

Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fall  
of the American Consensus*

An Author Meets Critics Roundtable Discussion

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Response: Rick Perlstein

Chair: Henry Farrell

Transcript edited for style and prepared by Henry Farrell

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<sup>†</sup>Due to time constraints, Paul Krugman did not have an opportunity to check through the edited transcript. Caveat lector. In addition, in the period between the panel and the preparation of the transcripts, Professor Krugman was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics.

## Henry Farrell - Introductory Remarks

So let's get this show on the road. This is an 'Author meets Critics' roundtable about Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland*. It's a great book, and I recommend that all of you read all 500 or 600 pages of in hardback. It's a very interesting, very helpful, very informative take on how it is that Richard Nixon and the forces surrounding him reshaped American politics during the 1960s and early 1970s. We have here gathered a distinguished group of political scientists and historians; what I would like to do is to give each of these people ten minutes to give a brief response to the book. Then after that, Rick can give a response. We have quite an audience for an 8am panel; I'm very grateful to all of you for having dragged yourselves out of your beds to come along. We'll start with Paul Krugman, who's an economist at Princeton University, and a regular columnist for the *New York Times*, then move to Paul Pierson, who is head of the Department of Politics at the University of California at Berkeley, who has written a lot both on historical institutionalism and (with Jacob Hacker) on the contemporary state of American politics and the forces driving current political developments. Nolan McCarty at Princeton has both served to help administer the Woodrow Wilson school and has written extensively on polarization among many other topics in American politics. Finally, we have Eric Rauchway, who is a historian at the University of California at Davis, who has written on the Gilded Age and other periods, and also has a direct interest in relevant and contemporary politics.

## Paul Krugman - Comment

So, I once read an essay on the types of book reviews you could write. As best as I recall, one of them was called the Murray Slotnick method of book reviewing. If you were reviewing a book by Murray Slotnick, you would say, 'Murray Slotnick is no Proust; Proust in his younger days ...,' and then you would go on to talk about whatever it was that you wanted to talk about. I'm going to do a bit of that now; before I do, let me say that I might be the oldest person up here. I actually remember all of this stuff vividly; not 1964 and Reagan but 1968 and so on. And part of what is so good about the book is that it conveys that real sense of chaos. It was far beyond what most people actually experienced in their lives, but there was enough of it that you really had the feeling that society was coming apart, and it was very much part of the perception that even people who were very liberal had at the time. I remember there was a line in a Walker Percy novel with a near future setting with a dystopian scenario, in which he said, 'As things fell apart, the center did not hold; however the GDP continued to rise.' What actually happened in the forty years following was the opposite. Things didn't fall apart, the center *did* hold, but the GDP faltered and we had this failure of working American living standards to rise.

What struck me, and this is where I get to the Marcel Proust book review part, is that those conditions that created the possibilities for Nixonism are gone. There aren't any urban riots, there aren't any hippies, there aren't any war protestors. In general, the American left is completely transformed or dissipated, depending on how you look at it. The thing against which against Nixon campaigned and against which Reagan campaigned has completely gone; even the crime issue has faded away. But the right is frozen in amber. Nixonism was sold as a defense against social chaos, against urban violence and an anti-American left. All those things are gone, but Nixonism is still there. The only thing that is still there is the Orthogonians-Franklins thing - the social outcasts who feel resentment against those whom they feel to be smarter or more stylish or something than they are. Human life is like that, but Nixon really did discover the power of that resentment, and obviously that plays a big role in the current campaign. In the ad I saw when I was eating my muffin this morning, the guy with seven houses was nonetheless managing to make

himself the Orthogonian and Barack Obama the Franklin.

Here's what the book *doesn't* say, which isn't a criticism. What happened, very crucially, was that Nixonism got institutionalized. The creation of a set of institutions - think-tanks, media organizations, all of it funded by a relatively small number of sources (it really comes down to about six angry billionaires, when all is said and done), creating a structure which perpetuates the political style and political goals that were created during these years. Rick has written a lot about the American Enterprise Institute, but not here - AEI was transformed into what we know today towards the end of the period that Rick covers here. The Heritage Foundation is founded in the last two years covered in this book. Those things create an institutional basis for maintaining this style of politics, and then what happens thereafter, is that although the objective reality of urban riots and hippies and anti-war protesters is gone, they are able to find, to conjure up the appearance of equivalents thereafter. No doubt, my claim is colored by the current politics of the last eight years, but that is what you see today.

We have a lot of what you might call fake Orthogonians, or professional Orthogonians now. Instead of the people who actually had a terrible time in college and felt inferior or left out, you have people who have actually had a very nice life all the way along, with cushy jobs at these conservative institutions, who are effectively quite nicely paid apparatchiks. But part of what they are paid to do is to simulate outrage at the cultural elite, the Franklins of the book. So, the whole thing persists into the present.

One thing I wonder about is how much path dependence there is in all of this. How much of our politics has been set by five years of social turmoil that created this structure that causes the polarization of our politics to persist. If we had somehow managed to get through that critical period without Watts, and without the Democratic convention of 1968 and so on, would everything have been different even if, in all other respects, the objective realities we live in were the same? Of course, I don't know the answer to that.

