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What Enemy Hath Done This?

The Death of the Fusion Movement and the Rise of Illiberal Conservatism

By

Savannah Eccles Johnston

Claremont Graduate University

2020

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## **Abstract**

### **What Enemy Hath Done This? The Death of the Fusion Movement and the Rise of Illiberal Conservatism**

By

Savannah Eccles Johnston

Claremont Graduate University 2020

The modern conservative movement, also known as the fusion, is the result of a powerful anti-communist coalition constructed in the late 1950s. The fusion movement sought to bring two competing schools of political thought, traditionalist conservatism and classical liberalism, into a coalition powerful enough to fight communism abroad and thwart progressivism at home. These two traditions are unlikely and unnatural allies, for they disagree on fundamental questions, such as the purpose of government, human nature, the meaning of equality, and the definition of freedom. In fact, traditionalist conservatism has long been deeply critical of the liberal project.

The implications of this deep theoretical division among conservatives were largely masked by the fusion's united front against communism. For forty years, the movement largely towed the line of the compromise, emphasizing social conservatism, muscular internationalism, and free market economics. With the downfall of communism, the theoretical divide within the fusion movement between traditionalist conservatives and classical liberals became more pronounced. The moderating influence of the fusion gave way to a push for theoretical purity in the absence of a common enemy, and external factors such as the rise of new media and the neoconservatives' fall from grace in the mid 2000s made room at the table for more radical segments. This dissertation demonstrates how modern conservatism was always theoretically divided and how illiberalism – or the theoretical critique of liberalism – has slowly gained the upper hand within the conservative intellectual movement. Using the archives of *National Review*,

the preeminent conservative publication and guardian of the fusion movement, this dissertation traces the growing divide between the two traditions and the concomitant rise of illiberalism through the development of key concepts and policies, including nationhood and immigration, free markets and trade, and the role of the state in reinforcing tradition and morality.

*For my Nana, a Mormon girl.*

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The second group I need to thank is my family. Dad, thank you for reading every word of this dissertation. It’s very fitting that you were the first person to read each completed chapter because this whole PhD endeavor is really your fault. You were the one who got me interested in politics way back in 6<sup>th</sup> grade during the 2008 election campaign. We haven’t stopped arguing

about politics since. In fact, the topic for this dissertation sprang up from our conversations about the state of the conservative movement. I love you, man.

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## Table of Contents

Introduction: The Fusion and the Conservative Movement.....	1
I. Literature Review.....	11
A. Race and Conservatism.....	15
B. Mapping Conservatism.....	21
C. Paleoconservatives v. Neoconservatives.....	27
D. The Rise of the Neoconservatives and the Christian Right.....	31
E. Theory and Politics.....	34
II. Research Questions and Methodology.....	39
III. The Structure of the Dissertation.....	44
IV. References.....	48
 The Fusion and Its Dueling Traditions: Traditionalist Conservatism and Classical Liberalism...54	
I. Burke and the Fusion.....	56
II. Traditionalist Conservatism.....	63
III. Classical Liberalism.....	67
IV. Classical and Modern Liberalism.....	72
V. Conclusion.....	75
VI. References.....	77
 The Rise of Illiberal Conservatism: Immigration and Nationhood.....79	
I. Fusion Era Conservatism Overview.....	82
II. Contemporary Era Conservatism Overview.....	83
III. Human Rights.....	84
IV. The Rule of Law.....	90
V. Economic Impact of Immigration.....	93
VI. Cultural Impact: Assimilation and Multiculturalism.....	97
VII. Nationhood.....	105
VIII. Conclusion.....	111
IX. References.....	113
 The Rise of Illiberal Conservatism: Morality, Tradition, and the State.....116	
I. The Moral Majority.....	118
A. Marijuana.....	120
B. Pornography and Sex Education.....	123
C. Abortion.....	137
II. The Long Divorce.....	134

A.	Drugs and the Failing Fusion Compromise.....	136
B.	Third Wave Femi-Nazis and Gay Rights.....	139
C.	The T in LGBT and the Death of the Fusion.....	153
III.	Conclusion.....	155
IV.	References.....	159
Forgetting John Galt: The Rise of a New Conservative Economics.....		163
I.	Christianity and Capitalism.....	165
II.	Protecting the Nation: Japan and Free Trade.....	178
III.	Protecting the Nation: NAFTA and Pat Buchanan.....	181
IV.	Free Market Economics in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.....	187
V.	A New Conservative Economics.....	195
VI.	Conclusion.....	202
VII.	References.....	205
Conclusion: The End of the Fusion? .....		210
I.	References.....	221

## **Introduction:**

### **The Fusion and the Conservative Movement**

“America is the one place in the world,” argued Jonah Goldberg, “where being a conservative has always meant being a liberal in the classical sense.”<sup>1</sup> American conservatives in the post-war era have traditionally supported free markets, free trade, immigration, freedom of religion, and anti-communism. In his final speech as President of the United States, Ronald Reagan praised the role of immigration in revitalizing the nation and its identity:

America represents something universal in the human spirit. I received a letter not long ago from a man who said, ‘You can go to Japan to live, but you cannot become Japanese. You can go to France to live and not become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey, and you won’t become a German or a Turk.’ But then he added, ‘Anybody from any corner of the world can come to America to live and become an American.’

However, neither Goldberg’s image of a conservative as a righteous defender of classical liberalism nor Reagan’s pro-immigration standard is an accurate representation of conservatism circa 2020.

Certainly, one element of the modern conservative movement is classically liberal. For example, *National Review* consistently publishes articles from fellows at the Cato Institute both supporting economic liberty as a basic right that yields positive social, political, and moral results

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<sup>1</sup> Goldberg, *What is Conservatism*, xvii.

and defending capitalism against attacks from populists on the left and right. Yet other major players in the tent of modern conservatism are either explicitly hostile to classical liberalism or implicitly suspicious of it. In his infamous essay *Flight 93 Election*, Publius Decius Mus (Michael Anton) writes that a growing number of self-described conservatives actually support most Trump policies without admitting it. As examples, Anton quotes two regular contributors at conservative publications and ostensibly ardent anti-Trumpers, Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, in their call to secure “the national interest abroad and national solidarity at home, support to workers buffeted by globalization, and setting tax rates and immigration levels to foster social cohesion.”

The inter-conservative struggles are further highlighted by the recent split within the movement over the Ahmari – French debates. In *First Things*, Sohrab Ahmari critiques the pre-Trump conservatism of David French and other conservative stalwarts.<sup>2</sup> He argues that there is no going back to a pre-Trump consensus. That is, the fusion that characterized the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is over because both the need and ability to compromise within the movement are gone. He especially targets French’s reliance on classical liberalism. Such a reliance on classical liberal economics ignores social morality in favor of market gains. It also makes too many cultural concessions to the progressive movement in the name of tolerance and pluralism. French responded in *National Review* that the old moral consensus is dead, and traditional conservatism will not succeed in bringing it back.<sup>3</sup> The only way for conservatism to be relevant and impactful in the present age is to accept that classical liberalism and pluralism are the only way to live in a

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<sup>2</sup> Ahmari, Soharab. 2019. “Against David French-ism.” *First Things*.

<sup>3</sup> French, David. 2019. “What Sohrab Ahmari Gets Wrong.” *National Review*.

morally, culturally, and philosophically divided society. French seems particularly alarmed by the war rhetoric used by Ahmari and his philosophical friends. French argues that politics is not war but coexistence. While Ahmari embraces an illiberal future, French is left wondering when his fellow conservatives gave up on classical liberalism.

Clearly Goldberg's assertion that being an American conservative has always meant being a classical liberal no longer holds true, and perhaps it never was true of modern conservatism. In a second attempt to pin down one common belief within the entire conservative tent, Goldberg asserts that "all conservatives believe that utopia is impossible. We can only hope for *e-utopia* (a good place) because there will always be inequalities and hierarchies."<sup>4</sup> But what of the more philosophically aware libertarians who see a way back to Eden through a fully open society and abolition of social coercion (Nozick 1974)? Is not Eden utopia? How else can one characterize the spontaneous, innovative progress championed by Hayek if not as the pursuit of some perfect end?<sup>5</sup>

Goldberg's failure to define conservatism is not unique. Even the definitions of conservatism given by its modern architects – such as Frank Meyer, Bill Buckley, Russell Kirk, Irving Kristol, and even Friedrich Hayek – often contradict each other or are maddeningly vague. Perhaps in this sense Goldberg's definitions of conservatism are both true and false because conservatism is both order and liberty, powerfully simple and utterly elusive. In his essay contribution to the seminal work *What is Conservatism*, William Buckley uses his experience at

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*, 3-9, 13-14, 15-25.

National Review and as the public leader of the modern fusion movement to draw borders around a workable definition of conservatism.

First, Buckley argues that conservatism is not Ayn Rand. That is, conservatism rejects a closed ideological system that does away with the inherent and inescapable mysteries of humanity.

Second, conservatism is not Rothbard's neo-anarchism. Politics must be based in reality, and conservatism recognizes that the state is sometimes very necessary, particularly (in Buckley's estimation) in the fight against global communism.

Third, conservatism is not Robert Welch's John Birch Society. Here it is important to note for the future of this study that Buckley does not outright condemn the John Birch Society or reject its central tenets. He merely dismisses its excesses. For example, Buckley chides Welch for his tendency to infer subjective motivation from objective results, which he condemns as a tendency toward a conspiracy theory of history. He also rejects Welch's belief in a one policy solution to the ills of the West – a *deus ex machina* to save mankind from his fallen nature.

Finally, conservatism is not Max Eastman's militant atheism. Buckley notes that one cannot be a conservative and simultaneously despise God and hold contempt for those who believe in him. A conservative can be an atheist, but he must be able to reconcile his atheism with the profound role that religion plays in the modern conservative movement.<sup>6</sup> Buckley's posits that freedom is good not just for its usefulness as the basis for prosperous economic and political associations – a view he ascribes to Hayek – but also inherently good. Thus Buckley sees a

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<sup>6</sup> Buckley, *What is Conservatism*, 242.

religious, individual good in freedom quite apart from any utility it may have for society as a whole.

These deep religious undertones are mirrored in Russell Kirk's influential work *The Conservative Mind*. As a devout Catholic political philosopher, Kirk acts as a bridge between theology, philosophy, and politics. Peace in society and in the soul comes from religion and introspection, not politics or government. Human nature is fallen and not easily given to reason, so man needs guidance – both religious and civic– on how to obtain the good life. On the scale of tradition and authority to liberty and Hayek, Kirk falls heavily on the side of prescription and authority. The wisdom of the ages is not to be discounted lightly, and the chief role of government is to allow its citizens to achieve the good life – that is, a virtuous life. The mode of government which best achieves this end is directly related to the type and character of people being governed. Contrary to the neo-conservative tradition, democracy cannot simply be spread or built abroad. It must come as a product of tradition and prescription.

Kirk is the ultimate Old Conservative, the intellectual godfather of traditionalist conservatism, and the discoverer of conservatism's intellectual heritage tracing back to Edmund Burke. Kirk argues that modern conservatism first appeared in 1790 with the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.<sup>7</sup> Burke rejected the politics of abstract theories in favor of habit and custom, or the accumulated wisdom of mankind. He did not reject change *in toto* but argued that change must occur incrementally for the stability of society. Hence Kirk

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<sup>7</sup> Hawley, *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 21.

advocated a politics of prudence. This does not mean lack of principal but healthy suspicion of ideological fanaticism in pursuit of utopia. A perfect society is not possible on earth because men are imperfect and human nature fallen. In this heavy emphasis on prudence and clear-eyed acceptance of the essential unchangeability of human nature, especially through government fiat, the ancient Greeks' influence on Kirk is clear.

In his contribution to *What is a Conservative*, Kirk notes that a “society is unjust which ... allots to one sort of nature rights and duties that properly belong to other sorts of human beings.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, “men are not created equal but different. Variety, no uniformity, gives any nation vigor and hope.”<sup>9</sup> This reflects an essential product of Greek political philosophy: the obvious existence of a natural hierarchy and aristocracy. This natural inequality was profoundly rejected by early Enlightenment thinkers, such as Descartes, at the beginning of the liberal tradition. Indeed, it is this rejection – this unnatural levelling of all mankind and all religions and modes of life – that is most abhorrent to conservatives in the vein of Russell Kirk and critics of modern progressivism. Indeed, Kirk asserts that “the only true equality is moral equality; all other attempt at leveling lead to despair, if enforced by positive legislation.”<sup>10</sup> This notion of natural hierarchy has remained a powerful counter-operator in the West, whether that hierarchy is racial, religious, or intellectual. At times this Greek emphasis on the natural inequality of nature borders on a

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<sup>8</sup> Kirk, *Prescription, authority, and ordered freedom*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 4.



defense of authoritarianism over democracy. Kirk argues that “a monarchy can balance the rights of the talented with the claims of the average natures.”<sup>11</sup>

This sentiment perfectly aligns with the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence leaves open the type of government best suited to protect natural rights. However, Kirk seems to highly favor the Declaration of Independence not for its statement of universal truths, such as the natural equality of man, but for its placement in the long tradition of English thought and history. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in this study, the focus on prescription, authority, and hierarchy in Burkean conservatism through to modern conservatism tends to lead to a focus on world historical men, such as Lincoln and Churchill, who are capable through their superior nature and wisdom of leading society virtuously. In this rejection of liberalism’s core belief, Kirk shows himself to be both explicitly anti-communist and implicitly anti-liberal. Both his attraction to the Declaration of Independence and the founding are due more to their ties to the British historical and political tradition than to a devotion to universal, liberal values.

In between Kirk and Hayek, Frank Meyer – the intellectual father of the postwar intellectual movement known as fusionism – argues that modern conservatism is the product of an intellectual and political balancing act between freedom, order, justice, and tradition. The ideological and theoretical sectarianism within the Old Right rendered the pre-1950s movement neutered. Meyer’s fusion attempted to unite order and its exponents with liberty and its supporters, i.e. to unite traditionalists with classical liberals, Russell Kirk with Friedrich Hayek. The basis of

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<sup>11</sup> Kirk, *Prescription, authority, and ordered freedom*, 45.

the unity was the assertion of a mutual dependency between the two tendencies. On one side, virtue needs liberty because “virtue not freely chosen is not virtuous.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, liberty must have order and morality or else individualism will descend into chaos, which will then descend into oppression. In this way, the fusion doctrine was less a teaching of what to think than how to think in terms of the natural and eternal codependency between order and liberty.<sup>13</sup> Meyer’s conservatism is a mindset that focuses on balance. This balancing act, according to Meyer, must always give the benefit of the doubt to liberty and submit any attempt at coercion to a much more rigorous burden of proof.

Indeed, Meyer argues that the only true unifier of the Right is a love and respect for the freedom of the person as the central and primary end of political society.<sup>14</sup> Yet in his essay *Why I am Not a Conservative*, Hayek asserts that what differentiates him from European conservatives is that he doesn’t oppose change itself but encroachments on liberty. In contrast, Hayek argues that many traditionalists do not fear encroachments on liberty so much as change itself. They lack an inherent love and respect for freedom. This lack of love for liberty stems from an incorrect understanding of human nature. Hayek is more optimistic about human nature than Kirk. His concern is less with the threat posed to liberty by individual men than the threat posed by large groups of men, whether in the form of undue devotion to tradition or government. Thus Hayek labels himself an “Old Whig” instead of a conservative. Nevertheless, it remains significant that Hayek’s essay was reprinted within the pages of *What is Conservatism*. Even as he distanced

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<sup>12</sup> Meyer, *The Conservative Mainstream*, 45-47.

<sup>13</sup> Meyer, *What is Conservatism*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Meyer, Frank. *In Defense of Freedom and Related Essays*, 33-40.

himself from the label, Hayek was clearly within the fusion tent, albeit on the far side from the more ardent traditionalists. Hence we see why the conservative tent is so large and contentious and undefinable because it has to accommodate both Russell Kirk and Hayek. It must simultaneously reject modern liberalism while balancing both defenses and critiques of classical liberalism. Such a fusion requires immense intellectual breadth. This is not without its own dangers.

In the final pages of his essay, Buckley lets the reader in on a deep and growing concern that troubled him through to the end of his life: did the conservative tent get too large? That is, in the modern conservative fight against communism, did enemies (“non-lovers of freedom”) fall into its ranks? And since conservatism is so difficult to define and so naturally contentious, how is one to know if another is truly a conservative or something more sinister? The Cold War made it difficult to “look behind the khaki” to know whether someone was truly a conservative or a dangerous radical.<sup>15</sup> Buckley and *National Review*’s motto on this regard was *pas d’ennemi* – no enemies to the right – for when one is fighting such a great ideological and political battle, one cannot afford to look too closely at, or to be too picky about, fellow fighters.

Another reason why conservatism tends to be susceptible to hijacking and remains deeply difficult to define is its inherent theoretical ambiguity. “Conservatives are susceptible to intrusion because fusion requires permitting everything in order to allow every individual to make a free – and thus virtuous – choice.”<sup>16</sup> This goes back to Buckley’s first boundary marker of conservatism: no Randian closed ideological system. Just like the balance between order and

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<sup>15</sup> Buckley, *What is Conservatism*, 228.

<sup>16</sup> Goldberg, *What Is A Conservative*, x.

liberty in society, the battle between coherency and intellectual liberty in the modern conservative movement always erred on the side of liberty, which often meant leaving the boundaries unguarded and allowing in masked radicals to take a seat at the table and expound their doctrine. On the practical political side, the fusion created a movement which only ever really agreed on anti-communism and the excesses of progressivism. Once communism was defeated, they had no clear agenda for the next destination. The libertarians sought to move forward to a radically new kind of open society on the basis of classical liberalism, and the traditionalists longed for return to a more virtuous society. Those in the middle, or those that saw only the battle against communism, had simply never considered theoretical ends and destinations nor proactive policy decisions required of an empowered majority. They were caught flat footed in domestic politics.

This dissertation attempts to sort out how conservatism shifted from Frank Meyer to Publius Decius Mus (Michael Anton). How did conservatism become so illiberal? In the words of Hayek, this dissertation seeks to uncover how the movement shifted from broad support for a moderate fusion in the majority to “nationalism of the European sort and xenophobia.”<sup>17</sup> This dissertation focuses on the change in the intellectual movement, or the thought leaders whose ideology truly has shifted. Furthermore, this dissertation argues that illiberalism was always an important component of the modern conservative movement as a carry-over from portions of the Old Right, Southern Agrarians, and the influence of modern political philosophers such as Russell Kirk. The philosophers in particular made robust critiques of communism and the historical school. That same theoretical vigor was employed in critique of classical liberalism. Over time, and in

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<sup>17</sup> Hayek, *Why I am Not a Conservative*, 120.

conjunction with the political ups and downs experienced by the various factions of the fusion tent, this critique of classical liberalism has overpowered the ideological balance central to the fusion movement. The philosophical poles of the fusion tent have been pulled to such extremes as to rip the movement apart and leave the center without cover.

### **Literature Review**

When it comes to the rise of the conservative movement, political scientists are playing catch-up with historians. As Cas Mudde (2010) notes, the vast majority of research on modern conservatism has been produced by political historians.<sup>18</sup> At first glance it seems that the bulk of scholars who have shown interest in a serious study of the varieties of movement conservatism have been conservative scholars! When political science has focused its attention on modern conservatism, it has generally zeroed in on the rise of the Christian Right (Heinemen 1998; Moen 1996), focused on conservatism from the perspective of the Supreme Court (Kersch 2019; Hollis-Brusky 2015; Teles 2008), or overlooked theory in favor of economic and social determinisms. In recent years, political scientists have begun taking the study of conservatism as a political ideology more seriously, such as evidenced by Hawley's *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism* (2016) and Main's *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (2018). Yet even these theory-serious books have either primarily or exclusively focused on fringe elements within the conservative movement.

For example, Hawley zeroes in on right wing movements that were never fully incorporated into the American conservative movement. These movements, such as

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<sup>18</sup> Mudde, *The Rise (and Fall?) of American Conservatism*, 588.

paleoconservatives and localists, differ substantially from the mainstream conservative movement's views on "the value of equality, the proper role of the state, the importance of free markets, the role of religion in politics, and attitudes toward race."<sup>19</sup> Yet Hawley takes the agreement within the mainstream of the fusion movement for granted. He acknowledges that a unified conservative movement did not exist prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when important thinkers, such as Russell Kirk and Bill Buckley, unified the movement under key policy platforms. But he overlooks the major theoretical disagreements within the 'mainstream' itself as well as between the mainstream leaders. For example, Richard Weaver's lauded *Ideas Have Consequences* rails against capitalism and the bourgeoisie, and the book is considered a foundational work of modern conservatism. This is a stunning departure from Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*, another foundational conservative text. Hawley accounts for this disagreement between Weaver and his fellow mainstream thinkers by stating that Weaver must have changed his mind in later years.<sup>20</sup> This explanation ignores the serious implications that Weaver's disparate economic thought has for the fusion movement, namely that the movement is a compromise of necessity between competing theoretical schools. Such a compromise does not hold up without a common enemy who makes ideological purity imprudent. In short, mainstream conservatism is not the unified movement it appears to be at first glance. This is precisely why conservatism is so notoriously difficult to define. Rather, it is a smorgasbord of major thinkers hailing from two competing political theories united by a critique of communism and progressivism.

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<sup>19</sup> Hawley, *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 20.

In *American Conservatism: NOMOS LVI* (2016), thirteen scholars address the definition, growth, and importance of American conservatism. Topics range from the role of Leo Strauss on American conservatism, the role of American conservatism in preserving Western civilization, and conservative constitutional thought. Yet eleven of the thirteen authors begin from the foundational point of Meyer's fusion. Meyer's fusionist synthesis made American conservatism the great defender of Western Civilization, with its dual pillars of individualism and the community, virtue and freedom. They accept as axiomatic the philosophical validity and consistency of the fusion and ignore the crucial philosophical differences at its heart.

Deneen (2016) bucks this trend by questioning the fusion as expounded by Buckley and Meyers. Deneen argues that the neoconservative national security element contains within it an "unconservative" dimension too reliant on liberal idealism and "supranational theories of cosmopolitanism".<sup>21</sup> He likewise criticizes the classical liberal economics of the fusion. Hence Deneen implicitly alludes to the inherent tension of the conservative movement, which embraces policies so philosophically disparate that he doubts whether "there is an actual conservative tradition in America."<sup>22</sup> In the place of the fusion and the liberalism that infects it, Deneen envisions a return to small democratic communities animated by virtue and liberty understood in the ancient sense.

Kersch (2016) also departs from Meyer's fusion by positing his own fusion. This fusion admits that, unlike the policy minded ideology of Meyer and Buckley, conservatism is not

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<sup>21</sup> Deenen, Patrick. *Why Liberalism Failed*, 153

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

commitment to a set policy agenda but a repudiation of social engineering and central planning in toto. It involves epistemological modesty. Yet even Kersch follows Meyer's philosophic footsteps by accepting conservatism as a synthesis of Anglo-American common law tradition (Burkean conservatism) and Austrian economics. His problem is less with the incompatibility of the two traditions at the heart of modern American conservatism and more with the specific policy applications and agenda setting of the conservative movement. This leads to the question of the way in which conservatism is traditionally studied.

Since political historians have led the way in the study of movement conservatism, they have also set the expectation for how conservatism should be studied. The accepted framework among historians, and later political scientists, is essentially the story of how disparate anti-communist and disgruntled ex-liberals banded together to reclaim power in the halls of Washington through strategic alignment with the GOP, presidential candidates, evangelical groups, and think tanks. The emphasis lies on the how and why of political gamesmanship with very little emphasis on the complex ideologies driving the movement. Prominent works on the political rise of modern conservatism include Critchlow's (2007) *The Conservative Ascendancy* and Regnery's (2008) *Upstream*. These authors trace the political developments that made room for the ascendancy of the modern conservative movement, from Goldwater to Reagan to Bush. Both write from a fairly favorable view and pay tribute to the political and networking power of the fusion movement and its factional exponents at publications *National Review*, *Modern Age*, *The Weekly Standard*, and *The Claremont Review of Books* as well as think tanks such as *Heritage Foundation*, *Intercollegiate Studies Institute*, and the *American Enterprise Institute*. Frisk, a conservative political scientist, follows this framework in *If Not Us, Who?* (2012), which traces the



rise of the conservative movement through the life and career of William Rusher, one of conservatism's most underrated political watchdogs.

One exception to this traditional framework is Lee's *Creating Conservatism*, which considers the forging of modern conservatism from the perspective of ten great "canonical" books. Authors include Hayek, Kirk, Weaver, Goldwater, Buckley, Meyer, Friedman, Chambers, and Nisbet. Lee pays special attention to the rhetoric, dialect, narratives, and voices of these books. He demonstrates that although these books allowed modern conservatism to cohere, they represent diverse philosophies. Lee argues that there were two competing political philosophies during the early period of modern conservatism: traditional conservatism and libertarianism. The fusion, then, was the end product of Meyer's attempt to reconcile these two competing philosophies. Yet Lee points out that Meyer never claimed to have successfully melded these philosophies. His success was in convincing conservatives that the fusion was philosophically sound and wielding this belief on behalf of political unity and power.

### **Race and Conservatism**

Notably, these authors also largely ignore or explicitly deny the racial elements that contributed to the realignment of the Republican party in the South and the growth of mainstream conservatism. Regnery and Critchlow assert that economics – not race – turned the South from Democrat to Republican. Critchlow concedes only that "whereas Democrats held fast to their New Deal liberal and internationalist vision, Republicans represented the fears of white middle-class and religious voters through a political platform of low taxes, national defense, preservation of family values, regulation of social morality, and opposition to policies that affirmed racial, gender,

or sexual preferences in the public sphere.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, conservative opposition to desegregation and civil rights legislation is attributed not to racial fears but to serious constitutional qualms and conservative resistance to radical social change.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the John Birch Society is largely dismissed as either fringe and uninfluential or organizationally impactful and sensitive to racial prejudices. Both of these conclusions are contested by Epstein and Forster (1967) who argue that “the quarrel of the John Birch Society with the concept of racial equality goes far deeper than mere questions of politics and methods, or even of the alleged Communist character of the civil rights movement itself.”<sup>25</sup>

Other authors also address the racial elements within mainstream conservatism from a decidedly less favorable vantage point. In his chapter on purges within the conservative movement, Hawley attributes racial animus as a key motivating factor for many paleoconservatives who lost mainstream respectability as a result. Schickler (2016) identifies racial anxiety as a cause for the rise of conservatism in the South.<sup>26</sup> Schreckhise and Shield (2003) identify race as a key factor in southern realignment.<sup>27</sup> Recent scholarship has focused on the role of race in the 2016 election

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<sup>23</sup> Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Epstein and Forster, *The Radical Right: Report on the John Birch Society and Its Allies*. In this on the ground study of the Birch Society, Epstein and Forster quote Welch as praising the racial harmony, with “a very, very tiny amount of injustice”, that existed just two decades prior to the Civil Rights Movements (103). Other members of the National Council, such as Professor Revilo P. Oliver, argued that a natural equality between the races was a lie and that voting is not a basic human right or necessarily linked to freedom (103). However, Welch personally only mentions race twice in the fourth edition of the *Blue Book of the John Birch Society*. In both cases, Welch mentions race to deny that he is bigoted against African Americans or “anything else except Communists” (106).

<sup>26</sup> Schickler, *Racial Realignment: The Transformation of American Liberalism*.

<sup>27</sup> Schreckhise and Shields, “Ideological Realignment in the Contemporary US Electorate Revisited.”

(Major, Blodorn, and Blascovich 2018; Gest, Reny, and Mayer 2018).<sup>28</sup> Smith and King argue for the existence of two distinct racial orders throughout American history.<sup>29</sup> One order promotes arrangements advantageous to those labelled “whites” while the other seeks to end many of those advantages. The post-Civil Rights Era (1978 – present) is likewise divided between those who seek color-blind policies, such as Republican lawmakers and Conservative think tanks, and the “race-conscious” order made up of most Democratic Party officeholders and liberal advocacy groups. Smith and King attribute the rise of the color-blind order, epitomized by its critique of affirmative action and majority-minority districts, to the ascent of conservative advocacy groups and “Republican success in winning white voters and populating courts.”<sup>30</sup>

While racial anxiety certainly played – and continues to play – a role in the rise of the GOP and its influence in the South, it is a mistake to wholesale reduce the conservative movement in theory and practice to a caricature of southern, white racial anxiety. Political theory must be held as connected to – but still distinct from – political practice. In the realm of theory, illiberalism has important implications for racial harmony, immigration, and the notion of nationhood, but it cannot be reduced to white nationalism. That is, the theory does not spring out of a desire to justify racism and white supremacy. Nevertheless, racial animus contributes to the rise of illiberalism, and illiberalism as a theory carries within itself subtle and complex implications for race.

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<sup>28</sup> Gest, Reny, and Mayer, “Roots of the radical right: Nostalgic deprivation in the United States and Britain.” Major, Blodorn, and Blascovich, “The threat of increasing diversity: Why many white Americans support Trump in the 2016 presidential election.”

<sup>29</sup> King and Smith, “Strange bedfellows? Polarized politics? The Quest for racial equity in contemporary America.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 694.

In 2014, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban stated that “an illiberal state, a non-liberal state does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of state organization, but instead includes a different, special, national approach.” This includes a rejection of tolerating minorities in favor of nationalism and separatism. Orban demonstrates the centrality of the concept of the nation to illiberalism as a viable alternative to liberal democracy founded on the concept of individual rights and liberty. A nation-state relies upon the pre-existence of a nation, which is typically characterized by a people of a similar culture, language, or religion who often occupy a centralized geographic area. A nation is also political due to its self-conscious awareness of distinct characteristics and interests. Yet the nation is porous concept because it is essentially an imagined community built on common memory, myths, and ideals. The place of race in a nation is complex. A nation is not simply reducible to race or ethnic identity, but it is not a separate grouping, either. Insofar as race is considered a most important distinguishing marker, it becomes interwoven into the concept of nation.

In at least one sense, the American nation is an imagined community. It lacks a truly common ethnic history, language, or religion. Rather, this common identity is tenuously created and maintained through a mixture of myth and foundational common commitments. In order to maintain the story of the American nation, which performs the important work of binding a people together, Native Americans and Black Americans are largely excluded, though these groups were present from the start. This tradition starts with the *Federalist Papers*. In *Federalist Paper* #2, John Jay remarks on the unity of the American people and their unique connection to the land they live on:

With equal pleasure I have as often taken notice that Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people – a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs, and who, by their joint counsels, arms, and efforts ... have nobly established their general liberty and independence. This country and this people seem to have been made for each other.

Here John Jay is purposely overstating the extent of colonial unity. He is laying the mythology for the American nation: a people with the same language, religion, and customs who have exercised themselves in a common, righteous struggle and share a providential attachment to a blessed piece of land. Notably absent are Native Americans, African slaves, religious minorities (such as Catholics or Quakers), as well as differing European heritages and histories. The inclusion of any of these groups would undermine the binding, essential myth of the American nation.

The John Jay framework for American nationhood is reiterated at length among many conservative think tanks in their discussion of race and immigration. The nation is used as an anchor for sovereignty against globalism. Erler contends that “diversity is in the service of universalism and the borderless world; sovereignty serves citizenship and the exclusive privileges and rights that attach to it. The nation-state is the stumbling block standing in the way of progress toward the uniform global regime.”<sup>31</sup> The nation-state can only accomplish its purpose if it maintains control over citizenship, or over the admittance of new members into the nation.

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<sup>31</sup> Erler, Edward J. “Citizenship, Immigration, and the Nation-State.” *American Mind*. Accessed March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://americanmind.org/features/the-case-against-birthright-citizenship/citizenship-immigration-and-the-nation-state/>

“America became a separate and equal nation with exclusive citizenship and rights and privileges that attach to that citizenship. The ‘one people’ who formed America by consent can, of course, admit new citizens ... only with the consent of those who already constitute the body politic.” Taking this view to the extreme, immigration places the tenuous balance of American nationhood at risk, and insofar as Black Americans cannot be wholesale integrated into the mythology of the “one people” who formed America, they remain a dangerous ‘other’ within the nation.

Critics of classical and modern liberalism, such as Pierre Manent, take the idea of nation seriously. Plattner argues that there cannot be liberal democracy outside the framework of the nation-state. “All human beings are endowed with universal rights,” these rights are only realized “within particular commonwealths” – i.e. within particular nation-states.<sup>32</sup> Modern illiberalism is partially founded on the concern that favoring the toleration of minorities, whether Native Americans, Black Americans, or immigrants, to the detriment of a distinct national identity undermines the capacity and balance of the state itself. Neither individual liberty nor human flourishing can occur outside the organizing idea of the nation.

On the other side of the fusion, classical liberals reject the ethnic, religious, and linguistic requirements of nationhood in favor of the theory of liberalism itself as the common distinguisher. That is, a civic religious attachment to the Declaration of Independence, and the liberal ideals it heralds, are held as the unique marker of the American nation. The Declaration of Independence is upheld as the ideal toward which Americans work. Groups excluded in practice from full

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<sup>32</sup> Plattner, Marc F. *Democracy without borders? Global challenges to liberal democracy*.

participation in the nation at the time of the Declaration of Independence was written, including women, Black Americans, and Native Nations, were extended the promise of participation in the future realization of the document's central ideals. Although the Declaration of Independence is people and place specific – it is meant for the American colonies – the liberal ideals it espouses favor the universal at the expense of the concept of the nation. Hence the criticism that defining the nation on the basis of a civic religious attachment to the Declaration of Independence is inherently unstable. At the core of the fusion lies an important theoretical argument about the character of the nation and what it means to be an American.

As with the competing theories of the conservative movement, racial animus does not as a single factor explain the entirety of the conservative movement politically either. At the very least, the nascent political conservative movement had policy goals, such as anticommunism and deregulation, that can be defended on purely non-racial grounds. As a result, this dissertation will not frame racial bias as the chief motivator among conservative intellectuals, though it may have been among southern Whites in the Civil Rights era. Neither will this dissertation ignore race as both a motivating factor among some factions within the conservative tent and as a subtle and complex facet of traditionalist conservatism and classical liberalism. Increased racial tension will be highlighted as both a cause and unfortunate consequence of the rise of a more illiberal conservatism.

## **Mapping Conservatism**

As stated previously, the fusion's ideological diversity makes it difficult to tie conservatism down to a single definition. Nevertheless, many authors have sought to define conservatism while others have sought to identify key elements. Regnery identified key ideas within the movement:

“individual liberty, free markets, limited government, and a strong national defense.”<sup>33</sup> Of course, these ideas are not equally agreed upon or emphasized by each faction. Nor are each of these elements the natural offspring of both the competing philosophical traditions of the conservative movement – classical liberalism and Burkean conservatism. Rather, these key ideas are the product of the 1950s fusion movement. These are the fusion’s compromise ideas, though factions and competing philosophical traditions within the fusion may vehemently disagree with the practical application or theoretical underpinning of one or more key elements of the platform. As was shown above, an attempt to define conservatism itself theoretically – not just identifying key policy positions in the vein of Regnery – was largely an attempt left to the intellectual thought leaders of the early fusion movement: Frank Meyer, Russell Kirk, William F. Buckley, Jr., and Friedrich Hayek. These different works led to the publication of a single anthology *What is Conservatism?* The main takeaway of this seminal work is that conservatism is rather difficult to pin down ideologically. Perhaps Meyers is correct that modern conservatism is more a way of thinking than a dictation of what to think – more a loosely defined region than a set latitude and longitude. More recent scholarship has adhered to the wisdom that mapping conservatism is far more productive than attempting to define it.

This mapping has resulted in a widely accepted grouping (with few variations from different authors): traditionalists, neoconservatives, and libertarians.<sup>34</sup> It must be noted that any groupings, whether mainstream or fringe, are necessarily fluid and overemphasize disagreements

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<sup>33</sup> Regnery, *Upstream*, xvi.

<sup>34</sup> Berkowitz, *Varieties of American Conservatism*, xiv-xv.



while downplaying agreements. Such distinctions also have the unfortunate effect of patching over deeper philosophical differences in favor of policy disagreements. Nevertheless, distinction is a prerequisite for discovery and argument, particularly in the murky waters of political ideology. Modern libertarians owe their ideology largely to European emigrants in the 1950s, most notably the free market/small government thinkers Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Ayn Rand.<sup>35</sup> The major think tank attached to this ideology is the Cato Institute. Libertarians took the economic lead within the fusion but were largely outmaneuvered in, or simply didn't show up for, cultural and foreign policy debates within the tent.

