



Conservative Intellectuals
and Richard Nixon

Rethinking the Rise of the Right

Sarah Katherine Mergel



CONSERVATIVE INTELLECTUALS
AND RICHARD NIXON

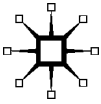
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In Memory of John W. Mergel

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INTRODUCTION

The postwar intellectual and political right has become an increasing source of fascination for scholars and the wider public. Those on the right have attempted to chronicle the rise of conservatism in order to justify their political success in the 1980s. Those on the left have sought an answer as to why conservatism grew to be such a dominant force in American life and why liberalism no longer stood at the center of American thought and action. Frustration over the Vietnam War played a central role in the political shifts of the late twentieth century, but it was not the only reason. Discontent about domestic policies and the moral direction of the country disheartened many people who then began to question the dominance of liberalism at a time when conservatives vociferously proclaimed its defects. At mid-century, few conservatives managed effectively to challenge liberal dominance, and yet in less than thirty years they actively promoted their beliefs to larger audiences.

Postwar conservatism brought together some rather unlikely individuals, who initially could not even agree to refer to themselves as conservatives. Most felt liberalism and communism threatened an inherent moral order and individual liberty, but they could not decide which ideal should take precedence. Conservative intellectuals worked hard in the late 1950s and early 1960s to bridge the ideological gaps among their fellow members. Ultimately, conservatives relied on the doctrine of fusionism—the idea that tradition and freedom were not mutually exclusive—to hold them together. Fusionism allowed the right to focus on their commonalities not their differences so they could broaden their base of support.¹

Conservative victories in the 1970s and 1980s would not have been possible had it not been for their earlier efforts. Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 showed that conservatives had learned how to translate their ideology to the political scene. For conservatives, Barry Goldwater's defeat in 1964 taught them several lessons; however, Richard Nixon's election

in 1968 taught them more about combining ideology with politics. Goldwater lost largely because he seemed too conservative prompting right-minded intellectuals to recognize that an outright conservative could not win the general election in 1968. So they sought a “centrist” who they could control. Richard Nixon turned out to be their centrist. With his victory in 1968 the right thought their time had finally come.

Almost overnight, conservatives went from attacking the establishment to defending it. This situation, however, proved short-lived. The right assumed that Nixon would owe them loyalty for their support and thus he would promote at least nominally conservative positions. Once in office, Nixon chose to introduce domestic and foreign policies that went against general conservative doctrine. As his administration progressed, the right responded by distancing themselves from the president. In so doing, they set the stage for a fresh start after his resignation in 1974. The conservative’s relationship with Richard Nixon was a defining moment for the right. Not only did Nixon help them define what they were not, he helped them define what they wanted to become. The tale of why conservative intellectuals supported Nixon in 1968 and how their support dwindled assists in explaining their movement’s later successes.

The conservative movement became increasingly important in American life after World War II. Its philosophy appealed to certain segments of the population as they began to question the wisdom of liberalism. Conservative success did not occur just because liberalism declined. People did not turn to conservatism because it was there, but because they could see how conservative ideas seemed more applicable to the issues of the time. Historians such as George Nash and Jerome Himmelstein in their studies of the right have done an excellent job of demonstrating how hard the conservatives worked to define themselves and their beliefs. As important as this work had been, the story of conservative development seemed incomplete, especially in terms of how conservative intellectuals learned to translate ideology into politics in the Nixon era. Conservative intellectuals expected to have a different—in fact a better—relationship with Richard Nixon when he was president. The course of their relationship should not be undervalued as a source of later conservative success.

