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Make America Great Again? American Conservatism and Donald Trump

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Make America Great Again?
American Conservatism and Donald Trump

By

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It might seem difficult to imagine now, but once upon a time it was possible to feel shocked by political developments. We've become so desensitized, especially in the last few years. Yet in 2016, there was a profound sense of disbelief over the results of the American presidential election. How could Donald Trump, a complete political outsider who'd never before held office, defeat an opponent who seemed to hold every office except for the presidency she sought? How could someone with Trump's particular brand of politics, of nationalist tendencies and unabashed populist appeals, experience unprecedented success? Upon closer examination, an explanation emerges. I trace the history of conservatism and the Republican Party in the United States, along with its many evolutions, and contrast it with the stories of the populist and demagogic politicians who paved a path Trump so expertly followed. What becomes clear is that Trump does not represent something entirely new, but rather something newly successful.

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Introduction
Election Night 2016

The Miracle

The concept of the miracle isn't new. It's the fundamental basis of the world's leading religions. Turning water into wine. The resurrection. The candlelight that burned for eight days, on one day's oil. It's the shared plotline of the greatest moments in professional sports. The "Miracle on Ice" at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. The 2004 American League Championship Series between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees. The New England Patriots rally to victory in Super Bowl LI from down 28 to 3. The list goes on, and on, and on.

Less often, though, it is a recurrent theme in U.S. politics. There are few examples of defying the odds when it comes to American democracy and elections. For decades, the most cited instance was President Truman's upset victory over Gov. Thomas Dewey, emphatically underscored by the woefully premature "Dewey Defeats Truman" headline.

That is, of course, until 2016.

Donald J. Trump, real estate mogul, entrepreneur, and reality television star rose through the ranks of an overcrowded Republican field of candidates to secure his party's nomination for the presidency, and score what seemed to be an impossible victory over Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

Trump's victory was, without a shadow of doubt, the most stunning, miraculous, and unforeseen outcome ever produced by American democracy. Virtually every television talking head pundit, virtually every odds-maker and predictor, virtually every so-called expert and analyst said it couldn't happen. Yet, it did. His candidacy was discounted from the moment he descended the escalator in Trump Tower that fateful day in June, 2015, and

every day in between then and Nov. 8, 2016. He never stood a chance, or so they said. It was going to be an Electoral College landslide, or so they said.

How Did This Happen?

To say Trump's victory was stunning is to say the bare minimum. But why? Why was it so overwhelmingly shocking for him to have won? It might have something to do with his overall job qualifications, which outside of being a relatively successful businessman (depending, of course, upon your definition of success), number exactly zero. Prior to the presidency, he held no elected positions. The President never served in uniform. He'd never been appointed nor nominated for as much as a city council committee. Using a popular phrase among the political punditry, Trump had never been elected so much as dog-catcher. He was now to be handed the reins of the world's greatest democracy, and its most powerful military, the codes to a vast nuclear arsenal, and the keys to the office and home inhabited by the likes of Roosevelts, Truman, Reagan and Lincoln.

Contrast this, in context, with the qualifications of his opponent in Hillary Clinton. Former First Lady of the United States, former Senator from New York, former Secretary of State of the United States. Her resume ran a mile long. Campaigning on her behalf, then-President Obama noted "there had never been anybody more qualified than Hillary Clinton to be the next President of the United States" (BBC News).

Yet the political headwinds of 2016 worked against Secretary Clinton and in favor of Trump's candidacy. The American electorate wanted change. The American electorate disproportionately favored a candidate who was male, who spoke to underlying themes of tribalism and populism, and who claimed to represent the "forgotten man and woman" against the traditional oversight of the establishment. Thus, despite his obvious

shortcomings, despite his clear absence of qualifications, Trump was indeed a competitive and viable candidate for the presidency. In fact, Trump was uniquely positioned to appeal and speak to voters who sought a candidate and platform message almost identical to his own.

Trump: The Unconventional Candidate, Unconventional President

Yet simultaneously, Trump was far from a perfect candidate. His campaign and candidacy were deeply flawed, chock-full of gaffe, controversy, and scandal. The Trump campaign will go down in history for its ability to both produce and subsequently move past the controversies of its candidate. Trump refused to call Sen. John McCain a war hero, called for a ban on all Muslims from entering the United States, publicly sought the assistance of a foreign power to aid his campaign efforts, and uttered now-infamous homophobic comments on *Access Hollywood*.

Additionally, Trump marked a decided shift from traditional conservative and Republican Party politics. Speaking broadly, in mainstream politics he represents a departure from the traditional norms and boundaries followed and abided by both sides of the ideological spectrum. He who lacks the respect for vital institutions, the basic understanding of government and its role regardless of partisanship, or the respect for the Constitution and the importance of individual rights and liberties cannot possibly pertain to represent neither the Republican Party nor American politics at-large. His support for protectionism ran afoul of decades of free-trade policies initiated by Republicans and eventually subscribed to by Democrats as well. His virulent immigration rhetoric barreled over the bounds of typically acceptable discourse, offending voters and politicians alike on both sides of the aisle. His attacks on a free press as the “enemy of the people” rebuke First

Amendment protections that strengthen and maintain our functioning democracy. His positions spoke to a plurality of Electoral College votes, but were and remain in clear attack on traditional American politics, with all which that entails.

And yet, Trump's politics and policies are not a new phenomenon in American democracy. In fact, the only new development is Trump's ability to turn these hallmarks, hallmarks of populism, nationalism, nativism, and protectionism, into success at the ballot box nationally. He is indeed the first president ever to be elected while running on a platform which fully subscribed to these issues and positions. There are those who have come before him, those who have trail-blazed in hopes of their own successes. Yet none have experienced the degree of success Trump has, despite their collective positions. Historically, these candidates have laid claim to a small, painfully loyal group of supporters, a voting bloc resolved to support them alone. Even after their preferred candidate drops out of the race, for reasons of low support, dwindling funds, or both, these supporters remain difficultly won over by the nominee of their party. Nonetheless, it is their candidate who typically lost. No longer in 2016. In 2016, their candidate won. The tables had been turned.

Trump remains highly popular among Republicans. While the President's overall approval rating ranks, at this time, just over 41%, he enjoys an approval rating among GOP voters of nearly 90% (Real Clear Politics). And yet his support among the GOP establishment seems transactional at best. There are still many who reside in "Never Trump" land, critics and politicians and intellectuals who still refuse to subscribe to the direction Trump has taken the party and the country. It is this bloc, in direct contradiction to Trump's staunch bloc of supporters, who now face exile, and a party which no longer

represents their interests. This is in combination with GOP voters who voted for the President despite the differences in his politics and policies. These voters hoped that, once elected, the President would rationalize some of his positions, evolving to what had been traditional Republican orthodoxy for decades. These voters now face the prospect of a President they supported but now no longer support, a President they voted for merely as the lesser of two evils. Their hopes for a Trump presidency were high. The reality is not. Their dreams did not come to fruition.

Of course, there was much hope among non-die-hard supporters for a Trump presidency. Even the President's strongest critics and opponents, stretching anywhere from Mitt Romney to Hillary Clinton, offered the then-President-elect well wishes and hope for a bright future. Optimism, that an outsider such as Trump might just actually shake up things in Washington, D.C. Dreams, of bipartisan legislation crafted under a President willing to adapt his own positions as he had so many times before. Hope, that once inaugurated the President would recognize the rarefied air he now inhabited, and adjust his tone and rhetoric accordingly.

Reality

The reality, as unfortunate as it may be, is obvious: precisely none of these hopes have come true. The President's tone and rhetoric have not been moderated; in fact, they may very well have only gotten worse. The President's positions remain as diametrically opposed to traditional Republican conservatism as they were during the election. Trump's disregard and disdain for the most vital institutions of our democracy continue. What was once cause for hope and dreams is now the cause of concern and prayer. Just how much longer can this go on? Can we come back from this? How did we get here, and where are

we going? This thesis seeks to address exactly that. It is to be the argument of this paper that a Republican Party which began with such honorable men as Lincoln, McKinley, Roosevelt, and Eisenhower has now been led astray by the populist infiltration begun under Goldwater and Nixon and which has now been capitalized upon by Donald Trump.

In Chapter 1, through an in-depth analysis of the foundations of modern American conservatism and the Republican Party, I seek to analyze the positions which had for decades characterized GOP candidates and their supporters. By assessing leading conservative intellectuals, examining both their areas of agreement as well as their key points of conflict, I wish to determine the foundational core of what was once American conservatism.

In Chapter 2, I will undertake a re-visitation of past GOP presidential nominees and presidents, highlighting among them their differences and similarities in an attempt to trace the evolution of the party at the national level. Why were some candidates successful, while others were not? How did they appeal to different constituencies, through different strategies and positions?

In Chapter 3, I begin the process of understanding the Trump presidency, beginning through the lens of populism in American politics and continuing with “The Great Party Shift” and President Nixon’s Southern Strategy. By examining the rise of populist, demagogic, and tribal appeals to a specifically vulnerable electorate, I seek to set the groundwork for those who blazed the trail Trump so expertly followed to victory. An analysis of how these politicians differentiated themselves and their positions is critical to a more thorough understanding of Trump’s rise.

In Chapter 4, I examine the GOP presidential primaries of the past. More often than not, every primary-contested GOP nomination has featured a contest between a traditional candidate and a candidate who displays more populist and tribal appeals. In the past, it has almost always been the more traditional candidate who has won, while the populist candidate has only won in circumstances particularly beneficial to their candidacy. Why, with Trump, does this change? What is its cause? Identifying political, economic, and social factors, I seek to assess why this change occurs, and why the 2016 election was such fertile ground for a candidate such as Trump.

Concluding, I seek to answer two brazenly simple questions: Where did we come from? Where are we going? I will recap the evolution of the Republican Party in the United States, with an emphasis on how the party has arrived in its current situation. Additionally, I seek to map a potential course for the future of America's Grand Old Party.

Chapter 1
American Conservatism: What Did It Stand For?

The Republican Party today in the United States wields power at every level of government. The GOP holds a majority in the U.S. Senate. Republican politicians reside in a majority of governor's mansions. Up until this past November's elections, the party held a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Not to mention this is all in addition to the most powerful man on the planet, the de-facto leader of the West and the free world, being a Republican. The Republican Party's influence on American politics in recent decades owes to a generational shift in conservative policies and positions. Yet these conservative pillars often find themselves at odds with current-day machinations of a Trump-led GOP. In other words, the Republican Party's influence of yesterday does not find its roots where the current GOP finds its own. To determine where the party is now, and where it is headed into the future, one must determine from where it is coming.

The foundational elements of the modern-day Republican Party and broader conservative movement trace easily to the rise and resurgence of a new brand of American conservatism in the wake of the Roosevelt New Deal and a twenty-year period of dominance by the Democratic Party. Stretching from FDR's election in 1932, through to Truman's reluctant transfer of power to Eisenhower in 1952, Democrats almost singlehandedly controlled the levers of American government for two decades.

Yet, American conservatives did not surrender, nor did the Republican Party roll over and die. Conservatives resolved among themselves, vowing to again provide the adequate challenge that a two-party democratic republic such as ours necessitates. Key figures rose, men who would serve as both the founders and the leaders of the American conservative movement. Men of the likes of William F. Buckley, Jr., Garry Wills, Barry

Goldwater, Russell Kirk, and others, came to political and national prominence in the 1950's and beyond. Despite varying degrees of ideological agreement and difference among them, most notably including their own journeys to the ideologies to which they subscribed and adhered, these men bonded together. In the process, they revived American conservatism and propelled it into its future, a future continued by men who followed in their footsteps, men of the likes of Bill Kristol and George Will.

The effect of these men cannot be underestimated. They affected not just the Republican Party, nor merely the conservative ideology. They built a movement. They formed a movement that imposed its will on American politics at large for decades. A movement that, largely, remains alive and well today, continuing to have many of the same characteristics and influences upon the American society it sought to conserve and protect. And yet they too followed in the wake of decades of Republican leaders who molded the party and movement they themselves would take the mantle of.

The Beginning of the Beginning

The Republican Party in the United States, despite its current orientation, had origins much different than its present configuration. Abraham Lincoln, the first elected president of the party and widely considered its foundational figure, would likely not find a place in today's Republican Party. Disregarding the fact that this is a frightening thought in of itself, it additionally indicates the extent of change which the party has undergone in the roughly century and a half since its founding. Many of the principles and ideas upon which the party was founded no longer find a home within it. Many of the most influential leaders and politicians in GOP and American history would no longer recognize nor believe in the party they once fought for.

Lincoln's Republican Party was founded on the premise of human and civil rights. Largely centered on the issue of slavery and its subsequent abolition, Lincoln would likely disapprove of what would become Nixon's Southern Strategy, and the overall lack of concern for civil rights present today among the conservative right-wing of American politics. Following this trend of civil and human rights advocacy, Lincoln was additionally a leading proponent of the incorporation of the Free Soil Party into the expanding GOP. The Free Soil movement, which although under Lincoln merged into the Republican Party, would in the future provide the basis for the rise of populist movements across the plains as the GOP moved further and further in the opposite direction.

Lincoln was also a leading proponent for building the transcontinental railroad across the United States. Above all other considerations, Lincoln's reasoning for this advocacy found a most prominent and relevant core in linking the Union together, ensuring the Western states did not fall into Confederate hands at the height of the Civil War. Additionally, though, it also represented a newfound focus for societal and infrastructure improvement at the national level. Previously, improvements had been made at the state and local level. For instance, contrast Governor DeWitt Clinton's pioneering of the construction of the Erie Canal in New York in the 1820s with President Roosevelt's New Deal work programs and President Eisenhower's support for the building of the interstate highway system, little more than a century later.

While Lincoln's presidency, for obvious reasons, focused mainly on the Civil War which defined it both then and now, he gave rise to a number of key positions which would define the party further into the future. His heavy reliance on northern industry for the war effort led him to adopt positions of protectionism. Lincoln adopted a pro-business, pro-

manufacturing stance and mentality which the party he left behind would continue to support.

This pro-business, pro-manufacturing stance and mentality adopted under Lincoln indeed lasted long after his assassination in Washington, D.C. on April 14, 1865. Republican leaders who followed in Lincoln's footsteps largely subscribed to his basic ideology, to his world view, and to his positions. Some thirty-plus years after Lincoln's death, the presidency of William McKinley continued many of the same pro-business policies initiated under Lincoln. The policies of protectionism, of the Gold Standard and tariffs, had cemented a role in the Republican Party and its platform. Additionally, the GOP remained the party of civil rights, presenting itself as representative of the African American community and their interests. McKinley's ascension to the presidency in 1896 came as a triumph over the Democratic Party and its nominee in William Jennings Bryan. McKinley's victory came largely as a result of the economic downturn and difficulties faced by his presidential predecessor, Grover Cleveland. As the economy rebounded during McKinley's first term, it enabled his administration to maintain adherence to the positions of protectionism, tariffs, and the Gold Standard that had differentiated McKinley in 1896 from the populist strain of proposals and positions supported by his Democratic opponent in William Jennings Bryan.

McKinley would again face Bryan in the 1900 election. Following the death of McKinley's Vice President, Garret Hobart, in 1899, McKinley was faced with the daunting task of selecting a new running mate for the rapidly approaching general election. Then-Governor Theodore Roosevelt quickly became the consensus choice. Roosevelt's brand of politics had worn out its welcome in New York, as he implemented his distinct strain of

progressivism across the state. Additionally, Roosevelt was selected in part for his ability to go toe-to-toe with Bryan on the campaign trail. Roosevelt could most successfully attack Bryan's populism through his own progressivism.

Following his reelection, McKinley too was felled of the same fate as Lincoln. Assassinated in Buffalo, New York, in 1901, McKinley's death enabled the ascendance of Roosevelt to the presidency. What would become of the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt marked a decided shift in ideology and position from what had by then become traditional Republican orthodoxy. No longer assuming the mantle of a pro-business mentality, Roosevelt was most decidedly a progressive President. Yes, despite its modern-day connotation, the Republican Party was indeed once the party of the Progressive. As Roosevelt once said,

“Of all the questions which can come before this nation, short of the actual preservation of its existence in a great war, there is none which compares in importance with the great central task of leaving this land even a better land for our descendants than it is for us, and training them into a better race to inhabit the land and pass it on. Conservation is a great moral issue for it involves the patriotic duty of ensuring the safety and continuance of the nation...Let me add that the health and vitality of our people are at least as well worth conserving as their forests, waters, lands, and minerals, and in this great work the national government must bear a most important part.”

Yet perhaps no Roosevelt quote so accurately sums up his progressivism as when he said, “A great democracy has to be progressive, or it will soon cease to be great or a democracy.”

