

RACE, RHETORIC, AND FEAR 1958-1968: HOW ELECTED OFFICIALS  
EXPLOITED WHITE MIDDLE CLASS RACIAL ANXIETY IN 1960'S AMERICA

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

Sam Houston State University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of History

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by

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May, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

Graber, Shelby J., *Race, Rhetoric, and Fear 1958-1968: How Elected Officials Exploited White Middle Class Racial Anxiety in 1960's America*. Master of Arts (History), May, 2017, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

This work is a sociopolitical history focusing on the relationship between political rhetoric and white middle class racial anxiety in America from 1958 to 1968. Throughout the 1960s, elected officials employed coded language to exploit white America's racial resentments for political gain. As the decade progressed from its early optimism to despair, this dialogue recalibrated the American political landscape and significantly impacted the nation's conversation on race. This analysis utilizes existing scholarship as well as primary source material to examine this discourse and its place amid the racial unrest and social fracture that characterized the 1960s.

This study closely observes white America's racial perceptions, outlining the critical events that fueled white anxieties, while also avoiding blanket characterizations of universal bigotry and racism. Whites in the 1960s understood and interpreted the chaotic era and the hard fought racial progress that it produced in varying ways. This progress is examined from the standpoint of an often uneasy, white middle class that had grown fearful of rising crime rates, urban unrest, and changing social landscapes. Their discomfort left many white voters susceptible to racially coded calls for law and order from candidates who promised to restore the status quo and return the nation to the relative calm of previous eras.

Though the scope of this work is limited to the 1960s, it speaks to present day political concerns in its analysis of the foundational fears and resentments that characterize contemporary race relations in the United States. Its primary contribution is

to trace the post-war origins of a political dialogue that continues to shape the relationship between America's white middle class and the elected officials they place in office. By outlining the distortions and anxieties that divided the nation along racial lines in the 1960s, this study challenges readers to be aware of the ways in which contemporary office seekers exploit this tension for political gain. In exposing this dynamic, the political manipulation of racial trepidation may be lessened and, for those who recognize the process chronicled in this study, relegated to the past.

KEY WORDS: 1960's Race Relations, Law and Order, Political Rhetoric

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Jeffery Littlejohn and my thesis committee at Sam Houston State University for their guidance and encouragement in shaping this work. I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Heath for his commitment to improving his students' writing and scholarship. Finally, this study would not have been possible without the tireless support of my wife Sara.

## PREFACE

On January 20, 2016, Donald Trump delivered an inaugural address that promised to return the United States to the people. In the preceding months, his “America First” platform and populist pledges to restore the nation to greatness were largely dismissed by the media, academic elites, and the political analysts who discounted the brazen real estate developer’s chances of victory. However, as election night found state after state fading to red, the prospect of a Trump presidency moved from a historical footnote to a new American decree. The 2016 election was, in part, a populist referendum on the sweeping social and political transformations that have shaped the new millennium. Globalization, terrorism, immigration concerns, and racial strife had recalibrated the American political landscape in an era characterized by profound change and the ascent of Barack Obama.

Speaking at a New York LGBT event in the weeks leading up to the election, Trump’s Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton broadly characterized the Republican candidate’s supporters as a “basket of deplorables.” Playing to the contempt of the crowd, she labeled prospective Trump voters as racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic. Her remark exposed a critical social disagreement that had grown increasingly contentious as the campaign season wore on. While pundits and national media outlets misread polling data, as well as the collective mindset of Middle America, white electoral support for Clinton quietly receded as the election approached. Despite the many controversies surrounding his qualifications for the presidency, Donald Trump embraced the anxiety and resentment of the nation’s white middle class voters. Conversely, Clinton’s controversial remark in New York a month earlier indicated that her campaign may have

failed to fully register the extent of Middle America's trepidation concerning changes in the nation's social, political, and economic landscape.<sup>1</sup>

Many white voters regarded Clinton as an establishment candidate too far removed from the day to day realities of the nation's working class. Lacking the charisma of the two previous Democratic presidents, her platform resonated among historically disenfranchised populations like immigrants and minorities, but largely failed to connect to the broader white middle class. Globalization and social advancements had left many of these voters in the alienated margins of a changing world. In an era increasingly characterized by social progress, inclusion, and diversity, many whites felt their tentative grasp on middle class prosperity and hegemony slipping away.

Often left unspoken in the shadows of these fears were deeply rooted racial and social resentments that had festered in recent years. For many white voters, the era's changing complexion and progressive momentum appeared to benefit minorities and immigrant populations at the expense of traditional white middle class interests. A collective sense that too much regard and too many tax dollars were funneling toward nonwhites continued to galvanize white communities throughout the Heartland. To many among this population, Clinton represented an increase in refugees and immigrants, ramped up welfare spending, and higher taxes. These measures were increasingly perceived as arriving at the expense of the Middle America. Adding urgency to this

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<sup>1</sup> White voters preferred Trump over Clinton by 21 percentage points (58% to 37%), according to the exit poll conducted by Edison Research for the National Election Pool. Voters without a college degree supported Trump 52%-44%. Trump's margin among whites without a college degree is the largest among any candidate in exit polls since 1980. Two-thirds (67%) of non-college educated whites backed Trump, compared with just 28% who supported Clinton, resulting in a 39-point advantage for Trump among this group. Alec Tyson and Shiva Maniam, "Behind Trump's Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education," Pew Research Center, November 09, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>.

dynamic were timely terrorist attacks in San Bernardino and Florida, racial unrest surrounding police shootings across the nation, and a prevailing sense that the country was fragmenting into deeply divided and culturally separate factions. Donald Trump's "America First" platform embraced white middle class apprehensions, channeling them into the political capital that would upend the nation's political arena.

Trump's embrace of the racial and social anxieties that shaped the 2016 election season was anything but a new phenomenon in twentieth-century postwar politics. His campaign drew from a well-established and calculated approach that surfaced long before his vow to "Make America Great Again." The strategy had been forged decades earlier in the primary victories of George Wallace, the exodus of the Dixie Democrats during Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign, and the 1968 rebirth of Richard Nixon. The "Forgotten Americans" or "Silent Majority" that delivered the White House to Nixon returned in the twenty first century to once again remind a divided nation of the political potency of an uneasy white middle class. The strategy that reframed the southern political landscape in the sixties was reformatted to fit contemporary social and racial anxiety. Trump's election indicates that in the six decades since its inception, the core tenants of the Southern Strategy have lost little of their sway over the white working class. Various precepts of this doctrine have benefited nearly every successful presidential candidate in subsequent decades. Donald Trump's unprecedented rise to power utilized a well-tested and intentional political approach that has been retooled and fortified for over half a century.

The intentional channeling of white middle class social and racial anxiety into electoral support remains an essential strategy in modern American politics. This thesis



chronicles the 1960s origins of this process and reexamines its impact in the wake of Donald Trump's election. In reassessing the 1960's sociopolitical landscape, this work traces the genesis of an uneasy political current that has traveled across six decades. In doing so, this tense energy has time and again adapted to changes in America's cultural climate. With each rebirth, it has gained a new potency and propelled a myriad of political and social constructs to the forefront of the American political arena. The pledge that adorned Trump's red campaign hat can now be rightfully placed next to the Southern Strategy, The Drug War, Willie Horton's mug shot, welfare as we know it, and other political initiatives that have nodded to the social and racial resentments of America's white middle class. To varying degrees, all of these measures were successful in convincing large numbers of white voters to support a return to the status quo. All were issued, at least in part, as a response to a liberalism and social change that left many in Middle America displaced and uncomfortable with progressive cultural advancements. It is within this context that this study will reappraise the social and political topography of the 1960s in order to better understand the manipulation of resentments and anxiety that placed Donald Trump in the White House in 2016.

As recent campus protests at U.C. Berkeley continue to intensify and renewed racial tensions generate national headlines, echoes of the 1960s reverberate within the many social and cultural divisions that fragment contemporary America. The Black Lives Matter campaign can trace core tenants of its ethos to the Civil Rights Movement, and the unabashed nationalism of the Tea Party recalls the ardent paranoia of the John Birch Society. Additionally, Trump's platform draws many comparisons to those of both George Wallace and Richard Nixon, all emerging, in large part, as a reaction to a decade

of profound social change and a liberal momentum that challenged the nation's prevailing social norms.

Recent sideline protests by African American athletes drew direct inspiration from the social activism of Muhammad Ali, Tommy Smith, and John Carlos. A new sexual revolution surrounding transgender equality also builds upon a 1960s foundation with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, the Stonewall Riot, as well as Mattachine Society's advocacy efforts. An accurate understanding of the sociopolitical developments that characterized the 1960s is essential for placing Trump's recent assent within the proper contextual framework. This thesis asks readers to consider that many of the nation's contemporary sociopolitical fractures are not unprecedented. Rather, they emerge amid the shadows cast by the 1960s. In many critical ways, it feels as if we've been here before.

Several pivotal factors provide a foundation for the relationship between racially coded political rhetoric and the white middle class racial anxiety profiled in this examination of the 1960s. The Great Migration of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North changed the complexion of the nation's urban landscapes. In the postwar era, this exodus coincided with an industrial decline that left many unskilled, black laborers without gainful employment. As rising population rates intersected with increased levels of adult male unemployment, crime rates began to climb in the 1950s, reaching a startling zenith a decade later. Assault, burglary, and rape convictions doubled, while robberies nearly tripled as the U.S population grew from 179,323,175 in 1960 to 201,385,000 by decade's end.<sup>2</sup> African American males represented a disproportionate

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Effgen, "United States Crime Rates 1960 - 2015," United States Crime Rates 1960 - 2015. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>.

percentage of this spike, both as victims and perpetrators of urban crime. As the turbulent 1960s came to a close, blacks were more than seventeen times as likely to be arrested for armed robbery than their white counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

This surge in violent crime, combined with the era's highly televised riots, led much of white America to associate urban criminality with African American males. The preconception of blacks as dangerous social predators was not a new phenomenon. The nation's long and complex relationship with race and slavery had left a violent and uneasy imprint upon white America's collective consciousness.<sup>4</sup> These deeply embedded perceptions, coupled with the racial turbulence of the 1960s, provided a new foundation for the rise of law and order political rhetoric and the tough on crime posturing that centers this study. In his work, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s*, Michael Flamm notes, "For many whites, the appeal of [law and order] was undoubtedly a reflection at least in part of racial prejudice and historical anxieties. But for most whites the appeal of law and order was due primarily to genuine fear, a sentiment shared by many blacks."<sup>5</sup> The manipulation of this fear into political capital anchors this examination as it follows the American sociopolitical landscape across the 1960s.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), citing, "The Troubled American: A Special Report on the White Majority." *Newsweek*, October 6, 1969, 29-48.

<sup>4</sup> Many works have documented this dynamic. See among others: Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth Century South*; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century South*; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*; Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South*; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*; Wilber J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*; Fox Butterfield, *All God's Children: The Bosket Family and the American Tradition of Violence*. Additionally, the 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* drew upon deeply embedded fears of black males as rapists, exposing an archetypal stereotype that extends back to the Reconstruction era.

<sup>5</sup> Flamm, 5.

The research in this analysis draws heavily from a number of prominent historians who have both directly and indirectly examined the relationship between political rhetoric and white middle class racial anxiety in the postwar era. Flamm's 2005 work is a critical study of the rise of law and order political posturing in the 1960s. He traces the collapse of liberal momentum through the turbulent decade and examines the relationship between rising street crime, civil unrest, and white middle class perceptions of the nation's African American population. Flamm contends that the era's social upheavals fueled the 1968 ascent of Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon, as Hubert Humphrey was unable to successfully refute claims that the Democratic Party had neglected the core interests and concerns of the nation's white middle class. Additionally, Flamm finds that by 1968 many white voters had come to associate Lyndon Johnson's civil rights reforms and Great Society with urban riots and soaring crime rates. These perceptions weakened support for the president's liberal agenda, ended longstanding Democratic control of the Oval Office, and paved the way for a conservative backlash that would reshape the American political arena in subsequent decades.

Alan Matusow's *The Unraveling of America* follows a similar, though more comprehensive trajectory, and stands as a seminal sociopolitical study of the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> His work also documents the collapse of the nation's optimism as the liberal ideals of the early sixties gave way to the volatile social divisions and unrest that characterized the latter part of the decade. First published in 1984, Matusow's work emerged in an America that was reflecting on the lasting implications of the tumultuous 1960s. The 1980s found Hollywood (*Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *The Big Chill*), pop music stars like

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<sup>6</sup> Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*. (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

Bruce Springsteen (*Born in the USA*), and vocal veterans like Ron Kovic (*Born on the Fourth of July*) attempting to process the lasting implications of the 1960s. *The Unraveling of America* surfaced amid this collective national reflection and remains a critical and exhaustive account of the era.

Matusow explores the disintegration of traditional American values and postwar consensus as the optimism born in the wake of Kennedy's election gave way to social fracture and desperation. As Martin Luther King, the Kennedys, and the Great Society fell to the era's darker impulses, the promise they embodied was replaced by despair and unrest as the decade came to a contentious close. Like Flamm, Matusow traces the torrents of white middle class disaffection that delivered the presidency to law and order candidate Richard Nixon. Both authors chronicle the decade's escalating turmoil and pay close attention to the perceptions and anxiety of white voters. In doing so, Flamm and Matusow masterfully outline the 1960's chaotic arc and provide a critical foundation for the analysis found in this study.

Historian Dan T. Carter examines the manipulation of white racial trepidation in 1995's *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics*.<sup>7</sup> With the infamous Alabama governor at the work's center, Carter outlines the channeling of white racial resentments into electoral support throughout the 1960s. Wallace's zealous provocations and racially coded language abandoned direct calls of "nigger nigger" for proclamations of states' rights, private property protections, and community control of neighborhoods and schools. As he championed the gospel of racial separation, Wallace's message found resonance

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<sup>7</sup> 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, 2013).

throughout the nation, traveling far beyond the segregated South. Carter's work examines the means by which Wallace exposed the racial hostilities and resentments of northern whites who were increasingly disenchanted with integration, the Civil Rights Movement, rising crime, as well as President Johnson's liberal initiatives. In doing so, Wallace provided a critical bedrock for the conservative groundswell that placed Ronald Reagan in the Oval Office and reshaped the twentieth century political landscape.

Michael Schaller and George Rising's 2001 *The Republican Ascendancy* places a similar emphasis on tracking the origins of 1960s conservative backlash, examining the expansion of the Southern Strategy that drew white voters away from the Democratic Party.<sup>8</sup> The authors outline the social, political, and cultural changes that transformed America in the 1960s and explore how these shifts made Republican candidates like Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater, and Ronald Reagan attractive to white middle class voters. Schaller and Rising find that G.O.P candidates became increasingly adept at channeling the discord of the 1960s into political support by amplifying conservative positions on racial and cultural issues, as well as embracing a staunch law and order platform.

In recent years, emerging scholarship has examined white middle class racial perceptions in an era characterized by the ascent of America's first black president. Scholars such as Michelle Alexander and Ian Haney Lopez refute the notion of a "post-racial" America, find considerable fault in Barack Obama's tepid response to race-based issues, and closely observe the white backlash that has followed the election of the forty-fourth president. Alexander's seminal 2010 work *The New Jim Crow: Mass*

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Schaller and George Rising, *The Republican Ascendancy: American Politics, 1968-2001*. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2002).

*Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* asks readers to consider the ways in which policy makers have channeled white America's racial fears and trepidation into support for the mass incarceration of the nation's black and brown populations.<sup>9</sup> She contends that this dynamic, not unlike the Jim Crow laws of old, has created a new racial under caste in which minority populations are denied access to full citizenship rights. In documenting this process, Alexander, like Flamm and Matusow, closely examines the ways in which the perceptions of the nation's white middle class are instrumental in shaping public policy. Her work traces the intentional manipulation of racial trepidation and resentment through the twentieth century and demonstrates how this process was used to garnish support for office seekers at all levels of government.

Much like Alexander's work, Ian Haney Lopez's 2014 *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* emerges in an America actively processing the presidency of Barack Obama.<sup>10</sup> Lopez asks readers to consider that for over five decades, elected officials have used carefully coded language to channel racial anxiety into success at the ballot box. In doing so, office seekers have manipulated racial fear, persuading white voters to support policies that increase wealth inequality while eroding support for public schools, unions, and other institutions that broadly benefit the middle class. Lopez posits that the white middle class has been deceived into supporting measures that undermine their best interests. He contends that this vulnerable population often becomes overtaken with fears of Sharia law infiltrating the heartland, illegal immigration, and welfare fraud. As a result, political

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<sup>9</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. (New York: New Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Ian Haney-Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

actors manipulate these racially charged apprehensions, convincing white voters to unwittingly support conservative directives that hinder the economic and social progress of Middle America. At the center of Lopez's analysis is the role of racial fear in guiding the perceptions and actions of the white middle class. In this way his work, along with Alexander's, provides a contemporary analysis and updated insight to the key tropes that guide this study.

In addition to the works cited above, this examination draws many of its findings from primary source material including polling data, population demographics, crime statistics, and pertinent periodicals from the era. These resources are instrumental in gauging the public sentiment that shaped the perceptions of the white middle class voters profiled in this study. Additionally, this analysis closely examines the language used by political actors in the 1960s. Because so much of this work's focus concerns the dialogue between white voters and the era's elected officials, a critical examination of their public addresses and correspondence necessarily centers this thesis. These resources allow us to analyze the impact of racially coded appeals on the white middle class. By paying close attention to the rhetoric used by politicians in the 1960s, readers are able to unravel the means by which this language spoke to the fears and resentments of white voters in an era characterized by unprecedented unrest and social change.

The term "white middle class" is used at great length throughout this work. In defining this phrase I echo Ian Haney Lopez's designation. In *Dog Whistle Politics*, he defines "whites" as "voters who respond to appeals directed at their sense of themselves as white persons."<sup>11</sup> While this characterization refers to whites in the aggregate, it does

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<sup>11</sup> Lopez, 11.



not intend to ignore the complicated and varied ways in which white Americans view their racial or ethnic identity. However, in this study the term is necessarily used broadly in order to chronicle the voters who anchor this analysis.

Similarly, the term “middle class” derives its meaning from the New Deal conception of “persons in the broad economic middle as well as those near poverty struggling to gain economic security.”<sup>12</sup> Important distinctions exist between the nation’s “working” and “middle” classes. However, this analysis often places both populations together as a means of distinguishing them from both the nation’s affluent, as well as its impoverished citizens. Throughout this work’s examination of the 1960s, references to “collapsing liberalism” are also taken from New Deal precepts. New Deal doctrine viewed the federal government as having four essential responsibilities in safeguarding the nation from the depredations of the Great Depression. This perspective held that the federal government should protect against unforeseen hardships such as sickness and job loss that economically devastate vulnerable middle class workers. Secondly, this approach acknowledged the need for protections of quality schooling, higher education, and mortgage assistance in order to promote upward social mobility. Additionally, the New Deal fostered infrastructure advancements that facilitated economic prosperity while utilizing federal regulations in order to monitor marketplace abuses. Finally, this liberalism also called for a progressive system of taxation that worked to prevent excessive concentrations of wealth.

Understanding this conceptualization of “liberal government” is critical in assessing this work’s overview of the Johnson administration, as well as the ways in

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<sup>12</sup> Lopez, 5-6.

which Goldwater, Reagan, and Nixon began to move the United States toward modern conservatism in the 1960s. As Republican office seekers increasingly convinced middle class whites of liberal government dangers, these elected officials ushered in a new conservatism that moved the nation's political center irreversibly to the right. The impact of racial perceptions in shifting the American political landscape underscores much of this analysis.

The chapters that follow examine the critical transformations of the 1960s and the impact of these changes on the perceptions of the nation's white middle class. In doing so, this work knowingly omits several important facets of the era. This study excludes, to a large degree, the direct impact of the decade's political rhetoric and subsequent elections on the country's African American population. Similarly, the myriad of responses leveled by blacks to the changes that shaped the decade are left unexamined. The absence of these stories from this analysis does not indicate a disregard for their relevance in understanding the 1960s. Rather, the confines of this work leave these issues for future examination.

Additionally, much of this study's examination of race centers on the nation's black-white dynamic to the exclusion of other minority groups and traditionally marginalized populations including Latinos, women, and homosexuals. The many ways in which the advocacy efforts of these populations impacted the perceptions of America's white middle class have been outlined at great length by a number of scholars including Ernesto Chavez, Heather White, and Sara Evans. Therefore, readers are encouraged to examine these respective works to explore these social evolutions in greater detail.

Finally, this research explores the 1960s political actors who worked to channel the racial fears and resentments of America's white middle class from the presidential campaigns that shaped the era's political landscape. With the exception of California (1966) and Alabama (1962), it largely ignores the state and local political arenas that greatly impacted the nation's perceptions and political reactions. Critical racially charged issues of the decade, including school and neighborhood integration as well as mayoral and city council elections, played out in local arenas throughout the country. Examinations of these local races and their impact on white voters are too numerous to be covered in this analysis and are therefore best reserved for regional scholarship and specialized examinations.

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## CHAPTER I

This chapter outlines the growth and manipulation of white middle class racial anxiety from George Wallace's 1962 rise to prominence to Ronald Reagan's successful bid for the California governorship in late 1966. Rising crime rates, racial unrest, and cold war anxieties impacted how white America perceived the nation's African American communities, the Civil Rights Movement, as well as President Lyndon Johnson's liberal reforms. This critical period helped galvanize the nation's racial and political divides, setting in place a cultural line of demarcation that continues to inform American race relations in the twenty first century.

This chapter also examines how the 1964 Presidential election found both Barry Goldwater and George Wallace offering the white middle class racially coded solutions to the era's mounting social and political turmoil. Along the campaign trail, each linked the President's liberal agenda to rising crime, racial unrest, and what they portrayed as the country's broader moral decline. In doing so, both candidates embraced an unrelenting return to law and order. By 1968, this issue would center the nation's political discourse and emerge as the primary concern confronting voters. While neither candidate would capture the Oval Office in 1964, they set in place a foundation for the highly-racialized Southern Strategy that would soon help carry Richard Nixon to the White House. In analyzing the language used by both Goldwater and Wallace, chapter one explores the postwar origins of directing racially coded appeals at middle-class whites. The decade's racial turmoil made this an essential approach for capturing white support at the ballot box and has since remained an indispensable strategy for subsequent office seekers at all levels of government.

Chapter one also examines how 1965's Watts riot, rising crime rates, as well as the *Moynihan Report*, impacted how middle class whites understood the nation's African American population. These events eroded support for both President Johnson's Great Society, as well as the Civil Rights Movement. Utilizing extensive polling data as well as periodicals from the era, chapter one explores how the white middle class' tenuous support for racial progress had begun to recede as Reagan initiated his bid for the Governor's mansion in early 1966. His language along the campaign trail reflected a willingness to target the mounting social and racial resentments of the nation's white middle class. By the fall of 1966, these resentments and anxieties had begun to irreversibly shape the nation's political landscape, setting the stage for a broader white backlash that would soon recalibrate the American political arena.

## **Wallace**

Assessing his defeat in Alabama's 1958 gubernatorial election, George Wallace famously vowed to never again be "outniggered" by a political opponent. Wallace's turnabout stands as a critical genesis point for the coupling of racially coded political rhetoric and white middle class racial anxiety in the United States. After being defeated by the state's Attorney General John Patterson and his staunch segregationist platform, Wallace observed that the most direct route to the governor's mansion was to appeal to the racial resentments of the state's white voters. In his subsequent 1962 gubernatorial campaign, the former Golden Gloves champion revised his strategy and deliberately harnessed the mounting racial animosities of whites in Alabama by zealously denouncing integration and federal authority.<sup>13</sup> Along the campaign trail Wallace vehemently

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<sup>13</sup> Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: The Origins of the New Conservatism and the*

opposed the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, while embracing a platform of southern nationalism and states' rights.

By 1962, over thirty percent of Alabama's three and a half million residents were black, which was a far higher percentage than the national average that had hovered at around ten percent since the 1940s.<sup>14</sup> The significant number of African Americans living among the white population rendered Alabama a contentious breeding ground for the civil-rights related unrest, which, by mid-century, had begun to impact race relations within the region. Much of Wallace's support in the 1962 gubernatorial election, as well as his eventual rise to national prominence, stemmed from a white backlash against civil rights efforts within his home state. Campaigns led by Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee targeted Alabama, making it a critical epicenter for the nation's broader civil rights struggle.<sup>15</sup>

By the 1962 gubernatorial election, whites in Alabama had nervously witnessed the escalation of racial tension and civil rights related unrest. Many whites in the state regarded 1955's bus boycott with trepidation and resentment as it disrupted the city's public transportation system for 381 days in the wake of Rosa Park's arrest in December of that year. Inspired by the lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, over a thousand black students from Alabama State College participated in protests at the Montgomery county courthouse on February 25, 1960.<sup>16</sup> A year later, freedom riders protesting interstate

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*Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 96.

<sup>14</sup> United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population: 1960*, Washington: U.S Dept. of Commerce, 1963.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Luther King and Clayborne Carson. *Stride toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*. (London: Souvenir Press, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Reddick, Lawrence Dunbar. "The Montgomery Situation." Southern Freedom Movement Documents 1951-1968. Accessed May 15, 2017.

segregation policy in the South made three stops in Alabama that resulted in violence as angry white mobs set fire to a bus near Anniston and attacked passengers with chains and pipes in Birmingham.<sup>17</sup> These disruptions to the state's racial status quo garnished national headlines and set the stage for Wallace's campaign. By the fall of 1962, the candidate's zealous, hardline rhetoric resonated with the state's white voters, many of whom had come to view recent civil rights activity as an affront to white hegemony and racial norms that had characterized the region for decades.<sup>18</sup>

By handily winning the 1962 gubernatorial election with ninety-seven percent of the popular vote, Wallace successfully channeled racial tensions among Alabama whites into political victory. However, his approach was not necessarily rooted in a long-standing, racial vitriol. Addressing black voters in 1958 he reasoned, "If I didn't have what it took to treat a man fair, regardless of his color, then I don't have what it takes to be the governor of your great state."<sup>19</sup> Instead, Wallace's appeal to the anxieties and resentments of whites in Alabama emerged from a relentless desire for office. Provoking the racial animus of southern whites simply provided Wallace with the most direct route to the governor's mansion in Montgomery. The highly racialized turnabout was born out of political expediency. This methodology would, in time, help deliver the South to the Republican Party and reframe the American political landscape.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Claude Sitton. "Alabamans Act to Bar Violence at University; Negro's Application to School Is Expected Next Term Leaders Urge Governor-Elect to Back Law and Order Law and Order Keynote Holds Violence Barred Declaration of Professors." *The New York Times*, November 24, 1962.

<sup>19</sup> Lloyd Earl Rohler, *George Wallace: Conservative Populist*. (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 88.

<sup>20</sup> Carter, 95.



Shortly after his election victory, in January 1963, Wallace delivered his infamous “Segregation Now, Segregation Tomorrow, and Segregation Forever” inaugural address in Montgomery, Alabama. The speech articulated a hardline, anti-integrationist stance that invigorated his base and established his persona as America’s foremost champion of segregation. Wallace’s subsequent gubernatorial and presidential campaigns would extend these themes and prod the nation’s racial anxieties and resentments. Reflecting on the potency of this approach, Wallace later recounted, “You know, I tried to talk about good roads and good schools and all these things that have been part of my career, and nobody listened. And then I began talking about niggers, and they stomped the floor.”<sup>21</sup>

Wallace’s first year as governor of Alabama found the state embroiled in nationally-publicized, civil-rights related unrest and violence. In early May, nearly a thousand African Americans, many of them minors, were arrested in Birmingham after the city’s Public Safety Commissioner, Bull Connor, savaged protestors with fire hoses and snarling dogs. The startling imagery of peaceful demonstrators being attacked by law enforcement was captured on film and broadcast throughout the nation. Just nine days after the nationally publicized confrontation with Connor, bombs exploded near the SCLC’s Birmingham headquarters and in front of the home of Martin Luther King’s brother. A riot followed wherein an estimated 2,500 of the city’s black residents “attacked police and firemen, wrecked scores of police and private automobiles and burned six small stores and a two-story apartment house.”<sup>22</sup> On May 12, President Kennedy, responding to national outrage over Connor’s highly publicized handling of the

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<sup>21</sup> J.L. Chestnut and Julia Cass. *Black in Selma: The Uncommon Life of J.L. Chestnut, Jr.* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1990), 117.

<sup>22</sup> Claude Sitton, “50 Hurt in Negro Rioting After Birmingham Blasts,” *New York Times*, May 13, 1963.

demonstrators, readied, but did not deploy federal troops near Birmingham in order to quell further unrest.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the fall of 1963, white supremacists in Alabama detonated explosives near the homes of black civil rights activists. On the morning of September 15, a bomb exploded on the steps of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church killing four children. In a letter he wrote to Wallace following the bombing, Martin Luther King declared that the Alabama governor had “the blood of our little children on [his] hands.”<sup>24</sup> The events in Alabama elevated the states’ protracted civil rights struggle, as well as its governor, to the forefront of the nation’s contentious conversation on race.

The 1963 court-ordered desegregation of the University of Alabama provided Wallace with a new platform from which to stir the mounting racial backlash among his southern constituency and increase his profile among white northerners. As he blocked the entrance to the college in Tuscaloosa, Wallace again made national headlines. With federal troops standing by and television news networks broadcasting the event, many whites across the nation, nervous about the impact of civil rights progress, found themselves relating to Wallace and his message of racial separation. A 1963 Gallup poll found that seventy-eight percent of the nation’s white population would relocate if their neighborhoods became integrated. Sixty percent expressed an unfavorable view of Martin Luther King’s March on Washington, stating that it was ineffective and would likely lead to violence.<sup>25</sup> To many middle-class whites throughout the nation who had grown

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<sup>23</sup> Haynes Johnson, "The March and The Dream," *Washington Post*, August 27, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> King quoted in “Six Dead After Church Bombing Blast Kills Four Children; Riots Follow Two Youths Slain; State Reinforces Birmingham Police,” *Washington Post*, September 16, 1963.

<sup>25</sup> "Public Opinion on Civil Rights: Reflections on the Civil Rights Act of 1964," Roper Center, October 20, 2015. Accessed March 03, 2017. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/public-opinion-on-civil-rights-reflections-on-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964/>.

increasingly nervous about changes to the nation's racial status quo, Wallace appeared composed and reasonable as he, like many of them, opposed integration and the collapse of America's racial order.

