

**“Roots of Discontent: The Rise of Grassroots Conservatism in the Southland, 1964-1967”**

**A thesis submitted by**

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**Abstract:** This work covers three specific groups that operated in the Southland region of Southern California from 1964-67. The three groups were the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, the John Birch Society, and most importantly, the California Republican Assembly. The thesis of this work is that these groups exerted an enormous influence on both California and national politics during this period by simultaneously promoting an agenda of anti-statist policies coupled with traditional values. In doing so, they laid the groundwork for the 'Reagan Revolution' and completely altered the conversation surrounding conservatism in this country, shifting it from a set of abstract intellectual principles to a more easily digestible set of beliefs for with more of a populist tinge.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to take the time to thank my mother and father for listening to me complain when I had severe writers block and for always showing a keen interest in my topic, however esoteric it may be. Dr. James Glaser and Dr. Peniel Joseph for working on my committee. Both are men took time from their busy schedules to assist me in the defense of this thesis and without them the completion of this project would not have been possible. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my adviser, Dr. David Ekbladh. Throughout this process, Dr. Ekbladh has been a source of intellectual support and guidance at every level. From the early stages of brainstorming during my first year to writing letters of recommendation for research funding in my final semester, Dr. Ekbladh has been an adviser in every sense of the word. For that, I extend my gratitude.

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## **Postwar Milieu and A Broken Movement**

In the years following the Second World War, the conservative movement in the United States was stagnant. The successful conclusion of the Second World War, coupled with the success of the New Deal during the Great Depression created a unique social and political milieu characterized by an overwhelming feeling of consensus. Both Democrats and Republicans who governed in Congress and the White House promoted liberalism as a standard mode of governance and for the most part the electorate confirmed this.

Although the world came close to destruction only a decade earlier, by the fifties and early sixties Americans had settled into a comfortable feeling of agreement, dominated by an overarching sense that the liberal order established during the Roosevelt years was a beneficial and necessary good. As one historical study written during the turbulent seventies noted, “At the end of the fifties, Americans worried about their own personal lives-about health and status. At the other end of the scale of immediacy, they worried about the danger of nuclear war. But few of them doubted the essential goodness and strength of American society.”<sup>1</sup> Millions of Americans that came of age during the Great Depression and the Second World War found the stability of the postwar period comforting and predictable.

Even as late as the presidential election of 1960, most Americans had trouble differentiating Republicans from Democrats in terms of policy initiatives and what each side effectively ‘stood for’. Although Nixon would later become the anointed leader of the ‘Silent Majority’ that stood for a certain cultural conservatism, during the election of 1960 he and Kennedy squared off in what would be a battle for the mantle of the American consensus.

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<sup>1</sup> Godfrey Hodgson, “The Ideology of the Liberal Consensus,” in *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America* edited by William H. Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 112.

Historian Jon Margolis points out, “So similar were the candidates’ views that Harvard professor and Kennedy friend Arthur Schlesinger Jr., concerned that liberal intellectuals were insufficiently committed to the Kennedy cause, felt impelled to compose a book length polemic: *Kennedy or Nixon: Does it Make Any Difference?*”<sup>2</sup> The conclusion, as Margolis points out, was that the results of the election were important, but only to see who would preside over the American consensus.

Underlying this harmony however, was the start of a conservative movement that would alter the American political landscape throughout the second half of the century. Writing during the 1950s, sociologist Daniel Bell saw the beginning of a fissure in the political consensus of the postwar period. Although most Americans saw a degree of liberal consensus in the political spectrum as a good thing many others saw the stirrings of discontent with the established order. In his landmark work *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* Bell argues that status anxiety of the middle class (something apparent in many of the grassroots groups in Southern California) was a major cause of the conservative movement that began to take shape in the 1950s writing, “The new divisions, created by the status anxieties of new middle-class groups, pose a new threat. The rancors [sic] of McCarthyism were one of its ugly excesses.”<sup>3</sup> Although McCarthyism was short lived, many of the underlying assumptions held by the anti-communist movement survived and found new form in the New Right Movements throughout the country.

Bell further elaborates a noteworthy thesis, which was that feeling of being dispossessed and exiled helped shift the far right’s momentum and ultimately benefitted the right wing of the

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<sup>2</sup> Jon Margolis, *The Last Innocent Year: America in 1964: The Beginning of the “Sixties,”* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: The Free Press, 1960), 123.

party. Republicans lacked a true conservative candidate for so long that a sense of alienation started to characterize the fledging movement. After two decades of democratic presidents followed by Eisenhower, a moderate Republican, conservatives sought a route to power, “After twenty years of Democratic power, the right-wing Republicans hoped that the election of Dwight Eisenhower would produce its own utopia: the dismantling of the welfare state, the taming of labor unions, and the “magical” rollback of communism in Europe. None of this happened.”<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, observers during this period were inclined to note the tendency for the radical or ‘New Right’ to push for extreme economic and political measures in response to historical factors of the previous 20 years. Seymour Martin Lipset writes, “Most, though not all of the radical right are opposed to: (1) the welfare state; (2) the labor movement; (3) the income tax.”<sup>5</sup> Though American society flourished in the postwar period largely as a result of increasing federal legislation, many Americans started to doubt the efficacy of the New Deal and feared that such as federal programs such as the Great Society would grow into a leviathan of government overreach.

Furthermore, many of the New Right groups that emerged during the postwar period (and especially the 1960s) were reacting to both the vestiges of New Deal liberalism *and* moderate Republicans. Members of the John Birch Society, activists in the California Republican Assembly, and various other groups saw the Eisenhower administration as a betrayal of conservative principles and a fundamental failure to live up to conservative ideals. Richard Hofstadter, the prominent Columbia University historian wrote, “It [the Eisenhower Administration] was worse than a disappointment, it was a betrayal. It did not repeal the New

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Bell, “The Dispossessed (1962),” in *The Radical Right 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* edited by Daniel Bell (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Sources of The “Radical Right (1955)” in *The Radical Right 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* edited by Daniel Bell (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 332-333.

Deal Reforms, do away with high taxes, kill foreign aid, or balance the budget. In fact, its primary historical function seemed to be to legitimate what had been done under Roosevelt and Truman.”<sup>6</sup> For conservative activists in the postwar period, moderation came to be associated with liberalism and was partly explained for the Republicans poor electoral performance during this time.

The conservative movement began to show signs of revival however. In 1955, William F. Buckley, a Yale graduate and member of a prominent Connecticut family started the weekly magazine *The National Review*. Not quite thirty years old, Buckley first gained attention when he published *God and Man at Yale* in 1951 in which he criticized what he perceived as the creeping liberalism of the Yale faculty during his undergraduate years.<sup>7</sup> By the mid 1950s, Buckley, reacting to the ostensible dominance of liberal media and intellectual outlets, formed *The National Review* in order to create a framework for conservative intellectual thought. George H. Nash, the premier historian of conservative intellectual history in the postwar period argues, “But Buckley’s journal was not destined to be a mere replica of *The Freeman*.<sup>8</sup> Its function was not solely to renew the attack against the Left but to consolidate the Right.”<sup>9</sup> Buckley intended to

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 96.

<sup>7</sup> The impact *God and Men at Yale* is important to note in that it not only gave Buckley a voice on a national scale but also of its scathing critique of academia. Critiques of academia and its members became an especially important point. A number of conclusions have been drawn from the alleged “liberalism” of faculty to universities as the breeding ground of a radical youth counterculture.

<sup>8</sup> *The Freeman*, created in 1946 is a Libertarian journal that is published ten times a year by the Foundation for Economic Education. As the name of its parent think tanks implies, it mostly discusses economic questions and has brought together some of the greatest libertarian economists and philosophers. Like *The National Review* ten years later, *The Freeman* filled a conservative/libertarian void in postwar public discourse.

<sup>9</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books Publishing, 1976), 148.

shape conservative intellectual discourse during this period and formulate a cohesive intellectual dogma.

The ideology that Buckley formulated helped push the right forward and stimulate an interest in conservative politics. It didn't hurt that Buckley was young, intelligent, articulate, and bold in his assertions. One account described Buckley and his publication as, "A blast of bold, fresh thinking on a right front grown crabby and defeatist under years of Democratic Party rule. In addition to being a prolific writer, Buckley was articulate, witty, and telegenic."<sup>10</sup> During the fifties and sixties, Buckley and *NR* helped articulate a form of conservatism predicated on free trade, traditional values, and anti-communism. As will later be discussed, the issues of anti-statist and anti-communism were in large part conditioned by both domestic and international developments in the postwar period.

Buckley and his colleagues at *National Review* were far from the only conservatives operating in the comfortable milieu of the postwar period, however. Although the intellectuals of the movement were prominent due to the high profile of their publications and institutionalized arenas (think tanks) a second wing of the movement emerged conterminously. The second wing of the conservative movement was characterized by a grassroots movement that sought control of electoral politics via aggressive mobilizing and campaigning, which attempted to simultaneously educate while helping elect rightwing candidates in local, state, and national contests. Like their intellectual counterparts the grassroots groups espoused a position predicated on anti-communism and anti-statism that greatly expanded the definition of what it meant to be a conservative.

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Scotchie, *Revolt From the Heartland: The Struggle for Authentic Conservatism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing, 2002), 31.

Naturally, Buckley and the other editors at *NR* never truly embraced *any* of the grassroots movements that would eventually sweep the country. The various organizations in the Southland were blips on their radar to them and as we have seen, groups like the John Birch Society were dismissed as ineffective at best, insane at worst. Nash writes, “Buckley forcefully rejected what he called “the popular and cliché-ridden appeal to the ‘grass-roots.’”<sup>11</sup> Buckley and many of the other intellectual leaders of the nascent conservative movement sought a top-down strategy to change public discourse. For these reasons, the trajectories of the two strains would not cross during this period, resulting in a continually fragmented movement. These incongruent groups shared ideological consistencies but disagreed on strategies for influencing American public opinion.

Of course, it is important to define what it meant to be ‘conservative’ in the postwar period. While American conservatives have always shared a faith in the immutable laws of the free market and an emphasis on traditional values, the postwar conservatives took these tenets one-step further. One scholar Samuel Brenner states, “In general terms, the Americanists of the late 1950s and 1960s enshrined what they saw as the traditional institutions of the American political system and Constitution and embraced free-market economics, individualism, and states’ rights.”<sup>12</sup> Many conservatives from the Southland embraced these ideologies, arguing against American involvement in the UN, deregulation of the economy and repeal of both New Deal and Great Society legislation, and opposition to Civil Rights for African-Americans. In many respects, the ‘new’ conservatives saw the stalwarts of the Republican Party as too

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*\_148

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Brenner, “Fellow Travelers: Overlap between “Mainstream” and “Extremist” Conservatives in the Early 1960s,” in *The Right Side of the Sixties: Reexamining Conservatism’s Decade of Transformation* edited by Laura Jane Gifford and Daniel K. Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2012), p.84.

conciliatory. Moderate Republicans who were unwilling to work against the Democratic majorities in Congress were seen as conservative, but only in that they want to “conserve” an already established liberal order.

Although the national political landscape of the postwar period may have looked bleak for conservative interest groups, various grassroots activists were in the process of forming a network of conservative organizations. Nowhere was this truer than in Southern California where organizations ranging from local chapters of the John Birch Society to the politically influential California Republican Assembly began to form locally oriented but nationally focused units. These organizations, despite their ostensibly local character, formed the basis for the national New Right by approaching various issues from the Civil Rights Movement and helping to mobilize conservative support throughout the nation. Locally focused but nationally and even globally oriented, the Southland conservatives made conservatism popular and accessible for a nation that had lost its faith in the right wing of American politics. Additionally, the tripartite synthesis of anticommunism, libertarianism, and emphasis on traditional American values made this version of conservatism particularly attractive.

### **The Southland: Land of Promise and the New Breed**

Southern California, following the Second World War, was for all intents and purposes, a boom region. Military spending, the entertainment industry, and a plethora of other ventures created a land of prosperity. Accompanying this massive expansion of industry were large numbers of Southern and Midwestern transplants who followed employment during the war and remained following the conflict. Carey McWilliams, a journalist and transplant who left Colorado for California during the 1920s, attests to this writing in 1946, “Since the war employment in manufacturing industries has increased from 400,000 to 1,000,000, while the

value of production, in all fields, has risen from \$5,000,000,000.00 to over \$12,000,000,000.00.”<sup>13</sup> More than just the observations of a new Californian, McWilliams statement attests to the newly militarized nature of Southern California. In fact, military spending together with massive demographic changes helped create conditions conducive for a conservative movement in the Southland.

Historically, the Southland was a term to denote the geographic region encompassing greater Los Angeles. This region, which extends from Los Angeles in the North to Orange County in the South and as far East as San Bernardino and Riverside counties was largely rural from the time of American settlers moved there until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the aforementioned passage described, however, the region exploded demographically as a result of the Second World War. The population grew rapidly and in order to accommodate, suburbs sprung up in places such as Irvine, La Crescenta, and Ventura County. While these Southland suburbs were never very far from the more urban and racially diverse core of Los Angeles, they were worlds away in terms of political affiliation, racial diversity, and income levels.

With these changes, California, and the Southland more specifically, assumed greater importance within the nation. Once considered a far-flung state built on the stuff of dreams, by the postwar period it was a trendsetter in terms of both political and social developments. The massive influx of people and growth in material wealth placed California in a unique place to set the pace nationally. Ethan Rarick of UC Berkeley writes, “In those years, in rapid and related succession, the state provided the blueprint for three great impulses of the day, leading the nation

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<sup>13</sup> Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, 1946), 371.

to postwar optimism, and then to sixties activism, and then to conservative backlash.”<sup>14</sup> This last trend became apparent throughout the postwar period as conservative activists reacted to both local and national events.

