

AMERICA'S RIGHT  
ANTI-ESTABLISHMENT CONSERVATISM  
FROM GOLDWATER TO THE TEA PARTY

ROBERT B. HORWITZ

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# CONTENTS

Preface	vi
Acknowledgments	viii
1 Introduction	1
2 Anti-statist Statism: A Brief History of a Peculiarly American Conservatism	23
3 Religion and Politics: The Rise of the New Christian Right	63
4 Two Generations of Neoconservatism: From the Law of Unintended Consequences to the Cleansing Fire of Violence	112
5 Richard Hofstadter's "Paranoid Style" Revisited: The Tea Party, Past as Prologue	157
6 Dogmatism, Utopianism, and Politics	202
Notes	211
Index	266

## PREFACE

Conservatism has been the most important political doctrine in the United States for nearly four decades. It has dominated the intellectual debate and largely set the national policy agenda, even during years of Democratic electoral control. But twenty-first-century conservatism has moved far beyond even the “Reagan Revolution” of small government, lower taxes, and a respect for tradition. Contemporary American conservatism practices a politics that is disciplined, uncompromising, utopian, and enraged, seeking to “take back our country.” An unlikely alliance of libertarians, neoconservatives, and the Christian right has launched anxious and angry attacks on the purported homosexual agenda, the “hoax” of climate change, the rule by experts and elites, and the banishment of religion from the public realm. In the foreign policy arena it has tried to remake the world through the cleansing fire of violence.

This is *anti-establishment conservatism*, whose origin can be traced back to the right wing that battled both the reigning post-World War II liberal consensus and the moderate, establishment Republican Party (also known as the Grand Old Party or GOP). This book examines the nature of anti-establishment conservatism, traces its development from the 1950s to the Tea Party, and explains its political ascendance.

Books on conservatism litter the journalistic and academic landscapes. Indeed, the treatment of conservatism has become somewhat of a scholarly cottage industry. What is different about *this* effort is its attention to both domestic and foreign policy, and the weaving of these two facets of anti-establishment conservative thought and action into one coherent narrative of change over time. *America’s Right* also revisits and reassesses some of the older, dismissed theoretical assessments of the conservative movement, most notably that of the mid-twentieth-century historian Richard Hofstadter. This

## PREFACE

revisit allows students of conservatism to circle back to the 1950s to see how public intellectuals and scholars like Hofstadter interpreted a moment of political ferment not unlike our own. *America's Right* then applies and adjusts some of those interpretations to help make sense of the current conservative moment.

The book begins in the 1950s, when conservatism shifted from its pre-World War II isolationism to embrace a double “rollback”: of the New Deal and of international communism. Anti-establishment conservatism’s fusion of libertarian and traditionalist principles found its political expression in the candidacy of Barry Goldwater, GOP standard-bearer in the 1964 presidential election. Goldwater’s crushing defeat did not subdue anti-establishment conservatism; its political entrepreneurs built the institutions that served to channel the ongoing discontent with liberalism. *America's Right* analyzes these institutions and how they helped facilitate the reemergence of anti-establishment conservatism in the late 1970s. It examines the two movements most responsible for this rejuvenation: the new Christian right and neoconservatism. The millenarian underpinnings of anti-establishment conservatism came to the fore after the 9/11 attacks, and informed the rationale for the George W. Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq in 2003. Finally, the book explores the most recent manifestation of anti-establishment conservatism: the Tea Party.

While *America's Right* is broadly sourced, it is written for the general serious reader. I have tried hard not to use academic jargon or assume great familiarity with social and political theory. Where I employ big concepts – such as secularism, pre- or post-millennialism, American exceptionalism, and the like – I endeavor to define them simply and clearly. Where I explore a theory – such as Hofstadter’s “paranoid style” – I try to explain it straightforwardly and with rich context. The vast majority of the notes are bibliographic citations, although I do employ the occasional textual note where it aids in explaining an issue in the main body of the text. Readers who wish to see a comprehensive bibliography can go to my webpage on the University of California, San Diego Department of Communication website: <http://communication.ucsd.edu/people/faculty/robert-horwitz.html>.

Because of the topic and the writing pitch and style, I hope the book will have some general audience readership. As a synthetic overview of history and political sociology that spans the politics of the post-war period and ends with the Tea Party movement, this volume is, I think, of contemporary topical interest and will have a decent shelf life for students interested in a longer perspective on American politics.

## INTRODUCTION



North Iowa Tea Party billboard, Mason City, Iowa, 2010.

The ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] has got to take a lot of blame for this [the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001]. And I know I'll hear from them for this, but throwing God . . . successfully with the help of the federal court system . . . throwing God out of the public square, out of the schools, the abortionists have got to bear

T1

## INTRODUCTION

some burden for this because God will not be mocked and when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. . . . I really believe that the pagans and the abortionists and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who try to secularize America . . . I point the thing in their face and say you helped this happen.

The Reverend Jerry Falwell, on the Christian Broadcast Network's  
*700 Club* television program (September 13, 2001)

Man-made climate change is “patently absurd . . . junk science . . . a beautifully concocted scheme . . . by the left . . . just an excuse for more government control of your life.

Former U.S. Senator and 2012 Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum, on the Rush Limbaugh radio show (June 8, 2011)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to the taxpayers of the (\_\_\_\_\_ district of the) state of \_\_\_\_\_ and to the American people that I will: ONE, oppose any and all effort to increase the marginal income tax rate for individuals and business; and TWO, oppose any net reduction or elimination of deductions and credits unless matched dollar for dollar by further reducing tax rates.