Wallace's heightened national profile increased his awareness of the degree to which, by mid-decade, racial tension and civil rights related concern had grown in the North as well as the South. A Harris survey poll from August 1964 found that nearly half of middle-class whites voiced uncertainty about civil rights progress, while almost a third directly opposed it. A subsequent poll the following year found that much of the nation's white population had grown increasingly suspicious of the Civil Rights movement. A plurality of those surveyed believed that civil rights organizations had been, "infiltrated by communists, with almost a fifth of the country unsure as to whether or not [the movement] had been compromised."<sup>26</sup>

The Alabama governor would soon channel these apprehensions and find new support from middle-class whites in the North who had grown alienated by the decade's social unrest and racial turmoil. Describing the heightened racial anxieties that had become evident in the North by 1964, NBC's Douglas Kiker imagined Wallace's realization that racial appeals could be employed above the Mason Dixon line proclaiming, "He looked out upon those whites north of Alabama and was suddenly awakened by a blinding vision: They all hate black people, all of them. They are afraid, all of them. Great God! That's it! They're all Southern. The whole United States is

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Southern."<sup>27</sup> Wallace's revelation would fuel the Alabama governor's bid for the Democratic Party's 1964 presidential nomination.

In the spring of 1964, Wallace landed in Madison, Wisconsin, and began captivating blue-collar audiences with racially coded warnings that would earn him over a third of the state's primary votes. He stirred the mounting racial resentments of the state's Polish, Hungarian, and Czechoslovakian communities with dire warnings regarding the Civil Rights Movement's harmful impact on union seniority practices, links to communism, and the dangers of open housing measures. The 1964 Civil Rights Bill, he said, would make it impossible "for a homeowner to sell his home to whomever he chose," and "would plunge community schools into chaos."<sup>28</sup>

Wallace's success in Wisconsin made national headlines and proved to the governor that his revelation regarding the racial resentments of white northerners was correct. Wallace campaigned in Indiana, channeling similar sentiments, winning thirty percent of the primary vote in the Hoosier state. According to a newspaper reporter in Maryland, where Wallace carried sixteen of twenty-three counties, voters "went to the polls with big grins on their faces to show Uncle Sam that they had had it." One Maryland voter told a stunned reporter in May that Wallace was, "not the bad man they keep reading and hearing about. What he says makes a lot of sense down here."<sup>29</sup>

In the weeks following Wallace's strong showing in the Maryland primary, President Lyndon Johnson declared from the East Room of the White House, "We believe that all men are created equal. Yet many are denied equal treatment...it cannot

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<sup>27</sup> Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> George Wallace Wisconsin speech, ADAH Speech Collection

<sup>29</sup> *Washington Star*, May 13, 1964.

continue.” “Morality,” said the President, “forbids it. And the law I sign tonight forbids it.”<sup>30</sup> On July 2, in front of more than one hundred and fifty legislators, civil rights activists, and justice department officials, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the nation’s most extensive civil rights measure since Reconstruction. The sweeping legislation, which ended segregation in public spaces and banned employment based discrimination, provided the Alabama governor with a new platform from which to oppose Johnson’s bid for reelection.

Two days after the bill was signed, Wallace warned an Atlanta audience “that the President of the United States has just signed into law the most monstrous piece of legislation ever enacted... a fraud, a sham and a hoax! This bill,” he said, “will live in infamy.”<sup>31</sup> Wallace also preyed upon perceptions of a communist link to the Civil Rights Movement telling the white middle class audience, “I do not call the members of the United States Supreme Court communists, but I do submit for your judgment the fact that every single decision of the Court in the past ten years...has been decided against freedom and in favor of tyranny.”<sup>32</sup> The “liberal left-wingers have passed it [the Civil Rights Act]. Now,” said Wallace, “Let them employ some ‘pinknik’ social engineers in Washington to figure out what to do with it.”<sup>33</sup> The crowd cheered and chanted “George! George! George!” as the Alabama governor exited the stage.

*Alabama Journal* reporter Wayne Greenshaw, shocked at the success of Wallace’s racially charged performance, recalled that the governor had “never uttered the

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<sup>30</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents, LBJ*, II, 843-44; *New York Times*, July 3, 1964; *Washington Post*, July 3, 1964.

<sup>31</sup> *Birmingham News*, July 4, 1964.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

word ‘nigger,’” but had strongly conveyed his messages with code phrases like “the boot of tyranny,” “the power to dictate,” and “the framework of our priceless freedoms.”

Wallace, said the reporter, had “cried out” for the white middle class’ collapsing social order. A former Alabama senator and contemporary of Wallace later recalled the governor’s use of coded language to exploit racial resentments and appeal to white audiences. “He can use all the other issues-law and order, running your own schools, protecting private property rights-and never mention race. But people will know he’s telling them a nigger’s trying to get your job, trying to move into your neighborhood. What Wallace is doing is talking to them in a kind of shorthand, a kind of code.”<sup>34</sup>

As the summer of 1964 wore on, the Democratic Party increased its support for Johnson’s reelection bid. These efforts, coupled with a decline in Wallace’s national support, (a Gallup poll in July showed the candidate slipping to only three percent outside of the South) led to his July 19 withdrawal from the Democratic primary race. The white backlash that had fueled the Alabama governor’s brief ascent to the forefront of the national political landscape was not enough to realistically allow him to unseat the President for the Democratic nomination. His rhetoric and broad association with racial bigotry was a hindrance to his campaign outside of the South. Wallace, however, declared his run for the Presidency a success, as he carried his ardent message to the end of the campaign trail announcing, “Today we hear more states’ rights talk than we have heard in the last quarter-century. I was the instrument through which this message was

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<sup>34</sup> Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by Color: Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 227.

sent to the high councils of both major political parties. My mission,” said Wallace, “has been accomplished.”<sup>35</sup>

In the waning days of Wallace’s 1964 primary run, the Alabama governor was forced to concede defeat. After flirting with the notion of a third party run at the presidency, Wallace contacted a Republican delegate with ties to Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, offering to join his campaign as vice president. Wallace advisor, Seymour Trammell, recalls the Alabama governor’s impassioned plea for a spot on the G.O.P ticket. “With all my big victories of the last two years, it must be apparent to a one-eyed niggah who can’t see good outa his other eye, that me and Goldwater would be a winning ticket. We’d have the South locked up, then him and me could concentrate on the industrial states of the North and win.”<sup>36</sup> Goldwater declined the offer and made a conscious effort throughout his own presidential campaign to avoid being linked to Wallace, carefully distancing himself from the charges of racial extremism that had limited the success of the Alabama governor. While Goldwater lacked Wallace’s racially zealous, populist provocations, the mild-mannered Republican candidate for president carefully coded his own campaign rhetoric around the nation’s mounting racial resentments as the Presidential election of 1964 approached.

## **Goldwater**

Republican Senator Barry Goldwater, along with the rest of the nation, watched as the country continued to fracture along racial and social lines as it approached the decade’s halfway mark. Against a backdrop of Cold War anxiety and mounting racial

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<sup>35</sup> Carter, *Politics of Rage*, 222.

<sup>36</sup> William Bradford Huie, *Humanity's Case against George Wallace*. (Place of Publication Not Identified: Publisher Not Identified, 1976), 3.

tension, the contentious divisions that would soon burn white hot had, by the 1964 election season, only just begun to intensify. The emergent white backlash against the Civil Rights Movement and shifting racial and cultural norms had steadily gained momentum for nearly a decade and had grown increasingly evident as Goldwater became the presumptive candidate for the Republican Party in the summer of 1964.

Racial anxieties and mounting social divisions continued to grow throughout the early 1960s along with the nation's crime rates. Violent crime had risen from 288,460 reported instances in 1960 to 364,220 only four years later and continued to rise in all categories including robbery, rape, and murder.<sup>37</sup> *U.S. News and World Report* from June 29, 1964 announced that the country was experiencing a "crime wave of unprecedented proportions" and linked much of the blame to street demonstrations and leadership within the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>38</sup> A Gallup poll taken in August showed the white middle class evenly divided between those who identified as sympathetic to the civil rights cause and those who had begun to identify it with violent provocations, communism, and rising crime rates.<sup>39</sup> Three months later, a report issued by the FBI claimed that the 1964 summer youth riots in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Jersey City "demonstrated an increasing collapse in respect for the law and the rights of others."<sup>40</sup> The uprisings, which came in response to decades of police brutality within black areas of the cities, captured national headlines and pushed the issue of law and order to the forefront of the

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<sup>37</sup> Christopher Effgen, "United States Crime Rates 1960 - 2015," United States Crime Rates 1960 - 2015. Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> David Lawrence, "The War Against Crime," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 29, 1964, 112.

<sup>39</sup> "Public Opinion on Civil Rights: Reflections on the Civil Rights Act of 1964," Roper Center. October 20, 2015. Accessed March 03, 2017. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/public-opinion-on-civil-rights-reflections-on-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964/>.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas E. Cronin E., Tania Z. Cronin, and Michael E. Milakovich, *U.S. vs. Crime in the Streets* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1981).



nation's political discourse.<sup>41</sup> *Newsweek*, looking ahead to the November election, profiled the nation's mounting concern over "safety in the streets," noting that the issue's real "potency could be its close association with civil rights in the minds of many voters."<sup>42</sup>

Promoting a law and order platform of limited government, states' rights, and a strict adherence to the Constitution, Barry Goldwater won the Republican Party's presidential nomination on July 16, 1964. From a podium at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco, Goldwater addressed the recent rise in crime and civil rights related unrest that had made white America increasingly uneasy. The Arizona Senator covertly linked social protest to crime, assuring the audience of his commitment to law and order while never explicitly mentioning race or the Civil Rights Movement.

[T]his party, with its every action, every word, every breath, and every heartbeat, has but a single resolve, and that is freedom - freedom made orderly for this nation by our constitutional government; freedom under a government limited by laws of nature and of nature's God; freedom - balanced so that liberty lacking order will not become the slavery of the prison cell; balanced so that liberty lacking order will not become the license of the mob and of the jungle. Security from domestic violence, no less than from foreign aggression, is the most elementary and fundamental purpose of any government, and a government that cannot fulfill that purpose is one that cannot long command the loyalty of its citizens. History shows us - demonstrates that nothing - nothing prepares the way for tyranny more than the failure of public officials to keep the streets from bullies and marauders.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout his campaign, the Republican candidate would cast the President as a liberal promoter of policies that facilitated racial unrest, delinquency, and the

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<sup>41</sup> Alan Taylor, "1964: Civil Rights Battles," *The Atlantic*, May 28, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/05/1964-civil-rights-battles/100744/>.

<sup>42</sup> Dennis D. Loo and Ruth Ellen M. Grimes, "Polls, Politics, and Crime: The Law and Order Issue of the 1960s," *Western Criminology Review* (May 1, 2004): 55.

<sup>43</sup> "Goldwater's 1964 Acceptance Speech," *Washington Post* (Part of Goldwater Remembered Series). Accessed February 04, 2017. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwaterspeech.htm>.

squandering of tax revenue on undeserving welfare recipients. Along the campaign trail in the summer and fall of 1964, Goldwater denounced the Johnson administration for tolerating civil disobedience in order to win the black vote. With the debate over civil rights legislation looming on the nation's periphery, the Arizona conservative declared, "Many of our citizens-citizens of all races-accept as normal the use of riots, demonstrations, boycotts, violence, pressures, civil disorder, and disobedience as an approach to serious national problems."<sup>44</sup> Goldwater drew a contrast between his embrace of law and order and the president's tolerance of chaos and unrest declaring in the fall of 1964, "choose the way of the Johnson administration and you have chosen the way of mobs in the street."<sup>45</sup>

In his 1964 campaign brochure, Goldwater carefully measured his opposition to civil rights legislation claiming, "Unenforceable government edicts benefit no one. Continued public attention and moral persuasion, I believe, will do more, in the long run to create the good will necessary to the acceptance of decent racial relations in all segments of our society."<sup>46</sup> The pamphlet, entitled *BARRY GOLDWATER SPEAKS OUT FOR A STRONGER AMERICA*, directly condemned civil disobedience. "Our people," it read "must not be herded into the streets for the redress of their grievances. We have better ways, more lasting and more honest ways."<sup>47</sup>

Goldwater ignored claims that the civil rights movement often employed civil disobedience as its last and only means to secure reform after repeated requests, petitions,

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<sup>44</sup> Flamm, 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> "Barry Goldwater for President 1964 Campaign Brochure." Accessed February 06, 2017. <http://www.4president.org/brochures/goldwater1964brochure.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

and peaceful demonstrations had proved ineffective. He also failed to address the underlying economic disadvantages facing poor black communities as a possible root cause of rising crime rates. Disregarding the structural racism and deeply imbedded injustices that fueled civil disobedience, he presented a simple choice to voters—law and order or crime in the streets. Despite being a proponent of limited government (he opposed Johnson’s civil rights legislation beneath the banner of states’ rights and constitutional overreach), Goldwater championed a law and order solution to recent unrest and rising crime rates by imploring the federal government to get tough on criminals.

Goldwater’s platform supported an implied, racially-coded matrix that divided the country between “us” (white, non-criminal, taxpayers) and “them” (black, criminal, welfare recipients). In establishing this paradigm, Goldwater worked to invigorate his national base and lure disenfranchised southern Democrats to the G.O.P. With his embrace of a racially coded, law and order platform, the Republican hopeful worked to reframe the election as an ideological battle between Johnson, a liberal who supported the Warren Court’s protection of criminals, and himself, a staunch conservative who championed limited government and traditional social values.

Throughout the campaign, Goldwater vigorously cast Johnson’s domestic policy as a failure of big government that promoted the collapse of societal order and public safety. On March 4, 1964, he warned a New Hampshire audience, "Government seeks to be a parent, teacher, leader, doctor, and even minister. And its failures are strewn about us in the rubble of rising crime rates."<sup>48</sup> The Arizona senator later extended this theme by

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<sup>48</sup> Keene, New Hampshire, March 4, 1964, Reel 9, MR, Goldwater MSS, AHF.

drawing comparisons between social safety nets like welfare, which were increasingly associated with poor black communities, and rising crime rates in northern cities.

Promising to, “call to halt the relentless drift toward the welfare state,” Goldwater strongly opposed “self-indulgent pressure groups [who] seek special privilege favors at the expense of the general public taxpayer.”<sup>49</sup>

By the summer of 1964, appealing to the resentments of middle class whites had proven an effective “wedge issue” for the Republican Party. The nominating speech delivered by Ronald Reagan at the Republican Convention regarding the dangers of liberalism and the welfare state elevated the former B movie star’s political profile, making him the darling of the conservative movement. After outlining his departure from the Democratic Party, Reagan linked both Johnson’s proposed Great Society initiative and the broader growth of government to the communist threat before directly condemning welfare abuse. He reminded the audience of a California woman who, “had six children, was pregnant with her seventh...Her husband was a laborer earning 250 dollars a month. She wanted a divorce to get an 80 dollar raise. She's eligible for 330 dollars a month in the Aid to Dependent Children Program. She got the idea,” Reagan told the audience, “from two women in her neighborhood who'd already done that very thing.”<sup>50</sup>

In what would go down in conservative lore as “The Speech,” Reagan implied a direct correlation between the growth of the welfare state and broader communist threats declaring, “We are faced with the most evil enemy mankind has known in his long climb

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<sup>49</sup> “Barry Goldwater for President 1964 Campaign Brochure.” Barry Goldwater for President 1964 Campaign Brochure.

<sup>50</sup> “Ronald Reagan Presidential Library - National Archives and Records Administration.”

from the swamp to the stars. There can be no security anywhere in the free world if there is no physical and economic stability within the United States. Those who ask us to trade our freedom for the soup kitchen of the welfare state,” Reagan said, “are architects of a policy of accommodation.”<sup>51</sup> Reagan’s attack on welfare abuse at the 1964 Republican National Convention helped make him a rising star among conservatives. In the minds of many in attendance, he and not the Arizona senator, represented the future of the G.O.P.

