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## The Political Scene

# Confounding Fathers

## The Tea Party's Cold War roots.

by Sean Wilentz October 18, 2010



Glenn Beck's view of American history stems from the paranoid politics of the fifties.

A few months ago, the cable-television and radio host Glenn Beck began his Fox News show with one of his favorite props: a pipe clenched between his teeth. "I've got my pipe," he told his audience, his speech slightly muddled by the stem, "because we're going to speak about schoolish kind of things." The theme of the day was "Restoring History," and Beck, looking professorial in a neat dark blazer and a pink button-down shirt, began the lesson by peering at a stack of history textbooks and pronouncing them full of falsehoods, produced by "malicious progressive intent." Progressives, he explained—liberals, socialists, Communists, the entire spectrum of the left—"knew they had to separate us from our history to be able to separate us from our Constitution and God." For the next hour, Beck earnestly explained some of the history that "is being stolen from us": the depression of 1920, for example, or how conservative economics saved the nation from the "near-depression" of 1946—crises that progressives don't want you to know about. "You've been taught one lie, I think, your whole life," he said.

For the fractious Tea Party movement, Beck—a former drive-time radio jockey, a recovering alcoholic, and a Mormon convert—has emerged as both a unifying figure and an intellectual guide. One opinion poll, released in July by Democracy Corps, showed that he is "the most highly regarded individual among Tea Party supporters," seen not merely as an entertainer, like Rush Limbaugh, but as an "educator." And in the past few months Beck has established his own institute of learning: the online, for-profit Beck University. Enrollees can take courses like Faith 102, which contends with "revisionists and secular progressives" about the separation of church and state; Hope 102, an attack on the activist federal government; and the combined Charity 101/102/103, a highly restrictive interpretation of rights, federalism, and the division of powers.

During the "Restoring History" episode, Beck twice encouraged viewers to join his Web seminars, where they can hear "lessons from the best and brightest historians and scholars that we could find." The B.U. faculty consists of three members, including one bona-fide academic, James R. Stoner, Jr., the chair of the political-science department at Louisiana State University; the other two are the head of a management consulting firm and the founder of WallBuilders, which the Web site calls "a national pro-family organization." Beck himself often acts as a professor, a slightly jocular one, on his Fox News program. Surrounded by charts and figures, he offers explanations of current politics and history lessons about the country's long march to Obama-era totalitarianism. The decline, he says, began with the Progressive era of the early twentieth century, in particular with the Presidency of Woodrow Wilson, when both the Federal Reserve System and the graduated federal income tax came into existence. "Wilson," Beck told his radio audience in August, "just despised what America was."

Beck's claims have found an audience among Tea Party spokesmen and sympathizers. At the movement's Freedom Summit in Washington last September, one activist told a reporter, "The election between Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson in 1912 was when it started going downhill." And in April an angry member of the Tea Party Patriots group from Cape Fear, North Carolina, claimed on the group's Web site that "the very things you see happening in this country today started with the Wilson Administration."

At a Tax Day rally this past spring, the veteran conservative organizer Richard Viguerie described the Tea Party as "an unfettered new force of the middle class." And, indeed, calling Obama a socialist in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson is audacious enough to seem like the marker of a new movement—or, at least, a new twist in the nation's long history of conspiracy-mongering. In fact, it marks a revival of ideas that circulated on the extremist right half a century ago, especially in the John Birch Society and among its admirers.

Beck's version of American history relies on lessons from his own acknowledged inspiration, the late right-wing writer W. Cleon Skousen, and also restates charges made by the Birch Society's founder, Robert Welch. The political universe is, of course, very different today from what it was during the Cold War. Yet the Birchers' politics and their view of American history—which focussed more on totalitarian threats at home than on those posed by the Soviet Union and Communist China—has proved remarkably persistent. The pressing historical question is how extremist ideas held at bay for decades inside the Republican Party have exploded anew—and why, this time, Party leaders have done virtually nothing to challenge those ideas, and a great deal to abet them.

The early nineteen-sixties were a turbulent time in American politics, for the right wing in particular. In the South, racist violence against civil-rights workers was constant, deepening sectional splits in the Democratic Party that would in time deliver the once solidly Democratic South to the Republicans. Southern elected officials, in support of what they called "massive resistance" to civil-rights laws and judicial rulings, resurrected the ideas of nullification and interposition, which claimed that individual states could void federal laws within their own borders. Others focussed on what they considered a fearsome Communist menace inside the United States. General Edwin A. Walker caused an enormous stir when he resigned from the Army in 1961, after President John F. Kennedy's Pentagon reprimanded him for spreading right-wing propaganda among his troops and accusing prominent American officials of Communist sympathies. Senator Strom Thurmond, the Dixiecrat from South Carolina, spoke for many on the far right when he declared that various modestly liberal domestic programs "fall clearly within the category of socialism."

