and the Glory of Billy Graham"; *Christianity Today*, March 11, 2002, "The Baptist Pope."

Graham was certainly no friend of controversy and when charges broke in 1977 that his evangelistic association had improperly given funds to a Dallas lawyer rather than numerous Christian ministries for which the funds had ostensibly been raised, he repudiated the charges and blamed the media for attacking and misrepresenting the facts of the case. Unlike the most famous member of his congregation, however, First Baptist Church of Dallas Pastor W. A. Criswell often was a friend of controversy. A respected conservative voice in the state, Criswell drew himself into the partisan fray as an increasingly vocal proponent of Republican politics throughout the decade. Also unlike Graham, who spent time in the 1960s touring with Martin Luther King advocating a peaceful acceptance of school integration, Criswell's firebrand style offered his well-to-do congregation a blending of economic acceptance, traditional Southern values, and evangelical conservatism. Yet, Criswell's influence extended beyond the messages he gave from his pulpit. More lasting in impact was the proliferation of "Megachurches" like Criswell's, which altered the state's traditional social conservative dynamic. These churches, predominantly a phenomenon in the South and West, were typically defined as "mega" by their membership totals. Any church drawing at least 2,000 people to weekend services could be deemed a "Megachurch." However, Megachurches were also defined as much by who was attending as by how many were attending. Almost exclusively Protestant, these churches provided suburban communities with a focal point—a meeting place for expanding neighborhoods comprised of middle to upper class, college-educated whites. These churches served suburban enclaves by not only providing spiritual guidance, but also intramural sports leagues, social mixers, and a host of other organized events, many of which allowed for the mobilization of like-minded and politically dissatisfied grassroots conservatives.⁵¹

⁵¹ Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 2005.

By the late 1970s, with Megachurches expanding just as rapidly as the suburban communities surrounding them, Dallas was becoming a new national hub for Christian ministry. The high cost of living forced many ministries out of Southern California and several in the coming years relocated to Texas because of the friendly religious climate and lower economic costs of the state. Thriving Christian organizations like Keith Green's Last Days Ministries, a ministry that was, in many ways, a reflection of the relational wave known in the late 1970s as the "Jesus Movement," came to call Texas its new home, buying land just east of Dallas. Other national organizations and leading figures, including multiple divisions of Campus Crusade for Christ, Pastor Chuck Swindoll, and the Trinity Broadcasting Network, had all relocated to Dallas by the early 1990s. This infusion of national ministries into the Texas social and political climate began in the late 1970s and reflected internal and external growth.

In addition to attracting national ministries, Texas was also the base for many home-grown evangelists. Preachers like David Terrell of Fort Worth, for instance, managed to attract a statewide following thanks to widely broadcast radio sermons that warned of impending famine and doom. In 1974, Terrell even persuaded several hundred people to move to the tiny central Texas town of Bangs, in an attempt to avoid the corruption of Texas's growing urbanity. The conservative Baptist James Robinson also garnered a statewide following, as well as a small national one, during the 1970s. Operating out of the Dallas area, the youthful and attractive Robinson broadcast weekly sermons on fifty television stations nationwide and launched a tour of one-night rallies and stadium revivals, much like Graham's, throughout the state.

Though Dallas dominated religion in much the same way that Houston dominated oil, Texas's largest city was not devoid of popular evangelical influence. Charles and Frances Hunter based their television ministry, "The Happy Hunters," out of Houston and used that

publicity to promote over fourteen authored books to a combined total of four million sold copies. The subject matter for the Hunters' books ranged from speaking in tongues to weight loss and their television show was broadcast regularly in most Texas markets. Chris Panos, also of Houston, gained fame in the late 1970s as the "Christian James Bond"—a man who smuggled Bibles into communist countries and organized "spontaneous" crusades in places like India, where he, on more than one occasion, drew crowds of over 100,000. The success of Panos's ministry also inspired him to market a series of books and tapes on how average, everyday people could hold their own evangelistic crusades.⁵²

Religious conservatism in Texas contributed to the overall political culture of the state. A greater awareness of and dissatisfaction with the moral health of the nation blended nicely with claims that the political process itself had become corrupt and that government was to blame for not just economic problems, but social ones as well. The relationship between social conservatives and the Republican Party was complex, but can be explained by both the perceived national liberalization of the Democratic Party as well as the GOP's willingness to incorporate social issues into its broadly conceived agenda. Certainly, the influence of such evangelists in Texas as those described above also contributed to a redefinition of what exactly that word "evangelical" meant in everyday American context.⁵³ Not all Texans shared a uniform belief in worship style or theology and many Christians deplored the commercialization of God emanating from such sources. The growing majority of Texas religious conservatives did, however, share some things in common—most notably their concern over issues which spoke to the decline of families and national morals.

⁵² *Texas Monthly*, March 1978, "The Power and the Glory of Billy Graham."

⁵³ *Ibid.*

For social conservatives, issues of gender provided the most-noticeable collision point in Texas between family values and declining morals. This collision did not go unnoticed by the state's conservative political hierarchy. George Mahon was one such conservative who saw the political value of Christian credentials. During his 1976 congressional campaign, Mahon, in part spurred on by the first legitimate GOP opponent he had ever faced, aggressively courted the endorsement of prominent Christian organizations and reconstructed his bio to lead with his membership in a local Methodist church and work as a Sunday School teacher.⁵⁴ In appealing to evangelical conservatives in West Texas, Mahon also emphasized his advocacy of the death penalty, opposition to welfare, and belief that being tougher on crime was an essential priority for the upcoming Congress.⁵⁵

Yet, the most serious reservations Mahon expressed during the late 1970s concerned the direction of his Democratic Party—with specific reference to elements of the national platform that appealed to and even courted feminist activists into the Democratic tent. Mahon believed his party's tent was becoming too broad and was, consequently, losing its moral authority.⁵⁶ As Democratic leaders like Mahon publicly questioned their own party's moral authority, Republicans seemed more credible in charging their opposition with liberalism. Accordingly, greater numbers of Texas conservatives were inclined to see the GOP as a much more respectable alternative than before.

In 1972, just four years prior to the noticeable shift in Mahon's personal re-election strategy, Texas ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. Each subsequent year between 1973 and 1977, members of the Texas legislature initiated proceedings designed to rescind that

⁵⁴ Political Brief: Nineteenth District. Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

⁵⁵ Letter to Dan Hanna, member, Board of Christian Men, from George Mahon, September 2, 1976, Box 376, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

⁵⁶ Letter from John C. White to George Mahon, March 29, 1978, Box 404, George Mahon Papers, SWC.

ratification.⁵⁷ That Texas became home to many conservatives who found disfavor with the tenets of the ERA is not a surprise. What is a surprise was that, in 1977, Houston was selected as the host city for the National Women's Conference. For several years, the selection made Texas' largest city synonymous within feminist circles for women's unification in the demand and fight for universal equality.⁵⁸ The Houston conference, though, was also significant for a variety of other reasons.

The 1977 National Women's Conference in Houston was chaired by prominent New York women's activist, and future Carter appointee to head the National Advisory Committee on Women, Bella Abzug. Joining Abzug in attendance at the Houston conference were women such as Rosalynn Carter, Lady Bird Johnson, Betty Ford, Jean Stapleton, Billie Jean King, and Margaret Mead.⁵⁹ During the four-day event, delegates passed an agenda that included planks on abortion, ERA, and gay-rights. Not all in attendance found accord with these actions. In fact, between 15 and 20 percent of the delegates in attendance voted against one or more of these planks.⁶⁰ Antifeminists, though ridiculed and greatly outnumbered, justified the convention's proclamation of diversity in political viewpoints, however nominal.

Conservatives' most powerful push for recognition, however, occurred not inside the convention doors, but because of their large exclusion from them. In response to the Houston convention, and the perception that only women who agreed with the general feminist platform were genuinely welcome to attend, "Pro-Family" rogue "conventions" that acted as protest gatherings gained steam in and around Houston.⁶¹ Led by Phyllis Schlafly, these protest

⁵⁷ "Texas Overview" "3/24/79-3/25/79 Trip to Oklahoma and Texas," Box 124, Staff Office Files: Office of Staff Secretary. JCL.

⁵⁸ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in America's Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 186.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Miscellaneous Files, Box 6, Office of Public Liaison: Margaret Costanza Files, JCL.

⁶¹ *Houston Post*, November 23, 1977, A17. Staff Office Files: First Lady's Staff – Press Office. JCL.

movements, 11,000 strong at one point, garnered as much press coverage as the main event itself.⁶² Schlafly proclaimed that, “Houston will finish off the women’s movement. It will show them off for the radical, anti-family, pro-lesbian people they are.”⁶³ Incapable of ignoring the protests or the distraction, leaders inside the convention publicly and privately dismissed these conservative factions as “clones” of the John Birch Society and even the Ku Klux Klan. Adding fuel to the fire, these appellations only incited greater protest and frequent press coverage of the event, particularly in Texas.⁶⁴

From a historical perspective, the legacy of the “Spirit of Houston” seems mixed. It also appeared that way to contemporaries in the Texas press. Editorials proclaimed the event as evidence that “real power in America lies in coalition building.” Both conservative and liberal factions were recognized as important political blocs. Attracting these blocs was seen as a gateway for a shift in the balance of power at the state and national level. However, the agenda voted on and approved by conservative women opposed to the “Houston” agenda was not simply a statement of diametric opposition. Purposely listed in order of prioritization and perceived importance, the Pro-Family Coalition passed planks on the following: limited and lower taxes, reductions in government spending and waste, security and national defense, local government control, opposition to the ERA, and a pro-life statement.⁶⁵ Whereas the goal of the feminist agenda was to gain entrée into the national political discourse by way of introducing a feminist agenda, conservative women chose an opposite strategy. Rather than prioritize gay-rights, abortion, or the ERA, conservative women doffed their collective hats to and unified under the rhetoric of populist conservatism. These conservative women hastened and strengthened the

⁶² *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁶³ Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Schulman, *The Seventies*, 187.

⁶⁴ Miscellaneous Files, Box 6, Office of Public Liaison: Margaret Costanza Files, JCL.

⁶⁵ *Houston Post*, November 23, 1977, A17. Staff Office Files: First Lady’s Staff – Press Office. JCL.

growing power of the Republican Party, both nationally and in Texas, by connecting the social conservative agenda with that of a western populism that emphasized strength, efficiency, and the liberation of Americans from the yoke of big government. This amalgam of special interests helped conservatism coalesce in Texas, contributed to redefinitions of liberalism, and even helped win the loyalties of Hispanic women in places like San Antonio, where the local GOP used family, abortion, and ERA to undermine Democratic appeals to Catholics.⁶⁶

The rise of evangelical social conservatism in Texas coincided with numerous other political maneuverings in the state and contributed to the coming fusion of conservatism within the Texas Republican Party. Conservative factions with seemingly little in common united under a worldview of conservatism that simultaneously appealed to multiple constituencies on the basis of discontent and anti-liberalism. Affluent urban Texans shared the belief of rural Baptists that the nation was in decline, Texas was threatened, and the government was to blame. Still, there was yet another aspect to the GOP's appeal which allowed factions of middle class free market libertarian conservatives to fuse with the state's rural social conservatives—the persistent Red Menace.

Canals, Communists, and Giveaways

In the last years of the decade, social conservatives in Texas rallied behind numerous issues, many of which went beyond the scope of gender.⁶⁷ Richard Viguerie was among those Texans with a passion to see the Republican Party carried to new national prominence on the backs of reinvigorated “New Right.” His early career included stints with the Right-Wing anticommunist radio preacher, Billy James Hargis as well his service as the Executive Secretary

⁶⁶ RNC Executive Meeting, March 12, 1977, Washington, DC, PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 15, Frame 003.

⁶⁷ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI; Briggs Initiative, 1978, Box 4, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI; *Atlas World Press*, March 1978, “The New Conservatism,” Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford, Inc. Papers, HI.

of the Young Americans for Freedom organization. Viguerie later founded the *Conservative Digest* magazine and began to work his way up the Republican political ladder. After the National Women's Conference in Houston, Viguerie saw an opportunity to network with and mobilize the over 11,000 protesters that had unified as part of the "Pro-Family" coalition and rally. That year, Viguerie's private firm mailed 75 million fund-raising letters for conservative causes. Viguerie organized diverse groups with diverse complaints against a single source: big government. His conservative activism and mobilization of grassroots forces drew the attention of national media, which acknowledged the strength of conservative grassroots activists through a collection of issues all addressed under a united anti-government banner. Prophetically, the *Washington Post*, in a story on Viguerie in January 1978, reported that the GOP was making strides in an effort to "steal Jimmy Carter's 1976 anti-government campaign issue and turn it against him and his Democratic allies in Washington."⁶⁸

Also in January 1978, Viguerie helped organize a new incarnation of the "Truth Squad"—a speaking tour of conservative politicians barnstorming across the nation and drawing significant amounts of free airtime on local and national news programs. The "truth" that this particular squad of conservative speakers wanted to communicate was occasionally disguised as an outright attack on the Panama Canal Treaties.⁶⁹ In 1978, as in 1976, such attacks resonated in Texas. After the treaties were signed in 1977, conservatives fought against their ratification in the Senate and Republicans used the issue to bolster their support in Texas among anticommunists, social conservatives, and anti-liberals who saw the treaties as a "giveaway."

In 1977, John Tower, whose personal opposition to the canal stretched back to 1966, claimed to be receiving as many as 4,000 letters a week from citizens in Texas voicing

⁶⁸ *Wall Street Journal*, January 3, 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁶⁹ *Washington Post*, January 19, 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

disapproval of the measure.⁷⁰ A flood of these letters poured into Tower's office in October 1977, after Jimmy Carter gave an interview to a Denver, Colorado radio station during which he rejected comparisons between the Panama Canal Zone and other territories like Texas, which Carter argued the United States had "bought and paid for." Texans were outraged to hear their state described in such a way and Tower, responding to the overflow of mail flooding his office, wrote Carter personally that, "the independence of the Republic of Texas was purchased with the red blood of patriots, as I'm sure you are now aware, and not with U.S. dollars. Texas existed as an independent nation from 1836 to 1845 when she voluntarily surrendered her sovereignty to become one of the United States." Tower added sarcastically that Carter was "certainly correct in rejecting any analogy between Texas and other situations. Texas is unique and will forever remain thus."⁷¹

To a certain extent, then, the Panama Canal issue illuminated issues of state pride for many Texans, regardless of political ideology. Simultaneously, the issue reinvigorated animosity toward Carter. Furthermore, the issue in Texas stirred passions for rugged individualism, independence, patriotism, tradition, and strength. To another (and even larger) extent, the continued use of the Panama Canal Treaties as a mobilizing issue for Republicans was an example of how grassroots conservatives managed to occasionally dictate politicians' agendas.⁷²

The animosity of the Texas grassroots toward the Panama Canal Treaties was evident both in terms of raw polling data and mobilized opposition. By February 1978, 79 percent of Texans were opposed to the treaties, while only 11 percent supported them. Partisan breakdowns were even more revealing. Not surprisingly, 86 percent of Texas Republicans disapproved of the

⁷⁰ "Panama Canal: 1977-1978," Folder 38, Box 1339, Houston Office, JTP; Letter from John G. Tower to Donald M. Dozer, August 11, 1966. Box 78, Donald M. Dozer Papers, HI.

⁷¹ Letter from John Tower to Jimmy Carter, October 26, 1977, John Tower Name File, White House Central Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

⁷² "Texas Trip 6/78," Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

treaties, whereas only 5 percent favored them. Just as significant, however, was the fact that at a rate of 80-12, Democrats in Texas also disapproved of the treaties.⁷³ Conservative Democrats in Texas who felt strongly that the Panama Canal issue was a national priority were given little choice but to publicly oppose Carter and side with the GOP.

The organization of a mobilized conservative grassroots was further evidence of the power that the Canal debate had on the Texas citizenry. In 1972, the National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution initiated operations across Texas, with a noticeably large base in Houston, for the purpose of opposing the treaties on grounds that the canal had been paid for and was therefore owned by the American taxpayer. The federal government, then, had no right to “give it away.”⁷⁴ In 1977, another grassroots organization, the Emergency Committee to Save the US Canal Zone, based its operations upon the precedent of Texas annexation, arguing that the Canal Zone should be admitted to the Union as a new state in order to give the over 40,000 United States citizens inhabiting that zone full representation in Congress, and requiring “the President to defend their territory in accordance with the supreme law of the land.” This organization, of which Phyllis Schlafly was a member, strongly objected to the relinquishing of the canal to “the Marxist Revolutionary Government of Panama” and couched its objections firmly in the context of anticommunism.⁷⁵

Texas grassroots opposition to the canal treaties also came in the form of individual agitators. For instance, George S. Petley of Houston began billing himself in the late 1970s as a “Researcher, lecturer, and former Canal Zone resident” and used said billing to promote a series of speaking tours throughout the state. During these lectures, Petley frequently compared the

⁷³ “Statewide Survey in Texas on Attitudes Toward the Panama Canal Treaty,” Conducted by Opinion Research Corp., Princeton, NJ – Feb. 1978, Box 11, George D. Moffett Collection, JCL.

⁷⁴ Citizens Groups, Panama Canal File, Box 66, Donald M. Dozer Papers, HI.

⁷⁵ Emergency Committee to Save the US Canal Zone, 1977, Box 68, Donald M. Dozer Papers, HI.

Canal Zone to Fort Knox, saying that the comparison was valid not just because both were the property of U.S. taxpayers, but also because giving away the Canal would be just as destructive to American interests as would a hypothetical giving away of Fort Knox. The Panama Canal was “economically and strategically ... our greatest territorial possession,” Petley wrote in his promotional literature. “We cannot afford to—and must not—lose it!” Petley also drew laughs from his audiences by routinely adding the quip that America should not “give Panama our Canal ... Give them Kissinger instead!”⁷⁶

As national icons like Ronald Reagan used the issue in Texas to buttress his own support, the association of Democratic policies with liberalism and liberalism with weakness gained strength in the state and had a profound impact on partisan allegiance in Texas. In 1978, twice as many Texans still identified themselves as Democrat than Republican. Yet, twice as many Texans also identified themselves as conservative rather than liberal. Texas conservatives from both parties increasingly identified Carter with liberalism, and saw America’s problems as the failure of liberalism.⁷⁷

In the summer of 1978, the Texas GOP distributed brochures that listed some of Carter’s liberal actions. These brochures were easily identified by large-print banner headlines that read, “Carter is NO Conservative,” “Carter’s Liberal Policies,” and “Carter’s Liberal Appointments.”⁷⁸ Wrapped up into this building animosity against Carter, the federal government, and liberal politics was an overarching conservative culture that blended anticommunism with anti-Statism and a general hostility toward government. The manifestation of this animosity took many forms in Texas. In Midland, for instance, city officials had, since 1975, rejected federal development

⁷⁶ Letter and attached advertisement, from George S. Petley to Donald M. Dozer, March 2, 1976, Box 68, Donald M. Dozer Papers, HI.

⁷⁷ “Statewide Survey in Texas on Attitudes Toward the Panama Canal Treaty,” Conducted by Opinion Research Corp., Princeton, NJ – Feb. 1978, Box 11, George D. Moffett Collection, JCL.

⁷⁸ *The Texas Advocate*, June 1978, Folder 22, Box 542, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

funds, citing their desire to maintain “the spirit of independence” and “freedom from federal government.”⁷⁹ While places like Midland also deflected federal encroachment in order to avoid federal integrationist policies, the primary effect of anti-government sentiment in Texas was the destruction of the state’s once-dominant Democratic Party. The “widespread perception” that Carter’s administration was “too liberal on a number of major issues nationally” discredited most Democratic efforts to elicit Texans’ support for federal programs.⁸⁰ Yet, the national Democratic Party was not solely to blame for the dissolution of its one-party dominance in Texas. Texas Republicans grew optimistic during the late 1970s that it was on the cusp of not only becoming a legitimate second party in the state, but also the state’s home for conservative politics, and presumably the state’s next power.⁸¹ Put another way, as more liberals controlled the national Democratic Party it became harder for the state Democratic Party to remain conservative. The growing liberalization of the Texas Democratic Party was a victory for the state’s minority and progressive blocs, the cost of which was the status of the Texas Democratic Party as the dominant force in state politics.

By 1978, a majority of Texans viewed Carter’s positioning on issues such as the Panama Canal and energy as liberal. Equally potent as a coalition-building force among the grassroots was Carter’s policy toward the Soviet Union. Conservatives in Texas were dismayed over Carter’s proposed reductions in military spending, which Republicans portrayed as acquiescence, appeasement, and defeatism in the global war on communism. For instance, Carter’s decision to discontinue the B-1 bomber was particularly unpopular both as an act of weakness and as a blow to the Texas economy, particularly in Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio, where defense and

⁷⁹ Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Midland, TX, April 30, 1980, Box 55, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

⁸⁰ “Texas Trip 6/78,” Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

⁸¹ Republican National Committee, February 27, 1976, Arlington, VA, PRP, Part I, Series B, Reel 13, Frames 389-398.

aviation manufacturing was a vital economic component. In 1978, nearly 60 percent of Texans polled favored an increase in military spending, versus only 17 percent who favored a reduction.⁸² Most Texans were also opposed to SALT-II negotiations, for which Carter unsuccessfully attempted to rally support by soliciting the backing of Texas clergy, even going so far as to suggest sermon topics on peace and the Christian perspective of war.⁸³ Carter's efforts could not combat the conservative momentum engulfing the state by 1978. As socioeconomic issues mixed with changing appeals to the state's racial minorities and a heightened sensitivity to the threat of encroaching national immorality on state culture, the Texas political landscape was ripened for the most memorable midterm election season in the state's history.

The 1978 Midterm Campaigns

Thanks in large part to the charismatic rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, anticommunism was once again en vogue among Texas Republicans in the late 1970s. John Tower even managed to extend his anticommunist credentials to a renewed interest in the American alliance with and protection of Israel. Tower spoke before several Jewish organizations as his 1978 re-election campaign approached, couching his speeches as calls for a renewed commitment to Israel's freedom in the midst of encroaching communist influence in the Middle East.⁸⁴ Tower readjusted some of his rhetoric after 1978 in anticipation of what he feared would be his most difficult re-election fight. His instincts were correct. Tower's 1978 re-election bid was his toughest to date and the obstacles he faced were predominantly of his own making. Tower's re-election bid also reflected some of the conflicts in Texas between ideology and partisan loyalty.

⁸² "Texas Trip 6/78," Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

⁸³ "Strategy," Box 12, Office of Public Liaison: Bob Maddox (Religious Liaison) Files, JCL.

