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Driven Towards Whiteness: the 1968 Election and White Supremacy

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Existing literature highlights the political interaction between the Republican party and civil rights, how civil rights impacted the white ethnic revival, and the appeals made by the Republican party to keep their new voters happy. Many are familiar with the history of discrimination against Eastern European immigrants, yet the process through which they adopted white identity politics is another matter. The role of right-wing activists and leaders during the Wallace Presidential campaign was instrumental in connecting these dots for the Republican leadership, however this too goes largely unnoticed. My thesis will complement existing literature by tracing the involvement of these right-wingers to the political realignment of many white ethnic voters, newly incorporated into 'white' America.

The Democratic party failed its faithful Southern members, who, a little over 100 years earlier, had fled the Union in defense of their slaves, their right to state sovereignty, and in overall rejection of changing cultural norms. By the end of the 1960s, this failure could not be more evident to Harry Dent, a South Carolinian and political aide to Senator Strom Thurmond. Thurmond's abandonment of the Democratic party first in 1948 and in 1964, at Dent's urging, to support Republican Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater and his opposition to civil rights. Like any good political operative, Dent sought to further his career, yet the vicious anti-Southern narrative he felt existed in national consciousness fueled his desire to succeed.<sup>1</sup>

Dent had positioned himself well as the election of 1968 approached: his faithful service to Thurmond garnered him a handsome appointment as the head of the state's Republican party.<sup>2</sup> Concerned over a prospective third-party challenge hailing from Alabama, the Republican

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<sup>1</sup> James Boyd, "Harry Dent, the President's Political Coordinator, Says:," *The New York Times*, February 1, 1970, sec. Archives, accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/02/01/archives/harry-dent-the-presidents-political-coordinator-says-i-gave.html>; "The Lives They Lived - Harry Dent - Politics - The New York Times," accessed May 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/30/magazine/30DENT-t.html>.

<sup>2</sup> "The Lives They Lived - Harry Dent - Politics - The New York Times."

opportunity to capture more of the Southern vote greatly depended on the endorsement of Senator Thurmond, which naturally required Dent's approval. Former Vice President Richard Nixon's visit to South Carolina not only won him the Senator's support, but as historian Daniel T. Carter noted, his flattery paid long-term returns: "'Strom is no racist,' he told reporters; 'Strom is a man of courage and integrity'. To Thurmond, laboring under the burden of his past as the 'Dr.No' of American race relations, it was like being granted absolution from purgatory by the pope of American politics".<sup>3</sup> Not only did Thurmond remain ever loyal to Nixon in the future, but after his ascension to the Presidency, bequeathed to him his most valuable political asset: Dent.

Although Nixon's 1968 election offered more of a wink to segregationists than a full fledged commitment, Dent's newfound position as political liaison between the President and the skeptical South helped to smooth things over. A son of Jim Crow tasked with expanding Nixon's regional appeal, Dent helped craft an interpretation of recent civil rights legislation to both solidify support for Nixon, but also to transform the former party of Lincoln into a bulwark for state's rights. Harry Dent, Nixon's head Southern strategist, viewed the Democrats as having created, "...vast social programs...creating a class of the permanently dependent even as they bankrupted the middle class...The poor -particularly the black poor- became increasingly appealing scapegoats".<sup>4</sup> Borrowing rhetoric from the far-right appeal to Southern voters in 1968, White House Council John Ehrlichman stated it was the administration's aim "...to present a position on crime, education, or public housing in such a way that a voter could 'avoid admitting to himself that he was attracted by a racist appeal'".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 329.

<sup>4</sup> Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

Democratic policy not only alienated Southern voters, it also made white ethnics uncomfortable. Newer members of the American middle-class, white ethnics did not oppose civil rights. But they objected to the seemingly unjustified claim made by African Americans that the U.S. Government owed them this aid: “‘We spend millions and the Negroes get everything’, stated Paul Deac, head of the National Confederation of American Ethnic Groups, ‘and we get nothing’”.<sup>6</sup> Attempting to assuage these concerns, Nixon created a Nationalities Division within the RNC, hoping to create an establishment link between these new voters and the party at large.<sup>7</sup> Nixon’s success with this initiative would be lukewarm at best, due in part to the lack of enthusiasm from his inner circle, including Charles Colson. The Nationalities Division appeared unnecessary given the broadening reception of white America to Nixon’s law and order rhetoric: but the inclusion of white ethnics as members of the average white American public eager to return to pre-civil rights norms was a marvel in and of itself. Seizing upon the frustrations of white ethnics, Dent offered Southerners a new vehicle for their racial animus in the form of backlash, ultimately helping the administration garner support to later defeat expanding civil rights. Today’s Harry Dent painfully recalls those decisions: “‘When I look back...‘my biggest regret now is anything I did that stood in the way of the rights of black people’”.<sup>8</sup>

### The Historical Construction of White Identity

American whiteness began taking shape with the discovery of the new world. The establishment of a Puritan colony in North America brought an attitude of religious and moral superiority, something they imposed on their Native American neighbors. England, the home for

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue and John D. Skrentny, “The White Ethnic Strategy,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, n.d.), 178.

<sup>7</sup> Ieva Zake, “Nixon vs. the G.O.P: Republican Ethnic Politics, 1968-1972,” *Polish American Studies* 67, no. 2 (2010): 53–74.

<sup>8</sup> “The Lives They Lived - Harry Dent - Politics - The New York Times.”

most of the Puritans, continually battled the Irish over territory and culture, using any means necessary to force the latter into submission. Labeling the Irish as “savages” helped to dehumanize them and delegitimize their claims to their land.<sup>9</sup>

Several factors help to understand how two neighboring peoples can view each other as so fundamentally different and, to some extent, less human than the other. English religiosity and national ethnocentrism were inherently connected, both facilitated through a church and state partnership. A rigid class structure defined English society, the justification for which stemmed from the divine right of kings and Protestant determinism. In contrast, the Irish were pagan, nomadic, and organized more tribally than under one supreme authority, as in England under the crown. English attempts to colonize the Irish were couched in an unapologetically arrogant manner: English life, here strongly tied to Protestant life, was superior, therefore Irish submission to English rule would bring a greater quality of life for the ungodly nomads.<sup>10</sup>

In the New World, what appeared to most infuriate the English are the lack of agricultural development by the Native Americans. The “Protestant work ethic”, which informed the daily lives of settlers, asserted that discipline and hard work were central features of being a good Christian. Psalm 104, among other Biblical passages, enforces this understanding of labor: “[God] makes the grass grow for the livestock and provides crops for man to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth”<sup>11</sup>. Domesticated animals and intensive agriculture are nearly the prescribed lifestyle for the devout, practices not similarly held by Natives. Settlers interpreted

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<sup>9</sup> Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 4th ed.. (Boulder, CO: Boulder, CO : Westview Press, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> “Psalm 104:14 He Makes the Grass Grow for the Livestock and Provides Crops for Man to Cultivate, Bringing Forth Food from the Earth:,” accessed February 5, 2020, <https://biblehub.com/psalms/104-14.htm>.

the wasted abundance and potential in North America as confirmation that not only were Natives godless, but they were also intellectually inferior and squandering their potential.<sup>12</sup>