The John Birch Society was one of the decade's most controversial right-wing organizations. Founded in 1958 by Robert Welch, a candy manufacturer from Massachusetts, the society took its name from a Baptist missionary and military-intelligence officer killed by Communist Chinese forces in 1945, whom Welch called the first American casualty of the Cold War. The group was founded at a propitious time. After Senator Joseph McCarthy's fall, in 1954, many of McCarthy's followers felt bereft of a voice, and Welch seemed to speak for them; by the mid-sixties, his society's membership was estimated to be as high as a hundred thousand. Welch, exploiting fears of what McCarthy had called an "immense" domestic conspiracy, declared that the federal government had already fallen into the Communists' clutches. In a tract titled "The Politician," he attacked President Dwight D. Eisenhower as "a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy" who had been serving the plot "all of his adult life." Late in 1961, after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion, he accused the Kennedy Administration of "helping the Communists everywhere in the world while pretending to do the opposite."

Wherever he looked, Welch saw Communist forces manipulating American economic and foreign policy on behalf of totalitarianism. But within the United States, he believed, the subversion had actually begun years before the Bolshevik Revolution. Conflating modern liberalism and totalitarianism, Welch described government as "always and inevitably an enemy of individual freedom." Consequently, he charged, the Progressive era, which expanded the federal government's role in curbing social and economic ills, was a dire period in our history, and Woodrow Wilson "more than any other one man started this nation on its present road to totalitarianism."

In the nineteen-sixties, Welch became convinced that even the Communist movement was but "a tool of the total conspiracy." This master conspiracy, he said, had forerunners in ancient Sparta, and sprang fully to life in the eighteenth century, in the "uniformly Satanic creed and program" of the Bavarian Illuminati. Run by those he called "the Insiders," the conspiracy resided chiefly in international families of financiers, such as the Rothschilds and the Rockefellers, government agencies like the Federal Reserve System and the Internal Revenue Service, and nongovernmental organizations like the Bilderberg Group, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Trilateral Commission. Since the early twentieth century, they had done a good deal of their evil work under the guise of humanitarian uplift. "One broad avenue down which these conspiratorial forces advance was known as progressive legislation," Welch declared in 1966. "The very same collectivist theories and demagogic pretenses which had destroyed earlier civilizations were now paraded forth in the disguise of new and modern concepts."

In the worst case, Welch believed, military action might be necessary to dislodge the totalitarians. But for the moment a nonviolent political revolution would suffice. Accordingly, he designed the Birch Society roughly, if not explicitly, on the Marxist-Leninist model of a vanguard revolutionary party: a series of small cells that would work in secret to agitate the populace and elect right-thinking candidates to office. "It isn't numbers we have to worry about," Welch wrote, "but the courage on the part of our followers to stick their necks out and play rough—the same as the Communists do."

The "Founder" himself would dictate the society's policies, advised by a council of about two dozen businessmen and professionals, and the local cells would be overseen by unyielding commanders. "It is the leadership that is most demanding, most exacting of its followers," Welch observed, "that achieves really dedicated support." Welch's group

became synonymous with right-wing extremism, earning satirical blasts from critics ranging from the cartoonist Walt Kelly to the musicians Bob Dylan and Dizzy Gillespie. The trumpeter, whose actual name was John Birks Gillespie, made a humorous run for the Presidency in 1964, organizing John Birks Societies in twenty-five states.

Still, the most outlandish of the era's right-wing anti-Communists was not Welch but Willard Cleon Skousen. A transplanted Canadian who served as a Mormon missionary in his teens, Skousen was considered so radical in the early nineteen-sixties that even J. Edgar Hoover's F.B.I. watched him closely; one 1962 memo in his extensive F.B.I. file noted that "during the past year or so, Skousen has affiliated himself with the extreme right-wing 'professional communists' who are promoting their own anticommunism for obvious financial purposes." Skousen was himself employed by the F.B.I., from 1935 until 1951, much of that time as a special agent working chiefly in administration. These desk jobs, he claimed implausibly, gave him access to confidential domestic intelligence about Communism. Skousen also maintained that he had served as Hoover's administrative assistant; Hoover informed inquirers that there was no such position.

Skousen taught for years in the speech and religion departments at Brigham Young University, interrupted by a stint, from 1956 to 1960, as the police chief of Salt Lake City. His time in office was contentious, and after he raided a friendly card game attended by the city's right-wing mayor, J. Bracken Lee, he was promptly fired. Lee called Skousen "a master of half truths" and said that he ran the police department "like a Gestapo"; Skousen's supporters placed burning crosses on the Mayor's lawn.

After losing his police job, Skousen founded a group called the All-American Society, which *Time* described in 1961 as an exemplar of the far-right "ultras." Although he did not join the Birch Society, Skousen worked with its American Opinion Speakers' Bureau, and, in 1963, wrote a rousing tract titled "The Communist Attack on the John Birch Society," which condemned the society's critics for "promoting the official Communist Party line." (This was a tic of Skousen's; he later defended the Mormon policy of denying the priesthood to blacks with a pamphlet called "The Communist Attack on the Mormons.")

