

ANTEBELLUM ANTIMASONS AND THE POSTINDUSTRIAL CHRISTIAN RIGHT:
SOCIOECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION, MORALITY POLITICS,
AND THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

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Abstract

Historical analysis can play a useful role in predicting the ability of the New Christian Right to continue to dominate the agenda of the Republican Party in the New South. Only one other time did the Christian Right enjoy such influence in the American party system—during the short life of the Antimasonic Party of the Jacksonian era. The conditions in Central and Western New York of the 1820s-1830s were remarkably similar to those experienced in the New South during the 1970s and 1980s—rapid economic growth, the presence of a new generation of political entrepreneurs coming of age in an era of social values markedly different from those of their parents, gender role change, and the breakdown of the established party system. The Antimasonic Party was never a national force, limited to New England and the Yankee-settled towns of upstate New York, just as the New Christian Right's influence is limited to the states of the New South. The fate of the Antimasonic Party is instructive for that of the New Christian Right. At best the Christian Right will take its place as one of many groups lobbying for influence in the Republican Party, but it is more likely that its adherents will go the way of the Antimasons—mainstream Republican Party (Thurlow Weed/Ralph Reed), concentrate on single issues (temperance/homosexuality), or retreat back to its home base (the church).

A politicized Christian Right has been with us for two decades—at least since 1979 when it burst on to the national stage with Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. While some scholars predict a waning ability to influence the national political agenda (Bruce 1988, 1995; Wilcox, 1994, 1996) and even its eventual demise as an identifiable political constituency (Lowi 1995), most observers agree that the Christian Right will continue to run candidates, manage elections, and help shape public policy at state and local levels. Still, a number of scholars argue that the Christian Right will continue as a political force in national politics (Green, 1995; Lienesch, 1993; Moen, 1996), but its behavior and goals (here, the Christian Coalition is the model) will be that of an interest group rather than a social movement. Lienesch (1993, 20) analogized American religious fundamentalism to a comet, it “appears boldly, then fades, only to return equally as bright.” What are the implications of this observation for electoral politics? Could one establish a causal link between evangelical excitement and politicization of religious values? If so, could one predict the political fortunes of the new Christian Right?

My goal in this paper is to assess the long-run viability of the Christian Right as an organized and influential force in national electoral politics. I organize my inquiry around three questions. First, under what conditions do enough white Protestant men and women become energized to create a political movement capable of shaping the agenda on which the two major political parties compete? Second, can we find other cases in the American experience where conservative Protestantism has produced political mobilization? Third, if there is such a case, what happened to the movement; for instance, was it

subsumed into a political party? Did its members lose interest in activist politics and return to their churches? Or did this movement continue to exert pressure on the party system in some institutionalized way (for example, interest group pressure)?

Before I expand into the politics of the Christian Right, it seems some sociodemographic or psychosocial profiling is in order. Just who and what is the Christian Right?

To begin with, there are broad-based membership organizations--the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, and Concerned Women for America—that have demonstrated their grassroots networks by flooding the U.S. Congress with communications when these organizations issue a call to their members. Ralph Reed (1994, 1996) offers an interesting glimpse into this strategy. Its leaders—Gary Bauer, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Bob Jones, James Dobson, and Beverly LaHaye—are recognized both for their organizational skills and political savvy. The Christian Right advances its agenda in the courts as well through the Christian Legal Society, the Rutherford Institute, and the American Center for Law and Justice. There are denominational organizations such as the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and an umbrella organization, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Christian Right’s version of the mainline National Council of Churches (Fowler, Hertzke, and Olson, 1999: 80-81).

The term evangelical poses its own set of problems. Can one distinguish between evangelical and fundamentalist? Smith (1997, 100) explains that “for Fundamentalists religion is something you *believe*, while for the Evangelical religion is something you *get*.” For Smith (1997, 11) evangelical is a “catch-all term for Protestants too moderate to be fundamentalists and too conservative to be mainline.” Fowler et al. (1999, 39-40) attempt to “clarify this diversity” by thinking “of the evangelical world as a tree with several main branches and numerous smaller ones.”

Nevertheless, most evangelical Christians are not members of mainline churches because they are strongly conservative and reject the ecumenical movement (Smith 1997, 11). This conservatism does, indeed, translate into electoral preferences. In both 1992 and 1996, Clinton’s Republican opponents carried 61 percent of the votes of Christian Right identifiers and 75 percent of all congressional votes cast in 1994 by evangelicals went to Republican candidates. Sixty-four percent of all evangelical voters between the ages of thirty and forty-four identify with the Republican party (Fowler et al. 1999, 102).

Evangelical Protestants are among the most conservative of American voters on a whole range of issues from gay rights to defense spending (Fowler et al. 1999, 103).

Women are more likely to belong to a church than men—three-quarters of all women compared to two-thirds of all men (Fowler et al., 1999, 175). But is there evidence for Ralph Reed's (1994, 9) claim that 62 percent of religious conservatives are women? Fowler et al. (1999, 175) report that women's religious beliefs are more conservative than that of men: eleven percent of women compared to 20 percent of men judge the Bible to be "little more than fable" and 67 percent of American women compared to 50 percent of American men believe that Christ is the only path to eternal life. Southern women, especially, struggle to maintain their femininity, while entering the competitive and high-stakes workforce of the New South. Perhaps Elizabeth Dole's popularity stems from a perception that she has managed to achieve this balancing act with polish and grace. Conservative women are most threatened by radical feminism; naturally, they would turn to church-based organizations to express their concerns about the direction of modern society because it is in them they are grounded.

Is the Christian Right a powerful voting bloc? Fowler et al. (1999, 35) report that roughly "one-fourth of the American population is Catholic, one-fourth white evangelical Protestant, less than one-fourth mainline Protestant, and nearly one-tenth African American Protestant." The Southern Baptist Convention, with 15 million members, is the largest Protestant denomination (Fowler et al. 1999, 80). These data return us to our central question: if one quarter of Americans are white evangelical Protestant, than why is its political mobilization a phenomenon of the last quarter of the twentieth century?

Cooperation has never been an easy feat to manage among Protestant sects, even when the advantages were obvious (for instance in the Plan of Union between the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches to build churches in western settlement). Competition among religious groups has been the defining characteristic of American religious practices, and nowhere has this competition been more fierce than among Protestants. This competition lies at the very foundation of American pluralist thought: John Noonan (1998), a federal judge, persuasively argues that Madison's experience as a local politician dealing with religious rivals to the established church, shaped the theory he would elaborate in Federalist Paper #10. To foreign observers, the American system of religion may seem like purchasing a tube of toothpaste where a dizzying array of choices are available and entrance requirements are low for many

churches. (In direct contrast to the steadfast Roman Catholic practice of the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, which normally takes several months before the initiates are accepted as members of the faith and parish.) But Americans have long been socialized to shop around for a congregation that satisfied their social and/or spiritual requirements. Many American Catholics envied this freedom of movement, which Pope John XXIII recognized when in Vatican II the parish/neighborhood structure was loosened.