Exploring the relationship between Nixon and conservative intellectuals raised several interesting questions about conservative hopes. What did conservatives think about and expect from Nixon before and during his presidential campaigns, after his elections, and beyond his resignation? Were they overly optimistic about what Nixon could or would do as a “conservative” in 1968? Were their expectations even

realistic? A second set of questions stemmed from how conservative intellectuals thought they could influence the president once he was in office. Nixon employed more moderates and liberals on his staff than he did conservatives and so conservatives did not have an intellectual champion in the Nixon White House.² Could their limited visits and writings sway the president to conservative policies? Were Nixon's staffing decisions a reflection of politics or a reflection of his ideological leanings? How, if at all, did Nixon approach conservatives for support? Finally, was the president interested in conservative viewpoints or merely hoping to placate potential critics with his efforts?

Discussing the relationship between Nixon and conservative intellectuals also broached that rather interesting question of whether Nixon was an intellectual. Nixon told a group of intellectuals shortly after his 1968 election, "I am an intellectual too" and yet he seemed to possess an intrinsic animosity toward them as a group. He could not grasp how such highly educated individuals could attack him, his policies, or the country.³ Given his feelings about intellectuals, was he willing to concede that they might provide useful policy advice or did he rely on what he considered his own intellectual ability to guide the country? Lastly, how did his view of himself as a thinker compare with the views of others about his abilities?

Conservative publications such as the *National Review* and *Human Events* helped outline the broad trends of conservative thought during the Nixon years in this study. *National Review*, which published its inaugural issue in 1955, hoped to give substance to the conservative attack against liberalism. *Human Events*, first issued in 1944, chronicled the Washington political scene from a conservative perspective. The writings, correspondence, and personal reflections of leading conservative intellectuals such as William F. Buckley, Jr., Frank Meyer, Russell Kirk, and James Kilpatrick helped complete the picture of the conservative opinion of Nixon and his handling of issues including the Vietnam War, communism, inflation, unemployment, poverty, and civil rights. Lastly, the personal reflections of Richard Nixon and his key advisers plus relevant documents from Nixon's presidential materials helped explore how the conservatives and the Nixon administration related to one another.

Vast changes in the 1960s created uncertainty about American institutions and beliefs. The civil rights movement made progress in extending equality to black Americans after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) ended de jure segregation. However, the Supreme Court's decision also spawned powerful reactions in the South and the North. Southern whites violently resisted the attempts of blacks to push the government to enforce *Brown*.

Northern blacks fiercely reacted to the slow progress in dealing with de facto segregation where economic opportunity or lack thereof emerged as a greater concern than did political rights. Race riots became increasingly common in the mid-1960s including those in Harlem, Newark, Los Angeles, and Detroit. Taking their cues from the civil rights movement, college age students and younger faculty members began to express themselves both culturally and politically in the 1960s. The hippies of the counterculture relied on sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll to create a new society. The more politically active youth joined the New Left, which called for broader political participation and more social activism to address society's ills. After working with the civil rights movement, the New Left turned its attention to the Vietnam War. Questioning the American response to communism, members held teach-ins and rallies to protest Lyndon Johnson's policies.⁴

The civil rights movement, the antiwar movement, and the counterculture raised questions about the nation's values and direction. On both sides of the ideological spectrum, intellectuals felt compelled to reposition their movements to capitalize on the relevant issues. Liberals faced challenges from within—activists who joined the New Left and disgruntled intellectuals who eventually became neoconservatives—as they attempted to cope with questions about race and morality. Conservatives, on the other hand, used the fissures of the 1960s to strengthen their political base among what Richard Nixon would later call the “silent majority.” As vocal as civil rights protestors, antiwar activists, and hippies appeared in the 1960s, these movements remained anathema to many Americans. Conservatives appealed to an ever-increasing constituency with their calls for respect of tradition and order, for reducing the influence of the federal government, and for a strong national defense. They sounded appeals for an end to the riots and protests that plagued the country. Most right-minded intellectuals supported the principles underlying the civil rights movement such as equal treatment under the law, but they sought less intrusive remedies encouraging black self-reliance and voluntary action. Conservatives strongly supported the Vietnam War and desired a fervent policy against communism. They believed that the more aggressively the United States responded to the communist threat, the more likely the country would be able to avoid destruction.⁵