All along, Skousen's evolving thoughts ran in tandem with Welch's. In "The Naked Communist," a lengthy primer published in 1958, he enlivened a survey of the worldwide leftist threat with outlandish claims, writing that F.D.R.'s adviser Harry Hopkins had treasonously delivered to the Soviets a large supply of uranium, and that the Russians built the first Sputnik with plans stolen from the United States. A year before Richard Condon's novel "The Manchurian Candidate" appeared, Skousen announced that the Communists were creating "a regimented breed of Pavlovian men whose minds could be triggered into immediate action by signals from their masters." A later book, "The Naked Capitalist," decried the Ivy League Establishment, who, through the Federal Reserve, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Rockefeller Foundation, formed "the world's secret power structure." The conspiracy had begun, Skousen wrote, when reformers like the wealthy banker Edward M. (Colonel) House, a close adviser to President Woodrow Wilson, helped put into place the Federal Reserve and the graduated income tax.

In 1971, Skousen organized another group, the Freemen Institute, which he later renamed the National Center for Constitutional Studies. According to an article published in the *Review of Religious Research*, the center's targets included "the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Communication Commission's fairness doctrine in editorial broadcasting, the federal government's change of the gold standard in currency, all subsidies to farmers, all federal aid to education, all federal social welfare, foreign aid, social security, elimination of public school prayer and Bible reading, and (that familiar right-wing nemesis) the United Nations." Skousen's pronouncements made him a pariah among most conservative activists, including some on the right-wing fringe. In 1962, the ultraconservative American Security Council threw him out, because members felt that he had "gone off the deep end." In 1971, a review in the Mormon journal *Dialogue* accused Skousen of "inventing fantastic ideas and making inferences that go far beyond the bounds of honest commentary," and advancing doctrines that came "perilously close" to Nazism. And in 1979, after Skousen called President Jimmy Carter a puppet of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Rockefeller family, the president of the Mormon church issued a national order banning announcements about his organizations.

Skousen was undeterred. In 1981, he produced "The 5,000 Year Leap," a treatise that assembles selective quotations and groundless assertions to claim that the U.S. Constitution is rooted not in the Enlightenment but in the Bible, and that the framers believed in minimal central government. Either proposition would have astounded James Madison, often described as the guiding spirit behind the Constitution, who rejected state-established religions and, like Alexander Hamilton, proposed a central government so strong that it could veto state laws. "The 5,000 Year Leap" is not a fervid book. Instead, it is calmly, ingratiatingly misleading. Skousen quotes various eighteenth-century patriots on the evils of what Samuel Adams, in 1768, called "the Utopian schemes of leveling," which Skousen equates with redistribution of wealth. But he does not mention the Founders' endorsement of taxing the rich to support the general welfare. Thomas Jefferson, for example, wrote approvingly in 1811 of having federal taxes (then limited to tariffs) fall solely on the wealthy, which meant that "the farmer will see his government supported, his children educated, and the face of his country made a paradise by the contributions of the rich alone, without his being called on to spend a cent from his earnings."

Skousen also challenges the separation of church and state, asserting that "the Founders were not indulging in any idle gesture when they adopted the motto 'In God We Trust.'" In reality, the motto that came out of the Constitutional Convention was "E Pluribus Unum": out of many, one. "In God We Trust" came much later; its use on coins was first permitted in 1864, and only in 1955, at the height of the Cold War, did Congress mandate that it appear on all currency. The following year, President Eisenhower—who Welch charged was a Communist agent—approved "In God We Trust" as the national motto.

In 1982, Skousen published a follow-up work, an ancestor-worshipping history text titled "The Making of America," and prepared a study guide for nationwide seminars based on its contents. As Alexander Zaitchik reports in his informative study of Beck, "Common Nonsense," the new book became an object of controversy in 1987, after the California Bicentennial Commission sold it as part of a fund-raising drive. Among its offenses was an account of slavery drawn from long-disgraced work by the historian Fred A. Shannon, which characterized slave children as "pickaninnies" and suggested that the worst victims of slavery were the slaveholders themselves. The constitutional scholar Jack Rakove, of Stanford, inspected Skousen's book and seminars and pronounced them "a joke that no self-respecting scholar would think is worth a warm pitcher of spit."

By the time Skousen died, in 2006, he was little remembered outside the ranks of the furthest-right Mormons. Then, in 2009, Glenn Beck began touting his work: "The Naked Communist," "The Naked Capitalist," and, especially, "The 5,000 Year Leap," which he called "essential to understanding why our Founders built this Republic the way they did." After Beck put the book in the first spot on his required-reading list—and wrote an enthusiastic new introduction for its reissue—it shot to the top of the Amazon best-seller list. In the first half of 2009, it sold more than two hundred and fifty thousand copies. Local branches of the Tea Party Patriots, the United American Tea Party, and other groups across the country have since organized study groups around it. "It is time we learn and follow the FREEDOM principles of our Founding Fathers," a United American Tea Party video declares, referring to the principles expounded by Skousen's book. If Beck is the movement's teacher, "The 5,000 Year Leap" has become its primer, with "The Making of America" as a kind of 102-level text.