The ambitious motivations for Puritan colonization of North America can be summed up by the renowned words of John Winthrop, a settler of the Massachusetts Bay Colony: "[w]e shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us".<sup>13</sup> Winthrop and Puritans generally sought out a religious haven in the New World, a goal Native Americans stood in the way of. Puritan animosity towards their Native American neighbors mimics their ancestral struggles with Ireland. Both the Irish and Natives were nomadic, more concerned with territorial control than private ownership, and pagan. A common English expression, the only good Irishman is a dead Irishman, was adapted to fit a new struggle: the only good Indian is a dead Indian. Writings of many Puritans advocated for violence against Natives similar to that used to quell Irish noncompliance, rejecting any ability to coexist.<sup>14</sup>

Whiteness in America began taking shape prior to the introduction of African slave labor. Modern cultural pillars of American values arose during settlement: the centrality of faith, the necessity of hard work, and the superiority of their way of life. Global participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade inevitably brought slaves to the colonies and was used, as elsewhere in Europe, to provide free labor to an emerging economy. Slave labor unquestionably helped to prop up the colonial markets throughout the 18th century; free labor saved money across hard labor industries, subsequently maximizing profits for white landowners and businessmen.

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<sup>12</sup> Joe R Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*, 2nd ed.. (New York: New York : Routledge, 2010); Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*.

<sup>13</sup> "Massachusetts Bay — 'The City Upon a Hill' [Ushistory.Org]," accessed February 4, 2020, <https://www.ushistory.org/us/3c.asp>.

<sup>14</sup> Feagin, *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*; Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*.

Included among these white beneficiaries were many of the revolutionary activists who helped create the modern United States. Advocating for adequate representation, equality, liberty, and protection of God-given human rights, are some of the prevalent themes included in the Declaration of Independence and, later, the Constitution of the United States. After fighting a war dedicated to liberating the colonists from alleged British tyranny, the now revered Founding Fathers proposed a government organized around direct representation for all; all referring here to white, land-owning, men. The design of this government helped to ensure citizens were protected from their tyranny, helping the economic advancement of every class, primarily the rich. Slaves did not have a legitimate place in this new system of government.

While the analysis thus far has contended with the conflicts between the English and Irish, and the colonial English and the Native Americans, yet it is the struggle between Americans and their enslaved class where white American superiority solidifies. When writing on African American slaves, Thomas Jefferson observed in the Notes on the State of Virginia: “[When] comparing them by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination...in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid: and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous”.<sup>15</sup> Jefferson’s pronouncements of slave capabilities appear in stark contrast to his pleas in the Declaration of Independence for government recognition that all men are created equal. Americans and Europeans reading his work might have questioned his ability to both advocate for egalitarianism while simultaneously increasing his own slaves; anti-slavery attitudes were not uncommon, even during the late 18th century.

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<sup>15</sup> “Notes on the State of Virginia,” accessed May 2, 2020, /site/research-and-collections/notes-state-virginia.

The “science” of the later 18th century declared there were separate races, some going so far as to assert inherent differences between each. African Americans were associated with blackness, slowness, stupidity, and negligence, as detailed by Carolus Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae* (1735), the first racial classification of humans. Voltaire suggested polygenesis, or multiple human origins, was responsible for different internal and external qualities across different human races. Observational research primarily justified these theories, similar to Jefferson’s own attempt in Virginia. Images were drawn to display the physical differences between races, and these rankings always placed Europeans as evolutionarily superior.<sup>16</sup>

Science gained further legitimacy in the United States with race research. For some, such explanations closed the gap between American institutions of equality and slavery. Europeans and whites generally, were more evolved than African American slaves, thus European Americans were equal only among themselves, and superior to others below. Ranking humans encouraged the disparaging treatment of slaves to continue, and while slavery was abolished after the Civil War, the sentiments of inequality run ramped throughout the American system today: “[r]ace’ generally, and ‘white’ racial identity, in particular provide the ideology which holds the system of white racial supremacy together”.<sup>17</sup> Identifying “others” often serves to unify people against a common threat or enemy, a tactic employed by the Klan in post Civil War America and beyond.

### Us Versus Them

The experiences of white ethnics during early twentieth-century immigration and assimilation are essential to understand the politics of America’s bootstrap legacy. Lifting one’s

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<sup>16</sup> Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*.

<sup>17</sup> Noel A. Cazenave, “Yes. America Is Racist to Its Core,” *The Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT, April 12, 1998), sec. Commentary.

self up by their own bootstrap harks to the noble southern/eastern European immigrant, who came to this country with little money and a dream of a better life, worked hard, and provided better opportunities for themselves and their families: as it is now recalled. The romanticization of the immigrant experience often accompanies another narrative, that of the undeserving welfare recipients. Recalling from my own childhood, Greek-American relatives would sneer in disgust at the 'government handouts' bequeathed unto those simply unwilling to get a job. Those recipients are usually characterized as a person of color, although typically African American, and are painted against a morally superior backdrop of hardworking European immigrants who never received such aid. No matter their factual validity, these feelings underscores a lack of class consciousness, or even class awareness extending outside racial categories. Despite today's assumptions on race, these immigrant families were victims of prejudice akin to yet not as severe as what befell African Americans.

Expanding their aims from jokesters to fear mongers, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) had two lives in American history. In post-Civil War America, the first KKK targeted Union soldiers stationed in the South during Reconstruction, where pranking evolved into harassment to protect the integrity of Southern culture. The Klan's resurgence in 1915 brought with it a new priority: protect Americanism at all costs. To accomplish this, the KKK was able to utilize its public influence to increase a volatile nationalism aimed at eliminating minority threats.

Immigrants were arriving in the United States from the country's founding, with each group of immigrants forcing existing Americans to adapt. Such adaptations were typically preceded by local resentment. The two waves of white ethnic immigration did not look alike: in the mid-1800s, German and Irish immigrants primarily arrived, while the opening of Ellis Island

helped to usher in more Eastern and Southern Europeans.<sup>18</sup> While the focus of this research tackles the expansion of white identity politics within the latter group of European immigrants, research regarding the acclimation of this first immigrant group is very important yet simply not of as much relevance here.

The peak for Ellis Island's immigration rolls reached 1.7 million in 1907; by 1910, new immigrants and their children accounted for about three-quarters of New York City's population.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, the United States was continuing to grapple with its freed slave class, many of whom were now also traveling to New York and to other industrial centers looking for work. While there were Constitutional provisions outlawing racial discrimination, existing minority citizens rarely saw their rights protected at all, signaling to new immigrants the best way to advance in America was not as a minority. Popular understanding among Americans at the time reinforced this interpretation:

“...the most ambitious social scientific study of ‘race attitudes’ of the native-born middle class found almost identical percentages wishing to exclude Japanese and Serbo-Croatian ‘races’ from citizenship...about 70 percent were in opposition. A majority also opposed the naturalization of the Czecho-Slovak, Russian Jewish, and Bulgarian ‘races’ and more than 40 percent opposed citizenship for Russians, Portuguese, Greeks, Poles, and ‘Roumanians’”.<sup>20</sup>

American racism is evident among these figures. Harking back to Carolus Linnaeus's categorization of human races, this takes that classification further. Not only do Asians remain

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<sup>18</sup> History com Editors, “The Volatile History of U.S. Immigration,” *HISTORY*, <https://www.history.com/topics/immigration/immigration-united-states-timeline>.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 59.

below whites in the hierarchy, but that placement is also reaffirmed by an overwhelming American desire to exclude them entirely from citizenship. Where racial classifications differ and are exacerbated is in the ranking of Eastern and Southern European immigrants. Based on the data, the average American was, at minimum, 11% more likely to oppose the naturalization of an Eastern European immigrant over a Southern European immigrant, raising questions about degrees of whiteness within that racial category.

