"Romper lo que está resquebrajado"[*]: 1968 in the United States of America

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ABSTRACT

Due to the inability of the United States political structure to resolve deep internal disagreements over the Vietnam War, Americans lost their faith in an effective public order regardless of their political sympathies. 1968 was the year in which faith in the nation's political institutions cracked. The year began with an organized movement within the Democratic Party to oust Lyndon Johnson from the White House and to place an antiwar leader at the head of the party, a leader who would refocus the political energies of the nation on healing racial division and the "war on poverty." The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy terminated movement to national reconciliation around a progressive program. Conservatives profited from escalating internal violence by presenting themselves as the only political force capable of bringing order. The New Left did not profit from the national political crisis, but new social movements forced into the public arena new conceptions of how the nation had developed and what "justice for all" entailed. The left failed politically, but its movements transformed the conduct of everyday life. The direction flowing from 1968 in the United States proved over the long term to be cultural regeneration of the nation's liberal values to fit the realities of a more diverse and divided citizenry.

Keywords: Conservatism. Liberalism. New social movements. Richard M. Nixon. Robert F. Kennedy. United States—cultural divisions. United States—distrust of public life. United States—1968 presidential election. Vietnam War. William F. Buckley, Jr.

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RESUMEN

Debido a la incapacidad de la estructura política de los Estados Unidos de resolver los profundos desacuerdos internos sobre la Guerra de Vietnam, los americanos perdieron su fe en un orden público efectivo a pesar de sus simpatías políticas. 1968 fue el año en el que se quebró la fe en las instituciones políticas de la nación. El año comenzó con un movimiento organizado dentro del Partido Demócrata que desbancó a Lyndon Johnson de la Casa Blanca y que colocó a un líder antibelicista a la cabeza del partido, un líder que centraría de nuevo las energías políticas de la nación en aliviar la división racial y la "guerra contra la pobreza". Los asesinatos de Martin Luther King, Jr, y Robert F. Kennedy pusieron término al movimiento de la reconciliación nacional en torno a un programa progresista. Los Conservadores aprovecharon la escalada de la violencia interna presentándose a sí mismos como la única fuerza política capaz de traer el orden. La Nueva Izquierda no sacó provecho de la crisis política interna, pero nuevos movimientos sociales introdujeron en la escena pública nuevas concepciones sobre cómo la nación se había desarrollado y qué "justicia para todos" conllevaba. La izquierda fracasó políticamente, pero sus movimientos transformaron la conducta del día a día. La dirección adoptada desde 1968 en Estados Unidos dio pruebas a largo plazo de ser una regeneración cultural de los valores liberales de la nación para adaptarse a las realidades de una ciudadanía más diversa y dividida.

Palabras clave: Conservadurismo. Liberalismo. Nuevos movimientos sociales. Richard M. Nixon. Robert F. Kennedy. Estados Unidos—divisiones culturales. Estados Unidos— desconfianza/recelo de la vida pública. Estados Unidos—1968 elección presidencial. Guerra de Vietnam. William F. Buckley, Jr.

In 1978, 74 percent of those interviewed for a *New York Times* poll agreed that the "government was controlled by big business for its own profit," a statement which only 18 percent had agreed with in 1958. Disenchantment with public solutions to social problems had risen dramatically according to the poll and was a major factor in the rapid decline in voter-participation rates that occurred during the 1970s. Cynicism about the public order was higher among the Vietnam War and Watergate generation, those who reached voting age after 1965 than in the age cohorts formed by the New Deal and World War II, but even these older Americans who had seen a powerful government-civil society alliance defeat fascism and lift the economic condition of the majority believed that the best days of the United States were in the past. A *New York Times* survey of nonvoters in 1979 found that 58 percent of those who did not vote gave as their primary reason that the country needed "greater change than was possible to achieve at the ballot box," while 41 percent of those who voted agreed with that statement. Respondents who self-identified as leftists had the most negative evaluation of political life in the United States, but conservatives, liberals, and moderates also questioned the nation's ability

to solve its problems in the interest of the people. Distrust of public authority crossed every ideological, economic, and social alignment[1]. Americans had apparently lost their faith in an effective public order regardless of their political sympathies.