But anyway, an amazing story. The only thing I can say is that I found it very painful. Again, I remember this stuff, and we thought at the time, during the Nixon years, that this was as bad as it could get, and the real tragedy is that that turns out to have been wrong. Thanks.

## Paul Pierson - Comment

It's a pleasure to be here; *Nixonland* is a terrific book and this is a great panel. What I have to say will connect in interesting ways with what Paul Krugman just had to say. I started reading this book and I had two reactions as I got into it. One, which has been shared by all of the reviews that I've read of the book, is that people find it absolutely riveting. It brings a time alive in a way that takes enormous talent, and enormous work. This makes the book hard to put down, even though it's six hundred pages long. But the second reaction was 'how do you talk to a bunch of political scientists at a professional meeting about this book, because, in a good sense, it is very much not a work of political science. People often talk about the control and energy of Rick's prose, and that is there, and also his eye for a telling scene. The book is chock-full of scenes, particular events and particular places where things happened, that Rick uses to move the story forward and to illuminate parts of what was going on. To me, what stood out the most (and admittedly I share some of his partisan biases so I might not be the best person to ask about this) was his capacity for empathy with very different vantage points. He brings you into what this period felt like for people who came from very, very different directions. In our language, this book is a powerful exercise in hermeneutics, among other things.

It's not easy to extract the essence of *Nixonland*, because it's not set up the way that a work of social science would be, with a clear thesis and propositions, and evidence provided in a systematic

way for those propositions. But as I got into the heart of the book, I came to the conclusion that despite all the things that make this book unique, it converges with pretty standard narratives of post-1945 American politics. I think that these narratives are shared by the sophisticated press, by most historians and most political scientists.

And the narrative goes something like this: the crucibles of civil rights and Vietnam, and their association in the popular mind with rising disorder, fractured the New Deal coalition, leading to the realignment of the American South and politics more generally. That realignment has two big effects. One is to strengthen the relative power in the two-party system of the Republican party, and the other, which is linked to that, is to increase the ideological sorting between the two parties, so that the conservatives are clearly in the Republican camp, and liberals are clearly in the Democratic camp. This leads to polarization. Those are the two main features of American politics ever since; the rising relative power of the Republican party, and increased polarization. I should say parenthetically that this narrative fits pretty well with the narrative that you get in Paul Krugman's recent book, which also puts very heavy emphasis on racial conflict and turmoil related to race in the shifting patterns of American politics since the 1960s.

Now clearly there is a lot to the story. There's a reason why people gravitate to this narrative. Clearly - and I think that Rick brings this out very well - there's a reason why Nixon's role in all that continues to resonate today in American politics, even if in somewhat different forms, along the lines that Paul was just talking about. So what's not to love? Actually, I think that there is quite a bit about this narrative that we should pause to think about before we accept it wholeheartedly. I want to suggest a different narrative. My guess is that there are elements of both that need to be brought into a complete story. But before I do that, I want to take a step back and ask: what is the basic vision of politics here? As I take it, the vision of politics in this book, is also the vision in a lot of popular commentary about American politics, and also in how a lot of political scientists look at American politics. At its heart are these huge spectacles we call elections (we saw a spectacle last night)<sup>1</sup>, circuses that bring together two broad groups, under a red, white and blue tent. The two groups at first are not Republicans and Democrats. On the one side is a group that is a fairly inchoate mass of voters, who are only paying a little bit of attention to what's going on. On the other is an equally inchoate set of ambitious politicians, individual strivers who hawk their wares to the voters, and whose success or failure is partly based on the wave of events - Vietnam, riots, an assassination - and partly their skill in riding those waves.

As I said, this is the way most journalists analyze American politics, and I think that in a somewhat different form, it's actually the way a lot of political scientists analyze American politics. Although political scientists would pay less attention to the personalities and leadership qualities of particular politicians, they would agree with the idea that you basically have a bunch of entrepreneurial politicians, who are acting as pretty autonomous actors, and maneuvering for position for reasons of personal ambition.

Now what's pushed aside in this vision of politics? I think that here are two critical things that ought to be integrated in a core vision of what modern politics is about that are pushed to the side here. One is policy, and the other is interest groups. Despite my really deep admiration for this book, there is very little about either of these things in *Nixonland*. I think that a vision of politics that shunts policy and interest groups to the side is likely to suffer as a consequence.

Why should policy be central? I really shouldn't even have to spell this out. Why do we care about politics at all? We care about politics largely because we think that what governments do matters. We think that the people who exercise authority, and are allowed to tell people what

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<sup>1</sup>The panel took place the morning after Barack Obama's speech accepting the Democratic nomination in the 2008 Presidential election.

they can do and what they can't do, and what they have to do, makes a difference for the quality of people's lives. And I think that pretty clearly, it does. If you've spent a little bit of time in countries that have different political systems, and you can see the effects of governance. So policy matters, and if you take governance - the substance of what governments do - out, then politics becomes just like a sports competition. Instead of talking about the red team and the blue team, you might as well be talking about the Celtics and the Lakers.