Roosevelt's politics, his policies of trust-busting, progressivism, and conservation, angered the business community which the Republican Party had for so long catered to and cultured a relationship with. Roosevelt did nothing of that sort. Rather, he followed his own instincts, his own self-guided direction of right and wrong, of just and immoral.

When Roosevelt was re-elected in 1904, he swore he would not seek another term of the presidency he so cherished and adored. It was, perhaps, his most significant mistake. What a refreshing change from modern American politics: a politician who actually kept a promise. In 1909, Roosevelt handed over the proverbial keys of power to his Secretary of War, William Howard Taft. Over the course of the next four years, Taft followed a more pro-business stance than had Roosevelt, but to a large extent still adhered to the legacy of progressivism left behind. Yet for a variety of reasons, Roosevelt felt that Taft had betrayed both him and progressivism. Taft once noted:

A National Government cannot create good times. It cannot make the rain to fall, the sun to shine, or the crops to grow, but it can, by pursuing a meddlesome policy, attempting to change economic conditions, and frightening the investment of capital, prevent a prosperity and a revival of business which might otherwise have taken place.”

Thus, while Taft exhibited a friendlier posture toward the business community, he remained progressive. Taft’s love of the law, evidenced by his prior career as Solicitor General and Judge on the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, as well as his later nomination and affirmation as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, factored largely into his own brand of progressivism. Taft’s actions as President came from a standpoint of the enforcement of progressive law. Yet, while Taft actually conducted more “trust-busting” than did Roosevelt, while Taft admirably carried forth the torch, Roosevelt focused on the 1912 election, seeking to oust Taft and reclaim the vaunted Oval Office which he so coveted.

When, in 1912, Roosevelt lost the Republican Party’s nomination for President to the incumbent Taft, Roosevelt’s quest did not end. Rather, Roosevelt formed the Bull Moose Party, continuing his pursuit. Effectively splitting the Republican Party and its vote

in half, Roosevelt paved the way to guaranteed defeat, handing an easy electoral victory to the Democrats and their nominee in Woodrow Wilson.

To many Republicans, this felt like betrayal. Roosevelt and the progressive wing of the party he so masterfully controlled had stabbed the party in the back in the name of their own, apparently more important and sacred movement. As such, the progressive movement was effectively ousted from the Republican Party, never to return. Disloyalty would not be allowed.

Ultimately, this meant more than the removal of the progressive wing of the Republican Party. It carried along much more than that alone. It fundamentally altered the party into its future. It further enhanced its pro-business mindset and eradicated any hint of progressivism. It began the process of creation of a less pro-civil rights view, of a decades-long saga of becoming increasingly ideological. It gave rise to the modern Republican Party and the corresponding conservative movement, and all which they stand for and represent. But perhaps above all else, the overall trend was one of less inclusion. It was once a party which any and all could subscribe to. A party which anyone, regardless of class or race or religion, could find a home within. Increasingly, though, it put forth a mindset of purism, a mindset that contradictory views to those of the accepted norm were discouraged and unwelcome. Being a voice of opposition, a critic, or merely not being a full-throated supporter increasingly turned a once-Republican into a fake, a phony, and a fraud. The party became an echo chamber, instead of the diverse, welcoming, and inclusive tent it had once been.

The Roaring Twenties

And yet, it did not have to turn out that way. History often has a funny way of providing us with the ultimate what-could-have-been scenarios, the possibilities which allow our minds to roam the expanse of our imaginations. One such what-could-have-been came no further than 1920. Theodore Roosevelt's untimely death in January 1919 eliminated the possibility of his re-election to the presidency some twelve years after his willingly but reluctantly leaving it behind. Had Roosevelt been alive for the 1920 election, he almost certainly would have sought the Republican Party's nomination. Roosevelt's pursuit of the GOP nomination, a pursuit which more likely than not would have ended in success, would have almost certainly re-unified the now disparate factions of the Republican Party and progressivism. Roosevelt was perhaps the only figure in Republican politics who could have reunified these factions into a winning coalition. The possibilities, of course, of this are endless. Imagine just how different our politics would be today. Unfortunately, what-could-have-been scenarios are just that: that which could have been.

Instead, in 1920 the Republican Party nominated Warren Harding of Ohio, who scored a landslide Electoral College victory in the general election. While there was the potential for Theodore Roosevelt's reunification of the conservative and progressive wings of the Republican Party in 1920, Harding and Coolidge did indeed form a winning ticket in their own right. Harding and his running mate, Calvin Coolidge, ran on a platform of a "Return to Normalcy." This platform, in some sense, meant more than a societal return to the calm of a pre-World War I world. It also meant a return to the Republican Party of old, a Republican Party which was pro-business, pro-manufacturing, and protectionist. In some sense, it meant a return to the McKinley-era GOP. Laissez-Faire economic policies were

once again the distinct manifest of America's Grand Old Party. As the famously quiet Coolidge once noted, "After all, the chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing, and prospering in the world."

In this sense, Harding, and his successor Coolidge (who ascended to the presidency upon Harding's death in 1923) were traditional Republicans, traditional conservatives. They represented traditional policies, of the traditional role of government as non-interventionist, of traditional societal norms and practices. More importantly, they represented traditional isolationism. Harding and Coolidge retracted America from the world stage in the wake of World War I. In their view, a return to normalcy meant a return-trip home. They focused on the clear issues facing America and Americans. Had Theodore Roosevelt lived through 1920, and had he been elected, this most certainly would not have been the case. A second tenure of a Theodore Roosevelt administration would have maintained a more progressive, interventionist government. It would have maintained America's posture on the world stage, and would have continued the societal change and reform begun in the decades prior.

Harding's administration, and the corresponding shift in opposing progressivism, was not perfect. In fact, Harding's administration faced a series of scandals and corruption allegations, some of which only came to light following Harding's untimely death in August, 1923. Most notably among these, of course, was the Teapot Dome scandal, in which the Secretary of the Interior was accused of, and proven to have accepted, bribes in exchange for favorable access to Naval emergency oil reserves in Wyoming. In the Congress, investigations into the Teapot Dome scandal were begun by progressive

Republican Senator Robert M. La Follette Sr. of Wisconsin. Alongside the allegations of multiple extramarital affairs, Harding and his administration did not go unscathed through the ringer that was and continues to be Washington, D.C.

Dark Clouds Ahead

1928 saw the election of yet another Republican to the White House. In some sense, Herbert Hoover continued the lineage of a return to traditional Republican orthodoxy begun by his immediate predecessors. Yet Hoover had elements of progressivism as well. His work in the Federal government began with post-war aid to World War I-ravaged Europe, as Director of the U.S. Food Administration.

During his presidency, the onset of the Great Depression derailed his hopes for a moderately successful tenure. Hoover often found himself overwhelmed by the mass extent of the Depression's reach and impact. His actions to combat the economic catastrophe were often too little, too late. While Hoover firmly believed in the ability of charity and goodwill to reverse the Depression's most adversarial and negative effects, he also utilized government in minor capacities in attempt to turn the tide of ever-rising unemployment.

Hoover's successor in Franklin Roosevelt went above and beyond the government intervention policies begun under the previous administration. If Hoover's actions were too little, too late, the same could never possibly be said for FDR. Roosevelt's New Deal was most definitively progressivism. Yet the New Deal in fact went further than traditional progressivism; the New Deal went above and beyond it. While the progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson was one of professionalism, of civil service standards, of conservation, the progressivism of the New Deal and of FDR added the now-fundamental element of fighting and combating economic catastrophe.

The New Deal created a litany of government institutions and agencies, all of which were designed to correct the disastrous state of the American economy and to ensure such a state was never again reached. The “alphabet soup” of New Deal agencies speaks volumes to this effect. Yet the New Deal did more, much more, than expand government and create one agency after another. It embedded into the American psyche that government knows best, that it is indeed the role of the government to avoid economic disaster; that government did in fact have a role to play in the everyday lives of Americans. The New Deal replaced political patronage with government entitlement. Roosevelt consciously removed the ability of political parties to provide for those under their quasi-jurisdiction, to provide economic relief to everyday Americans in conditional exchange for their support at the ballot box. Roosevelt intentionally instituted a system of government entitlements in its place, making it the sole jurisdiction of government alone to provide for the general welfare of the citizenry.

Roosevelt made many political enemies throughout his tenure in office. He was uncanny in his ability to maintain, simultaneously, stunningly long lists of political friend and foe. Roosevelt’s Tennessee Valley Authority, established under the guise of the New Deal, created one such foe: Wendell Willkie. Willkie’s business was among those most targeted by the practices implemented by the TVA. As a result, Willkie’s staunch opposition to the New Deal liberalism of FDR and his administration led to his nomination by the GOP for the presidency in 1940. Never having sought nor held office before that time, Willkie most certainly was a political outsider without clear qualifications for the job of president. Yet his ultimately unsuccessful bid for the presidency paved two clear paths:

a path for those in vehement opposition to New Deal liberalism, as well as a path to the presidency for complete political outsiders.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was eventually elected an unprecedented four times to the office of the presidency. Following his death in office in 1945, he was succeeded by Harry Truman, his Vice President. Truman continued the New Deal liberalism policies begun and implemented under the Roosevelt administration. Cementing much of the Roosevelt legacy, though, would ultimately be left to Truman's successor. Would a Republican president allow the New Deal to stand under his watch?

Eisenhower: Accepting the Unacceptable

Eisenhower, in fact, did allow for the New Deal to stand. Eisenhower embraced the stabilizing features of the New Deal, specifically those pertaining to the economy and those charged with preventing another collapse and subsequent depression. Eisenhower's decision, though, was not without consequence. His decision to largely abide by the precedent set by his predecessors propelled a conservative backlash in his wake. A conservative backlash that arose as a result of his unwillingness to take on the New Deal liberalism they so despised. A conservative backlash that was led by conservative intellectuals, and which would come to define much of the future of the Republican Party in the 20th century and beyond.

Yet Eisenhower was not alone in his acceptance of portions of the New Deal. There were, in fact, a number of moderate and progressive Republicans who agreed with his stance on New Deal reforms. Alf Landon, former Governor of Kansas and the 1936 Republican nominee, too supported many aspects of Roosevelt's New Deal and found fault only with those he saw as inefficient and wasteful of taxpayer dollars. George Norris, a

progressive Republican firebrand Senator from Nebraska, was perhaps one of Roosevelt's biggest supporters during the passage of the New Deal. Roosevelt even went so far as to call Norris the "...very perfect, gentle knight of American progressive ideals." Further, Thomas Dewey, the Republican nominee in successive presidential contests in 1944 and 1948, also shared Eisenhower's viewpoint of acceptance of the New Deal. Dewey's successor as leader of the moderate wing of the Republican Party, Nelson Rockefeller, additionally subscribed to this viewpoint. This is all to say that Eisenhower did not assume the position of accepting the New Deal alone. Rather, he did so alongside many fellow moderate and progressive Republicans.

Eisenhower also found support among these moderate and progressive Republicans in regards to his internationalism. In direct rebuttal to Robert A. Taft, Eisenhower crafted a GOP centered around a commitment to sound and responsible foreign policy, to international institutions and allies, and to maintaining U.S. presence and stature on the world stage. In this specific regard, Eisenhower found crucial allies of the likes of Arthur Vandenberg, Senator from Michigan, and the Dulles brothers, namely Allen and John Foster, the CIA Director and Secretary of State, respectively.

Overall, these moderate/progressive Republicans favored government activism and reform when necessary, were in support of civil rights, and fiercely believed in balanced budgets and internationalism. Eisenhower was not one of a kind in this respect.

Yet the conservative backlash that arose in the wake of Eisenhower and the moderate Republicans he followed began with Robert A. Taft, continued with Buckley and Wills and Goldwater, and continues today with Will and Kristol. The future of the Republican Party was shaping up to be a battle between the progressive and the traditional

conservative, the populist and the establishment. A battle between isolationism and internationalism, government intervention and states' rights, balanced budgets and supply side, deficit spending economics. This battle wages on still today, yet it has its roots in Eisenhower's unwillingness to take on the New Deal societal safety net many decades ago.

Buckley: Man and God

Skipping ahead a few decades or so, in the context of today's American conservatism, many still look to the *National Review* for guidance and opinion. Plenty of current events, the pressing issues and matters of the day, are seen and analyzed through a *National Review* perspective. Many current and former writers and contributors are household names in political circles. They are the talking heads at the roundtable you watch on the nightly news, the authors of the op-ed pieces in Sunday newspapers. The founder of *National Review* was none other than the widely acclaimed conservative intellectual William F. Buckley, Jr. Buckley rose to fame as both the founder of the aforementioned conservative publication, as well as through his own works, including *God and Man at Yale* and *Up from Liberalism*.

As a matter of personal opinion, Buckley's conservatism came largely from a standpoint of a response to liberalism. Liberalism, though, in the sense of New Deal Liberalism. Liberalism, not as a movement through which to enact necessary reforms and obtain critical human and civil rights and liberties. The liberalism Buckley critiqued was a liberalism that thought government knew best, that thought change and reform was best instituted from the top down, not the bottom up. Buckley once famously noted, "I'd rather entrust the government of the United States to the first 400 people listed in the Boston telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard University." While certainly a

conservative quote, an anti-liberal quote nonetheless, it is important too to note the strain of populism here as well.

In *Up from Liberalism*, Buckley notably addresses the issue of liberals before that of conservatives, writing:

“I mean to ask several questions about the Liberal movement in this country, and to draw tentative conclusions from the answers that suggest themselves. I mean to ask first how the Liberal thinks, how he argues, how he teaches, and then what are some of the root assumptions of his economic and political policies. I shall describe the behavior of prominent Liberals...I shall describe the atmosphere in which Liberalism thrives” (Buckley, xv).

It is only immediately following this that Buckley addresses the issue of the conservative, noting:

“As to the conservative movement, our troubles are legion. Those who charge that there is no conservative position have an easy time of it rhetorically. There is no commonly-acknowledged conservative position today, and any claim to the contrary is easy to make sport of. Yet there is to be found in contemporary conservative literature both a total critique of Liberalism, and compelling proposals for the reorientation of our thought...Up against the faith of a conservative, the great surrealistic ideologies reduce to dust. But first there must be a confrontation” (Buckley, xv).

Later, Buckley concludes “To do that we must bring down the thing called Liberalism, which is powerful but decadent; and salvage a thing called conservatism, which is weak but viable” (Buckley, xvi).

Buckley then sets about the process of provoking, of initiating such a conflict. He derides liberalism in the coming pages. He writes:

“I think it is fair to conclude that American Liberals are reluctant to co-exist with anyone on their Right. Ours, the Liberal credo tells us, is an ‘open society,’ the rules of which call for a continuing (never terminal) hearing for all ideas. But close observation of the Liberal-in-debate gives the impression that he has given conservatism a terminal audience. When a conservative speaks up demanding, he runs the gravest risk of triggering the Liberal mania; and then before you know it, the ideologist of openmindedness and toleration is hurtling toward you, lance cocked...in flat contradiction of the rules of the so-called open society, which of

course we don't have, and would have still less if the Liberals were in complete charge..." (Buckley, 23-24).

Undoubtedly, Buckley was a conservative. That much is clear. However, it is also clear that Buckley had a penchant, a joy for attacking liberalism. That much is also undoubtedly true as well. Buckley's conservatism was not so much conservatism as it was anti-liberalism, anti-New Deal liberalism. Buckley fashioned himself a conservative in the guise of a libertarian, as someone who believes strongly in individual rights and freedoms, evidenced most abruptly by his support for marijuana legalization as far back as his mayoral candidacy in 1965. In that particular race, Buckley was asked by a New York City reporter what exactly he would do if he were to win on Election Day. In response, Buckley said, "Demand a recount." In the end, the moderate, progressive Republican candidate in John Lindsay was elected as Mayor of New York.

In today's context, polarization has caused the opposite of one ideology to inevitably cause someone to join ranks with the other. In Buckley's era, this definitive causation was less clear. Regardless, Buckley's disdain for liberalism left him little choice. He despised the one-size-fits-all mindset that he saw as the fundamental evil of it. It was the fundamental basis of his conservatism.

Buckley was but one of many at the *National Review* who rose to prominence in American conservative and political society. Yet his contributions rank in a league of their own. His founding of the publication enabled a constant meeting of the minds, allowing them to converse, to exchange ideas and thoughts on anything from the miniscule to the massive. Speaking of his personal contributions to the ideology of conservatism from an individual perspective, one cannot ignore the fact that said contributions themselves stand alone in their enormity and importance. Nevertheless, they must be coupled with his

simultaneous role as a de-facto leader of the conservative movement, as a man who brought together the leading intellectuals of his era and enabled their growth to match the growth of the movement. His role as founder of the *National Review*, as host of the *Firing Line*, and as author of some of the leading conservative manifestos of his time allowed him to embrace such a role in its entirety.

