

Who's afraid of populism?  
American populism, conservatism  
and welfare reform

Brendon O'Connor

Flinders Institute of Public Policy and Management  
Flinders University

Refereed paper presented to the  
Jubilee conference of the Australasian Political Studies Association  
Australian National University, Canberra, October 2002

**F**rom the late 1960s onwards, the rise of the American New Right and the demise of American liberalism were mirrored at the public level as increasing numbers of Americans began describing themselves as 'conservative'.<sup>1</sup> Commentators linked this public conservatism to hardening attitudes towards welfare reform and crime.<sup>2</sup> Some described this shift in public opinion – or perception of a shift – as a 'backlash' against liberalism, and specifically as a backlash against the liberal reforms of the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>3</sup> The term 'backlash' also refers to the noted outbursts of public frustration at the impact of liberal policies such as busing reported in the press during this same period. These objections to liberal reforms and politics were soon dubbed the 'backlash' of the 'silent majority.' This reaction was often defensive and at times resentful. In keeping with the political style of the times, members of the 'silent majority' gradually became more vocal and started forming their own political organisations and campaigns to fight against busing, abortion rights, and other liberal reforms. This reaction against liberalism was linked to the rise of Richard Nixon, George Wallace, and later Ronald Reagan; these and other conservative politicians regularly highlighted the failings of American liberalism. The popularity of this attack led to claims that a backlash against liberalism had occurred because increasing numbers of working and middle class people who had been a part of the New Deal coalition that had supported liberal Democrats from Roosevelt to Johnson now started supporting conservative ideas, policies, and politicians. In short, it was widely argued that an electoral backlash against the social reforms of the 1960s had occurred. This paper will discuss the political history of conservative populism in the US and argue that welfare was one of range of social issues where the influence of this movement is noteworthy.

Successful politicians have a knack for capturing the public mood of their time: Reagan's attack on the Great Society picked up on a certain frustration with the impact of the changes of the 1960s and 1970s with considerable success. In 1992 Bill Clinton's election promise to 'end welfare as we know it' spoke to that majority of Americans wanting to be rid of the old welfare system. Clinton admitted that the old system was a failure, something few Democrats had been willing to do because their party had largely put the liberal welfare system in place. These two presidents have shown that political change is

most powerfully articulated when linked to public opinion trends. Similarly, as this paper argues, the welfare reform process was undoubtedly linked to broad shifts in public opinion and the more nebulous shifts in the public mood on welfare.

There are a number of reasons to believe that from the late 1960s onwards public attitudes towards welfare liberalism were changing and becoming more hostile. Commentators began arguing that a 'white backlash' against liberalism and the Great Society had underwritten the electoral successes of Nixon – and later Reagan – among working class Americans. During the Nixon era, this backlash was closely associated with racial politics; by the 1980s, however, it was regularly associated with the frustrations of so-called 'white ethnics' and connected to a variety of social issues including welfare. Steven Roberts, writing in the *New York Times* in 1980, expressed the essence of the backlash thesis. He reported that while liberalism once meant 'helping the Irish and Italian families who were still mired in lower working class,' it now signified 'helping poor black and other racial minorities' and this was something 'more prosperous' earlier beneficiaries of liberalism could not understand.<sup>4</sup> It was suggested that white 'ethnics' did not accept that blacks could need the same kind of government assistance they or their ancestors had received through the New Deal and that had helped them out of the Great Depression. Moreover, many seemed to feel abandoned and betrayed. From a liberal perspective, this was deeply disappointing and liberals criticised hostile elements of the white working class and white 'ethnic' population for their short memories and for their 'racist attitudes.' Republican political strategists soon exploited these tensions between liberals and the working class and 'ethnic' supporters. According to Republican strategists like Kevin Phillips and William Rusher, this backlash against liberalism would allow the GOP to appeal to the sensibilities of these former Democrat voters, and as a result they claimed the GOP would become the majority party.<sup>5</sup> Some scholars, however, have questioned the neatness of the 'white backlash' thesis. Barbara Ehrenreich argues in *Fear of Falling* (1990) that the picture of working class racism was often based on media and academic stereotypes. Ehrenreich contends that claims of a 'white backlash' against welfare overlooked the degree of economic insecurity experienced by many working class Americans. In short, her analysis sought to turn the focus of this debate from racial conflict toward questions of class inequality. Thomas Edsall<sup>6</sup> and Christopher Lasch<sup>7</sup> also perceptively questioned the simplicity of the standard backlash thesis.

Lasch's *The True and Only Heaven* is highly critical of liberals' elitist attitudes, which he sees as the core reason for what he calls the 'revolt against liberalism.'<sup>8</sup> He argues that the 'white backlash' thesis 'simply updates the critique of "working-class authoritarianism" advanced by liberals in the fifties and sixties.'<sup>9</sup> Lasch argues this case persuasively, but his dislike of the style of liberal politics blinds him – just as Ehrenreich's sympathies with the

struggles of the working class blind her – to the reality that racial prejudice was a significant factor in the backlash against liberalism. Although the nuances Lasch and others bring to this debate are important, there is no getting around the existence of a backlash against the reforms Lyndon Johnson's Great Society had set in motion. The actions of liberal and conservative elites undoubtedly contributed to this backlash, but it also had a racial and a 'populist' flavour to it. This populist rejection of liberalism – and the social and racial changes promoted by liberals – was integral to the transformation of American politics from the late 1960s onwards and to the demise of the liberal welfare system.