The traditionalists are the most complex of the three main groupings. They trace their thinking primarily to the Old Right, which was itself ideologically disperse and complex, and the sort of Burkean conservatism “predominant outside the United States.”<sup>36</sup> Their intellectual godfather is Russell Kirk, whose book *The Conservative Mind* provided a historical bridge between the Old Right and the traditionalists of the fusion movement. Traditionalists are characterized by a devotion to tradition, virtue, and Western civilization. They support state interference in defense of traditional institutions, such as the family and the church, and cultivation of virtue.<sup>37</sup> Traditionalists are not culturally or socially liberal in the way that Mises or Hayek defined the open society.

The relationship between traditionalist conservatism and feminism is particularly contentious and illustrative of this divide between classical liberals and traditionalist

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<sup>35</sup> Mudde, *The rise (and fall?) of American conservatism?* 589.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

conservatives. The traditionalists led the way in conservative opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, equal pay legislation, mandated paid maternity leave, and pro-choice abortion legislation. Yet the ‘woman problem’ goes much deeper than policy disagreements for traditionalists because women are almost exclusively relegated to second tier, dependent status in classical political theory, particularly in Greek political thought, as well as in traditional religious teachings tracing back to the Garden of Eden. Aristotle argued in *The Politics* that “the relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled.” The best systems of government rely upon proper governance by those of the proper nature (i.e. virtuous men) at the level of the family unit through to the level of the city-state itself. Of course, the household is actually run by the woman. *The Politics* thus opens itself up to a second, more feminist interpretation.<sup>38</sup> St. Paul urges in 1 Timothy 2: 11-14 that “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.” According to traditional interpretations of the Garden of Eden, woman became rightly subordinate as soon as Eve partook of the fruit of the tree. Traditionalist conservatism is built upon both Greek political philosophy and traditional Christianity, both of which are rife with deeply sexist teachings about women. On the other hand, classical liberalism does not share traditionalism’s allergy to feminism because of its emphasis on individual liberty over tradition and social order and its roots in the secular Enlightenment.

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<sup>38</sup> Campos, Grace. Judith Butler or Aristotle? A Feminist Reading of *Politics*. Unpublished.

Finally, neoconservatives are the least ideologically sophisticated of the three factions. Whereas the theoretical tension between libertarians and traditionalists is more easily identified, the neoconservatives largely skate over theory in favor of policy implementation, particularly a strong American presence abroad to counter the influence of the Soviet Union. The core domestic policy was that “aggressive policies on Communism abroad should be complemented by aggressive policies against Communists at home.”<sup>39</sup> Hence domestically many of the neoconservative positions were knee jerk reactions to any policies that smelled of communism.

Hawley considers these three groupings the mainstream elements of the fusion movement, with radical libertarians, paleoconservatives, the European New Right, White Nationalism, and the Secular Right acting as not-always-so-fringe right wing critics of the mainstream conservative movement. Main (2018) combines the European New Right, White Nationalism, and the Secular Right into an American Alt-Right, a powerful and disruptive fringe element within the modern conservative movement.<sup>40</sup> Though this mapping is helpful, the distinction between mainstream and fringe conservatism largely ignores the close ties between the mainstream and fringe elements of the movement, such as the connection between paleoconservatism and traditionalists, radical libertarians (anarchists) and mainstream libertarians.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, radical libertarians are to mainstream libertarians what socialists are to mainstream progressives. The argument is not in theory so much as pacing and purity.

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<sup>39</sup> Regnery, *Upstream*, 37.

<sup>40</sup> Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right*, 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> Even these connections are complicated. For example, an alliance between paleolibertarians and paleoconservatives was attempted in the 1990s. Yet mainstream libertarians, such as would be found writing in the pages of *Reason* or at the Cato Institute, would be appalled by the economic theories of paleoconservatives.

This divide holds for much of the conservative movement, whether fringe or mainstream. Each mainstream element tends to have its fringe alter ego that overemphasizes its pet element. For example, paleoconservatives are more extremely critical of postwar American culture, including racial and gender equality and interventionist foreign policy, than traditionalists. Yet both are descendants of Edmund Burke. The difference is in their view of compromise and change. Russell Kirk and his traditionalists understood the inevitability of change as a fundamental conservative concept. Indeed, Kirk was deeply anti-ideological at his core, for he viewed ideology, or the promise of utopia from adherence to abstract concepts, as the chief enemy of conservatism. “The word ideology means political fanaticism, a body of beliefs alleged to point the way to a perfect society.”<sup>42</sup> Pat Buchanan and his paleoconservatives, on the other hand, are more deeply ideological. They see the acceptance of such major societal changes as a revolt against the “permanent things” and the natural order. The power of the fusion movement was holding the emphases of the different mainstream segments – such as morality and liberty – in moderating tension, while ignoring the theoretical divide that would undermine the work, and casting out fringe elements that demand ideological purity. Hence the moderating influence of traditionalists on libertarianism – and vice versa – through unification against their common enemy progressivism, though one is staunchly classically liberal and the other is critical of the liberal tradition.

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<sup>42</sup> Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 42.

## **Paleoconservatives v. Neoconservatives**

Another stark divide in the fusion camp is that between paleoconservatives and neoconservatives. Paleoconservatives are deeply allergic to what they view as the neoconservative acceptance of the welfare state and their interventionist and globalist foreign policy. Yet this long feud goes beyond policy and theories of government to the dangerous realms of ego and emotion. Interestingly, both factions are something of the ugly ducklings of the fusion camp. They have traditionally lacked either the social connections, ideological refinement, or natural political clout of the traditionalists and classical liberals. Yet both have exercised a great deal of power over both the GOP and the conservative movement at key moments over the past seventy years. Indeed, one wonders whether Buckley's later in life reservations about the size and composition of the conservative movement did not have a good deal to do with the paleoconservatives.

While neoconservatives came to hold a seat at the mainstream table as part of the triumvirate of the fusion, paleoconservatives (paleocons) were not, at least until very recently thanks to the power vacuum left by the neoconservatives, invited to the big kids' table. A prime example of this imbalance of power between these two feuding factions is Reagan's withdrawal of his nomination of M.E. Bradford, the primary intellectual leader of the paleocons, as head of the National Endowment of the Humanities. The paleocons blamed this defeat on the protests raised by the neoconservatives to Bradford's nomination.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the neoconservatives had power sufficient to prevent such a powerful nomination, and the paleoconservative's concurrent

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<sup>43</sup> Smant, "Review: Paleoconservatives", 474

dissatisfaction with the lack of action in Reagan's administration, became a powerful wedge point between neocons and paleoconservatives.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of this seeming lack of political power, they remain particularly important to the story of conservatism, particularly its grassroots and populist elements, and are notoriously difficult to pin down. Paleoconservatives remain the most devotedly illiberal fusion faction with increasingly close proximity to the conservative mainstream. Hence the lack of scholarship on this small but highly mobilized and energetic conservative faction is a major barrier to an accurate understanding of the conservative movement.

Hawley devotes an entire chapter to paleocons in his study of conservative fringe movements. Though racial language has been more common among paleoconservatives than mainstream conservative ranks, Hawley states that it is neither a southern nationalist movement nor a white nationalist sect.<sup>45</sup> Rather, he assigns extreme nostalgia as the chief emotion of the movement, a deeply felt alienation that helps differentiate paleocons from traditionalists. Nostalgia for the distant past; nostalgia, perhaps, for a time that never really existed except in their argument of how the past should have been. This nostalgia lends to a deep gloom within the rhetoric and writings of this faction as well as a dissatisfaction with the compromises inherent in the notion of fusion. George Nash describes the paleoconservative faction as

fiercely and defiantly nationalist (rather than internationalist), skeptical of 'global democracy' and entanglements overseas, fearful of the impact of Third World immigration on America's Europe-oriented culture, and openly critical of the doctrine of free

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Hawley, *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 179.

trade...Buchananite paleoconservatism increasingly resembled much of the American Right before 1945: before, that is, the onset of the Cold War.”<sup>46</sup>

Hence Joseph Scotchie (2002), who has thus far written the most comprehensive work on the movement, uses the term paleoconservative and Old Right interchangeably.<sup>47</sup> This description both oversimplifies the diversity of thought within the Old Right and makes too strong of a connection between the rhetoric of modern paleocons, who are deeply populist minded, and the elitist libertarians of the Old Right.

Scotchie traces the intellectual heritage of “underfunded, mostly unknown” paleoconservatives back to Patrick Henry and the anti-federalists, William Jennings Bryan, William McKinley and his economic protectionist policies, civil libertarian critics of Lincoln’s wartime policies, and the Southern Agrarians.<sup>48</sup> In addition to Old Right thinkers such as Garet Garrett and Albert Jay Nock, Scotchie argues that paleoconservatives are also deeply influenced by the mainstream-beloved luminaries Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver. Furthermore, the populist paleoconservatives fueled the presidential runs of Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan, led the opposition to NAFTA, and produced columnists such as M.E. Bradford, Thomas Fleming, and Samuel Francis. Yet for all of this Scotchie takes a fittingly gloomy view of the potential mainstream reach of the paleocons, whether in the intellectual conservative movement or in the voting public. He doubts whether such a movement can overcome a “century of managerial consolidation”, which undermines the regional solidarity needed to curb federal administrators and

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<sup>46</sup> Nash, *Conservative Intellectual Movement*, 568.

<sup>47</sup> Scotchie, *Revolt from the Heartland*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, xvii.

judges.<sup>49</sup> Changing demographics due to immigration and “American rootlessness” also pose a significant problem as well as the idle satisfaction of the “Beltway Right with both the state of the American nation and the wisdom of the public.”<sup>50</sup> In short, “the Old Right faces a long road ahead. Every day is Monday.”<sup>51</sup>

Hawley similarly claims that paleoconservatism is a spent force, peaking in the 1990s and dwindling ever since. He attributes this to its lack of powerful research institutes and billionaire funders common to the other factions of the conservative movement.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, most of its writers have no access to mainstream publications or other media venues. Both Scotchie and Hawley’s assessments are incorrect. The rhetoric of the 2016 election had strong paleoconservative echoes. And while paleocons lack a dedicated research institute or journal, unless one counts *The Journal of American Greatness*, this dissertation will show that they have made significant footholds in the more mainstream publications, such as the *Claremont Review of Books* and *Modern Age*, as well as at institutions such as the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and Hillsdale College. Plus their connections go beyond American conservatism. Ironically paleoconservatives are both the mostly populist minded and the most internationally connected of the fusion factions. Their roots (and funds) run deep with the far right of Europe.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, the egalitarian nature of the internet has given paleoconservatives unprecedented access to rank and file, non-intellectual type ‘conservatives.’

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 110.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Hawley, *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 178.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 189.



## The Rise of the Neoconservatives and the Christian Right

Whereas paleoconservatism has not received sufficient attention from scholars, neoconservatism has been given considerably more attention. The reason is obvious. The impact of neoconservatism on the modern conservative movement can hardly be overstated. Yet this movement largely borrows its mixed ideological foundations from both traditionalists and classical liberals. Yet some scholars have pushed back on this supposed connection to classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism. Thompson and Brook (2010) argue that neoconservatism is at its philosophical root “anti-Americanism” and soft fascism that betrays the classical liberal principles of the founding in favor of an ideology obsessed with power. In comparison, Jacob Heilbrunn, senior editor at *National Interest*, argues that “neoconservatism isn’t about ideology...It is about a mindset, one that has been decisively shaped by the Jewish immigrant experience, by the Holocaust, and by the twentieth-century battle against totalitarianism.”<sup>54</sup> This claim is supported by Irving Kristol’s assertion that his Jewish faith was the linchpin in the difference between his neoconservatism and a more Burkean, British conservatism.<sup>55</sup>

In his biblically structured narrative of the neoconservative movement, Heilbrunn details the departure of disillusioned, “mugged by reality liberals” from the Democrat party in the 1960s due to both a social and political critique of Johnson’s Great Society and a vigorous, Israel-centered anticommunist foreign policy.<sup>56</sup> Next comes the move into the Republican party, with its culminating disappointment in the Reagan era. By the 1990s, the second generation of

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<sup>54</sup> Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Mudde, *The rise (and fall?) of American conservatism*, 591.

<sup>56</sup> Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*, 69.

neoconservatives come to the forefront. Whereas once distinct in origins and emphasis, the neoconservatism is now fully fused with the anti-communist faction of the conservative movement. The attack on 9/11 thrust the neoconservatives out of the political wilderness and into prominence within the George W. Bush administration.

This fateful rise to power within the Oval Office did not end well for the neocons. Fukuyama argues that “neoconservatism has now become irreversibly identified with the policies of the administration of George W. Bush in its first term, and any effort to reclaim the label at this point is likely to be futile.”<sup>57</sup> That is, the association with the Bush administration and the Iraq War fatally mortally wounded neoconservatism, or at the very least the label. Its waning influence is showcased by the recent shuttering of the *Weekly Standard*. Mudde argues that the neocons’ loss of predominance within the conservative movement has left open a power struggle within the GOP, which he predicts will favor paleoconservatives.<sup>58</sup> However, this power struggle within the GOP was predated and predicted by the decades long ideological struggle between traditionalists and libertarians – and their radical alter egos – within the post-war conservative intellectual movement.

There remain other forces and factions within the conservative movement that require only brief introduction. First among these is the Christian right. Within the context of the fusion movement, the Christian Right must be viewed as more of a political action wing than an important contributor to intellectual conservatism. The Christian Right impacted the focus on social issues

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<sup>57</sup> Fukuyama, *America At The Crossroads*, xxxi

<sup>58</sup> Mudde, *The rise (and fall?) of American conservatism*, 593

and mobilized an important voting bloc.<sup>59</sup> Moen describes the evolution of the Christian Right from a social protest movement reacting to the decadent 1960s to a more refined member of the conservative coalition largely in lockstep with mainstream politics of the GOP.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the Christian Right has not really emerged as ideologically distinct from traditionalist conservatism. As such, they are not particularly pertinent to the aims of this dissertation except in their electoral pull on traditionalists towards the enshrinement of government sponsored morality.

Far rarer are books that take theory seriously and trace the battles within the Republican party and the electorate by developments within the intellectual conservative movement. That is, this dissertation does not attempt to trace the intricate rise and fall of various strains of conservatism in the halls of power in Washington, D.C. Other scholars have, for example, shown the inter-party battles for power between neoconservatives and paleoconservatives in the George H.W. Bush administration through to the George W. Bush administration.<sup>61</sup> Certainly this dissertation is indebted to the work of these scholars. Nor does this work focus on the ideological tendencies of the electorate. As has been noted, scholars have long known that the electorate is not well versed in theory. Voters are not ideological. Rather, this dissertation seeks to take theory seriously and, as a result, focuses on developments within the conservative intellectual movement itself from the perspective of the two competing traditions of conservatism. The spotlight is placed not on politicians or voters but on intellectual thought leaders and the rise and fall of the two core

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<sup>59</sup> Importantly, the 1960 Sharon Statement did not include a single social policy declaration. The only mention of religion is the importance of God given free will.

<sup>60</sup> Moen, Matthew C. 1996. "The evolving politics of the Christian Right."

<sup>61</sup> Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*.

– and inherently incompatible – philosophical traditions of the conservative movement: traditionalist conservatism and classical liberalism.<sup>62</sup> By so doing, this dissertation seeks to identify and explain the deep illiberal tendencies within the fusion tent. These illiberal strains acted as antibodies that attacked the viral excesses of liberalism (both modern and classical), thereby overpowering the moderating tension of the fusion movement among intellectual thought leaders. This then led to a rise of illiberalism in the Republican party itself. As a result of this investigation, this work will also show how boundaries are set, abandoned, and changed by thought leaders as well as how theory and practice influence each other. Key policy disagreements within the conservative movement follow the lines set by the philosophic disagreements between the two competing traditions of the conservative movement.

## **Theory and Politics**

Understanding the division in modern conservatism also requires paying attention to sources of philosophical influence. Robin (2013) argues that conservatism is philosophically oriented towards the preservation of hierarchies. This reactionary orientation includes libertarians due to their fealty towards the market order. Devigne (1996) focuses on Oakeshott and Strauss to show the different ways that conservative leaning political philosophers have dealt with postmodernism. He argues that the difference in policy and jurisprudential response to the same postmodernist problem between the two thinkers and their acolytes is the product of their distinct

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<sup>62</sup> I hesitate to use ‘Burkean’ as a label for this ‘traditionalist’ tradition. Yet for the sake of not using the term ‘traditionalist tradition’, and due to Burke’s fundamental rejection of the liberalism of the French Revolution as well as the modern emphasis on Burke’s appeals to tradition and prescription, I will use the term Burkean conservative tradition and traditionalist conservative tradition interchangeably.

theoretical heritages. These heritages disagree on such questions as liberty, equality, morality, and authority. Both strains of conservatism – American and British – shape the political outlook of the modern movement. This dissertation focuses exclusively on the American conservative movement, and zeroes in on the theoretical division between conservative political intellectuals – those thinkers who have one foot in political philosophy and another in political practice- such as Hayek and Kirk.

Nevertheless, American conservatism cannot be wholly separated from its British roots, particularly its attachment to the legacy of Edmund Burke. Much has been written about the influence of Edmund Burke on American conservatism. Maciag traces the historical development of Burke’s influence from his own time to his inauguration as the father of modern conservatism.<sup>63</sup> Burke was the dogged opponent of the ideological excesses of the French Revolution and defender of Western civilization who became the theoretical backbone of the modern conservative critique of both communism and unrestrained liberalism. Mahoney likewise describes Burke’s “politics of prudence” as the inspiration for the modern conservative movement through his influence on thinkers such as Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet. Burke was a defender of liberty and authority in a complementary, fusion-esque fashion. Hence Burke is both the father of a significant intellectual tradition within modern conservatism and an excellent example of the fusion in practice. Mahoney further pays Burke perhaps the highest compliment by stating that Burke was recognized as “the paradigm of statesmanlike prudence by no less a figure than Leo Strauss.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Maciag, *Edmund Burke in America: The Contested Career of the Father of Modern Conservatism*.

<sup>64</sup> Mahoney, *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order*, 7.

This highest of compliments naturally leads to the question of Leo Strauss. The majority of work on the impact of Leo Strauss on the modern conservative movement comes from critics of that movement. For example, Drury (1988) argues that Leo Strauss was a major influence on important thinkers on the right and their emphasis on civil religion and criticism of relativism and secularism. She sees Strauss' influence everywhere from neoconservatives to the Christian Right to politicians such as Barry Goldwater. Thompson and Brooks (2010) likewise link Strauss as the chief philosophic source of neoconservatism. Havers (2013) criticizes the philosophy of Strauss – and thereby the most popular factions of American conservatism – from the historicist perspective of a paleoconservative. These works constitute an important step in understanding Straussians, but they give Strauss too much credit in the realm of day to day politics. Most conservative politicians have never heard of Strauss. Certainly Leo Strauss was and remains an important influence on intellectual leaders, though this influence gets less and less concrete with each step conservative minded philosophers and political scientists take outside their office doors. Even among self-labelled Straussians, great debate exists about whether there even is such a thing as “Straussianism.” Indeed, several books have been written by prominent Straussian political philosophers on this very problem!<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps Strauss' most explicit nods to American politics come from the first page of *Natural Right and History*, in which he quotes from the Declaration of Independence, and his signature on the bottom of a letter from academics endorsing the candidacy of Richard Nixon.

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<sup>65</sup> Zuckert, Michael and Catherine, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy*. And Jaffa, *Crisis of the Strauss Divided*.

Tarcov (2016) argues that Strauss was rarely involved at the level of policy. Moreover, Strauss maintained a distance from both free-market economics because of “its reliance on the automatic working of the market mechanism [as] another modern effort to replace the statesman’s prudence and the citizen’s virtue.”<sup>66</sup> Nor was Strauss particularly tied to any foreign policy positions beyond a personal friendliness to Israel.<sup>67</sup> Beyond these few staking of the flags, Strauss has been mostly dragged into contemporary politics through the political participation of his students, such as Harry Jaffa. This is not to say that Strauss is not fundamentally important to understanding the Burkean (traditionalist) tradition’s critique of classical liberalism as well as the overall conservative rebuke of modern liberalism. Strauss did not, however, pen editorials in the pages of *National Review* or the *Claremont Review of Books*. As such, this dissertation will view Strauss with the same philosophical distance that he himself applied to American politics and not as the alt-Right bogeyman beneath America’s bed.

Finally, several books have identified enemies to the left of classical liberalism. Mahoney argues that modern democracy has little or no place for the crucial historical, political, spiritual, and cultural prerequisites of the liberal order, or the “conservative foundations of the liberal order.”<sup>68</sup> Here Mahoney adds to a growing tradition of critiques of liberalism, both classical and its modern incarnation, from the right. Notable contributors are Patrick Deneen, Philippe Beneton, Pierre Manent, Charles Kesler, Ralph Hancock, and Harry Jaffa. These critics of liberalism are not

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<sup>66</sup> Tarcov, Nathan. 2016. “Leo Strauss and American Conservative Thought and Politics”, 394 in *American Conservatism: NOMOS LVI*.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 393.

<sup>68</sup> Mahoney, *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order*, x.

deeply undemocratic nor illiberal. Rather, they, like C.S. Lewis, perceive a difference between what democracies tend to like and what democracies need.<sup>69</sup> That is, they foresee the threat posed to the highest ideal of liberalism – individual liberty itself – by the democratic spirit of the age, namely the belief in the actual equality of all man as they are now. In this sense, the most powerful conservative critique of classical liberalism started not as a threat at all but as a warning. With Tocqueville these authors focus on the importance of rejecting dogmatic egalitarianism and emphasizing the key role of statesmanship.<sup>70</sup> These authors demand that liberal conservatives or conservative liberals (both of whom rest under the fusion tent) see beyond liberal theory, whether in its current or original state, because liberalism requires something beyond itself to survive. According to Mahoney, that *something* includes “openness to metaphysical claims about liberty, human nature, and natural justice; a respect for the political framework of democratic self-government, which is the nation state; and support for the biblical religions which have been a major source of our ethical system, one of self-restraint and belief in something beyond material existence.”<sup>71</sup>

Yet this same tradition has, at times, overcorrected by over-relying on great men and rejecting the existence of structural inequalities in hopes of defending the most natural inequalities. It has often given in to its worst aristocratic instincts. In their quest to save liberalism, some of conservatism’s gatekeepers have explicitly turned to illiberalism. Still other thinkers, such as Patrick Deneen, have abandoned hope for liberalism and sought only to preserve democracy in

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<sup>69</sup> Lewis, “Screwtape proposes a toast.”.

<sup>70</sup> Mahoney, *The Conservative Foundations of the Liberal Order*, xi.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



smaller communities. At times this branch of conservative thought has itself become the threat to classical liberalism that it so long forewarned. Evidence of this burgeoning illiberalism is not so obvious in itself but in what it has stoked and defended down the ranks, i.e. among the rank and file voters and candidates. This dissertation seeks to understand the impact that this rejuvenated traditionalist critique has had on the development of modern conservative intellectual thought, particularly in its contribution to the waning influence of classical liberalism within the fusion (or perhaps post-fusion) tent, in such areas as nationhood and immigration, economic policy, and the role of the state in morality.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

This dissertation relies upon certain assumptions and assertions:

1. The modern conservative movement (fusion movement) is a compromise coalition involving two distinct and perhaps incompatible theoretical traditions: classical liberalism and Burkean (traditionalist) conservatism.
2. The Burkean conservative tradition wields a critique of classical liberalism that is as intellectually powerful as its critique of modern progressivism and communism.
3. Just as classical liberalism has a tendency to drift into radical modern liberalism (progressivism), the Burkean tradition has a dangerous tendency towards illiberalism and authoritarianism.
4. The fusion movement moderated the tendencies of both traditions in an intellectually and politically powerful manner. Meyer's fusion was both contradictory and complementary.

Building upon these assumptions and assertion, this dissertation aims to answer the following questions:

1. What was the fusion movement, and why has it broken down?
2. What has led to the rise of illiberalism within conservative intellectual circles and, by extension, in the political sphere?
3. What role did the competition between the competing theoretical traditions play in the rise of illiberalism and breakdown of the fusion?
4. Can the divide between the traditions, and thus the rise of illiberalism, be traced over time in conservative intellectual circles?

Questions 1 and 2 are the primary questions of this dissertation and provide the theoretical framework for subsequent questions. They also rely upon and flesh out each of the four assumptions and assertions laid out previously. The questions of the breakdown of the fusion movement and the rise of illiberalism cannot be simply answered by recourse to political history. In order to understand why the fusion movement has broken down, the fusion movement must first be understood. An answer requires a deep dive into the competing theoretical traditions of the conservative movement and the moderating influence of the fusion. As such, I will take seriously the questions of liberty and authority, tradition and creation, as well as the purpose of government and the inescapable question of human nature. The fusion movement drew deeply from the works of long deceased thinkers, but it wielded these thinkers in service to the present moment. Hence I will focus on the major writings of the modern standard bearers of the conservative movement, such as Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, and Frank Meyer. Together these prominent thinkers are the intellectual power players of the conservative movement and represent the two competing

traditions. Russell Kirk was the wedge that linked modern conservatism back to thinking of Edmund Burke and thereby re-founded the Burkean conservative tradition. On the other end of the divide, Hayek represents the re-introduction of classical liberal economics and political thought in the United States. For their part, Frank Meyer and Bill Buckley were the architects of the fusion movement, which successfully sought to hold the two traditions in a moderating tension capable of facing down both communism abroad and progressivism at home and remaking American society. The tension between these two traditions, with their contradictory emphases, goes a long way in explaining the power of the fusion movement, why it broke down, and how that relates to the rise of illiberalism in American politics. I will seek to uncover the deep illiberal tendencies within the Burkean tradition as well as the excesses within classical liberalism that leads to this reaction.

Question 4 once again requires a switch of methodology to archival research and content analysis. I will seek to answer whether the growing divide between the two traditions and the rise of illiberalism is traceable over time in the conservative movement by resorting to the archives of *National Review*. *National Review* is the longest standing conservative intellectual magazine. Significantly, it was founded by William F. Buckley, Jr, the political face of the fusion movement, and was deeply influenced by the contributions of Frank Meyer, the intellectual godfather of fusionism. Its founding statement reads:

Let's face it: Unlike Vienna, it seems altogether possible that did *National Review* not exist, no one would have invented it. The launching of a conservative weekly journal of opinion in a country widely assumed to be a bastion of conservatism at first glance looks like a work of supererogation, rather like publishing a royalist weekly within the walls of

Buckingham Palace. It is not that of course; if *National Review* is superfluous, it is so for very different reasons: It stands athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no other is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who urge it.

*National Review* was created to bind together a conservative movement intellectually and politically powerful and unified enough to put the brakes on the forward march of History, or the rise of communism abroad and progressivism at home. To promote this unity, the key factions of the fusion movement were well represented in the pages of *National Review*, including traditionalists, libertarians, paleoconservatives, and later neo-conservatives. Catholic intellectuals and prominent ex-communists also played an important role. The point was to mold out of these disparate factions a unified, compromise position and then to defend that position.

Early contributors to the magazine included Russell Kirk, Frank Meyer, Willmoore Kendall, Whittaker Chamber, and James Burnham. Though other conservative journals existed early on, such as *Modern Age* and *Human Events*, and important magazines joined their ranks in later years, including the *Claremont Review of Books* and *The Weekly Standard*, *National Review* is unique. Other conservative intellectual magazines and periodicals argued for a particular faction of the fusion, such as *The Weekly Standard* and neo-conservatism. Yet *National Review* mainly stood above factional infighting to promote, protect, and define the fusion – that is, modern conservatism writ large. Hence *National Review's* positioning as the standard bearer of fusionism and gatekeeper to the conservative tent makes its influence unparalleled in the history of the modern Right. Moreover, its focus on promoting the fusion makes it the ideal location to study the major inter-conservative divisions and arguments that have roiled and restructured – and continue to roil and restructure – the Right.

Still one cannot trace the development of the conservative movement in the pages of one magazine without acknowledging other media disrupters, such as the rise of 24-hour news media and the internet. Gatekeeping is far more difficult when fringe elements can circulate their own ideas online and with news hosts without needing access to *National Review*'s platform. As the range of options has increased, *National Review* has become less important and less powerful as the gatekeeper of the conservative mainstream. An example of this shift is *National Review*'s 'Against Trump' edition that not only failed to prevent Trump from becoming the Republican nominee but proved the last gasp of anti-Trumpism at the magazine itself. The objective of this dissertation is to trace shifts in the mainstream of conservative intellectual thought, and *National Review* is still the hub. Though other magazines and their online counterparts exist and have grown in influence, *National Review* remains at the center of the conversation. Contributors range across the spectrum from Mark Krikorian and Victor Davis Hanson to Jonah Goldberg and David French. That is, the magazine has maintained its ideological breadth. Moreover, the top contributors from other factional journals, such as George Weigel at *First Things*, also write for *National Review*. In short, dynamic debates or major re-hauls of policy positions make their way into the pages of the magazine even if they do not originate there.

However, this task would prove too massive if not directed at specific areas of policy or idea development. Hence this dissertation seeks to narrow the search field to a number of key policy areas or principle developments. Focusing in on the development of the idea of nationhood and immigration policy, for example, can help demonstrate the traceability of the rise of illiberalism within the conservative movement and its essential connection to the decline of the fusion movement. This will involve both an in-depth textual analysis of key essays as well as a

broader identification of trends through a content analysis. This overview of trends through archival content analysis will rely upon Nvivo software. Nvivo generates an outline of all the sentences in which each key terms are used, such as ‘nationhood’, ‘illegal immigration’, and ‘heritage’, throughout the included sources. This can then be broken down into specific eras, thereby showing the development of policy trends and ideas over time. This content analysis will be supplemented and expanded by a textual analysis of key essays and reviews that either mark turning points in the debate or demonstrate the influence of the two theoretical traditions on conservative intellectual thought.

### **The Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter 2 is the most theory heavy section of the dissertation. It will involve a close analysis and comparison of the most influential works of Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, and Frank Meyer. These thinkers represent the competing theoretical traditions within the modern conservative movement from its inception. Frank Meyer was the intellectual architect of the fusion movement, which sought to hold the two traditions in a moderating tension capable of facing down both communism abroad and progressivism at home and remaking American society. This chapter will necessarily compare Meyer’s fusion to the soul of Edmund Burke, who was the original and more theoretically coherent embodiment of the fusion. Meyer’s fusion is best represented by the divide between Hayek and Kirk. Russell Kirk was the wedge that linked modern conservatism back to thinking of Edmund Burke and thereby re-founded the Burkean conservative tradition. On the other end of the divide, Hayek represents the rebirth of classical liberal economics and political thought in the United States. These thinkers harken back to theoretical traditions that fundamentally disagree on questions such as human nature, the purpose of government, the status

of the individual, and meaning of happiness. Finally, the important contribution of Leo Strauss to conservative political theory will be considered as well as its implications for the dominance of classical liberalism.

With these theoretical and historical frameworks developed in answer to the central question of this dissertation, the remaining chapters will attempt to demonstrate these frameworks in action. The divides in political theory should manifest themselves over time among the policy preferences and writings of political intellectuals. In other words, chapters 3 – 5 will trace the growing divide between the two traditions and subsequent rise of illiberalism in conservative intellectual thought in three key areas of policy using the archives of *National Review*. This will involve both a broad content analysis to show changes over time and a deeper textual analysis of significant essays or reviews.

Chapter 3 will focus on the rise of illiberalism as displayed in its rhetoric on immigration and nationhood. This chapter will include a discussion on the complex role that race plays in conservative movement's ongoing debate about nationhood and sovereignty. Racial animus will be considered as both a contributor to the rise of illiberalism and an unfortunate consequence of its rise.

Chapter 4 will focus on the role of the state in reinforcing tradition and morality. Here the liberty versus order divide within the fusion becomes particularly apparent. Chapter 4 will include a discussion of conservative rhetoric about, and policy implications for, traditional gender roles and feminism. Sapiro argues that “social policy has assumed that women are not autonomous

individuals and moral agents, but that they live contingent lives.”<sup>72</sup> Much the same could be said of the role of women in a more traditional conservatism, as evinced by conservative opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, equal pay legislation, mandated paid maternity leave, and pro-choice abortion legislation. However, the rhetoric within the fusion tent is more fractured than it appears at first glance. Classical liberalism is more gender neutral because it favors the ideal of individual liberty over tradition and social order. John Stuart Mill’s essay *The Subjection of Women* is a prime example of this theoretical disparity and its resulting overflow into policy disagreements within the fusion. Chapter 4 will also include a discussion of conservatism’s fractured response to legislation on same-sex marriage, marijuana, and transgender issues.

Chapter 5 focuses on the rise of illiberalism in conservative rhetoric on markets and trade. The status of capitalism and its compatibility with religion and the idea of the nation is explored in depth. The rise of a new conservative economics has been the most recent shift in conservative intellectual thought and heralds the extent of classical liberalism’s decline in power.

The final chapter will conclude with reflections on the fusion movement and its abilities moving forward. The fusion was a profound reflection of American society itself in that it attempted to tame liberalism in its unification of liberty and order. Indeed, Meyer successfully unified order and its exponents with liberty and its supporters, i.e. united traditionalists with libertarians, Russell Kirk with Friedrich Hayek. The basis of this unity was the assertion of a mutual dependence between the two tendencies. The central premise of the fusion was that order

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<sup>72</sup> Sapiro, Virginia. 1986. “The Gender Bias of American Social Policy.”.



and liberty are not contradictory but complementary. They are two sides of the same coin, and it is the tension between the two that allows for a moderate and stable liberal democracy. Tradition needs liberty because “virtue not freely chosen is not virtuous.”<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, liberty must have order and morality or else individualism will descend into chaos, which will then descend into oppression. In this way, the fusion doctrine was less a teaching of what to think than how to think in terms of the natural and eternal codependency between order and liberty.<sup>74</sup> Conservatism is a mindset that focuses on a balance. This balancing act, according to Meyer, must always give the benefit of the doubt to liberty and submit any attempt at coercion to a much more rigorous burden of proof. This tense balance between liberty and tradition provided the fuel for the remarkably successful modern conservative movement.

Yet Meyer’s rhetoric on the complementarity of the fusion covered up its ultimate theoretical incoherence. The two traditions are fundamentally at odds with each other. Without an urgent, common political threat, this theoretical incoherence led to an imbalance in the fusion as traditionalist conservatives become increasingly illiberal and powerful within the movement and libertarians become more radical as a truly separate movement. This will have grave consequences for both the Right and for American politics as a whole. It will also have consequences for the American order itself insofar as it represents the entrenchment of a radical liberalism devoid of attachment to first principles and an illiberal alternative equally allergic to compromise and democratic processes.

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<sup>73</sup> Meyer, *The Conservative Mainstream*, 45-47.

<sup>74</sup> Meyer, *What is Conservatism*, 12.

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## **The Fusion and Its Dueling Traditions:**

### **Traditionalist Conservatism and Classical Liberalism**

In order to understand why the fusion movement has broken down, the fusion movement must first be understood in theoretical terms and not just as a product of political history. This dissertation argues that the modern conservative movement is essentially a compromise coalition between two theoretical traditions: classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism. The fusion movement was the political outcome of a mutual moderation – or *détente* – between the two traditions produced through this essential tension. Uncovering the inherent tension between these two traditions, with their contradictory emphases, goes a long way in explaining the power of the fusion movement, why it broke down, and how that relates to the rise of illiberalism in American politics. This requires taking seriously the questions of liberty and authority, tradition and creation, as well as the purpose of government and the inescapable questions of human nature.

The fusion movement drew deeply from the works of long deceased thinkers, but it wielded these thinkers in service of the present. This chapter will focus on the major writings of the modern standard bearers of the conservative movement, including Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, and Frank Meyer. Together these prominent thinkers are the intellectual power players of the conservative movement and represent the two competing traditions. On one end of the divide, Hayek represents the re-introduction of classical liberal economics and political thought in the United States. On the other, Russell Kirk was the wedge that linked modern conservatism back to the thinking of Edmund Burke and thereby re-founded the Burkean conservative tradition.