Taxpayer Protection Pledge signed by 234 of 240  
Republican members of the U.S. House of Representatives,  
and 40 of 47 Republican members of the U.S. Senate in 2011.  
Authored by Americans for Tax Reform, a lobbying  
group headed by Grover Norquist

What we might call the “anti-establishment” right wing now defines American conservatism. It has by and large taken over the Republican Party. A movement long in the making, with roots in the Goldwater presidential campaign of 1964, anti-establishment conservatism achieved major success with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. It subsequently orchestrated the congressional opposition to the Clinton presidency in the mid-1990s, including shutting down the government and impeaching the president. Effectively securing the executive branch in the George W. Bush era, it helped drive the country to war in Iraq in 2003. During the years of the Obama presidency, anti-establishment conservatism has become the foremost

T1

## INTRODUCTION

face of the Republican Party, manifest in the populist rage of the Tea Party and the stunning obduracy of Republicans in Congress.

Instances of the anti-establishment right's forthright positions are now legion. In debates involving matters of science, for example, anti-establishment conservatives, such as Rick Santorum in the epigraph above, consistently ignore the overwhelming consensus among climatologists that human activity and industry are largely responsible for the perilous warming of the planet. Many conservatives of this tendency still hold out against Darwin's theory of evolution in favor of "creation science," and make every effort to stop "God being thrown out of the schools" (to paraphrase the Reverend Jerry Falwell in our opening epigraph) by getting at least equal billing for creationism or intelligent design in high school biology classes. In foreign policy, anti-establishment conservatives pressed relentlessly for the invasion of Iraq without proper regard to the actual evidence of the existence of Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction. The George W. Bush administration, epitomizing anti-establishment conservatism in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, insisted on the direct link between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda long after the claim had been thoroughly refuted. By many credible accounts, the administration cooked highly equivocal intelligence to appear substantive and conclusive. It engaged in tortured legal logic to find that torture was not torture. And it fixed facts to support preconceived policy determinations in areas of particular interest to business and religious constituencies. Indeed, the administration effectively turned over certain government agencies or departments to select religious groups.

In our current moment, congressional Republicans engage in an unbending, mantra-like advocacy of tax cuts and deficit reduction in the face of any and all economic conditions – showing that they do not have a real economic policy, but rather a canonical system of political beliefs. As became evident in the fraught congressional brawl over raising the federal debt ceiling in the summer of 2011, the Republican agenda revealed itself as a weird cross between duplicity and self-delusion, with demands for severe deficit reduction and balanced budgets notwithstanding the enormous, and unopposed, deficits run up by recent Republican presidents. Republicans failed to defeat President Obama in the 2012 election in a campaign replete with intemperate flights of fancy on the right. The GOP also failed to retake the Senate. Some Tea Party movement supporters insisted that President Barack Obama was not an American citizen and was secretly a member of the Muslim faith. In their view the president

T1



## INTRODUCTION

was intent on ruining America through his “socialist” policies – with the North Iowa Tea Party even equating Obama’s “Democrat Socialism” with Hitler’s “National Socialism” and Lenin’s “Marxist Socialism” in the notorious billboard pictured at the opening of this chapter. One Tea Party-identified candidate for the Senate in 2012 declared that a woman could not become pregnant from “legitimate” or forcible rape because under such circumstances “the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.” During the debate over President Obama’s healthcare bill, Tea Party supporters exclaimed with urgent fury, “Keep the government out of my Medicare!” – apparently not comprehending that Medicare is a social insurance program administered by the U.S. government.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, of all the political actors on the stage during the 2008 financial crisis, it was the Tea Party that possessed the political vocabulary capable of expressing the disgust of the class bias and unfairness of the government bailouts of the banks, insurance, and mortgage companies responsible for the financial collapse.

What is going on here? What is anti-establishment conservatism and where did it come from? Why is it so dogmatic and sometimes even at odds with empirical reality? And how has it triumphed – at least in terms of capturing the Republican Party, if not the political climate as a whole? The latter assertion may seem overstated in the wake of Obama’s reelection, but it is the case that the right has pretty much set the political agenda in the United States for almost four decades. The answers are rooted in conservatism itself, especially its American version.

Conservatism embodies a venerable, coherent, if sometimes conflicted set of values rooted in an appreciation for the importance of tradition and the social world we inherit, a theory of individual freedom and property, and a deep suspicion of the power of the state. European conservatism has typically been oriented toward the concern with tradition and cultural inheritance. In contrast, American conservatism, born of classical liberalism’s focus on the individual, has usually gravitated toward theories of freedom and property. In this outlook, liberty and property are inescapably linked. Property makes it possible for a human being to develop in mind and spirit: that is, for an individual to be free. Property in effect underlies personhood: it provides an individual with perspective, privacy, responsibility, and a concrete place in society. A person has the natural right to the possession and use of his or her property; indeed, private property is among the most fundamental of natural rights. Without property, a person has no concrete free existence. He or she is

## INTRODUCTION

inevitably dependent on others, especially government, and hence essentially unfree. Property, thus, is a sacred moral value, the key to individual freedom and the prerequisite of a free society. Against the modern liberal notion of equality, conservative thought declares human beings as essentially unequal in their natural gifts and abilities. Freedom can thus only consist in the ability of each person to develop without hindrance according to the law of his or her own personality. Hence of fundamental concern to conservatism is the power of the centralized state and its threat to liberty and property.<sup>2</sup>

While conservatism reaches back centuries, how its principles manifest concretely has varied considerably. Like most belief systems, there are many versions that fall under the label of conservatism: some have to do with the view of human nature; others focus on the lessons drawn from history (originally the lessons drawn from the shock of the French Revolution). The distinct form of conservatism that is dominant in any given historical period depends on the conditions of that period and the other political philosophies with which conservatism does battle, including battles internal to the conservative creed itself. Our current dominant form of conservatism in the United States, which I have called anti-establishment conservatism, has a complex but readily traced historical pedigree. That lineage enables us to understand its profile and disposition.