The findings are one piece of evidence of how devastating the Vietnam War and the divisions it generated were for public life in the United States.[2] 1968 was the year in which faith in the nation's political institutions cracked; it is not clear that the chasm separating citizens from their government has yet been bridged. The year began with an organized movement within the Democratic Party to oust Lyndon Johnson from the White House and to place an antiwar leader at the head of the party, a leader who would refocus the political energies of the nation on healing racial division and expanding Johnson's underfunded "war on poverty."[3] The electoral process brought positive results for the insurgency within the party as several localities voted by strong margins in favor of resolutions calling for withdrawal from Vietnam. In the first primary of 1968, held in mid-February, Eugene McCarthy, a senator from Minnesota largely unknown nationally running solely on an antiwar platform, garnered 42 percent of the vote, dramatically demonstrating how vulnerable Johnson was.[4]

Robert F. Kennedy, former attorney general during the presidency of his brother John F. Kennedy and at the time a senator from New York, jumped into the race believing that he had a better chance of uniting the nation around a progressive political agenda. Even though the antiwar vote was split, Johnson suffered clear defeat in the next set of primaries. On March 31, Johnson announced he had ended his campaign for reelection in order to seek a negotiated settlement to the war. Liberal electoral politics seemed to be successfully addressing the problem of the Vietnam War as it had the problem of civil and voting rights four years earlier. Conflict and

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[1] "Voters, Non Voters Alike Held Disaffected, Not Disillusioned," *New York Times* 20 November 1979, 1.

[2] On the Vietnam War and its impact on domestic politics in the United States see Walter LaFeber, *The Deadly Bet: LBJ, Vietnam, and the 1968 Election* (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Edward K. Spann, *Democracy's Children: The Young Rebels of the 1960s and the Power of Ideals* (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 2003); Rhodri Jeffrey-Jones, *Peace Now!: American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).

[3] On the organization of the anti-LBJ campaign within the Democratic Party, see William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 262-314; Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with Documents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). President Johnson engineered the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. These two bills, along with supporting legislation, ended all legal basis for racial discrimination within the United States. Johnson launched the "War on Poverty" in 1965. Budget constraints due to the cost of the Vietnam War forced Johnson to scale back anti-poverty programs in 1966 and 1967.

[4] On McCarthy's campaign, see Dominic Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar American Liberalism* (New York: Knopf, 2004); George Rising, *Clean for Gene: Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential Campaign* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

dissension were a necessary part of problem-solving, for as a committee of faculty investigating the causes of student unrest at Columbia university put it, U.S. society was still in the process of shedding its authoritarian and paternalistic legacies. The antidote to protest was discussion:

> Bringing students closer into... the process of decision-making [will] promote that intimate exchange of ideas and experiences which is vital to maturity. It [will] also aid them in learning how to control rapidly changing technological, social, and cultural conditions ... When decisions are made largely on the basis of who has the most power, especially when power is concentrated in a formal authoritarian structure, more and more people within the institution will be dissatisfied. When the decisions are made after full and frank discussion of the various issues involved, and with all opinions being taken into consideration, cohesion develops and effective teaching about the ways in which a democracy should operate is possible.[5]

The faculty report, a brief for the virtues of modern liberal politics, was confident in the assumption that in the conflict between passion and rational decision making, reason prevailed if those in authority involved the public in discussion over national policies. Improper decisions were inevitable but could be corrected. With Johnson's withdrawal, the U.S. political values and electoral appeared to be vindicated, but only for the briefest of moments.

