

Chapter Title: THE NEW SOUTH RISES

Book Title: Preparing for War

Book Subtitle: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism--and What Comes Next

Book Author(s): BRADLEY ONISHI

Published by: Augsburg Fortress, Broadleaf Books. (2023)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2phpsfh.6>

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Chapter 3

THE NEW SOUTH RISES

IN 1958, MY GRANDFATHER Noah Bradley told his family that they were moving to California. “Brad,” as everyone called him, was a cotton farmer. He’d had his crops wiped out by flooding enough times that he was willing to call it quits and head West to try something new. A short while later they left Portageville, a farming town in the boot heel of Missouri, to make the trek to the Golden State. My mom, who was eight at the time, and her younger sister were scrunched in the back of the family station wagon, along with all their worldly belongings. They left behind dozens of family members and the only place any of them had ever known. After an arduous journey, they settled in the San Gabriel Valley, east of Los Angeles, and about forty miles from Orange County.

Eventually, Mom moved to Orange County, where she met my dad. When Grandpa died in 1978, just before my birth, my grandmother relocated too. By the time my brothers and I came along in the early eighties, Mom fit seamlessly into the Orange County landscape. A short blonde with blue eyes, she had, by then, only a charming hint of her southern drawl. Southern California had become

home. Yet it wasn't because my mom and grandma had left the South behind. It's because they, and many others, had brought it with them.

Mom and her family were not the only ones on the road headed West. Between 1930 and 1960, six million southerners left home to relocate to major cities across the country, including Los Angeles and Orange County. Some of them were part of the Great Migration, which saw Black southerners leave Dixie in monumental numbers between 1917 and 1975. But that is not the whole story. Many White southerners left too, in what historians call the Sunbelt Migration. By 1970, more southerners lived in California than in any state in the South. This movement continued over the twentieth century, as economic growth in many Sunbelt cities after World War II stimulated migration from the Northeast and the Rust Belt. By 1990, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Phoenix were among the ten largest cities in the United States.

Orange County was one of the biggest winners of the Sunbelt Migration. Between 1950 and 1970, Orange County gained 1.2 million people. Between 1950 and 1960, 85 percent of the population growth was due to migration from other parts of the country. It was, in essence, a new gold rush made up of newcomers from the Midwest and the South. They were all flocking, like my mom and her family, for well-paying jobs, affordable housing, and Southern California's great weather.

The economic impetus for this migration was the Cold War, which fueled defense spending by the federal government and stimulated the economy in the process. The resulting windfall disproportionately benefited Southern California. By the early 1950s, California was at the top of the list for military contracts awarded. In the 1960s, the Golden State won twice as much money in such contracts than any other state. Before the Cold War, Orange County was a farming region, but it quickly transformed into the nation's hub for defense production. In 1950, very few Orange Countians worked in the defense industry. By the early 1960s, more than twelve thousand workers were employed by defense contractors such as Hughes Aircraft and Ford Aeronautics.

The establishment of the defense industry laid the foundation for other sectors. As migrants made their way to the Southland, they needed places to live, leading to a construction boom. Well-paying jobs at aeronautics and electronics factories provided the income for new single-family tract homes. Then Disneyland set up shop in 1955, making Orange County a year-round tourist destination.

While migration patterns and the reshaping of Southern California may seem tangential to a history of White Christian nationalism, the Sunbelt Migration is key to understanding the counterrevolution of the 1960s, the Goldwater rush in 1964, and eventually the White Christian nationalist movement that helped birth MAGA Nation. For many White people in both the South and the New South—Southern California, to which southerners had relocated—the rapid changes to American life as a result of various civil rights and freedom movements in the 1960s were unwelcome. The majority of White people, from Atlanta to Los Angeles—including my grandfather, who moved his family west in 1958—viewed the burgeoning civil rights movement as a threat to the God-ordained social order. They viewed policies and direct actions to integrate schools as an overreach by the federal government. Most of all, they saw on the horizon a future in which their children would be forced to attend the same schools and play on the same playgrounds with Black, Asian, and Latino kids—which in their minds was absolutely unacceptable. While Orange County was extremely homogenous—less than 10 percent of the county was non-White in the 1960s—these views weren't totally out of step with the rest of the country. A 1963 Gallup poll found that 78 percent of White people said they would move if many Black families moved into their neighborhood. As for the famous March on Washington organized by Martin Luther King Jr. and others, 60 percent of White people viewed it unfavorably.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this coincided with what many conservative Christians perceived as God being “taken out of public schools” and prayer being “outlawed.” In the face of the perceived