The popularity of Beck's broadcasts, which now reach two million viewers each day, has brought neo-Birchite ideas to an audience beyond any that Welch or Skousen might have dreamed of. Several times a week, Beck informs his audience that socialists (whom he also sometimes calls Fascists or Communists) led by Obama have seized power, and that patriotic Americans must take their country back. His TV show for some time featured "Comrade Updates," in which Beck described perfidy while the Soviet anthem played in the background. He attacks all the familiar bogeymen: the Federal Reserve System (which he asserts is a private conglomerate, unaccountable to the public); the Council on Foreign Relations (born of a "progressive idea" to manipulate the media in order to "let the masses know what should be done"); and a historical procession of evildoers, including Skousen's old target Colonel House and Welch's old target Woodrow Wilson. His sources on these matters, quite apart from Skousen's books, can be unreliable. On September 22nd, amid a diatribe about House, Beck cited a passage from "Secrets of the Federal Reserve," by Eustace Mullins. The book, commissioned in 1948 by Ezra Pound, is a startlingly anti-Semitic fantasy of how a Jewish-led conspiracy of all-powerful bankers established the Federal Reserve in service of their plot to dominate the world.

Part of Beck's allure is the promise that he will reveal secret information. In one segment last year, he produced a drawing of fasces—which he described, anachronistically, as "the Roman symbol of Fascism"—and then a picture of an old Mercury dime, with fasces on the reverse side. "Who brought this dime in? It happened in 1916—Woodrow Wilson was the President," he said. "We've been on the road to Fascism for a while." Benito Mussolini, of course, didn't adopt the ancient symbol of authority as the Fascist emblem until the nineteen-twenties; the designer of the coin, the sculptor Adolph A. Weinman, intended it to signify the nation's military preparedness, and paired it with an olive branch to illustrate the desire for peace.

Beck's readings of Progressive-era politics are nearly as bizarre. Whatever can be said about Theodore Roosevelt, he was not a crypto-radical. It was Roosevelt who coined the term "lunatic fringe" to describe the extreme leftists of his day, and his concept of New Nationalism—in which an activist government built a vibrant capitalism, partly by regulating big business—looked back to Alexander Hamilton, not Karl Marx. Nor was Wilson a Bolshevik; in fact, in 1917 he sent American troops to Russia to support the anti-Bolshevik White Army. At home, his reforms sought to break up monopolies in order to restore competition among small companies. "If America is not to have free enterprise," Wilson declared, "then she can have no freedom of any sort whatever."

In 2007, Beck, then the host of "Glenn Beck," on CNN's Headline News, brought to his show a John Birch Society spokesman named Sam Antonio, who warned of a government plot to abolish U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada, "and eventually all throughout the Americas." Beck told Antonio, "When I was growing up, the John Birch Society—I thought they were a bunch of nuts." But now, he said, "you guys are starting to make more and more sense to me." His guest beamed. "Yes, we at the John Birch Society are not nuts," Antonio said. "We are just exposing the truth that's been out there for many, many years." Since then, the Birch Society's Web site has run clips from Beck's Fox broadcasts, proudly pointing out similarities with their own ideas. Last June, an essay on the site described a presentation by Beck on Communism in America as "the ultimate in complete agreement between the Beck and JBS presentations of American history."

Beck has also praised Ezra Taft Benson, one of Skousen's close associates. Benson, the Secretary of Agriculture under President Eisenhower and the thirteenth president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, gained notoriety for a speech in 1966 in which he denounced Democratic officeholders and intellectuals (including the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.) as socialists and Communist sympathizers, warned that "the Constitution will be endangered and hang, as it were, by a single thread," and praised the John Birch Society as "the most effective non-church organization in our fight against creeping socialism and Godless Communism." Last June, Beck aired a clip from another Benson speech, intoning, "Ezra Taft Benson warned about what was coming." The Birch Society's Web site subsequently praised Beck for "getting progressively (sorry for the bad word choice) closer to presenting American history in the way that The John Birch Society has been doing it for over 50 years."