Degrees of whiteness, no matter how trivial, truly impacted the prospects of a new immigrant to join American society. Southern and Eastern Europeans had their racial identities on trial, and that skepticism allowed for various baseless observations into their cultures and daily practices. Intellectuals focused on racial research further waded into the debate over what to do with these new immigrants; Francis Amasa Walker, an early twentieth-century Ivy-league bureaucrat, found an abundance of examples to prove his skepticism about welcoming new immigrants to become Americans. Utilizing available census data, Walker, "...evoked images of disease, degradation, ignorance, squalor, and 'habits of life' to establish the racial unfitness of new immigrants".<sup>21</sup> Walker and Samuel Gompers, former head of the U.S. Census Bureau, both remarked that the immigrants arriving from Eastern and Southern Europe were "beaten men of beaten races". Adding to the abundance of negative imagery, was the sharp rise in births among new immigrants: "...[the] mass emigration from east-central and southern Europe that affected mainly people of childbearing age--mostly the young--and that occurred within a relatively compact period of time and was halted artificially by the immigration restrictions of 1924".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>22</sup> John Radzilowski, "Fecund Newcomers or Dying Ethnic? Demographic Approaches to the History of Polish and Italian Immigrants and Their Children in the United States, 1880 to 1980," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 27, no. 1 (2007): 67.

The main concern of the second KKK was the American people –not simply people who lived in America, but those they considered to be true patriots. To be considered truly American one had to be a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). According to the KKK, the American way was in jeopardy: a decline in agriculture and an increase in factories that hired more low-wage, non-Protestant immigrants than “real Americans” were among the primary concerns of the time. By 1921, the Klan figured out how to manipulate this to their advantage: “...the Klan’s opportunistic recruiting strategy –a strategy that involved offering the Klan as a solution to whatever issues might be troubling residents of a particular community...native-born, white, and Protestants”.<sup>23</sup> Running the Klan as a business as well as an issue-oriented group allowed recruiters the flexibility they needed to recruit as many possible members in one area to build a strong foundation. Much of the rhetoric being used were strong sentiments on preserving America for Americans, not for immigrants and minorities working in factories. Stemming from the growing monopoly of big business and commercialism over locally run operations, valid grievances were manipulated to ignore the men running these companies and to target their employees. It was the fault of immigrants and minorities for the growing strain on middle-class families: “America has within her borders many of the so-called hyphenated Americans...[s]uch a class of people do not deserve the respect of any decent, loyal, patriotic, red-blooded, pure and un-adulterated American citizen”.<sup>24</sup> The attempts of minorities to preserve their sense of self was the primary threat to America: that ‘these people’ would rather distort the American way to accommodate them, rather than adapt. Minorities were disrespecting the United States and it was

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<sup>23</sup> Rory McVeigh, “The Rebirth of a Klan Nation, 1915-1924,” in *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>24</sup> “Carnegie, Pa., Mob Martyrs Klan Hero and Violates All Rights of Americanism,” *The Imperial Night-Hawk*, August 29, 1923, 3.

the duty of Klan members, as posited by leadership, to reestablish American dominance throughout the country.

Restoring traditional Americanism would require the utilization of classic symbols to promote WASP values. To combat the hyphenated Americans, the KKK took to the streets in these communities to display their dominance and dedication to their culture. For example, the August 1923 issue of the *Imperial Night-Hawk* discussed in detail the death of a Klansman in Pennsylvania. Marching through an immigrant neighborhood, a ‘simple and humble man’ was killed for simply expressing his love of country: “...because he dared to march with the Cross and the Flag was martyred at the behest of enemies more deadly to American hopes and ideals as ever was a German Kaiser or a Catholic King of Spain”.<sup>25</sup> The Cross is a classic Christian symbol, reflecting the Protestant Klan base and their belief that Judaic or even Catholic influence was harming American culture. The flag serves as a reminder to immigrants, specifically in the area subjected to the march, that they are in the United States, and that if they intend on staying in the country they need to conform to the American way of life. These demonstrations were WASP retaliation against cultural invaders. Again, the hateful adaptation of symbols against self-proclaimed enemies is used to rile up their supporters, and the death of their own ‘brother’ serves to further their belief in the cause.

The United States began to experience the emergence of socialist and communist groups during the 1920s, and while the KKK did not explicitly target Jews, they targeted Eastern European immigrants who they feared represented communist sentiments. Rather than total political control, the KKK’s influence was limited to pockets throughout the United States: “Nowhere was the political dominance of the Klan more apparent than in Indiana...with

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 5.

Klansmen deeply entrenched in the state's legislature, the judicial branch, and law enforcement offices".<sup>26</sup> The Klan's control in Indiana was its most formal successful intrusion into the government sphere, but overall the Klan was far more successful as a near fascist movement. The main explanation for its limited government control was the constant divisions within the group itself; the KKK had constant infighting and legal battles that prevented it from developing beyond a movement.

Regardless of their internal setbacks, the Klan's appeal extended beyond their predominantly male base. Women gaining the right to vote was an opportunity for the Klan to expand its membership. Seizing the chance to expand the KKK's message: "...the Women's Ku Klux Klan (WKKK)...was billed as 'a Protestant Women's Organization which is for, by, and of women'".<sup>27</sup> Creating a separate women's KKK allowed them to focus on the nationalist issues most important to them in their traditional roles while retaining the control within the men's group. There was again an opportunist nature to the Klan's public approach, seeking to increase its base by including women, who were now able to vote.

While the Klan's most violent attacks continued to target African Americans, the conviction of Indiana Grand Dragon David Stephenson helped quell the growing support for the nationalist group. Stephenson, a member of the Indiana state legislature, used his position of power to target state employee Madge Oberholtzer: "...former Grand Dragon of the Indiana Ku Klux Klan, today heard Judge Will M. Sparks sentence him to life imprisonment, for the murder of Madge Oberholtzer".<sup>28</sup> Although membership had been on a slight decline, this gruesome trial forced many members to quit to save face. The Ku Klux Klan presented itself as a solution for

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<sup>26</sup> McVeigh, "The Rebirth of a Klan Nation, 1915-1924," 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>28</sup> "Stephenson Receives Sentence For Life: EX-KLAN LEADER IN DRAMATIC SPEECH DENIES HAVING SLAIN MISS OBERHOLTZER.," *New York Times (1923-Current File)* (New York, N.Y., November 17, 1925).

the issues most important to the American middle class in the 1920s: the seeming evaporation of local businesses, the influx of immigrants, and a national identity crisis. To advance a zealous nationalist agenda, they employed traditional symbols of faith and country to draw support. Devotion to the cause could come from either men or women, yet its main goal was to restore the traditional nationalist perception that, for the Klan, America and its citizens were superior.