Less than a week later, on April 4, a gunman killed Martin Luther King, Jr., the revered (and hated) leader of the civil rights movement who had turned into a particularly effective critic of Johnson's war policies. In the aftermath of King's death over one hundred cities suffered extensive riots and martial law; billions of dollars of property was destroyed, with dozens of blocks of central Chicago, Detroit, and many other cities burned down. The inherent violence historically underlying race relations in the country returned with a vengeance to swamp the moral luster of the civil rights struggle.

Over the next two months, Robert Kennedy linked his campaign against Johnson's war policy with the need to correct the historical injustice of the nation's racial system. Two recent books, Thurston Clarke's *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America* and Ray E. Boomhower's *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary,* have reexamined Kennedy's race for the Democratic nomination to show that in the midst of national turmoil over the Vietnam War and a backlash to civil rights, an impassioned political leader campaigning from the left succeeded in assembling a diverse coalition that might well have taken the White House. Both authors foreground Kennedy's demonstrated ability to excite

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[5] *Crisis at Columbia: Report of the Fact-Finding Commission Appointed to Investigate the Disturbances at Columbia University in April and May 1968* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 7.

loyalties across racial, educational, and economic divisions by playing to a widely shared faith in the nation's problem-solving abilities. His electoral victory in Indiana was particularly impressive given the state's long history as a bastion of social conservatism and the nastiness of the campaign waged against him. His wins in Indiana and similar states seemed to justify Kennedy's claim, "if we can reconcile Negroes and poor whites that they have common interests, and then add the kids, you can really turn this country around." Indeed, Kennedy appealed to Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, and made it a priority prominently to highlight the support he had in those communities. On June 6, the very last day of the primary campaign season, Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated after winning the California vote and securing his lead for the Democratic nomination for president.[6]

Kennedy's assassination ended any credible movement to national reconciliation around a progressive program. Hubert Humphrey, Johnson's vice president, claimed the nomination, but lacked the support of the most impassioned wings of the party. The civil disturbances spreading across the city of Chicago during the Democratic Party convention and the visible dissension within party meeting, both major stories on nightly television newscasts, underscored how ineffective the party had become in managing either its own affairs or national dissension. Richard Nixon surged from the right, picking up support from working-class white voters angry with Johnson for his war and/or his civil rights record. Rick Pearlstein's *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* demonstrates how adroit Nixon was at exploiting the nation's racial, regional, and class differences. Pearlstein emphasizes that Republican victories were tenuous rather than triumphant. Nixon created a "silent majority" defined by fear rather than hope, and "silence" was indeed essential to his formula for successful governance. Popular distaste for politics as such could shield the president's administration from having to account for its actions. Nixon and his successors worked to augment already dangerous tensions dividing Americans in order to present themselves as the political force best able to contain the chaos they themselves encouraged.[7]

The strategy required a continuous drumbeat of crisis, the development of policies that increased feelings of insecurity within the population, and a discrediting of the very institutions conservatives controlled. As an example: "affirmative action," that is preferential policies for hiring, admissions into schools, or the granting of government contracts to women and to members of racial groups that have historically been the victims of discrimination, has for forty years been a successful issue that conservatives use to denounce all government social policy programs. Ironi-

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[6] Thurston Clarke, *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days That Inspired America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008); Ray E. Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2008).

[7] Rick Pearlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008).

cally, however, the primary architect of federal affirmative action policies was President Richard Nixon, who instituted the programs in 1969 despite the skepticism of black civil rights leaders. Nixon may well have desired to improve the position of African Americans in U.S. society, but he adopted policies that he knew would generate resentment among white males. Affirmative action served his electoral purposes by subverting long-standing allegiances that unionized white working-class men had for the Democratic Party. With Machiavellian mastery, Nixon responded to white protests with proposals for scaling back his new policies, efforts that the Democratic-controlled Congress then felt it should block if a national commitment to racial justice were not to be rescinded. Instead of remedying the dramatically lower levels of education and property ownership that generations of segregation had caused in African American communities and working to equalize capabilities to compete for jobs and entrance into the best schools, affirmative action functioned as a political football pitting communities against each other.[8]