communist threat, they thought the United States was becoming more like Soviet Russia than the city on a hill the Puritans envisioned. In its place were new sex education curricula that taught young children things they should only learn about at home. Soon anticommunist organizations began peddling conspiracy theories to help provide a shortcut explanation as to why and how all these changes were happening in American society. The John Birch Society, for example, claimed that fourth-grade teachers were exposing themselves to students in order to teach anatomy and encouraging the practice of bestiality.

When they turned to their churches, some White Christians were faced with progressive action campaigns and messages about social justice. One often forgotten component of American religious history is that, from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-1960s, mainline or “liberal” Protestantism was the predominant form of American religion. Since the end of the nineteenth century, there had been a division between evangelical and mainline Protestants in America. The former rejected the theory of evolution, argued that the Bible was the errorless Word of God and should be read literally, and emphasized individual salvation over social change. This is the tradition I inherited at Rose Drive Friends upon my conversion. By contrast, the mainline churches saw the possibility of cohering the theory of evolution with biblical teaching on creation, made room for critical approaches to the Bible, and viewed the gospel as a commission to help the vulnerable, feed the poor, and fight for justice and inclusion in every way possible.

It may be hard to imagine now, but it was this latter tradition that dominated American Christianity throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Many Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations, especially in the Midwest and Northeast, were committed to causes like ending poverty, fighting for labor rights, and even working for racial justice. Their theologies lined up with the ideology of the New Deal: government can be a great equalizer that

enables more Americans to experience the benefits of a free and prosperous nation. For those in these mainline denominations, individual wealth was not something to celebrate or flaunt. Individualism was seen as a vice—a turning away from collective responsibility. And for mainline Christians, especially in the wake of two world wars and the fresh wounds of the war in Korea, militarism was not part of the gospel.

In response, White Americans along the Sunbelt mingled Christian nationalist mythology infused with libertarian economics and the sacralization of the individual. This laid the foundation for a new grassroots political movement aimed at toppling the GOP establishment through a different brand of American Christianity. As the historians John Compton, Darren Dochuk, and Lisa McGirr have shown in groundbreaking works, Southern California was the epicenter of the burgeoning new conservatism. It was the perfect petri dish for a movement that mixed old-time Christian revivalism, libertarian economics, cowboy individualism, and—it must be said—a militant White identity.

AN UNZONED LAND

When southern and midwestern migrants first made their way to Orange County, going back to the early 1900s, they found a place out of reach of the mainline denominations' vast networks of churches. Their influence had not extended that far south and west. In religious terms, it was largely unclaimed territory.

Evangelical preachers quickly filled the religious vacuum in Southern California's religious marketplace. From the time of the first Sunbelt migrations, evangelical preachers found a friendly audience in the Southland. R. A. Torrey, Dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University), edited *The Fundamentals*, which became a foundational text for twentieth-century Christian fundamentalism, in 1915. Charles Fuller broadcast his fiery sermons

from Placentia, a northern Orange County hamlet. In the 1950s, Bob Wells grew Central Baptist Church in Anaheim from a revival tent to a proto-megachurch in the matter of a few years. These White evangelical ministers envisioned themselves as missionaries reaching the lost. And they combined their missional outlook with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral, which started out as Garden Grove Community Church in the mid-1950s, exemplifies this. When Schuller moved to Orange County from Illinois in 1955, the only property he could find to lease and eventually buy to start his new church was a drive-in movie theater parking lot. When he signed the agreement, the owner had no idea Schuller was going to stand on a makeshift stage in front of congregants attending church in their cars. Away from the tradition and bureaucracy of his denomination's headquarters in the Midwest, Schuller was able to unleash his entrepreneurial instincts to their fullest in order to build a congregation from the gravel of an empty lot.