Why interest groups? For two reasons. One, because groups care about policy. Elections are means for them; they are not the end. One way to see this, as Lee Drutman was saying to me yesterday, is that if you look at business and their efforts to put money into the political process, something like a tenth of what they put into the political process goes to elections. The rest of it goes into lobbying. So they care about elections, and I am not trying to say that elections don't matter, because they matter a lot. But they're not the only thing that matters by a long shot. Groups care about policy and they have unique capacities that individuals don't have. This is the second reason why we should care about groups - they have unique capacities that allow them to influence governance in a way that atomized voters have a much harder time doing. They can mobilize massive resources, and coordinate these resources. That's extremely important, especially in the American political system, which is so fractured, where there are so many places where politics is happening. Groups can stay in there for the long term. Paul's story about the institutionalization of Nixon is a story about groups that were in there for the long haul, not just on election day, when the circus came to town.

That's an alternative vision, and I think that ultimately the goal would be to try to merge these different visions. I think there's a puzzle for those who see the Sixties as a crucible. If you were to look not at elections, but at what the government was actually doing, the role that government was playing in the lives of Americans, especially with respect to domestic policy, would 1968 or 1972 be seen as a turning point? I think the answer is clear - absolutely not. 1968 and 1972 come right smack in the big bulge of government activism, the rise in government activism that takes place roughly between the early 1960s and the late 1970s; I would say 1964 to 1978. If anything, all this {textitaccelerates while Nixon is in the White House. Social spending increases more rapidly under Nixon than it does under Johnson; you get a massive expansion in Social Security; you get the nationalization of food stamps; you get the nationalization of old age assistance. There are lots of other examples.

If you look at regulation, there's a huge expansion in government regulatory activity, especially with respect to consumer protection and the environment during the same period. Again, it doesn't slow down when Nixon comes into the White House. If you look at Mayhew's list of landmark pieces of legislation and look at the regulatory ones, there are twice as many major regulatory laws passed between 1964 and 1977 as there are if you combine the thirteen year period before that and the twenty five year period after that. More than twice as much regulatory legislation in about a third of the time. This is when it was all happening. The Nixon presidency is right in the middle of it.

When does it stop? It doesn't stop in 1981. Roughly, it stops in 1978. The defeat of key domestic initiatives like industrial relations reform and health care reform; the passage of a completely different kind of tax bill, much more oriented towards business and the affluent than the tax bills that had come previously, but a tax bill that would look very familiar to more recent discussions in American politics. You see also the beginnings of a deregulatory push that would eventually remake government and the connection between government and the economy. And all this comes *after* the huge Democratic electoral victory of 1974, and the recapture of the White House in 1976. I know there are more wonderful books coming, but I would suggest that if you think about this vision of politics, one that takes governance as a central object and not just electoral contestation as a central object, you might want to use a title like *Carterland* or *ChamberOfCommerceLand*,

but I'm not very good at titles.

### **Nolan McCarty - Comment**

First of all, I want to know which book my co-panelists read; mine has 748 pages plus footnotes, not just 600. I have 10 minutes to cover 748 pages; that's less than 1 second per page. So rather than give a broad overview, as has been done very well already on the panel, I'm going to talk about some very specific aspects of the book, bringing out, as Paul Pierson did, some aspects that are perhaps more of interest to the professional political scientist.

Let me start out by stipulating that this is a very rich, insightful, entertaining, riveting book. There are some difficulties with the book. One is simply that it's a story that has been told a lot more often than, say, the story of the 1964 Goldwater nomination, which Rick wrote about previously. In fact, as Paul Pierson noted, the role of the backlash and the Southern realignment have pretty well become conventional wisdom among high end journalists and political scientists. The story is one that's going to seem very, very familiar to those of us who have thought about and studied these issues.

The second issue - and this too relates to something that Paul Pierson said - is that the periodization of its narrative becomes a little awkward for trying to understand the big picture of how we got to the contemporary American political context. The periodization book-ends the landslide election of 1964 and the election of 1972. Because it's Nixonland, we get to go a little before 1964; we learn a little bit about Nixon, his background, his origin and lead up, but we don't go very far after 1972. The book ends in 1972 with a broad, sweeping statement that Nixonland perhaps spawns the politics that is still with us today. I think, and this very much echoes Paul Pierson's comment, that if we had tried to bring in developments after 1972, and put them into this context, it might be less obvious that Nixonland is still with us in various ways.

The other issue with this kind of dramatic bookending of the Democratic landslide and the Republican landslide is that it is intended in some way to suggest this major transformation of American politics that took place over this period. But if we'd used bookend elections of 1960 and 1976, we would have two pretty close deadlocked elections, and it would look very different, even though we still have the turmoil of the 1964 to 1972 period shaping the system.

In trying to make the case for the dramatic transformational aspects of American politics, there is a lot of attention paid in the book to the Congressional elections of 1966 and 1970, to show the electoral backlash against New Deal liberalism that took place in those elections. But I think if you look closely at the outcomes of those elections, they are actually fairly unremarkable, both in terms of party turnover and the ideological composition of the two parties, especially in Congress. This is something I've spent a lot of my career looking at. Take 1966 for example. On the face of it, it looks like a very dramatic electoral tide in favor of the Republicans; Republicans picked up 47 seats. But most of the seats they pick up - at least 36 of them - are seats they should never have lost in 1964. In fact, if you go back to 1956, the Republican caucus in terms of its size and ideological composition looks almost identical. It is less obvious, at least in the House, that 1966 is a watershed moment.