But factionalism is endemic among conservative Protestants, who had long split along fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic factions¹ by the early twentieth century, even if the labels are modern in origin. The differences among Protestant denominations and groups is something so American (pluralist) and so Protestant one almost has to be a Protestant American to understand what may, at times, seem at once silly and incomprehensible to nonbelievers, adherents of other faiths, and most certainly in societies with a long tradition of a monopolistic state-supported church. Cooperation, then, among conservative Protestants does not come easily.

The second obstacle to political mobilization among conservative Protestants is grounded in its premillennial theology. Political action is not especially natural or desired by religious conservatives. Smith (1997, 36) illustrates this point in his study of Baptist Republicanism, finding that in 1888 the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) ruled a convention resolution on temperance “*out of order* because the issue was too ‘political.’” The Scopes trial prompted SBC president E. Y. Mullin to write, “One of the greatest dangers facing us now is that Christian people will be diverted from their task of saving souls into lobbying around legislatures and making out a program for a statute book rather than a program for salvation of the world.”

This tendency to avoid political comment could extend even to world war. Carpenter (1997, 100) in his study of American fundamentalism in early to mid-twentieth century quotes Charles Trumbull, editor of the influential Philadelphia weekly *Sunday School Times* (25), in his response to *Time*

¹ Clyde Wilcox (1992, 4-5) draws a distinction between “pentecostal” and “charismatic,” which turns on doctrinal differences stemming from the traditions from which they originated (e.g., Methodist or non-denominational fundamentalist). Nevertheless, pentecostals and charismatics share two basic beliefs and practices: glossolalia and faith healing.

magazine's criticism in 1939 of the churches for their failure to halt World War II. "Christ never commissioned his Church to put an end to wars or convert the world," Trumbull wrote. "Christ called his Church to *evangelize* the world...and 'to take out of them a people in his name.'"

Carpenter traces this tendency to the dispensationalist belief of the imminent, premillennial second coming of Christ (6, 10)—the urgency to collect souls before the secret rapture and the onset of the Great Tribulation. Accordingly, public policy cannot eradicate the evils of the world (Wilcox 1992, 20). Lienesch (1993, 17-18), while less theological in his reasoning, concludes that the Christian Right is "at best ambivalent about politics," while drawing distinctions among fundamentalists, evangelicals, and charismatics:

Baptist fundamentalists...are inheritors of a separatist tradition which counsels them whenever possible to protect their church from the corrupting influence of the state. In the same way, evangelicals fear that their church may become too politicized, hampering their more important obligation to bring the Gospel to all people regardless of political views. Charismatics tend to see the political world in highly personal terms and have to be reminded frequently of the importance of ideology...almost without exception, religious conservatives prefer the church to the podium or political rally."

Fundamentalists shunned the social gospel and Progressive movement under the same logic current during the religious excitements in early nineteenth-century America. The postmillennial Christian communism of the celibate Shakers and the complex marriage system of the Oneida Community contrasted sharply with the adventist, premillennial Millerites. William Miller, criticized postmillennialists and reformers, warning his followers, "they tell you that the world is growing better and better, while the truth is as it was in the days of Noah, waxing worse and worse..." (quoted in Rowe 1985, 92) A century later, Will Houghton, one-time president of the Moody Bible Institute, observed that the airplane "has made it possible to be robbed at dinnertime in New York and shot at midnight in Chicago" (quoted in Carpenter 1998, 107).

If scholars agree that organized political action of the Christian Right is contrary to their teachings and traditions, what factors led to its mobilization beginning in the 1970s? Fowler et al. (1999, 148-151) provide a good overview of five distinct explanations.

The authoritarian thesis suggests that the Christian Right is "a group of people with authoritarian personalities who simply cannot deal with the realities of life in a free and somewhat disorderly nation."

Survey research, however, does not yield evidence that members of the Christian Right are “any more or less authoritarian than other Americans.” The authoritarian thesis also fails to explain why the Christian Right emerged in the late twentieth century, rather than at any other time in American history (given that there have been enough evangelical Protestants in the population to influence electoral outcomes).

The alienation thesis, a second explanation advanced to explain the rise of the Christian Right, reflects the secularist’s confusion about the beliefs of evangelical Christians. Individuals who feel alienated and hostile to American institutions and culture are more likely to join a cult or citizen militia than attend a fundamentalist church. Countless Wednesday night Bible study circles have been devoted to earnest exegesis of Christ’s response to his enemies, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.”

The third explanation, social status, seems on the surface a promising explanation, until one encounters both positive and negative correlations of the explanatory variable; that is, some proponents suggest that “declining social status leads people toward conservative politics,” while others point to the opposite! In either case, evidence is anecdotal. Ralph Reed (1996, 165) triumphantly recounts the Christian Coalition’s reaction to Michael Weisskopf’s articles in *The Washington Post* where he referred to “followers’ of religious broadcasters like Robertson as ‘poor, uneducated, and easy to command.’” The Christian Coalition coordinated an effort with other conservative groups to fax college diplomas and IRS tax returns to *The Washington Post*... “solid evidence that they were both well-educated and upper-middle class.”

A fourth position, associated with Clyde Wilcox, takes what the Christian Right says at face value: “The Christian Right simply represents the views of people who believe that the American political and cultural order often violates their values and want to change the situation as a result” (Fowler et al., 1999, 150; Wilcox 1992). Fowler et al. explain, that “Wilcox’s thoughtful argument makes sense, but we still need to explain *why* adherents of the religious Right believe what they do. We also need to understand why some have been politically mobilized by their values while others have not” (150). The key here, I think, is that *values* (read morality) become a politically-actionable concern at all to evangelical Protestants. I will address this point later in the paper.

A fifth approach, that of cultural analysis, offers a two-part explanation. The United States is a country with a long history of populist protests, making the Christian Right not new, but an “old manifestation of a constant tension in American culture about the responsiveness of the political system...the Christian Right may be as much about representation as it is about anything else...” (Fowler et al. 1999, 150). In the *unconventional partners* thesis, “religion provides a temporary refuge from the larger society...religion offers some of the meaning, morality, and community that are often otherwise missing in American society” (Fowler et al. 1999, 151). It is not an especially positive explanation, Fowler (1989, 30) recognizes, relying as it does on Freud’s interpretation (*The Future of an Illusion*) that religion is an emotional crutch for people who lack the courage to face the world. Individuals and families, then, go to church to receive the sustenance—whether for a social life, morality guidance—which governments organized around democratic capitalism (emphasis on individualism, free markets) and federalism (weak political parties) are not equipped to provide. This approach draws on deTocqueville’s observations about the mutually-reinforcing role of moral values inculcated in childhood religious education and the imperative of self-control in democratic systems.

