

HIST 3923H, 003
THE RISE (AND FALL?) OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT IN AMERICAN
POLITICS, 1960s TO THE PRESENT

Fall, 2009
MW 1:30-2:50
ADMIN 424

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American politics has undergone profound changes since the 1960s, including the collapse of a Democratic Party coalition which had dominated the Presidency and Congress for most of four decades, and the emergence of a conservative Republican-led coalition that has pushed the vital center in American politics to the right. We will examine the people, ideas, and the social movements which drove these changes, as well as the new means of communication and mobilization which fueled both movements and parties.

Within the past few years this conservative ascendancy has shown signs of waning, due in part to public reaction against foreign and economic policies of the Bush administration, but also to the emergence of countervailing progressive or liberal movements and to the use of new technologies by the Democrats, especially the campaign and administration of Barak Obama. We will observe in real time the ongoing struggle to shape domestic policy agendas and maintain or regain political supremacy at the national level. As a culminating event, each student will prepare and present to the group a report in the form of a “brief” to a real or potential leader in national politics about some aspects of this ongoing struggle.

READINGS:

Books:

- Carter, Dan T. *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution* (LSU Press, 1999).
- Kuttner, Robert. *Obama's Challenge: America's Economic Crisis and the Power of a Transformative Presidency* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008).
- McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2001).
- Schulman, Robert, and Julian E. Zeiler, eds. *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

Documents and articles on electronic reserve (password to be provided in class):

- Bai, Matt. "Newt. Again." *The New York Times Magazine*, March 1, 2009.
- Berman, Paul. "The philosopher of Islamic terror," *The New York Times Magazine*, March 23, 2003, 24ff.
- bin Laden, Osama. "Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement." February 23, 1998.
- Carter, Jimmy. "The 'Crisis of Confidence' speech." (July 15, 1979). *The American Experience* website.
- Cheney, Richard. "Defense strategy for the 1990s: The regional defense strategy." Pentagon Document, January, 1993.
- Cheney, Richard. "Vice President speaks at VFW 103rd national convention," August 26, 2002. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/08/print>.
- Dionne, E. J., Jr., "When the religious right was left," *The New Republic*, February 28, 2005.
- Diulio, John J., Jr. "Are conservative Republicans now America's permanent ruling class?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education* January 20, 2006.
- [Gingrich, Newt, *et al.*] "The Republican Contract with America" [1994].
- Gitlin, Todd. "Straight from the sixties: What conservatives owe the decade they hate," *The American Prospect*, 7 (May-June, 1996).
- Heilbrunn, Jacob. "The Rumsfeld doctrine," *The New York Times*, April 30, 2006.
- Krugman, Paul. *The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008* (W.W. Norton, 2008), pp. 139-191.
- Lewis, Michael. "The End," *National Business News*, November 11, 2008.
"The long demise of Glass-Steagall."
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/wallstreet/weill/demise.html>
- McMath, Robert C., Jr. "Comparing populisms across time and space: A personal reflection." Unpublished paper, Bogliasco, Italy, January 10, 2003.
- Moyers, Bill. "Democracy in the balance." *Sojourners Magazine*. August 2004.
- Nagourney, Adam, and Megan Thee. "With election driven by Iraq, voters want new approach," *The New York Times*, November 2, 2006
- Nagourney, Adam, and Megan Thee. "New poll finds that young Americans are leaning left." *The New York Times*, June 27, 2007.
- Norquist, Grover. "Reducing the government by half: How and why we can cut the size and cost of government in half in one generation—the next twenty-five years." *The Heritage Insider*, May 2000.
- Ostmeyer, Andy. "Hate finds a home in the Ozarks." *The Joplin Globe*, January 2001.
- Reagan, Ronald. "We will be a city upon a hill." Address to Conservative Political Action Conference, January 25, 1974.
- Packer, George. "The fall of conservatism: Have the Republicans run out of ideas?" *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2008.
- Perlmutter, David D. "Political blogs: The new Iowa?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 26, 2006.
- Schlafly, Phyllis. "A Short history of the E.R.A." *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, September 1986.
- Seelye, Katherine Q, and Leslie Wayne. "The Web takes Ron Paul for a ride." *The New York Times*, November 11, 2007.

Sugg, Jon. "Armageddon for the religious right?" reprinted in *Sojourners Magazine*, May 2006;
 Zeller, Shawn. "A Party fractured, GOP conservatives regroup." *CQ Weekly*, February 9, 2009.

EVALUATION:

25% Class participation
 50% Two in-class tests
 25% Reports ("briefs") on an aspect of contemporary national politics (see instructions below)

SCHEDULE OF discussion topics, readings, and TESTS & PAPER:

August 24. Getting started. Robert C. McMath. "Comparing populisms across time and space."

August 26. The '60s we think we know: Kennedy/Johnson, civil rights, Vietnam. Gitlin, "Straight from the '60s"; "The Long Demise of Glass-Steagall"

August 31 & September 2. The other '60s: Origins of the modern conservative movement. McGirr, Chaps. 1-3; Carter, Chap. 1.