For these reasons, historical scholarship of The New Right invariably focuses on the distinctive brand of conservatism that emerged out of the endless tracts of suburbs in Southern California. Often described as ‘Sunbelt Conservatism’, this strain of political thought and action emerged as a result of a confluence of unique historical, social and economic factors. Increased defense spending and dependence of local economies on this federal largesse, unease and anomie of a new white middle class that struggled to make sense of their new suburban environment, and anxieties over race became causes for the development of a new brand of conservatism. Darren Dochuk, one of the leading historians of Sunbelt Conservatism described these conservative communities as “Decentralized, racially uniform, defense-centered, pro-business sanctuaries, these communities suited their religious and political sensibilities perfectly.”<sup>15</sup> Consequently, these islands of conservatism in the Southland ultimately formed an archipelago that would shape national conservative discourse.

Like most American conservatives, those in the Sunbelt were invariably defined by pro-business tendencies and a strong reaction against the perceived liberal New Deal order. This supposed order, which existed since the days of Franklin Roosevelt placed labor and state regulation above *laissez-faire* economic policies favored by the rising business elite in the west. Historian Elizabeth Tandy Shermer argues, “The threat of a labor-liberal ascendancy spurred conservatives to action. Although they benefited from federal dollars, many business leaders in

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<sup>14</sup> Ethan Rarick, *The Life and Times of Pat Brown: California Rising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 169.

the Southwest had no intention of supporting the expansion of the New Deal state and its economic prescriptions.”<sup>16</sup> While the New Deal legislation that was put in place ultimately assisted the country in a time of dire economic need, it seemed incompatible with postwar prosperity, especially to the ‘cowboy capitalists’ in the West who perceived of stronger labor unions and government regulation as strangulating.

In fact, many scholars emphasize the strong importance stressed on free market economics and a sharp identification with regionalism. Countless activists in the west looked askance at what they perceived as the moneyed interests of the Northeast. Like the populist movement 70 years earlier, Wall Street and the manufacturing interests in the Northeast were seen as contrary to the welfare of hard working business owners in the West. In many ways, the conservatism that developed in the west was a reaction against the elitist nature of the liberal Republicans as well. One work, written by historian Nicol C. Rae highlighted that the stark rightward shift of the Republican Party was largely a result of transplanted Midwestern migrants transplanting their small town work ethic and belief in individualism out west, “Sunbelt nouveaux riches were also suspicious of established eastern wealth, fearing that the federal government was directing an excessive amount of its resources toward the industries and cities of the northeast at the expense of their own region.”<sup>17</sup> Although many Southland conservatives made their living off of federal dollars in the form of defense contracts they still tended towards a wary distrust of the federal government.

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, “Counter-Organizing the Sunbelt: Right to Work Campaigns and Anti-Union Conservatism, 1943-1958,” *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 78 No. 1 (February 2009): 90 <http://jstor.org>

<sup>17</sup> Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans From 1952 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 49.

These activists, far from the ivory tower of the *National Review* or conservative think tanks such as the Hoover Institute or the American Enterprise Institute created a form of conservatism that blended distinctly libertarian anti-statist notions with their own version of local autonomy and organization. Especially in Southern California, where a plethora of conservative activists groups emerged, the conservatism that developed can best be defined as a reactionary populism that emphasized small government and the status quo. The movement, comprised of business leaders, politically active housewives, local government officials, and variety of others reacted to the liberal status quo with determination and willingness to engage in the gritty day to day of grassroots organizing.

Kurt Schuparra, another historian of the rise of conservatism in Southern California provided an in depth treatment of the movement in his 1998 work, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966*. Like many scholars in his field, Schuparra notes that during the ascent of the New Right in the postwar period, an inherent tension existed between the aforementioned conservative establishment and the rising power of Western grassroots groups. Schuparra notes, “With occasionally grating arrogance, the prevailing view among this cadre [Eastern Establishment Conservatives] was that too much democracy, such as the populist and highly participatory variety practiced and celebrated in the West (e.g., the initiative and referendum), would threaten the nation through the ascendancy of uneducated reason on the voting process.”<sup>18</sup> However, the groundswell of populist oriented conservatism in the west began to gain hold as significant demographic shifts occurred.

As we saw with the founding of *National Review* although Eastern establishment conservatives and their Western counterparts shared similar ideological bents, they differed in

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<sup>18</sup> Kurt Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement 1945-1966* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), xx.

their preferred methods of action: the Eastern establishment preferred to change the intellectual climate vis-à-vis a Habermasian alteration of the public sphere (think intellectually oriented periodicals like *NR* and *The Freeman*). The westerners, on the other hand saw a more direct form of democracy for the future of the movement and a better chance for conservative successes. While both played crucial roles in the future of American conservatism, they were fundamentally different on a tactical level.

Furthermore, Schuparra's analysis of the rise of Southern California conservatism by crucially noting the importance that race played in galvanizing the movement. Although not explicitly segregationists, activists in Orange and Los Angeles County were fundamentally protectionist of their middle class, suburban existence. Schuparra writes, "Minorities, especially blacks, had never been welcome in Los Angeles's suburbs or Orange County. In addition to the practices of white homeowners' associations, the Ku Klux Klan in the 1930s terrorized blacks throughout the region, and in 1924, briefly ran Anaheim, Orange County's largest city."<sup>19</sup> Though never as overt as the segregationist 'White Citizens Councils' of the Deep South, the grassroots organizations of the Southland consistently opposed to the Civil Rights Movement and state aid to racial minorities. This became especially apparent with the passage of proposition 14 in 1964, the repeal of a fair housing act.

Lisa McGirr of Harvard University, one of the most noted scholars of the New Right furthers our understanding of this unique type of conservatism in her book, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. This work documents the conservative movement in Orange County during the late 1950s and early 1960s up until the Goldwater campaign in 1964. The county, known for its libertarian infused strain of conservatism served as an ideal case

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 45.

study for the rise of “Sunbelt Conservatism.” Overt fears of extension of federal control combined with strong anti-communist beliefs created an environment ripe for conservative activism.

Moreover, a significant portion of the region’s economy relied on defense contracts in everything from aerospace to research facilities. McGirr writes, “This virulent anticommunism, combined with a call for military might, found an audience among conservative Southern Californians despite their hostility toward federal power in other areas.”<sup>20</sup> Greater Southern California, from the naval base of San Diego to the defense plants of Orange and Los Angeles Counties, formed a hub of Cold War defense culture dependent on constant militarization. Despite the inherent contradiction of a fear of federal government spending but a reliance on taxpayer dollars for defense industries the Southern California conservatives continued their ascent.

McGirr’s work, however, may be more important in terms of defining agency and historical actors than simply highlighting the ideological underpinnings of the “New Conservatism.” Her treatment of the movement in Orange County and continual focus on grassroots groups shows that far from a top down movement, the New Right can best be described as a locally focused but nationally oriented movement. Many of these organizations were structured in such a way that they could act locally but still have a more statewide or even national focus. These groups acted on a local stage, but were focused largely on national issues such as the Goldwater campaign in 1964 and the Reagan Gubernatorial campaign in 1966.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 174.

<sup>21</sup> Although Reagan’s run for Governor was just for state office, pundits throughout the country kept a close focus on the campaign. With the political importance of California and the rising

Both causes assumed great meaning and for these grassroots groups and became a way for Southland Conservatives to gain prominence in a larger context.

Thus, this work is an expansion of Schuparra and McGirr's thesis that the Southland Conservatives were the embryonic seed of a larger movement. My contention is that during the mid sixties three California groups with a strong Southland presence, the California Republican Assembly, the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, and the local chapters of the John Birch Society played a particular and specific role in helping drive the conservative movement. By emphasizing the role of these three groups I can provide one more focused lens of analysis to this crucial subject and place the movement in a larger context.

Furthermore, these organizations were the beginning of a new form of conservatism that can best be characterized by its broad acceptance of conservative principles and language. Although a number of scholars have argued that the groups mentioned in this work were but a few groups within a larger national movement the fact remains that the CRA, Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, and even the John Birch Society created a language of extremism that fundamentally altered the pallor of conservatism. Highly populist and reactionary in its demands, these groups called for a conservative mandate that would greatly shrink the size of federal power and the socio-political relationship between the state and those who the state presided over. No longer content for compromise or moderate, the Southlanders were the first to use anti-statist language as a cause for the burgeoning conservative movement.

The issues that these groups advocated on behalf (and against) were numerous, but most important were those that represented the New Right's focus on an anti-statist position. This focus, which was vehemently against federal power in almost all aspects of American life from

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prominence of Reagan, this statewide election became important for many and had national repercussions.

Civil Rights for African-Americans to federal aid to the poor. The new conservatives, were however, keen on the idea of federal expansion if it created the grounds for a militarized state (the Military-Industrial complex employed many Southlanders). Working for the Goldwater and Reagan campaigns and against such issues as student unrest, the civil rights movement, and legislative reapportionment highlighted the importance of the aforementioned issues and laid the foundation for a an anti-tax revolution in the seventies, a form of cultural conservatism that would define white middle class America in the seventies, and ultimately transform a political novice and former actor into the movements hero.

### **California Republican Assembly**

Of the grassroots conservative organizations that flourished in Southern California during the Conservative ascendancy, undoubtedly the most prominent was the California Republican Assembly. Despite the CRA's role in pushing the Republican establishment to the far right in the late fifties and sixties, its origins belied its later conservative tenor. The CRA formed in the mid thirties when various California Republican organizations coalesced under one ideological umbrella to counter the rising prominence of New Deal Democrats. By this period, the cross-filing system that endured from the Progressive Era kept the Governorship almost exclusively in Republican hands but failed to impede the growth of the Democratic Party.<sup>22</sup> In order to counter this Democratic majority the CRA formed with the specific purpose of organizing disparate Republican factions under the aegis of the California Republican Party.

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<sup>22</sup> The Cross-Filing system was implemented under California Governor Hiram Johnson in 1913 and allowed Gubernatorial candidates to run in both Republican and Democratic primaries. Although initially intended as a Progressive Era reform mean to mitigate the effects of partisanship, it ultimately benefitted the Republican Party whose party organization was more clearly established in the first 80 years of California's founding.

During the Great Depression the CRA adopted a moderate and at times, even progressive form of conservatism. Despite the presence of conservative stalwarts within the state party (and the country as a whole) the CRA charted a middle road politically advocating for activist government policies and responsible governance.<sup>23</sup> The assembly, from the beginning was meant to serve as a counterweight to the Democratic Party and New Deal legislation. A pamphlet published years after the organization's founding made the case that the CRA was created to reinstate public confidence in government and bolster traditional values, "They [the founders] saw the threat to American traditions of freedom, private initiative and local government, and sought to arouse the people to a re-adherence to the true principles of our government and way of life."<sup>24</sup> Like many conservative organizations that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the tenor of their rhetoric assumed defensive proportions. Organizing against New Deal Democrats was not merely about partisan activities but protecting a sense of 'American values' and identity.

Although ideological differences existed throughout the assembly during the 1930s the strength of the CRA was its ability to organize on a statewide basis. Originally the CRA was organized at the county level. Each county formed a political subdivision by which political activities would take place. Individual members of the CRA reported to county directors and conducted grassroots political activities within their respective counties.<sup>25</sup> This unique form of micro-management allowed the assembly to focus its efforts within tightly defined geographic boundaries. Additionally, members developed close associations with their local chapters, avoiding the anomie associated with larger more centralized organizations. By 1935 the CRA

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<sup>23</sup> Kurt Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement 1945-1966* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 5.

<sup>24</sup> "The Story of the California Republican Assembly," Box 1, folder 4. California Republican Assembly Records MS-R128. Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

already had 8,000 members in 47 out of 48 counties and a highly defined organizational structure.<sup>26</sup> The Assembly was in the truest sense of the word, a grassroots organization predicated on organizing the Republican Party in California.

During the war years the CRA continued their activism throughout the Golden State, furthering their political infrastructure and working to keep the Republican Party competitive at the state level. Continuing with their moderate course, the assembly endorsed California Attorney General Earl Warren for Governor in the election of 1942 at their convention in Santa Barbara.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the thirties, Warren established himself as a liberal Republican willing to compromise and implement what many moderates considered activist, yet moderate government. From the beginning of his governorship, Warren sought out pragmatic solutions to the problems that plagued wartime California.

Despite the endorsement of the practical and moderate Warren, the CRA began showing signs of a shift to the right and adherence to a more ideological variety of conservatism. Following the gubernatorial election of Warren, the assembly started to work towards abolishing the cross-filing system. The system which allowed for gubernatorial candidates to run on both party's primary ballots helped Republicans capture the votes of moderate Democrats but also had the effect of creating ideologically neutral Republican candidates. In order to counter potential contenders in the primary, candidates were required to move to the center, ultimately producing moderate candidates like Warren. The CRA reined this in by pushing for the end of cross-filing and greater party control over their candidates. As former Republican Governor and CRA affiliate Frank Merriam stated, "A Republican has no business running in a Democratic primary

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<sup>26</sup> "G.O.P. Body to Convene: Republican Assembly Calls Cambria Pines Meeting on July 13-14," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1935, A2.

<sup>27</sup> "Earl Warren Called Leading Choice for Governor Contest," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1942, A10.

and what business has a Democrat in a Republican Primary?”<sup>28</sup> In pushing to abolish cross-filing (which was eventually eliminated in 1959) the CRA pushed California political culture in a more partisan direction. This would have long lasting effects on California’s political climate, especially during the sharply polarized 1960s.