Soon hundreds of people were attending "drive-in" services every Sunday at Schuller's makeshift church. Schuller adapted well to his people's needs. Everyone could stay in their cars for church if they pleased. There was no strict dress code, which was a welcome feature for new Southern Californians who were getting accustomed to wearing T-shirts and jeans for any occasion. He kept the sermons short and thus family friendly. If you didn't want to do more than attend the fifty-five-minute service, there was no pressure to join a committee, campaign, or anything else. And all were welcome, regardless of denomination or even faith. The goal was to pack the house and worry about the doctrinal details later.

When attendance skyrocketed, it seemed that Schuller had proved a stunning point: Orange County was an unzoned land. Its drive-in movie theaters could become churches. And Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians could all become one family in a church retrofitted for their needs.

The innovations didn't just come in the form of venue. Like other preachers in the Southland, Schuller played to his recently migrated audience—one filled with federal defense-industry employees who were rabid anticommunists and who saw capitalism as part of a God-ordained system in the greatest country on earth. Orange County, and Southern California as a whole, had become a national locus for anticommunist grassroots activism. The soaring rise in defense-industry jobs correlated to a population that was as outspokenly anticommunist and pro-America as any region in the country. Like pastors everywhere, Schuller and his White clergy counterparts mirrored back to their congregations their hopes, dreams, fears, and delusions.

In 1961, Fred Schwarz headquartered his School of Anti-Communism in Orange County. Fifteen thousand middle-class, mostly White Americans signed up for courses at the makeshift institution. The backbone of the curriculum was the idea that American democracy and “biblical Christianity” were the only hopes humanity had against the communist threat.

Orange County pastors like Schuller incorporated anticommunism into their sermons and teachings, as scholars Gerardo Martí and Mark Mulder outline in their work on the Crystal Cathedral. Schuller even developed a sermon series on the communist threat in local neighborhoods and what American Christians could do “to defeat worldwide communism.” In Southland churches, American nationalism and anticommunism were raised to the level of doctrine. To be a good Christian in Schuller's church and many other Sunbelt houses of worship meant vehemently defending the “greatest country on earth.”

In step with this philosophy, Schuller communicated a vision of Christianity as a privatized, individualist endeavor—a relationship with Jesus that happened in your heart and had little to say to the industry in which you worked or social issues such as racial discrimination, poverty, or homelessness. Unlike progressive mainline pastors, Schuller did not ask his congregants to join in letter-writing

campaigns for progressive causes or goad them to attend a rally for labor rights. Instead, Schuller preached a morality of individual choice and responsibility. “His migration to Orange County to plant a congregation for his denomination, the Reformed Church in America, serendipitously coincided with the larger tilt of the country to the Sunbelt in Southern California,” write Mark Mulder and Gerardo Martí in *The Glass Church*. “Schuller found a recently migrated, economically aspiring, and white middle class eager to hear his messages based on possibility thinking and his theology of self-esteem.”

In ways that foreshadowed the rise of megachurches all over the nation, Schuller implemented a model built for the individual consumer. It was comfortable. It was uplifting. And it didn’t require personal buy-in. There were few barriers to membership in the church. And parishioners were rarely asked about their politics, aside from the anticommunist messaging they heard from time to time. For Schuller and other evangelical preachers across the Southern California, Christianity was not about reforming economic systems or toppling inequalities of the social order. It was a matter of taking care of oneself and one’s family and defending one’s country. Personal salvation and individual responsibility usurped the common good and systemic change.