The fusion movement sought to hold these two traditions in a moderating tension capable of producing the political clout necessary to defeat communism abroad and progressivism at home and remake American society. Meyer believed that “those two streams of thought [classical liberalism and traditionalism], can in reality be united within a single broad conservative political theory since they have their roots in a common tradition and are arrayed against a common enemy.”<sup>75</sup> That common tradition is Western civilization. The great success of Western civilization, according to this line of thinking, lies in its ability to hold these apparently opposed ends in productive tension. This is thanks to “the fact that the two positions which confront each other today in American conservative discourse both implicitly accept, to a large degree, the ends of the other.”<sup>76</sup> Meyer further argues that “on neither side is there a purposeful, philosophically founded rejection of the ends the other proclaims” due to their “common heritage of belief in virtue as man’s proper end *and* his freedom under God as the condition of the achievement of that end.”<sup>77</sup> Instead, each side simply emphasizes the aspect of Western civilization which it sees as decisive, whether freedom or virtue. Meyer’s fusion seeks to moderate the tendencies of both traditions in an intellectually consistent manner. The competing emphases are actually complementary because of the fundamental dictum that virtue without liberty is not truly virtuous, and liberty unmoored from virtue devolves into chaos and finally oppression. Liberty and virtue are but flip sides of the same coin.

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<sup>75</sup> Meyer, *What is Conservatism*, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

At the level of tendencies between the two traditions, the fusion is intellectually consistent in that it engages in Western civilization's ancient practice of holding the two in moderating tension. However, Meyer's fusion incorrectly asserts that the two traditions share a common heritage and understanding about the purpose of government and the definition of virtue. Whether purposefully or not, Meyer masks the deeply contradictory theoretical divide between ancients and moderns within Burkean (traditionalist) conservatism and classical liberalism. Liberalism is the great modern ideology, while Burkean conservatism harks back to a pre-Enlightenment understanding of politics. The fundamental assumptions of ancient and modern regarding human nature, the concept of the individual, and the purpose of government are irredeemably incompatible. Meyer seeks to speak only of moderating, complementary tendencies – such as virtue and liberty – and ignore or deny the chasm between the two traditions. This chapter aims to flesh out the two competing theoretical traditions within the modern conservative movement and display their inherent incompatibility. This will first require an elaboration of the original fusion, embodied within the soul of Edmund Burke, which Meyer's fusion sought and failed to replicate.

### **Burke and the Fusion**

The first theoretical tradition contained within the modern fusion is Burkean conservatism. Its intellectual godfather is Russell Kirk, who linked the postwar conservative movement back to Edmund Burke and the reaction against the French Revolution. Indeed, Kirk argues that conservatism first appeared in 1790 with the publication of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution*

in France.<sup>78</sup> Burkean conservatism must be understood in the context of its birth, namely in the theoretical atmosphere of the French Revolution. Edmund Burke was the dogged opponent of the ideological excesses of the French Revolution and defender of Western civilization. Whereas the French Revolution equated liberty with equality and favored this liberty above all else, Burke countered with a focus on “rational liberty”, which acknowledges virtue, tradition, and the necessary link between liberty and duty.<sup>79</sup> Without these tethers, liberty is to a nation what freedom is to a murderous highwayman escaped from prison – internally and externally destructive.<sup>80</sup> Here we see that liberty is not good in and of itself. Rather, liberty is good for what it produces, such as good government, stability, and individual and collective virtue.

In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Burke questions the presuppositions of English factions supportive of the French Revolution. These clubs maintain that British peoples (and indeed all peoples) have the right to choose their own leaders, dismiss them for misconduct, and organize a government for themselves. Burke outright denies the existence of these rights for Englishmen. They occur nowhere in the *Declaration of Right*, which Burke calls the “cornerstone of our constitution.”<sup>81</sup> Nor was the abstract right to choose rulers declared in parliament’s solution to the succession crisis following the death of childless King William and Queen Anne. Rather, the wisdom of the nation opposed turning “a case of necessity into a rule of law.”<sup>82</sup> Instead of using the succession crisis as an opportunity to assert the right to choose one’s own rulers, the

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<sup>78</sup> Hawley, *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 9.

circumstances must be seen as “decisive proof of the British nation’s full conviction that the principles of the Revolution did not authorize them to elect kings at their pleasure and without attention to the ancient fundamental principles of our government.”<sup>83</sup>

The declared right that everyone must share equally in political power is derived from the notion that man is the sole judge of what constitutes his own happiness. Burke does not deny that mankind has a natural right to self-preservation and the pursuit of happiness. “But he denies that everyone’s right to self-preservation and to the pursuit of happiness becomes nugatory if everyone does not have the right to judge of the means conducive to his self-preservation and to his happiness.”<sup>84</sup> That is, men do not always do what is truly in their best interest; majority will is not equal to good government. Thus a government is legitimate not because it adheres to the “imaginary rights of men” but because it promotes virtue in society and provides for basic human needs.<sup>85</sup>

Nor does Burke deny that people may alter their systems of government under certain conditions. But “the health of the society requires that the ultimate sovereignty of the people be almost always dormant.”<sup>86</sup> Change in systems of government should not come from strict adherence to theory. That is, regime change based on strict application of a new doctrine of declared rights, such as the French Revolution, at the cost of social order is imprudent. Burke is

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>84</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 297.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 298.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 300.

no ideologue. Theory alone is an insufficient guide for practice. Here Burke harks back to a more ancient, Aristotelian understanding of theory and practice.

Burke's overstatements denying these fundamental rights are the self-declared product of his dislike for revolutions, the spirit of change that is spreading throughout the world, and the total contempt growing among mankind for all ancient institutions that stand in the way of a present sense of convenience or a present inclination.<sup>87</sup> Throwing away practiced wisdom of ages for the popular notion of the present is the height of folly. Hence Burke rejected the politics of abstract theories in favor of habit and custom, or the accumulated wisdom of mankind.<sup>88</sup> Still "a state without the means of some change is without the means of its own conservation." He did not reject change in toto but argued that change must occur incrementally for the stability of society.

In fact, Burke championed quite a bit of change during his lifetime, including issues such as American liberty, the condition of Ireland, religious toleration, the abolition of slavery, and the governance of India.<sup>89</sup> In regard to the later, Burke advocated the formation of an Indian *Magna Carta* to guarantee the Indian people rights along British lines.<sup>90</sup> In a more radically Whiggish moment, Burke declares, "If any ask me what a free government is? I answer, that, for any practical purpose, it is what the people think so; and that they, not I, are the natural, lawful, and competent judges on this matter."<sup>91</sup> What the people think, however, is not based solely on abstract reason

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<sup>87</sup> Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Hawley, *Right Wing Critics of American Conservatism*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Maciag, *Edmund Burke in America*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>91</sup> Burke, *Speech on Conciliation*.

but on accumulated wisdom and tradition. Naked reason must be contained by prescription, prejudice, and ancient institutions. Reform – not wholesale innovation – is the goal.

Even in his most anti-revolutionary moments, Burke was not against change per se. Rather, Burke's reformer – as compared to the revolutionary - is best described by G.K. Chesterton's parable of the fence:

In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, "I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away." To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: "If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it." (Chesterton, *The Thing*)

The accumulated knowledge of the past is not the heritage of generations of fools. Traditions and institutions were reasonable at the time of their erection. They must be viewed within the lens of historical processes and according to the peculiarities of distinct peoples. Whether those traditions or institutions remain reasonable requires determining the reason for their original usefulness. This is the mentality of the Burkean reformer *par excellence*. Liberty of the present must be weighed against order both past and future.

Maciag argues that Burke's Whig sensibility contained "both proto-liberal and proto-conservative elements, and circumstances determined which would dominate."<sup>92</sup> In contrast, Strauss argues that the practical character of Burke's thought explains his readiness to use the language of modern natural right when attempting to persuade his audience regarding a policy. But "he may be said to integrate" liberal ideals of natural right and social compact into "a classical or Thomistic framework."<sup>93</sup> In theory Burke belonged to a more ancient tradition, and yet in practice he implemented and supported many liberal policies. As such, Edmund Burke was not simply the founder of modern conservatism. He was the original embodiment of Meyer's fusion – a codependency and moderation between liberty and order, the past and the future. This is not a fusion of liberalism the ideology and the ancients. This is a fusion of the best and most tenacious tendencies toward liberty and order contained in both. Only in this light can Whiggish Edmund Burke be reconciled with the Burke of *Reflections on the Revolutions in France*. Burke acted in favor of prudence and balance, countering the radical liberalism of the French Revolution with extreme emphasis on tradition – and the historical processes later mirrored in the Hegelian movement – when required.

This argument could lead one to conclude that both Hayek and Kirk can legitimately lay claim to the Whig heritage of Edmund Burke in practice. The difference is simply in their interpretation and emphasis – from which situational Burke they cherry pick most. While Kirk emphasizes the 1790s Burke's emphasis on tradition and accumulated wisdom, Hayek emphasizes

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<sup>92</sup> Maciag, *Edmund Burke in America*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 296.

early Burke's Whiggish focus on the protection of liberty. Perhaps then it is unfair to define Kirk's conservatism as pure Burkean conservatism. This conclusion is incorrect.

The modern fusion often mirrors Burke in its apparent internal contradictions because Burke was not an ideologue. He was a man of prudence. Burke was a man living at a hinge point in history, split between the classics and the Enlightenment, seeking ordered liberty along modern terms. His prudence, moderation, and, at times, radical opposition to radical change, foreshadowed the dynamism of the fusion movement. It also foretold its downfall. Burke was able to reconcile his theoretical allegiance to the ancients with the liberalism of his day only in practice and only because liberalism was still in its childhood. Pure liberalism in its adult years is as incapable of compromise as any full-grown ideology. It must be true to itself in pursuit of the elimination of boundaries both natural and historical. Yet Burke and the ancients he followed were men of particulars, grounded in the unique characteristics of their time, their geography, their people. Man conformed to the laws of nature, not the other way around. Truly Burke was never a liberal in the theoretical sense; he was an ally of liberalism in furtherance of common causes. His modern followers, whether called Burkean conservatives or traditional conservatives, follow in his footsteps. They have often allied with liberalism in pursuit of common cause, but they harbor deep suspicion towards liberalism as an ideology. This then is the central point. The fusion within Burke's soul is not the fusion of Frank Meyer, which is ultimately and irredeemably divided between loyalty to liberalism as an ideology and a more ancient understanding of government. The day to day balance between tendencies toward liberty and order is possible only in a theoretically undivided mind. Burke did not adhere to liberalism as an ideology. Half of modern conservatism does give its allegiance to liberalism while the half of the fusion does not.



## **Traditionalist Conservatism**

As mentioned previously, Kirk's conservatism harks back through Burke to Christian political philosophy and to the ancient Greeks. Classical conservatism is another apt name for this section of the fusion camp. This ancient influence on Kirk is perhaps most clear in his repudiation of ideological fanaticism and its attendant utopianism. Human nature is fallen and unchangeable, and so a perfect society is beyond the reach of mortal man. Still Aristotle does not look down upon improvements in the political regime, even if those improvements cannot produce the perfect regime. Though man is imperfect, and regimes will rise and fall in circular motion, it is still a fundamental aspect of human nature to reason about right and wrong, good and bad. This includes regime types, which are a perpetual mixture of artificial selection and nature.

Of course, Kirk, as a believing Catholic, cannot believe that human nature is forever unchangeable, for the Christian story is one of redemption. Indeed, the classical conservative movement has deep ties to religion. This school can only ever accept Plato and Aristotle through the lens of Aquinas and Augustine. The key lies in the source and location of change. Redemption of human nature is the result of divine grace, and its location is the City of God – not the city on earth. Classical conservatives assert that governmental mechanisms will forever fall short of changing and perfecting human nature. Belief in the contrary is to them the great heresy of modernity.

Nor does Kirk adhere to the unnatural modern leveling of human nature. That is, he rejects the core tenet of the Enlightenment that all men are equal through their capacity to reason. In his contribution to *What is a Conservative*, Kirk notes that a “society is unjust which ... allots to one

sort of nature rights and duties that properly belong to other sorts of human beings.”<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, “men are not created equal but different. Variety, not uniformity, gives any nation vigor and hope.”<sup>95</sup> This reflects an essential product of Greek political philosophy: the obvious existence of a natural hierarchy and aristocracy. Some humans are taller and stronger, and some humans are shorter and weaker. Some humans are endowed with a greater capacity to reason and to rule. It is the rejection of this basic fact – or the unnatural levelling of all mankind and all religions and modes of life – that is most abhorrent to classical conservatives in the vein of Russell Kirk and critics of modern progressivism.

At times this Greek-influenced emphasis on the natural inequality of nature borders on a defense of authoritarianism over democracy. Kirk argues that “a monarchy can balance the rights of the talented with the claims of the average natures.”<sup>96</sup> Some men are more fit by nature to lead. This is plainly true, and it leads to a focus on world historical men, such as Lincoln and Churchill, who are capable through their superior nature and wisdom of leading society virtuously. The number of fawning books by conservative minded historians, philosophers, and political scientists to this select group of men is evidence enough of this hyper-focus on great men. Yet this concept of world historical men – when overemphasized in reaction to radical egalitarianism – leaves open a space for tyranny and reduces the masses to political impotence. Just the kind of character capable of leading a society virtuously is also the kind of character capable of destroying a society. As the situation grows more dire, the virtuous qualifications for such a character may become

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<sup>94</sup> Kirk, *What is a Conservative*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

progressively less demanding. This is the latent tendency beneath much of modern conservatism deeply uncomfortable in a modern world: counter-action at the expense of both virtue and freedom.

Moreover, a very masculine sort of pride is embodied in this idea. It is not a coincidence that the qualities that make a person most fit to lead by nature are the highest of the masculine qualities. This is the inheritance of Greek political philosophy, after all. Plato's philosopher knows himself wise, and he deigns to become king as both a right of nature and a service to the weak beneath him. In many ways, this mirrors the Wilsonian president capable of forming, discerning, and then implementing the will of the people, with a handy band of technocrats, for the sake of those people. The difference is truly in the destination and not the means.

Still, Kirk's sentiments on the natural inequality of natures is in alignment with the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence leaves open the type of government best suited to protect natural rights, whether monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. However, Kirk seems to favor the Declaration of Independence not for its statement of universal truths, such as the natural equality of man, but for its placement in the long tradition of English thought and history. Prescription, tradition, and the accumulated wisdom of a particular people give those people certain rights. Once again, this Burkean sentiment comes very close to Hegelian historical processes of freedom. In this rejection of liberalism's core beliefs, Kirk shows himself an implicit anti-liberal. Both his attraction to the Declaration of Independence and the founding are due more to their ties to the British historical and political tradition than to a devotion to universal, liberal values.

While the Declaration of Independence holds open the type of government best suited to the protection of natural rights, the purpose of government is clearly stated. The protection of

natural rights, such as life, liberty, and property, is the end of government. Liberty is an end in and of itself. It is freedom from external constraints. These are explicitly liberal goals not shared by the ancient Greeks. Liberty was understood by the ancient Greeks as self-governance, which required self-discipline. The purpose of government was to allow its citizens to achieve the good life – that is, the virtuous life. Human nature is fallen and not easily given to reason, so man needs guidance – both religious and civic religious – on how to obtain the good life. This guidance included legal and cultural limitations on individual choice. The mode of government which best achieves this end is directly related to the type and character of people being governed. It must come as a product of tradition and prescription. In this sense, universal theories cannot be allowed to speak over the conventions and unique character of a people. Civil society is a closed society. The character of the society not only determines the mode of government best capable of governing its people, that character is also fostered and produced by national and exclusive institutions.<sup>97</sup> Here Burkean conservatism’s tendency toward nationalism, whether constructive or destructive, is exhibited. This tradition necessarily rebuffs the universal for the particular.

Moreover, society and government are not detached from this individual pursuit of the virtuous life, nor is this virtuous life a matter of individual interpretation. No, the “classical Greeks” were not so relative and individualistic as we moderns concerning virtue, purpose, and happiness. Rather, the good life is inherently social, and society, government, as nature itself play a positive role in its attainment and definition and not simply a negative role in leaving open room for its open pursuit and definition. Leading a virtuous life involves aligning oneself with the natural

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<sup>97</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 257.

order, not the process of atomistic self-actualization. Freedom for freedom's sake is not the goal of government.

### **Classical Liberalism**

Hayek and his fellow classical liberals, on the other hand, are thoroughly the product of the Enlightenment. In his influential essay *Why I am Not a Conservative*, Hayek argues that conservatives and traditionalists do not fear encroachments on liberty so much as the notion of change itself. Moreover, “the conservatives are inclined to use the powers of government to prevent change or to limit its rate to whatever appeals to the timider mind.”<sup>98</sup> In Hayek's view, this timidity and willingness to use government force to prevent change stems from an insufficient love and respect for freedom. The conservative lacks trust in the spontaneous forces of adjustment and requires instead the supervision of some “higher wisdom” to keep the change orderly. Classical liberals are much more comfortable with change, for theirs is a revolutionary ideology. Unlike Kirk, Burke, and the ancient Greeks, classical liberals build upon the modern conceit that the individual is the preeminent starting point. While conservatives are fated to be dragged along the progressive path – ever affecting the speed but so rarely the direction of contemporary developments – liberals are concerned with the direction of movement itself.<sup>99</sup> In this way, liberalism is not averse to evolution and change; liberals are confidently prepared to let

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<sup>98</sup> Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, 525.

<sup>99</sup> Hayek, *Why I Am Not A Conservative*, 4.

spontaneous (not government mandated) change run its course to an unpredictable end.<sup>100</sup> Classical liberalism is inherently a progressive ideology.

This relies upon differing understandings between traditionalist conservatives and classical liberals of human nature. At first glance, both hold what Thomas Sowell calls a “constrained view” of human nature, meaning that they recognize limits on governments ability to improve human nature. Indeed, the American founding fathers – students of Locke and the liberal tradition – built a government based upon this fundamental fact. In Federalist 51, James Madison states that “If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.” The U.S. Constitution does not anticipate the impending defeat of vice. Instead, it channels vice in potentially constructive directions, such as innovation in the free market, checks and balances between the branches of government, and electoral politics.

However, the classical liberal tradition is only quasi-constrained. While the improvement of human nature through governmental mechanisms is eschewed, the perfectibility of human nature is possible through natural mechanisms. Human progression cannot come through coercion – whether governmental or social – but only through the mechanisms of spontaneous creation and destruction. New ideas arise spontaneously through the genius of the individual and old concepts are discarded by the majority. This concept of the creation of a new man is the bastard brain child of Rousseau. Once introduced, this idea permeated nearly all succeeding thought, including the

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 5.

Hegelian tradition and the classical liberal tradition through the medium of John Stuart Mill. Hayek is not the theoretical twin of Mill, but he and the vast majority of fellow classical liberals owe a great debt to the intellectual contribution of Mill.

Mill views human nature as essentially progressive, capable of refinement and perfection, under the right conditions. Mill fears coercion, particularly the cultural and social tyranny of the majority, because it prevents this development. Indeed, the progressive capacity of human nature is the justification for liberty. With the exception of harm, individuals must be allowed to act as they choose so as to promote “the utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.”<sup>101</sup> Liberty promotes the development of this individuality – and thereby the development of humanity itself.

As an inheritor of this liberal tradition through the medium of Mill, Hayek is more optimistic about human nature than Kirk. His man is not irredeemably lost – or lost beyond the self-sufficient redeeming of himself. Hayek’s concern is less with the threat posed to liberty by individual men than the coercion imposed by the dogmas of large groups of men, whether in the form of undue devotion to tradition or government, which would stymie the innovations of the creative genius and thus society itself. As long as society errs on the side of liberty over coercion, even when such liberty poses threats to the most sacred and ancient of institutions and beliefs, an increased measure of human happiness and progress will follow. Where the conservative is timid

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<sup>101</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 53.

in the face of change, Hayek and other proponents of the liberal tradition are willing to boldly go where no one has gone before.

Hayek likewise critiques modern conservatism for its essential arrogance in seeking to impose religious values on society. Hayek's liberal is very much aware that he does not have all the answers, and he is not even sure that the answers he does have are absolutely correct. Instead of claiming the authority of supernatural sources of knowledge, whether nature or God, the liberal accepts his ignorance when reason falls short of providing answers to the most meaningful question. "However profound his own spiritual beliefs, he will never regard himself as entitled to impose them on others."<sup>102</sup> Since the liberal is skeptical of even the answers he has discovered for himself, he must allow others to seek happiness in their own fashion. Tolerance requires separating the spiritual and temporal into distinct spheres. This hearkens back to an essential modern position of separating completely heaven from earth in political questions, thereby leaving open opportunity for self-salvation and creation within the earthly realm itself. The earthly realm is no longer capped in its power and capacity to create by the dictates of the heavenly realm. That is, man no longer is required to align himself to some abstract nature because that nature is not available to reason.

This sense of radical, creative freedom leads to another thoroughly modern feature of classical liberalism: the concept of the individual. The preeminence of the individual is an essential and enduring source of unity between classical and modern liberals. Liberals as a block

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<sup>102</sup> Hayek, *Why I am not a Conservative*, 13.



build upon the belief that humans are naturally in “a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions ... as they think fit ... without asking leave, or depending on the Will of any other Man.”<sup>103</sup> The liberal tradition begins with the natural equality and freedom of the individual. The individual is the primary fact of existence. His existence precedes the state, morality, religion, and society, which are all constructions built to best preserve the liberty and equality of the individual. Anything that would hamper the freedom of the individual via coercion is suspect. “The burden of proof is supposed to be with those who are against liberty; who contend for any restriction or prohibition .... The *a priori* assumption is in favour of freedom.”<sup>104</sup>

Strauss argues that the “quarrel between the ancients and the moderns concerns eventually, and perhaps even from the beginning the status of individuality.”<sup>105</sup> The question of human nature, then, is perhaps less helpful in understanding the conservative-classical liberal divide than the primacy of the concept of the individual. The modern tradition is founded on the principle of the individual as the basic existence which precedes all others and the starting point of morality. Fundamental moral facts are merely “rights which correspond to the basic bodily wants; all sociability is derivative and, in fact, artificial.”<sup>106</sup> Liberty then is the self-determination of the individual, or the individual’s pursuit and achievement of his own definition of happiness, according to his passions. Kirk’s view of the individual relative to society and God hearkens back to a more ancient conception. Happiness is found only by the constraints of virtue on the passions

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<sup>103</sup> Locke, *Second Treatise on Government*, 287.

<sup>104</sup> Mill, *On Liberty*, 52.

<sup>105</sup> Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 323.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 300.

which would otherwise rule supreme over reason. That is, happiness is found in virtue, which is the proper ordering of one's soul. The passions must always be under the control of reason, prudence, and virtue. This subjection to reason includes subjection to public reason as enshrined in government, custom, and law. Hence "man can never act without any moral ties since men are never in a state of total independence from each other." Man cannot be happy alone.

### **Classical and Modern Liberalism**

Such fundamental disagreement between the two traditions has not gone unnoticed by classical political philosophers and critics of modernity. The extensive and thorough critiques of modern progressivism posed by these political philosophers naturally include an indictment of classical liberalism as well. While political thought leaders, such as Frank Meyer, sought to unite these traditions through a fusion and inter-moderation of tendencies for the sake of practical politics, a school of political philosophy was laying bare the true extent of the chasm between the two traditions. Perhaps no political philosopher has had more influence in this regard than Leo Strauss, and it is his many students who primarily make up this school of political philosophy fixated on the ancient versus modern divide. These thinkers warn of classical liberalism's natural tendency towards radical egalitarianism. That is, they foresee the threat posed to the highest ideal of liberalism – individual liberty itself – by the democratic spirit of the age, namely the belief in the actual equality of all man as they are now. This critique warns classical liberals against individual liberty unmoored from its spiritual, cultural, historical, and political prerequisites – that is, virtue.

Strauss and other critics of the modern tradition argue that classical liberalism necessarily devolves into modern progressivism because both are based on modern assumptions. As has been

shown, classical liberalism shares with modern liberalism its fundamental assumptions, such as the primary positioning of the individual and the divide between the spiritual and temporal realms. Both are an outgrowth of the Enlightenment. They are in most respects harmonious theoretically. Nowhere is this harmony clearer than in liberal man's devotion to individuality. In this way, the classical liberal's quibble with modern liberals is more a question of means and not starting points and destinations. Both start with the individual in the state of nature and end with the distant horizon of accomplished progress.

The difference between modern liberals (progressives) and classical liberals comes down to the question of negative and positive rights or the definition of equality. Classical liberals define liberty as the absence of coercion; modern liberals classify liberty as effective power to act and frame one's life according to one's will. This requires equal power, not just equal opportunity, to discover and achieve happiness as defined by the individual, or to achieve happiness defined as self-determination. In other words, it is not enough that universities do not have class-based or race-based or gender-based prohibitions on enrollment. Though a working-class woman is not technically prohibited from enrolling, she lacks the effective power to do so due to economic concerns. The modern liberal would seek to remove this barrier on the woman's freedom through, say, taxpayer subsidized tuition or tuition caps for universities. The classical liberal would consider such an act of coercion against the individual – whether the owner of the university or the taxpayer.

The classical liberal argument with modern progressives is over encroachments on liberty in pursuit of progress, particularly progress in pursuit of a positive liberty conception of equality. That is, liberals along the spectrum disagree about the definition of liberty. A second tier of disagreement involves the status of property rights and the market economy. Classical liberals

view property rights as critical to protecting liberty broadly understood. Classical liberal views on this subject range from liberty and private property as inherently identical to property rights as a mode of power dispersal within a community subject to state interference and correction. For his part, Hayek seeks to protect private property because it provides opportunity for free growth rather than a state-sponsored imposition upon society of a preconceived rational pattern of progress.<sup>107</sup> This helps explain why classical liberals in the United States, such as Hayek, often come into convenient agreement with those who habitually resist change because long established institutions in the United States protect individual liberty.<sup>108</sup> To be a conservative in the United States is, according to Hayek, to seek to preserve institutions based upon liberal assumptions.

The key liberal assumption Hayek ascribes to America's institution is the natural right of the individual to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What the exercise of this right looks like is up to the determination of the individual. This requires opposing state action aimed at coercing people into living up to a specific moral standard. Here the classical liberal shows his theoretical naivete. A standard must exist, whether one erected by traditionalists or, increasingly more likely, progressives. That standard will be supported by government coercion and social fiat. When the only socially acceptable standard is tolerance, tolerance is enforced. The sacredness of the individual becomes its own state-sponsored dogma.

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<sup>107</sup> Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, 15.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

## Conclusion

The fusion movement provided the philosophical détente between Burkean conservatism and classical liberalism necessary to power the formation of politically powerful anti-communist and modern conservative movement. This fusion relied upon masking the legitimate and irreconcilable differences between the two traditions that make their long-term compromise untenable. Instead, attention was drawn to the level between policy and philosophy. Meyer recognized that the natural tendency toward liberty and anti-authoritarianism in classical liberalism could be moderated – and moderate, in turn – the authoritarian tendency towards virtue and order among Burkean conservatives. He argued that liberty and virtue are flip sides of the same coin, inherently necessary for each other's survival.

Meanwhile, classical liberal academics mostly relegated themselves to economics, and the Burkean conservatives planted their flag in political philosophy. Drawing on the work of Edmund Burke, Alexis deTocqueville, and Leo Strauss, the Burkean conservative tradition built up a critique of modern progressivism and communism that necessarily applied to classical liberalism as well. This body of work laid bare the irreconcilable foundations of the two traditions. For example, in their competing loyalties to the ancients and the moderns, Kirk and Hayek disagree on a slew of fundamental questions, such as human nature and the purpose of government. The modern conservative movement itself is also split down the middle between ancient and modern understandings of human nature, society, and the good life.

As a result, the conservative movement has long been talking out of both sides of its mouth. Politically the movement espoused a natural coalition between the two traditions while intellectuals in the academy increasingly highlighted their incongruent foundations. Over time,

this critique of the fusion has overpowered Meyer's fusion rhetoric about co-dependence and moderating tension. The policy implications for the coalition due to the loss of a common enemy in communism only accelerated the pace of this breakdown. Yet without the moderation of the fusion, both traditions have shown a tendency to drift toward dogmatism and theoretical radicalism. The next chapters will trace the development of the breakdown of the fusion from the perspective of certain policy sub-categories, such as immigration and nationhood, markets and economics, and morality and the state. Classical liberals have increasingly espoused more radically anti-statist and egalitarian policies while moving outside the conservative movement, and factions of the fusion linked with traditionalist conservatism have veered toward political illiberalism and authoritarianism.

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## **The Rise of Illiberal Conservatism:**

### **Immigration and Nationhood**

The fusion movement was the result of a coalition of the Right under the umbrella doctrine of anti-communism. The internal unity of the fusion movement was tied largely to the existence of a dangerous common enemy. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the great unifying cause of the American Right disappeared. American conservatism had to redefine itself in a post-communist era, now buffeted by new external factors such as the rise of the Internet, the increase of immigration from Latin America, the failure of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, foreign policy makeovers following the end of the Cold War and later 9/11, and finally the Great Recession. This need for redefinition has led to great debates among conservatives and seismic upheavals in the movement's core platforms. Whereas early external factors, namely the Cold War, gave life to the internal cohesion of the fusion, later external factors undermined the fusion and exacerbated its deep philosophical and political divisions. Consequently, the delicate fusion and inter-moderation of the two political philosophies that gave the conservative movement such breadth and political power during the Cold War began to unravel. Where once the key divisions within the fusion were largely papered over, the external realities of the contemporary era have stirred renewed competition between classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism.

This has played out along key policy fault lines. Immigration is the first such policy fault line studied in this dissertation. This chapter involves a textual analysis of all 241 *National Review* print articles significantly related to immigration and the concept of American nationhood between

1955 and 2019. These articles are divided into two time periods: the Fusion era (1955-1990) and the Contemporary era (1991-2019). This division into separate eras is not meant to minimize critical junctures in American politics, such as 9/11 or the failure of the 1986 IRCA. This chapter will address the impact of these defining moments. The eras serve three broader purposes: 1) to provide a template for research and writing 2) to demonstrate the dramatic increase in the conversation on the Right concerning immigration and nationhood between the early period and this contemporary period and 3) to emphasize the relative unity enjoyed by conservatives during the Cold War and the necessary reorienting of American conservatism in the aftermath of its conclusion.

At the 2019 American Political Science Association meeting, Michael Anton spoke as part of a Claremont Institute panel addressing the past, present, and future of American conservatism. In his address, he similarly argued for two eras of modern American conservatism – the fusion conservatism that peaked under Reagan and the post-Reagan conservatism that is rising from the ashes of the old fusion, or the conservatism currently under construction. Many intellectual thought leaders of the current moment, such as Anton, view themselves in opposition to that older fusion. There is a recognition that something is distinctly different between the old conservatism and the new. In the panel, Anton and other presenters pegged the twin catastrophes of the George Bush administration – the Iraq War and the Great Recession – as the great catalysts for this new conservatism. In reality, as this chapter will demonstrate, the shifts in immigration and nationhood predate the Bush administration. In short, the use of the two eras demonstrates the deep psychological divide between the fusion of the Cold War and the post-fusion conservatism of the contemporary era.

The fusion era (1955-1990) held a compromise view of immigration influenced by both classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism. The contemporary era (1991-present) has seen the emergence of two distinct immigration traditions: one clearly influenced by classical liberalism and the other strongly linked to traditionalist conservatism. Both have become less moderate than the fusion compromise on immigration over time. Ultimately, the immigration tradition linked to traditionalist conservatism has gained prominence in the restructured conservative movement. This study will follow the evolution of the debate on immigration in the conservative movement between 1955 and 2019. Such a process will uncover the content of the broad fusion consensus on immigration and nationhood during the Cold War as well as the inter-conservative debates of the 90s and early 2000s that substantially restructured that consensus and led to the rise of a dominant traditionalist conservatism with illiberal overtones and an increasingly absent classical liberal wing. The contemporary debates largely fell under six main categories: the cultural impact of immigration, the economic impact of immigration, the rule of law, human rights, national security, and American nationhood. This last category is the most fundamental of them all because it takes up the question of what makes a person an American, or what makes the American nation? While this question was lurking in the fusion era, it became a major touchpoint for debate in the contemporary era.

Finally, this study relies on a unique view of the relationship between theory and practice, ideas and politics. The theories discussed in this paper – classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism – exist on their own accord. They matter as ideas and influence politics and practice. However, it would be naïve to assume that theory can exist in isolation from politics and practical necessity. Power dynamics and other external factors influence theory as well. That is, no theory

is ever truly pure, and the necessities of the moment help to define the boundaries of that theory. For example, heavy streams of non-white immigration have brought out the most illiberal tendencies of traditionalist conservatism. That theory is not identical to white supremacy, but its view of nationhood can provide fertile ground for radical, supremacist offshoots. Indeed, traditionalist conservatism has always coexisted alongside, and perhaps facilitated, racism in the United States. Theory has always influenced, and in turn been influenced by, power dynamics and politics.

### **Fusion Era Conservatism Overview**

Between the years 1955 and 1990, *National Review* produced only 19 articles related to immigration and the concept of nationhood. That is a surprisingly small number for a weekly journal. In comparison, *National Review* published over 1700 articles on the topic of communism from 1955 – 1990. Clearly the primary concern at *National Review* and within the conservative movement more generally was the Soviet Union and the expansion of communist ideology during this era. Indeed, it is through the lens of the Cold War that fusion conservatism largely viewed the question of immigration and nationhood. This is particularly apparent in *National Review's* treatment of refugees and immigrants from the Soviet bloc. In the 1950s and 1960s, authors primarily focus on immigration and assimilation issues in Great Britain and France. These articles are very open about questions of race and demographics. Not until the late 1970s and 1980s do more articles about the economic and cultural impact of immigration in the United States begin to crop up. The main questions are tied to economics. Do immigrants provide a boost to the economy or just drain social coffers? The boost in immigration articles during these years is attributable to the surge of immigrants from central America and the economic malaise experienced during this

same period. The general consensus during the fusion era is that immigration is a net positive economically, assimilation is necessary and possible under the right conditions, and respect for free movement and net positive migration set the United States apart from the USSR.

### **Contemporary Era Conservatism Overview**

Between the years 1991 and 2019, *National Review* printed 219 articles on immigration and nationhood. Its digital output of immigration articles is even greater. This era, particularly in its opening decade, was largely defined by its revolt against the consensus of the fusion years, particularly the influence of classical liberalism on conservative platforms. This era is also marked by an attempt to redefine and reimagine American conservatism in a post-Soviet world. The first decade opened up movement-wide debates about the cultural impact of immigration. Discussion moved from questions of proper assimilation policies to concerns about whether assimilation is good enough or even possible. The demographic concerns raised bluntly in the fusion era are returned to with greater frequency in the contemporary era. The rule of law becomes a major theme of the conservative reaction to illegal immigration. In the post 9/11 years, greater attention is given to national security threats stemming from unchecked illegal immigration. Finally, the later years of the contemporary era produce a large body of articles about the negative economic, political, and cultural impact of immigration and the failure of multiculturalism in Europe. Beneath these various aspects of the immigration debate in the contemporary era, essential questions about the status of American nationhood lurk. What does it mean to be an American? The “shared political ideals” school of thought linked to classical liberalism is rejected in favor of a more culturally nationalist, anti-multiculturalist view of the American nation.

## Human Rights

While most immigration articles during the fusion era were concerned with the plight of immigrants trying to flee communist countries, some authors turned their attention to the plight of immigrants already in the country. One such author bemoaned the demoralizing and dignity stripping process through which immigrants claim asylum in New York. “What must it be like to have no legal standing at work or in your own bedroom?”<sup>109</sup> The author questions the capacity of the individual to live a life of dignity without legal recognition and political rights in a free country. The immigrant is subject to suspicion all around him. Is his marriage a sham for papers? Is he a drain on the economy, or is his work actually useful to the rest of America? Even with the promise of amnesty during the 1980s, the author argues that the process is slow and susceptible to corruption and abuse by lawyers. “And still they line up: to have their labor put in question, their marriages eavesdropped on: to languish in delay and great expense. Emma Lazarus said it well: Send these, the homeless, tempest tost to me. You’ll find a lawyer at the golden door.”<sup>110</sup> This is a conservatism deeply concerned with human dignity and freedom. It sets up the United States as the protector of these goods and the Soviet Union as the great abuser of rights.

