

The Conservative Movement in the United States since 1945

“The Liberals now dominate all the cultural channels in this country.
If you break completely with this dominant atmosphere, you’re a dead duck.”
-- Philip Rahv, editor of *Partisan Review*, to co-editor William Barrett, early 1950s

“*National Review* is out of place, in the sense that the United Nations and the League of Women Voters and the *New York Times* . . . are *in* place. It is out of place because, in its maturity, literate America rejected conservatism in favor of radical social experimentation....
It stands athwart history, yelling Stop . . .” — William F. Buckley, Jr. November 1955

"So inevitable, yet so unexpected," Alexis de Tocqueville declared in 1856, referring to the French Revolution of 1789. The same is true of the conservative movement which emerged in the United States in response to the New Deal, a movement with worldwide importance that caught even shrewd intellectuals by surprise.

What was the nature of the American conservative movement? When, how, and why did it emerge? What were its social, cultural, and geographic bases? How did conservative thinking evolve in America over time? What sort of variations and conflicts existed within the movement? How does modern American conservatism compare to earlier varieties of conservatism in the U.S. and to conservative parties in other Western nations? Is it correct to refer to the Reagan administration as a “revolution”? If so, why? If not, why not? Finally, did Donald Trump and his administration represent a continuation of modern American conservatism? If not, why did so many conservatives support him?

These are among the principal questions considered in this seminar. Reading will be substantial and will include many primary sources.

Ground Rules

1. I selected readings that are informative and intended to provoke conversation. Class participation will count significantly toward the final grade.
2. Each student will select **five** of the seven sessions for which to send me an essay on Moodle responding to one of the questions on the attached page or to a question which they devised themselves. In either case, the essays should integrate materials from several readings and put the subject in its historical context. Essays will be evaluated for clarity, insight, and accuracy.

The essays should be double-spaced, in a size-12 font. Paginate your document. No paper will be accepted that is longer than 1,200 words. Footnotes should accord with the format

set out in Kate Turabian's *Student Guide to Writing College Papers*, Andrea Lunsford's *Easy Writer: A Pocket Reference*, or the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

3. For the remaining **two** weeks in which you are not writing an essay, submit several questions—perhaps three, four, or five; more if you prefer--which you would like to discuss in class and/or afterwards. Or you may send several quotations from the readings which you find intriguing, confusing, or wide of the mark. Write one paragraph offering a tentative response to any **one** of those questions or quotations. Please send these responses to me via email on Friday by 11 a.m.
4. Regardless of whether they submit an essay or quotations to discuss, **students should come to class prepared to discuss all of the questions listed on the attached page for that week.**
5. All written work, both short essays and suggested discussion questions, will be graded. Your lowest grade will be erased.
6. My office hours are on Thursdays, 2:30-4 p.m. Email me ahead of time to make an appointment to talk on Zoom or telephone. If you have class or work during my office hours, send me an email before 6 p.m. and I will respond.
7. **On Friday, February 26, we will meet from 1:30-3:30 p.m., rather than starting at 2 p.m.**

Anchor Texts

Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives: Ideas and Personalities Throughout American History* (2009)

Gregory L. Schneider, ed., *Conservatism in America since 1930: A Reader* (2003)

Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (2004)

Daniel Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (2011)

John B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics* (2016)

All of these books will be on E-Reserve in Olin Library. They also can be purchased at the Wesleyan R. J. Julia Bookstore and on-line booksellers. Second-hand, less expensive copies of all of the older books should be available for sale. If you are going to buy only two of the readings, I'd recommend Schneide's and Allitt's, since we will be using them almost every week.

The other assigned readings—primary documents, scholarly articles, and book chapters – will be available on E-Reserve. The password to E-Reserve is CSS340.

Session 1 The Postwar Revolt

Readings:

Alan Brinkley, "New Deal," in *The Reader's Companion to American History*, ed. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (1991), pp. 783-86.

Patrick Allitt, *The Conservatives*, pp. 1-5, 126-27, 136-72, 183-87.

Excerpts from: *Human Events*; F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), and Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948), reprinted in Schneider, *Conservatism in America*, pp. 45-65, 68-90, 95-106.

Platform of the States Rights Democratic Party, August 1948:

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/platform-the-states-rights-democratic-party>

Russell Kirk, "Conservatism Defined," reprinted in *American Conservatism: Reclaiming an Intellectual Tradition*, ed. Andrew Bacevich (2020), pp. 5-11.

Session 2 Fighting the Reds

Readings:

Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 172—83.