During this time, additional factors helped spur the growing importance of the CRA and other conservative groups in Southern California. The “watered down” Republicans that Merriam discussed had purportedly created a climate that was not conducive to business and many of the remnants of New Deal legislation such as helping trade unions flourish were seen as overextensions of state power. Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, a historian who has focused mostly on the rise of Sunbelt Conservatism in Phoenix, Arizona writes, “For many business owners and executives, the Golden State stood for everything that they despised about doing business in Modern America. It had a strong union movement, a relatively high level of taxation, and a state government that was dominated either by moderate Republicans or liberal Democrats.”<sup>29</sup> For many pro-business conservatives, especially those allied with the CRA and other groups, a conservative mobilization and subsequent movement seemed necessary in order to alter the economic and political climate of California.

What was telling, however, was that in the first quarter century of the CRA’s existence, this group was, by and large, lacking in any serious discussion of ideology. The extremism that later became a hallmark of the assembly was absent, and in its place more of a partisan bent.

The *raison d’état* of the assembly was to win elections and put Republicans into elected office.

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<sup>28</sup> “Republican Assembly Attacks Cross-Filing: Committee Ordered to Prepare Corrective Bills for Next Session of Legislature,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1944, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, “Sunbelt Boosterism: Industrial Recruitment, Economic Development, and Growth politics in the Developing Sunbelt,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region* edited by Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p.53.

Very few discussion of ideology, or any type of existential battle between conservatives and liberals occurred and in many ways, this was one of the earliest differences between the young CRA and its more ideologically rigid incarnation in the post 1964 period.

As the 1950s progressed, the CRA expanded its political operations throughout the state. The assembly continued with the county oriented organizing scheme, but implemented a more top down hierarchical structure to coordinate grassroots activities throughout the state. At the annual convention following the 1956 election, the assembly met in San Mateo outside of San Francisco to discuss expanding the group's activities. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* from this period stated how, "Local and county units were given their roles in the California Master Plan for reorganizing the Republican setup for the 1958 state and congressional campaigns."<sup>30</sup> Working within the larger superstructure of the assembly, the local chapters pushed for more issue based initiatives ranging from political candidates to fair housing laws.

By the mid sixties, the CRA had fully mobilized a bottom up organization set on pushing California politics, and by extension national politics to the right. The assembly, while at least ostensibly moderate, began to shift further right as extremists within the organization pushed for a more conservative. In March of 1964, prior to the Republican primary in which Goldwater would beat out New York governor Nelson Rockefeller for the nomination, a extremists in the CRA staged a coup, "At the chaotic March 1964 convention, conservatives used Clif White's playbook to complete their takeover of the last remaining moderate-controlled organization. The conservative leader of these groups included a large number of members of the extreme right wing John Birch Society."<sup>31</sup> From this point on, the organizations tenor changed drastically,

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<sup>30</sup> "GOP Assembly Maps Grassroots Program," *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1956,11.

<sup>31</sup> Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 86-87.

aligning much more with the virulent conservatism of the John Birch Society and other more extremist organizations.

One pamphlet from the mid sixties highlights the structure and organization of the party stating, “Every unit should devote fifteen minutes or so of each unit meeting to discussion of current event articles clipped from newspapers. Discuss three subjects for five minutes each (foreign affairs, state, and national).”<sup>32</sup> This organizational scheme was almost more akin to the education and indoctrination of a communist cell rather than a conservative grassroots organization in greater Los Angeles. By the Goldwater and Reagan campaigns, however, the CRA was poised to assume a position of enormous clout in the rapidly changing political milieu of California. Devoting its energies to everything from voter registration to educational initiatives. Especially in California where direct democracy via the proposition and referendum made organizing like this more viable.

### **Network of Patriotic Letter Writers**

Less well known than the CRA, but nonetheless influential were the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers. Unlike the CRA or the John Birch Society The Network of Patriotic Letter Writers was different in that it was comprised primarily of women from the Southland, specifically the eastside of Los Angeles. Although their numbers were never significant, they acted as a force multiplier, writing letters and working on behalf of conservative causes in the Southland. The typical member of the Network was a middle-aged white woman of at least modest means, many of who were homemakers.

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<sup>32</sup> “California Republican Assembly Public Relations Committee, August 1963,” Box 2, Folder 23, California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Located in the suburbs, these women formed a network of conservative activists, who, like their male counterparts sought a rightward shift in both California and American politics. Michelle Nickerson, an historian who has covered the Network of Patriotic Letters writers and other conservative women's groups in the Sunbelt argues, "In this milieu, housewives forged an activists culture that took advantage of the mobility, prosperity, and access to power provided them by the economic boom."<sup>33</sup> The women in this group responded to the unique prosperity of the postwar Southern California suburbs and the distinct expectation that women were expected to stay at home. In a space defined by rigid gender roles, the network gave these women both a socially acceptable and active sense of political participation that was at once distinct and supplemental to the male dominated organizations.

Like the CRA and JBS, The Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, headquartered in Pasadena, just east of downtown Los Angeles furthered a conservative agenda predicated on anti-communism, libertarian economic policy, and most importantly traditional values. In many of their campaigns, the Network synthesized a mixture of the aforementioned values, "Grassroots activism in the conservative movement thus provided an alternative means by which women could promote a conjoining system of economic, social, and religious values taking shape in their political consciousness while nurturing their own ambition and creativity."<sup>34</sup> Still a far cry from the socially conservative movement that emerged in the late seventies with such figures as Jerry Falwell or James Dobson, the network nonetheless pushed for what contemporaries would describe as strong "family values" and stressed the importance of the "American way of life."

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<sup>33</sup> Michelle Nickerson, "Politically Desperate Housewives: Women and Conservatism in Postwar Los Angeles," *California History* Volume 86 No. 3 (2009): 9.

<sup>34</sup> Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women in Postwar Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 56.

One episode from the early late fifties, while comical, highlights the goal of the Network in pushing a “traditional American agenda” while stopping the thrust of worldwide communism. On Nikita Khrushchev’s whirlwind tour through the United States, the Soviet premier spent a portion of his trip in the Southland. Despite a full itinerary, Premier Khrushchev planned to stop at the Hollywood Bowl in order to see a performance of the Russian ballet company. When news made its way out to Pasadena, the letter writers contacted the head of the Hollywood Bowl, “We know that there is no question of patriotism involved in the Bowl Director’s choice of the Russian entertainers; merely a lack of information as to the ultimate results of inviting our enemies within our gates, placing our resources at their disposal and refusing to give credence to their oft repeated warnings of World Conquest.”<sup>35</sup>

What was interesting about the Network’s letter was not just their comically patronizing way of addressing the Hollywood Bowl’s directorship, but the way they introduced themselves and stated their purpose. In the very beginning of their letter, the Network wrote, “We are a non-profit non-partisan, completely spontaneous group united to preserve our previous American heritage. By expressing ourselves to our elected officials at all levels of government and civic life, we hope to preserve our dangerously weakened Constitutional Republic”<sup>36</sup> During the cultural and social upheavals that wracked both California and the United States, the Network, along with their allies in the CRA and John Birch Society would continually emphasize a traditional form of “Americanism” predicated on a novel anti-statist ideology emphasizing limited government and anti-communism.

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<sup>35</sup> “Letter to Mr. Griffin and the Directors of the Hollywood Bowl,” Box 18, Folder 12. Knox Mellon Collection, UCLA Special Collections.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

Of course, throughout the early to mid sixties, the Network worked in coordination with other groups and helped promote a conservative agenda. Michelle Nickerson, in her work *Mothers of Conservatism: Women in Postwar Los Angeles* uses Marjorie Jensen, a politically active mother from Pasadena as a case study of the typical letter writers during this period. Jensen, who became active with the conservative movement from an early date even hosted Robert Welch, the head of the John Birch Society in the late fifties, “When Welch came to California one year after the JBS started, Jensen hosted a big meeting for him and area Birchers to mark the occasion.”<sup>37</sup> Although the JBS was male dominated and hierarchical, both groups found it mutually beneficial to meet with one another and work together in the Southland. In fact, many members of the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers were either dual members of the Network and JBS or at least had close associates in both.

### **The John Birch Society**

Of the organizations examined in this work that maintained a formidable presence in the Southland, the John Birch Society was by far the most extreme in terms of its advocacy of the holy trinity of New Right ideological tenets: libertarianism, anti-communism, and traditional American values. Despite its status as a fringe group the JBS boasted thousands of member throughout the country by the mid sixties. In fact, one study from 1966 pointed out that 5 of the top 16 officials from the CRA were Birchers and that the Assembly had even defended the JBS from national GOP attacks.<sup>38</sup> Overlap between the two organizations was not necessarily a common occurrence, but in the Southland CRA members and Birchers often ran in the same

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<sup>37</sup> Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women in Postwar Los Angeles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 141.

<sup>38</sup> Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster, *The Radical Right: Report on the John Birch Society and Its Allies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 144.

circles, occupying positions on school boards, local offices, and roles within countless civic organizations.

As the sixties progressed, the John Birch Society expanded its operations creating a network comprised of more than 4,000 local chapters by the year 1967.<sup>39</sup> Like the CRA, the chapters used tactics to gain tractions in their communities and were locally oriented. Many of these 4,000 chapters were in the Southland where they enjoyed particular success in recruiting small business owners, defense industry executives, and others who were concerned with the apparent leftward shift of the nation. One impressive statistic from the period alleged that the society, rather than a fringe organization had actually generated just short of \$12 million in the year of 1966, over twice as much as the society made in 1965.<sup>40</sup> These sizable profits were gained largely through book sales and contributions from members and supporters.

Although the JBS was far right on most political and social issues, they earned notoriety for their virulent anti-communism. Robert Welch, in the opening pages of *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* noted the looming danger of international communist conspiracies writing, “Our immediate and most urgent anxiety, of course, is the threat of the communist conspiracy. And well it should be. For both internationally, and within the United States, the communists are much further advanced and more deeply entrenched than is realized by even most of the serious students of the danger among the anti-communists.”<sup>41</sup> While the threat of a communist conspiracy was never a salient point, it did provide ammunition for recruitment and stimulate the

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<sup>39</sup> Harvey B. Schechter, *How to Listen to A John Birch Society Speaker* (New York: B’nai B’rith Publishing, 1967) 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Belmont, MA: Robert Welch Publisher, 1961), 5.

cause. Like most anti-communist organizations during this period, the image of a creeping a communist takeover served to bolster the organizations *raison d'état*.

The threat from both internal and foreign communist conspiracies were the *bête noires* of the JBS and much of the literature produced by this organization during the postwar period attests to this fact. What is telling of the larger conservative movement in the Southland is the unique way in which many members of the JBS, and other organizations framed conservatism. No longer content to simply apply a Burkean emphasis on tradition and rule of law, Birchers sought a more nuanced and historically conditioned idea of what it meant to be conservative, at times even eschewing the very term 'conservative'. In a piece called, *This is the John Birch Society; An Invitation to Membership*, G. Edward Griffin, a film producer and Bircher living in the Greater Los Angeles region implied that the form of libertarian tinged conservatism espoused by the JBS and other groups was a reaction of the overarching ideologies of the first half of the century. Both communism and fascism sought political organization centered on a national or 'collective' identity. Writing only 20 years after the end of the second world war Griffin states that, "The communists, of course, but also the Nazis, the Fascists, and any others, no matter what they may *call* themselves; if they advocate total control over the people, they are all, by definition, *totalitarians*. Communism and Nazism are *not* opposites."<sup>42</sup> The new form of conservatism, however, emphasized a newfound sense of individualism centered on the idea of rugged self-reliance. Disdain for government programs and social welfare, especially those associated with the expansion of federal power under the Johnson administration, became central tenets of the organization.

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<sup>42</sup> G. Edward Griffin, *This is the John Birch Society: An Invitation to Membership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: American Media Press, 1970), 13.

Griffin furthers his argument, stating unequivocally that the John Birch Society was a bulwark against collectivism, maintaining that the organization advocated on behalf of individualism and limited constitutional government. He argues, “But following the dictum that government, like fire, is both beneficial *and* dangerous, we believe in the concept of *limited* government. And we believe that the constitutional Republic created by our founding fathers is the best *form* of government that has yet been devised by man.”<sup>43</sup> Resembling other conservative groups the JBS fused anti-communism and anti-collectivism views with a strong emphasis on traditional and at times nostalgic views of the founding of the nation. These views became especially pronounced during the upheaval of the Great Society and the Vietnam War in the mid to late sixties.

In addition to anti-communism, free market economics and a pro-business attitude characterized the JBS. Comprised largely of various businessmen and manufacturers, the society from the start championed a strong libertarian character that emphasized deregulation and utter contempt for unions. Like their brethren in the CRA, the Birchers saw remnants of the New Deal and the vestiges of the welfare state as a hindrance to the spirit and actual application of an uninhibited form of capitalism. J. Allen Broyles, writing at the height of the JBS’ power in the mid sixties wrote that one of the central tenets of the Bircher’s ideology was that, “Capitalism has produced the greatest growth of civilization to date-in terms of both material and (individualistic) personality values.”<sup>44</sup> Accordingly the JBS viewed their struggle against “communism” and “liberalism” as more of a battle for the character of American identity, civilization, and values than simply obtaining electoral success.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> J. Allen Broyles, *The John Birch Society: Anatomy of a Protest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 142-143.

