

**IN THE EYE OF THE STORM:
CONSERVATIVE STRUGGLES AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, 1956-1968**

ANDREW J. SHEEAN

Historians have correctly identified the University of Wisconsin as one of the most important incubators of the campus activism practiced by members of an emerging “New Left” during the sixties.¹ Credited largely to the efforts of outspoken American youth, such as Tom Hayden, the New Left presented students with a seductive ideology that rejected various components of the post-World War II social, cultural, and political landscape. Reacting against stagnant Cold War political circumstances, members of the New Left sought a new methodology for expressing their fears, frustrations, and passions. The New Left proposed new solutions for what members of the Right would never accomplish and members of the traditional left could. Stating that, “the old ideologies have lost their ‘truth’ and their power to persuade,” sociologist Daniel Bell articulated the concerns of American dissidents who refused to accept the complacency of older generations.²

The youthful exuberance associated with New Left ideology translated into an even more aggressive expression of discontent. Throughout the 1960s, perhaps most notably in response to increasing American involvement in Southeast Asia, the voices of American discontent became more willing to employ an increasingly overt style of activism and protest. While the 23 August 1970 bombing of Sterling Hall exists as a violent extreme in the story of UW student activism, the 1960s represents a distinct

¹ For an in-depth analysis of the development and characteristics of the New Left, see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War, and the Making of a New Left*, (London, New York: Verso, 1993), 1-245.

² Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideals in the Fifties* (Glencoe, Ill., 1960), 373, 363-368, quoted in Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2003) Chapter 3, 20.

era in which voices of discontent became infatuated with the utility of aggressive mass demonstration in expressing social, cultural, and political criticisms.

Without question, radical activism in all its forms dominates the story of the UW's experience in the 1960s. Despite this fact, efforts of historians to generalize the voice of UW students as one devoted almost exclusively to the tenants of New Left ideology and radicalism have oversimplified and underestimated the intellectual complexity of the student body. Recent scholarship has revealed that New Left ideology and radicalism were not the only ideological currents on campus. In fact, prior to the more famous actions of radical activists, a contingent of conservative-minded students undertook a series of initiatives intended to further their own ideological perspectives.

In this sense past histories have overstated the ideological homogeneity of the UW student body during the 1960s.³ Conservative thinking students *did*, in fact, make legitimate attempts to advocate an alternative system of beliefs that addressed many of the same issues that interested their New Left counterparts. Proof of the efforts of conservative students to further their own beliefs gives further credence to Jeremi Suri's assertion that, "the political right joined the left in calls for policy activism" during the 1960s.⁴ In particular, instances of conservative student opposition to large corporations illustrate similarities between the activism of New Left radicals and conservatives. Both groups used public demonstrations to voice discontent. However, conservative UW students' efforts focused more so on engaging their New Left foes on rhetorical, ideological, and, eventually, political grounds. By and large, conservative student groups refrained from participating in the aggressive style of expression, which radical activists

³ See E. David Cronon and John W. Jenkins, *The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1945-1971* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999) for extensive history of the University of Wisconsin during this period. One will note, however, that Cronon and Jenkins mention campus conservative groups only in passing.

⁴ Suri, *Power and Protest*, Chapter 3, 21.

readily embraced.

The growth of the Wisconsin Conservative Club, the UW Young Americans for Freedom, and the UW Young Republicans during the 1960s illustrates the extent to which ideological competition existed on campus. These three groups, however, exhibited an inexplicable reluctance to work together in advancing their conservative messages. In this sense, the study of such groups is further complicated by a certain degree of heterogeneity within the movement itself.

The trials and tribulations of these groups reflect both the similarities and differences between the campus and national conservative movements. Compared to national conservative movements, UW conservative groups demonstrated a more sophisticated attempt at cultivating interest in conservative ideas among students. Outnumbered and, to a large extent, outmatched by the cultural momentum of the 1960s, conservative students at the UW engaged their opposition with confidence. A better understanding of the rarely heard conservative student voices of the 1960s yields a fuller appreciation for the intellectual diversity that the UW fostered.

REDEFINING CONSERVATISM

The New Left was not the only contingent that objected to the perceived stagnation of Cold War politics. By the late 1950s, conservative thinkers had become increasingly disillusioned with practices and tendencies of Republican leadership. Showing restraint in objecting to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the Eisenhower administration embodied a political and intellectual position that an emerging current of conservative commentators sought to oppose and ultimately replace.⁵ In September of

⁵ Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 20-21. For a further discussion of the development of post-war conservatism, see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

1959, the Republican Party organized the Republican Committee on Program and Progress (RCPP) in an attempt to reconcile the positions of the liberal and conservative camps in the party. Despite the efforts of its chairman Charles Percy, the RCPP failed to build consensus among the competing factions of the Republican Party. The conciliatory efforts of the RCPP to placate all wings of the Republican Party further legitimized conservative discontent within the party.⁶ Attempting to reinvigorate conservative ideology, members of the emerging New Right advocated a return to a purer form of conservatism, which was void of compromise and the subversion of principle.