Reflecting on the polarisation of American society and politics in the 1960s James Patterson writes in his Oxford history of the United States:

These manifestations of backlash – against family break-up, illegitimacy, welfare, crime, riots, black activists, anti-war demonstrators, long-haired hippies, government programs that favored minorities, elitists, liberals generally – exposed a major development of the mid-1960s: rapidly rising polarization along class, generational, and racial lines. The backlash represented considerably more than white racism, which polls suggested was less intense than in the past. It also affirmed the behaviour and the moral standards of traditional ways. It exposed a fragmentation of society and culture that seemed if anything to grow in the next thirty years.<sup>10</sup>

In the late 1960s the rise of backlash politics was associated with the political campaigns of Richard Nixon and George Wallace. Nixon's 'Southern strategy' – designed by Kevin Phillips – was the subject of considerable journalistic and scholarly inquiry in the period around 1968, as were Wallace's and Nixon's appeals to frustrated so-called 'Middle Americans' who had once favoured the Democratic Party. This debate is well captured by Barbara Ehrenreich in *Fear of Falling*, as I discuss below.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the changing political allegiances of 'ethnic' Americans received considerable attention. Electoral results and studies suggested that the Republican Party was becoming increasingly popular and liberal ideas on welfare and social policy increasingly unpopular in Brooklyn, South Boston, Macomb County, and other traditional Democratic Party strongholds. Journalistic and sociological reports about these communities documented claims that although respondents believed the Democratic Party had once been the party of 'ethnic' America – of Italians, Irish, Slavs, Greeks, and Poles, like them – it had become the party of blacks, welfare recipients, and feminists.<sup>11</sup> One of the first books to document this realignment in the thinking of 'ethnic America' was Michael Novack's *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (1972). However, in the 1970s the evidence of an 'ethnic' backlash was mixed. Nixon achieved broad electoral success, but

the Democrats dominated the Congress and won back the presidency in 1976. Ronald Reagan's 1980 and 1984 victories, and the success of the GOP in the Senate in the 1980s, led to increasing claims of a backlash, strengthened by the strong ideological nature of Reagan's criticism of the Great Society reforms. One of the most widely cited attempts to capture the essence and spirit of the 'ethnic' backlash against liberalism in the early 1980s was Jonathan Rieder's *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism* (1985).

Rieder's work has received considerable attention because of the very graphic, honest, and direct way he captures the anxieties, fears, and anger of the white 'ethnics' of Brooklyn. Rieder's sociological study highlighted the frustrations this group felt towards liberalism and the Democratic Party (particularly at a local level at which liberals dominated the New York City Democratic Party). Similarly, in Boston the issue of busing<sup>12</sup> black children to predominantly white schools resulted in angry protests where liberals were often criticised and on a few occasions physically attacked.<sup>13</sup> In opposition to busing, protesters in Boston formed the organisation Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR), which soon became a powerful force in local politics. As the group's name suggests, the politics of backlash frequently rested on a belief that the rights of American blacks – with the support of liberals – had overridden the rights of working and middle class whites. Similarly, the white 'ethnics' whom Jonathan Rieder interviewed in Canarsie (a suburb within Brooklyn) express this outlook. Affronted by liberals' lack of understanding of their personal struggles to keep their neighbourhoods safe and their families financially secure, they spoke of themselves as 'victims'. The anger apparent in their responses led to other commentators taking particular notice of Rieder's work. Numerous commentators placed considerable significance on Rieder's research in their discussions of the politics of backlash.<sup>14</sup> The anger and frustration in Rieder's view often had a racial edge. In an essay written a few years after the publication of *Canarsie*, he concludes, that for many urban whites, 'liberalism meant taking the side of blacks, no matter what.'<sup>15</sup> A siege mentality developed as Canarsie's 'ethnic' population became increasingly fearful of crime and threats to public safety, which they blamed on problems originating out of neighbouring ghettos such as Brownsville. Rieder concludes that liberals were often held responsible for deserting the working and lower-middle classes and for offering, instead, a politics that assaulted 'their communities, their sense of fairness, their livelihood, their children, their physical safety, their values.'<sup>16</sup> Within this political context, welfare was often viewed as a significant part of the problems that the liberals had created.

As American 'ethnics' turned their backs on liberalism in the same urban centres where the liberal coalition had developed and thrived, opportunities arose for conservative ideas and politicians. The people of Canarsie and elsewhere who had once benefited from the New Deal started turning against liberal leaders.

## Richard Nixon, the resentments of 'middle America' and the growth of right-wing populism

The liberal coalition – comprising the working class, black Americans, and middle class liberals – was the cornerstone of the success of the Democratic Party from the victory of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 onwards, particularly outside of the South. The breakdown of this coalition has been devastating for the liberal arm of the Democratic Party and for the development of liberal social policies. The demise of the New Deal order is often connected with the increasing regularity with which working class voters expressed conservative views. The election of Richard Nixon to the office of president in 1968 was not the end of the liberal consensus, however it was in many ways the beginning of the end. Although Nixon maintained many of the structures of the liberal welfare system his political rhetoric, which was clearly anti-liberal, set the tone for the Republican Party on social issues for the next two decades. Reagan, Bush Sr, and hundreds of congressional Republicans from the late 1960s onwards frequently repeated and expanded upon Nixon's focus on law and order and other so-called 'Middle American' social concerns. Moreover, liberal Republicanism, with its libertarian social tendencies, became an increasingly untenable political position for Republican leaders to promote. The fall of Nelson Rockefeller, in 1976, symbolised the national death of liberal Republicanism.<sup>17</sup>

Richard Nixon asserted in a speech in the late 1960s that he represented the 'great silent majority' of Americans. Journalists and commentators quickly picked up his 'silent majority' phrase; the term has since been frequently used to describe the supporters of Nixon and other conservatives. Commentators attempting to explain this silent majority and its values coined their own term – 'Middle American' – to explain the type of person for whom Nixon (and George Wallace) had appeal. Resentment against the protest movements of the 1960s was a common factor in most discussions about the 'silent majority' or 'Middle Americans.' To a degree, Nixon's 1968 victory indicated a hardening of public opinion against the protest movements and a cooling of support for liberalism.<sup>18</sup> According to Barbara Ehrenreich, after the troubles of 1968, the mythical 'Middle Americans' drew a great deal of media and academic attention. A number of books were published on the so-called silent white majority – including *The Radical Center*, *The White Majority*, *The Troubled American*, and *Middle Class Rage* – during this period. Furthermore, as Ehrenreich points out 'in the fall and winter of 1969, every major newsmagazine ran a cover story on the "Middle Americans," the "troubled Americans," or the "forgotten Americans."<sup>19</sup>