⁸⁴ Draft Speech for Senator John Tower, September 1, 1977, American Zionist Federation, Folder 36, Box 20, Press Office, JTP.

The veteran voice of the Texas GOP had fallen into disfavor with the growing conservative grassroots, largely because of his opposition to Reagan in both 1968 and 1976. Tower was also unpopular, however, because, independently of his association with national figures, he had difficulty relating to his changing constituency. In 1978, for instance, Tower supported proposed legislation that would have permitted federal funds to be used for abortions, without restriction, while Texas's junior senator, the conservative Democrat Lloyd Bentsen, opposed such a measure. Tower's rationale that morality could not be legislated fell on deaf ears among the state's social conservatives, many of whom began to perceive Tower as a social liberal.⁸⁵

Thus, image was at the top of Tower's list of problems and manifested in several ways. By way of comparison, Tower appeared noticeably less rugged, Western, or Texan than did California's former governor, Ronald Reagan. Once an ardent Barry Goldwater supporter, Tower was, in the late 1970s, more often remembered for his fondness of wool suits bought on Savile Row in London than for his conservative resume. At the same time, the fact that Tower had been educated at the London School of Economics became a detriment to his credibility in Texas's conservative circles.⁸⁶ Foreign influence of any kinds was still met with a measure of distrust.

Tower responded to attacks on his Texas image by readjusting his rhetoric and mending fences with the most recognizable and popular icons of conservatism in the state. In April 1978, Tower began to publicly attack Jimmy Carter's foreign policy, speaking gravely of the imminent Soviet threat and arguing that Carter's policies were playing into the hands of the Soviet government. Tower also re-learned the benefit of linking such problems to big government liberalism and geographic bias. Tower spoke more often in the spring and summer of 1978 of

⁸⁵ *Houston Post*, July 3, 1977, "Abortion," Folder 1, Box 1339, Houston Office, JTP.

⁸⁶ Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982), 247.

his fight against “the Northeastern Liberal Establishment” than he had in years.⁸⁷ At the same time, Tower, after privately mending personal wounds between he and the Reagan camp, took every opportunity he could to publicly affirm his fondness for Ronald Reagan and reveled in the opportunity to appear with Reagan at GOP fundraisers in Texas.⁸⁸ The benefit of adding Reagan’s endorsement went beyond the scope of mere association with a popular conservative. Reagan could credibly say things to Texas voters that Tower, because of his opposition to Reagan in previous years, no longer could, for as much as Tower attempted to rail against Carter and liberalism, none of his efforts were as effective as having Reagan do the talking for him. Reagan effectively evoked wartime imagery on behalf of Tower as a means of uniting disparate factions of the conservative cause. Conservative rhetoric in Texas created a patriotic urgency that otherwise might not have existed. “Together we can stop Jimmy Carter and his band of fumbling advisors,” Reagan wrote in a direct mailing to Texas voters, “by seeing that conservatives like John Tower are not replaced by liberals.”⁸⁹ Direct mailings like these were also effective because they helped crystallize a correlation in the minds of Texas voters between liberalism and the Democratic Party.

This “image war” shaped Tower’s campaign in 1978. In addition to Reagan, George Bush and former Texas Governor Allan Shivers put their names to direct mailings endorsing Tower and denouncing the liberal alliance between “big labor, big government, and the liberal elements of the Senate and House of Representatives.”⁹⁰ Shivers’ endorsement was a particularly effective benefit to Tower’s efforts to attract older conservatives who were reluctant

⁸⁷ Remarks by Senator John Tower (R-TX) upon being presented the Annual President’s Award of the American Defense Preparedness Association in Washington, DC on April 27, 1978, Box 20, Press Office, JTP; “Why John Tower will go down to defeat,” Undated Poll Analysis, Box 542, Folder 10, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁸⁸ Letter, From: Lyn Nofziger, To: John Tower, April 26, 1977, Folder 7, Box 873, Washington Office, JTP; Letter, From: Nancy Palm, September 1977, Folder 7, Box 542, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁸⁹ Direct Mailing, From Ronald Reagan, June 1978, Folder 14, Box 572. Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁹⁰ Direct Mailing, From George Bush, December 1977, Folder 7, Box 572, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

to embrace the new perception of the Democratic Party as a voice for liberalism.⁹¹ Still, the image war of 1978 was about more than just Tower; his opponent, Congressman Bob Krueger, was also an active combatant. Krueger was a former Duke University English professor who was fond of quoting Shakespeare on the campaign trail. Krueger was widely regarded as a liberal, though his campaign advertisements and brochures were all emblazoned with the word “CONSERVATIVE”—in all capital letters—followed, in a much more subdued presentation, by the word “Democrat.”⁹²

Krueger, whose claim to fame in Texas was that he had almost succeeded in getting the House to approve a natural gas deregulation bill, joined Tower in not only trying to manage his own image, but also disparage his opponent’s. The result was one of the nastiest campaigns in Texas history. When the Krueger campaign attempted to use Tower’s divorces as a wedge between the incumbent and social conservatives in Texas, going so far as to charge Tower with rampant womanizing, Tower’s campaign responded by circulating rumors that the bachelor Krueger was actually a closet homosexual. Krueger responded to charges that he was gay by inserting a photograph of himself with two unidentified adult women, three young girls, and a dog—vaguely referred to in the photo’s caption as “family”—into new campaign circulars.⁹³

Krueger campaigned as a “good ‘ole boy”—the antithesis of the upper-crust elitism many ascribed to Tower, though “good ‘ole boy” had also become a double-edged sword as a euphemism for the Austin establishment. While Tower attacked Carter on foreign policy, Krueger made some headway by charging that his opponent cared little for the daily affairs of ordinary Texans. Krueger lost ground among conservative businessmen, though, when he

⁹¹ Direct Mailing from Allan Shivers, Undated, Folder 23, Box 560, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁹² “The Texas Chameleon,” by Mark Pinsky, *New Times Magazine*, November 1, 1974, Folder 25, Box 560, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁹³ Political Brief: Texas, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

unwisely introduced himself to the Downtown Kiwanis Club of Houston by saying, “If you’re looking for someone who is just a spokesman for business, you’re not looking for me.”⁹⁴

Krueger tried to undercut Tower’s popularity among Mexican Americans by reminding them of the incumbent Republican’s opposition to civil rights legislation in the 1960s and also took advantage of a 1978 Department of Justice decision to use the Voting Rights Act as a means to command authority of Texas election laws in response to allegations of voter discrimination. Tower adamantly opposed this action as federal usurpation of state power and garnered some support among white Texans as a result. However, among minorities, Tower’s popularity slid.⁹⁵ The youthful Krueger’s biggest mistake, however, was his decision to bring in national celebrities like Rosalynn Carter and Walter Mondale to campaign on his behalf. Rather than attract minority voters, as had been his hope, Krueger decision was far more effective in sending conservative white Texans back into the Tower camp. When all the votes were tallied, Tower won re-election by a slim 1 percent.

Tower’s narrow re-election may not have been secured without the assistance of the most groundbreaking Republican electoral achievement in Texas during the twentieth century. In November 1978, William P. Clements became the first Republican to win the governorship of Texas since Reconstruction. Clements’s resume prior to 1978 reflected an alignment with the more traditional elements of the GOP. Having made millions in the Texas oil and drilling industry, Clements served as co-chair of the Texas Committee to Re-Elect the President in 1972.⁹⁶ He subsequently served both the Nixon and Ford administrations as Deputy Secretary of Defense. During the early months of 1978, Texas Republicans began to court Clements as a possible nominee for governor. Despite his service at the federal level, as well as his financial

⁹⁴ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 249.

⁹⁵ “Voting Rights Act,” Comparison Papers, Folder 7, Box 561, Tower Senate Club, JTP.

⁹⁶ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 252.

status within the Dallas oil community, Clements faced a number of obstacles, not the least of which was name recognition. Reservations were also made about his age; (he was 60 at the time). GOP strategists, chiefly aware of the increasing power that television and radio was playing in state and national campaigns, were also concerned by Clements's lack of charisma and media savvy.⁹⁷ Launching the most expensive Republican candidacy in state history, Clements's campaign attempted to solve these problems by spending over \$1.8 million in television and radio advertising during the primary alone.⁹⁸

Beyond money, however, Clements did enjoy one significant advantage in the race for governor. He was not a liberal Democrat associated in any way with the Carter administration. Clements's opponent, however, was and did. A surprise victor in the Democratic primary, Texas Attorney General John Hill handily defeated the more conservative and incumbent governor, Dolph Briscoe by capitalizing on the perception that Briscoe was a do-nothing governor. Conservatives failed to turn out during the primary and motivated liberals took advantage. Hill's campaign against Briscoe exacerbated tensions within the state Democratic Party. Conservatives were dismayed over Hill's aggressive attacks on Briscoe and feared that liberal activism within the Democratic Party was threatening to take a stranglehold on the operations of that party. Elected as a representative of liberal Democrats who were voting in larger numbers, Hill quickly hoped to boost his credentials for the general election by gaining a national endorsement. On May 17, Hill joined a constituency of Texas liberals in making a trip to Washington for a meeting with President Carter. Hill quickly gained Carter's endorsement and favor.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Clements for Governor, Primary Campaign Plan, Final Draft, March 11, 1978, Prepared by V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 5, WCP.

⁹⁸ *Texas Observer*, April 28, 1978, 7; *Texas Monthly*, October 1978, 188.

⁹⁹ U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977-1981), Jimmy Carter, 1978, 934, 1168.

Throughout the campaign, Hill's greatest weakness—his perceived liberalism and association with the White House—was also Clements's greatest strength. For all that Texans did not know about Bill Clements, they knew plenty about Jimmy Carter. Polls released in Texas during 1978 indicated that as much as 80 percent of the state believed that new leadership was needed in both Austin and Washington.¹⁰⁰ These same polls indicated that Carter himself was listed among the “things” Texas voters saw as “most problematic” with the state—not just the nation. At the same time, Texas voters, though dismayed over the direction Carter had taken since his election, still identified with the broad, ideological doctrines Carter had championed in 1976 and Reagan still championed by 1978. Survey samples consistently showed that the rapidly increasing upper to middle class Protestant population of the state saw the solutions to their woes not in federal activism, but in winning the “fight [against] the federal government.”¹⁰¹

Despite these obstacles, Hill ran a relatively passive general campaign. The unpopularity of the Carter administration in Texas only made the overconfident Hill's quest for association with Washington all the more peculiar. Conservative Democrats feeling alienated by the divisive primary campaign against Briscoe joined Republicans in making Hill's association with Carter a chief issue.¹⁰² Hill was also consistently lambasted in the press, which reported conservatives' criticism of the Democratic nominee's support for ERA and the pro-choice abortion lobby.¹⁰³ Regarding state-level issues, Hill fared little better. When a Briscoe-sponsored tax-cut package stalled and eventually died in the Texas Legislature, conservatives on both sides of the aisle blamed Hill. The Attorney General, they argued, indirectly defeated the tax-cut plan by

¹⁰⁰ A Preliminary Report to the Clements for Governor Committee, V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, Box 10, File 21, WCP.

¹⁰¹ Clements for Governor, Primary Campaign Plan, Final Draft, March 11, 1978, Prepared by V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 5, WCP.

¹⁰² *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, October 19, 1978, *Dallas Morning News*, October 1, 1978, *Midland Reporter Telegram*, October 17, 1978, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 9, 17, WCP.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

organizing a coalition of moderate and liberal Democrats in the Texas House of Representatives. Voters and Briscoe-insiders alike blamed Hill for “playing governor” and began to publicly support the Clements campaign.¹⁰⁴

Republicans, however, did not rely solely on anti-Carter or anti-liberal sentiment. Rather, they actively sought to broaden the tent underneath which conservative Texans could, without guilt, align themselves with the GOP. Clements’s platform did not initially include discussion of national issues such as defense spending, détente, or the Panama Canal Treaties. By the time of the general election, it did. Clements also regularly included diatribes in his campaign speeches against the deregulation of oil and gas, (which many Texans believed Carter had promised them in 1976), as well as hot-button issues like local control for education, tougher crime laws that included similar sentences for similar crimes, and support for the death penalty. In addition, Clements touted a \$314.8 million tax reduction plan, certainly attractive to fiscal conservatives in the old guard of the Texas GOP.¹⁰⁵

Yet, just talking about these issues was not as effective as the iconographical alignment Clements established as the fall campaign approached. In August, John Connally responded to the Clements platform by offering a ringing endorsement, broadcast statewide via radio. The same endorsement was broadcast on television in September.¹⁰⁶ Clements also earned the public endorsements of George Bush and Briscoe.¹⁰⁷ By the end of the summer, the Clements team established campaign centers in over 130 rural counties in Texas, each of which was chaired by a registered and conservative Democrat.¹⁰⁸ Knowing that he had the support of oil leaders and conservative business leaders in Dallas and Houston, Clements’s team next prioritized Reagan’s

¹⁰⁴ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 257.

¹⁰⁵ Bill Clements Position Papers, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 15, File 1, WCP.

¹⁰⁶ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 256-257.

¹⁰⁷ *Austin American-Statesman*, September 14, 1978, Box 95, Deaver & Hannaford Inc. Papers, HI.

¹⁰⁸ Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 255-256.

exuberant base. These voters found resonance with issues such as busing, school prayer, abortion, gun control, and communism. That summer, Reagan was approached about campaigning for Clements in Texas. Although he was initially asked to limit his speech topics to either issues of national security or direct attacks on Jimmy Carter, evangelicals began to move more rapidly toward Clements as Reagan's presence in the campaign increased. Reagan made campaign appearances with Clements on September 1, (in Austin), and again on October 19, as keynote speaker at the Fort Worth luncheon to kickoff the Convoy for Clements organization. He was also asked to lead campaign efforts in San Antonio and Lubbock, two of the top six vote producing counties for Reagan in his 1976 presidential primary campaign.¹⁰⁹

As a sign of the state's changing political climate, among the more lasting criticisms made against Clements during his election bid were ones centered on past comments made in support of Lyndon Johnson. Loyalty had been a staple of partisan politics in the 1960s, but in 1978 yellow-dogs were fewer and further between.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, Clements' campaign effectively combined strands of libertarian anti-Statism with social and fiscal conservatism. In September, Clements accepted the endorsement of New York Congressman Jack Kemp, who rallied with Clements to support a taxpayer's bill of rights. From a national perspective, the contest between Clements and Hill was a potential referendum on the Carter presidency in Texas.¹¹¹

In a narrow race, Clements used Carter's unpopularity, Reagan's appeal, and a rhetoric which fused multiple factions under a banner of anti-liberalism to defeat Hill and give the governor's mansion a Republican resident. The Texas gubernatorial campaign of 1978 was a

¹⁰⁹ Miscellaneous Correspondence, Letter from Tom C. Reed to Mike Deaver, June 13, 1978, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 6, WCP.

¹¹⁰ Clements for Governor, Primary Campaign Plan, Final Draft, March 11, 1978, Prepared by V. Lance Tarrance and Associates, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 5, WCP.

¹¹¹ News Release, September 9, 1978, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 9, File 16, WCP.

watershed for Republican acceptability in the Lone Star State. Fueled largely by the momentum of Reagan's 1976 bid and Texans' dissatisfaction with Carter, Clements hastened the reconciliation of divisions that had left the Texas GOP temporarily fractured after 1976. He helped recast the party as a new and stronger coalition of fiscal and social conservatives, united by a common interest in anti-communism and anti-Carter liberalism. In doing so, Clements also attracted disaffected conservative Democrats—one more link in the chain that moved the state toward large-scale partisan realignment.

Yet, not every Republican who ran for public office in Texas in 1978 had the same good fortune as Bill Clements. James Baker, for instance, fell twelve points short in his bid to win the office of Texas Attorney General, losing to the state's incumbent Secretary of State, Mark White. Still, Baker's campaign was revealing. Having run Gerald Ford's 1976 campaign, Baker understood the Texas political culture and intended to anchor his campaign to anti-liberal and anti-Carter appeals.¹¹² Baker had not, however, expected to run against the conservative Democrat, White, but rather against Price Daniel, Jr., the liberal son of the former Texas governor of the same name. White scored an unexpected, yet relatively decisive victory over Daniel in the Texas Democratic Primary. During that campaign, White attacked Daniel as a "liberal" with ties to the Carter administration. The Texas press did not assist Daniel in shaking the label, and many metropolitan newspapers ran editorials critiquing the extent of Daniel's leftward leanings.¹¹³ White further infused a sense of state pride and populist provincialism into the race when he associated Daniel's campaign with "foreign influence"—which he defined as federal encroachment and the influence of Northern "outsiders" migrating into Texas.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 262.

¹¹³ Miscellaneous Files, Box 37, Folder 1: General 73-78, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹¹⁴ Baker News Digest and Analysis, No. 2, April 18, 1978, Box 37, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

In positioning himself to Daniel's right, White also neutralized the "liberal" issue for the general campaign against Baker. Thus, a major difference between the campaigns of Tower and Clements and that of Baker was the conservatism of their Democratic opponents. Baker's strategy for the general election was supposed to center on magnifying the liberal stigma of his expected opponent. Campaign staff repeatedly assured Baker that Daniel's liberalism was "potentially the most damaging" part of his record." Against White, however, the same charges were ineffective, not just because they were less true about the conservative White, but also because White had used the same strategy to defeat Daniel in the primary.¹¹⁵ Left scrambling to devise a new approach, Baker's strategists emphasized the need to get to White's right on three issues: crime, energy, and federal encroachment. The Baker campaign also accused White of ignoring the problem of illegal immigration from Mexico, yet also courted the Hispanic vote by charging that White was "dragging his feet" on "minority concerns."¹¹⁶

The only specific issue Baker consistently used to any degree of effect was White's public support of the Equal Rights Amendment, which Baker believed would benefit him "with conservative groups in West Texas." On this issue however, Baker's consistent argument was less about the infusion of gender or family into the campaign, but rather that everything the ERA was intended to do was already provided for by the 14th amendment and was thus nothing more than Constitutional tampering and federal encroachment.¹¹⁷ Baker's strategy on ERA was effective to the degree that he maintained the support of ardent libertarians. This strategy was ineffective, however, for drawing in rural Democrats whose blood was already up because of the social ramifications surrounding events like the previous year's women's conference in Houston.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum to James Baker, from Jim Cicconi, re: Thoughts on Opposition to Date, December 22, 1977, Box 37, Folder 1: General 73-78, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹¹⁶ "Opposition and Issues Report," Box 37, Folder 2: General 1978, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Without appealing directly to evangelicals, Baker struggled to find other means of tying White to liberalism. For instance, Baker tried but failed to associate White's endorsement from the ACLU and United Auto Workers as a reflection of liberalism.¹¹⁸ The inability of Baker's campaign to out-conservative the conservative White was particularly frustrating to the Republican candidate, who understood the importance of shaping anti-liberalism in the public mind and believed that against Daniel, he would have been able to successfully do so through the media. Against White, however, Baker was swimming upstream in his efforts to be Texans' lone conservative option.¹¹⁹

The significance of the Baker candidacy goes beyond the attempted association of White to Democratic liberalism. Baker also believed that television and radio were perfect mediums through which a campaign could emphasize crime as a political problem. Images of crime evoked emotion, he told his strategists, and emotion rallied the conservative base.¹²⁰ Early on, Baker prioritized crime as a top issue in the campaign with the overall agenda being a dovetailed argument on "anti-federal issues."¹²¹ Still, despite Republican efforts to convince the public that their candidate was the true (and only) conservative in the race, the Baker team struggled. In an effort to tap into rural Democratic constituencies, Baker shifted his campaign rhetoric to a themed discussion of "independence"—defined broadly to incorporate an agenda that gave both greater freedom and protection to police officers without having to fight bureaucratic red tape. Baker also argued that his own "independence" placed him beyond the influence of "political power structures which still dominate Texas politics"—meaning the established Democratic leadership in Austin.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ "Baker Clips," Box 37, Folder 2: General 1978, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹²⁰ Baker News Digest and Analysis, No. 1, March 29, 1978, "Baker Clips," Box 37, Folder 2: General 1978, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹²¹ "Crime Top Priority," Box 28, Folder 21, "Baker Clips," Box 37, Folder 2: General 1978, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹²² Press Release, May 5, 1978, Box 37, Folder 10: Strategy, 1978, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

It was only when discussing this notion of “independence” that Baker managed with any success to convey a Reaganesque vision of anti-government conservatism. It was also usually (and only) within the context of a discussion on “independence” that Baker was able to use the Carter administration against his Democratic opponent. Baker did this by highlighting areas of incompetence in Washington and linking Texans’ frustrations to existing and/or potential problems in Texas.¹²³ Down in the polls and needing to broaden his base, Baker went after the Hispanic vote in much the same way Tower had traditionally done. He promised to protect Hispanic civil and voting rights and vowed to vigorously prosecute any and all violations against that minority.¹²⁴ Expanding the conservative tent, he often reminded his staff, was a needed step on the road to national credibility. In the end, however, Baker’s campaign flopped where the Clements campaign had flourished. Baker failed to out-conservative White, nor could he get past the stigma of anti-Republican tradition that always surfaced in a contest between two conservatives.¹²⁵

Another noteworthy political race in 1978 unfolded on the dusty plains of West Texas, in the fight to replace 43-year incumbent Democrat George Mahon. The 76-year-old Mahon announced his retirement from the United States Congress in 1977 and conservative Democrat Kent Hance soon became the frontrunner to win the vacant seat. Hance, like Mahon, was a conservative Democrat. Also like Mahon, Hance was a resident of Lubbock, a graduate of Texas Tech University, and a friend to the farming constituency that dominated the South Plains—all important factors to the constituents of the nineteenth congressional district. Hance also shared much in common with his Republican opponent. Both had been publicly critical of the Carter

¹²³ Letter from Frank J. Donatelli, August 10, 1978, Box 28, Folder 5, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹²⁴ Press Release, April 22, 1978, “Speech to League of United Latin American Citizens.” Box 37, Folder 10: Strategy, 1978, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹²⁵ Miscellaneous Files, Box 37, Folder 1: General 73-78, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

administration's oil policies and each recognized the importance of connecting with the agricultural constituents that dominated the Lubbock region of the district. On the issues, there seemed to be little distinction between the candidates, but this campaign was ultimately more concerned about image than issues.¹²⁶

The Republican nominee in the nineteenth district was not a native West Texan. He had not attended Texas Tech University, as had both Hance and Mahon, but instead called the Ivy League schools of Harvard and Yale his alma maters. His family had moved to Midland during the oil boom of the 1950s and was forced to fight the labels of “carpetbagger” and “Yankee.” Simply put, Hance's opponent, the 32-year-old George W. Bush, lacked West Texas credibility—and the Hance campaign team knew it. Throughout the race, Bush was attacked in Lubbock as an outsider, ignorant to the needs of area farmers, and incapable of representing West Texas in the US House of Representatives. In one particularly effective and memorable radio advertisement ran by the Hance campaign, Bush's lack of Texas credibility was bluntly characterized:

In 1961, when Kent Hance graduated from Dimmitt High School in the 19th congressional district, his opponent George W. Bush was attending Andover Academy in Massachusetts. In 1965, when Kent Hance graduated from Texas Tech, his opponent was at Yale University. And while Kent Hance graduated from the University of Texas Law School, his opponent -- get this folks -- was attending Harvard. We don't need someone from the Northeast telling us what our problems are.¹²⁷

Bush also faced challenges beyond his roots—challenges that also plagued his father's campaign efforts in the 1960s and 1970s. The nineteenth congressional district encompassed much of West Texas, with Lubbock as the largest city in the Northern region of the district, and

¹²⁶ “Biographical Profiles on Congressmen Elected in 1978 – Democrats, 1978,” “Democratic Study Group,” Folders 4-5, Box 204, Kent Hance Papers, SWC; *Texas Observer*, June 25, 1999, “A Shrub Grows in Midland: W's 1978 West Texas Campaign for Congress”; Political Brief: Nineteenth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

¹²⁷ *Texas Observer*, June 25, 1999, “A Shrub Grows in Midland: W's 1978 West Texas Campaign for Congress.”