As mentioned previously, the fusion era framed the immigration question through the lens of the Cold War. *National Review* was quick to espouse a right to free movement out of communist countries and towards freedom. “We do not have to think further, if we think deeply enough, than about ... this ‘right to leave.’ Surely this is in its first rank, quite probably first of all, among the

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<sup>109</sup> Mano, Keith. July 8, 1988. Immigrating.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

human rights that define a free society.”<sup>111</sup> The free movement of Jews behind the Iron Curtain to Israel was one example of this right in practice. Buckley wrote that the bargain of “emigration rights for American commercial favoritism approaches, and the parties involved are bargaining hard. They are: 1) the senators who are spokesmen for the 78 senators pledges to deny Russia Most Favored Nation treatment unless Russia permits emigration of her Jews.”<sup>112</sup> The right to emigrate and to seek freedom elsewhere was so important that *National Review* supported the use of potentially economically harmful levers to force Russia to allow free movement of Jews to Israel. The flight of Hungarians to the West was another example of this fight. “The folks on Capitol Hill are as anxious to help the Hungarian refugees as anyone else. That goes without saying.”<sup>113</sup> Later Bozell argues “shouldn’t the U.S. take on its share of women, children, and the aged who escape from behind the Iron Curtain.?”<sup>114</sup>

*National Review* was particularly critical of Carter’s response to the Castro regime in Cuba and the underwhelming aid given to the masses of people fleeing to the shores of Florida. “Where was the President’s ‘absolute commitment to human rights?’ Where was the massive American airlift or sea-lift that could have shortened the agony?”<sup>115</sup> Instead of rushing to the aid of Cubans fleeing Castro, the author chides President Carter for placing perceived realpolitik ahead of a commitment to human rights. While the President cow-tows to the Soviet Union, “the battered

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<sup>111</sup> Burnham, James. 1971. The right to leave.

<sup>112</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. July 19, 1974. The Jackson Amendment.

<sup>113</sup> Bozell, Brent L. Jan. 12, 1957. National trends.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Hunt, Howard E. June 13, 1980. Castro’s worms.

clusters of refugees from Haiti and Cuba brave wind, sea, thirst, and risk of drowning in their anguished quest for freedom merely to exist in dignity.”<sup>116</sup>

Essentially, people in the Soviet Union, Hungary, Cuba, and Haiti were voting against communism with their feet. The message from *National Review* is clear: this flight should “remind us, if we are willing to be reminded, what Communist regimes are really like, and how close to absolute the difference is between those regimes and ours, for all the stains and tatters on our banner.”<sup>117</sup> Not only were waves of immigrants fleeing communism rhetorically useful during the Cold War, but this movement was indicative of a fundamental right of human beings to move and seek dignity and freedom elsewhere.

The essential question, of course, is whether humans have a fundamental right to enter as well. This necessarily involves questions about national sovereignty. Authors across the spectrum at *National Review* during this fusion era were deeply suspicious of any attempts by global governing bodies to limit or nullify American sovereignty. This included threats linked to the immigration question. M.E. Bradford argues:

Since the Renaissance it has been conventional to imagine how well the world might go if all types of sovereignty were abolished. The present-day version of this notion is something like a “universal right to immigrate.” The trouble is that such a right cannot coexist with an immigration policy designed to serve the best interests of the United States, a country

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Burnham, James. The right to leave.



that already receives ‘twice as many immigrants and refugees as all other nations combined.’<sup>118</sup>

Here Bradford is simply repeating a common concern among conservative intellectuals about threats to national sovereignty. Yet this statement also comes into conflict with both earlier and later statements in *National Review* that champion the right to leave as a fundamental human right. What is the right to leave if not the right to immigrate? The right to leave cannot end in the nebulous space between nation-states, for such a non-political, non-permanent space poses the same threat to human dignity and freedom as the totalitarian state. At what point – if ever – does this right to leave supersede questions of national sovereignty?

This question is not addressed again in the American context for nearly three decades. The migrant caravans from central American in 2018 and 2019 reenergize this question. In the intervening years, *National Review* has clearly taken on M.E. Bradford’s view and discarded its legacy of championing free movement. Lowry argues that “Trump has been wrong to portray the migrants as inherently threatening — the overwhelming majority just want a better life — but we have the sovereign right to decide who does and doesn’t come to this country, and demand that it be an orderly, lawful process.”<sup>119</sup> As will be demonstrated in later sections, this is a standard conservative argument about the rule of law and the preservation of social order. But the pecking order of sovereign nations and free moving peoples is clearly established. Krikorian, an important

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<sup>118</sup> M.E. Bradford. May 23, 1986. The politics of immigration. *National Review*.

<sup>119</sup> Lowry, Rich. Nov. 27, 2018. The media was wrong about the caravan.

figure in the reconstruction of conservative immigration policy, argues that the caravans are simply symptoms of a larger problem regarding asylum rights:

Another long-term objective should be to limit the grounds for asylum...As it stands now, we have created a “right” to asylum in the United States, a surrender of sovereignty whose consequences are becoming increasingly clear. Only the American people, through their elected representatives, should decide who gets to move here, not individual foreigners asserting a “right” created by the U.N. and vindicated by post-national anti-borders activists.<sup>120</sup>

No longer is the right to leave a fundamental human right championed by *National Review* and the conservative movement. Rather, this “right” is the creation of open border activists and global governing bodies bent on limiting American sovereignty. Oddly, *Reason Magazine* circa 2018 seems more at home with *National Review* of the fusion era in regards to immigration policy. Dalmia writes that, “The U.S. is responsible, at least in part, for the mess in these countries. We ought to be sending planes to evacuate their residents — not greeting them with boots and bayonets. America is the richer for doing the right thing when it welcomed over half a million fleeing boat people after the Vietnam War. It can't ... shy away from its moral responsibility in the face of a far smaller challenge now.”<sup>121</sup> This is deeply reminiscent of Hunt’s *National Review* lambasting of the Carter administration for its lackluster aid to Cubans and Haitians fleeing to Florida.

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<sup>120</sup> Krikorian, Mark. Oct. 26, 2018. Stopping the Caravan.

<sup>121</sup> Dalmia, Shikha. Oct 31, 2018. Donald Trump fails to confront the truth about the migrant caravan.

What accounts for this change in sentiment among conservative intellectuals? One argument is that the origin of the refugees largely determines the response. Immigrants fleeing communism in Eastern Europe were Europeans, while refugees fleeing gangs or dictatorship today are largely non-white. As will be discussed later in this paper, traditionalist conservatives during both eras were quick to differentiate the idea of preferring one's own as the majority in the country, including one's own race and religion, from racism. For these thinkers, it is deeply natural to prefer that the country remains the way it has always been, namely majority white. Whether or not one accepts this differentiation, this concept is implicitly accepted among traditionalists today. Of course, this framework does not account for *National Review's* ardent stance in favor of accepting refugees from Cuba and Haiti.

A second possibility is the change in political climate. Perhaps because of the fall of the Soviet Union, articles extolling the right of humans to leave totalitarian regimes are not found in the pages of *National Review* in the contemporary era. In fact, articles regarding any right to leave – or right to immigrate – are simply not written for the *National Review* after the fusion era. Political expedience and rhetorical opportunity played at least some role in pushing conservative intellectuals of the fusion era to support the right to leave. However, it would not do to attribute this solely to political necessity, for the right to leave fits well within the framework of classical liberalism as well. More traditionalist minded thinkers may have been persuaded by political necessity, but the authors who wrote so passionately about the right to leave as a fundamental right of mankind were not all unabashed cynics writing for pure political gain. If we take these fusion era authors at their word, they truly did believe in a right to leave – that is, a right to free movement – derived from the tenets of classical liberalism.

So then three factors emerge to explain the change in attitudes: race, political necessity, and the influence of competing political traditions. The central argument of this dissertation is that the fusion movement was a compromise coalition of two competing political philosophies which were held together only by political necessity and the presence of a common enemy. Without a compelling reason for unification, the inter-moderation of the fusion movement gave way to an increasing radicalism within both political philosophies, leading to a more illiberal traditionalist conservatism. *National Review* of the fusion era showed both faces in regards to the question of human rights. Yet the contemporary era has far more often produced articles founded in deeply traditionalist conservative ideals. So perhaps the right to leave was a tenet of the fusion era both because of its philosophical links to one of the fusion's underlying political philosophies and because of its usefulness in the political and rhetorical fight against communism. In other words, both practical realities and theory influenced these public intellectuals. Without this political and rhetorical usefulness, traditionalist conservatives no longer felt compelled to toe the compromise line on questions of free movement and, as we will see in the next sections, the rule of law and immigration's political, economic, and cultural impact.

### **The Rule of Law**

Curbing the employment of illegal immigrants and proposals for national identification cards are at the center of rule-of-law musings regarding immigration during the fusion era. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was an important touchstone for debate during the last decade of this era, particularly due to its amnesty clause and requirement that employers prove employee immigration status. Amnesty for immigrants who entered the country illegally was nearly universally panned. Williamson asked, "Why should this be a matter of concern to us? In

the first place because every illegal who comes across the Rio Grande is committing an act, as it were, of theft; an overt act of aggression.”<sup>122</sup> This argument is very representative of conservative sentiment regarding the rule of law during the fusion era. Without law, there is no order; without order, there is no society and no protection for individual rights. This formulation was accepted both by more classically liberal writers and traditionalist conservative writers.

This concern for the rule of law held steady, though it was certainly vocalized more often due to the increase in immigration articles, in the contemporary era. The consensus among conservatives was that the capacity and willingness to enforce the law – whatever that law may be – must be the fundamental rule of immigration policy. The introduction of *The Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act* in 2005 by Senators Ted Kennedy and John McCain and a compromise version in 2007 (*Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2007*) supported by President Bush once again set off a firestorm about amnesty and adherence to this fundamental rule of immigration policy. O’Sullivan writes, “What the voters want is border security and sanctions on employers who break the rules; what they oppose is rewarding lawbreaking with an amnesty.”<sup>123</sup> Fellow contributors were quick to agree that amnesty before enforcement undermines both the purpose of immigration reform and the authority of the law itself. “The bill provides legal status to millions of aliens, premised on a showing that they have violated our immigration laws, before any improvements in enforcement are made .... Within months of the bill’s enactment, millions of illegal aliens will qualify for probationary legal status and Social Security numbers.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Williamson, Chilton Jr. Aug. 15, 1986. The right books.

<sup>123</sup> O’Sullivan, John. June 19, 2006. Defeat this monstrosity.

<sup>124</sup> O’Beirne, Kate. July 9, 2007. Animosity and amnesty.

*National Review* once again came out hard against amnesty proposals and executive orders issued during the Obama Administration. The general feeling of *National Review* articles during the Obama administration was that enforcement promises would always be ignored, so compromise on amnesty and reform was impossible. “The only defensible reaction from conservatives is “No”: no bill that empowers Obama to amnesty illegals, however strong the enforcement promises might be, since they will be ignored.”<sup>125</sup> To support immigration reform, conservatives would need proof that enforcement is prioritized and enacted prior to any votes on reform bills. This disenchantment towards compromise during the Obama years has turned to indignation during the early Trump years.

Though some authors at *National Review* reject President Trump’s tone and unhelpful rhetorical style on immigration, the majority have nonetheless generally supported his steps toward immigration enforcement. Classical liberal opposition to Trump’s rhetoric on the negative impact of immigration on the economy has been largely muted in the face of rule of law sentiment. Local and state interference with ICE has only bolstered this support as evidenced by a bevy of articles from infuriated conservatives. These authors claim that such actions demonstrate the central tactic of the left: prevent enforcement of the law and then claim that since enforcement is impossible, new policies should be put in place. In short, authors argue that the left simply prefers “lawlessness.” How can you compromise with unfaithful negotiating partners who routinely prefer people of unknown character and origins to the safety of their fellow citizens? This history of lack of enforcement and failed compromises has left conservatives with a bitter taste in their mouths

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<sup>125</sup> Kirkorian, Mark. February 10, 2014. Enforcement, then amnesty.

towards not just the “radical Left” but illegal aliens who cannot become good citizens because they carry with them an inherent disregard for the rule of law. In short, “if responsible actors refuse to deal seriously with immigration, there are sundry populist-nationalists of varying degrees of respectability or nastiness waiting on the sidelines to pick up that dropped ball. You know how the Trump guys are always saying, ‘This is how you got Trump’? That is how you got Trump.” President Trump not only appealed to a hardline immigration sentiment among voters but to a long burgeoning hardline sentiment among traditionalist conservative intellectuals who care deeply about the rule of law as well.

### **Economic Impact of Immigration**

The positive economic impact of immigration is often hailed as the linchpin of the classical liberal argument in favor of free movement. This argument was frequently referenced in the fusion era literature. “The historical record shows clearly that an economy genuinely free can accept almost unthinkable infusions of cheap labor.”<sup>126</sup> What problems immigration might pose for the American economy, then, is less to do with immigration itself than with overregulation of the economy and barriers to the free market. Some authors in this period did challenge this economic view, though this was always framed as an alternative to accepted opinion. Williamson argues that “illegal aliens cost the American public \$25 billion a year: in terms of outrageous welfare and Social Security fraud, medical and education bills, crime, and the treatment of diseases not seen in the U.S. for years – not to mention jobs ... taken from U.S. citizens.”<sup>127</sup> Of course, the author pins these costs not on immigrants as a broad category but on illegal immigrants.

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<sup>126</sup> *National Review*, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1984. Illegal Immigration.

<sup>127</sup> Williamson, Chilton Jr. Oct. 4, 1985. The right books.

The contemporary era really reopened debate on this conservative doctrine. On the pro-immigration side, authors cited low domestic birthrates, the natural demands of growing economies, and the entrepreneurial spirit of immigrants. The classical liberal argument for immigration as a positive good is as follows:

The output of an economy can surge only if the key factors of production—capital and labor—surge, or if firms combine inputs in a more productive way. For most economies, labor input accounts for about twice as big a factor in output as capital input does, so growth of the labor force, accordingly, is the most important driver of supply-side growth. A rule of thumb often relied upon by economists is that a 1 percent increase in the labor force produces about half a percentage point of extra output growth.<sup>128</sup>

In order to keep up with this demand for increased labor force, the United States has to rely on immigration. American birthrates are simply not enough to keep up with demand. The key is that immigrants are not taking jobs from Americans; they are filling empty posts. This includes both high-skilled jobs that demand the best and brightest worldwide as well as low-skilled jobs. “The problem isn’t just that Americans don’t want to work out in the fields or up on roofs in the hot sun; employers can’t pay them enough to make that kind of job worthwhile for most people. The real problem is that there aren’t enough native-born workers to sustain the industries that rely on unskilled labor.”<sup>129</sup>

Several authors were quick to point out that economic reality does not always equal

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<sup>128</sup> Hassett, Kevin A. Feb. 25, 2015. America needs workers.

<sup>129</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. Oct 10, 2005. Debating immigration.



political output. That is, Americans don't always recognize the economic advantage provided by immigration even when they are experiencing it. "There are advantages to Americans in economic mobility .... We had economic gains coupled with high employment. This was owing substantially to the free movement of capital and manufacturing. But in political forums on such subjects, one sees only the plant that shut down and was restarted in Siam."<sup>130</sup> The feeling that immigrants are taking your job, Buckley argues, is not evidence that such is actually occurring. Moreover, pro-immigration authors argue that these immigrants are more entrepreneurial than native born Americans, so they are self-employing and creating new jobs in new companies.

This defense of immigration as an economic good even extends to illegal immigration. "The typical libertarian view of illegal immigration is that we are essentially powerless before its titanic force, which overwhelms mere man-made borders as might a tidal wave .... America's immigration laws are colliding with economic reality, and reality is winning."<sup>131</sup> This doesn't mean that such authors support illegal immigration. On the contrary, they are merely recognizing the economic and policy realities driving the surge in illegal immigration. In other words, immigration will come one way or another. Policy will simply decide its legality.

On the flip side, anti-immigration authors began taking apart these classical liberal foundations piece by piece in the 1990s. In fact, an entire issue of *National Review* in 1995 was dedicated to the question of immigration and its economic and cultural impact. Both classical liberal arguments and their detractors were given space. These anti-immigration critiques began with a rethinking of the liberal economic theory that immigration is necessary for higher rates of

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<sup>130</sup> Buckley, William F. Feb 9, 2004. Bushwhacking immigration.

<sup>131</sup> O'Sullivan, John O. Nov. 25, 2002. Rendezvous with reality.

growth. “Both theory and practice combine to disprove the argument that immigration (legal or illegal) is necessary for higher rates of growth.”<sup>132</sup> In fact, instead of growing the economy, immigrants simply depress wages and take jobs from native born Americans. “Legalization would add to our citizenry millions of people, most of them poor and less-educated, whose prospects for advancement are decidedly low .... Low-skill immigrants offer cheap labor ... but it also depresses wages for the low-skill natives who have to compete with illegal immigrants for work.”<sup>133</sup> The price of goods may drop, but cheap imported labor also depresses “the wages of low-skilled workers by 5 to 8 percentage points.”<sup>134</sup> The problem is not with employers’ importation of young geniuses to revolutionize the American economy. The problem is with the majority of “employers’ desires to hire heaps of cheap, compliant labor.”<sup>135</sup> From this perspective, immigration is just a subsidy for employers for “which the cost falls on the taxpayer.”<sup>136</sup>

On top of all of this, the entrepreneurial advantage immigrants bring to the country “is now statistically insignificant; by 1997, therefore, the presence of immigrants had no effect on the overall level of entrepreneurship in the U.S.” Essentially, the argument is that not only are immigrants taking jobs from low-skilled native born workers, they are also no longer producing new jobs or self-employing at above-average levels. Instead of acting as a bailout for Medicare and Social Security, which rely on workers to fund retirees, “low-skill immigration creates even worse problems over the long term; the benefits eventually owed to low-earning immigrants will

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Richwine, Jason. June 7, 2010. A population portrait.

<sup>134</sup> Borjas, George J. May 8, 2006. Immigrants in, wages down.

<sup>135</sup> Matloff, Norman. Oct 9, 1995. Debugging immigration.

<sup>136</sup> O’Sullivan, John O. Nov. 25, 2002. Rendezvous with reality.

be much greater than what they paid in.”<sup>137</sup> In short, these authors urged their fellow conservatives to stop relying on old libertarian tropes that the market will iron out all these kinks in the long run to the ultimate financial benefit of the consumer.

Beyond questioning the classical liberal lens through which conservatism had long viewed the economic impact of immigration, these authors also highlighted the long recognized financial burden immigration places on social coffers. Immigrants place particularly heavy burdens on cash-strapped local and state governments.<sup>138</sup> *National Review* editors argue that immigrants also grow dependent on welfare programs. “Indeed, *BusinessWeek*’s own statistics show that ‘nonrefugee immigrants’ have an average welfare-participation rate of 7.8 per cent, compared to a native-born rate of 7.4 per cent. (And the rate among native-born American whites is dramatically lower, perhaps only 5 per cent.)”<sup>139</sup> In summary, these anti-immigration authors conclude that not only is immigration not a boon for the U.S. economy, it actually harms U.S. workers and depletes social resources. Over the course of the contemporary era, these anti-immigration arguments have slowly replaced the standard classical liberal doctrine of the fusion era as the new accepted view of immigration economics. The pro-immigration camp has found itself decidedly in the shunted aside opposition on the question of immigration economics.

### **Cultural Impact: Assimilation and Multiculturalism**

This transformation in accepted immigration economics pales in importance to the significant role that the cultural-impact-of-immigration debates have had on conservative views of

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<sup>137</sup> Richwine, Jason. June 7, 2010. A population portrait.

<sup>138</sup> Skerry, Peter. Feb. 21, 1994. Beware of moderates bearing gifts.

<sup>139</sup> *National Review* Staff. July 11, 1994. Immigration battle lines.

immigration in the contemporary era. The earliest articles in fusion-era *National Review* on the question of assimilation and multiculturalism, or the broader cultural impact of immigration, dealt almost exclusively with the problem facing Europe, particularly France and Great Britain. “Fifteen years ago, Britain had virtually no color problem at all. Now she is within foreseeable distance of having a problem on the American scale.”<sup>140</sup> Of course, the other major issue on the mind of writers at *National Review* was the civil-rights movement and race-relations. In the American view, Europe was importing its own race-relations problems through its disastrous immigration policies. “The dream of a multiracial Commonwealth rank[s] second only to the United Nations as the favorite liberal illusion.”<sup>141</sup> If the American racial experience of the 1950s and 1960s was anything to go by, the dream of a successful multiracial Great Britain was deeply flawed. The idea under the assertion is, of course, that some races simply cannot live together in harmony and equality. This idea that assimilation is sometimes simply impossible was rejuvenated later in the contemporary era. Other fusion era authors stopped short of such a bold statement and stuck to attacking Britain’s lax assimilation policies. The basic argument was that though some immigrant groups, such as those of a different religion or race, will be harder to assimilate than others, assimilation is possible as long as multiculturalist illusions do not get in the way.<sup>142</sup>

As the 1950s and 1960s gave way to the immigration booms of the 1970s and 1980s, conservatives at *National Review* began contemplating the vision of an America much like immigrant heavy Great Britain. In response, *National Review* came out unequivocally against

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<sup>140</sup> Lejeune, Anthony. June 4, 1968. Mr. Powell’s blockbuster.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Huxley, Elspeth. Oct 13, 1972. England faces the great migration.

multiculturalism. Though America was an immigrant nation, it was also a nation of immigrant assimilation. “The prospect of the United States’ accepting an essentially new conception of itself as a multinational state with minimal norms of assimilation is not a particularly happy one.”<sup>143</sup> Francis asks rhetorically whether the United States should “accept masses of new immigrants now and probably more in the future when the pressures for cultural assimilation are weakening and the demands for minority rights and identity are increasing?”<sup>144</sup> To combat this lax view of assimilation, some conservative writers supported the idea of reinstating quotas to prevent “immigration [from] chang[ing] the national or ethnic composition of the American population.” Van Den Haag argued that holding such a view was not blatantly racist. Rather, Van Den Haag asserted that “one need not believe that one’s own ethnic group ... is superior to others (or more likely to make good citizens) in order to wish one’s country to continue to be made up of the same ethnic strains in the same proportions as before.”<sup>145</sup> Such a disposition is inherently natural and actually socially constructive. “All human loyalties begin with blood ties and work outward...; there is a serious value in being more obliged to particular person than we are to mankind in general.”<sup>146</sup>

The reality of these immigration surges forced conservatives to begin looking at the actual demographic impact of such movement. The obvious concern was the destiny of European-Americans as the dominant race: “owing to the pattern of chain migration ... in combination with the breeding habits of the largely Hispanic, Caribbean, and Asian immigrants, by the year 2050

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<sup>143</sup> Francis, Samuel T. April 25, 1986. A nation of numbers.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Van Den Haag, Ernest. Sept. 21, 1965. More immigration?

<sup>146</sup> Bradord, M.E. May 23, 1986. The politics of immigration.

post-1980 immigrants plus their descendants will account for 45.2% of our total population .... In less than a century more than half of America will be the Third World.”<sup>147</sup> *National Review* was concerned not only with the demographic destiny of the United States, which would be decidedly less white and less Protestant, but with the improper assimilation of these new groups. That is, if the composition of the United States is to irrevocably change racially and ethnically, proper assimilation procedures can nonetheless blunt the impact. However, some authors, such as Williamson, were concerned that these new immigrants “do not melt as earlier influxes of immigrants did (frequently they make no effort even to learn English).”<sup>148</sup> This lack of proper “melting” was attributed to multiculturalist sentiment around the country that made lack of assimilation culturally acceptable.

The contemporary era largely continued this trend of decrying multiculturalism and focusing on assimilation. Many, such as libertarian leaning Jacoby, took a positive view of America’s assimilation capacity. Jacoby argues that “today’s newcomers are assimilating—learning English as fast as or faster than the immigrants of a hundred years ago, moving up the economic ladder, intermarrying at unprecedented rates.”<sup>149</sup> Even authors who bemoaned lax assimilation requirements hailed America’s unique capacity to Americanize. “We can be proud of the fact that we are the least xenophobic society in human history, making Americans out of people from every comer of the earth.”<sup>150</sup> This ‘making of Americans’ does not require each new immigrant to become a WASP. Rather, Kurtz argues that American-style assimilation “call[s] on

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<sup>147</sup> Williamson, Chilton Jr. Oct. 4, 1985. The right books.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Jacoby, Tamar. Oct 10, 2005. Debating immigration.

<sup>150</sup> Kirkorian, Mark. Oct. 27, 2003. A stern face and warm welcome.

prospective citizens to attach their personal heritage to American principles and identity ... acceptance of English as the national language, willingness to live by the Protestant work ethic ... and pride in American identity and belief in our democratic principles.”<sup>151</sup> O’Sullivan argues that historically successful assimilation has come as a result of the combined effort of multiple facets of society. Without such a combined effort, assimilation will not happen. “The U.S. government, private industry, and charitable organizations all set out to ‘Americanize’ them. It was a great historical achievement and helped to create a new America that was nonetheless the old America in all essential respects...every immigrant group added its own spice to the original American tomato soup. The final product was spicier but still recognizably tomato soup.”<sup>152</sup> In short, American-style assimilation is deeply linked to the national motto ‘E Pluribus Unum’ and uniquely successful when properly applied.

Most authors in the contemporary era, however, took a decidedly less positive view of modern assimilation, focusing less on its historical successes and more on its present failures. One major concern regarding failed assimilation is the role it could play in heightened racial tensions – a balkanization of American society. “High immigration fosters ethnic enclaves in which immigrants retain their original language and culture; this provides ethnic pressure groups with apparently reasonable grounds for bilingual arrangements in schools, voting, the workplace, etc.; and ordinary Americans, seeing these as temporary concessions to immigrants adjusting to American life, realize only late in the day that they are the permanent rules of a balkanized

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<sup>151</sup> Kurtz, Stanley. May 20, 2013. Acculturation without assimilation.

<sup>152</sup> O’Sullivan, John O. Nov. 19, 2016. A people, not just an idea.

society.<sup>153</sup> Some authors, such as Kupfer, also repeatedly forewarned that high immigration coupled with poor assimilation could lead to a rise of the populist Right and perhaps even white nationalism.

The contemporary era does not differ strongly from the fusion era in its negative view of the cultural impact of immigration – with two exceptions. The first significant change is the contemporary era’s emphasis on the cultural over the economic impact of immigration. That is, the cultural impact of immigration has become much more important to conservatism’s overall view of immigration than its economic impact. In the fusion era, the overall net economic positive of immigration, based in the classically liberal school of economics, took precedence over the more traditionalist argument about the culturally negative impact of immigration. Economics in the contemporary era is not beholden to the classical liberal school and has taken a more sidekick role.

The second major change in the contemporary era came in its evolving view of assimilation, especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Whereas assimilation was once the solution to cultural immigration woes, the new view questioned whether assimilation of certain groups was both possible and desirable. For example:

Our European cousins have had some sobering experiences with large, poorly assimilated populations of Muslim immigrants and their descendants, both as a question of national culture and in the specific matter of providing a hospitable growth medium for radicalism and terrorism. With a few already-worrying local exceptions (such as the dozens of Somali

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<sup>153</sup> Custred, Glynn. June 16, 1997. Country time.



Americans from Minnesota who have joined al-Shabaab), the United States has no such population. It could do itself a favor by not importing one.<sup>154</sup>

Somewhere along the route, conservative views of America's assimilation capacity – and the desirability of such assimilation – began to shift. In other words, America's unique capacity to assimilate, even at its most stringent social application, cannot keep up with the tide of high immigration and the major cultural and religious differences of these new immigrants.

The role of terrorism anxiety in framing this traditionalist conservative view of immigration puts this rhetoric in a helpful context. One author in the fusion era briefly raised the concern that immigrants from Cuba and Central America were moles and agitators working for the Castro regime. Such sentiment was the absolute minority within the pages of *National Review* during the fusion era. The vast majority cast immigrants and refugees as victims of totalitarian regimes. In the early contemporary era, immigrants were often referred to as drains on social safety nets, but they were not viewed as potential threats to American civilization itself - except, of course, if they were illegals. The events of 9/11 raised new questions about assimilation and immigration:

Our porous borders allow into the U.S. not only hard-working migrants but also resourceful terrorists. As long as the number of illegal immigrants remains so large, and the immigrant-smuggling networks exist un-harried, they provide a kind of underground sea in which terrorists swim, as well as gardeners and nannies.<sup>155</sup>

America's vaunted ability to forge a cohesive society out of many immigrant strands is now in doubt. The implications of this breakdown range well beyond terrorism, but the connection between terrorism and the weakening of assimilation cannot be dismissed as a

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<sup>154</sup> Williamson, Kevin D. Dec. 31, 2015. Discriminating Discrimination.

<sup>155</sup> O'Sullivan, John O. Nov. 25, 2002. Rendezvous with reality.

side issue.<sup>156</sup>

Third, and perhaps most important, cultural adaptation poses a special problem for Middle Eastern Muslim immigrants.... There is also a debate among Muslims about whether a good Muslim can give his political allegiance to a secular government, such as ours, that is composed of non-Muslims. Many Muslims can and do become loyal Americans; they have served with distinction in the U.S. military. But for some share of Muslims, coming to identify fully with America will be difficult. And this problem could become more pronounced over time.

These two Muslims, however, thought of America as an opportunity, but not as an identity. Orientations like theirs are, in today's America, perfectly normal—even among the unhyphenated, as I have learned in assorted conversations since 9/11. Among a vast proportion of Americans, one of the very defining traits of being an American is to lack pride in being one. One either has no conscious sense of American identity or, if one is given to lending the issue more attention, is ashamed of being American. To celebrate America, meanwhile, is considered naive and peculiar; one gets a pass by defining America as the sum of competing “diversities”—witness claims that Barack Obama represents ‘what America is’—which means that America is no one thing, and thus nothing, finally, but an address.<sup>157</sup>

These extracts demonstrate two parallel concerns: lack of assimilation has become a threat to national security, and the capacity of the U.S. to make Americans out of certain groups, such as devout Muslims, is in serious doubt. For example, are there simply too many Hispanics to viably assimilate them and maintain our national culture? This is the question implicitly raised by McConnell: “Even in relatively mainstream political venues like the National Council of La Raza, delegates courted by leading national Democrats and Republicans chant ¡Viva Mexico! No one blinks when a moderate like Arturo Vargas ... points to our changing demographics and says, ‘We will overwhelm.’”<sup>158</sup> Moreover, how can America assimilate anyone without a base layer to

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<sup>156</sup> Kurtz, Stanley. May 20, 2013. Acculturation without assimilation.

<sup>157</sup> McWhorter, John. Apr 16, 2006. Americans without Americaness.

<sup>158</sup> McConnell, Scott. Dec 31, 1997. Americans no more.

assimilate to? This is the question first raised by Auster in a 1994 special edition *National Review* focused on the question of multiculturalism and national identity. “Underlying all these problems is the steady decline of Americans of European descent from majority toward minority status, with the concomitant redefinition of America as a multicultural nation—an oxymoron if there ever was one.”<sup>159</sup> Underlying all of these statements and concerns about assimilation and multiculturalism and immigration is a growing concern about the definition and viability of the American nation.

### **Nationhood**

National identity – what makes someone an American – is the great driving force beneath all the other concerns of the immigration debate. The fusion era did not dwell much on the question of nationhood, which is odd considering the civil rights movement also occurred during this period. Regardless, the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of new external factors required the conservative movement to ask these questions once again. Two schools of thought have dominated the question of nationhood in the contemporary era and split conservatives into two camps. These two camps are not products of the modern conservative movement but are steeped in much older American intellectual traditions. In his seminal critique of the Tocquevillian framework of American political thought, Smith (1993) asserted that multiple traditions form the core of American political identity.<sup>160</sup> These traditions include liberalism as well as more ascriptive, ethnocentric schools of thought. The first school of thought on the question of nationhood that divides modern conservatism draws from the liberal-republican tradition. The second school of thought, linked with traditionalist conservatives, is very much tied to the older ascriptive and

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<sup>159</sup> Auster, Lawrence. Feb. 21, 1994. Avoiding the issues.

<sup>160</sup> Smith, Rogers. 1993. “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America”.

ethnocentric traditions. Of course, both classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives claim to be the rightful heirs of the founding fathers, and traditionalist conservatives would not define themselves as necessarily hierarchical and certainly not along racially defined lines. Regardless, I will focus on these two main groupings of traditions as they have been appropriated and applied within modern conservative intellectual thought.

Classical liberals attached to modern conservatism generally fit within the liberal tradition of American nationhood. This is the ‘political ideal’ school, which argues that the core of American identity is commitment to the classically liberal principles of the Declaration and the U.S. Constitution. This is the view championed by Barack Obama when he said in 2011: “America is not defined by ethnicity. It’s not defined by geography. We are a nation born of an idea, a commitment to human freedom.” Lincoln avowed a similar view of the American nation when he claimed that even those not descended from revolutionary war veterans were “blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration” if they accept that great principle that “all men are created equal”. From this perspective, the American nation is never truly challenged by immigration unless new immigrants do not bring with them – or are not otherwise inculcated with – a commitment to the Declaration and the U.S. Constitution. George Will and Irving Kristol are two important conservative intellectuals attached to this political-ideal school.

The second view, held mostly by traditionalist conservatives, holds that the American nation is not an ideological abstraction but a people and a culture. Something deeper than political ties is required to make a nation. Political union makes a state. A shared history of sufferings and successes, language, customs, culture, religious sense, and Lincoln’s “mystic chords of memory” make a nation. This second view of nationhood takes the influence of culture and binding ties more

seriously. Thinkers such as Russell Kirk and Richard Weaver belong solidly to this second school of thought.

The first major debate over these two ideas of nationhood erupted in *National Review* in 1995 between John O’Sullivan et al and Richard Neuhaus et al over the ideas proposed by Peter Brimelow in *Alien Nation*. O’Sullivan started the debate by arguing that the American nation is not just an idea but a culture and tradition deeply attached to the Anglo-Saxon tradition:

To be founded on an idea, however, is not the same thing as to be an idea .... The ideas in the Declaration on which the U.S. was founded were not original to this country but drawn from the Anglo-Scottish tradition of Whiggish liberalism. Not only were these ideas circulating well before the Revolution, but when the revolutionaries won, they succeeded not to a legal and political wasteland but to the institutions, traditions, and practices of colonial America—which they then reformed rather than abolished.<sup>161</sup>

The American nation is distinct from the British nation but closely linked through its political and social heritage. How then can new immigrants ever hope to become Americans? The U.S. is “a nation, a people, a culture—like other nations in some respects but unique.... American national identity remains at the moment more cultural than ethnic, and for that reason this identity is inclusive. It is possible to become an American, no matter what one's genetic roots, in a way it is not possible to become a Slovak or a Pole.”<sup>162</sup> And since Americans are a unique people, and assimilation is possible, then it is reasonable to expect new immigrants to assimilate to the society they enter rather than the reverse.

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<sup>161</sup> O’Sullivan, John. Nov. 19, 2015. A people, not just an idea.

<sup>162</sup> McDonald. July 11, 1994. A nation once again.

O'Sullivan's comments are a watered-down version of Brimelow's argument, which states that both the Declaration of Independence and The Federalist assumed ethnic and cultural homogeneity as a precondition of a coherent nation. "Whatever ideas enter into the definition of America as a political order, those ideas depend for their proper functioning on a population that accepts them as habits balanced and defined by other habits rather than as newly learned precepts and abstractions."<sup>163</sup> Moreover, the high rate of immigration coupled with high fertility rates among non-white immigrants will reduce the European population to a minority, which will jeopardize not only America's cultural identity but its very existence as a nation-state.<sup>164</sup> O'Sullivan's predictions are not so dire, and he allows more room for immigrant assimilation, particularly immigrants from different ethnic and cultural groups. Both authors, however, agree on the idea of an American nation defined by its attachment to common cultural and ethnic, or nearly ethnic, understandings. For O'Sullivan this cultural heritage is the Anglo-Saxon heritage; for Brimelow, this unique American culture is better described as white (European) culture.

Neuhaus, a proponent of the liberal school of nationhood, critiques both Brimelow and O'Sullivan. Neuhaus critiques O'Sullivan for the deeply unconservative (in his opinion) view that what makes Americans unique is that they are uniquely British. On the contrary, "There is no Anglo copyright on the characteristics that make for assimilation and success in America: hard work, thrift, civic-mindedness, devotion to faith, family, and freedom."<sup>165</sup> Rather, Neuhaus contests that "American identity is neither cultural nor ethnic, but a philosophical commitment (to

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<sup>163</sup> Francis, Samuel. May 1, 1995. Hercules and the hydra.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Neuhaus, Richard John. Feb. 6, 1995. Alien notion.

liberty, political equality, etc.) within which ethnic groups retain their distinctive character: the homogeneity of America is in the shared recognition that there are many ethnic identities that, for limited public purposes, are subordinated to a common enterprise."<sup>166</sup> For Neuhaus, this is the self-understanding that has animated the nation since its founding.

