THE RADICAL RIGHT
Third Edition

Daniel Bell, editor

With a new introduction by David Plotke
Afterword by Daniel Bell
THE RADICAL RIGHT
To
SAMUEL M. LEVITAS
(1896–1961)
Executive Editor of The New Leader
In Memoriam
this book is personally dedicated
CONTENTS

The Contributors ix

Introduction to the Transaction Edition xi

Preface lxxvii

1. The Dispossessed (1962) 1
   DANIEL BELL

2. Interpretations of American Politics (1955) 47
   DANIEL BELL

3. The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt (1955) 75
   RICHARD HOFSTADTER

4. Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited:
   A Postscript (1962) 97
   RICHARD HOFSTADTER

5. The Intellectuals and the Discontented
   Classes (1955) 105
   DAVID RIESMAN and NATHAN GLAZER

6. The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes:
   Some Further Reflections (1962) 137
   DAVID RIESMAN

7. The Revolt Against the Elite (1955) 161
   PETER VIERECK

8. The Philosophical “New Conservatism” (1962) 185
   PETER VIERECK
| CONTENTS |
|------------------------|-------|
| 9. Social Strains in America (1955) | Talcott Parsons |
| 10. Social Strains in America: A Postscript (1962) | Talcott Parsons |
| 13. The Sources of the "Radical Right" (1955) | Seymour Martin Lipset |
| 14. Three Decades of the Radical Right: Coughlinites, McCarthytites, and Birchers (1962) | Seymour Martin Lipset |
| Afterword (2001): From Class to Culture | 447 |
| Acknowledgments | 505 |
| Index | 507 |
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Two sets of vivid images capture the dramatic course of the American right over the last quarter century. A triumphant President Ronald Reagan provides the primary images. In the 1980s he often seemed to beam with the confidence of having achieved great success. His position as the most effective and influential president of recent decades seems secure, even among those who remain strongly opposed to most of his policies. His administrations receive substantial credit for ending the Cold War on American terms, even as debate continues about the sources and meaning of this momentous result.

The horrible bombing of a major government building in Oklahoma City provides a second set of enduring images, full of death and destruction. Timothy McVeigh, the author of this act, was linked to shadowy parts of the contemporary ultraright. Facing his execution in 2001, McVeigh affirmed the political rage and bitterness that led him to engage in spectacular terrorism against the American state.

Reaganism, the dominant outlook of the modern American right, has roots that go back to conservative intellectual and political movements of the 1950s and 1960s, including currents which in those years were deemed marginal and extremist. The roots of the ultraright of the 1990s have intersecting, though by no means identical, sources. Thus, one route from
the conservative milieus of 1950–64 led toward national power and redefining the terms of American political argument. Another led toward a furtive and conspiratorial network of ultraright militants and terrorists.

To understand these developments it makes sense to look at analyses of the American right in the first two decades after World War II. A serious evaluation of the American right of those years might well begin with *The Radical Right*, which was first published in 1963. The book is an expanded and updated version of *The New American Right*, published in 1955. The 1963 edition remains one of the best books about the modern American right. *The New American Right* focused on McCarthyism as a political and a social phenomenon. *The Radical Right* reprinted the main essays from that volume. It also examined the new right of the early 1960s and included the authors' reflections on their prior evaluations of McCarthyism.

I

*The Radical Right's Argument*

In the United States, McCarthyism is part of history rather than a fact of daily political life. Yet if Joseph McCarthy's efforts partly expressed frustration and anger at modernizing forces that proved hard to resist, they also helped chart a political course that has been expanded and reshaped by notable figures. The list of those who were influenced by McCarthy, and who were willing to defend at least parts of his project, includes Goldwater, Nixon, Reagan, and Gingrich. This list signals the enduring political influence of elements of the far right of the first two decades after World War II.

What were the main positions and the composition of these distinctive forces on the right in the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s? What warranted calling them radical? *TRR*'s authors recognized the vehement opposition of these currents to domestic and international Communism, their sharp rejection of the New Deal, and their difficulty in distinguishing between the two. *TRR*'s controversial point of departure was to regard the basic positions of what it termed the radical right
as so excessive in their estimation of the Communist threat and so unrealistic in their rejection of New Deal reforms as to be unreasonable. Thus Richard Hofstadter cited the "dense and massive irrationality" of the radical right (Richard Hofstadter, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt," 81). From this starting point the authors sought to understand the radical right in ways that went beyond the programs and self-descriptions of its leaders and organizers (Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed," 8, 13; Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Sources of the 'Radical Right,'" 360–65; Talcott Parsons, "Social Strains in America," 209). In this context "radical" was intended not merely as a way to underline that these groups were very conservative in conventional left-right terms, but to stress that these currents aimed at a real break with prevailing institutions and practices, though they disagreed among themselves about just how profound a break was required.

The key argument of *The Radical Right* explained the phenomenon of McCarthyism and its political successors in terms of conflicts over social status and the shape of American culture. The introductory essay by Daniel Bell focused on the social dislocation of significant groups in the post-New Deal decades. Many members of these groups perceived themselves as dispossessed and victimized by recent changes, even if it was not possible to regard them as having undergone any great suffering. Richard Hofstadter's essay focused on his concept of status politics. Hofstadter linked McCarthyism to prior forms of American radicalism that blamed opaque processes and concealed forces for creating disorder and uncertainty. Thus McCarthyism echoed pre-New Deal modes of political and social radicalism in its hyperbole and inclination toward conspiratorial views of political life. Seymour Martin Lipset elaborated the status politics view. He also traced the recent history of radicalism on the right, linking McCarthyism to populist anti-Communism in the 1930s. Nathan Glazer and David Riesman emphasized the resentful anti-elitism that suffused the radical right in the 1950s, and considered why intellectuals had trouble responding effectively. For Peter Viereck, this populist radicalism and anti-elitism were nota-
bly distant from any genuine conservatism. The wide support for such positions marked the failure of the American right to police its own precincts. Talcott Parsons emphasized the inability of the radical right to reconcile itself to modernizing imperatives.

The authors of *The Radical Right* converged in regarding McCarthyism and the radical right of the early 1960s as a distorted and unrealistic response to Communism. A major source of this distortion was the inability of relevant social groups to recognize or cope with status changes that had been generated by postwar prosperity. There was a Communist threat, at least internationally, and there were deep social changes in the United States. McCarthyism was distinguished by its unreflective linking of these realities, which resulted in an outpouring of anger and resentment at allegedly disloyal elites.

McCarthyism was anti-elitist, conspiratorial, and fevered. For the authors of *The Radical Right*, this linked McCarthyism both to American traditions of populist radicalism and to previous expressions of authoritarian radicalism on the right. Here the authors were easily misinterpreted to mean either that McCarthyism was literally continuous in social and organizational terms with prior populist movements; or that McCarthyism was wholly a popular movement of the intolerant and fanatical. In part, this reading was fostered by the authors' attempts to distance themselves from Marxist and Progressive readings of the political right in which its popular forms merely reflect the schemes of reactionary elites. The authors' main point is now familiar. Once a movement introduces durable themes into a national political culture or tradition, those themes (or discourses) become widely available to later forces who may not be identical in aims or composition to those who came before them.

*The Radical Right* viewed its subject as historically rooted rather than episodic or spontaneous. It considered these forces to have a mass character and a real popular following. They did not simply express the strategies of other political agents, notably conservative Republican elites or business groups. In the large literature on the American right it remains distinc-
tive to consider the radical right as historically rooted, mass, and popular. By historically rooted I mean that *The Radical Right* linked the upsurge of radical right activity and thought in the 1950s and early 1960s to aspects of prior political efforts and discourses, from Populism in the 1890s through Coughlin in the 1930s. Each of these links can be debated. The point is that the postwar radical right did not emerge simply as a response to special Cold War circumstances. By mass and popular, I mean that the authors consider the radical right to have gained significant support and widespread sympathy. If these currents were almost certain to remain a minority, especially in such variants as the John Birch society, they were by no means inconsequential. The diversity of their support indicates that we are talking about more than a narrow sectarian outburst. The authors of *TRR* argued that the political initiatives of the radical right expressed and partly articulated general social tensions. Its leaders and main organizations developed political views, rather than taking isolated positions for narrow or purely instrumental reasons.

*The New American Right* and *The Radical Right* occasioned debate in academic circles and beyond. Among the criticisms of the book's arguments, four stand out for their enduring interest.

From the right—and not only the radical right—there was general hostility to the basic project of *The Radical Right*. Its starting point was rejected in favor of the view that McCarthyism was a reasonable, if sometimes excessive, reaction to the genuine threat of Communism. If McCarthy's methods were dubious, and his claims about the extent of domestic Communist influence were inflated, these were partial errors rather than grave misjudgments that could warrant defining his project as unreasonable. Critics on the right thus took issue with the basic effort to find status or other dynamics to explain McCarthyism. In their view, there was no need to search for latent sources of a political effort whose manifest self-description was close enough to the truth to require that it be treated with the same respect accorded other reasonable political forces.

From a different political direction several analysts, nota-
bly Nelson Polsby (and later Michael Rogin), charged *TRR* with missing the obvious—that McCarthyism was a political force primarily among Republicans. Its dynamic, in this view, had more to do with political and strategic maneuvers in and around that party than with any allegedly deeper social and cultural forces. For some proponents of this view, *TRR*'s judgment of McCarthyism as unreasonable missed its strategic rationality for parts of the Republican right. McCarthy was a useful club, for a time, with which to beat Democratic leaders and elites.

It was consistent with this view, though not logically required by it, for critics on the left to argue that *TRR* went wrong whenever and to whatever extent it sought to depict McCarthyism as having a popular and mass dimension. At the political level, this critique meant emphasizing the links between McCarthyism and conservative Republican forces. At the social level, this meant trying to refute claims about the popular and multiclass character of McCarthy's supporters. At the cultural level, the aim was to reject any association of the authoritarian elements of the radical right with working class and other nonelite social groups. In historical terms, the idea was to mark off the radical right of the postwar decades as sharply as possible from the populism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, so the latter might remain as a source of democratic inspiration for contemporary reformers and radicals.

Finally, several commentators on *TRR* argued that the central concepts of status politics, dispossession, and related concepts were not specified clearly and were therefore hard to assess accurately.

In the decades since the publication of *TRR*, these critiques have remained alive in debates about how to understand radical right politics. Whenever the radical right is analyzed in terms of status and cultural conflicts, critics counter that its significance lies mainly in political conflicts among party factions. Others point out that the radical right's initiatives are in some sense functional for the projects of the right as a whole. And analysts debate whether and in what sense the radical right has gained a genuinely popular character.
These debates are most pertinent at times when the broader right has made its largest advances. One notable moment was the late 1960s and early 1970s. A second important moment was the early 1980s, when making sense of Reaganism and the "new right" was obviously necessary. A third important moment was marked by the conservative electoral shift in the mid-1990s associated with Newt Gingrich and the "Contract with America."

While the arguments of TRR have been vigorously criticized, its framework has not been replaced by a better way of understanding its subject. Arguments about how to interpret the presence and intermittent growth of a radical right have most often counterposed views like those in TRR to theories in which the radical right acts as a commando force on behalf of more respectable rightist forces. The latter accounts are at times partly true, but rarely do much explanatory work because they do not illuminate why such initiatives sometimes gain substantial popularity and at other points fail badly.

Three questions arise in reconsidering TRR's account of the radical right in the 1950s and 1960s:

First, how should one assess TRR's evaluation of McCarthyism and the Birch Society?

Second, what does this analysis suggest about the course of the American right after the early 1960s?

Third, how should one assess the theoretical and conceptual efforts of TRR? I will consider this question mainly in terms of TRR's account of the radical right and the implications of that account for analyzing the subsequent development of the right in American politics. Given the broad theoretical interests of the authors, this question raises general issues. One concerns the role of psychological categories and evaluations in evaluating political protest. Another concerns the theoretical implications of the concept of status politics.

II

McCarthyism and American Politics

I begin with the book's judgments of McCarthyism and the radical right of the early 1960s. How should we evaluate the
authors' analyses? We can gauge their efforts partly by weighing TRR's arguments against those of its critics.

Was McCarthyism Reasonable?

The question is not whether McCarthy's judgments and tactics were valid. The issue is whether they were sufficiently defective to be regarded as unreasonable. Was it legitimate for the authors to consider McCarthyism and its successors in the 1960s to be lacking in basic judgment to such an extent that no account with explanatory aims could simply take these forces on their own terms? Conservative critics of TRR recognized the importance of TRR's depiction of McCarthyism as essentially unreasonable. On that basis alone they rejected the book.

Here the substance of TRR's position remains valid. To consider a political position or project as unreasonable entails claims about both its validity and its forms of expression. The basic point of McCarthyism was that American society was at grave risk of internal subversion from Communists and their sympathizers. Yet no such large and grave risk of internal Communist subversion existed by the early 1950s. Communists had been present in the government in the 1930s and 1940s. They had gained prominence in cultural life, and substantial influence in the mass movements affiliated with the New Deal, primarily the trade unions. By the time of McCarthy's initial prominence in 1950, however, loyalty investigations and purges had been underway for years in all these areas. The Communist Party was politically marginal, on its own and in the broader Popular Front milieus that had withered in the first years of the Cold War.

Democratic foreign policies were more consistently anti-Communist in an active, internationalist form than the policies proposed by most conservative Republicans. McCarthyism might be depicted as a reasonable but excessive response to Communism if its domestic hyperbole were compensated for by advocacy of a coherent and plausible foreign policy. No such policy was proposed. Among the reasons for this absence, lingering divisions about internationalism among conservative Republicans certainly figured.
TRR's depiction of McCarthyism as basically unreasonable is more accurate than considering the latter as a reasonable if excessive response to a dire internal threat. This does not grant a license to deny any forms of rationality to the proponents of McCarthyism. It does justify widening the explanatory lens in something like the manner that the authors of TRR recommend. This means looking at social and cultural forces that might be implicated in generating support for McCarthy's project.

TRR's position also means that McCarthy's wild speeches and statements signified something, and that it is worth considering what they meant. Unless one takes the position that political discourses don't matter at all (as against behavior or some other factor) one only needs to read a few of McCarthy's speeches to see that he was distinctive. He was unusual and at times innovative in his fury, his willingness to name and attack individuals, his disrespect for liberal norms, and his intensely resentful criticism of elites. He often laced his arguments with strong claims of conspiracy, as in 1951 when he grouped George Marshall and Dean Acheson as members of "a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man."10

McCarthyism as a Republican Strategy?

Several commentators criticized TRR for failing to appreciate the obvious: McCarthy's supporters were largely Republican, and his efforts aided Republicans who wanted to reduce Democratic power. Taken too narrowly this claim would not make sense, however, because TRR's authors clearly recognized both points. The force of the argument is that McCarthyism can best be explained as a conservative Republican initiative.

This criticism is limited by an apparent misunderstanding of what TRR was trying to explain. The aim was not to explain the existence of conservative Republicans. Nor was the aim to explain the attraction of McCarthyism for some of them, although this attraction was noted (Lipset, "The Sources of the 'Radical Right,'" 345).
What needed explanation was the emergence of McCarthyism as a relatively broad and occasionally successful effort to reshape national political discourse and to influence the results of elections. The presence of conservative Republicans who generally agreed with McCarthy cannot explain these results, as such currents had existed from the early New Deal to the 1950s. Numerous attempts had been made to undermine the New Deal and Democratic power by denouncing Communist influence and assailing the radicalism of the new state agencies and programs. Most such efforts failed to produce major political results.

Why did McCarthyism get so much further, even if its supporters (and some opponents) overstated its successes? The main relevant factors cited by Polsby were linked to a changing international situation in which Communism loomed large and American power was newly challenged. But such factors would be much more salient in explaining a McCarthyism that did not exist. This McCarthyism would have focused clearly on the Soviet Union and its allies and would have posed a compelling alternative to the containment strategy developed by the Truman administration.

Several critics suggested a similar but subtler explanation for the rise of McCarthyism. In this view, McCarthyism's brief ascent as a significant political force was due to the fact that conservative and even centrist Republicans regarded it as a valuable device for damaging Democrats. The idea is that Republican leaders were happy to see someone attack the Democratic leadership in an unqualified and even brutal way. They were also pleased that the critic and his main associates were far enough away from them so that they did not have to bear much responsibility for the attacks.

This might have been a provocative explanation: McCarthyism grew from a minor current to a substantial political force because Republican elites encouraged and benefited from it. We would not need to refer to status politics or to make any other social and cultural argument to account for something that could be explained by the adroit maneuvering of Republican leaders.
Yet the proponents of this argument did not develop or support it seriously. They did not show that Republican elites actually did manage events to produce such a result; in fact, no one has shown that this occurred. A more likely story is that McCarthyism emerged mainly apart from any explicit strategic intervention or calculation by Republican national leaders. Center and center-right Republicans were ambivalent about McCarthy even while Truman was in power. They appreciated his strident anti-Democratic attacks, but not his evident disrespect for authority. Ambivalence became opposition for many leading Republicans when Eisenhower's victory was not matched by any new restraint from McCarthy. Instead, he continued and even expanded his attacks on national elites.

If this account is basically accurate, we cannot explain McCarthyism primarily in terms of elite Republican maneuvers. (And we are therefore not forced onto the shaky ground of "who benefits?" arguments.) Instead, we return to the problem of understanding how political currents that had been marginal in the 1930s and 1940s gained so much attention and achieved at least a few notable political victories in the 1950s, even while taking more extreme and extravagant forms.

Yet another strategic and political account of McCarthyism might start by emphasizing not the unsurprising elements of McCarthy's support but its more distinctive features. Public opinion data available on McCarthyism do show that the strongest support for McCarthy came from conservative Republicans and the strongest supporters of the Republican Party (analytically distinct categories that were often identified). But it is misleading to leave the characterization of McCarthyism's support at that point. First, if one brackets "strong Republicans," support for McCarthy was similar among all other groups defined by their party identification. Roughly 10 percent of weak Republicans and of Democrats of all types avowed their support for McCarthy. Second, support for McCarthy was relatively strong among a number of primarily Democratic social groups.

These factors suggest a significant strategic dimension to McCarthyism. McCarthy did not simply rally the troops, as-
sembling the most conservative parts of the Republican Party to reenact their routine defeats by supporters of the New Deal. While McCarthy certainly mobilized conservative Republicans, what made his effort distinctive was its ability to cut into the Democratic coalition and gain support from among pro-Democratic social forces. Seen in this light, McCarthyism appears as an early effort to break apart the national Democratic coalition "from below." It is less the predecessor of the exotic radical right currents of the early 1960s than of parts of the Goldwater campaign and of the Wallace movement of the second half of the 1960s. To appreciate this strategic dimension of McCarthyism would mean emphasizing what was unusual in its approach, rather than focusing on its continuity with traditional conservative Republicanism.

The critique of TRR for not recognizing the obvious is unsatisfactory. It misunderstands what needs to be explained, which was not the presence of Republican conservatism, but its vitality and intermittent success after years of failure. The more interesting strategic elements of McCarthyism were linked to its political and social novelty.

*McCarthyism and Populism*

An important criticism of TRR charged it with failing to understand American Populism and wrongly identifying McCarthy and his supporters as heirs to that movement. This charge was developed in Michael Rogin's 1967 book, *McCarthy and the Intellectuals*. Partly following Polsby's critique, Rogin emphasized the conservative and Republican sources of McCarthy's support. His argument was based on analyzing electoral data in Wisconsin and the Dakotas. These data showed considerable discontinuities between the geographic (and thus social) sources of McCarthy's support and support for earlier Populist and Progressive campaigns.

*TRR*'s claims about the populist dimension of McCarthyism are often loosely formulated (Lipset, "Sources of the 'Radical Right,'" 335). Yet they are not really refuted by Rogin's analysis. He showed that there was not a high degree of continuity between the organizations and constituencies of post-
World War I populism and progressivism in the upper Midwest and McCarthyism. TRR's authors sometimes made claims that are vulnerable to this rejoinder. However, their main argument regarding populism was not about specific organizations or even constituencies. Hofstadter, Bell, and others proposed that McCarthy's popularity derived partly from his ability to link up with elements of a durable populist tradition that had resonance in numerous political and social locations.

This difference registers a familiar disagreement among analysts of American Populism of the late 19th century and its successors. Defenders of the earlier movement generally stay close to its original and primary organizations, and then focus on successor political forms that were located clearly on the left. Those who are less convinced of the virtues of Populism define the phenomenon more broadly to include a variety of political figures and movements. Rogin's book strongly advanced the first conception. He vigorously criticized what he took to be an underlying fear of popular movements and mass democratic politics in TRR. McCarthyism, in his view, was not populism at all, but a mobilization of familiar strands of extreme conservatism. Thus imputing the authoritarian and sinister elements of McCarthyism to populism is not only wrong but also a clear expression of a fearful and distrustful stance toward popular politics.

For historians of American politics in the 19th century, this continues to be an interesting controversy. As regards the American right in the second half of the twentieth century, this debate was settled soon after Rogin's book appeared, insofar as such debates can ever be settled by actual political events. With the national prominence of George Wallace in the late 1960s and early 1970s it was obvious that populist motifs in American political culture were available to a wide array of political forces. American populism is varied and complex in its meanings. There is no way to expel McCarthy from a diverse tradition that includes several versions of Tom Watson and William Jennings Bryan, Robert La Follette and Father Coughlin, and Huey Long and George Wallace. Innumerable Southern racists have relied on populist themes, while in the
1980s Jesse Jackson used populist arguments to try to expand his electoral base to include more white voters. In the 1990s, Patrick Buchanan deployed populist motifs as part of his attack on the Republican national leadership. Part of the novelty and dynamism of McCarthyism derived from McCarthy’s willingness to experiment with populist themes, a course that much of the Republican leadership regarded with skepticism or disdain.

*Status Politics?*

What does one make of the core argument that McCarthyism was driven by the status concerns of groups whose positions had been disrupted by economic and social growth?

I will discuss this argument at length later. In my view, this conception was (and remains) provocative and fruitful, despite being loosely formulated. It was a more promising route toward explaining McCarthyism than the two main alternatives on the table in the 1950s and 1960s. One of these was to identify McCarthyism as a conservative Republican mobilization. The other was to claim that this mobilization served the interests of reactionary elites and was thereby caused by them. In this context, *TRR*’s argument about status politics opened important questions that otherwise would not have been addressed.