Given the tragedies of 1968 and the transparent cynicism of the politics that followed, it should not be surprising that the perspectives most historians of the United States have brought to the year's events have generally been negative. In *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, one of the most widely used university-level textbooks, William H. Chafe writes that the year ended with "defeat for those who sought a new society based on peace, equality, and social justice; victory for those who rallied in defense of the status quo. But in the process the nation faced, with brutal candor that had rarely been seen before, the stresses, tensions, and contradictions that lay at the heart of the modern-day experience."[9]

The outlines of this assessment had appeared as early as 1984, when Allen J. Matusow in *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* characterized 1968 as the year in which the New Deal coalition that Franklin Delano Roosevelt had constructed spun apart.[10] Matusow wrote at the beginning of Ronald Reagan's administration. What had once been literally unimaginable, the ascendancy of a laissez-faire, socially conservative Republican had become the actuality. Matusow explained the sudden lurch to the right as an inevitable result of the contradictions that racial politics and an interventionist foreign policy posed for progressive liberalism in the United States. Matusow also blamed the student left and the black power movements of the 1960s for pursuing a politics of emotional confrontation and refusing to present rational argument. Protest expressed the rage that

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[8] Vincent Hutchings and Nichollas Valentino, "The Centrality of Race in American Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (2004), 383-406; John Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[9] William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, Sixth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 330.

[10] Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984).

many felt, but radical groups had no strategy short of revolution. Nonetheless, in his estimation, their ability to seize the political stage was primarily the result of infighting among mainstream liberals over where to lead the nation.

Divisions within the Democratic Party over foreign policy remained, but after the 1968 election, the left wing of the Democratic Party linked with the reform wing of student movements to form a new alliance that could replace the New Deal coalition. In 1970, Democrats in Congress began challenging Nixon's war powers authority, introducing bills requiring withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam. By 1973, a bill mandating withdrawal passed with sufficient votes to override a presidential veto. Nixon had already begun removing U.S. forces, but the new legislation prevented him from either slowing down or reversing the withdrawal underway. The same year, Congress also passed the War Powers Resolution that limited presidential powers to commit U.S. forces in overseas conflicts without prior congressional approval.[11] The Watergate crisis and the increasing evidence of Nixon's misuse of his power fed a liberal resurgence culminating with Nixon's forced resignation in 1974 and even larger Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress after that year's midterm elections. In terms of national power, the new liberal-progressive alliance proved unable to consolidate its power during either the Carter or Clinton administrations but maintained its strategic centrality within the Democratic Party as a whole and thus was the only effective national alternative to conservative dominance of the executive branch.

Political void at the center and on the left provided an opportunity for the right to take leadership of a nation that in 1964 had repudiated the conservative program by an exceptionally large majority. Conservatives found in the events of 1968 confirmation for their assessment of the nation's problems and a renewed chance to present their case to the public. As conservative commentator William F. Buckley put it in his column of January 16, 1969, the left demonstrated it possessed only the power to make the "nation ungovernable."[12] Nixon won the election, though just barely, not because he was an attractive candidate, but solely because a conservative was better positioned on principle to act decisively to restore order. If candidates on the right took firm, even inflexible stands on questions of law enforcement and preservation of traditional moral values, voters who otherwise disagreed with

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[11] For debates over the constitutionality and impact of the War Powers Resolution see *The U.S. Constitution and the Power to Go to War: Historical and Current Perspectives*, eds. Gary M. Stern and Morton H. Halperin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994). Nixon and every subsequent president has claimed that the War Powers Resolution is an unconstitutional infringement of presidential responsibilities and authorities. Nonetheless, every president has avoided a confrontation over the issue with Congress and the courts, by generally adhering to the law even if often skirting its precise requirements. On the Case-Church Amendment that required withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Vietnam, see Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 671-674.

