

BUCKLEY AND HIS BEDFELLOWS

Fusionism, Birchism, and the Rise of Conservative Populism

Abstract: William F. Buckley Jr.'s 1962 clash with Robert Welch directly and indirectly contributed to the rise of extreme grassroots populism on the American Right. Buckley's anti-communism differed from Welch's in its attribution of incompetence rather than subversion to the cause of Sovietization, but their natures and styles were largely similar. Buckley's jettisoning of Edmund Burke's communitarianism in favor of an untenable libertarian-conservative fusion enabled a new conservative ethos characterized by inconsistent thoughts, principles, and ideas. Well-organized advocacy groups thrived off anathematizing propaganda that incited populist fears, whereas traditional conservatism would have disdained its lunacy.

By William Field
Yale University

In 1962, at the height of the Cold War, America's preeminent conservatives clashed bitterly with right-wing extremists over the nature and extent of Communist inroads within the United States. Leading the former contingent was the charismatic William F. Buckley Jr., who had gained prestige for reinvigorating conservatism through his publication of *God and Man at Yale* in 1951 and his ongoing weekly magazine, *National Review*, in circulation since 1955. He had developed a reputation as a patrician gadfly crusading against the liberal forces of intellectual conformity, relativistic atheism, moral dissolution, repressive statism, and malignant communism. Beyond his charisma and intellect, Buckley's political ascendancy was a function of his audacity to challenge what amounted to almost the entire political spectrum of the 1950s. He legitimized resentment for New Deal socialism, timid Soviet containment strategy, and loosening cultural mores at a time when the right-wing establishment, the so-called Rockefeller Republicans, had mostly acquiesced to these liberal gains.

In spite of its well-defined ideological adversaries, Buckley's reimagined American conservatism lacked a clear philosophical basis itself. His movement was constructed from a discrepant fusion of libertarianism and religious traditionalism. Combining these "strange bedfellows" necessitated a degree of argumentative dissonance that enabled the participation of extremists who applied elements of his philosophy beyond their intended boundaries. The mutability of Buckley's political convictions, in concert with his aristocratic, gunslinging style, emboldened radical conservatives to extend his ideas beyond their rational limits and thereby threaten the respectability of his movement. Buckley's clash with Robert W. Welch Jr., a confectionary tycoon turned rabid anti-Communist advocate, elucidated not only the newfound power of grassroots conservatism as an implacable force of the New Right, but also Buckley's determination to protect his branch of conservatism from

that radicalism. Welch, as the influential founder and leader of the radical John Birch Society, cultivated a substantial membership dedicated to a paranoid vision of a covert Communist conspiracy that penetrated the highest levels of the United States' government. Buckley and Welch initially maintained a cordial symbiosis designed to bolster each other's influence amongst the conservative base. Eventually, Welch's allegation that President Dwight Eisenhower and other prominent leaders were engaged in treasonous sabotage became the fodder of the national media. Buckley and his allies feared association with a man that many Americans perceived to be unhinged from reality.

Collaborating with Senator Barry Goldwater and political theorist Russell Kirk, Buckley publicly advocated for Welch to be jettisoned from the conservative fold, but simultaneously offered support for the underlying mission of his organization. With the power afforded by hindsight, Buckley and most recently Senator Jeff Flake have characterized the episode as the courageous ousting of a figure emblematic of extremist "irresponsibility" by conservative purists.¹ Buckley certainly disagreed with Welch's intentions and the Bircher's cultish structure, but he could not deny the commonality of religious and anti-Communist values between the *National Review* and the John Birch Society, nor ignore the many overlapping subscribers between both organizations, without sacrificing his own reputation as an ardent conservative. In reality, Buckley's maneuver was primarily a self-serving calculation, not a principled rejection. When the opportunity to attain respectability by marginalizing the outlandish Welch appeared, Buckley seized on his competitor's vulnerability because it was politically expedient. To protect his veneer of upper crust civility, Buckley publicly condemned Welch. In a wider context, however, the conflict illustrated how Buckley's movement contributed to the rise of the extreme grassroots fundamentalism as a permissible component of the American Right.