At the forefront of the drive to reformulate the priorities of the conservative agenda, William F. Buckley denounced the inability of the existing conservative leadership to combat the diminishing role of principles in the Republican Party. Conservative hallmarks—anticommunism, moral absolutism, and the defense of state sovereignty—had become diluted by considerations for political expediency. Buckley advocated the necessity of youth participation in revitalizing conservatism:

My God, America needs vocal students and young people who will re-establish the national reputation, which nowadays rests on...pot smokers, betelnut chewers, clam juice fanatics, and others strung out on left ideology.⁷

Buckley was not alone however in criticizing the direction of the conservative movement. Russell Kirk, in *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, encouraged conservatives to become more active in trumpeting their ideologies for the sake of change. Espousing the importance of taking a more proactive approach in remaking one's surroundings, Kirk suggested one's efforts "begin by brightening the corner where you are; by improving one human unit, yourself, and by helping your neighbor."⁸ Kirk's sentiments

⁶ John A. Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and The Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 35-41.

⁷ Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 110.

⁸ Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1993), 287, Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Chicago, Henry

provide a better understanding of the emergence of a new conservative movement, mainly among youth, which attempted to halt the subversion of conservative principles.

Aside from encouraging personal action, conservatives concerned with change emphasized the importance of maintaining united opposition to the spread of communism. James Burnham, in *The Struggle for the World*, took an aggressive stance against the forces of communism. Describing anti-communism as a moral obligation, Burnham advocated an “offensive-subversive war”, capable of liberating foreign nations from the snares of collectivism.⁹ Burnham’s moralistic anti-communist rhetoric enriched the vocabulary of conservatives looking to revitalize their core principles. John Kolbe further described anti-communism as a moral obligation:

Implicit in this movement is the conviction that the heritage of the Christian West, and *not* some conglomeration of opinions and opposite moralities offers the only hope for a world besieged by an ideology which teaches that there is no God and that wrong is right—if it’s not for the Party... The crises facing Western civilization is *moral* as well as *political* in nature.¹⁰

Religion was central to conservatism’s moral sensibility. Kolbe’s comments emphasize the religious implications of these new conservative arguments. Religion, specifically Christianity, provided all conservatives with a sense of tradition and absolute truth. Paul Niemeyer, a founding member of the conservative youth group Young Americans for Freedom, explained that conservatism arose from a “belief in an absolute moral law which cannot be tested in scientific and epistemological questions.”¹¹ Conservatives’ embrace of moral absolutism developed from the notion that “man’s purpose is to shape his life to the patterns of order proceeding from the Divine center of

Regnery, 1960), 7-8, quoted in Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 10-11.

⁹ See Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 12 for a further explanation of Burnham’s anti-communist stance.

¹⁰ M. Stanton Evans, *Revolt on Campus* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1961) 180, quoted in Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 106.

¹¹ Evans, *Revolt on Campus*, 182, quoted in Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 106.

life.”¹²

The 1964 presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater represents the clearest attempt on the part of disenchanted conservatives to alter the course of mainstream conservative ideology. Goldwater personified the rejection of compromise that Buckley, Kirk and others spoke against. From the perspective of the New Right, Goldwater provided an exemplary model of conservatism. Perhaps the most important aspect of Goldwater’s candidacy to this story was his popularity among conservative youth. Present at the 1960 Republican Convention, M. Stanton Evans described the young members’ of the audience reaction to Goldwater’s introduction as “bedlam”, continuing, “A great wave of sound exploded into the vaulted regions of the hall...the ovation for the senator was real and deep.”¹³

Thus, the foundations of a new upsurge in the youth conservative movement were rooted in the arguments made by the likes of Buckley, Kirk, and Burnham. These arguments sought to sharpen the conservative agenda, which focused heavily on the support of American policies intended to oppose the spread of communism. Disenchanted conservatives, while eager to criticize contemporary trends, chose not apply their ideology to specific domestic issues.¹⁴ Instead these new conservatives committed themselves to “the entirety of [their] Western civilization. Unlike liberals, [they] did not believe that any single issue (like ‘peace’ or ‘civil rights’ for liberals) [could] present these essential qualities...which [were] worth fighting for.” In this respect, historians have noted a lack of specificity in the conservatives’

¹² Melvin Thorne, *American Conservative Thought Since World War II: The Core Ideas*, Westport, Connecticut: Westport Press 1990), 49, quoted in Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 65.

¹³ Evans, *Revolt on Campus*, 64, quoted in Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 16.

¹⁴ Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 63.

recommendations for change.¹⁵ The foundations of this new conservative movement remained largely ambiguous, lacking attention to specific issues of local and national importance. Civil Rights, for example, received little attention from national conservative movements. When conservatives did discuss civil rights, they did so using broad, unspecific arguments, which focused on the primacy of state sovereignty in dealing with racial issues. To some extent, this ambiguity explains success that the agenda had in mobilizing conservative youth. Framing the conservative agenda in terms of broad principles and concepts, Buckley and others removed the possibility of fragmentation within the movement. From the groundswell of youthful momentum, conservative students around the country began to take steps towards revitalizing conservative ideology. Conservative UW students joined this crusade against New Left ideology and radicalism that developed throughout the 1960s.