Neuhaus is particularly critical of the portions of O'Sullivan's argument that verge near white nationalism. "Since George Washington's 'our' people were WASPs, *e pluribus WASP* is an undiplomatic but accurate way of expressing traditional Americanism: namely the assimilation of many peoples into one—the one here first."<sup>167</sup> Since the ones here first were WASPs – excluding, of course, Native Americans and blacks – traditional Americanism is white Americanism. This is true enough. Neuhaus does not deny the historical reality that European protestants formed the majority of Americans at the founding. Still Neuhaus fears that this focus on white culture as American culture, excluding America's long history with ethnic and religious minorities, along with O'Sullivan's tendency to blame "immigration for some of our major domestic problems, such as multiculturalism and the welfare dependency of the urban underclass..."<sup>168</sup> could revive nativist sentiment, which has had such a poisonous effect in American political history.

The Neuhaus-O'Sullivan debates provide a clear example of the divide within conservatism over the idea of nationhood. Each school is distinctly linked to one of the guiding political philosophies of the fusion: classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism. Neuhaus

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

is solidly within the ‘political ideals’ school of nationhood. O’Sullivan and Brimelow join Richard Weaver and Russel Kirk in the second tradition. This ‘culture school’, heavily linked to traditionalist conservatism, takes seriously the idea of binding ties, inherited values, and a deep, shared culture as the ultimate transmitter, arbiter, and moderator of ideals. Classical liberals are more abstract in their intense focus on the theory of rights that makes the American nation so unique and liberates the individual from the bonds of tradition. Over the course of the two decades succeeding these initial debates, O’Sullivan and the ‘culture school’ of nationhood have largely won the day among conservative intellectuals, though such thought is seldom mentioned outright. Rather, its influence is seen in conversations about demographics and assimilation, as well as in the rise of nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric on the Right. The evolution in conservative thought on the cultural impact of immigration during the contemporary era (see above) provides ample evidence of this shift.

At its core, modern conservatism is split between two fundamental ways of viewing America and defining what it means for themselves and others to be an American. This creates a lens through which classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives observe the economic, cultural, and legal impact of immigration as well as the place of human rights in refugee and immigrant movements. The increased radicalization of these two schools of thought in the past decade and the rise of illiberal immigration sentiment among conservative intellectual leaders should not come as a shock. The fusion’s success lay in its unique and temporary capacity to hold the two camps together by muting and moderating the culture minded view of nationhood held by traditionalist conservatives – and its derivatives in economics and social policy – in favor of a more classical liberal view of immigration. That synthesis has naturally and gradually come apart



in the past three decades, revealing the true divides on nationhood and immigration within the conservative tent.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the impact that the decline of the fusion, particularly the collapse of its inter-moderating union of two competing political philosophies, has had on the immigration debate in the conservative movement. The separation and radicalization of these two philosophies is evidenced in the turmoil and reconstruction of conservative dogma on immigration in the 1990s and 2000s. Where does conservatism stand on immigration circa 2019? The new standard conservative position in the Age of Trump appears to be much the same as it was during the preceding decade and a half, albeit with more explicitly illiberal tendencies. This new position is substantially different from the accepted position of the fusion movement. Today the negative cultural impact of immigration is widely accepted, and the emphasis on the rule of law remains strong. The threat of terrorism and the fear of a loss of cultural identity have worked hand in hand to add a dehumanizing lens to refugees and immigrants. The economic impact of immigration has taken on a more negative hue over time, especially as classical liberal economics has gone out of vogue in the conservative movement. Arguments to the contrary from classically liberal thinkers still aligned with the conservative movement are the ever-growing exception. Finally, standard conservative dogma on immigration has come to rely heavily on a culture-centric view of the nation as something more than just union behind shared political ideals. This culture is neither reducible to race and ethnicity nor entirely separate from it. Race is the ever-present undercurrent, though it is rarely explicitly mentioned. Rather, traditionalists paint the American nation as the product of ideals passed through the moderating gates of shared stories, inherited

customs, language, religious understandings, “mythic chords”, and lived experience. In short, their America is not an open, multicultural society but a unique people besieged by the ‘other’ on their own lands.

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## **The Rise of Illiberal Conservatism: Morality, Tradition, and the State**

The previous chapter explored immigration and the concept of nationhood in the conservative movement since the 1950s. In that chapter, I argued that anxiety about race, peoplehood, and culture has increased since the 1990s to a crescendo during the 2016 election. In this period of time, immigration was a particularly pertinent topic for demonstrating the longstanding and morphing divide within the fusion camp between traditionalist conservatism and classical liberalism. The state's role in enforcing morality and protecting tradition is another pivotal area of disagreement between the two competing theories. This chapter will follow in the previous chapter's footsteps by highlighting the rise in anxiety concerning the maintenance of Judeo-Christian traditions and morality in the United States.

The first step, however, is to combat the all-too-easy split of the fusion camp into the side that prefers traditional Judeo-Christian morality and the state enforcement of such (traditionalist conservatism) versus the side that applies laissez-faire to the realm of morality in the vein of John Stuart Mill (classical liberalism) - in short, the lazy division of the fusion camp into religious crusaders versus pot-smoking libertarians. Of course, there are members in each camp who can be defined in these terms, especially among voters. The actual divide among conservative intellectuals, however, is far more nuanced. It concerns the essential question of old civic republicanism – namely, whether a republic lacking civic virtue can long survive. Once again, the balance between virtue and liberty appears. Does the state have a role in perpetuating and enforcing traditional morality, which is a component of civic virtue necessary for liberty and self-

government? Or does the law of moral agency require that society honor liberty even up to the point of self-destruction at the level of the individual and the state?

The question of morality, tradition, and the state also raises concerns about the immutability of nature and man's mastery over his physical environment. Can man so master the tools of science as to change human nature itself? Are tradition and biology simply constructs to be reconstructed by the power of man's imagination and the rigorous application of the scientific method? This also touches on the question of whether science can ever be truly apolitical.

Finally, the debate over the role of the state in safeguarding traditional morality calls into question the trustworthiness of liberalism. Is liberalism truly tolerant, or is liberalism tolerant only up to the point of destroying and replacing the former majority? This is the terrifying question conservatives have had to ask themselves since the loss of culture wars, or since the majority no longer ascribed to traditional values. When the majority agreed on Judeo-Christian values, honoring both virtue and liberty was not such a difficult balancing act. Afterwards, liberalism became either the great protector of virtue and moral agency or the menace that methodically destroyed all barriers and traditions in the way of its own radical morality of total freedom.

These questions and contours are essential for understanding the growing divide between traditionalist conservatism and classical liberalism concerning tradition, morality, and the role of the state. Good natured squabbles in the 1950s-1990s turned far more serious and divisive within the conservative movement as a result of losses to third wave feminism and the gay rights movement, culminating in the rejection of the liberal compromise with the issue of transgenderism in the 2010s. In the end, I believe, the divide on the essential questions outlined above as applied

to contemporary movements proved the breaking point for the old fusion and led to the current remodeling of the conservative movement.

### **The Moral Majority**

*“The law...will only weaken individual moral responsibility by trying to take its place. What we want is fewer laws, not more.” (Anthony Lejeune “The Wolfenden Report,” 1957)*

The fusion camp has never been a bastion of moral relativism. With the exception of a few radical libertarians, conservative intellectuals did not argue for fewer laws because they rejected old moralities based solely on tradition and prejudice. Morality is real for these thinkers, and it matters to the health and prosperity of society. However, the prevailing feeling among fusion intellectuals, at least at the *National Review* in the 1950s-1980s, was that moral responsibility must be held by the individual and not the state. These fusionists did not want government to regulate morality because government is dangerous and such regulation hampers the moral agency of the individual. They did not object to government regulation of morality because they believed in moral relativity. The distinction is very important.

The view that moral agency belongs solely to the individual was prominent during the 1950s through 1980s on topics ranging from homosexuality, marijuana, pornography, and the sexual revolution. For example, even the most ardent later opponents of same-sex marriage argued for the legal tolerance of homosexual acts during this period. Buckley argued that there is “no reason to deny homosexuals the right to practice privately, or to place them at a disadvantage when



their homosexuality is irrelevant....They are, and should remain, a private affair.”<sup>169</sup> The desire for homosexuality to be conducted solely in private drove many other prominent thinkers during this period. Irving Kristol argued that he “did not want to see homosexuals persecuted by the law or by society. But I believe it is the responsibility of homosexuals themselves to keep their sexual life as private as possible.”<sup>170</sup> Phyllis Schlafly agreed stating that “really, no one cares about someone’s private sex practices. Everyone has a free will to choose what he wants to do.” The important thing was that all was done in as much privacy as possible, and the gay rights movement need not attempt publicly to “compel the rest of us to respect their lifestyle.”<sup>171</sup> Even thinkers closely aligned with traditionalist conservatism, such as Schlafly, appeared to accept this classical liberal compromise during these years.

At least one contributor to the *National Review* disagreed with this majority opinion. M.J. Sobran argued that “the state cannot remain neutral on moral issues.” Naïve fellow contributors may have acquiesced to the thought that free individuals needn’t practice, or like, or approve homosexuality to regard it as merely another lifestyle from the perspective of the law. Sobran responded that such a moral relativity is “asking a lot of people who have a way of life, and a reverence for those who have bequeathed that way of life to them.”<sup>172</sup> Gary North likewise argued that “the libertarian shibboleth that laws cannot make men moral and you cannot legislate morality is a silly half-truth. Are we to conclude that laws are to be totally neutral, abstracted from any

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<sup>169</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1989. Confirmed, but not bachelors.

<sup>170</sup> Toledano, Ralph De. 1984. The homosexual assault.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Sobran, M.J.1974. Mr. Brudnoy’s argument.

system of morality...All law is legislated morality; each law will infringe on somebody.”<sup>173</sup> Here Sobran and North preview an argument that became very powerful from the 1990s onward among conservative intellectuals of the traditionalist ilk with increasingly hard feelings toward the liberal compromise.

### *Marijuana*

The early reaction to marijuana laws by conservative intellectuals was perhaps the most revealing example of the fusion bent toward classical liberalism. An article endorsing marijuana decriminalization first appeared in *National Review* in 1968. Then in 1969, the Senator Goldwater’s office published its support for marijuana decriminalization. In the early 1970s, several articles appeared arguing that the government should not enforce collective morality and that marijuana is no more dangerous than alcohol. Surely alcohol causes problems socially when used improperly, but prohibition produced even worse results. Why should we expect any better from marijuana criminalization?

Moreover, the criminalization of marijuana serves only to alienate the people from the police, which further undermines respect for authority in society. “How ... can you expect your children to respect authorities who will ruin a person’s life for possession of marijuana or put a man in jail for using a drug with the abuse potential of a cocktail?”<sup>174</sup> Marijuana criminalization

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<sup>173</sup> North, Gary. 1973. Pornography, community, law.

<sup>174</sup> Gollan, Antoni. 1968. The Great Marijuana problem.

also carries the terribly destructive side-effect of putting too many people in jail for too minor of an offense. As Antoni Gollan wrote:

“But when government sees fit to protect the private citizen from his own activity, the paradox transcends jurisprudence into a not always lucid moral dilemma: How do we justify the imprisonment of people who have done things of which one may disapprove, but which have not disturbed others or harmed themselves?”<sup>175</sup>

Quoting the Young Americans for Reagan organization in 1968, Gollan continued, “If a person is behaving differently from how a moral collectivist wants him to behave, and yet is minding his own business, who or what gives the moralist the right to prevent that person’s behavior?” The term “collectivist morality” is highly fitting for the fusion movement at the peak of its anti-communist, pro-individualist, classically liberal era. “Indeed, it has been the feeling of most conservatives that social attitudes and behavior cannot be legislated – in fact, should not be legislated, lest the action do injury to individual liberty and personal prerogative.”<sup>176</sup> This is the classical liberal position on morality and the state par excellence, and this position stands in the majority during this era.

Of course, the traditionalist argument was represented during this era as well. The main thrust of this argument regarding marijuana is that government exists for the purpose of interfering in such matters. Calling the more extreme classical liberal arguments “nonsense,” Buckley wrote, “society interferes all along the line through laws, customs, sanctions, etc., in an attempt to

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

preserve a variety of values. It interferes successfully as well as unsuccessfully, and, from the point of view of my conservatism, interferes far too little: as in the case of pornography, for example. No society can be free in the sense implicit in Mr. Cowan's sentence and still survive."<sup>177</sup> Here it is important to remember that Buckley was stridently pro-decriminalization of marijuana. Even as Buckley embraced the classically liberal position on marijuana, he was cautious about accepting the larger social argument in toto. In this sense, Buckley fully embraced the fusion, combining both traditionalist conservative and classically liberal arguments into one.

Another important argument against marijuana criminalization was anti-regulatory in nature. C.H. Simonds, a confessed "hemp hater" argued, "Absolutely ... let us decriminalize it; let's not legalize it, simply because legal weed would be just another thing to slap taxes on and hire bureaucrats to regulate, and then we'd be making a criminal out of every citizen who, appalled at the high price of Acapulco Golds, elects to grow his own behind the outhouse."<sup>178</sup> The problem is not pot-smoking but the size and reach of government. Buckley similarly wrote that "I ... never understood why it was necessarily a function of government to take the lead in enlightening the American people on the matter of drugs."<sup>179</sup> In summary, the general feeling in the 1970s among conservative intellectuals was in favor of decriminalizing personal use and against giving government yet another thing to regulate.

*National Review* finally hosted a debate in its pages on decriminalization in 1983. Decriminalization came out on top. The minority opinion focused primarily on the negative social

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<sup>177</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1972. Marijuana and the counter-culture.

<sup>178</sup> Simonds, C. H. 1972. Confessions of a hemp hater.

<sup>179</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1970. Private enterprise and dope.

and health effects of marijuana. “Weed is an adjunct, forcing tool and instrument of initiation for a lifestyle that generally rejects or seeks to bring down ordered life as we know it.”<sup>180</sup> Even in this minority opinion, marijuana is not a problem in itself. It is its connection to a counter-culture movement that seeks to destroy tradition that is the problem. The majority opinion, which preferred decriminalization, nodded toward personal responsibility, self-governance, and a strong anti-regulatory mentality. The debate on marijuana within conservative circles during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s revealed a divide between the more traditionalist wing and the classical liberal wing. While the classical liberal argument was predominant, it was truly more of a compromise position. Important thinkers such as Frank Meyer and Bill Buckley did not accept the full scope of the classical liberal argument, but they did adhere to a very typical fusion compromise. Essentially, government necessarily has some role in creating and protecting traditions and morality, but it is best that this power be used in as limited a capacity as possible. Men are only free when they are moral agents unto themselves. The position can be summed up like this: you do as you please as long as you don’t force me to do it as well and do not hurt anyone else in the process. Importantly, this position, or compromise, does not give room to the idea that all choices are equally moral.

### *Pornography and Sex Education*

Another example of this classical liberal compromise within the fusion was the reaction to the rise of pornography between 1950s and 1980s and the resulting Meese Report under the Reagan administration. Prior to the Meese Report in 1986, the general response to pornography at *National*

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<sup>180</sup> Oberbeck, S.K. 1971. The Problems of Pot.

*Review* was eye-rolling fascination. Buckley largely laughed off pornography in the 1960s and 1970s but cautioned that men are free in “proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there is without...men of intemperate minds cannot be free.”<sup>181</sup> Pornography was but one way that citizens undermined their right to self-government by requiring external controls upon their actions. To be sure, these external controls were a bad thing – a necessary evil that prevented true republican self-governance.

A major theme in responses to the pornography issue in the 1960s through the 1980s was its connection to the sexual revolution and the decay of traditional sexual morality. Chief among these concerns was that sex was being differentiated from love and commoditized, reducing man to the level of an animal acting on instinct and pleasure. Traditionalists well understood the role that sexual morality played in the stability of society and cohesiveness of the family unit. Marriage was understood as a binding social obligation to one’s spouse and one’s offspring, essentially making sex safe for society. This is not necessarily a religious argument but a political and economic one, though a great many conservative intellectuals of this era were religious.

The concern for promoting traditional sexual morality extended beyond responses to the rise of pornography to the issue of sex education. The traditionalist conservative argument is that the very idea of sex education hints that the state has a role in setting sexual boundaries and cultivating morality. Up until the sexual revolution, the role of the state was to support abstinence

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<sup>181</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1973. *The ennobling dirty movie*.

in any sexual education classes. The question confronting conservative intellectuals was whether this was a correct application of state power. Should the state define the boundaries of sexual education to simply abstinence, or should the state give equal favor to both abstinence and safe-sex education and leave it up to parents to teach morality and students to act as moral agents? Russell Kirk argued that “education about sex...does have a rightful place in every school but only as a part of a general ethical instruction.” Yet Kirk also admitted that

“an atheist’s notions about sex differ radically from the beliefs of even a vestigial Christian or Jew: for nearly all sanctions or prohibitions in sexual ethics are of religious derivation;...thus the present controversy on sex education ... is a contest between atheistic views of human nature in sexual relationships and religious views.”<sup>182</sup>

Since the majority of the nation adheres to a religious understanding of human nature in sexual relationships, that is naturally the view that is promoted in schools through ethical instruction. The state reinforces and supports the morality of the majority.

On the other side, Van Den Haag countered that “it is impossible to teach sex education without at least implying opinions on the morality of sexual activities, or restraints, in various circumstances.”<sup>183</sup> Though Van Den Haag was personally against the sexual promiscuity promoted by the sexual revolution, he strongly cautions against giving the state the job of advocating abstinence in schools. That is, the role of the state is neutrality, which often requires the state to do nothing. The state should not offer sex education at all. Morality is taught in the home and not

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<sup>182</sup> Kirk, Russell. 1969. About sex education.

<sup>183</sup> Van Den Haag, Virgil. 1979. Birds, bees, and bathroom tours.

in school. Additionally, “there is no evidence that the information offered in the classroom is necessary, or that it is any better than what the student easily picks up outside.”<sup>184</sup> Not only is it dangerous to involve government in moral reinforcement, but also it is a colossal waste of taxpayer money.

Kirk and Van Den Haag provide helpful counter examples of the split in the fusion on issues of morality and the state. Although the two share a moral outlook, they strongly disagree on the role of the state in regards to morality and tradition.

Obscenity laws and the first amendment caused some light controversy as well when the Supreme Court took up the issue in the 1970s. Some authors argued in favor of obscenity laws, which they argued did not violate the first amendment. Regardless of the “insurmountable difficulties of enforcing anti-obscenity laws which tread the line surely between literary expression, which includes even psychopathic literary expression, and pure pandering. The effort, nevertheless, should continue to be made, however elusive the criteria.”<sup>185</sup> Others countered that “censorship must be opposed ... not because we think pornography is harmless but because we consider censorship immoral. There are limits to the power of the state and only those who recognize these limits can logically argue against censorship.”<sup>186</sup> By upholding obscenity laws in *United States v. Reidel*, the Supreme Court “decided to make men good in spite of themselves not by punishing the deed but by censoring the thought.”<sup>187</sup> While some thinkers, such as Buckley,

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1986. Ginzburg and love.

<sup>186</sup> Tonsor, Stephen J. 1967. The passionate ‘I’.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.



supported some anti-obscenity laws, they acknowledged the theoretical danger of giving the state power to legislate morality. Not until the moral majority in the nation permanently flipped did this theoretical danger become a practical consideration in the rift within the conservative movement. Indeed, the discussion on obscenity laws and the role of the state in enforcing morality reemerged in force after the Meese Report in 1986, by which time the fusion compromise on morality and the state was fraying and the culture wars were at a peak.

### *Abortion*

In no area was the compromise more severely tested during the first three decades of the modern conservative movement than the abortion debate. That is, the cracks in the compromise first showed during the debate on abortion and presaged major upheavals to come. Surprisingly few articles were written about abortion leading up to *Roe v. Wade*. Only four articles were written about abortion in the 1960s. Each article concerned Catholic teachings and the encyclical. Then three articles appeared in *National Review* while the case was at the Supreme Court between 1971 and 1973. The real surge of articles came after the decision with 66 articles written on abortion between January 1973 and December 1979. This onslaught of abortion articles kept pace during the 1980s with 89 total articles written.

Unlike marijuana, pornography, or homosexuality, the abortion debate among conservative intellectuals was never truly a debate because there was only one side. Anti-abortion, or pro-life, was the position of conservatives. The various reasons used to reject legalized abortion are nevertheless instructive. From the deeply traditionalist point of view, abortion was tied up with the sexual revolution:

Abortionism, then, is part of an integral world-view that sees man as an animal; an animal whose destiny is a life of pleasure and comfort... it is his right. Nobody should have to endure any avoidable hardship, not even if he brings it upon himself. Parenthood, when it comes unlooked for, is a cruel and unusual punishment...Birth control is therefore more than a convenience; it is a fundamental human right. For sexual ecstasy, with no strings attached, is our birthright. There is no special virtue in restraint; restraint is repression...[a] barrier to full self-expression, self-fulfillment, self-discovery, self, period.<sup>188</sup>

The fulfillment of the self is the idea of individualism, and this necessarily includes sexual fulfillment. As discussed in chapter 2 of this dissertation, classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives disagree on the status of the individual, human nature, and the definition of happiness. This division is clearer in few places than in the arena of sexuality. It gets significantly less clear in the area of abortion, which perhaps accounts for the lack of diversity in opinion in the conservative movement on the subject. Traditionalist conservatives tend to view abortion from the vantage point of religion and the sanctity of human life. Classical liberals, on the other hand, are dedicated to a right to life as the fundamental right that neither government nor fellow-citizens may infringe upon. Classical liberals may wonder whether a society or government that sanctions abortion ever be totally committed to the protection of life. Or perhaps classical liberals simply did not care enough about the subject to argue against traditionalist conservatives during the period from the 1950s to the 1980s. Either way, the number of authors supporting a right to choose in the

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<sup>188</sup> Sobran, M.J. 1976. Abortion: The Class Religion.

pages of *National Review* is very low. Pro-choice arguments have largely been kept outside the conservative mainstream for as long as the fusion movement has existed.

James Jackson Kilpatrick's "A Comment" in *National Review* is one of the rare exceptions. Kilpatrick asserted that he would have voted for the substantive provisions of Justice Blackman's opinion in *Roe v. Wade* if they had been embodied in a legislative proposal before a state legislature, though he rejects the Justice's opinions as lousy law. "I had assumed it to be a fundamental principle of conservatism to challenge *every* doubtful intrusion of the state upon the freedom of the individual. The more serious the intrusion, the more it must be resisted."<sup>189</sup> Here Kilpatrick is not arguing for the morality of abortion. He is not arguing about morality or theology or medicine at all. Rather, his argument is that nowhere in the law is a fetus defined as person, but a woman is legally a person who possesses rights against intrusion by the state. This is a deeply classical liberal argument in that it strips morality and theology out of the debate. The argument is purely about legal status and limiting government restrictions on intensely personal decisions.

John Miles came the second closest to giving a quick pro-choice argument in the middle of a larger, lukewarm pro-life argument in *National Review*. Miles' concern was with technology and social science, and he sees abortion as merely a symptom of reconciling morality and new technological advancements. He began by giving a rather unsettling history of infanticide and abortion in Europe prior to the widespread use of contraceptives and medical abortions. He then argues that "if infanticide is not equally widespread in our own day, the credit surely must go to

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<sup>189</sup> Kilpatrick, James Jackson. 1979. A comment.

the technology of birth control [and abortion]...the alternatives are hardly less humane.”<sup>190</sup> Here Miles discredited the idea that abortion in large numbers is a relatively new phenomenon produced by the sexual revolution and *Roe v. Wade*. He asserted that infanticide and abortion have always existed due to economic and social pressures. Modern contraceptives and abortion procedures are simply more advanced, more controlled, and more humane continuations of this long history. Miles gave this argument in the middle of a longer argument that ponders the potential social effects of *Roe v. Wade* and the sexual revolution. This is no staking of the pro-choice flag, though it is not a passionate argument against pro-choice laws either.

Many conservatives viewed abortion as one of the central issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the same way that slavery was the central issue of the previous century. “Once or twice in a century an issue arises so divisive in its nature, so far-reaching in its consequences, and so deep in its foundations that it calls every person to take a stand.”<sup>191</sup> Indeed, only opposition to communism seems to spur so little dissent from within the conservative movement. This was not an issue on which conservatives were willing to compromise.

This no compromise position on abortion also pit the conservative movement against mainstream feminism. Abortion and feminism are intimately tied together. Schroedel (2000) found that the best predictor of anti-abortion laws in the United States is hostility to women’s equality and not public opinion support for the fetus as a human prior to birth. That is, abortion rights undermine male dominance in both the public and private domains of life. Abortion is about power

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<sup>190</sup> Miles, John A. Jr. 1973. *The wife of Onan and the sons of Cain*.

<sup>191</sup> McFadden, J. P. 1979. *Liberty as a dirty word*.

and gender roles. The myriad of opinions published in *National Review* during this era denouncing abortion as murder cannot be overlooked. The sanctity of life was certainly a chief concern among conservatives. Gender dynamics and power structures were also foundational concerns, though they were stated far less frequently and less explicitly than sanctity of life concerns. For example, Phyllis Schlafly denounced both the ERA and abortion during a speech at the 1977 National Women's Conference. "We cannot accept the idea that women who think they have been oppressed should become the oppressors at the first opportunity. By demanding the freedom of abortion, they become tyrants choosing a victim more helpless than themselves; they become terrorists who threaten a society by destroying its most precious resource, its future generations."<sup>192</sup> Women have a right to control their own bodies – not the bodies of unborn children. Conservatives argued that such is the biological hand that women have been dealt. Inequality of the genders is natural, and society ought to conform to nature for best outcomes.

While conservative intellectuals were largely of one mind on abortion, Sobran was the first to declare that the abortion debate was lost in 1976, or at least that the rhetorical upper hand had flipped to the side of "pro-abortionists." Abortion was an important issue in elections throughout the 1970s and 1980s, yet Sobran's pronouncement highlighted an odd, nagging sense among conservatives that they were losing the abortion debate. This pronouncement is particularly odd given the history of abortion in America in the years after his article. Since 1976, all public funding for abortion has ended. Many states have passed much more restrictive abortion laws, and practical access to legal abortions have been sharply curtailed in much of the country. The number of state

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<sup>192</sup> Schlafly, Phyllis. 1977. National Women's Conference.

laws designed to require the courts to reconsider *Roe v. Wade* have also risen sharply. So, contrary to Sobran's declaration, pro-choice forces have been losing since 1976, though they have not yet lost. The American people are still divided over abortion. The intellectuals, the well-educated, and the upper class largely subscribe to the pro-choice argument. They are not the majority. Yet the cultural clout of the intellectuals and the pro-choice upper classes has left pro-life conservatives feeling like the rhetorical underdog, the dissenting opinion. Pro-choice is a majority opinion with a minority complex. In the years since Sobran's pronouncement, the reaction from conservative intellectuals to their perceived underdog status has been predictably divided. The disparate reactions to losing the rhetorical abortion debate foreshadows conservative reactions in the '90s to further culture war losses. Some intellectuals re-emphasized classical liberal arguments opposing the involvement of the state in questions of morality. Others, such as the founders of the Federalist Society, refocused the movement on the useful power of the courts to enforce moral standards.

One area of agreement for savvy conservatives has been to look to religious freedom protections to defend pro-choice activism. Buckley repeatedly argued that it does not matter if opinions on abortion are impacted by religious belief. A Protestant is not affected by the Pope's declaration on the sanctity of life any more than an atheist is affected. Nor does the First Amendment require religious folks to adopt secularism before entering the square of public debate. For example, "It is perfectly plausible to say that a human life begins when two human beings conceive a third, who is genetically distinct from either."<sup>193</sup> This argument requires no recourse to religion on the matter of when life begins. Yet any such requirement that pro-life proponents use

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<sup>193</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1979. *The ACLU's Holy War*.

only secular arguments such as this would effectively favor non-religion over religion, thereby violating the First Amendment.<sup>194</sup> So, according to Buckley, justifying one's stance against legalized abortion using either scripture or philosophy or science is equally valid.

The arguments in favor of legal access to abortion and legal access to marijuana and pornography are the same at the foundation. The argument concerns individual agency and the right to control one's own body without interference from the state. Many conservative intellectuals accepted this argument, or at least begrudgingly compromised with it, when applied to marijuana and pornography. The vast majority even argued in favor of legalizing private homosexual activity as a result of this argument. Abortion, however, was a step too far. Here we see that the conservative movement were never purely liberal in the classical sense. Many conservatives recognized the usefulness of the liberal argument and were even willing to forego some of the cultural and moral power they could wield as members of the moral majority through the auspices of the state, such as in the realm of drugs and pornography, as a result. But the conservative movement was not entirely wedded to traditionalist conservatism either. Rather, the conservative movement was a fusion. It comprised a uniquely blended and perhaps slightly incoherent smorgasbord of members, ranging from hardened traditionalists to devoted classical liberals. Some were deeply Burkean in that they put on the mask of classical liberalism when it was useful to them but never truly accepted the ideology. Others held tightly to traditional religious values and yet were classical liberals in their soul. Still others existed in the confusing, deeply human space in between the two traditions. The power of the fusion lay in holding these groups

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

together in a grand compromise in order to wield great political power in the nation. The undoing of the fusion coalition was the doomed expectation that the two traditions could compromise forever. Such is impossible once the moral majority of the nation shifts. The reaction to moral-minority status animates intra-conservative debates in the 1990s and propels the movement toward reconstruction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Long Divorce**

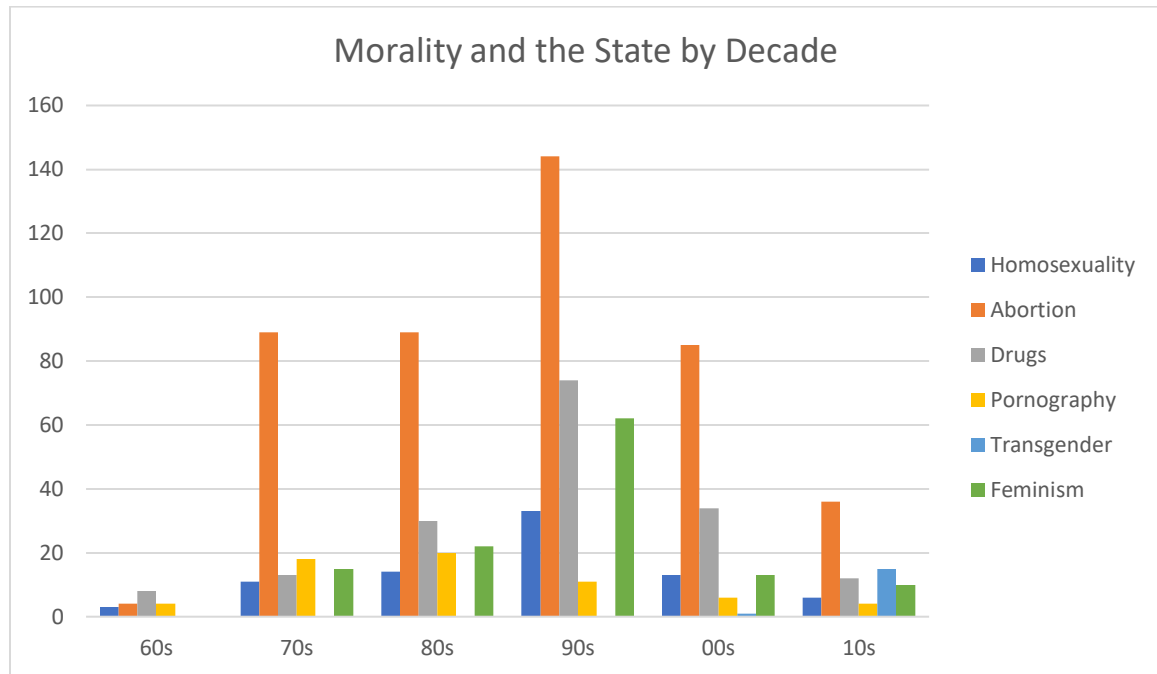
The terms “religious right” and “culture wars” are familiar to anyone who has followed American politics for the past several decades. The raucous debates among conservatives in the late 1980s and 1990s were set against the backdrop of the culture wars and the rising political power of the religious right. Hartman argued that the culture wars began in the 1960s and peaked in the public imagination in the late 1980s and 1990s.<sup>195</sup> The left, in particular the New Left, won the culture wars in academia starting in the 1960s, but they finally claimed victory after the defeat of a highly reactionary right in the 1990s. This included battles over third wave feminism, gay rights, the war on drugs, affirmative action, public education curriculum, and public morality. The moral majority of the country, at least among the rising generation, was permanently (or at least so it seems today) shifting away from traditional values. Even the moral expectations of the political class had shifted as witnessed by the Clinton impeachment saga and his reelection. The right reacted strongly against these developments.

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<sup>195</sup> Hartman, Andrew. 2016. *A War for the soul of America: A history of the culture wars*.



Chart 1



As shown in chart 1, conversation on public morality and the role of the state reached a fever pitch among conservative intellectuals during the 1990s on every topic discussed in this chapter with the exception of pornography and transgenderism. The issue of transgender acceptance and rights did not enter the public mind in a major way until the 2010s after the successes of the gay rights movement. Why were so many articles written on subjects concerned morality and the role of the state during this particular decade? The first explanation is that political writers respond to their external environment. Homosexuality, abortion, the drug wars, and feminism were all on the public docket. The second explanation, which works in tangent with the first, is that conservative intellectuals disagreed on how to react to such shifts in public opinion and behavior. For the first time, conservatives were confronted with the possibility of moral-minority status and a loss of political-cultural power. Should they continue their longstanding

policy of classical liberal compromise? Or had such a compromise actually led to the issues in the 1990s? A very large coalition within the fusion movement wanted to shed the old compromise in favor of a new, more aggressive strategy.

### *Drugs and the Failing Fusion Compromise*

The most ardent proponent in the pages of *National Review* during the 1990s and early 2000s for marijuana decriminalization was Bill Buckley. He wrote 11 articles on marijuana in the 1990s alone. He strongly supported a federal approach to marijuana wherein states decided for themselves on marijuana decriminalization. What, then, was the role of the national government? The national government's role was nothing more than to educate the public about the science of marijuana use. Yet not even Buckley's once authoritative voice could finish the debate on drugs once and for all among conservatives. Instead, his voice was largely drowned out in the reinvigorated debate in the 1990s and early 2000s over marijuana and the drug wars between more ardent classical liberals and entrenched traditionalists. These highly contentious debates showcased the declining power of *National Review*, which long considered itself the gatekeeper of the fusion, and the growing divide within the conservative movement.

In February of 1996, the editors of the *National Review* declared that "the war on drugs is lost." The editors were quick to acknowledge that they had given space to a "variety of opinions by right-minded thinkers and analysts who sometimes reach conflicting conclusions about public policy." This included whole editions dedicated to the question of marijuana decriminalization and sponsored debates about the broader drug wars. The editors then cited the influential arguments from Michael Gazzaniga, a leading scientist on addiction, supporting marijuana decriminalization, James Wilson's eloquent arguments defending the drug war, and Milton Friedman's early and

vocal opposition to the war on drugs. Friedman and Gazzaniga's arguments appeared to win the day at *National Review*:

We don't [favor drugs]; we deplore their use; we urge the stiffest feasible sentences against anyone convicted of selling a drug to a minor. But that said, it is our judgment that the war on drugs has failed, that it is diverting intelligent energy away from how to deal with the problem of addiction, that it is wasting our resources, and that it is encouraging civil, judicial, and penal procedures associated with police states. We all agree on movement toward legalization, even though we may differ on just how far.<sup>196</sup>

In the following pages, various leading conservative intellectuals, including Buckley and Ethan Nadelmann, politicians, and policy experts opined that the war on drugs had led to greater political destabilization in Central America, and thus greater flows of immigration into the United States, higher rates of incarceration, resulting in a devastating erosion of the family, particularly among black families, and willful ignorance of the crippling scale of drug abuse across the nation. This declaration led to no unified conservative effort to end the war on drugs and only spurred heated dissent from more traditionally minded conservatives.