RECONSTITUTING THE CANON

The conservatism Buckley espoused descends from Irish-born political philosopher Edmund Burke, but Buckley reengineered the principles of the transatlantic antecedent in establishing a new American conservatism for the modern era. While Buckley channeled some of his predecessor's sensibilities, he injected the canon with an anti-statist, laissez-faire, populist individualism that the renowned statesman would have disdained. In his effort to fuse two incongruous political persuasions, economic libertarianism and traditionalist conservatism, Buckley radically changed conservative ideas about political engagement. Burke's convictions, regurgitated for the modern era by Russell Kirk in his 1953 book *The Conservative Mind*, were sixfold: his school of thought espoused belief in a "divine intent" above

fanaticism" if religious doctrine were applied literally to the world of current affairs. To Burke, scripture was not a written template, but a spiritual inspiration in the formation of policy. Pragmatic, "sound doctrine" should govern religious expression; the inversion of this precept, particularly by government enforcement as during Charles I's "violent and ill-considered attempt...to establish...the Church of England in Scotland," subverted not only the "order, but...the liberty, of the whole community."⁶ Buckley, a devoted Roman Catholic, split with his predecessor in promoting the primacy of Judeo-Christian doctrine, even by state intervention if necessary, through his advocacy for mandatory school prayer and against abortion.⁷ Where he observed religious expression under assault, Buckley employed Hamiltonian constitutional rhetoric, but where he perceived the alignment of popular

“In his effort to fuse two incongruous political persuasions, economic libertarianism and traditional conservatism, Buckley radically changed conservative ideas about political engagement.”

society and conscience; appreciation for the “proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life”; support for a civilized society of “order and classes” defined by natural distinction; understanding that private property is the basis of human liberty and “economic levelling” is antithetical to “progress”; “[f]aith in prescription and distrust of ‘sophisters’” knowing that people are “governed more by emotion than by reason”; and gradualism in political reform.² Burke advocated for a spiritual communitarian society insulated from its own short-sighted impulses by a venerated government that interpreted godly will. He supported virtuous prescriptions that prioritized existing hierarchies and harmonious interests over the uncertain promises of reform. Like Burke, Buckley despised the unfettered Baconist faith in the “perfectibility of man and illimitable progress of society”³: in his 1955 *National Review* “Mission Statement,” he asserted that the “profound crisis of our era” is “the conflict between the Social Engineers, who seek to adjust mankind to conform with scientific utopias and the disciples of Truth, who defend the organic moral order.”⁴ A wealthy heir himself, Buckley's self-assured manner would appear to be an implicit endorsement of Burke's third tenet, the idea of “natural distinctions among men,”⁵ at the very least within the intellectual sphere.

Still, Buckley's philosophy conflicted with Burke's in a meaningful, though somewhat obfuscated, manner. Both Burke and Buckley emphasized the importance of religion in government and society. But while the former considered faith to be an important metaphorical guide that inculcated communitarian values, respect for tradition, and moral enrichment, he also understood the potential for “dangerous

opinion with his personal viewpoint, he willingly ditched civil rights in favor of government-backed religious enforcement aligned with his agenda.

In *God and Man at Yale*, for example, Buckley stringently defended the religious freedoms of college students supposedly suppressed by homogenizing, authoritarian administrators. Yet in a collection of cultural essays, Buckley chastised the “First Amendment rampart-watchers” who opposed government-sanctioned “religious instruction,” referring to the people who opposed school prayer.⁸ In an even greater departure from Burke, Buckley defended political candidates' use of “God's name” by reporting that over 85% of Americans believed in a divine ruler.⁹ Clearly, freedom of religious expression on the basis of utilitarian diversity and constitutional protections, statist administration of Catholic prayer justified by religious law, and the politicization of God through a majoritarian rationalization are incompatible arguments. With the potential exception of the first statement, Buckley's reasoning contradicts Burke's. Yet his divergence extends beyond comparisons to intellectual ancestors, because his rhetoric conflicts with itself. If the political end were right, Buckley employed any means necessary to justify it, a fundamentalist tendency he shared with his radical counterparts.