*Diagnosis and Criticism*

If McCarthyism was unreasonable, does that imply that psychological categories are needed to understand its proponents? One current of argument, though not primary in *TRR*, suggests an affirmative answer. This might be the weakest part of the book (Hofstadter, “Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited: A Postscript,” 99–100; David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, “The Intellectuals and the Discontented Classes,” 118).

In the 1950s and later, analysts of political and social life often used psychological categories to explain the choices and views of those with whom they strongly disagreed. This approach substitutes psychological for political categories in a way that is often problematic. It tends to presume rather than
show that a political position is unreasonable and further presumes that the problem is psychological. Such an approach might have been valid for some of the cases with which TRR's authors were concerned. There were notably disturbed people among those involved in the McCarthy effort, and that was clearly the case with the Birchers and the radical right of the early 1960s.

Yet even here the clinical approach does not do much explanatory work. It is difficult to explain a political position or action as a function of psychic conflict and disturbance. To do so requires knowing more about the subject (and about the clinical theory used to make such a judgment) than social scientists and historians usually know.

The history of the right after TRR poses further problems. If the positions of the 1950–63 radical right expressed psychological disturbance, then today such problems appear at the center of the Republican Party, in the Speaker's office, and on the Supreme Court. If it is disturbed to be angry and on the fringe, how can we explain the capacity of such forces to enter and transform mainstream American politics?

The clinical approach also threatens a key argument of TRR. The concept of status politics implies that rightist activism is a plausible form of politics, not one distinctly in need of psychological explanation. If status politics is a relatively common political mode, why shouldn't individuals who experience a decline in status try to recoup their losses? Moreover, it is in the nature of losing status that recovering it is an uncertain and risky process, one apt to be full of passion.

Such difficulties have led to problems for those whose political view of the right is mainly critical. Beginning with TRR, critics use psychoanalysis in discussing McCarthy, Nixon, Reagan, and others on the right, and use political interpretation and argument in assessing the right’s critics and opponents. The tendency to treat one’s friends as healthy (even if misguided) and one’s enemies as disordered seems hard to resist.

We are probably better off starting with social and political causes and addressing the issues raised by substantive arguments. Since TRR was published, political ideas that were
then widely regarded as crazy have become a major part of national discourse. Such ideas include the following: government is generally terrible, taxes are close to theft, and evolution is no more legitimate a view than the Bible’s account of creation.

As these examples suggest, in considering political discourses and arguments it is no easy matter to distinguish the politically unreasonable from the clinically irrational. Both concepts are valid, yet both are very difficult to define and employ precisely, and both are vulnerable to partisan misuse. Here TRR’s difficulties designate a zone of problems that largely remain unsettled and unsettling.

The Problem of Pseudoconservatism

One strand of The Radical Right still merits attention although it was not often debated when the book’s merits were first assessed. The authors identify and reject a politics that claims to be conservative but strives with vigor and passion to change political and social life. This conservatism wants to undermine conventional practices. When its proponents urge overturning corrupt forms and punishing betrayers, the impulse is disruptive and even rageful.

This critique accompanies complaints about the lack of a proper conservatism. As against the bully Joseph McCarthy and the paranoid Robert Welch (head of the John Birch Society in the early 1960s), where is the responsible right? Such a right would respect authority. It would be resolutely committed to liberal procedures. It would accept at least limited state action, with the aim of maintaining political and social decency. Such a right might even hesitate before giving unqualified support to the market (Viereck, “The Philosophical ‘New Conservatism,’” 197–201).

The Radical Right contrasts the actual radical right with this conception of a responsible right. Yet something like this latter, more reasonable right had a major national presence in the Eisenhower administration and the Republican Party’s center. Should the radical right have emulated this moderate right? That would have undermined its rationale. Eisenhower, after
all, appeared to the radical right as a moderate conservative who changed nothing.

Perhaps the aim is subtler—the authors mean to indict the right edge of respectable opinion (Robert Taft in the early 1950s, the conservative wing of Richard Nixon’s coalition in the early 1960s) for not policing their own right flanks more vigorously. The authors of TRR may have believed or hoped that the radical right would be replaced by a more energetic version of Taft. This new right would reject libertarian as well as populist temptations.

TRR’s authors claim that McCarthyism revealed how much of the right was aggressively uncivil. The post-World War II radical right mistrusts authority even when speaking favorably of it (Hofstadter, “The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt,” 76–77). When authority figures appear politically unreliable, this right is quick not only to attack individuals but also to attack their institutions and question their legitimacy. From McCarthy on (to Wallace and Buchanan, one might add) this radical right has charged opponents with an elitist domination of American political and cultural life (as in the national media, liberal Protestant denominations, and elite universities).

The Radical Right helps explain why, from the early 1950s on, the most successful elements of the American right have not been committed to temperate and sober modes of conservatism. The civil and responsible conservatives that the authors of The Radical Right preferred to the radical right can be found at several points in American politics in later decades. But these forces were not often leaders or victors, as they seem to lack imagination or dynamism. Alone and even as leaders of coalitions they are often easy targets for centrist or center-left modernizers in national politics (Kennedy against Nixon, Carter against Ford, Clinton against Bush). A restrained and temperate conservatism, which mainly emphasizes order, can make little headway on its own without alliances that include other more dynamic forces on the right. In a fluid and unsettled social context, much of the American right will have strong commitments to growth and mobility. This openness to change, in which many conservatives will support calls for
thorough transformation and renewal, makes it hard for a conventional party of order to succeed.

**The Merit of The Radical Right**

*The Radical Right* is at times marred by overstatement. Its arguments about status politics are imprecise. It pays too little attention to the strategic uses of McCarthyism in national politics. Its use of psychological categories is sometimes partisan. But its virtues are far more important and long-lasting than these defects. *TRR* recognized the novelty and importance of McCarthyism without overstating its reach or potential. It tried to link that political force both to distinctive currents of postwar social and cultural life and to more durable patterns of American politics. Its main arguments about status politics, the limits of traditionalist conservatism, and the ambivalence of the populist tradition in the United States remain productive and interesting. Thus *TRR* provides a valuable point of departure for analyzing the American right and American politics from the early 1960s to the end of the century.

III

**The Changing Shape of the Right, 1965–2001**

*TRR* was published soon before a crucial development for the American right—the nomination of Barry Goldwater as Republican candidate for President in 1964. In one sense this event confirmed the analysis of the authors of *TRR*. It demonstrated the growing weakness of moderate conservatives, whose inability to control their own political territory opened the way for more aggressive forces.

**The Goldwater Moment**

Despite his massive defeat, Goldwater's campaign reduced the marginality of the radical right. His campaign built a new and durable road from the radical right into national politics, and made clear what had to be done to keep this road open. Threats to dismantle all the social welfare policies of the 1930s and 1940s, and to do so soon, had to go. So did loose talk
about nuclear confrontation; aggressive claims that major public figures were effectively Communist in their outlook; and claims of conspiracy about everything from the Supreme Court to fluoridated water.16

Parts of the radical right of the 1950s and 1960s continued to enter mainstream national politics after the Goldwater campaign. There was mutual influence, as some of the views and elements of the style of the radical right of the first postwar decades were assimilated by leading figures on the broader right in the 1960s and 1970s. The form and extent of this incorporation varied. But radical right elements were dynamic and had a significant role in the successes of notable political actors such as in Wallace’s populism, Reagan’s antistatism, and later in Buchanan’s nativism.

These volatile elements were not simply a burden for the right as a whole. The picture became more complex with the rise of new and vigorous political forces concerned mainly with cultural and social questions. Regarding such issues as abortion, homosexuality, and prayer in school, it became difficult to draw a sharp line between the radical right and more conventional forms of conservatism. After 1964, the distance between the main centers of Republican power and less extreme currents of the radical right (William F. Buckley, Jr., for example) diminished greatly.

**Placing the Radical Right**

Deep changes have occurred in national politics since *TRR* was published. The political spectrum has moved well to the right, and many whose positions resemble those of the radical right of 1950–62 have gained important national positions. With each overall shift to the right, the space of the radical right has been replenished with new themes and elements. The most militant sections of the radical right have given rise to an ultraright that is fully antagonistic toward public authority and sometimes encourages terrorism. A dynamic of centrist has not prevailed (in which radical tendencies would either moderate or be marginalized in favor of less radical currents), even if some major Republican leaders sincerely employ a centrist political style.
In this context does “radical right” designate a viewpoint or a characteristic political location with respect to other forces? It is not possible to separate these approaches entirely, but the distinction is needed to get a clear image of the radical right in relation to the right as a whole. I start with a relational view and then look at substantive commitments.

In relational terms, the radical right is defined by its place far to the right on the political spectrum. The scale of protest from this area has expanded. In the mid-1950s and early 1960s the predominance and relative coherence of American progressive liberalism in both thematic and institutional terms made it relatively easy to map the forces to its right. To begin, there was the loyal opposition, such as Thomas Dewey. There were constitutional opponents of the regime such as Robert Taft in the early 1950s. They wanted to get rid of Democratic domination but did not routinely attack the loyalties of Democratic leaders and rarely hinted at unconventional forms of politics. Taft disputed the national regime’s policies and perspectives, but he did not reject its constitutional right to exist.

Starting with part of Taft’s supporters, other forces on the right emphasized the need to make a fundamental break with the Democratic regime. Some claimed that the New Deal order was not only a fertile source of bad policies but also a morally damaged regime whose legitimacy was dubious. Part of the right defined itself as radical by proposing to end a noxious regime, not only to change particular New Deal policies. Thus a radical right rejects the national regime and aims to replace it. In relational terms, a radical right normally includes the most conservative parts of the Republican Party and more conservative positions outside it. The Radical Right correctly depicted this force as neither transitory nor an incipient majority. The radical right was a secondary political force in the 1950s and early 1960s, but it did not go away.

The Radical Right’s Viewpoint

If we analyze substantive themes rather than relative positions, a different story emerges. Since the early 1960s, political forces that were once marginal have become important.
Views that from the 1930s to the early 1960s were repeatedly defeated became acceptable and sometimes predominant in the 1980s and 1990s. The major shifts to the right of recent decades are signified by these events: Goldwater's nomination in 1964; Nixon's two presidential victories; Reagan's triumphs in 1980 and 1984; and the successes of conservative Republicans in Congress from 1994 on.

After the 1960s a vehement antistatism became respectable and even conventional. By the mid-1980s the New Deal was no longer taken for granted as the framework for American public policy. Political campaigns and initiatives often featured populist attacks on elites, especially those in government and cultural life. Tax revolts surged, and then diminished as special political events while the focus on cutting taxes and reducing government became routine. Political figures often affirmed religious commitments as both a good thing for individuals and a valid part of public life.

Here the main dynamic was not centrist. Instead, the positions initially proposed by the right took up more space and redefined the political center. Further to the right, traditional conservatism grew and its themes spread toward the center. The radical right expanded and then divided between a far right that opposes the regime through legal means and a militant ultraright that sometimes rejects legality.

In this new configuration, views not far to the left of Barry Goldwater in 1964 (absent some of his provocative rhetoric) are now frequently depicted and perceived as centrist, or barely to the right of center (President George Bush). Positions very close to those of Goldwater not only gain respect but sometimes dominate national politics (Reagan, Gingrich).

This process of change is illustrated in Table 1. The overall political spectrum has shifted notably to the right, as from T1 to T4 in the table. Thus a position well to the right of center in the early 1960s (position x) had become centrist as of the 1990s without undergoing deep substantive changes. Within the terms of that shift to the right, a centrist logic operates at any given point. This centrism appears within a broader process of political redefinition. In this context, sec-
All these changes do not mean that the radical right analyzed in TRR has defined a new common sense for the entire American polity. Yet a range of radical right ideas (opposition to virtually all government regulation, rejection of the entire welfare state, etc.) has grown in significance and now appears across a much larger part of the political spectrum. Descendants of those who filled the political zone from Taft to McCarthy can be found not only on the fringes of politics but in powerful and influential positions (such as William Rehnquist and Richard Cheney).

In this process the pro-McCarthy right, the religious far right, the least extreme of the anti-Communist activists of the early 1960s, and their many successors have faced a problem that confronts radicals who find themselves closer to real power than they expected to be. They can join the new regime, or they can oppose it as little better than what it replaced. The first choice has meant supporting Nixon, Reagan, Gingrich, or George W. Bush. Thus major elements among radical right forces have often chosen to ally themselves with leading national Republicans and have thereby been able to gain significant positions and shape policies.

Many of the substantive positions of the postwar radical right now extend much further toward the political center than
they did before Goldwater. And the forces that occupy the same location as the radical right of the 1950s and early 1960s have become more radical both in their views and tactics. This space has been refilled with new and striking themes and with more militant conceptions of action. The rightward motion of the overall political spectrum continues, as newer themes of the radical right are readily available to the legitimate right and are influential in the choices of the right-center.

In the last three decades in the United States, the center of American politics has moved notably to the right. The main themes of the legitimate right—defined relationally as that part of the right capable of gaining serious national power and winning office—have also moved further to the right. A wide space has opened for varied forces whose predecessors were well to the right of what was the center of American politics when *TRR* was published.

*The Right’s Diversity*

*TRR* did not anticipate the overall shift to the right that has occurred, but almost no one did at the time. The authors of *TRR* took the radical right of the early 1950s and early 1960s seriously, and tried to link it to deep tendencies in American social and cultural life.

The shifts noted in the previous section have been driven primarily by the success of substantial parts of the right in defining a distinctive and frequently successful combination of themes. The prevailing formulations have linked strong support for the market in economic and social policy to deeply conservative cultural and social commitments. Reagan articulated this position forcefully. Candidates who take up this stance are not always victorious. But they most often dominate the broad right while they fare at least decently well in two-party competition.

It is properly the subject of another work to try to explain fully the dynamic that drives these large rightward shifts in the national political spectrum. Beyond the right’s thematic and organizational efforts, the weaknesses of the American left and center-left after the mid-1960s have been a large part of
the story. Following the achievement of historic reforms in racial politics and the passage of major social welfare legislation, this broad left has lacked the resources required to answer increasingly serious and powerful critiques from various parts of the right. This has allowed the right to weaken its mainstream opponents by identifying them with unpopular forms of leftist radicalism and by insisting loudly on the entire left's exhaustion.

A position committed both to the market and to cultural conservatism had to be built and developed in order to prevail within the right and to endure as a major national force. Comparing today's right with Eisenhower or even Taft in the 1950s, or with the Nixon of 1960, it becomes apparent that large shifts had to occur for leading sections of the right to consider that affirming traditional cultural values should be a major political theme.

The combination of antistatist and deeply pro-market economic views and traditionalist cultural and social commitments is not dictated by any purely conceptual logic. Parts of the left often tried to weaken this position by pointing out the apparent tension between the aversion to state action in economic and social welfare policies and the willingness to use government to defend traditional cultural values. This strategy was more clever than effective. Its proponents often made their critique in place of a substantive response to either half of the right's perspective. And they most often ignored the vulnerability of the left to the same charge of incoherence, as the left remained statist in economic policy while becoming nearly libertarian in cultural matters.

A dynamic combination of antistatism and cultural conservatism took shape in the 1960s and achieved full expression in the efforts of Reagan in the 1980s and the Congressional Republicans in the 1990s. (See Table 2.) This position is now the primary referent of the entire right in the U.S. Its ascendance is notable in comparative terms. Herbert Kitschelt has analyzed the contemporary radical right in Western Europe and concluded that its greatest chances of success arise when it combines pro-market economic policies with social
The irony is that what Kitschelt meant by success was managing to keep small parties afloat so they can win a few seats in parliament and some local elections. (His book appeared before the Austrian Freedom Party grew large enough to gain power as part of a coalition government in 2000). In the United States a similar combination of views contends for national leadership, and even when it does not win, it still shapes national policy and debate.

From the 1960s to the present the right has been striking for its expansion and differentiation. There remains a traditional conservative right which never accepted the New Deal and vigorously opposes major new government projects. This right is at home in the Republican Party. The lines have been blurred between this part of the right and what is now often called the Republican center. (The latter current is similar to what used to be considered mainstream conservative Republicanism.) Thus, such prominent national figures as President George Bush and Senator Robert Dole are often termed centrist. If we trace these individuals and their allies back to the 1960s and early 1970s, they were clearly on the conservative side of the Republican Party.
Major figures on the contemporary right, such as President George W. Bush and John McCain, are often centrist in their demeanor. As was dramatically the case in McCain's campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000, some of these figures are willing to distance themselves from the most conservative sections of the Republican party and forces to its right. They strive to appeal to what they consider to be the political center, and want to avoid taking steps that would polarize centrist forces against them. Yet in substantive terms these figures are centrist mainly because the overall political spectrum has moved even further to the right. What was once called liberal or centrist Republicanism (Rockefeller) has dwindled and in some regions disappeared altogether.

There has been a substantial populist right, whose recent roots lie partly in George Wallace's presidential campaigns. In the 1970s, the populist right was identified with efforts to limit or halt school desegregation and to cut government spending for social programs. In the 1980s, this force helped to generate a significant group of "Reagan Democrats" among lower middle class and working class whites.

With parts of this populist right, as well as other sections of the right, racial themes have played a major role, even if most of the right now claims to accept core elements of the Civil Rights Act. Racial conservatives who are suspicious of any new reform measures aimed at racial equality dominate the right. They also make communal appeals to whites as a group.

From the 1970s on, an important neoconservative right has been led by intellectuals previously identified with the Democratic center or center-right. Many of these people joined the Republican Party during the 1980s on domestic and foreign policy grounds. Few have returned to the Democratic Party.

There has been a great expansion of political action by conservative religious forces. From a core of evangelical Protestants in the 1970s, this mobilization has broadened to include other Christians who are not evangelical or fundamentalist in their orientation. Forces based on religious conservatism can
### Table 3
**Political Currents on the Right**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Market vs. State Allocation</th>
<th>Center Right</th>
<th>Far Right</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choice vs. Values</td>
<td>LR</td>
<td>SC</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LR</th>
<th>Liberal Republicanism (Arlen Specter)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Suburban Conservatism (John Rowland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR</td>
<td>Mainstream Republicanism (George W. Bush, Jeb Bush)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>Neoconservatism (Irving Kristol)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Traditional Conservatism (Robert Dole)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>Radical Right (Patrick Buchanan, Helen Chenoweth, Pat Robertson)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Greatly influence or win many local and state political contests. Yet the religious right is not an unquestioned authority within the right, even on its core cultural issues. Some of the disagreement comes from parts of what might be called a suburban right made up of voters in new occupations in newer cities and suburbs. These people tend to be conservative in economic matters, but not on social and cultural issues.

This inventory points to both the diversity and scale of the contemporary right (see Table 3). Along with the successes come problems. It is not easy to sustain mobilization, bridge wide thematic differences, and share power and positions among divergent forces. There is a temptation to reach too far and imagine that popular support for aspects of Reaganism and substantial parts of the right's perspective means approval for the full economic and social programs of the most conservative sections of the right. This temptation plagued Republicans in Congress after their great electoral successes in the mid-1990s. Newt Gingrich's inability to gauge the bases and limits of his success was a major reason for his rapid political decline after 1994.

Strong fundamentalist currents flourish on many parts of the right. They view their principles as wholly coherent and integrated, and strongly reject compromise. The presence of fundamentalists gives most strategic problems a sharp edge,
because some of those who must be included in major projects
are likely to reject as betrayal any major compromises of prin­
ciple or even tacit cooperation with the impure. Fundamen­
talists also threaten to play a card that is not common in na­
tional politics—they may leave the game. If total political vic­
tory is out of reach and the world remains corrupt, a retreat
deep into religious and communal networks is an inviting al­
ternative to politics.

Sometimes, as in 1992, fundamentalist currents have been
a large burden for Republican presidential candidates. At other
points these forces have played a mainly positive role in mo­
bilizing and organizing voters. On balance the challenging
presence of fundamentalism has not prevented the broader
right from contending seriously for national power.

IV

From McCarthy to the Militias

To maintain continuity with the analysis of TRR and to rec­
ognize the expansion and diversity of the contemporary right
requires a new distinction. A deep division has emerged in
what the authors termed the radical right. Now there exists both
a legitimate far right and a militant and sometimes violent
ultraright. This ultraright poses problems of explanation simi­
lar to those faced by the authors of TRR.

The national shift to the right has opened space for many
sections of the radical right to enter party politics. Some have
gained a presence in Congress and in state and local institu­
tions. What can now be called the far right extends from the
right of the legitimate political spectrum and shades off into
marginal and sectarian political thought and activism. The far
right has grown considerably in size, and its location resembles
that of McCarthyism and the less extreme parts of the radical
right of the early 1960s.

Estimating the size of political currents in and around the
two main parties has always been a tricky enterprise. The ex­
pansion of the primary system provides an improved basis for
making guesses. In 1992 Patrick Buchanan, whose political
career included service to Republican presidents and activism in the far right, strongly opposed incumbent President George Bush in Republican presidential primaries. He achieved notable successes, such as winning 37 percent of the vote in New Hampshire. Then in 1996 Buchanan ran again, with Robert Dole as his main opponent. In this year Buchanan received 21.6 percent of the total votes cast in Republican primaries. Perhaps Buchanan’s national reputation and his skills as a writer and performer inflated his showing. Yet his efforts can also be taken as a good measure of the radical right. To choose Buchanan, voters had to reject a clearly conservative administration in 1992 and then vote against a respected Republican conservative in 1996. If one takes Buchanan’s support to indicate the size of the radical right, his 21.6 percent of the Republican primary vote in 1996 translates into somewhat more than half of that figure as a proportion of the active national electorate.

The Shape of the Ultraright

Further to the right, more intransigent and militant groups form, mobilize, and splinter. Most of these groups are thoroughly alienated from conventional political life. These ultraright forces call for drastic political change, and at the extreme are willing to countenance violence against an oppressive state.

To cite the radical right of the 1950s and 1960s as a predecessor and source of recent ultraright currents is politically provocative because it highlights the common roots of the contemporary ultraright and the legitimate parts of the far right.