The category of 'Middle Americans' subsumed the working class into a much larger and more politically innocuous grouping. This categorisation was useful for American conservatives, who had been on the losing side of a coalition between liberals and the working class since the New Deal. The gradual disappearance of the language of *class* benefited the Republican quest to win over working class supporters in the post-New Deal period. Furthermore, the decline of class rhetoric and class consciousness enabled ideologically conservative politicians, particularly Ronald Reagan, to achieve high levels of support among working class voters, even in the union-members households that had once been the bedrock of the Democrat's supporter base. The label 'Middle American' reflected the increasing likelihood of white Americans from the 1960s onwards to identifying themselves as 'middle class,' not 'working class,' including many workers with blue-collar jobs. The decline of the union movement and the rise of 'New Politics' liberals within the Democratic Party significantly contributed to the decline in the use – and possibly the usefulness – of class conscious political rhetoric. These voting realignments and shifts in public opinion had a negative impact on the security of the liberal welfare system, as voters became increasingly willing to support politicians openly hostile to welfare. Reagan's pitch to the resentments of 'Middle Americans' followed in the footsteps of Nixon's and Wallace's political campaigns against liberalism. Neither Nixon, nor Wallace, was above repeating the worst fears and suspicions of their supporters about protesters, 'welfare queens,' and government bureaucrats. In the 1970 mid-term elections, Nixon campaigned for Republican candidates by taking up Wallace's attack on government workers but as Dan Carter writes: 'The mindless bureaucrats condemned by Nixon were, after all, his mindless bureaucrats';<sup>20</sup> a point that highlights the mindlessness of much anti-government populism.

Both as governor and as a presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan took Nixon's rhetoric a step further. Reagan's use of a story about welfare fraud in his 1976 campaign is one of the best examples of this form of political expediency. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Zucchino recounts Reagan's lax use of the truth to target welfare recipients:

During the 1976 Presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan drew roars of approval at rallies by telling the story of a Chicago welfare mother who cheated the system. "She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexistent deceased husbands," Reagan told one rally. "And she's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free income is over \$150,000." Reagan had a name for the woman: Welfare Queen.<sup>21</sup>

Reagan embellished the truth. The woman in question was charged with welfare fraud of \$8000, not \$150,000, and for having used four, not eighty, different names.<sup>22</sup> When national

political leaders like Reagan openly distorted the welfare debate by suggesting that the creation and outbreak of the Cadillac driving 'welfare queen' was the end result of overly generous and poorly managed liberal welfare policies, objectively assessing public opinion becomes increasingly difficult. One is left asking whether the public dislikes a system they have personal knowledge of, or whether they came to hate the system that Reagan and others told them existed. As Nixon, Reagan, and others prospered, the profile of government as an effective actor vis-à-vis welfare recipients declined. And in turn the future of the liberal welfare system became clearly threatened. Some liberals are inclined to blame Nixon's - and later, Reagan's - demagoguery for this backlash, whereas conservatives point to widespread public calls for reform to the liberal welfare system. The reality lies somewhere in between. Furthermore, it is also difficult to estimate how much of an impact the criticisms of 'Middle Americans,' the sentiments of focus groups, and the results of large-scale polls each had on developing welfare politics and policy.

Public opinion on welfare is notoriously contradictory, depending on the wording and focus of the question; a problem common to much public opinion polling. Welfare abuse as an issue immediately stirs up the passions of people who see their tax dollars as supporting those on welfare. Yet when the conversation turns to policy change, many of these same people are not willing to support cutting welfare to families with children. On one level, government welfare is a basic moral issue about doing the 'right thing' - ie. helping those in genuine need, with an expectation that they not abuse the system. On another level, welfare plays a complex social and economic role by providing social order, poverty relief to poor parents and children, a safety net to cover joblessness, and support for those who do not have the help of a partner in child rearing. To further complicate matters, conservatives have long argued that providing welfare encourages some people to not actively seek work or to behave in a sexually irresponsible way. Given these tensions, contradictions, and complexities, it is difficult to gauge the influence and effect of public opinion. Furthermore, as the coverage of the views of 'Middle Americans' indicates, reports attempting to capture the public mood are often based on broad perceptions and stereotypes. Barbara Ehrenreich argues that just as sociologists and journalists discovered the so-called 'other America' in the early 1960s, restlessness and resentment towards change in some sectors of white America was written up as a broadly shared outlook among millions of 'Middle Americans' in the late 1960s. Ehrenreich, suspicious about the overly homogeneous label 'other Americans,' also questions the validity and political motives behind the label 'Middle Americans.'

Who exactly were these 'Middle Americans' that the media claimed were a frustrated and overlooked silent majority? *Time* magazine said the term 'excluded only the nation's intellectuals, its liberals, its professors, its surgeons and naturally, its blacks' (Ehrenreich,

1990: 102-103). But more significantly, the term 'Middle American' referred to a state of mind. Much energy was spent discussing this state of mind: agreement was reached that Middle Americans experienced a pervasive sense of discontent – they disliked protesters, welfare expenditure, high taxes and the government's inability to solve problems. Ehrenreich argues that, in defining its mood, the media portrayed 'a blue-collar vanguard [that] was leading Middle America in its shift to the Right.'<sup>23</sup> Weekly magazines highlighted the frustrations of working-class men who talked coarsely about the 'problems' they saw arising out of the sixties. Such examples as the following outpourings made it easy for commentators to locate the roots of a backlash against liberalism within the working-class, whether there was real substance to this claim or not.

"Paint your face black and you can get a new Cadillac and the country will come in and feed your family..." says [Frank] Reis.... "There's only one way to solve this, and that's gonna be with a revolution. I'm for fighting it out between us," [David] Pedroza says angrily.... "What do you call dragging the American flag on the ground and burning draft cards and all that s---?" asks Reis.... "We should have a Hitler here to get rid of the troublemakers the way they did with the Jews in Germany."<sup>24</sup>

These strong words were presented as representing the thinking of a significant sector of the population. In this climate, where antagonism definitely existed towards liberal reforms and protest movements, 'the term *hardhat* replaced *redneck* as the epithet for a lower-class bigot' (Ehrenreich, 1990: 107). Ehrenreich tends to portray the working class as victims of narrow-minded and conceited journalists and sociologists who presented a prejudiced assessment of the working class and their response to the social changes of the 1960s.<sup>25</sup> Despite making some important points, she also overlooks how the social conservatism of particular elements of the working class made them willing to support the Republican Party. She has far too little to say about this alliance and its importance during the Reagan and Bush era. While Ehrenreich correctly points out how the benefits of Social Security, Medicare, collective bargaining, and education kept many working-class voters in the Democratic camp, her analysis sheds little light on the persistence and strength of working-class social conservatism in America. Too often, Ehrenreich ignores the racial, cultural, and social conflicts over which liberals lost the support of working-class voters. These issues cannot all be written off as media beat ups or as the result of academic narrow-mindedness, or blamed on the failings of American liberals to understand the working class.