Beck is no more the sole representative of today's multifaceted Tea Party than Welch or Skousen was of the nineteen-sixties far right; he recently told the *Times*, a bit disingenuously, that he was "not involved with the Tea Party." Why, then, have the politics of Skousen, Benson, and the John Birch Society had such a resurgence among conservative Republicans—not just through Beck but through Tea Party heroes like the Nevada Republican Senate candidate Sharron Angle? (Last month, Angle gave a warm address to a "freedom conference" in Salt Lake City, co-sponsored by the John Birch Society and Skousen's old group, the National Center for Constitutional Studies, praising her audience as "mainstream America" and patriots who had "heard the call.") The columnist Frank Rich, among others, has suggested that the election of a black President sowed "fears of disenfranchisement among a dwindling and threatened minority in the country." There are signs that this is so: Republicans' singling out of Thurgood Marshall as an "activist Justice" during Elena Kagan's Supreme Court confirmation hearings, the warnings on Fox News about the terrible dangers posed by the minuscule New Black Panther Party. But "socialist" is not a racial slur. Jim Crow was not built out of fears of the Federal Reserve and the I.R.S. The Tea Party's fulminations against cap-and-trade, federal-government bailouts, and big government generally play on very old themes that have nothing to do with the color of President Obama's skin. The current right-wing resurgence has more to do with the inner dynamics of American conservatism in the past half century. In the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties, the far right was condemned by liberals, as might be expected; in November, 1961, President Kennedy devoted part of a speech in Los Angeles to denouncing those "discordant voices of extremism" that "equate the Democratic Party with the welfare state, the welfare state with socialism, and socialism with Communism." But the Bircher right also provoked deep anxiety among conservatives, who feared being perceived as paranoids and conspiracy-mongers.

The leading intellectual spokesman and organizer of the anti-Bircher conservatives was William F. Buckley, Jr., the editor of *National Review*. Buckley was by no means moderate in his conservatism. He was a lifelong defender of Joseph McCarthy and a foe of New Deal liberalism. But he drew the line at claiming that the course of American government was set by a socialist conspiracy, and he feared that the ravings of the extreme right would cost more balanced, practical conservatives their chance at national power. "By 1961," his biographer John B. Judis writes, "Buckley was beginning to worry that with the John Birch Society growing so rapidly, the right-wing upsurge in the country would take an ugly, even Fascist turn rather than leading toward the kind of conservatism *National Review* had promoted." In the next two decades, with Buckley's support and counsel, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan completed a conservative revolution that succeeded by keeping extremist elements far from the centers of power.

As confidant and adviser to leading conservative politicians, Buckley had far more political influence than might be expected from the editor of a weekly journal. Yet in the early nineteen-sixties he found fighting the Birchers and their fellow-travellers extremely difficult. Even though some of Buckley's colleagues at *National Review* thought that the Birch Society went too far, they would not attack the society publicly, for fear of alienating both the Birchers and the conservatives who sympathized with their views. When Buckley wrote an editorial in 1962 that accused Welch of "distorting reality" and failing to make "the crucial moral and political distinction" between Communists and liberals, the magazine immediately lost subscriptions and financial support.

By 1960, Senator Barry Goldwater, of Arizona, was emerging as the great political hope of conservative Republicans, and he consulted closely with Buckley. At a meeting at the Breakers hotel, in Palm Beach, in January, 1962, Buckley urged Goldwater to repudiate the Birch Society. Goldwater demurred; though he conceded that some embarrassing "kooks" lurked among the Birchers, he insisted to Buckley that there were also some "nice guys," and that it would be injudicious to attack the group in public. The Birchers' support helped gain Goldwater the Republican Presidential nomination in 1964, and he winked at them in his acceptance speech with his famous line: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. . . . Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue."

In the general election, though, Goldwater suffered a crushing loss to Lyndon Johnson, partly because Democrats succeeded in making him look like a captive of the loony right. (To the Goldwater slogan "In Your Heart, You Know He's Right," the Democrats shot back, "In Your Guts, You Know He's Nuts.") Buckley's fears had been confirmed. But he was undeterred in his efforts to build a respectable and viable conservative movement. In 1967, he favored Richard Nixon among a field of Republican aspirants. He liked Ronald Reagan's politics, but considered Reagan, who had only recently been elected the governor of California, too new to national politics. George Romney, the governor of Michigan, a wishy-washy moderate, was obviously unsuitable, to say nothing of the Republican archliberal Nelson Rockefeller, of New York. Nixon was a hard-nosed Republican with strong conservative views, especially on Communism and the Cold War; he had established himself as a Communist-hunter in the nineteen-forties by pressing the charge that Alger Hiss, a former official at the State Department, had spied for the Soviets. And, promisingly, Nixon was the front-runner. "It seems to me that we ought to have a real chance of winning this year," Buckley wrote to Goldwater around the time of the Republican National Convention. He served the campaign as an adviser, and by aiding his friend Frank Shakespeare, who had taken charge of Nixon's media operations.