THE WISCONSIN CONSERVATIVE CLUB

Soviet attempts to broaden the influence of communism in Eastern Europe coupled with Joseph McCarthy's influence in state politics encouraged the UW Board of Regents' lack of patience in dealing with campus protest and dissent during the early 1950s. Marginalizing the voice of dissent against the Korean War, the faculty Committee on Student Conduct placed nineteen protesters on academic probation following the 11 May, 1950 anti-military demonstration at the ROTC review staged annually at Camp Randall. During the early 1950s voices of campus discontent sought to extend the rights and privileges of expression by defending basic principles of academic freedom. These principles guaranteed students and faculty protection against the ridicule and punishment that resulted from voicing alleged "communist sympathies." During this time the UW administration

¹⁵ Robert Schuchman, "YAF and the New Conservatism," *The New Guard*, March, 1962, 3, quoted in Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 55-60, 140.

actively pursued campus policies that attempted to quell the growth of student dissent.¹⁶ As several historians have shown, however, the administration's conservative attempts to mute liberal discontent ultimately failed and the "rise of student power" brought with it an invigorated form of student opposition.¹⁷

In a broad sense, the conservative actions of the UW administration during the 1950s produced opposite responses from the student body. In one respect, initiatives to temper the voice of discontent further inflamed students. At the same time, such efforts provided an ideological impetus for other students to organize in response to the perceived dangers of leftist ideology. The Wisconsin Conservative Club (WCC) represents the most poignant example of such an organization interested in furthering the spread of conservative ideology as a response to the growing popularity of New Left ideas.

Officially chartered in 1956, the WCC began its efforts in furthering the popularity of conservative ideology through grassroots initiatives not commonly associated with conservative groups. Such efforts included "ringing doorbells on campus in an attempt to spark interest."¹⁸ Catalyzed by the efforts of Alan McCone, a senior honor student in chemical engineering, the WCC represents a clear example of the principled conservative youth movements that Buckley claimed essential to the continuance of a strong, unified conservative movement. Stating that the WCC had "no political connections or ambitions other than the promotion of a conservative philosophy," McCone distinguished the WCC as an organization concerned solely with the spread of conservative ideology rather than political success and advancement.¹⁹

McCone, in offering a self-portrait of campus conservatives,

¹⁶ Cronon and Jenkins, *The University of Wisconsin*, 383-446.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 432. For a demographic analysis of the rise of mass youth culture, see Suri, *Power and Protest*, Chapter 3, 1-14.

¹⁸ "University's Conservative Club Would Open Grandma Jones' Eyes," *Wisconsin State Journal*, 7 June, 1959.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

ARCHIVE: A JOURNAL OF UNDERGRADUATE HISTORY delineated the core principles of the WCC and explained the nature of conservative students' concerns. "Conservatives," he proclaimed, "are dubious about the results of government planning or welfare services that are compulsory [and] they don't see the advantage in giving ground to hostile foreign powers (like the Soviets)."²⁰ McCone asserted that the WCC remained "dedicated to halting further centralization of the federal government so as to protect the freedom and privacy of the individual."²¹

In combating the centralization of government, members of the WCC identified the proliferation of New Left ideology on college campuses as a serious threat to the foundations of American democracy: "The essential values of a free society are being neglected in our universities."²² In an effort to gauge the support of New Left ideology among UW faculty members, the WCC distributed an ideological survey among history, economics, and social science professors in the spring of 1959. Records show that the initiative did not receive a warm response. One can only imagine the icy response McCone most likely received from faculty members who interpreted the survey as an effort to publicize their personal viewpoints. McCone followed his initial inquiry with an apologetic response, stating the WCC's intentions to drop the survey project. While the concerns of those faculty members unwilling to participate in the survey may have been legitimate, one cannot overlook the effect this episode must have had on members of the WCC. The faculty's unwillingness to entertain the WCC's inquiry surely did not change the perspective of conservative students.²³

²⁰ Letter to Professors in Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology from Alan McCone, Jr., President WISCONSIN CONSERVATIVE CLUB, 17 March 1959, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²¹ "Join the Wisconsin Conservative Club. Get an Education in Political Thought," Advertisement (Flyer), University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²² Wisconsin Conservative Club, Annual Report (1961-1962), June, 1962, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²³ Letter to Professors in Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology from Alan McCone, Jr., President WISCONSIN CONSERVATIVE CLUB, 17 March, 1959, University of Wisconsin Archives, The Wisconsin Conservative Club Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

The WCC sought to arm students with the rhetorical tools necessary to combat the spread of New Left ideology. Asking students “Can you defend your position in a political argument?” and then asserting that “The club will teach you how”, the WCC advertised its desire to provide the student body with rhetorical ammunition to use in engaging the New Left over issues such as to the extension of social welfare and arguments against perceived American imperialism.²⁴ WCC efforts to organize a “Symposium on Conservative Thought” further illustrate this intention. With such titles as “Why Liberalism Leads to Persecution” and “Psychological and Propaganda Aspects of Soviet Expansionism”, the Symposium represents a concrete example of the WCC’s efforts to expose UW students to a “healthy alternative” to the growing popularity of New Left ideology.²⁵

Abhorring ideological neutrality, the WCC encouraged UW students develop rigid ideological positions:

In our day, ‘middle-of-the-roader’ is more an excuse for intellectual sloppiness than a guide to moral discipline...Halfway between the theft of a small amount and the theft of a large amount is robbery all the way, no matter how you slice it.²⁶

WCC initiatives, like the Symposium, sought to provide “bait which [would] allow the Club [WCC] to interest the greatest number of students in the shortest possible time.”²⁷ This competition for the interest of students further supports the notion of the WCC as an organization concerned solely with spread of conservative principles. At the same time, the WCC recognized the