Conservatives increasingly believed they had the power to control the Republican Party (GOP) because no other political faction truly addressed the needs of the American people. Working from the bottom up, conservative politicians engineered the nomination of Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) for president in 1964. The Draft Goldwater

Movement successfully reached out to voters dismayed by the visible changes in American society. While Johnson soundly defeated Goldwater in the general election, conservative influence on the Republican Party remained strong. Moreover, many Americans warmed up to Goldwater's message as they began to cling to old values to meet the changes of the 1960s.⁶ His ideas, drawing on themes from his best-selling book *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960), spoke to Americans about renewing their fight for the cause of freedom. Conservative Republicans, he pledged, would fight for freedom grounded in a constitutional government limited "by laws of nature and of nature's God." Moreover, Americans with renewed effort could be "freedom's missionaries in a doubting world." Goldwater also lambasted liberalism's approach to the country's problems especially its disdain for order, hard work, and morality. He insisted that it was time once again for the government to provide security—from violence at home and aggression abroad.⁷ Goldwater's image as an extremist counteracted his attempts to bring the conservative message to Americans in 1964. However, the grassroots organization that helped secure his nomination lived on to spread conservative ideas before the next presidential election.

Capitalizing on the appeal of Goldwater's message and changes in American society, conservatives worked to increase their exposure in the 1960s. Barry Goldwater and William F. Buckley, Jr. were by far the most visible conservatives in America, but they were not the only voices trying to convince Americans of the dangers of liberalism. The men who appear most often in this study not only shared a desire to spread the conservative message, but they also met generally speaking the definition of what Tevi Troy called "public intellectuals" in his book *Intellectuals and the American Presidency*. Public intellectuals were "relatively well-known generalists" able to speak on a broad range of subjects through the lens of their own worldview. Many supported themselves through free lance writing and part-time teaching rather than through a full-time institutional affiliation.⁸ In some cases, but not always, a better term to describe public intellectuals might be pundits. Politicians often fit the definition of a public intellectual; however, most politicians influence people through their actions (support for specific legislation or programs) as opposed to the content of their writings. So this work focused more on active public intellectuals in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

William F. Buckley made his first public splash with *God and Man at Yale* (1951), which attacked the philosophy of the modern university especially as it related to academic freedom. After co-authoring *McCarthy and His Enemies* (1954) with his brother-in-law L. Brent Bozell, Buckley

turned his attention to starting a journal for conservative-minded individuals, *National Review*. Throughout the 1960s, Buckley increased his visibility as a conservative pundit and worked to bring respectability to the movement. He served as *National Review's* editor, wrote a syndicated column as well as other freelance articles, published several works of non-fiction, made frequent public appearances on university campuses, ran for mayor of New York City as the Conservative Party's candidate in 1965, and began hosting *Firing Line* in 1966.⁹

Although Buckley was the most visible member of the *National Review's* staff, he was not alone in the fight against communism and liberalism. In the late 1950s, James Burnham, Frank Meyer, and William Rusher joined him. Burnham and Meyer migrated to the conservative movement because of their first hand experience with communism in the 1930s and 1940s. In his pre-*National Review* writings, Burnham increasingly expressed disillusionment with communism and its promise of a more equitable society. In his column, "The Third World War," Burnham continually lamented liberalism's failure to stop the communist menace.¹⁰ In 1956, Meyer joined *National Review* as editor of the book review section. Through his choice of books and his column, "Principles and Heresies," he provided postwar conservatism the philosophical grounding it lacked. The architect of fusionism, Meyer brought conservatives together in their opposition to liberalism, the centralization of power in the federal government, and the appeasement of communism. He also worked with the American Conservative Union (ACU) to give the right a political voice.¹¹ Rusher joined *National Review* as its publisher in 1957; he also served on the editorial board. More politically motivated than his fellow editors from the beginning, Rusher felt the position would allow him to help focus the energy of the movement and propel its growth. In the early 1970s, he began to write a syndicated column and appeared regularly on PBS's *The Advocates*.¹²