If you look at the Senate elections, it's even less clear - the three seats that the Republicans picked up were Mark Hatfield, Chuck Percy and Howard Baker; three moderates, two of whom became dedicated opponents of the Vietnam war. So it's very hard to see 1966 as a backlash. Of course, Ronald Reagan was elected as Governor of California - there are some aspects of a backlash, but it is less clear than the book makes out. Perhaps as Rick concedes, 1970 is less remarkable because the economy is bad, and the Republicans underperform. Even still, we don't see the kind of changes in the ideological compositions of the parties, the polarization and the

sorting of the ideologies that Paul talked about until we get to elections like 1974, which moves the Democratic party in a much more progressive, liberal direction, and 1978, 1980, 1994, which moved the Republicans in a much more conservative direction. In terms of thinking about the polarization of American politics, 1966 and 1970 are pretty much non-events.

A second concern I have with the book is as follows. In my work I've argued that polarization on economic issues and across income classes and lines has become more pronounced in recent years.<sup>2</sup> It has important policy consequences, as we know, in terms of the distribution of resources in society and so forth. Other political scientists have also found that the role of economic issues remains at least as important if not more important than social cultural issues, race, culture and the backlash. Obviously, these things can be related in various ways, and I believe that they are, but the book doesn't really address the economic changes that take place during the 1970s. This is in part because it stops in 1972; that's the narrative device. But, I have a harder time linking up Nixonland with contemporary politics because of that missing link to economic policy and economic polarization.

A third concern, I think, is that there is very little attention to the conservative ideas that were fomenting during this period. It's understood that this is primarily social history, but I think that more attention to the conservative intellectuals would provide some context to what is going on. Just as one example; the only neo-conservative who gets much attention in the book is Moynihan, and that's primarily because of his direct connection with Nixon as part of the administration. *The Public Interest, Commentary*; those aren't even in the index. *The National Review* is included, but again, it's Buckley's role in electoral politics and in melding together the conservative coalition that gets attention, not any of the ideas that were published in there.

Another concern as a mainstream political scientist is that there's very little attention to public opinion, and whether or not there are big fundamental transformations among the bulk of Americans on this issue. Most of the voices of regular people that come out from the book come from newspaper reporting. This has some obvious advantages - people can say what they really think in such an unstructured setting. They're not forced to say 'I sort-of support, kind-of support or don't support x, y or z,' but there's the disadvantage that we don't get a sense of how representative particular viewpoints were. In fact, when I talk to reporters, I rarely find that what they said is a representative sample of what I said. So, I think it would have been good to pay a little more attention to traditional public opinion work in the era. And also, to have paid attention to work on electoral data. There is electoral data used to make particular cases about ethnic politics, identity politics and backlash, but primarily, they are secondary-sourced ecological statements like 'The Polish neighborhoods voted 'x.' Perhaps it's not right for this particular book to do that, but future scholars who take up the challenge of explaining Nixonland will want to analyze polling and electoral data.

A minor point - one that we wouldn't expect in such a book, but one that I think is very important for understanding the politics here - is some kind of comparative perspective. The United States is obviously not the only country that has a student rebellion and crime problems. Some countries responded differently than the US, and it's important to weigh that in if we're trying to understand the lasting influence of the turmoil.

And finally, the other book I read this summer - not the *only* other book - was by my history colleague, Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan*,<sup>3</sup> which covers essentially the same period. This opens the question - especially if we take the last sentence of the book which says that Nixonland is still with us - of whether this is true, or whether it's the Age of Reagan, since there is a great deal

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<sup>2</sup>See further, Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal (2006), *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, the MIT Press.

<sup>3</sup>Sean Wilentz (2008), *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008*, Harper.

of overlap in materials. Now, is it just a matter of which president we associate with the era? I think not - they had different styles of politics. Nixon was more resentful and mean, Reagan was more optimistic; at least rhetorically he had a more inclusive style of politics. They have different policies, different emphases on economic versus foreign policy, different approaches to both of those. I would argue, based on my work on polarization, Reagan did something that Nixon desperately wanted to do but couldn't, which was to turn the Republican party into a conservative party. I understand that Rick is going to move this forward, and I think that this is a key question that he's going to have to grapple with.

## Eric Rauchway - Comment

I'm the historian - I have historian things to say. So I hope that this will help to draw some of these threads together. I want to begin by talking about something I saw because I happened to stay up far too late watching coverage of the speech last night. I saw Pat Buchanan - that's Pat 'we can break the country in half and it will leave us with far the larger half' Buchanan - talk about how wonderful Obama's speech was, and how it came from the heart of America, and spoke *to* the heart of America. Coming from Pat Buchanan, this is quite something, and it leads me to think: what does it mean that we still live in Nixonland when Pat Buchanan is saying these things on television.