Direct biographical and organizational descent from the radical right of the early 1960s to the contemporary ultraright is hard to demonstrate in a way that has much explanatory force. There are gaps in the organizational forms of the radical right and shifts in the composition of its constituencies.

Yet the new ultraright is in substantial part linked to prior forces on the radical right. The thematic connections between TRR’s radical right and the contemporary ultraright are important. The key to making the connection is the intense
antistatism of the ultraright of the 1980s and 1990s. This was a founding theme for much of the postwar radical right, and has been expressed more ardently after the end of the Cold War. For many on the radical right, the existence of the Cold War rationalized at least the national security dimension of a vigorous American state. With the end of the Cold War, this justification is no longer plausible.

Today there is more concern with cultural questions on the ultraright, including those raised by feminism, than was typical of McCarthyism or the radical right of the early 1960s. Yet there was little or no feminist movement for the radical right to oppose in the 1950s and early 1960s. The question of abortion was barely on the public agenda. The focus of parts of the ultraright on family and gender matters is consistent with the prevalent cultural orientation of most earlier currents on the radical right (though not all—consistent libertarians would find no home in the contemporary ultraright).

Ultraright Militancy

In the 1990s, notable parts of the ultraright radicalized their demands and tactics. Smaller parts of this current supported political violence and terrorist conspiracies. While extremist militants of the ultraright comprise only a small portion of the radical right’s supporters, the numbers involved have been large enough to sustain considerable violence. Moreover, the lines dividing partisan action on behalf of the most radical parts of the Republican Party, sectarian agitation, and antigovernment militancy are not always sharp. This blurring of distinctions is not because any central committee seeks to provide cover for its militants by sowing confusion. It is due instead to the political success achieved by parts of the far right amid the overall rightward shift of American politics.

The most militant and sometimes violent tactics of the ultraright have unfolded along three main dimensions. First, there have been numerous disruptive and violent acts by militia groups and other ultraright currents. They have aimed primarily at challenging and disrupting the activities of the federal government and sometimes of state governments as well.
These tactics have accompanied claims that the federal government is illegitimate. Second, major violence has been directed against medical facilities and medical professionals who provide abortions. Third, episodes of racial violence have been launched from ultraright circles.

The first two of these forms of violence fly under the flag of demands relatively close to those of the broad American right. Calls to cut back the role of the state dramatically and attacks on a wide range of government activities are routine for much of the right. From mainstream Republicans through the far right, these attacks usually propose a deep change of course without claiming that the national state has become illegitimate (much less urging violent resistance). Nonetheless, it is accurate to say that parts of the ultraright propose to take illegal action on behalf of the antistatism that permeates the right as a whole.

With the abortion issue the thematic links are even closer. Proposals to make abortion very difficult if not impossible to obtain are a fixture of Republican national discourse. Many Republican and far right critiques of abortion insist on equating it with murder. If such claims were taken seriously, and abortion really were understood to be murder, then many forms of civil disobedience aimed at blocking the performance of abortions might be reasonable. And at least some militant action against practitioners, if carefully tailored to hinder only their medical activities, would at least merit serious discussion. Thus links between mainstream rightist discourse and ultraright actions are close and substantial.

The third strand of ultraright violence, which targets racial and ethnic minorities, is not directly connected to dominant rightist themes and ultraright actions. Most of the right, including the far right, is now nonracist in principle. Many on the right cite their egalitarian commitments as part of the basis for their opposition to affirmative action and other public efforts at racial reform.

But issues of race and ethnicity are not so simple. The right has consistently rejected reform projects in the area of race, including court-sponsored efforts to desegregate schools, af-
firmative action in education and employment, and districting plans aimed at increasing the presence of minority representatives in political bodies. In each case they have sought to argue against these projects in terms that are plausibly consistent with a liberal notion of racial equality. Yet a consistent record of opposition to racial reform has made the broad right a magnet for racists old and new. In this context, virulent racism has become part of ultraright politics. Racial violence in recent years has been the work of apparently isolated individuals or very small groups. These people have often been immersed in ultraright political milieus, but they do not appear to be acting on behalf of even the loose networks that exist among the militia or anti-abortion militants.

Ultraright violence from the 1980s on has had the following main features. First, the antigovernment ultraright has sponsored the most dramatic episodes of violence. This current combines radical antistatism with extreme variants of Christian fundamentalism. Second, the most sustained forms of disruption have been carried out by militant sections of the anti-abortion movement. Third, while the discourses of the militias and of Christian identity groups have been aggressive and threatening, the discourses of the most radical sections of the anti-abortion movement have been in some ways even more violent. They encourage direct action against abortion providers and facilities beyond what the militia groups usually propose for government officials. Fourth, despite the decline of ultraright violence since Oklahoma City, a tightly organized core of activists remains involved in the militia groups and their peripheries. Fifth, while there has been some thematic convergence between the anti-abortion militants and the anti-government contingents, these currents remain mostly separate.

Bell, Lipset, and other contributors to TRR considered the antidemocratic contribution of the radical right mainly in terms of its negative effects on political culture (Lipset, "The Sources of the 'Radical Right,'" 307–08). They regarded it as a source of intolerance and an obstacle to political reflection and deliberation. They did not worry that supporters of McCarthy or members of the John Birch Society would blow up gov-
ernment buildings and shoot federal officials. Now the potential for ultraright violence seems to be durably present both as dramatic large episodes (which entail substantial planning) and as nearly random assaults by individuals.

Explaining the Ultraright

To analyze the radical right today requires accounting for ultraright militancy. The violence of the ultraright, as in militia actions, the bombing in Oklahoma City, and attacks on doctors who provide abortions, has been widely discussed. But there have been relatively few serious efforts to explain these events. By the time of Timothy McVeigh's execution in 2001, in much of the public discussion he had become an almost pure symbol of remorseless evil. This made his death very interesting as regards the debate about capital punishment in the United States. But his execution was not an occasion for serious reflection on the political origins and meaning of his crimes.

Leading public intellectuals of the right, such as George Will and William Bennett, have criticized the ultraright's violence. But they have not sought to explain or rigorously criticize the political themes and activities of ultraright militants, beyond routine references to frustration and disturbance.

This may be partly due to an aversion to sectarian controversy within the right. Many on the right have spent years blasting away at statism and cultural decay. In this context there is a good chance some will take the assaults too literally and engage in disruption or violence. To reject all those who sympathize with such dire conclusions would mean trying to draw sharp lines between the ultraright and the rest of the right. Yet this effort would cause much turmoil in the far right and beyond.

Political commentators on the left have also given less attention to this violence or to the proximate radical-right discourses than might seem appropriate. Some on the left fear that analyzing conspirators will become conspiracy mongering. This would distort reality by giving too much notice to the most extremist forces, and diverting attention from the
main projects of the American right. Others on the left might want to avoid the likely countercharge that the modern American left initiated political violence as a widespread tactic in the 1960s. Analysts with left of center views who focused on the recent violence of the ultraright might be quickly reminded of that decade’s urban civil disturbances and of the far left’s subsequent terrorism. Why, given the depth and extent of the shift to the right, have parts of the radical right turned to extraterrorist and sometimes violent means? Since Lyndon Johnson withdrew from the presidential race in 1968, national politics has been mainly conservative on many fronts. Yet parts of the ultraright are certain that they face an alien and tyrannical state, and act accordingly in opting for sectarian adventures and even terrorism. From Nixon to George W. Bush, Bill Clinton was the president furthest to the left in the last thirty years. This striking fact illustrates a deep rightward shift that should produce a sense of accomplishment if not deep happiness across the right. Instead, a strong and bitter sense of unfinished business often prevails.

To say that the ultraright upsurge is about opposition to welfare statism, abortion rights, affirmative action, and immigration, is accurate in roughly the same limited way that it was correct to claim that McCarthyism was about Communism. The key question is this: given a broad conservative shift, and so many conservative successes, why did ultraright militancy flourish in the 1990s? First, extensive economic and social change occurred from the 1970s on, including major regional and sectoral shifts. There have been phases of strong growth, as from the mid-1990s, along with phases of more limited growth and of recession. Sometimes growth has brought benefits to a majority of the population, while at other points the rewards have been much more narrowly distributed. This unsettled economic and social picture cannot be cited as a direct and sufficient cause of the radical right’s expansion or of the choice of parts of that current to launch conspiracies. Yet social and economic change has dislocated many people, some of whom are available for new forms of political mobilization.
Second, the cultural disruption of the last several decades has been at least as great as the economic and social change. Here, the story on one front after another roughly resembles the abortion battles. Major egalitarian changes with libertarian elements occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. Parts of these changes soon gained legal and political legitimacy, so that cultural conservatives found themselves losing a war they had not quite realized was being fought. They have mobilized repeatedly against reforms that they regard as threatening.

The economic changes and cultural conflicts of recent decades provide a framework for the emergence of a new ultraright but do not determine that result. A crucial dynamic derives from the difficulty of coping with political success that is less than total. The sequence Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush signaled a very strong run by the American right. It meant the end of Democratic national domination and provided numerous opportunities for conservatives.

Yet by the standards of the full program of the far right in Reagan's coalition, the world has not really changed. Abortion continues, prayer is still excluded from schools, the national government remains large, and (limited) affirmative action continues. In the 1990s, a centrist Democrat won election twice and upheld liberal policies in many areas regarded as crucial by cultural conservatives. Clinton often bore a certain similarity to Eisenhower, in his moderate administration of someone else's regime, and he often made a virtue of this position by selectively advocating conservative themes. Such ironies were entirely lost on many militants of the right, for whom his electoral successes were simply an infuriating provocation. Especially for cultural and social conservatives, the real changes remain to be made (even after Gore's defeat in 2000).

The resulting sense of anger and political betrayal cannot simply be termed irrational. Republican platforms pledged to ban abortion and smash the welfare state, rather than to restrict access to abortion and curb the growth of state spending. The road to ultraright action starts with the insight that breaking up the old Democratic order and enhancing Republican power did not wholly change the political world. But why
not? One answer might be weakness and betrayal by Republican leaders. This answer, while superficial, appeals to the legitimate far right. It recommends a politics aimed at creating a genuine version of the regime that parts of the radical right thought was on its way first with Nixon and then more rigorously with Reagan. Another answer is structural—if changing the government was not enough to change the world, the basic forms of American political life must be deeply corrupt. Because of this corruption, conservative and far right forces failed to deliver what they promised. They could not even stop Clinton from winning two presidential elections. According to this logic, a new political world has to be created—thus militant action begins to seem plausible. Within the ranks of the militant, new divisions arise about how to speed the needed transformation—some conclude that violent action, however unfortunate, will be necessary.

The broader right’s prolonged and vigorous attacks on the national state and on liberal culture nourished the durable radicalization that has led part of the far right into sectarian and violent adventures. This is not because Bennett or Buckley counsels disruption. It is because both figures and many others assail the state and the more liberal aspects of American culture in the most severe terms. Most influential figures on the right are careful to distinguish their stringent critiques from a rejection of constitutional methods. But their attacks on policies and institutions have often been so intense as to make constitutionalism seem less important than the need to end great evils and corruption.

Economic and social turmoil and cultural conflict have facilitated the emergence of a militant ultraright. It has taken shape mainly as a political response to the dramatic yet incomplete victories of mainstream conservatives in recent decades. The ultraright proposes to make good on Republican promises and go much further in the same direction. Responsibility for specific acts of violence lies with those who commit them. Nonetheless, the aggressive and destructive elements of radical right themes and arguments have helped to make ultraright militancy appear to some as a reasonable political option.
If recent experience signals future dynamics, ultraright politics is likely to produce more violence and terrorism when the national administration has a centrist or center-left character than when it is center-right or entirely on the right. Ultraright militants may regard these political differences as superficial, and may view the national government as thoroughly corrupt in both cases. However, they will have more trouble acting as though the government is wholly illegitimate when it is under the control of Republicans and conservatives. When there is a centrist or center-left administration, mainstream conservatives and the respectable far right have fewer means of incorporating or disciplining their most radical associates. Is it then fair to conclude that electing a president as conservative as George W. Bush is the simplest way to contain the most extreme forms of ultraright militancy? Perhaps so, but the need of presidents in situations like Bush's to create and sustain governing coalitions may lead to frustration and bitterness relatively soon among the most ardent militants of the ultraright.

V

From Class to Status to Identity

Analytically, much of The Radical Right centered on the concept of status politics (Hofstadter, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt," 80–85). This approach derived partly from a critique of Marxism and progressive historiography. Several contributors to The Radical Right had been socialists or social democrats and were influenced by Marxism. By the time of their encounter with McCarthyism none of them remained Marxists in any orthodox sense. Yet they were still engaged with Marxist views. McCarthyism seemed interesting as well as significant in part because it so clearly illustrated the limits of Marxism as a mode of political analysis.

The status politics argument insists that politics is basically about more than the efforts of groups to seek economic objectives. Hofstadter argues that individuals and groups also compete to establish and secure their positions in a status order. This claim gains theoretical force against a background
of Marxian premises about the (class-based) formation and (mainly economic) aims of political groups.

Hofstadter's position had notable referents in social theory and American history. Max Weber's theory was crucial, as he aimed precisely to distinguish class and status as forms of stratification and axes of conflict. The American referent is a political and social history that appears full of conflict about status. McCarthyism and the radical right marked a distinctive moment in a long sequence of battles about such matters as religion, temperance, and evolution.

Hofstadter claims that status politics is prominent in phases of economic prosperity, while class politics dominates in times of economic distress. This formulation reflects the prior three decades' experience: nativism and Prohibition flourished in the prosperous 1920s, an American labor politics dominated the Depression era, and McCarthyism and later the John Birch society surfaced along with prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s.

The concept of status politics greatly increased the possibility of saying something interesting about the radical right. Members of the radical right, in this view, have their own complaints and objectives. They are not simply the hapless tools of reactionary elites. Those who take political steps to pursue status aims are often people whose world and place within it have been severely disrupted. They aim to retrieve lost honor. The status politics view provided a cogent way to describe important elements of the radical right in the first two decades after World War II. In historical terms, Hofstadter argued that similar concerns and dynamics could be found in prior political movements that seemed to share little with the radical right.

Yet analytical problems remain. In TRR, the positive content of status politics remains uncertain. Regarding class politics the basic notion seems clear, perhaps because it has been explored so often. The idea is that class-based agents enter politics to seek crucial objectives. Their aims center on improving their own position and thus the position of their class relative to others. These agents want more economic resources, and they want to gain political and social power in order to maintain or increase their resources. When people engage in
status politics, what are they trying to do? This key point is elusive, because status is both the name for the agents who fight (status groups) and the name for what these actors want. Class actors do not fight to get class; they fight for power and resources. What is it that status actors are trying to get? Do they want prestige? Recognition by others as worthy? Formal and legal acceptance of a status claim?

One might say that status groups want honor and want their position in society to be esteemed. That seems to be Hofstadter’s view in his 1955 essay. But this position is not rich enough to express or account for what the groups are really doing. When status groups seek honor, they usually want particular values and activities to be honored.

Hofstadter and Bell mark status off from class, and doing so always requires a substantial theoretical effort. Yet they do not get much further than making that crucial distinction—Max Weber himself did not get much further in his classic essay on the subject.[22]

TRR had trouble specifying when social groups will tend to engage in status politics. Two main claims were made. One, mentioned earlier, asserts that episodes of status politics occur when economic times are relatively good, while class politics dominates in difficult economic phases (Lipset, “The Sources of the ‘Radical Right,’” 308–14). It makes sense to contrast the nativist 1920s and anti-Communist 1950s with the class politics of the 1930s. Yet the turbulence of the Depression called many status positions into question. And some of that decade’s movements made status claims as well as raising class issues.

The second claim is mainly about the agents of status politics. Bell and Hofstadter argued that both rising and falling social groups could make their concerns political through presenting them as status conflicts (Bell, “The Dispossessed,” 22; “Interpretations of American Politics,” 47). This idea is plausible, yet vague. It is plausible because one can see how disorder might lead members of a group to worry about their status relative to others. Yet the United States from the Civil War to the present has been a dynamic society full of change. Many
groups rose and fell, while some groups broke apart and new ones emerged.

In *TRR*, the authors who use the concept of status politics do not claim there was a time when status was fixed and stable in the United States. But without means of distinguishing between routine change and more unusual shifts that are likely to yield status politics, the implication is that status politics itself is routine, rather than a function of prosperity. Does the concept then expand to include everything beyond a clearly defined class politics?

If *TRR* provides no clear answer to this question, its main formulations imply that status politics has a long future. Here Bell and Hofstadter take a position distinct from most theories of modernization. In the latter view, when modern social orders take hold they integrate the great majority of the population. Thus, Parsons argues that the radical right is doomed by its refusal to accept modernity (Parsons, "Social Strains in America," 233–34). Yet if status politics is about social change in a modern setting, there are few grounds for expecting it to disappear. As new changes occur, social positions will be disturbed. Then status politics will continue well into the future in any likely version of modernity.

Some formulations in *TRR* expressed a view of modernization as such a strong and determining force that it would render the radical right marginal. This view predominates in the contributions by Talcott Parsons (and appears in Lipset’s articles as well). For Parsons, the main line of social cleavage separates groups that are fully integrated in modern social life from partially integrated or displaced groups. This cleavage was expected to give rise to professional politics on the one hand and expressive movements on the other. The protagonists of a modern, professional politics would typically win these conflicts. Most of *TRR*'s authors did not wholly accept this view, though they used its imagery to underline what they took to be the backwardness of the radical right. Hofstadter, Bell, and others affirmed the possibility of new moments of status politics, and by implication, the prospect of new radical movements on the right.
The modernization view predicted much less of a future for the radical right and its successors than did the status politics argument. Yet the authors who relied mainly on the status politics view hesitated to make claims about the likelihood of new forms of radical right politics. Perhaps this was due to a fear of appearing alarmist about the future of McCarthyism or the radical right currents of the early 1960s. Whatever the source of this caution, the result is that the arguments of Hofstadter and Bell in particular are more useful in understanding the subsequent flourishing of far right currents than are their own explicit statements about these matters.

From Status to Identity Politics

Hofstadter's 1963 article revised his earlier view of status politics (Hofstadter, "Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited," 98–99). His revision proposed that status politics is not only about rank but also about the values used to produce the ranking. Status politics concerns defining the honor and value of important attributes and practices.

Here Hofstadter turned toward a concept of cultural politics. If McCarthy was about status politics, the radical right of the early 1960s was also about cultural politics. Radical right groups wanted their cultural commitments to be prevalent, if not entirely dominant. That is different from wanting a group's distinctive features to be recognized. For cultural practices to be properly valued, social life has to be organized in some ways and not others. Those engaged in cultural politics want to reduce the distance between social reality and their own view of an appropriate cultural ordering. Political conflicts readily arise from efforts to gain positive recognition of the value of cultural practices, because such efforts affect everyone and entail government action.

Hofstadter's discussions of status and culture raised questions that remain important. For example, when are the two kinds of issues more or less closely linked? One might sharply distinguish status politics from cultural politics under some conditions. If social positions were relatively fixed, status would refer to the distribution of honor and esteem. Cultural
politics would then designate conflicts about values—what ways of life should be regarded as valid and worthy, and why? In a rigid social order, the two sorts of politics might be quite separate. Status conflicts might occur between clearly defined estates or castes, while cultural conflicts might center on religion. But with the notable exception of race, much of the status order in the United States has been fluid and status positions have not been fixed. In this context, status and cultural politics are apt to be intertwined.

TRR's account of status and cultural politics indicates that in the United States today (and in other advanced market countries) we should expect recurrent conflicts about status, honor, and cultural values. Protagonists of new conflicts might include those who have been recently displaced, as well as those who resent their location in a status order. Others will propose to reshape prevailing cultural commitments.

These arguments call into question a deeply influential understanding of politics in which class and distributive conflicts are considered to engage interests, while cultural and status conflicts are understood to focus on desires and norms. To recognize a place for a durable cultural or status politics implies that most major political conflicts involve interests of some sort while they also concern norms, desires, and even fantasies. In this light, class politics is about distributive shares among classes and/or the shape of the class structure itself. Cultural politics is about the evaluation of practices, the distribution of status and esteem, and the shape of a status order or relations among values. In both class and cultural or status politics, there is usually an interplay of interests and norms.

*Status Politics and the Status Quo*

*The Radical Right*'s account of status and cultural politics was a valuable contribution with the potential for substantial development. But the response to this conception was mixed. This had partly to do with relations between intellectual and political life in the 1960s and 1970s. Soon after TRR appeared, neoprogressive and neoMarxist currents in historiography and social science gained prominence. For many proponents of
these positions, TRR's focus on status politics and cultural politics wrongly downplayed the extent of class-related political conflict in the United States.

Critics also objected to TRR's account of illiberalism in American political life. In this view, Bell, Lipset, and the other authors depicted normal American political conflict as pitting a radical extreme (such as McCarthyism) against a liberal and modernizing center. They regarded lower middle class and working class groups as a potential source of intolerant and antidemocratic politics. When some analysts rejected TRR's focus on status politics, they also criticized its emphasis on the popular side of McCarthyism because that view meant emphasizing the possible importance of popular threats to democratic liberties. Critics instead stressed the class elements of McCarthyism and its links to traditional Republican politics, and sought to acquit lower status and working class groups of the charge of antiliberalism.

TRR's authors saw McCarthyism and the John Birch Society as threats from the margins of political life. The assaults were launched against a center that had been reshaped and democratized by the New Deal. If this did not amount to the complacency that some critics claimed to find in TRR, there was strong skepticism in that work about the liberal commitments and democratic meaning of new movements on the left and right. Moreover, Bell began the 1955 volume by asserting that the entire complex that The New American Right had aimed to analyze was framed by the exhaustion of the left of the 1930s and 1940s (Bell, "Interpretations of American Politics, 47).

When a populist and participatory spirit dominated the left in the 1960s and early 1970s, many viewed TRR's skeptical view of populist radicalism as simply a preference for order. This reduction was understandable, if unsubtle. The liberal-labor center that Bell and Hofstadter were willing to defend against McCarthy in the early 1950s looked very different ten or fifteen years later amid conflicts about Vietnam and racial politics.