American conservatism has always differed from its European counterparts in its virtually unalloyed embrace of individualism and capitalism, and its selective hatred of the state. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American conservatism (then known as classical liberalism) was defined by its stout, repressive, and successful defense of laissez-faire capitalism and property rights, often legitimated by the ideology of Social Darwinism (the “survival of the fittest” applied to human society).<sup>3</sup> Interference with the invisible hand of supply and demand, even if well intentioned, was understood to disrupt the natural negotiations that make the market function so well. If this meant suffering for those who lost in the competitive struggle, it was the unfortunate price of both liberty and productivity. The operative maxim was: the government that governs best is that which governs least.

But the Great Depression weakened faith in American business and its sundry ideological supports. The policies initiated under the Democratic presidency of Franklin Roosevelt – known as the New Deal – ushered in various forms of state interventionism, some of which, pushed by a newly empowered labor movement, had a social democratic cast of mitigating inequality and of promoting basic public

T1

## INTRODUCTION

controls over markets. In the 1930s and 1940s, what we might call the “old right,” rooted in business and straddling the Democratic and Republican parties, set itself against the Roosevelt administration. The old right decried the New Deal as fostering economic collectivism and redistribution. For the conservatives of the 1930s and 1940s, like their predecessors in the “Gilded Age” from the 1860s to the mid-1890s, the market was the democratic sphere of liberty. It was government that threatened freedom. Indeed, for conservatives the experience of the twentieth century was that in the name of equality and with the professed aim of improving life for the masses, the state alarmingly accrued power and weakened property rights. In so doing, the state undermined the fundamental condition of liberty that emanates from property, undercutting freedom writ large. The old right thus called for the “rollback” of the New Deal. Its critique of the state in many respects extended to foreign policy. In the period between the two world wars, American conservatives tended toward isolationism. They counseled avoidance of entangling political commitments – especially in European affairs, which, after the experience of World War I, conservatives saw as intractable. And because spending on armies and armaments required higher taxes and thus inevitably produced inflation, the old right was convinced that a militarized foreign policy would lead inevitably to the dreaded concentration of governmental power.

Voters, however, did not agree. New Deal Democrats were consistently returned to office. (To be sure, the New Deal coalition had its own conservatives – on racial matters and labor unions, concentrated in the Democratic South.) By the early 1950s, the old right – still anti-New Deal and isolationist – split more or less into two key factions. The dominant bloc essentially made its peace with the New Deal and with America’s post-war internationalist, interventionist foreign policy of the containment of communism. This dominant bloc was “establishment conservatism” or moderate Republicanism, centered (actually or metaphorically) in the Northeast, tied to Wall Street and large corporations, led initially by GOP 1944 and 1948 presidential nominee Thomas Dewey, and then Dwight Eisenhower. In essence, establishment conservatism made its accommodation with liberals and with theory and doctrine in the overweening pragmatic effort to protect private enterprise and foster its advance. By and large, establishment conservatism accepted what historians label the post-war “liberal consensus”: that is, the basic New Deal order of modest welfare state, Keynesian economics (i.e. a fiscal and monetary policy of government spending to increase aggregate demand) and

## INTRODUCTION

the application of disinterested social science in pursuit of the national interest, and interventionist foreign policy of containment of communism – but a milder, less state interventionist, less expensive, less labor-dominated, more business-friendly version.

*Anti-establishment conservatism*, the other faction that emerged from the dissolution of the pre-war old right, developed as a movement in opposition not just to the liberal consensus of the post-war period, but to establishment conservatism as well. Located principally in small business and its political affiliates, geographically rooted in the Midwest and West, but also scattered amongst a welter of anti-communist and political fringe groups (some of which identified as Christian religious organizations standing up for God and western civilization), anti-establishment conservatism continued the call for the rollback of the New Deal – and for the ousting of the Republican establishment. Barry Goldwater, the Arizona Senator who emerged as one of anti-establishment conservatism's leaders, denounced establishment conservatism as “me-too Republicanism.” “Me too” conveyed sharp criticism of the established Republican Party's collaboration with Democrats in the post-war liberal consensus. In contrast, anti-establishment conservatism advocated the rollback of the centralized New Deal state in favor of a principled individual liberty. The rollback metaphor also applied to foreign policy. This signaled a major ideological shift. By the early 1950s, virtually all segments of the old right turned away from isolationist foreign policy. But whereas establishment conservatism largely accepted the policy of containment, anti-establishment conservatism called for the military defeat of international communism. Anti-establishment conservatism denounced containment in favor of aggressive, muscular, and – if necessary – nuclear action against the Soviet Union and its satellites. Roll communism back.

Anti-establishment conservatism thus carried on the pre-war old right's loathing of the New Deal but turned away from its foreign policy isolationism. It combined or “fused” two strains of thought: an economic libertarianism with a socially conservative Christian traditionalism. These strains resided in some tension. The libertarian form, derived from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European liberalism (and particularly the English philosopher John Locke), was founded on principles of the freedom of the individual, limited government, a capitalist economy, and the social contract to protect private property.<sup>4</sup> The market was a mechanism of virtue because of its efficiency and its promotion of individual freedom. The traditionalist strain, rooted in a religious, essentially Christian sensibility,

T1

## INTRODUCTION

understood society as a community woven into a web of values and obligations that binds individuals to one another, united by belief in a transcendent being and an objective moral order. A particular reading of Edmund Burke, the eighteenth-century British parliamentarian and political philosopher, formed the basis of traditionalism. Burke emphasized order and social harmony, on the necessity to balance freedom with self-restraint and duty. We have obligations toward those from whom we inherited our world, Burke maintained. Likewise, we have obligations toward those who will inherit the world from us.<sup>5</sup>

What bridged the differences between the two strains of conservatism was a shared loathing of the New Deal and of communism. In the fusion of traditionalism and libertarianism, the moral force of property was understood to guarantee individual freedom, the traditional family, and communal virtue. The Bible and the U.S. Constitution were understood as textual guides. Known at the time as “fusionism,” anti-establishment conservatism presented an ideologically charged version of customary conservative beliefs in laissez-faire capitalism and private property rights, limited government and low taxes, the defense of the traditional family, the original meaning of the Constitution, anti-communism, and stout national defense. Best articulated by William F. Buckley, Jr.’s *National Review* magazine, fusionism adopted a peculiarly anti-statist statism, allowing the movement to support interventionist anti-communist foreign policy and the massive military-industrial complex that served it, while in the same breath condemning the growth of the federal government as a threat to individual liberty, personal responsibility, and self-reliance.<sup>6</sup> Anti-establishment conservatism’s grassroots, located largely in the West and later in the South, were nurtured on this ideology while sustained materially by massive government spending on defense.