National Review, as well as *Human Events*, attracted other conservatively inclined writers to their pages including James Kilpatrick, Russell Kirk, Ralph de Toledano, M. Stanton Evans, Milton Friedman, and Henry Hazlitt. Kilpatrick began his career as the editor of the *Richmond News Leader*. He later became a well-known syndicated columnist, a contributor to *National Review*, and a commentator for *60 Minutes*. While his writings covered a broad range of subjects, in the 1960s and early 1970s, he wrote most often about segregation, the courts, and presidential politics.¹³ Kirk became perhaps the most articulate voice of intellectual conservatism with the publication of *The Conservative Mind* (1953), which traced American conservative thought to the works of Edmund Burke and

highlighted the key principles of conservatism. He wrote a regular column for *National Review* focusing on the maintenance of traditional values and institutions, wrote a syndicated column, and was instrumental in the founding of *Modern Age* and the *University Bookman*.¹⁴ Early in his career, de Toledano worked for *The New Leader* and *Newsweek*. After moving from left to right, he frequently wrote for *National Review* in the late 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, he began writing a syndicated column for King Features. De Toledano also authored two books on Richard Nixon based on his longtime association with the California Republican.¹⁵ Evans served as an assistant editor of *The Freeman* in the 1950s and then as the editor of the *Indianapolis News* in the 1960s and 1970s. He authored several books on the errors of liberalism and the prospects for conservatism in the 1960s. He wrote actively for *National Review* and *Human Events* on a domestic policy issues and politics. Evans also served as the chairman of the ACU in the 1970s.¹⁶ Friedman, a champion of economic freedom and a leader of the Chicago school of economics, helped guide the conservative approach to economic policy in his books and his column for *Newsweek*. He argued that monetary policy was the best means to combat inflation and that no amount of government tinkering could fine-tune the economy. Hazlitt served as the leading spokesman of the Austrian school of economics. He wrote for *National Review*, *Human Events*, and *The Freeman* as well as several other newspapers and magazines calling for balanced budgets and reduced government expenditures to keep inflation down.¹⁷

In the late 1960s a newer generation of conservatives emerged on the scene including Jeffrey Hart, R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr., and George F. Will. Hart, a professor of English at Dartmouth, joined the editorial board at *National Review* in 1969 after serving as a book reviewer for seven years. A scholar of eighteenth-century politics and literature, Hart wrote on various issues for the magazine and began writing a syndicated column in the 1970s.¹⁸ Tyrrell founded *The Alternative* in 1967 while attending Indiana University to counter New Left influence at his school. By the mid-1970s the magazine reached a nationwide audience. Tyrrell wrote on a variety of topics, which included a series of enlightening interviews with noted conservative leaders. He also appeared on a local television show in Indiana (sometimes with M. Stanton Evans), where he attacked liberalism and Nixonian idealism.¹⁹ Will began his career in the 1960s as a professor of political philosophy at Michigan State and then the University of Toronto. He went on to work for Sen. Gordon Allott (R-CO), while also contributing articles to *National Review* and writing a column for *The Alternative* titled "Letter from a Whig." When Allott

lost his bid for reelection in 1972, Will convinced the *NR* editorial board that the magazine needed a Washington editor—a position he held from 1973 to 1976.²⁰