Importantly, white ethnics were not alone in their struggles for acceptance by the American masses. Irish-Americans were the most notable allies of the new immigrants, for their established presence in America allowed for them to develop political machines and or fraternal organizations to help their political voices be heard. One of the most notorious of these political machines was Tammany Hall in New York City. Tammany Hall was active in New York City without Irish members, however, after the mid-18th century Irish and German immigration wave, the decision was made to extend membership to them. From there, the Irish maintained an important role in the machine, acting in any capacity from a prospective candidate to an illegitimate political operative. Tammany drew criticism for its manipulation of new immigrant communities to support their candidates, with some reports charging that since they embraced, "...the poor and uneducated, suggesting that Tammany relied on ignorant voters to keep their candidates in power".<sup>29</sup> These charges in mind, operations like Tammany Hall helped promote political participation among new white immigrants, while purposely excluding minorities. With the support of Tammany, immigrants and first-generation families activated their white legal classifications to garner greater access to political systems than their minority working-class counterparts.

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<sup>29</sup> Seth Masket, "When Party Machines Turned Immigrants into Citizens and Voters - The Washington Post," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/12/16/when-party-machines-turned-immigrants-into-citizens-and-voters/>.

In his book, *Working Towards Whiteness; How America's Immigrants Became White*, David Roediger uses the terminology of 'inbetweenness' to define the location of the white ethnics on the American racial spectrum. White ethnics were metaphorically situated between the WASP Americans and the minority others. One area in which this ranking appeared commonplace was among working-class jobs. The influx of greater white ethnic and immigrant labor accompanied by the Great Migration of African Americans towards industrial centers saw a hierarchy even in unskilled positions: "Unions that discriminated but opened to new immigrants more readily than to African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans reinforced the 'inbetween' position of southern and eastern Europeans".<sup>30</sup> Roediger's use of inbetweenness encapsulates a central theme of the white immigrant experience in that they are not, at this time, considered to be a member of the white power structure in the United States. They are seen as confidants, a near petit-bourgeois, seeking the approval of those in power to validate their new American identity.

#### The Tale of Two Political Opportunists

The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was founded as a special committee in 1934 to uncover pro-fascist groups in the United States, however, they were largely unsuccessful, notably excusing the Ku Klux Klan's activities because it was an "...old American institution". By 1938 the committee became permanent, launching a new, self-appointed mission to identify communists within both federal institutions and the greater country looking to overthrow the government. Holding fast to their traditional ideologies, the Republican minority on the committee encouraged investigations into the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, convinced the progressive New Deal and Fair Deal programs represented

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<sup>30</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs*, 91.

communist ideals. The 1946 Congressional election gave Republicans their first majority in 14 years, inspiring legislators to create names for themselves, hoping national attention would retain their majority.<sup>31</sup>

A freshman Representative from California, Nixon utilized his appointment to draw Americans' attention to the enemy among them: communists. On January 26, 1950, Representative Nixon addressed HUAC to deliver his verdict in the Alger Hiss case, a Federal employee then charged with perjury in connection to espionage for the Soviet Union. Reflecting on the betrayal, Nixon commented: "The tragedy of this case is that the great majority of them were American citizens, were graduates of the best colleges and universities in this country, and had yet willingly become members of an organization dedicated to the overthrow of this Government".<sup>32</sup> Pre-WWII notions of a world with no war had met its end in 1948 with the USSR's interference in Greece, ushering in the Marshall plan which, at its core, believed the world was divided into good and evil, with the United States representing the good and Communism as the evil. Further actions by the USSR confirmed that judgment, and it became the role of the US to uphold the world's moral conscious. This responsibility affirmed the important role of education for Americans, but that education was to be administered properly: "...we must develop and put into effect an extensive educational program which will teach the American people the truth about Communism as well as the truth about democracy".<sup>33</sup> Nixon, and many others similarly dedicated to their virtuous cause, needed to close ranks within the

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<sup>31</sup> John E. Moser, "House Un-American Activities Committee," *Encyclopedia of U.S. Political History*, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Rick Perlstein, ed., "'The Hiss Case—A Lesson for the American People' (January 26, 1950)," in *Richard Nixon, Speeches, Writings, Documents* (Princeton University Press, 2008), 37, accessed April 8, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sg9w.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sg9w.10).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

country around their new enemy. So enthralled with the young representative, Nixon utilized the prestige of his position to garner himself the Vice Presidency to Eisenhower at just 39.

Modest Clio, Alabama was the sight of George Wallace's upbringing. Oldest of three boys, the Wallaces were a lower-middle-class family, his father a borderline alcoholic, and his mother a pillar of strength and stoicism. A consistently Democratic family, the Wallaces held Franklin Roosevelt in high regard, and his father, George Wallace Sr., was engaged in local politics. Young George Wallace came from modest circumstances and was a modest student, yet it was in the boxing ring where his star was born. In high school, he won back-to-back Alabama Golden Gloves titles in 1936 and 1937 and went on to attend the University of Alabama Law School. Despite his boxing excellence, Wallace remained an outsider in many elite social circles, forcing him to develop an alluring charm to bypass his modest upbringing. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps after his 1942 graduation, married Lurleen Burns in 1943, and was medically discharged in 1945. Using his grandfather's political connections, Wallace became a local representative amidst the chaotic split between the South and the Democratic party.<sup>34</sup>

Having honed his charisma to suit Alabama politics, Wallace quickly set his sights on a seat in the state legislature and succeeded. His first brush with national politics came at the 1948 Democratic convention in Philadelphia. A precocious Wallace walked into one of the most chaotic nominating conventions of the 20th century. The death of FDR in 1945 left the country to Harry Truman; significant Democratic defeats in both House and Senate races left Congress with a Republican majority. Many feared the country did not hold Truman in the same regard they once held Roosevelt, yet more divisively, despite his Southern roots Truman sought to advance certain causes including desegregating the military. In response to the rousing

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<sup>34</sup> Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*; Carter, *The Politics of Rage*.

progressive platform delivered by senate candidate Hubert Humphrey, Southern delegations sneered at his calls to, “...get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights”<sup>35</sup> in reference to the Jim Crow system Truman hoped to slowly dismantle. After 14 days the convention nominated Truman, sending every Mississippi delegate and half the Alabama delegation out the door in protest. Recalling his decision to remain at the convention, Wallace saw it as his duty to fight against the shifting political norms within the party in power, for any influence the Southern delegations could exert ensured some say in contrast to a third party gamble.<sup>36</sup> Another interpretation may find a young Wallace still developing his political muster and who chose safety in the arms of the national establishment. Nevertheless, Wallace supporters would rave at his time behind enemy lines,

"It was Mr. Wallace...who in 1948, battled Hubert Humphrey on the Democratic convention floor against trying to crucify the South on the cross of Civil Rights...Wallace knew that the political bosses of the Democratic Party could further his career as a politician, but he chose to fight them for what he knew was right".<sup>37</sup>

What Wallace bore witness to was the fracturing of the New Deal coalition. For a period, Democrats were able to enjoy begrudging cooperation among an unlikely cast of characters. The South had maintained allegiance to the Democratic party since the Civil War, and though apprehensive about FDR, they were the hardest hit region by the Great Depression. Not only were they the poorest, their agricultural sector required massive bailouts and federal support. Labor is quickly drawn to the Democratic party by FDR's Depression relief. Unlike Hoover's

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<sup>35</sup> “1948 Democratic Convention | History | Smithsonian Magazine,” <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/1948-democratic-convention-878284/>.