At the Illinois State Fair on August 19, Goldwater echoed Reagan’s refrain in his condemnation of the welfare state by criticizing the president for contributing to the collapsing values of the American underclass. “Telling people again and again,” he said, “that the federal government will take care of everything for them leads to the decline of personal and individual responsibility which is the base cause of the rise in crime and disregard for law and order.”<sup>52</sup> While neither Goldwater nor Reagan explicitly mentioned race or recent civil rights discord in their critique of welfare abuse, the message to their audience was clear: Your tax dollars are being doled out to undeserving and unlawful minorities by a liberal administration that is not protecting the nation’s values or its citizens.

Goldwater further exploited white resentment on October 1 declaring, “If it is entirely proper for government to take from some and give to others, then won’t some be led to believe that they can rightfully take from anyone who has more than they?” Drawing a thinly veiled parallel between welfare and dangerous urban communities, Goldwater continued, “Our wives, all women, feel unsafe in the street.”<sup>53</sup> These

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Illinois State Fair, August 19, 1964, Box 10, PCF Goldwater Mss. AHF.

<sup>53</sup> Barry Goldwater, “Peace Through Strength,” in *Vital Speeches* vol. 30 (Oct. 1, 1964): 743-746.

insinuations spoke to the racial fears of middle-class America and promoted a return to the traditional values of limited government, free enterprise, and hard work. However they failed to acknowledge root cause explanations for black poverty such as systemic racism, centuries of violence and intimidation, as well as limited access to education and quality employment.

Johnson won reelection with a plurality in excess of sixteen million votes, securing ninety-four percent of the black vote.<sup>54</sup> By the 1964 Presidential election, the social division that would soon fracture American consensus in the coming years had not yet reached its volatile summit. While the Goldwater campaign's racially coded rhetoric had resonated with many white Americans, the nation was not yet ready to hand the election to a candidate based solely on a law and order, limited government platform.

Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign did, however, fortify law and order politics as a core precept of Republican political strategy, setting into motion a strategic, racially aware approach that would change the nation's political landscape in subsequent campaign seasons. While Lyndon Johnson handily defeated the Arizona Senator, Goldwater carried five states in the Deep South. The capacity of Republican candidates to lure southern Democrats to the G.O.P would soon recalibrate the American political arena.

Goldwater, like Wallace remains, "a prophet ahead of [his] time-who bore the burden of ideological and racial extremism."<sup>55</sup> Both men employed racially coded, law and order rhetoric in order to convert the white middle class' apprehension regarding civil rights related unrest into political capital, while opposing the President's liberal

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<sup>54</sup> Tom Wicker "Johnson Swamps Goldwater." *New York Times*, November 4, 1964.

<sup>55</sup> Flamm, 49.

agenda, which, by 1964, had only begun to lose traction. The next presidential election would hinge on similar partisan divisions as the nation unraveled. This time, the candidate that effectively channeled the country's racial anxieties and offered law and order as a solution to America's cascading social and political turmoil would not be denied.

## 1965

In his 1965 State of the Union Address, President Johnson outlined the core tenants of a new program that would utilize the nation's booming prosperity in order to combat poverty and racial injustice. "America," he told a joint session of Congress, "was only at the beginning of the road to the Great Society. Ahead now is a summit where freedom from the wants of the body can help fulfill the needs of the spirit."<sup>56</sup> The President's ambitious vision for his nation would soon be sidetracked by an unpopular war in Vietnam as well as the continued escalation of racial tensions in the United States.

Just months into his second term, the President watched from the Oval Office as racial unrest and violence in the South once again garnered national headlines and further stirred the nation's racial anxieties. On February 18 civil rights demonstrators in Marion, Alabama, were attacked by local police, resulting in the death of twenty-six year old Jimmie Lee Jackson who died while defending his mother from a State Trooper's nightstick.<sup>57</sup> Jackson's death escalated tensions between protestors and police, prompting activists to embark on a march from Selma to Montgomery. On March 7 in what would

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<sup>56</sup>"Lyndon B. Johnson: Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union - January 4, 1965." The American Presidency Project. Accessed March 12, 2017. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26907>.

<sup>57</sup> Craig Swanson, *The Selma Campaign: Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmie Lee Jackson, and the Defining Struggle of the Civil Rights Era*. (Bloomington, IN: Archway Publishing, 2014)

come to be known as “Bloody Sunday,” news cameras stationed near the Edmund Pettis Bridge captured Alabama State Troopers assaulting the peaceful marchers with batons and tear gas. Much of the nation responded in outrage to the unsettling footage, prompting the president to declare, “Americans everywhere join in deploring the brutality with which a number of Negro citizens of Alabama were treated when they sought to dramatize their deep and sincere interest in attaining the precious right to vote.”<sup>58</sup> Johnson again sympathized with demonstrators when, on March 15, he announced to the nation that, “their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome.”<sup>59</sup> Two days later, the President sent new voting rights legislation to Congress.

The white middle class’ reaction to the unrest in Selma and the Civil Rights Movement’s recent advancements revealed a divided nation. A national Opinion Research Corporation poll taken in the immediate aftermath of Selma showed that although seventy-six percent of those surveyed supported new voting rights legislation, sixty-eight percent wanted to see moderation in its enforcement.<sup>60</sup> One month later, a Gallup poll revealed that forty-five percent of participants felt that the Johnson Administration was moving too fast on integration efforts.<sup>61</sup> These numbers revealed the

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<sup>58</sup> Lyndon Johnson, “Special Remarks to the Congress: The American Promise,” March 15, 1965, in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966).

<sup>59</sup> Lyndon Johnson, “Statement by the President on the Situation in Selma, Alabama,” March 9, 1965, in *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Kohut, “50 Years Ago: Mixed Views about Civil Rights but Support for Selma Demonstrators,” Pew Research Center. March 05, 2015. Accessed March 12, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/05/50-years-ago-mixed-views-about-civil-rights-but-support-for-selma-demonstrators/>.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*



hesitation with which the nation's white middle class supported civil rights progress. It was not difficult for a majority of whites to oppose Bull Connor's brutal, state-sanctioned violence against peaceful demonstrators. However, as integration efforts moved from an idealized concept to a reality, many whites lessened their support for measures that would bring *actual* and immediate racial change to their neighborhoods and schools. By broadly supporting only "moderate enforcement" of civil rights legislation, whites displayed a nervous reluctance to part with the long-established structures that supported the nation's dominate racial order.

On August 11, less than a week after the President signed the Voting Rights Act, the 1965 Watts Riot in Los Angeles sent shock waves throughout the nation. The riot began after officers attempted to detain twenty-one year old Marquette Frye for drunk driving in South Los Angeles in front of a crowd of local residents. A mob soon gathered at the scene, growing restless and violent shortly after a drunken Frye, along with his brother Ronald, were arrested. The six days of rioting that ensued left thirty-four dead, hundreds injured, and resulted in thirty-five million dollars in property damages.<sup>62</sup> The chaos and anxiety surrounding the riots greatly expanded the racial resentments and anxieties of America's white middle class. A national study conducted in the aftermath of the riots found that nearly half of those polled expressed fear of being attacked by a Negro, while forty-two percent reported experiencing increased social distance between the races as a result of the riot.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 38.

<sup>63</sup> Vincent Jefferies and H. Edward Ransford. "Interracial Social Contact and Middle-Class White Reactions to the Watts Riot." *Social Problems* 16, no. 3 (1969): 312-24.

As the National Guard worked to quell the third straight day of rioting and violence, an August 14<sup>th</sup> *Los Angeles Times* headline declared, "Racial Unrest Laid to Negro Family Failure," while on the same day the *Wall Street Journal* announced, "Family Life Breakdown in Negro Slums Sows Seeds of Race Violence."<sup>64</sup> The Watts Riots expanded white America's perceptions regarding the link between crime and the breakdown of the traditional family structure within the nation's black, urban communities. As the nation followed news media coverage of the Watts Riots, a controversial report authored by Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan offered both explanations and a solution for the crime, poverty, and collective hardships facing America's black inter cities. The report entitled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, later known simply as the *Moynihan Report*, blamed systemic racial oppression, black illegitimacy rates, and the breakdown of the traditional family structure for the difficulties enveloping the nation's African American communities. The report, released the same month as the Watts upheaval, would be a source of controversy surrounding conversations on race in America for decades to follow.<sup>65</sup>

Moynihan's findings warned that "The Negro family is the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community at the present time. At this point," said the report, "the present tangle of pathology is capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world."<sup>66</sup> Moynihan elaborated on the failings of black matriarchal households the following year writing, "A community that allows a large number of young men to

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<sup>64</sup> "Family Life Breakdown in Negro Slums Sows Seeds of Race Violence." *Wall Street Journal* (New York), August 14, 1965.

<sup>65</sup> *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1965).

<sup>66</sup> Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey. *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy; a Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report*. (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1967.) 41,43,51,61-63,93.

grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never requiring any stable relationship to male authority, never requiring any set of rational expectations about the future - that community asks for and gets chaos.” The report concluded, “Crime, violence, unrest, disorder... that is not only to be expected, but they are very near to inevitable.”<sup>67</sup>

Two years earlier, Moynihan coauthored a similar study entitled *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italian, and Irish of New York City*. The report used ethnicity to trace the cultural advancements and failures of New York’s white and nonwhite populations. The report described the dire consequences of broken homes in black communities when,

The mother is forced to work (as the Negro mother so often is), when the father is incapable of contributing support (as the Negro father so often is), when fathers and mothers refuse to except responsibility for and resent their children, as Negro parents, overwhelmed by difficulties, so often do, and when the family situation, is left vague and ambiguous (as it so often is in Negro families).<sup>68</sup>

Moynihan’s findings fed an increasingly intense debate surrounding race in America. To many middle class whites, the reports confirmed the biases and racial criticisms they had silently harbored for years. While both accounts linked generations of structural racism and slavery to the contemporary struggles of black America, their findings explicitly linked black matriarchal *culture* to the contemporary struggles and shortcomings of African American communities. This “tangle of pathology,” according to the report, bred crime, poverty, broken homes, and low academic achievement.

While the report offered a scathing indictment of the nation’s history of systemic, white oppression, it could also be misrepresented as evidence that black culture was

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<sup>67</sup> Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey. *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy; a Trans-action Social Science and Public Policy Report*. (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1967.) 385, 393.

<sup>68</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1970).

inferior and wrought with pathological shortcomings. Bypassing the report's root cause explanations (slavery, segregation, systemic racism), some whites, especially conservatives, instead focused primarily on Moynihan's dire findings. In this way, the study's results could be easily reframed as a harmful appraisal of the nation's African American communities. Critics of the study claimed that it blamed the victims for their own poverty and promoted harmful black stereotypes.

As the 1960s passed the halfway mark, many in Middle America began to grow weary of liberal allegations of structural racism and white oppression as crime rates continued to climb in the wake of both the passage of 1964's Civil Rights Act as well as the recently enacted Voting Rights Act. By clinging to Moynihan's findings, while downplaying the root causes that informed them, many middle class whites were able to dismiss claims that linked poverty and biased racial structures to the struggles of black communities. Systemic racism, segregation, and years of intimidation and violence were disregarded and culpability was placed on the shoulders of absent black fathers and dysfunctional family structures.

As the final weeks of December 1965 came to a close, a commission headed by former CIA director John McCone released a study entitled *Violence in the City—An End or a Beginning?: A Report by the Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, 1965*. The report assessed the causes of the Watts riots and cited urbanization, unemployment, discrimination, and poverty as the primary sources of the unrest. It also criticized black leadership for the community's lack of progress, the promotion of civil disobedience, as well as for, in some cases, "issuing brutal exhortations to violence."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Governor's Commission on the Los Angeles Riots, "Violence in the City," pp. 269-283.

The commission's broader assessment of the upheaval in Los Angeles was emblematic of the era's liberal optimism. The report cited, "defects in our development as a democratic society," rather than moral decline or personal evil on behalf of those who participated in the riots.<sup>70</sup> Calling for additional social programs and funding to address the poverty and unemployment that spawned the chaotic disturbance, the commission concluded that, "we cannot solve the problems of our slums by police power...It is no more possible to suppress rioting where its causes are fermenting than it is to hold the lid on a boiling pot."<sup>71</sup>

The report expressed the liberal viewpoint of the riots as manifestations of systemic injustice and poverty. To many on the left, the answer to the ghetto crisis was increased spending on anti-poverty programs such as housing and education as well as greater police oversight and the formation of a civilian review board to safeguard against police misconduct. Prominent activists within the black community fingered, "white leadership...which has caused millions of Negroes to be born and grow up in poverty and ignorance" as the underlying cause of the riots.<sup>72</sup>

Conservatives, by contrast, condemned the moral failures of individuals rather than societal inequality. These voices blamed the rioters themselves as well as the liberalism that, in their view, bred a culture of perpetual dependency and entitlement. Provoking the resentments of middle class whites who funded the president's Great Society with their tax dollars, conservatives claimed that the Johnson administration had

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<sup>70</sup> Report on the President's Task Force on the Los Angeles Riots, August 11-15, 1965, Box 47, WHOF of Joseph Califano, LBJ Library.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Norman B. Houston to various California news agencies, March 17, 1966, Box 64, Administrative File (IV), NCAAP Papers, Library of Congress (LOC).

squandered revenue on the undeserving while, “raising false expectations and constructing an expansive as well as intrusive bureaucracy that trampled on the prerogatives of municipalities and the values of communities.”<sup>73</sup> Will Herring, writing for the *National Review* directly linked the riots to leadership within the Civil Rights Movement. In an article entitled “Who Are the Guilty Ones?” he concluded, “If you are looking for those ultimately responsible for the murder, arson, and looting in Los Angeles, look to [civil rights leadership]: they are the guilty ones, these apostles of ‘non-violence.’ They have taught anarchy and chaos by word and deed-and, no doubt with the best of intentions-they have found apt pupils everywhere, with intentions not the best.”<sup>74</sup>

These divergent reactions to the Watts riots reveal the means by which the white middle class continued to fracture in its support for Civil Rights and the President’s optimistic plan to end poverty and racial injustice. These differing responses expose a perceptual divide that would shape the ways in which the white middle class viewed black America for generations to come. Were the riots the result of poverty and injustice or manifestations of a violent and criminal culture that had been emboldened by the government’s liberal reforms?

## **Reagan**

With the burnt out ruins of the Watts Riots still smoldering in the minds of white voters, Ronald Reagan entered California’s gubernatorial race in early 1966 promoting law and order as a remedy for the state’s recent urban upheavals and mounting student protests. Declaring that city streets had become, “jungle paths after dark,” the former

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<sup>73</sup> Flamm (2005), 65.

<sup>74</sup> Will Herring. “Who Are the Guilty Ones?” *National Review*, September 7, 1965, 769-70.

Screen Actors Guild president utilized growing trepidation among California voters regarding the state's liberal agenda and its role in facilitating social and racial discord within the state.<sup>75</sup> In 1962, Reagan's opponent, incumbent governor Pat Brown, coasted to an easy victory in the traditionally left-leaning state and was projected to recapture the governor's office in 1966. However, mounting concerns over rising crime rates, the Watts Riots, and Reagan's charismatic persona would present substantial obstacles for the governor in his reelection bid.

Like Goldwater two years earlier, Reagan's campaign rhetoric drew a parallel between liberal social programs and increases in crime and rioting. He condemned Johnson's Great Society efforts for discouraging individual initiative, creating personal dependency on government, and growing a bloated and costly bureaucracy.<sup>76</sup> However, Reagan's greatest criticisms appealed directly to California's recent rise in urban crime and mounting backlash from the Watts Riots.