As the postwar conservative movement started to take shape in the late 1940s and 1950s, Richard M. Nixon began his long career of public service. After serving in the navy during World War II, Nixon returned to California to practice law. He successfully ran for Congress in 1946. During the campaign, Nixon presented himself as the ultimate “conservative populist” fighting for the underprivileged, industrious, forgotten man. He also provided an alternative New Deal liberalism during the crisis of postwar reconversion. In 1950, Nixon ran against Helen Gahagan Douglas for a seat in the Senate. Although Nixon again relied on his conservative populist image, he added a new element to his image during the campaign. In 1948, Nixon had taken a seat on the House Committee on Un-American Activities then investigating instances of domestic communism and treason. His pursuit of former State Department employee, Alger Hiss, increased his national reputation as an anticommunist. After the outbreak of the Korean War, communism played a large role in the final months of the 1950 campaign giving Nixon the edge he needed to defeat Douglas. In the wake of the election, Douglas frequently repeated a phrase to describe her opponent she picked up from an article in the *Independent Review*, “Tricky Dick.”²¹

The Republican Party chose Richard Nixon to run with Dwight Eisenhower in 1952. When allegations that Nixon received illegal campaign contributions surfaced during the campaign, Eisenhower’s advisers forced Nixon to defend himself. He used a spot on national television to make his case. In his “Checkers Speech,” which took its name from his reference to a cocker spaniel named Checkers he received from a campaign contributor, Nixon appealed to the American people for support. In his remarks, the vice presidential nominee detailed his personal finances making for example a comment about his wife’s “Republican cloth coat” to prove that his family was not living beyond its means. He then challenged the other candidates to do the same. Although the broadcast upset Nixon, the support he received helped him stay on the Republican ticket.²²

Nixon served eight years as vice president, during which time he did an extensive amount of foreign travel and showed a sense of level headedness in administration when Eisenhower suffered a heart attack and later a mild stroke while in office. He also furthered his reputation as an anti-communist during his these years. Eisenhower preferred to remain above the political fray and made his vice president the face of the Republican

Party's attack against not only communism, but overzealous anticommunists such as Joseph McCarthy. The Republicans nominated Richard Nixon for president in 1960. He lost the election against John Kennedy, but by only a small margin. Nixon then made an ill-fated run at the governorship of California in 1962. He was soundly defeated after which he gave one of his most famous press conferences telling reporters, "You won't have Richard Nixon to kick around anymore, because, gentleman, this is my last press conference."²³ Nixon may have been serious when he gave his "last press conference" but he was drawn into politics once again in the mid-1960s. Slowly he laid the groundwork for a run at the presidency in 1968.

Conservative intellectuals looked with anticipation to the 1968 presidential election and the prospect that unlike in 1964, a conservative-minded candidate might win. The civil rights and antiwar movements contributed to a rise in conservative sentiment in some segments of the American population. While conservatism was far from dominant going into the 1968 election season, it had blossomed into a more viable political movement after Goldwater's defeat. A victory in 1968 would finally allow conservatives a fighting chance to tackle both liberalism and communism from inside the government. They would not only be able to roll back New Deal and Great Society programs, but fight a more effective war against the communists in Vietnam and elsewhere. Hence, conservative intellectuals had to decide which Republican candidate would best represent their interests. Was Richard Nixon—the clear frontrunner—conservative enough to suit their needs? Many right-minded individuals remained unsure as the campaign heated up.

CHAPTER 1

RICHARD NIXON: AN ELECTABLE CONSERVATIVE?

Conservatives had extended only lukewarm support to Richard Nixon in 1960 when he ran against John Kennedy for president. However, in 1968 many right-minded intellectuals lent their voices to Nixon's campaign. Surveying the political landscape in 1968, leading conservatives such as William F. Buckley and Frank Meyer concluded that supporting Nixon afforded their movement the best opportunity to defeat liberal Republicanism. Choosing Nixon proved difficult for some conservatives, but his election convinced them of their relevance to the American political scene. Conservative intellectuals believed Nixon's administration would follow right of center policies and such expectations continually shaped their view of his presidency.

Nixon's wilderness years coincided with widespread political, social, and cultural changes in the United States. The civil rights movement and the antiwar movement, combined with the rise of an expressive utopian youth culture, made average Americans worry about the direction the country was headed. The tensions of the 1960s culminated in 1968, beginning with North Vietnam's Tet Offensive in January and ending with Richard Nixon's election in November. With each passing day and month, increasingly the country seemed to be on a course toward self-destruction. Where conservatives wondered at the start of the year was the leadership that would head off the wave of violence at home and steer the country to victory in Vietnam.