In fact, the John Birch Society actually had a fair amount of success getting members from the Southland elected to political office. An anti-Right wing political pamphlet from the early sixties, written by socialist Irwin Suall and titled *The American Ultras: The Extreme Right Wing and the Military Industrial Complex* decried the rise of the right. Suall, pointed out the ease with which Birchers from the Southland had in getting elected to political office, citing the cases of John Rousselot, Edgar W. Hiestand, and James B. Utt.<sup>45</sup> The first two were from the eastside of Los Angeles, the latter from Orange County. All three men were staunch anti-communists, and as Suall notes, “They [JBS] control a number of state legislators. They wield considerable power in both major parties, but especially in the California Republican Party. In the 1962 Republican gubernatorial primary they have their own candidates, wealthy oilman Joe Shell, a rightwing assemblyman from Los Angeles.”<sup>46</sup> While Suall’s piece can be look at with a certain degree of cynicism (a socialist publication reproving the John Birch Society would hardly stand out as unique) it highlights the fact that while this group was denounced as extreme and marginal, they did operate through traditional democratic channels. Furthermore, the JBS was actually able to obtain some electoral success in Southern California’s more conservative districts.

While the CRA was somewhat provincial in character (as the name indicates, it was a state oriented organization) the JBS was national in scope. Formed in December 1958 by candy manufacturer and Harvard Law School dropout Robert Welch, the organization was named after an American missionary killed by Chinese Communists at the end of the Second World War. Members of the organization considered Birch, the first casualty of the rapidly burgeoning Cold

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<sup>45</sup> Irwin Suall, *The American Ultras: The Extreme Right Wing and the Military Industrial Complex* (New York: New America, 1962), 58.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 33.

War. Like other conservative grassroots organizations, the JBS was superbly organized and geared towards mass mobilization. Unlike various grassroots organizations, however, membership was not simply a matter of signing up and forgetting, but rather oriented around active participation. Members were encouraged to formulate MMM (Members Monthly Messages) in which they wrote down thoughts or suggestions for the organization and mailed them into the main office.<sup>47</sup> These were processed by the main office and in many cases used the suggestions to make the organization more effective.

In addition to the MMMs, Birchers required active political participation and commitment to an organization that at times, (most times) was highly controversial. The commitment required of Birchers differentiated them from normal organizing in that, “Unlike membership in a political party, which could involve little personal commitment, joining the JBS involved risks that jeopardized some individuals standing in their communities and among friends.”<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the effect of being in a highly divisive group created a sense of *esprit de corps* among the members of this group and a feeling that they were working against a corrupt political establishment.

Of course, the JBS was comprised largely of middle to upper-middle class protestant white males. Commercially oriented and concerned about the direction of the country, these men formed a cadre of activists willing to push the envelope and further the conservative movement through education and mobilizing. As one study noted, “The right wing of the 1960s, whose leadership has fallen to the John Birch society, continues to move up the socioeconomic ladder. With its strong commitment to ultra-conservative ideas, the Birch Society makes little appeal to

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 80.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 84

the economically deprived.”<sup>49</sup> Espousal of *laissez-faire* economic policies and anti-communist rhetoric had particularly strong appeal to those most anxious over losing their middle class existence.

Highly organized and national in scope, the John Birch Society enjoyed a particularly prominent standing in Southern California. For many of the same reasons that strengthened the CRA and gave rise to the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, the JBS flourished in spite of charges that they were extremists. The weariness that many national members experienced as a result of association with a fringe group was not a problem in the Southland, with the JBS at times even flaunting established political authority. As late as 1962, the California States Senate Committee on Un-American activities decided to investigate the group. Rather than avoid or equivocate, the JBS “ran a full-page ad in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* in April 1962 which welcomed the California Senate Committee on Un-American Activities to Los Angeles for its investigation of the society.”<sup>50</sup> In fact, by the mid-1960s Southern Californians would make up almost a third of the organizations membership.<sup>51</sup>

## **Part 2 The Beginnings of Change in the Southland**

By 1964 the social milieu of the United States underwent dramatic shifts. The previous November an assassin’s bullet struck down President Kennedy as he rode in a motorcade through Dealey Plaza in Dallas. Kennedy’s murder contributed to end of the idyllic period known to many as Camelot but the break from the halcyon days of the fifties and early sixties came from more than just the death of one man. During the early sixties the United States saw the

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) 70-71.

<sup>50</sup> Kurt Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement 1945-1966* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 49.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 49

beginnings of campus upheaval and protest, coupled with the civil rights movement created the beginning of an activist culture that shook the foundation of middle class America. Civil disobedience and sit-ins exposed the sins that a complacent nation allowed and a generation of young people took aim at many of the problems afflicting American society.

This domestic turmoil came in the wake of the Bay of Pigs and the brinkmanship of the Cuban Missile Crisis that highlighted both the threat of a communist superpower and American vulnerability in the international arena. Additionally, Americans were just starting to hear of the ongoing calamities in Indochina where a small but determined guerilla force had pestered the South Vietnamese Army and their American advisers for almost a decade. The fear of subversion, both domestic and foreign loomed large in the minds of countless Americans and helped contribute to a siege mentality for many. Thus the legacy of the 1960s is more than just an upsurge of activism but also a reaction from conservatives that still felt the sting of the New Deal and feared the prospects of a 'Great Society.'

While periodization implies an inherent subjectivity of the historian, it is important to note that the three-year period from 1964-1967 marked a crucial era in the rise of Southland conservatism. During this timespan, a number of factors helped transform the Southland conservatives into a formidable force. These issues ranged from a presidential campaign that placed a "New Deal Liberal" against a pro-business libertarian-esque candidate from Arizona, the civil rights acts (and subsequent state legislation), turmoil in some of the California's largest and most prestigious universities, and a gubernatorial campaign that gave many conservative Californians a chance to take back their states executives after eight years of what they perceived as profligate government spending under Edmund 'Pat' Brown.

In 1964, however, the most important political opportunity for the burgeoning grassroots organizations in the Southland was undoubtedly the presidential election in November. Four years earlier, the election between Kennedy and Nixon pitted two seemingly moderate candidates against one another in a race to govern a relatively stable nation. As previously stated, however, by 1964 the American people had begun to see the cracks in the façade of American consensus. Many Americans, especially those in the affluent suburbs outside of Los Angeles saw the beginnings of a movement that would shape the American political spectrum for decades.

In 1964, the differences between the candidates were starker than any race in recent memory. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater sought the presidency from incumbent Lyndon Johnson. Although both men earned their stripes in the Senate and came from Western states, the similarities stopped there. Johnson, a New Deal Democrat and champion of the Great Society saw government, and specifically federal power, as a remedy to the structural problems inherent in a modern industrial society. A young man during the great depression, he saw first hand the effects of both Jim Crow racism and economic instability while growing up in Texas.

Consequently, Johnson saw the election as a way to continue the affluence of the Eisenhower and Kennedy years while extending the embryonic initiatives of the Great Society. Additionally, at stake in the election was the future of American involvement in Southeast Asia and continuing the war closer to home: the one against poverty. The platform at the Democratic National convention in August argued for a war on poverty and furthering of the Civil Rights legislation, strengthening the role of the federal government in providing for the rights of

minorities and the poor.<sup>52</sup> The Democrats also included a plank of their platform condemning political extremism “We condemn extremism whether from the right or left, including the extreme tactics of such organizations as the Communist Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and the John Birch Society...”<sup>53</sup> Conspicuously, the Goldwater campaign and Republican Party made no special concession against extremist political groups.

Goldwater, for his part, was a virtual embodiment of everything that the blossoming grassroots conservative movement in California stood for. Born in Phoenix in 1909 to a wealthy family of merchants, Goldwater grew up in relative comfort in the sparsely populated frontier town in the desert.<sup>54</sup> Goldwater’s political career began a few years after his return from the Second World War when he was elected to the United States Senate. From the beginning of his tenure in the upper house of Congress, Goldwater espoused a hardline against communism and the overreach of federal power. During his first senate campaign his slogan was against the three C’s “Communism, cronyism, and chiseling.”<sup>55</sup> The last 2 Cs referenced Goldwater and many other Western conservatives severe mistrust of government and the belief that government should be strictly limited such essential duties as national defense.

Goldwater’s appeal was that he was unlike many of the conservatives that preceded him. His rugged charm coupled with his ideologically hardline positions on issues ranging from foreign policy to fiscal regulations to the Warren Court made him an attractive candidate for the burgeoning grassroots activists in the Southland, and really the nation as a whole. Robert A.

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<sup>52</sup> “How the Party Platforms Stack up: Violence and Extremism,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 26, 1964, 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that at the time of Goldwater’s birth, Arizona was not yet a state, but rather fell under the category of U.S. territory. It would not be until 1914 that Arizona achieved statehood.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 95.

Goldberg, a scholar of Western American history at the University of Utah sums up Goldwater's appeal to the Southland conservatives, "Goldwater was a westerner—a man of action, a rugged individualist, direct, virile, and tough. The image was in part real, part promoted. On the stump or before television cameras, Goldwater evoked the western hero standing alone against all odds, imbued with frontier virtues, refusing to compromise his beliefs or his country."<sup>56</sup>

Despite an abortive attempt at the Presidency in 1960, Goldwater became well known for his work *The Conscience of a Conservative* published in the same year.<sup>57</sup> Prior to the publication of this work Goldwater was known as conservative to be sure, but a conservative from Arizona rather than a significant national figure. This work, which "translated the ideas of the conservative intellectuals into something accessible for a popular audience," made the new more populist libertarian oriented conservatism palatable for mass consumption.<sup>58</sup> Of course, by this time the conservative grassroots started to engage in activism that helped begin the process of making conservatism a clearly articulated doctrine.

In the minds of many Southland conservatives, however, the election of 1964 represented something of a reawakening. For years, conservatives were forced to acquiesce to the liberal and moderate factions of their party. Republican candidates were rarely conservative and in the cases of such men as Nelson Rockefeller and William Scranton were often described as "Liberal Republicans." Thus Daniel Bell's idea that the far right developed as a result of a sense of exile

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Alan Goldberg, "The Western Hero in Politics: Barry Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and the Rise of the American Conservative Movement," in *The Political Culture of the New West* edited by Jeff Roche (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 26.

<sup>57</sup> L. Brent Bozell, the brother in law of William F. Buckley, ghostwrote *The Conscience of a Conservative*. Although disagreements abounded between the grassroots conservatives and the intellectuals at *National Review* both sides saw the Goldwater presidency as a revitalization of their political efforts.

<sup>58</sup> Albert S. Regnery, *Upstream: The Ascendance of American Conservatism* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2008), 86.

and displacement holds considerable merit. Republicans, and *conservatives* more specifically, saw the Goldwater campaign as an opportunity to strike and place the presidency in the hands of a true conservative who believed in the principles of limited government, traditional values, and who would stand as a bulwark against communism, both domestic and international.

In March of 1964, Goldwater's emerging campaign received a breath of life when the California Republican Assembly chose to endorse him at their annual conference in Fresno, California.<sup>59</sup> By this time the assembly consisted of just over 14,000 members and while the endorsement meant little in terms of direct financial aid, the prestige of the CRA's endorsement helped Goldwater tremendously as he sought the primary in the most populous state in the country.<sup>60</sup> In fact, publications as far away as Salt Lake City, Utah noted that the endorsement for Goldwater indicated that his overwhelming support in California highlighted the wide "scope of his grassroots support."<sup>61</sup> Throughout the country, pundits and laypeople began to take note of the ominous development in California and the possible repercussions this would have for the future of conservatism.

The backing of the CRA for the Goldwater campaign came in the wake of a change in the composition of the CRA that was a harbinger of the change within the larger conservative movement itself. Again, while the CRA started as a moderately center right organization meant to counter the rising prominence of New Deal Democrats in the 1930s, by the early 1960s it had started to shift its focus towards a more militantly rightist agenda. In doing so, the assembly called for massive cuts in the role of the federal government and an increasing call to act on

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<sup>59</sup> Coincidentally enough, 1964 also marks the year that California surpassed New York as the most populous state in the country. The postwar increase in population and prosperity contributed to presidential candidates focusing on the state for both financial and electoral backing.

<sup>60</sup> "California GOP Endorses Barry," *The Deseret News*, March 16, 1964.

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

behalf of an anti-communist agenda. These changes, while not immediately distressing, slowly eroded at the assembly's moderate base and changed the tenor of discourse held by the CRA.

The split and usurpation of power by the right wing elements of the CRA took place at the organizations aforementioned annual convention in March 1964 in Fresno, California. Historically, the assembly met at an annual convention, normally held at an upscale hotel anywhere from San Diego to San Francisco. Typically the proceedings were a banal affair that combined bureaucratic procedures with socializing between delegates from the states 58 counties. In 1964, however, far right wing elements within the CRA staged a veritable *coup d'état* at the convention.

The leader of the conservative takeover of the CRA was Newport Beach optometrist Dr. Nolan Frizzle.<sup>62</sup> On the Monday immediately after the Fresno convention, Dr. Frizzle, an avowed conservative, committed 600 assembly volunteers for the Goldwater campaign.<sup>63</sup> Although Frizzle was only 42 years old when he installed himself at the helm of the CRA he had already made a name for himself in Southland conservative circles and was credited with bringing many of Orange County's right wing conservatives into the CRA fold. Frizzle represented a new breed of conservative that emphasized extremely limited government and anti-communism. A stalwart for business and fiscal conservatism, Frizzle advocated on behalf of the "Liberty Amendment" which called for the abolishment of the federal income tax and a

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<sup>62</sup> Dr. Nolan Frizzle would later serve as a state assemblyman from Huntington Beach in Orange County from 1980 until 1992. During his time in California's lower house Frizzle became known as an advocate on behalf of a number of conservative causes including controversial "pay as you go" toll roads in Orange and Riverside counties. His election to the state legislature in 1980 came as part of the Reagan Revolution and highlights what commentator George Will said about the Goldwater campaign and its auxiliaries, that Goldwater won the 1964 election, it just took 16 years to count the votes. Frizzle passed away on January 31, 2013 from congestive heart failure.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Bergholz, "Orange County Dr. Heads GOP Assembly," *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1964, 5. <http://proquest.com>

mechanism that would prohibit government from competing with private businesses.<sup>64</sup> To reiterate, however, many of the businesses in the Southland existed solely *because* of the federal government in the form of infrastructure investment and defense contracts.