By 1966, following a ten year pattern, California's murder rate had risen by fourteen percent, while robbery and rape rates also increased substantially. African Americans represented a disproportionate number of both the victims and perpetrators of this increase.<sup>77</sup> Picking up on this alarming trend, the former movie actor utilized television ads that drew thinly-veiled parallels between dangerous urban crime and minority communities. One commercial from Reagan's 1966 campaign warned viewers, "Every day the sun goes down, the jungle comes a little closer." As the camera panned to

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<sup>75</sup>"Watts Riots Shifted State to the Right, but New Demographics Pushed It Left." *Los Angeles Times*. Accessed March 14, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/local/politics/la-me-pol-watts-politics-20150806-story.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Press Conference, January 4, 1966, Box 25, Reagan MSS, Hoover Institution; Transcript, "Issues and Answers," *ABC-TV*, May 29, 1966, Box 25, Reagan MSS, Hoover Institution.

<sup>77</sup> "Reagan Interview," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 21, 1966, 55.

a white woman alone on a foreboding street, the ad appealed to mounting trepidation of urban crime and accessed deeply embedded fears of white women as victims of violent crime. "There isn't a city street," said the ad, "that's safe for our women after dark."<sup>78</sup>

Further exploiting rising crime rates and extending his message to illicit drug use, Reagan declared in September of 1966, "Narcotics traffic has mushroomed like a rush hour jam on the freeway, and directly in its path -as its prime target – is our youth, our sons and daughters."<sup>79</sup> Reagan's language in both television ads and on the campaign trail warned of a California backsliding into social chaos at the hands of dangerous criminal elements, liberal government, and feckless leadership. Throughout the summer and fall of 1966, he painted a dire panorama of a society falling prey to moral perversion, rising crime, and racial discord, framing his Democratic opponent as a facilitator of California's cultural upheaval. As anxious middle class voters fell under the sway of the gifted orator's message of conservatism and tough-on-crime campaign promises, his lead in the polls steadily grew throughout the 1966 election season. By June, Reagan's message had resonated with voters and earned him a fifty-one to thirty-seven percent lead over the incumbent governor.<sup>80</sup>

Much of Reagan's lead in the summer months stemmed from his hardline stance regarding the student protests on the U.C Berkeley campus. By mid-decade the university had emerged as an epicenter for the nascent countercultural revolution that gave birth to the student anti-war movement and helped facilitate the growth of militant black power organizations. Demonstrations on the campus had steadily increased both in numbers and

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<sup>78</sup> "Crime," 1966, RNC Series-Film, Audio-Visual Department, JFK Library.

<sup>79</sup> "Men from Clean," *Newsweek*, September 5, 1966, 23-24.

<sup>80</sup> Flamm (2005), 71.



intensity since 1964, as students defiantly challenged the authority of the school's president Clark Kerr. In the spring of 1966, a bomb exploded outside of the university's Vietnam Day Committee office, drawing increased national attention to the nation's broader, student-led, anti-war movement which, by mid-decade, had gained momentum around the country.<sup>81</sup> By the summer of 1966, California voters as well as much of Middle America, had begun to identify the campus protesters with a myriad of societal ills including political radicalism, sexual promiscuity, communism, and illicit drug use. Vowing to "clean up the mess at Berkeley," Reagan criticized leftist agitators, telling an audience at San Francisco's Cow Palace on May 12, "beatniks, radicals and filthy speech advocates" have more to do "with rioting, with anarchy than academic freedom." He extended his criticism to the administration and faculty who, "press their particular value judgments" on students, and promote "a leadership gap and a morality and decency gap" within the university. He also suggested a code of conduct be imposed on faculty in order to "force them to serve as examples of good behavior and decency."<sup>82</sup>

Reagan used Berkeley's student demonstrations as a cultural line of demarcation, allowing him to elicit support from white, middle class Californians who viewed the campus movement as a threat to the establishment and to the broader societal order. Future Nixon advisor H. R. Haldeman counseled the Reagan campaign to exploit the unrest at Berkeley and channel it into a referendum against Brown in the coming election.

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<sup>81</sup> "Media Resources Center." The Pacifica Radio/UC Berkeley Social Activism Sound Recording Project: Anti-Vietnam War Protests in the San Francisco Bay Area & Beyond. Accessed March 16, 2017. <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/pacificaviet.html#1966>.

<sup>82</sup> Ronald Reagan, "The Morality Gap at Berkeley," speech at Cow Palace, May 12, 1966, in *The Creative Society*, 125–129.

Haldeman advised, "Berkley is clearly an issue to be thoroughly and effectively exploited. Brown is scared of it, and for good reason."<sup>83</sup>

Extending his criticism of the Berkley protests to the Civil Rights Movement, Reagan linked civil disobedience to inadequate liberal leadership that protected criminals at the expense of the broader public safety. He also condemned the governor's failure to deploy the National Guard to disperse recent racially charged protests in San Francisco, declaring in an October debate that Brown "had not profited at all from the experience of Watts and has done nothing to forestall future disturbances in possible trouble spots."<sup>84</sup> At Berkeley's Boalt Hall, Reagan furthered his appeal to nervous white voters, many of whom connected rioting to the Civil Rights Movement when he declared, "The leaders of the Negro community who have urged civil disobedience," he said, "have forfeited their right to leadership."<sup>85</sup>

Reagan was not alone in directly criticizing the Civil Rights Movement and its leadership for engaging in civil disobedience. Months earlier, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover declared, "civil disobedience [is] a seditious slogan of gross irresponsibility, [and] has captured the imagination of citizens...I am greatly concerned that certain racial leaders are doing the Civil Rights Movement a great disservice by suggesting that citizens need only obey the laws with which they agree. Such an attitude," he concluded, "breeds disrespect for the law and even civil disorder and rioting."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Haldeman to Henry Salvatori, August 23, 1966, Box 9, Series 2, Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library (RMN Library).

<sup>84</sup> "Ronald Reagan v.s. Pat Brown," *Life*, October 14, 1966, 48.

<sup>85</sup> Appearance at Boalt Hall, Berkeley, n.d., Box 25, Reagan MSS, Hoover Institution.

<sup>86</sup> Velsa M. Weaver, "Frontlash: Race and the Development of Punitive Crime Policy," *Studies in American Political Development*, no. 21 (2007): 230, 248.

With California's 1966 gubernatorial election drawing near, Pat Brown charged his Republican opponent with exploiting a rising tide of white resentment for political gain. Just days before the election on an episode of NBC's *Meet the Press*, Reagan replied that the backlash was "nothing more than the concerns people have for ... extremists in the civil rights movement taking to the streets, the use of violence, of demonstrations instead of an orderly process of appealing wrongs through legitimate channels."<sup>87</sup> Reagan's appearance on the program was a final appeal to the California voters who would soon send the charismatic conservative to the governor's mansion in Sacramento. In the fall of 1966, Reagan defeated Democrat Pat Brown; winning fifty-eight percent of the vote and carrying all but three California counties.<sup>88</sup> In the wake of his defeat in November, the ousted governor acknowledged the role of escalating racial tensions in his loss declaring, "They [white voters] felt that I was too friendly with the blacks. They just tarred and feathered me with it and said, 'Put a guy in there that will put these colored guys in their place.'"<sup>89</sup> Whether we like it or not," said Brown, "people want separation of the races."<sup>90</sup>

In a tumultuous year of increased urban unrest and anti-war protest, Reagan's campaign successfully channeled fear from the Watts Riot, campus demonstrations, and rising crime into a potent message that linked the breakdown of law and order to his

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<sup>87</sup> "Watts Riots Shifted State to the Right, but New Demographics Pushed It Left," Los Angeles Times. Accessed March 14, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/local/politics/la-me-pol-watts-politics-20150806-story.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Lisa McGirr *Suburban Warriors: Grass-roots Conservatism in the 1960s*. (Princeton University Press, 1995), 50.

<sup>89</sup> Flamm (2005), 70, citing Edmund "Pat" Brown OH, interview by Joe B. Frantz, August 19, 1970, Tape #2, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (LBJ Library).

<sup>90</sup> *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1966, 14.

opponent's liberal agenda.<sup>91</sup> Reagan's subsequent rise to national prominence further demonstrated the efficacy of racially coded, law and order language in compelling voters to elect tough-on-crime political actors who promised to protect the broader public safety and social order. While the Goldwater campaign emerged in the months before urban upheavals had begun to envelope northern cities, Reagan was the beneficiary of better timing and a more appealing persona. Unlike Wallace and Goldwater, he would profit directly from the escalation of urban rioting and successfully convince California voters, and in time the nation, that rising crime, racial turmoil, and a drug addled counterculture were manifestations of failed liberal doctrine. Reagan channeled a public sentiment that was growing increasingly skeptical of Johnson's reforms. In doing so, he set in motion a rising tide of conservatism that would reshape the American political landscape in subsequent decades.

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<sup>91</sup> In 1966, there were 43 racial disturbances in the United States including significant uprisings in Cleveland, Chicago, Lansing, Michigan, and Atlanta. Anti-war demonstrations were staged throughout the nation including Oakland and New York City.

## CHAPTER II

Following Ronald Reagan's successful 1966 bid for the California governorship, conservative politicians around the nation received a surge of support. This chapter examines the causes and consequences of that development. It begins with an examination of 1967's Newark and Detroit riots and concludes with the 1968 Presidential election. Using polling data, pertinent secondary sources, as well as periodicals from the era, this chapter explores how racial unrest, crime, and the Johnson administration's liberal agenda impacted white middle class perceptions of the nation's African American population as the decade's turbulence reached a critical climax. The rise of Black Power, continued urban uprisings, as well as the Kerner Commission's startling findings highlight the means by which race informed the period's divisive turmoil.

In the wake of 1968's Tet Offensive in Vietnam, President Lyndon Johnson fell deeper into a hopeless despair, announcing his withdrawal from the American political arena. Chapter two pays close attention to the subsequent realignment of the nation's political landscape as the perilous year witnessed the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, as well as the chaos surrounding the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. With Vietnam and street riots hanging heavily in the nation's consciousness, Republican hopeful Richard Nixon looked to the racially charged Southern Strategy, channeling the resentments and fears of the white middle class. For many of these "Forgotten Americans," law and order had become the most important issue of the 1968 election season. Additionally, this chapter examines the language used by both Nixon and third party candidate George Wallace as they competed for white voters who had grown uneasy with the era's volatile unrest and social change. Both

candidates embraced law and order, layering their campaign messages with racially coded appeals that nodded at the resentments of white voters. Chapter two closes by linking Nixon's election to the collapse of New Deal order as the decade's early optimism was replaced by a loss of hope and unity.

## 1967

"To the conservative mind the riot is essentially a revolution against civilization," wrote Tom Hayden who, by 1967, had become among the nation's most high-profile student activists. "To the liberal mind," he said, "[riots are] an expression of helpless frustration. While the conservative is hostile and the liberal generous toward those who riot, both assume that the riot is a form of lawless, mob behavior. Against these two fundamentally similar concepts, a third one must be asserted, the concept that a riot represents a people making history."<sup>92</sup> Hayden's assessment captures the disparate lenses through which the nation viewed the forty-three racial disturbances that erupted in 1966 and the 164 that followed in the first nine months of the following year. At various times, the National Guard occupied eight major cities as riots erupted throughout 1967's long hot summer.<sup>93</sup> The year would mark the height of the nation's racial discord and greatly widen the contentious gulf between African American populations and the white middle class as racial tensions and civil unrest continued to divide the country.

On July 12, John Smith, a black cab driver, was involved in an altercation with police in Newark, New Jersey. A restless crowd gathered later that evening and alleged police brutality. In the widespread rioting and looting that ensued, twenty-three of the

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<sup>92</sup> Tom Hayden, *Rebellion in Newark: Official Violence and Ghetto Response* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 69.

<sup>93</sup> Matusow, 215.

city's black residents were killed, while a shocked nation sat transfixed in front of their television sets as the racial tension that had simmered for months exploded from the Newark ghetto. Despite the deployment of the National Guard, the riot continued for nearly five days, leaving over 750 injured, over one thousand jailed, and property damages in excess of ten million dollars before coming to a close on July 17, 1967.<sup>94</sup>

Less than a week after the unrest in Newark was quelled, police raided an afterhours establishment at the intersection of Twelfth Street and Clarimont Avenue in Detroit. After arresting eighty-two of the illegal establishment's patrons, restless onlookers claimed that law enforcement used unnecessary force in detaining those in attendance. By the next morning rioting was underway near the club. Like the Watts and Newark riots, the unrest was sparked by allegations of police brutality. However, the uprisings were also expressions of years of underlying segregation, unemployment, and frustration with the perceived racial injustices leveled against the city's black residents. The riot resulted in the deployment of forty-seven hundred paratroopers, forty-three deaths, seven thousand arrests, and twenty-seven hundred businesses looted.<sup>95</sup> The unrest in Detroit, like the Newark riot, shocked the nation and altered white middle class perceptions of the Civil Rights Movement, Johnson's Great Society, as well as country's broader black population.

On the one month anniversary of the Detroit riots, H. Rap Brown, chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a high profile member of the militant Black Panthers organization declared, "We live in the belly of the monster. So

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<sup>94</sup> Kevin J. Mumford *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America*. (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

<sup>95</sup> "The Fire This Time" *Time*, August 4, 1967, 13.

it's up to us to destroy its brain. When we do this not only will Africa be free but all people oppressed by the man will be free."<sup>96</sup> Just weeks earlier, Brown made national headlines when he urged blacks in Jersey City to, "wage guerrilla war on the honkie white man."<sup>97</sup> "If America don't come around," he declared, "we going to burn it down."<sup>98</sup> Brown's comments are emblematic of the nascent Black Power movement that began to galvanize mid-decade after Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale established the Black Panthers in the fall of 1966.

In *The Unraveling of America*, author Alan Matusow describes the archetypal black militant of the mid to late 1960s as "proud of his race, politically hip, savvy to discrimination, tolerant of violence, the new ghetto man reached maturity in the 1960s, which explains why centuries of repressed black anger erupted it when it did. The riots," wrote Matusow, "were [his] contribution to the black protest movement. His announcement that he would not passively submit to a life of discrimination and poverty."<sup>99</sup> The high profile rise of Black Power personalities like Brown, Stokely Carmichael, and Eldridge Cleaver, who professed to raping white women as an act of political insurrection, coincided with the escalation of 1967's urban unrest.<sup>100</sup> Black militancy and urban riots significantly impacted the ways in which the white middle class

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<sup>96</sup> Jamil Al-Amin (H. Rap Brown), *Die Nigger Die!: A Political Autobiography of Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin*. (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2002), 143.

<sup>97</sup> *New York Times*, July 19, 1967.

<sup>98</sup> Tape-recorded text of Brown's speech in "Antiriot Bill-1967," Committee on the Judiciary, Senate hearings (1967), 31-36. Quotes on pp. 32, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Nathan Caplan, "The New Ghetto Man: A Review of Recent Empirical Studies," *Journal of Social Issues* (vol. 26, winter 1970), 59-73.

<sup>100</sup> Firinglinevideos. "Firing Line with William F. Buckley Jr.: The Black Panthers." YouTube. January 25, 2017. Accessed March 20, 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NPwk\\_Dbin8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NPwk_Dbin8). In this interview, Buckley mentions the rapes as he introduces Cleaver and they are again referenced near the end of the discussion.



perceived black America, as the nation and its president continued to unravel amid intensifying racial, social, and political unrest.