Following in Buckley's Footsteps

As you might imagine, especially given Buckley's outsized role as both leader and intellectual, his importance and his status were immeasurable. The fellow intellectuals Buckley brought together thus owed him both a debt of gratitude and respect. In fact, the opening chapter of Garry Wills' *Confessions of a Conservative* is devoted to "Going to Meet Buckley," and details the backstory of his hiring at the *National Review*. At the same time, Wills was by no means a conservative in the mold of Buckley. Wills did not follow in the steps of Buckley's conservatism, basing his ideology in his disdain for liberalism. Rather, Wills took a moralistic and religious approach to his ideology.

Prior to joining the *National Review* staff, Wills was formerly enrolled at Jesuit seminary institution. As such, Wills' Catholicism was deep rooted; it was ingrained in his very character. Concluding his *Confessions of a Conservative*, Wills wrote:

"My political childhood was retarded; but it gave me a set of experiences to reflect on, and a desire to puzzle out the attraction I felt and feel for the very term 'conservatism.' It was easy from the outset to see that libertarians lived in a dream world of hypothetical atoms interacting with each other dynamically, not chemically. No society can ever be formed on the basis of individualism, togetherness deriving from apartness. It would take me longer to see through the authoritarian side of conservatism, trying to uphold religion and morals by law, turning communism into the new anti-Christ against which justice must be done, *ruat caelum*. In St. Augustine's last view of things, to do apocalyptic battle with anti-Christ is to arrogate Christ's role to politics. Augustine's agnosticism about the souls of other men was what I ultimately needed, not the certitudes of right-wing righteousness. Yet the instinct toward conservatism remains. Some of this is

no doubt a matter of temperament, the mere accident of birth. I am by taste and training a classicist. My Church puts great emphasis on tradition. I respond to the praise Ennius gave his hero as *multa tenens antiqua* (tenacious of the ancient things). Yet so far as I can tell in my own case, the positions I have reached by reflection seem conservative in a way that goes beyond quirks of my own taste. I am certainly not a liberal. I don't believe our politics works the way liberal theory claims. And I admire the system's workings because they guarantee coherence and continuity: They soften difference and mute change, so it may enter the social body as nutriment, not as a knifeblade. These surely are conservative values. On the other hand, I admire the voices calling for moral renewal and difficult change. I find in them the mystery of free will and heroism, and know we depend on these. No system can automatically turn human selfishness into 'checks and balances' with benign results. The liberal wants a 'system' that works automatically, a government of laws and not of men. But until we can mass-produce prophets and martyrs, we must listen constantly for whatever light is given us from human ingenuity and courage. We cannot produce wisdom or sanctity or genius—though all of these can be crushed, can be starved or broken or killed. This should dispose us to allow as much freedom of preaching and teaching as we can, within our large politics of compromise. Conservatism is a title deserved by a view that tries to value and retain the politician as well as the prophet, the bureaucrat as well as the technocrat, the business elite as well as the unions, the poor and oppressed along with the elites. That kind of politics would be elitist, but not partially so, like our other political philosophies; not covertly so; not attacking 'elites' when all that is intended is destruction of elites opposed to one's own favored group. The right wing in America is stuck with the paradox of holding a philosophy of 'conserving' and an actual order it does not want to conserve. It keeps trying to create something new it might think worthy, someday, of conserving. My own conservatism is simpler and more accepting. I like our political order because I don't believe for a minute it is trying (and failing) to do things liberals keep praising it for trying to do and accusing it for failing to do. I know the term conservative is often misleading, that people will take it to mean 'right wing' in either its libertarian or authoritarian senses. I tried for a while to do without it. But people do keep asking what one is; and while I do not want to fight for a term, neither do I want to acquiesce in the mindlessness that calls a hodgepodge of anarchic and repressive resistance to our 'liberal establishment' by so improper a title as 'conservative'" (Wills, 209-211).

It is clear Wills' conservatism is not in response to anything. It is not the result of disdain and distrust of another ideology, as was so clearly the case for Buckley. Rather, Wills' conservatism is the essence of his being. It is the content of his character. It is as much a part of him as his limbs and his conscience. It is, in fact, his conscience. Yet, irrespective of this, Wills admires Buckley. He respects Buckley's position and power, and

the role Buckley embraced as a founding father of the American conservative movement. Wills went to work for Buckley, not the other way around. Despite their differences, Wills accepted the role which he was presented, and did his best in furtherance of the conservative movement.

Respect, Never Bow

Despite what may seem like a conservative movement that largely circulated around the center mass of William F. Buckley, Jr., this simply was not always the case. Many conservative intellectuals did indeed work for Buckley at *National Review*, and thus admired and respected the man as both intellectual and founding father of the conservative movement. Although at the same time, there were a number of leading conservative intellectuals who respected Buckley as fellow intellectual. However, these men never fully subscribed to his status as leader of the conservative movement. Chief among this class was the conservative intellectual Russell Kirk.

Kirk never joined the staff at *National Review*, though he would periodically write pieces for publication in its pages. He and Buckley often butted heads, over matters of occasionally trivial importance. For instance, *National Review* never reviewed Kirk's published books, a fact which often caused a rift between the two men. As such, a recent article in *The Atlantic*, written in the wake of Kirk's 100th birthday and which seeks to reclassify his standing and importance within the conservative movement, writes, "The tension persisted...It is noteworthy that Kirk looked upon the flagship publication of the conservative movement with detachment...When Kirk assembled his anthology of conservative thought for Penguin, he omitted Buckley while including the godfather of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol." (*The Atlantic*).

It is additionally worth noting the sheer differences between the two men. “Kirk wasn’t interested in defending a party agenda. He wanted to promote a cast of mind” (*The Atlantic*). In reality and hindsight, it can be argued Kirk could never have played the role of Buckley, not to mention to the extent or success to which Buckley played it. Nevertheless, Kirk felt an underwhelming sense of appreciation from the conservative movement he clearly played a vital role in erecting from the ground up.

Overlooking Kirk’s personal relationship issues with Buckley, their brands of conservatism also differed greatly. Perhaps one of Kirk’s most famous quotes illustrates this perfectly. Kirk said:

“The twentieth-century conservative is concerned, first of all, with the regeneration of the spirit and character—with the perennial problem of the inner order of the soul, the restoration of the ethical understanding, and the religious sanction upon which any life worth living is founded. This is conservatism at its highest” (Kirk).

His divergence from Buckley’s anti-liberalism conservatism is even further highlighted when Kirk wrote, “Men cannot improve a society by setting fire to it: they must seek out its old virtues, and bring them back into the light” (Kirk).

Kirk’s legacy must take all of this into account. His status in the American conservative movement is inappropriately insufficient to say the least. He deserves ample more credit than he receives both for his role in creating and sustaining the movement as well as his willingness to provide an alternative point of view to what was becoming conservative orthodoxy. As, ironically enough, a recent *National Review* piece notes:

“Russell Kirk’s shade points us to a less dogmatic and more modest conservatism. This is a temperament willing to adapt to present circumstances. Nor is it afraid to ignore the admonitions of economists and central planners. Kirk’s is a conservatism of the heart centered in the old places where human connections are multiple and enduring. It is well versed in the Great Books. It is eager to defend hearth and home, faith and family, and classical and religious education against

the gathering armies of wokeness. Revisiting Russell Kirk on his hundredth birthday, our eyes are opened not only to the intellectual lineage of conservatism. We also glimpse the daunting future that awaits it” (*National Review*).

The conservatism put forth by the likes of Garry Wills and Russell Kirk is much in the mold of some of the earliest conservative thinkers of the Enlightenment, Edmund Burke foremost among them. Burke’s conservatism placed an emphasis on the role of institutions, traditions, and religion in the maintenance of the well-being and moral standing of a given government. Perhaps Burke’s most telling quote was when he uttered “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” Burke is undoubtedly a central figure in the conservatism of the men who followed his path, namely Wills and Kirk. The importance these two subsequent conservative intellectuals place on institutions, tradition, and religion, and their role in the maintenance of a foundationally solid government is telling of their roots in Enlightenment conservatism.

The Future

In decades since, as these intellectual titans have aged and some have passed, the mantle has been assumed by a new generation. A generation of scholars and thinkers who followed in the footsteps of the men who came before them. George Will and Bill Kristol certainly follow this mold. Their thoughts and instincts are much similar to those of the predecessors. Bill Kristol founded the conservative publication *The Weekly Standard*, and often appears as pundit commentator on news broadcasts. George Will is a frequently published author and essayist. As Will has noted:

“Believing that a crisis is a useful thing to create, the Obama Administration—which understands that, for liberalism, worse is better—has deliberately aggravated the fiscal shambles that the Great Recession accelerated...In the lexicon of the political class, the word sacrifice means that the citizens are supposed to mail even more of their income to Washington so that the political class will not have to

sacrifice the pleasure of spending it. Politicians fascinate because they constitute a paradox: they are an elite that accomplishes mediocrity for the public good.”

Of course, these men cannot possibly have the impact their predecessor claim their fame to hold. This is due to the rather simple fact that they cannot proclaim to be the founders of a resurgent conservative movement. However, their role in the continuance of the movement begun by the men who came before them cannot be underestimated nor understated. They carried forth the torch admirably.

The Movement

The Republican Party, despite its positions, will always be the party of Lincoln. This means nothing to take away from the evolutions the party has undergone since Lincoln’s tenure. Lincoln’s acceptance of civil rights and embrace of the African American community evolved into a conservative ideology perpetuated under Buckley and Wills and Kirk and which would be carried forth by Goldwater. These two ends perhaps cannot be much different. The liberalism which Buckley’s conservatism so decidedly opposed largely found its roots in the Progressive Era politics of Roosevelt and Taft and Wilson which manifested most properly in New Deal liberalism. Need I remind that Roosevelt and Taft were Republicans, members of the same political party Buckley sought to reform and guide into the future. The extrication of the Progressive Wing of the Republican Party largely fell on Roosevelt’s third-party bid in 1912. A sense of betrayal caused it, but its effects were more numerous and important than betrayal and response alone. It caused a loss of inclusivity, a loss of diversity, a loss of critical and oppositional voices and viewpoints. It turned a party of inclusion into one of exclusion. It fundamentally set the groundwork for the future of the party.

Yet, in the modern day, when we talk about the Republican Party we rarely speak of Roosevelt and Taft, and this is but another cause of that very fact. We occasionally speak of Lincoln, of his foundational and legendary status, and our attempts to live up to the legacy and party he left behind. We too often give Lincoln the credit for the party, without thought to the party he thought he created. Rather we speak of men like Reagan and Bush, McCain and Trump. The modern Republican party dominates conversation over the old. And it is due to the conservative intellectuals of the mid-20th century that this is indeed the case. They had differences, differences nonetheless but differences of a different kind than did, say Roosevelt and Buckley. Buckley, Wills, and Kirk certainly had their differences. To say otherwise is to revise history, to ignore the truth of the matter. It might well be possible the conservative movement would have taken off without them. That in their absence, a different class of conservative intellectuals of a different generation and of different perspectives would have filled their void. That too, though, is revisionist; it is alternative history. The conservative movement that these men built has to give to them the credit they are due. To all of them. Their movement enabled the resurgence of the Republican Party in the United States. They largely put their differences aside in favor of that which was more important, and yet it was these differences that gave the movement its appeal. The conservative movement could appeal to religious and economic conservatives alike, to staunch conservatives and those simply tired of liberalism. As Kirk summed up so eloquently, “Mine was not an enlightened mind...I did not love cold harmony and perfect regularity of organization; what I sought was variety, mystery, tradition, the venerable, the awful” (Kirk). Their respect for institutions and traditions, for the rule of law and the necessary facet of democracy that are individual rights and liberties

separates them from today's Republican Party. It is why so many who proclaim to adhere to their key values cannot possibly also claim to support the current President.

This is the story of the foundations. The story of the groundwork behind the image. It certainly was not perfect. Never was it close. Nor was it close to harmonious. It was full of variety and of difference, and of varying kinds and extents of each.

This is not to mention success. The Republican Party became the predominant American political party in the 20th century. It is thanks to these men, to their disagreements and feuds and legacies.

Chapter 2
American Conservatism: Who Stood For It?

In the wake of the resurgence of a conservative ideology in response to the moderate nature and positions of Republican politicians such as Eisenhower, Dewey, and Rockefeller, an examination of those Republicans who occupied the Oval Office into the future must be conducted. Evaluating their individual traits and characteristics, as well as how well each adhered and subscribed to an increasingly conservative ideology, a thorough analysis is critical to an in-depth understanding of the evolution of American conservatism from its resurgence in the 1950s, to today.

Over the course of the decades spanning the 1950s to the present, a recurrent story takes shape. It is often, if not always, the story of establishment moderate in sharp contrast to conservative firebrand, and all the subsequent policy and personality differences that come along with it. It is the story of internationalism, compared to isolationism. The story of a sense of country, of responsibility to both Americans and the world, compared to a sense of selfish self. It is the difference between a party and a movement.

Over the years, this battle has been waged and won time and time again. Each side has won, and each side has lost, multiple times over. Yet taking a long view, one can begin to see the consequences. As the conservatives and populists have moved further to the right, moderates have been forced to some extent to move along with them, in order to maintain relevancy and viability. This has caused the Republican Party which once stood for balanced budgets and responsible fiscal policy to become a collection of individually motivated politicians, who seek only their reelection every mandated election cycle and who show blatant disregard for the American people and their finances despite

pronouncing their representation of economic nuance and knowledge. This has caused the Republican Party which once stood for responsible foreign policy and intervention where necessary to now become increasingly isolationist, and partial to a retraction of American power and presence around the world.

These changes did not happen overnight, and nor are they set in stone. There have been moderate Republican politicians of the establishment elite in the past, and they may again rise in the future. What is undoubtedly clear, however, is that the party has shifted to the right, and so have its positions and values. Tracing this evolution is the first logical and necessary step to determine how the party arrived in its current predicament, and to attempt to project where the party is headed.

“I LIKE IKE”

Beginning, of course, with the Eisenhower Administration of the 1950s, it is clear to see still the influence of Eastern Establishment, moderate elites on his presidency. Eisenhower’s positions on issues such as maintaining an international stance, on balanced budgets, and on civil rights clearly fall within the general guidelines of then-moderate Republicans. Eisenhower was able to draw support from virtually every corridor of the country given the high respect and admiration for the former hero general of World War II. It seemed as though Eisenhower could transcend, or rise above the political fray in furtherance of the interests of the nation at large. Largely absolving himself from political attacks and mudslinging, Eisenhower left the more distasteful and politically oriented tasks to his Vice President, Richard Nixon. Fred Greenstein’s *The Hidden Hand Presidency* details Eisenhower as seemingly removed from the entirety of the day-to-day processes of his presidency, at least in the public eye. Yet, Eisenhower kept a receded role

to further play upon his apolitical status among the American public, while behind the scenes he remained involved and up-to-date.

Eisenhower's stances on the pressing issues of his era, namely civil rights and balanced budgets and America's role on the world stage, placed him firmly in what was then accepted Republican orthodoxy. Eisenhower had firm respect for the institutions and traditions of the nation, most of which is probably fair to say came from his time spent in the military. Of course, adding upon this, he believed in the individual rights and liberties and freedoms of the American people, believing it was government's role not to interfere in their everyday lives but rather to assist them wherever possible. Eisenhower's Farewell Address, delivered just days before he handed the reins of power to his successor in President Kennedy, highlighted the significant dangers of what he coined the "Military-Industrial Complex." Within this, it's possible to pinpoint Eisenhower's resistance to a growing government, both under the lens of a conservative nature toward balanced budgets as well as a smaller federal government at large. Additionally, it is important to recognize Eisenhower's placement of national over special interests within the speech. Eisenhower, though, fundamentally subscribed to many of the New Deal-initiated reforms, choosing not to dismantle the social safety net that was erected and strengthened by his predecessors in Roosevelt and Truman. This, in fact, was Eisenhower's cardinal sin among the growing conservative backlash movement: Eisenhower was simply not conservative enough, simply not anti-New Deal Liberalism enough. He represented too much of the Eastern Establishment elite, moderate Republican Party.

Eisenhower's presidency came at a transcendent time for his party, for his nation, and for the nation's politics. His election owes largely to his heroic service in the defense

of his country, the West, and the free world. Yet the maintenance of the status quo of traditional Republican orthodoxy during a time of growing conservative backlash only further fueled its rise. Needless to say, that while Eisenhower's presidency certainly did not subscribe to every position of this new conservative movement, it did assist its ascendance.

Nixon: The Third Term

Eisenhower's eight year Vice President, Richard Nixon, won his party's nomination in 1960, seeking to be Eisenhower's successor in the Oval Office. Nixon faced little opposition for the party's nomination, as it was almost a given that he would seek the presidency after two terms as second-in-command. Nixon and Eisenhower shared the title of Cold War warrior, yet it was Nixon who began to bring politics into the fray of the discussion.