Certainly the major weakness in this approach is that fundamentalism and evangelical Christianity is all about *discomfort*—as ministers say, “our job is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” Anyone who has worshiped at an evangelical church knows the very uncomfortable feeling when it seems the pastor is looking right at “you” when issuing challenges from the pulpit. Coming forward to an altar call for the first time is not a comfortable feeling, however relieved a person may feel afterwards. It seems to me the participant’s relief often is more a lifting of fear, the fear of going to hell for an unwillingness to publicly declare Jesus Christ to be his or her lord and savior. The word “comfort” is not one that comes to mind when one reads firsthand accounts of revivals.² They were called “anxious seats” in the Finney revivals precisely because they were the opposite of comfortable. Woody Allen tells of how the closest he

² See for instance, Frances Trollope’s antebellum observations in *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. 1949. Ed. Donald Smalley N.Y: Vintage Books p. 81. In describing the “anxious bench,” she writes: “It was a frightful sight to behold innocent young creatures, in the gay morning of existence, thus seized upon, horror struck, and rendered feeble and enervated for ever. One young girl, apparently not more than fourteen, was supported in the arms of another, some years older; her face was pale as death; her eyes wide open, and perfectly devoid of

came to becoming a believer was when he asked Billy Graham, “What if you’re wrong? What if there is neither heaven nor hell?” Graham responded, “Well, no harm done. I’ve led a clean, moral life. But what if I’m right?”

Whether comfort or fear, the point is that political action cannot be sustained by the Christian Right, “since few come to conservative churches specifically to hear sermons about the necessity of political action” (Fowler et al. 1999, 151). Indeed, the sure way to stir up trouble in a congregation and sow dissatisfaction among, what in some cases can be a significant portion of a congregation, is to bring politics into the pulpit. This means, that for evangelical Christians to become mobilized, the issues must become so salient to their lives as to galvanize an extraordinary majority of members to political action. In this way, the misgivings of some will pose no threat to the stability of the congregation.

Fowler et al. 1999, 151 capture this point perfectly:

The Christian Right’s dissent stems from a belief that today’s society denies Christians the opportunity to nurture their versions of meaning, morality, and community. As the Christian Right sees it, society is attacking the traditional Christian refuge. So the Christian Right emerged to insist that society must be changed.

Modernism and Postmodernism are the culprits. But modernism is hardly a new philosophical outlook. Again, we are brought back to this recurring question, why didn’t the Christian Right emerge in the Roaring Twenties—a decade when fundamentalism thrived, despite the Scopes trial (Carpenter 1997).

The key to understanding why the Christian Right emerged in the late twentieth century is to look at its place of origin, that is, to understand the regional component of the Christian Right. Lienesch (1993, 10) fixes the Christian Right in the “New South,” residing “along the broad crescent called the Southern Rim: beginning at Virginia Beach, Virginia (home of Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network), passing through Jerry Falwell’s Lynchburg, in western Virginia, and Jim and Tammy Bakker’s Charlotte, North Carolina, extending on through the Bible Belt heartland to the urban frontier of the Southwest and ending in Southern California.” As new arrivals to the rapidly expanding cities and growing suburbs of the New South, many moved from smaller towns and rural areas. James Guth (quoted in Lienesch) calls them members of a “first modernized generation.” By this he means to describe “traditional people struggling to maintain rural religious values in an increasingly urban and secular society.” Guth concludes, “That the

meaning; her chin and bosom wet with slaver; she had every appearance of

current religious militance draws much of its strength from the rapidly modernizing regions of the South and West hints that in some way the processes of modernization and secularization may be responsible for this movement.”

Grant Wacker (1984, 22) draws a similar conclusion when he writes that “the general history of movements of collective behavior, religious or otherwise, suggest that they are generated not by discrete provocations in the cultural environment but by fundamental realignments in the social system that create new needs and stir new aspirations.” The South, he finds, continued the custodial tradition of the Puritans, rooted out in other regions by pluralism.

Undoubtedly individuals raised in the New South are not the only Americans since World War II to live differently from childhood to adulthood; but, while upstate New Yorkers watched wetlands—where as children they captured crayfish, frogs, and turtles--transformed to suburban shopping malls and housing tracts, the socioeconomic and cognitive dissonance experienced by southerners was more dramatic. To begin with, no one could argue that rural Northeast United States was not enmeshed in an industrial economy. Most of the family farms served local canning factories and farmers’ markets in the nearby cities and sons and daughters habitually took factory jobs in the city. Inhabitants of the New South have witnessed a transformation from an agricultural, to industrial, to postindustrial economic base within a single generation.

Ralph Reed, in arguing that religious conservatives are on the cutting edge of technology (and by implication, not the country bumpkins portrayed by the liberal news media), writes:

...the information highway gives religious conservatives what they have always lacked: a sense that their movement represents the future, not a frozen snapshot of the past. Some may claim that traditional values and the nuclear family are fossilized relics, but it is hard to argue that its advocates are trying to retrofit American society to the 1950s when their main tools are computers and satellite dishes. The pro-family movement of today owes more of a debt to Buck Rogers than to Elmer Gentry.

Scholars of religion would not argue the point with Reed. Martin Luther not only revolutionized Christian theology, he innovated worship by translating first the New Testament and later the Bible into German, incorporated hymns into church services (Wilson 1999) and composed what was to become a theme song of Protestantism—*Ein fest Burg ist unser Gott*—that over four hundred and seventy years later

idiotism.”

still makes hearts beat faster. In his famous handbook of revivals, Charles Grandison Finney (1960) defended innovative techniques for winning souls in his lecture, “A Wise Minister Will Be Successful.” A man who would buck the Calvinist Presbyterian and Congregational Churches to preach that every individual had the free will and the moral ability to call upon God for his or her salvation, replace the doctrine of total depravity with perfectionism (or “sanctification” in Finney’s parlance) ought to be innovative in delivering this challenge. “What do politicians do?” Finney asked his revivalists in training.

They get up meetings, circulate handbills and pamphlets, blaze away in the newspapers, send their ships about the streets on wheels with flags and sailors, send coaches all over town, with handbills, to bring people up to the polls...The object is to get up an excitement, and bring the people out...The object of the ministry is to get all the people to feel that the devil has no right to rule this world, but they ought all to give themselves to God, and vote in the Lord Jesus Christ as the governor of the universe. Now what shall be done? What measures shall we take? Says one, ‘Be sure to have nothing that is new.’ Strange! The object of our measures is to gain attention, and you *must have* something new.” (181)

Not all evangelists are fundamentals, it has been said, but all fundamentalists are evangelists. And evangelists have shown themselves at the forefront of adopting modern technology to save souls—nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines to twentieth century radio, television, and the internet.

And so it is that Reed confuses modernity with modernism. It is modernism, not modernity, he can’t abide. And on this point Reed has more in common with Camille Paglia than either might care to admit. Bruce Lawrence (1989, 83) writes that “all fundamentalists are ideologues protesting the modernist hegemony in the High Tech era.” Modernity is “the emergence of a new index of human life shaped, above all, by increasing bureaucratization and rationalization as well as technical capacities and global exchange unthinkable in the pre-modern era” (27). Modernism, on the other hand, is “the search for individual autonomy driven by a set of socially encoded values emphasizing change over continuity; quantity over quality; efficient production, power, and profit over sympathy for traditional values or vocations, in both the public and private spheres. At its utopian extreme, it enthrones one economic strategy, consumer-oriented capitalism, as the surest means to technological progress that will also eliminate social unrest and physical discomfort” (27).