### **Kerner Commission**

The 1967 Detroit and Newark riots forced President Johnson to concede that his support for civil rights as well as his Great Society initiatives were negatively impacting his standing among middle-class whites. By the autumn of that year, opinion polls showed his approval rating at the lowest of any president since Harry Truman during the Korean War.<sup>101</sup> In July, Johnson formed the Kerner Commission to assess the causality of the riots. The committee's findings left Johnson with few options and less hope. The President had intended to demonstrate to the nation his resolve to confront the season's racial unrest. Instead, the commission's report offered a bleak appraisal of race in America and warned "Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, and one white-separate and unequal." The report claimed that, "Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood-but what the Negro can never forget-is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."<sup>102</sup>

The report attributed the 1967 riots to systemic police misconduct stating that "Negroes firmly believe that police brutality and harassment occur repeatedly in Negro neighborhoods." It also found that the increasingly militarized police tactics in urban areas had led blacks to associate law enforcement with "white power, white racism, and

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<sup>101</sup> Gallup, Inc. "Presidential Approval Ratings -- Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends." Gallup.com. January 23, 2014. Accessed March 22, 2017. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/116677/presidential-approval-ratings-gallup-historical-statistics-trends.aspx>.

<sup>102</sup> *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. (New York: Dutton, 1968).

white oppression.”<sup>103</sup> As a result, the commission called for billions in additional funding to urban America and an increased devotion to meaningful civil rights reform.

Johnson was caught off guard by the degree to which the report’s findings exposed racial tension and harmfully linked the urban riots to his administration’s social programs and reforms. According to the commission’s account, the President’s civil rights efforts had failed to heal the nation’s racial divisions and would require billions in additional funding to succeed. The President viewed the report as a political liability and was angered at its failure to recognize his budgetary limitations as well as his contributions to civil rights reform. Johnson publically ignored the report for months, provoking criticism from liberals and conservatives alike. In March 1968, he finally acknowledged that, although its findings were thorough, he did not support all of the commission’s recommendations. Johnson advisor Harry McPherson described the dilemma facing the president as the nation began to lose faith in his reforms. “We talk about the multitude of good programs going into the cities,” said McPherson, “and yet there are riots, which suggests that the programs are no good, or the Negroes are past saving.”<sup>104</sup>

Johnson’s tepid recognition of the Kerner Commission coincided with continued national tension over the Vietnam War and loss of support for his Great Society programs, many of which were increasingly viewed by white America as contributing to the riots. Delivering a speech in Kansas City just weeks after the Detroit uprising, Johnson publically acknowledged the need to restore order. “We cannot,” he said, “tolerate behavior that destroys what generations of men and women have built here in

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Nimetz to Califano, August 9, 1967, Box58, WHOF of Joseph Califano, LBJ Library.

America-no matter what stimulates that behavior, and no matter what is offered to try to justify it."<sup>105</sup>

Despite his denouncement of the riots, President Johnson would soon be forced to acknowledge the impact of urban unrest and racial tension on his political buoyancy. Polling data indicates that in the early 1960s many whites in the North were permissive, if not supportive, of the civil rights movement. A small majority of those polled were in favor of measured racial progress and a reprieve from the era's highly visible and unsettling images of racial injustice and brutality. In its formative stages, the Civil Rights Movement was personified by Martin Luther King's Christian leadership and non-violent demonstrations, many of which were sanctioned by middle-class whites in the North. These efforts were often met with tepid approval, if not outright support, in large measure because the agitation, protest, and unrest was "down there" and had not yet reached northern cities.<sup>106</sup>

Prior to the high profile riots that shocked the nation, many whites in the North viewed the fire hoses and snarling dogs in Birmingham as an unjust assault and had condemned Bull Connor's cruel, militant response to the peaceful demonstrations. The tear gas and billy clubs deployed in Selma too closely resembled the militancy of European fascism that was still fresh in the nation's memory. Much of white America watched in horror as news cameras captured Alabama State Troopers brandishing gas

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<sup>105</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson*. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, 1965), 382.

<sup>106</sup> "Public Opinion on Civil Rights: Reflections on the Civil Rights Act of 1964," Roper Center. October 20, 2015. Accessed March 03, 2017. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/public-opinion-on-civil-rights-reflections-on-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964>. A Harris Survey from August 1964 asked, "Looking back on it now, would you say that you approve or disapprove of the civil rights bill that was passed by Congress last month?" The results show that nearly three quarters of those polled either supported the Civil Rights Bill or were unsure, while nearly a quarter opposed it.

masks and savaging female marchers at the foot of the Edmund Pettis Bridge. Continuing coverage of the murder of three civil rights activists in Neshoba County Mississippi the previous year was further cause for both outrage and empathy. The imagery associated with these injustices justified support for Johnson's civil rights reforms and placed southern segregationists on the wrong side of the nation's broader public opinion.<sup>107</sup>

However, as the 1960s grew increasingly contentious, media coverage of sit-ins and orderly marches began to give way to shocking footage of urban riots. With the ascent of black militancy, rising crime rates, and mounting white backlash, the President began to lose public support for his Great Society and role in championing civil rights legislation.<sup>108</sup> As the decade wore on and the war in Southeast Asia continued to escalate, middle class whites increasingly viewed the President with contempt. In the wake of mounting racial unrest, many began to lessen their sympathy for problems associated with African American communities.<sup>109</sup> This anxious white population often did not view the riots as political expressions stemming from centuries of racial injustice, but instead as manifestations of a culture that was increasingly prone to violence and crime.

### **The Racial Divide**

As the decade's upheaval continued through the summer of 1967, many whites were startled by the volatile racial unrest overtaking northern cities. A survey conducted in the immediate aftermath of the Newark and Detroit riots revealed that "the number of

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Gallup, "Presidential Approval Ratings -- Gallup Historical Statistics and Trends," Gallup.com. January 23, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Jeffery K. Hadden, "Public Opinion Polls," *Springer Reference*. Accessed January 1967. doi:10.1007/springerreference\_205142. A poll conducted by National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago during January from January 1967 revealed that eighty three percent of whites surveyed agreed that "Negroes would be better off if they would take advantage of the opportunities that have been made available rather than spending so much time protesting."

whites fearful for their personal safety rose from forty-three to fifty-one percent by August 1967."<sup>110</sup> Sixty percent of whites thought the police should use deadly force against looters and twice as many whites as blacks felt that the riots were organized.<sup>111</sup> These numbers reveal the ways in which the riots impacted the white middle class' already tenuous support for racial progress.

In the wake of 1967's explosive racial turmoil, white fear compounded as many in Middle America failed to understand why urban blacks had resorted to violence and rioting. Why, they wondered, had blacks destroyed their own communities? How long until urban unrest found its way to *their* suburbs? Were the riots political acts of protest, or were they manifestations of a violent and criminal culture? In the wake of the riots, an elderly white man from California said of African American's "they need food, work, and education but they just use these as excuses to riot." A housewife from Michigan expressed little empathy for rioters saying, "They have everything that I have and some have even more."<sup>112</sup>

Much of white America, along with its President, viewed the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act the following year, as well as the War on Poverty as evidence of racial progress. However, when racial tension and urban violence continued to escalate rather than subside, many whites increasingly linked African Americans, especially those living in the nation's urban centers, to violence and crime.<sup>113</sup> These perceptions were informed by staggering rises in violent crime, assault, robbery, rape, and theft. Crime in these categories nearly doubled from 1960 to the decade's end,

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<sup>110</sup> "After the Riots: A Survey," *Newsweek*, August 21, 1967, 18-19.

<sup>111</sup> Panzer to LBJ, August 11, 1967, Box 398, WHOF of Fred Panzer, LBJ Library.

<sup>112</sup> "After the Riots: A Survey," *Newsweek*, August 21, 1967, 18-19.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

while murders rose from 9,110 to 14,760.<sup>114</sup> Anxious middle class whites increasingly ignored liberal root cause explanations for rising crime within the nation's inner cities. The cumulative impact of slavery, segregation, and centuries of systemic violence and intimidation were often dismissed or underemphasized as the immediate shock of the riots overtook media headlines and newspaper reports. The confident idealism that had fueled the President's liberal political ambitions throughout the decade had begun to fade as the nation increasingly lost faith in government's ability to end poverty, safe-guard the streets, and ease tensions between the country's black and white populations.

This loss of faith was manifest throughout the nation as much of the white middle class rescinded its fragile empathy for the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>115</sup> The impact of televised looting and enflamed cities slowed civil rights progress and altered how many whites viewed the nation's black population. In July 1966, sixty-five percent of whites felt that blacks had "less ambition" and fifty percent thought that they had "looser morals" than their white counterparts. In the immediate aftermath of the 1967 riots, these figures increased to seventy and fifty-eight percent respectively. Questions from the same survey about whether blacks had "less native intelligence" or desired to "live off the handout" generated similar responses.<sup>116</sup> These shifting perceptions of race, public safety, and the civil rights movement emerged as political liabilities for those who championed the liberal cause. Chicago congressman Roman Pucinski admitted "Go into any home, any bar, any barbershop and you will find people are not talking about Vietnam or rising

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<sup>114</sup> Christopher Effgen, "United States Crime Rates 1960 – 2015," Accessed March 07, 2017. <http://www.disastercenter.com/crime/uscrime.htm>.

<sup>115</sup> "After the Riots: A Survey," *Newsweek*, August 21, 1967, 18-19. This report also revealed that "Americans of all races agreed that the riots had hurt the civil rights cause, harmed blacks the most, and attracted only limited support."

<sup>116</sup> "After the Riots: A Survey," *Newsweek*, August 21, 1967, 18-19.

prices or prosperity. They are talking about Martin Luther King and how they are moving in on us and what is going to happen to our neighborhood.”<sup>117</sup>

*Newsweek* captured the era’s waning support for the protracted civil rights struggle noting, “The country seems to be retreating from active concern with its black minority-as the nation did nearly a century ago with the demise of reconstruction.”<sup>118</sup> The article profiled a frustrated and fatigued white laborer from Middle America who warned readers, “They think they’ve heard from black power, wait till they hear from white power-the little slob, G.I. Joe, the guy who breaks his ass and makes this country go. Boy, he’s getting sick and tired of all this mess. One day he’ll get fed up and when he does, look out!”<sup>119</sup>

A letter from a white father of five to U.S senator Sam Ervin captures a similar sentiment, one that, by early 1968, had begun to reverberate across the nation:

I’m sick of crime everywhere. I’m sick of riots. I’m sick of “poor” people demonstrations (Black, white, red, yellow, purple, green or any other color!) I’m sick of the U.S Supreme Court ruling for the good of a very small part rather than the whole of our society....I’m sick of the lack of law-enforcement....I’m sick of Vietnam....I’m sick of hippies, LSD, drugs, and all of the promotion the news media give them...but most of all, I’m sick of constantly being kicked in the teeth for staying home, minding my own business, working steadily, paying my bills and taxes, raising my children to be decent citizens, managing my financial affairs so I will not become a ward of the city, county, or state, and footing the bill for all the minuses mentioned herein.<sup>120</sup>

These sentiments reveal much about the nation’s disenfranchisement with the decade’s volatile racial, social, and political divisions. They also outline the extent to

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<sup>117</sup> *New York Times*, September 21, 1966, 1 and 28.

<sup>118</sup> Kenneth Auchincloss, Lawrence Martz, Tom Mathews, “The Troubled American: A Special Report on the White Majority,” *Newsweek*. October 6 1969.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Curt Furr to Sam J. Ervin, Jr., June 18, 1968, Folder 669, Box 204, Legislative Files, Ervin Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chappell Hill, quoted in Flamm (2005), 1.

which the white middle class had grown increasingly vulnerable to the racialized law and order rhetoric that had, by the 1968 election season, begun to significantly reshape the American political landscape.

## 1968

“In 1968, America was a wounded nation,” said American historian Thurston Clarke. “The wounds were moral ones; the Vietnam War and three summers of inner-city riots had inflicted them on the national soul, challenging Americans' belief that they were a uniquely noble and honorable people.”<sup>121</sup> Clarke’s observation articulates the means by which, by 1968, the United States, like its President, had succumb to the turmoil that had begun to erode the nation from within. The year would mark the height of America’s social and political unrest as blood continued to flow from the jungles of Southeast Asia, the streets of the nation’s inflamed ghettos, and from the balconies and podiums where its greatest advocates of peace were slain by the era’s darker impulses.

In January, the Tet Offensive solidified the country’s skepticism regarding a victory in Vietnam and sent the President into a state of hopeless despair from which he never fully recovered. Johnson declared in March that he would not seek reelection. In the wake of his announcement, support for Democratic presidential candidates Robert Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy began to galvanize as Vice President Hubert Humphrey prepared his own bid for the Oval Office. Just days after the President’s announcement, James Earl Ray shot and killed Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee. As news of King’s death spread, over sixty American cities erupted in riots leading to forty-three

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<sup>121</sup> Thurston Clarke, *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 1.



deaths, more than three-thousand injuries, and twenty-seven thousand arrests.<sup>122</sup> Two months later, Robert Kennedy was shot dead after delivering a campaign speech in Los Angeles. The optimism and promise that characterized the early 1960s had dissolved into fear and dread as, "across the country, the young blamed their unyielding elders; the elders blamed the disorderly young. Black militants blamed white racism and fearful whites blamed black power."<sup>123</sup> Not since the Civil War had the United States been so divided. Much like the War Between the States one hundred years earlier, America in 1968 found itself fractured over a seemingly endless war, racial animus, and the loss of an idealism that had once seemed unwavering.

### **Chicago**

As the number of American troops stationed in Vietnam peaked at 541,000 in August, anti-war protests surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago pitted youthful demonstrators against police and the Illinois National Guard.<sup>124</sup> The agitation surrounding the convention emerged as a power struggle between free expression in the city's public spaces and law and order. The blue collar police force exchanged slurs and blows with affluent, and what many perceived as, entitled kids from the suburbs. Led by the era's infamous new-left torchbearers Abbie Hoffman and Tom Hayden, these demonstrations represented the generational fracture between the nation's youthful dissidents and the powers that be.

With anxious delegates shouting and shoving inside Chicago's International Amphitheatre, the nation watched as tensions mounted between protesters and law

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<sup>122</sup> James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 686.

<sup>123</sup> Flamm, 150.

<sup>124</sup> George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam an American Ordeal* (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010), 460.

enforcement. After several days of confrontation, violence erupted between the police force and demonstrators. Press coverage of the event exposed a Democratic Party that was unraveling in full view of the country. To those watching the coverage on television, the Democrats seemed unable to stabilize their party. Convincing voters to hand the presidential election to Vice President Hubert Humphrey would prove difficult.

Democratic Mayor Richard Daley presided over the convention and sounded the call for law and order. As tensions mounted, Daley promised, “As long as I am mayor, there will be law and order in Chicago. Nobody is going to take over this city.”<sup>125</sup> The mayor was a walking embodiment of his city’s blue collar identity; the antithesis of the radical leftist agitators that had stirred his city’s youth into a volatile frenzy. For him, the conflict between demonstrators and police was personal. In the wake of the riots and looting that followed King’s assassination months earlier, Daley declared that police should “have had instructions to shoot arsonists and looters-arsonist to kill and looters to maim and detain.”<sup>126</sup> Now, with a divided nation watching his city descend into chaos, the mayor would not back down.

While covering the escalating brutality outside of the Democratic National Convention, Walter Cronkite referred to the police force as “thugs.” Mayor Daley, objecting to the negative characterization of police, subsequently demanded equal air time. In an interview on August 29, the Chicago Mayor defended law enforcement efforts. Viewers overwhelmingly agreed with Mayor Daley’s defense of his officers and the public support that followed the interview stood as a potent indication of the white middle class’ broader disapproval of civil unrest and riots. CBS received over nine-

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<sup>125</sup> “Daley City Under Siege,” *Time*, August 30, 1968, 19.