Ehrenreich stresses the fear of falling economically and socially into a lower class when she contemplates the reasons for this anger amongst the working and middle classes with liberalism. She highlights how inflation cut into blue-collar workers' pay packets, resulting in wage reductions in real terms by the late 1960s. On working-class racism, Ehrenreich

constructs an argument very similar to Christopher Lasch's position.<sup>26</sup> She firstly states that working-class people were much more often at the front line of integration than those sheltering in the suburbs. She goes on to argue that whites who have daily contact with blacks are often less racist than others. Furthermore, she argues that liberals' 'air of moral superiority and contempt for the whites who would actually have to make room, in their schools and workplaces, for black progress' is a large part of the problem.<sup>27</sup> Ehrenreich also points to other cultural conflicts, such as liberal belittling of working-class consumerism and consumer tastes, which exacerbate the tension between the working class and liberals.

Ehrenreich's outlook when summarising the faults of American liberalism is scathing. She argues that the working class often sees liberals as having elitist attitudes. According to her, this cultural conflict has often misled liberals into thinking that they needed to become more conservative to reach out to working-class voters. This, for Ehrenreich, was the opposite of what was necessary; 'if anything,' she asserts, 'working-class anger should have shown that middle-class liberalism had not gone far enough.' The liberal approach to welfare, she argues, saw poverty as an isolated problem rather than more realistically as something experienced in various forms by many 'ordinary' people, and properly requiring sizeable social reforms. Such a challenge was beyond liberalism, in Ehrenreich's view. Her final comments on this issue are her most critical. She argues that: 'In discovering the working-class, the middle class discovered a negative, and hideously unflattering, image of itself: an isolated elite, pretentiously liberal, and despised by authentic, hardworking Americans' (Ehrenreich, 1990: 143). Ehrenreich's assessment of working class America and its politics at times is highly unrealistic. Christopher Lasch makes this point very well in his critique of Ehrenreich's *Fear of Falling* (Lasch, 1991a: 525). Ehrenreich sees clear possibilities for working class radicalism in America, particularly during in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This outlook, however, seems to rely more on wishful thinking than strong evidence.

Like Ehrenreich, Thomas Edsall argues that a top down coalition was instrumental in shaping the turn against the Great Society reforms. However, Edsall's analysis focuses on the role of conservative political and business elites rather than on liberals, academics, and the media as Ehrenreich does. Furthermore, in *The New Politics of Inequality* (1984) and *Chain Reaction* (1991), Edsall draws directly on public opinion surveys to substantiate his claims, something little used by Ehrenreich. In *Chain Reaction*, Edsall examines the coalition that made the movement of American politics to the Right possible. In his analysis of the increasing successes of the Republican Party and the problems faced by the Democrats, Edsall focuses on the political power of Republican claims that the Democrats had become the party of special interest groups, taxation, and social engineering (eg. the

promoters of busing and affirmative action). Moreover, he attempts to explain how the Republicans developed an image of themselves as the party of prosperity, patriotism, and anti-liberalism.

Edsall traces the rise of the Right back to the politicking and rhetoric of George Wallace and Richard Nixon. He suggests in his discussion of the Nixon era that conservative forces had been developing steadily until the Watergate crisis took the wind out of their sails. Edsall examines the longstanding conservative campaigns against the size of the liberal welfare state and the rates of taxation in America. He argues that this refrain against rising taxes and welfare spending exerted strong pressure on working and lower middle class whites to turn against the Democratic Party they had traditionally favoured.<sup>28</sup> Edsall valiantly seeks to understand the erosion of working-class support for the Democrats from the Nixon period onwards, a transformation that has been one of the most significant changes in twentieth century American politics. He emphasises the importance of race, rights and taxation as issues that conservatives used skilfully to gain supporters. Like Theda Stocpol (1995), Edsall suggests that middle class concerns about an increased tax burden were not unfounded; considering that 'for the affluent family the tax burden increased by 46 percent from 1953 to 1976, while for the average family, the tax burden increased by 92.4 percent.'<sup>29</sup>

Edsall also highlights how the Right's criticism of liberals for being 'too soft on criminals' gained them broad support. He claims that by 1977, 83 percent of the population felt that the treatment of criminals was insufficiently harsh. Moreover, American conservatives exploited the intersection of race and crime for political gain. The liberal position on race was closely associated with two policies unpopular among American whites: busing and affirmative action.<sup>30</sup> Christopher Lasch has suggested that these two 'deep issues' split the liberal coalition of working-class whites and blacks, adding that these issues were more significant to white voters than concerns about welfare. Lasch posits that it was cultural and social issues and not economic concerns about the amount being spent on welfare *per se*, which split the liberal coalition. He justifies his position by contending that claims of backlash against welfare 'exaggerate the economic security enjoyed by the working-class and the lower middle class' (Lasch, 1991a: 477). Lasch's argument is to some extent confirmed by opinion polling throughout the 1980s which consistently showed that a majority of Americans supported providing assistance to the poor.<sup>31</sup> However, opinion-polling surveys of the public at large does not necessarily mirror the attitudes of the voting public which is a smaller and generally more conservative group. Edsall attempts to address this problem in his work and he suggests that at times the general views of those who are most likely to vote – or of those who have just voted on election day – differ somewhat from the views of the general public. Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward

have consistently argued that the lower voting rates of poorer Americans benefit the conservatives.<sup>32</sup> Although this contention has its critics, politicians undeniably market their policies to a large degree to the non-poor population who votes in higher numbers. Furthermore, a large percentage of this target audience lives in suburban America, which now houses the majority of voters. I will return to the issues of public opinion after examining the writings of Kevin Phillips, whose explanation of backlash politics helped shape received opinion on this topic.