<sup>36</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*.

<sup>37</sup> L. L. Baker, “Gov. Wallace Is Sincere, Honest and Concerned Man,” *The Amarillo Texas News*, April 6, 1968, sec. Letters to the Editor.

intention to allow the market to sort itself out, FDR's proactive policies such as public labor projects, long-term social welfare, and other public programs offered refuge for low-income Americans. White ethnics are incorporated into the party through FDR's relationship with urban political machines. These are typically Catholic organizations promoting the interests of often poorer whites living in urban communities, overlapping at times with labor. Jewish Americans similarly supported his progressive policies.

African Americans were not at the forefront of Roosevelt's priorities when constructing his support; however, his social programs began to benefit African Americans and by 1936 FDR captured most of their vote. The African American long-term presence among Democrats became more apparent once the Truman administration and the Democratic convention supported action on civil rights, which directly forced the South out of the Democratic party. To the South, their party and its administration scoffed at their traditions and way of life to side with plights of those they considered to be less worthy members of society. Resentment for this choice ultimately fueled the defense of Jim Crow.

Southern Democrats responded to the Democratic party's desertion in an ironically Southern fashion: they created their own party, the Dixiecrats, and promoted it on a platform of state's rights led by Senator Strom Thurmond. Wallace himself never joined the party, yet his later campaigns for office saw a gradual embracement of the state's rights agenda. Elected to the Third Circuit Court of Alabama, Wallace earned the nickname the "Fighting Little Judge" for his candor, dedication to local causes, and his early law and order rhetoric from the bench. Above all, his vocal opposition to federal mandates requiring school integration helped mold his public image into a faithful guardian of Southern society. Only once did Wallace fail to capitalize on the political value of being ardently pro-state's rights: Wallace lost his first bid for governor in

1958. Not being enough for the Alabama public did not deter Wallace from his goal. If Alabama wanted proof of his dedication to their causes and their culture, an endorsement from the Ku Klux Klan in the 1962 gubernatorial campaign helped to end the debate and secured him his first term as governor. At his inauguration, Alabamians largely cheered for “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever”.

Newly elected Governor Wallace’s first brush with national attention came in 1963. Southern resentment over *Brown v. Board of Education* (1953) did not dissipate, for the NAACP proved without a shadow of a doubt the tangible and intangible realities of the separate but equal precedent from *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) was unconstitutional. Although it had taken a year, the Warren Court returned a follow-up opinion in 1955 placing the burden on segregated districts to remedy their policies, and established the courts as supervisors to ensure these remedies. Most outrageous to its opponents was the provision that supervision over these remedies would be carried out so long as the judge in question saw fit.<sup>38</sup> After delays and court battles, the day finally came for desegregation to come knocking on Alabama’s door, and not just on any door, but that of Wallace’s alma mater, the University of Alabama. Media coverage escalated as the day approached, pinning state’s rights against federal supremacy, Southern politics against the new face of the Democratic party: the type of title fight Golden Gloves Wallace was built for. Arriving promptly on June 11, 1963, Governor Wallace stood in the entrance to the University of Alabama auditorium, and gave an impassioned speech to a crowd of his supporters, his protestors, the newly federalized Alabama National Guard, intrigued reporters, and their wide-eyed viewers: ““The unwelcomed, unwanted, unwarranted and force-induced intrusion upon the campus of the University of Alabama today of the might of the Central Government offers a

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<sup>38</sup> Robert J. Cottrol, *Brown v. Board of Education: Caste, Culture, and the Constitution*, ed. Raymond T. Diamond and Leland Ware (University Press of Kansas, 2003).

frightful example of the oppression of the rights, privileges and sovereignty of this state by officers of the Federal Government”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, ““I stand before you today in place of thousands of other Alabamians whose presence would have confronted you had I been derelict and neglected to fulfill the responsibilities of my office”<sup>40</sup> Wallace finally took his overt public stand against the Democratic establishment his younger self failed to do 15 years earlier.

While racism was and continues to be a problem across America, the hotbed for racial inequality was in the Solid South. President Johnson skillfully navigated the aftermath of President Kennedy’s assassination to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964: "Civil rights organizations could now point to the rule of law as the best way out of the country's divisive racial problem, and they could look to the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department..."<sup>41</sup> As is often the case, simply enacting this law did not change the circumstances for African Americans in the South. The systematic disenfranchisement of African Americans would continue if left unchallenged, as was the case with other forms of discrimination: “as a result of the obstacles in Southern states in general, and Selma, Alabama in particular, ‘only 2 percent of Selma’s eligible black voters (300 out of 15,000) had managed to register’<sup>42</sup> Led by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference including Dr. Martin Luther King, the march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery took five days, during which, mass media attention grew as more joined the walk to urge Governor Wallace to ensure their 15th amendment rights. Intrigue

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<sup>39</sup> Claude Sitton, “Governor Leaves: But Fulfills Promises to Stand in Door and to Avoid Violence Students Go to Dormitories ‘sad Duty’ Emphasized Governor Keeps Campaign Pledge Stands in Doorway before Yielding to Guardsmen He Avoids Violence Stems from ’55 Injunction General in Mufti Lips Are Sealed,” *New York Times* (1923-Current File) (New York, N.Y., June 12, 1963).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> James P. Turner, “The Crusade at Selma,” in *Selma and the Liuzzo Murder Trials*, ed. Ari Berman, The First Modern Civil Rights Convictions (University of Michigan Press, 2018), 1, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9753373.5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.9753373.5).

<sup>42</sup> “The Selma Conflict,” *Graduate School of Stanford Business*, last modified 2015, [http://web.stanford.edu/group/instr\\_design/case\\_study/selma/](http://web.stanford.edu/group/instr_design/case_study/selma/).

became horror on “Bloody Sunday” as Alabama State authorities attacked the peaceful protestors attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge towards the state capital.