When neopopulist and neoMarxist critics of TRR charged
its authors with fearing the masses, they misunderstood its project. TRR drew on Weber while offering a quasi-Marxist account of why a raucous and intense status politics often appears in this country. This conception might have been wrong, but it was neither celebratory nor disinterested in conflict.

While the specific context of these arguments has receded, important issues remain. Is it useful to analyze liberal and democratic themes in American politics in terms of contrasts between a center and peripheries? This question presumes that a recognizable center exists in American political life, which is a point of contention. But if there is a political center in some form, what is its relation to democratic impulses? When and why do major democratic changes occur?

Since World War II, analysts have given three main responses to these questions. For some, democratic change flows primarily from the center. This can be construed positively, as evidence of a systemic capacity for reform guided by thoughtful elites. Or it can be regarded as a sign of the extent of elite manipulation (in contrast to more authentic modes of democratization).

The second view of democratic change emphasizes its popular sources and dynamics. The people—in more or less organized forms—either directly implements democratic changes or forces elites to make them. This analytical point can be taken as locating a problem, because popular forces cause disorder and inefficiency while raising unrealistic expectations. Or it can be seen as finding a virtue, the one means of saving a deeply flawed American regime from sliding into totally decay.

The third way of understanding democratic change focuses on the development of political institutions through processes of legal and political reflection. Here the core image is much less a conflict between center and periphery than a collective effort at constitutional deliberation.

Democratic reform was not the main subject of *The Radical Right*. Yet that book entered the debates of the 1960s and 1970s about the sources of democratic reform primarily because it disrupted what had become a new common sense on
the left. For neopopulists, participatory democrats, and (most) American neoMarxists, a strong version of the second position I have sketched was nearly constitutive. Democracy was seen almost entirely as a popular accomplishment, and political problems were seen as requiring more popular involvement and activity.

The arguments of *The Radical Right*, in this context, amounted to claiming that popular impulses and movements were not necessarily democratic in aim or effect. This meant rejecting any notion of a unified people aiming for democratic improvement. It also meant rejecting the idea that nondemocratic and illiberal political practices could be remedied simply by increasing popular engagement in political life.

This was not a message that many on the left wanted to hear in the 1960s or early 1970s. Now it has become a familiar report from many different precincts of American politics, and it is difficult to find serious analysts who claim a simple and unproblematic relation between the popular and the democratic elements in American politics.

It is still reasonable to claim that major democratic changes in the United States require substantial popular engagement and mobilization. Yet one can affirm this point while insisting that there is no exclusive site of democratic virtue. Conventional dichotomies between elites and the people cannot provide much analytical or normative guidance as regards proposals for democratic reform. I have argued elsewhere that democratic changes occur from the joint effects of popular mobilization and elite efforts at reform. That view may or may not be correct. The point here is that *TRR*'s account of the radical right helped to undermine the populist common sense of the new and old lefts in the 1960s, and many were not glad to hear this news.

By now it is not very bold to say that political and economic elites can at times use their power to sustain democratic reforms (as with the judicial defense of abortion rights, or corporate willingness to support some forms of affirmative action). After all, parts of the radical right routinely charge elites with victimizing the people in the name of expanding democ-
Nondemocratic projects also have many sources in the contemporary United States, including the rigorous antiunion efforts of large corporations, anti-immigrant agitation on the right (Buchanan), and obscurantist nationalism on the left (Farrakhan). In this area of dense and passionate arguments, one of TRR's enduring contributions is to provide a stringent antidote to the populist sentimentality that tempts diverse currents in American intellectual and political life, not only on the left.

The Resurgence of Post-Marxism

Sometimes TRR's approach was treated as a premature post-Marxism. Yet from the 1970s on, neoMarxism became less and less orthodox as analysts emphasized that the meaning of political projects cannot be deduced from the economic locations of their members. Arguments about the political force of status, culture, and identity have become increasingly widespread. Whether Weber, Parsons, or Foucault is invoked, claims about the importance of noneconomic elements flourish. In this context, the effort of TRR to open analytical space for examining status and cultural politics prefigured the cultural turn that has been so influential in American historiography and parts of the social sciences.

TRR's account of status and cultural politics became even more durably salient than the authors imagined in light of major political and economic developments of the 1970s and 1980s. TRR's account had proposed that class politics would dominate in times of economic distress. Yet this did not occur during the economic troubles of the 1970s. Instead, status and cultural politics flourished along with varied class and nonclass distributive conflicts. While distributive political battles certainly took place, these conflicts were an important element rather than the defining feature of political life.

Since the 1970s numerous cultural conflicts have persisted, such as those concerning the legal status of abortion, the legal and moral position of homosexuality, the cultural meaning of immigration, and the cultural and social dimensions of education. Even fights about evidently distributive matters—
Health care, taxes, and social welfare—have been laced with status and cultural elements. Proposals about status and culture have often focused on concepts of identity. This concept provides groups with means both of demanding esteem and of proposing that government action be taken to sustain deeply held values.

Growth and increasing prosperity returned after the 1970s—in partial and uneven forms in the 1980s, and then more broadly in the 1990s. This renewal took place on a scale that exceeded all serious prior predictions. It takes no wisdom to predict an eventual interruption of the powerful growth that occurred in the United States in the 1990s and into the new century. Yet it is hard to imagine how any plausible economic downturn would cause conflicts about status, culture, and identity to become marginal or disappear from political life for an extended period in favor of class politics.

A New Political Sociology?

TRR’s analyses raise several theoretical issues, one of which follows directly from the argument about status politics. The field of political sociology has a distinguished history and an uncertain future. Its premise is that social relations can explain a substantial part of politics. The point of departure has often been Marxian. The shift to include status and culture as well as class in accounting for politics might open new lines of inquiry. But the difficulty of the enterprise is evident: if there is no definite relation between class and politics, and there are multiple sources of political mobilization of roughly equal importance, can there still be an explanatory sociology of politics?

TRR made a cogent critique of American progressive historiography and Marxian political sociology. The turn from class toward status and culture does not make explanation simpler, however. It has always been difficult to develop a Weberian political sociology beyond the initial and always useful rejection of economic reductionism. For a new political sociology, what social relations are the basis of politics? What political forces typically arise from the main social...
groups, and how? In the ensuing political conflicts, who tends to prevail? Are we in fact left without an explanatory political sociology? Should we simply recognize that an open-ended politics has no bases?

Conventional Marxian and progressive accounts of politics—certainly as the authors of *TRR* saw them—are economic or class-based. They posit a one-way causal arrow between class and politics. Both views see parties, unions, and business groups as the main political agents arising from class relations. They expect that the class-based political groups in control of the most resources will normally win political conflicts. *TRR*'s authors rejected that view as a sufficient or adequate guide to explanation, and they remain correct in doing so.

The next option, which is proposed by several authors in *TRR*, augments a class account with a status-based account: politics is about competition over status, as well as about class. This model posits two unidirectional arrows, pointing from both class and status to politics. This approach does not explain when class or status elements are more important for politics. And it gives politics little weight in shaping status or class relations.

A further move is from status toward culture. Status politics often involves claims about how life should be ordered and what should be valued. Groups engaged in status politics are trying to shape the culture. Such efforts, in plural societies, lead to conflicts in which groups claim that a particular cultural form or set of relations is crucial for them to exist in a decent way. Claims about the position of social groups and the value of cultural activities are thus linked. In the last several decades, conflicts about rights and identities have been very important results of linking claims about status and culture.

Each move away from a class determination of politics produces empirical richness. These moves also seem to head toward indeterminacy insofar as an indefinite number of ways of producing political action seem possible and (in principle) of equal importance. Any social difference can be decisive for political organization and action.
The claim that the social bases of politics are diverse is analytically distinct from the idea that politics has no social bases in a causal sense. But the implications of the first view may not be so different from those of the second. If the links between social and political life are indefinitely large and shifting, it is hard to attribute substantial causal significance to any particular link.

The logic of stressing plural connections between the social and the political leads to further questions. Can political practices significantly affect social and cultural relations? Are there political causes of political outcomes? These questions open the way to conceiving political sociology as a source of theories in which class, status, and politics all interact to shape political results. The problems of such an open theory in providing causal accounts do not need restatement. The issue is how to proceed when such a theory seems to be the logical result of a critique of the limits of Marxian and Weberian political sociologies.

Is it possible to develop a causal account of politics that starts from an acknowledgment of systemic complexity and interaction? This means criticizing the project of political sociology as it was understood in much of the Weberian tradition and almost all of the Marxian tradition. In this direction, one starts by recognizing both the range of major social influences on politics and the causal efficacy of politics in producing political outcomes. The danger, of course, is that one will end up with figures so full of causal arrows that nothing can be explained or even much clarified. Yet this direction follows logically from two points that by now seem strongly established: class is not always or necessarily the main social cleavage as regards politics, and political factors matter in causing political results.

VI

TRR and New Themes of American Politics

If politics after the 1960s had returned permanently to an American-style class politics similar to that of the 1930s and
1940s, then TRR's perspective might have had diminishing pertinence. While distributive issues have not disappeared, status politics, cultural politics, and identity politics have all proliferated. TRR's perspective helps to illuminate major ongoing conflicts that have been intertwined with the growth of parts of the right.

*Gender Politics After the 1960s*

TRR did not say much about the sexual politics of the radical right. It was written before the new wave of feminism appeared in the 1960s. From the 1970s on, the radical right has been resolute and passionate in opposing feminist views of gender, sex, and family, and in fighting legal and political decisions that partly reflect those views.

The status and cultural politics perspectives of TRR describe key aspects of gender politics. Dramatic changes weakened and disrupted the status positions defined by the system of gender relations that prevailed after World War II. New identities in gender relations have taken public and explicit forms. The evident relevance of status and identity questions has informed several valuable accounts of battles between feminists and their opponents.

Some of the sharpest conflicts in gender politics, such as those over abortion, have endured well beyond the point at which a general modernization of family and gender relations occurred. The stakes of these conflicts include both status positions and cultural commitments. Proponents of antifeminist views are not doomed to extinction so long as they have some capacity to adapt their perspectives to the pressure of modernizing changes. Parts of the antifeminist right have demonstrated at least this minimal ability, and sometimes considerably more.

Very few accounts of American politics and culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s envisioned anything like the bitter and volatile conflicts over gender issues which have extended over the last three decades. TRR was not unusual in failing to discern this major development. It was unusual, however, in providing elements of an approach to analyzing these durable conflicts about gender, family, and sexuality.
Race and Status Politics

Race is mentioned but does not figure prominently in TRR. The authors saw it primarily as a legal question and thought that reform leading toward the civic and political inclusion of blacks was under way. They were surprised by the lack of explicitly racist elements in the discourses of the radical right in the 1950s and early 1960s. In that light, it was reasonable for the authors to emphasize that the radical right did not avow racist commitments, though this led them to miss some of the ties between the radical right and segregationists.

The course of racial politics from the mid-1960s on was certainly not predicted, even in broad outline, by the authors of TRR. But that book’s main arguments can usefully be applied to later events. The distinction between TRR’s unremarkable empirical account and its fruitful theoretical approach is clear in Hofstadter’s claim: “Because, as a people extremely democratic in our social institutions, we have had no clear, consistent and recognizable system of status, our personal status problems have an unusual intensity” (Hofstadter, “The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt,” 83). Empirically, race is the obvious and dramatic exception to this claim. And the analytical point is valuable for understanding racial politics after the Civil Rights Act. If fluid and uncertain status relations encourage an intense status politics, it makes sense that legal and political attacks on caste-like racial relations in the 1960s would unleash torrents of conflict. The new status position of blacks remained to be defined after legal equality was won. The racial status positions of many whites were uncertain and often likely to be devalued by political and legal change. Not surprisingly, parts of the radical right turned toward racial issues during and after the mid-1960s.3

The status politics view helps to illuminate aspects of contemporary racial conflict. First, race is a status. Different racial positions receive varying amounts of esteem and honor in an inclusive system in which everyone has a racial definition. Second, racial conflict is not simply determined by economic competition or hardship. While such conflict is sharpened by economic competition among racial groups, it also
occurs in periods of growth and relative prosperity. Third, ra­
cial conflict can readily become cultural conflict about choos­
ing and sustaining desired forms of order and defining core
values and commitments.

Much of modern racial politics appears as contentious
forms of status and cultural politics. TRR's authors mainly an­
ticipated a gradual reform of race relations. Yet their perspec­
tive implies that deep legal changes like those of 1964 and
1965 would open the way to severe racial conflict, because
those changes disrupted a long-standing and highly unequal
status order. As that order fell apart, many people (most of
them white) experienced a loss of status and tried to recoup
their losses through new political and social initiatives.

A New Religious Mobilization

TRR's approach illuminates one of the most important de­
velopments of the last thirty years. There has been an extraor­
dinary growth of religious forces in politics, and this growth
has occurred mainly on the right. This upsurge marks a de­
parture from the 1950s and early 1960s, when much of the
radical right presumed Christian commitments but did not
make them a primary thematic focus or a basis for efforts at
mobilization.

In this extended political mobilization, status politics is
thickly present. This has been clear in conflicts among Pro­
estant denominations, as fundamentalist and evangelical forces
have fought with considerable success to reorient American
Protestantism. Rather than remaining a contest for status and
leadership among Protestants, the religious upsurge of recent
decades has become a general cultural conflict. One side in­
cludes fundamentalist Protestants, other conservative religious
forces within Protestantism, and conservative currents in con­
temporary Catholicism and Judaism. These forces are suspi­
cious of or hostile toward political liberalism and cultural plu­
ralism, which they see as threatening to religious values and
the position of religion per se. They not only demand recog­
nition but also propose to shape the national culture to express
their own values and doctrines. In these cultural battles—about
abortion, homosexuality, education, and other issues—conservative religious forces often justify their proposals partly by reference to their identities. In a move that is now familiar across the political spectrum, these speakers equate their authenticity and sincerity with the validity of their arguments.

Through assaults on secular liberalism, appeals to tradition, and claims about the legitimacy of religious identities, religious conservatives argue that religious doctrine is a valid basis for making political judgments. Some claim that honest citations of such doctrine should count as legitimate reasoning in public debate. The dangers to liberal politics that TRR found in the radical right of the first postwar decades thus reappear, especially when the religious right considers its critics and opponents as corrupt, illegitimate, and malevolent.

TRR had little of interest to say about gender, race, and religion per se, and did not predict their emergence as durable political issues. Yet it is more important to note that TRR’s framework provides at least a decent grasp of these major themes of modern American politics. Groups have repeatedly formed and mobilized to achieve status and cultural aims, especially when status relations that were relatively stable have been disrupted. For parts of the American right the focus on culture has gone even further than TRR’s framework would suggest. Influential figures such as William Bennett, Robert Bork, and Irving Kristol have come to place primary and sometimes exclusive emphasis on cultural matters.

This cultural emphasis partly reflects the right’s great success in conventional matters of political economy. Thus, from the right it would be hard to formulate a strongly critical view of American economic and social policies since Reagan was first elected president without that view being libertarian. But the cultural turn has involved more than a search for new issues. In the 1990s and even after George W. Bush’s election, a deep and enduring sense of betrayal emerged in parts of the far right. Many lamented that only the economic parts of their project had succeeded, leaving a morally adrift nation to use the proceeds of successful economic reform for progressively more corrupt and expensive forms of decadence. This cultural
and moral critique of American life usually downplays conventional strategies of coalition building based on class or status interests. Instead its proponents launch fierce jeremiads against decay and depravity.

VII

*The Right and the Radical Right Today*

*TRR* made a major contribution to understanding the radical right of its time. Today it provides a useful starting point for analyzing the subsequent development of much of the American right. The concept of status politics and the related arguments were a serious effort to outline a post-Marxist political sociology attentive to the shape of American political and social life. That effort offers insights into some of the main themes of American politics in the last three decades, in which battles about status, culture, and identity have played such a large political role. There are notable problems with the book's arguments. For the most part, however, these problems point to difficult analytical and empirical issues that are yet to be resolved. Adequate accounts of the American right of the last half-century, when they are produced, will take *TRR* as a valuable reference point.

Earlier I tried to locate the radical right both in relation to other political currents and in terms of its main themes. I did not directly address a question that often troubles accounts of the political right and left. What do these terms indicate about both the political commitments and the shape of these forces?

*TRR* did not spend many pages on this issue, with the exception of its discussions of authentic and pseudo-conservatism. Perhaps this was because the massive reordering of American politics produced in the 1930s was still recent, and it could be presumed that left and right retained the clear definitions given by the battles of that decade. Forty years after *TRR* was published, no such clarity exists.

Conventional terms do not capture the forms of the modern right very well. Neither a party nor any specific organization can be taken as a proxy for the right, even given its over-
lap with the Republican Party. But it would not be accurate to take the right as a name for a coalition among groups who engage in joint action only to achieve their immediate aims. To view the right as a coalition in this sense would make it very hard to explain how such a diverse political force could remain relatively coherent for a long period. Purely instrumental coalitions tend to break up and disappear due to a powerful logic that drives their membership down toward the minimum required to win the next major contest.

The best way to understand the right's forms is via the concept of a political bloc. A political bloc is organizationally and socially diverse, linked by political commitments, and oriented toward gaining political power in a durable way. A political bloc aims to gain power in the service of basic commitments. Thus political blocs are defined by their commitments when the latter frame practical political efforts.

As a political bloc, the American right has included many elements. It has always included large sections of the Republican Party, and sometimes parts of the Democratic Party as well. The right includes interest organizations and lobbies, civic and religious groups, and intellectual currents. These elements have never been wholly unified. But its leading elements have forged positive relations of cooperation and mutual respect. These relations have depended on the understanding of participants that the links among them are valuable and should be sustained.

Given this conception of the right, what commitments are central in defining and unifying it over time?

In the mid-1990s, Norberto Bobbio provided a valuable service by bravely insisting on a definition of left and right organized around a single concept. Many authors throw up their hands at the difficulty of finding a definition—Bobbio's blunt clarity aids discussion. The left, he says, favors equality and the right does not.

While this definition has some merit, it is partisan in form and has only limited value in making sense of American political divisions. Given the democratic revolution in modern politics, to define the left as those who favor equality almost
automatically works to define the left as modern and reasonable. To be defined as against equality means to be against progress and even against liberty in many modern interpretations of that term. There is clearly something to Bobbio's definition, as many on the right are critical of equality. But it is too simply a means of defining the left as better than the right.

Bobbio's definition is most plausible in countries where a right that rejects political and legal equality among citizens is part of a common political memory, even if such a right is not easy to find in daily politics. Historically, the United States has tended to lack a frankly inegalitarian right (such as monarchists, anti-market advocates of an organic society, and fascists), with the exception of racial politics. After 1964, the general acceptance of at least a limited notion of racial equality, save for extreme sections of the ultraright, makes it even harder to apply Bobbio's definition of left and right fruitfully.

If we start by asking what the right opposes, we can identify two core elements of the modern American right. "The right" designates political actors who generally oppose using the national state to regulate the market, except as an unavoidable last resort. These actors almost always oppose using the state to redistribute resources. "The right" also designates forces opposed to a further expansion of the number and range of rights. After the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the American right remains firmly antistatist. It opposes new rights as well as new regulation or redistribution.

In positive terms closer to those that its leaders and activists affirm, the right has asserted the value of market orderings—both for efficiency and to foster self-reliance and independent judgment. The right has affirmed efforts to sustain or reestablish what it regards as valid traditional moral values. These positive commitments are the basis for opposing state action aimed at regulation, redistribution, and expanding rights.

While the right's commitments to the market and traditional cultural forms are not linked by logical necessity, the links are thick and meaningful. Intellectuals and politicians on the right
have made serious efforts to link commitments to the market and to traditional values in practical and theoretical terms. The content of "right" can change within and across societies, and the core aims of the American right may eventually change; but that prospect does not make the right's present forms of unity arbitrary or transient.

Given this conception of the American right, it is easier to see what makes the radical right radical. It is not, as Bobbio's definition would suggest, that such forces are deeply devoted to inequality. Some elements may be. But the populist themes of the radical right sometimes make it more egalitarian than other parts of the right. The radical right is ardently committed to traditional values and deeply in favor of market orderings. Its leaders and members believe that realizing their commitments will require deep changes in American political institutions and cultural forms. These positions provide grounds for opposing all the political and cultural forces that limit the market or jeopardize traditional values as the radical right understands them. On this basis the radical right has played a large role in national political life over the last three decades, one larger than the authors of TRR anticipated.

After 2000

Less than a year after the presidential election of 2000, it is not possible to know the long-term effects of that extraordinary process on the position and prospects of the radical right. Yet both the campaign and its result seem likely to continue the main dynamic discussed above. A general shift to the right gives conservative views a centrist location, while opening space for the less sectarian parts of the radical right to play a large and influential public role.

George W. Bush became President partly because of his adroit management of relations with the radical right, especially the more legitimate sections of the far right. By all indications Bush received the active support of most leaders and activists of the far right. One reason for this success was that many of these actors were very tired of losing presidential elections in the 1990s. They saw strong support for Bush as
their best way to prevent another loss. In terms of the vote, exit polls show that Bush received the support of the great majority of conservative Republicans (and of most conservative independents). Bush was a sufficiently attractive candidate to the far right on both strategic and principled grounds that there was little if any room for Patrick Buchanan's independent campaign. At the same time Bush gained the support of about two thirds of liberal Republicans and of those who voted for Perot in 1996.

Bush achieved these results through an even-tempered presentation of traditional conservative positions along with elements of the views and approaches of the far right. This was not a clever trick but a real accomplishment. It resulted from years of debate about how to develop and articulate the right's core themes in broad and open forms, as the Republican platform of 2000 sought to do.

Bush generally avoided provocative formulations of his views, which were almost entirely consistent with prior initiatives from the Republican right. Thus he strongly urged large tax cuts, which he argued for not only on economic grounds but because they would have the benign result of reducing the role of the national government. Reducing the role of the national government was also one dimension of his proposal to restructure and partially privatize social security. Along with these proposals, Bush's campaign expressed conservative communitarian themes about family and social life, while urging that religious organizations become much more active in carrying out and thus in shaping social policies.