²⁴ “Join the Wisconsin Conservative Club. Get an Education in Political Thought,” Advertisement (Flyer), University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²⁵ Letter to Conservative Friends around Wisconsin from the Wisconsin Conservative Club, 3 April, 1959, 1962 Program of the Wisconsin Conservative Club, October, 1961, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²⁶ Wisconsin Conservative Club—Clichés of Socialism, Number 17, “I’m a Middle-Of-The-Roader”, Leonard E. Read [Reprinted from the Foundation of Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, New York], University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²⁷ Financial Picture—Encouraging Club Program and Strategy Attracting Support, REPORT, 3 April 1959, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

fact that the fruits of their labor would come to bear later on in the lives of those minds they helped to change. Believing that “one of the features which makes the Conservative Club attractive to students is the chance to mix with businessmen and other good citizens in the state”, the WCC attempted to engrain a core set of conservative principles in students by exposing them to individuals already aware of the virtue of a capitalist system unmolested by the meddling hand of the federal government.²⁸

To what extent then did the WCC succeed in furthering the spread of conservative ideology at the UW? The substantial expansion of the WCC operating budget, increasing from \$4377 in 1959 to approximately \$15000 in 1962, due in large part to private donations from local conservatives, suggests significant organizational growth.²⁹ This budgetary expansion facilitated the establishment of a library filled with conservative literature, the publishing of an original periodical, *INSIGHT AND OUTLOOK*, and the staffing and maintenance of the club headquarters.³⁰

Perhaps a more important indication of the success of the WCC is the rigor and excitement with which members of the WCC expressed their desire in continuing their crusade. Waging war against the forces of collectivism required high morale among the soldiers. Trumpeting its successes, the WCC asserted its place among the groups competing for the minds of UW students:

In the course of its five-year history, the University of Wisconsin Conservative Club has established several beachheads on the stern and hidebound shores of campus liberalism. During the 1961-1962 academic year, the Conservative Club has had notable success at rushing in through the sally ports of the Liberal citadel to lay waste to the inhabitants.³¹

²⁸ Letter to Conservative Friends around Wisconsin from the Wisconsin Conservative Club, 3 April 1959, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

²⁹ 1962 Program of the Wisconsin Conservative Club, October, 1961, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7.

³⁰ Wisconsin Conservative Club Annual Report (1961-1962), June 1962, University of Wisconsin Archives, WCC Papers, 20/3/2/2/7. This report also boasts that WCC's publication, *INSIGHT AND OUTLOOK*, had a readership of over 800 people in 40 states.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Unfortunately for the purposes of this analysis, the records of the WCC do not continue beyond 1962 with the exception of a single motivational letter written by David Derry, WCC Program Chairmen, in 1965. Whether or not the WCC's slide into obscurity was the result of its institutional collapse or its diminished notoriety given the rise of other more politically active conservative groups remains a matter of speculation. By 1965, the WCC's predominantly philosophical basis had most likely fallen short of the student body's interests. Perhaps more so than any decade since, UW students demanded tangible examples of ideologies put to use. The WCC offered no such examples and, thus, possessed similar inadequacies inherent in the national conservative movement.

Of greater importance is the role the WCC played as the first outspoken conservative student organization of the 1960s. Resisting the momentum of New Left student discontent, which would eventually careen out of control, the WCC presented UW students with a mechanism by which one could affirm the conservative initiatives taken by the UW Board of Regents in the early 1950s. At the same time, the WCC provided a conservative alternative and, thus, fostered ideological heterogeneity on campus.

The existence of the WCC in the late 1950s and early 1960s represents a new, dynamic attempt on the part of UW students to popularize their conservative philosophy. In this sense, the WCC represents a clear manifestation of Buckley and Kirk's conceptions. However, WCC existed as an organization concerned purely with the dissemination of conservative ideas. The WCC refrained from making reactionary criticisms of the dilution of conservative principles within the Republican Party. Operating in somewhat of a vacuum, WCC members paid little attention to national trends and tendencies of the broader conservative movement.

Whereas the WCC operated, to a large extent, with little regard for national conservative movements, the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) at the UW took part in a broader national conservative struggle against not only the perceived intrusion of liberalism in the conservative thinking, but the increasing prevalence of New Left radicalism on college campuses as well. Attempting to dispel the association of conservatism with “old age and people who look back to the good old days”, the YAF began as a national conservative youth movement concerned primarily with the revitalization of conservative principles in politics and American foreign policy³² Although officially a nonpartisan organization, members of YAF were spurred to action largely by the influence and presidential candidacy of Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater represented a tangible form of Buckley and others’ ideas. Symbolic of a newfound commitment to conservative principles, Goldwater invigorated students with an aggressive conservative message.

Surprisingly, UW YAF records indicate little, if any, interest in the candidacy of Barry Goldwater. Instead, UW YAF members concerned themselves more so with issues of predominance on campus, engaging mainly in an ideological crusade against the increasingly radical campus Left. Believing that “much of the liberalism that is permeating the campuses today has been accepted not by choice but by a process of osmosis”, David Keene, UW senior and National Director of YAF, articulated the goals of the UW YAF. Continuing the efforts of the WCC to expose students to a “responsible” alternative set of conservative beliefs and principles, the UW YAF took its fight against the campus Left one step further in objecting to the tendency of their counterparts to embrace radicalism:

³² “Campus Conservatives on the Move: The ‘Noisy Left’ Makes Headlines While YAF Multiplies It’s Membership”, *Manion Forum*, Weekly Broadcast No. 660, interview with David Keene, 28 May 1967, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers, 20/3/2/2/2.