A right-wing populist revolt against the post-war liberal consensus, including the consensus’s Republican establishment supporters, fueled the Goldwater movement in the early 1960s. Establishment conservatism’s vigilance against communism, which included the New Deal itself as a form of proto-communism, was judged by the revolt to be woefully deficient. Winning only 38.5 percent of the popular vote, Goldwater lost big in the 1964 presidential election, but the forces set in motion by his defeat laid the ideological and institutional groundwork for anti-establishment conservatism’s subsequent ascendance. Diminished by the Goldwater defeat, the movement didn’t disappear; rather it went into rebuilding mode. It re-grouped, built

## INTRODUCTION

institutions and recruited leaders, attracted money from right-wing businessmen, mobilized conservative Christians politically, and, sixteen years later, helped bring Ronald Reagan to the presidency. Since that 1980 victory, anti-establishment conservatism has manifested in an effective, if somewhat discordant alliance of reenergized anti-New Deal business, the Christian or evangelical right (embodying social conservatism), neoconservatism (disillusioned liberal intellectuals who moved to the right in the 1970s), and the libertarian conservative tradition now embodied by the Tea Party movement. Anti-establishment conservatism has effectively become the new establishment. Conservatism today is of the anti-establishment variety. This book traces that development.

What are the features of contemporary anti-establishment conservatism? Principled to the point of being dogmatic, fundamentalist in style and inclination, apocalyptic in rhetoric, anti-establishment conservatism brooks no compromise. Indeed, it derides the old maxim that politics is the art of the possible and deems those who live by that adage as weaklings, sellouts, even traitors. The old “me-too Republican” insult has been replaced by the RINO acronym – “Republican in Name Only.” Politics for anti-establishment conservatives is, for all intents and purposes, Manichean, a life or death struggle between good and evil. My use of religious metaphors is, plainly, by design, for a convinced, intransigent, faith-based style of politics has become characteristic of contemporary American conservatism, one that seems to attack the very notion of a public good. The old hardline libertarian saw, “taxation is theft,” increasingly animates conservative politics. In this view, taxation beyond some very restricted level of collective security is illegitimate, which makes the entire thrust of twentieth-century progressive politics essentially criminal. While this may be an extreme view, going far beyond the older, states rights-based conservative criticism of *federal* taxes as opposed to *local* ones, the extreme seems now to pervade all contemporary conservative politics. The Taxpayer Protection Pledge referred to in the opening epigraphs to this chapter conveys this outlook. For anti-establishment conservatives, taxes and government spending have become as much a moral matter as a political or economic one. Government, in this moral calculus, squanders hard-earned taxpayer dollars on programs that reward bad behavior. But when politics become ensconced within a deeply moralistic framework, negotiation and compromise become next to impossible. One’s opponents do not just differ on policy matters; their very opposition is confirmation of their bad intent, perhaps, even, their evil nature. Contemporary

T1

## INTRODUCTION

conservatives are apt to vilify their adversaries in a way that recalls historical religious battles. Their deeply held values tend to overwhelm inconvenient facts and evidence in a way that recalls religious fundamentalists explaining away the contradictions found in Scripture. Faith over facts.

Indeed, current-day conservatism puts the lie to the wry dictum attributed to the late Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan: “You’re entitled to your own opinions; you are not entitled to your own facts.” Virtually everything to anti-establishment conservatives – facts, science, expertise – is politics: that is, unsettled, untrue, and open to contestation. An aide to President George W. Bush, widely reputed to be Bush’s closest adviser, Karl Rove, conveyed this perspective in a noted 2004 interview with the journalist Ron Suskind. In Suskind’s retelling:

The aide said that guys like me were “in what we call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world really works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.”<sup>7</sup>

Although in recent decades the right has attacked liberals and liberalism for their supposed relativism and lack of a clear moral center, the aide’s comments in fact betray the right’s affinity with a worldview – these days laid at the door of postmodernism – that reality and truth are not fixed. Rather, politics is the power to define reality, to make truth. This articulation of what amounts to Leninist vanguardism, which at the same time casts some doubt as to the objective nature of reality, is rather stunning for a perspective that presumably cleaves to traditional notions of self-evident facts, timeless truths, and foundational texts.

The anti-establishment right thus reveals itself to be a complicated mix of conservative principle, fundamentalism, and truth-creating exercise of will, engaged in a radical effort to overturn settled law, norms, and institutions. How has conservatism evolved into such a state that it seems at odds with its moderate and intellectually principled origins in the likes of Edmund Burke, the French political

T1

## INTRODUCTION

thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville, the British statesman Benjamin Disraeli, and even, in comparison to what we see today, William F. Buckley, Jr.? If conservatism is in historical and theoretical terms a political philosophy and practice tied to notions of continuity, prudence, and incrementalism, of securing restraints on human passions and creating social institutions that foster, in Burke's phrase, "public affections," how is it that current American conservatism has become so fervent, so furious, so revolutionary? How are we to understand the tension in anti-establishment conservative ideology between the ostensibly fixed knowledge provided by an inerrant Bible and Constitution with the suggestion, by, it would appear, Karl Rove and others, that reality and truth are infinitely malleable? What explains the rage of the Tea Party movement and the elected representatives affiliated with it? And why has this brand of conservatism become so successful? These are the central questions this book tries to answer.