[12] William F. Buckley, "The Psychology of Defeatism," *Los Angeles Times* 16 January 1969, p. D6.

conservative priorities might temporarily shift their allegiances. Buckley, at the time the most widely read conservative writer in the United States, was not optimistic about the long-term prospects of a genuine reconstruction of the nation around respect for authority and tradition. The liberal ethos he thought was deeply ingrained in political institutions as well as in the expectations of citizens.

The circumstances surrounding the collapse of Lyndon Johnson's presidency particularly disturbed Buckley. Like many others in the United States, he was elated when he first heard the news. There was national, even bipartisan agreement that the country needed a new president, but on further reflection, Buckley saw the manner of Johnson's demise forcing future politicians to link complicated matters of war and security to electoral calculations. Many hailed Johnson's defeat "as evidence that the people are in better command of their own affairs. Others, conservatives for the most part, will wonder whether it is all a cause for rejoicing. The conservative fears plebiscitary government, for the very same reasons given by Burke and Adams. Instant guidance by the people of the government means instability, and instability is subversive of freedom... enthusiasm [in politics] subtly deteriorates into unreason, and such conscious rejection of standards and restraints as sustained Mussolini and Perón."[13]

For conservatives, the crisis gripping U.S. politics had emerged because the nation lacked a tradition of responsible authority, it lacked leaders who were invulnerable to popular whim or willing to take decisive action even if unpopular. A more extreme conservative commentator claimed that the country was under siege from "a Satan-inspired conspiracy of Man against God which has led to a world-wide defiance of His law and His plans for both societies and governments."[14] Buckley, a more careful but perhaps equally caustic critic of modern life, noted that the public in general was, despite its overt displeasure with protests, still inclined to sympathize with and find excuses for demonstrators, particularly when they became the victims of police violence.[15] Buckley argued that the American people were not to

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[13] William F. Buckley, "The Unseating of Johnson: A Disturbing Phenomenon," *Los Angeles Times* 8 April 1968, p. A5.

[14] Don Bell, "The Religion of Revolution: Before You Can Build, You Must Destroy," *Don Bell Reports*, 7 June 1968.

[15] William F. Buckley, "How Plastic Must the Line Be Between Law and Its Defiers?, " *Los Angeles Times* 6 September 1968, p. A5. A dramatic example of Buckley's point that the citizenry was *not* supportive of violent suppression of demonstrators occurred in September 1970 during Ronald Reagan's campaign to be reelected governor of California. Speaking at a campaign rally in a particularly conservative community, Reagan got carried away with his denunciation of "student anarchy" and stated that if there needed to be a "bloodbath" to bring protest to a halt, "so be it." As the news media reported Reagan's comments, his comfortable lead in the polls vanished overnight. The campaign issued rectifications assuring the public that Reagan intended to control campus unrest firmly but without violence. The lesson Reagan's staff drew was that the people will support Republicans if they present themselves as good managers who maintain order and efficiency, but can easily lose sup-

be trusted to support the firm steps a new leader would need to take to restore national greatness. The sovereignty of individual desire had overtaken ideas of law and moral code. Conservatives could win elections, but they worked in an adverse climate and the most successful conservative politicians adopted populist rhetoric that undermined their ability to provide voters with a genuine alternative to liberal politics. They would win by pledging to administer liberal programs more effectively than liberals themselves could. Public opinion was largely against elimination of liberal social programs, and few politicians would have the fortitude to tell voters their preferences were wrong. Conservative leadership needed to be strategic in handling an unstable and untrustworthy public opinion that had long been divorced from the compass a strong moral tradition provided.[16]

For radicals and revolutionaries within the United States, 1968 was equally a year in which lines of differentiation grew sharper, and unity became more difficult. All segments of the left criticized the Johnson administration and the putative Republican candidate Richard Nixon. They had no agreement over whether to support the electoral campaigns of either McCarthy or Kennedy, and the largest student organizations were critical of shifting the focus from issues to candidates. For many leaders of the student left, elections were theater and the underlying reality of U.S.