In the Bush campaign boundaries were blurred between traditional Republican conservatism and parts of the far right. Numerous advisers and activists bridged and blended these two currents. The tone was centrist; the content was strongly and firmly conservative. Bush's moderate tone won him very little Democratic support, but that was probably not the point. It does seem to have been effective among independents and more liberal Republicans.

Bush's campaign showed that mainstream Republican conservatives regard the support of the radical right (mainly the
far right) as very important for electing a Republican president. This support was indeed crucial in defeating Senator John McCain in the Republican primary contest. The far right's support seems to have been significant in defeating Gore in some of the states that voted for Clinton in the 1990s. Bush showed that a highly partisan strategy could produce a Republican victory, even if it was narrow in conception and made few new inroads among mainly Democratic constituencies.

Early in Bush's administration parts of the right drew the conclusion that the unfinished conservative agenda of the mid-1990s could be enacted despite the tenuous Republican majority in Congress. Especially after the loss of Republican control of the Senate, others will regard such an approach as sectarian, given Bush's narrow victory. They may try to develop a broader strategy for drawing significant parts of the center and center-right toward the right in support of Bush's overall program.

Winning yields such difficulties. As the center once again moves to the right, the main elements of the radical right face major choices. For much of the increasingly respectable and influential far right, the opportunity to influence Bush's themes and policies is both appealing and a perceived duty. Other parts of the far right may be more hesitant, doubting that a narrow victory over Gore marks a new political era. The ultraright is apt to be under great pressure to restrain itself—and some will respond by withdrawing from politics. In the near future this will probably mean that ultraright disruption and violence are more limited than they were in the 1990s.

Gore gained little support from his efforts to link Bush with the far right, as his likely voters were already opposed to Bush. If Gore's failure to stigmatize Bush does not really show popular approval of the far right, it registers yet again the blurring of boundaries between traditional Republican conservatism and the legitimate sections of the far right. The presence of the National Review in the Bush camp thus surprised no one and scared very few people who were not already opposed to Bush.

Given the shape of the Bush campaign and its success, we
can expect a significant radical right—mainly the legitimate far right—to play an influential role in national politics in the next few years. The radical right has shown the ability to develop and adapt after important defeats. In the 2000 election most of its elements contained their more sectarian impulses at key moments. If the radical right seems unlikely ever to achieve its full program, that reality will sooner or later cause new disappointment and bitterness for its adherents. Yet this surprisingly vigorous political force has survived and at times flourished over the last half century. The radical right has established itself in national politics as a force with enough strength and flexibility to survive the challenges of both incorporation and marginality. It will likely remain on the scene through and beyond the presidency of George W. Bush.

Notes

1. Erik Asard, Daniel Bell, and Michael Kazin made valuable comments on earlier drafts. I benefited from the comments and research assistance of the following students at the Graduate Faculty of New School University: Nancy Wadsworth, Shelley Hurt, Joseph Lowndes, Mark Redhead, and Marcos Soler. Time to work on this essay was one of the many opportunities provided to me as Fulbright Chair at the Swedish Institute for North American Studies at Uppsala University in 1999–2000.

2. TRR’s analyses retain a broad comparative significance. In the second half of the 1990s and early in the next decade, parties of what is called the “far right” or the “radical right” in Western Europe made notable advances in several countries, even if their overall success was not impressive. When one such party, the Freedom Party in Austria, helped to form a government in 2000, controversy centered on the inflammatory statements of its leader, Jorg Haider. When he responded by continuing to make similar statements while affirming his commitment to democracy, the key question became clear: How is it possible to distinguish between a party of the right that is happy to employ nativist and racialist discourses but is basically committed to constitutional procedures and democratic liberties, and a party whose core commitments are illiberal and dangerous? This is not precisely the issue that faced the authors of The Radical Right, of course, but there are sufficient similarities to make that work of interest to people who are mainly concerned with contemporary comparative politics.


4. The Radical Right was reviewed widely in 1963 in academic and popu-


6 Nelson W. Polsby, "Toward an Explanation of McCarthyism," *Political Studies* 8 (1960): 250–71; Michael Paul Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967). Polsby and Rogin differ considerably from Nash in their political judgments of McCarthy. However, they share with Nash a view of McCarthy as a conventional, if melodramatic, conservative politician. There is merit in this view as McCarthy sought office and engaged in routine politics. But it understates the aggressive, rageful, and destructive elements of his projects.

7 Polsby emphasizes the diffuseness of the status politics argument in "Toward an Explanation of McCarthyism," 254.

8 In the last decade the opening of ex-Soviet and American intelligence files has produced mounting evidence both of the political and financial dependence of the American Communist Party on the Soviet Union, and of the involvement of a substantial number of Communists in espionage in the 1930s and 1940s. This evidence has helped to spur a retrospective appreciation of McCarthy as basically correct if erratic and excessive. For such efforts, see Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (Free Press: New York, 2000); and William F. Buckley Jr., *The Redhunter—A Novel Based on the Life of Senator Joe McCarthy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999). McCarthy is not re-valued in this way in the most reliable new work on American Communism and the Soviet Union, which has appeared in a series of volumes by Klehr, Haynes, and co-authors. The most recent of these books is John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

9 The actual sequence—in which McCarthy's emergence occurred well into the Cold War—creates difficulties for his defenders. The problem with the pro-McCarthy view is, putting it simply, Truman. By 1950–51 the Marshall Plan was underway and NATO existed. The U.S. was at war against a Soviet ally. The Communist Party was broken as a political organization in the U.S. Why, in this context, was a new and more extensive initiative against domestic Communism required in the United States? How would such an offensive help the U.S. in international politics?


11 Interpretations of McCarthy’s support based on poll data should be
qualified by noting that the data are thin and their quality is uncertain. Polls in the 1950s mainly asked respondents whether they supported McCarthy or not, without specifying the aspects of McCarthy's views and actions that were in question. Lipset, Polsby, and Rogin were evaluating the same limited polls. These data definitely showed that Republicans more often favored McCarthy than did Democrats. But they also showed significant support for McCarthy among Democrats. Thus, a 1954 Gallup survey cited by Polsby aimed to gauge the extent of support for McCarthy by party. As measured four different ways, from 21 to 30 percent of Democrats supported McCarthy. This was a much lower level of support than among Republicans, but it was nonetheless substantial. Rogin surveyed Gallup Polls in the early 1950s to find that McCarthy gained support from 36 percent of Democrats and 61 percent of Republicans, while 44 percent of Democrats and 25 percent of Republicans opposed him. These data show that McCarthy was more apt to be supported by Republicans than Democrats. But they also show the potential effectiveness of McCarthy in gaining Democratic support without losing too many Republican votes. In two-party competition, an initiative that could produce the alignment I have just sketched might be a very attractive one for a party to launch. Imagine an election in which McCarthy was somehow made the only issue and voters were distributed as Rogin indicates. Undecided voters are not counted, and the numbers of Democrats and Republicans are equal. In this imaginary contest, Republicans would get 58 percent of the total vote. (Polsby, "Toward an Explanation of McCarthyism," 262; Rogin, The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter, 233–35; Lipset, "Three Decades of the Radical Right," 396, 400).

14. An unreasonable political argument in the context of the contemporary United States entails premises or proposals that few if any citizens could accept as compatible with liberal and democratic commitments. But such an argument remains political insofar as it could in principle be adopted as a way of organizing social relations. A purely irrational claim is so evidently unworkable either for the individual or group proposing it or for the polity of which those making the claim are part as to be clearly and directly destructive. These distinctions are necessary, complicated, and partly contextual. See John Rawls, Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
15. Karl Mannheim argued that conservatism should be distinguished from traditionalism because the former is a conscious effort to reflect on and reshape tradition in response to the disruptions of modernity. Conservatism is both reactive and creative. Peter Viereck’s formulations resemble what Mannheim argued three decades earlier. Mannheim is not cited in The Radical Right, but its main authors knew his work. Karl Mannheim, Conservatism: A Contribution to the Sociology of Knowledge, edited and introduced


I would place the figure at 12 to 14 percent of the national electorate. This estimate might be deemed high, because the Republican primary electorate is usually regarded as to the right of the Republican national presidential vote. Yet the overall decline in voting rates diminishes the salience of this point. So does the weakening of party identification, which means that someone like Buchanan could expect to obtain support from a number of voters who are registered Democrats, independents, or Republicans who don't vote in primaries.

Poll data on abortion also suggest that estimating the radical right at 12 to 14 percent of the electorate is reasonable. These data find that 15 to 20 percent of those surveyed want to ban abortion. One would expect the anti-abortion figure to be higher than the core strength of the radical right because some people who oppose abortion on Catholic doctrinal grounds are centrist or liberal on other issues. For the figures on Republican primaries, see Gerald M. Pomper, The Election of 1992 (Chatham House Publishers: Chatham, New Jersey, 1993): 46-50; and Gerald M. Pomper, The Election of 1996 (Chatham House Publishers: Chatham, New Jersey, 1997): 46-47.

On organizations and currents on the radical right (especially the ultraright), see Sara Diamond, Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995).

Ultraright violence in the 1990s was reported regularly by law enforcement agencies and these reports were collected by several organizations. This information is available in the publications and web sites of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League and the Southern Poverty Law Center. Both groups have a political interest in stressing the extent of violence, but they have to defend their reports against hostile critics. NARAL claimed on its web site in 1999 that anti-abortion forces committed seven murders since 1993, attempted sixteen murders since 1991, committed over 2,000 reported acts of anti-abortion violence, and engaged in 28,000 acts of disruption at facilities where abortions are performed. The first two figures can readily be checked against other sources. Even if the latter two figures are high estimates, the reality of substantial anti-abortion violence is evident. So is the extent of ultraright anti-government violence, which is the main subject of the reports of the Southern Poverty Law Center. This source focuses
on militia groups and racist groups. It emphasizes and perhaps overstates the convergence between the two. It also seems less reliable than NARAL in its quantitative claims. Thus, a web site in September 1999 cited 435 active "patriot groups" in the U.S. as of 1998-99. When one looks at the list, organized by state, many of the entries refer to bookstores and tiny groups that do not resemble the highly organized and well-armed groups commonly identified as militias. Nonetheless, the Southern Poverty Law Center's reports on episodes of violence are generally accurate and they record a very disturbing experience. These episodes declined after the mid-1990s and their renewal seems unlikely in Bush's first term. Yet the ultraright remains on the scene as both a political current and infrastructure that could lead to new phases of militancy and perhaps new forms of political violence.


22. Such a broad claim might be disputed by reference to particular columns and articles. I base it on a review of *Commentary*, *National Review*, and *Weekly Standard* from 1996 through 1999. In these years ultraright activities received very little serious analysis in these important publications.

23. For a collection of such critiques, see Mitchell S. Muncy, editor, The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics (Dallas, Texas: Spence Publishing Company, 1997). The book's core is a symposium published in *First Things* in 1996, in which prominent far right intellectuals questioned and in some cases rejected the legitimacy of the current American regime. In the symposium and responses, William Bennett and the editors of *National Review* countered the provocative assertion of illegitimacy. They agreed with much of the critique of American politics and culture, but counseled respect for constitutional procedures.

24. The left's problem in making a consistent critique of the right's links with illiberal and antidemocratic forces is not only historical. It continued into the 1990s, where it was symbolized by the political figure of Louis Farrakhan. Once it became clear that Farrakhan had some support among constituencies that the left regarded as important, there was great reticence about simply rejecting him altogether, despite the many opportunities that his positions provided for this response.


26. Several decades later the emergence and political success of Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives in Britain occasioned a similar process of reflection among left of center analysts in that country. Their rethinking, which was conducted in terms much closer to Marxism, occasioned a vigorous debate about whether Thatcherism had elements of genuine political novelty. See Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, editors, The Politics of Thatcherism (Lon-


30. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau made an ambitious effort to demonstrate the full analytical separation of class and politics. After their careful effort to retain elements of Marxism within a postmodern framework, the way was open to focus on identity as a plastic and virtually self-created reality for which there are no real social determinants. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).

31. In addition to Marxism, political sociology has non-Marxist roots in the elite theories of the early 20th century produced by Michels, Mosca, and Pareto. These theories made their way into mid-century American social theory via several routes, including Weber’s political sociology and Parsons’ own work. For an interesting recent effort to reinvigorate political sociology, in which the authors seek to emphasize the causal importance of social cleavages for national politics in the United States, see Jeffrey Manza and Clem Brooks, *Social Cleavages and Political Change: Voter Alignments and U.S. Party Coalitions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).


33. Obviously George Wallace was a key figure. In this area there are a number of important controversies. These concern figures such as Wallace himself, the shape and dynamic of public opinion about race in recent decades, and the relative importance of race as compared with other issues in defining the perspective and activities of various strands of the radical right. Adjudicating the last issue is especially difficult because of deep changes in public discourse on racial matters as a result of which explicitly racist language is rarely used. I do not think it is accurate or useful to claim that the post-Reagan radical right as a whole is racist. Yet what I would call racial conservatism has been a major theme in both the antistatism and social conservatism of the radical right. And the radical right has been a magnet for explicitly racist political forces. On these matters, see: Amy Elizabeth Ansell, *New Right New Racism: Race and Reaction in the United States and Britain* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997); Lawrence D. Bobo and Ryan A. Smith,


The idea for the original edition of this volume, which appeared under the title *The New American Right*, arose in 1954 in a faculty seminar on political behavior, at Columbia University. The subject was McCarthyism, and we sought to bring to bear on this question whatever sophistication the social sciences had achieved. One thing soon became clear: the standard explanations of American political behavior—in terms of economic-interest-group conflict or the role of the electoral structure—were inadequate to the task. (See Chapter 2.) The most fruitful approaches seemed to be those worked out by Richard Hofstadter and Seymour Martin Lipset.

Hofstadter, from a historian's vantage point, argued that a preoccupation with status has been a persistent element in American politics and that McCarthyism as a social phenomenon could best be explained as a form of "status anxiety" in groups that have been "tormented by a nagging doubt as to whether they are really and truly and fully American." He called the individuals in such positions "pseudo-conservatives" because, while claiming to uphold tradition, they were in reality projecting their own fears and frustrations onto society.

Lipset, a sociologist, distinguished between "class politics," which seemed applicable during periods of depression and "status politics," which seemed to predominate during periods of prosperity, when groups were concerned to defend their newly won positions. McCarthyism, he argued, was a species of status politics, and McCarthy's followers were the "radical right"—a term coined by Lipset and used for the first time in the original edition of this book—because they represented a form of extremism, rather than a genuine effort to bespeak the conservative point of view.
A number of essays appearing about this time—by David Riesman and Nathan Glazer, Peter Viereck, and Talcott Parsons—indicated that other writers had independently been engaged in the same kind of analysis, although each with a different emphasis. The congruence was striking enough to suggest a book that would bring together these essays as illustrations of this new conceptual analysis. Hence, The New American Right.

When the book appeared in 1955, McCarthy was already sliding toward his downfall. But as the introductory essay noted at that time, “McCarthyism, or McCarthywasm, as one wit put it, may be a passing phenomenon. This book is concerned not with these transiencies, but with the deeper-running social currents of a turbulent mid-century America.” The re-emergence of the “radical right” in 1961–62 has justified these fears while confirming our analysis. This is not to say that Birchism, and other aspects of the present radical right, are exactly the same as McCarthyism. As a number of the following essays make clear, there are some distinct dissimilarities as well as some common features. McCarthy was a wrecker—what the Germans call an Umstürzmensch, a man who wants to tear up society but has no plan of his own. The radical right of the nineteen-sixties is a movement that fears not only Communism but “modernity,” and that, in its equation of liberalism with Communism, represents a different challenge to the American democratic consensus.

In bringing out this new, enlarged edition of The New American Right, the authors felt that, rather than rewrite the original essays, they would prefer to let these stand as their judgments at the time, and to add supplementary essays. In American social science, there is a valuable tendency, initiated by Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton in their follow-up volume on “The American Soldier,” to create “continuities” in research by allowing participants in the original efforts, and others, to comment on that research and to extend the initial analysis. In that sense, this volume represents a “continuity” in which the authors can assess their own work and, at the same time, contribute analyses of the radical right, circa 1962. Thus, the original essays carry the notation “1955”
after the title, while the new essays bear the legend “1962.”

From the original volume, one essay, “The Polls on Communism and Conformity,” by S. M. Lipset and Nathan Glazer, has been eliminated, primarily because it was methodological, while its substantive material, a report on the volume *Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties*, by Samuel Stouffer, is summarized in the new essay by Herbert H. Hyman.

In addition to the supplementary chapters by the original authors, we have added two new essays to this volume. One, by Alan Westin, is an intensive examination of the ideology and operations of the John Birch Society, which Westin locates in the context of extremist politics, both left and right, in the United States. The second, by Herbert H. Hyman, is a comparison of the climates of political intolerance in England and America. Any general explanation of a social movement has to be rooted in comparative analysis, and Hyman’s pioneering work in that direction provides a useful corrective to some of the parochial aspects of the original analyses.

The volume opens with a new chapter by the editor, which seeks to explain the emergence of the radical right of 1961–62 both in its immediate political context and as a reflection of more pervasive social changes in American life; this is followed by the editor’s original essay of 1955, which deals with the standard interpretations of political behavior in America. In all other instances, the original essay precedes each author’s supplementary chapter.

The stimulus to several of these essays came initially from the Fund for the Republic, and we again acknowledge, gratefully, its courageous and early help. Mr. Lipset’s long, supplementary contribution—a monograph in its own right—was aided by a grant from the Anti-Defamation League which is sponsoring, at the University of California at Berkeley, an extended survey of the relationship of political extremism to ethnic prejudice in the United States.

Daniel Bell

*Columbia University*

*June, 1962.*
The American has never yet had to face the trials of Job. 
. . . Hitherto America has been the land of universal good will, confidence in life, inexperience of poisons. Until yesterday, it believed itself immune from the hereditary plagues of mankind. It could not credit the danger of being suffocated or infected by any sinister principle. . . .

GEORGE SANTAYANA,
*Character and Opinion in the United States*

In the winter of 1961–62, the “radical right” emerged into quick prominence on the American political scene. The immediate reasons for its appearance are not hard to understand. The simple fact was that the Republican Party, now out of power, inevitably began to polarize (much as the Democrats, if they were out of power, might have split over the civil rights and integration issue), and the right wing came to the fore. The right-wing Republicans have an ideology—perhaps the only group in American life that possesses one today—but during the Eisenhower administration they had been trapped because “their” party was in power, and the American political system, with its commitment to deals and penalties, does not easily invite ideological—or even principled—political splits. An administration in office, possessing patronage and prestige, can “paper over” the inherent divi-

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sions within a party. But out of office, such conflicts are bound to arise, and so they did within the G.O.P.

Clearly there is more to all this than merely a contest for power within a party. Something new has been happening in American life. It is not the rancor of the radical right, for rancor has been a recurrent aspect of the American political temper. Nor is it just the casting of suspicions or the conspiracy theory of politics, elements of which have streaked American life in the past. What is new, and this is why the problem assumes importance far beyond the question of the fight for control of a party, is the ideology of this movement—its readiness to jettison constitutional processes and to suspend liberties, to condone Communist methods in the fighting of Communism.

Few countries in the world have been able to maintain a social system that allows political power to pass peacefully from one social group to another without the threat of hostilities or even civil war. In the mid-twentieth century, we see such historical centers of civilization as France, let alone states just beginning to work out viable democratic frameworks, torn apart by ideological groups that will not accept a consensual system of politics. The politics of civility, to use Edward Shils' phrase, has been the achievement of only a small group of countries—those largely within an Anglo-Saxon or Scandinavian political tradition. Today, the ideology of the right wing in America threatens the politics of American civility. Its commitment and its methods threaten to disrupt the "fragile consensus" that underlies the American political system.

I believe that the radical right is only a small minority, but it gains force from the confusions within the world of conservatism regarding the changing character of American life. What the right as a whole fears is the erosion of its own social position, the collapse of its power, the increasing incomprehensibility of a world—now overwhelmingly technical and complex—that has changed so drastically within a lifetime.

The right, thus, fights a rear-guard action. But its very
anxieties illustrate the deep fissures that have opened in American society as a whole, as a result of the complex structural changes that have been taking place in the past thirty years or so. And more, they show that the historic American response to social crisis, the characteristic American style, is no longer adequate to the tasks.

I

The Emergence of the Radical Right

Social groups that are dispossessed invariably seek targets on whom they can vent their resentments, targets whose power can serve to explain their dispossession. In this respect, the radical right of the early 1960s is in no way different from the Populists of the 1890s, who for years traded successfully on such simple formulas as "Wall Street," "international bankers," and "the Trusts," in order to have not only targets but "explanations" for politics. What lends especial rancor to the radical right of the 1960s is its sense of betrayal not by its "enemies" but by its "friends."

After twenty years of Democratic power, the right-wing Republicans hoped that the election of Dwight Eisenhower would produce its own utopia: the dismantling of the welfare state, the taming of labor unions, and the "magical" rollback of Communism in Europe. None of this happened. Eisenhower's Labor Secretary courted the unions, social-security benefits increased, and, during the recession, unemployment benefits were extended, while the government, in good Keynesian style, ran a twelve-billion-dollar budgetary deficit. In foreign policy, Secretary of State Dulles first trumpeted a "liberation policy," and then retreated, talked brinkmanship but moved cautiously, announced a policy of "massive retaliation," and, toward the end of his tenure, abandoned even that, so that the subsequent Eisenhower moves toward summity were no different from, or from a "hard" right line were "softer" than, the Truman-Acheson containment policy. Thus eight years of moderation proved more frustrating than twenty years of opposition.
Once the Democrats were back in office, the charge of softness in dealing with Communism could again become a political, as well as an ideological, issue. And the radical right was quick to act. The abject failure in Cuba—the name of the landing place for the abortive invasion, the Bay of Pigs, itself became a cruel historical joke—seemed to reinforce the picture of the United States that emerged out of the stalemate in Korea a decade ago—of a lurching, lumbering power, lacking will, unsure of its strength, indecisive in its course, defensive in its posture. The theme of the radical right was voiced by Rear Admiral Chester Ward (ret.), the Washington director of the American Security Council, who declared, "Americans are tired of defeats. They are tired of surrenders covered up as 'negotiated settlements.' They are, indeed, tired of so much talk and little action by our leaders. For the first time in sixteen years of the cold war, a demand for victory is beginning to roll into Washington."