Midland the largest in the South. While the Permian Basin oil boom of the 1970s fueled a growth in wealth and prestige in Midland, it did not give the city the population expansion necessary to compete with its sister city in the North. Lubbock, therefore, continued to serve as the de facto seat of congressional power and did, for all intents and purposes, decide who the next congressman from that district would be.¹²⁸ Lubbock was one of the state's most traditionally Republican urban centers, but because of the popularity and strength of conservative Democrats like Mahon, Lubbock routinely split its vote between Republicans at the national level and Democrats locally.¹²⁹ Additionally, Lubbock was home to one of Ronald Reagan's strongest support-centers in Texas, and any support for the son of George H. W. Bush was seen by some as aid to—at the time—a potential Reagan presidential rival.¹³⁰

An inexperienced campaigner, Bush failed to impress during speaking engagements in Lubbock. Before a political science class at Texas Tech University, Bush, in answering questions about the United States' grain embargo against Russia, promised to work toward the elimination of the embargo, but then launched into a tirade against Cuba and the evils of communism. When confronted about the apparent contradiction in his support for the continued embargo of Cuba, Bush appeared befuddled. Later that day, as he and some campaign workers walked past a fraternity lodge less than a mile from campus, Bush had to be restrained from physically confronting a student from the class who called the GOP candidate an "idiot" and pelted him with snowballs. Bush's cause was further damaged when a series of alcohol-saturated parties promoted as "Bush Bashes" attracted Texas Tech University students to venues

¹²⁸ "Surveys," Box 25, Kent Hance Papers, SWC. This dynamic continued until 2004, when a redistricting plan separated Midland into its own congressional district.

¹²⁹ Political Brief: Nineteenth District. Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

¹³⁰ *Texas Observer*, June 25, 1999, "A Shrub Grows in Midland: W's 1978 West Texas Campaign for Congress."

where few, if any, of the students attending were actually carded for proper identification.¹³¹

Shortly after the last of these parties—less than a week prior to the election—local conservatives distributed a letter to pastors throughout the district explaining that such behavior was “un-Christian” and should not be tolerated at the ballot box.¹³²

Regardless of why Bush lost—and despite his problems, he still managed 47 percent of the vote, and an astonishing margin in Midland that reached a near 100 percent—this small campaign in West Texas demonstrates the broad power, malleable nature, and multiple applications of anti-liberalism in Texas. In this case, Bush fell victim to his own party’s strategy of defining outside influences as foreign and dangerous—whether they originated in Moscow or Andover, Massachusetts. In a race between two conservatives, the people of West Texas defaulted to a tradition of independence, local control, and Christian family values.¹³³

In other races across the state, 1978 proved to be a big year for the Texas GOP. Though some races, such as the one in the nineteenth district, enabled conservative Democrats to remain in power, elsewhere across the state, Republicans not only won the governorship and retained Tower’s senate seat, but also won several local races and forced many conservative whites to choose between ideological conviction and partisan loyalty. The Texas GOP’s biggest congressional success story was Ron Paul, who unseated the liberal Bob Gammage in the twenty-second district, representing the south side of Houston down the coastal plain to Brazosport on the Gulf of Mexico. Two years earlier, Gammage defeated Paul by only 236 votes in the closest congressional race in the nation that year. Gammage’s record, including his voting

¹³¹ Leaders of the Republican Party in Lubbock accused the Hance campaign of planting the ad and funding the event. Hance campaign advisors indirectly denied the charge simply by stating that no such advertisement had been approved in their particular office. The actual source of the parties remains in question, though it is highly likely that the ads were placed by someone sympathetic to the Hance campaign.

¹³² *Texas Observer*, June 25, 1999, “A Shrub Grows in Midland: W’s 1978 West Texas Campaign for Congress.”

¹³³ Political Brief: Nineteenth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

history on labor issues, was more liberal than he advertised—particularly to the affluent constituents in his district.¹³⁴ Paul’s campaign took advantage of this and also gained national notoriety when Ronald Reagan stumped on the Texas Republican’s behalf in September. No GOP candidate in Texas could find a better friend than Reagan, who told an audience of legislators in Houston that Paul’s opponent should be “quarantined” so that the liberal “contagion doesn’t spread.”¹³⁵

Reagan’s attacks deftly combined disarming humor and quick wit with an empowering conservative rhetoric, tinged with a populist ethos and laced with anti-liberal and anti-Carter critiques. His campaigning for Paul had far less to do with Gammage than with the leftward slide of the Democratic Party. As he campaigned for Paul and other conservatives in Texas, Reagan earned credibility by reminding his Texas audience that he too had once been a Democrat. Once a rapport with his audience was established, Reagan launched into his standard diatribe—one that the 1978 midterms allowed him to perfect on the road to 1980. Reagan typically opened his speeches by saying, “I’m not going to present you with a long list of what is wrong with the current administration or the Democrat-controlled Congress. We’d be here all night.” Reagan then usually mentioned Jimmy Carter, Tip O’Neill, or Ted Kennedy as a way to undermine emotional connections many Texans still had to the Democratic Party. By linking the Democratic Party to personalities like Carter, O’Neill, and Kennedy, Reagan, in turn, created an association between these Democratic leaders and all Democrats—a strategy particularly effective in a state hostile to both Carter and Northeastern liberalism.

Reagan then typically shifted to, depending on the location, any number of hot-button conservative topics. While campaigning for Paul, Reagan stressed pocketbook issues. He

¹³⁴ Political Brief: Twenty-Second District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

¹³⁵ *Houston Post*, September 12, 1978. Box 95, Deaver & Hannaford, Inc. Papers, HI.

criticized Carter for contributing to the nation's "welfare mess" and also linked busing and affirmative action to government incompetence and wastefulness. He accused Democrats of waging "devastating attacks against the people" and assured those in south Houston that he and the GOP were "on their side." He spoke of Democrats waging "economic warfare against American families" and charged liberal congressmen with "ineptitude." In a city struggling to reconcile issues like busing, Reagan's speech to this audience of affluent suburban Houston families was tailor-made. Regardless of location, though, Reagan's language was always plain, conversational, and emotional.¹³⁶

Reagan was just as effective and ubiquitous in campaigns elsewhere in Texas.¹³⁷ Bashing Jimmy Carter was Reagan's specialty and was almost always effective. Regardless of the issue being discussed—economics, morality, or national security—Reagan related failure after failure to Carter, Carter to liberalism, and liberalism to the Democratic Party.¹³⁸ Reagan gave Texas conservatives an ideal image. In his rhetoric, Reagan, more than any other political figure in the state, tore down the barriers of loyalty and tradition that had kept many Texans voting Democrat for so long. "Family, work, neighborhood, freedom, peace," Reagan told several Texas audiences in 1978. "We should not repeat those words until they become second nature. We should meditate on their meaning and how our policies can be applied to them. They should be on our lips. But, they must also be in our hearts, just as they are in the hearts of Americans all across this country."¹³⁹ He referred to Democrats as "elitists" and quoted Thomas Jefferson as if the two really had been good friends growing up. He spoke of freedom and hope and contrasted

¹³⁶ Remarks by Ronald Reagan, September 11, 1978, Box 24, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

¹³⁷ Remarks by Ronald Reagan, October 17, 1978, Box 24, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL; Campaign Records, 1978, Box 13, File 20, WCP.

¹³⁸ Letter from Tom C. Reed to Mike Deaver, June 13, 1978, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 6, WCP.

¹³⁹ Remarks by Ronald Reagan, September 12, 1978, Box 24, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

the American Dream with the Soviet threat—a threat, he said, that was not being dealt with appropriately by the Democratic leadership in Washington. Reagan appealed to fiscal conservatives, hawks, and evangelicals—all at the same time and seemingly without contradiction. His rhetoric and skill were especially effective in uniting urban, suburban, and rural conservatives, each of whom came to the political table with a different appetite, but all of whom left Reagan’s banquets fully satisfied. Without Reagan’s presence in Texas during the 1978 midterms, the Republican Party would not have been nearly as successful and without that success, the stage would not have been so neatly set for Reagan’s next bid for the White House in 1980.¹⁴⁰

Reagan personified Texas conservatism even more than Connally. Though Reagan’s staffers were often perplexed by their boss’s association with populism, they were also unwilling to dismiss the benefit of being defined as a populist, especially in Texas. Reagan rarely shied away from the populist tag, but more typically associated his brand of conservatism with the integrity and wisdom of the “common man”—the property owning, independent individualist whose prestige and importance Thomas Jefferson had championed. Reagan’s intentional association with Jefferson not only contributed to his sense as an advocate for “the people” but meshed nicely with the nostalgic aura that surrounded the former California governor’s call for patriotism, family, and the recapturing of the greatness that defined America’s past.¹⁴¹

In a state proud of its own independent heritage, Reagan was a natural fit. A feeling permeated Texas in the late 1970s, expressed through the sentiments of long-time volunteers, campaign organizers, and other grassroots activists, that Reagan, with his unshakable

¹⁴⁰ Speech by Ronald Reagan, September 12, 1978, Dallas, TX. Box 104, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI; “Texas Trip 6/78,” Box 291, Staff Office Files: Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat, JCL.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum to Peter Hannaford, from John McClaughry, April 2, 1980, Box 1, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

commitment to defense and his grandfatherly exhortation to patriotism and family, had single-handedly removed the fear and guilt many middle-class whites endured as a result of casting a vote for the Republican Party. This newfound Republican respectability in Texas manifested most visibly through grassroots mobilization in cities and small towns. One such organization, for instance, was the Texas Federation of Republican Women (TFRW). By 1978, the TFRW had organized 130 clubs statewide, with over 6000 volunteers. These women had been contributing to conservative mobilization for years, but not until the late 1970s did they become a force to be reckoned with. The TFRW alone supplied over 38,000 hours of volunteer support for GOP candidates in 1978 and most of those call centers and campaign headquarters were established because of Reagan's primary campaign in the state two years earlier.¹⁴² Including all other conservative organizations operating in Texas, over 37,000 grassroots workers mobilized in support of Republican campaigns and conservative causes in 1978.¹⁴³ Texas Republicans were not just gaining respectability; they were on their way to overtaking the Democratic Party as the top party in the state.

Conclusion: The Road to 1980

As 1980 approached, the Texas sky braced for a Republican storm. The state's political climate was affected by race, economics, energy policy, social debates, rising evangelicalism, and the iconography of two national figures who became inextricably associated with political philosophy in Texas. Grassroots conservatives mobilized around many issues, but the one commonality these factions shared that contributed more than anything else to the growth of the movement in Texas during the late 1970s was the iconic popularity of Ronald Reagan and unpopularity of Jimmy Carter. The study of how Texas could have supported Carter in 1976 and

¹⁴² Olien, *From Token to Triumph*, 242-243.

¹⁴³ *Dallas Morning News*, November 1, 1980, 30A.

then rejected him so vehemently and so quickly four years later is also the study of why Texas's tradition of Democratic dominance finally fell by the wayside during the late 1970s.

The root of conservative Texans' bolt to the Republican Party lies in all of the above factors, maturing together and converging on Texas as a relatively unified force. The impetus for realignment was further affected by altered perceptions of political philosophy and the ascription of those perceptions to party politics. These perceptions were hastened into the Texas public's consciousness by the symbolic presence of Ronald Reagan as the standard-bearer for both modern American conservatism and traditional Texas values. The 1978 midterm elections in Texas reflected the convergence of these forces and the growing power of anti-liberal rhetoric in the state, as well as the critical effectiveness of using national issues as a segue to state and local politics. Because of a political climate that both allowed the synchronic maturation of these forces during the late 1970s and was affected by it, the state of Texas became the bedrock of national Republicanism for decades to come. The political winds in Texas converged from many directions during the late 1970s and united to form one powerful gale force. In 1980, the Reagan Revolution would sweep through Texas like a perfect storm.

CHAPTER 7 TEXAS AND THE REAGAN REVOLUTION, 1979-80

In 1980 Texans witnessed both an ending, of sorts, and a beginning. It was the end of conservative Democratic dominance in a one-party state—the culmination of almost two decades of political change, brought on by a host of economic, social, and demographic forces. It was also a beginning—the birth of two-party Texas as the modern bedrock of conservative American Republicanism. Phrased differently, the rise of modern American conservatism and the birth of a dominant Republican Party in Texas coincided in 1980 as the fury of a “perfect storm” was finally unleashed. For years, the state GOP had fought and failed to establish itself as a viable second party. When not presented with a clear dichotomy between conservatism and liberalism, Texans’ votes usually defaulted to tradition and loyalty—and to the Democratic Party. Yet, after 1976—and particularly by 1978—the political winds in Texas began to change. Intra-party factionalism within the GOP was replaced by a growing coalescence of conservative thought, united under a banner of anti-liberalism and animus toward Jimmy Carter.

At the same time, the New Deal coalition splintered under the weight of a liberal purge from the GOP and coalescence within the Democratic Party. The state’s economy boomed while the rest of the nation went bust. The economic and corresponding population boom hastened the development of suburbs across the state. In many of these Texas suburbs, middle class whites, long mobilized at the grassroots in other parts of the South by race-inspired protectionism of property and assembly rights, began to adopt such rhetoric with increasing gusto, though for a far more complex set of reasons.¹ The maturation of Texas suburbs contributed to the maturation of conservative ideology, where libertarian middle class rhetoric was blended with the religious values of neighborhood, family, and patriotism.

¹ Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), Epilogue.

Since 1964, one or more of these factors had yet to reach maturity in Texas. By 1980, this was no longer the case. The final and critically important component to this partisan and ideological metamorphosis was the establishment of a clear and iconic dichotomy between conservatism and liberalism, represented respectively by national figures Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. Thus, driven by national party movements, economic issues, grassroots mobilization, and the emergence of ideological icons, a majority of Texans abandoned the Democratic Party and replaced the New Deal coalition with a coalition of conservatives united under one Republican banner. In 1980, the success of modern conservatism manifested in Texas as a rejection of liberalism, the coalescence of conservatism, and the ascribing of those re-defined terms to isolated parties. This success came in the form of Republican respectability, partisan realignment, and a landslide victory for the conservative movement's preeminent icon—and took place when it did because of the relative synchronic maturation of a multiplicity of social and political forces. It was the perfect Republican storm and Ronald Reagan was the weatherman who told Texans about it.

The Setting

Even Mother Nature played a role in Texas's political transformation. During the summer of 1980, seventy-eight Texans died as a result of a record-breaking heat wave. In Houston, where 92 percent of buildings were air-conditioned, energy demands reached all-time highs. In Dallas, one woman approached a parked truck loaded with bags of ice and, without word to the driver, climbed into the back of the vehicle to lie down on the cargo. In West Texas, the heat scorched the state's biggest crop—cotton—inciting small-scale panic among farmers.² Then, in August, Hurricane Allen, a Category 5 storm (though it was only a Category 3 storm

² *Time*, July 14, 1980, 21, Box 1, Bill Boyarsky Papers, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA (Hereafter cited as HI).

when it made landfall) tore through South and Central Texas with winds in excess of 115 miles per hour, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage and leaving seven dead. In the aftermath of Hurricane Allen, the Carter administration allocated Federal Disaster Aid to much of the state, but chose to exclude two particular counties in South Texas where the damage had been less severe. The residents of these counties, most of whom were Hispanic, were outraged about their exclusion from federal aid.³ The weather caused many problems for Texans, but was also an unwelcome situation for Jimmy Carter, who undoubtedly had no control over nature, but was certainly blamed for policies seen as having contributed to high energy costs and agricultural struggles—shortcomings that were intensified as the winds blew and the mercury rose on thermometers across the state.

The weather was only one of a myriad of things affecting the state's political culture in 1980. In order, therefore, to come to terms with the ramifications of the political campaigns of that year, it is first necessary to understand the broad foundations—the economic issues, social currents, and local distinctions—that made Texas what it was. Raw demographics and economic statistics also provide insight. In a state with an economy based on energy, finance, insurance, real estate, and agriculture, nearly half of the state's employed workers held white collar jobs, while just over a third held blue collar ones. By 1980, only 4 percent of Texans still farmed for a living. In July, the state's unemployment rate stood at only 5.6 percent, a significant 2-3 percentage points lower than in the rest of the nation.⁴ As it was nationally, inflation was a problem in Texas and was largely seen as a covert tax.⁵ Also important was the state's ethnic composition. African Americans comprised only 12 percent of the population, significantly less than other parts of the South and far more in accord with national averages. Furthermore, even

³ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Miscellaneous Issues, Box 21, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

at 12 percent, the African American population was largely concentrated in the eastern portion of the state. At the same time, however, the Hispanic population was over 20 percent by 1980, and growing. These factors created a racial dynamic in Texas similar in many respects to the state's neighbors in the West and Southwest.

Politically, Texas was still, at least on paper, a bastion of Democratic dominance. Only three of 31 state senators were Republicans and only twenty of 130 state representatives identified themselves as members of the GOP. Of the state's 24 congressional districts, only four were represented by a Republican.⁶ Democratic dominance in Texas was based on tradition and loyalty, but those forces had become less powerful during the 1970s and these numbers actually represented significant gains for the state GOP. By 1980, as the base of the national Democratic Party changed to include demographic minorities, a disconnect emerged whereby the Texas Democratic Party was less able to or willing to apply national strategies for the recruitment of these minorities into the Democratic mainstream.

Furthermore, the Texas population was relatively young—the median voting age in 1980 was 41 and less than ten percent of Texans were considered senior citizens. Eighteen percent of Texans were Catholic—a figure that corresponded broadly to the state's Hispanic population totals. Union labor was still quite weak in Texas and the state's Jewish population was negligible. The more the state Democratic Party was pressured to conform to the will of the national party, the wider the disconnect that developed between the party and Texas constituents grew.⁷

⁶ Texas Political Brief, September 12, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, CA (Hereafter cited as RRL).

⁷ "Polls," Box 79, Staff Office Files, Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, GA (Hereafter cited as JCL); Texas Political Brief, September 12, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files,

In 1982, longtime political observer Theodore White wrote that by 1980, the Democratic Party's New Deal coalition was all but dead. Nationally, the party ceased virtually all talk of limited government, states rights and was widely regarded as a collection of special interests. No cohesive or coherent body remained in operation; rather, the party was embroiled in competition for power and control of nominating conventions, congressional caucuses, and vision-casting.⁸ The Democratic Party's inability to present a united front contributed to a public perception that it was a sinking ship. Texas's political culture had been shaped by a conglomeration of forces—economic, social, and demographic—but it was most affected by image. As modern American conservatism meshed with the traditions of brash Texas individualism, local issues slowly gave way to broader and less well-formed visceral responses to the icons, ideas, rhetoric, and images that came to symbolize on a grand and powerful scale the totality of the same economic and social issues at work in Texas. For many white conservatives in the state, the word liberal, by 1980, came to mean something dangerous, radical, extreme, and not at all in accord with the interests and values of "Texas." More and more Texans identified liberalism with the national Democratic Party. By 1980, 83 percent of Texans identified themselves as either moderate or conservative.⁹

Texas was no doubt a conservative state, but it was also a state that shied away from extremes and ideological labels. In 1964, it was the perception that Barry Goldwater was an extremist, not the lack of an appeal for his agenda that, along with the loyalty given a native son in the aftermath of a national tragedy, doomed the original icon of modern conservatism in

RRL; Reagan for President Files, Box 354, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

⁸ Theodore H. White, *America in Search of Itself: The Making of the President, 1956-1980* (New York: Warner Books, 1982), CH 9.

⁹ Post-Election Poll, *CBS News-NY Times Poll*, November 1980, Box 2M758, Walter Cronkite Papers, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Hereafter cited as CAH).

Texas. In 1980, the trouble for Democrats in Texas was that the political culture was contributing to redefinitions of liberalism as extreme and the Democratic Party as the exclusive home for liberals. Texans who identified themselves as moderate were typically in greater accord with Republican conservatism when issues were discussed on a case-by-case basis. Simply put, by 1980, conservative Texas Democrats—both elected officials and those at the grassroots—felt disconnected from their national party and with little hope of reconciliation.¹⁰

Jim Hightower, a former editor of the *Texas Observer* and among the state's most prominent liberal-progressives, had this to say about his state's political climate in 1980:

The political inclinations of typical Texans differs profoundly from the conventional thought that they are don't rock the boat moderates at best, hard-core right-wingers at worst. I'm talking about small business owners, family farmers, retired people, homemakers, building-trade unionists, the courthouse crowd, and what's known in Texas as Yellow-dog Democrats. For the most part, these are non-ideological, commonsense voters who won't be found on anyone's liberal list, but also don't share much ground with the Dallas bankers, Houston oil barons, or other peers of the Texas plutocracy. Such folks are hardly defenders of the Powers That Be, and their politics ought not to be taken for granted. The old labels—"liberal" and "conservative"—just don't stick to this group. They are disgruntled mavericks, and they may be the majority.¹¹

The problem for Hightower and other Texas liberals was that the public increasingly perceived the Democratic Party not only to be the more ideological party, but also the more extremist party, and not at all the party for "disgruntled mavericks" like themselves. For small business owners and family farmers, national Republicans like Ronald Reagan seemed much friendlier than national Democrats on the traditions, values, and social issues that they valued—and seemed to express just as sincere a level of concern over pocketbook issues.