Nixon's Democratic opponent was then-Senator John F. Kennedy, who had only been elected to the Senate some eight years earlier. Nixon's service as Vice President as well as his tenure in the Congress prior to that gave many the opinion that Nixon was far more qualified for the presidency than was Kennedy. As such, Nixon's campaign played largely on the issue of his experience and readiness for the job over that of the inexperienced, young Kennedy.

The Nixon campaign of 1960, as the election is largely remembered for, thus largely campaigned on the issues of foreign policy, especially as they related to U.S.—Soviet relations and the Cold War. The issues dominated the election season, and little in the way of meaningful social or domestic policy was discussed on a broad basis.

Yet the Nixon campaign's focus on his experience and foreign policy prowess might have in fact hurt the candidate more than it helped. The Kennedy campaign's focus on their candidate's youth, as well as unfounded claims of a missile gap and un-readiness among the American military landed as strong criticisms against Nixon. In this instance and others, Nixon's occasionally rocky and never strong nor close relationship with President Eisenhower significantly weakened his campaign and his candidacy. Nixon's focus on foreign policy seemed ineffectual given the Kennedy campaign's claims of a missile gap, claims which a sitting president may have otherwise disproved. Additionally, Nixon's heavy reliance on the issue of his experience was severely undercut by President Eisenhower's remark that, when asked which of Nixon's ideas the president had followed, responded "If you give me a week, I might think of one." The quip hurt Nixon's electoral prospects more than is in quantifiable. By the last week of the campaign, Nixon and Eisenhower finally began appearing for campaign events together, which aided Nixon's chances. Yet it was too little, too late. John Kennedy was elected the nation's thirty-fifth President.

Nixon's reliance on foreign policy and experience led him to largely appear as a third-term of the Eisenhower Administration. Nixon's internationalist stance led many to view him as cut from the same cloth as Eisenhower, when in fact this was simply not the case. Nixon and Eisenhower's long-standing tumultuous relationship was at least in part due to their differences on a multitude of issues, many of which arose in the domestic and social policy spheres. As these were not significant issues during the campaign, their differences were not highlighted. Nixon bucked the trend of Eisenhower's moderate Republican policies, but he was never able to showcase those differences as a result of his

own campaign's tactics as well as how the election played out. Yet for Nixon, this was not his last rodeo. He would return to politics on the national stage.

Goldwater: The Conservative Candidate

Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona was a leading figure among the rising conservative movement. His published book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, was a leading manifesto among American conservatives. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1953, Goldwater was indeed a conservative to the very core, a politician who resented the Republican elite of the East Coast almost as much as he resented New Deal Liberalism and the social safety net reforms it left under government supervision.

Goldwater's nomination was much more challenged and difficult than Nixon's had been some four years earlier. Nixon, though neither quite fully a conservative nor fully an East Coast elite, managed to hold together these two factions of the Republican Party in lockstep during 1960. His effort, of course, came up short of success. By 1964, no candidate emerged who could do the same. As such these two factions opened war amongst themselves, battling for who would win their party's nomination. Goldwater's main opposition was the moderate Republican Nelson Rockefeller of New York.

The battle between Goldwater and Rockefeller for the GOP nomination went all the way to the floor of the convention hall in Daly City, California. By then, it had become clear that Goldwater was the frontrunner for the nomination, but Rockefeller and his supporters would not go down without a fight. Raucous yelling, evident contempt, and near verbal war on the floor and stage characterized the convention.

Eventually, though, Goldwater was nominated on the first ballot. In his acceptance speech of the nomination, Goldwater spoke what is now one of the most famous lines in

American politics, and a line for which is he most remembered: “I would remind you that extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. And let me remind you also that moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue.”

Throughout the course of the campaign, Goldwater consistently alienated moderate Republican voters, which limited his ability to expand his support base and remain viable by Election Day. He retained the strong and unwavering support of the conservative bloc which had supported him from the very beginning. Goldwater’s positions on civil rights, namely his support of states’ rights and his refusal to support the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The dichotomy of Republican figures who chose whether or not to support Goldwater was telling. The likes of Eisenhower, Rockefeller, and George Romney of Michigan refused to support his candidacy in the slightest. Meanwhile Nixon and rising conservative star Ronald Reagan, whose *Time for Choosing* speech gained him nationwide attention, loyally supported Goldwater’s campaign.

Goldwater lost to President Johnson in landslide fashion in 1964. The reasons were clear: for too many in the American electorate, including many moderate Republicans, supporting Goldwater was simply not an option. He was too radical, too far right, and too extreme to be President of the United States. Yet the Goldwater campaign of 1964 set about fundamental changes that would affect presidential election contests for decades to come.

First, and foremost, the support of the Goldwater campaign by the likes of Nixon and Reagan solidified their support among the conservative bloc of the Republican Party. It is telling that, beginning in the next presidential election cycle in 1968, the ensuing twenty years were dominated by six years of a Nixon presidency, and eight of a Reagan Administration. Their election to the highest office of the land would simply not have been

possible without their support among their conservative base, which manifested itself most prominently in the 1964 campaign.

Second, the Goldwater campaign represented the first breakthrough by the Republican Party into the once Democratic stronghold of the South. This stronghold began to crack in the 1964 election. Goldwater carried his home state of Arizona, in addition to Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and Louisiana, the only six states he claimed victory in. For comparison, in the 1960 election between Kennedy and Nixon, Nixon carried only Florida in the South. Moving forward, this dynamic would come to be vitally important to Republican politics on the national level, as Republican candidates for the presidency could begin to depend on support from the South. The party and geographic alignment begun in the 1964 campaign lasts to the present day, traces its support to the conservative faction of the Republican Party's refusal to support civil and voting rights legislation, and is the hallmark of any successful Republican candidacy for the presidency.

Nixon: Redemption

In 1968, the makeup and orientation of the American electorate was fundamentally different than it was when Richard Nixon had last sought the presidency in 1960. Nixon capitalized on his ability to play the part of both a Rockefeller-like and Goldwater-like candidate. Nixon's ability to unite these two disparate factions within the Republican Party was unmatched among his competition, and he thus successfully won the GOP nomination for the second time in 1968.

Yet his nomination was not the smooth-sailing process it had been some eight years earlier. Nixon faced far more opposition to his nomination in 1968. Among Nixon's competitors were Gov. Nelson Rockefeller, of New York, Gov. Ronald Reagan, of

California, and Gov. George Romney, of Michigan. Romney and Rockefeller largely represented the moderate challenge to Nixon's candidacy, while Reagan was portrayed as the conservative firebrand. Romney's candidacy fizzled out in the New Hampshire primary. While he had begun his candidacy with a polling lead over Nixon among Republican voters for the nomination, he ended his campaign by the end of February, 1968. Rockefeller, who had decided against running and had backed Romney's candidacy, made clear he would be available for a draft after seeing Romney's significant drop in the polls. While Rockefeller maintained his non-candidacy, his name was placed into consideration for nomination at the convention.

Because Rockefeller had not actively contested any primaries nor caucuses, he was largely dependent upon the votes of undecided and faithless delegates to the convention. While Rockefeller ultimately comes closer than any other candidate to winning the nomination than Nixon, he indeed finished a distant second. Had Rockefeller challenged Nixon earlier, by running an actual campaign in the primaries and more vocally announcing his candidacy, his fortunes may have turned out quite differently.

Nixon, upon his nomination, instituted his now-famous Southern Strategy for previously unfounded success in the general election. Building off the transformation set in place under the Goldwater campaign that preceded him, Nixon was able to draw support for his "Law and Order" platform of the "Silent Majority" he sought to appeal to.

Nixon remained much in the mold of the vice presidential candidate he had been in 1952 and 1956, and the presidential candidate he'd been in 1960. What had changed was the makeup, ideology, and allegiance of the American electorate. Nixon benefitted greatly from this party and ideological shift in U.S. politics. He remained, in some sense, a

moderate Republican who could appeal to elite, east coast WASPs as a result of his respect for institutions, his internationalist stances, and his general acceptance of a broader role for government. On the other hand, he never fully embraced the east coast elite (nor did they, for that matter), and his “Law and Order” platform which formed the basis of his “Southern Strategy” was dog-whistle politics for the social conservatism of anti-civil and voting rights legislation.

Nixon had not changed much by 1968. America had. Nixon’s election to the presidency in 1968 ensured the fundamental changes adrift in American society and its electorate would continue well into its foreseeable future. Yet for all which was to come of the Nixon presidency, namely the Watergate scandal and his subsequent resignation upon the very real threat of his impeachment, Nixon’s administration was largely both successful and progressive. Nixon brought moderates into his cabinet, including his primary challenger in George Romney, who he selected to lead the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Nixon also pursued a progressive agenda, in which he sought out efforts to limit rising inflation, instituted the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) into existence, and signed into the law the Clean Air Act of 1970. His foreign policy pursuits included the first American overtures to a communist China, negotiations for the end of the Vietnam War, and détente with the Soviet Union, including treaties for arms reductions. Nixon’s main advisor on foreign policy, Henry Kissinger, began as the National Security Advisor and was eventually promoted to Secretary of State. Kissinger would serve under both Nixon and his successor Ford, and played an instrumental role in shaping American foreign policy throughout much of the 1970s.

Nixon's time as president, ultimately, was cut short as a result of Watergate. This, of course, was for good reason: the president had indeed committed impeachable and illegal offenses, and had ordered subordinates to commit countless others on his behalf. Yet his presidency itself cannot be considered a total waste, nor failure, when considering all which he accomplished.

Ford: The Speaker Becomes President

Supposedly, Gerald Ford had never wanted to be President. When he assumed the presidency following Nixon's resignation due to the Watergate scandal, he spoke from the East Room of the White House and said "I have not sought this enormous responsibility, but I will not shirk it."

Ford's presidency lasted less than a full term, and he was never popularly elected to either the office of president nor vice president, despite having served in both capacities. In 1976, seeking election in his own right as President, he lost to Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter. Ford's campaign was characterized by the moderate positions and stances of his candidate, especially in stark contrast to the more conservative primary challenger in former California Gov. Ronald Reagan. Ford's positions, especially in foreign policy, were criticized as too moderate by the conservative wing of the GOP. For instance, conservative attacked Ford's willingness to pursue détente with the Soviet Union, and his negotiations over the Panama Canal. Ford attempted to enhance his conservative bona fides by replacing his Vice President, Nelson Rockefeller, with what was perceived to be a more conservative candidate in Senator Bob Dole, from Kansas. Reagan's largely successful primary campaign evidenced these conservative shortcomings, and only fell just short at the convention in Kansas City.

Upon Ford's loss, it was clear the rising star within the party was Reagan, and this had been the case for some time. Ever since his "Time for Choosing" speech on behalf of Goldwater in 1964, Reagan had become the face and leading spokesman of the conservative faction of the GOP. Following Ford's loss, the critical question of 1980 was which candidate could unite the fractious Republican Party into a nomination and a successful bid for the presidency. As it turned out, it was Reagan.

The Reagan Revolution

Ronald Reagan's bid for the 1980 Republican nomination for the presidency was his third. Previously seeking the 1968 and 1976 nominations, he gained little traction at first, and only fell just short at the convention on his second attempt. Leading into 1980, Reagan had name-recognition among Republicans almost unmatched by any of his fellow competitors, and he was clearly the front-runner. His conservative bona-fides bode well with the Republican base, and Reagan's campaign largely focused on presenting himself as a more moderate, reasonable, and tempered candidate than his public image may have indicated.

Reagan's conservatism marked a decided shift in Republican orthodoxy. What would come to be known as "Reaganomics" were his economic policies, which definitively fell under the school of supply-side economics. Reagan's economic theory was simple, at least in theory: cutting taxes and regulations on corporations and the wealthy will enable them to spend more. Their spending will "trickle down" through the economy, producing economic growth which reaches Americans of any class. Later, the deficits produced by the initial tax cuts would be paid off as a result of increased tax revenues thanks to robust economic growth. This supply-side economics was to be coupled with free trade

agreements around the world, which inevitably gave rise to the first trade deficits between America and her allies. George H.W. Bush, one of Reagan's primary competitors, who would later serve eight years as his Vice President and four of his own as President, infamously derided Reaganomics as "voo-doo economics."

Reagan marked a number of other transitions within the Republican Party as well. From protectionism to free trade. From détente and cooperation to the "Evil Empire" and renewed hostility. From arms reduction to rapidly increasing defense spending and a new arms race. From balanced budgets and minimal government expenditure to ballooning deficits and a government newly reinterested in spending. Reagan brought new constituencies into the Republican fold, and solidified others, most notably Evangelical Christians, social conservatives, and those personified under the "Moral Majority" of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. Reagan's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment earned him the support of advocates for the traditional role of women, including Phyllis Schlafly, a renowned anti-feminist, whose support only furthered his credibility among social conservatives and furthered their entry into the growing Republican Party.

Reagan was indeed the conservative candidate within the GOP in 1980. Yet by no means was he the traditional Republican candidate. In fact, it may have been difficult for him to be farther from it. Reagan, though, was unabashed in his respect for the institutions and the traditions of American government. Here, clearly, is where he shared most with his fellow Republicans. Reagan's Administration was seen as having brought respect and prestige back to the presidency, an office which had suffered scandal, misstep, and inadequacy in prior years. Reagan believed the fundamental role of government was to enable the best of America, not to get in its way. Of his legendary quips, perhaps none

compares to his notion that “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I’m from the government, and I’m here to help.”

Reagan represented a new breed of conservatism and the Republican Party in the United States. His successful bid for the presidency in 1980 provided the conservative wing of the GOP with a fateful triumph over East Coast establishment moderates. His positions came to redefine the mantra of the Republican Party, with deficit spending, unbalanced budgets, and free trade taking the place of traditional orthodoxy. He also remade the Republican Party in his own mold, adding constituencies partial to his positions and limiting the influence of those in opposition. Increasingly, the party became populated with conservatives and Evangelicals, and less with moderates and even liberals. Yet simultaneously, Reagan was much moderated by the office of the presidency. One need look no further than his infamous “Evil Empire” characterization of the Soviet Union, which only a few years later was contradicted by renewed negotiations and détente between Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. This dichotomy, having been the conservative firebrand and yet also appealing to moderates and adopting some of their positions as well, allowed the GOP to continue into the future as the party of moderates and staunch conservatives.

Bush 41: Read My Lips

When Ronald Reagan won the Republican nomination in 1980, he faced the difficult decision any nominee for the presidency grapples with: who to pick as running mate. Reagan initially raised the idea of another Ford vice presidency, where he and the former President would participate in something of a “co-presidency” in which both men would run the nation in tandem. Reagan chafed at the idea, and set his sights on another man: George H.W. Bush.

Bush had been a competitor of Reagan's for the GOP nomination. Infamously, he called Reagan's economic policies "voo-doo," and overall he represented a brand, style, and substance of politics almost entirely different than Reagan. While Bush was the East Coast, Yale-educated, WASP elite, Reagan was diametrically opposite.

After eight years of a Reagan presidency, Bush positioned himself as the third term candidate of the Reagan Administration. He proposed to be an extension of Reagan and his policies, having seemingly abandoned the relatively moderate positions which characterized his previous campaign for the highest office of the land.

Bush seemingly converted to the prerequisites of Reagan conservatism: free trade, deficit spending, and most importantly, tax cuts. In his 1988 convention acceptance speech, Bush uttered the lines which would come to haunt his reelection candidacy four years later. Bush told the convention:

"And I'm the one who will not raise taxes. My opponents now says he'll raise them as a last resort, or a third resort. But when a politician talks like that, you know that's one resort he'll be checking into. My opponent won't rule out raising taxes, but I will. And the Congress will push me to raise taxes, and I'll say no. And they'll push, and I'll say no, and they'll push again, and I'll say, to them, 'Read my lips: no new taxes.'"

-George Herbert Walker Bush, 1988 GOP Convention

Bush triumphed over Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis on Election Night. The Bush campaign effectively portrayed Dukakis as an East Coast liberal who was soft on crime, prone to raise taxes, and return the country into the economic disaster of the pre-Reagan era. Meanwhile, the campaign highlighted Bush as the man able to continue four more years of Reagan policies and combine them with the experience and knowledge of perhaps the most qualified candidate to ever seek the presidency. The Bush campaign of 1988 fundamentally changed the narrative and focus of the election from the economy to

ideology, thus changing the race from grounds on which they could not win to grounds on which they could.

Bush's presidency itself was characterized most by its foreign policy. It oversaw a successful, worldwide effort to combat the Iraqi conquest of Kuwait. It expertly managed the fall of the Berlin Wall, communism in Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union itself, all within a three year period. By the end of the Gulf War, Bush's approval rating among the American public had skyrocketed to almost unparalleled heights, and many believed his reelection in 1992 was all but a foregone conclusion.