But Buckley's candidate had a reputation for shiftiness that made him unpopular across the political spectrum. Some of the editors of *National Review*, recalling that Nixon had cut a deal with Rockefeller in order to secure the G.O.P. nomination in 1960, didn't sufficiently trust him. And the Birch Society had nothing but contempt for the figure whom Welch had called one of "the slipperiest politicians that ever showed up on the American scene." As President, in 1969, Nixon began to open diplomatic relations with Communist China, and the right wing placed him on its list of perfidious appeasers. When he visited Beijing in 1972, even Buckley was deeply offended. But when the general election took place later that year, with the antiwar Democratic candidate, George McGovern, voicing the country's anxieties over Vietnam,

Buckley and the mainstream of what he called "responsible conservatism" returned to Nixon. The purist conservatives were left to back the third-party candidacy of John Schmitz, a Republican congressman and a member of the John Birch Society.

Nixon won in a landslide, and the next year he appointed Buckley the American delegate to the United Nations. The conservative pragmatists had found the way to real power. And, despite the embarrassment of Watergate, in Nixon's second term, their strategy proved effective over time. Nixon's campaign against McGovern sharpened the Democrats' internal divisions over civil rights and Vietnam, and, Buckley wrote, revealed that the Democrats had "an indifference toward national independence and a hostility toward national freedom." Meanwhile, the Buckley mainstream, having read the Birchers out of the conservative movement, established itself as a permanent and growing force in the Republican Party and in national politics.

In 1976, Buckley and *National Review* supported Ronald Reagan's primary challenge to Nixon's successor, Gerald Ford. After two terms as governor, Reagan had matured into what Buckley considered a nearly ideal conservative politician: a shrewd leader as well as a man of principle. Reagan nearly succeeded in wresting the nomination from Ford, demonstrating how formidable a national figure he had become. The Bircher right had flourished in his political bastion of Orange County, and Reagan was adept at winning extremists' allegiance while he pursued realistic strategies. His pragmatic side showed immediately after he finally secured the Republican nomination in 1980, when he chose the relatively moderate George H. W. Bush, his bitter foe during the primaries, as his running mate. Though the decision dismayed right-wing ideologues, it had two practical benefits: it instantly healed the divisions between Republican moderates and conservatives, and it helped dampen charges from the Democrats that Reagan was a reckless right-winger. Nobody was more pleased by Bush's selection than his fellow Skull and Bones man William F. Buckley, who understood the political logic as clearly as Reagan had.

As President, Reagan flattered the extremists—he even delivered some admiring words about Skousen's Freeman Institute—but he saved his political capital for his real goals: undoing the fiscal underpinnings of New Deal-style government, and redirecting U.S. foreign policy by battling the Soviet Union and its proxies around the world. He appointed moderates to positions of importance, as when he made James Baker III, Bush's close associate, his first chief of staff, rather than the far more ideological Edwin Meese III, his former chief of staff from California. (As a top policy adviser, Meese helped Reagan stack the federal bench with conservatives, but he was otherwise eclipsed by Baker and Baker's deputy, the pragmatic Reaganite Michael Deaver, and his crusade, as Attorney General, to roll back civil-rights legislation largely failed.) When zealots in the Administration were exposed, as in the Iran-Contra scandal, Reagan skillfully evaded responsibility and replaced them with more centrist Republicans. And, when he recognized in Mikhail Gorbachev a Soviet leader with whom he could undertake genuine efforts to reduce the nuclear threat, Reagan pushed forward, ignoring the complaints that he had become, in the hard-liner Howard Phillips's phrase, "a useful idiot for Soviet propaganda."

Whatever misgivings may have arisen about him on the right, Reagan achieved a dramatic conservative overhaul of the federal tax code, a profound reconfiguring of the judiciary, and a near-victory for the West in the Cold War. From the standpoint of the mainstream right, the only problem with his legacy was that no other Republican could come close to matching his public appeal and political savvy. For the party of Reagan, his departure was the beginning of a long decline, and it is the absence of a similarly totemic figure, during the past twenty years, that has allowed the current resurgence of extremism. George H. W. Bush repelled right-wingers with his moderate tendencies—not least when, in the face of fiscal calamity, he broke his campaign pledge not to raise taxes. Bill Clinton inspired them to an almost ecstatic series of attacks, and though there remained enough of an older conservative establishment, personified by Senator Bob Dole, to check some of the wildest charges, the new Republican House majority after 1994, pushed by such ideologues as Tom DeLay and Dick Armey, had little interest in maintaining the center. They harassed Clinton, forcing an impeachment even though polls showed that more than sixty per cent of the American people disapproved. George W. Bush seemed at first to have a bit of Reagan's conservative charisma, but the right wing turned against him for failing to win the war in Iraq, for his moderate position on immigration, and for spending hundreds of millions of federal dollars to combat the financial collapse in 2008. When William F. Buckley died, during the 2008 primary season, it seemed to symbolize the end of a conservative era. David Klinghoffer, a former literary editor at *National Review*, lamented that "urbane visionaries and builders of institutions" such as Buckley have been replaced by media figures "who make their money by stirring fears and resentments." Conservatism, Klinghoffer added, "has undergone a shift toward demagoguery and hucksterism," and is now ruled by those he called "the crazy-cons."