Naturally, during the shakeup of the CRA, the Rockefeller campaign attempted to downplay the rightward shift of the Republican Assembly, or at the very least, a nonissue. Rockefeller himself said that the CRA has been taken over by “extremists” while members from the Goldwater camp stated that the rightward swing of the group actually indicated Goldwater’s broad support in California.<sup>65</sup> Regardless of the varying opinions that many observers had the takeover by Birchers and other conservatives helped shift the organization in a solidly conservative direction. This shift would become especially apparent on the Goldwater and Reagan campaigns when interviews with such figures as John Roussetot and other Birchers showed that both organizations held similar goals and often worked in conjunction with one another.

When accusations came out that the CRA had been taken over by the John Birch Society, Frizzele came out in defense of the society and the CRA’s new composition. When one charge was leveled at the JBS that they were a fringe organization that bordered on extremism, Frizzele replied, “I don’t consider the John Birch Society extremists. Except maybe extremely American.”<sup>66</sup> Frizzele’s defense of the JBS is crucial because it illustrated the process through which allegedly fringe groups melded with the more mainstream organizations. The 1964 Fresno conference, while highlighted the beginning of the symbiotic relationship between CRA

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

<sup>65</sup> Harlan Trott, “CRA Tempest: Kuchel Race Recalled,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 19, 1964, 15 <http://proquest.com>

<sup>66</sup> Nolan Frizzele quoted in Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of The American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 166.

and JBS volunteers that would completely alter the composition and direction of the movement in the Southland.

Taking time from his campaign, Senator Goldwater even made it a brief comment at the CRA's convention praising the organization and noting their effectiveness on the campaign trail. Goldwater, who relied on grassroots organizations to bolster his support stated, "Your next annual convention, I am confident, will be a celebration of that victory. You, and America, will have men in the White House, in the Congress, in the Senate who will understand what you've been talking about and who will listen to what you will be talking about."<sup>67</sup> Though 1964 proved to be a poor year for the CRA's candidates to actually obtain national office, Goldwater's augury proved accurate, for in the next two decades the CRA's and other grassroots groups efforts would be rewarded in numerous electoral races.

The conservative takeover of the CRA however had repercussions throughout the state as well. *The Los Angeles Times* covered a noteworthy story a few days after the convention detailing a split at a local chapter in San Diego. The Kearny Mesa chapter of the California Republican Assembly, just north of the city of San Diego, split off from its parent organization due largely to the rapid rightward shift of the assembly. The advocacy of Goldwater over Rockefeller, extremist positions on fiscal and foreign policy, and opposition to Civil Rights legislation made many centrist Republicans uneasy.

Jean Thomas, the President of the 140 person Kearny Mesa group stated in an interview with the *Times* that, "Extremists and John Birch Society members took over the state volunteer organization. I don't like black Muslims and I'm not about to keep company with white Muslims. These people pay \$24 a year to prove they are Birchers, but they don't want to pay

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<sup>67</sup> "Speech by Barry Goldwater, March 14, 1964," Box 29, Folder 3 Knox Mellon Collection, UCLA Special Collections.

income taxes to prove they're Americans."<sup>68</sup> Charges that the Birchers and other right wing activists had infiltrated the organizations were rampant and forced many moderate Republicans to flee the CRA in search of more centrist organizations.

A notable example of this was the case of Joseph Martin Jr. who served as California's chairman for the national Republican committee. Around the time of the CRA's rightward shift, Martin left the national committee in order to work for the Rockefeller campaign in the 1964 primary. Before his departure, however, Martin argued that the John Birch Society and the new elements of the CRA were such a threat to conservatism that they could hurt the parties' "effectiveness for some years to come, if not forever."<sup>69</sup> His commentary is interesting for a number of reasons. First, Martin's analysis seems to miss the point that many Southland conservative groups were not fringe groups but in fact represented the demands of a rising suburban class of people that demanded new and at times radical changes to the American political milieu. Extreme economic policies, hawkish foreign policy, and an avowed commitment to traditional American values became popular not only in the greater Los Angeles region but nationwide.

Secondly, in criticizing the rightward shift of the CRA Martin fails to see the rising importance of the Southland's new breed of conservatism and its national importance. In many ways this is unsurprising; Martin was a Californian but operated on a national scope and through the Republican committee ran in circles largely dominated by Republicans from the Eastern seaboard. The centrist policies of such men as Rockefeller and Henry Cabot Lodge were accepted as the orthodox versions of Republicanism. Though these blue blooded easterners had

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<sup>68</sup> "Republican Club to Quit State Group," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 21, 1964, C20 <http://proquest.com>

<sup>69</sup> Harlan Trott, "CRA Tempest: Kuchel Race Recalled," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 19, 1964, 15 <http://proquest.com>

formed the backbone of the party of decades their prominence had begun to wane by the 1960s. Thus Martin's gaze was too high and focused too much on the leadership of the party and the old breed that had made up the GOP for years. In doing so he missed the rumblings of the grassroots movement in the west and the ultimate future of the Republican Party on a national scale.

With the rightward shift of the CRA, the Birchers, and letter writers from the Network, the Southland quickly blossomed into Goldwater country. Los Angeles and Orange County helped contribute to Goldwater's campaign in both the primary and the general election and gave Goldwater a massive support boost. These groups started working on behalf of the campaign with intense fervor in capacities ranging from pamphlet distribution to actual fundraising for the Goldwater-Miller Ticket. At the convention in Fresno, Goldwater had even told the CRA that "this will be your finest year-that your thousands of members will be in the lead of the hundred of thousands who will carry the Republican Party to victory in 1964."<sup>70</sup>

Likewise the shift of the CRA into an ultra-right organization showed both the influence of the John Birch Society, and a willingness on the part of the CRA to begin working with overtly conservative candidates. By the spring of 1964, inherent tensions within the American political spectrum had forced a split in the Republican Party. Concerns over communism, federal power, and the Civil Rights Movement gave cause for the conservatives to begin backing conservative candidates such as Barry Goldwater.

Additionally, Goldwater's direct address to one of the Southland's most important organizations provides an insight into the relationship that existed between these groups. It was this close respect and the intimate relationship that the Goldwater camp had with the CRA, that

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<sup>70</sup> Speech by Barry Goldwater, March 16, 1964, Hacienda Hotel, Fresno, California. Box 29, Folder 3. Knox Mellon Collection, UCLA Special Collections.

they granted a unique interview with the assembly before Goldwater became the official nominee. The interview consisted of 25 questions and focused on both substance and style with questions ranging from domestic fiscal policy to what it “took” to be a president and qualities of leadership. The conversation between the assembly and Goldwater highlights what issues were important to both parties and the increasing role that a specific group like the CRA had in helping dictate which issues would be emphasized.

The questions in the interview highlighted much of the unease that the CRA, John Birch Society, and the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers had with the emerging Great Society and the liberal consensus that dominated American political and social life during this time. As scholars often note, the unique aspect of the New right was that it was conditioned not by immutable principles but by historical contingency in the late fifties and sixties. When the CRA asked a pointed question about the role of an activist judiciary regarding civil rights, Goldwater responded by pointedly saying that “I believe and always have believed that segregation in public schools and other public establishments is both immoral and inhuman, but I am dedicated to the constitutional principle which vests legislative power in the House of Representatives and the Senate and then limits decisions and rulings of the judiciary to congressional intent.”<sup>71</sup> Many of the decisions made by the Warren Court, from school desegregation to legislative reapportionment struck a chord with the burgeoning conservative movement and acted as a focal point around the movement was organized.

Goldwater, in answering a question about the recent Civil Rights bill that passed had this to say, “It is perhaps an unfortunate fact of life that most of the rights and privileges of the sort

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<sup>71</sup> “Answers to Questions Submitted by the California Republican Assembly Submitted by Senator Barry Goldwater,” Box 29, Folder 2. Knox Mellon Collection, UCLA Special Collections.

contemplated in some sections of the bill cannot be given to one group without denying rights and privileges to others.”<sup>72</sup> The Goldwater and conservative groups never predicated their opposition to the Civil Rights movement on racial principles the way Southern opposition did. Undoubtedly some latent racism factored into the conservatives views on Civil Rights legislation, but underlying their opposition was the anti-statist rhetoric that was so prevalent in the Southland’s brand of conservatism. The Southlanders saw the Civil Rights Movement as essentially federal power run amok. The line of logic for many conservative activists in Orange County and Los Angeles, was if an overly powerful federal government could tell you who you could sell your house to or who you were required to hire, where would their power end?

Throughout the interview the CRA’s increasingly anti-statist position became further evident. Not only did the CRA ask questions regarding the federal governments role in legislating Civil Rights, but also the way that an increasingly large federal government supposedly chipped away at the freedoms enjoyed by millions of Americans. Responding to a question about what he and the other conservatives running for office in 1964 Goldwater stated, “All those constitutional principle of individual freedom from central government control and dictation which deny our people the right of true representation and vest oppressive power in the executive branch of government.”<sup>73</sup> A bold statement, coming from a man who was running for the executive expounded on that familiar idea that the conservatives that sought political power in 1964 predicated their beliefs on a staunchly anti-federal platform.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

By late summer, however, the CRA's mobilization was in full swing, especially in Orange County.<sup>74</sup> The activities of the organization emphasize the organization's grassroots character and the objectives of the assembly in working on behalf of the Goldwater-Miller campaign. A pamphlet that was released during the summer prior to the election highlights their goals were to both fundraise and educate local groups in the Southland by "PRE-PRIMARY ENDORSEMENTS [sic], legislative "watchdogging", fundraising and selective financial support."<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the CRA planned to "**TO PROMOTE THE CRA AS A GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZATION** inviting all Republicans, young or old, who believe in God, a republican form of government, the protection of private property, and the free enterprise system to join its membership."<sup>76</sup>

Goldwater's popularity was become increasingly clear in assembly circles and many viewed his campaign as a political cause. In another leaflet distributed during the height of the campaign the assembly described Goldwater as the "Republican's Republican" and stated Goldwater is waging an All-American Campaign. This is not a conservative, liberal, or moderate campaign. This is a Republican crusade on principles which are the foundation of the

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<sup>74</sup> One newspaper article from time described Orange County as the "Cradle of California Conservatism." Despite Goldwater's loss, 1964 turned out to be an excellent year for a number of state Republicans from the County. James. B. Utt was reelected to the House of Representatives and most conspicuously, John Schmitz, a Bircher from the town of Tustin was elected to the state senate. November 5, 1964 *LA Times*

<sup>75</sup> "Objectives of California Republican Assemblies of Orange County," (1964) Box 2, Folder 24. California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

Republican Party.”<sup>77</sup> Since the CRA first declared its support for Goldwater 5 month earlier, volunteers had been working at a feverish pace to spread the word of the Goldwater and to assist in fundraising, something Goldwater desperately needed to compete with Lyndon Johnson and the refill his coffers after the Republican primary season.

Goldwater’s right wing program meshed perfectly with the newly formed rightist agenda espoused by the CRA. The assembly stated that Goldwater’s campaign was important because of the problems vexing American society. While millions of Americans, especially the poor and racial minorities, benefited from the Great Society and much of the federal legislation cobbled together under LBJ, the CRA disagreed. They, like their candidate, saw profligate government spending and waste and centralization of power in Washington, D.C. This anti-statist ideology was far from partisan and illustrates the alienation that many of the Southland conservatives felt with the established political order. The CRA believed that the Johnson administration intended to create a welfare state replete with a massive bureaucracy and unaccountability. As one CRA publication from the time stated, “[Federal Power] Runs rampant over individual freedoms in the name of sweet “something for nothing” charity” and that the government Takes 25% to 30% of our incomes in taxes (or more) thus stifling initiative and private enterprise.”<sup>78</sup>

Moderate Republicans, however, intended to do little to stave this off and the Goldwater campaign became more about reforming the party and rebranding the GOP than it was about the candidate. At stake was the future of the Republican Party, and somewhat ominously in the

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<sup>77</sup> “Barry Goldwater: The Republicans Republican.” (1964) Box 2, Folder 24. California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

<sup>78</sup> “Why the California Republican Assembly: Questions and Answers” (1964) Box 2, Folder 24. California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

minds of many CRA members, whether the U.S. would become a welfare state. In describing the moderate and liberal Republicans, the CRA wrote, “Even the Republican Party has seemed to offer no real challenge to the concepts of centralization and welfare statism. Modern Republicans seem only to be trying to get there cheaper and slower.”<sup>79</sup>

The John Birch Society, while nationally focused was also particularly influential in the Southland during the election of 1964. Though the JBS was only six years at this time, it had earned a reputation as a far right group that simultaneously educated its members and promoted political candidates into office. During the Goldwater campaign Birchers worked with the CRA and other groups to promote not only Goldwater but also a number of statewide offices. John Rousselot, a Bircher who would later become a special assistant to President Ronald Reagan emphasized the intragroup cooperation between the JBS and the CRA saying, “I see evidence in their [CRA] platforms and resolutions that are similar to John Birch Society positions.”<sup>80</sup>

Among these positions were support for the liberty amendment, withdrawal from the United Nations, and opposition to Civil Rights legislation. All of these positions represented a significant move away from a moderate form of conservatism to a version that sought anti-statist solutions for many political questions.