Yet, it was anything but that. Bush's moderate nature and willingness to compromise when necessary for the good of the people contrasted with his "No New Taxes" pledge at the 1988 convention. The American economy simply did not fare as well under the Bush Administration as it had under Reagan, and Bush was forced to grapple with rising debt and deficits, all the while managing an economic downturn. Bush raised taxes in conjunction with a Congressional compromise to return to balanced budgets. In the long run, these balanced budgets were the fundamental stepping stone for the Clinton era economic resurgence. In the short and political contexts, Bush had committed a fatal mistake: he'd raised taxes, in direct opposition to what was now Republican orthodoxy following Reagan, and especially after he'd pledged not to so profoundly only a few years earlier.

In the 1992 election, Bush came under attack from both the right and the left. In the GOP primaries, Bush faced competition from former Nixon aide Pat Buchanan. Buchanan placed second in the New Hampshire primaries, gaining some 37% of the vote. Over the course of the primary campaign, Buchanan never posed a true threat to Bush's re-

nomination. Yet his consistent attacks on Bush for having raised taxes and for being too moderate left damage. By the time Bush was nominated for a second term, he was a flawed candidate, unable to answer on the pressing issue of the campaign: the economy.

The Clinton campaign which challenged Bush in the general election capitalized on these flaws. The Clinton campaign's mantra? "It's the economy, stupid." Their wholehearted focus on economic issues severely limited Bush's ability to highlight the tremendous foreign policy achievements of his first term.

The Clinton campaign was also aided by third-party candidate Ross Perot, who also criticized Bush's domestic policies and the economic downturn the nation was experiencing. Perot staged an insurgent, populist campaign with appeals to those across the political spectrum. Perot focused on issues such as balancing the federal budget, opposition to gun control, and ending the adverse effects of free trade, namely outsourcing. Perot's campaign was ultimately unsuccessful of course, yet he ranks among the most successful third-party candidate of all time, and must be at least in part be credited with the rise of populist appeals and politics in the United States.

In the end, Bush's mistakes were too much to overcome in 1992. His loss to Clinton can be attributed to any number of factors: his campaign pledge in 1988, his betrayal of that pledge, the economic downturn immediately before the election, the third-party candidacy of Perot. Any of these factors, solely or in combination, can explain Bush's defeat. Undoubtedly, though, Bush's loss must be attributed to the fact that he never fully subscribed to the Reagan-era policies and politics which, by 1992, had come to utterly dominate Republican politics. Bush was never the candidate of the conservative faction. Reagan, Buchanan, and Perot were. Bush's willingness to compromise against those ideals,

and all the subsequent events which said compromise caused, were the main causes of his defeat.

Bob Dole: Military Man

By the time of the 1996 election, if anything was clear and widely agreed upon within the Republican Party it was this: we should've put aside our differences to elect George Bush over Bill Clinton. Clinton's presidency had seen animosity and tension with the Congress, particularly newly-elected Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole.

Dole had traversed the stage of presidential politics before. Following Reagan's conservative challenge to Ford's nomination in 1976, the Ford campaign was prompted to replace the moderate, East Coast establishment Nelson Rockefeller, who had been Ford's Vice President, with the Senator from Kansas. The Ford-Dole ticket fell short against the victorious Carter campaign, yet Dole left the campaign with national recognition and prestige he before did not have.

In 1980, Dole briefly challenged for the Republican nomination eventually won by Ronald Reagan. After a poor showing in the New Hampshire primary, Dole dropped out of the race. By 1988, Dole had decided to make another run for the presidency. Challenging then-Vice President George H.W. Bush for the nomination, Dole scored a critical victory in the Iowa Caucuses, while Bush finished in third. Yet, after victories in New Hampshire and South Carolina, the Bush campaign had seen its resurgence, and Dole never again seriously challenged for the nomination.

Come 1996, Dole was the consensus GOP candidate. He faced some opposition from Pat Buchanan, who had challenged Bush only four years earlier. Dole won forty-six

contests in the Republican primaries, making his nomination all but an afterthought by the time of the convention in San Diego. Dole chose Jack Kemp as his running mate, and the two set to challenge President Clinton's reelection campaign.

The Clinton campaign held the advantage over Dole from the start, painting the Kansas Senator as too conservative, too extreme, and with policies too old for the good of America. Dole, who faced challenge in the Republican primaries for appearing to be too moderate, now faced challenge in the general election for appearing to be too conservative. This conundrum, of having to prove conservative bona fides only to then have to appeal to a plurality of American voters, was not shared by Dole alone, and continues today.

Dole's signature campaign pledge was a 15% income tax cut, across the board. Dole chose supply-side economics advocate Jack Kemp as his running mate, in part, to further prove his conservatism on economic issues. Here, the Clinton campaign found yet another point of attack, challenging Dole's positions as eventually mandating cuts to social welfare programs and inevitably causing huge deficits and rising debt.

Outside of his tax pledge, Dole largely campaigned against President Clinton, and sought votes on the effect of opposition to him rather than in his own right. By Election Night, Clinton won a landslide Electoral College victory over the Dole-Kemp ticket, which was no surprise to political observers.

Dole's economic positions focused heavily on a continuation of Reagan-era policies, of supply-side economics. By 1996, these positions had clearly become orthodoxy within the GOP. Dole's opposition to President Clinton represented what many felt within the party as well: that allowing Clinton's election in 1992 over their unwillingness to support then-President Bush was foolish and unsound. Ultimately, though, the Clinton

campaign was able to portray Dole as too conservative, given his economic plan, his choice of Kemp as V.P., and his relationships with fellow Republican members of Congress. In reality, Dole was never as conservative as made out to be. It was his unlucky misfortune to face a popular president, with a rebounding economy, which made his odds longshot to begin with. Dole represented a clear continuation of Republican Party politics from both his predecessors as well as into the future. Having served in World War II, and suffering injuries which plagued the rest of his life, having served in the Senate and in American politics for decades, Dole's commitment to American exceptionalism, traditions, and institutions cannot be questioned. He carried forth the torch of the GOP admirably, to a Governor of Texas who sought to follow in his father's footsteps.

W: Living in Dad's Shadow

Texas Governor George W. Bush was, or so everyone thought, elected the 43rd President of the United States in November, 2000. Then, the epic debacle of Florida began. Over the course of a month of legal battles and recounts and uncertainty, the conclusion reached was the same as the original: Bush was to be President.

The first son of George H.W. Bush and wife Barbara, Bush was born in Connecticut as the first member of the next generation of politicians in the Bush political dynasty. Bush would never fully escape the shadow of his father, a man who had served his country admirably for decades in a number of different positions and roles. Yet, by 2000 Bush appeared to be the clear choice of the GOP as its nominee.

Bush initially won the Iowa Caucuses, but lost in stunning fashion to insurgent candidate John McCain in the New Hampshire primaries. McCain's "Straight Talk Express" won the support of voters for his clear honesty and unabashed principle. The next

primary contest was to be held in South Carolina, where whoever won the state was clear to become the frontrunner for the nomination. The campaign in South Carolina was brutal and dirty, with each side engaging in mudslinging and boorish tactics. Bush won a critical victory, and the challenge from McCain never again surfaced as a threat to his nomination.

Bush's nomination in Philadelphia allowed the party to showcase his slogan of "Compassionate Conservatism." Bush's conservatism meant traditional Republican economic orthodoxy, yes. But it also meant a renewed focus on the good that government can provide for its people, specifically in areas such as improving education. Bush's selection of Dick Cheney as his running mate gave him much needed foreign policy prowess and experience on his ticket, as the Democratic Gore campaign repeatedly criticized Bush's inexperience as being unfit for the job.

In the general election, Bush drew his biggest contrasts with the Gore-Lieberman ticket over domestic issues. Specifically, how to reform Social Security and Medicare, tax reform, and what to do with the projected budget surplus were the oft-discussed topics of the campaign. Foreign policy was often an issue as well, with the Bush campaign criticizing Clinton-Gore "nation-building" with the presence of peace-keeping troops in the Balkans and Somalia.

The Gore campaign's connection to President Clinton arose as well as a critical issue of the campaign. Bush ran on a platform of restoring "honor and dignity" to the White House and the office of the presidency, in direct reference to the scandal-plagued Clinton Administration, specifically the Lewinsky affair. As a result, Gore avoided campaigning with the president.

Bush's "compassionate conservatism" represented both a continuation and a shift in traditional Republican policies. Bush's economic positions were in clear evolution from Reaganomics; policies of free trade, cutting taxes, sparking defense spending, and deregulation. Yet simultaneously, Bush seemed to accept that government indeed had accepted a broader role in the lives of everyday Americans than previous Republican nominees and presidents had allowed themselves to believe. His campaign for education, Social Security, and Medicare reform speaks to this. Rather than seeking their abolition on the federal level, Bush sought to reform their practices, making them more efficient and less burdensome on the federal budget, small businesses, and average Americans. Bush's respect for the institutions of government and its traditions is highlighted by his promise to restore "honor and dignity" to the highest office of the land.

By 2004, the general election campaign was as focused on foreign policy as it was on domestic policy in 2000. Following the events of September 11th, the Bush Administration had invaded Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and in March, 2003 launched an invasion to liberate Iraq from the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. The Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq was argued under the guise of its status as a member of the "Axis of Evil," and potentially having weapons of mass destruction (WMD's).

The Bush campaign of 2004 positioned itself as strong and decisive in contrast to what it criticized as Sen. Kerry's indecisiveness and "flip-flopper" status. Kerry's service in Vietnam was criticized in television ads run by "Swift Boat Veterans for Truth," and Kerry was portrayed as an out-of-touch, East Coast liberal who could not possibly represent the best interests of average Americans.

Bush's reelection to the presidency in 2004 owed to belief in his ability to successfully manage foreign policy issues and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bush's presidency had been, and continued to be, dominated by neo-conservatives of the likes of Cheney and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, men who advocated for renewed American intervention around the world and had, by the time of the Bush presidency, been fully enveloped into the broader GOP.

Whereas in 2000, Bush had run a campaign focused on domestic issues, the 2004 campaign focused on foreign policy to a similar extent. Bush's advocacy for the War on Terror and an interventionist policy around the world differentiated him from the Kerry-Edwards ticket, and represented continuity among the GOP. His positions on domestic policy did the same.

John McCain: Country First

John McCain spent a lifetime in service to his country. On the last page of his memoir, *The Restless Wave*, McCain wrote:

“‘The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it,’ spoke my hero, Robert Jordan, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. And I do, too. I hate to leave it. But I don’t have a complaint. Not one. It’s been quite a ride. I’ve known great passions, seen amazing wonders, fought in a war, and helped make a peace. I’ve lived very well and I’ve been deprived of all comforts. I’ve been as lonely as a person can be and I’ve enjoyed the company of heroes. I’ve suffered the deepest despair, and experienced the highest exultation. I made a small place for myself in the story of America and the history of my times...What an ingrate I would be to curse the fate that concludes the blessed life I’ve led. I prefer to give thanks for those blessings, and my love to the people who blessed me with theirs. The bell tolls for me. I knew it would. So I tried, as best I could, to stay a part of the main. I hope those who mourn my passing, and even those who don’t, will celebrate a happy life lived in imperfect service to a country made of ideals, whose continued success is the hope of the world. And I wish all of you great adventures, good company, and lives as lucky as mine.”

-John McCain, *The Restless Wave*

McCain, despite the current president's beliefs to the contrary, was a war hero. Of this there is absolutely no question. The man who suffered at the Hanoi Hilton, who refused early release on account of his rank and status, who then returned home to continue service to his nation. This man was a patriot and a hero. His respect for the traditions of the country and for the institutions which make up its fundamental core cannot be understated.

By 2008, McCain was the long-tenured, well-respected Senator of Arizona who had previously sought the presidency in 2000. In the run-up to the election, the Bush Administration was on the ropes, facing crisis both at home and abroad. With the American economy in turmoil, and on the brink of entering the Great Recession, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan having turned drastically south, with insurgency and rising death tolls.

Initially, McCain appeared to be an afterthought in an otherwise crowded Republican nomination field. Yet again, New Hampshire was his savior. His victory in the New Hampshire primary propelled him over fellow contenders in Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, Ron Paul, and Rudy Giuliani.

McCain's platform was much similar to that of the 2000 campaign. He campaigned on the "Straight Talk Express" throughout New Hampshire and the country. He positioned himself as a ready and capable leader, able to tackle the various crises facing the nation. Yet time and time again McCain seemed unable to position himself against Obama in terms of answers to the crisis. Whereas Obama had opposed the war in Iraq, McCain had supported it. McCain's economic relief proposals fell short of those proposed by the Obama campaign. On the issue of healthcare, McCain's free-market solutions paled in comparison to Obama campaign proposals.

The Obama campaign was able, as a result, to paint McCain as just an extension of the Bush Administration: fundamentally unable to answer the crises and thus unworthy of popular support. Bush's serious unpopularity among the American people severely hindered McCain's chances.

McCain and his campaign, seeing both Obama's star power and ability to attract voters to his campaign, as well as their own difficulty in escaping the troubled Bush presidency, decided it needed a race altering move to change the dynamics of the election. In selecting a vice presidential nominee, McCain chose Gov. Sarah Palin, of Alaska. Palin initially seemed to be just the choice McCain needed. She had conservative credentials, populist resonance, and a refreshingly anti-typical politician mantra. Over the course of the election, though, it became clear choosing Palin was a tremendous mistake. Palin's inadequacy for the Office of the Vice President, yet alone were she to become President, became a burden on the McCain-Palin ticket. She was increasingly gaffe-prone, and was subject to criticism and ridicule among the media and the Obama campaign. Additionally, her populist and conservative bona fides added much un-needed rancor to the McCain campaign, as anti-Obama voters became ever more hostile toward his candidacy. McCain's shining moment of the campaign, his "No, Ma'am" moment when he told a female voter that Obama was not, in fact, an Arab, but was a "...decent, family man. A citizen who I just so happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues, and that's what this campaign is all about." This moment is indicative of both McCain's honor and integrity, but also of the rising populist and anti-Obama virulence within the GOP, partially onset by the choice of Palin for V.P.

McCain's loss in 2008 can be attributed to any number of factors. The economic free-fall and subsequent Wall Street bailout by the Bush Treasury Department. The state of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The inability of McCain to propose new solutions to the pressing issues the country faced. The overall charisma and star power of Barack Obama. The seeming unpreparedness of Gov. Sarah Palin.

Nonetheless, McCain was an admirable Republican nominee, continuing forth GOP orthodoxy despite the consequences for his campaign. His positions on foreign and domestic policy represented no sizable shift from traditional Republican policies. He was simply outmatched, due to the preexisting conditions of the election, and the overwhelming candidate he faced.

Mitt Romney: Businessman Turned Politician

Mitt Romney had competed for the presidency in 2008, but eventually lost to eventual GOP nominee John McCain. By 2012, it was clear Romney was the frontrunner for the Republican nomination. Though he faced some opposition in the primaries, notably from Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich, Romney mostly coasted to nomination at the GOP convention in Tampa Bay.

Romney, too, was a traditional Republican candidate, in favor of lowering taxes, introducing deregulation measures, and strengthening the military. By 2012, the implementation of the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") had also become a critical issue of the campaign.

Romney was well positioned to critique Obamacare. As the former Governor of Massachusetts, Romney's healthcare reforms provided the basis of the Affordable Care Act. As a former businessman at Bain Capital, Romney was additionally well equipped to

criticize what he saw as the Obama Administration's overly burdensome regulations and tax structure, to which he proposed reforms which represented traditional Republican positions.

The Romney campaign focused largely on these criticisms. Ultimately, though, following a number of missteps and verbal gaffes, coupled with Obama's ability to portray Romney as just another rich, elite Republican who did not serve the nation's best interests, Romney fell short on Election Night.

Following the election, the Republican National Committee conducted a post-mortem evaluation of what went wrong in the 2012 election. How could the Romney-Ryan ticket, which seemed so well positioned to defeat a seemingly vulnerable Obama reelection campaign, have failed? In short, the conclusion reached was that the GOP had to establish means by which it could better appeal to minority voters, particularly Latinos and African Americans. The post-mortem concluded that, without introducing these efforts, the GOP could expect to continue to lose in nationwide elections. What sound advice that would turn out to be.

What Happened?

No, this is not an introductory paragraph to a Hillary Clinton-written post-campaign analysis of what went wrong in her exquisitely horrendous candidacy, which somehow alleviates any and all of the blame for her shoulders and places it elsewhere.

Rather, this is a conclusory evaluation of nearly seven decades of Republican nominees for, and presidents of, the United States of America. Book-ending these seven decades, think of the sheer quantity of differences between the initial case-study in Dwight Eisenhower, and its concluding candidate in Mitt Romney.