But let's go back to the earlier Pat Buchanan, and talk about what he and Nixon were using to break the country in half. As Rick notes, and as a lot of us already know in that way that Paul Pierson summarized a little while ago, one of those things was the 'demonic fury of race' that Perlstien talked about. This leads us into a literature that Rick touches upon and weighs into about the actual role of race in America's politics from, roughly, Nixon's era to the present. To draw what Paul Pierson and Nolan McCarty said together, there are two big stylized facts that we know about politics since the Nixon era. One: economic inequality has been increasing; two: Americans have largely begun to vote largely in line with that increased inequality, so that rich people tend to vote Republican and poor people tend to vote Democratic. One of the things we can therefore say about American politics in Nixonland is that it is more broadly *rational*. The parties represent policy formations that benefit particular income groups and people vote accordingly.

The thing about these stylized facts and this broad-gauged rationality is that it is true nationwide, and for the most part, which is fine, but as we know, American elections aren't won nationwide and for the most part; they're won at the state level, and often by quite narrow margins. A third stylized fact that is worth thinking about, and helps us get back into *Nixonland*: the electorate in a given state might be shifted to the left or the right on that political spectrum, but as Gelman, Shor et al. point out in a pretty widely cited paper,<sup>4</sup> rich people in Connecticut are more likely to vote Republican than poor people in Connecticut, but rich people in Connecticut are *less* likely to vote Republican than even poor people in Mississippi. This is a classic American problem - there's a sectional fly in our rational ointment.

And as soon as we start talking about sectionality, of course we're talking about race. Let me do my historian thing, and tell you a little story about that. Back in 1895, a year before he ran for president, William McKinley took a lease on a house in Georgia. He spent quality time there over the next year with possible Republican voters. Not just the black ones, who would of course have been loyal to the Republican party since the Civil War, but also white ones. This represented a significant effort on McKinley and his advisor Hannah's part, to gain Republican votes in the South. Now McKinley lost the South to Bryan in 1896, but by a much narrower margin than any

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<sup>4</sup>Andrew Gelman, Boris Shor, Joseph Bafumi and David Park (2008), "Rich State, Poor State, Red State, Blue State: What's the Matter with Connecticut," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 2:345-367.



Republican since the Civil War. So there was something there, and McKinley spent the entirety of his presidency trying to reach out to the South on behalf of the Republicans. There are a lot of sectional reasons why he was doing this that I don't really have time to cover - basically, they were nervous that they had lost so many of the Western states to Bryan in 1896, and thought that with the Southern states, they might be able to make up that loss - so McKinley went to Tuskegee, he went to speak in the South to take federal control of Confederate war graves; he engaged in a process of he called 'magic healing,' which also involved going to war, and pulling the sections together against a common enemy in 1898.

So, we should see this years around 1900 as a critical moment in Southern political history and American political history, because while he was trying to reach out to the South, of course the Democrats were busy pulling it away. The years around 1900 are the years of the state-level disenfranchisement laws; the Jim Crow laws, which represent a specific reaction to exactly what McKinley is doing. The Republicans are creating an electorate in the South; the Democrats are trying to pull it away from them by using race. And it works. In 1901, then-Congressman John Hollis Bankhead (Tallulah's grandfather), gives a speech in which he says that

There has been a wonderful industrial development in Alabama, and many of the wealthy and prominent men engaged in these enterprises are at heart Republicans, and if conditions were such as to admit of it, would vote for the Republican party. As long as the Negro is in politics, however, they cannot do so. They have to ignore every other consideration of politics when confronted with the danger of Negro domination. I feel no hesitation in saying that if the Negro Question is eliminated, some of the most prominent men in Alabama will associate themselves with the Republican party.

Now, what Bankhead was saying was that race stood in the way of there being a class politics in the South. As long as race was a contested issue, you wouldn't get affluent Southerners voting Republican. But if you somehow removed race from politics, these people would vote Republican. And that's of course what happens. With the Civil Rights movement, race is basically out of politics by the mid-1960s. That's what the great liberal wave from roughly 1957 to 1965 does - you can no longer in an acceptable way stand for segregation, except around the margins and around the edges. So race is removed from politics, and those people whom Bankhead describes as being willing to vote Republican if only race were out of the picture begin to vote Republican. So what happens in the Nixonland era, is that you get 'Bankhead Republicans,' if you like, becoming an important constituency of the Republican party in the South.

That's why Rick is right to focus on the issue of race, to begin the book with Watts, and to talk about these issues, even though they don't touch directly on those issues that Nolan and Paul Pierson mentioned. Because you *cannot pull apart* race and class when you are talking about the ways in which the Republicans have ascendancies in the South. As Paul Pierson said, we have a whole potted narrative about this, and mostly it relies on looking at what Republican strategists say. Kevin Phillips says in the Nixon era that we want to see the civil rights laws enforced. We want to see the civil rights laws enforced, because the more blacks vote or seem to be ready to vote, the more, to use Phillip's phrase, 'negrophobe whites,' will be pushed to the Republican party. You get to Lee Atwater in the Reagan era, in Reaganland who says "you cant say 'nigger' that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states rights, and all that stuff." Then, in more recent times, you get 'call me, Harold' a couple of years ago, and of course you had Fox News talking about 'Obama's Baby Mama' earlier this year. There is a whole range of dogwhistle politics to appeal to the racial voter.