The election exposed the interesting relationship that was developing between the Goldwater camp and the Birchers. Of course by the summer, the Republican establishment had become uneasy with the rising tide of conservative activists in the party. At the Republican convention held in San Francisco’s Cow Palace, a floor fight ensued that captured the attention of the nation. Moderate and liberal republicans castigated the new conservative faction that

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Paul Beck, “How the Ultra-Conservatives Could Take over State GOP,” *The Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1964 A1 <http://proquest.com>

seemed poised to usurp power and control the party. Pennsylvania senator Hugh Scott, a Republican stalwart and moderate, began a speech stating, “the efforts of irresponsible extremist groups, such as the Communists, the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, and others to discredit our Party by their efforts to infiltrate position of responsibility in the Party or to attach themselves to its candidates.”<sup>81</sup> Despite the challenges, however, the Republican delegates at the convention selected Goldwater over both New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Pennsylvania Governor William Scranton in a landslide. Goldwater, had become the presumptive favorite and despite what many perceived as extremist positions he easily secured the nomination of his party.

Republican unease with the Birchers paled in comparison with that of the Democratic Party. Despite Goldwater’s at times tepid reception to the Birchers, Democrats often tried to smear his campaign as one run by Birchers. James Roosevelt, the late Franklin Roosevelt’s oldest son, who was also a Congressman from California’s 26<sup>th</sup> district, argued that the Goldwater campaign was trying to “reshape the Republican Party into the image of the John Birch Society.”<sup>82</sup> Coincidentally enough, Roosevelt’s district buttressed or even included many of the Los Angeles suburbs like Pasadena and Flintridge, which became hotbeds of conservatism activism.<sup>83</sup>

The relationship between the Goldwater camp and the Birchers was a curious phenomenon during the campaign, however. While Democrats and liberal Republicans often tried to paint the Goldwater campaign as extremist and run by the JBS, Goldwater’s feelings were mixed. On one side, the Society and its support garnered negative support at times,

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<sup>81</sup> Hugh Scott quoted in Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of The American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 382-383.

<sup>82</sup> “Roosevelt Hits Birch Inroads,” *The New York Times*, August 2, 1964, 49. <http://proquest.com>

<sup>83</sup> Roosevelt served in Congress from 1955-65 but chose not to run in the 1964 election.

reinforcing the image that Goldwater was an extremist who sought to undue the New Deal and pull the United States from the United Nations. The converse, however, was Goldwater, the consummate Western politician, loved to turn his nose up at the Northeastern and Midwestern Republicans who had treated him as an outsider in during his time in the Senate.<sup>84</sup> Accepting the support of the Birchers meant avowing a group that was primarily located in Southern California and the Midwest but not the Northeast (aside from its headquarters in Belmont, MA there was little grassroots presence in New England).

The national Democratic campaign also felt the threat of the Birchers bandwagoning on the Goldwater campaign. Late in the campaign on November 1, 1964, the Johnson campaign felt so threatened by the rise of the extremists in the Southland that Herbert Humphrey, Johnson's running mate made an impromptu stop in Southern California. On the tarmac at Los Angeles, Humphrey announced that California and other western states were the Achilles heel of the Johnson campaign, "Our big worry is the west, because the East is going for Johnson."<sup>85</sup> Humphrey also made the link between the John Birch Society and the Goldwater campaign, saying that Goldwater and his advisers refused to condemn the support from the society saying, "there has been no indication *from* the Goldwater leadership that such support is not welcome."<sup>86</sup> Humphrey's statements and his visit to Los Angeles point to both the fracturing of the Republican establishment and the fear that not only moderate Republicans had but also Democrats. The new Southern and western democratic factions had the potential to help create realignment in American politics and significantly weaken the Democratic Party.

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<sup>84</sup> Jonathan M. Schoenwald, "We are An Action Group: The John Birch Society and the Conservative Movement, in the 1960s," in *The Conservative Sixties* edited by David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), 33.

<sup>85</sup> "Western Vote Our Big Worry, says Humphrey," *The Chicago Tribune*, November 1, 1964 <http://proquest.com>

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Notwithstanding the work of the grassroots groups in the Southland, Election Day proved disastrous for the Goldwater campaign. Lyndon Johnson won 61% of the popular vote plus the Democrats acquired 37 seats in the house, more than doubling the number of seats held by Republicans.<sup>87</sup> In short the Johnson campaign routed the Goldwater and his supporters in what historian Steven Hayward would describe as “the most consequential election loss in American history.”<sup>88</sup> In fact, the Goldwater-Miller ticket only took Goldwater’s home state of Arizona, and five states from the Deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina). Undoubtedly Goldwater’s tepid response to Civil Rights legislation helped bolster his support in states of the former confederacy but underlying all of this was the importance of the new anti-statist tones of the New Right. These tenets were articulated by both the CRA, JBS, Network although it was the two former organizations that were particularly active in organizing on behalf of the campaign.

### **Between Goldwater and Reagan: Cultural Conservatism and the Reactionaries**

Although the election was a route for the Goldwater campaign, the CRA and other groups in the Southland used the loss as a way to gain momentum and help shape the future of the movement. A letter from Ronald Reagan, to a CRA member named Mrs. Sydney Clark, stated the optimism that he and conservatives were imbued with, “All of us are disappointed, none of us discouraged. I’m sure you will be happy to know that we are encouraging local groups to stay together at the grass roots level and that a national organization, sort of a Republican version of ADA [Americans of Democratic Action], is being formed to give some direction and policy to

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<sup>87</sup> Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980* (Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing, 2001), 3.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 3

local efforts.”<sup>89</sup> Although Reagan’s sanguine assessment of the movement’s chances could be dismissed as the hopeful wishes of a political neophyte, the movement was actually galvanized by the loss. In many respects losing was a wakeup call for the fledgling movement and illustrated the ways in which the movement should move forward.

The two years between the failure of Goldwater and the election of Ronald Reagan in 1966 represented a time when the conservative movement regrouped and attacked a number of diverse issues. Towards the end of 1964 California’s venerable flagship institution at the University of California, Berkeley appeared to be under siege by “campus radicals”, the civil rights movement was in full swing, and an activist Supreme Court had decided on a number of controversial cases involving both race and legislative apportionment.

This period was a phase when the grassroots movement, embodied by these three groups attacked a myriad of issues and reinforced this new brand of conservatism. The Goldwater campaign was a time when conservative were able to espouse a doctrine about limited government, hawkish foreign policy, and libertarian economic policies. In essence, the election of 1964 was a platform to defend an ideologically rigid set of principles. The two years following the election, however, were more a time of reaction against the social and cultural upheaval of the mid sixties, especially that which pertained to the grassroots home state of California.

One month after the election, the CRA did something strange: they nominated Goldwater again. This time, the CRA, along with the support of other grassroots organizations pushed a resolution calling for Senator Goldwater to be named as the titular head of the Republican

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<sup>89</sup> “Letter from Ronald Reagan to Mrs. Sydney Clark,” November 24, 1964. California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Party.<sup>90</sup> The proposed resolution aimed to create a more conservative cultural and political atmosphere in California, and ultimately create a model of governance for the nation as a whole. Among the proposed steps was the abolishment of a personal property tax, a call for then governor Pat Brown to curb the distribution of pornography, and a condemnation of a June 1964 Supreme Court Ruling mandating that legislative districts be at least roughly equal in representation.<sup>91</sup> The final tenet was a direct shot at the recent Supreme Court ruling of *Reynolds v Sims*.

In 1962, two years before the *Reynolds* decision the Supreme Court fired the opening salvo in what would be a protracted struggle for the conservatives. In deciding in the case of *Baker v Carr* the Warren court established the precedent that federal apportionment was under judicial review. The case, which was decided in a 6-2 vote, argued that mal-apportioned districts were a violation of the equal protection clause and thus subject to judicial review and evaluation.<sup>92</sup> The case became a cause for many in the conservative movement, but was far from the end for the movement in terms of the Warren Court.

The *Reynolds* case, which was decided in June 1964, mandated that state and federal legislative districts be apportioned based on population, not geography. The reason was simple: for many years agrarian and suburban congressional districts held a disproportionate amount of power in both state and national legislatures. These districts, which often contained significantly less voters than their urban counterparts gave whites a significant advantage in the elections and

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<sup>90</sup> Robert M. Blanchard, "Goldwater, Burch Win GOP Assembly Backing," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1964, 4. <http://proquest.com>

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Nathaniel Persily, "Forty Years in the Political Thicket: Judicial Review of the Redistricting Process since *Reynolds v. Sims*," in *Party Lines: Competition, Partisanship, and Congressional Redistricting* edited by Thomas E. Mann and Bruce E. Cain (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 75.

took power away from urban districts that were often highly Hispanic or African-American. Additionally the urban districts were the major basis of the Democratic parties support (labor unions, ethnic whites, and minorities) and allowing reapportionment would have the likely effect of creating an upsurge in Democratic strength.<sup>93</sup> Many suburbanites and rural politicians and their constituents felt threatened by the possibility of an emerging Democratic majority.

The reaction to the decision was widespread, particularly from the abovementioned areas that were predominantly rural and suburban. Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen even went so far as to propose an amendment that would reverse the courts decision and return power to the individual districts. Thus, even districts that were badly drawn would have power over their own borders.<sup>94</sup> Dirksen was notorious for making the claim that it would be unfair for the city of Chicago to control the state's congressional legislation simply because the greater metropolitan area of Chicago had a greater population than the rest of the state.

The *Reynolds v Sims* decision in 1964 represents an interesting aspect of the nascent conservative movement, which was that it was decidedly white suburban movement. Although Orange County and the suburban periphery of Los Angeles were highly populated, their populations were usually dwarfed by more the more diverse urban areas of San Francisco, Oakland, the Westside of Los Angeles, and other regions throughout the state. These urban areas were not only racially and ethnically more diverse, but were usually Democratic strongholds. The *Reynolds* case had the potential to greatly dilute the conservative areas of the Southland and weaken the amount of conservative congressman and assembly members elected to congress and other legislative bodies.

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<sup>93</sup> "Districting Foes Press New Drive: Hope to Amend by Constitution by Never Used Method," *The New York Times*, December 13, 1964, 54. <http://proquest.com>

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

The Network of Patriotic Letter Writers had always looked the Warren Court with a certain level of skepticism and at times, outright opprobrium. In March 1961, they had worked with the Los Angeles chapter of the John Birch Society in order to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren. In typical fashion, the Network attempted to circulate the Birchers petition to impeach and oust the Chief Justice and former CRA founder.<sup>95</sup> The organization also tried to start a movement to discourage viewers to attend showings of Dalton Trumbo's *Exodus* and *Spartacus*.<sup>96</sup> It remains unclear what connection the two films had with the spread of global communism or what political clout the petition possessed, but the joint action between the two organizations highlighted both a symbiotic relationship between the two groups and particular distrust of the nations "unelected branch."

The decision by the Supreme Court to ensure proportional representation, while ostensibly fair and equitable by most standards, struck at the core of the movement. As early as the fall of 1963, while the case was moving from federal circuit to the Supreme Court, the Network of Patriotic Letter writers of Pasadena sent out a letter to their members (with hopes that they would give letters to non-members as a recruitment tool) detailing the potential threat that the court's ruling possessed. In the letter, which also requested that members mail \$2.00 to the Network to support operations, the organization called for "1.) To take away from Federal Courts all Jurisdiction in the field of state legislative reapportionment. 2.) To establish a super Supreme Court composed of 50 Chief Justices of the various states, with power to overrule the Supreme Court of the United States in cases involving Federal-state relationships"<sup>97</sup> The

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<sup>95</sup> Gene Blake, "Birch Program in Southland Told: Thousands of Members Reported Organized in Small Chapters," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1961, 2. <http://proquest.com>

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

<sup>97</sup> "Important Letters to Write," *Network of Patriotic Letter Writers*, September 1963, Box 20, Folder 15. University of California, Los Angeles, Knox Mellon Collection.

Network, whose membership was usually quite concerned with keeping to an “originalist” interpretation.

The period between the elections also highlights one of the unique aspects of the three organizations mentioned in this work. The CRA and Birchers were consistently involved in pushing for political candidates. Scale of the election was unimportant-volunteers were seen on such diverse campaigns as school boards up to presidential races. The Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, however, focused its efforts more on their letter writing campaign and honed in on more specific issues and an overarching sense of “Americanism.” For the network, the loss of Goldwater was undoubtedly disheartening, but it was the other developments of the Great Society that stimulated this group. In 1965, after the passage of Medicare, the Network released a region wide pamphlet lamenting the new legislation. Using the metaphor of the frog and the boiling pot of water they stated, “Even today we cannot believe that Medicare is the same warm water that will one day boil us in socialized medicine. We see no connection between farm price supports and Nationalized agriculture. And if we draw a parallel between subsidized teachers’ pay and federal control of education, we are called “extremist.”<sup>98</sup>

More importantly the conservatives in the Southland saw the Civil Rights movements and much of the legislation that accompanied it as overexpansion of government power. One notable case came not from the Washington, but rather from Sacramento. In 1963, legislation was passed known as the Rumford Fair Housing Act. The law prevented discrimination in the purchase and sale of housing in California.<sup>99</sup> More importantly, it reflected the growing trend

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<sup>98</sup> “Frogs and Freedom,” *Network of Patriotic Letter Writers*, Circa 1965, Box 20, Folder 16. University of California, Los Angeles, Knox Mellon Collection.