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port if a candidate appears overly committed to public order. The episode in Reagan's political career is discussed in detail in an oral history with Jack S. McDowell, Reagan's press secretary at the time; see Jack S. McDowell, "Press Work and Political Campaigns, 1966-1970," in *Republican Campaigns and Party Issues, 1964-1976*, (Governmental History Documentation Project: Ronald Reagan Gubernatorial Era, interviews conducted by Sarah Sharp and Gabrielle Morris 1981 and 1983, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley; online at *http://www.archive.org/details/repcamp partyissues00sharrich*), pp. 22-25.

[16] Buckley was a Catholic and sympathetic to the ideas of the Opus Dei order. In his time, Catholic Americans were overwhelmingly Democratic because the party had long protected the interests of cultural minorities. Catholics were a minority within U.S. conservatism, though have seen become an essential part of the contemporary movement. The five most conservative members of the U.S. Supreme Court are all Catholics and shaped by neo-Thomist principles. On Buckley, see Linda Bridges, *Strictly Right: William F. Buckley, Jr., and the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Wiley, 2007); David Burner, *Column Right: Conservative Journalists in the Service of Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988). On Catholic participation in and influence upon U.S. conservative movements see Thomas E. Woods, *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Peter R. D'Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Theology* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: Norton, 2003); Gene Burns, *The Frontiers of Catholicism: The Politics of Ideology in a Liberal World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Kevin E. Schmiesing, *American Catholic Intellecutals and the Dilemma of Dual Identities, 1895-1955* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, 2002); Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

society was violence. As protest grew stronger, so would the methods used by the government to maintain its control. Violence, therefore, was indeed a marker of success, and police brutality an experience necessary for young people to abandon their liberal illusions.[17] The end result was not growth, but the self-destruction of organizations that had grown quickly during the 1960s and demonstrated their ability to capture the imaginations of students and the public. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) founded in 1960 to contribute to the civil rights movement while assisting community organizing and struggles for economic rights organized a national student strike against the Vietnam War for April 26, 1968, to test its strength. Over one million students stayed away from classes to participate in marches, sit-ins, and teach-ins. Yet within a year, the organization split apart as factions within SDS fought for leadership. Divisions grew over whether the "third world" or the "working class" was the vanguard of the coming revolution, and there were fights that turned increasingly violent over the relative importance of factory organizing or guerrilla warfare in the formation of a radical vanguard.[18]

Between 1967 and 1970, a broad variety of new oppositional movements suddenly emerged to supplement the antiwar, labor, and black civil rights/power movements that previously dominated the left. Textbooks covering the period stress the radically new perspectives brought to political life in the United States by groups as varied as feminism; Asian American, Chicano and Puerto Rican activism; American Indian power and sovereignty movements; disability rights activism; patient rights activism; environmentalism; gay liberation, to list only some of the more prominent. The new movements taken together meant that the left no longer presented a unified understanding of U.S. political, economic, and social life, nor was a comprehensive theory of social change possible. Instead, advocates forced into the public arena varied, deeply personal concerns that had long been marginalized by liberals, conservatives, and socialists alike. Each new movement challenged conventional ideas of how the nation had developed and what "justice for all" entailed.

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[17] Michael Rossman, "Reflections on the American Theater: The 1968 Elections," in Rossman, *The Wedding Within the War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1971), 279-283; reprinted from *Activist* #22 (fall 1968).