Some Republicans have tried to extend the Buckley tradition, but to little effect. The commentator David Frum, a former speechwriter for George W. Bush, lost his job at the American Enterprise Institute after he complained about the Republicans' obstruction of health-care reform and called the right-wing surge a threat to conservatism. In June, the congressman Bob Inglis, of South Carolina, a tough conservative who nonetheless backed Bush's financial bailout, lost a vicious primary fight with a right-wing insurgent named Trey Gowdy. To his amazement, Inglis was confronted on the campaign trail by voters who were convinced that numbers on their Social Security cards indicated that a secret bank had bought them at birth. "And then, of course," he recalls, "it turned into something about the Federal Reserve and the Bilderbergers and all that stuff." Not even Karl Rove can afford open dissent with the Tea Partiers. Appearing on Fox News the night of the recent primaries, he described the Tea Party-backed Senate candidate in Delaware, Christine O'Donnell, as probably unelectable and said that some of her statements were "nutty." Instantly, criticism came from Sarah Palin, Rush Limbaugh, and other right-wing Republicans. Within days, he was back on Fox, proclaiming himself "a

huge Tea Party fan," endorsing O'Donnell, and affirming that the National Republican Senatorial Committee would give her its full backing.

So far, Rove, an unlikely dissident, is the only prominent Republican leader to so much as gesture at stepping forward, as Buckley and his allies did. Even strong conservatives like Inglis have been pushed aside, as have such former G.O.P. stalwarts as Charlie Crist, in Florida, and Mike Castle, in Delaware, both beaten in the primaries by Tea Party candidates; Crist is now running a long-shot campaign as an Independent. Desperate for gains in the midterm elections, the Republicans are neglecting the struggle it took to make politics safe for Reagan.

Fifty years ago, President Kennedy deplored the far right's "counsels of fear and suspicion." Today, Obama's White House is still struggling to make sense of its enemies. In the absence of forthright leadership, on both the right and the left, the job of standing up to extremists appears to have been left to the electorate. Candidates like O'Donnell may prove too eccentric to prevail, or voters may simply become disillusioned by politicians who campaign on their hatred of government. After the election, mainstream conservatives may well engage in what Richard Viguerie has forecast as "a massive, almost historic battle for the heart and soul of the Republican Party." (Already, Rove and some leading Bush political operatives, including the former Republican National Committee chairman Ed Gillespie, have been quietly supplanting the battered G.O.P. establishment in the effort to raise funds for this year's candidates.) But, according to a recent poll, more than seventy per cent of Republicans support the Tea Party, and it seems almost certain that a Republican Party that has unstintingly appeased the far right will enjoy a strong and perhaps smashing victory in the coming midterm elections.

In 1906, early in the Progressive era, the humorist Finley Peter Dunne's fictional barroom sage, Mr. Dooley, put the social and political tumult of the day into perspective. "Th' noise ye hear is not th' first gun iv a revolution," Dooley remarked. "It's on'y th' people iv th' United States batin' a carpet." A century from now, or even a year from now, Americans may say the same about the Tea Party. For the moment, though, it appears that the extreme right wing is on the verge of securing a degree of power over Congress and the Republican Party that is unprecedented in modern American history. For defenders of national cohesion and tempered adversity in our politics, it is an alarming state of affairs. ♦

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-----Original Message-----

From: H <HDR22@clintonemail.com>

To: 'sbwhoeop [redacted]' <sbwhoeop [redacted]>

Sent: Sun, Oct 10, 2010 8:24 pm

Subject: Re: H: The Boehner poll. Sid

I gave to Bill who is trying to influence strategy.

----- Original Message -----

From: sbwhoeop [redacted] <sbwhoeop [redacted]>

To: H

Sent: Fri Oct 08 16:08:27 2010

Subject: H: The Boehner poll. Sid

The Huffington Post <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>> <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>>

Drew Westen <<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/drew-westen>>

Psychologist and neuroscientist; Emory University Professor

Posted: October 8, 2010 09:23 AM

B6

Bringing Up Boehner <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/drew-westen/post\\_1034\\_b\\_755497.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/drew-westen/post_1034_b_755497.html)>

According to news reports, today Republican minority leader and Coppertone model John Boehner will give his "closing argument" to the American people on why they should throw out the Democrats and kill the Obama-Pelosi-Reid "job-killing agenda." He will be returning to his working class roots, speaking at a piping manufacturing plant, an unusual venue these days for a man who is seen much more frequently at gatherings of Wall Street executives with open checkbooks and the males-only country club where he works on his tan when not making the rounds at other clubs with industry lobbyists.

Either the Speaker-to-be is following the model of Michael Steele and free-lancing, or Karl Rove and the Republicans believe it is safe or even advantageous to bring him out in public after the White House made an effort to put Boehner's face on what a Republican majority might look like, with the president invoking his name eight times in one speech.