What is clear, above all else, is that the Republican Party of old is simply not the Republican Party of new. America's Grand Old Party can no longer, at least as presently constituted, be considered grand nor old. It is not the party of Lincoln, nor Roosevelt, nor Eisenhower, nor Reagan, nor Bush. It is now the party of Trump. It is now a party of isolationism and selfishness which these Republican predecessors would have disdained.

How did the GOP arrive here? Decades of contests between conservatives and moderates slowly but surely shifted the party to the spectral right. Over time, moderate positions were abandoned in the name of maintaining relevance and electoral viability. Yet in more recent years, the moderate GOP has come under attack not just from conservative firebrands, but also from populist insurgents. This attack has taken shape to an unprecedented extent. It began with Nixon's populist appeals under the Southern Strategy of 1968, continued only further with the candidacies of Perot and Buchanan in the 1990s, resurged with the selection of Palin in 2008 as running mate, and saw its culmination with the election of Trump in 2016.

Along the way, there were differences left unsaid and leading figures left unmentioned. In the next chapters, an evaluation of "The Gathering Storm" of populist conservatism in the United States, and an analysis of the politicians who represented and furthered its rise within the Republican Party.

Chapter 3
“The Gathering Storm” – Winston Churchill

Populism has a long, storied history in American politics. Its crowning achievement: the election of Donald J. Trump to the presidency. Yet the story of populism in America, its rise and its preeminence, does not begin nor end there. Populism has affected political developments in the United States for over a century, and it will likely continue to do so well into the future. Beginning with plains-states populism, evolving under William Jennings Bryan, continuing its rise with Huey Long, progressing further with George Wallace, cementing under Richard Nixon and the Southern Strategy, and gaining power over the subsequent decades through Buchanan, Gingrich, and Trump. American populism often finds itself pitted against American progressivism, but always emerges as the tale of the everyday, workingman American compared to the coastal elite. It is the process by which elite politicians portray themselves as one of the masses, honing and cultivating the concept of the outsider turned politician, and appealing to alternative constituencies through different positions on critical issues to win votes, elections, and power.

Roots

The earliest origins of populism in America can be traced to 19th century U.S. politics, under the guise of William Jennings Bryan, agrarianism, and the People’s Party. Founded in 1892, the People’s Party represented farmers from across the plains states, representing their interests on a variety of issues including bimetallism, a progressive income tax, and collective economic action. These positions enabled the party to appeal broadly to a constituency which felt overlooked and overshadowed by the two dominant political parties and the coastal establishment both which both sought to win the favor of.

Ultimately, the People's Party collapsed when it endorsed a major party candidate, namely William Jennings Bryan in 1896, for the presidency. Such a direct acceptance of the preeminence of the two major political parties spelled disaster and death for a rising third. Regardless, the People's Party and the espousal of populism which it evoked among some portions of the American electorate provided the basis for future populist movements and candidacies in the future of U.S. politics.

Early 1900s Progressivism

Throughout the early 1900s, progressivism ruled supreme over American politics. The presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson saw the implementation and maintenance of government bureaucracy and intervention on a scale not seen before in U.S. history. Increased regulation of big business and the economy, government intervention and prosecution against monopolistic enterprises, and conservation of environmentally pristine and sacred lands: all of this found itself manifested in three consecutive progressive presidential administrations.

In their wake, they enacted much needed reform and instituted much needed change. The trust-busting of the Roosevelt and Taft administrations re-leveled the economic playing field. Meanwhile the creation of governmental institutions to regulate the economy, such as the Federal Reserve under Wilson, created stabilizing mechanisms in attempt to limit the wildly erratic tendencies of the American economy. More broadly, their conservation efforts preserved the beauty of landmarks and natural wonders for future generations, and their introduction of professionalism and the civil service to the federal bureaucracy made government more responsible, accountable, and efficient for the public at large.

In a vacuum, these reforms can only be seen as necessary, and their effects can only be seen as undoubtedly positive. And, to a significant extent, the average American felt the same. It is why three consecutive progressive administrations were elected. It is why these administrations were able to accomplish as much as they did, to the extent they did, and with the success they did. Into the future, however, many of the classification “average American” would fall out of favor with progressivism. These people became increasingly frustrated with its flaws and defects, with its high-handedness and intellectual strain, and were ever the more susceptible to populist appeals.

Left-Wing Populism on the Rise: Huey Long

What, exactly, were the populist issues with progressivism? First, and foremost, average Americans and populists alike took issue with the “noblesse oblige” aspects of progressivism, the overarching sense that it was elites imposing their views and their beliefs upon the American populace. Think of the three progressive presidential administrations of the early 1900s, namely Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson. Each man was undoubtedly a progressive, but also simultaneously a member of the elite. Each had served in government in some form or capacity prior to their election, and each had the access to means and resources unmatched by many among the American working class masses.

Highlighting this frustration of elite imposition upon their ordinary way of life, one can trace the 1930s rise of Huey Long as reactionary to it. Long, a populist firebrand from Louisiana who would serve as the state’s governor and senator before his untimely death by assassination in 1935, pitted himself against the capitalist institutions and elite of the coast. In doing so, Long was an initial supporter of FDR and the New Deal programs he instituted, but over time fell out of favor with them, and proposed more radical, and believe

it or not populist, proposals to replace them. Long coined his “Share Our Wealth” plan with the motto “Every Man a King.” It’s easy to see the populist appeal, it virtually jumps off the page. This all goes without mention of Long’s proposal to make every American a property owner.

Long suggested going above and beyond Roosevelt’s New Deal reforms, which he saw as doing too little to end the economic peril plaguing so many Americans. Long proposed, under the guise of the “Share Our Wealth” plan, to institute a net asset tax, the revenues from which would be redistributed among the American people to limit the effects of homelessness and poverty affecting millions of Americans under the Great Depression.

Long plotted a challenge to President Roosevelt’s reelection to the presidency in 1936, which was of course cut short by his assassination. By 1935, Long’s popularity and support had risen to mass levels: “Share Our Wealth” clubs around the nation had over 7.5 million members, his radio broadcasts repeatedly earned over 25 million listeners, and on a weekly basis he garnered over 60,000 letters from his supporters, which was more than the President himself (www.hueylong.com). Long’s untimely death in 1935 prevented his future contention and candidacy for the presidency, though his impact on the rise of American populism must be acknowledged and appreciated.

Long did not stand alone, however. He was joined, in part, by the likes of Francis Townsend, creator of the Townsend Plan which sought to provide every American over sixty years old with a pension of \$200 per month. Additionally, Father Coughlin adopted a number of populist appeals. Though far less economic than both Long and Townsend, Coughlin represented some of the worst aspects of populism: his strong fascist leanings led to attacks on the “other,” specifically raised in his anti-Semitic beliefs. He was eventually

forced off the air in 1939 due to these beliefs, however at the height of his popularity he reached nearly 30 million listeners a week.

These appeals to average, everyday Americans stood in stark contrast to the elitist, progressive New Deal reforms of the Roosevelt Administration. Into the future, populist attacks on, and challenges to, progressivism, liberalism, and establishment elitism would continue, though with variation in nature and composition. Populist appeals and rhetoric from both the right and left existed, and to some extent continue to exist in American politics. However, it is clear that, in sum, conservative and right-wing populism became the stronger of these two partisan, populist movements.

McCarthy: Populist?

The trials and practices of a communist-fearing 1950s America are well documented and repeated. Perhaps no man better encapsulates this era, nor this trend, than Joseph McCarthy. The Republican U.S. Senator from Wisconsin, McCarthy rose to national and international prominence and fame through his high-profile accusations of communist infiltrations within the American government and other important societal institutions.

Without a shred of substantive nor reliable evidence, McCarthy nonetheless convinced countless Americans of the veracity of his claims. His demagogic appeals and rhetoric gained unprecedented notoriety and support, and represented what may be the first exposure of populism to demagoguery in American politics. For instance, McCarthy's 1950 speech in West Virginia included "The State Department is infested with communists. I have here in my hand a list of 205—a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working

and shaping policy in the State Department” (Griffith, pg. 49). Irrespective of truth or lie, of actual evidence or forged showmanship, McCarthy’s accusations resonated with a segment of the U.S. population already inclined to believe his rhetoric. In a sense, it is in this respect that McCarthy built off the preexisting tradition begun under Father Coughlin in the 1930s. This clear demagoguery cannot be overlooked, as it is clearly representative of a broader shift within populist politics: of increasingly rhetorical and unsubstantiated claims which prey on the people’s ignorance and fear.

Simultaneously, McCarthy’s politics and practices, better enshrined under the catch-all phrase “McCarthyism,” must additionally be considered populist, not merely demagogic. His appeals to everyday, average Americans were clear: they must take their government back from an infiltrating, communist elite who do not represent their interests and instead seek to subvert their will and freedom. McCarthy increasingly sought to resonate with those who previously sympathetic to populist appeals and politics, those who believed in the flaws of the progressive elitism found under the likes of the Roosevelt presidencies.

In the long run, however, McCarthy’s influence in American politics was short lived. With the benefit of time, little substantiated evidence, and rising rhetoric, many of McCarthy’s fellow politicians and supporters saw through his communist-seeking charade. His death in 1957, at the age of 48, cut short a political career which almost certainly had little future success. His rebuke among his peers and supporters was too strong. President Eisenhower no less played a vital role, behind the scenes, in quietly ending McCarthy’s reign of terror without much in the way of a backlash. Yet as the U.S. Army’s Chief Legal Representative Joseph Nye Welch scolded him, “Until this moment, Senator, I think I never

really gauged your cruelty or your recklessness...Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?" (Griffith).

George Wallace: Populism Travels South

Personally, mention of Alabama Governor George Wallace's namesake brings to mind his now infamous 1963 inaugural address, in which he called for "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever." Despite these clearly racist and discriminatory beliefs, Wallace's political career serves as a critical benchmark for the evolution of American populism, in particular its rapid expansion into and throughout the south.

Wallace was among the first of southern politicians to turn a combination of populist and demagogic appeals and rhetoric into electoral success, as evidenced by his numerous elections to the Alabama governorship as well as his repeated candidacies for the presidency. Yet Wallace stood out from the pack specifically, as his fellow populists were often countered by other politicians from the same state who exhibited more traditional and moderate positions. Wallace had no moderating factor nor figure. The content of his demagoguery: his repeated appeals to the ignorance and bias of his southern electorate, in particular their racial bias and beliefs. The content of his populism: his repeated appeals to the average Alabamian, or average American in his national campaigns, that elite politicians no longer served the public interest. In the face of national legislation undertaken by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the fields of voting and civil rights, the backlash among white, southern populations was fierce. Wallace, and as we'll examine later Nixon, took advantage of this fact. Wallace was specifically adept at

portraying himself as in-touch with the needs and concerns of the average, white Alabama citizen voter, while nationally their concerns came under attack with a renewed push for desegregation and equality under the law and at the ballot box.

Wallace's candidacies for the presidencies, namely in 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976, were met with varying degrees of success. Arguably the closest Wallace came to the presidency was in 1968, where he staged a third-party run against Republican nominee Richard Nixon and Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey. Wallace ultimately carried five southern states, garnering nearly ten million popular votes in total. Throughout the campaign, both major party candidates feared Wallace's appeal and his potential to siphon away votes from their campaigns in critical states. While these fears never came to fruition, the very fact of their existence speaks to Wallace's ability to combine populist rhetoric and demagoguery. Despite Wallace's virulent and offensive racism, he resonated with millions of Americans, particularly in the south, who felt disenfranchised and un-represented by either of the major parties. Moving forward, it would be the Republican Party who sought to court these voters into its constituency. Adapting its platform to fit this mold, it is clear to see the effects this shift has had upon the party.

Nixon: The Southern Strategy

One man who, unlike George Wallace, combined demagoguery with populist appeals into national success was Richard Nixon. Though not an avowed populist of the likes of Wallace, McCarthy, Long, and Bryan, Nixon undoubtedly shared many of their aspects while maintaining a respect for, and cozy relationship with, the elites. Nixon's campaigns for the presidency in 1968 and 1972 brought together his revered status and experience as Eisenhower's Vice President, along with Goldwater's trail-blazing campaign

of 1964 which began the shift of southern, white conservatives from the Democratic to Republican Party.

Nixon's ability to combine these two forces allowed his campaign to appeal to a broad swath of voters across the American electorate, and it showed. With his landslide victory in 1972, in which Nixon carried 49 states and garnered over 60 percent of the popular vote, the southern strategy had been cemented in Republican, and American politics.

In essence, this national strategy involved appeals to conservative, white, southern voters who felt un-represented and disenfranchised by the Democratic Party they'd previously supported based on the passage of civil and voting rights guarantees for African Americans. The Republican Party, seeing an opportunity to add these voters into its constituency base, aimed populist, demagogic, and tribal appeals their way. Nixon's "Law and Order" strategy is a clear example of this. So is Goldwater's "states' rights" positions of 1964. Continuing into the future, the Republican Party could increasingly rely on this southern base of support. However, as a result, the Republican Party forever tied itself to a future of increasing populist and demagogic appeals and rhetoric to ensure its success. Even to the present day, these are fundamental elements of a successful Republican candidacy for national office.

Progressivism v. Populism: The GOP

The issue, of course, with the Republican Party's increasing populist and tribal appeals to woo southern voters was that they simultaneously pushed away progressive and liberal Republicans. The consequence was that, while adding a significant voting bloc to

the Republican base through the south, it coincided with more and more progressives and liberals leaving the party as a result.

Think of the titans of Republican Party history, the men who shaped, molded, and left a lasting effect on the party and their country. These men included Lincoln, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Buckley. In recent years, however, they've been replaced with Gingrich, Buchanan, and Trump. What the first men shared, the second most certainly do not. While Lincoln, Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and Buckley certainly had differences, of which there were many, they shared and agreed on a respect for the vital institutions and traditions of American government and society. They understood the importance of them, and through their own beliefs sought to strengthen and preserve them. For Lincoln and Roosevelt, this meant progressivism. For Eisenhower and Buckley, it meant conservatism. Yet they all believed in the fundamental promise and core of the United States: freedom, justice, and liberty for all. Their sole disagreements came in how to achieve it. For men like Gingrich, Buchanan, and Trump, they do not share these concerns. They themselves have a fundamental disdain for the vital institutions and traditions of American society and government. Whereas the first group saw the Constitution as a document to be followed, the second sees it as an obstacle to be subverted in furtherance of their own careers and interests. The second group highlights a so-called "Deep State" of unelected and unsupervised government officials who impose their will and beliefs on an unwilling American public. The second group attacks their political opponents with vitriol and rage, leaving little room for compromise nor discussion. The second group uses populist and demagogic appeals to an unprecedented degree, encapsulating the concept of the outsider turned politician into their own gain despite cloaking it in populism and accountability.

What is clear now is that the populist and demagogic appeals which took over the Republican Party have now led it astray. Over a decades-long process of increasing rhetoric with only electoral success as its aim, it has now gone too far, and perhaps irretrievably so. As unfortunate as it may be, it is the unfortunate truth. The gathering storm of populism which began in the mid-20th century has now taken over the Republican Party. What began with Wallace, continued with Nixon, gained legitimacy under Reagan, earned backbone under Gingrich and Buchanan, and finally attained full-on success with Trump. This is the reality of the Republican Party, be it as it may.

The Reagan Revolution

Ask any Republican on the street who their favorite president is. To this day, an astounding number of responses continue to be Ronald Reagan. In a sense, this is because he represents one of the most successful Republican presidencies of the 20th century, as well as a connecting tissue between the GOP of the past and the GOP of the present.

Fundamentally, what was Reagan's presidency but a restoration of American ideals and traditions and respect? He sought to return government to its rightful place, ending its seemingly never-ending growth and curbing burdensome regulation. Reagan sought to provide economic relief to Americans through supply-side economics, cutting taxes and enabling Americans of all classes to control how and where they spend their hard-earned money. He re-established American respect, influence, and image around the world which had been badly tarnished by the trials of Vietnam and the poor foreign policy of the Carter Administration.

Taking that in, it might seem easy to believe Reagan in no way represented a continuation of the populist and demagogic plague that has now taken over the party. Yet

he did. He began his campaign by declaring his belief and support for states' rights. His candidacy represented the initial introduction of the Christian Evangelical right into the Republican Party. His nomination and subsequent electoral victory came not just over President Carter, but also over John Anderson, whose candidacy was quite possibly the last of a progressive Republican. Reagan's rhetoric included enough meat on the bone to maintain support among a base becoming increasingly susceptible to populist and demagogic appeals. His positions on abortion, states' rights, civil rights, religious liberties, and his judicial appointments speak volumes to this effect. For instance, while he opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, making it a part of the GOP platform in 1980, he also appointed the first woman to serve on the Supreme Court in Sandra Day O'Connor. He also personified the belief in the ability of the outsider turned politician to influence and create change in a stagnant and gridlocked Washington, D.C. Reagan's past was as an actor, not as a politician. Additionally, his landslide victories in both 1980 and 1984 only further solidified the shift of support within the South from the Democratic to the Republican Party.