If you want to say that the South goes Republican because the South becomes more prosperous as a political science literature argues, you can't say that without noting that race and class are

intertwined in the South. Even one of the political science books most associated with the ‘it’s class not race’ theory - *The End of Southern Exceptionalism* by my friend and former colleague Byron Shafer and his co-author Richard Johnston<sup>5</sup> - points out that although among whites (and you have to leave blacks out of the picture for this class story to make sense) class is the determinant of partisan voting in the post-Nixon era, racial attitudes are also highly correlated with partisan voting in the South. What do Shafer and Johnston mean by racial attitudes? They mean willingness or unwillingness to have the federal government use its authority to help African-Americans. Republican voters - richer voters - are less willing to see the federal government act that way; Democratic voters - poorer voters - are more willing to see the federal government acting that way among blacks. So you look exclusively at income inequality in the South and you say aha! - it’s rational politics. If richer whites are more likely to vote Republican, it’s because they don’t want their taxes raised. They don’t want their money taken away; they’re strictly protecting their economic interest. That’s an incomplete story. You have to say they don’t want their money taken away *because* they are afraid that it will be given to black people.

In other words, just as Bankhead said in 1901, there is still a strong element of worry about negro domination. It’s just that the negro domination might therefore be of the federal government’s distributory policies, rather than strictly of political voting in the South. So if you want to look at the role of race in the South, you really cannot extricate it from class, and simply pointing to income inequality doesn’t give you the whole story.

## Rick Perlstein - Response

First, let me say how extraordinarily pleased and privileged and even humble I am to be the focus of this panel. A lot of exciting things have happened to me because of my work; God willing, a lot of exciting things will happen in the future, but really, this is the most exciting. The idea of a scholarly panel at this level of intellectual achievement on my work - the only word I can use is humbling. When I do this wonderful work, I like to say that I stand on the shoulders of graduate students. What would I do without the guy who wrote his dissertation on the 1966 governor’s race in Arkansas, without my friend who wrote a Masters thesis on Frank Rizzo in Philadelphia? I’d be nowhere. I feel a profound sense of communion and kinship and solidarity with the academic community, and you know, I know what path dependence is, and I think I’m writing about Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and Giddens’ concept of structuration, but I don’t say so, because that doesn’t look good in the *New York Times* review, but I take this engagement very seriously.

Let me lay out a kind of mainline theme, and then go through a checklist, hopefully covering a bunch of the points. Let me begin with Paul’s notion of the 1960s as a crucible - in other words a dramatic moment in history in which some kind of structure took form that determines future structures and actions - structuration. I stand by the concept of the 1960s as a crucible. Were I to tease it out a little bit, I think that Paul and I could find our views compatible in this way: changing the nature of an electoral appeal is relatively easy - you just use different words. Changing the direction of a state is profoundly more difficult - there is a lot more inertia and institutional embeddedness. What I see happening in the 1960s and in Nixonland is indeed the crucible for a new kind of rhetoric - Franklins vs. Orthogonians, the idea of backlash - and any kind of policy shifts that result from that are naturally going to lag. I completely accept that 1978 is a good benchmark, even though we have the Watergate babies and a Democratic president, for these changes to start happening, at the level of statute, bureaucracy, personnel, and structure.

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<sup>5</sup>Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnson (2006), *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South*, Harvard University Press.

I think that an agenda for political science, if *Nixonland* suggests one, might be to think more formally about how these lags work. I'm not specific about this at all - I'm happy to elaborate more on how I think about this in theoretical terms - but, taking it to the present, what kinds of lags are we involved in now? Paul Krugman points out that the banquet of Nixonland-style grievances has pretty much evaporated on the ground. For another project, I was looking at my notes, where I read every newspaper, every day, for a month (January 1972) - the level of violence was numbing and unbelievable. That's not on the ground any more. And yet, for some reason, we still get this kind of rightwing backlash policy apparatus. Paul points to the fact that we have these professional Orthogonians - professional Nixonlanders, basically. To use a mixed Marxist metaphor, even after the rhetorical base has faded away, we still have this institutional superstructure. Who knows whether we are just going through some kind of lag, where we're beginning to see a progressive alignment, where long after the rhetoric began to signify, the institutions are beginning to shift in a meaningful way.

By the same token, the period of 1965 to 1972, in which as Paul Pierson has constantly pointed out to me, there was a profound level of liberal policy making, is possibly a similar lag. Paul Krugman talks about professional Orthogonians - in the years 1965-1972, and perhaps until 1978, you have a great density of professional New Dealers, professional liberal policy bureaucrats. A lot of what the neo-conservatives were doing was talking about this entrenched class of people whose job it was to make social change. In a memorable phrase, Kevin Phillips called it the 'Toryhood of Change.' This group came out of the New Deal and the World War II planning mentality - from the post-war, end of reform, military-Keynesian-liberal state. They didn't go away when people started voting for Republicans because they were afraid that negroes were going to move next door. They were embedded. They kind of rolled along.