Thus the stage was set.

The factors that precipitated the radical right into quick notoriety in early 1961 were the rancor of their attacks and the flash spread of the movement in so many different places. McCarthyism in the mid-1950s was never an organized movement; it was primarily an atmosphere of fear, generated by a one-man swashbuckler cutting a wide swath through the headlines. In some localities—in Hollywood, on Broadway, in some universities—individual vigilante groups did begin a drumbeat drive against Communists or former fellow-travelers, but by and large the main agitation was conducted in government by Congressional or state legislators, using agencies of legislative investigation to assert their power. In contrast, the radical right of the 1960s has been characterized by a multitude of organizations that seemingly have been able to evoke an intense emotional response from a devoted following.

Three elements conjoined to attract public attention to the radical right. One was the disclosure of the existence of the John Birch Society, a secretive, conspiratorial group obedient to a single leader, Robert Welch, who argued that one could
combat the methods of Communism only with Communist methods. Thus, membership lists were never disclosed, fronts were organized to conduct campaigns (such as the one to impeach Chief Justice Warren, which turned, with heavy-handed jocularity, into calls to “hang” him), and a symbol of patriotism was put forth in the name of an Army captain who had been shot in China by the Communists.

The second was the fashionable spread of week-long seminars of anti-Communist “schools,” conducted by evangelist preachers who adapted old revivialist techniques to a modern idiom, which swept sections of the country, particularly the Southwest and California. These schools promised to initiate the student into the “mysteries” of Communism by unfolding its secret aims, or unmasking the philosophy of “dialectical materialism.” And, third, there was the disclosure of the existence of extreme fanatic groups, such as the Minutemen, who organized “guerrilla-warfare seminars,” complete with rifles and mortars, in preparation for the day when patriots would have to take to the hills to organize resistance against a Communist-run America. Such fringe movements, ludicrous as they were, illustrated the hysteria that had seized some sections of the radical right.

To a surprising extent, much of the radical-right agitation—and the spread of the seminar device—was unleashed by the Eisenhower administration itself. In 1958, the National Security Council issued a directive, as yet still unpublished, which stated that it would be the policy of the United States government, as Senator Fulbright cited it, “to make use of military personnel and facilities to arouse the public to the menace of Communism.” Following this directive, the Joint

[1] “Memorandum Submitted to the Department of Defense on Propaganda Activities of Military Personnel,” by Senator Fulbright, Congressional Record, August 2, 1961, pp. 13436–13442. As the New York Times summarized this N.S.C. directive on June 17, 1961, “President Eisenhower and his top policy leaders decreed that the cold war could not be fought as a series of separate and often unrelated actions, as with foreign aid and propaganda. Rather, it must be fought with a concentration of all the resources of the
Chiefs of Staff and the National War College entered into consultation with the Foreign Policy Research Institute of the University of Pennsylvania, and the Institute of American Strategy (a creation of the Richardson Foundation), to plan curriculum and seminars for reserve officers and local businessmen. A basic text was adopted, *American Strategy for the Nuclear Age*, edited by Walter F. Hahn and John C. Neff, of the University of Pennsylvania group. An equally influential text was the book *Protracted Conflict*, by Robert Strausz-Hupe and Colonel William Kintner, which argues that no negotiations with the Russians leading to a stable settlement are really possible. The Strausz-Hupe group is neither part of, nor should it be identified with, the lunatic fringes of the right. Its arguments are serious and subject to the debate and rival assessments of other scholars. But the actions initiated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff did lead to a large number of Projects Alert and indoctrination seminars, carried out by official Navy and Army spokesmen, that went far beyond the original scope of the National Security Council directive, and that brought into these sessions the pitchmen of the radical right.

In August, 1960 (as detailed in the Fulbright memorandum), the United States Naval Air Station, at Glenview, Illinois, sent out invitations to community leaders and businessmen, inviting them to a seminar on “Education for American Security.” The announced purpose of the seminar was to stimulate an active force against “moral decay, political apathy and spiritual bankruptcy,” and to teach the participants how to create similar schools in other Midwestern communities. The conference was addressed by a number of high-ranking naval officers. But it also included Dr. Fred C. Schwarz, the organizer of the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade; E. Merrill Root, author of *Brainwashing in the High Schools* and *Collectivism on the Campus*, and an en-
dorser of the John Birch Society; and Richard Arens, former research director of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and a member of Schwarz's Christian Crusade. The speeches during the sessions, according to the Christian Century, the liberal Protestant weekly published in Chicago, not only attacked Communism but condemned as well "liberals, modernists, John Dewey, Harvard students, the New York Times, the American Friends Service Committee, pacifists, naive ministers," and so on.

It was this same mixture of official military sponsorship and propagandists of the radical right that characterized dozens of similar seminars around the country. On April 21, 1961, the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Pittsburgh sponsored a Fourth-Dimensional Warfare Seminar, with the cooperation of the commanding general of the 2nd U. S. Army, Lieutenant General Ridgley Gaither, and his staff, at whose sessions the House Un-American Activities Committee film Operation Abolition was shown, and the principal speaker, Admiral Chester Ward (ret.), attacked Adlai Stevenson and George Kennan, as advisers to the President whose "philosophies regarding foreign affairs would chill the typical American." A Strategy for Survival conference held on April 14th and 15th in Fort Smith, Fayetteville, and Little Rock, Arkansas, sponsored by the local Chamber of Commerce and promoted by Major General Bullock, the area commander, heard speakers from Harding College, a small institution in Searcy, Arkansas, operated by members of the Church of Christ, which has been the source of much extreme right-wing material. And on the program was the film Communism on the Map, prepared by Harding College, which equates Socialism with Communism. A Project Alert was organized at the Pensacola Naval Air Training station, in Florida, based on Harding College materials, and the program was repeated in similar "alerts" in Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas. Dr. Fred C. Schwarz held a seminar at the headquarters of the 8th Naval District, in New Orleans, which was endorsed by the Commandant, Rear Admiral W. G. Schindler. A Houston Freedom Forum was held by Schwarz's
Christian Anti-Communism Crusade at which Admiral F. W. Warder gave the keynote address.

And so it went. In almost every area of the country, seminars, schools, and projects, organized by the military or by business groups in cooperation with the military, spread the propaganda of the radical right and gave a broad aura of authority and legitimacy to such propaganda and to such pitchmen of the radical right as the Reverend Dr. Schwarz and the Reverend Billy Hargis.

II

The Psychological Posture

The psychological stock-in-trade of the radical right rests on a threefold appeal: the breakdown of moral fiber in the United States; a conspiracy theory of a "control apparatus" in the government which is selling out the country; and a detailed forecast regarding the Communist "takeover" of the United States.

Central to the appeal of the radical right is the argument that old-fashioned patriotism has been subverted by the cosmopolitan intellectual. An editorial in the National Review on the space flight of astronaut John Glenn sums up this theme in striking fashion. Glenn, said the editorial, is an authentic American hero because he is unashamed to say that he gets a thrill when the American flag goes by and because he will openly acknowledge the guidance of God. "It is 'American' as in older storybooks, as in legends, and myths and dreams—brought up to technological date, of course—as, let's say it plainly, in the pre-1930 Fourth of July celebrations; and the Saturday Evening Post covers before they, too, not long ago, went modern; and a touch of soap opera. Yes, a bit corny—for that is the traditional American style. Too corny by far for the Norman Cousinses, Arthur Schlesingers, Adlai Stevensons, Henry Steele Commagers, Max Lerners, John Kenneth Galbraiths, and those others of our enlightened age—so many of them now fluttering around
the Kennedy throne—who have long left behind the old provincial corn for a headier global brew.”

Here one finds the praise of the “simple virtues”—they are always simple—the evocation of small-town life, the uncluttered Arcadia, against the modern, the sophisticated, the cosmopolitan. But the Glenn flight, according to the editorial, proved more: it proved the victory of “man” against the “mechanical” and, implicitly, against the intellectual. “This and that went wrong, we all learned, with the unbelievably complex mechanism of Glenn’s ship, as it whirled through the emptiness of Space,” continued the National Review.

The attitude control thingamajigs didn’t work right. There were troubles in some of the communication instruments. A signal indicated that the latching of the heat shield was precarious. This and that went wrong with the mechanism, and man took over and brought Friendship 7 to its strange harbor. . . . And that is fine news, though it should hardly be news. It is good technically, because we Americans, with our gadgetry obsession and our wish for too much convenience, safety and comfort, tend to crowd all our machines and vehicles with too immensely many tricky devices. Every additional transistor in these automatic mechanisms means that many more connections to loosen; every valve can fail to open; every fuse can blow. Many sober engineers believe that this over-complication habit accounts for not a few of our missile and space troubles. . . . It is better news still, philosophically, we might say, because it reminds us that there is no such thing, and never will be, as a “thinking” machine. Only man thinks, wills, decides, dares. No machine, on land, in sea, air or space, can do man’s job for him: can choose, for good or ill.

The fact that “man” is also the one who designs the machines is, of course, beside the point of the editorial. Its implication is fairly clear: don’t let anyone tell us that space (or politics, economics, or life) is complicated; machines can never be perfect (“every valve can fail to open; every
fuse can blow”); only “man” (not the scientist, the intellectual, or the unsober engineer) can think. In short, America will be back on an even keel when the simple virtues prevail.

The theme of conspiracy haunts the mind of the radical rightist. It permits him to build up the image of the children of darkness and the children of light. It exempts him from having to specify empirical proofs. General Edwin Walker told a Congressional committee that a “control apparatus” was “selling out the Constitution, national sovereignty and national independence,” but when asked to specify the members of the control apparatus, he replied that he could not name the individuals, but that the apparatus could be identified “by its effects—what it did in Cuba—what it did in the Congo—what it did in Korea.”

The irony of this reply is that it is cut from the same cloth as vulgar Bolshevik explanation: accident and contingency are ruled out of history, subjective intentions are the prattlings of “bourgeois morality,” history is plot and objective consequence. Just as in a concentration camp—or any extreme situation—a victim adopts unconsciously the mode, manner, and even swagger of the aggressor, so men like General Walker seem to have become mesmerized by the enemies they have studied so assiduously and with such horrified fascination.

And to round out their picture of horror, the radical right has given us an exact forecast of things to come. Just as the “enthusiastic” preachers of Baptist fundamentalism would predict with Biblical certainty the date of the end of the world, so the fundamentalists of the radical right make their own predictions of the end of liberty in the United States. Fred Schwarz has named 1973 as the date set by the Communists for the takeover of America. In his lectures, Schwarz builds up the picture of the ultimate fate in store for his audience once the Communists win. “When they come for you, as they have for many others, and on a dark night, in a dank cellar, they take a wide-bore revolver with a soft-nose bullet, and they place it at the nape of your neck. . . .”

A more elaborate fantasy is provided in The John Franklin
Letters, a Birchite novel that was circulated in 1959, and then withdrawn. The novel pictures an America Sovietized by the Communists in 1970. The beginning of the end comes in 1963, when the World Health Organization sends in a Yugoslav inspector, under powers granted by the President of the United States, to search any house he chooses. The Yugoslav discovers in the house of a good American a file of anti-Communist magazines, seizes them as deleterious to the mental health of the community, and is shot by the American, who escapes to the woods. But the infiltration continues. By 1970, the United States, thanks to the global do-gooders, has become part of a World Authority dominated by the Soviet-Asian-African bloc, and this Authority suspends the country's right to govern itself because of the "historic psychological genocide" against the Negro race. United Nations administrators, mostly Red Chinese, are sent in to rule. Harlem, triumphant, arises and loots the liquor stores. The city proletariat, its sense of decency destroyed by public housing, begins to raid the suburbs. In short order, twenty million Americans are "done away with," while the people are subjected to torture by blow-torch and rock-'n'-roll—the latter on television.

Meanwhile, the good American begins to fight back. As far back as 1967, John Franklin and his friends had been stockpiling rifles. And now they act. Franklin describes in gory detail a total of fourteen patriotic murders: two by fire, one by hammer, one by strangling, two by bow and arrow, one by defenestration, one by drowning, and the rest by shooting. These brave actions are sufficient to turn the tide—despite the atom bomb, a huge invasion army, and absolute terror. By 1976, the people all over the world go into the streets, and everywhere Communism falls. The assumption is that Communism is so inefficient, it cannot build heavy tanks or heavy weapons. All that is necessary is the courage

\[1\] I am following here the account of Murray Kempton in the New York Post, October 26, 1961.
of a few determined men, practicing the "simple virtues,"
to overthrow this clumsy Moloch.

"This, of course," as Murray Kempton remarks, "is the
Bircher's dream. America slides unresistingly into Commu­
nism; a few Mike Hammers find their rifles; and in five years
the world is free. The Birch mind is only the Mickey Spil­
lane mind. There is that lingering over and savoring of pure
physical violence, the daydream of the disarmed. Reading
The John Franklin Letters we can recognize Robert Welch's
voice. He is Charles Atlas saying to us again that we need
only mail the letter and back will come the muscles which
we will use to throw the bully off the beach and have the girl
turn to us with eyes shining with the sudden knowledge of
how special we are."

The distinctive theme of the radical right is that not only
is Communism a more threatening force today than at any
other time in the past forty years, but that the threat is as
great domestically as it is externally. If one points out, in
astonishment, that the American Communist Party is splin­
tered badly, its membership at the lowest point since the
mid-1920s, its influence in the trade-union movement nil,
and that not one intellectual figure of any consequence to­
day is a Communist, the rightist replies do not confront
these assertions at all. They range from the question that, if
this is so, how did it happen that the United States "lost"
China, Czechoslovakia, and Cuba to the Communists, to the
outright charges, like General Walker's, that the highest offi­
cials of the Democratic Party are members of the "Com­
munist conspiracy," or to Robert Welch's claim that former
President Eisenhower was a "tool" of the Communists and
that his brother Milton is an avowed one. Defeat can be
possible only if sinister men were at the helm.3

3 Typical of this line is the question constantly reiterated by the
Reverend Billy Hargis: "How can you explain the mistakes of our
leaders for the last 30 years if there aren't Communists giving them
advice?" Hargis is one of the more flamboyant evangelists of the
radical right. He publishes The Weekly Crusader, which contains a
Foreign Intelligence Digest Section, written by Major General
In fact, so great is the preoccupation with the alleged domestic threat that only rarely in the press of the radical right is there any mention of Russia's military prowess, its scientific equipment, or its ability to propel intercontinental ballistic missiles. When such facts are raised, it is often asserted either that such strength is a sham or that whatever knowledge Russia has was "stolen" from the United States (the claim made, for example, by Medford Evans, now an adviser to General Walker, in his book *The Secret War for the A-Bomb*, Chicago, Regnery Press, 1953). For a considerable period of time, in fact, the magazines of the radical right refused to acknowledge that the Russians had sent a sputnik to the moon, or that they had sent a man into space, and, like the *Daily Worker* unmasking a capitalist conspiracy, they gleefully pounced on inconsistencies in news stories to assert that we were all being hoodwinked by a hoax (as were, presumably, the American tracking stations).

The existence of an extreme *internal* threat is crucial to the ideological, if not the psychological, posture of the radical right, for if it admitted that such a threat is dubious, then the debate would have to shift to ground about which it has little comprehension, or rightists would have to admit—as Eisenhower did—that the area of maneuverability in foreign policy is highly limited. If the threat was conceded to be largely external, one would have to support an expanded federal budget, large military expenditures, foreign aid to allies, and also confront the intractable fact that American might alone is insufficient to defeat the Russians—or that victory for anyone would not be possible once war began!—and that the United States has to take into account the forces working for independence in the former colonial world.

The unwillingness of the radical right to recognize Russian military strength as a prime factor in the balance of terror, and the compulsive preoccupation with a presumed internal threat, can perhaps be clarified by a little-under-

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Charles A. Willoughby (ret.). Willoughby was General Douglas MacArthur's Intelligence chief in the Pacific.
stood psychological mechanism—the need to create "fear-justifying" threats in order to explain fright that is provoked by other reasons. For example, a child who is afraid of the dark may tell his parents that the creaking noises he hears in the house indicate that there are burglars downstairs. It does not reassure the child if he is told that there is no burglar, or that the noises are harmless, for he needs the story to justify the fear he feels. In fact, it upsets the child to the "reassured." (The simplest answer is to tell the child that if there are burglars downstairs, his father is strong enough to handle them or the police are close by.) Similarly, a study by Prasad of rumors in India following an earthquake revealed that people in the areas adjacent to the earthquake, who had heard about the quake but had had no direct experience of it, persisted in believing and spreading rumors that a new earthquake was coming. The function of such stories was to justify, psychologically, the initial apprehensions, which had little basis in experience.\[4\] In short, the

For a technical elaboration of this psychological mechanism, see Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Row, Peterson; Chicago, 1957), especially Chapter 10, which reports the study of the rumor. Festinger's theory seeks to explain how individuals try to reconcile—or, technically, "to reduce the dissonance" of—the holding of two inconsistent beliefs at the same time; e.g., the belief that smoking reduces tension and the fear that smoking may produce cancer. When beliefs are specific, denial may be one simple means, conversion to an opposite view follows under certain specifiable conditions, or, if the apprehensions are vague, the creation of "fear-justifying" threats becomes another mechanism.

In the light of Festinger's theory, it would be interesting to confront a sample of the radical right with the problem of explaining the belief in the rising internal threat of Communist infiltration into government with the continued presence of J. Edgar Hoover—the one figure who seems to be sacrosanct to the right—as director of the F.B.I. Since Hoover has been in office all through the years when Communism was allegedly growing as an internal threat, how explain the inability of the F.B.I. to cope with it? One could say that the Communists were cleverer than Hoover, but that would tarnish his image. Or one could say that Hoover had been shackled by the successive administrations—even a Republican one. But if that were the case, why would such a stalwart anti-Communist accept such shackles? One could retort that Hoover felt his role in
radical right, having a diffused sense of fear, needs to find some story or explanation to explain, or justify, that fear. One can deny the external reality, and build up the internal threat, through such psychological mechanisms.

One sees among the radical right, particularly among individuals in its upper-middle-class following who have never seen a Communist, the most extraordinary apprehensions about the extent of current Communist infiltration in government. If one asks them to explain these attitudes, one is constantly reminded of Alger Hiss and Harry Dexter White. Yet whatever the actuality of past Communist infiltration in the government—and its extent has been highly distorted as to the actual influence exerted—none of this offers any proof about the current status of Dean Rusk or W. W. Rostow, or any of the present foreign-policy advisers of the Kennedy administration. Yet the internal threat is the one that is primarily harped upon, along with suspicions of the “soft” attitudes of the current administration.

It is largely among the leftist fringes of the radical right that such paranoid views are peddled. But most of the radical right, uneasy aware of the difficulty of maintaining the position that the Communist Party alone constitutes the internal threat, has shifted the argument to a different and more nebulous ground—the identification of Communism with liberalism. “I equate the growth of the welfare state,” says Dan Smoot, a former F.B.I. agent whose program, The

office to be more important than a grand gesture of renunciation (such as General Walker’s). But if the Communist infiltration has been so enormous as to extend almost to, if not into, the White House, why would he not step out and unmask the plot? But then, since the Communist threat may grow even greater, he would still be needed in office—or, horrors to admit the thought, it may well be that, reversing G. K. Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday*, J. Edgar Hoover is himself the chief agent of the Communist conspiracy in America, and that could explain the protection the conspiracy has received so far. The possibilities of such a thought are clearly quite provoking, and it may well be that Robert Welch, in the privacy of his office, has entertained them. But if that were so, who, then, is immune from the plague?
Dan Smoot Report, is heard on thirty-two television and fifty-two radio stations, “with Socialism and Socialism with Communism.” Thus it is argued that the administration is unwilling (for ideological reasons) or incapable (for intellectual reasons) of “getting tough” with Communism. And in this fashion, the foreign-policy issue is tied in with a vast array of right-wing domestic issues, centering around the income tax and the welfare state.

But with this shift in the argument, the nature of the debate becomes clearer. What the right wing is fighting, in the shadow of Communism, is essentially “modernity”—that complex of attitudes that might be defined most simply as the belief in rational assessment, rather than established custom, for the evaluation of social change—and what it seeks to defend is its fading dominance, exercised once through the institutions of small-town America, over the control of social change. But it is precisely these established ways that a modernist America has been forced to call into question.

III

The Crisis in National Style

Every country has a “national style,” a distinctive way of meeting the problems of order and adaptation, of conflict and consensus, of individual ends and communal welfare, that confront any society. The “national style,” or the characteristic way of response, is a compound of the values and the national character of a country. As anyone who has read travelers’ accounts knows, there has long been agreement on the characteristics of the American style.

The American has been marked by his sense of achievement, his activism, his being on the move, his eagerness for

The “style” of a country, or of an organization, is in this sense a literary counterpart of the idea of an “operational code”—the do’s and don’ts that implicitly prescribe and proscribe permissible modes of action for an organization or a group. For an explicit, technical application of this concept, see Nathan Leites, The Operational Code of the Politburo (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1951).
experience. America has always been "future-oriented." Europe represented the past, with its hierarchies, its fixed statuses, its ties to antiquity. The American "makes" himself, and in so doing transforms himself, society, and nature. In Jefferson's deism, God was not a transcendental being but a "Workman" whose intricate design was being unfolded on the American continent. The achievement pattern envisaged an "endless future," a life of constant improvement. Education meant preparation for a career rather than cultivation. When Samuel Gompers, the immigrant labor leader, was asked what labor's goal was, he gauged the American spirit shrewdly in answering, simply, "More."

Hand in hand with achievement went a sense of optimism, the feeling that life was tractable, the environment manipulable, that anything was possible. The American, the once-born man, was the "sky-blue, healthy-minded moralist" to whom sin and evil were, in Emerson's phrase, merely the "soul's mumps and measles and whooping cough." In this sense the American has been Graham Greene's "quiet American" or, to Santayana, "inexperienced of poisons." And for this reason Europeans have always found America lacking in a sense of the esthetic, the tragic, or the decadent.