In 2004, *National Review* once again hosted a debate in its pages between Ethan Nadelmann, a long-time contributor to *National Review*, and John P. Walters, the then-Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Nadelmann argued that the science simply does not support the government's current policies on marijuana. Even if marijuana has negative medical

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<sup>196</sup> Editors. 1996. The war on drugs is lost.

effects, does government have the right to tell its citizens what they can and cannot put into their bodies? Criminalizing “marijuana is costly, foolish, and destructive. What’s most needed now is principled conservative leadership.”<sup>197</sup> Walters took issue with Nadelmann’s implicit definition of conservatism and countered that the science is not settled on the health effects of marijuana.

Can anyone seriously argue that American democracy would be strengthened by more marijuana smoking? The law is our safeguard, and it works...Using the discourse of rights without responsibilities, the effort strives to establish an entitlement to addictive substances. The impact will be devastating...their goal is clearly identifiable: tolerated addiction. It is a travesty to suggest...that it is consistent with conservative principles to abandon those who could be treated for their addiction, to create a situation in which government both condones and is the agent of drug distribution, and to place in the hands of the state the power to grant or not to grant access to an addictive substance. This is not a conservative vision. But it is the goal of George Soros.<sup>198</sup>

Walters’ argument focuses on government’s role to protect its citizens and society at large from harm. His reference to George Soros, a burgeoning bogeyman of the right in the early 2000s, is also instructive. This is a traditionalist version of conservatism that seeks out enemies and conspiracies among former friends and foes alike. He explicitly ties classical liberal arguments to Soros, the billionaire funder of American progressives and a man Walters and other believe is trying to undermine American democracy. By extension, he is accusing Nadelmann and other

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<sup>197</sup> Nadelmann, Ethan. 2004. An end to marijuana prohibition.

<sup>198</sup> Walter, John P. 2004. No surrender.

classical liberals within the conservative movement of undermining American democracy. Once again, both authors expose the volcanic divisions between classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives. These are two traditions deeply dissatisfied with the state of their once convenient, always incongruous marriage.

### *Third Wave Femi-Nazis and Gay Rights*

The reaction from conservatives to the culture wars in the 1990s resulted in more than just chest thumping. It also created a deep distrust in liberalism itself, whether classical or progressive. As this section will demonstrate, conservative reaction to the victories of third wave feminism and the gay rights movement led to a revolution in mainstream conservative thinking regarding liberalism. Essentially, the argument is that you cannot share your cookie with a mouse because he will never be satisfied with just his half. Compromise is impossible. Liberalism is likened to a parasite that keeps spreading and is never satisfied until the entire body is destroyed. This argument gained great strength in reaction to third wave feminism.

The vast majority of articles on feminism in the early fusion movement focused on abortion, sexuality, and the Equal Rights Amendment. These early articles are notable for their flippancy and latent (or not so latent) sexism: “the conference demonstrated...the unwisdom of ever teaching little girls to read.”<sup>199</sup> Concerns were expressed that “women will change things if admitted to all-male areas,” and feminists were accused of trying to usurp the privileges of fatherhood.<sup>200</sup> Marital rape was dismissed as a misunderstanding of the nature of sexual difference

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<sup>199</sup> Kilpatrick, James Jackson. 1977. Abortion, equal rights, and Robert’s rules of order.

<sup>200</sup> Buckley, Bill Buckley, JR. 1970. Women’s lib watching. **And** Odie, William. 1991. The goddess squad.

in marriage.<sup>201</sup> The ERA was rejected on account of women already gaining those rights, many of which equal rights were first opposed by the same writers.<sup>202</sup> Needless to say, few women were included in the ranks of conservative intellectuals during the early fusion years and clearly none were included on the editorial staff of *National Review*. One exception was Florence King who contributed over 300 columns to *National Review*. Phyllis Schlafly was also upheld as a champion of sanity and tradition by fellow conservatives. Schlafly made a significant contribution to the defeat of the ERA. The point, however, is that general conservative sentiment towards feminism was not welcoming in the early years of the fusion. Yet it did not take on a contemptuous, overtly aggressive tone until the birth of third wave feminism.

During the early decades, “second-wave” feminism succeeded in making problems previously considered personal, such as sexual harassment and access to abortions, political. Wendy Shalit attempted to explain this phenomenon to bewildered conservative intellectuals who felt that recourse to customs and morality and not legislation was the correct course of action to correct abusive marriages, prevent unplanned pregnancies, and stunt sexual harassment. “Women who identify with feminism will continue to do so not because they hate men, but because they feel mistreated by them. From vulgarity on the streets to transient husbands at home, our culture is not kind to women. As long as conservatives ignore this reality and remain incapable of addressing it, the personal will remain political.”<sup>203</sup> In short, conservatives offered no palatable alternative to the feminist movement, and so the feminist movement would win. Indeed, the

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<sup>201</sup> Novak, Michael. 1980. Lust in the eyes.

<sup>202</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1980. What do women want?

<sup>203</sup> Shalit, Wendy. 1998. Feminism lives!

movement did win many legislative and legal victories, ranging from The Equal Pay Act to Title IX and Supreme Court cases giving people the right to use birth control. The culminating legislative victory was *Roe v. Wade* and the most publicized defeat was the shelving of the Equal Rights Amendment. Along with the defeat of the ERA came a lapse in the feminist movement. Its political energy had run its course. Critics across the political spectrum had succeeded in framing the movement as a collection of angry, bitter, bra-burning, man-hating lesbians.

Then the Anita Hill hearings started in the Senate, and “riot grrrl” groups emerged in the pacific northwest. Third-wave feminism was born. This third wave is not so easily defined as the first and second waves. If anything, the modern movement is defined by its intersectionality and fragmentation. Regardless, this new feminism was met with a renewed conservative backlash, one that shed the genial paternalism of the past in favor of a more contemptuous, energetic response. Conservatives reacted strongly against the political hypocrisy of the movement, the “feminization” of treasured institutions and practices, the general revolt against nature, and the marshalling of the powers of the state on behalf of feminist doctrine.

The Anita Hill hearings stirred a deep anger within a conservative movement which was just beginning to identify with minority and victim status. Conservatives began to argue that the rules were unfairly applied across the political spectrum. For example, Shalit argued that either sexual relations between Clinton and Lewinsky constituted abuse of power and sexual harassment, or the terms harassment and abuse of power are just political tools. Certainly, conservatives have not been paragons of feminist virtue in the past, but modern feminists are not acting very feminist either by demonizing Lewinsky and protecting Clinton. Shalit admitted as much by stating that “if some feminists are wrong in failing to criticize President Clinton then an equal number of

conservatives must have been wrong in failing to criticize thousands of men beforehand.” Other authors argued that the Anita Hill scandal was a political hitjob against a conservative judge using a punchy, progressive accusation. Truth bends the knee before the throne of political expediency. This argument touched on a growing sense among conservatives in the 1990s and 2000s that they were being treated and targeted unfairly. The game was rigged against them. Conservatism and traditional values were now the intellectual and social pariahs, and the rising generation of conservatives felt this second-tier status acutely.

Men, particularly conservative and white men, were thought especially vulnerable to such unfair and biased treatment. “Oddly enough, even though women do live longer than men, and even though our society frowns on men who kill women, one finds in *Ms.* (the magazine) a great deal of talk about survival, as if merely staying alive and sane were a difficulty of women as such (most of the patients in the mental hospital I used to work in were men), or as if men were waiting to wipe out fractious women at the first opportune moment.”<sup>204</sup> Feminism makes men out to be aggressive monsters. It decries traditional masculinity (toxic masculinity in modern parlance), yet it “celebrates women ... in the masculine terms of status and achievement.” Women hate the power structures created and populated by men because they are jealous. Sobran further argues that nothing irritates feminists more than “the stark asymmetries of two sexes – one big and strong, the other small and soft and fertile.”<sup>205</sup> Underneath these defenses of masculinity and man-kind is a distinct claim to victim status. Women are no longer the victims;

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<sup>204</sup> Sobran, M.J. 1974. Of Ms. And men.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.



feminism has turned women into the oppressors and men into the undeserving victims. Men are more likely to be homeless and to die at a younger age. Men are more likely to go to prison. Fewer men than women achieve a college degree. Jordan Peterson is not the author of this rebuke of modern feminism. The outcry against feminism's unfair treatment of the male half of the population started in the early 1970s and gained traction in the 1990s and 2000s among young, primarily male conservative intellectuals.

Adding to this humiliation was the national and institutional shifts attributed to the “feminization” of America. Whereas Buckley had once warned that women would change things if admitted to all-male spaces, conservatives in the 1990s and 2000s actually witnessed the effect of feminism on institutions ranging from the military to American universities and the legal system. The fight for the inclusion of women in the military was, according to David Horowitz, not concerned with national security or improving military outcomes. Rather, the effort was fundamentally anti-war and even anti-American military. The more women in the military, the more difficult it would be to commit troops to combat.<sup>206</sup> Yet, Horowitz argues, men are stronger than women. They are more physically aggressive. Women have the unique capacity to give birth. These basic biological facts have structured human societies from the beginning. Why should those structures change when the biological facts have not changed? How have these cold, hard facts been so easily pushed aside? Horowitz pegs the blame on the new “emotional element introduced by the moral posturing of the Left.” Bigotry, not biology, is to blame for gender segregation and inequality in the military. Emotion trumps logic, and “politically correct” policing makes reasoned

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<sup>206</sup> Horowitz, David. 1992. The feminist assault on the military.

debate impossible. Conservatives argued that even American political discourse had been irreparably influenced by feminization. Florence King bemoaned that “the feminization of America has made emotions sacrosanct while condemning as cold and unfeeling rigorous concepts such as duty and honor ... political correctness is nothing more than female touchiness writ large.”<sup>207</sup>

One particularly enlightening example of conservative reaction to the feminization of America was the rise of feminist jurisprudence in the 1990s. Feminists in the law “maintain that the law is a male concoction which systematically oppresses women ... and [they are] intent upon social transformation.”<sup>208</sup> Law, that once great equalizer and shelter for minorities, had become the oppressor. In fact, “the feminists who hold this divisive view ... believe that all our institutions, from the state to the family to the grade schools, perpetuate male dominance.”<sup>209</sup> What would this new, transformed society look like? Letwin quotes straight from a statement made by Professor Leslie Bender of Syracuse University: “until the domination of women is ended in all institutions, we cannot know what undominated de-genderized forms will emerge with which to construct a critical form of androgyny.” The end of history is unknowable from the present. What is known is simply that gender, which is nothing but social construct, will end in the traditional sense. Feminists are social engineers, and feminization is the social and cultural tool of transformation.

This attempt to transform human nature, as well as the traditions and moralities built around the recognition of that nature, was most abhorrent to conservative intellectuals. A plethora of

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<sup>207</sup> King, Florence. 1993. Time capsule.

<sup>208</sup> Letwin, Shirley Robin. 1991. Law and the unreasonable woman.

<sup>209</sup> Sommers, Christina Hoff. 1994. Figuring out feminism.

conservative authors linked feminist theory directly to Marxism. “Gender feminism is a bastard child of Marxism. It holds that women are not women by nature, but that society has constructed or created them female so that men could oppress them. Gender feminists are social engineers in the same way as Communists.”<sup>210</sup> Traditionalist conservatives reject the notion of social engineering outright. Human nature cannot be changed by government or the free market. Contrary to the feminist orthodoxy that “the sexes are inherently alike ... there has never been a sexually egalitarian or matriarchal society anywhere....Patriarchy is the natural and universal condition of human society, and rests on immutable biological differences in males and females.”<sup>211</sup> If the bloodbaths and cultural upheavals of the communist world of the 20<sup>th</sup> century teach one lesson it is that no amount of social engineering can change human nature. Traditionalist conservatives argue that the best policy is to construct traditions and systems of morality in accordance with the facts of nature. The governments job is to maintain these structures. As discussed in chapter 2, classical liberals do not have such a finite view of human nature. Rather, they view human nature as progressive through natural evolution. Government’s job is to get out of the way of this transformation and certainly never to force it. This second point unites conservative and classical liberals in a rejection of feminist social engineering.

Not only do radical feminists seek to transform society, but also they seek to use the levers of the state to enforce feminist doctrine. “Because feminism’s ideology is incompatible with human nature, society will never conform to the feminist ideal of its own accord. Feminists are

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<sup>210</sup> Horowitz, David. 1992. The feminist assault on the military.

<sup>211</sup> Davidson, Nicholas. 1988. Gender ideology.

obliged to mobilize the coercive machinery of the state in pursuit of their goals.”<sup>212</sup> Davidson further argued that such mobilization had succeeded to a great degree by 1988. School curricula undermined traditional gender division by inverting traditional gender relations – boys depicted as passive and girls aggressive – and pushing girls toward careers instead of motherhood. Government monies went to feminist organizations, including Planned Parenthood. Most importantly, affirmation action ensured feminist successes in the military, the academy, in corporations, and in government agencies.<sup>213</sup> Traditionalist conservatives began to point to the successes of feminists in harnessing the levers of the state to enforce a new morality in response to the old classical liberal dictum that morality cannot be enforced by the state. Had the conservative movement been terribly naïve during the most crucial years?

The successful application of these state levers in the realm of LGBT rights in the 2000s and 2010s answered this question once and for all for traditional conservatives. Starting in the late 1980s, conservatives began to cite with concern the change in public opinion regarding homosexuality. How did could public opinion have changed so quickly, particularly in light of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s? The AIDS crisis whipped up a frenzy of anti-homosexual sentiment among conservatives. Though most were slow to even acknowledge its existence, the fallback for conservatives was to cast AIDS as the result of homosexuality. Decter bemoaned “the spread of a new – and hideous and fatal – disease that resulted from the corresponding spread of a kind of blind and heedlessly driven homosexual promiscuity.”<sup>214</sup> She argued that the media’s coverage of

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Levin, Michael. 1988. *Feminism and freedom*.

<sup>214</sup> Decter, Midge. 2004. *An Amazing pass*.

the crisis lent too much sympathy for its victims while ignoring out the “culture of homosexual promiscuity in which the disease has flourished in this country.”<sup>215</sup> Homosexual promiscuity led to the crisis, and money devoted to fighting back against AIDS, thereby ratifying the culture of promiscuity, was a poor use of taxpayer funds. The enemy in the fight against AIDS was homosexuality. “Presumably aware of the dangers they court, homosexuals continue to contract AIDS at an astonishing rate. The support they receive for doing so is unconscionable.” This sentiment was echoed many other authors, including Buckley and M.J Sobran, the former of which wrote that ‘AIDS’ should be stamped on the backsides of infected homosexuals to prevent the spread of the disease.

An anonymous contributor using the penname of John Woolman (the real name of a prominent Quaker abolitionist in the 1700s) was the first to publish a serious rebuke of the mainstream conservative reaction to the AIDS crisis and homosexuality.<sup>216</sup> Addressed to Buckley, Woolman called out conservatism’s obsession with, and hypocrisy regarding, homosexuality. Why, he asked, are conservatives engaging in the politics of homophobia? Enforcing morality at the level of the state is dangerous, for no opinion is more terribly enforced than an incorrect opinion held by the government. Such was the lesson of the Soviet Union and moral collectivism. Woolman then pondered whether traditionalists like Sobran sought to equate homosexuality with AIDS to make them a public health pariah. If homosexuals were dangerous, they were open for persecution. Now that the Soviets were gone, conservatism needed a new target.

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<sup>215</sup> Decter, Midge. 1995. *Dying of the light*.

<sup>216</sup> Woolman, John. 1987. Letter to a friend.

At a more practical level, Woolman argued that conservatives risked losing voters and pushing gays toward a more radical agenda by refusing to advocate for the end of anti-sodomy laws and discrimination. Inflammatory rhetoric about reinforcing sodomy laws or stamping AIDS on backsides could only serve to drive the homosexual community to seek the same minority protections as other religious and racial minorities. These types of protections would be well deserved. The conservative movement was forgetting the lessons of the civil rights movement, and liberals were unnecessarily gaining a new constituency as a result. In summary, Woolman cautioned that conservatives were ignoring reality at the peril of their own agenda! The advance of gay rights would not turn the world upside down. Traditionalists could still personally disapprove of homosexuality as long as that disapproval did not involve employment or housing discrimination. A neutral state was safer for everyone because it would prevent the rise of any government sponsored thought policing. Woolman finished his letter by preemptively answering the question of whom homosexuals thought they needed protection from: "From those who think that since there is nothing worse than homosexuality, their violence is the wrath of God. Ideas do have consequences."

Woolman's defense of gay rights was not the only one published in *National Review*. Legions of conservative intellectuals broached the question of the extent to which the LGBT community should be protected before and after this article. However, Woolman's article is notable for its directness and its unmistakably classical liberal character. His concern is with government encroachment on personal liberty; morality is left to the care of the individual, the family, and the church. The author's anonymity is also telling. As the AIDS crisis gave way to a burgeoning public acceptance of homosexuality in the 1990s and 2000s, classical liberal arguments

became rarer, and their authors less accepted, within the fusion movement. For all its dynamism, on certain social issues deeply important to the traditionalist wing, the fusion movement displayed a surprising resistance to dissent. Traditionalist conservatives were, after all, in a compromise position with classical liberalism. The fusion was a marriage of convenience bolstered by a common enemy. That enemy was gone, and the marriage was getting far less convenient.

The 1990s introduced the public to questions regarding homosexuals in the military, culminating in the Clinton-era policy of “don’t ask, don’t tell” (DADT). The strength of the American military and the virtue of military culture have historically been very important to conservatives. The primary issue at stake with DADT was military effectiveness. Bacevich advocated for a live-and-let-live mentality. “Judging from the flurry of media reports ... gays are everywhere, serving their country with distinction in every branch, in every specialty, at every level of responsibility.”<sup>217</sup> The homosexual issue was a non-issue because, with a few egregious exceptions, military brass really only care about performance. Of greater concern to Bacevich was the overall decline of military culture from one of discipline and rigor to a culture of decay and lowered expectations. In short, women in the military were a much more serious threat to military culture than homosexuals. Others disagreed, arguing that the repeal of DADT would impede effectiveness by undermining military culture. “There are foolish reasons for excluding homosexuals from the armed forces, but that does not mean we should ignore the good ones. Chief among the good reasons remains military effectiveness.”<sup>218</sup> DADT was just a snapshot of a larger

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<sup>217</sup> Bacevich, A. J. 1993. Gays and military culture.

<sup>218</sup> Owens, Mackubin Thomas. 2007. Ask, tell, whatever.

debate among conservatives about what rights the political community ought to concede to homosexuals.

*National Review* proposed a compromise that would give certain rights to homosexuals while not conceding the larger point on the morality of homosexuality. Those rights included professional security, except in the role model positions like school teachers, estate security, and allowing homosexuals to quietly serve in the military was the right balance. IRS benefits unique to married couple should not be extended to homosexuals. Compromise along these lines would allow society to maintain the position that homosexuality is a violation of the moral code. In return, gays should not “engage in moral extortion: if you are in any way opposed to gay practices, you are a bigot.”<sup>219</sup> The key to this compromise is that it proposed to extend gay rights without opening the door to social or moral acceptance. The state would be neutral on the morality of homosexuality only up to the point at which it must favor the traditional, heterosexual family.

Buckley and other conservative intellectuals viewed gay rights like a game of dominos. If one tablet is knocked over, the next will fall as well. Thus Buckley viewed DADT as a conservative success, closing the door to larger scale attacks on the traditional, nuclear family. He wrote “We can feel reassured that broad public support for the nuclear family has been demonstrated, and a social preference for heterosexuality reaffirmed.”<sup>220</sup> This view was quickly discarded as naïve. By the 2000s, traditionalist conservatives began to realize that the key domino – public acceptance of homosexuality - had already been knocked over. The debate over DADT was a small victory in a

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<sup>219</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1992. A fresh deal for gays.

<sup>220</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. 1993. Don’t speak its name.



war that had already been lost. Conservatives had capitulated too early in their tolerance of homosexuality at both the legal and social level. State neutrality had simply led to the rise of a new state-enforced morality.

In 2003, Ramesh Ponnuru declared that same-sex marriage was on the way due the stunning shift in public opinion between the 1970s and 2000s along with seismic legal victories.<sup>221</sup> By appealing to genetic determinism (i.e. human nature), which Ponnuru hailed as a distinctly conservative outlook, homosexuals had won the argument. Gays are born that way, which makes it natural. Once the American public was convinced, conservatives could no longer oppose gay marriage without looking intolerant. Intolerance, of course, being the worst sin in a liberal democracy. Ponnuru's lament did not stop other traditionalists from standing and fighting against the oncoming tide of gay marriage.

Hadley Arkes and Roger Scruton, for example, wrote passionate defenses of traditional marriage and the Defense of Marriage Act. Arkes argued that marriage is fundamentally about begetting and nurturing children, which can only be done between a man and a woman.<sup>222</sup> Scruton dismissed same-sex marriage as a perversion, similar to pedophilia, that cannot be afforded the social approval of marriage. "Marriage has been treated, in our society, as a sacrament, whereby two people consecrate their lives not just to each other but to the family that will spring from them. In no sense is marriage, so conceived, merely the rubberstamping of a sexual contract. It marks an existential transition .... It is not an act of gratification but an act of renunciation, the beneficiaries

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<sup>221</sup> Ponnuru, Ramesh. 2003. Coming out ahead.

<sup>222</sup> Arkes, Hadley. 1996. Odd couples.

of which are not the spouses themselves, but their future children.”<sup>223</sup> Others called for conservatives to “stand and fight.” Ground that had been lost should be retaken. “Our laws presuppose that life and education are common goods. In the same way, marriage depends for its health partly on sound laws that protect, maintain, and support it.”<sup>224</sup> For this reason, homosexuality should be prohibited in the same way that adultery was once prohibited.

The conservative stand against gay marriage was all just an exercise in futility. The sexual revolution had changed the social understanding of sex and marriage, and the gay rights movement had capitalized on this shift by winning over public opinion in the 1990s and early 2000s. The rousing traditionalist dissent had not come early enough; the classical liberal strategy had been abandoned far too late. Conservatives sensed this fact by the mid 2000s and recognized that they were watching the advent of a new state-enforced morality compliments of the liberal mind overly obsessed with tolerance and a deformed version of Christian charity. Proponents of gay marriage had promised that its passage would not require a wholesale redefinition of the family, and they had lied. Perhaps gay marriage had never been about marriage at all. “What, then, is the exercise for? It is for knocking the remaining pins out from under an already badly creaking culture, for being able to declare the unnatural natural, and for playing the final malicious joke ... on all those people who want nothing more than to be able to account themselves compassionate.”<sup>225</sup> “This is not a debate about extending an institution, it is a debate about overthrowing a norm; not about

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<sup>223</sup> Scruton, Roger. 2004. Perversion.

<sup>224</sup> Bradley, Gerard. 2003. Stand and fight.

<sup>225</sup> Decter, Midge. 2004. An amazing pass.

reconstruction, but about destruction.”<sup>226</sup> The major feminist and LGBT victories of the 1990s and 2000s was the story of betrayals, humiliations, and indignities for conservatives who had so recently represented the moral majority of the nation.

*The T in LGBT and the Death of the Fusion*

On the backend of these significant victories, many conservatives began to recognize that triumphant progressives would not be so naïve as classical liberals – and traditionalist conservatives as a result – had been. The levers of the state would certainly be used to defend their new morality. “Here’s the problem: It’s not a matter of ‘who cares’ anymore. It’s a lurking fear that you *should* care, and you had better care the right way.... Silence = disapproval. Acceptance isn’t enough. Endorsement is required.”<sup>227</sup> An earthquake in American morality and culture had occurred, and it was progressives who were in charge of reconstruction. The meteoric rise of the transgender movement demonstrated progressive willingness to use the levers of the state in that reconstruction.

At its heart, traditionalist conservatives conceived of the transgender movement as the ultimate revolt against nature. Homosexuality posed a problem for the traditional family unit, and feminism exposed unnecessary gender demarcations. The transgender movement, however, went further than either by denying the basic facts of biology in favor of self-construction. Whereas once biology mattered, gender is the new marker of identity. The speed with which the transgender movement gained traction in the public and legal spheres shocked conservatives. “Who is willing

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<sup>226</sup> Frum, David. 2005. A new word, a new day.

<sup>227</sup> Lileks, James. 2014. The tolerance that dare not speak its name.

to stand up and declare that bodies mean something? What beleaguered traditionalist will insist that we must submit to the tyranny of an inflexible material world?”<sup>228</sup> How could conservatives successfully fight back against such a movement when the Left controlled the vocabulary of justice, equality, and identity? “The foundational premise of the transgender agenda is that the objective fact of biological sex is some sort of arbitrary fiction assigned at birth and that the subjective conception of gender identity is the genuine reality that demands recognition and respect - including the use of wrong pronouns, thus yielding such absurdities as ‘she tried to castrate herself by tying off her testicles.’”<sup>229</sup> Not even the basic biological facts of nature could prevent the oncoming tide. To add betrayal upon insult, science was seen as complicit in this latest revolt against nature. Lobbying replaced scientific consensus; feelings dethroned facts. Traditionalist conservatives could not compromise with a movement that had so successfully captured the media, the national vocabulary, the academy, and the sciences.

The transgender movement demonstrated to the conservative movement for a final time the true colors of liberalism. For example, under the Obama administration, federal civil rights litigation was used against North Carolina after authorities offered private facilities to transgender students. The private bathroom was the compromise position for conservatives! For progressives, the argument was never about the bathroom. “But, as North Carolina has learned, toleration and accommodation are not sufficient for the culture warriors of the Left. What’s demanded instead is positive affirmation, which is why culture war is war instead of conversation.”<sup>230</sup> Here Williamson

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<sup>228</sup> Lu, Rachel. 2018. The assault on reality.

<sup>229</sup> Whelan, Edward. 2016. Title IX in the restroom.

<sup>230</sup> Williamson, Kevin D. 2016. The transgender culture war.

gave voice to the new consensus opinion among conservative intellectuals. Now that liberalism is in power, it no longer seeks compromise because it never did want to compromise. Rather, liberalism has always sought domination and the destruction and replacement of old ways. It will gladly use “official political power backed by state violence threatens to visit ruination on pronoun nonconformists and on noncompliant state and local actors.” Whereas government and cultural institutions once preached neutrality, the new normal involves silencing nonconforming views. Total acceptance, even celebration, is demanded “of what one previously found aberrant or even abhorrent.” Liberalism has, in the conservative mind, proved itself yet another totalitarian ideology akin to fascism and communism.

## **Conclusion**

The defining quality of a conservative movement is reaction. How are conservatives reacting in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Both traditionalist conservatives and classical liberals worry feverishly about religious freedom moving forward. The fines incurred against the Little Sisters of the Poor and the vitriol surrounding the Christian baker case are two often cited examples of the danger that socially conservative and religious peoples face. However, the proposed courses of action for the two groups are telling. Classical liberals are moving to reaffirm religious liberty through court cases and public education. For example, the Cato Institute regularly hosts events and publishes research on religious liberty in the United States. Cato emphasizes individual liberty and state neutrality on questions of morality. The state simply has no place in the great religious debates or in the spiritual life of the individual. The Acton Institute, a think tank which harkens back to the philosophic height of the fusion, focuses almost exclusively on protecting religious liberty. It seeks to promote individual liberty and situate the free market within a Judeo-Christian framework.

Acton focuses less on state neutrality and more on the importance of individual liberty in securing long-lasting individual and societal morality. This position is more deeply fusionist than the one taken by the Cato Institute, though both demonstrate deep concern for the future of religious liberty.

Of course, traditionalist conservatives support religious liberty as well. *First Things*, a renowned journal of religious, political, and philosophical thought, regularly includes articles on religious liberty. It especially emphasizes attacks against the religious liberty of conservative Christians. The Intercollegiate Studies Institute, the think tank which publishes *Modern Age*, hosts conferences on college campuses across the United States on the topic of defending religious liberty. Both of these publications are heavily influenced by conservative Catholic political thought, and each has demonstrated a deeply traditionalist disdain for liberalism.

A growing number of traditionalist conservatives, including many writers at *First Things* and *Modern Age*, no longer put their trust in the rights assured by liberal democracy. These conservatives are deeply disillusioned with liberalism as a whole. Hence the flurry of “post-liberal” conservative intellectuals condemning liberal democracy and supporting instead Christian models of governance. Some of these “post-liberals” prefer the “Benedict Option”, in which conservative Christians remove themselves in part from a post-Obergefell society. This option is based on the premises that conservatives have lost the culture wars and that politics will not bring salvation. As a result, religious conservatives should embrace their newfound minority status in American popular culture and seek to recreate the religious communities founded by St. Benedict of Nursia during the Dark Ages. The Benedict Option does not seek to reverse the tide of the culture war. Rather, it is meant to sustain faith during the oncoming dark ages of the post-Obergefell world.

This option includes educating children privately or otherwise outside the public-school system and building Christian employment networks.

Others favor a more militant, political model, such as the one proposed in the “Against the Dead Consensus” manifesto published in *First Things*. The more recognizable signers of the manifesto include Sohrab Ahmari, Patrick Deneen, Rod Dreher, Matthew Peterson, and James Poulos. For the most part, proponents of this more militant model are also religious. Unlike the Benedict Option, these religious traditionalists are still willing to engage in cultural and political struggle. They will not, however, do it under the old fusion banner. The manifesto published in *First Things* is particularly instructive. Its authors bid a final farewell to the fusion in favor of a “post-liberal” conservatism. It argues that the old conservative consensus served its purpose by playing a heroic role in the defeat of communism. But it had too often “tracked the same lodestar liberalism did- namely, individual autonomy” and consistently failed to “reverse ... the eclipse of permanent truths, family stability, communal solidarity, and much else...it surrendered.” This emerging conservatism is more militant and less disposed to compromise. In many ways, it mirrors the New Left in disposition and the European Right in policy preferences. Indeed, these traditionalists harshly criticize the Benedict Option for its willingness to surrender the political, legal, and cultural point. Action and reconstruction are the orders of the day, and many of these traditionalists have taken up the call through their work with the Trump administration, think-tanks, journals, and media outlets. *American Greatness* is one example of post-liberal conservatives reconstructing the conservative movement in the same way that the early editors of the *National Review* constructed the fusion movement. The emerging conservative movement disavows compromise with liberalism because it rejects liberalism in toto. Its goal is to dethrone

and discredit liberalism, starting at ground zero in academia and then moving on to the media. While liberal immigration policy is certainly viewed as a threat to the American nation, the power of the state to enforce liberal orthodoxy has been the catalyst for the final apostasy of traditionalists from the fusion movement and its classical liberal compromise.



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## **Forgetting John Galt: The Rise of a New Conservative Economics**

In May of 2019, *National Review* published a special two-part issue defending markets. The magazine's concern was that free markets were under a revitalized attack from the Left – such as the rise of Bernie Sanders and the popularity of democratic socialism – as well as in unprecedented danger on the Right. In the two-part issue, Jonah Goldberg lamented that “at the precise moment when socialism is mounting something of a Spring Offensive, many conservatives are abandoning their posts and refusing to defend what was once holy ground.”<sup>231</sup> For example, Goldberg notes:

an editor of *American Affairs* proposes ditching the Left-Right distinction altogether to forge a new party of the state that would have conservatives ... embracing the administrative state rather than dismantling it. Both Patrick Deneen's *Why Liberalism Failed* and Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism* take dead aim at classical liberalism, arguing that the West took a wrong turn when it embraced John Locke.”

As Goldberg put it, Locke's most important contributions to the American tradition was his defense of private property as a fundamental natural right. The idea of a “new party of the state” grounds itself in national solidarity and not in individual freedom or performance. Deneen likewise argues that global capitalism robbed the working class of dignity while simultaneously fraying the

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<sup>231</sup> Goldberg, Jonah. 2019. Freedom is not a tool.

communal ties which allow humans to flourish.<sup>232</sup> Unfettered capitalism undermines both community and traditional morality – the two things held most dear by traditionalist conservatives.

Perhaps more than any book or academic paper, the growing threat against capitalism on the Right was best demonstrated by Tucker Carlson’s rebuke of capitalism on primetime on Fox News in January of 2019. Carlson lumped together capitalism and globalization, arguing that economic liberty arguments have been used as fronts for globalization, which threatens national solidarity and the moral health of the community. “Any economic system that weakens and destroys families is not worth having. A system like that is the enemy of a healthy society.” Economic nationalism, not unfettered global capitalism, was the solution for a dwindling middle class and a white working class in moral and financial crisis. In June of 2019, Carlson approvingly quoted Elizabeth Warren: “But for decades, those same politicians have cited free market principles’ and refused to intervene in markets on behalf of American workers.... We can navigate the changes ahead if we embrace economic patriotism.” Carlson explained his perplexing endorsement of Warren’s economic outlook by arguing that:

Republicans in Congress can’t promise to protect American industries. They wouldn’t dare. It might violate some principle of Austrian economics. It might make the Koch brothers angry. It might alienate the libertarian ideologues who, to this day, fund most Republican campaigns ... you’re either a libertarian zealot controlled by the banks ... or, worse, you’re

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<sup>232</sup> Deneen, Patrick. 2016. *Why liberalism failed*.

some decadent trust fund socialist ... there isn't a caucus that represents where most Americans actually are: nationalist on economics, fairly traditional on the social issues.

In contrast, the fusion movement can be accurately described as classical liberal on economics and fairly traditional on social issues. Carlson is a talk show host, not an economist or a think tank researcher. Yet in his rejection of global capitalism and his finger-pointing at libertarians, Carlson demonstrated the rise of a new conservatism. This new conservatism is nationalist first and capitalist only second. It favors Pat Buchanan over Milton Friedman or Friedrich Hayek. This new conservatism has rejected the classical liberal economics of the fusion in favor of a more traditional economic mentality. How did classical liberal economics lose its nearly "holy" status in modern conservatism?

### **Christianity and Capitalism**

The very idea of a fusion hints that traditionalist conservatism has not always been wedded to free market economics. Indeed, free market economics were largely ignored by traditionalists for decades prior to the fusion. Devout Catholics, such as John Courtney Murray, were particularly allergic to classical liberalism. Forerunners of modern libertarianism, for their part, instead dismissed the economic authority of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The sense from both sides was that capitalism and Christianity were inherently incompatible. Ayn Rand argued more forcefully than most that Christianity and capitalism were at odds. For Rand, the chief virtue was selfishness. "The first right on earth is the right of the ego. Man's first duty is to himself. His moral law is never to place his prime goal within the persons of others. His moral obligation is to do what he

wishes, provided his wish does not depend primarily upon other men.”<sup>233</sup> If the West hoped to establish and maintain a truly free society, it must make war upon religion, particularly the Christian religion which enshrines altruism. In short, Christianity stands athwart pure capitalism.

Though he considered her “the most thoroughgoing advocate of laissez-faire capitalism ever to set pen to paper,” M. Stanton Evans wrote that “Miss Rand shows no signs of understanding the spiritual and historical conditions that are antecedent to [freedom].”<sup>234</sup> Rand’s selfishness provided no way to perpetuate freedom in the future. “She attacks the Christian culture which has given birth to all our freedoms and takes her stand with the destroyers...[having] marched steadfast into battle, she wheels about and embraces the standard of the enemy. That embrace and the paradox it seals are fatal to morality and liberty alike.” Evans further argued that free, liberal America was created by unselfishness linked to the Christian religion. Here Evans invokes the key fusion argument: liberty and morality depend upon each other for survival.

The questions posed by Rand – can faith in God be reconciled with liberty for man and is Christian belief compatible with libertarian attachment – were “the central dilemmas of the era.”<sup>235</sup> The viability of the fusion depended upon the answer. No one knew this better than Bill Buckley. In his eulogy of Rand, Buckley argued that Rand was both brilliant and blind.<sup>236</sup> She risked giving capitalism a bad name by arguing that altruism is despicable, God does not exist, and only self-interest is good and noble. Here it is imperative to note that Buckley considered the economic

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<sup>233</sup> Rand, Ayn. *Atlas Shrugged*.