September 7. Labor Day

September 9. Richard Nixon and the making of a Republican majority. Carter, Chap. 2; Schulman & Zeiler, Chaps. 7 & 8.

September 14 & 16. The angry '70s: The rise of populist conservatism. McGirr, Chap. 4; Schulman & Zeiler, Chaps. 3-6 & 9; Phyllis Schlafly. "A Short History of the E.R.A; Grover Norquist, "Reducing the government by half. "

September 21. The new religious right and American politics. Schulman & Zeiler, Chaps. 1&2; Ronald Reagan. "We will be a city upon a hill."

September 23. Carter, Reagan, and the triumph of conservatism. Schulman & Zeiler, Chap. 10; Carter, pp. 55-68; McGirr, Chap 5; Jimmy Carter, "The 'Crisis of Confidence' speech."

September 28. Off the grid: Survivalists, militiamen, and the "Christian Identity" movement. Andy Ostmeier, "Hate finds a home in the Ozarks."

September 30. FIRST TEST

October 5. The end of the Cold War and American politics. Cheney, "Defense strategy for the 1990s." (skim)

October 7. Globalism and its discontents. “The World is spiky.” *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 2005; John Gray, “The Global Delusion,” *The New York Review of Books*, April 27, 2006.

October 12. George H. W. Bush and the Reagan coalition. Carter, pp. 68-86;

October 14. Bill and Newt’s excellent adventure: The politics of the first Clinton administration. Carter, Chap. 4; “Republican contract with America.”

October 19. George W. Bush and the strands of the conservative movement. Diulio, “Are conservative Republicans now America’s permanent ruling class?”

October 21. 9/11, the “war on terror,” and the Bush revolution in American foreign policy. bin Laden, “Jihad against Jews and crusaders;” Berman, “The philosopher of Islamic Terror;” Cheney, “Vice President speaks at VFW national convention;” Heilbrunn, “The Rumsfeld doctrine.”

October 26. Winds of change: Another story about religion and politics. Dionne, “When the religious right was left;” Moyers, “Democracy in the balance;” Sugg, “Armageddon for the religious right?”

October 28. Shifting public opinion and the 2006 Congressional elections. Nagourney and Thee, “With election driven by Iraq, voters want new approach;” Nagourney and Thee, “New poll finds that young Americans are leaning left.”

November 2. SECOND TEST

November 4. The Great Recession and its political impact. “The Long Decline of Glass-Steagall;” Lewis, “The End;” excerpt from Krugman, *The Return of Depression Economics*.

November 9. Movement culture and electronic mobilization. Perlmutter, “Political blogs: The new Iowa?” Seelye and Wayne, “The web takes Ron Paul for a ride;” and material collected by the class.

November 11. Has the conservative movement run its course? Yes: Packer, “The fall of conservatism;” **No:** Matt Bai, “Newt. Again.”

November 16& 18. Obama’s challenge. Kuttner, *Obama’s Challenge* and material collected by the class.

November 23. No class—work on briefs

November 25. Fall break

November 30. No class—work on briefs

December 2. Submit briefs and circulate to other class members

December 7. Roundtable discussion/critique of briefs.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE BRIEF

This assignment has two purposes. The first is to let you reflect on what you have learned in the colloquium and draw some conclusions from it. The second is to let you apply that knowledge by exploring a specific example (your choice) of how national politics and social movements or other organized interest groups are interacting with one another.

So first pick a current and/or future event, such as the battle over health care legislation, the 2010 Congressional elections, or the declining support for a party or elected official. Then identify one organized group of people which is attempting or has attempted to influence the outcome of the event. The group could be a movement, as we have used the term in this class, or some other organization based on a common economic, religious, or other interest or point of view.

Then gather information about the intersection, or potential intersection, of the event and the group, making use of (1) pertinent materials and ideas from the colloquium, (2) additional journalistic or scholarly writings pertaining to your subject as needed, and (3) publically available information in print or electronic form (either text or video) that comes directly from participants in the thing you are studying. Sources could include websites or blogs, TV or radio broadcasts, mailings, e-mails and other forms of communication from the organizations to members and supporters.

Finally, think of an potential recipient who needs the information you have developed (a candidate, party official, movement leader, etc.) and write a report which will enable the recipient to understand what is going on and why in the relationship between the event and the movement which you are describing. Bear in mind the relationships between parties, politicians, and movements which we have already studied: how do such things as the formulation of movement agendas, use of new communication technologies, and what we have called in this class “wars of maneuver” between movements and parties shape political outcomes, and how do unforeseen events such as wars, terrorist attacks, and economic crises change the balance of power?

Your papers should be roughly eight to ten pages double spaced pages in length and should appropriately document your sources. At the end of the term members of the class will share papers with each other, and on the final day we will take turns in conversations between the “briefers” and the “recipients” of the briefs.