<sup>99</sup> John Caughy and Norris Hundley, *California: History of A Remarkable State 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.* (Englewood, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982), 396.

among state legislatures throughout the country in liberalizing law regarding race and real estate that had contributed to de facto and in many cases *de jure* segregation throughout the country.

In 1964, despite the Goldwater loss, the CRA, Network, and JBS were instrumental in the passage of California proposition 14, which effectively nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Act. In Orange County, archconservative and Bircher John Schmitz used the proposition as the main plank in his campaign and won a seat in the state legislature's upper chamber.<sup>100</sup> The California Republican Assembly argued that private property was a "God-given right not to be retracted by the whim of government."<sup>101</sup> For the Southlanders private property (and a racially homogenous community) was an essential principle that could not be taken away by government intervention.

All of these points, however, while seemingly disparate point to the Southland conservatives discomfort with the rapidly evolving nature of government in America. Both at the federal and state level, institutions such as the courts and legislatures were attempting to restructure American society and remedy many problems that had plagued American society for generations. These ranged from inequitably drawn congressional districts, to entrenched racism in schools and housing. The activist stance taken by government helped stimulate a call to action amongst conservatives who saw the need to restrain federal power.

### **Part III 1966: The Turning Point and the Consequences of the Movement**

In early 1966, the conservatives in the Southland received a unique opportunity that dramatically changed the trajectory of the conservative movement in the United States. Ronald Reagan, the actor, spokesman for General Electric, and political dilettante announced on January 4, 1966 that he would make a run for the highest office in California. In a speech delivered in

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Beck, "Birch Society Member Seeks State Senate Seat: Rightist Candidate, Proposition 14 Split Both Parties in Orange County," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1964, 15.

<sup>101</sup> Jules Tygiel, *Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 87.

California, Reagan announced that his run for governor would be predicated on limited government and law and order. While vague these two issues became a mainstay of the conservative rhetoric employed throughout the state during this period. Interestingly enough, Reagan also used his platform to simultaneously take a swipe at the campus activism at Berkeley and overly expansive federal power saying, “Will we allow a great university to be brought to its knees by a noisy, dissident minority?” and “With Federal aid goes federal control and as the administration in Sacramento relinquishes states sovereignty to Washington at the same time it takes power from those who have been elected to run out towns and cities.”<sup>102</sup> The Reagan gubernatorial campaign was the opening salvo of the “Reagan Revolution” and helped point both California, and the country in a more conservative direction.

Ostensibly the campaign was between Ronald Reagan and the incumbent Edmund “Pat” Brown. On a more subtle level, however, the gubernatorial campaign was a chance for the conservative movement in Southern California to regain the Governor’s mansion and push a conservative agenda in the nations largest, and by this time most influential state. One pamphlet released by the CRA during the campaign showed that many in that organization felt morally bound by the Reagan campaign and felt an urgent need to take part in the Reagan campaign. The pamphlet lamented the current state of affairs in California and called for volunteers to work on behalf of the campaign saying “It is vital to the Republican party-It is vital to the election of our

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<sup>102</sup> Carl Greenberg, “Reagan Announces He’s Candidate for Governor: Requests Tax Moratorium for Retired Home Owners, Urges Full-Time State Legislature,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1966.

Republican candidates in November and to the return of responsible, honest government to Sacramento.”<sup>103</sup>

A cursory analysis of Reagan led many to dismiss him as a political rookie with little to his name but mediocre movies.<sup>104</sup> The reality was far from that, however. In fact, during the mid sixties, Reagan slowly began to ramp up his political ambitions and make a name for himself in conservative circles. In October 1964, Reagan emerged on the national political scene when he delivered his televised “A Time for Choosing” speech on behalf of the Goldwater campaign. Reagan, who was Goldwater’s party co-chairman in California emphasized the importance of the Goldwater campaign in blunting the forces of international communism, maintaining Constitutional principles in government, and a restraint of federal power. On this last point, Reagan said, “This is the issue of this election: whether we believe in our capacity for self-government or whether we abandon the American revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far distant capitol can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves”<sup>105</sup> The anti-statist and inherently populist rhetoric of Reagan would become one of his lasting trademarks.

The fear of Reagan was especially palpable amongst certain leading Democrats who, responding to the tumultuous political milieu of California and Reagan’s strong following saw him as both a probable state candidate and powerful national force. Immediately after Reagan announced his intention to run, California Democratic chairman Robert L. Coates speculated about Reagan’s strength as both a gubernatorial and later presidential candidate and noted that

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<sup>103</sup> “CRA Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 2 August 1966,” California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

<sup>104</sup> Michael Schaller, *Ronald Reagan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17.

<sup>105</sup> Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” nationally televised broadcast, Los Angeles, CA, October 27, 1964.

Reagan would be the hardest candidate for incumbent Pat Brown to beat because of Reagan's "organizational strength because of the actor's association with the tightly knit right wing of the GOP."<sup>106</sup> Indeed, it was Reagan's ability to stir the grassroots and reformulate conservatism on both the state and national levels caused consternation amongst liberals and admiration amongst conservatives.

Reagan had started to build his national stature well before he announced his run for the Governor's office. In June 1965, Reagan was the keynote speaker at a ceremony held for Ohio Congressman John M. Ashbrook in his district (a solidly conservative district in central Ohio). While the ostensible reason for the function was to honor the congressman, Reagan almost immediately broke into a speech rife with policy initiatives and lambasted the Federal government, "There are hundred of Government corporations operating thousands of businesses in direct competition with the private businessmen and in so doing these Government-owned corporations have lost to date \$81 billion."<sup>107</sup> Despite his lack of political experience, Reagan's charm and conservative outlook appealed to a new breed of conservatism.

This was especially true in the Southland where the CRA, Birchers, and the Network of Patriotic Letter writers finally had a cause following the stinging Goldwater defeat in 1964. In fact, the Goldwater defeat was a rallying cry, especially for the Southland chapters of the John Birch society, which increased its membership from around 12,000 just prior to the 1964 election to over 15,000 by the end of 1965.<sup>108</sup> Following Reagan's announcement that he intended to run for Governor in January, these groups began organizing and working on behalf of the Reagan

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<sup>106</sup> Daryl E. Lembke, "Reagan Biggest GOP Threat, Democrat Says," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1966, 28.

<sup>107</sup> Ronald Reagan, "A Moment of Truth: Our Rendezvous with Destiny," Delivered at a Testimonial Dinner for Representative John M. Ashbrook, Greenville, Ohio, June 18, 1965.

<sup>108</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 144.

campaign. As the campaign carried on, however, it became apparent that Reagan's strength was as much about grassroots activism in the Southland as it was about his charm or political prowess.

For conservatives, however, the Reagan gubernatorial run was more than an attempt to elect a former actor as governor, but to push for a fervently conservative agenda in California. While the highest office in California was a far cry from the executive branch of the federal government, Reagan's platform underlined his support for law and order, fiscal conservatism, and limited government. Moreover, Reagan, in announcing his candidacy argued for the reduction of property taxes, lambasting the federal assistance to the poor, and cited "handouts" as the causes of the previous August's riots in Watts.<sup>109</sup> Underlying all of this was support for the white suburban class that had helped Goldwater win the Republican nomination.

The first half of 1966 saw Reagan pitted against former San Francisco Mayor George Christopher in the Republican Primary. Christopher, a moderate well versed in the more liberal politics of Northern California and the Bay Area ultimately tried to paint his opponent as a stooge for the conservative organizations of the Southland, especially the John Birch Society. Shortly into the primary season, Christopher commented on Reagan's seeming ambivalence towards the JBS saying, "It's no secret that the John Birch society is supporting Mr. Reagan."<sup>110</sup>

The relationship between the Reagan camp and the Birchers was a little bit more complicated than Christopher's accusations suggest, however. Reagan, like Goldwater before him, knew that openly praising the JBS was for all intents and purposes, political suicide. It had the effect of alienating swing voters and conservative Democrats who might vote Republican due

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<sup>109</sup> Peter Bart, "Reagan Enters Gubernatorial Race in California," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1966, 21.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Bergholz, "Birch Society backing Reagan-Christopher," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1966, 2.

to fiscal matters or cultural reasons (many middle class voters found youth culture and student protest repugnant) but were not particularly concerned overreach of federal power. As the aforementioned piece discussed, Reagan sought inclusive support for his platform and was wont to dismiss the Birchers or any group that had the potential to support his campaign. By 1966, the organization had become very powerful, but also suffered from the stigma of being one of both the Southlands and the nation's most conservative organizations. Still, early in the campaign Reagan chose to be inclusive stating "There should be a place [in my campaign] for anyone who can support the aims of the Republican Party."<sup>111</sup>

The society's extreme positions on issues ranging from American foreign policy, the Civil Rights movement, to their storied history of anti-communist efforts made the society *persona non grata* in many political circles. Especially by the mid sixties, the John Birch Society's extremist positions made many uncomfortable. During the campaign, Reagan attempted to diffuse the Bircher situation by calling for the society to release membership lists in order to bring a greater degree of transparency to the organization and for the public to see if the JBS was working for the "best interests" of the two major political parties.<sup>112</sup>

Implicit in Reagan's proposal for more open membership was a deflection of bad press for the JBS, but not an outright condemnation of the society. At the same time that Reagan called for more transparency of the society he was promoting the candidacy of a Southland JBS member named H.L. Bill Richardson of Arcadia (a conservative stronghold 13 miles east of Los Angeles).<sup>113</sup> Reagan relied heavily on groups such as the JBS and was weary to dismiss their

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<sup>111</sup> Peter Bart, "Reagan Enters Gubernatorial Race in California," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1966, 21.

<sup>112</sup> Richard Bergholz, "Disclosure of Birch Membership Backed by Reagan," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1966, 3.

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

support, both fundraising and organizing, when facing formidable opponents in both the primary and general election.

The John Birch society in 1966 had grown to such proportions, that one observer likened it, somewhat ironically, to the American communist Party at its height of 80,000 members in the mid 1940s.<sup>114</sup> Of course while the society had large numbers, it also had something of an image problem. Since the 1964 election, many Americans came to see the John Birch Society as not simply a political action group, but rather as a fringe organization. The Republican national leadership saw the writing on the wall with the JBS takeover of the CRA in 1964 and started to condemn the JBS. In many national Republican circles Birchers were treated with disdain and in some cases outright hostility.

Well into the campaign Reagan's support from the Birch campaign became apparent and it became vital for Reagan to address the claims. Although Reagan tried to downplay his association with the right wing organization, an article released in the *Long Beach Independent* in August of 1966 highlighted the support that Reagan received from the JBS. The article stated, "William Coberly, on Reagan's finance committee, is a Birch Society member, and committee member Fritz Burns [Los Angeles based real estates developer] is a Birch supporter."<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, the article added that many of the financiers of the Reagan campaign, were Birch supporters or in some cases actual members.<sup>116</sup> Although many Birchers would refrain from openly campaigning on behalf of the Reagan camp, their capital and reasonably substantial financial resources would prove invaluable to the Reagan campaign.

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<sup>114</sup> Harvey B. Schechter, *How to Listen to A John Birch Society Speaker* (New York: B'nai B'rith Publishing, 1967) 4.

<sup>115</sup> Bob Houser, "Reagan Men Hit Demo on Birch Link: Candidate Silent on Charges," *The Long Beach Independent*, August 12, 1966.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, John Rousselot, a Southlander, national public relations coordinator for the John Birch Society and a vocal supporter of the Reagan campaign made the prediction in June that Reagan would go easily to Reagan, “I’ve said all along that California was ready for such a conservative sweep and that all it needed was a true voice a leader.”<sup>117</sup> Rousselot, not only endorsed Reagan, but mentioned the stunning fact between 30 and 50 Birchers were riding the Reagan wave into office and had been elected to the Republican County Central Committee for Los Angeles County.<sup>118</sup> The reality was that by this time many far right candidates had begun to ride off of the Reagan coattails and made significant inroads into the California political establishment.

The effects of the conservative swell in California, and the Southland in particular were beginning to be felt throughout the country. Russell Kirk, one of the leading conservative intellectuals and founders of *National Review* even saw that California and the upsurge in support for Reagan meant a more conservative shift for the country as a whole, “In the nation, as in California, the pressure is for governmental retrenchment.”<sup>119</sup> Considering *NR*’s initial reluctance to embrace any of the grassroots movements, praise for Reagan and his heavily grassroots oriented campaign was major praise. What it meant, however, was that the grassroots in the Southland, far from marginal, had begun to exert a considerable influence on national political discourse.

Due to their similar trajectories and complimentary roles, the JBS and CRA had begun to organize in much of the same manner. At the CRA convention in April 1966, Cyril Stevens Jr. the convention coordinator defrayed fears that the JBS was extreme and voiced his support for

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<sup>117</sup>“Conservative Sweep on in State, Rousselot Says,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1966, B8.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Russell Kirk, “New Direction in the U.S.: Right?,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 1966, 193.

that organization, calling it an “educational organization comprised of both Democrats and Republicans” and attributed its reputation to the misdoings of a select group of radicals within the society.<sup>120</sup> While the likelihood that there was *any* Democratic presence in the JBS is low, Stevens’ laudatory tone highlights the symbiotic relationship between the two groups. The benefits of both groups working together were obvious. For the JBS, the obtained a sense of legitimacy from working within the states largest volunteer organization; the CRA on the other hand, received an influx of fervently conservative die-hards who bolstered the assembly’s ranks. Especially, when the JBS began to really lose respectability, the CRA was able to absorb many of its members.