Daniel Bell (1973) predicted that social and political disruptions would increase as societies moved from industrial to postindustrial society. He analogized the uncertainty accompanying the emerging postindustrial society to an “interregnum,” the widespread use of “post” emblematic of this uncertainty

(51). The transformation from industrial to postindustrial society is a social structure problem; for instance the centrality of theoretical knowledge challenges the "tendencies of culture, which strives for the enhancement of the self and turns increasingly antinomian and anti-institutional" (13).

Bell argued that conflict is inevitable with a change in production; it subsides only when one ideology overwhelms the others. For instance, "bourgeois society of the 19th century was an integrated whole in which culture, character structure, and economy were infused by a single value system. This was the civilization of capitalism at its apogee."

The nature of capitalism, however, undermined the value system from which it grew: "through mass production and mass consumption, it destroyed the Protestant ethic by zealously promoting a hedonistic way of life." So that by 1950:

capitalism sought to justify itself not by work or property, but by the status badges of material possessions and by the promotion of pleasure. The rising standard of living and the relaxation of morals became ends in themselves as the definition of personal freedom. The result has been a disjunction within the social system itself. In the organization of production and work, the system demands provident behavior, industriousness and self-control, dedication to a career and success. In the realm of consumption, it fosters the attitude of *carpe diem*, prodigality and display, and the compulsive search for play. But in both realms the system is completely mundane, for any transcendent ethic has vanished. (479)

Technocratic societies, however, do not ennoble: "Material goods provide only transient satisfaction or an invidious superiority over those with less. Yet one of the deepest human impulses is to sanctify their institutions and beliefs in order to find a meaningful purpose in their lives and to deny the meaninglessness of death." Postindustrial society fails to "provide a transcendent ethic—except for the few who devote themselves to the temple of science."

Is there an identifiable *Zeitgeist* in the advanced industrial societies? Bell warned of a culture clash in the interregnum between industrial and postindustrial society; but, there may be three distinct and irreconcilable views competing for primacy: early capitalist vs. consumerism vs. postmaterialism. The Protestant Fundamentalist harkens back to antebellum life in New England and the Middle States or in Anthony F. C. Wallace's term, *Evangelical Christian Capitalism* (Carpenter 1997, 10)--the New England village of class harmony, upward social mobility, Protestant moral values, and volunteerism. American evangelicalism was a product of the Jacksonian era. And coincident with the lowering of the last barriers

to white male voting, frustration with the harsh Calvinism of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches was expressed in a popular jingle (McLoughlin 1978, 101):

You can and you can't
 You shall and you shan't
 You will and you won't
 You're damned if you do,
 And damned if you don't.

How could one reconcile the clerical rhetoric of unworthiness and sinfulness, with the moral virtues necessary for this expanded electorate to govern a democracy? Finney and the many other antebellum revivalists insisted upon the elevation of man and woman, their inherent goodness, their perfectability, just as Jackson had, in his First Inaugural address said: “I believe that man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he become more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God” (quoted in McLoughlin 1978, 139). The point is that this was to be done largely by the effort of the citizens in their communities, not the national government. Fundamentalists are non-denominational, entrepreneurial Christians—they reject sacramental and works-based Christianity—focusing on individual responsibility for one’s salvation. Without an intermediary to reassure the supplicant, only an Herculean inner confidence satisfies many of the faithful of his or her state of grace—hence those members of fundamentalist congregations who answer the altar call week after week, and in each visiting crusade. Understandably those Americans who recently left their hometowns for the sprawling suburbs of Sunbelt cities (and in the Northeast and Midwest left the farming communities of their youth in the 1940s and 1950s) would be most earnestly in search of communion with people of similar experience.

The urban, consumer culture of postwar America vies with evangelical Christian capitalism. This is the society based on good paying, unionized (or union-scale) employment created by the New Deal national government and Keynesian economic theory—a world in which national laws both empowered and protected workers and the president and Congress assumed responsibility for the economy. Competing with these two *weltanschauungen* is the postmaterialism of the scientific and educational

establishment, described, analyzed, and surveyed by Ronald Inglehart (1997) and his disciples across the advanced industrial societies. Its adherents are Robert Reich's (1991) "symbolic analysts." Hence, the Sunbelt baby boomers came of age at the intersection of three competing world views while direct economic beneficiaries of the New South.

Here, then, is a summary of this analysis of the Christian Right in the New South:

1. They are experiencing a shift in industrial to postindustrial society with a concomitant shift from traditional to postmodern values.
2. Women are struggling to come to terms with the gender role changes that accompany modernization.
3. As middle class, college-educated Protestants, they have a strong sense of political efficacy. This is a group of upwardly-mobile voters, who because of their income gains are most vulnerable to the lure of the mundane; yet, the temptations attending prosperity create cognitive dissonance to evangelical, fundamentalist, or charismatic Protestants in that these faiths emphasize the spirit and a close personal relationship with God, reinforced through church attendance and faithful prayer. Max Weber explains this best in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. David Landes updates this argument in *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*.
4. They experienced within their own lifetimes the rapid urbanization of the New South.
5. They are the participants and beneficiaries of dizzyingly strong economic growth. (Growth rates in the New South have consistently outpaced that of the Asian tigers.)
6. Strong economic growth in the New South has attracted migrants, especially from the Northeast and Midwest, with more liberal, postindustrial cultural values—mainline Protestant faiths and middle-class Roman Catholics.

Have similar conditions appeared elsewhere in the history of the American republic? Bear with me and I will take you into the antebellum excitements of Western New York. These conditions and circumstances that led to the New Christian Right's political activism in the New South were nearly identical to that of Yankee-settled towns and villages in Western New York. The outcome was religious and political Antimasonry.

The Antimasonic party, the first third party of the United States, was born of the factionalism and disorder engendered by the break-up of the First Party System. Fervently Anti-Jacksonian, its core later furnished the leaders and partisans for the Whig party.

Antimasonry began when Western New Yorkers refused to vote for candidates who were Freemasons in local contests in the spring of 1827; Antimasons ran for statewide offices in the fall of that year, astounding both National Republicans and Democrats with their electoral success. By 1828 one can speak of a genuine political party. Antimasonry never achieved national prominence, drawing its electoral base from parts of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. Its high tide occurred in the elections of

1830; by 1834 most of its leaders and voters were subsumed in the newly-formed Whig party and by the presidential election of 1836 Antimasonry had disappeared.

Antimasonry was born of public frustration over the mystery surrounding the kidnapping and disappearance of William Morgan in September of 1826. Formisano and Kutalowski (1977) describe him as “a pretentious if impecunious stonemason” who along with “David C. Miller, a struggling publisher of the *Batavia Republican Advocate* announced their plans to publish an exposé of Masonry. Both certainly sought profit, and both may have wanted private revenge against certain Masons or lodges.”