One noted explanation for the dogmatic turn of conservatism is that of the "paranoid style in American politics," formulated in 1963 by the historian Richard Hofstadter in his effort to comprehend the popular movements around Joseph McCarthy and Barry Goldwater. In Hofstadter's view there was legitimate debate to be had about American foreign policy and the danger of the Soviet Union, Keynesian economics and government spending, the influence of labor unions, and the like. What concerned Hofstadter was the *style* of popular conservatism. What he found so significant and disturbing about McCarthyism was the *way* the senator and his followers engaged in political argument (conspiracy mongering), expressed their political subjectivities (as rage), and understood themselves (as patriotic victims, in McCarthy's old phrase, of "a conspiracy so immense"). And, in the end, it wasn't a matter of simply style. The paranoid outlook affected substantive political content, transforming otherwise legitimate political disputes into fevered charges of betrayal and treason, the violation of natural law or God's will, and resulted in a poisoned political climate and the widespread abuse of people's rights. Hofstadter understood right-wing movements as manifestations of a periodic, punctuated upwelling from a permanent reservoir of anti-intellectualism, even mass irrationalism, in American life. Those drawn to the paranoid politics of McCarthyism and Goldwaterism were, in Hofstadter's analysis, deeply distressed by the pace and direction of post-World War II social change, and judged their group position in American society to be under grave threat. They were convinced that "America has been largely taken away from

T1



## INTRODUCTION

them and their kind, though they are determined to try to repossess it and to prevent the final destructive act of subversion.”<sup>8</sup> Behind these convictions, Hofstadter submitted, was the powerful phenomenon of “status anxiety,” the psychological sense of loss of rank and place, of an intense feeling of victimhood, and the need to find and punish those responsible for this. The result was a curiously crude and almost superstitious form of anti-communism which discovered in elites (even Republican presidents!) individuals of wholly evil intent who conspired against the public good, and found in the modest American welfare state alarming economic policies that posed an existential danger to the fabric of free society.<sup>9</sup>

Jump forward forty-plus years. The rage and conspiracy mongering following the election of Barack Obama – and the generally dogmatic tenor of conservative politics in the George W. Bush years – have prompted a Hofstadter revival of sorts among political commentators and social scientists. Again, the antipathy to taxes and government spending, the anxiety about what conservatives perceive as the increasing control by the federal government over American life are, of course, familiar themes, legitimate subjects of even passionate political disagreement. What startled, again, was the *style* of conservative politics, particularly that embodied by the Tea Party movement but hardly confined to it: the rage and invective that accompanied the critique of government spending and the so-called nanny state; the racist rhetoric and fantastical fixation on President Obama’s birth certificate, citizenship status, religious affiliation, and reputed association with terrorists; the outraged claims, backed by no evidence whatever, that the Democratic health care reform bill of 2009–10 called for “death panels”; accusations that the scientific consensus on climate change was a politicized hoax perpetrated by leftist elites. It’s hard not to summon up Hofstadter’s concept of the paranoid style after encountering the ubiquitous Tea Party slogan, “We want our country back!” Back from whom? Back to what? To a simpler, happier time when nice white Christian people ran an America that itself confidently ran the world? Indeed, Hofstadter’s description of the paranoid style of the early 1960s is so apt for our current moment it feels slightly uncanny.

In the paranoid style, as I conceive it, the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy. But there is a vital difference between the paranoid spokesman in politics and the clinical paranoiac: although they both tend to be overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and

## INTRODUCTION

apocalyptic in expression, the clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world in which he feels himself to be living as directed specifically *against him*; whereas the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others. Insofar as he does not usually see himself singled out as the individual victim of a personal conspiracy, he is somewhat more rational and much more disinterested. His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far to intensify his feeling of righteousness and his moral indignation.<sup>10</sup>

But incisive description is not adequate explanation. As many of Hofstadter's critics were quick to point out, the problem with the theory of the paranoid style is that its social psychological approach makes it easy to label as atavistic and irrational those political actors and behaviors with which the researcher happens to disagree. At the end of the day, Hofstadter's analysis is a description of a political style, tied to a grand social psychological theory. Hofstadter posed a macro argument (certain social structural conditions produce status anxiety) and a micro argument (people anxious of their place in the world exhibit a paranoid, conspiracy-mongering political style) – with nothing in between. A central flaw is the absence of a middle level of analysis to connect the two. This book focuses on this middle level of analysis. It traces the concrete institutions responsible for mobilizing and channeling anger, anxiety, and ideas in particular conservative directions, and that produce particular kinds of conservative political subjectivities and a distinct conservative political culture. In this approach, institutions and ideas are co-constitutive. To understand the ascendance of anti-establishment conservatism, we must trace the development of ideas in the rough and tumble of politics in historical context, and understand the networks of money, media, and organizations that the anti-establishment conservative movement has built to channel those ideas over the last four-plus decades.

Of particular interest to this study are the Christian right and the neoconservatives, inasmuch as these particular groups developed the ideas and networks that reenergized anti-establishment conservatism beginning in the 1970s. Politics are often defined by what (and who) one hates. Arriving separately on the American political scene, the Christian right and neoconservatism each articulated deep loathing toward the worldview and politics of the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. This abhorrence grew into an expansive critique of the modern

T1

## INTRODUCTION

liberal state, which Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals believed (with some justification) had turned against them, their institutions, and their values. The logic of the equal protection and due process protections of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution – the so-called rights revolution – expanded in the 1960s from the legal protection of racial minorities against discrimination to a defense of pluralistic values in the public sphere. Pluralism, particularly in the form of the ban on school prayer, and the striking down of laws against contraception, abortion, and sexual expression, upended the fixed moral truths that essentially had been embedded in American society by virtue of its Protestant-based civil religion. The rights revolution, and the “counterculture” that accompanied and fueled it, had the effect of challenging the relatively insular, protected world of conservative Christians generally, and particularly through tax, education, and labor policies. Fearful for their institutions (especially their private schools and their lucrative radio and television networks), fundamentalists and conservative evangelicals denounced liberal government and the value system they believed lay behind it, labeling that value system “secular humanism.” They were especially scornful of a federal judiciary that had begun to apply the Fourteenth Amendment in cases involving Christian institutions. As this book will show, while fundamentalists supposedly withdrew from the secular world to concentrate on salvation, in fact they were very much part of the politics of anti-communism and anti-civil rights. Nonetheless, it *is* the case that by the late 1970s, conservative Christians, newly mobilized politically and brought into the Republican fold with the help of former Goldwater political entrepreneurs, became a key constituency in the Reagan electoral coalition. Since 1980, the Christian right has been acknowledged as the “base” of the Republican Party.