Buckley's deviation partly can be explained ontologically; although his work is less philosophical than Burke's, it implies fundamental disagreement on the contract between individuals and society. Whereas Burke deemed localized institutions, the “little platoon[s],” to be the ideal

foundation of society and “love of country,”¹⁰ Buckley’s patriotism stemmed from a libertarian orthodoxy in which individualism supplanted institutionalism and the pursuit of wealth possessed a societal, if not individual, morality. Burke approved of Adam Smith’s free market as an efficient means of economic organization but disapproved of capitalism as an ethical basis for personal or sociopolitical affairs. Buckley’s arguments extended beyond Burke’s to suggest laissez-faire capitalism was not only economically sound but a worthy end in determining social hierarchy. In *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley elevated “free enterprise and limited government” to normative superiority in judging “the role of man in his society.”¹¹ His views stopped short of Ayn Rand’s objectivism because he believed that a divine will governed “the role of man in the universe”¹² – whereas she categorically rejected religion and championed materialism as the foremost ethical end¹³ – but his individualism was nonetheless extreme by Burkean standards.

FLUORIDATED WATER AND POISONED CANDY

Buckley’s endorsement of capitalist self-improvement as a socioeconomic good impeded by the “growth of Big Brother government” had important implications for the role of radical populism within the conservative movement.¹⁴ It validated right-wing resentments around power, wealth, and class as a function of insidious collectivism. Buckley aroused suspicion for “satanic...communism” internationally and an expanding government domestically as the primary threat to “liberty and material progress.”¹⁵ He may not have overtly indicted national leaders as card-carrying Communists, but he emboldened Welch and his fellow conspiracists in their distrust of American institutions through his advocacy. The Bircher’s perception of a Communist “octopus” whose “tentacles reach[ed] into all of the legislative halls, ...union labor meetings, ...religious gatherings, and ...schools of the whole world”¹⁶ differed in extremity but not nature from that of the *National Review*, which regularly editorialized with a suspicious worldview.

The so-called “Siberia, U.S.A.” controversy of 1956 demonstrated this interplay between grassroots radicalism and Buckley’s *National Review*. A congressional proposal to permit Alaskan authorities to “hospitalize...mentally ill residents” incited the ire of far-right suburbanites like Gene Birkeland, who believed that the government was “establishing... Siberian slave camps,” otherwise known as Gulags. These credulous conspiracists, many of whom participated in the John Birch Society, inhabited a parallel universe with alternative information, language, and convictions—the “fake news” of yesteryear. Pamphlets, articles, letters, and petitions from the Educational News Service, Liberty Lobby, Daughters of the American Revolution, and Network of Patriotic Letter Writers promulgated “bizarre apocalyptic fantasies”¹⁷ through provocative headlines such as “Seeds of Treason,” “Government Book Control,” “Unbelievable Degeneracy [in Public Schools],” and “Communist Brainwashing: Your Child



L. Grant Bozell, and William F. Buckley, Jr. (1954)

Source: *Los Angeles Times* photographic archive, UCLA Library (Wikimedia Commons)

is Their Target.”¹⁸ With scant or no evidence, these groups disseminated propaganda that interpreted real or imagined events that threatened the white, middle-class suburbanite’s worldview as the deliberate sabotage of “Big Business,” “Big Labor,” “Big Government,” “The Power Elite,” “totalitarian Leftists,” and “the Jews” amongst others.¹⁹ This splintering of perceptions was self-perpetuating: distrust in the establishment encouraged engagement with advocacy groups that further alienated the reader. “Projective politics,” defined by scholar Richard Hofstadter as the expression of irrational, “essentially pathological” concerns in the public sphere, was the upshot of this divisive feedback loop.²⁰