Although apparently once affiliated with the Batavia lodge, Morgan had “fallen out with most Genesee County Masons.” A vocal minority of zealots—primarily young men—prided themselves on membership in an exclusive organization and regarded seriously threats to reveal the secrecy of their ceremonies and rituals; they reacted accordingly. Local Masons attempted to destroy Miller’s printing presses, set fire to his shop, and arrested both Miller and Morgan. Eventually several Masons arrested Morgan on a trumped-up charge of petty theft, spiriting him off to the Finger Lakes village of Canandaigua, where he was imprisoned for debt. A Mason, posing as a friend to Morgan, paid his debt. Once outside, Morgan apparently recognized the trap (a witness heard him cry “murderers”), as he was wrestled into the waiting carriage. He was transported through a number of towns and counties to Fort Niagara. Morgan’s abductors had hoped to hide Morgan in Canada, but there Masons would have none of it. They brought him back to Fort Niagara, where not only was he becoming a nuisance, but his supporters were beginning to attract public attention with their insistence in learning of Morgan’s whereabouts. Although the mystery was never solved with no body found that could be conclusively identified as Morgan’s, confessions many years after Morgan’s disappearance point to the drawing of lots by his kidnapers, his assassination, and disposal of the body into the swift currents of the Niagara River (Weed 1884).

How an abduction and murder of an ex-Mason could fuel a virulent political movement and spawn a political party has long puzzled students of the Jacksonian era; certainly, Antimasonic sentiment was not new: as early as 1737 newspapers in Philadelphia and New York intimated behind Masonic secrecy lay immoral and lewd practices, even the occasional murder.

The institutionalist approach, advanced by Richard McCormick (1966), emphasizes the gap filled by the Antimasonic party with the passing of the First Party System and the bitter factionalism within the National Republican party in the four-way contest of 1824. In states where the two-party system was nonexistent or uncompetitive the Antimason party achieved its most stunning successes. A new breed of professional politicians emerged to exploit constitutional changes in electoral procedures: the advent of universal suffrage between 1800 and 1824, the popular election of presidential electors in all states but South Carolina by 1832, the change, which became mandatory in 1842, from state-at-large and multiple-member congressional districts to single-member, the popular election of governors in all but Virginia and South Carolina by 1844, winner-take-all distribution of presidential electors, the increased use of printed ballots over voice voting and hand-written ballots, and the expansion of elected, rather than appointed offices at more levels of government. Despite the constitutional barriers to party formation, these changes, coupled with technological leaps in communication (printing) and transportation (steamboat, canals, road construction, railroads), young political entrepreneurs created innovative political techniques to mobilize a mass electorate, while the old Federalists-cum-National Republicans were slow to adapt to a system no longer grounded in the political caucus from which to select candidates.

Would it be too bold to draw a parallel between the one-party system in New York of the Jacksonian-era and the breakdown of the Democratic Party's Solid South, beginning in the 1950s (or even in the New Deal, as some scholars suggest)? The Christian Right has influenced the Republican Party in the New South in precisely the same way as the Antimasons had in uncompetitive Northern states. Green, Guth, and Wilcox (1998), employing an *Index of Christian Right Influence*, found that in 1994 "the movement had a great GOP organizational presence in eight southern states, ranging from North Carolina to Texas." On the other hand, the Christian Right was weak in the East as well as some states in the Midwest (118-119).

Yet one can readily spot a weakness in the institutional approach as a stand-alone explanation for the rise of the Christian Right in the New South: when the Antimasonic Party was formed the First Party System had collapsed throughout the nation not just in Western New York. Why didn't similar rebellions against the Democratic Party occur in other regions of antebellum America?

Richard Hofstadter (1966) understands Antimasonry in terms of political psychology. He classifies the Antimasonic movement as an early case of paranoia in American politics, finding that Antimasons fit "...the central preconception of the paranoid style—the existence of a vast, insidious preternaturally effective international conspiratorial network designed to perpetrate acts of the most fiendish character." Formisano and Kotalowski (1977) counter this alienation thesis (which has been employed to explain the Christian Right—see above) by showing that Antimasonic "extremism as it came into existence has been exaggerated while Masonry's has escaped notice. Both the emergence of total denunciation and political reprisals bore some rational relation to actual vigilantism, conspiracy, and cover-up." Soon after Morgan's disappearance, citizens in several western towns and counties organized public meetings whose participants authorized investigative committees. Thurlow Weed, a newspaper editor and a shrewd political entrepreneur who is credited with channeling Antimasonry into a political party, wrote in his memoirs that in those early days Masons could have averted Antimasonry; if only they had cooperated in the investigations, "it would have calmed the 'troubled waters,' for up to this period there had been no general or indiscriminate denunciations"(227): frustration over the cover-up, attempts to block the investigation, and protection of alleged perpetrators outraged citizens, turning many into ferocious enemies of Freemasonry. While serving on an investigative committee which convened in Lewiston to gather facts about Morgan's fate, Weed and its other members were confronted by a "large number" of Masons, several armed, who "many in an excited manner uttered threats against the members of our committee, rushing into the room, extinguishing lights, and showering epithets upon those who were engaged in the investigation" (243) Later, when Antimasonry took to the road, Masons crowded meetings and shouted down Antimasonic speakers.

Masons abused their positions in law enforcement and the judicial system in a number of instances: a judge in Genesee County said, "whatever Morgan's fate might have been, he deserved it," a constable searched Morgan's apartment for the manuscript and harassed him with summonses and warrants for small debts, the LeRoy constable led a raid on Miller's printing office, Eli Bruce, the sheriff of Niagara County participated in conveying Morgan to Lewiston, Dr. S.S. Butler, Knight Templar, appointed foreman of a grand jury in Genesee County who commented to a fellow juror, who was also a Mason, "We have a majority of jurors, and our friends must not be indicted" (Weed 1884, 247). Indeed, sheriffs in all the

western countries were Masons and under state law grand jurors were selected and summoned by country sheriffs. Suspects disappeared; witnesses invoked self-incrimination when brought before grand juries. When New York Assemblyman Francis Granger introduced a resolution on the behalf of local citizen committees for that body to investigate the matter the Democratic assembly speaker responded, “We read frequently of murders being perpetrated. Are committees of the legislature upon all occasions to be sent in search of the murderers?” Hammond (1847, 237) notes that “a majority of persons holding official stations in the state were masons.” To anxious citizens struggling to come to terms with the Morgan disappearance, it seemed the conspiracy to protect Masons extended even into state government.

Lee Benson (1961, 18) focuses on the egalitarian aspects of Antimasonry, finding substantial support for this view in Antimasonic broadsides, convention speeches, and newspapers. “The real object of the institution (Masonic Order) is, to procure UNFAIR ADVANTAGES to its members,” one reads in an address of the Antimasonic New York State Convention, February 1831. At the Antimasonic Convention in Oswego County in October of 1832 it is “Resolved, That it is the peculiar aim of Anti-Masonry to restore equal rights, equal laws, and equal privileges to all men, by rendering ineligible to office, the adherents of the blood-stained order...” Benson (1961, 18) concludes that “at a time when the transportation revolution was raising the level of aspiration to unprecedented heights, ‘equal opportunity for all’ was the perfect battle cry. Thus the Antimasons depicted themselves as leading a crusade against the Master Institution which created ‘Odious Aristocracies’ by its obligations to support the interests of its members; in preference to others of equal qualifications.”