Governor Wallace, who attempted to deter the protestors from proceeding with their demonstration, was villainized for the blatant racial violence perpetrated by those tasked with maintaining peace, yet his account treated the situation differently: “[Wallace] believed that ‘Voter registration and voting rights are not the issues involved in these street demonstrations.’ Wallace further stated that state authorities are ‘completely adequate to cope with the situation’ although those state and local law enforcement instigated the attacks of ‘Bloody Sunday’”.<sup>43</sup> Wallace garnered popularity in his state for being a government reformist; during his time as Governor, he had significantly increased educational funding and decreased ‘frivolous government spending’, cutting the vehicle quality of government cars from Cadillacs to Fords.<sup>44</sup> His ability to improve the quality of life without raising taxes benefitted his image with his white constituency, for his rhetoric served to alienate any potential African American voter. Wallace’s statement in the aftermath of “Bloody Sunday” emphasized his appeal to his base: this was a state not federal matter and he viewed the demonstrators as criminals, not protestors. Further emphasizing this point, Wallace’s own statements: “Wallace deeply regretted the violence connected with that giant demonstration but repeats that he warned everyone in the nation that violence would come if the march were permitted”.<sup>45</sup>

In wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 58% of Americans supported the law, yet in later polling 68% of Americans felt only moderate enforcement was appropriate. Data from 1965 predictably cites 61% of Southerners who felt Johnson was moving too quickly with integration,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Don Wasson, “George Wallace’s Four Yers as Governor,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, January 16, 1967.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

meanwhile nationally that number stood at 40%.<sup>46</sup> The nation wholistically did not oppose integration, simply the way in which it upended their lives. Those most immediately impacted by those policy decisions were lower-income whites living in proximity to African Americans: the same constituency most supportive of Wallace.<sup>47</sup>

While Wallace steadily developed his national persona, former Vice President Nixon stood largely out of mind. After his defeat to John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election and a failed bid at California governor in 1962, a downtrodden Richard Nixon looked out on the sea of reporters who had taunted him so throughout the campaign. Basing their livelihoods off his political misfortunes, no matter how sincere or valiant his efforts to serve the public, Nixon felt the press had enjoyed their front row seats to the most significant political failure of his career. Off-the-cuff Nixon no longer filtered his thoughts: “You won’t have Nixon to kick around anymore, because gentlemen, this is my last press conference”.<sup>48</sup> The lecture continued in an unabashed tone, urging future political coverage to be more honest: “if they’re against a candidate, give him the shaft, but also recognize if they give him the shaft, put one lonely reporter on the campaign who will report what the candidate says now and then”.<sup>49</sup> With his last punch landed, Nixon adjourned his first press conference for the 1968 presidential election.

He had truly intended on retiring, or at least to enjoy a break from party politics. Diving into the private sphere, Nixon’s newfound work at the law firm of Mudge, Rose, Guthrie &

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<sup>46</sup> “From the Archives: 50 Years Ago, Mixed Views about Civil Rights but Support for Selma Demonstrators,” *Pew Research Center*, n.d., <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/01/16/50-years-ago-mixed-views-about-civil-rights-but-support-for-selma-demonstrators/>.

<sup>47</sup> DOROTHY ELAINE FREEMAN, “A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN THE POLITICAL SPEAKING OF GEORGE C. WALLACE IN THE 1968 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN,” *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., Indiana University, 1981), <https://ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/303152916?accountid=14518>.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Nixon Foundation, “55 Years Ago -- ‘The Last Press Conference,’” *Richard Nixon Foundation*, November 14, 2017, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2017/11/55-years-ago-last-press-conference/>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

Alexander capitalized on his previous diplomatic connections and sent him abroad to handle clients. The diplomatic restraints of the United States government were unheard of in the private sector, allowing Nixon the exposure to mediate between sometimes unsavory parties. While claiming his travels to Asia showed him the failure of current American leadership, it is fair to assume Nixon never intended on leaving politics. Confiding in Pat Buchanan, Nixon lamented, “If all I had was my legal work, I would be mentally dead in two years and physically dead in four”. By 1967, Nixon’s political courage from his “last” press conference intact, he would ultimately earn the Republican nomination for President.<sup>50</sup>

Conservatism’s rise to prominence in the 1960s was achieved, argues Corey Robin in *The Reactionary Mind*, as a reaction to the significant cultural changes of the time. As Robin explains, “...the reactionary imperative presses conservatism in two rather different directions: first, to a critique and reconfiguration of the old regime; and second, to an absorption of the ideas and tactics of the very revolution or reform it opposes”<sup>51</sup>. Breaking Conservatism into these two parts is essential to one’s understanding of its appeal to Americans, especially during a moment when rejection of the old appeared commonplace. Robin warns writing off conservatives as stubborn traditionalists, and while modern conservatism appeals to most of the old order, it is styled to complement the new rhetoric of the left. One must also consider the role of provincialism in fostering conservatism, a feature central to Michael Thompson’s thesis in “America’s Conservative Landscape: The New Conservatism and the Reorientation of American Democracy” (2007). Thompson connects American suburbanization with conservatism’s rise because the white flight, which populated suburbs during the 1950s and 60s, crystallized the

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<sup>50</sup> Alex Marshburn, “Nixon’s Comeback » Richard Nixon Foundation,” *Richard Nixon Foundation*, January 13, 2017, <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/exhibit/nixons-comeback/>.

<sup>51</sup> Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

political norms of the fleeing whites, creating racial and political segregation. Calls for any change to the existing order, particularly in communities at risk to lose something if liberal causes prevail, is what galvanized conservative sentiments.

A mobilization of indignant white Americans was nothing new for African Americans attempting to assert their rights. Clarecne Mitchell Jr., a reporter for the African American newspaper *Afro-American* from Baltimore, Maryland, commented on the characteristics of the white resistance: "By promising the stupid and bigoted that colored people would be kept in vassalage, the Democrats made certain that the economically deprived white people would continue to rejoice on hunger-pinched stomachs while sinking deeper in ignorance because of low incomes and poor schools".<sup>52</sup> Frankly, Mitchell finds the backlash a predictable staple of the American way: the desire for cheap labor requires division among the masses of laborers. Pointing directly at the American working class he dubs them ignorant and a propaganda byproduct of the old Southern aristocracy and American white supremacy as a whole. While the qualms within his piece mainly concern the makeup of Southern politics, his candor regarding the state of affairs among workers is key. Cities or areas predominantly consisting of white working class voters were increasingly listening to the rhetoric of special rights, referencing a rejection of the unearned privileges sought after by the Civil Rights movement: "...four of every five Wallace voters in the South would have voted for Nixon with Wallace out of the contest. (In the North, Wallace voters divided almost evenly in choosing between Nixon and Humphrey, but even these non-southern Wallace supporters gave a slight edge to Nixon as their second choice)".<sup>53</sup> Wallace supporters were more likely to be white working and lower middle-classes,

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<sup>52</sup> Clarence Mitchell Jr, "FROM THE WORK BENCH: SOUTH CAROLINA REPUBLICAN FLIRT WITH DRINKING FROM JUG OF RACIAL PREJUDICE," *Afro-American (1893-1988)* (Baltimore, Md., April 9, 1966).

<sup>53</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 369.

often in a lower skilled occupation. Calling Wallace supporters “stupid” may not be an appropriate definition of their character, however noting these people have little else to gain outside their position in the hierarchy is worthy of discussion.

Nixon’s relationship with the African American community left much to be desired. Coverage of his campaign across many African American papers were quick to recall his allegiance to Barry Goldwater in 1964: “Nixon was one of the most ardent supporters of Barry Goldwater...followed his lines of argument against civil rights and related issues. We see no sign of a philosophical change in Nixon's attitude. Leopards don't change their spots”.<sup>54</sup> Although some saw Nixon’s attempt to distance himself from Wallace’s divisive nature by advocating for better programs in African American communities, however, he typically did not elaborate further.<sup>55</sup>

Wallace’s intentions to run for the Presidency were always clear, however selecting his time to strike accurately measured public sentiment on the state of domestic affairs. “I have stated that I will be a candidate for President of the United States in 1968 unless one of the major parties shows a real and determined intent to offer the American people a choice in 1968,” Wallace said, ‘Neither of the parties to date has disclosed such an intent’”.<sup>56</sup> He would later go on to insist Americans should vote for him because there was not a dime’s worth of difference between Nixon and Humphrey. This sentiment was largely shared throughout the ‘extremist’ wings of the Democrats and Republicans, justifying why many felt the 1950s and early 1960s represented a period of slightly left leaning, yet mostly moderate administrations. To the

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<sup>54</sup> “GOP And Wallace,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973)* (Chicago, Ill., February 15, 1967).