The consequent division of American political engagement underlay the paranoia around the Alaskan mental health bill. Conspiracists threatened to undermine a measure that, ironically, Senator Goldwater supported for its very decentralization of federal power.²¹ In her well-known grassroots study *Mothers of Conservatism*, historian Michelle Nickerson recounted the impressions of Jane Crosby, a South Pasadena Bircher, who felt disenchanted with “social scientists who lectured about mental health” at a local educational conference, an encounter that inspired her reversal from Roosevelt Democrat to radical conservative. “The perception of being psychologically manipulated by authorities,” in Nickerson’s analysis, “invigorated the activism of conservative women.”²² Paranoid about ties between “psychiatric professionals and the welfare state,” many far-right activists linked the Alaskan bill to a broader campaign

of “mass indoctrination aimed at stifling individualism and belief in God,”²³ the two principal tenets of Buckley’s fusion. Although *National Review* published a caustic satire of the Gulag-crazed housewives, it also championed their skeptical anti-statist thinking with Kirk’s glowing book review “Those School Psychological Tests” and Dr. Thomas Szasz’s criticism of “psychiatric liberalism,” which questioned the redefining of “moral and political values” as “health values.”²⁴ Buckley chided the delusional excesses of these crusaders, but also substantiated their suspicions about an elite academic, governmental complex conspiring to strip them of their liberties. Balancing the respectable right and the radical conservatives, *National Review* often confirmed the sentiments of grassroots extremists without adopting their delusions.

The ideological fickleness that characterized Buckley’s vacillations between libertarianism and conservatism, individualism and statism, constitutionalism and majoritarianism, and reason and faith further contributed to the inroads of

of firebrand rabble-rousing; in a scathing critique, liberal commentator Dwight Macdonald labelled the *National Review*’s commentary “demagoguery,” arguing that a “true conservative...is not simply anti-something.” He “appeals to the laws or...tradition, but certainly not to the ‘hearts of men.’”²⁸ Macdonald based his claim on the *National Review*’s rebuke of the Plessy doctrine in which *Review* editors evaded the discriminatory nature of segregation by invoking public will in its favor.

Buckley gleefully substituted silver-tongued fomentation for concrete reasoning, which naturally made him popular among extremist groups like the John Birch Society. Robert Welch’s characterization of the Communist threat employed similar rhetorical means, albeit with a more extreme conclusion. Within the same 1961 letter to followers of the John Birch Society, the former candy magnate declared that “the enemy” was “now closing in...on the informed anti-Communists of this country.”²⁹ Simultaneously, though, the

“Welch, like Buckley, propagated multiple narratives about the state of affairs in order to expediently attack the liberal establishment.”

groups like the John Birch Society. Buckley imbued his conservative synthesis with a demagogic tone. To the extent that his anathematizing charisma overpowered the glaring inconsistency of his ideas, he endowed American conservatism with its indignant populism. Demagoguery was not unprecedented amongst United States’ reactionary politicians. Almost a century before Buckley founded *National Review*, Senator Stephen Douglas touted the “great principle of popular sovereignty” while also proclaiming his view that the United States government was “made by the white man, for the benefit of the white man, to be administered by white men.”²⁵ Douglas stoked racial resentments while invoking localized populism in order to safeguard the preordained hierarchy he envisioned amongst people. Buckley certainly was not the first to bridge European-style conservatism with America’s democratic predisposition in pursuit of an agenda, but his anti-establishment brand went further to legitimize demagoguery with lasting consequences.

In fact, Buckley deliberately engaged in anti-elitist fearmongering, using hyperbolic labels such as “parasitic bureaucracy,” “cultural menace,” and “Fabian operators” to describe a bankrupt American political system.²⁶ Criticizing the intellectual establishment, he once opined that he would “rather be governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston telephone directory than by the faculty of Harvard.”²⁷ Indeed, prior to the Welch altercation, contemporary critics observed Buckley’s argumentative “equivocation” as an indicator

“Communists and their sympathizers...[were] frightened over” the promising campaign to impeach Chief Justice Earl Warren.³⁰ Welch, like Buckley, propagated multiple narratives about the state of affairs in order to expediently attack the liberal establishment.