Neoconservatism was neither an electoral constituency nor a grassroots movement. Rather it was an influential intellectual inclination that began with a trenchant critique of government overreach and the unintended consequences of liberal public policies. Although in general supportive of the New Deal, neoconservatives turned to the right because they believed the federal government by the late 1960s was guilty of engaging in social engineering. At the root of government overreach, epitomized in their view by the anti-poverty Great Society programs of Lyndon Johnson’s administration, was a “New Class” of unproductive liberal public sector professional elites whose ill-advised and costly endeavors to re-make social behavior served to fortify their own position and power. The New Class’s will

## INTRODUCTION

to power came largely at the expense of virtuous “producers”: that is, at the expense of those honorable laboring members of society, including businessmen, who actually produced economic value and added to the real wealth of the nation. By implication, the New Class did not add value; indeed, its members were parasitic on those who did. Neoconservative New Class analysis represented a right turn in the anti-elitist politics historically identified with American populism.

Distinct movements, the Christian right and neoconservatism by the mid-1970s discovered they shared intellectual affinities and moral convictions. The neoconservative critique of the New Class in many respects mirrored the Christian right’s critique of secular humanism. Both groups blamed big government for creating the nation’s ills and imperiling private enterprise, which, naturally, also served to align them with certain business interests. The Christian right and neoconservatism both also held that the United States was faltering in its leadership of the free world. They shared an unabashed belief in American exceptionalism: that is, in the conviction as to the beneficent, universal nature of the American values that necessarily accompany U.S. military ventures abroad; that war was the preferred means to defeat America’s external enemies and, in the case of the neoconservatives, the way to spread democracy to blighted parts of the globe. And they shared an appreciation of religion as providing the moral and cultural foundations for a wobbly, even endangered, liberal democracy. As leaders of the two groups began to interact, they increasingly came to share material networks and resources as well as ideas. They implored business to help spread the ideas, and business responded generously. The same foundations, corporations, millionaires, and CEOs began funding neoconservative and religious initiatives, think tanks, advocacy organizations, symposia, and publications; Christian right and neoconservative leaders began attending the same conferences; their writings appeared in each other’s newsletters and journals.

The corporate underwriting of right-wing Christian and neoconservative ventures highlighted a third element in a reconstituted anti-establishment conservative alliance: big business. Having for the most part signed on to the post-war liberal consensus, big business ditched it in the 1970s in a revolt against regulation and tax policy and accommodation with organized labor. Although the business mobilization against government was swift and consequential, business was in many ways a follower, not a leader, of the anti-establishment conservative zeitgeist formulated by the intellectuals associated with the

T1

## INTRODUCTION

Christian right and especially the neoconservative movement. Here the role played by the neoconservative essayist and organizer Irving Kristol was crucial.

Kristol et al.'s ideas were powerful in this moment when the New Deal political coalition had begun to break down and the old liberal consensus policy tools had become less effective. The national Democratic Party's commitment to civil rights led to the defection of the white South from the party. Organized labor had already been transformed, beginning with the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, from a crusading social movement to just another interest group – and a diminishing one – of the Democratic coalition. The Vietnam War split the party. The 1970s marked the beginning of the decline in American hegemony: the Vietnam War sapped American global political leadership and economic globalization had begun to lessen America's post-war economic supremacy. Keynesian economic tools seemed unable to cope with the combined high inflation and unemployment of the 1970s. Together, the New Class and secular humanism critiques called into question a core principle of the modernist liberal consensus – that disinterested social science and policy expertise could be marshaled in the service of the national interest. Instead, neoconservatives and Christian evangelicals challenged – in their minds, exposed – expertise as politics and power. The essence of the New Class critique was that expertise was simply a masquerade for a particular kind of group self-interest. Liberal professionals in the government and non-profit sectors used their educational credentials and the language of expertise to gain power. This, too, had a deeper, historically pregnant religious dimension. The idea of a disinterested social science-based policy elite was in many respects the secular embodiment of the liberal Protestant Social Gospel. In that tradition, science, including social science, was a prime tool in achieving the kingdom of God on earth. At the time of the formulation of the Social Gospel around the beginning of the twentieth century, building the kingdom of God meant civic action to rectify social problems – which entailed Christian engagement in the world largely for the betterment of the working class and the poor. By the New Deal, the goal had become secularized and generalized as the common or national interest. Elite values of nonpartisan, disinterested social science were to be mobilized in the service of the people.<sup>11</sup> But fundamentalist Christians had been at war with the Social Gospel from the outset. The Social Gospel's assumption that humans, rather than God, could and should affect social outcomes was nothing short of blasphemy to conservative Christians.

T1

## INTRODUCTION

When in the 1970s the new Christian right, echoed in a more secular way by neoconservatives, criticized government actions as anti-religious or as social engineering, they were channeling central elements of the old battle with the Social Gospel into the new fight with liberals over the nature of liberalism and, concretely, the expansion of the Fourteenth Amendment-based rights revolution. To the Christian right and neoconservatives there was no such thing as disinterested social science; that was simply a mask for partisan liberal policy. This battle allied these newer constituents of the anti-establishment right to the old Goldwater libertarians, and fueled what would become the conservative class war on expertise in general. The attack on expertise as a form of liberalism became a key element in what came to be called the “culture wars.”