## Kevin Phillips and the application of the backlash strategy

Kevin Phillips's analysis of the rise of the American Right makes particularly interesting reading given that Phillips has been described as the architect of the Republican Party's 'Southern Strategy' adopted by Nixon with much success in 1968. Furthermore, Phillips also coined the term 'Sun Belt,' a concept regularly connected with the success of Ronald Reagan<sup>33</sup> After making a name for himself as a Republican strategist, Phillips then moved into the media and established himself as a journalist. By the 1980s, Phillips had an independent career as a political commentator willing to criticise Democrats and Republicans alike. By the late 1990s this once win-at-any-cost Republican was described as a liberal in the *New York Times Review of Books* in a review of his latest book *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (1999). Phillips also provides an interesting counterpoint to the swing of the political pendulum described in this paper, as his transition from right to left runs counter to the movement of American welfare policy. In the middle of his transition, in 1982, Phillips in his book *Post-Conservative America* developed an archetypal backlash theory. Much of this book is concerned with understanding the rise of American conservatism and the demise of the New Deal coalition. It provides a standard outlook on the so-called backlash debate, which is hardly surprising given that Phillips was one of the standard bearers of this backlash thesis. Because of his background and status, Phillips's account of the electoral and attitudinal changes that occurred between the 1950s and the 1990s has become part of the received understanding of American politics.

Phillips's account of the rise of conservative politics in the US emphasises a 'traditionalist Middle American reaction against the social, moral, and racial upheavals of the 1960s.' He also highlights the emergence of the New Right and the politicised religious fundamentalists. Phillips asserts that he is inclined to see this broad reaction as 'populistic' in character.<sup>34</sup> Explaining what he calls the 'two decade breakdown' of liberalism, he

surmises that although liberals were successful in reducing poverty and easing Victorian social and sexual mores, middle class voters ultimately reacted negatively to liberal 'social engineering and judicial permissiveness.' He argues that these policies

drove the middle class, whites and blacks alike, from the old Northern cities, making residential integration impossible and worsening the municipal revenue crisis. Radical prescriptions – from busing to job preferences – provoked three- or four-to-one negative majorities in national opinion polls, and voter indignation followed suit.<sup>35</sup>

This argument has been repeated many times. As a result the term 'suburbanisation' and 'white ethnic' have become synonymous with the idea of political backlash against liberalism. Phillips's understanding of backlash politics is based on his use of general opinion polls and election results, as well as his own unique assessment of American geopolitics. *Post-Conservative America* develops a backlash thesis that had distinct regional and socio-economic components. Explaining the electoral movement toward the Republican Party, he argues that racial politics and the revolution in moral and social norms attracted white Southerners to the Republican Party as they cast off their Civil War attachment to the Democrats. He argues that in the large urban centres there was a 'conservative drift of 'peripheral urban ethnic' voters from South Boston and Queens, in New York and to Detroit and San Francisco.' For these voters, Phillips claims that the 'backlash' against the 1960s revolution in social and moral norms 'can hardly be overstated.' He thus outlines the genealogy of backlash politics:

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, race-linked issues had generated the principal social-issue electoral backlash. By 1980, however, a second social-issue wave, pivoting on religious, moral and sexual controversies, had moved to the fore. In retrospect, by championing permissiveness, homosexuality, and abortion while derogating the family, prayer and Biblical teachings, the morals revolution ultimately served to energize an increasingly militant neo-partisan counterforce that encompasses 20 to 30 percent of the American people.<sup>36</sup>

As tensions evolved from conflict being centred on racial change to a focus on a broader set of 'social issues,' welfare became part of the politics of backlash. Phillips's account of the right-wing backlash thesis reflects his belief that liberalism became less popular the less it was associated with blue-collar politics and the more it was connected with middle-class 'reformism and permissivism of various economic, diplomatic, sociological and sexual hues.'<sup>37</sup> Phillips's argument adopts the conservative outlook that assumes polarisation, with liberalism increasingly becoming an elite position and conservatism a populist doctrine, due to the popularity of conservative positions on taxation, bureaucracy, regulations, and the unpopularity of liberal judicial social engineering. Phillips acknowledges that the aforementioned trends are only partial and that "'liberal

politics" continues to command the allegiance of large numbers of factory workers and morally traditionalist minority groups; on the other [hand], conservatism still musters huge numbers of suburban and rural defenders of the status quo.<sup>38</sup>

Conservative forces in America have undoubtedly succeeded since the late 1960s in attacking liberalism at its weakest points. Influential GOP strategist Lee Atwater reiterates Phillips's contention that the Republicans developed an electoral strategy, which started out using race as a key wedge issue but expanded by the 1980s to a strategy based on attacking liberal 'social issues and values.' Particularly at the presidential level, Atwater believes this tactic underlies the success of Reagan and Bush Sr. In this revealing quote, Lee Atwater outlines the GOP's conservative 'populist' approach in the South:

We have as the main voting groupings in Southern politics 1) country clubbers ["reliably Republican"], 2) populists, 3) blacks ["reliably Democratic"]...The class struggle in the South continues, with the populists serving as the trump card...Populists have always been liberal on economics. So long as the crucial issues were generally confined to economics - as during the New Deal - the liberal candidate would expect to get most of the popular vote. But populists are conservatives on most social issues...As for race, it was hardly an issue - it went without saying that the populists' chosen leaders were hard-core segregationists...After Carter's defeat [in 1980], the Democrats backed away from their Great Society rhetoric and diverted public attention from busing, affirmative action, etc., and towards clear economic issues. In 1982, we discovered we could not hold the populist vote on economic issues alone. When Republicans are successful in getting certain social issues to the forefront, the populist vote is ours. The trick we must master is choosing those social issues that do not alienate the country clubbers since, again, we need their votes and the populists' to win in the South.<sup>39</sup>

Commentators with a less strategic outlook than Atwater have suggested that the backlash against liberalism occurred because liberals pushed more controversial political concerns on the back of the successes of broad based progressive programs such as civil rights, federal aid to education and Medicare. They view this agenda as disturbing the social and moral sensibilities of the working-class constituents who had supported the New Deal and the early Great Society programs.<sup>40</sup> In Kevin Phillips's language, this shift signified liberalism increasingly becoming an 'establishment credo' as it moved in the 1960s from its prior association with 'outsiderism' to become linked to 'cosmopolitan elitism.' In constituent terms, Phillips argues, that 'liberalism had pretty much forsaken the values of red-brick factory towns for those of gentrified urban brownstones.'<sup>41</sup> Continuing in this vein, Phillips states:

Slowly but surely, liberalism lost much of its Jacksonian and Trumanesque moorings in rural Missouri and Steelmaking East Baltimore, and led by the ascendant professors, urban planners, social-welfare workers, minority caustists and international economists, managed

to become increasingly the political vehicle and banner of *those* interests, not of blue-collar Americans.<sup>42</sup>

For Phillips, this liberal turn set an anti-elitist and anti-establishment 'conservative' politics in motion. This was the politics that saw George Wallace rise to national prominence and that later energised the growth of the New Right movement. Furthermore, on a broader electoral front, claims of 'elitism' were central to the working-class electoral backlash against liberalism. According to Phillips's analysis, this reaction against liberal elitism was mirrored by shifts in power within the GOP, away from the Northeastern establishment – the traditional base of the Republican Party – towards the West and South (the broad expanse that Phillips had dubbed the 'Sunbelt'). The success of politicians from the West and South within the GOP beginning with Barry Goldwater from Arizona, through Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan from California, to Newt Gingrich from Georgia, and Trent Lott from Mississippi, signifies a power shift within the Republican Party away from its long-standing base in the Northeast to the Sunbelt.

Kevin Phillips had been one of the first political analysts to understand the electoral significance and possibilities for the GOP in the South and the West. At the age of 27, Phillips, a recent Harvard graduate, impressed Nixon in the lead up to the 1968 election with his data on the regional breakdown of American voting blocs. His election advice to Nixon – the so-called 'Southern Strategy' – posited that the politics of race and fear would benefit the GOP particularly in the South. In 1969, Phillips published his electoral theories in the *Emerging Republican Majority*, a book that 'would have a profound impact on his party's future political strategy' as Dan Carter accurately argues in his biography of George Wallace and the politics of rage.<sup>43</sup> In the *Emerging Republican Majority*, Phillips propounded that race was driving whites from the Democratic Party in the Midwest and the South into the Republican Party. He went as far as to suggest that the GOP should strenuously maintain and expand the voting rights of blacks in the South, not for moral reasons, but because he believed it would hasten the transfer of whites into the Republican Party fold in the South and in the North.<sup>44</sup> He promoted this unprincipled strategy as the best way of breaking apart the liberal coalition and making the GOP a 'populist' party. Phillips had confided in Gary Wills in the middle of the 1968 elections that what makes politics tick is who hates who.<sup>45</sup> A generation later the electoral map has followed many of Phillips's predictions, although Phillips himself and some Republicans<sup>46</sup> have walked away from the 'Southern Strategy' and the politics of polarisation. Another major player in the 1968 election, George Wallace, also had a 'Southern Strategy' of his own, which mixed Southern populism with anti-liberalism and covert racism. Wallace, possibly more so than any other politician, successfully implemented the anti-elitist/anti-liberal populism which

Phillips emphasises in his backlash thesis, and which lies at the heart of the backlash against American liberalism.

## Wallace strategy and the legacy of the politics of rage

The genealogy of backlash politics in America is frequently traced back to the 1968 campaign of Alabama Governor George Wallace. Wallace's national success in 1968 illustrated clear divisions within the New Deal coalition, particularly in the South, but also among working class voters in the North – notably in the Midwest. Wallace's rhetoric and style – if not his policies – helped both define the style and rhetoric of the American New Right and create a populist politics based on attacking the federal government and Washington elites. Wallace's rhetoric spoke of an 'us vs. them' mentality, which put all politicians and their advisers on notice as belonging to a suspect class. At worst, this outlook created a corrosive cynicism contributing to a public perception of government action as always futile and self-serving. This 'anti-politics' is deeply ingrained in the outlook of the American New Right. As Dan Carter convincingly argues in *The Politics of Rage* (1995), Wallace's entry in national politics transformed the nature of conservative politics in America in the twentieth century.

As a presidential candidate Wallace received criticism from both liberal and conservatives, and from both major parties. Liberals compared his ideology to fascism, and the American Conservative Union denounced him as a danger from the Left, arguing that: 'True conservatism cannot be served by George Wallace. At heart he is a Populist with strong tendencies in the direction of a collectivist welfare state.'<sup>47</sup> However, ultimately Wallace affected both political parties. Democrats were made to realise the precarious nature of their hold on the South. The Republicans acknowledged that Wallace's covert racism and anti-liberal rhetoric was useful, and that his attacks on "'theoreticians and the bureaucrats'" whose crimes of course, included school busing.'<sup>48</sup> could be harnessed to extend the Republican coalition. Wallace's attack on the 'liberals, intellectuals, the long hairs [who] have run the country for too long...intellectual morons...[with] sissy attitudes' and not to mention 'phonies' and 'social engineers' was soon copied by Republican Spiro Agnew who claimed that he would dedicate himself to attacking the 'effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectuals.'<sup>49</sup>

The claim that the backlash against liberalism was driven not by economic concerns, but rather by cultural conflicts and particularly by lower-middle class antagonism towards

liberal elitism – a position advanced by Christopher Lasch<sup>50</sup> – has obvious links with the politics of the George Wallace. Wallace's politics spoke to the concerns of working-class conservatives; his 1968 presidential campaign was highly critical of liberal social reforms. He argued against liberal social change and the liberal social agenda. Wallace's attacks on the liberal elite in Washington paved the way for criticism of the 'New Class,' and for Reagan and Bush's attack on the liberal establishment. His rhetoric highlighted a 'liberal establishment' threatening the values and wallets of 'the people.' Traditionally in American politics, 'the establishment' had generally referred to the corporate establishment; Wallace and the emerging New Right suggested that liberals had now taken on this establishment role. This attack on liberal leaders, their networks, and the bureaucracy proved very politically useful to the Republicans. As Edsall points out:

The Republican corporate establishment had been stigmatized by countless Democratic candidates in order to win elections. The Wallace populist message created a countervailing Democratic "establishment" determined to impose its liberal authoritarian, statist agenda on an unwilling electorate, a Democratic establishment made up of the government itself and of "a select elite cult" including "some professors, some newspaper editors, some preachers, some judges and some bureaucrats."<sup>51</sup>