After Martin Luther King's assassination in April sparked widespread urban rioting *Human Events* noted that "selective civil disobedience for the purpose of narrow goals [was] not the answer to the problems of America." When student radicals at Columbia University later that month

began a sit-in to protest the administration's racist policies toward Columbia's neighbors in Harlem, conservatives hoped that university officials would take a stand that would head off similar protests at other schools, but they failed to do so. After Robert Kennedy's assassination in June conservatives saw lawlessness everywhere, yet most thought the liberal's response left much to be desired. Why, they wondered, had the liberals allowed the perpetrators of violent, illegal action to hold them hostage?¹

Conservatives surveying these events concluded, as Frank Meyer did, that the country faced a "massive crisis . . . generated by decades of liberalism." The problems stemmed from "the corrosion of national morale" caused by the government's failure to live up to the social compact it had with the people. Anarchy seemed to be just around the corner. William F. Buckley further argued the intellectual response to the events at Columbia showed that the Old Left had faded into "utter intellectual ineptitude," since the liberals insisted that the action of the rioters was consistent with American democracy. As the summer came to a close, the question of whether the nation had become ungovernable had escaped the realm of idle talk to become a legitimate fear for conservatives.²

Coming to Terms with the Republican Nominee

Conservatives, determined to capitalize on their gains in the Republican Party, deliberated over the best means to triumph in 1968. Intellectuals and political activists brought much to the discussion. Convinced that with the appropriate candidate they would win, conservatives looked both to the 1960 and 1964 elections for guidance during the primaries. Experience with Nixon in 1960 made conservatives wary that any right-leaning candidate might move to the left in order to court liberal Republicans. Experience with Goldwater in 1964 showed conservatives the need for party unity and for keeping their emotions in check.³

In 1960, Richard Nixon appeared the logical Republican choice to succeed Dwight Eisenhower as president. His experience as vice president and his strong anticommunism made Nixon appealing to some conservatives. Russell Kirk saw him as being "cool, prudent, and a good mediator." His proposed policies shied away from centralization; rather he favored state and local action. The vice president, more importantly, seemed to share the traditional Republican value of "ordered liberty."⁴ However, others on the right believed Nixon would continue Eisenhower's moderate course of action thereby failing to meet the twin challenges of communism and domestic statism. Beyond that, Nixon's

conservative detractors maintained the reasonable fear that Nixon would abandon his seemingly conservative campaign positions. Frank Meyer, along with William Rusher, encouraged their colleagues at *National Review* to deny Nixon an endorsement. Rusher recalled that Nixon left him “simply cold or, more precisely, cool.” Meyer had similar doubts about Nixon’s conservative credentials. While “less obnoxious than the alternatives,” he was no conservative ideologue. Meyer, Rusher, and other conservatives of a similar mindset believed Nixon’s politics drifted “with the tide.” Therefore, they could not count on him to enact a conservative agenda.⁵

In 1964, the Republicans nominated a decidedly more conservative candidate for president. The National Draft Goldwater Committee succeeded in placing their candidate on the ballot, a significant victory for conservatives. However, Barry Goldwater’s supporters failed to translate their accomplishment into a November success. Lyndon Johnson took 61 percent of the popular vote leaving many political observers to offer post-election evaluations filled only with conservative failure. Goldwater’s extremist image was only one reason for his defeat; the senator’s lack of support from moderate and liberal Republicans also contributed to his loss. Wary of the consequences of a conservative victory for their own political agenda, many liberal Republicans chose not to support the party’s nominee. Without party unity, the GOP simply could not mount an effective challenge to Johnson.⁶