It is, perhaps, in a study of ideology that the transforming power of perception becomes truly evident in Texas during this time. Local politics remained important, but national politics

¹⁰ DMI: "A Statewide Survey of Voters in Texas" – June 1980, Box 201, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Richard Wirthlin – Political Strategy Files, RRL.

¹¹ *The Washington Monthly*, October 1980, 57, Box 3, Bill Boyarsky Papers, HI.

defined people's political identity. Icons defined, attracted, and unified "disgruntled mavericks" around core, thematic, big picture issues. Part of Reagan's appeal in Texas can be summed up in Hightower's assessment of the political culture. Reagan was himself seen as a "disgruntled maverick"—a cowboy of the West fed up with the mess in Washington and determined to do something about it. Reagan Democrats in Texas identified with the former California governor on many issues, but it was his persona and his words more than the specifics of his platform and policies that engendered admiration. Mass politics created a need for local politicians to identify themselves with larger ideas and the larger ideas coming from the nation's two main political parties left conservative Texans with only one choice—voting Republican. The act of voting Republican at the presidential level had contributed to the tearing apart of traditional "Yellow-dog" loyalties since the 1950s. But it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that this act coincided with a growing movement of suburban, rural, and social conservative grassroots activists responding to perceived national chaos and malaise, couched as a threat to tradition, home, and happiness.¹²

As a liberal Texas Democrat, Jim Hightower claimed to know the grassroots. Yet in Texas, when the grassroots was given an opportunity to speak up, it often did, revealing much about the attitudes of the "disgruntled mavericks" of which Hightower spoke. For instance, one anonymous resident of Brownwood, a small town in the central part of the state, described to his local newspaper his understanding of Texans' political attitudes this way: "Hell, most everybody around here calls themselves a Democrat, but that don't mean they're a bunch of crazy liberals." Identified only as an "old Cowboy," this citizen did more than just reflect the idea that liberalism, extremism, and the Democratic Party were becoming linked in the minds the Texas grassroots. This "old Cowboy" also reflected an emotional hostility toward the incumbent

¹² Ibid.

president: “Carter’s ruined our defense position. He’s let some dinky little country push us around and kidnap our people. He’s sacrificed our farmers with his wheat embargo and ruined our economy while he runs giveaway programs and lets a bunch of Cubans come pourin’ in here. Maybe Reagan can turn things around.”¹³ These words are telling. Across Texas, local issues remained important, but emotions ran highest on national issues. The emotional antipathy toward the national Democratic Party was as potent as the emotional connectedness grassroots conservatives felt when they listened to Ronald Reagan. Emotions like these affected changes in partisan loyalties and traditions, as did the adherence to “old cowboy” designations as indicators of self-perception and image consciousness.

The unification of conservative factions that resulted from iconographic personalities and mass political culture does much to explain Texas’s behavior as a whole. However, it would be a mistake to argue that mass culture made local distinctions unimportant. Each small town and city in Texas brought unique characteristics to the political table. One such city was San Antonio. No city in Texas enjoyed as strong a heritage of independence as did the Alamo City. Additionally, the city boasted one of the heaviest military concentrations in the nation, with two major air force bases (Lackland and Randolph), an Army medical center, and United Services Automobile Association (USAA)—the predominant financial hub for veterans and families of the United States Armed Services. San Antonio also had the largest Hispanic population (60 percent) of any major city in the United States and was the congressional home of Henry B. Gonzalez, the liberal regarded by many in San Antonio as the city’s “patron saint.”¹⁴

¹³ *Middletown Journal*, October 12, 1980, Box 483, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Research & Policy Files, RRL. The “dinky little country” being referred to was Iran.

¹⁴ Texas Political Brief, October 26, 1980: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 25, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

In February 1980, Jimmy Carter chose San Antonio as the location for a major policy speech on immigration. It was the first of many efforts by Carter to elicit support from the city's ethnic community. San Antonio became the most popular choice for national politicians wanting to make a statement on anything associated with Hispanic issues. Not surprisingly, therefore, local politics in San Antonio also concentrated on issues close to Hispanics, while the relationship between social conservatism, religiosity, and race manifested in interesting ways. The civic activism of Hispanic women, for instance, was visible in 1980 through campaigns designed to curb alcohol abuse in Mexican-American families as well as efforts to rectify problems referred to as "Double Jeopardy" issues—discrimination faced by Hispanic women both in society and in the home.¹⁵

The Republican Party was also heavily active in San Antonio in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As Hispanic women grew more active, and liberal Democrats discussed how best to organize minority activists, the Texas GOP embarked on a new voter registration drive in the city.¹⁶ The result of the drive was a remarkable increase in the number of GOP voters in San Antonio's Bexar County where new Republican voters outnumbered new Democratic voters at a 4 to 1 rate. With some Hispanics finding appeal in the GOP's pro-life, pro-family, traditionalist rhetoric, the Republican Party's growing popularity in San Antonio was not limited to the city's white community. Still, racial tensions did animate the white conservative grassroots from time to time. Of particular note was the debate over whether or not Texas could legally continue to withhold funds from school districts educating the children of illegal immigrants. The issue was

¹⁵ February 15, 1980, Speech, San Antonio, TX, Box 9, "San Antonio Trip – 6/12/80," "San Antonio Trip – 9/8/80," Box 10, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Esteban Torres, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

¹⁶ "Issues," Box 1, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Cruz Files, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

seen in San Antonio's white community as a liberal attempt to provide free education to children whose parents were not paying taxes.¹⁷

As the Democratic Party's appeal declined among conservative Texans, the Hispanic vote became more important. At the same time, liberals finally began to see opportunities for leadership positions and vision-casting within the state and national party. Texas cities with the highest Hispanic populations—such as San Antonio, Corpus Christi, which was home to the national headquarters of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Harlingen, which was 75 percent Hispanic, and El Paso, where, sarcastically, Carter's plan to build a metal fence to curb immigration became known as the "tortilla curtain"—gained attention from candidates in both parties, though for different reasons.¹⁸ While the Democratic Party attempted to solidify its support among Hispanics, Republicans appealed to Hispanics through social issues. At the same time, the GOP welcomed discontented whites struggling with the reality that their vote meant less in a more inclusive Democratic Party than it used to. In some cases, white conservative Democrats in these cities abandoned their party in favor of the revitalized and much more unified GOP because their standing as a voter within the Democratic Party, they believed, was being marginalized.

The importance of Hispanics as a political bloc was not isolated to these four cities. In Dallas, for instance, Hispanic leaders were focused on greater inclusion into the city's business community and industrial sectors. A few of these leaders vocally criticized what they viewed as the insincere courtship of Democrats for their communities' votes. Feeling as though Democrats

¹⁷ Texas Political Brief, October 26, 1980: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 25, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI; Memorandum, To: Jerry Carmen, Fr: Rick Shelby, September 16, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

¹⁸ "El Paso Issues," Box 525, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Briefing Materials Files, RRL; Political Brief: Harlingen, Corpus Christi, September 11, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

only appealed to Hispanics during election years, some Dallas-area Hispanic activists denounced such disrespect and encouraged other Hispanics to withhold their votes until their various concerns were legitimately addressed.¹⁹ The national Democratic Party met these challenges not by embracing Hispanic concerns, but by resorting to its party's populist tradition. Carter administration official Esteban E. Torres, for instance, addressed politically active Hispanic organizations across Texas in 1980, not by proposing new policy or discussing the nuances of certain issues, but by reminding Hispanics of the evils of Republican elitism and the Democratic "common man" tradition of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and—of course—Jimmy Carter.²⁰ Frustrated, the Texas Hispanic leadership sought attention by reframing their discontent and political value in the context of broader racial discrimination. Just as African Americans had struggled in Texas as well as in other parts of the nation, these leaders argued, so Hispanics were also suffering under the yoke of delayed desegregation.

The city receiving the most attention from Hispanic leaders on this issue was the state's capitol.²¹ Between 1960 and 1970, Austin was Texas's fastest growing city. Though by 1980 its rate of expansion was no longer exceeding the state's industrial hubs, Austin continued to grow and during the late 1970s was fast becoming among the nation's leaders in electronics manufacturing and technology. The Motorola Corporation, for instance, moved its headquarters to Austin in 1975, bringing with it an initial 2500 new jobs. The rapidly expanding population was largely due to the creation of new white-collar job opportunities. Over 50 percent of the

¹⁹ "Dallas Trip – 4/24/80," Box 10, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Esteban Torres, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

²⁰ "Suggested Talking Points for Ambassador Esteban E. Torres for Carter, April 12-13, 1980," Box 9, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Esteban Torres, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

²¹ February 8, 1980, Letter from Arturo Gil, National Hispanic Institute, to Esteban Torres, Box 9, Staff Offices, Special Assistant to the President – Esteban Torres, Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

jobs in the greater Austin area were classified as white collar, versus only 26 percent of jobs classified as blue collar.²²

Austin was also the state's intellectual hub. In addition to being the home of the state's two most influential periodicals, the *Texas Observer* and *Texas Monthly*, Austin was home to the University of Texas, among the nation's largest higher education institutions. UT's nearly 40,000 students had traditionally acted as a loyal voting bloc for liberal interests. By the close of the 1970s, however, UT students were increasingly preoccupied with their job prospects in a nationally deflated economy. Though still considered an important liberal bloc, political candidates viewed UT's student body as "more conservative than most."²³ With the local economy booming and uncertainties surrounding the national economy, an increasing number of UT students graduated and moved into jobs in the local sector, contributing both to greater partisan equilibrium and population growth. In sum, by 1980 access to higher education and new white collar jobs brought greater numbers of this traditionally Democratic haven into the conservative GOP corner.²⁴

In the fall of 1980 the city of Austin began busing students across town in an effort to accelerate and adjust the desegregation process of its local public schools.²⁵ Only 14 percent of Austin's population was Hispanic, which was below the state average. However, 14 percent of the city's population was African American, which was slightly above the state average. As Hispanic leaders across Texas focused on desegregation efforts in Austin, the city's growing

²² Population Growth during the 1960s, Texas Cities Over 100,000, Box 541, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Briefing Materials Files, RRL; "States-Texas-Austin." – (3/3), Box 525, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Briefing Materials Files, RRL. This trend indeed did continue. In 1984, the Dell Corporation was founded in the north Austin suburb of Round Rock. Since then, Austin has become a national hub for the electronics industry. The city remains one of the nation's fastest growing.

²³ "Local Issues – Austin, TX," Box 414, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

²⁴ Political Brief: Tenth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

²⁵ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

suburban population began to organize in protest. Under the pretext that property tax payers' right to send their children to local schools was being violated, numerous suburban neighborhood organizations across Austin formed to resist the forced integration. The most ardent efforts of these organizations were politically centered. Suburban anti-busing organizations actively sought the resignations of school board members they believed had buckled under social pressures and betrayed middle-class family rights. By 1987, busing laws in Austin were rescinded. In 1980, however, the divisions between class and race reflected in the citywide busing debate heightened the salience of state and national conservative leaders' anti-tax, anti-government, populist rhetoric.²⁶

Individual regions, cities, and towns in Texas made their way to the Republican fold from multiple directions. In the East Texas city of Longview, for instance, the issue was oil. Longview produced more independent oil than any other city in the United States. Area voters reviled Carter's energy policies, the Windfall Profits Tax in particular. Longview had provided Barry Goldwater with his largest majority vote in the nation in 1964 and virtually its entire Chamber of Commerce was actively backing Ronald Reagan in 1980. There was very little union activity in Longview, but a great deal of anti-union sentiment. Broadly speaking, the citizens of this East Texas town more actively rallied around Republican ideals of free market capitalism than they rallied around any other issue, including religious, racial, or other social issues.²⁷

Located between Dallas and Longview was Tyler, the proud home of Earl Campbell, the 1977 Heisman Trophy winning running back from the University of Texas. In many ways, Tyler

²⁶ "Local Issues – Austin, TX," Box 414, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

²⁷ Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Longview, TX, March 25, 1980, Box 54, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

acted as a hinge between the Deep South and the Southwest. Roughly 15 percent of area residents were African American, but only 3 percent were Hispanic. To the west, Tyler's neighboring thirteenth congressional district was barely 5 percent black. That district had been originally settled by people from northwest Oklahoma and western Kansas; these parts of the district were traditionally Republican. To Tyler's east was the first congressional district, which was 22 percent black and traditionally Democratic. At the same time, Tyler's district—the fourth—was one of the most staunchly Democratic by registration, but was carried by Nixon in 1972 at a 72-28 clip. Carter recaptured the district in 1976, but by only 2 percentage points and only as a protest against Ford. The district was one of Reagan's strongest in 1976. In 1978, the fourth district overwhelmingly supported both Bill Clements and John Tower.²⁸

Tyler was at the fulcrum of social, economic, conservative, and traditional political forces in East Texas. While Tyler slowly urbanized, the surrounding area was still predominantly comprised of farmers with an anti-elitist populist heritage. Little suburban sprawl marked the territory, yet Reagan's free market Republicanism seemed much friendlier when mixed with fear that the nation's social travails threatened to invade East Texas if something was not done to stop its advance. Reagan's popularity was a force to be reckoned with in Tyler. When the local party chairman Bill Lust, a Bush supporter, was selected to lead the area GOP, many Reagan organizers balked. At the same time, the local Republican apparatus was ineffective in resisting the influence of several local religious groups, which were campaigning on behalf of Republican candidates and slowly demanding a greater voice over the party's directions and activities.²⁹

²⁸ Political Brief: Thirteenth District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

²⁹ Political Brief: Tyler (Smith County), Political Brief: Fourth District, Box 406, Tyler Political Brief, September 20, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

In central Texas, the state's eleventh congressional district was also home to one of the nation's most prominent Army bases—Fort Hood. Fewer white or blue collar jobs existed in the eleventh district than in other parts of the state. The majority of the district's residents maintained a farming tradition that was accompanied politically by a deep loyalty to the Democratic Party. Jimmy Carter earned a solid 57 percent of the vote in the eleventh district in 1976 and John Tower and Bill Clements came up far short in their bids to win over Republican converts from the area in 1978.³⁰

As Democratic as the region was, it was also conservative. The district's largest city, Waco, was home to Baylor University—a private Southern Baptist college which sent more volunteers to the 1976 GOP convention than any other school in the nation. In the spring of 1980, a controversy involving Baylor University coeds and *Playboy* magazine erupted into a highly visible reflection of how morality and family values could quickly trump other issues and offer a gateway to greater Republican respectability. When Baylor's president, Dr. Abner McCall—himself a prominent Reagan supporter—threatened to expel any coeds who posed nude for the magazine, the school newspaper wrote an editorial highly critical of what it called the administration's "censorship." Controversy raged across the campus and the city. Soon after the publication of the critical editorial in the student newspaper, McCall acted by shutting down the newspaper for three weeks. When the school paper finally began publishing again, the three editors responsible for the diatribes against McCall's policies had been fired and replaced. For students, the incident brought to light far more than just a debate on sexual morality; it had also created a divide on the campus over whether or not the university had a right to mandate behavior and restrict free speech. Such concerns were of less importance in the city itself, where

³⁰ Political Brief: Eleventh District, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

the stance taken by McCall was largely applauded.³¹ Waco operated as a hub of grassroots religious conservatism both before and after the *Playboy* controversy. Churches in the area actively assisted “independent” organizations like the Moral Majority in distributing letters, fliers, brochures, and other forms of communication—each promoting the image of a Democratic Party overcome with liberalism, the result of which was a decline in American prestige across the globe, military weakness, moral laxity, and communist “appeasement.” Efforts like these were aided by a pervasive fear among the grassroots that liberal proposals like the Equal Rights Amendment would ultimately lead to the legalization of homosexual marriage. Such fears became hot topics in Waco throughout the summer and fall of 1980.³²

No doubt, other areas of the state were just as religiously aware and socially conservative as Waco and the eleventh district. Much of West Texas, for instance, with its farming communities surrounding Lubbock and Amarillo, behaved in similar ways.³³ The political culture of Texas’s two biggest cities, however, was more complex. In 1980, Dallas was home to 650 different million-dollar net-worth companies, the fourth most of any city in the United States. The abundance of million-dollar companies fueled development and expansion in the city by providing a tax base that the city’s residents did not have to be burdened with. However, when a Supreme Court ruling disallowed the practice of charging businesses higher than market value property tax rates, Texans—long accustomed to among the nation’s lowest overall tax burdens—found local home property taxes accelerating. Local citizens, particularly those in the

³¹ Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Waco, TX, April 23, 1980, Box 55, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL; Miscellaneous Files, Box 525, Briefing Materials Files, RRL.

³² General Correspondence, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL; “Ronald Reagan File,” Box 13, Press Office, Jody Powell Files, Jimmy Carter Papers, JCL.

³³ Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Lubbock, TX, April 9, 1980, Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Amarillo, TX, April 9, 1980, Box 54, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

city's growing suburban outskirts, were considerably displeased with the ramifications of this ruling. A renewal in anti-tax rhetoric ensued.³⁴

Dallas also shared San Antonio's reliance on the military as a major component of its economic base. The fighter plane manufacturer Ling-Temco-Vought Corporation based its operations in Dallas, as did General Dynamics. The military's industrial presence in Dallas heightened the city's awareness of national security issues and made national defense budget debates, including Carter's proposal to eliminate the B-1 bomber, a great concern. The conservative philosophy that emphasized strong national defense paralleled the city's economic participation in the military industrial complex. Yet, Dallas also had social problems that affected its political climate in 1980. A report earlier that year revealed that the city had led the nation in total number of sexual assaults during the previous year. The city was embarrassed by this national attention and initiated a renewed campaign for increased security and crime prevention.³⁵

The renewed attention given to crime benefited the state GOP, which already enjoyed greater unity in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex than in any other area of the state. The proliferation of suburban sprawl in the DFW area also contributed to this unity. As late as the mid-1970s, Interstate-635, known in the area as the Lyndon B. Johnson Freeway, unofficially served as the city's northern boundary. By 1980, tens of thousands of area residents had flocked to the new suburbs north of I-635, partly in response to the decay of the inner city and the inability of the Dallas Independent School District to maintain a high standard of education for the city's residents. The largest such suburb to spring up north of I-635, for instance, was the city of Plano. Plano became one of the Metroplex's largest suburbs and by 1980 had established

³⁴ Texas Political Brief, October 26, 1980: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 25, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

³⁵ Texas Briefing: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 24, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

its own independent school district. Thus, in addition to being a cog in the nation's military industrial complex, an epicenter of religious conservatism, and a city with a renewed focus on crime, the DFW Metroplex was also emblematic of larger patterns of white migration out of city limits and into more cohesive middle-class white communities, complete with their own school districts, zoning commissions, tax policies, and city managers.³⁶

By 1980, economists ranked Fort Worth, with its mix of military and agricultural industry, as home to the ninth best economy in the nation. San Antonio was ranked fourth, Dallas second, and Houston—the state's biggest city—was ranked first. The fact that Texas had the most vibrant economy in the nation should have been good news for incumbents. Instead, the vibrant Texas economy moved more residents into the middle class, which resulted in new construction, extended suburban boundaries, encouraged sprawl, and hastened ideological polarization. The thriving economy attracted businesses and labor from across the nation, many of whom relocated to Texas without the baggage of political loyalty dogmatically tying them down to a single party.³⁷

For all of these reasons, Texas was at the epicenter of the Republican Party's growing national strength. Not only did presidential contenders George Bush and John Connally hail from Texas, but Ronald Reagan's organization was so well-established in the state that political observers like Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* declared it to be the "real base of the Reagan campaign." Yet, it was not solely for this reason that Texas became the locus of attention for the 1980 presidential campaign. Of all the Southern states Jimmy Carter carried in 1976, none was as crucial to the incumbent president's re-election prospects as Texas. In the aftermath of the

³⁶ Political Brief: Ft. Worth, August 8, 1980, Box 406, Plano Political Brief, October 6, 1980, Box 415, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

³⁷ Houston Chamber of Commerce Information Packet, Box 541, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Briefing Materials Files, RRL.

1978 midterms, animosity toward Carter, encouraged by the Republican Party, intensified in Texas. Carter was widely viewed as having reneged on a campaign promise to deregulate natural gas. His energy policy was unpopular among the state's oil power. The vast majority of the state had opposed ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties. Carter's popularity was slipping among the state's Hispanics and grassroots conservatives were mobilizing in both suburban and rural communities. Clearly, the political culture across the United States, and particularly in conservative Texas, meant a steep uphill climb to a second term for Jimmy Carter.³⁸

The state's political climate was far more hospitable to Ronald Reagan. Texas was not simply perceived as a base of the Reagan campaign—it actually was.³⁹ The leadership of the Reagan campaign efforts in Texas was experienced and committed to the conservative ideology that had made their candidate a popular choice in Texas since 1968. Men like Ernest Angelo, Jr., Chester Upham, Ray Barnhart, Ron Dear, Lyn Nofziger, and Bill Clements each influenced the Reagan campaign nationally and in Texas.⁴⁰ As his campaign prepared for 1980, Reagan continued to make his presence known in Texas through an active speaking schedule before civic and business organizations across the state. Both Reagan's presence in Texas and the content of his messages made it appear as though he cared deeply about the state.⁴¹ At the top of Reagan's priorities for Texas was the enlistment of grassroots Democrats and independents to his conservative cause. Reagan believed that grassroots Texas Democrats and independents largely

³⁸ *New York Times*, April 22, 1979, E19, Box 461, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Research & Policy Files, RRL.

³⁹ "Thoughts on Campaign Strategy," Undated Research Report prepared for John Sears, Box 5, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁴⁰ Press Release, May 11, 1979, Memorandum, To: Charlie Black & Andy Carter, Fr: Ron Dear, May 23, 1979, Box 112, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ed Meese Files, RRL; Anonymous Memorandum, To: Omar Harvey, February 1, 1978, Campaign Records, 1978, Box 14, File 5, William Clements Papers, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX (Hereafter cited as WCP).