RIGHTING THE SHIP

Welch’s paranoid right-wing fundamentalism, recorded primarily in *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, his public manifesto chronicling the founding meeting of his organization, and “The Politician” or “Black Book,” an incendiary book-length “letter”³¹ intended for a “limited number of good friends and outstanding patriots,”³² distinguished itself from Buckley’s assessment in its attribution of subjective intentionality to objective consequence. Logically, Welch’s approach was the inverse of Hanlon’s Razor, which states that one should “never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity.” *The Blue Book* described an indefatigable Communist conspiracy that had utilized “bribery, lies, bluff, brutality, the countless tentacles of treason, [and] murder on a scale never before dreamed of in the world...without the slightest concern for any moral difference.”³³ Unless “inexorable” forces could be overturned, the United States faced “Communist dominion...from the Kremlin” within a few years.³⁴

Welch’s assessment of the internal danger was that Machiavellian leaders were yielding to collectivism for career

advancement, though not necessarily through conscious sabotage. He cautioned that the “mass psychological flight towards amorality” enabled duplicitous politicians with the “appearance of excellent morals” to do “a tremendous amount of ball-carrying” for the Communist conspiracy.³⁵ In *The Blue Book*, Welch’s assertions about feckless leadership in United States were hardly more extreme than Buckley’s, who believed that Eisenhower’s “lethargy, indecision, and ignorance” had been adroitly exploited by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev.³⁶ Both feared the inroads of a relativism in American culture that prevented the assertion of the “superiority of capitalism to socialism.”³⁷ Both Buckley and Welch believed in a pernicious collectivist plot facilitated in some manner by the behavior of American politicians. In public statements, the latter is only slightly more alarmist in his assessment of the Communist threat.

“The Politician,” however, cast Faustian aspersions about domestic leaders that garnered national attention, exposed the John Birch Society to extensive criticism, and eventually persuaded Buckley to condemn Welch. It directly accused Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower; C.I.A. Director Allen Dulles; and Chief Justice Earl Warren of being “knowing instruments of the Communist conspiracy.”³⁸ In 1962, at Senator Goldwater’s request, Buckley quietly compiled Welch’s most preposterous “remarks” in order to facilitate the most effective condemnation of the Birch

The outlandish claims in “The Politician” discredited Welch’s mainstream credibility when they were widely reported in 1961, but when Buckley, entrusted with the manuscript of “The Politician” in 1958, was amongst the few conservatives aware of Welch’s genuine sentiments, he avoided public conflict with Welch. Buckley, eyeing the expedient path, prioritized his own reputation in regards to the Society and its founder at every turn. Their earlier correspondence had been defined by a reluctant cordiality interspersed by pledges of written and financial aid.⁴² Reflecting on Welch’s swelling popularity amongst *National Review*’s associates and the conservative base, Buckley staved off a rupture in 1958. He expressed to Welch that they “agree[d] on essentials” and their “differences [were] a matter of emphasis,”⁴³ even after Welch had emphasized that “conscious treason” was “propelling our ship of state down its present dangerous course.”⁴⁴ In Buckley’s missing reply to Welch regarding “The Politician,” he supposedly challenged the Bircher assumption that communist expansion meant “American leaders wanted them to win,” the intentionality fallacy, which led Welch to demand the return of his manuscript. Still, in the interest of protecting his reputation as a staunch anti-Communist, Buckley upheld a public entente with the exception of one standalone critique by proxy, a piece by Eugene Lyons.⁴⁵

Evidently, Buckley was roused to action not by his reading of the controversial manuscript, but the 1961 media firestorm

“When self-preservation necessitated temporary well-wishing towards the Society, Buckley obliged.”