The political figure who embodied the anti-establishment conservative outlook was Ronald Reagan. It was around Reagan’s 1980 candidacy that coalesced the interlocking sets of conservative issue groups, the mobilization of material resources, and the articulation of a powerful political ideology of victimhood. Government was the problem; the citizenry was its victim. Reagan’s candidacy especially galvanized the Christian right. He famously declared his allegiance to the anti-establishment conservative alliance, saying to the August 1980 National Affairs Briefing of 15,000 religious leaders, “Now I know this is a nonpartisan gathering and so I know you can’t endorse me, but I only brought that up because I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing.”<sup>12</sup> Reagan was and remains conservatism’s idol. But Reagan is also in some ways an ambiguous figure. Whereas he benefited from the populism of the newly mobilized Christian right to gain the presidency and satisfied that constituency with occasional policies, more often he offered mere rhetorical flourishes, and in the end Reagan’s presidency was not much beholden to it. The actual Reagan revolution was for the most part a capitalist revolution, a re-conquest that reconfigured the relationship between the state and the economy in the partial dismantling of the welfare state, the deregulation of many industries (and consequent decline of labor union power), the privatization of a number of public functions and services, and the partial transfer of risk from corporations and government to individuals – what has come to be labeled neoliberalism.<sup>13</sup> Reagan was a more complicated politician than was once thought, as several new scholarly studies suggest. Denouncing taxes, Reagan raised them several times in the course of his presidency. Condemning government spending, his administration nearly tripled the federal budget deficit. Having supported on the campaign trail a

## INTRODUCTION

constitutional amendment that would have prohibited all abortions except when necessary to save the life of the mother, in office Reagan did comparatively little about abortion. And ranting against the Soviet Union as the evil empire, Reagan engaged Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in serious negotiations over massive reductions in nuclear arsenals and the possible sharing of missile defense technology.<sup>14</sup> This is not to say Reagan was no conservative. Hardly. It was Reagan who realigned the state toward the interests of business. But notwithstanding his top billing in the conservative pantheon and contrary to his own rhetoric, Reagan engaged in old-style give-and-take politics. Beyond well-timed rhetoric, Reagan did not much serve the interests of strict conservative ideologues or the Christian right or the neoconservatives. Still, the fact that Reagan is revered for anti-establishment right-wing policies he often didn't carry out is telling, for conservative politics since Reagan, endlessly invoking his legacy, has been largely of the anti-establishment variety.

It wasn't until 9/11 that anti-establishment conservatism saw its broadest hopes and policies put in place under George W. Bush. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 set the stage; the debacle of the Iraq War was the result. As neoconservatism evolved into its foreign policy-focused second generation, the intellectual movement came to share with the Christian right not just a harsh critique of liberalism, but the deep structure of millenarian utopianism. Neoconservative influence from the 1970s, first in hawkish foreign policy lobbying organizations and later in dominance of defense policy institutions, put the movement in a strong position when the fear and sense of risk became amplified by the attacks of September 11. The second generation of neoconservatives ignored its forebears' watchword of the dangers of social engineering and unintended consequences of public policy in favor of utopianism and the cleansing fire of violence in foreign affairs. This meant strong support for a confrontational policy legitimated by the belief in American exceptionalism. The idea that the United States is the embodiment of God's gift of freedom and constitutes the greatest earthly force for good the world has known has always fused elements of nationalism and religion. Muscular versions of American exceptionalism distinguished the thinking of the Christian right and neoconservatism, and figured heavily in the Bush administration's militaristic Middle East policy. Christian right support for the U.S. wars in the Middle East proceeded in some significant measure from the pre-millennialist belief in the Rapture and the "end-time," in which the world's destruction enables Christ's return and a new, perfect world to emerge. During

## INTRODUCTION

the Persian Gulf War of 1991, for example, the veteran prophecy writer Charles Taylor advised his followers that the war was preliminary to the Rapture.<sup>15</sup> If not the Antichrist himself, suggested conservative evangelical organizations and preachers, Saddam Hussein could well be a forerunner of the Evil One. In many evangelical readings of the New Testament's book of Revelation, the return of Jesus requires first that Jews return to the biblical boundaries of ancient Israel. War on Iraq would hasten this process. Thus many evangelicals regarded the invasion of Iraq as not simply an instance of a just war, but the realization of the prophesies of Revelation. Second-generation neoconservatism's utopianism lay in an analogous apocalyptic belief in the United States' ability to hasten universal democracy and a global free market through the creative application of violence.

Christian right and neoconservative brands of conservatism, influential since the late 1970s, became fully joined and embraced by the Bush administration in the wake of the fear and heightened perception of risk following September 11. President Bush himself said that he sensed a "Third [Great] Awakening" of religious devotion in the United States that coincided with the nation's struggle with international terrorists, a war he depicted as "a confrontation between good and evil."<sup>16</sup> Fusing Christian right and neoconservative worldviews, Bush disclosed in a 2007 interview, "It's more of a theological perspective. I do believe there is an Almighty, and I believe a gift of that Almighty to all is freedom. And I will tell you that is a principle that no one can convince me that doesn't exist."<sup>17</sup> The parallel millennial beliefs of the Christian right, neoconservatism, and the Bush administration coincided in the disaster of Iraq.