The left, the so-called “New Left”, gets a lot of publicity, of course, because they engage in riots. I’ve [Keene] said that you can get more publicity by lying down in front of a train than you can by solving problems, and I think they [the left] have pretty well proved this.³³

Violent student revolts at Columbia University on 24 April 1968 legitimized Keene’s claims and provided a tangible example of a dangerous trend among students which, in the eyes of YAF members, necessitated organized opposition by conservative forces. While the UW YAF chapter existed as an organization somewhat independent of national YAF trends, this objection to radical activism was an integral component to the message of conservative UW students. In fact, UW YAF records indicate that publicizing this particular criticism of the New Left was the group’s most important objective.

The UW YAF’s initiatives to curtail the “noisy Left” began with a rational criticism of the methods that radicals employed in furthering their causes:

A university is an institution dedicated to the rational method, and for this reason it cannot tolerate the presence of those who reject reason and embrace physical force. It must be kept in mind that with the ‘student rebels’ we are not engaging in debate; we are confronting students who have announced their scorn for, and rejection of, such methods.³⁴

Furthermore, the UW YAF shared the concern of the WCC in questioning the ability of faculty members to offer legitimate opposition to the efforts of campus radicals:

The faculties are incapacitated by their radical members and their inane dogma. They will only assist the radical conversion of our universities into staging grounds for revolution. The problem will not be solved by the University community, obviously.³⁵

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “TO ALL THOSE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY,” fundraising letter, summer, 1968, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers, 20/3/2/2/2.

³⁵ “A Preliminary Report on THE UNIVERSITY PROBLEMS PROJECT,” Richard O. Wright, State Chairmen, undated, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers,

Armed with this conviction, the UW YAF undertook an ambitious legal campaign, referred to as the University Problems Project, which sought immunize the University against the spread of radicalism. Consisting of three objectives, the UW YAF proposed the formation of a faculty committee that would grant access to student groups interested in “peaceful dissent”.³⁶ In this sense, the UW YAF did propose a sensible alternative to radical campus protest prevalent during the 1960s. Prophetically, in June 1968, the UW YAF claimed that without such efforts, “students will threaten destruction of buildings... (and engage in) raids on the offices of professors.”³⁷ In light of the bombing of Sterling Hall two years later, this warning gives credence to the UW YAF’s concerns regarding the escalation of violence on campus.

Besides their struggle for the favor of the student body, the UW YAF devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to the formulation of a conservative global perspective. The UW YAF actively affirmed the broader intentions of American foreign policy and refused to cede ideological ground to radical protestors demanding American withdrawal from Southeast Asia. In an interview with conservative Clarence “Dean” Manion, radio talk show host and former President of the University of Notre Dame Law School, Keene recounted an episode that occurred in Madison that furthered his belief in the irrationality of leftist opposition. In 1965, the State Department had sent a panel of experts to Madison to talk about the American involvement in Vietnam. Keene recalled that:

The left had a field day shouting them [State Department panelists] down, harassing them and generally ridiculing them. They never did finish what they were trying to say, and quite frankly it wouldn’t have mattered if they had, because they didn’t know what they were talking about.³⁸

20/3/2/2/2.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ “TO ALL THOSE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE UNIVERSITY,” fundraising letter, summer, 1968, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers, 20/3/2/2/2.

³⁸ “Campus Conservatives on the Move: The ‘Noisy Left’ Makes Headlines While YAF Multiplies It’s Membership”, *Manion Forum*, Weekly Broadcast No. 660, interview with

Thus, the UW YAF sought to deprive the New Left contingent of any semblance of rational credibility regarding Vietnam. Furthermore, Keene articulated the intention of the YAF to “counteract the voices of appeasement that have been raised in recent years.”³⁹ The UW YAF supported the broader intentions of American involvement in Vietnam. Keene and others embraced policy that focused on opposing the spread of communism around the world.

At the same time, the UW YAF did not refrain from offering its own form of criticisms of American foreign policy. In describing the experience of the State Department panelists in Madison, Keene lamented the inadequacy of their background on the subject of Vietnam: “These so-called experts were from the commercial section of the State Department and served on the Latin American desk. The other expert...didn’t know any more about Vietnam than the other two.” Keene further doubted the ability of the United States government to recognize a larger struggle against an “International Communist bloc”.⁴⁰ While critical, Keene, however, did not advocate a complete policy overhaul. Rather, he favored a more aggressive commitment to engaging the spread of international communism. Keene decried the limited nature of American involvement and argued for a more aggressive, indiscriminant prosecution of the war effort. In seeking a more direct policy, Keene’s sentiments seem anomalous to those made by Buckley and Burnham in particular.