founder in future conversations and publications;³⁹ 30 of the 66 quotes in this document came from “The Politician.” Among these statements were accusations that Eisenhower was “a dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy”; was the “most conspicuous and injurious of [the] enemies” to the American people; was “one of the most vigorous and vicious anti-anti-Communists in American public life”; had “adjusted his policies...to tie in with [the Kremlin] line”; and served under “superior and boss” Milton Eisenhower “within the Communist Party.” Furthermore, Presidents Roosevelt and Truman were “used by the Communists” and Allen Dulles was an “untouchable supporter of Communism.” Indicative of his alarmist fanaticism, Welch proclaimed that the Communist danger was “almost entirely internal, from... treason right in our government.”⁴⁰ Whether deliberate or not, his levelling of treason at the “very top social, economic, educational, and political circles”⁴¹ neatly fit the paranoid predisposition of the grassroots base described by Nickerson. Moreover, it preemptively contextualized any criticism against Welch as part of the wider Communist conspiracy, such that these attacks would further entrench many of his supporters.

surrounding its widespread circulation. *Time Magazine*’s 1961 expose, entitled “The Americanists,” lambasted the Birchers as a would-be “comic-opera joke” save for their “unsettling presence...in scores of U.S. communities.” The piece decried the John Birch Society’s structure of secretive cells harnessing “Communist-style” tactics under Welch’s “hard-boiled, dictatorial direction.” Before reporting the more salacious allegations of “The Politician,” *Time* declared the document “Welch’s *Mein Kampf*,” an allusion to Adolf Hitler’s fascist manifesto.⁴⁶ Welch responded that the document was a “private confidential letter” expressing “personal opinion” with no bearing on the Society “in any way,” and naturally blamed “Communist” machinations for the attack on his character.⁴⁷ To all but his faithful supporters, however, the “Black Book” was the sinister dogma behind the more agreeable “Blue Book.” It was “the ultimate truth held by his founder and his hard core, but...too advanced and too powerful to present, as yet, to the “masses” being led,” according to legal scholar Alan F. Westin.⁴⁸ The negative publicity around the John Birch Society naturally forced conservative leaders like Buckley onto a political tightrope:



Russell A. Kirk at his typewriter. (cir. 1950s)

Source: *The Imaginative Conservative*
(Wikimedia Commons)

they had to deflect doubts of their sanity from the left and of their anti-Communist allegiances from the right.

The extent to which widespread denunciation by the “religious, civil, and political establishment”⁴⁹ in 1961 alienated conservative ideologues, particularly the *Review’s* and Society’s shared proponents, was the subject of intense speculation by Buckley, because it determined the potential success of an effort to excommunicate Welch. Although never openly expressed, Buckley’s ultimate goal was the consolidation of the conservative movement under his control. When self-preservation necessitated temporary well-wishing towards the Society, Buckley obliged. He indicated his non-confrontational intentions to the ascendant Welch via Birch confederate Bryton Barron two weeks after the *Time* expose.⁵⁰ At the same time, Buckley drafted an unpublished editorial outlining the “personal motivation” fallacy and calling for Welch’s resignation.⁵¹ The shrewd Buckley was uncertain of the optimal course of action, and sought the advice of trusted allies. *National Review* publisher and confidante William Rusher wisely observed that Buckley’s insistence on the syllogism that Welch’s irrationality made the “John Birch Society” incurable was a disguised “impatience” with a conservative organization that was not “obediently following [National Review’s] lead.”⁵² Confirming this interpretation are a list of prominent John Birch Society sponsors and a memo outlining the dangers of alienating “our readers and contributors.”⁵³ Buckley’s determination was a question of political opportunism. He sought to ascertain the reaction of the conservative community to an assault on Welch.