Republicans would recycle Wallace's attack on the liberal establishment with great effect. George Bush Sr. elevated 'liberal' to a swear word in the 1988 presidential campaign when he attacked 'Harvard boutique liberals' and 'limousine liberals' for being elitist and opposing the interests of the general public. When George Bush Sr., a candidate long labelled a 'preppy' Washington insider with well recognised links to the super rich and corporate America, was effectively able to portray himself as a man of the people and paint his opponent as an elitist, one begins to realise how useful the cultural backlash rhetoric of Wallace and Spiro Agnew has been to the Republicans.<sup>52</sup> Kevin Phillips, commenting on Bush's success stated that: 'It's the ultimate triumph of the populist revolution in Republican politics. Here we have the nation's leading preppy – an ornament and offspring of the Establishment – winning as a barefoot populist.'<sup>53</sup> Bush was ultimately criticised as an insider during the next presidential election: after 12 years of Republican presidential administrations, the 'outsider' label lacked credibility. In 1992 Bush's opponents Bill Clinton and Ross Perot cast themselves as the authentic outsiders. The 1992 Democratic reprieve was short lived, however. In the 1994 congressional elections, the *Contract with America* recycled the attack on the 'liberal establishment' and its support for 'big government' with considerable success.

As Dan Carter has argued, the populist anti-government rhetoric of the *Contract* draws on a tradition within which George Wallace plays a central role.<sup>54</sup> Wallace's attacks on the liberal establishment gave voice to the multiple frustrations of working and middle class

Americans, and provided them with a scapegoat: the liberal federal government. The following example of Wallace's rhetoric reflects this catch-all politics of the frustrated:

They [judges, federal regulators, liberal intellectuals] have looked down their noses at the average man on the street for too long...and they say, "We've gotta write a guide-line. We've gotta tell you when to get up in the morning. We've gotta tell you when to go to bed at night."<sup>55</sup>

This snarling anti-liberalism became the bread and butter politics of American right-wing populism and the emerging New Right. Wallace, however, only exemplifies one of the planks of the American New Right. His politics represented the conservative working class who resisted social and legal change, opposed bureaucracy in private and public organisations, and distrusted big business as much as big-government. However, Wallace's politics was also supportive of the welfare state and fearful of undermining the economic security of the working class. Because of these tendencies, the *National Review* criticised Wallace's economic outlook as being 'Country and Western Marxism.' It has largely been Wallace's socially conservative and anti-liberal rhetoric that Republican politicians from Richard Nixon onwards adopted and not his economic views.

Wallace's politics sought to stop the momentum of liberal social change by appealing to people's fears and targeting liberals as an out of touch elite minority. Furthermore, Wallace anticipated the conservative criticisms of 'reverse discrimination' with his claim that 'the biggest bigots in the world are - they're the ones who call others bigots.'<sup>56</sup> Wallace's racism was crucial to his success, but the new symbolic language and arguments he popularised within conservative circles have had far greater long-term significance. Thomas Edsall argues that Wallace was valuable to the Right because he led the way, showing how one was 'able to establish a common ground between besieged working-class voters and their traditional Republican adversaries - corporate America, the well-to-do, and the very rich - a common bond in opposition to federal regulation and to high taxes.'<sup>57</sup> Wallace's legacy lives on in the rhetoric of scores of anti-liberal conservative politicians from Ronald Reagan to Newt Gingrich.

Ronald Reagan in 1980 capitalised upon the forces Nixon and Wallace set in motion. Many commentators saw Reagan's sizeable 1980 and 1984 victories as proving that a backlash against liberalism had most definitely occurred. The Reagan 'realignment' brought with it a new voting bloc, the so-called 'Reagan Democrats' - working class voters who turned against the party of their earlier affiliations to vote Republican. In truth, many of the 'Reagan Democrats' had probably voted for Nixon in 1972, but Watergate squashed talk of realignment in the 1970s. Furthermore, as Stanley Greenberg<sup>58</sup> has argued, throughout the

1980s many 'Reagan Democrats' still voted for Democrats in the Congress and at the state level. It was not until the 1994 elections that the GOP became the majority party in both the House and the Senate. Liberal columnists for the *Village Voice*, *The Nation*, and *Dissent* wrote up the 1994 GOP victory as the ultimate victory for the politics of backlash. Similarly, Dan Carter<sup>59</sup> argues that the victory of the Gingrich-led GOP was the end point of a journey that George Wallace's politics of rage had set in motion three decades earlier.

Explaining the victories of Reagan and the GOP in 1994, Michael Lind also attaches great significance to Wallace's role: 'The success of the Republican politicians owes little to the persuasiveness of conservative intellectuals like William F. Buckley, Jr. and Irving Kristol – and almost everything to Republican mastery of techniques of right-wing Southern demagogues like George Wallace.'<sup>60</sup> Lind calls this victory part of the 'Southernization' of the Republican Party. This 'Southernization' was reflected in the congressional leadership of the GOP following the 1994 election. Excepting Robert Dole, all of the party's leaders were Southerners. Moreover, as Lind argues, the issues the GOP leadership took up were often rooted in Southern or Sunbelt politics. Driven by a strong moral disquiet about 'illegitimacy,' the push to reform the American welfare system certainly has strong connections to the welfare debates that have been common in the South throughout the twentieth century – debates where racism has often played a significant role in shaping welfare policies and determining welfare payments.

In summary, backlash politics has had a significant impact on the welfare debates from the 1960s onwards. The voices of those who opposed welfare gained a more attentive audience and were more regularly heeded as policy reform was developed. The 1996 welfare reforms, which included punitive time limits on AFDC and Food Stamps, spoke to those who resented welfare and so-called welfare dependency. The very name of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) speaks directly to backlash politics. The word 'reconciliation' suggests that the policy will attempt to reconcile welfare assistance with 'Middle American' concerns and values, and with the wallets of working American whose taxes have paid for decades of welfare cheques. The PRWORA can be correctly viewed as addressing the frustrations that had been heard since the late 1960s from 'ethnic America,' 'Middle America,' and 'Reagan's America.' This build-up of right-wing populism encouraged Republicans like Newt Gingrich to push for dramatic welfare reform once they gained control of the Congress in 1994.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hodgson, Godfrey. *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996. p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> Greenberg, Stanley. 'From Crisis to Working Majority,' *The American Prospect*. Number 7, Fall 1991: 104-117. (<http://epn.org/prospect/07/07gree.html>); Brown, Peter. *Minority Party: Why Democrats Face Defeat in 1992 and Beyond*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1991; Wattenberg, Ben J. *Values Matter Most: How Republicans or Democrats or a Third Party Can Win and Renew the American Way of Life*. New York: The Free Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Phillips, Kevin P. *Post-Conservative America: People, Politics, and Ideology in a Time of Crisis*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983; Edsall, Thomas Bryne. *The New Politics of Inequality*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984; Edsall, Thomas Bryne, with Mary D. Edsall. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Lasch, Christopher. *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics*. New York: Norton, 1991, pp. 476-477.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips, Kevin P. *The Emerging Republican Majority*. New York: Arlington House, 1969; Rusher, William. *The Making of the New Majority Party*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1975.