Apart from its critique of American diplomacy, the UW YAF also objected to certain American trade and financial aid arrangements with communist states. Referencing YAF’s assertion that “American foreign policy must be judged by this criterion: does it serve the just interests of the United States?,” Keene argued:

David Keene, 28 May 1967, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers, 20/3/2/2/2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Such trade strengthens existing Communist dictatorships at the expense of political reform...To aid the government of such a nation is not necessarily to aid the people; rather, aiding corrupt, totalitarian and economically inefficient Communist dictatorships may actually hurt those people we are so anxious to help...We are told, that we are building bridges to the people of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. But are we? Or are we building bridges to Brezhnev, Kadar, and Ulbricht?⁴¹

In doing so, Keene and members of the UW YAF again undertook the same endeavors as their counterparts around the nation in opposing extensive financial interactions with communist states. The skepticism of Keene's comments further suggests that the UW YAF questioned the utility of "east-west trade" in moderating Cold War tensions. The UW YAF's opposition to extensive financial interaction with communist states mirrors national YAF efforts to protest large American corporations such as Firestone and IBM for engaging in trade with communist states.⁴²

The UW YAF also objected strongly to the lack of interest President Johnson and the American State Department took in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1968. Consequently, on 22 August 1968, Keene announced the formation of the Student Committee for Freedom of Czechoslovakia (SCFC). Echoing the criticisms of disillusioned conservatives of the 1950s with regards to Hungary, the SCFC denounced American unwillingness to affirm Czech sovereignty: "If we abandon them today, as we abandoned the people of Hungary in 1956, their blood will be on our hands." Framing the issue in terms of a moral obligation, Keene and the UW YAF made an emotional appeal to Americans, designating 25 August "a day of vigil in observance of the plight of Czechoslovakian people".⁴³ Keene further articulated UW YAF's insistence that President Johnson pursue an aggressive

⁴¹ Testimony of David A. Keene before the Democratic Platform Committee, Subject: East-West Trade, Monday, 19 August 1960, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers, 20/3/2/2/2.

⁴² Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 101.

⁴³ Statement on the Czechoslovakian Situation for the Student Committee for Freedom in Czechoslovakia, David A. Keene, 22 August, 1968, University of Wisconsin Archives, UW YAF Papers, 20/3/2/2/2.

policy against the Soviet Union that took the following steps:

1. Institute an immediate and complete economic boycott of the Warsaw Pact nations involved in the attack of Czechoslovakia;
2. Meet with our NATO allies to discuss joint economic and political action against attacking nations;
3. Continue to insist that the United Nations impose any sanctions necessary to guarantee the freedom of the Czech nation and people.⁴⁴

In making these demands, the UW YAF further exposed the idealism inherent in its global conceptions. While conservative, the UW YAF, like their New Left counterparts, promulgated an ideal worldview, dissatisfied with the existing world order and confident in the utility of their suggestions and reservations.

The UW YAF's efforts also focused on domestic issues. John Powell of the *Daily Cardinal* identified UW YAF demonstrations on 7 July 1965 in support of section 14(b) of the Taft-Hartley Act as "the first time that a right-wing group [had] used demonstration tactics in Madison." The demonstrations came in response to Congressional discussions that suggested that President Johnson had considered repealing section 14 (b). Carrying signs that read "What's wrong with free unionism," 12 YAF demonstrators expressed their support for the clause, which permitted states to enact the right-to-work laws forbidding the union closed shop. Demonstrators distributed leaflets that stated that the UW YAF's efforts did not intend to advocate specifically a "right-to-work law in Wisconsin" but rather to:

Ensure respect for the expressed desires of the people of the 19 states which already passed right-to-work laws and to ensure that the people of Wisconsin... will have the right to enact right-to-work legislation to protect their citizens should abusive union practices ever make this necessary.⁴⁵

Affirming the importance of state sovereignty, the UW YAF's

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "The Right Pickets for Time As YAF Supports Taft-Hartley Clause", *Daily Cardinal*, 7 July, 1965.

demonstrations added a certain level of specificity to its conservative agenda. This specificity helped to distinguish the focus of the organization's conservative principles.

Ultimately, the story of the UW YAF runs both parallel and perpendicular to the national YAF movement during the 1960s. No better example of this exists than the striking lack of interest on the part of the UW YAF in the candidacy of Barry Goldwater. While the national YAF movement embraced Goldwater as the savior of true conservative principles, the Madison chapter remained relatively quiet in its support of the inflammatory Arizona Senator. Furthermore, UW YAF's support for Czechoslovakia and section 14 (b) of the Taft-Hartley Act illustrates tangible attempts to provide a positive program for change. While emphasizing the philosophical premises of conservatism, the UW YAF also worked to define its objectives in more specific terms. However, while diverging from its parent organization in several respects, the UW YAF shared a concrete interest in global affairs with its national organization.