Senator Goldwater, anxious about a broad-brush association with the erratic Welch, cemented the political calculus of Welch’s excommunication by offering Buckley a coalition of rational conservatives from which to launch his attack. In January 1962, Goldwater, Buckley, Kirk, and a few other prominent conservatives secretly convened at The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida, for a two-day conference that would determine their approach to the John Birch Society in advance of Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign. Goldwater had adopted a similarly nonconfrontational attitude because of the Society’s hold on the Republican constituency in his home state of Arizona. The Society and its prominent members had backed him, and like Buckley, he needed to disabuse the public of any official association while preserving relationships with his supporters. The coalition vowed to isolate Welch without alienating his followers, leading Buckley to pen his damaging editorial, “The Question of Robert Welch.”⁵⁴ The rationalization behind the maneuver was certainly Machiavellian in nature. The coalition’s self-serving intentions were demonstrated by Goldwater’s undemonstrated claims of having criticized Welch in an interview with the *New York Times*.⁵⁵ Suspicious of this assertion, Buckley expressed to Kirk his distress over Goldwater’s inactivity in denouncing Welch.⁵⁶ Rather than a brave stand, as Jeff Flake retroactively characterized it, the coalition’s mutually distrustful, delayed response was the product of savvy maneuvering for political gain.

More than any other conservative intellectual, Buckley possessed the resources, including financial wherewithal, editorial independence, and political legitimacy, to invalidate Welch’s premises on reasons of principle in 1958. Instead, he waited until convenience compelled him to do so in 1962. Whether his reaction indicated his ideological proximity to Welch, the political expediency of remaining cautious allies, or a combination of both factors, the incident demonstrated Buckley’s responsibility for, and participation in, the rise of grassroots populism within the conservative movement. If the former is true, then the commonality of a conservative tastemaker and a radical movement that advocated the levelling of the patrician political establishment through subversive means was a sign of the new anti-Burkean individualism in the right-wing ethos. If the latter is true, then as the foremost conservative intellectual of his era, Buckley’s own propensity for demagogic behavior effectively licensed the “absurd superstitions” of the nation’s “populistically oriented popular culture.”⁵⁷ By any interpretation, Buckley’s involvement in this ideological groundswell was significant. Underneath his wild allegations, Welch’s political philosophy attributed the “Communist’s overwhelming success” into a telling principal factor: “patient gradualism.”⁵⁸ In the confectioner’s mind, the quintessential basis of European conservatism, and indeed the United States Constitution, was the single greatest tool in the destruction of the American way of life. Buckley may not have endorsed that assertion himself, but his tepid, self-serving rejection of Welch illustrated the inversion of populism’s role in the conservative movement. ■