Whitney Cross (1965), and more recently Richard Goodman (1988), emphasize economic and social transformations, concomitant changes in gender roles, and the perceived undercutting of traditional religious values. Antimasonry was not an isolated incident in the Burned-over District of Western New York. The region earned this designation from the Boston clergyman, Lyman Beecher, who wrote in 1828, “New-England of the West shall be burnt over...as in some parts of New-England it was done 80 years ago” (quoted in Cross 1965, 210) Religious revivalism (sabbatarianism, enthusiastic religion, temperance, Bible societies) and ultraist movements (Millerism, Mormonism, Spiritualism, Utopian communities) swept this Yankee path of emigration from western Vermont to the western reserve of Ohio in the early nineteenth century. By the late 1840s the women’s right movement, antislavery, and abolitionism became

the social manifestations of postmillennial influences in the Burned-over District. The leaders of these new causes, including (and especially) the women, had been converted in the Finney revivals and in them honed their oratory skills. It is instructive in drawing parallels between antebellum feminists and Christian Right women, that both drew their sustenance from, gained their organizational experience in evangelical churches. The Seneca Falls Convention, let us recall, took place at a Methodist church—a denomination that pioneered the licensing of women preachers.

A number of socioeconomic changes intersected to produce these enthusiasms. First, the Burned-over District was largely settled by emigrant Yankees who were predisposed to evangelicalism. Second, within the space of a generation the inhabitants experienced the transition from subsistence, frontier farming to commercial agriculture (with the opening of the Erie Canal) to debilitating price competition from wheat producers in the Midwest, to industrialization. Cross and other historians place Rochester, New York at the epicenter of the burned-over district; not coincidentally this Yankee village was the undisputed political and cultural capital of Antimasonry.

Paul Johnson (1978) argues that Rochester became the most spectacular example of the new inland cities created by the commercialization of agriculture in it lay on the junction of the Erie Canal and the Genesee River; from a wilderness in 1812 it grew to a city of 20,000 by the late 1830s. Rochester, with a growth rate of 512 percent in the 1820s, grew faster than any other community in America. It was the Atlanta, the Charlotte, the Phoenix, and the Jacksonville. Fox (1919, 304) observes that “the pioneer who had cut his painful way into the wilderness had lived to see a mighty transformation.” During the 1820s, the population in central and western New York grew more rapidly than in any other part of the country: the entire five counties surrounding the western half of the canal increased by 135 percent in that decade (Cross 1965; 56).

By 1830 the household economy in the burned-over district had ended: women bought their textiles and evenings were now freed up for prayer meetings, religious revivals, missionary work, and temperance activities. As men increasingly worked outside of the home, female replaced male authority. Cross (1965) documents the critical force of women driving revival and ultraist activities, while Goodman (1988, 88) shows how it is that women would see Masonry as a threat, in that

all-male forms of recreation, such as Masonry, circumscribed female influence and provided places where middle-class men need not be afraid to be 'men.' This left Freemasonry vulnerable—its secrecy inspired doubts...the evidence that men indulged their passions, betrayed the domestic ideal, and resisted reform made people understandably suspicious that an all-male institution such as Freemasonry was a cover for vice. As in other spheres, such as religion and politics, Masonry became a lightning rod that attracted and concentrated the free-floating anxieties of the age.

Epstein (1981, 8) argues that nineteenth-century Yankee women identified with orthodox Protestantism and thought men were trying to escape piety “under the guise of a watered-down theology” of Unitarianism and Universalism. This was a time when men who left farms saw a wife and children as financial burdens rather than helpers. “Young men dreamed of going west and escaping the constraints of what they regarded as effeminate civilization” (62). And life in the rapidly industrializing New England and Western New York held new risks for women. The eighteenth-century sex ratios that favored women were reversed in the early nineteenth century in New England (D’Emilio and Freedman 1988, 44) and in the Burned-Over District (Ryan 1981, 62). Women who were no longer protected in their relations with men by community enforcement of moral codes found themselves increasingly vulnerable in consensual sexual relations. Prostitution became the occupation of poor women displaced from traditional means of support, such as spinning, and by the 1830s prostitutes were more visible on urban streets (132-133).

“Antiprostitution,” D’Emilio and Freedman (1988, 141) inform us, “originated where revivalism and commerce converged: in New York City, Boston, and the Erie Canal...The response to prostitution, then, must be understood within the context of the perfectionism of the Second Great Awakening and the needs of the developing commercial class.” Mary Ryan (1981) found in her intensive study of antebellum Utica, New York that local female reform societies issued pamphlets, printed names of adulterers, stopped men at taverns, and visited employers who made sexual advances to their servants. One mother followed her son to a brothel and demanded that he return home. These female domestic reform societies of the 1820s and 1830s “encountered fierce, even violent resistance from men” (Goodman 1988).

Even the Antimasonic Party’s candidate for president reflected the influence of Yankee women. Goodman (1988) emphasizes the Antimasonic concern with community over individualism: William Wirt, the Antimasonry presidential nominee of 1832 who had served as Attorney General under both Madison and John Quincy Adams, was seen as the embodiment of republicanism and civic virtue. His wife was a devout Presbyterian who was responsible for her husband’s conversion. Wirt supported women’s rights

and encouraged women to participate in the public sphere. His political experience left him disillusioned with the moral authority of male leadership. Finally, he bemoaned the absence of civic virtue he believed endemic among a new breed of politicians and businessmen. While National Republicans argued that Antimasonry electors should vote for Clay instead of Wirt as there was no difference in principle between the two, Antimasons replied if that be the case, the electoral votes should go to Wirt, “whose moral character was fair, rather than to Mr. Clay, whose days and nights had been spent in a brothel.” Goodman argues that Masonry in preaching the “virtues of cosmopolitanism over localism,” was a place for transplanted men to enjoy society outside of the constraints of church. At the same time, “it legitimized a male form of middle-class sociability outside the home and enabled members of a newly-emergent middle class to identify one another.”

Given that today’s conservative Protestants are overwhelmingly women (as they were in antebellum Western New York), it seems there must be a link between gender role change and Protestant religious activism. If I might return to the point that conservative religious women work through religious associations, rather than the secular organizations dominated by their secular and mainline sisters, than it seems plausible that when these women are threatened with change, and in the case of the South there is little question the change was a modernist assault on the *cult of domesticity*, they will react with the language and tools which are readily available to them. Electoral politics was not an option for antebellum Yankee women: moral reform, temperance, and antimasonry societies operated under the sanction of their ministers. For women of the New South, a new outlet channeled their discontent—the political lobbying groups, such as local chapters of the Christian Coalition—again, sanctioned and welcomed into the church by the pastor.

Thurlow Weed wrote that Antimasonic sentiment was strong among farmers and weak in villages, “especially among the wealthy and influential classes”; but, one must be cautious in assuming that this always translated into poor versus rich. Antimasons, Kutalowski found, “were not poor, resentful, disadvantaged farmers.” She finds that in Genesee County the party’s electoral power lay in the most economically-prosperous townships. Similarly, Formisano found Massachusetts Antimasons to be “unusually upwardly mobile, aspiring individualists, fully attuned to the spirit of improvement.”