<sup>126</sup> “Should Looter Be Shot?” *Time*, April 26, 1968, 18.

thousand letters, ninety percent of which were critical of the networks portrayal of the unrest outside the convention. A Gallup poll found that by a margin of fifty-six to thirty-one percent, Americans approved of the mayor's handling of the demonstrators. A Harris poll reported that sixty-six percent of those surveyed sided with Daley and the police.<sup>127</sup>

The overwhelming response to the Daley interview was a key indication that public safety and law and order were the primary issue facing white middle class voters in the coming election. *Time* magazine reported, "Law and order now looms as the number one issue of 1968, even overshadowing the war that keeps more than 500,000 American servicemen in combat in Southeast Asia."<sup>128</sup> By the summer of 1968, many Americans were exasperated with the decade's turmoil and seemingly endless uprisings. They had witnessed crime rates soar, cities burn, youth revolt, black militancy, and now Democratic delegates shoved each other, while outside, tear gas obscured another violent confrontation between authority and a dissenting mob. Law and order had become the country's primary concern and the coming election would serve as a referendum on the social, political, and economic changes that had fractured the last vestiges of the nation's post-war consensus. Economic prosperity had slowed, crime was rampant, and the war dragged on, while the New Deal order that had once promised so much, began to fade along with Hubert Humphry's hopes of returning to the White House.

### **Nixon's Revival and the Southern Strategy**

From the Miami Beach Convention Center in August 1968, Richard Nixon accepted the Republican Party's presidential nomination. As he addressed the audience,

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<sup>127</sup> "Commentary," *CBS News*, September 2, 1968.

<sup>128</sup> "The Overshadowing Issue," *Time*, August 1, 1968, 21.

he promised to restore law and order to a divided and anxious nation. Nixon condemned the Johnson administration for allowing the United States to descend into chaos declaring, “When the nation with the greatest tradition of rule of law is plagued by unprecedented lawlessness, when a nation that has been known for centuries for equality of opportunity is torn by unprecedented racial violence, it is time for new leadership in America.”<sup>129</sup>

Nixon’s address to the delegates in Florida made multiple references to, “cities enveloped in smoke and flame” and “sirens in the night.” He peppered his language with pleas to the, “great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans -- the non-shouters; the non-demonstrators.” To these voters he promised, “The first civil right of every American is to be free from domestic violence, and that right must be guaranteed in this country.” “The wave of crime,” he declared, “is not going to be the wave of the future in the United States of America.”<sup>130</sup> In his 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon would make seventeen speeches regarding law and order. His language nodded to the white middle class resentments that had followed in the wake of the decade’s civil disobedience and racial unrest. “The increase in the crime rate,” he said, “can be traced directly to the spread of the corrosive doctrine that every citizen has the inherent right to decide for himself which laws to obey and when to disobey them.”<sup>131</sup>

Throughout 1968, the Nixon campaign worked to convert the era’s racial tensions and fear into political capital. Exploiting white middle class anxiety regarding public

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<sup>129</sup> Richard Nixon: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida. Accessed February 04, 2017. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25968>.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Richard Nixon, “If Mob Rule Takes Hold in U.S.,” *U.S News and World Report*, Aug. 15, 1966, 64.

safety, the campaign relied on a Southern Strategy with racially coded promises to restore law and order. This approach would facilitate an exodus from the Democratic Party in the South on the grounds that party leadership had neglected its core base by enacting liberal reforms that promoted lawlessness, protected criminals, and disproportionately benefited black communities. The campaign hoped to attract northern Catholics, labor leaders, and conservative southern Democrats who had become alienated by civil rights related unrest, endless rioting, and the era's broader cultural upheaval.<sup>132</sup> Republicans claimed that Democrats had enacted policy that promoted social discord and permitted racial strife to infiltrate middle-class neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. Nixon offered a conservative alternative which promised to upend the Johnson administration's liberal agenda, appealing to the "silent majority" who wished to see the country returned to the stability and conservative values of previous eras.

Nixon Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman admitted the necessity of employing covertly racial language when applying the strategy to alienated white voters admitting, "You have to emphasize the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to."<sup>133</sup> Nixon's Domestic Affairs Councilor, John Ehrlichman, confirmed that, "Subliminal appeal to the anti-black voter was always present in Nixon's statements and speeches."<sup>134</sup>

"You start out by saying nigger, nigger, nigger," confessed former Republican National Committee chairman and strategist Lee Atwater as he outlined the racially

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<sup>132</sup> Michael Schaller and George Rising, *The Republican Ascendancy: American Politics, 1968-2001*. (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2002), 35.

<sup>133</sup> H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries* (New York: G.P Putman's Sons, 1994), 53 (emphasis in original). See also, Willard M Oliver. *The Law & Order Presidency*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003) 127-128; Dan Baum, *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure* (Boston: Little Brown, 1996), 13;

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

coded appeal that anchored the Southern Strategy. “By 1968,” he said, “you can’t say nigger—that hurts you, backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights, and you’re getting so abstract. Now, you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is, blacks get hurt worse than whites. We want to cut this,” he continued, “is much more abstract than even the busing thing and a hell of a lot more abstract than nigger, nigger.”<sup>135</sup> In describing the evolution of coded appeals that targeted the racial anxieties of middle class whites, Atwater articulated a strategy that would help propel Nixon to the White House and alter the American political landscape for generations.<sup>136</sup>

House Minority Leader Gerald Ford issued a common sense plea that reverberated across the once solidly Democratic South. “How long,” he asked, “are we going to abdicate law and order in favor of a soft social theory that the man who heaves a brick through your window or tosses a firebomb into your car is simply the misunderstood and underprivileged product of a broken home?”<sup>137</sup> This message articulated the sentiment that centered Nixon’s appeal to voters across the nation and reveals the underlying resentment that drove the Southern Strategy. Ford’s message was not lost on traditional Democrats in both the North and South who increasingly viewed

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<sup>135</sup> Rick Perlstein, “Exclusive: Lee Atwater’s Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy,” *The Nation*, June 29, 2015. Accessed March 28, 2017. <https://www.thenation.com/article/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy/>.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph A. Airstup *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-down Advancement in the South*. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 5. In the wake of the 1972 presidential election, George McGovern said of the Southern Strategy: What is the Southern strategy? It is this. It says to the South; let the poor stay poor, let your economy trail the nation, forget about decent homes and medical care for all of your people, choose officials who oppose every effort to benefit the many at the expense of the few-and in return, we will overlook the rights of the black man, appoint a few southerners to high office, and lift your spirits by attacking the eastern establishment whose bank accounts we are filling with your labor and your industry.

<sup>130</sup> Flamm, 5.

<sup>137</sup> Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin. *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 202.

the Johnson administration with growing distrust and mounting apprehension. As a result, the 1968 Presidential election would find twelve million voters deserting the Democratic Party.<sup>138</sup>

Kevin Phillips's landmark study *The Emerging Republican Majority* analyzed the impact of race in realigning the American political landscape. The future Nixon advisor poignantly observed that, "Historically, our party system has reflected layer upon layer of group oppositions. The prevailing cleavages in American voting behavior," he said, "have been ethnic and cultural. Politically, at least, the United States has not been a very effective melting pot. The Negro problem, having become a national rather than a local one, is the principal cause of the breakup of the New Deal coalition."<sup>139</sup>

Phillips anticipated a white exodus from the Democratic Party, as it had increasingly become identified with African Americans rather than the New Deal programs that had primarily benefited whites during the Great Depression. Southerners, predicted Phillips, would desert the party that had claimed their political allegiance since the Civil War. He concluded that, "Ethnic and cultural division has so often shaped American politics that, given the immense mid-century impact of Negro enfranchisement and integration, reaction to this change almost inevitably had to result in political realignment."<sup>140</sup>

Phillips observed that white southern Democrats had grown alienated by the party's support for civil rights legislation and War on Poverty programs that integrated their communities and channeled tax revenue into African American communities. Nixon

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<sup>138</sup> Flamm, 2.

<sup>139</sup> Kevin Phillips. *The Emerging Republican Majority*. (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969), 22, 39-40, 470.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

stood to gain scores of new voters as a result of mounting animus toward black America. Describing this transition, Warren Weaver of the *New York Times* observed, "Full racial polarization is an essential ingredient of [the Southern Strategy's] political pragmatism. They want to see a black Democratic Party, particularly in the South, because this will drive into the Republican Party precisely the kind of anti-Negro whites who will help constitute the emerging majority. This even leads [them] to support some civil rights efforts."<sup>141</sup>

### **1968 Presidential Election**

Advancing the Southern Strategy, Nixon and his advisors carefully measured their position on law and order, safeguarding their platform against claims of racial extremism. They understood the necessity of leveling racially coded appeals to disillusioned white voters, while still appearing moderate next to the independent late-comer George Wallace and his reckless provocations. As a third party candidate, Wallace had grown more zealous in the months leading up to the 1968 election, declaring from the campaign trail, "We don't have riots in Alabama. They start a riot down there, first one of 'em to pick up a brick gets a bullet in the brain, that's all. And then you walk over to the next one and say, all right, pick up a brick. We just want to see you pick up one of them bricks, now!"<sup>142</sup> He followed the diatribe by promising to shoot arsonists and looters and famously threatened to drive his car over demonstrators. Campaigning in California, Wallace criticized "pseudo-intellectuals" who equated crime in black communities to societal inequality and poverty. He lambasted liberals for rationalizing criminal behavior

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<sup>141</sup> Warren Weaver, "The Emerging Republican Majority," *New York Times*, Sept, 21, 1969.

<sup>142</sup> *New York Post*, October 25, 1968.



in poor communities by claiming, "The killer didn't get enough watermelon to eat when he was ten years old."<sup>143</sup>

Wallace's rhetoric entertained and aroused white middle class audiences; stirring them to a frenzied state with racial insinuations that evoked negative images of African Americans. Following one rally, Wallace told a reporter, "Did you see those women in there? They were hysterical about their children. Folks are mad about law and order and about schools... race mixing doesn't work. Show me a place where it worked."<sup>144</sup> His language and innuendo linked civil rights protest with a broader breakdown of law and order. A commercial from his 1968 presidential campaign depicted riots in the streets, imploring viewers to, "Take a good look. This was done by anarchists, revolutionaries - the Molotov cocktail set. Ask yourself why are the anti-American, anti-God, anarchists also anti-Wallace? Want to get rid of them? Then don't waste your vote on those who encourage illegal marches." The ad then asked voters to, "Vote for a law-abiding, God-fearing America. It takes courage. Wallace has it. Do you?"<sup>145</sup>

Wallace echoed this sentiment with emphatic pleas to audiences throughout the nation. The Alabama governor warned of a world backsliding into chaos at the hands of communists, beatniks, and civil rights agitators, all of whom were contributing to the decline of societal order. Along the campaign trail, Wallace shouted, "It's a sad day in our country when you cannot walk even in your neighborhood at night or even in the daytime because both national parties in the last number of years have [pandered to] every group of anarchists that have ever roamed the streets of San Francisco, Los Angeles and

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<sup>143</sup> Carter, 313.

<sup>144</sup> Stephan Leshner. *George Wallace: American Populist* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 399.

<sup>145</sup> George Wallace: *Settin' the Woods on Fire*, (PBS American Experience, 2000).

throughout the country.” He concluded his rant warning the crowd, “And now they've created themselves a Frankenstein monster and the chickens are coming home to roost all over this country.”<sup>146</sup>

The majority of Wallace's 1968 support came from protestant, Goldwater supporters in the South and Catholic union members in the North. Three quarters of those who supported Wallace were in favor of slowing racial integration, while seventy percent expressed anxiety about recent riots and street crime.<sup>147</sup> These numbers reflect the anxiety of northern, middle-class whites who had grown tired of integration and riots. They, more so than their affluent neighbors, were likely to be directly impacted by newly integrated spaces; sharing public facilities that had once belonged solely to whites.

To these voters, Wallace represented a reprieve from the social changes that had begun to leave them displaced and nervous about losing their tentative grasp on the middle class. Many felt compelled to protect the prevailing structures that assured their social and economic superiority. Integration violated a long established order - a hierarchy of social belonging and place that threatened dominant white status; often eliciting visceral responses of fear and anger. The true source of racial animus for many of these voters was the threat of falling from a well-established social ranking - one that had assured them generations of supremacy. Many of the white voters likely to support Wallace felt unable to escape black encroachment of their schools, factory floors, public facilities, and neighborhoods. They viewed integration as a zero-sum game. Black America's foothold into the middle class was arriving at *their* expense.

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<sup>146</sup> Berkowitz, Peter Berkowitz and David Cole. *Varieties of Progressivism in America*. (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004)

<sup>147</sup> Panzer to LBJ, September 16, 1968, Box 27, Ex PL/Wallace, George, WHSF, LBJ Library; “Why They Want Him,” *Time*, October 18, 1968, 19.

Social psychologists Richard Eibach and Thomas Keegan studied the degree to which the human mind processed these losses and applied their research to whites experiencing integration. They observed that, “The human mind seeks to assure whites that their superior position is warranted rather than illegitimate. But it seems likely to also reflect a cognitive predisposition to greatly resent any effort to take away what we presently hold. Thus,” the study concluded, “even if gains from integration exceed the losses, the losses will be counted much more heavily in how whites experience them.”<sup>148</sup> For other white voters, Wallace simply represented a return to the previous era’s acceptance of white supremacy and opposition to racial progress. An Italian American at a Madison Square Garden rally observed, “George Wallace sure told them Niggas a thing or two.” A cab driver from Baltimore applauded Wallace’s highly racialized tough-on-crime posturing, declaring, “I like his stand on law and order. You know - The niggers.”<sup>149</sup>

As the election approached, Nixon positioned himself between Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s reluctance to fully embrace law and order and the extremism of George Wallace’s zealous rants, emerging as a seemingly reasonable middle ground candidate between the nation’s polarizing and divergent political ideologies. In the months leading up the election, organized labor’s staunch support for Humphrey, as well as Wallace’s fanaticism, had damaged the Alabama governor’s standing in the polls. By late October, sixty-nine percent of those surveyed felt that he was a racial extremist, an

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<sup>148</sup> Richard P. Eibach "Are We Free at Last? Loss Aversion, Social Dominance, and White and Black Americans' Differing Assessments of Progress towards Racial Equality, "*PsycEXTRA Dataset*, (2006).

<sup>149</sup> Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 174; "Wallace: The Unspoken Issue." *Newsweek*, November 4, 1968, 35.

increase of eighteen percentage points. The number of those polled who felt that he would properly handle law and order fell from fifty-three to twenty-one percent.<sup>150</sup>

While Wallace slipped in the polls, Nixon continued to run a deliberate but measured campaign, utilizing television ads that touched upon the law and order premises that had become the cornerstone of his campaign. One commercial announced, "Freedom from fear is a basic right of every American and we must restore it."<sup>151</sup> His message tapped directly into the resentments and racial anxiety of middle-class America and played a prominent role in shaping public opinion in the months leading up the election. The G.O.P candidate had learned in the 1960 presidential debates the potency of television media and vowed this time to engage it in his favor. After viewing one of his campaign ads in 1968, Nixon remarked, "Yep, this hits it right on the nose...it's all about law and order and the damn Negro-Puerto Rican groups out there."<sup>152</sup>

Future Fox News chairman Roger Ailes served as a media advisor to Nixon in the months leading up to the election. He counseled the candidate to bypass the left-leaning press, and instead, use the power of television to directly engage voters with a series of televised events. These staged town hall gatherings placed loyal G.O.P. party members in the audience. Ailes described those in attendance as an "applause machine" that lofted pre-selected questions at Nixon. As a counterbalance to a token black man who had been planted in a Philadelphia audience, Ailes proposed adding a, "good, mean Wallace cab

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<sup>150</sup> "Wallace's Army: The Coalition of Frustration," *Time*, October 18, 1968, 15; Louis Harris, "Polls: An Insight," *Newsweek*, November 11, 1968, 34; "The Autonomy of the Vote," *Newsweek*, November 11, 1968, 35-36.