American achievement and masculine optimism created a buoyant sense of progress, almost of omnipotence. America had never been defeated. America was getting bigger and

One viewpoint argues that national character is rooted in the language system of each society. Thus, as an old joke has it, the Englishman earns his living; the Frenchman gagne (gains); the German verdient (earns—with the connotation of serving); the American makes his livelihood; and the Hungarian keretznenni (looks for and finds) his living.

The forms of murder and the styles of pornography mirror a society, for they disclose ways in which, actually and vicariously, the society satisfies forbidden desires. Death in the American mode is impersonal, sudden, and violent, rather than a lingering disease, as, say, in The Magic Mountain. Pornography in Mickey Spillane (in contrast with the French L'Histoire d'O, with its complex account of slavish female submission to sinister erotic wants) is a slashing, compulsive emphasis on brute masculinity—which betrays its own fear of castration or impotence.
better. America was always first. It had the tallest buildings, the biggest dams, the largest cities. "The most striking expression of [the American's] materialism," remarked Santayana, "is his singular preoccupation with quantity."

And all of this was reflected in distinctive aspects of character. The emphasis on achievement was an emphasis on the individual. The idea that society was a system of social arrangements that acts to limit the range of individual behavior was an abstraction essentially alien to American thought; reality was concrete and empirical, and the individual was the moral unit of action. That peculiar American inversion of Protestantism, the moralizing style, found its focus in the idea of reform, but it was the reform of the individual, not of social institutions. To reform meant to remedy the defects of character, and the American reform movement of the nineteenth century concentrated on sin, drink, gambling, prostitution, and other aspects of individual behavior. In politics, the moralistic residue led to black-and-white judgments: if anything was wrong, the individual was to blame. Since there were good men and bad men, the problem was to choose the good and eschew the bad. Any defect in policy flowed from a defect in the individual, and a change in policy could begin only by finding the culprit.

All of this—the pattern of achievement, of optimism and progress, and the emphasis on the individual as the unit of concern—found expression in what W. W. Rostow has called the "classic" American style. It was one of ad-hoc compromise derived from an implicit consensus. In the American political debates, there was rarely, except for the Civil War, an appeal to "first principles," as, say, in France, where every political division was rooted in the alignments of the French Revolution, or in the relationship of the Catholic Church to the secular state. In the United States, there were three unspoken assumptions: that the values of the individual were to be maximized, that the rising material wealth would

dissolve all strains resulting from inequality, and that the continuity of experience would provide solutions for all future problems.

In the last fifteen years, the national self-consciousness has received a profound shock. At the end of World War II, American productivity and American prodigality were going to inspire an archaic Europe and a backward colonial system. But the American century quickly vanished. The fall of China, the stalemate in Korea, the eruption of anti-colonialism (with the United States cast bewilderingly among the arch-villains), the higher growth rates in the western European economies at a time when growth in this country has slowed considerably, and the continued claims of Khrushchev that Communism is the wave of the future have by now shattered the earlier simple-minded belief Americans had in their own omnipotence, and have left almost a free-floating anxiety about the future. In a crudely symbolic way, the Russian sputniks trumped this country on its own ground—the boastful claim of always being first. Getting to the moon first may be, as many scientists assert, of little scientific value, and the huge sums required for such a venture might be spent more wisely for medical work, housing, or scientific research, but having set the "rules of the game," the United States cannot now afford to withdraw just because, in its newly acquired sophistication, it has perhaps begun to realize that such competitions are rather childish.

But these immediate crises of nerve only reflect deeper challenges to the adequacy of America's classic national style. That style, with its ad-hoc compromise and day-to-day patching, rather than consistent policy formation, no longer gives us guides to action. The classic notion was that rights inhered in individuals. But the chief realization of the past thirty years is that not the individual but collectivities—corporations, labor unions, farm organizations, pressure groups—have become the units of social action, and that individual rights in many instances derive from group rights, and in others have become fused with them. Other than the thin veil of the "public consensus," we have few guide lines, let alone
a principle of distributive justice, to regulate or check the arbitrary power of many of these collectivities.

A second sign that the classic style has broken down appears in the lack of any institutional means for creating and maintaining necessary public services. On the municipal level, the complicated political swapping among hundreds of dispersed polities within a unified economic region, each seeking its own bargains in water supply, sewage disposal, roads, parks, recreation areas, crime regulation, transit, and so on, makes a mockery of the *ad-hoc* process. Without some planning along viable regional lines, local community life is bound to falter under the burdens of mounting taxes and social disarray.

And, third, foreign policy has foundered because every administration has had difficulty in defining a national interest, morally rooted, whose policies can be realistically tailored to the capacities and the constraints imposed by the actualities of world power. The easy temptation—and it is the theme of the radical right—is the tough-talking call for “action.” This emphasis on action—on getting things done, on results—is a dominant aspect of the traditional American character. The moralizing style, with its focus on sin and on the culpability of the individual, finds it hard to accept social forces as a convincing explanation of failure, and prefers “action” instead. Americans have rarely known how to sweat it out, to wait, to calculate in historical terms, to learn that “action” cannot easily reverse social drifts whose courses were charted long ago. The “liberation” policy of the first Eisenhower administration was but a hollow moralism, deriving from the lack of any consistent policy other than the need to seem “activist”—again part of the classic style—rather than from a realistic assessment of the possibility of undermining Soviet power in eastern Europe. Until recently, there has been little evidence that American foreign policy is guided by a sense of historical time and an accurate assessment of social forces.

Styles of action reflect the character of a society. The classic style was worked out during a period when America was an agrarian, relatively homogeneous society, isolated from
the world at large, so that *ad-hoc* measures were a realistic way of dealing with new strains. As an adaptive mechanism, it served to bring new groups *into* the society. But styles of action, like rhetoric, have a habit of outliving institutions. And the classic style in no way reflects the deep structural changes that have been taking place in American life in the past quarter of a century.

**IV**

*The Sources of Strain*

Although the crisis in national style can be detected most forcefully in the realm of foreign policy, there have been, in the past thirty years, deep changes taking place in the social structure that are reworking the social map of the country, upsetting the established life-chances and outlooks of old, privileged groups, and creating uncertainties about the future which are deeply unsettling to those whose values were shaped by the "individualist" morality of nineteenth-century America.

The most pervasive changes are those involving the structural relations between class position and power. Clearly, today, political position rather than wealth, and technical skill rather than property, have become the bases from which power is wielded. In the modes of access to privilege, inheritance is no longer all-determining, nor does "individual initiative" in building one's own business exist as a realistic route; in general, education has become the major way to acquire the technical skills necessary for the administrative and power-wielding jobs in society.

In the older mythos, one's achievement was an individual fact—as a doctor, lawyer, professor, businessman; in the reality of today, one's achievement, status, and prestige are rooted in particular *collectivities* (the corporation, being attached to a "name" hospital, teaching at a prestigious university, membership in a good law firm), and the individual's role is necessarily submerged in the achievement of the collectivity. Within each collectivity and profession, the prolif-
eration of tasks calls for narrower and narrower specializations, and this proliferation requires larger collectivities, and the consequent growth of hierarchies and bureaucracies.

The new nature of decision-making—the larger role of technical decision—also forces a displacement of the older elites. Within a business enterprise, the newer techniques of operations research and linear programming almost amount to the "automation" of middle management, and its displacement by mathematicians and engineers, working either within the firm or as consultants. In the economy, the businessman finds himself subject to price, wage, and investment criteria laid down by the economists in government. In the polity, the old military elites find themselves challenged in the determination of strategy by scientists, who have the technical knowledge on nuclear capability, missile development, and the like, or by the "military intellectuals" whose conceptions of weapon systems and political warfare seek to guide military allocations.

In the broadest sense, the spread of education, of research, of administration, and of government creates a new constituency, the technical and professional intelligentsia, and while these are not bound by some common ethos to constitute a new class, or even a cohesive social group, they are the products of a new system of recruitment for power (just as property and inheritance represented the old system), and those who are the products of the old system understandably feel a vague and apprehensive disquiet—the disquiet of the dispossessed.

V

The Generational Dispossessed

Many of the political changes that have transformed American society originated in measures taken thirty and more years ago. In many instances, the changes have been irrevocably built into the structure of American society. Why then have the consequences of these changes—and the reac-
tions to them—become so manifest, and produced such rancor, at this time?

It was Walter Bagehot who said that the Reform Bill of 1832 was "won" in 1865—that political reforms are secured largely through generational change. New legislation may stipulate a set of reforms, but the administration of the law, its judicial interpretation, and its enforcement are in the hands of an older political generation which may hinder the changes. Only when the new generation comes of age are the judiciary and the bureaucracy taken over, and men educated in the "new spirit of the time" come into the established framework of power.

In this sense, the social enactments of the New Deal came to fruition thirty years later. While the Roosevelt administration created a host of new regulatory agencies, the judiciary, in its values and social outlook, largely reflected the ancien régime, and even though there was no entrenched bureaucracy, like those of Germany, France, or Britain, that would impede or distort these reforms, the lack of a broad intelligentsia made it difficult to staff the regulatory agencies without drawing in the business community, the trade associations, and the like. Thus, while the enactments of the Roosevelt administration seemed to many conservatives to be startlingly revolutionary, the business community—the main group whose power was abated—could, through the courts, Congress, and often the administrative agencies, modify substantially the restrictions of the regulations.

The paradoxical fact is that while the New Deal has lost much of its meaning on the ideological or rhetorical level, the fabric of government, particularly the judiciary, has been rewoven with liberal thread so that on many significant issues—civil rights, minority-group protection, the extension of social welfare—the courts have been more liberal than the administrations. Only Congress, reflecting the disproportionate power of the rural areas and the established seniority system, has remained predominantly under conservative control.
In identifying "the dispossessed," it is somewhat misleading to seek their economic location, since it is not economic interest alone that accounts for their anxieties. A small businessman may have made considerable amounts of money in the last decade (in part because he has greater freedom than a large corporation in masking costs for tax purposes), and yet strongly resent regulations in Washington, the high income tax, or, more to the point, his own lack of status. To the extent that any such economic location is possible, one can say that the social group most threatened by the structural changes in society is the "old" middle class—the independent physician, farm owner, small-town lawyer, real-estate promoter, home builder, automobile dealer, gasoline-station owner, small businessman, and the like—and that, regionally, its greatest political concentration is in the South and the Southwest, and in California. But a much more telltale indicator of the group that feels most anxious—since life-styles and values provide the emotional fuel of beliefs and actions—is the strain of Protestant fundamentalism, of nativist nationalism, of good-and-evil moralism which is the organizing basis for the "world view" of such people. For this is the group whose values predominated in the nineteenth century, and which for the past forty years has been fighting a rear-guard action.

The present upsurge of American nativism—one aspect of the radical right—is most directly paralleled in the 1920s, in the virulent assaults on teachers' loyalty by the fundamentalist churchmen in the name of God, and by patriotic organizations like the American Legion in the name of country. These conflicts—expressed most directly in the Scopes trial on the teaching of evolution in Tennessee, and the bellicose efforts of Mayor Big Bill Thompson in Chicago to expunge favorable references to Great Britain from the school textbooks—were between "fundamentalists" and "modernists," between "patriots" and "internationalists."

These skirmishes of the 1920s were the first defensive at-
tacks of the nativist and the old middle-class elements. They arose in reaction to the entry into society of formerly "disenfranchised" elements, particularly the children of immigrants and members of minority ethnic groups—an entry made through the urban political machines, the only major route open to them. In short, it was a reaction to the rise of a mass society.

Until the mid-1920s, America in its top and middle layers had been, politically and culturally, a fairly homogeneous society. As Walter Lippmann pointed out in 1928, in a neglected but prescient account of the times, American Inquisitors, "those who differed in religion or nationality from the great mass of the people played no important part in American politics. They did the menial work, they had no influence in society, they were not self-conscious and they produced no leaders of their own. There were some sectarian differences and some sectional differences within the American nation. But by and large, within the states themselves, the dominant group was like-minded and its dominion was unchallenged."[10]

But in time its dominion was challenged, and principally from the cities. The year 1920 was the first in American history when a majority of persons lived in "urban territory."[11]

[11] The sociological definition of "urban"—using government statistical data—is a difficult task. Thus, in 1920 about 54,157,000 persons lived in "urban territories" and 51,550,000 in "rural territories." But rural is defined, at the time, as places under 2500 population. Clearly many persons living in small towns partake of "rural" attitudes. Thus, in 1920 sixteen million of those in "urban territories" lived in towns under 25,000 population. If one takes the 25,000 population as the dividing line between "urban" and "small town," then it was only in 1960 that a majority of Americans lived in urban areas. Since 1950, of course, the movement of city dwellers to the suburbs has complicated the definitional problem. If one takes the census definition of a metropolitan area as a guide (i.e., populations living within a county, or group of contiguous counties, possessing at least one city of 50,000 inhabitants), by 1950 slightly more than half of the United States popu-
The children and the grandchildren of the immigrants began to come of political age. The movement to the cities and the gradual cultural ascendancy of metropolitan life over rural areas, accentuated by the rise of the automobile, motion pictures, and radio—creating, for the first time, a national popular culture—began to threaten established customs and beliefs. Thus, there was no longer, as Lippmann pointed out at the time, "a well-entrenched community, settled in its customs, homogeneous in its manners, clear in its ultimate beliefs. There is great diversity, and therefore there are the seeds of conflict."

Faced with the rise of "heretical" beliefs, the religious fundamentalists in Tennessee put forth the argument, self-evident to them, that teaching in the schools ought to conform to the views of the majority. If the people of Tennessee did not believe in evolution, they had a right to demand that it be stopped. And as Lippmann wryly commented, there was warranty for such a populist demand in Jefferson's bill for the establishment of religious freedom in Virginia, in 1786, which declared that "to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical."

Intellectually, the fundamentalists were defeated and the modernists won; their views came to predominate in the country. But the fundamentalist temper of the 1920s still holds strong sway in rural-dominated states. As David Danzig has pointed out, "the States that repudiated Darwinianism and Al Smith are today prominent among those nineteen that have passed 'Right to Work' laws since 1950." And, paradoxically, although they have become intellectually and socially dispossessed, the fundamentalist "regions" have risen to new wealth in the last fifteen years or so. The industrialization of the South and Southwest, the boom in real estate, 

the gushing wealth of oil in Texas and Oklahoma have transformed the fundamentalist churches and the Southern Baptist movement into a middle-class and upper-middle-class group. Small wonder that, possessing this new wealth, the fundamentalist groups have discovered the iniquity of the income tax.

The social ideas of fundamentalism are quite traditional—a return to the “simple” virtues of individual initiative and self-reliance. In political terms, this means dismantling much of the social-security program, eliminating the income tax, reducing the role of the federal government in economic life, and giving back to the states and local government the major responsibilities for welfare, labor, and similar legislation.

Until now, much of the political strength of the right has stemmed from its ability to block the reapportionment of seats in the state legislatures (and to gerrymander seats for Congress), resulting in a heavily disproportionate representa-

As for the actual meaning of these ideas, as Richard Hofstadter pointed out in a memorandum for the Fund for the Republic in 1955, “A casual survey of the contents of some of the right-wing periodicals will show that the fear of modernity which inspired the fundamentalist crusades of the 1920s and the dislike of the polyglot life of the city, and of Jewish and Catholic immigrants, which inspired the Ku Klux Klan, is still alive among the extreme right.”

The rationalizations for the farm programs of the various administrations—which support farm prices and give the farmer money not to produce—offer a fascinating example of the ideological moralizing of the right. For those reared on fundamentalist virtues, the idea of being paid not to produce creates considerable moral queasiness. Yet, given the overproduction in agriculture, the operation of a free market would serve only to wipe out thousands of farmers immediately. The function of the acreage restrictions is to adjust supply to demand, and farm-price supports provide an “income cushion” in order to ease the lot of the farmer. These programs, costing billions of dollars a year, are defended ideologically on the ground of protecting private property. But the effort—which has the same protective function—to help workers through unemployment compensation is attacked as weakening moral fiber, and the suggestion that technological changes which disrupt the established lives of thousands be retarded is attacked as impeding progress.
tion of the small-town and rural areas in both assemblies. In Tennessee—whose flagrant failure to act precipitated the Supreme Court decision in April, 1962, ordering the reallocation of seats—although the state constitution specified that a reapportionment be made every ten years, the state legislature, since 1901, had rejected all bills attempting to carry out that mandate. As a result, in the voting for the Tennessee State Senate, one-third of the electorate nominated two-thirds of the legislators. In almost every state of the Union one could point to similarly glaring disproportions—though none so astounding as in California, where the single state senator from Los Angeles represents 6,038,771 persons, while a colleague from a rural area represents 14,294 persons, a ratio of 422.5 to 1. In forty-four states, less than forty percent of the population can elect a majority of the state legislators; in thirteen states, fewer than a third of the voters can elect a majority. How quickly this will change, now that the federal courts are empowered to act, remains to be seen.

VI

The Managerial Dispossessed

To list the managerial executive class as among the dispossessed may seem strange, especially in the light of the argument that a revolution which is undermining property as the basis of power is enfranchising a new class of technical personnel among whom are the business executives. And yet the managerial class has been under immense strain all through this period, a strain arising in part from the status discrepancy between their power within a particular enterprise and their power and prestige in the nation as a whole.

The old family firm was securely rooted in the legal and moral tradition of private property. The enterprise "belonged" to the owner, and was sanctioned, depending on one's theological tastes, by God or by Natural Law. The modern manager lacks the inherited family justifications, for increasingly he is recruited from the amorphous middle class. He receives
a salary, bonus, options, expense accounts, and "perks" (use of company planes, memberships in country clubs), but his power is transitory, and he cannot pass on his position to his son.\footnote{On the decline of inherited position and nepotism in the large corporation, see Mabel M. Newcomer, \textit{The Big Business Executive} (New York, Columbia University Press, 1955).}

In order to justify his position, the manager needs an ideology. In no other capitalist order but the American—not in England, or Germany, or France—has this drive for ideology been so compulsive. This ideology is no longer derived from private property but from enterprise, the argument being that only the American corporate system can provide for economic performance. But if performance is the test, then the American manager more and more finds himself in a sorry position. The growth rate of the American economy in the past decade has been surprisingly small. And the "legitimacy" of the manager—the question of who gives him the right to wield such enormous economic power—has been challenged in a series of powerful arguments by Berle, Galbraith, and others.

Within the enterprise, the new corporation head often finds himself with the vexing problem of trying to "downgrade" the importance of the trade-union leader—in order to raise his own status. In an age when management is deemed to be a great and novel skill, involving the administration of production, research, finance, merchandising, public relations, and personnel, the company president feels that there is little reason now to treat union leaders as equals—especially when labor is, after all, only one of a large number of the "co-ordinates of administration." Labor relations, he feels, should be reduced to their proper dimension, as a concern of the personnel manager.

Yet the corporation head is often unable to obtain even this satisfaction—as has been evident in the steel industry. For years the industry smarted at the union’s power, particularly at U. S. Steel, where in 1957 a new management team, headed by Roger Blough, a lawyer with no experience
in production, took over. Blough's predecessor, Ben Fairless, an old production hand who had come up through the mill, had cleverly sought to assuage the vanity of Dave McDonald, the steel-union president, by joint "walking tours" through the plant. There was talk of "mutual trusteeship" by the managers of capital and the managers of labor. But Blough would have none of this charade, and when it was evident that because of slack demand the industry could take a strike, it did so.

The strike lasted three months and ended only with the intervention of Vice-President Nixon and Labor Secretary Mitchell (after Blough and McDonald met secretly at the Vice-President's home), who feared the political consequences in the 1960 campaign of such a long-drawn-out struggle. The strike proved in this, as in a dozen other areas, that the industry could not escape the checkrein of government—not even in a Republican administration. This was demonstrated even more dramatically by Roger Blough's comeuppance in 1962. In the spring of 1962 the Kennedy administration, in an effort to maintain the wage-price line, brought pressure on the steel union to sign an early contract that provided some small fringe benefits but, for the first time in the union's history, no direct wage increase. Shortly afterward, however, U. S. Steel, followed by most of the industry, announced an immediate price rise. In a burst of fury, the colossal weight of the federal government was mobilized against the big steel firms—through threats of prosecution, cancellation of government purchase orders, and the cajoling of the business community—and in short order the industry gave in.

It is unlikely that the business community will take this crashing demonstration of governmental power without making some countervailing efforts of its own on the political level. Already in 1960 the efforts of a number of corporations, led by General Electric, to go "directly" into politics, in imitation of the unions—by taking a public stand on political issues, by sending out vast amounts of propaganda to their employees and to the public, by encouraging right-to-work
referendums in the states—indicated the mood of political dispossession in many corporations. Since then, a significant number of corporations have been contributing financially to the seminars of the radical-right evangelists. Despite the black eye General Electric—the most vocal defender of free enterprise—received when the government disclosed that G.E. as well as a dozen other electrical manufacturing companies had been guilty of illegal price-rigging and cartelization, it is likely that the Kennedy-Blough imbroglio of 1962 will provide an even greater impetus for corporations to finance right-wing political activity in the coming years.

VII

The Military Dispossessed

The irony for the American military establishment is that at a time when, in the new states, the military has emerged as the ruling force of the country (often because it is the one organized group in an amorphous society) and at a

16 The National Education Program, at Harding College in Arkansas, which prepares films on Communism and materials on free enterprise, has been used extensively by General Electric, U. S. Steel, Olin Mathieson Chemical, Monsanto Chemical, Swift & Co., and others. Boeing Aviation and the Richfield Oil Company have sponsored many of the anti-Communism seminars on the West Coast. The Jones & Laughlin Steel Company has a widespread propaganda program for its employees. One of the most active firms is the Allen Bradley Company, of Milwaukee, which makes machine tools and electrical equipment. The Allen Bradley Company advertises in the John Birch Society magazine and reprinted Dr. Fred Schwarz's testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee, a reprint which Schwarz claims had "wider distribution than any other government document in the history of the United States, with the possible exception of the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution." The Allen Bradley Company, which constantly extols the virtue of free enterprise, was one of the companies convicted of collusive bidding and illegal price-rigging.