Antimasonry was grounded in value shifts that cut across economic lines in a commercializing republic; it was this explosive combination—Puritan religious fundamentalism and dramatic change in the way one organizes his or her worklife and leisure—which was absent in the South and the frontier. Nevertheless, a populist component surfaced in Western New York. Cross (1965, 117) writes that “...it had an agrarian cast in that it aligned leaseholders and renters against the resident agents of absentee landlords.” The Democratic party in New York was controlled by landlords and ignored the concerns of renters. Seward, when Whig governor of New York, cleared the jails of anti-renters.

According to Charles McCarthy (1902, 548), “the Morgan incident was but the spark that lit the fire. The fire was fanned and controlled by some of the shrewdest leaders this country has ever seen.... Seward, Tracy, Maynard, Granger, Whittlesey, Spencer, Holley, Ward, Fillmore, Thaddeus Stevens, Burrowes, and Fenn, some of the brightest men of the generation; some of the most brilliant newspaper writers and politicians of the time...They faced a daunting task: to achieve harmony between the extremists whose one goal was the extinction of Masonry and the professional politicians who hoped to channel the enthusiasm to the benefit of National Republicans.” Could we draw parallels among these antebellum politicians and consultants: Newt Gingrich the combatative Thaddeus Stevens and Ralph Reed and the late Lee Atwater the astute political manager Thurlow Weed? Just as a new generation of politicians joined the Antimasons and later founded the Whig Party, these politicians of the New South created a new Republican Party, one that shares a name with the Republican Party of the Midwest and Northeast, but is patently more conservative.

The center of Antimasonry remained in Western New York and western and southern Pennsylvania, and it was from these regions that its great politicians and organizers emerged. Antimasonry was understood, as the *Pennsylvania Reporter* wrote in 1830, “A Yankee concern from the beginning.” With some exceptions such as the German sectarians in Pennsylvania and New York, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians of Pennsylvania, and the Quakers, Antimasonry drew its strength in the path of New England emigration. Most of its leaders—Granger, Weed, Holley, Ward, Maynard in New York, Stevens and Burrowes in Pennsylvania, were of New England extraction. Most of the Antimasonic newspapers were under New England editors. In addition to Pennsylvania and New York, political Antimasonry achieved varying degrees of success in the western reserve of Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, and all but northeastern

Massachusetts. Antimasonry was “virtually non existent” in New Hampshire and Maine and “insignificant” in New Jersey. McCormick (1966) explains that among New England states Jacksonian sentiment was weakest in Vermont and Massachusetts and in New York and Pennsylvania Adams sentiment was weakest among the Middle States. He argues that the Antimasonic party “served to fill a particular kind of political void....for various reasons where the contest for the presidency did not stimulate the formation of balanced parties oriented toward the presidential candidates, the Antimasons flourished” (338).

Antimasons are barely distinguishable from the National Republicans on most issues, in both state and national contests. Like the National Republicans, they supported the American system (internal improvements, protective tariffs), favored recharter of the Bank of the United States, supported Indian rights and were outraged by Jackson’s support of Georgia’s Cherokee policy, despite the U. S. Supreme Court’s ruling favoring the Cherokees. Its leaders often championed women’s rights. The difference lay in the Antimasons as a Christian and moral party: they were antislavery, teetotalers. Brackney (1976, 3) argues that “Antimasonry was initially and fundamentally a religious crusade,” which was promoted by the Protestant clergy before it was organized as a political party. Clay, the National Republican leader was morally-corrupt, a slave-owner, a Mason, a duelist, and a drinker—his politics could hardly make up for these personal defects. Ideological bundling was evident in the many papers devoted to Antimasonic, temperance, moral, and religious news (Hixson 1983). But this emphasis on morality was always an evangelical Protestantism and some Antimasons drifted into anti-Catholicism: Millard Fillmore was one among a number of prominent Antimasons who filled the ranks of the nativist Know-Nothing party in reaction to the rum, Romanism, and rebellion increasingly associated with the Democratic party. The Irish-Catholics and the New York Dutch resented both Antimasonic and Whig (Protestantism and Yankee) proscriptions, which drove them into the Democratic party. Weed and Seward had hoped to recruit immigrants into the Whig party, while Fillmore held out little hope for that strategy. (He nursed a resentment against Irish-Catholics, believing they cost him the governorship.) Seward’s hopes, although not realized at the time, had not been personally unrealistic: the Workingmen’s Party helped elect him in 1830 to the New York State Senate.

In state politics, Antimasons specialized in opposing everything the Democrats proposed, except in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, where they allied with the Democrats against the National

Republicans. There was always the role of balancer in the absence of a competitive two-party legislature. In New York politics Antimasons allied with the National Republicans against the Albany Regency to attack the militia system (rich men could afford the twelve dollar fine for absenteeism), support internal improvements (popular in the western counties), and fight efforts to raise tolls on the Erie Canal. They favored rechartering of the national bank, arguing that state banks were more susceptible to corruption and political manipulation. But Antimasons miscalculated for the national bank was mistrusted by the great mass of voters; most supported Jackson's veto of the recharter. In his autobiography, Seward claims that Antimasons supported the 1831 bill that abolished imprisonment for debt, while the Jacksonians divided on it and yielded only to "the rising tide of popular feeling." Benson (1961, 45) finds that the papers of the day support this claim, for while Weed's paper "hailed the bill as a great victory for reform," the Democrat's paper, *The Albany Argus*, belittled it. This issue was of great concern to Western New Yorkers, where, for instance in Monroe County (Rochester) there was one imprisoned debtor for each of ten families in the year prior to the passage of this bill. Nor was it forgotten that Morgan met his fate while imprisoned in a debtor's cell.

In his memoir, Thurlow Weed recounts his father's efforts to stay out of debtor's prison, while creditors were determined to put him and other failed farmers and small tradesmen into debtors' prison as an example to other borrowers. Weed's account of his childhood and his stand on the political issues of the day do not sound Federalist: his National Republican/Antimason/Whig/Republican sprang from the shared cultural experience of young men (and women—who clearly formed party identifications a century before suffrage), who as the sons of Revolutionary War veterans had the guilty burden of living up to their fathers' dreams for the democratic republic while coming of age during the War of 1812 and the exploding commercializing and industrializing economy with the war's end. They were swept up in the tide of value change—the undercutting of the agrarian democracy by the commercial ethos of industrial capitalism. They were the quintessential Yankees—thrifty, hard-working, and eager to grow rich in ever new commercial ventures, but incessantly reminded that it was easier for a camel to pass through a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.³

³ How much less cognitive dissonance for Protestants if they had the benefit of recent scholarship—the needle a break in the city wall to