Finally, with individualism, American nationalism, and the nuclear family—something I discuss at length in chapter 5—in place as the bedrocks of their churches’ theology and politics, Schuller and other evangelical preachers added a procapitalist message to the gospel. “You have a God-ordained right to be wealthy,” Schuller writes in *God’s Way to the Good Life*. “You’re a steward of the goods, the goods, the gifts, that God has allowed to come into your hands. Having riches is no sin, wealth is no crime. Christ did not praise poverty. The profit motive is not necessarily unchristian.”

Schuller was teaching the prosperity gospel, a brand of Christianity that promises material and worldly blessings to those who obey God. According to this way of thinking, calamity, sickness, and even poverty are the result of a mix of disobeying God and not trying hard

enough. Those who are blessed with material goods are seen as spiritual scions. Those who are not are seen as spiritual failures.

Messages like these were a welcome permission slip for those in the pews and watching on TV. They could enjoy the new affluence many in the region were experiencing as a result of well-paying government-funded jobs in the defense industry and the booming real estate market. There was no reason to feel guilty about one's material blessings. Financial success was increasingly seen as a marker of spiritual commitment, as the free market became the totem of White Christians in Southern California and beyond. In the 1964 election, this translated into furious support for Goldwater's antitax and anti-regulatory libertarianism and opposition to the legacy of the New Deal. In this way, sociologist of religion Gerardo Martí told me in a 2020 interview, "Big business began to align themselves with conservative Christians," in order to create a brand of Christianity that celebrated hard work, entrepreneurship, and financial risk.

Unsurprisingly, these components also cohered with a militant White identity. In the 1960s, only about 10 percent of Orange County's population was not White. The dearth of people of color in Orange County was the result of policy decisions designed to maintain segregation between White middle-class families and the Mexican Americans who were forced to attend segregated schools and the very few African Americans in the area. The large majority of Orange Countians owned single-family homes. This fact, coupled with the stunning White majority in the county, led to the development of what many have called "not in my backyard politics" (NIMBY) that entrenched racial segregation and prevented affordable housing from being built. Historian Lisa McGirr, in *Suburban Warriors*, recounts the extent to which White people went to keep their neighborhoods White. Dr. Sammy Lee was a world-famous Korean American athlete and two-time Olympic gold medal winner. In 1954, he tried to purchase a home in Garden Grove, a northern Orange County town on the border of Anaheim, but was prohibited.

Culturally, Orange County was a kind of open lot: a land free of the traditional authorities who had often directed people's energies and influenced their politics. It was not dissimilar to Schuller's drive-in church, in its independence from tradition and denominational oversight. This vacuum of religious and cultural authorities created a mass of White Christians who were ripe for political participation in a grassroots conservative movement buttressed by Christian rhetoric and built through neighborhoods, small groups, churches, social hours, and coffee breaks for stay-at-home moms while the kids were at school.

Orange County was the ideal setting to incubate this type of movement because there was a void of civic and social groups. There were few unions, few mainline churches organizing social justice drives or campaigns, few ethnic communities that directed people's politics. The Kiwanis and Lions Clubs didn't have generations-long footholds in these suburban enclaves. There was no minority religious group—a Jewish neighborhood or Buddhist enclave—that had been anchored in the region for generations. In Anaheim, California, as opposed to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, there were no Italian or Polish or Irish neighborhoods or rooted civic organizations that provided community and cultural influence. Orange County's midwestern and southern migrants were unmoored from the Main Streets of their old towns and installed into a sprawling suburban nexus. Any community to be built would happen through neighborhood small groups and church attendance. The lack of structure left a gap that became filled by extremist politics and conspiracy theories.

CONSPIRACY AND COMMUNITY

Robert Welch founded the John Birch Society as an anticommunist organization in 1958, and Orange County became the epicenter (more on this in chapter 8). From the beginning, it was marked by a fierce libertarianism and vehement stance against taxes, government

welfare programs, and civil rights reforms. It was also based on the idea that Christianity and American democracy go hand in hand. The society used homegrown cells to cultivate and spread the movement. Members hosted small groups in their homes and were encouraged to invite friends and family to learn about the society's Christian libertarian principles.