17 One of the factors that has acted to safeguard democracy in England and the United States is that both countries have never had any permanently large standing armies. The insularity of Eng-
time in American history when the amount of money allocated to military purposes—roughly fifty per cent of the federal budget—is the highest in peacetime history, the military is subject to challenges in its own bailiwick. The problems of national security, like those of the national economy, have become so staggeringly complex that they can no longer be settled simply by common sense or past experience. As a writer in the *Times Literary Supplement* recently put it, "The manner in which weapons systems are likely to develop; the counters which may be found to them; the burdens which they are likely to impose on the national economy; the way in which their possession will affect international relations or their use the nature of war; the technical problems of their control or abolition; all these problems are far beyond the scope of the Joint Planning Staff study or the Civil Service brief."[18]

The fact is that the military establishment, because of its outmoded curriculum, its recruitment and promotion patterns, the vested interests of the different services, and the concentration at the top levels of officers trained in older notions of strategy, is ill equipped to grasp modern conceptions of politics, or to use the tools (computer simulation, linear programming, gaming theory) of strategic planning. As Morris Janowitz has pointed out in his comprehensive study of the military:

land made it place its protection in the Navy, whose forces were always far from shore, and the continental isolation of the United States made it unnecessary to build up any permanent military force. Where large armies have existed, the military, because it has represented an organized bloc whose control over the means of violence could be decisive, has almost invariably been pulled into politics. Thus the German Army in one crucial situation, in 1920, defended the Weimar Republic (against the Putschists of the right), but in a second crucial instance, in 1932 (the machinations of von Schleicher), contributed to its downfall. In Spain in 1936, in France in 1960, and more recently in Argentina, Turkey, Korea, Pakistan, Burma, and so on, the armed forces have been the decisive political element in the society.

There is little in the curriculum to prepare the officer for the realities of participating in the management of politico-military affairs. While the case-study and war-games approaches give the officer a direct understanding and "feel" for the logistics and organizational apparatus that must be "moved" for military operations, there is no equivalent training for the political dimensions of international relations. . . .

All evidence indicates that both absolutists and pragmatists—in varying degree—overemphasize the potentials of force. The realistic study of international relations involves an appreciation of the limits of violence. Military education does not continually focus on these issues, as it relates both to nuclear and limited conventional warfare. Paradoxically, military education does not emphasize the potentialities of unconventional warfare and political warfare, since these are at the periphery of professionalization.19

In the last decade, most of the thinking on strategic problems, political and economic, has been done in the universities or in government-financed but autonomous bodies like the Rand Corporation. A new profession, that of the "military intellectual," has emerged, and men like Kahn, Wohlstetter, Brodie, Hitch, Kissinger, Bowie, and Schelling "move freely through the corridors of the Pentagon and the State Department," as the T.L.S. writer observed, "rather as the Jesuits through the courts of Madrid and Vienna three centuries ago."

In structural terms, the military establishment may be one of the tripods of a "power elite," but in sociological fact the military officers feel dispossessed because they often lack the necessary technical skills or knowledge to answer the new problems confronting them. Since the end of World War II, the military has been involved in a number of battles to defend its elite position, beginning in 1945 with the young

physicists and nuclear scientists, down to the present action against the "technipols" (the technicians and political theorists, as the military derisively calls them), whom Secretary McNamara has brought into the Department of Defense.

The first challenge came from the scientists over the issue of continuing military control of atomic energy. In a burst of almost H. G. Wellsian messianism, the scientists moved into the political arena. And, as a result of skillful lobbying by enthusiastic young scientists from Los Alamos, Chicago, and Brookhaven, Congress passed the McMahon Bill, which set up the Atomic Energy Commission under civilian control. J. Robert Oppenheimer, the scientific head of the Manhattan District project, which constructed the atom bomb, became a leading adviser to the State Department and was one of the principal authors of the Baruch plan.

The advent of the Cold War, in 1947–48, raised a number of issues that divided the scientists and the military even further, and for the next four years a "hidden struggle" between the two elites went on in the labyrinthine corridors of Washington. The chief issue was whether or not to build an H-bomb. The scientists in the General Advisory Committee to the A.E.C., in overwhelming majority—including Oppenheimer, Conant, Rabi, duBridge—opposed the construction of the H-bomb, but lost out. A different issue was raised about the need for defense. The Strategic Air Command, the big-bomber striking arm of American power, argued that no defense against atomic attack was possible and claimed that the only effective deterrent against the Russians would be the threat of massive retaliation. In strategy, this would mean reliance solely on heavy atomic bombs. Against the S.A.C., the scientists claimed that continental defense was possible—if the United States could be made invulnerable to attack, negotiations with the Russians could be opened from strength—and, furthermore, that western Europe could be defended with limited, tactical atomic weapons, so that the United States was not wholly dependent upon "big-bomb" deterrents.

To test their arguments, the scientists got support—in some cases surreptitiously—from backers in the National Security
THE DISPOSSESSED (1962)

Council for a series of "games." Project Lincoln was set up at M.I.T. to study the problems of defense, which resulted later in the radar net of the D.E.W., or early-warning system, in the Arctic. Project Vista, which enlisted some five score scientists from different universities, was set up at the California Institute of Technology to study the use of tactical atomic weapons.

The S.A.C. pooh-poohed both projects, deriding continental defense as a Maginot Line of the air. And it sought to block the distribution of both projects' findings. Eventually, the results from the two laboratories were adopted. An early-warning system was created, and the N.A.T.O. strategy was revised, which meant, in effect, that the S.A.C. monopoly of atomic policy was broken.

Although Robert Oppenheimer had not been the prime instigator of these moves—except in the case of Project Vista—he became the symbol of the scientific opposition to the big-bomber command. In November, 1953, when Lewis Strauss was appointed by President Eisenhower to the chairmanship of the Atomic Energy Commission, Oppenheimer was charged with being a security risk. The basis of the charge—that Oppenheimer had in the later 1930s been sympathetic to a number of Communist fronts—had long been known to the security agencies. But the real inspiration for the A.E.C. action, as is evident from testimony before its special panel, came from men who believed fervently in the theory of strategic air power, who resented Oppenheimer's influence, and could draw only sinister conclusions from his stands on policy.20

20 Major General Roscoe C. Wilson, the former chief of the Air War College, testified that he once "felt compelled to go to the Director of Intelligence to express my concern over what I felt was a pattern of action that was simply not helpful to the national defense." The items cited in this pattern included Oppenheimer's interest in the "internationalizing of atomic energy," his insistence that it was technically premature to build nuclear-powered aircraft, and his conservatism on thermonuclear weapons. (United States Atomic Energy Commission, "In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer," Transcript of Hearings Before the Personnel Security
The Oppenheimer case is now almost a decade behind us, and a shameful instance of national folly; the specific strategic issues regarding the role of manned bombers as the major weight of military power have by now been outmoded by the work on missiles. The originally small scientific community, whose members, drawn from a few university centers, knew each other intimately, has greatly expanded, and with the rise of space exploration, missile technology, and the like, it is no longer dominated by the small group of nuclear physicists who charted the new atomic age. Nor does it any longer, needless to say, have the rough unanimity of outlook that characterized it in the immediate postwar decade. And yet, though the military won the first round of their fight with the nuclear scientists, in the present decade its position as the shaper, as well as the executor, of strategic policy has been consistently eroded. For in present-day decision-making, the nature of strategy involves a kind of analysis for which experience is insufficient. If one takes the complex problem of the choice of "weapons systems," the long lead time that is necessary in the planning and testing, let alone the production, of weapons forces an analyst to construct mathematical models as almost the only means toward rational choices. The recent controversy over the desirability of the RS-70 bomber is a case in point. The systems analysts in the office of the Secretary of Defense, led by Charles Hitch, an economist from Rand who has become

The decision of the special A.E.C. panel was a curious one. Its chairman, Gordon Gray, president of the University of North Carolina, noted that if the board could use common sense rather than apply the stringent rules of the security regulations, its decision might have been different. But in the light of those regulations, while Oppenheimer's "loyalty" was affirmed, he had to be declared a security risk. The full A.E.C. board, by a four-to-one vote, rendered an even harsher judgment in forbidding Oppenheimer access to all classified material. See also, Robert Gilpin, *American Scientists and Nuclear Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1962), Chap. IV, for a discussion of Project Vista and Project Lincoln.
the comptroller in the Pentagon, decided on the basis of computer analysis that the manned RS-70 bomber would long be outmoded by the time it could come into full production, and that it would be wiser to concentrate on missiles. Dismayed by this decision, the Strategic Air Command and its allies in the aircraft industry invoked Congressional support, and the House Military Affairs Committee voted money for the bomber.

But the “technipols,” with McNamara at their head, have gone far beyond the use of linear programming or other planning devices for making more rational choices in the allocation of military resources. The entire Pentagon has been almost completely reorganized so as to reduce the importance of the traditional service arms—Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines—and to introduce “functional” groupings, whereby missions from each of the services are grouped together for budget and strategic purposes in order to test their effectiveness.

The point of all this is that such reorganization means more than the introduction of modern management practice into a top-heavy bureaucratic structure. For the reorganization on program and mission lines stemmed from a new conception of the strategic distribution of the armed forces—a political conception of the role of limited wars and nuclear capabilities, most of which came from the “technipols,” rather than from the military establishment.

The traditional services, and their Chiefs, have reacted to all this with dismay. As an article in Fortune put it, “It was at this point that the military professionals began to exhibit real alarm. McNamara did not ignore them; they had their say, as usual, in defense of their service budgets. But his drive, his intense preoccupation with figures and facts, left the Chiefs and their staffs with the feeling that the computers

Much of the newer economic thinking is reflected in the study by Charles Hitch and Roland N. McKean, The Economics of Defense in the Nuclear Age (Harvard University Press, 1961), completed at Rand before Hitch was appointed comptroller in the Pentagon.
were taking over." And the Fortune article, reflecting the dismay of the service Chiefs, was also a veiled attack on McNamara's penchant for "quantification"; for his failure to respect "the uncomputable that had made Curtis Le May [the head of the big-bomber command] the world's finest operational airman"; for his "inexperience" in military strategy and for his reliance on the technipols, "the inner group of lay experts who were dispersed through State, the White House and Defense." The import of the article was clear: the traditional military professionals were being dispossessed.

On any single set of political or strategic issues, it is an

See "The Education of a Defense Secretary," by Charles J. V. Murphy, Fortune, May, 1962. Murphy, the military correspondent of Fortune, has consistently reflected the views of the military establishment in its battles with the scientists and other critics of the military. Murphy's comprehensive story of the reorganization of the Pentagon is the first account of the "hidden" conflicts between the traditional services and McNamara that has resulted from the introduction of long-range programming in the Defense Department. As Murphy writes, "So swiftly did he move that the high brass again and again found itself confronted by a McNamara decision while it was still mulling over his initial direction for action. . . .

"In two months McNamara produced blueprints for the Kennedy line of action for both the strategic and the conventional forces. The new requirements in the first area was drawn up by a task force under a former Rand economist, Charles J. Hitch, the Defense Department comptroller. Those for the limited-war forces were developed by another task force under Paul H. Nitze, a former investment banker and State Department planner who was and remains the Assistant Defense Secretary for International Security Affairs.

"The job was pretty much over and done before the military had more than grasped that something unusual was going on. By tradition, the military services had generated their own requirements. It was they who proposed, the civilians who disposed. Under McNamara, however, the system was suddenly turned upside down. Now it was McNamara and his lay strategists who were saying what weapons and what forces in what numbers were needed; the service Chiefs found themselves in the strange position of reviewing weapon systems and force structures they had never formally considered."
exaggeration, of course, to speak of "the military," or "the scientists," or "the military intellectuals," as if these were monolithic entities. On any particular set of issues, or even on fundamental values, members of the scientific community are often sharply at odds (for example, Edward Teller and Hans Bethe), as are the political strategists, from the "protracted-conflict" line of the University of Pennsylvania group (Strausz-Hupe and Kintner) to the various arms-control and bargaining or negotiation schemes advanced by Thomas Schelling and Hans Morgenthau.

But the main point is that the military community is no longer the only, or even the dominant, source from which the strategists are drawn, and the older military leaders particularly, with vested interests in military doctrines and weapons systems derived from their own by now parochial experiences, find themselves in danger of being ignored or shelved. A few—Major General Walker is an example—may feel that all intellectuals are involved in a plot against the nation. No doubt most of the military men will be forced, as is already happening, into the more complex and bureaucratic game of recruiting particular groups of scientists for their own purposes (in part through the power of the purse), or attempting to make alliances. In the long run, the military profession may itself become transformed through new modes of training, and a new social type may arise.

But one can already see, in the behavior of retired military officers, the rancor of an old guard that now finds its knowledge outdated and its authority disputed or ignored, and that is beginning to argue, bitterly, that if only "their" advice had been followed, America would not be on the defensive. A surprising number of high-ranking officers on active duty as well as high-ranking retired officers have become active in extreme-right organizations. The Institute of American Strategy, which is financed by the Richardson Foundation, has on its board, and among its members, Rear Admiral Rawson Bennett, Chief of Naval Research; Lieuten-
General E. C. Itschner, Chief of Engineers; Rear Admiral H. Arnold Karo; Lieutenant General George W. Mundy, Commandant of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces; and General E. W. Rawlings (U.S.A.F., ret.), the executive vice-president of General Mills, Inc. The American Security Council, for example, lists on its national strategy committee such retired officers as Admiral Arthur W. Radford, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who had been one of the leading exponents of "massive retaliation"; General Albert C. Wedemeyer, who served in China; Lieutenant General Edward M. Almond; Admiral Felix B. Stump; Admiral Ben Moreell (now head of the Republic Steel Corporation); and Rear Admiral Chester Ward.

More active as anti-Communist entrepreneurs are some lesser lights who have held Army posts, often in Intelligence work, and who seek political status accordingly. Thus Brigadier General Bonner Fellows (ret.), a wartime aide to General MacArthur, is the national director of a group called For America, and chairman of the Citizens Foreign Aid Committee, which, despite its name, seeks to reduce foreign aid. Lieutenant Colonel Gunther Hartel (ret.), a former Intelligence officer in Europe and the Far East, heads an organization called American Strategy, Inc. These and other retired officers are active in the various "seminars" and public meetings organized by the radical-right groups.

The stock in trade of almost all these individuals is the argument, reinforced by references to their experiences, that negotiation or co-existence with Communists is impossible, that anyone who discusses the possibility of such negotiation is a tool of the Communists, and that a "tough policy"—by which, sotto voce, is meant a preventive war or a first strike—is the only means of forestalling an eventual Communist victory.
VIII

The Polarities of American Politics
and the Prospects of the Radical Right

A meaningful polarity within the American consensus has always been part of the American search for self-definition and self-identity: Jefferson versus Hamilton, Republicanism versus Federalism, Agrarianism versus Capitalism, the frontier West versus the industrial East. However significant such polarities may have been in the past, there seems to be little meaningful polarity today. There is no coherent conservative force—and someone like Walter Lippmann, whose *The Public Philosophy* represents a genuine conservative voice, rejects the right, as it rejects him—and the radical right is outside the political pale, insofar as it refuses to accept the American consensus. Nor does a viable left exist in the United States today. The pacifist and Socialist elements have been unable to make the peace issue salient. The radicals have been unable to develop a comprehensive critique of the social disparities in American life—the urban mess, the patchwork educational system, the lack of amenities in our culture. Among the liberals, only the exhaustion of the "received ideas," such as they were, of the New Deal remains. It is a token of the emptiness of contemporary intellectual debate that from the viewpoint of the radical right, the Americans for Democratic Action constitutes the "extreme left" of the American political spectrum, and that *Life*, in order to set up a fictitious balance, counterposes the tiny Councils of Correspondence, a loosely organized peace group led by Erich Fromm and David Riesman, as the "extreme left," to the "extreme right" of the John Birch Society.

The politics of conflict in any country inevitably has some emotional dimension, but in the United States, lacking a historically defined doctrinal basis—as against the ideological divisions of Europe—it takes on, when economic-interest-group issues are lacking, a psychological or status dimension. In this psychological polarity, the right has often been
spleenetic, while the mood of the left has traditionally been one of *ressentiment*. Today the politics of the radical right is the politics of frustration—the sour impotence of those who find themselves unable to understand, let alone command, the complex mass society that is the polity today. In our time, only the Negro community is fired by the politics of resentment—and this resentment, based on a justified demand for equity, represents no psychological polarity to the radical right. Insofar as there is no real left to counterpoise to the right, the liberal has become the psychological target of that frustration.

One of the reasons why psychological politics can flare up so much more easily here than, say, in Great Britain is the essentially “populist” character of American institutions and the volatile role of public opinion. In the ill-defined, loosely articulated structure of American life, public opinion rather than law has been the more operative sanction against nonconformists and dissenters. Though Americans often respond to a problem with the phrase “there ought to be a law,” their respect for law has been minimal, and during periods of extreme excitement, whether it be the vigilante action of a mob or the removal of a book from a school library, the punitive sanctions of opinion quickly supersede law. The very openness or egalitarianism of the American political system is predicated on the right of the people to know, and the Congressional committees, whether searching into the pricing policies of corporations or the political beliefs of individuals, have historically based their investigative claims on this populist premise.

It has always been easier to “mobilize” public opinion on legislation here than it is in England, and in the United States the masses of people have a more direct access to politics. In the elite structure of British politics, control is not in the constituencies (or, as here, among the hundreds of local political bosses who have to be dealt into the game), but in the small parliamentary caucuses, which have a legal as well as historic independence from mass party control. The British elite, wedded to a
ministerial system), with the candidates appealing to every voter and, if possible, shaking every hand, involves a direct relation to the electorate. And in the Congressional system, individual constituents, through letters, telephone calls, or personal visits, can get through immediately to their representatives to affect his vote. The Congressional system itself, with its elaborate scaffolding of Senatorial prerogative, often allows a maverick like Borah, Norris, or Robert La Follette to dominate the floor, or a rogue elephant like Huey Long or Joseph McCarthy to rampage against the operations of the government.

But while the populist character of the political institutions and the sweeping influence of public opinion allow social movements to flare with brush-fire suddenness across the political timberland, the unwieldy party system, as well as the checks and balances of the Presidential and judicial structures, also act to constrain such movements. In a few instances, notably the temperance crusade, a social movement operating outside the party system was able to enforce a unitary conception of social behavior on the country; and even then prohibition was repealed in two decades. Until recently, the party and Presidential system have exerted a “discipline of compromise” that has put the maverick and the rogue elephant outside the main arena of the political game.

Within this perspective, therefore, what are the prospects of the radical right? To what extent does it constitute a threat to democratic politics in the United States? Some highly competent political observers write off the radical right as a meaningful political movement. As Richard Rovere has written, “The press treats the extreme Right as though it were a major tendency in American politics, and certain politicians are as much obsessed with it as certain others are with the extreme Left. If a day arrives when the extreme Right does become a major movement, the press and the obsessed politi-

“politics of civility,” tends to dampen any extremism within the top political structure, while the control system keeps the masses outside and makes it difficult for them to be mobilized for direct pressure on the government.
cians may have a lot to answer for. For the time being, there seems no reason to suppose that its future holds anything more than its present. There is no evidence at all that the recent proliferation of radical, and in some cases downright subversive, organizations of a Rightist tendency reflects or has been accompanied by a spread of ultraconservative views. On the contrary, what evidence there is suggests that the organizations are frantic efforts to prevent ultra-conservatism from dying out.²⁴

In his immediate assessment, Rovere is undoubtedly right. In the spring of 1962, both former Vice-President Nixon and Senator Goldwater had moved to dissociate themselves from the extremist right. Nixon quite sharply repudiated the Birchites, on the premise that they are already a political liability, and Goldwater did so more cautiously in expressing his concern that, if not the Birchites, then its leader, Robert Welch, may have gone too far. Yet the future is more open than Rovere suggests. It is in the very nature of an extremist movement, given its tensed posture and its need to maintain a fever pitch, to mobilize, to be on the move, to act. It constantly has to agitate. Lacking any sustained dramatic issue, it can quickly wear itself out, as McCarthyism did. But to this extent the prospects of the radical right depend considerably on the international situation. If the international situation becomes stable, it is likely that the radical right may run quickly out of steam. If it were to take a turn for the worse—if Laos and all of Vietnam were to fall to the Communists; if, within the Western Hemisphere, the moderate regimes of Bolivia and Venezuela were to topple and the Communists take over—then the radical right could begin to rally support around a drive for “immediate action,” for a declaration of war in these areas, for a pre-emptive strike, or similar axioms of a “hard line.” And since such conservatives as Nixon and Goldwater are committed, at least rhetorically, to a tough anti-Communist position, they would either be forced to go along with such an extreme policy or go under.

Yet, given the severe strains in American life, the radical right does present a threat to American liberties, in a very different and less immediate sense. Democracy, as the sorry history of Europe has shown, is a fragile system, and if there is a lesson to be learned from the downfall of democratic government in Italy, Spain, Austria, and Germany, and from the deep divisions in France, it is that the crucial turning point comes, as Juan Linz has pointed out, when political parties or social movements can successfully establish "private armies" whose resort to violence—street fightings, bombings, the break-up of their opponents' meetings, or simply intimidation—cannot be controlled by the elected authorities, and whose use of violence is justified or made legitimate by the respectable elements in society.

In America, the extreme-right groups of the late 1930s—the Coughlinites, the German-American Bund, the native fascist groups—all sought to promote violence, but they never obtained legitimate or respectable support. The McCarthyite movement of the early 1950s, despite the rampaging antics of its eponymous leader, never dared go, at least rhetorically, outside the traditional framework in trying to establish loyalty and security tests. The Birchers, and the small but insidious group of Minutemen, as the epitome of the radical right, are willing to tear apart the fabric of American society in order to instate their goals, and they did receive a temporary aura of legitimacy from the conservative right.

Barbarous acts are rarely committed out of the blue. (As Freud says, first one commits oneself in words, and then in deeds.) Step by step, a society becomes accustomed to accept, with less and less moral outrage and with greater and greater indifference to legitimacy, the successive blows. What is uniquely disturbing about the emergence of the radical right of the 1960s is the support it has been able to find among traditional community leaders who have themselves become conditioned, through an indiscriminate anti-Communism that equates any form of liberalism with Communism, to judge as respectable a movement which, if successful, can only end the liberties they profess to cherish.