Endnotes

- [1] Jeff Flake, *Conscience of a Conservative: A Rejection of Destructive Politics and a Return to Principle* (Random House: 2017), 63; William F. Buckley Jr., “Goldwater, the John Birch Society, and Me,” *Commentary Magazine*, March 1, 2008.
- [2] Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, Vol. 7 (Regnery: 1986), 7-8.
- [3] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 9.
- [4] William F. Buckley Jr., “Our Mission Statement,” *National Review*, November 19, 1955, <https://www.nationalreview.com/1955/11/our-mission-statement-william-f-buckley-jr/>.
- [5] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 7.
- [6] Edmund Burke, “Speech on the Acts of Uniformity,” in *Burke’s Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 7 (John C. Nimmo: 1887).
- [7] William F. Buckley Jr., *Happy Days Were Here Again: Reflections of a Libertarian Journalist* (Random House: 1993), 107-25.
- [8] William F. Buckley Jr., *Happy Days Were Here Again*, 110.
- [9] William F. Buckley Jr., *Happy Days Were Here Again*, 116.
- [10] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Bartleby: 2001), 75.
- [11] William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of “Academic Freedom”* (Regnery: 2002), lxiii.
- [12] William F. Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale*, lxiii.
- [13] Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (Bloomsbury: 2011), 198-221.
- [14] Buckley, “Our Mission Statement.”
- [15] Buckley, “Our Mission Statement.”
- [16] Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Appleton: 2012), 58.
- [17] Richard Hofstadter, “Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited,” in *The Radical Right*, ed. Daniel Bell (Routledge: 2017), 99.
- [18] “Seeds of Treason,” *Free Enterprise*, June 1963; “Government Book Control,” *The Register*, September 9, 1967; “Save Our Schools,” *Liberty Lobby*; “Communist Brainwashing,” *Liberty Lobby*, February 21, 1966 (Harry W. Selden Right Wing Materials Collection: Yale).
- [19] “Big Business and Big Labor Interlocked with Big Government” and “The Power Elite,” *The Network of Patriotic Letter Writers*, September-October 1966; “Save Our Schools,” *Liberty Lobby*; “Communism and the Jews,” *National States Rights Party* (Harry W. Selden Right Wing Materials Collection: Yale).
- [20] Hofstadter, “Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited,” 100.
- [21] Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton UP: 2012), 132.
- [22] Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 136
- [23] Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 134, 143.
- [24] Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 134.
- [25] Stephen A. Douglas, “Speech in Chicago” (speech, Chicago, IL, July 9 1858), Teaching American History, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/homecoming-speech-at-chicago/>.
- [26] Buckley, “Our Mission Statement.”
- [27] Peter Robinson, “Milton Friedman, Ronald Reagan And William F. Buckley Jr.,” *Forbes Magazine*, December 12, 2008,
- [28] Dwight Macdonald, “On the Horizon: Scrambled Eggheads on the Right,” *Commentary Magazine*, April 1, 1956; Seymour Martin Lipset, “The Sources of the ‘Radical Right,’” in *The Radical Right*, ed. Daniel Bell (Routledge: 2017), 360.
- [29] Letter from Robert Welch, 20 March 1961 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [30] Letter from Robert Welch, 20 March 1961.
- [31] Alan F. Westin, “The John Birch Society,” in *The Radical Right*, ed. Daniel Bell (Routledge: 2017), 244.
- [32] Letter from Robert Welch to William F. Buckley Jr., 24 November 1958 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [33] Welch, *The Blue Book*, 3.
- [34] Welch, *The Blue Book*, 2.
- [35] Welch, *The Blue Book*, 58.
- [36] “So Long, Ike,” *National Review*, January 14, 1961, 8-9.
- [37] Buckley, “Our Mission Statement.”
- [38] Westin, “The John Birch Society,” 244.
- [39] Letter from Barry Goldwater to William F. Buckley Jr., 14 January 1962 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [40] William F. Buckley Jr., “Damaging Robert Welch Quotes,” 1962 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale), 1-12.
- [41] Buckley, “Damaging Robert Welch Quotes,” 7, (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [42] Letter from William F. Buckley Jr. to Robert Welch, 27 June 1956; Letter from Robert Welch to William F. Buckley Jr., 6 June 1957 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [43] Letter from William F. Buckley Jr. to Robert Welch, 9 June 1958 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [44] Letter from Robert Welch to William F. Buckley Jr., 20 May 1958 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [45] Bogus, *Buckley*, 180-1.
- [46] “The Americanists,” *Time Magazine*, March 10, 1961, <http://time.com/vault/issue/1961-03-10/spread/20/>.
- [47] Letter from Robert Welch, 20 March 1961 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [48] Westin, “The John Birch Society,” 244.
- [49] Westin, “The John Birch Society,” 240.
- [50] Letter from Bryton Barron to William F. Buckley Jr., 28 March 1961 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [51] William F. Buckley Jr., “First Draft of Birch Editorial,” 1961 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale), 1-8.
- [52] Letter from Bryton Barron to William F. Buckley Jr., 28 March 1961 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [53] Memo from Frank Straus Meyer to William F. Buckley Jr., 26 March 1961; Letter to William F. Buckley Jr., 28 March 1961 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [54] Bogus, *Buckley*, 193.
- [55] Letter from Barry Goldwater to William F. Buckley Jr., 14 January 1962 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [56] Letter from Barry Goldwater to William F. Buckley Jr., 16 April 1962 (William F. Buckley Jr. Papers: Yale).
- [57] Hofstadter, “Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited,” 99.
- [58] Robert Welch, *The Blue Book*, 3.