In ways that parallel the more recent rise of QAnon, the John Birch Society went well beyond libertarian economics, though, and into the dangerous territory of conspiracy theories. It seduced members through claims that Dwight Eisenhower and Chief Justice Earl Warren were, in fact, communist agents who were trying to take down the government. Welch saw communism as a tactic of the Illuminati, a group he said was secretly controlling the world's governments from the shadows.

The John Birch Society published numerous reports that accused civil rights organizers of communist sympathies while alleging that people of color and immigrants were plotting to divide the country and control the world. In ways that were popular across the southern regions of the United States, Welch and other leaders used the bogeyman of communism as a way to delegitimize Martin Luther King Jr. and other Black leaders by claiming they were Soviet agents trying to overthrow the government. According to the Birchers, civil rights legislation and new proposals for fair housing represented a government takeover of American life, one most likely directed by Soviet agents at the highest level of government.

As libertarianism and racism collided in the cosmos of conspiracies that was the John Birch Society, the conservative political movement gained momentum. Now viewing themselves as part of a high-stakes political battle, conservative White Christians had come solidly into the orbit of a cosmic war between good and evil.

The Sunbelt migrants were not expatriates ready to adjust to the cultural values of a new place. They were implants, not transplants.

Rather than forming a new wave of outsiders ready to adapt to their new surroundings, they were a critical mass ready to reshape the area's political, cultural, and religious makeup. In Orange County and in Southern California as a whole, they were entering a proverbial empty parking lot ready for development. It was a chance to create the community—and the country—they had always wanted. As the historian Carey McWilliams observed way back in the 1940s, the new migrants to Southern California sought to re-create the sense of culture and values they left behind in the South and Midwest. Nostalgia has a way of twisting the past and thus creating an alternative present, however, and their longing for a past America was in many ways a longing for one that never existed. Their desire to make America great rested on an illusion of what it used to be.

But there was nothing and no one to stop them from these labors, and they kept trying to create from scratch the ideal form of what they left behind. So when the Arizona senator with the booming baritone voice and square jaw emerged as a viable presidential candidate, it seemed too good to be true. Barry Goldwater's opposition to civil rights, fierce libertarianism, rugged individualism, and Christian nationalist mythology were custom-made for the Southland's new arrivals.

THE GOLDWATER RUSH

It was fitting that the 1964 GOP convention took place in California, because it was a grassroots army of Goldwater supporters who helped the Arizona senator win the state and, ultimately, the GOP presidential nomination. With Orange County as its epicenter, the "Goldwater rush" spread throughout Southern California, from San Diego to Ventura. White libertarian Christians, organized in cells under the influence of the John Birch Society, knocked on doors, handed out pamphlets, and stood on street corners in order to do what seemed impossible: make Goldwater the nominee for president.

The historic parallels to the 1964 Goldwater grassroots campaign and Trump's unexpected rise in 2015 are too striking to ignore. Goldwater himself was viewed as an outsider and an extremist who said the quiet part out loud when it came to war, race, and civil rights. Like Trump, he had no interest in drafting detailed policy plans or listening to bookish advisers. Most importantly, the Democrats and most of his party viewed the Arizona senator as a candidate with no real chance of making a national splash. After all, his supporters were organizing in home "cells" to read John Birch Society conspiracy pamphlets. They were openly against civil rights legislation, in favor of atomic warfare, and convinced that everyone from Martin Luther King Jr. to Dwight Eisenhower were communist agents leading a worldwide conspiracy against the United States. Their tactic was all-out warfare, not carefully delineated plans or principles. Goldwater's volunteers felt as if they were part of an American counterrevolution—or, as one supporter said, a "revolving back" to America's values in order to save the first Christian republic in history.