As such, both sides of the perpetual argument believed in and opposed some of what Reagan stood for and accomplished. Both sides agreed on the success of his presidency, while they were also left with a sense of wanting more done in furtherance of their own positions compared to those of the other. Reagan represented, and continues to represent a transformative figure within the party and its internal battle. Each side sees what they want to see in him and his presidency, while ignoring the other. Into the future, his namesake would be referred to increasingly, especially by populist politicians seeking

to gain notoriety and attention by positioning themselves as the successor to the Reagan Revolution legacy.

The So-Called Successors

Clearly, the successors to the Reagan Revolution were those who followed in his footsteps. Namely, George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole, George W. Bush, John McCain, and Mitt Romney. These men, nominees of the party to which they all belonged, invoked the Reagan legacy as part of their candidacy. However, the men over which they triumphed in pursuit of their party's nomination, men of the likes of Gingrich, Santorum, Huckabee, and Buchanan, invoked Reagan nonetheless. They sought to position themselves as the rightful successor to the Reagan Revolution they believed in: of a presidency which finally took populism and demagoguery to the Oval Office.

Gingrich and Buchanan, the politicians who came immediately in Reagan's wake in the 1990s, sought to continue the rise of populism within the Republican Party. Gingrich's 1994 "Contract with America" included clear appeals to populist rhetoric. Requiring all laws which apply to the people to also apply to Congress. Term limits. Requiring committee meetings to be open to the public. Guaranteeing honest compilation of the federal budget. These proposed reforms and pillars are clear in their appeal to an average American voter. Moreover, they gained success at the ballot box with the landslide victories of the Republican Party in the 1994 midterms, which culminated in Gingrich's election to the position of Speaker of the House of Representatives. Meanwhile, Buchanan's candidacy for the presidency in 1992 sought to reverse the return to elite control and its ills he saw present under the Bush 41 Administration. Buchanan attacked Bush for his having promised "No New Taxes," while raising them during his first term.

Buchanan portrayed Bush as being one in the same as the elite and liberal progressives he saw as detrimental to the country. In describing why he sought the presidency, he noted “What I can’t stand are the back-room deals. They’re all in on it, the insider game, the establishment game—this is what we’re running against” (Allen). After falling in his challenge to Bush’s re-nomination, he delivered a speech at the 1992 GOP convention in which he said:

“The agenda Clinton and Clinton would impose on America—abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units—that’s change all right. But it’s not the kind of change America needs. It is not the kind of change America wants. And it is not the kind of change we can abide in a nation we still call God’s country... Like many of you last month, I watched that giant masquerade ball at Madison Square Garden—where 20,000 radicals and liberals came dressed up as moderates and centrists—in the greatest single exhibition of cross-dressing in American political history.”

-Patrick J. Buchanan, 1992

The populist and demagogic appeals are so clear herein it is virtually unnecessary to highlight them. Yet his references to social conservative issues (abortion, gay rights, religion) combined with his populist, anti-elite rhetoric combined to produce an insurgent candidacy in 1992. In the years since, Buchanan has fallen off as a political contender, though he continues commentary and opinion which voice many of these same views and positions. The former Nixon and Reagan Administration official, the man who in part founded the Southern Strategy, continued its rise into the 21st century.

Meanwhile, in recent years, politicians of the likes of Mike Huckabee and Rick Santorum have continued the evolution of populism and demagoguery throughout the Republican Party. Huckabee’s candidacy for the presidency in 2008, followed by Santorum’s in 2012, built off of what was by then decades of populist rhetoric and appeals within the Republican Party. The Huckabee and Santorum campaigns focused largely on

their Christian evangelicalism, and the positions they took spoke volumes to that effect. Huckabee's victory in the 2008 Iowa caucuses represented his ability to appeal to a white, rural constituency which is often most susceptible to populist appeals. Santorum's victory in the 2012 Iowa caucuses showed the same. Both men, despite showing an inability to translate populist appeal into national electoral success, carried forth and continued the transition of the Republican Party from party to movement; from conservatism, progressivism, and respected positions, to populism, demagoguery, and absurdity. Donald Trump's successful candidacy in 2016 built off of and only furthered these trends and developments.

Trump: The Populist, Demagogue President

Donald Trump's election to the presidency in 2016 shocked and stunned millions of Americans across the country. Yet viewing his election through the lens of decades of Republican Party evolution and development from its first exposure to populism to its nomination of a purely populist candidate, his success comes clearer into focus.

Trump stands as perhaps the fundamental image of an anti-progressive populist. He bucks against the use of civil service requirements and professionalism as key indicators for government positions, appointing family members and people wholly unqualified for a variety of positions within the government without fail. He clearly lacks a respect for the institutions and traditions vital to American government and society, instead seeking to subvert and end-run whatever may come in his path. He uses the Constitution merely when it is most convenient for him to do so, otherwise overlooking or simply ignoring its mandates, its laws, and its effects. He claims the existence of a "deep state" of government bureaucrats who seek his downfall, and in doing so seek to overrule the will of the people

and their interests. His repeated statements of loving the un-educated speak volumes to a long-standing strain of anti-intellectualism present in his choices of both who to staff the government, as well as to take advantage of his supporters' ignorance and lack of knowledge. This is most evident by his astounding payback to the wealthiest of Americans, despite purporting to represent the "forgotten man and woman" in America.

Does any of this sound familiar? All of it? Well, it should. It's because the so-called Trump playbook, the plan of attack which led him from the escalator at Trump Tower in June 2015 to the front steps of the White House in January 2017, is not his own. It is a tried-and-true, oft-repeated set of positions, steps, and rhetoric which has gained increasing influence within the GOP in recent decades. It is, almost without change, the same playbook as Bryan, Long, Wallace, Nixon, Reagan, Gingrich, Buchanan, Santorum, Huckabee, and others. It appeals to racial bias in the south, and appeals to anti-elite establishment in the plains. It believes in the power of the outsider turned politician, and their unique ability to affect change in Washington. The only difference now is it unabashed success in the face of prior disappointment and failure. Never before had a fully avowed populist gained national success, until now. Nixon, despite using some of the playbook to his advantage, remained to some extents a progressive. Reagan gave lip-service rhetoric and some position issues, though remained a conservative and loyal to the elite establishment. Trump does neither. He takes no issue calling himself a nationalist, calling himself a populist. His miracle is his success where others have failed before. The cause of this is solely a different playing field than the others. Trump's campaign took place in a prime environment for his particular brand of politics and rhetoric. He does not represent something entirely new within politics, he represents something entirely new

within successful politics. His is a campaign and presidency without comparison. The only new development which Trump signals is the repeated propensity with which he lies, distorts truth, and willfully misleads the American public.

What makes populists different within American politics are their issue positions, and their means of communicating them. What makes Trump different is his ability to translate that into national success. In the next chapter, an evaluation of why the playing field shifted so perfectly into Trump's hands. Why did his predecessors fail where he succeeded? What changed?

Chapter 4

“War Does Not Determine Who is Right—Only Who Is Left” –Bertrand Russell

As seen in Chapter 3, the rise of populism within American politics but additionally within the Republican Party itself was undeniable throughout the twentieth century. While sparked as the result of insurgent politicians and candidates, the movement also found resonance within the party mainstream. Since 1968, almost every primary-contest GOP presidential nomination has featured a contest between a traditional conservative Republican candidate, and a candidate who displays more of a populist and tribal appeal. While the candidacies of Ronald Reagan would ordinarily stand in stark contrast to the candidacies of George Wallace and Pat Buchanan, there are clear and unmistakable similarities. This, of course, is also not to say that all Republican nominees have not adopted some varying form of populism following their nomination. After all, following Nixon’s wildly successful Southern Strategy in 1968 and 1972, and the subsequent party realignment, populist appeals and rhetoric became staples of any national GOP campaign.

While the influence of populist politics upon the mainstream system evolved at a slower rate than it did outside the proverbial beltway, it nonetheless evolved similarly. It began with the shock value of an outsider-turned-politician bringing talents and appeals to mainstream politics (Goldwater), and it culminated in the ultimate success in a purely populist nominee (Trump). Along the way, similarly populist, tribal, and demagogic candidates have furthered the rise of the movement both within the GOP and U.S. politics at large, each step causing further and further removal from the preexisting “norms” of acceptable behaviors and policy proposals which now appear so long ago and so far away that they seem irretrievable. No single man nor campaign can be definitively seen as the sole cause or reason for this; rather, it is their combination that has produced such

devastating consequences. In determining from where we have come, it is vital to examine the candidacies and men which have provoked us along our current path, their policies and politics, and their role in the de-evolution of the American political system into a populist-dominated sport.

1964: Populism Takes the Stage

Perhaps no GOP primary contest for the presidential nomination is more indicative of the populist trend than that of 1964, which pitted Barry Goldwater against Nelson Rockefeller. Ultimately, the outcome of the primary election would come to be indicative of the long-term, though not necessarily short-term, future of the Republican Party: successful populist candidates.

Of course, Goldwater's campaign throughout 1964 can be described as a multitude of things: anywhere from avowed radical conservatism, to extreme libertarianism, to populism. Much space and attention has already been devoted to the Goldwater candidacy in previous chapters, and as such, I won't delve too much further into detail here for the redundancy's sake. Regardless, it is clear that while the Goldwater campaign displayed some populist characteristics and tendencies, it is additionally possible to argue it was inherently anti-populist. Goldwater's respect for the institutions and traditions of American government and society dominated his campaign, his proposed policies, and his overall message and beliefs. On the other hand, however, his campaign began the first experience within the GOP of populist appeals to white, southern voters. While Goldwater may not have been a clear populist himself, his campaign undoubtedly took part in populist rhetoric and messaging in an attempt to drive up support for his candidacy in the South.

This seeming contradiction stood in direct and utter contrast to the moderate, even progressive candidacy of New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. Rockefeller wanted nothing to do with the increasingly race-related rhetoric espoused by his opponent. While Goldwater opposed the Civil and Voting Rights acts, Rockefeller stood in strong support of them. While Goldwater seemed at every turn to dial up populist appeals on the basis of economics, attacking New Deal liberalism and its flaws, Rockefeller instead sympathized with certain aspects of it. Rockefeller's moderatism stood in stark contrast to the extremism of Goldwater. Ultimately, as Goldwater echoed in his acceptance speech at the 1964 convention, "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice."

Goldwater's triumph over Rockefeller in 1964 was the signal of a number of factors and developments. First, and perhaps most importantly, Goldwater's victory marked a decisive shift in the decades-long struggle between the East Coast Establishment elite and the middle-America conservatism of Robert A. Taft and, now, Goldwater. There was no better encapsulation of the establishment elite than Rockefeller, and Goldwater had beaten him. Rockefeller's loss continued decades of struggle between these forces, though with increasing success for the non-establishment, non-elite.

Additionally, Goldwater's victory realized not only the first introduction of populist politics into the mainstream Republican Party, but also its first success. While there had been populist politicians along the periphery, they had never risen to positions of significant prominence, and were almost always countered by voices of moderation and reason in their wake. Goldwater bucked this trend completely. In fact, in support of his campaign were to-be prominent Republicans in Nixon and Reagan. As a result, the rise of populism of the GOP was only further enabled.

The success Goldwater experienced was not to be shared in upcoming primary contests, perhaps as result of his devastatingly unsuccessful general election performance. In the coming decades, the populist candidate virtually always lost to the establishment-backed candidate. Goldwater must be considered, at least, a significant cause for this.

Reagan: The Third Time is Quite Literally the Charm

Ronald Reagan's first introduction to national politics was in support of the candidacy of Barry Goldwater in 1964. Reagan's campaign speech, entitled "A Time for Choosing," endeared him to conservatives across the country. In his speech, Reagan noted:

"Do they mean peace, or do they mean we just want to be left in peace? There can be no real peace while one American is dying some place in the world for the rest of us. We're at war with the most dangerous enemy that has ever faced mankind in his long climb from the swamp to the stars, and it's been said if we lose that war, and in doing so lose this way of freedom of ours, history will record with the greatest astonishment that those who had the most to lose did the least to prevent its happening. Well I think it's time we ask ourselves if we still know the freedoms that were intended for us by the Founding Fathers...If we lose freedom here, there's no place to escape to. This is the last stand on earth. And this idea that government is beholden to the people, that it has no other source of power except the sovereign people, is still the newest and the most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man. This is the issue of this election: whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves. You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or a right. Well I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There's only an up or down: man's old, old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. And regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would trade our freedom for security have embarked on this downward course."

-Ronald Reagan, *A Time for Choosing*, 1964

Reagan's attack on a "little intellectual elite in a far-distant capitol" is a clear reference to both an anti-New Deal liberalism conservatism, as well as populist appeals and rhetoric. The belief that the average American can better judge his affairs than can

government is an age-old pillar of both conservatism as well as, in more recent years, American populism.

As such, Reagan clearly presented himself in the 1968 Republican presidential primaries as a more populist-oriented candidate than the otherwise viewed establishment, moderate candidate in Richard Nixon. Nixon, who had served as Vice President, under Eisenhower no less, who came to be seen by many as the epitome of establishment elite in the latter years of his presidency. Nixon's ultimately successful candidacy came to be characterized by his Southern Strategy, which was much the topic of discussion within Chapter 3. Reagan's populist appeal, deriving from his support for Goldwater in 1964 and the policy outlines he traced in *A Time for Choosing*, fell short of a serious challenge to Nixon's nomination. However, he nonetheless represented a clear continuation of the populist strain within the GOP, begun under Goldwater, and which would only continue in his subsequent candidacy in 1976.

Reagan's 1976 campaign saw him pitted against incumbent President Gerald Ford, who had ascended to the presidency in the wake of Richard Nixon's resignation due to Watergate. Gerald Ford quite literally epitomized the term "establishment": he had served in the Congress since 1949, with tenures as both the Speaker of the House as well as Vice President prior to his presidency. The 1976 Reagan campaign sought to position itself once again as the conservative alternative to the perceived, and rightly so, moderate in Ford. The campaign sought to win early primary contests in an attempt to damage the veneer of inevitability surrounding Ford's nomination. Reagan once again utilized the appeal of populist and tribal appeals to boost his candidacy. Reagan challenged Ford primarily on the basis of foreign policy, criticizing what he saw as Ford's unwillingness to take

necessary tough stances against the Soviet Union, rather than Ford's actual overtures to the U.S.S.R, as well as what Reagan saw as Ford's missteps in ending the war in Vietnam.

Ford had also alienated and angered conservatives within the GOP by nominating Nelson Rockefeller to serve as Vice President for the duration of his term. Rockefeller, who had by that time had served as the standard-bearer of the establishment, moderate wing of the party, had no love lost among the conservative wing.

All of this combined to form a potentially lethal combination of forces against Ford's nomination to continue as President. Ultimately, however, Reagan fell short once again of his party's nomination for the presidency, just as he had done eight years earlier. Reagan came closer than he had in 1968, losing to Ford by a tally of 1,187 delegates to 1,070 delegates. Reagan's stock within the party was clearly continuing to be on the rise, and the effect he had on the Ford campaign was clear: rather than re-nominating Nelson Rockefeller for the post of Vice President, Ford instead chose a more conservative running mate in Robert Dole of Kansas. In the end, Ford lost the general election campaign to Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter, while Reagan became the clear front-runner for the 1980 nomination.

Four years later, Reagan's conservative bona fides had been well-proven. He was the undeniable front-runner, and led polls of GOP voters by wide margins in the run-up to the primary election campaign. This positioned Reagan in unfamiliar territory: rather than being the conservative firebrand challenger, he could no longer claim that mantle. Instead, it seemed inevitable he would win the party's nomination. As such, along with painstaking years of establishing his outsider image and building support among a base susceptible to

populist appeals, he could focus his attention on gaining traction among the party's more moderate voters.

This, of course, did not stop moderate challenges to Reagan's nomination. Namely, George H.W. Bush and John B. Anderson. Anderson and Bush represented the moderate and progressive challengers to Reagan's nomination: Bush going so far as to call Reagan's economic proposals "voo-doo" and Anderson mounting a third-party bid even after his loss of the nomination. While Anderson was quite possibly the last stand of the progressive wing of the GOP, Bush's nomination as Reagan's running mate added much needed credentials and support to the ticket. Reagan's nomination, though challenged by these men, was never seriously in doubt following the first few primary contests, and he sailed to the convention having won forty four primaries.