⁴¹ Memorandum to Gov. Reagan, Fr: James Stockdale, Re: Briefings for Campaign Appearances: Houston & San Antonio, October 29, 1979, Box 52, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

shared his philosophy on taxes and government waste. The path to Democratic hearts in rural Texas, however, also necessitated communicating that Reagan, more than his GOP rivals and more than the born-again Southern Baptist Carter, was a true friend to ethics, morality, and family values.⁴²

Reagan accomplished this through carefully crafted speeches that appealed to both economics and tradition. Reagan's oratorical skills were the perfect complement to a team of speechwriters who knew how to frame big ideas with emotion and passion. Quite simply, Reagan spoke as a populist, a conservative, a Christian, an anticommunist, and a commoner all at the same time. He presented himself as the embodiment of hope in contrast to Carter's malaise. He magnified problems, simplified solutions, and romanticized an American past that may never have actually existed. "I am calling for an end to giantism," Reagan said in multiple speeches throughout Texas in 1979 and 1980. He called "for a return to the human scale—the scale that human beings can cope with; the scale of the local fraternal lodge, the church congregation, the book club, the farm bureau." He continued:

It is the locally owned factory, the small businessman who personally deals with the customers and stands behind his product, the farm and consumer cooperative, the town or neighborhood bank that invests in the community, the union local. It is this activity on a small, human scale that creates the fabric of community, a fabric for the creation of abundance and liberty. The human scale nurtures standards of right behavior, a prevailing ethic of what is right and what is wrong, acceptable and unacceptable.⁴³

On his own spiritual commitment, Reagan was no less passionate—and won the support of social conservatives in Texas as a result:

The time has come to turn back to God and reassert our trust in Him for the healing of America. This means that all of us acknowledge and reaffirm our belief in our Judeo-Christian heritage and join forces to reclaim those great principles embodied in that Judeo-Christian tradition and in ancient scripture. Without such a joining of forces, the

⁴² Transcript: "The Year of the Elephant" by Ronald Reagan, September 26, 1978, Box 3, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁴³ Speech Excerpts, Undated, Box 29, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

materialistic quantity of life in our country may increase for a time, but the quality of life will continue to decrease. Our country is in need of and ready for a spiritual renewal. Such a renewal is based on scriptural reconciliation—man with god, and then man with man.⁴⁴

Reagan valued the support of conservative Democrats in rural Texas and tailored much of his rhetoric in order to appeal to that constituency. Considering the relatively low percentage of farmers still functioning in that capacity in Texas, Reagan's rhetoric served the symbolic purpose of appealing to rural and agrarian values. The invocation of such neo-Jeffersonian agrarian virtue contributed to a nostalgia for small-town values in Texas by using "farmers" as short-hand for the forgotten American whose idyllic conservative political climate had been plowed under by liberal expansionism and intrusion.⁴⁵

Yet, Reagan also knew how to blend issues into a web of dissatisfaction and discontent with the status quo of Democratic leadership in Washington, always identified in tandem with liberalism, big government, and threats to the American "way of life."⁴⁶ This blending allowed Reagan to maintain consistency with his message regardless of the audience. Whether he was speaking to businessmen or farmers, Reagan sought to capitalize on the nation's need for hope. He wanted to convey ideas that he was a sound leader, was tough and fair, and that the consequences of the upcoming election were paramount.⁴⁷

Reagan's most skillful and delicate accomplishment was his ability to champion simultaneously a conservative philosophy, malign a liberal one, and claim with credibility that he was not an ideologue. This was not accomplished by accident. Reagan only attacked liberalism directly when he knew he had a sympathetic audience—such as most of those he encountered in

⁴⁴ "Ronald Reagan on Spiritual Commitment," Box 39, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Drew, *Portrait of an Election: The 1980 Presidential Campaign* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981), 209, 213.

⁴⁶ Gary Wills, *Reagan's America* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 406-416.

⁴⁷ The Reagan Candidacy: Advertising Strategy for 1980, prepared by C.T. Clyne Company, October 25, 1979, Box 6, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

Texas. Reagan published editorials and other writings that lambasted Carter's litany of failures and accused the President of disrespecting workers and the middle-class. He rarely referred to "liberals" without referring to "Liberal Democrats" or the "Liberal Establishment."⁴⁸

Reagan linked his Democratic opponents to elitism and ideology—both characteristics historically applied to Republicans with much greater frequency and negative impact, particularly in Texas. In doing this, Reagan indirectly promoted his own brand of conservatism, created a belief that Republicans were the true party of the common man, while at the same time appearing above the ideological fray by condemning Democrats for a dogmatic adherence to a Leftist political philosophy. "We all know how liberals win," Reagan wrote in 1978. "They buy votes with big promises and bigger spending programs. They appeal to those who are willing to trade freedom and pay outrageous taxes in exchange for the mirage of cradle to grave security of the bottom line profit that comes from big government contracts."⁴⁹

To many Texans, Reagan represented a call to freedom from taxes and regulations, and to send children to neighborhood schools, to pray, and to bear arms. He accused Carter of changing "voting laws to make it possible for liberal Democrats and big labor to stack and steal elections." He claimed that Carter had weakened America's "defense by dropping the B-1 bomber and cutting back our Navy, making special deals with the Soviet Union, and otherwise appeasing communism." In these cases, Reagan's rhetoric was not subtle. Words like "freedom," "steal," "weaken," and "appeasement" fomented emotion among the grassroots and created urgency in the minds of conservatives and non-partisan citizens alike, most of whom in Texas came to believe that liberals were as extreme and dangerous as Barry Goldwater had seemed in 1964.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Citizens for the Republic Newsletters, 1979, Box 110, Citizens for Reagan Papers, HI.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Letter from Ronald Reagan and the Citizens for the Republic, March 5, 1978, Folder 7, Box 873, Washington Files, John G. Tower Papers, Southwestern University, Georgetown, TX (Hereafter cited as JTP).

Thus, the political atmosphere in Texas was ripe for the Reagan Revolution. The Republican Party gained respectability in the state thanks to demographic changes and an amalgam of social and economic issues. This respectability meshed with perceptions in the state that the Democratic Party had been overtaken by national liberalism. Those factions of the New Deal coalition existing in Texas began to jump ship and strengthen a growing conservative coalition of “disgruntled mavericks,” religious conservatives, and free market libertarians all of whom could agree on at least one thing—that Jimmy Carter was not for them. At the same time, Texas became a focus of the national Republican Party, strengthened the state party’s respectability, and simultaneously undermined the Democratic Party by way of contrast and comparison. Reagan’s oratorical skill and his leadership team’s ability to promote a consistent and simplified message, tailor-made for the traditions of conservative Texas politics, made the Lone Star State an epicenter of Republican resurgence nationally and shaped modern American conservatism.

The End of Intra-GOP Factionalism

Ronald Reagan may have been the most popular Republican in the state, but he was not the only Republican hanging his hopes for national office on Texas. In February of 1978, former Texas governor John Connally had a chance to challenge Reagan and establish himself as a frontrunner in the race for the 1980 GOP presidential nomination. Connally promised to organize a fundraiser celebrating the Eisenhower-era Republican Party. Funds raised were to go toward paying off the mortgage on the Republican National Committee’s permanent headquarters in Washington. Rather than pour his every effort into the occasion, however, Connally procrastinated. The last-minute organization of the event was plagued by logistical problems and the event itself raised only \$400,000 of a publicized \$1.5 million goal. Connally’s

inability to plan the event effectively was only part of his problem. On the night of the event, rather than organize a series of tributes to the Eisenhower-era—the purported theme of the fundraiser—Connally dominated the evening. He delivered a speech that most in attendance found far too long and political in which the topic of discussion were the problems of the Jimmy Carter White House. It was the right speech given at the wrong time and in the wrong place.⁵¹

Nonetheless, John Connally was running for president. In October 1979, Connally purchased the earliest presidential campaign TV advertisement in the nation’s history. He had procrastinated in organizing the RNC fundraiser the previous year, but was not about to procrastinate when it came to his own political ambition.⁵² Early funds for Connally’s campaign were provided by some of the nation’s largest corporations, a clear signal that the Houstonian’s business acumen and economic policies would serve as his foundation.⁵³ However, Connally’s ideas about the presidency and the importance of personality drew more attention than his relationship with big business or his economic plans. Connally’s ideas about image and public relations also shed light on the nation’s political culture of late 1970s and early 1980s, though the former Texas governor might have been wise to stay quiet. In 1979, Connally told *Texas Monthly* magazine that “personality is the one essential issue in presidential politics. We are too often mesmerized by matters of policy, looking for the smallest difference that will distinguish candidates, when the big difference—those of personality—are out there for all to see.”⁵⁴ For a candidate to openly minimize the importance of policy in favor of image was no doubt a questionable strategy. These statements had other consequences as well, including an opened door for critiques of Connally’s personality. Connally had long been viewed nationally as a bit

⁵¹ *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, February 6, 1978, Box 85, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

⁵² October 31, 1979, *New York Times*, Box 2M449, Phillip Scheffler Papers, CAH.

⁵³ *The Wichita Eagle*, September 14, 1979, Box 9, David Stoll Collection, HI.

⁵⁴ *Texas Monthly*, November 1979, “The Truth About John Connally.”

of a “wheeler-dealer”—an image helpful in the early 1960s, but harmful in the post-Watergate American political scene that largely distrusted politicians.⁵⁵

Connally’s presence meant that as the 1980 presidential campaign got underway, Ronald Reagan’s nomination was not a foregone conclusion. Democratic insiders in Washington quietly feared that Connally was, potentially, their most formidable opponent in the upcoming election. Having been a Democrat in a Southern state, they feared, Connally would be a much greater threat to Carter’s hopes for once again carrying the Solid South than Reagan. In looking at Texas, the Carter team assumed the Lone Star State was still a Democratic haven, where tradition and loyalty would always trump ideology on the national stage.⁵⁶ At the same time, however, Democratic strategists responded to Connally’s statements that image was vital to success in presidential politics by doing a study of Connally’s appeal in critical swing states, Texas included. Their findings were prescient. Though a Republican, Connally was not perceived by the mass public, they believed, as a true conservative. Neither was Connally “establishment” or “New Right.” Put yet another way, if image was everything, as Connally said, then his image lacked, as one Democratic analyst said, “coloration.” The Carter campaign believed that while Connally was potentially the GOP’s most formidable candidate, he was also the easiest to define—because no definition readily existed.⁵⁷ Democratic forecasts showing Connally as potentially their strongest rival were not grounded in polls. This is evident because early polls, even in Texas, showed Reagan maintaining a relatively comfortable lead on Connally throughout 1979 and early 1980.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Carter’s campaign advisors were distracted by

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Texas Overview” “3/24/79-3/25/79 Trip to Oklahoma and Texas,” Box 124, Staff Office Files: Office of Staff Secretary, JCL.

⁵⁷ “Analysis: 1980 Presidential Campaign, by Eddie Mahe, Jr. December 5, 1978, Box 4Ad34, George Christian Papers, CAH.

⁵⁸ Memorandum, To: Mike Deaver, From: Peter Hannaford, July 6, 1979, Box 8, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI; Reagan Country Update, Newsletter, September 1979, Box 50, Ronald Reagan Subject Collection, HI;

the early Connally campaign and, to a significant degree, dismissive of Reagan as a viable national candidate.

Connally's bid for the 1980 nomination had really begun at the 1976 GOP convention in Kansas City where, in the midst of the Ford-Reagan split that seemingly threatened to sever the GOP in two, Connally's name was bandied about as a potential compromise candidate. He maintained credibility among conservatives in Texas, though he was seen as a bit of a turncoat among the state's more established conservative Democrats. In essence, he more than Reagan personified the political wrangling many Texans had experienced over the previous decade. Initially a faithful, yet adamantly conservative Texas Democrat, Connally had supported Lyndon Johnson's congressional and senate campaigns. But his relationship with LBJ grew distant during the turbulent late 1960s. Connally spearheaded efforts like "Democrats for Nixon" in 1972 and even managed to serve the Nixon White House without himself acquiring the stain of Watergate, though only barely. By 1976, Connally was a convert—not by choice he would say, but because he had been forced. His party had left him. His new home was the Republican Party and many Texans, still struggling to reconcile their conservatism with the loyalty that befell a "yellow-dog" state, identified with their popular former governor.⁵⁹

Connally's constituency in 1980 paralleled Reagan's. Though he trailed Reagan in most polls taken in the state leading up to the primary, Connally maintained one apparent advantage—the perception of electability. Connally's campaign strove to take advantage of this, reminding some Republicans of Reagan's association with the extremist Goldwater campaign of 1964. Connally, however, underestimated Reagan's skill in shedding the extremist label. At the same

Austin Poll – Summer 1979, Box 461, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Research & Policy Files, RRL.

⁵⁹ Personal Correspondence, Political, April 5, 1976 – November 22, 1976, Box 553-52A, 52B, 72, 202, 232C, John Connally Papers, Lyndon Johnson Library, Austin, TX (Hereafter cited as LBJL).

time, Connally's campaign suffered from a dearth of originality. Borrowing from Reagan at every turn—to the point of using Reagan campaign material as a basis for speeches—Connally spoke openly against ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, was adamantly pro-life, and even outdid the Gipper's passion on the issue of illegal immigration.⁶⁰ Connally, like Reagan, also adopted an anti-Carter strategy and frequently reminded his audiences of Carter's failed promise to deregulate the oil and gas industries in Texas.⁶¹ Reflecting a growing belief among Republicans that increased minority voting was both an existing threat and a potential new constituency, Connally appealed to Texas minorities by praising Reagan's record on race relations in California. He frequently cited the statistic that 20 percent of Reagan's appointees during his first year as governor were minorities. Connally wanted to attract Reagan supporters who were fearful of nominating a candidate that the general public would reject as extreme. He chose to do this by associating himself closely with Reagan, even praising his opponent, in the hopes that minority backers would be softened to the new conservative agenda. It was a curious strategy and one that benefited Reagan far more than it did Connally.⁶²

John Connally's bid for the presidency barely made it out of the starting gates. The rough-and-tumble world of Texas politics, which actually organized in an effort to help Connally's campaign, greatly contributed to its failure. The thrust of that story surrounds a political situation in the Texas legislature that Connally's biographer and former *New York Times* reporter James Reston called "decidedly Wild West."⁶³ In 1979, a handful of Connally supporters in the state legislature, most of whom were Democrats, began to organize support for a proposed bill that would move the Texas presidential primary election up from May to March

⁶⁰ Campaign '80 Briefing Book, Box 1209-192, F-2, John Connally Papers, LBJL.

⁶¹ Memorandum, From: Sam Hoskinson, To: John Connally, Subject: Illegal Immigration, 1980 Campaign Files, Box 743-461A, John Connally Papers, LBJL.

⁶² Campaign '80 Briefing Book, Box 1209-192, F-2, John Connally Papers, LBJL.

⁶³ James Reston, *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harpers & Row, 1989), 563.

11. The goal was to provide Connally with a golden opportunity for an early and big win, thus giving momentum to his campaign. The bill gained the backing of Governor Clements, but when the proposal officially made its way before the legislature, no vote could be had because no quorum existed; twelve liberal legislators who collectively came to be known as the “Killer Bees” went missing in action in order to prevent a quorum and kill the bill. The situation gained national attention, but not in a good way. The zany happenings of the “Killer Bees” made Connally’s home state look like a circus. Political observers across the country called the situation a “laughing stock” and Connally’s reputation as a backroom political “wheeler-dealer” once again came to the forefront, though this time, he looked like a failure.⁶⁴

Connally also lost the critical support of social conservatives. Though he had tried to appeal to evangelicals by way of his stances on abortion and ERA, Connally made the mistake of suggesting that he would reconsider the United States’ support of Israel if American oil interests were ever threatened as a result. He also supported the establishment of a Palestinian state within Jordan. Evangelicals were not alone in charging anti-Semitism, but they were the most important. Despite his Southern appeal, his Texas popularity, his relative moderation, and an impressive war chest donated by some of the nation’s most powerful corporations, Connally never made it to the Texas primary. He withdrew after defeats in Florida and Iowa, leaving only one Texan left to challenge Reagan for Lone Star State Republican domination.⁶⁵

That one challenger was George Bush, who chose a different strategy against Reagan than had Connally. In the weeks prior to the 1980 primary election in Texas, George Bush aggressively campaigned not only against Reagan, but also against the Reagan conservative philosophy. This strategy was also a mistake. Loyalty alone should have given Bush a thriving

⁶⁴ Ibid., 564.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 575.

home state advantage, but Reagan appealed to Texas conservatives far more than Bush did. Conservatism in Texas had grown past the factionalism of the previous years and coalesced since 1976. Failing to recognize the success of the new conservative agenda and, particularly, the anti-liberal backlash that accompanied it, Bush derided Reagan's anti-government populism, forgoing that mantra for a broadly defined "human rights" theme.⁶⁶ Characterized as a "Republican for all factions," Bush seemed everywhere and nowhere—all at the same time.⁶⁷ He believed that Republicans were desperate to defeat Jimmy Carter and would make electability a top priority. In order to seem electable at the national level, Bush embraced his moderate background. He famously critiqued Reagan's economic policy throughout the campaign—calling it "voodoo economics"—but it was his opposition to Reagan's proposed tax cuts that gained the most attention in Texas.⁶⁸

On social issues, Bush consistently kept to Reagan's left. He openly supported the Equal Rights Amendment and opposed a constitutional ban on abortion.⁶⁹ The effect of this strategy was unintended and undesired. Setting himself up in opposition to Reagan on specific issues like taxes and "values" did not make Bush seem more electable to Texans, but more liberal, particularly in contrast to Reagan. The larger issue at stake, therefore, was image. Reagan's appeal as a ranch owner from the West overshadowed Bush in Texas, who had difficulty shaping his public persona because of the perception that he had only moved to the state for political reasons and was, in reality, a carpet-bagging New Englander.⁷⁰ Reagan also undermined Bush's presidential campaign by listing Bush, along with John Connally and Bill Clements, as potential

⁶⁶ Box 128, Folder 3: Issues Papers, 1979, James A. Baker Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ (Hereafter cited as SGML).

⁶⁷ *New York Magazine*, January 21, 1980, Box 86-107/11, Allan Shivers Papers, CAH.

⁶⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, April 24, 1980, 14A.

⁶⁹ "George Bush on Abortion – DRAFT," November 14, 1979, Box 128, Folder 3: Issues Papers, 1979. James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

⁷⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, April 4, 1980, 16A.

running mates in the general election campaign.⁷¹ Bush wanted to seem moderate and therefore more electable, but failed on both counts.

Unlike 1976, when Reagan won a surprisingly large victory in Texas over the incumbent Ford, there was little drama leading up to Election Day in May of 1980. Reagan consistently outpolled Bush by no less than 25 points in surveys taken throughout the campaign. In some parts of the state, Reagan's lead over Bush in the polls exceeded 60 percent.⁷² Nonetheless, the 1980 presidential primary, though it lacked the pizzazz of the 1976 campaign, represented a culmination for direction and control of the Republican Party in Texas. The previous years had fostered coalescence in the conservative tent, and most of that activity took place under a Republican banner, even as many established conservatives remained loyal Democrats in name. Bush was seen as less a part of the "Eastern Establishment" than Ford had been four years earlier, but was individually rejected as too liberal. The lack of factional identification meant that conservatives in Texas were more apt to unify around an individual than a philosophy, for the battle over philosophy was, for the most part, over.⁷³

When voters actually went to the polls, Reagan defeated Bush as expected, but by a slimmer margin than predicted—only 4 points. Bush cut into Reagan's lead during the final week of the campaign for three main reasons. First, the expectation of a Reagan landslide depressed voter turnout, giving Bush an opportunity to narrow the gap simply by getting his supporters out to the polls. Second, Bush shifted gears late in the campaign and decided to join Reagan in making Jimmy Carter the chief issue of the election.⁷⁴ Bush wanted to appear more

⁷¹ Ibid.; *Dallas Morning News*, April 5, 1980, 35A.

⁷² DMI: "A Statewide Telephone Survey of Republican Voters in Texas" – April 24, 30, May 2, 1980, Box 200, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Richard Wirthlin – Political Strategy Files, RRL.

⁷³ White, *America in Search of Itself*, CH 10.

⁷⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, April 4, 1980, 16A; Press Release, April 30, 1980, Box 8, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

electable at the national level to voters in his home state, but it was Reagan's focus on Carter rather than Bush's attempt at moderation that did the trick. Reagan played for the national stage and most conservative Texans wanted to join in the fight. When Bush shifted his attacks away from Reagan, he seemed less divisive, less moderate, more conservative, and more Texan. Lastly, Bush began to match Reagan's rhetoric on national defense. This strategy was particularly effective in Houston, where Bush made small inroads by portraying Reagan as a potential risk, while at the same time adopting Reagan's stance on numerous foreign policy issues.⁷⁵

Bush's shift to the Right contributed to Reagan's decision at the GOP convention in Detroit that summer to tab the Houstonian as his running mate.⁷⁶ The combination of Reagan and Bush helped unify the Texas GOP, where it had remained fatally divided in 1976.⁷⁷ Yet, the unification of the Texas Republican Party was the result of far more than a convenient political partnership. The state GOP entered the 1980 presidential campaign as a force to be reckoned with because its agenda mirrored that of the national party, communicated the tenets of modern American conservatism, broadly conceived, and took advantage of internal divisions within the Democratic Party, which had left conservative Texas voters with a clearer partisan choice between conservatism and liberalism.

The Reagan Revolution

No event provides more insight into the culmination of conservative coalescence under the Republican tent, or the final splintering of the New Deal coalition in Texas, than does the

⁷⁵ *Dallas Times Herald*, April 10, 1980, Box 13, Ronald Reagan File, Press Office, Jody Powell Files, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL; DMI: "A Statewide Telephone Survey of Republican Voters in Texas" – April 24, 30, May 2, 1980, Box 200, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Richard Wirthlin – Political Strategy Files, RRL.

⁷⁶ Drew, *Portrait of an Election*, 209, 213.

⁷⁷ Memorandum, To: Jerry Carmen, Fr: Rick Shelby, September 16, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

1980 presidential campaign. By 1980, the Texas Republican Party, once an afterthought in state politics, was in the early stages of overtaking the state's Democratic Party as a dominant source of political power, not only in the Lone Star State, but also nationally. Though influenced by local issues, grassroots activism, and regional distinctions, Texas conservatives united around broad themes, iconic personalities, and a nationalized rhetoric that appealed to factions spanning class lines, social interests, and partisan loyalties. Whereas both parties appeared fractured in 1976, by 1980, the Texas Republican Party had become the conservative voice of opposition to policies and mistakes made by an administration increasingly disparaged among the public at large as "liberal," while the Texas Democratic Party was more fractured than ever.