Nonetheless, Goldwater won the nomination. When he took the stage in San Francisco at the GOP Convention, he stared down the moderates of his party and boomed out a warning. "This is a party, this Republican Party, a Party for free men, not for blind followers, and not for conformists," Goldwater announced. "Anyone who joins us in all sincerity, we welcome. Those who do not care for our cause, we don't expect to enter our ranks in any case. And let our Republicanism, so focused and so dedicated, not be made fuzzy and futile by unthinking and stupid labels."

If you didn't get on board, you'd be considered a faux conservative, at best, and a communist-collectivist Democrat sympathizer, at worst. The message was clear: In or out. One or the other. Pick a side, because there are no moderates in war.

In her groundbreaking work on how Southern Californian conservatism in the 1960s transformed the American political landscape, Harvard historian Lisa McGirr concludes that the Southland

was the birthplace of modern conservatism, and Orange County was its nucleus. For McGirr, the formation of Orange County during the middle decades of the twentieth century is a prism for understanding the emergence of what historians now call the New Right and the “reconfiguration” of American politics throughout the rest of the millennium. While support for Goldwater and the new conservatism weren’t limited to Southern California, the region is the clearest distillation of the religious, economic, political, and cultural ideals guiding them. It was the possibility model for a new movement. The paradigm for unapologetic nostalgia and political and cultural conflict. This brand of conservatism—based on free-market libertarianism, individualism, and staunch American nationalism, all held together by a Christian myth of the nation—quickly entrenched itself along the southern corridors of the United States.

FROM THE ASHES OF DEFEAT

Barry Goldwater lost to Lyndon Johnson in humiliating fashion in the 1964 election. In a historic defeat, the Arizona senator carried only six states: his home state of Arizona and five states in the Deep South. Northern Californians ensured he didn’t win the Golden State. None of the counties in the Bay area or near Sacramento went for him. But if it had been up to Southern California, Goldwater would have been president. He won a majority in Orange and San Diego counties, and he performed well in several others. In 1964, the Southland voted like the South.

The newspapers and pundits announced the end of both the Goldwater cause and conservatism as a whole. They eulogized the grassroots extremism that galvanized new voters and frightened most of the nation. Despite the humiliation of defeat and the confident proclamations of the pundit class, Goldwater had inspired a movement. His candidacy was a window into the future of the GOP. The celebratory laughter roaring from Democratic spaces only exacerbated

the resentment that Goldwater's supporters felt for the mainstream politicians, both Republican and Democrat. In their minds, the political elite of both parties had left them and most of the country behind in the name of civil rights, equality, and progress. More than anything, the Goldwater campaign signaled a tide change in American conservatism. The young campaign volunteers and staffers across the Goldwater movement had been formed politically by the language of war, radicalism, and takeover. Their training was not in dialogue or debate; it was in conflict and the will to power. Their mission was not to reform the country or to run a winnable race against the Democratic stranglehold on national politics. It was to destroy the opponent in order to take the country back from those who didn't deserve it.

THE MASTERMIND AND THE AD MAN

Paul Weyrich was one of Goldwater's foot soldiers in 1964. Despite the fact that he was barely old enough to buy beer when he joined the campaign, the Wisconsin native found in Goldwater the type of militant conservatism he felt the country needed in order to right itself. Weyrich's politics mirrored his religious views. In the wake of Vatican II, a landmark event in the Catholic Church that in many ways modernized and liberalized its doctrine and practice, Weyrich left the Roman Catholic Church for the ultraconservative Melkite Catholic Church, where he found a sufficiently traditional bastion of hierarchy and tradition.

"It is basic to my philosophy that God's truth ought to be manifest politically," he proclaimed in 1973. Later he added this clear articulation of Christian nationalism: "Ours is a war between truth and untruth. It is one facet of the war between good and evil. . . . This Nation was founded upon and more closely followed Christian principles than any other."

Goldwater's defeat did nothing to dissuade Weyrich from the mission. Soon after the election he became a congressional staffer.