<sup>234</sup> Evans, M. Stanton. Oct 3, 1967. The gospel according to Ayn Rand.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Buckley, William F. Jr. April 2, 1982. Ayn Rand, R.I.P.



radicalism of Randism, which necessarily pitted Christianity against capitalism, to be as equally threatening to the nascent fusion movement as the racial messaging and conspiracy theory tendencies of the John Birch Society. Buckley worked hard to purge both from the fusion movement to maintain the integrity and respectability of the movement. The threat posed by Ayn Rand was clear: if Christianity and capitalism are truly at odds, then their fusion is not possible. Buckley and Meyer's project ultimately depended on Ayn Rand being wrong. *National Review* went to great lengths to prove Rand wrong and effectively muzzle her as a force within mainstream conservatism. In pursuit of this goal, Buckley's eulogy of Rand spent the majority of the words retelling her troublesome personal stories and noting her immense character flaws. Dismissing Rand intellectually was not enough, perhaps because of her charisma, perhaps because her critique of the fusion carried some essential nugget of truth dangerous to its long-term survival.

The purging of Ayn Rand began in earnest in 1957 with Whittaker Chambers' blistering review of *Atlas Shrugged* in *National Review*. Revealingly, though, Chambers' review demonstrated his own Christian uneasiness with the philosophical underpinnings of capitalism. Chambers dismissed Ayn Rand as a Nazi-lite and a student of Nietzsche. "Miss Rand acknowledges a grudging debt to one, and only one, earlier philosopher: Aristotle. I submit that she is indebted, and much more heavily, to Nietzsche."<sup>237</sup> The comparison to Nietzsche is particularly instructive, for Nietzsche wrote about the super man who could not be held back by popular morality. Rand's perfect man is likewise entirely self-centered and unrestrained. In this selfishness, Rand sees virtue, and Chambers sees only will to power. Capitalism preaches

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<sup>237</sup> Chambers, Whittaker. December 28, 1957. Big sister is watching you.

individuality and mastery. Christianity preaches selflessness and charity, which Chambers come close to declaring at odds with the philosophy of capitalism. In fact, Chambers, the converted Christian and self-proclaimed “man of the Right,” was a consistent critic of capitalism. In his view, capitalism could not generate the moral capital necessary to protect free markets. Capitalism was inseparably connected to liberalism, which Chambers rejected because of its lack of ability to see the human costs of its own success. For example, the need for fewer farmers because of increased agricultural productivity is called economic progress and creative destruction. Yet it comes at the cost of the livelihood and dignity of the farmer, who is the bedrock of democratic capitalism. Laissez-faire capitalism comes with a cost that it never acknowledges. Chambers’ critique of Rand was genuine and urgent, but its reputation as the definitive rejection of Randism in favor of fusion, rather than Christian traditionalism, is simply odd.

Nevertheless, more than a dozen authors referenced Chambers’ review of *Atlas Shrugged* over the course of 50 years in the *National Review*. A few authors wondered whether Chambers’ rejection of Ayn Rand was incorrect. E. Merrill Root found a morality and beauty in Rand’s depiction of capitalism that Chambers evidently did not.<sup>238</sup> Rand gave language to the sublime pleasure associated with creating and knowing that the creation is good. In this parallel to the ultimate creation depicted in Genesis, Rand was unintentionally attempting to explain the beauty of divinity. Root further warned that too strong a rejection of Rand, such as the one written by Whittaker Chambers, could unintentionally lead to a rejection of capitalism itself.

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<sup>238</sup> Root, E. Merrill. January 30, 1960. What about Ayn Rand?

The vast majority of references to Chambers' review, however, were positive. This number included Buckley, who wrote that Chambers was right about Rand all along. Kevin Williamson argued that Rand "never truly understood capitalism as an economic arrangement of a moral system."<sup>239</sup> Rand imagined heroic, creative geniuses while capitalism is actually about the unexceptional men and women who make processes a little quicker and a little cheaper. Llewellyn Rockwell and Jeffrey Tucker similarly argued that Rand was the opposite of fusion, which was the "emergence, or rather re-emergence, of Christian libertarianism ... [which] makes it possible for us to join together to limit the giant state. We are all libertarians when it comes to the federal government. And we are all conservatives in our cultural and moral values."<sup>240</sup> A key tenet of this Christian libertarianism, or simply the fusion, is that proper civil liberties are based on property rights and that the unhampered free market is morally and practically superior to all other systems. The acknowledgement of economic liberty as inherently good, and not just good for what it produces, is extremely important. Economic liberty is not simply a tool. Moreover, since private property is economically and morally necessary, welfare is organized theft by the leviathan state, which is the prime institutional source of evil throughout history. The egalitarian ethic at the heart of the welfare state is morally reprehensible and destructive of private property and social authority. Though Rand was thoroughly marginalized by the fusion, one cannot read the previous sentence without thinking about her. It was her aversion to Christianity, not her rejection of state economics, that led to her dismissal.

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<sup>239</sup> Williamson, Kevin D. July 1, 2013. The Grapes of Rand.

<sup>240</sup> Rockwell, Llewellyn H and Jeffrey A. Tucker. May 28, 1990. Ayn Rand is Dead.

The original constructors of the fusion were deeply concerned with bridging the gap between capitalism and the Judeo-Christian tradition. This required convincing both classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives of their interdependence. For example, at a 1965 *Philadelphia Society* panel on humanism and theism, Frank Meyers argued that humanism and Christian principles can enter into an organic synthesis in establishing an ethical economic and political order.<sup>241</sup> He was fittingly seated between Henry Hazlitt (an agnostic) and Professor Gerhart Niemeyer (a devout Episcopalian), who represented the two polar answers. This panel perfectly encapsulated the enormity of the fusion project. How do you both convince students of the Enlightenment and devout Christians that their economics need not clash? You begin by emphasizing that capitalism is a rational system that depends on pre-rational commitments and institutions provided by the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In the early years of the fusion, convincing traditionalists was the more difficult feat, primarily because most classical liberals also happened to be Christian or Jewish. Here the central dictum of the fusion was particularly helpful. Virtue without freedom is not truly virtuous, and freedom without virtue is anarchy, which leads to tyranny. Virtue and freedom need each other to survive and thrive. Similarly, capitalism and Christianity need each other. For its part, economic liberty is a prerequisite for moral liberty. Samuel Gregg argued that there will always be tensions between faith and capitalism, “yet the price of giving people the space to pursue the higher freedom to which reason and the Jewish and Christian faiths point as the telos of liberty” is worth the cost

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<sup>241</sup> Leddihn, E. Kuehnelt. November 2, 1965. *The Philadelphia Society*.

of people using capitalism for immoral ends.<sup>242</sup> Commercial republics, such as the United States, have shown how allowing people “to pursue their self-interest within a particular political and legal context indirectly helped to establish important material and political conditions of the common good.”

The fusion has long relied upon this instrumental argument to convince traditionalists of the merits of capitalism. For example, Milton Friedman argued that “the only way that has ever been discovered to have a lot of people cooperate together voluntarily is through the free market. And that’s why it’s so essential to preserving individual freedom.” Michael Munger asserted that Friedman was a liberal consequentialist, viewing questions through a positive economic lens.<sup>243</sup> Munger cited Friedman’s reaction to rent control as evidence. Rent control was a problem because it was inefficient. The violation of property rights was not mentioned.

Yet the fusion also relied upon more explicitly classically liberal arguments that economic freedom is good because it is a form of liberty, and liberty is good in and of itself.<sup>244</sup> This included Milton Friedman, who argued that “freedom in economic arrangements is itself a component of freedom broadly understood, so economic freedom is an end in itself.” Friedman was not purely an instrumentalist. Towards the end of his life, Friedman understood freedom as both “an end in itself...and partly the means by which society improves itself.”<sup>245</sup> Jonah Goldberg asserted that this was the dominant argument in the conservative movement for decades. “Is liberty itself a goal,

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<sup>242</sup> Gregg, Samuel. May 20, 2019. *Michael Novak now*.

<sup>243</sup> Munger, Michael. 2015. “Milton Friedman as a liberal philosopher.”

<sup>244</sup> Sirico, Rev. Robert A. November 17, 2016. Milton Friedman and the human element.

<sup>245</sup> Munger, Michael. 2015. “Milton Friedman as a liberal philosopher.”

or a tool .... For more than 70 years, the vast majority of conservatives and libertarians have argued that freedom in the economic realm was not just the engine of prosperity but was also a good in and of itself.”<sup>246</sup> Arguments for economic freedom were made both inductively and deductively. Economic freedom was good for what it produced, and, most importantly, economic freedom was good because it was freedom.

Convincing classical liberals of the economic merits of religion was the second task. Hayek understood economic freedom as a byproduct of the Western tradition as it grew from the foundations laid by Christianity and the Greek and Roman civilizations. “But the essential features of that individualism which, from elements provided by Christianity and the philosophy of antiquity ... has since grown and spread into what we know as Western civilization .... The respect for the individual man qua man, that is, the recognition of his own views and tastes as supreme in his own sphere.”<sup>247</sup> Christianity laid the foundation for classical liberal economics because it laid the foundation for the liberation of the individual.

Of course, the discovery of individualism also had the effect of “freeing the individual from the ties which had bound him to the customary or prescribed ways in the pursuit of his ordinary activities.” Hayek’s recognition – and celebration – of this fact indicated the difficulty of the fusion undertaking from a very early date. As noted previously, Hayek long refused to call himself a conservative because he recognized the fundamental tension between the two theories both temperamentally and directionally. Perhaps he sensed at least a grain of truth in Rand’s rejection

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<sup>246</sup> Goldberg. May 20, 2019. Freedom is not a tool.

<sup>247</sup> Hayek. F.A. The road to serfdom, 16-18.

of modern conservatism. Hayek particularly celebrated the innovation and the loosening of cultural and traditional ties that conservatives sought first and foremost to preserve. Michael Novak described Hayek's aversion to the fusion label the best: "I cherish the inventiveness, dynamism, mobility, and sheer energy of a democratic capitalist society. I like the new forms of community – voluntary, associative, tolerant, multiple, non-holistic – our sort of society has invented. I like progress."<sup>248</sup> Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* is a celebration of progress beyond tradition. The book is only conservative in the sense that it supports classical liberal economics.

In comparison, fusion economics relied upon the idea that virtue and liberty in the economic realm are interdependent. Friedman was a better representative of the economics of the fusion, for as a practicing Jew and a dedicated student of the Enlightenment, Friedman modelled the idea within his own soul. During his more than thirty years of contribution to the *National Review* – he wrote 31 times in the publication – and his myriad of other engagements in similar conservative publications and forums, Friedman shored up the economic underpinnings of the fusion. For example, he acknowledged that economic liberty and political liberty are not necessarily mutually reinforcing. Economic liberty can exist without political liberty, such as in Hong Kong, and political liberty has often led to the limitation and destruction of economic freedom.<sup>249</sup> The key to balancing the freedoms was, for Friedman, limited government and self-interest rightly understood.<sup>250</sup> Friedman looked to Adam Smith to explain the role of private interest in achieving any public good. Individuals must be left to pursue their own private interests,

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<sup>248</sup> Novak, Michael. June 26, 1981. Why I am not a conservative.

<sup>249</sup> Friedman, Milton. May 14, 1990. Four steps to freedom.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

and these interests will work to the benefit of society through no particular intention on the part of the individual. Good intentions do not always equal good government policies. The invisible hand of the free market is much more adept at channeling the pursuit of private interest, such as making a living, into a public good. It gives men a chance to contribute and not simply take. In the framing of Yuval Levin, the market gives space for virtuous practice, though it does not create a virtuous people.<sup>251</sup>

Rather, capitalism requires the “kind of human beings that it does not by itself produce and can easily corrupt. Left to itself, it would tend to prioritize consumption over every other human endeavor and profit over every other standard of the good.”<sup>252</sup> Hyde likewise argued that “capitalism requires certain habits – virtues, in theological parlance – if it is the function successfully.”<sup>253</sup> That is, capitalism operates best when it draws upon pre-liberal roots, which both Levin and Hyde described as the Judeo-Christian tradition. As such, private interest must be understood as something more than mere selfishness. Friedman argued exactly this point, stating that “private interests are not to be taken to coincide with narrow, material, selfish interests.”<sup>254</sup> Moreover, Simon argued in an article paying homage to fusion economics that “the true concept of economic freedom must be understood to be far deeper and richer than the mere ... license to do as one pleases. The only defensible kind of economic freedom is freedom coupled with a sense of moral responsibility ... to the God Who will judge us all.”<sup>255</sup> Fusion economics relied upon the

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<sup>251</sup> Levin, Yuval. 2019. The market tradition. *National Review*.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Hyde, Henry J. 1990. Morals, markets, and freedom? *National Review*.

<sup>254</sup> Friedman, Milton. August 24, 1965. Social responsibility: A subversive doctrine. *National Review*.

<sup>255</sup> Simon, William. 1990. The morality of economic freedom. *National Review*.



idea that the market functions best when the individual acts according to his self-interest properly understood. This does not mean that material pleasure is ruled out. On the contrary, Friedman understood that “the pursuit of private interests has built churches, universities ... and yes ... beach resorts.”<sup>256</sup> Private interests lead to job creation, and space for sociality, learning, and education. Yet if capitalism is not grounded in morality, “state coercion in the guise of social responsibility” will be enforced upon the individual.<sup>257</sup> Virtue is needed to create the kind of individual that thrives in a capitalist society, thereby rebuking moral critiques of capitalism from the Left. In short, fusion economics were deeply anti-Rand. The fusion was built upon the common acceptance of the premise that freedom and virtue need one another in the economic realm and a common rejection of Rand’s atheistic version of capitalism.

The union of capitalism and conservative Christianity was reinforced in the movement’s response to the rise of liberation theology in Latin America. Liberation theology emphasizes economic and political freedom along with spiritual freedom. Sin enslaves the soul and undermines human freedom. Likewise, economic and political injustice enslave the individual and prevents the unity among men commanded by Christ. This version of Christianity is deeply rooted on Earth. Conservative reaction to liberation ideology emphasized the inherent incompatibility of Marxism and Christianity. The most obvious incompatibility is the existence of God.

Still the reaction to liberation theology was necessarily disjointed and clumsy, for liberation theologians and traditionalist conservatives are not so different in their understanding of the vital

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<sup>256</sup> Friedman, Milton. August 24, 1965. Social responsibility: A subversive doctrine. *National Review*.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

role of community and religious tradition in society. Faith matters in the political arena. Indeed, throughout the 1980s, many traditionally minded conservatives lamented the declining role of religion and tradition in society. Some of these more disgruntled traditionalists met in 1986 to proclaim the birth of paleo-conservatism at the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Society. It was made clear from the birth of paleo-conservatism that they viewed true conservatives as Roman Catholics, or at the very least Anglo-Catholic. These paleoconservatives felt deeply wronged by the power dynamics within the fusion. Pro-capitalist economists and neoconservative social scientists were welcome in the conservative movement and in the fight against communism – but only in a subordinate role to true social conservatism. Speaking of classical liberals and neoconservatives, one traditionalist panelist at the first meeting of the Philadelphia Society stated, “We are all delighted to see the town whore come to church – even to sing in the choir – but not to lead the service.” Though the paleoconservatives remained subordinate powers to both classical liberals and the neoconservatives throughout the 1990s and 2000s, their rebuke of free market fundamentalism at the cost of social morality and unity gained an important following in the 2010s. In other words, a conservative “liberation theology,” or a conservative economics focused on reinforcing the religious and traditional structures of community and family, was never successfully stamped out by the gatekeepers of the fusion.

Similarities between traditionalists and liberation theologians notwithstanding, the reaction from the evidently more influential sector of the movement was to reinforce the strictly spiritual nature of the ministry as separate from the free market. This rebuke was aimed at both progressive Christians and paleoconservatives. E. Kuehnelt Leddihn wrote disapprovingly of paleoconservatives who “carry monastic ideas into a field where they do not belong – into

economics or into the social order.”<sup>258</sup> Some even called upon the Catholic church to do more to preserve the spiritual message of Christianity against the material onslaught of Marxism and liberation theology. Malachi Martin argued:

What is needed from the Vatican is a clear statement ... that the unity Jesus promised is already achieved, and that it has nothing to do with socialist unity; that the Church's service is to the spirit *only*; and that no form of authentic Christianity can promise even the possibility of material prosperity, social justice, or international peace – capitalist, socialist, or Brobdingnagian.<sup>259</sup>

In fact, the Vatican did issue a statement on communism more than a decade after Martin's article. Milton Friedman reviewed the 1990 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* and praised its anti-communist attitude. However, he also bemoaned the overtly pro-union tones within the encyclical and the church's refusal to reject Christianity's capacity to influence the temporal world. In other words, the church did not give the boot to liberation theology, nor did it silence more traditionalist conservatives who likewise understood a role for religion in the political and economic spheres of life. Likewise, the fusion succeeded in fusing Christianity and capitalism for the first several decades of the fusion, but it never truly stamped out dissenting voices who raised concern about the compatibility between the market and religion.

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<sup>258</sup> Leddihn, E. Kuehnelt. November 2, 1965. The Philadelphia Society.

<sup>259</sup> Martin, Malachi B. Dec 19, 1975. Are Christianity and Marxism Compatible?

## **Protecting the Nation: Japan and Free Trade**

The second major hurdle the fusion had to overcome in wedding traditionalist conservatives to the economics of classical liberalism was the tension between the nation and the globalizing tendencies of the market. The first major test of fusion economics came during the Japanese trade scare during the 1980s. Japan's economy was booming, and the United States' trade imbalance with the country was significant. American industries were failing to compete with Japanese manufacturers and companies, especially in the automotive and electronic industries. This led to calls for protectionist trade policies to shield American industries from Japanese competition. Ronald Reagan advocated protectionist policies in his 1980 campaign, arguing that "Japan is part of the problem. This is where government can be legitimately involved. That is, to convince the Japanese in one way or another that, in their own interests, that deluge of cars must be slowed while our industry gets back on its feet." Reagan's concern was American workers and American companies – not American consumers who bought Japanese products. After his election, Reagan imposed a 100 percent tariff on selected Japanese electronic products. This was apparently his way of reinforcing the principles of free and fair trade in response to Japan's "dumping" of electronic products on the United States market. Reagan sought to force American products upon the Japanese market through protectionist principles.

Classical liberal economics would have responded to the trade deficit with Japan by doing precisely nothing. The theory states that tariffs do not reduce trade deficits in the long term, and consumers always benefit from free trade. Hence the strong response from contributors to the *National Review*. The majority of articles regarding Reagan's trade policy with Japan were critical of tariffs and nationalist economic concerns. Bill Buckley particularly lambasted Reagan's trade

policy, stating that “unless Japan promises to charge Americans more for semiconductors, the U.S. government promises to charge Americans more for other Japanese goods. Either way, Americans pay more .... The U.S. thus hopes to protect its fragile little semiconductor producers.”<sup>260</sup> In order to protect American business and American workers, Reagan sacrificed American consumers. The Reagan administration had argued that Americans could get the same products elsewhere, so the U.S. had the economic advantage in this trade war. Yet Buckley countered that “The official argument is that selective tariffs on Japanese good won’t raise prices for Americans, because we can buy similar goods from Korea, Taiwan – or ourselves, for that matter. But reduced competition always raises prices, raising the cost of living and producing.” Perhaps the harm to American consumers could be offset by a more permanent victory over unfair trade deficits with Japan. Here too Buckley rejected the administration’s stance. “Getting tough with the Japanese can only weaken their already depressed economy, aggravating world surpluses of chips, grain, oil, and many other goods.”

In the same April issue of *National Review*, George Gilder likewise dismissed concerns about the trade imbalance with Japan. “Balanced trade between national units is not a virtue in itself.... National economies are no longer nationally owned or controlled .... In this environment, there is no more reason for a balance of trade between two countries than between two American states.”<sup>261</sup> Instead of a national tragedy, “the U.S. made large gains in competitiveness over the last five years chiefly because we ignored nationalistic fetishes and pursued strategies appropriate

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<sup>260</sup> Buckley, William F. April 24, 1987. Chip Wars.

<sup>261</sup> Gilder, George. April 24, 1987. Don’t let the grinch steal Christmas.

to the global economy.” The term “nationalistic” is particularly important here. The trade policy pushed by Reagan was not based on classical liberal economics but on a deeply nationalist urge to protect the home economy. The problem, according to Buckley and Gilder, is that there is no such thing as protecting the home economy anymore. The global economy is by definition beyond the control of the nation, and that is good news for the consumer.

Anthony Harrigan was one of the few contributors to *National Review* who urged more aggressive trade policies towards Japan. Citing the declining economic power of the United States on the world stage, Harrigan called for “a strategic economic policy” which recognized that trading partners were actually adversaries in a battle whose outcome will “determine the standard of living and the national security of the American people.”<sup>262</sup> The era of free trade had been forcefully closed by foreign governments. “A generation ago, when international trade was between companies, the competition was healthy .... Free market economists continue to think in those terms. Today, however, American companies are competing against foreign *countries*.” The problem was that American companies were left largely unaided by the American government while Asian companies were either the virtual arms of foreign governments or were heavily subsidized and directed by their home governments. In short, American companies were competing on unequal terms, and the only solution was for the United States government to begin supporting American companies. Free trade would recommence once all companies were on an

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<sup>262</sup> Harrigan, Anthony. March 4, 1983. Needed: A strategic economic policy.

equal footing. This militaristic sentiment was well captured in a provocative poem by W. H. Von Dreele:

*Some say our salesmen fail to please  
Thanks to their lousy Japanese,  
While others claim they lose because  
Consensus rules the social laws,  
But Tokyo won't trim its views  
Till buzzed by some B-52s.*<sup>263</sup>

These sorts of anti-free trade, pro-national economy sentiments were the minority among mainstream conservatives even during the Reagan administration. As the Japanese economy stagnated, the economic tension within the fusion quieted for a short time. But rival economic ideas were revived once again in the battle over NAFTA and the rise of Patrick Buchanan in the 1990s.

### **Protecting the Nation: NAFTA and Pat Buchanan**

The initial concern regarding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was whether the agreement would morph from a liberalization of trade to simply a means of greater regulation. The idea of a free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico was not the issue. “Nothing is plainer than that NAFTA is a terrific idea if let alone.”<sup>264</sup> The problem worrying some conservatives was whether the Clinton administration would know to leave well enough alone. Would NAFTA actually undermine free trade between the two nations through strangling

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<sup>263</sup> Von Dreele, W.H. May 17, 1985. Trading with Japan.

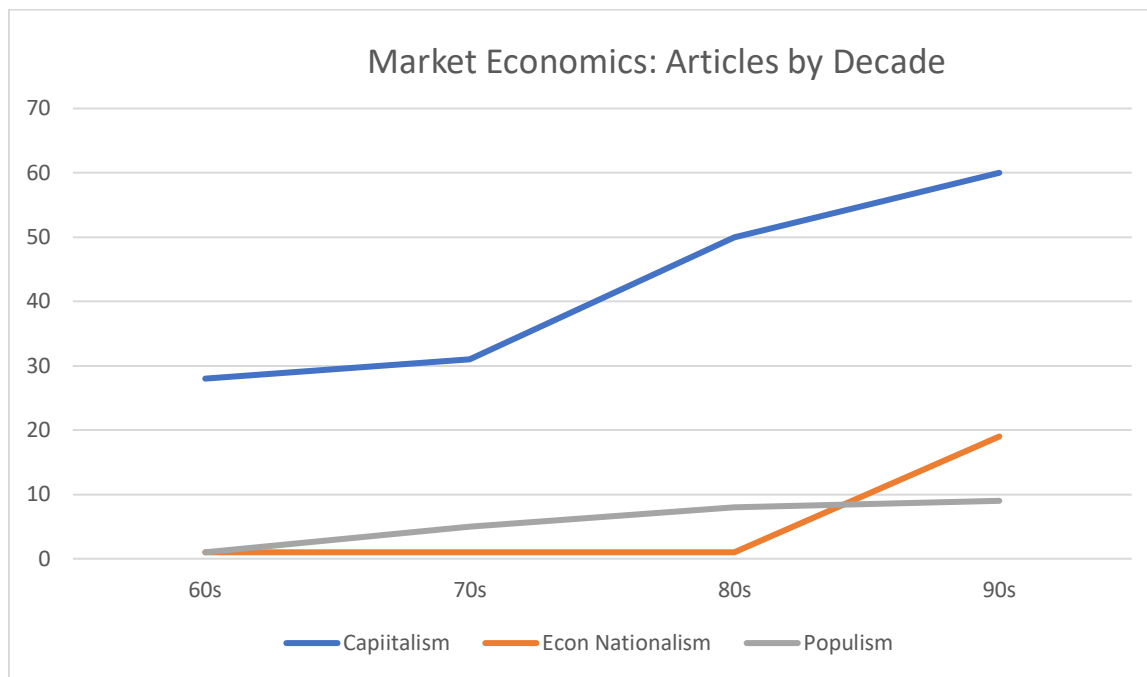
<sup>264</sup> Buckley, William F. September 15, 1993. NAFTA: What to watch out for.

regulation? Was the title a clever lie to sell conservatives on a trade agreement produced by the Democrat in the White House? A total of 15 articles directly addressed these concerns in the pages of *National Review* between 1992 and 1997. Of those articles, eight were written to explicitly support the free trade deal, one was written to oppose the deal, five were critiques of the Clinton administration's political handling of the deal, and one article was a spoof of Al Gore's environmental concerns about NAFTA. The principle of free trade versus the protection of national industries was not heavily debated at the outset of the NAFTA debates, and it would not be fully voiced until the national rise of Pat Buchanan.

The mid-90s produced the most sustained attack on classical liberal economics from conservatives in the fusion movement up to that point. As Chart 1 demonstrates, conversation about capitalism, economic nationalism, populism, and protectionism reached a peak during the 1990s. Though conversations about populism reached a peak during the 1990s, the number of articles directly referencing populism was still relatively low. In comparison, 80 articles were written about Buchanan, later called the father of Trumpism, during the decade.



Chart 1



Buchanan ran for the Republican nomination in 1992 and 1996. He later left the Republican party and ran as a third-party candidate in 2000. Buchanan is significant because he was the first Republican presidential candidate to challenge the postwar conservative orthodoxy on free trade and market economics. “Better the occasional sins of a government acting out of the spirit of charity than the constant omissions of a government frozen in the ice of its own indifference.”<sup>265</sup> The indifference he bemoaned was attributable to free market fundamentalism.

Buchanan was not, however, the pioneer of these anti-classical liberal arguments. For example, James Burnham argued in 1961 that the current trade policies of the fusion reflected the preferences of wealthy elites on the eastern seaboard instead of the trade preferences of the

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<sup>265</sup> Buchanan, Patrick. The great betrayal.

heartland.<sup>266</sup> The resentments from middle America would fester over time. Murray Rothbard, though a leading libertarian, also argued in the early 1960s that protectionism is true economic conservatism. Rothbard further asserted that the domination of the right wing by Bill Buckley and the *National Review* was the cause of the resurgence of old Right heresies in the 1990s. That is, true conservatism took a wrong turn by morphing into the fusion and purging Birchers, Randians, anti-Zionists, and anarchists from the movement. The culmination of this folly was the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who Rothbard rejected as a false representative of the Right. It was these old Right arguments that Buchanan and a host of right-wing intellectuals were reviving in their rejection of the fusion.<sup>267</sup> Tom Bethell, however, saw Reagan differently than Rothbard, and praised Buchanan as the more fitting heir to Reagan than George W. Bush. While Bush employed Keynesian economics at home, supported higher taxes, and weakened American industry through globalist trade policy, Buchanan sought to support the middle class through government programs and to protect American sovereignty against encroachments by multilateral institutional such as the World Bank.<sup>268</sup> What Tom Bethell failed to point out was that Buchanan's policies, such as supporting the middle class through government programs, were also Keynesian in nature. The real difference between Bush and Buchanan was Buchanan's emphasis on protecting the national economy and thereby American sovereignty.

The conservative establishment's reaction to the economic nationalism proposed by Patrick Buchanan was resounding. In the April 20, 1998 issue, three conservative powerhouses contributed

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<sup>266</sup> Burham, James. December 16, 1961. Conservatives and the common market.

<sup>267</sup> McGurn, William. February 17, 1992. Pat Buchanan and the Intellectuals.

<sup>268</sup> Ponnuru, Ramesh. October 11, 1999. Conservative no more.

articles soundly denouncing Buchanan. First, Ramesh Ponnuru bemoaned the easy political pandering toward the working class and summarily dismissed the trade policies of Buchanan and his intellectual supporters:

When it comes to trade, however, Buchanan insists that the nation-state wield its sword like King Canute against global economic tides. He would slap 15 per cent tariffs on imports from every country in the world except possibly Canada and impose steep wage-equalization tariffs on countries with the bad manners to be poor. He would systematically dismantle the institutions that have undergirded the West's postwar prosperity, withdrawing from the World Trade Organization and restoring the pork-barrel protectionism that characterized his Golden Age .... Buchanan argues that tariffs would reduce America's dependence on other countries for vital needs like food and weapons...his economic policy [is] practically guaranteed to lead to disaster.<sup>269</sup>

Buchanan's economic policy could be summarized in the simple phrase "America First Nationalism". John O'Sullivan joined Ponnuru's severe critique of Buchanan's economic nationalism, arguing that it risked spilling over into foreign policy by alienating allies through trade wars and threats regarding equal payments to NATO.<sup>270</sup> The rejection of the classical liberal consensus of the fusion was also implicit in this economic nationalism. Finally, Robert Bartley wrote that "Patrick Buchanan is still urging his peasants with pitchforks to storm the castles of the GOP establishment and to pull up the drawbridge against the global economy."<sup>271</sup> Buchanan would

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<sup>269</sup> Ponnuru, Ramesh. April 20, 1998. Pat answers.

<sup>270</sup> O'Sullivan, John. April 20, 1998. Nationalist Anthem.

<sup>271</sup> Bartley, Robert. April 20, 1998. The great betrayal.

throw out two hundred years of tested economic theory in the name of tribal solidarity and sovereignty. “We globalists view this as a rejection of modernity .... Attempts to dam up change bear heavy costs ... in undermining the value of the very skills that make America the leader of the global economic revolution.” Though written about Buchanan in 1998, these statements accurately describe Donald Trump, who is the heir of Buchanan.

Buchanan was the political embodiment of the paleo-conservative movement, a more radical segment of the traditionalist wing of the fusion movement that considered itself the true old Right. The paleoconservatives rose to push back against what they viewed as the capture of the conservative movement by free market fundamentalists and neoconservative war hawks. Their goal was to purge the movement of free market fundamentalism and marry “economic nationalism with supply-side growth theory.”<sup>272</sup> The new conservative economics would only pick the aspects of classical liberal economics that supported the health and sovereignty of the nation. Robert Bartley argued that the triumph of the conservative coalition against the Soviet Union in 1989 was dangerous because it deprived the movement of its clearest unifying mission. The movement “started to suffer an identity crisis, with libertarian economists, religious evangelists, and assorted political opportunists all asserting their claims to the name. In this milieu, it was probably inevitable that the old nativist and isolationist Right would test its strength.”<sup>273</sup> The presidential ambition of Patrick Buchanan was that test. Buchanan managed to convince over three million Americans of his vision in both his 1992 and 1996 attempts at the nominations, but he failed to

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<sup>272</sup> Novak, Robert D. August 14, 1995. Populist Republican.

<sup>273</sup> Bartley, Robert. April 20, 1998. *The great betrayal*.

fracture the fusion consensus that kept classical liberalism at the heart of conservative economic policy. The conservative movement was not remade into the image of the old Right. Still Robert Novak felt compelled to warn conservative elites not to ignore “Buchanan the prophet” in the long term.<sup>274</sup> Novak’s warning was accurate. Though Buchanan failed in 1992, 1996, and 2000, a very Buchanan-esque nominee did win the Republican nomination and the presidency in 2016 and perhaps even the battle for the soul of the conservative movement.

### **Free Market Economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The trade war with Japan, NAFTA, and the rise and subsequent defeat of Patrick Buchanan were ultimately victories for the free market consensus of the fusion. The stories were much the same. Pressure was placed on free market principles, more traditionalist economic principles were proposed and then defeated, and the free market consensus reigned once again. The story has begun anew in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the Great Recession of 2008, the renegotiation of NAFTA, and the rise of China. This time, however, the conclusion of the story may be very different. The free market consensus is weakly defended by a fracturing fusion movement. The classical liberal dam is beginning to give way before a new conservative economics.

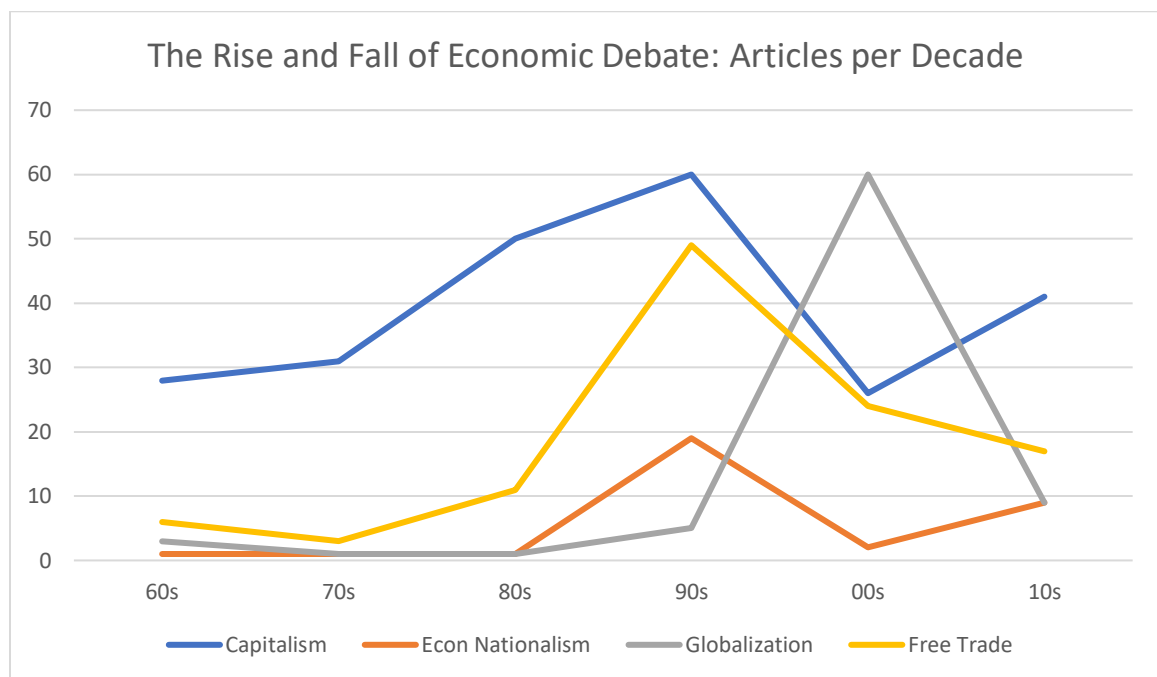
Whereas Chart 1 demonstrated the seriousness of the challenge to market economics in the 1990s, Chart 2 focuses on the second major challenge unfolding in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inter-conservative arguments over economics went quiet during the first several years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rates of discussion on every topic dropped during the first several years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and

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<sup>274</sup> Novak, Robert D. August 14, 1995. *Populist Republican*.

only crept back up in the late 2010s. This was probably the result of a rejuvenated focus on foreign policy in the wake of 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The cost of the war and money America poured into foreign aid were perhaps the most discussed economic issues during the early 2000s.