Antimasonic electoral success was a function of the existence or lack of a two-party, competitive system and the absence of strong party attachments. In the fall of 1827, fifteen Antimasons were elected to the New York Assembly. Hammond (1847, 382-383) wrote that, “the results of the election astonished all—even the Antimasons themselves—and opened the eyes of politicians to the growing power of the new party.” The next year five Antimasons were elected to the senate and seventeen to the assembly, when for the first time one could speak of a legislative party. But in New York, the Antimasons would come to play the role of spoiler: in the 1828 gubernatorial election Martin Van Buren took 136,785 votes, Thompson, the National Republican nominee, 106,415, and Southwick, the Antimason, 33,335. In the 1832 Pennsylvania elections, 32 (out of a body of 100) were elected to the state house. In Vermont, William Palmer was elected for three successive years as an Antimason governor, while the party held a majority in both the house and council. In Massachusetts, three state senators and somewhere between 20 and 25 assemblyman were elected on the Antimasonic ticket; by 1831 Antimasons held 150 seats in the lower house, out of a total of 490. In 1833 John Quincy Adams ran for governor on the Antimasonic ticket; by 1831 Antimasons held 150 seats in the lower house, out of a total of 490. In 1833 John Quincy Adams ran for governor on the Antimasonic ticket. (While never a Mason, he did offer to reveal the secrets of Phi Beta Kappa.) The four-way contest went to the legislature with Adams withdrawing his name in order to unite the National Republicans and Antimasons. (He was also eager to avoid the same situation which led to his election by the U. S. House of Representatives in 1824.) Adams was unacceptable to adhering Masons who were National Republicans, as his views about Masonry were well known. In his diary Adams wrote, “It is a matter of curious speculation why such degrading forms, such execrable oaths, and such cannibal penalties should have submitted to by wise, spirited, and virtuous men. It is humiliating to the human character.” Never a serious contender for the presidency, William Wirt carried only Vermont in the 1832 contest.

Did Antimasonry affect American political culture? How successful was Antimasonry in achieving its goals? The Antimasonic movement, which remained centered in Western New York,

ease a camel through at night without opening the gate—very carefully, but certainly not impossible!

temporarily achieved its principal goal: by 1835 there were only 49 lodges with 3000 members, down from 480 lodges in 1825 with 20,000 members; but on the eve of the Civil War there were nearly 5,000 lodges in the United States. The revivalist Charles Gradison Finney tried unsuccessfully to warn a new generation about the evils of Masonry; but according to Goodman, “in the gilded age, Finney’s warnings went unheeded...the shift from an agrarian Republic to an industrial society had advanced so far that the ideological and social basis for a popular Antimasonic movement no longer existed.”

Political Antimasonry pioneered the popular party-nominating convention for local, state, and federal offices—an innovation soon imitated by the National Republicans and Democrats. It was the first party to take advantage of technological advances in communication and transportation—there were 141 Antimasonic papers in 1832, originating from 15 states and Antimasonic leaders traveled widely to campaign and lecture. Yet Antimasonry’s primary contribution lies in the phenomenon itself in terms of party politics, voter mobilization, and political culture.

McCarthy (1902, 550) wrote that the Antimasonic party’s chief importance in American political history is its role in providing the “first solid base for the Whig movement.” The Greely-Weed-Seward (or antislavery Antimasons) became the “conscience Whigs,” later to become the radical core of the Republican party.

National Republicans and Democrats were both surprised and concerned about the sudden electoral strength of the Antimasons. The Antimasonic experience taught a new generation of party leaders the power of voter mobilization. By the end of 1827 Antimasons had elected candidates in town, county, and state races. Antimasonry demonstrated the rapidity with which nonvoters could be mobilized when enthused about a cause: just the phenomenon that writers of state constitutions had feared in imposing property qualifications for suffrage and limiting the number of directly-elected offices.

The Antimasonic experience illustrates that political culture became a factor in party competition early in the history of American political parties. The Antimasonic party was the first Christian-moral political party. This is why Universalists, Unitarians, and Roman Catholics would have none of it. Fundamental socioeconomic transformation carries with it uncertainty and trepidation for some people. Activist religions provide an anchor for those people feeling adrift. It is natural that this group would attach itself to the party of civic virtue and republicanism rather than the party of civil liberties and

individualism. This is why the history of religion and American political parties is that of National Republican, Whig, and the modern Republican party struggling both to appease and contain the fundamentalist Christians among its ranks. Nor is it surprising that on the eve of the millennium it is in the South, not the North, where religious fundamentalism has emerged as a vociferant faction in Republican party politics, for this time it is the South/Sunbelt, not the North/Rustbelt, which is experiencing the nation's most dynamic socioeconomic transformation.

Despite one-hundred and fifty years of history, the concerns of the Antimasons and the New Christian Right derive from similar circumstances; but, remarkably, even many of the issues have not changed, including Antimasonry! The Southern Baptist Convention commissioned a study of Freemasonry in 1992, in which it found “that many of the religious teachings presented in *A Bridge to Light* (an official publication of The Supreme Council, 33rd Degree Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, United States of America) are incompatible with biblical Christianity” (Home Mission Board). Larry Holly, a Texas physician who initiated the challenge of freemasonry in the Southern Baptist Convention sounds no different than the writers of Antimasonic newspapers and pamphlets archived in libraries and local historical societies throughout Central and Western New York when he wrote of “joining affinity with the Anti-Christ in the Masonic Lodge” and referred to membership as “an evil association” (Baptist Press, 1996).

Twentieth-century scholars often employ new language to describe a debate that is different only in its degree, not in its foundation: fundamentalism versus modernism and postmodernism. It is the classic Lockean/Burkean debate which scholars have traced to the very beginnings of the American republic (Pocock 1975). Paul Goodman (1988, 37) wrote, “Those attracted to Antimasonry did not necessarily reject the pull of the marketplace and its values, but they shared a suspicion that an industrial order was subversive of republican order.” These same concepts have resurfaced as the New South experiences the magnitude of economic transformation the Erie Canal brought to Western and Central New York in the early nineteenth century. Much as Thurlow Weed attempted to forge links between religious Antimasonry and political Antimasonry, especially through keeping the lid on its more radical spokesmen, Ralph Reed (1994, 1996) was to document a similar effort when at the helm of the Christian Coalition. Both eventually would forge out on their own—tired of the incessant squabbling among the doctrinaire purists—

and earn respect among mainstream politicians (of both political parties) as insightful political managers. Lincoln turned to Weed for advice and brought him to Washington, much as Reed will inevitably one day become the counsel of Republican presidents—the Christian Coalition, like political Antimasonry, regarded as a stepping-stone (rather than a defining moment) in Reed’s career.

The fate of Antimasonry is instructive for that of the New Christian Right. Antimasonry never became a national force, drawing its electoral base from parts of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. Its high tide occurred in the elections of 1830; by 1834 most of its leaders and voters were subsumed in the newly-formed Whig party and by the presidential election of 1836 Antimasonry had disappeared. A new generation of Americans experienced none of the cognitive dissonance of their parents—they knew of no world without textile mills, ironworks, and steamboats—much as the children of baby boomers in the New South have not been born to one way of life and found themselves as adults in another. And as the South continues to develop the normal two-party competition of its pre-Civil War experience, the Christian Right will lose its influence in the state organizations of the Republican Party of the New South.

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