That is the main thrust of what is going on. I'm going to do a third volume on the period of 1973-1980. Some of the areas of emphasis are very much going to involve political economy - what did it mean that corporations were dealing with falling rates of profit, and how did they convert that into interest groups? That's part of the story of the neo-conservatives too - Irving Kristol renting himself out as a propagandist, and giving the business classes a way to talk about their interests that was demotic, American, and could be uttered by a presidential candidate. I will be talking a lot more about the rise of conservative movement institutions, which pretty much drop out of the story of *Nixonland*. The reason for that is that the role served by the conservative movement in my first book, *Before the Storm* and probably my third book, is almost taken up by Nixon. He is such an awesome presence, he sucks the air out of any room he's in. The conservative movement is there; it's building; it's making its arguments and building its institutions. But to Nixon, they are just another interest group to engage or ignore as he liked.

Let me go to the checklist, and get to the question of how much path dependence there was in these five years. How much was there path dependence was structured in by the high Hundred Days, the New Deal, and the five years following that? How much path dependence was structured in, in a much shorter window of time - Birmingham, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act through 1966, when what I consider to be the watershed moment happened when the next civil rights act, the Housing Right Act, fails? There was still a kind of inertia that civil rights bills keep on passing, because that is what we do as policy entrepreneurs in Washington.

Going through the checklist - Paul Krugman talks about how painful the book is. I very much think in psychological terms, and there is a lot of psychology in the book. How does a national community make sense of the events that are going on around it? There is a profound paucity of memory about how painful the 1960s were, and this has had a material effect on how we do politics now. One of the reasons that there is such a fascinating lag - Angela Davis isn't running around loose any more, but she suddenly shows up in the guise of Michelle Obama on the cover of the *New*

*Yorker* - is that we do have this minivan commercial version of the 1960s in which everything was fun. What is the one thing that everyone knows about the 1960s? It's that if you remember it, you weren't there. The synecdoche by which we understand the 1960s is 'well, it was a pretty good party!' That is obviously bullshit and has a lot to do with how societies do with trauma. This is more of a historiographical inquiry than a political science one, but the parallel is to how America dealt with the trauma of the Civil War. If someone were thinking about this very fascinating story about McKinley and Southern Republicans and Democrats, and were to write a story about the Civil War forty years later, as I am writing about the civil war forty years later, he might say that we are still living in 'Antietamland.' The rhetorical structure of what is important in politics, what a politician does, was basically framed by the crucible of these six hundred thousand bodies.

I completely stand behind the notion that in the main, the most important story for *me* to tell about politics, is one of voters who are only slightly informed, being courted by entrepreneurial politicians surfing the wave of events. I've used the wave metaphor all the time in radio interviews. By the same token, the points about both policy and interest groups are of course well taken. The method that I ended up using when writing this book was to think in terms of this modal low information voter, and almost think myself into his or her shoes as the world is going by. But every once in a while I break the fourth wall, and take you into the White House, or take you inside a part of the Civil Rights movement, and that is completely arbitrary; part of my authorial prerogative. Every once in a while I say 'now I am going to explain something.' I end up not talking about Irving Kristol and the *Public Interest*, because that happens not to interest me at this particular point, and I want to talk about about something else instead.

On the issue of interest groups - I spent an enormous amount of time doing two things - reading every newspaper from cover to cover in January 1972. The book tries to reverse engineer what I read, and tries to explain that movement. Going over those notes, I sedimented ideas in my head that I would end up explaining. There was a really interesting sex-ed story, about an Unitarian minister who was put in jail in Brookville, Wisconsin for showing two explicit sex-ed film strips. That happened in January 1972, and when I wrote about the summer of 1969, the themes that were revealed in that story of Franklin liberal religion versus demotic right wing populism played out over the issue of sexuality. The other thing that I spent too much time on was this question of the Civil Rights Bill of 1966 and open housing. It takes up a lot of the first part of the book, but if it had equivalent space to the amount of research I did on it, it would be a third of the book. One of the things that drops out is a very interesting interest group - the National Association of Real Estate Boards, which is a really interesting interest group because it invented the "American Dream." These are the guys who said in the 1920s that we need to have low money down long-term mortgages and encourage everyone to buy a home in America. There are papers on this and it is a very important part of the policy story. The same group, in 1966, does the biggest lobbying campaign to that point in history, with hundreds of thousands of letters. Everyone who owns a home is encouraged to send a letter to Congress saying that this bill is going to destroy our property values.

One of my most incredible experiences as a historian was sitting in the Chicago Historical Society, reading the letters to Senator Paul Douglas from the South West Side of Chicago as Martin Luther King was marching through their neighborhoods, and seeing that a bunch of people on the same block wrote the same letter. This obviously suggests the role of some kind of organized interest group. The fascinating thing about it is that this is how the National Association of Real Estate Boards understood their interests - defeating this bill that would tell them how to do their business - while the professional New Dealers, the Toryhood of change were saying 'look at the research - the property values don't go down.' James W. Rouse, the famous developer in Columbia, Maryland testifies, saying that if we pass this law, it will be better for realtors, because

we won't have these blockbusters that have a comparative advantage in being unethical.