[18] James P. O'Brien, "The New Left, 1967-68," *Radical America* 2 (November-December 1968), 28-43; Steve Halliwell, "Rebellion Heightened Radical Awareness," *Guardian* 24 August 1968; Paul Rockwell, "The Uprising at Columbia: A Radical View," *New York Free Press*, 9 May 1968; Irving Louis Horowitz, "Radicals and the Revolt Against Reason," *New Politics* 6 (1968), 30-41; Samuel P. Hays, "Right Face, Left Face: The Columbia Strike," *Political Science Quarterly* 94 (1969), 311-327. On the history of SDS see David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2008); James Miller, *"Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (New York: Praeger, 1982); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Un-making of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

Perhaps most importantly, movements forced norms for the conduct of everyday life to change, first in the intimate aspects of life such romance and family, but in law, politics, and economics, as new concerns generated new practices. Ideas of unquestioned national unity gave way to recognition of difference as fundamental to the human condition. A free society recognized and protected, rather than suppressed, the variety of experiences constituting every social organization. Freedom was not an achieved state but a continuous act of moral exertion that rested on the willingness to state, "This is what I believe." A new definition of pluralism took hold, and it was capacious enough that conservative groups like evangelical Christians could take their place in the mosaic of experiences, perspectives, and interests. No group could ever define a nation that was inherently pluralist and "multicultural." National identity emerged instead through the contention that normal political life entailed.

While conservatives could gain temporary advantage through stereotyping movements that were simultaneously social, cultural, and political, their leaders were aware how fragile their gains were. To the degree that "mainstream" voters knew feminists or gays personally, sympathy for the individual tended to overcome stereotypes about groups. General values were less important than what could be learned from person-to-person contact, precisely the point that conservatives like Buckley made in their analysis of why the United States was such an unstable society. Further, the media was typically though not uniformly sympathetic to the new movements. Many of the most widely watched national television shows, such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show, All in the Family, Soap,* or *M*A*S*H*, presented positive caricatures of the new cultural rebels while ridiculing conservatives whose commitment to tradition prevented them from learning from experience. *Fortune* magazine, a business journal produced by the Time-Life Corporation, produced a special issue on the new protest movements in 1969; in the introduction to the issue, the magazine's editors claimed that precisely because protestors were willing to take a stand, they were "forerunners." Their critical perspectives, rather than those of "conservatives" or "conformists," would be the basis for the national commonplaces of the end of the century. *Fortune*'s editors predicted that because young social movement leaders were unafraid of action and impelled by strong moral values, as they matured they find themselves in leadership positions in every part of U.S. society.

Polls through the 1970s show remarkable consistency in the ability of large numbers of Americans to hold apparently contradictory opinions. Government was needed to maintain order, but politicians were by definition corrupt. Private action was more likely to solve important problems more effectively than the government. Ironically, the most frequently cited evidence for that conclusion was the success of protest movements for causes like civil rights, women's equality, or the environment in getting the nation to confront its problems. Poll respondents censured the nation's protest movements for excessive actions and statements, but large majori-

ties still held that "most" protestors acted with good motivations, the issues they raised were important, and the end results were beneficial. [19]

The unifying thread connecting the protest movements emerging in the 1960s to the nation's liberal traditions was the insistent demand that the principal decisions of one's life be voluntary and not coerced. At the very minimum, individual autonomy mean the right to define the meaning of one's own experiences, and that might include the decision that the satisfaction of desires hitherto decreed sinful was positive. The new movements insisted that private experience and public life were two distinct, antithetical orders, a stance that had profound ramifications for how one defined the scope of political life and the proper questions that should be included in its deliberations. The relocation of value from public order to private experience meant, for example, that "freedom" as the right to participate in civic life with the corresponding obligation to abide by its decisions yielded to a sense of independence from civic life and a diminution of its sacral character. Nonetheless, personal belief remained meaningless until it was expressed and received response. Freedom did not rest on the solitude of individual belief, but in a strengthened because unforced collective agreement that took into account a greater variety of experience.

The growing divisions between public and private order also complicated long-standing differences between right and left, for although conservatives insisted that government involvement in economic matters was socialism, they increasingly demanded that government rigorously enforce customary morality by reimposing bans on abortion lifted in 1973 (and possibly contraceptive technology as well), recriminalizing homosexuality, making divorce more difficult, and tightening censorship of the media and publications to eliminate morally offensive material. Conservatives most consistently maintained public visibility by clamoring for government control over the most intimate aspects of personal behavior. Increasingly popular culture associated conservatives with repression of individuality. The right gained from the political vacuum of 1968, but by insisting that control of sexuality was the necessary foundation for restoring national discipline lost the cultural wars.