<sup>55</sup> “Peaceful Future,” *New York Amsterdam News (1962-1993)* (New York, N.Y., December 30, 1967).

<sup>56</sup> “Presidential Battle Continues: Peace Party Proponents Claim Ballot Qualifications,” *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition) (1966-1973)* (Chicago, Ill., January 6, 1968).

aggravation of many on the far right, there was little effective right-wing policy representation during this time.

The John Birch Society was established around 1952, naming itself for an alleged American serviceman who died during the Korean War. A group shrouded in conspiracy, founder Robert Welch attested that Birch had been killed in an American sanctioned Communist hit, to continue the ongoing Communist plot to take over the United States. The Society was a conservative political organization, targeting mainly the white middle class, expanding the terror of the Red Scare. Their core values aligned with movement conservatism's hatred of communism, importance of its defeat, and free market ideology. Many of the members charged that the past several American Presidential administrations were run by Communists, pointing even at President Eisenhower. Despite Eisenhower being a Republican President, his moderate position and continuation of many New Deal policies meant he too was involved in the plot.<sup>57</sup>

Discussions of the Civil Rights agenda within the Society were not characterized by supportive tones. Gary Allen, a regular contributor to the Society's circulation *American Opinion* frequently offered scathing reviews of Dr. King, Black Power, and as a whole:

“The ‘Civil Rights’ people, he explained, compound the problem --by screaming ‘police brutality,’ and the encouraging lawlessness; by demanding improved economic conditions, and then burning down what has been built up; by calling for quality education, then boycotting schools; by crying for better jobs, then causing unemployment by demanding fantastic wages and destroying attitudes that make for good workmen”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>58</sup> Gregory Allen, “Negroes: What ‘Liberal’ Racists Never Mention,” *American Opinion*, March 1968, 39.

Birchers differed from the KKK in that their engagement with race often came hand in hand with the views on labor. Welfare prevents people from accessing jobs which would allow them to become self-sufficient; demonstrations are deemed as riots, seeing the destruction of a few over the message of the event. Allen also charges Democrats with having deprived their community of the value of hard work, utilizing familiar rhetoric on African American laziness, yet also defines this laziness in the context of the welfare system: it is “destroying attitudes that make for good workmen”. The value of the minority in society is measured in their aptitude for capitalist production, and squabbling over rights distracts from that function. Similar metrics concerning usefulness to American markets were often featured in the debates around white ethnic immigration.

In conjunction with their belief that previous American Presidents were engaged in or had knowledge of an American communist plot, so too did Birchers believe Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a co-conspirator. Founder Robert Welch in his pitch to join the Society readily embraced this theory, featuring it in his pitch to prospective new members:

“He [King] was a key figure in the Communist plans to create so much turmoil and anarchy in our country as to enable a Communist-run central government to counter such confusion with the massive use of a national armed force - which is a forerunner of Communist tyranny...King has been made by his Communist bosses into a deceptive and vicious pro-Communist enemy of his own race, of all good American citizens, and of the American nation”.<sup>59</sup>

Similar to Allen, Welch sees welfare and the Great Society programs as communist pandering. Welch goes further to associate riots in areas like, for example, Watts and groups like the Black

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<sup>59</sup> Robert Welch, “Why Join the John Birch Society?,” *American Opinion*, 1968, 4.

Panther Party directly with a communist plot. Raising suspicion that activists could not have managed such an organization without the interference of the Kremlin allowed Birchers and others to write off the motivations for the movement and to dehumanize, again, minorities whose activism appeared treasonous.

The roots of modern far-right political extremism can be traced to the American failures in Vietnam, among other factors, posits Kathleen Belew in *Bring the War Home*. Emphasis on renewing American masculinity, repudiating the government which abandoned their soldiers, and organizing around a mutual distrust, at a minimum, of other races, began fermenting in the early seventies. Belew highlights these trends to suggest the losses in Vietnam translated for some as a retreat to defend the remnants of American superiority, which translates for many to preserving white American superiority.

The conference at Woodley Country Club in Montgomery Alabama typified the experience of being in the Wallace inner circle. Discussing his inevitable run for President, the meeting led by Asa Carter and Jim Clarke brought together an array of characters on the American right to utilize their grassroots connections to help place Wallace on the ballot in all 50 states for the American Independent Party. Carter had been with the Wallace team since his election to the Governor's office, and his resume coincided with the more extreme wing of Wallace support: "...[Carter was] founder and co editor of the Southerner, one of the most racist magazines published in the 1950s...he was in reality a professional anti-Semite and hard-line racial terrorist, the organizer of a secret paramilitary force with the romantic name 'Original Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy'".<sup>60</sup> Members of both the Klan and the John Birch Society were not alone in their role at Woodley, the Wallace team made space for other fringe groups: "...the

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<sup>60</sup> Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 2.

Reverend Carl McIntire's Twentieth Century Reformation, Dr. Fred Schwarz's Christian Anti-Communism Crusade, the Reverend Billy James Hargis's Christian Crusade, Edgar Bundy's Church League of America, Dean Clarence Manion's Forum, and Texas oilman H.L. Hunt's Life Line Foundation...".<sup>61</sup> Each of these organizations held a large enough grassroots pressense to help mobilize prospective Wallace voters. A significant throughline between all these organizations is their dedication to fighting the Communist threat at home, therefore liberalism became their natural enemy. These men also considered it their allegiance to the American hierarchical system their foremost priority.

As the campaign materialized connections with these organizations became increasingly evident to the wider public. Wallace calculated the threat posed by Communism and the Civil Rights movement to traditional order would lead voters to excuse his staff; at minimum, this strategy proved hugely successful in the South and the border states. Such threats to conventional norms saw an increase in faith-based political organizations. "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism", by Paul Boyer details the draw and growth of Americans to the Protestant sect. Specifically, he cites the protests and social volatility of the 1960s as fodder for disproportionate growth; evangelicalism grew significantly in comparison to the 'liberal' episcopal, presbyterian, methodist, and congregational churches. Several evangelical pastors used their growing flocks to push their own political agendas, and placed liberal activism and Supreme Court rulings on a continuum tracking the moral decline of America. Such organizations also had elaborate fund-raising systems, at times their leaders would emass large fortunes on the contributions of its members to advocate for white evangelical causes. One of the largest contributions the religious-right offers Wallace is a model for grassroots fundraising that

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<sup>61</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 295.

proved extremely effective: majority of Wallace contributions were usually \$10-\$20 supplied by millions of working- and middle-class supporters.<sup>62</sup> Although his supporters never represented the average American, they identified their concerns as such.