Many conservatives believed that Goldwater’s message carried little responsibility for the outcome in 1964. Rather, the loss resulted from organizational problems. Frank Meyer argued that the 1964 campaign stood as a conservative success because it created conditions in which the Republican Party could serve as an “institutional vehicle for conservatism.”⁷ Richard Nixon and William F. Buckley discussed two key factors for securing Republican victory in 1968—both of which related to the results of the 1964 election—during a September 1967 taping of *Firing Line*. Nixon argued that since President Johnson had not sold the liberal agenda in a way that appealed to most voters, they would look elsewhere for solutions. He believed that the Republicans had to present their proposals in an “exciting fashion” to draw in voters. Buckley reiterated Nixon’s point by noting that the GOP’s future depended on whether or not it could produce a “seductive spokesman” to “penetrate the shibboleths...cultivated by the other side.” Furthermore, both men agreed that the results of the 1964 election showed “the necessity to unite” all elements of the party. If what happened in 1964 happened in 1968, the prospects for the Republican Party would be dim.⁸

Although conservatives recognized the importance of unity, they had distinct notions about their ideal candidate for 1968 as well. To win conservative support, according to Frank Meyer, a candidate should hold “broad views which are in general consonant with the conservative consensus in America today.” When choosing a candidate the right needed to remember the tenets of modern conservatism—namely, the preservation of individual liberty and the dangers of communism. Shortly before the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, Meyer also maintained that above all else, the GOP nominee needed to be ready and willing to stand up against liberal-radical ideologues who subjected themselves to the blackmail of the dissatisfied.⁹ Moreover, though most conservatives saw the need of choosing a moderate, some worried about the potential problem of placing party needs before conservative ends. Conservatives headed into 1968 guarding against the possibility that they would allow their emotions for a conservative-minded candidate to sweep them away.¹⁰

Richard Nixon began campaigning for the 1968 election almost immediately after Barry Goldwater’s defeat, perhaps even before. Ever the realistic politician, Nixon knew that 1964 was not his year to make a comeback. However, he used the campaign to demonstrate his loyalty to the GOP. Nixon looked upon his selection to present the nominee to the convention as his “best chance to begin the ministry of party unity.” He dutifully played this role through the end of the campaign. In the five weeks before the election, Nixon made appearances in thirty-six states on behalf of Goldwater and local candidates.¹¹ To meet the challenge of almost constant campaigning Nixon recruited Patrick Buchanan, an editorial writer for the St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, to serve as his chief aid in 1966. Buchanan took the position because in his opinion Nixon “could unify our bitterly divided party; he knew foreign policy; he was the most qualified man in America to be president.”¹² During the 1966 congressional elections, Nixon with Buchanan’s help carefully picked the races in which he campaigned for Republican candidates. He focused on those districts that had been lost to the Democrats in 1964, but the GOP could recapture. The plan paid high dividends; Republican victories made Richard Nixon the frontrunner as the 1968 election approached.¹³

Nixon also attempted to counter his image as a loser. His narrow loss to Kennedy in 1960 and his defeat in the 1962 California gubernatorial race remained major liabilities for the 1968 campaign. He needed to prove himself a winner in the primaries. Nixon’s growing campaign staff knew that simply relying on the party apparatus would be futile. He needed to build delegate strength at the state level in the primary races.

The closer Nixon came to the nomination, the more former advertising men like H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, Dwight Chapin, Larry Higby, and Ron Ziegler controlled his image. Their strategy worked to Nixon's advantage; he managed to speak to the voters without over exposing himself. He positioned himself to be the one person with the ability to guide the GOP to victory.¹⁴

In 1967, Nixon's team worked to develop his political base and raise the necessary funds for his campaign. Nixon delivered the annual Lakeside Speech in July to the members of California's Bohemian Club (something Herbert Hoover did until his death in 1964). His appearance helped to solidify support from powerful Republican donors in the business community. At similar engagements around the country, Nixon worked to ensure he had the financial backing to make his candidacy successful. He also travelled abroad in 1967 to revitalize international contacts and to sharpen his ideas about the state of the world. Nixon's article "Asia after Vietnam" appeared in the October issue of *Foreign Affairs*. It outlined his post-Vietnam worldview and reinforced the view that he had a wealth of experience and insight on foreign policy.¹⁵