Chart 2



The 2008 Recession brought the topic of globalization to the forefront in a big way. Sixty articles were written about globalization during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The primary question was whether fusion economics had an answer to the chaos globalization was creating in American industry. Jim Manzi demonstrated the stakes of the globalization debate: “If we give up the market-based reforms that allow us to prosper, we will lose by eventually allowing international competitors to defeat us; but if we let inequality grow unchecked, we will lose by eventually hollowing out the middle class and threatening social cohesion. This ... is what

globalization means for the U.S.”<sup>275</sup> The old classical liberal mantras were inadequate for such a complicated situation. Truly, market economics were still important, but the realities of the global economy required a rethinking of capitalism to protect the American middle class. “Capitalism has worked, but it has also generated a great deal of inequality. This needs to be fixed or the social support required for a democratic and capitalist society to flourish will be undermined. Conservatives need to discover new tactics to raise competitiveness and reduce inequality.”<sup>276</sup>

Classical liberals pushed back against this line of thinking. For example, Michael Poterma argued that, “global capitalism is good for the rich and even better for the poor.”<sup>277</sup> Then, quoting Kofi Annan, he continued, “The main losers in today’s very unequal world are not those who are too much exposed to globalization. They are those who have been left out.” Poterma’s quote of Kofi Annan is particularly telling, for Annan is undoubtedly a member of the global elite. Here then is the key point that classical liberals were missing. Is globalization really good for the poor, or is it just a boon to a new global elite comprised of the rich and the well-educated? Has global capitalism become socialism for the wealthy? Many conservative thinkers bristled against pro-market elitist claims and pointed toward the dying American middle class instead for proof. The death of the American middle class was not simply an economic question but a cultural question. Must the nation be sacrificed on the altar of global capitalism? Here the old tensions between traditionalist conservatism and capitalism are laid bare. Peter Kolozi argues that conservatives are reawakening to the natural animosity between the market and tradition. Capitalism is inherently

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<sup>275</sup> Manzi, Jim. February 25, 2008. A more equal capitalism.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Poterma, Michael. September 29, 2003. Bring the walls down.

revolutionary and destabilizing, while conservatism seeks to protect traditions and hierarchies and social structures.<sup>278</sup>

More importantly, conservative voters pushed back against this perceived classical liberal elitism in the 2010s. Conservative intellectuals had thought that the electorate reflected the fusion: socially conservative and economically classically liberal. Yet “Trump showed that much of the base of the party was driven far more by resentment of elitist arrogance, by a rejection of globalism, and by economic and cultural insecurity than by commitment to conservative economic or political principles.”<sup>279</sup> In fact, it was with the election of Donald Trump that the most significant challenge to the fusion economic consensus really began. Discussions about economic nationalism, capitalism, and free trade all began to increase accordingly in the mid-2010s. Conservative intellectuals took the 2016 election as permission to discuss openly whether the 20<sup>th</sup> century fusion model – muscular internationalism, supply-side economics, and social conservatism – fit the reality of America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed, this dissertation is being written in the midst of what may rightly be called a conservative civil war sparked during the 2015 Republican primary campaign. Previous skirmishes have seen the victory of classical liberal economics. This current disruption appears more serious and the scales appear to be leaning towards a new conservative economics.

The tortured inter-conservative debates about Trump’s trade war with China demonstrate the fracturing around the free market consensus. Some conservative intellectuals, such as Robert

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<sup>278</sup> Kolozi, Peter. *Conservatives against capitalism: From the industrial revolution to globalization*.

<sup>279</sup> Levin, Yuval. December 5, 2016. *A changed GOP*.



Atkinson, have argued in favor of Trump's tariffs against China. Atkinson asserted that the United States has enabled China's economic growth in the mistaken belief that China's rise will "bring us cooperation, diplomacy, and free trade."<sup>280</sup> Instead, China has exploited the system, including informally violating the rules of the World Trade Organization and artificially suppressing the value of its currency, in its own favor. Meanwhile,

the Washington trade and economics establishment, which, almost without exception, refused even to consider the possibility that Chinese economic and trade policies might pose a threat to the United States. The Washington elite-consensus view was and is that trade is always good (even one-sided free trade in which the other side is mercantilist); that while trade might hurt individual workers, it can't hurt the overall economy; and that there is no difference between challenging foreign mercantilism and naked protectionism. Coupled with this rigid adherence to a strict free-trade ideology came the argument that China simply could not succeed with a state-run economy. Wasn't it obvious? The Chinese leadership had clearly never bothered to read Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.

Atkinson praised President Trump for being the first U.S. president to forcefully confront China over these unfair economic practices. Still, the United States should have responded much earlier through the imposition of tariffs, and Trump's poor diplomatic skills have prevented a "alliance of the willing" to gang up on China. Looking forward, Atkinson argued that the conservative trade

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<sup>280</sup> Atkinson, Robert. August 13, 2018. Who lost China?.

policy should focus entirely on pushing back against China and leave behind naïve arguments about how the free market is supposed to function.

While the majority of authors at *National Review* argued against tariffs, their reasons for doing so differed significantly and were not exclusively based on free market arguments. This is deeply significant. For example, Kevin Williamson argued that China's clever trade strategy has meant that Trump's tariffs have disproportionately hurt American producers while Chinese consumers are shielded from higher prices.<sup>281</sup> "One of the nice things about being a totalitarian police state is that you can do things like just order your soybean importers to not do business with American producers, and that is what China has quietly done." This is the problem with free market economics on a global scale. The United States cannot win trade wars because it lacks China's control over the domestic economy. This is not an argument against tariffs from a free market ideological perspective. Williamson's argument is that China's domestic control is hurting U.S. economic interests because controlled economies have the advantage over free economies in the global market.

Others argued that protectionist principles, even if warranted, are simply impossible to apply in a global economy.

Even if it were morally and economically advantageous for the United States to embrace protectionism, it's almost certainly impossible for it to do so. U.S. manufacturers have evolved over decades to become integral links in a breathtakingly complex global value

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<sup>281</sup> Williamson, Kevin. June 24, 2019. A battlefield planted with soy.

chain—whereby producers across continents cooperate to produce a single product based on their respective comparative advantages—that could not be severed without crippling both them and the global economy.<sup>282</sup>

Unilateral trade barriers will simply serve to alienate the United States from the global market instead of alienating China.<sup>283</sup> Like the first group, this second group is also not making an argument based on classical liberal orthodoxy. The argument is not whether protectionist policies are desirable in principle; rather, the argument is that protectionist policies are impossible to implement regardless of how desirable. This is a marked shift in rhetoric from the arguments put forth during the Japanese trade war in the 1980s and the debates over NAFTA and protectionism in the 1990s.

Finally, a third group have argued that tariffs are wrong in principle and in practice. Derek Scissors made the quintessential free market argument against tariffs, stating that “American consumers would be hurt if goods produced or assembled over there became costlier because of import duties. The poor would be hurt the most.”<sup>284</sup> Tariffs harm American consumers, especially the poor, more than trade imbalances. Indeed, Scissors argued that America experienced a trade surplus during the Great Depression. Trade imbalances are less important than household income for the American consumer. Scott Lincicome likewise asserted that “despite its harms to some manufacturing interests, free trade also has generated broad-based benefits for U.S. consumers,

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<sup>282</sup> Lincicome, Scott. April 11, 2016. The truth about trade.

<sup>283</sup> National Review Editorial Staff. April 30, 2018. Breaking China.

<sup>284</sup> Scissors, Derek. February 6, 2017. Trade reciprocity with China.

businesses, and workers.”<sup>285</sup> As a result, labor unions that expend considerable financial resources lobbying the federal government for insulation from foreign competition are actually hurting their fellow American consumers. Here Lincicome backslid into an old classical liberal trope: the American consumer victimized by the isolationist tendencies of a much smaller number of American workers.

Ramesh Ponnuru took a more conciliatory tone toward American workers, arguing that “Raising our tariffs now is not going to cause China to resurrect its old state-owned firms, and it would raise input costs for American manufacturers. Nor would breaking with a nearly century-old policy of liberalizing trade increase business certainty.”<sup>286</sup> However, he also acknowledged that free-traders “sometimes ignore the losers from trade.” The pain attributed to globalization is real. American workers have lost jobs, but protectionist policies will not fix the problems plaguing middle America.

This third group is unapologetically orthodox on the free market. Yet even authors like Ramesh Ponnuru gave conciliatory nods towards the pains of American manufacturers and workers. Something has broken down in global economy, and even the most ardent supporters of free trade have been forced to recognize those failures in their defenses of free trade. Moreover, none of the authors offered a solution to the failure of American manufacturing or the loss of jobs overseas. Nor do any of the free-traders give an alternative solution to the China problem other than to accept unfair practices because they work out for American consumers in the long-term.

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<sup>285</sup> Lincicome, Scott. April 11, 2016. The truth about trade.

<sup>286</sup> Ponnuru, Ramesh. July 11, 2016. On Trump and trade.

Moreover, the arguments put forth in favor of free trade are far less morally grounded than those offered by Hayek and Friedman in the previous generation. The concern is access to consumer goods and not the moral superiority of economic freedom. In short, the old fusion arguments have gone stale.

### **A New Conservative Economics**

An unprecedented number of articles challenging free market orthodoxy as out-of-date and stale have appeared in the pages of *National Review* – the locus of fusion economic consensus – over the past decade. Some of these articles have presented themselves as friendly fire. For example, Brink Lindsey and Steven Teles, authors of *The Captured Economy*, opined in 2017 that conservatives are caught in an inequality paradox. Conservatives believe that “American economy is clogged up with crony-capitalist corruption ... they also hold that economic inequality ... is morally justified by the rights of property and the tendency of free markets to raise living standards overall.”<sup>287</sup> These two beliefs are incompatible. If the economy truly is riddled with cronyism, then the money earned from such cronyism is not due the respect conservatives give it. The money earned is better termed “loot” than “income.” Hence the paradox: Either conservatives have overstated the amount of crony capitalism, or their dismissal of the concept of inequality as envy is misplaced. What should conservatives do to escape this paradox? Lindsey and Teles argue that conservatives should continue to attack forms of regulation that advantage large corporations at the expense of new competitors and small businesses. But conservatives should also seriously

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<sup>287</sup> Lindsey, Brink and Steven Teles. November 13, 2017. The conservative inequality paradox.

reconsider their willingness to defend business interests and their hostility to redistribution. This includes opening the economy up to greater high-skilled immigration in order to expose the wealthy to the same competition experienced by those at the bottom and letting go of policies aimed at reducing the top marginal income-tax rates. In other words, free-market arguments feel stale because at least half the time they are being used to support a market that is not free. Conservative economic policy needs to adjust accordingly.

Kevin Williamson addressed the role that capitalism plays in undermining traditional institutions in a 2020 piece entitled “Momonomics.” Williamson argues that the market has made being a stay-at-home mother a very difficult proposition. In order to have a stay-at-home mother, “dear old Dad has to earn enough to do two things: 1) Provide the desired standard of living for the family, and 2) Buy Mom out of the labor force on behalf of the firm of Family, Inc.”<sup>288</sup> That is, capitalism has kicked the most important member of the traditional household out of the house and into the workforce because dad’s income is not enough anymore. Families are paying the price.<sup>289</sup> Yet Williamson also asserted that Americans can’t go back to the way it was before because making it easier to be a stay-at-home mom is not a matter of labor-market regulation or housing policy – it’s a consumption subsidy. The market has unalterably restructured the American family, which is the most basic traditional unit, and conservatives effectively cheered it on through their unwavering support of free-market economics. What is left unsaid by Williamson is that it did not need to be this way. Conservatives are not naturally free-market ideologues.

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<sup>288</sup> Williamson, Kevin D. January 28, 2020. Momonomics

<sup>289</sup> Interestingly, this is the same basic argument made first by Elizabeth Warren and her daughter in *The Two Income Trap*.

Joel Kotkin, on the other hand, did push for a less orthodox approach to the free-market by rejecting the inherent morality of capitalism. “I’m not a free-market fundamentalist. To me, the beauty of liberal capitalism lies in its performance: More people live well, and live longer, than ever before ... today this egalitarian capitalist progress is showing signs of fading.”<sup>290</sup> That is, economic freedom is a tool meant to produce other, more important goods. This is a direct contradiction of the economic teachings of Meyer, Friedman, and Buckley, who argued that economic freedom is good because it is freedom. Kotkin further lambasts capitalism, stating that it “robs workers of dignity” and actually increases their dependence on the state. Stripped of the dignity that comes from well paying, honest work, American workers are understandably turning their back on capitalism – and perhaps even democracy. “Reacting to the arrogance and disdain of the globalized upper crust,” who ignore the human costs of global capitalism, “these voters drove the election of Donald Trump, the support for Brexit, and the rise of populist parties across Europe.” Essentially, Kotkin was questioning the defensibility of capitalism as an economic system given the human costs across middle America. This is an astonishing argument for the pages of *National Review*.

Oren Cass made a similarly shocking argument in early 2020. In “The Return of Conservative Economics,” Cass introduces the formation of *American Compass*, an organization dedicated to helping American conservatism recover from its chronic case of market fundamentalism. In other words, Cass is heralding the end of free market orthodoxy in the pages of the publication that established free-market economics as the conservative economic orthodoxy.

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<sup>290</sup> Kotkin, Joel. August 12, 2019. The return to serfdom.

“There is more to life than economic freedom. Also, there is more to economic freedom than economic freedom. A society that attempts to maximize everyone’s freedom at every moment will fail miserably in preserving individual liberty and limiting government over time.”<sup>291</sup> Conservatism has forgotten that its true allegiance is to human dignity and not to material gain or blanket economic freedom, neither of which can solve the dilemmas now facing the American soul:

What is missing from our public debates is a distinctively conservative approach to economics .... Having for decades outsourced their economic thinking to libertarians, conservatives now watch from the sidelines as classical liberals (i.e., libertarians) and modern liberals (i.e., progressives) debate how best to pursue their shared and unquestionable priorities of personal consumption and aggregate economic growth.

Yet neither classical liberalism nor modern liberalism prioritizes the traditional structures that provide the foundations of a flourishing society and strong nation. Both sides have spent decades laying waste to the very institution, such as the family and community, that made such unprecedented individual freedom possible in the first place. A true conservative economics recognizes the interdependence of social and market forces. “It will concern itself with the pernicious effects that high levels of economic inequality can have on the social fabric, the market’s functioning, and people’s well-being, regardless of absolute living standards.” The goal is not higher economic value but greater human flourishing. This new conservative economics –

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<sup>291</sup> Cass, Oren. February 18, 2020. The return of conservative economics.



which is a natural outgrowth of conservative principles – will prioritize the family, community, and national industries. It will favor collective worker representation over shareholders and the domestic over the international. In short, this new conservative economics is conservatism as it would have always been had it not been for a very strange sixty-year marriage with classical liberalism.

Outside the pages of *National Review*, conservative authors have also been calling for a new conservative economics in longstanding, reputable publications. *First Things*, a journal dedicated to both religion and public life, has been particularly open in its criticism of market economics in the past decade. One very clear example is that Mathew Schmitz, a long-term contributor on economic and social matters, is a self-declared Christian socialist. In 2010, Joe Carter addressed the morality of the market economy and argued that the market economy requires goals beyond narrowly construed economic freedom to be moral. That is, economic freedom is not moral in and of itself.<sup>292</sup> Andrew Strain later argued that “the faith of neoliberals in the intrinsic beneficence of self-regulating free markets becomes untenable when we look closely at the actual, practical basis of markets. So called free markets are not actually free. Recognizing this, we are at liberty to evaluate economic life by other, higher criteria than market freedom.”<sup>293</sup> That is, there is a higher purpose to economics than economic freedom. Economic policy should be oriented towards the good understood in the traditionalist sense. The fact that *First Things* is a

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<sup>292</sup> Carter, Joe. October 7, 2010. What the market needs in order to be moral.

<sup>293</sup> Strain, Andrew. July 25, 2017. Free markets and unicorns.

predominantly conservative Catholic journal is significant, for contributors to the journal have predominantly relied upon religious, especially Catholic, arguments against the free market.

*The Claremont Review of Books* has published many critiques of market economics, including works by Michael Anton calling for a new conservative coalition that addresses the moral failing of classical liberal economics.<sup>294</sup> Anton targeted the iron triangle of Republican politicians, conservative donors, and magazine-think tanks (the conservative intellectual class) that works to protect laissez-faire economics from serious debate. Edward Feser also took on the prevailing classical liberal orthodoxy, arguing that even Hayek had moral concerns regarding laissez-faire economics.<sup>295</sup> Feser asserted that Hayek became distinctly more Burkean in later life, arguing that dismissing traditional morality wholesale demonstrates as much fatal hubris as the socialist planner who thinks he can do better than the market. Feser did not deny that Hayek was a fusionist until the end. Hayek's fusion was more skeptical and tragic than the one advertised by Frank Meyer. He viewed religion as useful, not true, and bourgeois morality as a painful but necessary corrective to human nature. Regardless, Hayek's fusion was as flawed as the original because it could never account for the necessity of community and the danger of corporate power. That is, Feser rejected the economics of the fusion because the fusion first ignored the importance of traditional structures. The fusion convinced traditionalists of the merits of the market, but it never fully converted classical liberals to the traditional structures it inevitably seeks to destroy.

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<sup>294</sup> Anton, Michael. Spring 2019. Tucker's Right.

<sup>295</sup> Feser, Edward. Spring 2019. Hayek's tragic capitalism.

Authors at less established publications have also joined the chorus of conservatives arguing for a new economics. The lower stakes of these newer publications have allowed these authors to propose more radical alternatives to the market economy than authors at *National Review* or *The Claremont Review of Books* could get away with. Over at *The Week*, Matt Bruenig dismissed the primacy afforded laissez-faire institutions over traditionalist outcomes by conservative intellectuals.<sup>296</sup> Instead, Bruenig pointed to European countries who have put serious political effort into achieving traditionalist goals, such as supporting family structures, through greater government involvement in the economy and investment in society. Laissez-faire institutions in the United States are in direct conflict with the widespread adoption or maintenance of traditionalist structures. Socialist economic policies in Europe, on the other hand, are better situated towards these traditionalist ends.

At *The Imaginative Conservative*, Michael Warren Davis argued that conservatism is inherently anti-ideological, and so it should not be so beholden to classical liberal ideology. “We should be neither partisans of Statist Socialist Liberalism nor of pure Classical Liberalism.”<sup>297</sup> Rather, conservatives should think more seriously about policy. For example, “there is a distinct need to be absolutely sure that every American receives the medical treatment they require. I do not think market forces will guarantee this .... [Conservatives] should break up the Left’s grip over nationalized or nationally subsidized healthcare.” Instead of wedding itself in sickness and in health to unfettered laissez-faire economics, conservatives should take the teachings of the

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<sup>296</sup> Bruenig, Matt. February 12, 2014. Why conservatives should embrace socialist, European-style economics.

<sup>297</sup> Davis, Michael Warren. February 24, 2020. Should conservatives embrace a form of socialism?

German tradition of “ordoliberals” more seriously. Ordoliberals, such as Wilhem Ropke, argued that state intervention in the economy is sometimes necessary to prevent monopolies and ensure that market outcomes approximate the theoretical outcomes produced in a perfectly competitive market. Wilhem Ropke was especially insightful, for he understood that the market economy is dependent on a humane, ethical social order. Davis concluded by arguing that a humane social order may actually require distributive efforts.

## **Conclusion**

These articles are just a sampling of an unprecedented, deeply significant discussion on the Right about the status of classical liberal economics moving forward. Not since the era before the construction of the fusion has such an open and honest evaluation of the free market occurred among conservatives. As demonstrated above, traditionalists of all stripes have marshalled powerful arguments against classical liberal economics, and the tide may be finally turning in their favor.

The precarious situation that classical liberal economics finds itself in is exacerbated by three factors. First, the internet has made it more difficult for any single publication or group of intellectuals to act as gatekeepers to the conservative movement. For thirty years, *National Review* had a stranglehold on this position. This made possible the purging of Randians and silencing of members of the Old Right and conservative Catholics who saw religion and capitalism in opposition. It also lent classical liberal economics a protected status. Frank Meyer’s controversial position that free markets and morality mutually rely upon each other for success became the prevailing dogma. As demonstrated above, critiques of the market were heavily regulated and largely outside the conservative mainstream for nearly three decades. Successfully shielding

classical liberalism from serious, widespread criticism during the volatility of the trade war with Japan and the protectionist urges of the 1990s was possible because one single publication held the position of preeminence among conservative magazines and controlled so much of the readership. That is no longer the case in 2020.

Second, classical liberals have left the conservative movement in large groups to form a separate classical liberal movement. Or, at the very least, large numbers of classical liberals refuse to call themselves conservatives even if they write for conservative publications or attend conservative think tank meetings. These classical liberals tend to be economists. A prime example is Deidre McCloskey, a world renowned classical liberal economist who has contributed frequently to conservative publications, such as *National Review*, and attended conservative gatherings. Dr. McCloskey refers to herself as a “Christian Libertarian” and not a conservative. The Cato Institute is another example of the separation of classical liberals. Cato is a think tank dedicated to classical liberal ideas, with an emphasis on the free market. However, it also espouses classical liberal social ideas, which stand in opposition to traditionalist policy preferences. This makes the Cato Institute a frequent ally of the conservative movement, but not so clearly a member of that movement, given its characteristic social views. This alienation has had ramifications for the fusion because classical liberalism is so often defended these days from without the movement instead of from within the fusion itself.

Finally, the free market consensus at *National Review* has broken down because fusion intellectuals have lost faith. Are religion and capitalism really so easily reconciled? Do the internationalizing tendencies of global capitalism dangerously and intolerably undermine the health of the nation? Even within the pages of *National Review*, prominent conservative

intellectuals are launching criticisms and discussions of the viability of capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the main, conservative intellectuals still appear to have a preference for the free market, but this is less an ideological devotion than a practical attachment. As a result, publications like *National Review* are likewise morphing to resemble the new realities of the conservative movement. This new conservative movement is, at the very least, significantly less attached to classical liberal economics than the old fusion. The next decade will reshape conservatism for the next generation. The trajectory charted in the 2010s suggests that classical liberalism will be discarded in favor of a new conservative economics that resembles the economics of the European Right.

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## The End of the Fusion?

*“One thing certain is that when President Trump has finished his work, the conservative movement and Republican party will not be the same. The result will not be a mid-point between Trump and John Kasich. Rather it will be a fresh formulation of what it means to be a conservative or a libertarian in the modern age.”*

— Christopher DeMuth, “Trump, Nationalism, and Conservatism”, The Claremont Review of Books.

*“In this climate, the old balancing tests of fusionism have become relics of pointy-headed intellectuals, elitists, globalists, and the dreaded establishment...The situation is not sustainable, but that doesn’t mean what comes next will be better. It will be recognizable, to be sure, but recognition is not a very high bar.”*

— Jonah Goldberg, “Fusionism Today”, National Review.

This dissertation is not about the death of conservatism as a political or intellectual movement. Conservatism will live on. The question is what form it will take. This dissertation is about the death of a certain kind of conservatism – the conservatism that animated the second half of the twentieth century. It’s about the end of a massively productive marriage between classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives. This is an elegy for the fusion.

The fusion was a simple idea. Meyer posited that a virtuous society is necessarily a free society, for virtue not freely chosen is not truly virtuous.<sup>298</sup> Likewise, a free society unrestrained by morality will inevitably dissolve into anarchy. Tyranny is the byproduct of anarchy, and so a society without virtue will never remain free. A man who cannot govern himself must be governed by the state. This was the basis upon which the fusion coalition was built. Meyer sought to create

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<sup>298</sup> Goldberg, Jonah. 2015. Fusionism, then and now. *National Review*.

a coalition between various anti-communist factions strong enough to challenge communism abroad and progressivism at home. This dissertation has demonstrated that these factions – libertarians, traditionalists, paleoconservatives, neoconservatives – can be reduced to two competing schools of political philosophy. Classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism echo the philosophical interplay between virtue and liberty. Classical liberals understand freedom as the primary good, while traditionalist conservatives emphasize policies designed to cultivate virtue. Meyer viewed virtue and liberty as flip sides of the same coin. The two ennoble each other. Likewise, classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism could be made to work together and moderate one another, thereby allowing a powerful political coalition to form. For this to work, both would need to be convinced of the truth that virtue and liberty mutually rely upon one another.

The fusion was not a novel idea. As chapter 2 demonstrated, Edmund Burke was something of a fusion himself. Yet long before Burke, the ancients understood the simple truths outlined in the fusion as well. Classical definitions of liberty were concerned with self-mastery and self-government. Man was free through the proper ordering of his soul. Yet, as Patrick Deneen has argued, the modern definition of liberty is significantly different. Liberty is understood today as license or the absence of coercion. At its worst, this understanding of liberty breeds an ugly materialism and an argument for a large state apparatus in the absence of custom and tradition. This is the liberty experienced by a two year- old painting on the walls of the house that gives it refuge. Deneen does not point out, however, that traditionalists have also wandered from the logic of the fusion. Meyer argued “Truth withers when freedom dies, however righteous the authority that kills it; and free individualism uninformed by moral value rots at its core and soon brings about conditions that pave the way for surrender to tyranny.” The second half of that quote is

obvious to traditionalists, but they often overlook the first part. Traditionalists have long attempted to hedge up the way and freeze time using the powers of the state. In confusing statecraft for soulcraft, they forget the limits of both government and society by making themselves God. Neither government nor society has the capacity to change human nature, though both can improve the human condition. Of course, many a traditionalist would argue that they are not seeking to change human nature. They simply want to suppress its worst components and elevate its best. Here they forget the inviolability of man's agency. If virtue not freely chosen is not truly virtuous, then mankind has a right to not choose virtue. Man has a right to destroy himself.

Hence the brilliance of the fusion. It constrains both the zealous efforts of the traditionalists and the destructive tendencies of the classical liberal. At this surface level, it appears that the fusion is both politically and theoretically sound. The fusion has been a massive political success, but it has never been theoretically coherent. As chapter 2 demonstrated, the fusion attempted to marry two traditions with competing understandings of human nature, the purpose of government, equality, and, yes, freedom. Uniting virtue and liberty is difficult when you disagree on the definitions of virtue and liberty.

Conservative intellectuals have long sensed this internal incoherence, which explains why the fusion project has been under attack from the very beginning. In 1981, Russell Kirk denounced any attempt to form a coalition with classical liberals, arguing that such is "like advocating a union of ice and fire." Of course, 1981 was two decades too late for Kirk to denounce such a union. On the other side, Rothbard bemoaned the successful formation of the fusion as early as 1968. Classical liberals had "surrendered [their] birthright into the hands of those who yearn to restore the Golden Age of the Holy Inquisition." He further argued that the fusion was nothing but a

political maneuver: “Intellectually, the concept must be judged a failure.” L. Brent Bozell Jr. revolted against the fusion movement in the early 1960s because of its classical liberal allergy towards authority. The role of authorities is to make choosing a virtuous life easier, yet the fusion always errs on the side of individual liberty over authority. These philosophical concerns later gave way to major political divisions.

Jonah Goldberg, the most consistent commentator on the fusion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, highlighted the growing breach in the fusion marriage in the pages of *National Review* in 2006. Goldberg argued that both parties had grown apart by drifting from their once and mutual love. “Perhaps the real lesson here is that conservatives and libertarians need to recommit themselves to the fusionist project. In other words, let’s seek counseling.”<sup>299</sup> Nearly a decade later, Goldberg placed the blame for the sad separation squarely on libertarians desperate to strike out on their own.<sup>300</sup> Goldberg was partially correct. Classical liberals deserve some of the blame for the breakdown of the fusion. They have become increasingly radical and tired of the fusion’s constraints. Yet as this dissertation has shown, traditionalists have themselves grown tired of the influence exerted by classical liberals on economics, immigration, and social policy. Traditionalists have become distinctly less liberal over time. As a result, the conservative movement has become a far less welcoming place for classical liberals. In other words, the libertarians may have moved out, but traditionalists are redecorating the house and ‘rediscovering themselves’ instead of begging them to come home.

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<sup>299</sup> Goldberg, Jonah. 2006. A lib-lib romance. *National Review*.

<sup>300</sup> Goldberg, Jonah. 2015. Fusionism, then and now. *National Review*.

By 2018, Goldberg had once again changed his tune on fusionism. Citing L. Brent Bozell Jr.'s concerns, Goldberg declared "I think fusionism ultimately doesn't work as a seamless and consistent political philosophy."<sup>301</sup> It refused to give enough power to authorities, such as laws and customs, that make individual choice easier by limiting it and setting consequences. Goldberg compares this to a relationship between parent and child. "If I tell my daughter that her mother and I will not punish her if she uses drugs or ignores her responsibilities, I'm making it harder for her to live a decent, virtuous life." By assigning too much weight to freedom, fusionists ignore the greater importance of virtue, and the role that institutions play in making virtue easier. As such, the fusion was never the correct philosophy, much less a coherent philosophy. It was simply the organizing principle for a powerful political movement. It should be emphasized that Goldberg made this argument in the pages of *National Review*, the very publication created to expound fusionism.

Here I disagree once again with Goldberg. The analogy between government and the parent as enforcers of virtue is false. The government is not a parent, nor are citizens children. Custom and tradition are supra-parental forces that can make choosing virtue easier. A citizen owes some deep respect to the inheritance offered by tradition. It is the bond between ancestor and progenitor. The government, however, is not a parent because the citizen does not owe her life to the state. There is no familial bond between state and citizen. Even if there was such a bond, citizens are adults. The relationship between an adult child and a parent is far different than the relationship between a small child and a parent. That difference matters. No parent can force a curfew on an

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<sup>301</sup> Goldberg, Jonah. 2018. Fusionism today. *National Review*.



adult child. They can beg and plead, but they cannot punish or force. Hence the false analogy. The state has no greater right to force virtue upon a citizen – with the exception of preventing harm to another citizen – than a stranger has a right to set your child’s curfew. In matters of the state, individual freedom must always be given greater weight than the cultivation of virtue.

Goldberg further argued that the fusion is best thought of as a “useful tool for identifying where principles are in conflict.” Does the identified problem infringe upon liberty? Does the problem impede the cultivation of virtue? What about the proposed solutions? This is a highly prudent way to analyze public policy. Yet Goldberg ignores that in a conflict of good principles, one principle must be given greater weight than another. For Goldberg and other critics of the fusion, the weightier principle is virtue; for Meyer, the benefit of the doubt must always be given to freedom. The fusion balances two principles – virtue and liberty – but it gives a priority to liberty when the two are in conflict. In a way, the fusion is the true Judeo-Christian libertarianism. It recognizes the imperative of virtue, but it gives liberty preference in the political arena. It also recognizes the natural limits of politics as well as the likelihood of social collapse when freedom no longer leads to the cultivation of virtue.

Moreover, the fusion was powerful because it was not a coherent, seamless political philosophy. Contradiction is a defining feature of the human condition. Goldberg himself recognized this when he argued that “A defining feature of conservatism – in some sense *the* defining feature – is comfort with contradiction.” In other words, a defining feature of conservatism is comfort with the contradictions inherent in the human condition. In the words of Ralph Hancock, “all ideology is incoherent when taken seriously.” Human nature does not conform to a pre-conceived political plan laid out by some ideology. Human nature is anti-

ideological because it is contradictory. Any successful ideology or philosophy must reflect human nature, thereby making itself inconsistent and perhaps even incoherent. The fusion represents the best effort at a human political philosophy in the modern era by breaking all the rules of a philosophy. It gave a common language and motivation to classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives. By overstating their philosophical compatibility, it allowed their inter-moderation. It also generated a powerful and highly successful political movement.

Thus, Goldberg is correct in writing that the fusion was not a philosophy but a tradition. “Tradition is not a philosophy but the arena in which competing philosophies shape the civilization around them.” Classical liberals and traditionalists share the fusion tradition, which both Goldberg and Meyer equate with Western Civilization itself, because they share some key assumptions. Modern liberalism, communism, and Randism do not share these assumptions. Now the great tradition is dying because both sides are becoming more radically separate from one another. The causes are manifold. Goldberg blames high levels of immigration with low levels of assimilation, the market, and the media. This paper has demonstrated that divisions within the fusion movement have always existed, but the upheavals of the 1990s marked a turning point. Without the common threat of the Soviet Union, the fusion coalition had little left to justify its existence and even less power to cover up its internal divisions. Rather, these divisions were amplified by the rise of new media and the internet as well as the slow decline in the gatekeeping capacity of *National Review* and the fusion elite. Traditionalists became deeply resentful of the outsized influence wielded by classical liberals, who also began to chafe against the constraints of the fusion. Now the conservative movement is in a period of restructuring.

What will the remodeled conservative movement look like ten years down the road? Goldberg argued that in the place of the fusion the Right has “erected a clean and well-lit prison of one idea...for some it is nationalism, but for most it is simply Trump.”<sup>302</sup> If Trump likes a policy, the Right will also like that policy. Given how unpredictable President Trump is, Goldberg feels that the future is similarly unpredictable. Certainly, the Republican Party has undergone a makeover in the image of President Trump, but his preferred policies predate him. As this dissertation has shown, none of President Trump’s policies are revolutionary in the conservative movement. The fusion movement has typically been dominated by classical liberal thinking in the areas of immigration and economic policy while espousing social conservatism. Yet under this compromise position, both classical liberals and traditionalist conservatives have pushed for more ideologically pure positions. This is especially true of traditionalists who feel that the movement has given too much authority to classical liberalism. In short, President Trump did not invent this new conservatism.

In fact, the shift in conversation among conservatives over the past five decades has pointed to this exact transformation in the conservative movement. Conservative politics circa 2020 is no shock once the archives are considered. This means that the arcs of policy preferences detailed in chapter 3-5 also give us some important clues about what the conservative movement will look like in a decade. In chapter 3, I demonstrated that conservatives have become increasingly anti-immigrant and suspicious of the classical liberal view of the nation. The negative cultural impact of immigration is widely accepted, and the emphasis on the rule of law remains strong. The threat

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

of terrorism and the fear of cultural identity have worked hand in hand to add a dehumanizing lens to refugees and immigrants. The economic impact of immigration is also viewed increasingly negatively. This new standard conservative dogma on immigration relies upon a culture-centric view of the nation as something more than just union behind shared political ideals. Race is the ever-present undercurrent of this view. I expect the conservative movement to continue to move in a nationalist, culture-centric direction in a vain attempt to preserve the nation as they imagined it. This urgency will be exacerbated by the reality that the United States will soon be a majority-minority nation. Standard conservative policy will favor lower levels of immigration, greater efforts towards assimilation, and a re-focus on the sovereignty of the nation-state.

As for social policies, the Right is less tolerant of compromise than it was at the peak of the fusion. Traditionalist conservatives feel betrayed by the liberal compromise, which turned out to be not so neutral after all. This feeling of betrayal peaked with the transgender movement. Conservatives are refocusing on religious freedom in response, both at the level of the Supreme Court and in the political branches. Compromise with the progressive social agenda has fallen out of vogue in favor of a more militant brand of cultural struggle. Moving forward, arguments calling for an explicit rejection of liberalism in favor of a Christian model of governance are likely to become more prominent. Gender issues, such as legal recognition of more than two genders, as well as intersectional feminism and abortion rights will continue as central concerns of conservative social policy.

Finally, the restructured conservative movement will feature a revamped conservative economics. This will not be the economics of Hayek and Friedman. Rather, this new heartland economics will focus on protecting national industry and will pay much more attention to the

plights of the working class. A strengthened social safety net, technical training, and policies designed to promote domestic manufacturing will make their way onto the list of preferred economic policies. Heartland economics will include rejection, whether implicit or explicit, of globalism in favor of a stronger, more independent American economy. The free market economy will not be totally rejected, but it will be evaluated on a more practical level, meaning the dominance of free market orthodoxy will fade away.

As chapter 2 demonstrated, both traditions have become more radical as they have moved apart. This has been shown in the rise of a deeply illiberal traditionalist conservatism. The same holds true for classical liberals as well. The libertarians were long anchored by the practicality of the fusion. Their focus was primarily on economic policy, and they allowed room for some sense of respect for tradition in the social policy arena. Moreover, classical liberal policies, especially in economic matters, were so influential over the past five decades precisely because they achieved majority status through the fusion alliance. Without the fusion, classical liberals lack a real foothold in government. They need a new coalition partner if they wish to remain politically influential, their desire to be an independent movement notwithstanding. This will perhaps lead them into a coalition with progressives emphasizing social policy, such as the alliance exercised by the marijuana legalization movement. Such a coalition would not be strange. Classical liberalism and modern liberalism have much in common – even more so than classical liberalism and traditionalist conservatism. Modern liberalism is a progression, if you will, of classical liberalism. As a result, any alliance with modern liberalism is likely to make the libertarian movement even less independent and more progressively minded.

An argument can be made that modern conservatism really began in 1955 with the publication of the first issue of *National Review* – the publication which deserves the most credit for creating the fusion movement. Conservatives and various types of anti-communists certainly existed before 1955, but they were not a cohesive political movement. The brilliance of the fusion lay in uniting two schools of political thought to thwart the expansion of communism abroad and the progress of modern liberalism at home. In many ways, the fusion was but an American expression of Western Civilization in that its energy was drawn from the tension between virtue and liberty. Indeed, the energy and dynamism of the fusion coalition allowed it to exert an enormous political influence in the United States for nearly seventy years. Its reign saw the demise of communism as a legitimate ideological competitor to the West and the common acceptance of the market system both abroad and at home. Now the lights are dimming, and the fusion is on its last breath. The consequences for the American order will be severe.

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