UW YOUNG REPUBLICANS

Unlike the WCC and the UW YAF, the UW Young Republicans (UW YR) predated the campus strife of the 1960s. In fact, the UW YR had been upholding the foundations of conservatism as early as 1947 in their calls for the banning of the radical student organization, the American Youth for Democracy. Throughout the 1950s, the UW YR remained a relatively minor student group interested primarily in supporting the efforts of state legislators to obstruct the perceived influence of communist ideology.⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, the UW YR became especially active in their extensive support of Barry Goldwater and the "GOP team of Peace, Progress, and Prosperity" in 1964 but because of relatively small size (less than 300 members) failed to make a

⁴⁶ Cronon and Jenkins, *University of Wisconsin*, 400-411.

serious impact on campus.⁴⁷

However, preceding the 1966 mid-term elections, the UW YR underwent a substantial amount of institutional expansion. Between the fall of 1965 and the spring of 1966, the UW YR increased its membership by roughly 215, a 72% growth.⁴⁸ This exponential growth can be attributed largely to the recruitment efforts of the UW YR's leadership, namely Jon Guiles, UW student and chairman of the YR's. Guiles' sense of urgency provided the impetus through which the UW YR would drastically increase its campus base. Instructing membership booth works to "be courteous and avoid arguments," Guiles emphasized a non-combative recruitment strategy that focused on attracting the largest number of students possible. The UW YR's inclusive recruitment efforts are further evidenced by an initiative to offer *all* students a "Political Action Course in Practical Politics." Advertisements for the class encouraged "Republicans, Democrats, Independents and the Unconcerned" to take part in the course in order to become more effective citizens.⁴⁹ Through these efforts to increase the political awareness among students, the UW YR believed that an informed student body could develop into conservative student body receptive of the UW YR's ultimate goal: "to promote in every honorable manner the platforms and candidates of the Republican Party of Wisconsin."⁵⁰

Whereas the WCC and UW YAF remained largely nonpartisan in their scope, the UW YR embraced its existence as a partisan association. In many respects, the UW YR was more willing to follow the leadership that,

⁴⁷ A Program for You! Wisconsin, America, UW YR flyer, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

⁴⁸ Membership growth indicated in the September 1965 and March 1966 issues of the University of Wisconsin Young Republican Newsletters, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

⁴⁹ "How can you become a more effective member of your community? Take the political Action Course in Practical Politics", UW YR flyer, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵⁰ Constitution and By-Laws of the University of Wisconsin Young Republican Club, Article III, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

according to disillusioned conservatives, had subverted core conservative principles. The UW YR's efforts to bring speakers such as Nelson Rockefeller and Robert Taft, Jr. to Madison illustrates its support for national figures endorsed by the National Republican Party but unpopular in certain conservative sects.⁵¹ Further evidence indicates a substantial amount of intra-organizational conflict existed especially in the case of UW YR, which needed to be saved from "intraparty destruction" through the reorganization of the group's structure and focus.⁵² Elections held within the organization for leadership positions spawned extensive criticism coming from group members. In an abortive attempt to replace John Guiles as Chairman, Douglas Ludy in 1965 denounced the jaded intra-organizational discourse: "Far too often we have been all talk and no results. We have been too concerned with senseless squabbling within our own organization." Ludy continued his criticism of the organization's inability to cultivate Republican support throughout the state: "Many of the schools in other areas of Wisconsin are not receiving adequate information about what is going on at the state capitol."⁵³

Despite internal conflicts, the UW YR remained unified in its complete support of American involvement in Southeast Asia. Unlike the UW YAF, which affirmed American efforts but advocated a change in policy, the UW YR offered total support to American foreign policy. Formed in response to "the continuing demonstrations of the irresponsible minority on the nation's college campuses", the Committee on National Student Citizenship in Every National Case of Emergency (CONSCIENCE) received considerable support from the UW YR, especially after appointing Guiles as its Wisconsin State chairman.

⁵¹ UW YR Press Release, Fred C. Borgarht-Publicity Chairmen, 1965, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

⁵² "A Practical Political Suggestion", Judith Ann Faber, 25 March 1966, paper written for English 201, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 2.

⁵³ Ludy to Young Republicans, 27 April 1965, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

In response to anticipated anti-war rallies in Washington D.C. and Oakland on 22 November 1966, CONSCIENCE scheduled a series of “lecture-ins” titled “Vietnam: Responsible Democratic citizenship in the University Community.”⁵⁴ The UW YR affirmed the importance of student support for American foreign policy and deplored the subversive effects of mass demonstrations and protest, intending the program to:

Reassert the image of responsibility, dignity, courage, and moderation on the part of American college students...and inform President Johnson...that the great majority of American college students feel it their responsibility to support the national government at this time of international crisis...⁵⁵

In this respect, the intentions of the UW YR mirrored those of the WCC and the UW YAF which emphasized the importance of a well informed, responsible student body. Interestingly, Guiles expressed his willingness to cooperate with UW Young Democrats on a bipartisan basis in cultivating support for CONSCIENCE, suggesting that the UW YR viewed the UW Young Democrats as a legitimate student organization. Confident in the effect of CONSCIENCE’s efforts to produce “dramatic but dignified symbol[s] of the moderation, courage, and good judgment of the great majority of American university students”, Hal Scott and Michael Cummings, National Co-Chairmen of CONSCIENCE, identified a critical linkage between all three UW conservative student groups; the association of conservatism with a “respectable” form of student action based on rational judgment and void of emotional impulses. Scott and Cummings further argued that student protests “(1) undermine[d] the authority of the President, (2) demoralize[d] America’s friends, allies, and men at the front, and (3) discourage[d] the Vietcong from seeking a

⁵⁴ Memo to UW YR from Jon Guiles, undated, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵⁵ “To the Student Body:”, Hal S. Scott, Michael S. Cummings--National Chairmen of CONSCIENCE, undated, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

CONCLUSION

To a large extent, the existence of these conservative student groups clarifies one's understanding of the manner by which the rhetoric of unsatisfied conservatives of the 1950s translated directly into a youth movement concerned with remaking their surroundings. All three organizations sought to influence students in a manner contrary to the efforts New Left activists. Each organization recognized the urgency with which their mission had to be prosecuted.