Few aspects of the potent, nationalized rhetoric used by the Republican Party to unite conservatives against the forces of liberalism were as effective in Texas as straightforward hostility and criticism of Jimmy Carter. In 1979, for instance, Phil Gramm, a young conservative Democrat in Texas's sixth congressional district and future convert to the Republican Party, canvassed churches, restaurants, and neighborhoods to investigate the level of support in his district for Jimmy Carter. His findings did not encourage the Democratic Congressman to offer an endorsement for the sitting president. Gramm's district, which covered rural and small towns stretching from South Dallas to Bryan, was typically Texas—traditionally Democratic though vociferously anti-liberal and willing to break party ranks in presidential elections. The district, which overwhelmingly rejected McGovern liberalism in 1972, returned to the fold in 1976 and supported Carter. By 1980, however, Carter's populism and moral authority was being questioned. Gramm gained favor in his district by opposing much of Carter's legislative agenda, which encouraged many other conservative Texas Democrats to do the same.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Campaign '80 Briefing Book, Box 1209-192, F-2, John Connally Papers, LBJL; "Rep. Phil Gramm (D-TX-6)," Box 124, Staff Office Files: Office of Staff Secretary, JCL.

Whereas Carter had difficulty garnering the support of Texas Democrats like Phil Gramm, Ronald Reagan had no such problem. Masterfully using television and radio to broadcast his conservative qualifications to the entire state, Reagan publicized endorsements from several prominent Texas political leaders. Former governors John Connally, Preston Smith, and Allan Shivers joined current Texas Governor Bill Clements in not just endorsing Reagan, but also appearing together in front of cameras as a show of conservative unity on behalf of the Republican nominee.⁷⁹ John Tower also came out as an adamant supporter of Reagan, not by enthusiastically endorsing the GOP nominee, but by hammering Carter. Tower spoke to civic groups across Texas on the subject of “trimming the bureaucratic fat” from Washington. Tower further criticized Carter as “weak on defense,” in support of a punitive and overbearing tax policy, and practically called the President a liar for reneging on promises to deregulate the oil and gas industry.⁸⁰

With grassroots enthusiasm for Republican conservatism at an all-time high in Texas, the state’s political loyalties and traditions quickly began to change.⁸¹ For the first time since Reconstruction, Republican candidates in Texas enjoyed a widespread optimism that they could not only be collectively competitive, but individually successful at the local level. Additionally, unlike 1976, local party leadership enjoyed widespread harmony with grassroots conservatives.⁸² Reagan’s coattails were the source of both conservatives’ unity and optimism. GOP candidates for every office imaginable contacted the Reagan campaign asking, not for a joint appearance—

⁷⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, November 1, 1980, 14A.

⁸⁰ November 1, 1980, *Abilene Reporter-News*, 1980 Campaign Final Week [2], Box 21, Hendrik Hertzberg Collection, JCL.

⁸¹ Fall Campaign Trips – Texas, Box 145, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ed Meese Files, RRL.

⁸² Political Brief: Ft. Worth, August 8, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL; Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Longview, TX, March 25, 1980, Box 54, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

though Reagan's willingness to do that was always welcome—but simply for Reagan to mention, by name, particular candidates in his speeches across Texas.⁸³ Even some conservative Democrats, like Lubbock's Kent Hance, welcomed Reagan's support during campaign stops in West Texas.⁸⁴

Reagan's campaign in Texas reflected an elegant blend of nationalized rhetoric with local appeals that elicited a visceral connection between conservatives and the Republican Party. In Texas, the state GOP was built upon emotional responses to national momentum, the voice of which was provided by Reagan. Whether he was campaigning to businessmen in Dallas, oil barons in Houston, Hispanics in San Antonio or El Paso, defense contractors in Fort Worth, or farmers at local and country fairs in West Texas, conservatives of almost any ilk felt that Reagan supported them personally.⁸⁵ Part of this was simply public relations skill, but much more of Reagan's success could be attributed to the thematic approach to his rhetoric. Reagan's speeches were tailored in only small ways depending on his audience, while Carter and national Democrats were much less capable of offering a single message to multiple constituencies.

The GOP's public relations skill transferred to success in other areas like fundraising. Texas provided the Reagan campaign with a unique opportunity to build its campaign coffers without having to do much to appeal to state or local issues. There were two main reasons for this. First, older, wealthier Republican conservatives inclined to donate large sums to the Reagan campaign were used to a system in which state and local politics, long dominated by the Democratic Party, were largely off limits to the GOP. As such, by 1980 the tradition that Texas

⁸³ Letter, To: Ronald Reagan, From: Mrs. St. John Garmond, August 12, 1980, Box 387, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

⁸⁴ Briefing for Campaign Appearances: Lubbock, TX, April 9, 1980, Box 54, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Hannaford / California Headquarters Files, RRL.

⁸⁵ Memorandum, To: Charlie Black, Andy Carter, and Ernie Angelo, Fr: Doug McSwane, September 16, 1979, Box 112, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ed Meese Files, RRL; Fall Campaign Trips – Texas, Box 145, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ed Meese Files, RRL.

Republicans invest their resources in national success was a well-established practice.⁸⁶ At the same time, Reagan's appeal to socially conservative and more rural Democratic Texans reflected a branding of conservatism that was appealing virtually regardless of region. Though the Texas GOP did well with its more affluent constituents, Reagan also received more small donations from rural Texans in 1980 than did Carter.⁸⁷ Also important was the dramatic infusion of out-of-state dollars into the Texas Republican effort. For instance, an independent organization known as Americans for Effective Presidency (AEP) raised and spent over a half million dollars on anti-Carter advertising in Texas, Illinois, and Ohio. The efforts of the AEP stand as a microcosm for numerous aspects of Republican development in the Lone Star State. Funding flowed in from outside the state and was directed at converting conservative Texas Democrats to Republicanism based on anti-Carter and implied anti-liberal sentiment.⁸⁸

One of Reagan's greatest allies in Texas was Bill Clements, who had made Jimmy Carter's defeat a personal goal. Clements also served as the Campaign Chairman for Reagan-Bush in Texas.⁸⁹ Though he had largely been elected as a friend to Dallas and Houston big business, with some social conservative cross-over, Clements invested his political capital in 1980 into the mobilization of grassroots Texas conservatives. Clements raised over \$2.5 million in funds for the Reagan-Bush campaign in Texas, which embarked on the most gargantuan and successful grassroots Republican operation in the state's history. By the end of September, the Reagan-Bush campaign had over 30,000 volunteers staffing 50 phone centers in 39 cities across the state, each operating 66 hours per week. By Election Day, these call centers alone had

⁸⁶ Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982).

⁸⁷ White, *America in Search of Itself*.

⁸⁸ Memorandum II: Debate Strategy, Patrick H. Caddell, October 21, 1980, in: Drew, Elizabeth. *Portrait of an Election*, 417.

⁸⁹ Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Committee, October 14, 1980, Box 25, Annalise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

reached over 3 million Texans on behalf of the Reagan campaign.⁹⁰ The success of the call centers inspired the Carter campaign to attempt a similar grassroots mobilization in Texas, though with only \$400,000 raised and public animus against Carter running high, their efforts fell flat.⁹¹

Clements also spearheaded an organization known as the Texas Victory Committee. He and his wife, Rita, served on the board of this committee along with numerous other influential Texas Republicans, including Ernest Angelo, Jr. and former Goldwater and 1960s Republican guru Peter O'Donnell. In addition to overseeing operations at all 50 of the state's volunteer call centers, the Texas Victory Committee organized phone bank systems in 177 of Texas's 254 counties. The success of these call centers cannot be overstated. In addition to the massive reach achieved by these centers, the mobilization of grassroots conservatives under the control of the state GOP fostered a sense of party loyalty among middle-class, working-class, and rural conservatives. Such participation shifted the emotional connection of the grassroots away from one of a temporary, cross-voting protest to one of manifest partisan realignment. In early October, for instance, the Dallas County Reagan Phone Bank, because its call center had already reached its capacity of 5000 volunteer workers, had to turn away literally hundreds of supporters looking to donate their time on behalf of Reagan.⁹² The grassroots mobilization through these call centers in Texas is even more impressive when compared to similar activities in other states. In Florida only 19 call centers operated on behalf of the Reagan campaign, and of those, ten were professional and only nine were staffed by volunteers. West Virginia had ten volunteer phone banks working for Reagan, while Arkansas had only eight, Kentucky had two, Missouri three,

⁹⁰ Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Committee, October 14, 1980, Box 25, Annalise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

⁹¹ *US News & World Report*, October 13, 1980; *New York Times*, October 5, 1980. Box 3, Bill Boyarsky Papers, HI.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Oklahoma five, North Carolina three, South Carolina seven, and Mississippi had four. Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia had none.⁹³

The new power of the telephone, however, was not the state's only weapon in the public relations campaign for the hearts and minds of conservative Texans. The Texas Victory Committee also sent over 500,000 letters to undecided voters in the state, 84,000 letters to conservative voter groups active in various parts of the state, and 800,000 letters to rural voters.⁹⁴ As with its phone bank operations, Texas Republicans by far and away led their comrades in other states in the area of direct mail. By late October, Alabama Republicans had mailed only 10,000 letters to undecided voters. Kentucky and Oklahoma reported similar figures, while no Reagan-sponsored direct mail campaigns to undecided voters existed in Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, or West Virginia.⁹⁵

Throughout 1980, phone banks and direct mail helped reach hundreds of thousands of Texans on behalf of Reagan and conservative causes across the state. Yet, the Reagan-Bush campaign did not rest solely on these efforts. Instead, the campaign also organized dozens of special-interest voter groups designed to enlist and unite conservatives sharing common characteristics all on behalf of the Reagan election effort. Many of these national organizations found their driving force in Texas. For instance, Roger Staubach served as the national chairman for one of the most prominent of these voter groups, Athletes for Reagan-Bush. Staubach, a former Naval officer, Heisman Trophy winner, and Super Bowl-winning quarterback for the Dallas Cowboys, also enlisted the services of Houston Astros pitcher Nolan Ryan, Dallas

⁹³ Letter To: Bill Timmons, Fr: Bill Clements, Rita Clements, Ernest Angelo, Rick Shelby, Peter O'Donnell, Chet Upham, September 29, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL.

⁹⁴ Phone Bank and Direct Mail Operations by State, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Cowboys Head Coach Tom Landry, Cowboys Defensive Coordinator Ernie Stautner, and former Cowboy defensive standouts Bob Lilly and LeRoy Jordan. Four years earlier, NFL Films dubbed the Cowboys “America’s Team”; in 1980, America’s Team, whose very mascot recognized the heroic nature of the cowboy in American history, seemed to back Ronald Reagan.⁹⁶ Staubach’s support for Reagan was particularly effective in Texas. Admired and trusted far more than most politicians, Staubach used his stature in Texas to promote Reagan as an American necessity. In direct mailings, Staubach told Texans that he was not yet a registered Republican, but was voting for Reagan because he was “scared about what has happened to the United States under Jimmy Carter.” “To me,” Staubach continued, “a vote for Ronald Reagan in 1980 is a vote for the future of my children.”⁹⁷

Texas was also the operating home for the national “Hispanics for Reagan-Bush.” This organization was partly developed in response to the Texas Victory Committee’s assessment that its one weakness was in the need for advertisements reaching the state’s enormous Hispanic population.⁹⁸ With headquarters in Texas and a major branch of operations in California, Hispanics for Reagan-Bush helped organize Republican efforts and extend the party’s reach into Hispanic communities across the state. Voter Groups for Reagan-Bush reached almost every imaginable constituency. “Sportsmen and Conservationists for Reagan-Bush” operated in Texas, Pennsylvania, Florida, Illinois, and Ohio. “National Small Business for Reagan-Bush” operated in Texas, Oklahoma, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and California. Other voter groups actively supporting the Reagan campaign effort in Texas through direct mail,

⁹⁶ Press Release, October 30, 1980, Box 248, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Campaign Operations – Mike Deaver Files, RRL.

⁹⁷ Letter from Roger Staubach, October 25, 1980, Box 317, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Director of Citizens’ Operations – Max Hugel Files, RRL.

⁹⁸ Letter To: Bill Timmons, Fr: Bill Clements, Rita Clements, Ernest Angelo, Rick Shelby, Peter O’Donnell, Chet Upham, September 29, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL.

local meetings, and a general fostering of identification with Republican activities, included “Lawyers for Reagan-Bush,” “Realtors for Reagan-Bush,” “Seniors for Reagan-Bush,” “Veterans for Reagan-Bush,” and “Youth for Reagan-Bush.”⁹⁹ The Reagan campaign in Texas did a particularly effective job of mobilizing support among college students in state universities. This was accomplished through cooperative efforts with student groups like College Republicans and Young Republicans, who provided forays for the Reagan campaign into fraternity and sorority houses, agriculture clubs, and campus ROTC.¹⁰⁰

That Reagan’s campaign went out of its way to identify so many different voter groups, yet maintained a relatively consistent and simple message with each of them, reflects an important Republican strategy—and one that was essential to political transformations in Texas. Conservative Republicans made small interest groups and voting blocs feel recognized through organizations that came with Reagan’s backing. This contributed to Reagan’s persona as a common-man populist with an interest in the lives of ordinary Americans.¹⁰¹

Between 1976 and 1980, Jimmy Carter became a symbol of liberalism, much in the same way that Ronald Reagan was a symbol for conservatism. This association was also similar to the one that existed between Lyndon Johnson and liberalism a decade earlier, but was more potent and damaging in the political culture of the late 1970s than it had been in the 1960s. The potency of negatively associating Carter with liberalism was further highlighted by the visibility of economic and foreign policy failures.¹⁰² Loyalties to the Democratic Party were also undermined by conservative Republicans who used terms like liberal and Democrat almost

⁹⁹ General Files, Reagan-Bush Campaign, Box 379, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum, To: Chet Upham, Fr: “Wayne”, May 14, 1980, Box 412, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

¹⁰¹ Voter Group Files, Box 316, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Director of Citizens’ Operations – Max Hugel Files, RRL.

¹⁰² Memorandum II: Debate Strategy, Patrick H. Caddell, October 21, 1980, in: Elizabeth Drew, *Portrait of an Election*, 417.

interchangeably. Therefore, the more Jimmy Carter was associated with failure, the more failure was associated with liberalism, and liberalism was circularly associated with the Democratic Party. In essence, the marketing of political ideology developed into one of the most powerful strategic political weapons in the conservative arsenal of 1980.

Carter and the Democratic Party did not concede the battle over ideological perceptions without a fight. In Texas, Carter's predominant strategy for appealing to voters was to remind the state of its Democratic heritage.¹⁰³ When Carter was not overtly appealing to Democratic loyalties, he did so in more subtle ways—particularly by drawing connections between Texans and his administration. This strategy, which typically included little more than listing the cabinet-level officers from Texas serving in his administration, including Deputy Secretary of Defense Charles Duncan, Chairman of Civil Service Commission Scotty Campbell, and Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall, was designed to elicit a quasi-home state advantage in a Southern state that had been critical to Carter's success in 1976.¹⁰⁴ Throughout his campaign stops in Texas, Carter stressed his desire for ideological moderation and balance. Carter desperately tried to avoid the term "liberal," which made the word that much more potent a weapon in the rhetoric of his opponents. In fact, much of Carter's strategy in Texas can be seen as a quest for and against such associations.¹⁰⁵

Carter's attempt to appeal to Texans' Democratic loyalties rarely included discussions of specific issues, but rather focused on broad, national relationships and personalities. Reminding voters of their Democratic heritage was typically accompanied by broadly conceived vitriolic attacks against the Republican Party. Carter threw the word "Republican" around as if he were

¹⁰³ *Dallas Morning News*, November 1, 1980, 1A; *Dallas Morning News*, October 12, 1980, 14A.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977-1981), Jimmy Carter, 1978, 1157-1164.

¹⁰⁵ "The Next Four Years – Abilene, TX Sat. 11/1/80," 1980 Campaign Final Week [2], Box 21, Hendrik Hertzberg Collection, JCL.

speaking of evil itself, and routinely associated Republicans with “anti-populism.”¹⁰⁶ At a rally in Beaumont, Carter accepted a pair of cowboy boots and told his audience that he was going to use them to “stomp Republicans” and “step around all their horse manure.”¹⁰⁷ Among Carter’s biggest problems was that his opponent was popular in Texas for the same reasons Carter had been in 1976 and because he represented everything Carter was not in 1980. To be sure, undermining Reagan’s popularity in Texas was a daunting task. Initially, Carter hoped that charging Reagan with extremism would help, but when Reagan showed righteous indignation toward such attacks, Reagan appeared to be the victim of dirty politics.¹⁰⁸ Carter’s campaign advisors devised an initial strategy on how to diminish Reagan’s popularity in Texas. They hoped to plant fears in the minds of the voters that Reagan both lacked the intelligence necessary for the office and the necessary temperament to avoid international confrontations.¹⁰⁹ The more Carter visited Texas, however, the more that strategy proved ineffective and in need of change. By the end of the campaign, Carter spent far more time buttressing his own hawkish credentials than he spent critiquing the specifics of his opponent’s resume.¹¹⁰

Reagan’s campaign against Jimmy Carter in 1980 also reflected lessons learned from a decade and a half of Republican campaign strategies. Texas Republicans used Jimmy Carter as a symbol for Democratic and liberal failure. Texans were reminded of Carter’s inability to make good on many of his 1976 campaign promises, and these reminders were often used to undermine Carter’s honesty and ethics—both strengths he previously used to carry religious

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Campaign, from Operations Center, October 23, 1980, Box 23, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

¹⁰⁸ Memorandum to: Ronald Reagan, from: James Baker, Myles Martel, re: 10/28/80 Cleveland Debate Strategy, Box 134, Folder 6: Strategy Team, 1980. James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹⁰⁹ June 26, 1980 Memorandum for President Carter, From: Martin Franks, Subject: Reagan Research, Ronald Reagan File, Box 79, Staff Office Files, Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan, Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, JCL.

¹¹⁰ Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Campaign, from Operations Center, October 23, 1980, Box 23, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI; White, *America in Search of Itself*, 399-401.

conservatives in the state.¹¹¹ Reagan’s specific ability to turn Carter’s greatest assets in 1976—his honesty and ethics—against him in 1980 was a particular coup for the Republican presidential hopeful.¹¹² Conservatives made Jimmy Carter a main issue in the 1980 elections—not just at the presidential campaign level, but in campaigns at every level. Carter was accused of corruptions and abuses including leaking classified information, fudging on statistics, and misusing federal employees.¹¹³

Republicans gained some additional notoriety by reintroducing a “Truth Squad” to the campaign—this one operating as a watch dog on virtually everything Carter said in public appearances. The very existence of a “Reagan-Bush Truth Squad” contributed to distrust of Carter and government in general.¹¹⁴ Attacking Carter’s honesty successfully reminded Texas voters that corruption in Washington, DC was bipartisan. Adding to the perception that political corruption knew no partisan boundaries was the fact that Texas House Speaker and Democrat Billy Clayton had been on trial in Houston for the better part of the year, defending himself against allegations that he had illegally awarded insurance contracts for state employees. The Clayton scandal was widely reported throughout the state and made attacks against other Democrats, particularly Carter, seem more credible.¹¹⁵

Texas Republicans painted Carter as weak and incompetent, while Reagan blasted the incumbent president for being “missing in action”—a reference with military connotations to

¹¹¹ Memorandum to: Ronald Reagan, from: James Baker, Myles Martel, re: 10/28/80 Cleveland Debate Strategy, Box 134, Folder 6: Strategy Team, 1980, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹¹² Memorandum, September 5, 1980, To: All Republican Members, From: Paul Russo, Folder 10, Box 873, JTP.

¹¹³ White Paper on Incumbency Abuses by the Carter Administration, October 23, 1980, Box 20, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

¹¹⁴ Texas Political Brief, September 12, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL; Southern Region Files, Box 385, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

¹¹⁵ Texas Political Brief, September 12, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL.

Carter's lack of leadership in Washington. When Carter's ideology and moral integrity were not being called into question, his energy policy was. Conservative campaigns in Dallas and Houston typically focused on Carter's hostility toward to the oil industry. When Reagan used the energy issue, he rarely failed to mention America's dependency on foreign sources of oil or connect that dependency to the administration's problems in Iran. Reagan's ability to transform the perception of conservatism and negatively redefine liberalism as a failed philosophy was the result of Republican strategists' ability to mesh issues into one mammoth problem of incompetence, corruption, big government, and lack of moral leadership. State politics in Texas was being driven by national issues in 1980 to a greater extent than in previous years.¹¹⁶

One of the results that GOP efforts to redefine Carter, liberalism, and the Democratic Party engendered was a polarization of ideological interest groups in Texas. This polarization, however, meant that multiple conservative factions were drawn into the same Republican corner for the first time in Texas history. Conservative factions, divided within the Republican Party in 1976, coalesced under the Reagan banner in 1980, which resulted in the formation of a truly legitimate and viable second party in Texas. By 1980, conservative coalitions that operated at the national level began to operate more effectively in Texas. This trend resulted in far greater benefits for the state GOP and, in fact, contributed to the near collapse of the state Democratic Party. On the basis of Carter's liberalism, for instance, former conservative Democratic Governor Dolph Briscoe refused to support Carter in 1980, though he had done so—albeit reluctantly—in 1976.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ *Dallas Morning News*, April 3, 1980, 14A, 15A; *Dallas Morning News*, April 18, 1980, 9A; Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Campaign, from Operations Center, October 24, 1980, Box 23, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI; Memorandum to: Ronald Reagan, from: James A. Baker, re: Debate Strategy – Robert Teeter, September Box 134, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹¹⁷ Memorandum, To: Jerry Carmen, Fr: Rick Shelby, September 16, 1980, Box 406, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – Jerry Carmen Files, RRL.

Democrats were not oblivious to these trends, but in Texas, they also did not know how to combat them. Carter stressed—in addition to Texans’ Democratic loyalty and anti-Republicanism—his support for big labor, health care reform, equal rights for women and minorities, mass transit, and energy conservation. In Brownsville, Carter campaigned on bilingual education, his doubling of funds for student-aid programs, his expansion of head start programs to include migrant worker children, and promised to extend health care benefits to larger numbers of impoverished Mexican Americans. Carter’s appeals worked in South Texas, but were broadcast to the rest of the state so that Republican conservatives could decry further expansions of federal bureaucracy and inattention to middle class white issues.¹¹⁸

In San Antonio, Carter told audiences that a Republican president would mean the end of progressive social justice. In Abilene, Carter once again reverted to anti-Republicanism, though his advisors had pleaded with the President to give a speech on the centrality of religion in American life. In Fort Worth, Carter attacked Reagan as an extremist and outlined the various differences between Democrats and Republicans. Both Carter’s and Reagan’s campaigns were aware of the importance of tailoring campaign messages to the region, state, and locality being addressed, but Texas Republicans recognized sooner than did Democrats that the power of television meant that every speaking engagement was a speaking engagement with the entire state. As Carter altered his messages in every city, Reagan’s message remained consistent: Carter was incompetent, big government in Washington had gotten out of control and was acting as an enemy of the people, and the Soviet threat remained dangerous, especially as America’s military had been weakened under Democratic leadership.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ “Houston Rally,” 1980 Campaign Final Week [2], Box 21, Hendrik Hertzberg Collection, JCL.