In 1966, the California Republican Assembly, while financially important, served more as foot soldiers for the Reagan campaign. Their organizational capabilities honed in the primary and general election for the Goldwater campaign, made them a well-organized force. Reagan’s campaign, from the start, took on the form of almost a religious calling. Reagan was well polished, typified the small government conservative that was becoming so prominent by the mid sixties, and of course, he was well known from his years in Hollywood. Those in the assembly, in some ways more than the JBS, saw Reagan as the perfect candidate and planned to work tirelessly on behalf of his candidacy.

During the campaign, Richard Darling, the head of the CRA at the time, released a pamphlet in the Southland calling for all volunteers to begin working on the campaign. Darling, who was a Southlander, was urgent in his pleas for volunteers to mobilize and work on behalf of the campaign for Reagan. He stated, “Ronald Reagan can and MUST win on November 8.

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<sup>120</sup> Richard Rodda, “Reagan is Favored to get the Support of the CRA,” *The Fresno Bee*, April 2, 1966.

This is the most crucial election in the history of our state...<sup>121</sup> Darling furthered his argument, saying “the outcome will decide whether we continue down the road past the welfare state to socialism or whether we start back up the road to a constitutional form of government based on the free enterprise system and the freedom of the individual.”<sup>122</sup>

Although ostensibly hyperbolic, Darling’s pamphlet highlighted the concerns that many on the right felt about intrusive government policies and the threat of continued Democratic governance, especially in California. Allegations of profligacy in both state and federal spending coupled with the unrest of the mid sixties created a climate conducive for Reagan’s campaign. By the fall, the Brown administration in Sacramento was suffering considerably with charges of ineffective governance and loss of control of the state. The turmoil throughout the state from inner city riots to antiwar protestors to a ballooning deficit all seemed to point in the direction of the failings of government and the need for a change.

Furthermore, Darling’s language implied the new acceptance of extremist rhetoric that became a trademark of the conservative movement. No longer were elections about simply one political party winning, but rather decided the course of history. Issues spanning the political spectrum from defense of constitutional principles to stopping the spread of communism were said to be at stake in elections. With specific reference to the Reagan campaign, Darling and his affiliates in the CRA saw something of a mandate to oust Brown and create a Reagan governorship that would establish a model of governance for the nation’s largest state.

Unlike the CRA and the John Birch Society, the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers was somewhat silent regarding the Reagan campaign, and instead chose to tackle issues that were

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<sup>121</sup> “CRA Newsletter, Volume 1, Number 2 August 1966,” California Republican Assembly Records (Collection 2039). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

tangentially related to Reagan's rise. Of course, many of the women in this organization were Reagan supporters, but the frequent newsletters sent out were usually aimed at issues like law and order and the failures of the Brown administration to tamp on down on issues usually associated with "law and order." One newsletter released during the campaign lamented the inefficacy of government "“Ask for greater support for law enforcement agencies & officers. WRITE to your newspaper and ask that they print a box score every ten days showing the number & types of crimes committed during that period.”<sup>123</sup>

In November 1966, Reagan solidified his triumph over Brown in a win reminiscent of Johnson's victory over Goldwater two years earlier. The results were stark: Reagan won by a fifteen-point margin and over 1 million votes.<sup>124</sup> For many in the movement, the Reagan victory vindicated their hard fought efforts to shift the movement in a more conservative direction. The foot soldiers in the CRA, JBS, and the Network had advocate passionately on behalf of Reagan. From educational meetings held in the living rooms of suburban Orange County to wealthy donors from Los Angeles, the aforementioned organizations created a network of conservative activists in the Southland that greatly assisted the movement.

Furthermore Reagan's role as the leading conservative voice in California acted as a rallying cause for the grassroots groups in the Southland. The Reagan campaign shifted conservatism from the extremism of Goldwater to a more palatable and digestible form for many Californians. One scholar notes that "When Reagan made this leap, he took a crucial step toward more popular form of conservatism, transforming a largely fringe movement prone to extremism

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<sup>123</sup> "Important Letters to Write, February 1966," Box 29, Folder 5 Knox Mellon Collection, UCLA Special Collections.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Lee Edwards, *The Conservative Revolution: The Movement that Remade America* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 160.

into a more appealing, broad-based movement that could appeal to a vast swath of working- and middle-class whites in Southern California.”<sup>125</sup> It was this form of conservatism that emanated from the Southland and would change the trajectory of American political life.

At the time, however, it was easy to dismiss the campaign as the mere triumph of Reagan and the political cunning of his inner circle of advisers. Far from that however, the Southland conservative organizations raised money, held information and education sessions informing their communities about candidates and issues, and created the infrastructure that mobilized thousands on behalf of conservative candidates and causes. Without organizations such as the California Republican Assembly, Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, and the John Birch Society, the conservative movement would likely have idled and failed to produce the types of candidates that ultimately made it a nationwide movement.

Reagan’s successful campaign for governor breathed a breath of life into the formerly stagnant conservative movement. Across the country, conservatives saw both the work of the grassroots in the Southland and the inauguration of Reagan as a watershed moment. Prominent sociologist Julius Q. Wilson tried to explain the new brand of conservatism in the wake of Reagan’s first electoral victory. Writing in May 1967, Wilson wrote, “The Southern Californians about whom I have written want limited government, personal responsibility, “basic” education, a resurgence of patriotism, an end to “chiseling,” and a more restrained Supreme Court.”<sup>126</sup> In Ronald Reagan, they received a candidate that was willing to begin a revolution in anti-statism. Aversion to state power and government could be even be seen in

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<sup>125</sup> Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan’s First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2000) 73.

<sup>126</sup> Julius Q. Wilson, “A Guide to Reagan Country: The Political Culture of Southern California,” May 1967 <http://commentarymagazine.com> accessed April 2013

Ronald Reagan's 1973 abortive attempt to pass a state amendment that would have set a limit on the number of public sector employees.<sup>127</sup>

In April 1967, however, the newly elected Governor of California addressed the California Republican Assembly at the Lafayette Hotel in Long Beach California. Long Beach, situated midway between Los Angeles and Orange County served as a symbolic center of the Southland, making Reagan's address to the organization rather appropriate. Reagan's speech to the assembly was more than simply geographically apposite, however. The address to the CRA spoke of the future of the state, the nation, and the party itself. In florid language, Reagan announced a future free of intrusive government, "I have that warm feeling a person gets when he knows he's among friends – friends who think like he does and have the same goals and aspirations. Could be I'm especially conscious of this for the same reason a man only realizes how thirsty he really is when he takes a cooling drink. Besides that, the members of the CRA have always put their money and their energies where a lot of people are content merely to put their mouths. And, believe me, that is appreciated."<sup>128</sup>

Reagan went on to laud the CRA and highlight the future of the anti-statist revolution that the conservatives were embarking on. He state, "We have been brought together by a belief that one of our problems is too much government and too much compulsion ... that we, as citizens, have right to participate in our government in ways other than just paying taxes, running for office or seeking appointments."<sup>129</sup> Furthermore Reagan discussed the importance of cutting

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<sup>127</sup> David O. Sears and Jack Citrin, *Tax Revolt: Something for Nothing in California* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 21.

<sup>128</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Address of Ronald Reagan to the California Republican Assembly," Lafayette Hotel, Long Beach, CA, April 1, 1967.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

taxes, especially property taxes, calling for “for the first time, direct property tax relief.”<sup>130</sup> Tax relief and efficient government would become some of the major tenets of the conservative revolution, therefore it is

By 1967, the two other organizations mentioned in this work had begun to wane in influence. The Birchers in particular lost their clout during the late 1960s with declining membership and severely reduced funding. After the election of Reagan, many members in the Southland began to question their role in the organization. Despite the rising tide of conservatism “The society’s top-down structure added to the problem of sustaining an appeal at the grass roots. By the end of the decade, the agenda items in the monthly bulletin appeared stale, despite the leadership’s efforts to update them.”<sup>131</sup> In addition to the structural problems, the ideological underpinnings of JBS became too extreme. Many of the committed anti-communists that filled its ranks instead chose to join the CRA or other conservative organizations in promoting a more limited form of government (the case of John Rousselot highlights this move from the Society to more mainstream conservative organizations).

The Network continued to distribute letters into the early seventies, but by and large ceased to exist as a force of information dissemination. While the actions of this group largely ceased, their message continued in the anti-statist rhetoric and traditional values espoused in earlier messages. Many members of the John Birch Society and the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers joined with more respectable organizations like the CRA or joined with the states actual Republican Party. The mid sixties provided the training ground and the organization structure for many conservatives and gave them experience conducting political campaigns and raising

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

<sup>131</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 221.

awareness of conservative issues. Of course, the question remains, why was the Southland, and the specific grassroots organizations covered in this work so important to the gradual rise of the conservative movement. Groups such as the California Republican Assembly, the John Birch Society, and the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers were only three of many groups in this volatile region and historical milieu, but represented a larger trend in the movement.

As this paper mentions, for decades, the conservative movement, and by extension the Republican Party had languished in torpor. Candidates were often watered down and labeled as too liberal. Ideologically, conservatives had very few fresh ideas and were inevitably surpassed by the activist government policies of liberals from Franklin Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson. To put it bluntly, the Democrats defeated fascism and imperial Japan, were credited with saving the country from the depths of the great depression, and were rightly viewed as the party of Civil Rights. As the turmoil of the sixties engulfed the United States, the rising tide of conservatism swept through Southern California and the country. The questions remains, however, why in the mid sixties and why did it occur in the Southland?

The Southland organizations covered in this work were important for a number of reasons. First, and foremost, the organizations in this work promoted anti-statist rhetoric that helped spur an anti-government movement throughout the country. This revolution was predicated on powerful aversion to federal power and policies associated with extreme fiscal conservatism. Throughout the political campaigns in the Southland, the theme of restricting the state's power to tax, enforce civil rights, and a myriad of other laws dominated the rhetoric of the CRA, Birchers, and the Network. It is no surprise that the candidates that they promoted were small government conservatives, who in today's political climate might even be considered libertarians.

For example, the current of anti-government rhetoric and feeling espoused by the Southlanders helped lay the groundwork for the tax revolution that spread rapidly from California throughout the country. The first stage of which occurred in California with Proposition 13, a measure that severely limited the state's power to collect property taxes and limited the property tax as 1% of assessed value. A boon for homeowners, the measure has been cited as the "third rail" of California politics that politicians refuse to address for fear of losing support among suburban homeowners. The measure is often cited as one of the biggest problems facing the perennially insolvent Golden State.

In addition to pushing a fiscally conservative form of limited government, the Southland conservatives became known as the most powerful volunteer organization in the nation's largest state. Their endorsement was considered *sine qua non* for any conservative Republican seeking political office in California. In 1978, archconservative and former Los Angeles Chief of Police Edward M. Davis declared to the CRA, "You did it for Ronald Reagan, and I think perhaps you can do it for me."<sup>132</sup> While the assembly's endorsement did not "do it" for Davis, it had become apparent that by this period the CRA and many of the conservative activists had found their niche in California and were exerting a monumental level of influence on the political process there.

In fact, the California Republican Assembly was the first Republican Assembly in the nation and is considered the germ that helped spur the National Federation of Republican Assemblies throughout the country. The National Federation, in their words, "to create a strong strategy to invigorate the movement inside and outside the Beltway" and considers themselves

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<sup>132</sup> Richard Bergholz, "Conservative GOP Group Backs Davis: Endorsement Comes as Four Rivals Blocking Effort Fails on Second Ballot," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1978, B3.

the “Republican Wing of the Republican Party.”<sup>133</sup> Many in this conservative organization consider the CRA the forerunner of the movement that pushed the Republican Party far to the right of the political spectrum. The CRA’s structure and populist appeal did in fact serve as a model of action for thousands of other conservative activists throughout the country.

What was crucial about these organizations, and what ultimately made them the vanguard of a larger movement, is that they were some of the first grassroots groups employing the language of extremism. Long before the conservative movement shifted far to the right and employed highly partisan and ideological means to win elections, the CRA, Network, and JBS were creating a vocabulary for their belief structures that made their far right views palatable on a national scale. An obvious example was the opposition to civil rights and the ways in which these groups looked at fair housing. While southerners in places like Atlanta and Alabama often used overt racial language, the Southlanders were able to employ rhetoric that was racially neutral but averse to government overreach that could be acceptable to suburban whites in places like places are far away the Northeast and Midwest. When Bostonians opposed busing efforts in the late seventies, they did not have to use racial rhetoric; all they had to do was say that liberals were using government, or the state to enact a policy that was obtrusive and overreaching, the same way fair housing laws were in the sixties. In many respects, the template for this was created in the expansive suburbs of the Southland a decade earlier.

While the Network of Patriotic Letter Writers, The John Birch Society, and California Republican Assembly were but three organizations working in the Southland. Their ability to raise funds, promote political candidates, and change the tenor of conservative the rhetoric from

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<sup>133</sup> National Federation of Republican Assemblies, “A History of the National Federation of Republican Assemblies,” <http://www.republicanassemblies.org/about/history> accessed April 2013.

staid platitudes to virulent anti-statism made them the foot soldiers in the vanguard of the Reagan Revolution. Their success was due to their grassroots organizing and their populist appeal that helped make conservatism palatable and digestible for thousands of suburbanites in the Southland and ultimately the nation. Thanks in part to direct democracy in California, the availability of right wing candidates at many levels, and the historical milieu of the mid sixties, the aforementioned groups were able to shape a movement that continues to impact American society.

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