<sup>151</sup> President Nomination Acceptance Speech, August 8, 1968, PPS 208 (1968).58.11.2, Speech Files, RMN Library.

<sup>152</sup> Joe McGinniss *The Selling of the President*. New York, NY, U.S.A.: (Penguin Books, 1988).

driver. Wouldn't that be great? Some guy to sit there and say, 'Awright, Mac, what about these niggers?'"<sup>153</sup>

When confronted with suggestions that his calls for law and order were racially charged critiques of poor black communities, the future president took the advice offered by his speech writer Pat Buchanan. Nixon defended his campaign against claims of racializing his rhetoric to appeal to white voters, declaring that the charge was "reverse racism" because it, "implies that Negroes are opposed to law and order. This is an outrageous calumny and indeed two recent polls indicate clearly that crime is the major concern of Negroes in our largest cities." He further deflected claims of race baiting declaring, "Law and order is not racism. Law and order with justice is what Negroes want, what they need, and they have an ever greater stake in it than do whites, because they are the main victims of disorder and illegal activities."<sup>154</sup>

In the summer and autumn months leading up to the 1968 election, Nixon addressed middle-class white voters whom he termed the "Forgotten Americans" - the Silent Majority who, "did not indulge in violence, those who did not break the law, people who pay their taxes and go to work, people who send their children to school, who go to their churches, people who are not haters, people who love this country, and because they love this country are angry about what has happened to America."<sup>155</sup> It was among this increasingly anxious demographic that Nixon's message found its greatest

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<sup>153</sup> Tim Dickinson, "How Roger Ailes Built the Fox News Fear Factory," *Rolling Stone*, May 25, 2011. Accessed February 03, 2017. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/how-roger-ailes-built-the-fox-news-fear-factory-20110525>.

<sup>154</sup> "Order and Justice Under Law," September 29, 1968, Box 20, Ramsey Clark MSS, LBJ Library; Buchanan to Nixon, September 7, 1966, Box 18, Research Files, RMN Library; Press Conference, Disneyland Hotel in Anaheim, September 17, 1968 PPS 208 (1968). 102, Speech Files, RMN Library.

<sup>155</sup> "Daley City Under Siege," *Time*, August, 30, 1968, 19. Richard E. Rubenstein and Stephen Kaplan, "Planning Ahead for the Summer in Chicago Part One: Black and Blue," *New Republic*, April 6, 1968.

resonance. The decade's cascading turbulence had shifted the nation's collective temperament and propelled Nixon to the Oval Office. He, like Reagan in 1966, would be the beneficiary of the era's chaos and division.

Nixon won the 1968 presidential election receiving 302 electoral votes to Humphrey's 181 and Wallace's forty-five.<sup>156</sup> The liberal momentum born during the New Deal and emboldened by the decade's early optimism and economic prosperity, had finally collapsed in a contentious battle of attrition. George Wallace's relative success as an independent candidate revealed the potency of appealing to white America's racial anxieties. He received sixteen percent of the vote in the Midwest while carrying five southern states and receiving nearly ten million popular votes.<sup>157</sup> His success as "the most important loser in American politics" exposed white disenfranchisement with the decade's turbulent changes.<sup>158</sup> Wallace's support and Nixon's triumph underscored the degree to which a growing number of Americans had become disenchanted with the perceived failures of liberal government, the loss of law and order, an unpopular foreign war, and the decade's volatile racial discord.

Vice President Humphrey was unable to successfully refute Republican claims that the Johnson administration had facilitated the nation's descent into cultural fracture and social unrest. The election was a referendum that firmly established a new precedent that would follow subsequent presidential candidates into the twenty first century. In order to gain access to the White House, presidential hopefuls would need to channel the

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<sup>156</sup> "Narrow Victory, Wide Problems," *Time*, November, 15, 1968, 20; The Way the Voting Went- And Why," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 18, 1968, 40, 42; "Nixon's Hard-Won Chance to Lead," *Time*, November 15, 1968, 22.

<sup>157</sup> Matusow, 426.

<sup>158</sup> The quote "the most important loser in American politics" is attributed to Dan Carter.

anxieties, insecurities, and frustrations of white America into cogent political capital.

Failure to rally the support of these voters would mean almost certain defeat in subsequent election seasons.

## EPILOGUE

President Richard Nixon's first year in office marked both a literal and symbolic end to the 1960s. Noting the degree to which, by early 1969, the United States had divided against itself, the President acknowledged the nation's "crisis of spirit" and "raucous discord." From the inaugural podium he declared, "We cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another."<sup>159</sup> The decade's disunion and turmoil would continue throughout the year as an exhausted nation continued to unravel. The horrors associated with My Lai, Kent State, and the Manson Family ushered out the decade as anti-war protests and racial unrest continued to divide the nation. As Americans took their first strides across the lunar surface in 1969, they looked back on a homeland forever changed by the painful conflicts that defined the era.

As the turbulent 1960s came to a close, the United States began to confront new challenges that would remove racially coded provocations and law and order posturing from the forefront of the nation's political discourse. Although tough on crime promises and white backlash did not disappear, the shifting political landscape did not lend itself as easily to the racially coded rhetoric employed by Goldwater, Wallace, and Nixon. In the 1960s, the cauldron of racial tension, integration, urban riots, and student protest stirred the nation's anxieties, leaving the white middle class vulnerable to calls for law and order. However, by the early 1970s these contentious issues began to fade from the headlines and were replaced by America's withdrawal from Vietnam, Watergate, and a sharp economic decline.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> "Richard Nixon: Inaugural Address - January 20, 1969." The American Presidency Project. Accessed April 07, 2017. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=1941>.

<sup>160</sup> Flamm, 179-180.



Nixon's corruption scandal nullified the moral high ground of his law and order platform, while the liberal view that linked crime to poverty in the 1960s was abandoned by many on the Left as unsound. While the methodology that propelled the Southern Strategy in the 1960s was still evident in local political campaigns throughout the nation, its presence at the national level diminished amid the malaise of the 1970s. However, the election of the fortieth president in 1980 would restore racially coded appeals for states' rights and limited government to the center of American political discourse.

While campaigning in 1980, Ronald Reagan revised the Southern Strategy and applied it to emerging changes in the American cultural, economic, and political landscape.<sup>161</sup> He rode to Pennsylvania Avenue with the support of powerful conservative think tanks and a reinvigorated Republican base. This New Right movement harnessed the electoral backing of Evangelical Christians and an increasingly conservative white middle class. Many of these voters carried racial resentments and frustrations from the sixties with them into the 1980s.

With Reagan as the party's charismatic figurehead, racially coded provocations were revived and once again brought to the forefront of the American political arena.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> At a 1980 campaign stop located just miles from the infamous murders of three civil rights activists in 1964, Ronald Reagan revisited a core precept of the Southern Strategy by appealing to the racial resentments of middle-class whites. From a stage at the Neshoba County Fair in Mississippi he announced, "I still believe the answer to any problem lies with the people. I believe in states' rights. I believe in people doing as much as they can for themselves at the community level and at the private level, and I believe we've distorted the balance of our government today by giving powers that were never intended in the Constitution to that federal establishment." - *1980, August 3 - Ronald Reagan - Neshoba County Fair - States Rights Speech - Closed Captioned*. Performed by Reagan. YouTube. October 15, 2015. Accessed February 2, 2017. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqNkmZ3n\\_bc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqNkmZ3n_bc).

<sup>162</sup> While campaigning in the South in 1976, Reagan described an imagined male welfare recipient as "some young buck" (a derogatory term for black males) who, "buys a T-bone steak while you were waiting in line to buy hamburger." - Lopez (2015), 59, citing Dan T. Carter. *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2001) pg. 64. Reagan also condemned, "Chicago welfare queens with eighty names, thirty addresses, and twelve Social Security cards who is collecting veteran's benefits on for non-existing deceased husbands. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she's collecting welfare under each of her names.

Preying upon the flaccid leadership and economic travails of the 1970s, he would wean the nation away from the last vestiges of the New Deal and hasten blue collar America's move toward modern conservatism. As he pushed the nation's political center to the right, Reagan mobilized the racial anxieties and resentments of America's white middle class, completing a process that had begun in the primary victories of Wallace and Goldwater two decades earlier. By the 1980s, the Southern Strategy had come full circle, facilitating the rise of a modern conservatism that would impact the American political landscape well into the twenty first century.<sup>163</sup>

The racially coded language that anchored the political ambitions of Wallace, Goldwater, and Nixon in the 1960s has since echoed across the campaigns of Democrats and Republicans alike. George H. W. Bush mobilized white fear of black criminality by enacting Willie Horton, an African American convicted of rape and murder, as a political boogiemán in order to portray his Democratic opponent Michael Dukakis as soft on crime. The controversial ploy helped sway voters against the Massachusetts Governor, allowing Bush to capture the Oval Office in 1988.<sup>164</sup> Four years later while running as a Democratic Presidential candidate, Bill Clinton demonstrated to white middle class voters his willingness to get tough on crime by overseeing the execution of a mentally

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Her tax-free cash income is over \$150,000." - Lopez (2015), 58, citing "Welfare Queen Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign," *New York Times*, February 15, 1976. See also Kaaryn S. Gustafson, *Cheating Welfare: Public Assistance and the Criminalization of Poverty* 34-37 (2011).

<sup>163</sup> In the 1980 Presidential election, twenty-two percent of Democrats abandoned the party to vote for Reagan. The defection rate rose to thirty-four percent among those Democrats who felt that civil rights leaders are pushing too hard for reform – Alexander (2012), 48. Additionally, seventy-one percent felt the government should not make any special effort to help blacks because they should help themselves. - Lopez (2015), 59, citing Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*. (New York: Norton, 1992.) Pg. 153.

<sup>164</sup> At the height of the controversy over the Horton ads, twelve percent of the electorate began to support Bush over Dukakis. Dan Carter's *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* observed, "No campaign ever turns on one issue, but no one who followed the campaign believes George Bush had any more devastating ally the homicidal, black rapist Willie Horton." - Carter (2001), 79.

disabled black man during his 1992 campaign.<sup>165</sup> As President, Clinton ended “welfare as we know it,” signifying to Middle America an intolerance for those who abused public assistance. This measure, while outwardly race neutral, nodded to racial resentments regarding a social safety net which many white voters associated with African Americans. While in office, Clinton expanded Reagan’s drug war and enacted “three strikes” sentencing mandates which disproportionately impacted African American communities and greatly expanded the nation’s incarcerated population. These actions indicate that Clinton had learned from his Republican forbearers the necessity of channeling white America’s racial anxieties into electoral support.<sup>166</sup>

The September 11 terrorist attacks recalibrated the worldview of America’s white middle class, providing the nation’s elected officials with new leverage from which to transfer racial trepidation into political capital. Critics of George W. Bush point to his administration’s channeling of post-9/11 racial animosity in order to advance a broad range of political initiatives, including the War on Terror and America’s 2003 invasion of Iraq. These voices express valid concerns although they are also compelled to acknowledge Bush’s public denouncement of anti-Muslim sentiment as well as his electoral support from Hispanic Americans in both 2000 and 2004.<sup>167</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>165</sup> In 1992, Clinton returned to Arkansas from the campaign trail to oversee the execution of Ricky Ray Rector. In the wake of the execution Clinton concluded, “I can be nicked a lot, but no one can say I’m soft on crime.” - Michael Kramer. “Frying Them Isn’t the Answer.” *Time*, March 14, 1994.

<sup>166</sup> Clinton transformed public perceptions of the Democrats ability to get tough on crime. “In 1991, Republicans had a 37-16% advantage on law and order according to a Time/CNN poll; by 1994, the Democrats had a 42-34% edge according to a CNN/USA today poll.” – Flamm (2005), 184, citing Blumenthal, Sydney. “Crime Pays.” *The New Yorker*, May 9, 1994, 42-44.

Acknowledging the impact of the Southern Strategy, Clinton emerged as a “New Democrat.” The Arkansas Governor embraced many of the political precepts found in Thomas and Mary Edsall’s book *Chain Reaction*. This work implored Democratic candidates to get tough on crime and welfare and to distance themselves from African-Americans.

<sup>167</sup> Lopez (2012), 115-122.

prominent liberal scholars including Michelle Alexander, Ian Haney Lopez, and Cornell West find considerable fault in President Obama's failure to enact more impactful racial reforms. They view his acknowledgement of the social problems associated with absent black fathers, deportation of undocumented immigrants, failure to end the Drug War, as well as his hardline stance on child rapists, as evidence of his capacity to pander to white voters.<sup>168</sup> Prominent black academics continue to criticize Obama's handling of a myriad of race related issues ranging from "Gates-Gate" to housing, unemployment, and education. Collectively, they contend that his tepid response to these issues stems from an unwillingness to alienate white voters. However, my analysis contends that both Bush and Obama, when compared to the political actors profiled in this study, employed relative restraint in their appeals to white racial anxieties.

However, as President Obama prepared to leave office, the populist rise of Donald Trump once again brought the resentments of the nation's white middle class to the forefront of the American political arena. The country's changing racial demographics, new fears regarding terrorism and immigration, as well America's place in the global economy, have left many whites displaced and alienated. Just as the social turbulence of the 1960s drew this vulnerable population away from Lyndon Johnson's liberal reforms, the racial anxieties and resentments inherent in the twenty first century political landscape have again inspired a conservative backlash. Trump's campaign promises and "America First" platform made little attempt to veil a contempt for the nation's progressive domestic advancements or the United States' role in an increasingly

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<sup>168</sup> Lopez, Alexander, and West join prominent African Americans such as Tavis Smiley, Michael Eric Dyson, and Julianne Malveaux who have publically condemned Obama for his centrist stance on issues confronting the nation's black population.

globalized world. His message was welcomed by the white middle class voters who found in his language an acknowledgement of their displacement, racial fears, and unspoken resentments.<sup>169</sup>

As the nation again finds itself divided along ever widening ideological, racial, and economic lines, echoes of the 1960s ring throughout contemporary America's social and political landscape. This disunity is not entirely new or unprecedented. Instead, it represents the most recent release of white America's smoldering racial resentments and broader social frustrations. These festering sentiments came to a rolling boil throughout the Obama presidency as liberal momentum and social change again challenged critical precepts of the nation's long standing status quo. For many among the country's white middle class, Trump's provocations offered a restoration of the national character and a reprieve from the literal and symbolic changes put forth by America's first black president.

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<sup>169</sup> White voters preferred Trump over Clinton by 21 percentage points (58% to 37%), according to the exit poll conducted by Edison Research for the National Election Pool. Voters without a college degree supported Trump 52%-44%. Trump's margin among whites without a college degree is the largest among any candidate in exit polls since 1980. Two-thirds (67%) of non-college educated whites backed Trump, compared with just 28% who supported Clinton, resulting in a 39-point advantage for Trump among this group. Trump also won whites with a college degree 49% to 45%. - Alec Tyson, and Shiva Maniam. "Behind Trump's Victory: Divisions by Race, Gender, Education." Pew Research Center. November 09, 2016. Accessed April 09, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/>.

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