I have referred to the Iraq War as a debacle a few times now. I am hardly alone in this judgment. Many prominent diplomats and scholars, including retired Army general William Odom, the preeminent conservative newspaper columnist George F. Will, and former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, called Iraq the worst foreign policy disaster in U.S. history.<sup>18</sup> The lineaments of this assessment are now well understood. The direct American combat role in the Iraq War proceeded for almost nine years, with nearly 4,500 American military and at least 100,000 Iraqi civilian casualties at an unknown cost (officially \$750 billion but estimated at far higher – well beyond \$3 trillion when long-term medical costs and replacement costs of troop and equipment are factored in), and the internal displacement of 2.7 million Iraqis and exile of another 2 million.<sup>19</sup> The war siphoned off money, manpower, and attention from the military engagement in Afghanistan. The American military effort did remove the vile

T1



## INTRODUCTION

dictator Saddam Hussein from power. But as of this writing the viability of the Iraqi government remains in doubt, neighborhoods in major cities have been ethnically cleansed, infrastructure remains shattered, and basic services such as electricity are marginal at best. Indeed, the very “state-ness” of the country remains a question, given the strong tendencies of Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish communities toward separation and perhaps partition. Contrary to the self-assured pronouncements of Bush administration policy-makers, there were no Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. And contrary to the hoary expectations of the backers of the war, a would-be democratic Iraq did not become a model for other Arab states. A severely weakened Iraq is no longer a regional counterweight to Iran; indeed, many analysts point to Iran’s heavy, if below-the-radar, influence on Iraq’s ruling parties. U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that the Iraq conflict was a prime source of recruitment for the global jihadist movement.<sup>20</sup> In short, the Iraq War proved to be an utter fiasco, a dreadful monument to the law of unintended consequences abroad and at home.

Domestically, the Iraq War was perhaps the most far-reaching political event of recent years, for two interrelated reasons. First, when combined with the large tax cuts the Bush administration enacted in 2001 – which lowered tax rates across the board on income, dividends, and capital gains, and eventually eliminated the estate tax (and hence mostly reduced the taxes of America’s wealthy) – the huge expenditures on the Iraq War caused the federal budget deficit to balloon. Bush increased the budget deficit by \$6.1 trillion, far more than any other administration in history. Thus when the housing collapse and financial crash ensued in 2008, the increased indebtedness meant that the U.S. government had far less room to maneuver than it otherwise would have had. The high deficit/debt made Keynesian remedies under the incoming Obama administration much more difficult to sell politically. Worries about the (war-inflated) debt and deficit constrained the size and effectiveness of Obama’s economic stimulus.<sup>21</sup> And, of course, the effectiveness of a domestic stimulus package in an increasingly globalized economy already made its effectiveness less likely. The second far-reaching consequence was that the crisis intervention spending remedies that were put in place to deal with the near economic collapse mobilized a ferocious conservative populist political reaction in the form of the Tea Party movement, reanimating the anti-establishment conservative politics that had been temporarily discredited by the multiple failures of the Bush administration.

## INTRODUCTION

As stated previously, it was the Tea Party that proved most capable of expressing the disgust of the class bias and unfairness of the government bailouts of the banks, insurance, and mortgage companies responsible for the financial collapse. The government was seen as aiding the elites. This view superficially is true inasmuch as the structural bias of the state causes it to engage in crisis management in ways that safeguard the financial infrastructure of a capitalist economy. But it is also the case that the game *is* rigged on behalf of elites. Paradoxically, it is in part the very success of anti-establishment conservatism – the force that animates the Tea Party – that has made this so. After thirty-five years of hard ideological work, anti-establishment conservatism has succeeded in getting large sections of the American people to view government as the problem. This has consequences. When government is the problem, the public institutions historically built to check the power of structurally powerful entities, business corporations first among them, become eroded, hollowed out, and corrupted – and subject then to legitimate contempt and calls for their elimination. And in point of fact, since the 1970s and economic globalization, the old Keynesian solutions have proved less effectual and the old New Deal social democratic ideal has seemed more financially problematic. The conservative triumph does not come in a political vacuum, after all. But when the very idea of disinterested social science policy in the national interest is in doubt, there is no reason for the actual policy elite to pursue its activity in the pursuit of a non-existent ideal. The governmental elites then become the personification of what is held in contempt. If government is by nature ineffective and oppressive, even perhaps evil, why not try to “drown” the beast?<sup>22</sup>

### The scope of the book by chapter

If this, chapter 1, sets the stage, chapter 2 addresses the birth and development of modern American conservatism. It surveys the post-World War II political landscape, in which the old right found itself having to adapt to the liberal consensus of the New Deal and the interventionist, but bounded, foreign policy of containment of communism. The chapter traces the emergence of anti-establishment conservatism and its characteristic anti-statist statism, and its embodiment in the 1964 Goldwater campaign. The forces set in motion by Goldwater’s defeat, in conjunction with the erosion of the New Deal coalition owing to civil rights and the Vietnam War, laid the

T1

## INTRODUCTION

ideological and institutional groundwork for the victory of Ronald Reagan sixteen years later.

Chapter 3 traces one key element of that ideological and institutional groundwork, the rise of the new Christian right. In so doing, the chapter reconstructs a condensed history of evangelical Protestantism in America, the split between church modernists and fundamentalists, the supposed withdrawal of the latter from the world, and their reemergence to the realm of politics in the 1970s when they found their institutions under threat from the consequences of the expansion of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Chapter 4 discusses the evolution of neoconservatism from its roots in skeptical social science of domestic policy to its embrace of war as the preferred form of foreign policy. The chapter traces the intellectual affinities and institutional connections between neoconservatism and the Christian right and how, together, in a common critique of the New Class and secular humanism pursued through networks of foundations, think tanks, and media, they reinvigorated anti-establishment conservatism in the 1970s.

The neoconservative critique of the New Class underlies the sense of victimhood that propels the populist rage of the Tea Party movement, the latest manifestation of anti-establishment conservatism and the central focus of chapter 5. The Tea Party is a continuation of the revolt against elites, in which regard Richard Hofstadter's "paranoid style" is a powerful analytical device. The Tea Party pursues the long-term political goal of anti-establishment conservatism: to shrink support for and dismantle government.

Chapter 6 concludes the book with an exploration as to how utopianism has shifted from the political left to the political right. Anti-establishment conservatism is utopian and now rules the Republican Party. Its utopianism is largely responsible for the GOP's current dogmatic politics.