I have to admit that at the time I was agnostic as to whether it made sense to try to brand him at this late date, as Boehner has minimal name recognition among voters. But the White House was no doubt responding to three realities. First, Boehner is an unknown to most Americans, which means that, unlike most Republicans in the news, he has not been well branded by the GOP -- which means for once Democrats might actually brand someone or something first rather than playing catch-up. Second, Boehner would indeed be the highest-ranking Republican were the GOP to assume control over the House (other than of course Karl Rove, who is now directing traffic on the right side of the street in Washington again). And third, a concrete face is always better than an abstraction when telling a story, and other than perhaps Sarah Palin, who Republicans could alternately accept and decline as the leader of their party, Boehner's tanned visage and history as errand-boy for virtually every major corporate special interest in his two decades in Washington (including his stint as the Marlboro Man, handing out tobacco lobby campaign checks to his fellow Republicans on the floor of the House) made him a potential counter-villain to the Republican's bogeywoman, Nancy Pelosi.

I remained agnostic until this week, when colleagues at Media Matters Action Network and I conducted a national messaging survey <<http://cloudfront.mediamattersaction.org/static/images/pdf/BrandingBoehner.pdf>> with 1,000 registered voters, selected to match the demographics of the voting and likely voting populations. The goal was to see how effectively we could speak with voters about Boehner as not only the symbol and standard-bearer for the GOP but also the water-boy for corporate America. (The results were surprisingly similar whether we looked at registered voters or likely voters, although as others have described, precisely how to determine who is a "likely voter" in this election is as much art as science, and the point of good messaging at this point is actually to change the dynamics of likely voting, not just to reflect them.)

As detailed in a memo published in Politico, what we found was clear: Boehner is a target well worth defining, who readily stands for precisely what Americans perceive to be the reasons they would have to hold their noses to vote for Congressional Republicans (perhaps the only group left who poll worse than Congressional Democrats with swing voters). We tested both paragraph-length narratives and single-sentence language designed to capture the essence of those narratives, and in each case, we tested them against the toughest opposition language we could test them against: the words of Boehner, Cantor, Limbaugh and others combined in defining the "Obama-Pelosi-Reid" agenda.

What we found, in brief, is that we could beat a tough GOP narrative about the "job-killing" socialists in the White House and Congress by 15 to 20 points with two narratives starring Boehner in the leading role (with best supporting bad

actor going in one of the narratives to Karl Rove and his corporate allies), and we could win with over 15 different sentence-long descriptions of "what's the matter with Boehner" with margins ranging from 10 to 60 points against a tough conservative attack on the Obama-Pelosi-Reid axis of conservative evil.

The narratives that most moved likely voters -- including swing voters, who preferred them by double-digits over tough Republican rhetoric -- made clear whose voices Boehner would be speaking for as Speaker (e.g., the Wall Street executives he convened to try to block Wall Street reform). They harnessed the same populist anger at the hijacking of Washington by corporate special interests that has enlivened the tea partiers and is palpable across the political spectrum, and they focused on the extremism of the party Boehner would Speak for. A narrative that brought Karl Rove into the picture was slightly more polarizing with swing voters but slightly more powerful with likely Democratic voters.

In some ways what was most surprising was the success of the single-line statements of what we need in a Speaker and who John Boehner really speaks for (although these single-line statements came after the narratives, and likely reflect the power of branding, even over the course of a brief online encounter with voters). They ranged from relatively lofty and aspirational (e.g., "We need a Speaker who is also a listener, who can hear the voices of ordinary Americans" -- a theme colleagues and I found highly resonant across the political spectrum in message testing on the role of money in politics) -- to the harder-edged (e.g., "The Speaker of the House is a heartbeat away from the Presidency. Unfortunately, we know where John Boehner's heart is, and it isn't with the middle class," or "John Boehner understands deficits. He's spent nearly 20 years in Washington creating them.")

If there's a message in this message research, it is at once short-term and long-term. In the short run, if Democrats want to hang onto their seats in November, they would do well to define this election in terms of the middle class and small business versus the billionaires and big corporations that are hijacking our democracy; to use Boehner as a poster child for the party whose primary commitment is to the latter and whose tan is a testament to that commitment; and to avoid giving voters reason to regret their vote if they give it to Democrats again this time, by supporting the things they say they stand for and avoiding that golden mean between the public interest and the special interests that finance campaigns on both sides of the aisle.

In the longer run, branding matters. One of the biggest strategic and messaging mistakes of the last two years was the failure of Democrats to brand their opponents while their opponents were busy branding them -- and in particular the failure to brand the Bush Recession as the natural consequence of failed Republican economic principles. Two years ago, that was a virtually uncontested political proposition, as the voters made clear in handing Democrats the White House and supermajorities in both the House and Senate. Today, the public is split down the middle as to who caused the recession.

Reality doesn't brand itself. Hopefully it won't take a debacle in November and another 10 million jobs lost for reality to unveil itself again for a brief political moment and for progressives to have a second bite at the apple.

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