When Governor Wallace spoke on the campaign trail, anyone in the audience was already captivated. Personal accounts recall a booming voice from a man full of conviction and Southern twang, some young women sheepishly admitting they fancied the widower. It was something to behold: an attractive, middle-aged man, raising his fist during his orations as if he were literally fighting for the soul of the nation. The spectacle of a Wallace rally far overshadowed its intended messaging, reporters often commenting that, "On paper, his speeches were stunningly disconnected, at times incoherent, and always repetitious. But Wallace's followers reveled in the performance".<sup>63</sup> No spectacle was greater than his speech at Madison Square Garden on October 24, 1968.

Any hope Wallace had in winning the Presidential election depended on his success in the border states; gaining those electoral votes would prevent his opponents from reaching an electoral majority, consequently throwing the election to the House of Representatives. Preparing himself for his most attended campaign rally of the election season, Wallace knew he could not win in November. Attempting to collect his thoughts, the clashes between protestors and supporters were nothing new to him, yet new for Wallace was the anxiety of this address. Making his way to the stage the calls for his election and his demise rattled around the room. When the time for the great demagogue of 1968 to open his mouth, cheers demanded attention instead. New York City erupted, as had Boston, Detroit, Pittsburg, and so on.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 11.

<sup>63</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 346.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

Cheers were not without protest, and that fight reminded the former boxer that no matter the outcome in November, tonight's match he could win. Redirecting the crowd's focus from berating the media and leftist protestors, Wallace toyed with his audience's bloodlust: "So all you newsmen look up this way now. Here's the main event. I've been wanting to fight the main event a long time in Madison Square Garden, so here we are. Listen, that's just a preliminary match up there. This is the main bout right here".<sup>65</sup> Wallace landed continual punches against the domestic policies enacted by Democrats and the Republican unwillingness to retaliate. Touching on a relevant anxiety, Wallace enumerated his calls for law and order by waving his clenched fist around the stage, each enraged swing blaming the two parties, the Supreme Court, the revolutionaries, the Communists, the people attempting to destroy the American way of life.<sup>66</sup>

New York City had been an epicenter for white ethnic immigrants and their children even before the opening of Ellis Island. First and second generation white ethnics began to move to the outer suburbs and increasingly supported Republicans for office, while their working- and lower-middle-class relatives and once loyal New Dealers debated their future in the Democratic party.<sup>67</sup> Familiar methods of white ethnic political mobilization through fraternal organization continued to be used throughout the 1960s, often to express their frustration with then Republican mayor John Lindsay. Although well known for his dedication to the city's African American constituency, yet Lindsay did not hide his, "...disdain for working-class ethnic communities, which he regarded as parochial and even tribal".<sup>68</sup> White ethnic reclamation began

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<sup>65</sup> "George Wallace Speech," accessed May 2, 2020, <http://www-personal.umd.umich.edu/~ppennock/doc-Wallace.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Michael J. Thompson, "America's Conservative Landscape: The New Conservatism and the Reorientation of American Democracy," in *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

<sup>68</sup> Joshua M. Zeitz, "Reaction," in *White Ethnic New York, Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Postwar Politics* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 181, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807872802\\_zeitz.11](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807872802_zeitz.11).

occurring throughout the United States after the second World War, and while many benefitted from rediscovering their roots, the negatives were as potent. Lindsay's policies of police non-engagement with civil rights protestors and his continual presence in Harlem did not sit well with working-class ethnics: "As Lindsay campaigned in working-class, predominantly Catholic areas of Queens and the Bronx, he was greeted by jeers and cries of 'Nigger lover!'"<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, his attempts to integrate the city in compliance with civil rights legislation to the "detriment" of ethnic communities — housing, bussing, state assistance — made race a central, yet not the only source, of ethnic disapproval. Tensions over such issues were ripe to be exploited by Wallace at Madison Square Garden.

Wallace's background is semi-typical of the young white American's experience during the Depression era. On the surface, someone like Wallace whose family's local political involvement could have allowed him to run in smaller circles did not come to fruition: he was almost good enough, but not quite. This is a stark portrayal of the Alabama Governor, casting him as an inevitable anti-hero who some rooted for out of a curious investment in his future. One can easily look backward, see the man in the schoolhouse door and simply paint him as a vehement racist, which he was. However, this interpretation of his upbringing does little to reconcile that whatever his faults, there was an intangible personal quality that invited supporters in and made them comfortable with his shortcomings.

Rather than attempting to redeem Wallace for his less-than-ideal slot in white American life, one may find it more prudent to place him against the historical experiences of first or second-generation white ethnic Americans. While Wallace's whiteness never saw the scrutiny incurred by white ethnic groups, he nevertheless needed to establish his claim to the upper

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 190.

echelon of life. After all, he was a white middle-class man of the American South, with modest local political connections and a competitive drive fueled by his recognized athleticism. Despite all these redeeming qualities Wallace had to prove himself in the greater landscape of American whiteness, for he was not standing out and that was unacceptable. Motivated by his desire to achieve, Wallace did work hard to graduate college, climb local political ladders, and be elected a State Circuit Court judge by the time he was 34. What may be the most thematic link between Wallace and white ethnic Americans was the desire to have their share of the white American bounty. Regardless of socially constructed racial classifications and expectations, white ethnics and the white working-class more broadly looked around inside the whites-only restaurants and still saw a difference between where they were seated and where their WASP counterparts were escorted to. Pushing one's self to academic or vocational success is not a marker of a racist, however, everyone is motivated by different external factors. Being a star boxer does little in a community of football fans; working to establish yourself in a new country can be futile if the society is skeptical of your ability to meet their standards. Some children of white ethnics felt it more effective to shed their ethnic identities and assimilate to achieve what their parents hoped for them, perhaps returning to their roots once satisfied with their work. Wallace similarly donned the cloak of social viability and championed the very regional social structure which attempted to reject him. Wallace's desire to prove he understood what it meant to be a successful white American meant he willingly joined far-right organizations down their spiral of anger and resentment. Along the way, white superiority reconciled with their ethnic counterparts and united to advocate the politics of resentment throughout the 1970s.

One cannot merely describe Wallace's racism as entirely opportunistic, yet it is clear that he understood the implications of embracing racism in American politics and assumed that risk.

Perhaps in that regard, him and Richard Nixon are kindred spirits. Nixon's approach to American racial politics was much more representative of where white America stood on race issues. No longer could one justify or skirt around their overt racism, it had to be more covert. The focus is not meant to be on the blatant racism exhibited during the campaign, for it is easy to look back and recognize it. By addressing the role of race in the political discourse, one can see past its abhorrent existence and analyze its function in politics and society broadly.

In the aftermath of the election, Nixon and his staffers would continue on to embrace public outrage against civil rights. "After 1970, Nixon and his men worked to create a new Republican majority by inflaming these middle-class white voters against special interests who wanted the government to help them out. They divided Americans between hardworking, tax-paying individuals and 'detractors of America' -lazy people eager for a government handout".<sup>70</sup> Taking a page from the old Southern playbook, Dent's handiwork is evident throughout this mobilization. While attempting to rebrand Southern discontent with resentment rather than racism, Nixon, Dent, and Republicans of the conservative era all helped to further the expansion and potency of American white racial superiority.

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<sup>70</sup> Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 281.