Excerpts from Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (1952); William F. Buckley, Jr., "National Review: Statement of Intentions," 1955; William F. Buckley, Jr., "National Review: Credenda and Statement of Principles," reprinted in Schneider, *Conservatism in America*, pp. 131-48, 195-205.

Excerpts of James Burnham, *The Struggle for the World* (1947) and Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for Americans* (1951), reprinted in Bacevich, *American Conservatism*, pp. 558-83.

Joseph R. McCarthy, "Lincoln Day Address," February 20, 1950, and excerpts from Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society*, 1959, reprinted in Ronald Story and Bruce Laurie, *Rise of Conservatism*, pp. 40-43, 54-59.

William S. Schlamm, "Across McCarthy's Grave," *National Review*, May 18, 1957, pp. 469-70.

Session 3 Barry Goldwater and the Reshaping of American Politics

Readings:

Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 187-90.

“The Question of Robert Welch,” *National Review*, February 13, 1962:

<https://web-b-ebshost-com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=5b5351dd-32d1-4e37-8518-94eec4a2a9fd%40pdc-v-sessmgr06>

National Review, “Why the South Must Prevail,” August 24, 1957:

<https://web-a-ebshost-com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=695cca74-77c5-40a6-9d28-415a15e2b341%40sdc-v-sessmgr02>

Excerpts from Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960); William F.

Buckley, Jr., “The Young Americans for Freedom,” *National Review*, 1960;

YAF, “The Sharon Statement,” Sept. 1960; excerpts from Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice, Not an Echo*,” 1964, reprinted in Schneider, *Conservatism in America*, pp. 211-37.

Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, ed., *Barry Goldwater and the Remaking of the American Political Landscape* (2013), chs. 2, 6.

Session 4 The Civil War of the 1960s

Readings:

Ronald Reagan, “A Time to Choose,” October 1964 – two options:

The original, 29 minutes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXBswFfh6AY&t=20s>

Excerpts, 4 minutes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0w_eaUVthM

Dallek, *Right Moment*, introduction, chs. 3-10.

Judis, *Populist Explosion*, introduction, ch. 1

Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 191-203

Session 5 The Evangelical Right, the Neo-Cons, and the Right to Life Movement

Readings:

Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 203-20

Excerpts from Committee on the Present Danger, “Common Sense and the Common Danger,” reprinted in *Rise of Conservatism*, ed. Story and Laurie, pp. 107-10.

Rev. Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (1980), prologue, pp. 3-20, 215-34.

Williams, *God’s Own Party*, introduction, chs. 1-4, 6-8.

Phyllis Schlafly, “What Wrong with ‘Equal Rights’ for Women,” *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, February 1972.

Session 6 High Tide

Readings:

James Q. Wilson, "Reagan and the Republican Revival," *Commentary*, 70:4 (Oct. 1, 1980), pp. 25-32:

<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/docview/1290113654/fulltext/68FB187CB8064>

Kim Phillips-Fein, "Reaganomics: The Rebirth of the Free Market," in *Living in the Eighties*, ed. Troy and Cannato (2009), ch. 8.

Ted V. McAllister, "Reagan and the Transformation of American Conservatism," in *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*, ed. Brownlee and Graham (2003).

Allitt, *Conservatives*, pp. 224-54

President Reagan's 1981 inaugural address; address before a joint session of the Congress, April 28, 1981; and remarks at the annual meeting of the Association of Evangelicals, March 8, 1983, reprinted in *Conservatism in America*, ed. Schneider, pp. 341-46, 352-61

President Ronald Reagan's 1982 address to Westminster:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm35tFTsuc>

Session 7 Trump and Trumpism

Charles J. Sykes, *How the Right Lost Its Mind* (2017), chs. 1, 6, 13

Stuart Stevens, *It Was a Lie: How the Republican Party Became Donald Trump* (2020), ch. 1

Judis, *Populist Explosion*, ch. 3, conclusion

Gerald F. Seib, "Where Trump Came From—And Where Trumpism Is Going," *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 16, 2021:

<file:///C:/Users/Ron/Downloads/ProQuestDocuments-2021-01-16.pdf>

Kathleen Below, "The Right Way to Understand White Nationalist Terrorism," *New York Times*, Aug. , 2019: <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/docview/2268223776/9A8E8DDDF9F0B45EFPQ/1?accountid=14963>

Seyward Darby, "We Didn't Listen to the Far Right," *New York Times*, Jn. 8, 2021:

<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.wesleyan.edu/docview/2476045882/fulltext/291F553D28AA4781PQ/97?accountid=14963>