¹¹⁹ “10/30/80 – Speeches for 11/1/80,” 1980 Campaign Final Week [2], Box 21, Hendrik Hertzberg Collection, JCL; Remarks of Geroge Bush at Republican BBQ, Midland, TX, October 7, 1980, Box 21, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

Though Carter's religion was, perhaps, more well-known than Reagan's, the Republican's relationship with the Texas religious establishment was far healthier. On August 22, Reagan spoke before the Religious Roundtable's National Affairs Briefing in Dallas. This event provided Texas Republicans with an opportunity to bolster its standing within the state by drawing from the momentum of a national event being held in Texas's most religiously active city. Leading up to the event, Reagan was terribly frustrated over how he should approach the speech in Texas and even told one advisor that he would just "wing it."¹²⁰ Ultimately, Reagan's speechwriters managed to craft a speech that was, in their words, "denominationally clean." The speech was also written with what Reagan's handlers called "code words"—meaning religious allusions that only evangelicals would pick up on, but that would illustrate a deep awareness of and commitment to fundamentalist Christianity.¹²¹

Regardless of how Reagan arrived at the podium to address an audience full of socially conservative evangelicals in Dallas, the result was a smashing success. Reagan preached the authority of scripture, calling it "God-breathed," as adeptly as would a pastor. He articulated the need for America to revive its ethical code based on Biblical standards.¹²² He lamented America's "moral decline" and related that decline to increased "peril [faced] from atheist tyranny abroad." Reagan's speech even drew the praise of national Jewish leaders, not just for its reassertion of support for Israel, but also because of Reagan's general stand on morality and ethics.¹²³ Reagan did something else with this speech—something that was tactically brilliant in light of Texas's Democratic heritage and his awareness that Carter would be using that heritage

¹²⁰ "Friends" lead-in to Reagan Speech, 1980, Aug. 22, Typescript, Box 12, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

¹²¹ Memorandum, To: Ed Meese, Bill Gavin, and Mike Deaver, Fr: Bill Gribbin, Box 437, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Speech Files, RRL.

¹²² "Friends" lead-in to Reagan Speech, 1980, Aug. 22, Typescript, Box 12, Deaver & Hannaford Papers, HI.

¹²³ Memorandum, To: Ed Meese, Bill Gavin, and Mike Deaver, Fr: Bill Gribbin, Box 437, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Speech Files, RRL.

as his chief strategy in Texas. Reagan evoked sympathy and camaraderie from the evangelical crowd by linking Carter's attacks against him and other Republicans to Christ's warnings that Christians would endure persecution. In doing this, Reagan established a common enemy with his audience. We are "all persecuted together by Democrats and liberals," Reagan said.¹²⁴

Reagan's appearance in Dallas solidified his support among evangelicals in Texas by successfully demonstrating a credible awareness of Biblical teachings and then linking those teachings to modern America's problems. Reagan's appearance at the Religious Roundtable's National Affairs Briefing in Dallas was such a brilliant political success that the campaign included the text of the speech in new brochures distributed to churches throughout the state.¹²⁵

Texas Republicans benefited from the infusion of social conservatism into the mainstream of political discourse. Much of this was the result of Reagan's campaign and the national following that that campaign brought with it to Texas. Reagan made numerous personal appearances at churches across the state during the campaign, including one memorable stop to the First Baptist Church of Dallas, where he was welcomed by the famed pastor, Dr. W. A. Criswell.¹²⁶ Reagan also enjoyed the support of Dr. Abner McCall, the Baylor University President who had famously taken a stand against *Playboy's* recruitment of Baylor coeds to appear nude in the pages of its magazine earlier that year. McCall led the McClennan County Reagan-Bush campaign and drew the support of numerous other rural Baptists in the county, most of whom had supported Carter in 1976.¹²⁷ Reagan's relationship with Texas religious organizations was so tight that by October, Robert Strauss, himself a Dallasite and the Chairman

¹²⁴ "Roundtable Speech in Dallas: Religious Values and Public Policy in the 1980s," Box 437, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Speech Files, RRL.

¹²⁵ Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan, the Roundtable National Affairs Briefing, Dallas, TX, August 22, 1980, Box 10, Fred C. Ikle Papers, HI.

¹²⁶ Oran Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 62.

¹²⁷ Texas Political Brief, September 12, 1980, Box 253, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL.

of the Carter-Mondale Committee, publicly charged that multiple churches and religious organizations had merged illegally with political action committees to raise money for Reagan.¹²⁸

Texas Republicans capitalized on Reagan's coattails to attract the loyalty of social conservatives.¹²⁹ State Republicans established cooperative relationships with organizations like Texas Right to Life, which also appealed to Christians in Texas in tandem with the Stop-ERA movement and the Moral Majority. Republicans tailored their messages on social issues in such a way that the same message could be presented to multiple single-issue groups. In other words, Texas Republicans managed to maintain consistency with Reagan's national campaign while, at the same time, addressing the specific concerns of a wide array of single-issue grassroots movements.¹³⁰ On ERA, for instance, Reagan's position included the argument that ERA was not necessary because such provisions were already provided for by the 14th amendment. Reagan did not, however, let that be his only response. He always followed this up by linking ERA to other examples of bureaucratic expansion and intrusion into the private sphere, thus connecting the proposed amendment to busing and other court orders unpopular in the state. Reagan furthermore tied all of this back to the notion that only a shift in America's moral fiber would ultimately solve these social problems. This strategy enabled Texas Republicans to successfully relate to multiple conservative factions through a single message.¹³¹

Texas Republicans promoted the friendship of their party with the state's evangelical community. In July, at a Christian booksellers convention in Dallas attended by over 15,000 evangelicals, the Reagan campaign spent \$1000 to have a "Reagan Info Booth" distributing \$20,000 worth of "Reagan vs. Carter Issues Tracts"—about 500,000 such tracts—to 5000

¹²⁸ *Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1980, 37A.

¹²⁹ Memorandum for the Governor, September 15, 1980, Box 134, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹³⁰ Detailing of US Pro-Life Organizations – Single Issue Groups, Box 301, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Director of Citizens' Operations – Max Hugel Files, RRL.

¹³¹ Memorandum for the Governor, September 15, 1980, Box 134, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

bookstores for handout across the convention and, then, in bookstores all across Texas. The success of these efforts in Texas prompted the spending of an additional \$35,000 to mail 225,000 of the same tracts to Protestant and Catholic clergy nationwide. The Republican courtship of evangelicals created a sense of importance among religious conservatives and fostered an appreciation toward conservatives like Reagan who appeared to be sincerely interested in attracting Christian support.¹³²

In Texas, these efforts resulted in an overflow of correspondence from evangelicals, each expressing concern over a multiplicity of issues, but all sharing a single-minded and committed support for Reagan's campaign against liberalism. Some Texans detailed their own conversion to Reagan Republicanism. Many expressed a reticence to believe that Reagan was sincere in his conviction for God, alluding to long-held perceptions of Republicans as "politically motivated" and friends "only of the rich." As pastors, lay leaders, and average church goers wrote the Reagan campaign of their support for the Republican fight against ERA, humanism, socialism, communism, abortion, evolution, taxes, and a host of other things, the relationship between social conservatives in Texas and the Republican Party grew much more secure.¹³³

Defense issues and a generally hawkish conservative climate further contributed to both Reagan's and the Republican Party's success among conservatives in Texas. Every political opponent Reagan had ever faced unsuccessfully tried to play the foreign policy card against him. Fears that Reagan could potentially push the nuclear button, however, were overshadowed in Texas by his promise to revitalize the American military and win the peace through strength.

¹³² Detailing of US Pro-Life Organizations – Single Issue Groups, Box 301, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Director of Citizens' Operations – Max Hugel Files, RRL.

¹³³ Religious Correspondence, Letter, To: Ronald Reagan, From: Sandra Pratt Martin, August 29, 1980, Letter, To: Ronald Reagan, From: Majorie Gunnerson, October 24, 1980, Box 342, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Director of Citizens' Operations – Max Hugel Files, RRL; Religious Correspondence, Box 343, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Director of Citizens' Operations – Max Hugel Files, RRL.

The potential economic windfall from a renewed federal investment into military production spurred Reagan's popularity in Texas, particularly in communities like Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio, where the military industrial complex had contributed to those cities' economic good fortune since the 1960s.¹³⁴

Many Texans were encouraged by the potential economic benefit of a Reagan-led military, but far more were attracted to the emotional elements of a patriotic renewal of American prestige and power across the globe. In San Antonio, for instance, Henry Cisneros, then a pro-Carter city councilman, remarked to one reporter that "Carter's hole card was that Reagan would be seen as a horrible alternative. But so far, he doesn't look that horrible. He goes out and talks to the working people in language they can understand." Lyndon Johnson's former press secretary and longtime Texas political insider, George Christian, privately began telling Carter campaign officials as early as September that the national defense issue would be as strongly anti-Democratic in Texas as it had been in 1972, when George McGovern's failed campaign helped redefine and imbue notions of liberalism with inherent military weakness. With Reagan promising to restore American pride and prestige to pre-Vietnam levels, a promise that came with hope for increased financial benefits to much of the state, Carter's foreign policy failures were magnified in Texas.¹³⁵

Reagan also enjoyed a relatively prosperous courtship of Hispanic voters in Texas. In 1976, Gerald Ford carried only 13 percent of Hispanic voters in the state. In 1980, Reagan's Texas campaign team hoped to capitalize on several legitimate opportunities to garner as much as 25 percent of the state's Hispanic vote. With Clements and Tower leading the charge,

¹³⁴ *Dallas Morning News*, April 3, 1980, 14A, 15A.

¹³⁵ Interview Transcripts, ABC Affiliate in Houston, broadcast in Tyler, September 24, 1980, Box 10, Fred C. Ikle Papers, HI; *Washington Post*, September 14, 1980, Box 483, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Research & Policy Files, RRL

Republicans believed they were on the cusp, not of winning a majority of the Hispanic vote, but of siphoning off a significant chunk from one of the Democratic liberal establishment's most loyal voter blocs.¹³⁶

The Reagan campaign's efforts to attract Texas Hispanic voters were successful for four reasons. First, Reagan made numerous personal appearances before Hispanic crowds in Texas. On September 16—Diez y Seis de Septiembre, (Mexican Independence Day, most commonly celebrated in Texas and Southwest border states)—Reagan spoke to a crowd of Hispanics in Harlingen, appealing to those in attendance on the basis of community, tradition, freedom, independence, and the value of work. Observers noted Reagan's ability to connect with Hispanics' sense of hope for a better future, but were also impressed by the Republican Party's acknowledgement of political neglect in these communities.¹³⁷ Thus, the second reason Reagan was able to earn the support of many Texas Hispanics was his ability to capitalize on a pervasive distrust and dislike of Jimmy Carter. Reagan blamed Carter and other Democrats for failing to deliver on their promises to Texas Hispanics. He then promised to do better. Lack of enthusiasm and distrust were the biggest negatives for Carter among Hispanics in the state, and contributed to the Democratic Party's demise in 1980.¹³⁸ Reagan's message and appeal to Hispanics in Texas built upon its own momentum and maintained an active presence throughout the fall. Reagan's attention to this community emboldened state leaders to do the same, created a sense of urgency and opportunity, and broadened the GOP's focus in the Lone Star State.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Texas Political Brief, October 26, 1980: Office of Policy Coordination, Box 25, Annelise G. Anderson Papers, HI; Voter Groups – Hispanics and American Indians, Box 256, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Political Operations – William Timmons Files, RRL.

¹³⁷ Fall Campaign Trips – Texas, Box 145, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ed Meese Files, RRL.

¹³⁸ Memorandum, From: Alex Armendaris, To: Bill Timmons, October 5, 1980, Box 387, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

¹³⁹ Fall Campaign Trips – Texas, Box 145, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ed Meese Files, RRL.

The third main reason for Reagan's and Republican success among Hispanics in 1980 was that Bill Clements went out of his way to soften the GOP's image among Hispanics in Texas, and largely succeeded. However, Hispanic appointments to jobs and positions of influence in state government had to be publicized in order to gain the desired effect. Clements successfully used the Texas press to inform the state's Hispanic population of his appointments, but also used the media to communicate a host of other ideas and statements, all of which collectively softened the party's image in the state.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the fourth reason why Texas Hispanics supported Reagan in larger-than-expected numbers in 1980 can be explained by showing how meticulous GOP strategists were in shaping their appeals to this traditionally Democratic bloc. The Reagan campaign saturated Spanish-speaking television stations with advertisements lauding the virtues of the GOP and disparaging the Democratic Party and its presidential ticket.¹⁴¹ In October, Reagan strategists in Texas mailed over 250,000 letters to Texans with Spanish surnames. The mailing included a brochure outlining the differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties in Texas on various social issues of particular importance in Catholic communities.¹⁴² Reagan even personally received tips on how to interact in Mexican-American and Hispanic settings. He was told to refer often to the culture, tradition, and pride of these communities in his speeches. He was told to always emphasize family, neighborhood, dignity, and self-respect. When listing ethnic minority groups in Texas whose problems had not been adequately addressed by the Democratic Party, Reagan was told to mention Hispanics first. Reagan was also given a list of don'ts. He was told not to refer to

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Campaign, from Operations Center, October 5, 1980, Box 23, Annalise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

¹⁴¹ Memorandum for Reagan-Bush Committee, October 14, 1980, Box 25, Annalise G. Anderson Papers, HI.

¹⁴² Memorandum, From: Alex Armendaris, To: Bill Timmons, October 5, 1980, Box 387, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

“Chicanos” or “Latinos.” He was also told never to wear “Mexican-style” clothing or refer to the Alamo, “Illegals,” or speak Spanish. Republican efforts to court Hispanic votes in Texas succeeded because the party’s figurehead publicly prioritized this minority group, appealed to its social heritage, and avoided obvious and insincere attempts to establish common ground outside of the issues. Reagan avoided offending Hispanics and succeeded in more than doubling the number of votes Ford received from that community in 1976.¹⁴³

In 1980, Texas Republicans did a better job of public relations than did Democrats. The success of these initiatives, accomplished through direct mailings, press releases, public appearances, television commercials, and a simplified, yet effectively constructed message, broke down barriers that stood in the way of a conservative realignment into the state’s Republican Party. With Ronald Reagan acting as the state party’s most recognizable figurehead, Texas Republicans enjoyed widespread social acceptability among conservatives, moderates, and even increasing numbers of state Hispanics. Virtually every Reagan-Bush campaign center across Texas submitted weekly reports to the state and national campaign requesting increased supplies of brochures, buttons, bumper stickers, and yard signs. Walk-in traffic to these headquarters was heavy, the consumption of Reagan-Bush advertising seemed insatiable, and word of such flurries of activity became hot topics of conversation in local restaurants, grocery stores, and neighborhoods across Texas.¹⁴⁴ The conservative message made use of a common set of core principles, values, and beliefs while simultaneously depicting Democrats as the proponents of an outdated, unfair, Leftist, extremist, and ineffective set of principles, values, and beliefs.

¹⁴³ “Suggested Do’s and Don’t’s for TX Trip,” Box 439, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Speech Files, RRL.

¹⁴⁴ General Files, Reagan-Bush Campaign, Box 377, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

Reagan's media strategy in Texas also offered a glimpse into future GOP efforts. In Reagan's earliest radio ads placed in Texas, Carter, who—along with his administration—was referred to disparagingly as “them,” was identified as responsible for the nation's ills. Reagan appealed to young voters worried about getting jobs in the “Carter Economy.”¹⁴⁵ Reagan's handlers were also supremely confident in their candidate's television savvy.¹⁴⁶ Republican pollster Richard Wirthlin told Reagan that he was “the best electronic media candidate in history” and encouraged the GOP presidential nominee to use his humor to disarm Carter while, at the same time, using his public appearances to stress optimism in contrast to Carter's pessimism and “acquiescence to mediocrity.”¹⁴⁷

Reagan received encouragement and advice from a host of media advisors and campaign strategists, but also from ex-political figures. In September, Richard Nixon wrote to Reagan that, “In the final analysis, in a close election it comes down to how people look at the two men. You come over on TV like gangbusters and, despite his glibness with facts and figures, [Carter] comes over like a little man.”¹⁴⁸ As good as Reagan was with the media, Carter's campaign appearances in Texas floundered. Carter's appearances in Texas were usually scheduled in the heat of the day, which noticeably annoyed the press team following him. Additionally, the press corps traveling with the President had been hammering Carter for not establishing a clearer theme in his campaign, and belittled the retreats of anti-Republican and Democratic-loyalty messages to which Carter almost always reverted. Furthermore, the cloud of the Iran-Hostage Crisis typically followed Carter to each campaign stop, where local reporters couched the

¹⁴⁵ Political Field Operations, Texas Ads, Box 376, Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan, 1980 Campaign Files, Regional Political Files, RRL.

¹⁴⁶ Memorandum to: Ronald Reagan, from: James A. Baker, re: Debate Strategy – Robert Teeter, September Box 134, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹⁴⁷ Memorandum to: Ronald Reagan, from: Richard Wirthlin, re: Summary of the Debate Strategy. October 24, 1980, Box 134, Folder 6: Strategy Team, 1980, James A. Baker Papers, SGML.

¹⁴⁸ Letter from Richard Nixon to Ronald Reagan, September 12, 1980, Box 134, A. Baker Papers, SGML.

President's appearance in Texas as critically important to his re-election prospects.¹⁴⁹ The day following the final nationally televised presidential debate, during which Carter responded to a question about which issue he believed was most important by telling the audience which issue his 13-year old daughter Amy thought was most important, Reagan stumped across Texas mockingly asking rhetorical questions to the crowd, which then responded in unison, "Ask Amy! Ask Amy!"¹⁵⁰ Carter lost the image battle to Reagan in Texas and the nation in 1980 not simply because he was on the wrong side of popular opinion on a host of issues, or because a revitalized GOP attracted a host of traditionally Democratic voters, but also because in the war for public opinion, conservatism seemed patriotic and practical while liberalism appeared outdated, extreme, and failed.

Ronald Reagan helped recast conservatism not as an ideology, but as a populist worldview through which the residual disillusionment from the turbulent 1960s and malaise-ridden 1970s would be exiled from the American consciousness. Texans conservatives embraced that image. On the night before the election, Reagan spoke to a national audience. His speech captured the essence of his popularity in states like Texas:

Not so long ago, we emerged from a world war. Turning homeward at last, we built a grand prosperity and hoped—from our own success and plenty—to help others less fortunate. Our peace was a tense and bitter one, but in those days the center seemed to hold. Then came the hard years: riots and assassinations, domestic strife over the Vietnam War and in the last four years, drift and disaster in Washington.

Reagan then invoked the name of an old friend: John Wayne. Wayne's death in 1979 was received in the press with headlines like, "The LAST American Hero" and "Mr. America Dies." "Well," Reagan said, "I knew John Wayne well, and no one would have been angrier at being called the LAST American hero. Just before his death, he said in his own blunt way, 'Just give

¹⁴⁹ Transcript, October 20-23, 1980, CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite, Box 2M758, Walter Cronkite Papers, CAH.

¹⁵⁰ White, *America in Search of Itself*, 404-407.

the American people a good cause, and there's nothing they can't lick." He continued: "I find no national malaise, I find nothing wrong with the American people. Oh, they are frustrated, even angry at what has been done to this blessed land. But more than anything they are sturdy and robust as they have always been." Reagan ended his speech with a story about tourism in Washington DC, saying, "These visitors to that city on the Potomac do not come as white or black, red or yellow; they are not Jews or Christians; conservatives or liberals; or Democrats or Republicans. They are Americans awed by what has gone before, proud of what for them is still ... a shining city on a hill."¹⁵¹

Conclusion

Jimmy Carter and the Democratic Party could not overcome the collision of forces working together against them in Texas during 1980. The state's economy was thriving, though no credit was given to Carter. Instead, Carter and the Democratic Party seemed to threaten the basis for that economic surge, specifically on issues of energy and defense. The Texas economy attracted Americans from across the nation who helped diffuse the anti-Republican tradition that had previously gripped the state during elections. These factors contributed to the rise of thriving suburbs in areas like Dallas, where the social activism of evangelical Christians was among the most pronounced and influential in the nation. The rise of suburbia and the growing respectability of Republicanism were not unrelated or unforeseen phenomena in other parts of the nation. Yet, the way in which Texas's economy was diversified, the unique role of racial diversification in the state, and the overall size and importance of Texas to national realignment gave Texas a unique position and regional identity. Whereas Ronald Reagan carried Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee each by less than two

¹⁵¹ News Release, Television Address by Governor Ronald Reagan: A Vision for America, November 3, 1980, Box 1, Peter Hannaford Papers, HI.

percent in 1980, his margin of victory in Texas was a comfortable 14 points. Though Texas had remained more loyal to the Democratic Party in past elections than had other Southern states, by 1980, the state had progressed beyond that of many of its Southern neighbors and its loyalties evolved into a much more national brand of conservatism.

In Texas, the GOP's drive for legitimate second party status and the momentum of modern American conservatism cooperated to usher in the Reagan Revolution by way of a perfect Republican storm. The aftermath of the storm was far easier to understand in 1980 than were the storm's origins. The *Texas Observer* editorialized that the elections of 1980 had served as a "neutron bomb" on the state Democratic Party.¹⁵² *Texas Monthly* declared the 1980 elections to be the death knell in what was left of modern American liberalism.¹⁵³ The real victor in 1980 was conservatism, but its chief beneficiary was the Republican Party. The conservative triumph and Republican Ascendancy in Texas resulted from the coalescence of factions under the national and then state Republican tent and the corresponding splintering of the New Deal coalition into interest groups and minority voter blocs that did not exist or behave in Texas in the same way that they existed and behaved in other parts of the nation. The process of conservative coalescence and liberal fragmentation was spurred forward in Texas by a host of social, economic, and demographic forces that emerged together to alter ideological perceptions and foment partisan realignment. No single issue or movement can be credited with the formation of modern Republicanism in Texas, or for that matter, modern American conservatism. Changes in ideological perception and partisan allegiance were far more complex and nuanced. Stymied for nearly two decades, the perfect storm that Texas Republicans had long waited for had finally arrived.