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[19] The special issue of *Fortune* was released as a book, *Youth in Turmoil: Adapted from a Special Issue of Fortune* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1969). On public opinion during the 1970s, see Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real America: A Surprising Examination of the State of the Union* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976), particularly pp. 158-160, 218-223; Daniel Yankelovitch, *Generations Apart: A Study of the Generation Gap* (New York: Columbia Broadcasting System, 1969); Daniel Yankelovitch, *Youth and the Establishment* (Washington: Daniel Yankelovitch Inc., 1971); Daniel Yankelovitch, *Changing Youth Values in the 70s: A Study of American Youth* (Washington: Daniel Yankelovitch Inc., 1974); Daniel Yankelovitch, *The New Morality: A Profile of American Youth in the 70s* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); Daniel Yankelovitch, *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York: Random House, 1981); Roberth Wuthnow, *The Consciousness Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). On the positive treatment of new social movements in television programming during the 1970s, see Edd Whetmore, *Media America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 229-241.

Out of the cultural conflicts of the late 1960s three factors in particular became important political realities, factors that define the confusing shifts of late-twentieth-century life in the United States:

1) Greater frankness in public expression about varieties of individual behavior, particularly as related to sexuality;

2) Distrust of public life as a persistent threat to the primacy of personal experience;

3) Fracturing of a unified American identity based on shared myths of a common national history.

The new history of the country emphasized that the crimes of genocide against Native Americans and of slavery lay at the founding of the American state. Despite protests by conservatives that this history was one-sided, its spread through school curriculum, through popular media, and its effects on public holidays was a specific instance of a broader distrust of all institutions that conservatives promoted for their immediate political interests but could not control. The new history facilitated minority groups finally able to speak of the oppression that had shaped their collective histories and their members' individual development.

Since 1968 and the election of Richard Nixon as president, the U.S. has been a society split between a conservative political hegemony and a culture where "anything goes," meaning open to vicarious exploration (and exploitation) of wider varieties of behavior. Executive powers have grown, and presidents, regardless of party, have asserted their prerogative to act independently of Congress should he (and he alone) determined he needed to defend "national security" or "order." The concentration of power has only intensified distrust of politics and the higher value the people of the United States place in personal relationships and private activity.

The direction flowing from 1968 in the United States proved over the long term to be cultural regeneration of the nation's liberal values to fit the realities of a more diverse and divided citizenry. The ability to speak of experiences that had always been painful but had only recently become expressible did not mean, however, either that pain vanished or that its causes were known. Nor did it mean that rational discussion would follow, much less coherent problem solving. The narration of self and the valorization of difference have been no more than initial steps in a process with no predefined conclusion, but the new openness at the very least forced others in society to acknowledge the variety of experiences their world encompassed. Institutions in the U.S. now assume conflict rather than harmony as the practical basis of civic life. To use a metaphor that poet Robert Duncan proposed, social interaction has become a debate between poems, in which each person tries with varying degrees of success to convey the meaning that he or she has found.[20] Given the shifting interpretations and the fabulistic roots of consciousness that in its socially

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[20] Robert Duncan, "The Truth and Life of Myth," in Robert Duncan, *Fictive Uncertainties* (New York: New Directions, 1984), 35-36.

determined forms seek expression in stereotypes, widening the scope of experience to which society will listen in no way guarantees an effective response. Interpersonal dialogue, however valuable an element in establishing the needs of actual human beings as a foundation to group process, is not the same thing as social dialogue, in which the participants attempt to uncover the ways social structure, discourse, and identity are produced. The relation between private validity and public disorder remains the open, waiting-to-be-resolved problem of contemporary life in the United States.