At a fortuitous moment in 1969, he happened to walk into a Democratic planning meeting in the Capitol. Weyrich saw there what he felt conservatives lacked: a grassroots organizing machine that worked on multiple levels and from different angles to mobilize voters, shape policy messages, and cultivate public opinion in their favor. This was a lightbulb event for Weyrich. It was when he realized how to transform the charisma and collective effervescence of the Goldwater movement into a political machine that would blanket the country in conservative messages and ideals. Rather than relying on the magnetism of one person, and rather than fighting the moderate establishment in the GOP, Weyrich envisioned a political network that would operate as the nervous system of the Republican Party.

In contrast to Goldwater, who was an irresistible presence on the campaign trail but had no real interest in policy or organization behind the scenes, Weyrich was a natural-born institution builder. In 1973, he founded the institutions that now define Republican policy on the national and state levels. Weyrich launched the Heritage Foundation as a counterpart to the Brookings Institute; he launched the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the conservative state-level policy machine that formulates bills and policies for state legislatures to propose and ratify. Perhaps most importantly, Weyrich teamed up with two other Goldwater campaign soldiers, Richard Viguerie and Morton Blackwell, to found the Council for National Policy, a secretive network that to this day acts as the connective tissue linking the main arteries of conservative politics in the United States: the National Rifle Association, the Susan B. Anthony List, the Family Research Council, the League of the South, and the Liberty Counsel, which has tried to criminalize homosexuality, among many others.

“Weyrich was really the master strategist and the intellectual architect,” journalist Anne Nelson, author of *Shadow Network: Media, Money, and the Secret Hub of the Radical Right*, told me in a 2020 interview. “And he had this ferocious vision. I found it quite overwhelming

when reading his work, because his theoretical documents were basically: we have to create a movement that will overthrow the federal government and turn American culture on its head.”

If Paul Weyrich was the mastermind, Richard Viguerie, with whom he cofounded the Council for National Policy, was the messenger and ad man. He obtained the Goldwater campaign’s mailing list and then did the same with GOP donors on the state level. The result was an innovative direct-mail strategy that reached out to voters directly, often targeting the issues they were passionate about. “Viguerie’s big idea was applying mass-mailing marketing techniques to politics,” Anne Nelson told me. “Beginning with the Goldwater era, he started assembling mailing lists in ways that people really hadn’t done in the political sphere before.”

Remember: there was no Fox News in the early 1970s. No internet or widespread cable television. Viguerie’s direct-mail campaigns were the forerunners of right-wing media’s lascivious, targeted messaging that played on the resentment and fear of their recipients.

Despite being Catholic, Viguerie, the son of a Texas oil magnate, cut his teeth working for the segregationist evangelical preacher Billy James Hargis. He helped Hargis reach millions of readers and listeners through campaigns and crafted messages about the downfall of America at the hands of godless communists and race mixing. He knew that a recipe of resentment, political victimhood, and racial animus would entice this religious bloc to join what was becoming known as the New Right on its quest to retake the country.

By the early 1970s, Weyrich, Viguerie, and their New Right cohorts were making inroads in their quest to retake the country for God and White Christians. But despite their organizing efforts and political machinery, they simply needed more votes. All the calculations, messaging, and research weren’t going to change this fact: they needed millions of American citizens to vote en masse with the radical new ideology they wanted to implement. The question remained: Which American demographic would come on board in order to

push the GOP to the extreme right? Where could they find the hidden voters ready to transform the Republican Party on all fronts?

In order to find more votes, Viguerie flirted with George Wallace, the segregationist former governor of Alabama, who had run as a third-party presidential candidate in 1964 on a segregationist platform. Viguerie realized Wallace was too much of a firebrand to be an effective coalition partner for the New Right. While a long-standing alliance never formed, he learned something valuable about Wallace's segregationist voters: they were all White evangelicals. "The next major area of growth for conservative ideology and philosophy," he said in 1976, "is among evangelical people."

Viguerie was absolutely right. What started in Southern California and the South with the Goldwater revolution was, a decade later, poised to spread across the nation.