Reagan's third bid for his party's nomination, and thus the presidency, was in fact the charm: he later won the presidency, defeating incumbent President Jimmy Carter in a landslide victory. Over the course of his campaigns, however, certain trends emerge which deserve further attention. First, I mean not to propose that Reagan was an avowed populist. Rather, in the context of viewing his candidacies in comparison to those whom he challenged, Reagan emerges as the more populist candidate among the others. This does not make Reagan populist per se, but rather more populist than the given opponents. Reagan clearly stood for and supported a number of positions and values which avowed populists would not: free trade, respect for institutions and traditions, and an interventionist foreign policy come first to mind.

Additionally, the evolution within Reagan the candidate is clear to see as well. His 1968 campaign, while never gaining serious traction in polls nor actual election contests,

paid far more attention to garnering conservative and populist support than did his 1980 campaign, which sought to build additional support among the moderate wing, which was inclined to support Bush and Anderson instead given their “Rockefeller Republican” characteristics and ideologies. In fact, by the time of the general election in 1980, Reagan spent much of the campaign defending his ability to lead the nation given the lens of his perceived extreme views and proposals. He was indeed much moderated over the course of the years.

Given this, Reagan’s role in the evolution of the GOP, and populism within it, is undeniable and profound. For years, he presented himself as the firebrand candidate, the chosen son of the conservative wing of the party who sought to return it to its so-called founding ideals. Yet only when he consolidated his support among this faction, and sought to build support among the moderates, did he actually experience true success. This combination, of building conservative credentials to then inch-worm back towards the center in pursuit of moderate support as well would become characteristic of numerous GOP candidacies into the future, much as they had been of the Ford and Nixon campaigns which had vanquished Reagan’s challenges in the past. Looking forward, incidentally enough, most successful bids for the Republican nomination mirrored Reagan’s 1980 candidacy in that very respect.

Bush: Reagan’s Third Term?

Ultimately, the Reagan presidency produced much of what led him to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: an ability to blend conservative backing with moderate, elite establishment support. His economic policies clearly benefitted the wealthiest of American society, providing tax cuts and incentives along with the beginning stages of free trade and

outsourcing. Yet he also provided the rhetoric and symbolic gestures his conservative supporters craved and demanded: his positions on their most important issues, including the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion access, ensured their continued support for his administration.

Yet when the time came for Reagan's successor to be chosen, his Vice President in George H.W. Bush emerged as the leading contender. The issue? Bush's perpetual struggle to earn support among the conservative base given his portrayal as an east coast, establishment elite who held virtually every post Washington, D.C. government had to offer except the presidency. This very fact opened Bush's campaign to conservative challenges from Sen. Bob Dole and Pat Robertson, the television evangelist preacher. Bush had always struggled to garner support among the conservative base, a fact which doomed his candidacy in 1980 and which had the potential to derail both his 1988 and 1992 nomination bids.

Perhaps ironically enough, Bush's triumph in winning the 1988 nomination came in large part to his ability to portray himself as the more conservative candidate than his competitors. His characterization in the run-up to the critical New Hampshire primary of the leading threat to his campaign, Bob Dole, as prone to raising taxes resonated among the GOP electorate and was a leading cause of his ultimate victory in that contest. Pat Robertson never quite matched the success he had experienced in the initial Iowa caucuses, and soon fell off as a serious contender. In short, Bush's march to the nomination in 1988 was due to his eight years having served as Reagan's Vice President, which enabled him to envision himself as Reagan's third term and to garner previously unprecedented support among conservatives. While giving his acceptance speech for the GOP nomination, Bush

uttered the famous “Read my lips” quip. Four years later, that comment would come to haunt him.

By 1992, Bush had done exactly that which he had so publicly promised not to do: raise taxes. He had also governed in much a moderate manner, reaching across the aisle on numerous occasions to pass bipartisan reform packages. This, however, did not endear him to conservative voters pre-inclined to be suspicious and unwilling to support him. As such, his 1992 re-nomination was challenged by Pat Buchanan, who attacked Bush for reneging on his tax promise, and proposed significantly more conservative and indeed populist policies. Buchanan may very well represent the first avowedly, undeniably populist candidate within the GOP. Ultimately, he fell well short of the nomination, winning the most support in New Hampshire and subsequently falling off as a serious challenger. Yet his very challenge to Bush itself continued what by then had become a long-running trend within GOP politics: of battle between conservative, populist firebrand and establishment favorite.

Bush’s unsuccessful reelection campaign came as a result of a number of reasons. Yet in this context it is perhaps most important to view his inability to win over the conservative base of his party as the most evident and damaging fact to his political career. The disdain for him among this conservative base sparked the 1992 third-party candidacy of Ross Perot, and was among the leading causes of his loss in the general election. While Bush, like GOP nominees who came before him and like those who followed, adopted some of the populist rhetoric and appeals, namely the focus on winning southern conservatives as majority part of a broader winning coalition, he never embraced it fully.

Here was a man borne of American tradition and institutions, a man clearly of the elite, east coast establishment. Who could have expected him to?

2000: “Compassionate Conservatism”

Eight years after President Bush’s loss in his 1992 reelection campaign, his son took the stage as the leading contender for the GOP nomination to succeed the presidency of Bill Clinton. George W. Bush, then the Governor of Texas, led the field of Republican challengers for the party’s nomination. Perhaps realizing their mistake eight years earlier in withholding their support for his father, and thus virtually handing the presidency to Clinton, George W. Bush enjoyed far more support among the GOP’s conservative base than his father did.

In fact, Bush’s main challenger in the primary came from Sen. John McCain, who portrayed himself as a moderate challenger to Bush’s candidacy, campaigning largely on a platform of campaign finance reform. McCain’s upset victory in the New Hampshire primary was soon countered by Bush’s bounce-back victory in South Carolina. From that point on, McCain struggled to maintain viability and later suspended his campaign.

It strains the imagination, given the generally accepted image of his father, including that held by the conservative wing of the GOP, to envision George W. Bush as the conservative firebrand candidate who espoused populist rhetoric and appeals in pursuit of the presidency. Yet strain the imagination we must. His 2000 campaign was centrally focused on the issue of restoring integrity and honor to the White House after the scandal-ridden years of the Clinton Administration, and he rallied support for his “compassionate conservatism” which sought maintain his image as reasonable and moderate. As such, he both threw the necessary, proverbial red meat to his conservative, populist appeal-prone

base, and maintained his viability among the larger electorate. He toed the line which many before him had, and which those who followed would as well.

2008: Country First?

For John McCain, the underdog dark-horse candidate was a positioned he cherished. It enabled him to quietly but assuredly build his base of support without the bright lights of media attention and scrutiny. In 2000, it worked to his advantage, enabling his upset in the New Hampshire primary. By 2008, he caught lightning in a bottle for a second time. His upset victory in the Granite State this time, however, would propel him to his party's nomination for the presidency.

In 2008, his main competitors for the nomination came in the form of Mitt Romney and Mike Huckabee, both former governors. While Romney and McCain represented much the same brand of politician (elite, establishment, moderate), Huckabee represented a different entity entirely. Serving as the Governor of Arkansas for nearly 11 years, Huckabee had crafted an image and ideology which closely followed his predecessor who carried the populist badge and torch. Huckabee's appeal came largely from the perspective of social conservatism, campaigning on by then age-old issues of religious freedom and abortion access, among others. Huckabee's support among the conservative base of the GOP became well evident given his victory in the Iowa caucuses. He was never able to build off his initial success, however, and eventually suspended his campaign by March, 2008.

Yet Huckabee's candidacy spoke to larger issues within the GOP electorate, and McCain's campaign understood this. Recognizing the need to shore up his support within this base already reluctant to support him, as well as to provide his campaign a much-

needed boost to match the star-power of Democratic nominee Barack Obama, McCain chose Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his running mate.

For a number of reasons, McCain's selection of Palin for Vice President was important. First and foremost, Palin's populist rhetoric and appeal was undeniable. She was consistently portrayed, and portrayed herself as, an average mom from an average family. The "hockey mom" persona was clear and evident at the 2008 GOP convention and beyond. Yet what the McCain campaign believed they thought they had found in a game changing VP candidate, they instead found a game changer of an entirely different variety: Palin both virtually singlehandedly wrecked any chance of McCain's success in the general election, as well as represented the first avowedly populist candidate to be elevated to the national GOP ticket. As such, the introduction of the populist brand of politics into the mainstream had both devastating and long-lasting effects on American and Republican politics. It increased the hostility within the GOP toward the Obama campaign, largely centered on issues of race and ideology. It also sparked the initial stages of the Tea Party movement, which would come to characterize the GOP's response to the Obama Administration, and which would continue to gain traction and influence within the Republican Party.

In a sense, McCain's selection of Palin as running mate went entirely against his campaign slogan of "Country First" and instead represented a selfish, campaign-first attitude. It's hard to believe McCain did not understand, nor consider the consequences that choosing Palin would have both on the 2008 campaign and beyond. Additionally, even were this to be the case, it speaks to a larger sense of irresponsibility both on the behalf of McCain and the campaign staff he surrounded himself with. Continuing into the future of

the GOP, into the 2010s and under the guise of the Obama Administration, the populist rhetoric and appeals which had previously been at least somewhat suppressed and overcome gained evermore influence and traction, and eventually came to fruition with the candidacy and election of Donald J. Trump. The McCain-Palin ticket must be seen as at least a partial, if not significant cause of this.

2012: The Last Stand

The GOP primaries in 2012, at the time, could be considered much of the same-old, same-old. A somewhat conservative, though also somewhat moderate candidate in Mitt Romney, who had previously run for the nomination and lost and who now sought the presidency once again emerged as the frontrunner. His main challenge: garnering support among a conservative base which was suspicious and reluctant to support him. Sound familiar? It should. By 2012, the same rough sketch outline had been taking place for over four decades of GOP nominations.

Yet, knowing what we know now but did not then, the 2012 nomination contest must also be considered the last stand of this same-old, same-old process of GOP nominations. Viewing 2012 through the lens of 2016, it must additionally be considered the end of the normality, the end of the moderation and reason triumphing over the extremism and populist conservatism.

Mitt Romney's nomination in 2012 came by victory over populist rhetoric challengers in Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum, who challenged Romney as establishment elite and criticized his lack of conservative credentials. Ever since his 2008 candidacy, Romney had been positioning and preparing another run, and he began the 2012 primaries as the frontrunner for his party's nomination. Romney lost the first-in-the-

country contest in the Iowa caucuses to Santorum, who from there forward provided the most serious challenge to Romney's nomination. The contrast between the two candidates was clear, and age-old. Romney struggled to garner support among the conservative base of the GOP, which by now had become even more fervent and populist-driven given the developments of the first term of the Obama presidency, and the lasting effects of the McCain-Palin ticket and rhetoric. Santorum failed to build off his initial success, largely owing to his inability to gain traction among the more moderate and establishment elite wing which instead supported Romney. Romney's selection of running mate, Congressman Paul Ryan from Wisconsin, was in part an attempt to build support and energy among his conservative base. Ultimately, this attempt fell short, as Romney lost to President Obama's reelection bid on Election Day.

Forty-Eight Years of GOP Nominations: What Have We Learned?

In the pages that precede this paragraph, an examination of some forty-eight years of GOP nomination contests has taken place. Spanning 1964 to 2012, some trends stand out and others require further evaluation.

First, the evolution of populist politics within the Republican Party is plain to see. At times, it is more successful than others, and there is a unifying cause for this: candidate recognition and popularity. Think of the populist candidates which scored nomination victories over the more establishment, elite, and moderate candidates. Who comes to mind? Goldwater, Reagan, Bush (43), and Trump. What these candidates have in common: tremendous name recognition. Goldwater, author of *The Conscience of a Conservative*, published in 1960, was by 1964 the chosen candidate of the conservative wing of the GOP. By Reagan's 1980 nomination and election to the presidency, he had sought the presidency

thrice and had fallen just short a mere four years prior. George W. Bush's candidacy espoused more populist and conservative appeals than did his competitors, yet he masked it under the guise of a "compassionate conservatism" which sought to moderate his positions, while he also enjoyed the name recognition of being a former First Son. Finally, with Trump, the reality television star enjoyed nearly universal name recognition, which certainly boosted his campaign in its initial stages.

Additionally, and secondly for that matter, Trump enjoyed a far different playing field than did his predecessors. Think now of the overarching trends within American and specifically Republican politics over the course of these specific forty eight years. The rise of populism, of course, but also the rise of conditions which made it evermore possible and probable for populist candidates to succeed. Trump's success, in some and perhaps large part, lies in his very being: a billionaire who presents himself as one of the people, yes, but also as a man who can challenge the preexisting, stagnant system like no other. The trends of American politics, the embrace of free trade and globalization, with the subsequent effect of outsourcing, led to a hollowing out of the middle class which made America the greatest nation in the world. More specifically, these trends specifically targeted manufacturing and production jobs, jobs typically held in the Rust Belt of the Midwest United States, which made these areas particularly and increasingly susceptible to populist appeals and rhetoric. All of these causes and effects also combined to form an overarching authority crisis within American politics and society at-large. Nearly no societal institution has gone without scandal nor challenge over the course of these forty-eight years. Trump is the ultimate authoritarian figure: he is inherently empowering, especially to those who feel especially un-empowered.

Trump took advantage of these factors and effects to sail to a GOP nomination which, in retrospect, seems easily attainable given our 20-20 hindsight perspective. He took advantage of middle-class ruin, of decades of increasingly populist politics without success nor respect nor even acknowledgement. Yes, it is true that all GOP candidates within this nearly fifty year era embraced some aspects of the Nixon Southern Strategy, which was inherently populist itself. Yet the fact remains that all of them embraced it, with much emphasis on the ‘all.’ When every candidate partakes, it seems less acknowledgement and embrace and more political expediency and doing what one must in order to win an election. The fact remains that an embrace of the Southern Strategy is required by a GOP candidate to have any hope for general election success: it has become part and parcel of a Republican campaign for the White House.

The Trump “phenomenon,” therefore, is not so much phenomenon in of itself, but rather phenomenon in its success. It is not new, but instead newly successful. It is the result of decades of policy and politics, which finally reached a critical mass at a critically important time and with a critically polarizing candidate. In the next chapter, a recap of the evolution of the Grand Old Party, with an emphasis on from where we have come, and an attempt to predict where we are headed.

Conclusion

“Where Did We Come From? Where are We Going?” – Dan Brown

In seeking to answer two brazenly simple questions, in one respect we must revisit the areas on which we have already spent much time and paid much attention. In another respect, we must use that knowledge and information to project into the future.

What is now clear is that the Republican Party has a long and storied history of evolution. That is about as broad and inclusive a statement as I can possibly make while remaining true to the facts of the matter. What began as progressive and inclusive with Lincoln has now shifted to populist and exclusive under Trump. Yet simultaneously what began as a party of protectionism and tariffs under Lincoln continues as a party of the same under Trump, despite changes throughout party history toward that end. Along these same lines, the party’s ideology has changed countless times over the decades. To this end much detail has been paid and provided. It is needless to say that what we now experience with the GOP is unprecedented, though not unimaginable. There have been populist and demagogic politicians who taken the mantle of the Republican Party for decades. What is new is the success of their cause, not their cause itself.

In short, this thesis has sought to provide the information with which one conclusion can be most easily drawn: that the seemingly unimaginable phenomenon of the election of Donald Trump is not so. It is neither unimaginable nor phenomenon. The likes of Donald Trump have existed in GOP and American politics for decades, and will likely continue to exist well into the future. Over them we hold one measure of control: our ability to determine their success. When we prevent it, they are relegated to the ash-heap of history, as men vital to an overall story of America and our politics but not vital to our society and our values. When we allow their success, we see the ramifications and effects

in our everyday lives. The attacks on vital institutions of society and government. The permeating and infectious anti-intellectualism which is required for such a brand of politics to exist and thrive.

I do not blame the politicians of our past. As a politician, one has a singular aim: election. Following achievement of that aim, another: re-election. The Republican Party has evolved over its history, that much is undoubtedly true. Yet the same voices have existed throughout. It is what we choose to believe, what we choose to vote for, and what we choose to lead us and our society which matters most. There have been populist demagogues since the beginning of time and the beginning of this nation and the beginning of the Grand Old Party. The only difference is that we have allowed them to lead us at certain times, while stopping their rise at others. The reason for this boils down simply to our own knowledge, our own fears, our own biases, and our own values.

To where we are headed is up to us entirely. If we choose to continue along our current path and trajectory, we can expect much of the same, if not worse. If we choose to change, the future and the potential is limitless. What I know for sure is that we cannot reach our fullest potential under present leadership, present values, and present beliefs.

The Republican Party and this nation can once again dream impossible dreams, and achieve them. Yet when we participate willingly in the politics of fear, of the hatred and paranoia of the other, we simply cannot. The future is ours for the taking. Let us seize it, with understanding of how we arrived in our present situation, and full knowledge of where we are headed and where we can go together.

As Colette Werden said, "It's ok if you fall down and lose your spark. Just make sure that when you get back up, you rise as the whole damn fire."

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