<sup>6</sup> Edsall *The New Politics of Inequality & Chain Reaction*.

<sup>7</sup> Lasch *The True and Only Heaven*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 476-532.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 476.

<sup>10</sup> Patterson, James T. *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 676.

<sup>11</sup> Rieder, Jonathan. *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1985; Greenberg 'From Crisis to Working Majority' & *Middle Class Dreams: The Politics and Power of the New American Majority*. New York: Times Books, 1995; Brown, *Minority Party*; Wattenberg, *Values Matter Most*.

<sup>12</sup> The busing debate definitely ignited strong feelings. Lasch goes as far as to write that: 'Of all the 'social issues', as they became to be called, that divided the New Deal coalition down the middle - abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, the death penalty, gun control, gay rights, school prayers, the pledge of allegiance, judicial lawmaking - busing was the most fiercely contested and the most dramatic in its exposure of the growing distance between wealthy liberals and workers, formerly united in support of Franklin Roosevelt and his heirs in the liberal succession' (Lasch *The True and Only Heaven*, pp. 504-505). Siding against the 'wealthy liberals,' Lasch argues that the portrayal of those who opposed busing to their children's schools as 'racists' overlooked these parents' understandable want to protect their own communities and neighbourhoods (Lasch *The True and Only Heaven*, pp. 504-508). Lasch again is only partially correct. Undoubtedly, anti-busing campaigns were not solely driven by racial prejudice, but these campaigns were not without racial prejudice either, as much of the concern over 'protecting' neighbourhoods centred on keeping them racially segregated. At a deeper political level, Lasch's argument questions the manner in which liberal policies possibly see community as less important than tolerance and social equality.

<sup>13</sup> Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up*, p.150.

<sup>14</sup> Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*; Dionne, E. J. Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.; Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up* .

<sup>15</sup> Rieder, Jonathan. 'The Rise of the 'Silent Majority,'' in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle. (Editors). *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order. 1930-1980*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 258.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> Carroll, Peter N. *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982, p.317; Rae, Nicol C. *The Rise and Fall of the Liberal Republicans: From 1952 to the present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Public opinion had hardened against the tactics of the anti-war movement and the black rights movement, and Nixon and Wallace exploited these concerns for electoral gain. However, ironically as these protest movements became increasingly unpopular with the general public so did the war in Vietnam. Similarly in most surveys, the general public were expressing less racist views on most topics – from racial intermarriage to school integration.

<sup>19</sup> Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup> Carter, Dan. *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995, p. 395.

<sup>21</sup> Zucchino, David. *Myth of the Welfare Queen: A Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist's Portrait of Women on The Line*. New York: Scribner, 1997, pp. 64-65.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, p. 105.

<sup>24</sup> Newsweek [1969] quoted in Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, p.106.

<sup>25</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset in his 1959 essay 'Working Class Authoritarianism' had argued that the working class are more inclined to authoritarianism than other social classes due to their lack of education and sophistication (Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, pp. 109-112).

<sup>26</sup> Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*, p.453.

<sup>27</sup> Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, p. 130

<sup>28</sup> Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>30</sup> The detailed survey analysis of Thomas Edsall shows significant differences in black and white attitudes to welfare, law and order, and racial policies – such as busing and affirmative action – with blacks being considerably more liberal-minded than whites. Furthermore, poorer Americans are far more likely to support welfare than are richer Americans. This difference is politically significant because voting in America is heavily skewed in favour of the non-poor, whose attitudes tend to be more conservative. It can therefore be argued that it is voters' opinions that politically matter and not the opinions of the total American adult population (Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality & Chain Reaction*).

<sup>31</sup> Schwab, Larry M. *The Illusion of a Conservative Reagan Revolution*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Piven, Frances Fox, and Richard A. Cloward. *Why Americans Don't Vote*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

<sup>33</sup> Davis, Mike. *Prisoners of the American Dream: Political and Economy in the History of the US Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1986.

<sup>34</sup> Phillips, *Post-Conservative America*, pp. ix-xx.

<sup>35</sup> Phillips, *Post-Conservative America*, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Edsall, *Chain Reaction* pp. 221-222.

<sup>40</sup> Lowi, Theodore J. *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969; Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*; Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*.

<sup>41</sup> Phillips, *Post-Conservative America*, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, p. 379.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> Republican congressman and vice-presidential candidate Jack Kemp argued that: 'We [the GOP] should have been there with Dr. King on the streets of Atlanta and Montgomery. ... I think the whole idea of Kevin Phillip's Southern majority is a disgrace. You want the South, the North, the East, and the West. You want consensus, not coalitions, in my view' (Frum, David. *Dead Right*. New York: BasicBooks, 1995, p. 96).

<sup>47</sup> Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling*, p. 127.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p.128.

<sup>50</sup> Lasch argues that the association of the Democratic party with McGovern in 1972 (as well as a group of Democrats elected in 1974 described as 'life-style' liberals) created a tension within the traditional arms of the Party and signalled a wider cultural divide between old and new politics. Liberalism argues Lasch 'became more and more associated with the modernist liberation of the educated class and the championship of minorities and the poor' (Lasch, Christopher. 'Beyond Left and Right,' *Dissent*. Fall, 1991, p.587).

<sup>51</sup> Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, p. 78.

<sup>52</sup> Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*.

<sup>53</sup> Phillips, Kevin P. 'Poppy as Populist,' *Newsweek*. November 7, 1988, p. 58.

<sup>54</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*.

<sup>55</sup> Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> Greenberg *Middle Class Dreams*.

<sup>59</sup> Carter, *The Politics of Rage*.

<sup>60</sup> Lind, Michael. *Up from Conservatism: Why the Right is Wrong for America*. New York: Free Press, 1996, p. 130.