Interestingly, all three campus organizations refrained from making any legitimate statement regarding arguably the most inflammatory issue of the 1960s, civil rights. At the national level, the conservative movements of the 1960s, particularly YAF, avoided participation in the civil rights debate. Barry Goldwater's position on civil rights encapsulates much of the broader sentiments of the conservative movement. Framing his opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the context of the federal infringement on states rights, Goldwater argued, “social and cultural change, however desirable, should not be affected by the engines of national power.”⁵⁷ Members of the national YAF made similar arguments in opposing the public accommodations component of the Civil Rights Act and the broad extension of power to the federal government.⁵⁸ The lack of concern UW conservative groups exhibited for these issues suggests that these groups accepted the established conservative position, which viewed federal civil rights legislation as an infringement on states sovereignty.

All three organizations were hopeful that providing students with a

⁵⁶ Memo to UW YR from Jon Guiles, undated, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵⁷ Barry Goldwater, *Conscience of a Conservative*, (New York: Hillman Books, 1960), 71-72, quoted in Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 18.

⁵⁸ Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 191.

conservative alternative would continue to yield positive social and political consequences in years to come. At the same time, these organizations hoped to provide a political training ground for future conservative leaders. Warren Knowles, Governor of Wisconsin, commented on this feeling of optimism among the conservative ranks:

We must recognize that our young citizens have become the most important element in American politics. By 1970 more than 50% of the voting age population will be 25 years old—or younger. With the courage, vision, and self-discipline to tackle the new and difficult and controversial, we will be a vital force in the development of this era of youth.⁵⁹

The differences between the WCC, the UW YAF, and the UW YR accentuate the complexity of the conservative movement at this time. David Derry's 1965 letter written to members of the WCC further complicates one's understanding of the connections between these groups. Writing, "I am, at present, the program director of the club [WCC]...I am a member of the University's Young GOP and the Young Americans for Freedom...I am a former member of the infamous collegians for Goldwater", Derry's membership in multiple conservative groups illustrates the disunity of the conservative campus movement. Derry's statement indicates the most plausible explanation for conservative student groups' inability to secure thorough historical treatment. Little evidence exists which suggests that efforts were made among these groups to cooperate in popularizing the virtues of conservative ideology.

The importance of religion, particularly Christianity, in the conservative message provides another explanation for the relative historical obscurity of UW conservative groups. Religious homogeneity was not a characteristic of the UW student body. By the 1960s, students from eastern states, many of them Jewish, comprised a sizeable component of the UW

⁵⁹ Y-GOP Flyer, Warren Knowles, undated, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Judith Ann Faber Papers, Box 1, Folder 3.

student population, which had become increasingly active in campus politics and activism.⁶⁰ Calls for a return to traditional conservatism, which relied heavily on conceptions of divinity and absolute truths, did not resonate with non-Christian students already interested in New Left ideas.

Certain instances in this story suggest that conservative UW students recognized, to an extent, the inadequacy of a conservative message based exclusively on philosophic arguments. UW YAF efforts to reinforce its conservative agenda with specific initiatives—support for Czechoslovakia and Section 14 (b) — illustrate a legitimate attempt to rectify the inadequacies of the broader conservative movement. UW YR Secretary Bob Pelner’s criticism of the Republican Party further suggests that UW conservatives were aware of the inadequacies of their movement: “How long has it been since the Republican Party has initiated a positive program?” Citing several recent Democratic reform movements (the “war-on-poverty”, Medicare, and the Peace Corps), Pelner asked, “Where were we [UW YR]? Were we suggesting possible alternatives, or were we fighting them every step of the way?” Pelner concluded that the UW YR needed to “becom[e] more of an action group than a reaction group.”⁶¹ Conservative UW students exhibited a sophisticated awareness of the conservative movement’s broader inadequacies.

Despite this awareness, the most apparent shortcoming of the conservative student movement at the UW was its inability to reconcile adequately conservative calls for a return to principle with considerations for electoral success. In this sense, the difficulties of the UW conservative student groups mirror the larger problems of the conservative movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The UW YR came the closest but failed to integrate the UW YAF in its push for greater visibility on campus. At the height of their popularity, conservative student groups were small in comparison to single

⁶⁰ Cronon and Jenkins, *University of Wisconsin*, 450-451.

⁶¹ “Factions Scuffle After Liberal GOP Meeting”, *Daily Cardinal*, 1 October 1965.

Students for Democratic Society (SDS) demonstrations, which often times numbered over 1000 students.⁶²

Apart from the inherent inadequacies of the different conservative movements, each group enriched the intellectual diversity on campus by challenging mainstream New Left ideology. Although it is difficult to speculate on the effect that these conservative groups had on diminishing the dominance of radical activists during the 1960s, one can say with certainty that UW students did not speak with a unified voice in protesting American foreign and domestic policy.

⁶² See Cronon and Jenkins, *University of Wisconsin*, 447-520 for a complete history of student protests during the latter half of the 1960s.