¹⁵² *Texas Observer*, November 28, 1980, 3-4.

¹⁵³ *Texas Monthly*, December 1980, 5.

CHAPTER 8 EPILOGUE: DEEP IN THE HEART OF REPUBLICAN TEXAS

In 1984, the city of Dallas was chosen—in no small part because of its proclivity to affluent business leaders and its sprawling base of social conservatives—as the host city for the Republican National Convention. Twenty years earlier, Ronald Reagan had been the lone bright spot in Barry Goldwater’s futile campaign against the Texan and incumbent President, Lyndon Johnson. In 1984, Reagan accepted his re-nomination for president in Johnson’s home state, where Democratic loyalties had long since begun to fade. Just 21 years since the very mention of Dallas conjured images of motorcades, assassinations, and shame, Ronald Reagan—the standard-bearer for a new generation of Republican conservatives—accepted his re-nomination for the presidency less than one mile from Dealey Plaza. To be sure, times had changed. The Dallas of 1984 was the Dallas of fictional oil baron and ruthless businessman J.R. Ewing. It was the Dallas of “America’s Team,” led by their evangelical Christian and successful Head Coach, Tom Landry. And it was home for a thriving base of conservative Reagan Republicans. The 1984 Republican National Convention became both Texas’s and Dallas’s opportunity to showcase itself afresh to the nation.¹

Between 1963 and 1980, Texans’ loyalties were challenged, traditions retired, and politics changed. The Lone Star State’s transformation from a bedrock of Yellow-dog Democratic tradition to one of conservative Sunbelt Republicanism did not occur overnight, nor was it shaped by any single issue or cause. Certainly, economics was a key. Several new industries descended upon the state, diversifying the economic climate and contributing to what became the nations’ best economy for much of the sixties and seventies. Race also played a

¹ “Protester Campsite Brief,” August 9, 1984, Box 19, Folder 1, Republican National Convention Archives, City of Dallas, 1983-84, Dallas Public Library, Erik Jonsson Central Branch, Dallas, Texas.

major role. As African-American enfranchisement heightened the importance of minority voting in Texas, as it did in the rest of the South, diversity and liberalism came to dominate the Democratic Party, pushing many white conservatives, initially against their will, to the GOP. The role that race played in shaping political participation in Texas mirrored, in many ways, the role played by race in the rest of the South. Yet the role played by Hispanics in Texas also made the state's racial climate much more complex. Republicans were far more successful in attracting Hispanics to the broadening Texas GOP tent, but did so by way of cultural and religious appeals, not economic or overtly political ones. The Texas GOP's success in this regard was made increasingly possible by the larger role such issues were playing among white audiences, as well. A revival in politically active evangelical Christians suddenly and forcefully began to alter the state's political agenda in the early 1970s, while, at the same time, government itself seemed less and less capable of solving the problems of crime, chaos, and disorder that so many Americans had, in the past, turned to government to solve. These and other issues collectively helped to fuel a perfect storm, so to speak, ushering in all the necessary elements for sweeping and dramatic political change.

Yet, even the combination of these impulses does not fully explain the transformations gripping Texas during this time. To be sure, image, perception, and iconography undoubtedly played as central a role in this transformation as did anything else. As Dallas experienced a resurrection of its own image thanks to highly-rated television dramas, successful football teams, and Reagan himself, Republicanism in Texas became the recognized and respectable home for state conservatives. Despite tangible changes in voter behavior, this evolution was also largely visceral and intangible in nature. It was about hearts and minds. Throughout the 1980s, Texas Republicans continued to embrace the support of its traditional base—affluent elites—but also

welcomed in droves the support of, as Jim Hightower once called them, “disgruntled mavericks.” These mavericks, not to be confused with, what in 1984, was the mascot of Dallas’s relatively new professional basketball franchise, were comprised of working class populists, evangelical Christians, suburban middle class traditionalists and aspiring business leaders, college-aged fraternity and sorority members, and older citizens who blamed the decadence of the sixties and selfishness of the seventies on the failures of liberalism and the national Democratic Party. This was a coalition as diverse, at least in terms of agendas and interests, as the one it replaced and based on the coalescence of various strands of conservative thought against a singular definition of liberalism as a failed, weak, and outdated political philosophy.

In contrast, conservatives like Reagan constructed an image whereby the Republican Party became the voice of the people. In Reagan’s America, it was the Republican Party that spoke to patriotism, tradition, and faith. It was the Republican Party which sought to eliminate race from the political discourse, publicly conceiving of all citizens as non-hyphenated Americans. It was the Republican Party that wanted to lower, not raise taxes. It was the Republican Party that defended faith and religion. And it was Thomas Jefferson, long-embraced as the father of the Democratic Party, whom Ronald Reagan grew so fond of quoting—for Jefferson represented the Founding Fathers, the revolution against tyranny, the demand for power to the people, and a respect—at least in rhetoric—for the central place that faith played in shaping America’s ideals.²

In 1998, the historian Joseph J. Ellis wrote of Thomas Jefferson’s political genius in the context of his timelessness as an icon for American values. “A crucial component of Jefferson’s genius,” Ellis wrote, “was his ability to project his vision of American politics at a level of generalization that defied specificity and in a language that seemed to occupy an altitude where

² See also Garry Wills, *Reagan’s America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988).

one felt obliged to look up and admire without being absolutely certain about the details.”³

Much the same can be said of Ronald Reagan, who, at the 1992 Republican National Convention in Houston, stole a page from the Democratic playbook of just four years earlier, by saying that he had known and was a friend of Jefferson’s and that the Democratic presidential nominee of that year, Bill Clinton, was no Thomas Jefferson.⁴

Texas has continued to play a pivotal role in shaping national politics since the 1980s. Houston’s George Bush ran for and won the presidency in 1988, earning a measure of revenge against the man who had defeated him in the 1970 Senate race—Lloyd Bentsen. Bentsen ran in 1988 as the Democratic Party’s vice presidential nominee, alongside former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. Despite a 17-point lead in the polls following the Democratic National Convention that summer, the Democratic ticket was soundly defeated in November 1988, thanks largely to image warfare fought primarily with some of the era’s most vicious campaign commercials. Those advertisements positioned the campaign as a battle between what a majority of Texans saw as a contest between patriotic conservatism and malaise-ridden and failed liberalism.⁵ Bill Clinton won two terms to the White House in the 1990s, but failed to carry Texas in either of his campaigns. The polarizing Clinton presidency pushed still more Texans into the Republican Party and, in 2000, the GOP gave its presidential nomination to Texas Governor George W. Bush and his running mate, Dick Cheney, who—despite an official Wyoming residency—had deep ties both to the Reagan and Bush administrations of the 1980s, as well as the Houston oil industry of the 1990s. In two tightly fought national campaigns, the

³ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 217.

⁴ Reagan’s line was, of course, inspired by Lloyd Bentsen’s similar statement from the 1988 Vice Presidential Debate against Dan Quayle, during which Bentsen told audiences that Quayle was “no Jack Kennedy.”

⁵ Kathleen H. Jamieson, *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 459-484.

junior Bush would win eight years in the White House, carrying his home state of Texas with ease on both occasions.

The Republican and corresponding conservative ascendancies gripping the nation through much of the 1980s and 1990s had deep roots in Texas. By 2002, those roots were finally and fully evident at the state and local levels. Traditions and loyalties died harder at these levels than they did at the national level, where iconography was more easily and effectively employed as a barometer of ideological loyalties. Yet the early years of the new millennium found Republicans in control of every statewide office in Texas, both houses of the state legislature, and both of the state's U.S. Senate seats. For decades, Texas Republicans and liberal Texas Democrats had worked toward the same goal—a two-party state. Texas liberals, in cooperation with moderate Democrats, eventually succeeded in ousting the conservatives from control of the Texas Democratic Party. Eventually, Texas Republicans also succeeded, and emerged, not simply as a viable second party, but as the dominant party in what some liberal Democrats have lamented is once again a one-party state.

One of the goals of this study was to make a statement about Texas's regional identity. Alas, no such conclusion can be drawn other than to say that, perhaps, Texas is its own regional identity. Texas was and is a Southern state. Texas was and is a Western state. Texas was and is a Southwestern state, and Texas was and is a state that continues to expand as people from all over the nation move into the heart of the Sunbelt, looking for new jobs, career changes, and low taxes. Talk to a Texan about his or her home state and you'll likely hear stories of independence, individualism, and state pride. You might be told that Texas is the only state in the Union which has the authority to fly its state flag at the same height as the American flag. You might be reminded that Texas was once its own country. You might also learn that Democrats don't stand

much of a chance at winning statewide elections anymore. Is Texas a truly two-party state?

Yes, the Democratic Party is more powerful at the dawn of the new millennium than the GOP was for much of the twentieth century. But GOP dominance in the Lone Star State was certainly entrenched with a vengeance as the dawn of a new century appeared on the vast Texas horizon.

Understanding how that transformation took place necessitates more research and analysis than this study has been able to provide. More needs to be done on the complexity of race in Texas, particularly the dynamic between African Americans and Hispanics—as well as the class dimensions that inform understandings of race and whiteness. More certainly needs to be done on the rise and nature of Christian evangelical conservatism in Texas, particularly in cities like Dallas, where the rise of such impulses coincided with rapid and massive suburbanization—yet another aspect in need of more detailed treatment. It has been this author's sincere hope to provide in this study the foundational introduction for future explorations into the complexity of Texas politics during the final decades of the twentieth century. Showing that political transformations in Texas happened in the context of what this author has chosen to call a “perfect storm,” is, in and of itself, an important contribution. Understanding the complexity of each element to this storm is the next step on the road to understanding the depth of the political heart of Texas.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Archival and Manuscripts Sources

Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin

Dolph Briscoe Papers
George Christian Papers
Walter Cronkite Papers
Harris County Democratic Party Records, 1952-1977
Phillip Scheffler Papers
Stephen Shadegg Papers / Barry Goldwater Collection
Alan Shivers Papers
Ralph W. Yarborough Papers

Cushing Library, Texas A&M University, College Station

William P. Clements Papers

Dallas Public Library, J. Erik Jonsson Central Branch, Dallas, Texas

Republican National Convention Archives, City of Dallas, 1983-84

George Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville

Papers of the Republican Party [microform]

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Papers, 1974-1977
Ron Nessen Papers, 1974-1977
Presidential Briefing Book
Presidential Handwriting Files
White House Operations, Richard Cheney Files, 1974-1977
White House Press Secretary's Office:
 David Gergen Files
 Ron Nessen Files, 1974-77
President Ford Committee Records, 1975-76

Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, CA

Bill Boyarsky Papers
Citizens for Reagan Papers
Kathryn R. Davis Papers
Donald M. Dozer Papers
John Ehrlichman Papers

Deaver & Hannaford, Inc. Papers
Annelise Graebner Anderson Papers
Peter Hannaford Papers
Fred Charles Iklé Papers
Denison Kitchel Papers
John McLaughry Papers
New Left Collection
Ronald Reagan Subject Collection
David Stoll Collection
Charls E. Walker Papers

Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta, Georgia

Jimmy Carter Papers (Pre-Presidential), 1976 Campaign Files
Jimmy Carter Presidential Papers, 1977-1981
Office of the Assistant to the President for Communications
Office of the Assistant for Public Outreach: Robert Lee Maddox's Subject Files
Office of Public Liaison:
 Margaret Costanza Files
 Bob Maddox (Religious Liaison) Files
Records of the Office of the Assistant to the President for Women's Affairs:
Records of the Office of Congressional Liaison, Frank Moore Files
Records of the Office of Hispanic Affairs, 1979-1981
Records of the Speechwriter's Office, 1977-1981
Staff Office Files:
 Cabinet Secretary and Assistant for Intergovernmental Affairs
 Chief of Staff, Hamilton Jordan
 Domestic Policy Staff, Stu Eizenstat
 First Lady's Staff
 Press Office, Jody Powell
 Office of the Staff Secretary
 White House Central Files Subject File, 1977-1981: Texas
 White House Central Name File: John Tower
Hendrik Hertzberg Papers, 1977-1981
George D. Moffett Files, 1977-1985
Carlton Neville Collection, 1976-1977

John Tower Library, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas

John Knaggs Papers
John G. Tower Papers

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, University of Texas at Austin

George Christian Papers
John Connally Papers

Democratic National Committee Papers
Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Papers, 1963-1969
National Security File, 1963-1969, Subject Files
Office Files of the White House Aides
George Christian Files
Richard N. Goodwin Files
Harry C. McPherson Files
Bill Moyers Files
Frederick Panzer Files
George E. Reedy Files
White House Central Files, Subject Files
Political Affairs
Public Relations
States—Territories
White House Name Files
Richard Nixon
Ronald Reagan
Reference File: 1968 Campaign
Texas State Democratic Committee Papers

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California

Governor Ronald Reagan Papers, 1967-1975
Research Files
The Pre-Presidential Papers of Ronald Reagan
1980 Campaign Files
Briefing Material Files
Campaign Operations—Mike Deaver Files
Director of Political Operations—William Timmons Files
Director of Citizens' Operations—Max Hugel Files
Hannaford / California Headquarters Files
Ed Meese Files, 1976-1980
Political Operations (Jerry Carmen) Files
Regional Political Files
Speech Files (Robert Garrick and Bill Gavin)
Research and Policy Files
Richard Wirthlin—Political Strategy Files

Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey

James A. Baker III Papers
George S. McGovern Papers

Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University, Lubbock

Waggoner Carr Papers

Kent Hance Papers
George Mahon Papers
Preston Smith Papers

Oral Histories

Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, University of Texas, Austin

Billy Graham
John G. Tower

Printed Primary Sources

The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1963-1969.
Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965-1970.

The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1969-1974.
Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1974.

The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Gerald R. Ford, 1974-1977.
Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974-1977.

The Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: James E. Carter, 1977-1981.
Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977-1981.

Newspapers, Magazines, and Periodicals

Austin American-Statesman
Daily Texan
Dallas Morning News
Houston Chronicle
Lubbock Avalanche-Journal
National Review
New York Times
Texas Monthly
Texas Observer

Audiovisual Material

Firing Line. Hosted by William F. Buckley, Audiovisual material, 1966-1999. Hoover Institution Archives, The Hoover Institute, Stanford University.

Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Audiotape collection: 1965-74. Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, CA.

“Town Meeting of the World: “The Image of America and the Youth of the World” with Senator Robert F. Kennedy and Governor Ronald Reagan.” As Broadcast over the CBS Television Network and CBS Radio Network. Monday, May 15, 1967, 10:00-11:00 pm EDT, Charles Collingwood, Host. Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, CA.

Secondary Sources

Alexander, Gerard. “The Myth of the Racist Republicans.” *The Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy: Claremont Review of Books*, (Spring 2004).

Anderson, Patrick. *Electing Jimmy Carter: The Campaign of 1976*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994.

Bartley, Numan V. *The New South: 1945-1980*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995.

Bass, Jack and Walter De Vries. *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995.

Bennett, David H. *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Black, Earl and Black, Merle. *The Rise of Southern Republicans*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002.

Borstelmann, Thomas. *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Brands, H.W. *The Strange Death of American Liberalism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Brennan, Mary. *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Brinkley, Alan. “The Problem of American Conservatism.” *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 99, No. 2. (Apr., 1994), pp. 409-429.

Cannon, Lou. *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power*. New York: Public Affairs, 2003.

Carleton, Don E. *Red Scare!: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas*. Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1985.

Carter, Dan T. *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

- Christensen, Terry. *Reel Politics: American Political Movies from "Birth of a Nation" to "Platoon"*. New York: Blackwell, 1987.
- Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.
- Critchlow, Donald T. *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Dallek, Matthew. *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics*. New York: The Free Press, 2000.
- Dallek, Robert. *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism*. Harvard University Press, 1984.
- _____. *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- _____. *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- _____. *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*. New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 2003.
- Davidson, Chandler. *Race and Class in Texas Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Davies, Gareth. *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996.
- De Vries, Walter and Tarrance, Lance, Jr. *The Ticket Splitter: A New Force in American Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972.
- Diamond, Edwin & Bates, Stephen. *The Spot: The Rise of Political Advertising on Television*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992.
- Diamond, Sara. *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right*. New York: Guilford, 1998.
- _____. *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States*. New York: Guilford, 1995.
- Drew, Elizabeth. *Portrait of an Election: The 1980 Presidential Campaign*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981.
- Edsall, Thomas and Mary. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics*. New York: Norton, 1991.

- Ellis, Joseph J. *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.
- Foley, Neil. *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Frank, Thomas. *What's the Matter With Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*. New York: Owl Books, 2004.
- Fried, Richard M. *The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Garcia, Ignacio M. *Viva Kennedy: Mexican Americans in Search of Camelot*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000.
- Goldberg, Robert A. *Barry Goldwater*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.
- Goldwater, Barry. *Conscience of a Conservative*. Shepardsville, KY: Victory Publishing, 1960.
- Green, George Norris. *The Establishment in Texas Politics: The Primitive Years, 1938-1957*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979.
- Greenshaw, Wayne. *Elephants in the Cottonfields: Ronald Reagan and the New Republican South*. New York: Macmillan, 1982.
- Hart, Roderick P. *Verbal Style and the Presidency: A Computer Based Analysis*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1984.
- _____. *The Sound of Leadership: Presidential Communication in the Modern Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Hayward, Steven F. *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980*. New York: Prima Publishing, 2001.
- Heale, M. J. *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- _____. *McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.
- Heineman, Kenneth J. *God is a Conservative: Religion, Politics, and Morality in Contemporary America*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Hofstetter, C. R. and Zukin, C. "TV Network News and Advertising in the Nixon and McGovern campaigns," *Journalism Quarterly*, 56, (1979), 106-152.

- Isserman, Maurice & Kazin, Michael. *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Jamieson, Kathleen H. *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Campaign Advertising*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Kaid, Lynda Lee and Johnston, Anne. *Videostyle in Presidential Campaigns: Style and Content of Televised Political Advertising*. Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, 2001.
- Kazin, Michael. "The Grass-Roots Right: New Histories of U.S. Conservatism in the Twentieth Century." *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 97, No. 1 (Feb., 1992), pp. 136-155.
- Key, V.O. *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1949.
- Klarman, Michael J. "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 1. (Jun., 1994), pp. 81-118.
- Knaggs, John R. *Two Party Texas: The John Tower Era, 1961-1984*. Austin: Eakin Press, 1986.
- Kruse, Kevin M. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Lasch, Christopher. *The World of Nations: Reflections on American History, Politics, and Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- _____. *Haven in a Heartless World: The Family Besieged*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- Lassiter, Matthew D. *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Lavergne, Gary M. *A Sniper in the Tower: The Charles Whitman Murders*. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1997.
- Lawson, Steven. F. *In Pursuit of Power: Southern Blacks and Electoral Politics, 1965-1982*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Matusow, Allen J. *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.
- McCombs, Maxwell and Shaw, Donald. "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36 (1972), 176-87.
- McGinnis, Joe. *The Selling of the President. 1968*. New York: New York University Press, 1988.

- McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Micklethwait, John and Wooldridge, Adrian. *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*. New York: Penguin, 2004.
- Moorehead, Richard. *50 Years in Texas Politics: From Roosevelt to Reagan, From the Fergusons to Clements*. Burnet: Eakin Press, 1982.
- Nash, George H. *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1996.
- Olien, Roger M. *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1982.
- Patterson, James T. *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- _____. *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Patterson, T.E. and McClure, Robert D. *The Unseeing Eye: The Myth of Television Power in National Politics*. New York: Putnam Press, 1976.
- Pells, Richard. *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Perlstein, Rick. *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*. New York: Hill & Wang, 2001.
- Phillips, Kevin P. *The Emerging Republican Majority*. New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969.
- _____. *American Theocracy: The Perils and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*. New York: Viking Press, 2006.
- Powers, Richard G. *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.
- Reston, James. *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally*. New York: Harpers and Row, 1989.
- Ribuffo, Leo P. *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Hard Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.

- Robinson, Michael J. "Public Affairs Television and the Growth of Political Malaise: The Case of the 'Selling of the Pentagon,'" *American Political Science Review*, 70 (1976), 409-432.
- Schlafly, Phyllis. *A Choice Not an Echo*. Alton, IL: Pere Marquette Press, 1964.
- Schneider, Gregory. *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Schoenwald, Jonathan. *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Schulman, Bruce. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.
- _____. *From the Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Schwartz, Tony. *The Responsive Chord*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor Press, 1973.
- Shirley, Craig. *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign that Started it All*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Current, 2005.
- Smith, Oran. *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Sugrue, Thomas J. *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Tyler, Ronald, Ed., et. al. *The New Handbook of Texas*. Austin, TX: Texas State Historical Association, 1996.
- Viguerie, Richard A. *The Establishment vs. The People: Is a New Populist Revolt on the Way?* Chicago, IL: Regnery Gateway, Inc., 1984.
- Ward, Brian. *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001.
- _____. *Radio and the Struggle for Civil Rights in the South*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004.
- Weeks, Oliver Douglas. *Texas Presidential Politics in 1952*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1953.
- _____. *Texas One-Party Politics in 1956*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957.
- _____. *Texas in the 1960 Presidential Election*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961.

- West, Darrell M. *Air Wars: Television and Advertising in Election Campaigns: 1952-1996*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1997.
- White, Theodore H. *The Making of the President: 1964*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1965.
- _____. *The Making of the President: 1968*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969.
- _____. *The Making of the President: 1972*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1973.
- _____. *America in Search of Itself: The Making of the President, 1956-1980*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982.
- Whitfield, Stephen J. *The Culture of the Cold War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Wills, Garry. *Reagan's America*. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.
- _____. *John Wayne's America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.
- Woods, Jeff. *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anticommunism in the South, 1948 - 1968*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sean P. Cunningham was born in Dallas, Texas in 1977. Prior to his graduate work in Gainesville, Cunningham completed his B.A. in public relations from Texas Tech University in 1999, and his M.A. in history and M.Ed. in higher education administration, also at Texas Tech, in 2002. Specializing in American political history with an emphasis on the twentieth-century South and West, Cunningham has presented his research at several state and local conferences in Texas and Florida and has published articles in the *East Texas Historical Journal*, among others. In 2007, Cunningham was awarded the Calvin A. VanderWerf Award in recognition of his selection as the outstanding graduate teaching assistant at the University of Florida.