Richard Nixon built his campaign message around the two touchiest issues facing the country in 1967 and 1968—Vietnam and domestic disorder. He based his Vietnam position on a desire to end the war "in a manner that would save the South Vietnamese people from military defeat and subjugation to the domination of the North Vietnamese Communist regime." Nixon reasoned that the only way to push the communists to a negotiated settlement would be "for the United States to employ its great economic power to demonstrate convincingly to the Communists that aggression would not pay." He also indicated that he would look to the Soviet Union (USSR) to assist with negotiations telling the *New York Times* that the Soviets were "very possibly key" to concluding an agreement in Southeast Asia.¹⁶ Nixon's position on domestic disorder caused by urban rioting centered not only on his belief that racism was wrong, but also on his belief that "systemic racism" was not solely responsible for the violence in the mid-1960s. Rather, the riots resulted when "extremists" encouraged people "to obey only the laws with which they agree." Nixon thus stressed the law and order theme. He called upon his fellow citizens to "pay the necessary price to restore peace to society" and to "commit themselves to the proposition that any man who disobeys the law pays the penalty the law exacts."¹⁷

Nixon's basic campaign speech spoke directly to the country's problems, but proposed only vague solutions. Its elusiveness allowed him room to attack opponents on the left and right.¹⁸ His mantra during the

primaries centered on a call for new leadership to end the war and quell domestic troubles. He harkened back to Franklin Roosevelt in hopes of pulling in some Democratic voters with his call for new freedoms. However, Nixon made the emphasis on freedom more positive. Rather than proposing the freedom from want or from hunger, he offered the freedom to work and to choose. "Personal freedom" he said "will not ensure that everyman will get all he desires, it will ensure that everyman will get all he deserves." Nixon also maintained that the federal government could not deal with domestic problems alone—state and local governments needed to take some responsibility.¹⁹ He was equally appealing when he spoke about an American obligation to maintain world peace. Nixon favored making it "clear to a potential aggressor that the price of aggression [was] too high, and the chances of success too slight." Nixon proposed to restore American military superiority, noting the "'parity' concept means superiority for potential enemies... we cannot accept this concept and survive as a free people."²⁰

Nixon's standard speech also gave the impression that the "new" Nixon was being entirely candid with his audience. To shed his "Tricky Dick" image, his staff implemented Operation Candor—a program designed to impress voters with his sincerity and conviction. Richard Whalen, a conservative journalist who worked for Nixon's speech writing team, noted that the candidate surrounded himself with a young campaign staff to enhance his "new" image. By shedding advisers from his vice presidential days and choosing young men from different ideological backgrounds, Nixon gave his campaign a sense of drama.²¹

Nixon also relied on his skills as a master political speaker to appeal to a wide variety of voters. William Rusher, never a fan of Nixon, recalled being impressed with the former vice president's capacity to enunciate both sides of an issue after a meeting in 1967. Regarding the same meeting, William F. Buckley wrote to Patrick Buchanan: "A note to tell you that I was glad... to talk with Mr. Nixon, who was wonderfully candid and ingratiating."²² By early 1968, Richard Nixon appeared well on his way to proving himself a strong candidate to conservative intellectuals and the wider voting public.

Of course, Nixon was only one of many potential Republican candidates in 1968. He faced challenges from Charles Percy, George Romney, and Nelson Rockefeller on his left and Ronald Reagan on his right. Percy, Romney, and Rockefeller—at various stages in the campaign—competed with each other and with Nixon for center and liberal-leaning Republican votes. Reagan, always more of a direct threat to Nixon, competed with the former vice president for the support of conservative Republicans,