This brings me to a point that Nolan made about the 1966 election - that a lot of the people who got elected were, in fact, moderates. Howard Baker, Charles Percy and Mark Hatfield were the three people he mentioned. Interestingly, the way that the 1966 election has come down to us is the way that Richard Nixon wanted it to come down to us, which was that it turned on who was better on Vietnam - the Republicans or the Democrats. I think that you can fairly conclude that Vietnam had very little to do with the outcome of the election - the parties were pretty divided on that. Mark Hatfield is one example of a person who succeeded because he took a forceful anti-Vietnam war stance. I would say that Hatfield is an outlier. Baker and Percy are interesting cases. Even though they are obviously moderates. They did a lot of progressive things in Congress - Baker had a role in saying what did Nixon know and when did he know it, while Percy was run out of town on a rail by AIPAC for being too nice to the Arabs. But if you look at how Percy was elected (I think that I nailed this case, and Sam Tanenhaus in *The New Republic* has a review and if I were to write a letter, this would be what the letter was about), he won because the Republican Party, in a very top down fashion, nationalized the election over open housing, and over race. So that pulling the lever for the Republican - and I reprint a campaign flyer that was circulated on the South Side of Chicago - was perceived as a vote against open housing and an anti-riot vote. I adduce evidence that some people even voted for Massachusetts' own Edward Brook for the Senate because he was Republican, and they wanted to 'stick it to the Negroes.' The irony of course being that Edward Brook was an African-American.

There's no question in my mind that that happened - it is all over the documents and coverage of the time. So Percy *won* because he trimmed his sails on open housing and was able to take advantage of this national framing of the election. Howard Baker was the guy who in 1968 gutted the Open Housing Bill that eventually passed. Open housing is the vanguard issue - by 1978 you are getting things like Proposition 12 and the rise of Reagan as a presidential figure. I will be doing a lot on Reagan in Volume Three.

Now to this notion that the 1970 election and 1966 are not necessarily some kind of mandate for this right wing swing of the electorate. 1970 is a very interesting test run. The Democrats do really well in 1970 even though Spiro Agnew is going around saying that hippies are going to eat your babies, and I have an explanation for that in the book. Basically, the Republicans' campaigning was too hot. They seemed to be too much a part of the very cacophonous, chaotic world that they wanted to vitiolate. So you do get Nixon toning it down for 1972, and you get Reagan mastering a way of talking about these social fears that is apparently uplifting. One of the things I'm *really* interested in is both the construction of and the reality of this notion that Reagan was optimistic and sunny. Because he sure as hell wasn't in 1966. This is the guy who, when people are saying that the youthful energy of the young generation must be harnessed, said that he'd like to harness their youthful energy with a strap. Look at the picture of Reagan I have in the book - he looks like George Wallace. Either he managed to actually shift in terms of affect, which he was very gifted at doing, or he was able to make people think of him in this way. That was one of the ways in which this Franklin-Orthogonian politics was normalized in ways that made it easier to sustain even when the grievances were not as sharp.

*Paul Krugman* - Just one thing. In some ways, I thought I had already read the sequel. Tom Edsall's book *The New Politics of Inequality* (W.W. Norton 1984) is very different, but in my mind it reconciles, in my mind at least, the discussion about how policy doesn't really begin to change until 1978. What Edsall describes and gets, in this *amazing* book, which was written just as this

thing was starting to happen, was this coming together of what we now think of as the Republican coalition, which is pushing policies in a direction that produces the economic results. One of the things that I like to write about is how if we're looking at the correlation between inequality and polarization, it looks as though the political polarization is the lead on the economic changes. The coming together of this coalition that Edsall describes is something that takes place in the early 1970s, it is something that takes place because of Nixonland. Nixon provides the formula for winning the election and *then* supports the coalition that causes the policy changes.

*Rick Perlstein* - And then you get to the policy changes, and this very interesting question - or perhaps it is not an interesting question but kind of boring - of whether Nixon is a liberal or a conservative and to what extent. But the Great Man is a variable in this story, and the fact that temperamentally he just didn't care about domestic policy is a motivating force in history. Two things. First, being the insecure person he is, he knows that the cool kids are into environmentalism and increasing Social Security, and is willing to accede to that, basically out of his native disposition to be liked. He doesn't invest much capital in that; what he is willing to fight for is obviously his global vision, foreign policy, making the North Vietnamese think he was a madman etc. It just so happens that domestic policy doesn't make a shift. Of course there is always the question of what he would have done with the political capital from 1972 ....

*unknown member of panel* - Universal healthcare - that's what he was actually pushing for.

*Rick Perlstein* - I think that there are tantalizing hints that he would have become Reagan. But that's a counterfactual.

## Discussion with the Audience

*Bruce Miroff (SUNY-Albany)* - I want to make a comment questioning Nolan, and ultimately supporting Rick. If you take Presidential *and* Congressional elections, you see the rise of split-ticket voting. The Democrats develop incumbency advantages, leading to the vanishing marginals and Mayhew and all of that. If you look at Presidential elections, the Democratic candidate got the lowest share of the popular vote in 1968 and 1972 that the Democrat had gotten since the 1920s. You look at the defection of Catholic voters; the defection of union voters, and this is the theory of where the whole white working class and ethnic thing is starting to hit the Democrats, and that is Barack Obama's problem today. So if you are focusing on the area that Rick is focusing on - the vote - you find in 1968 and 1972 the kinds of dynamics that Nixon is playing brilliantly. That, along with the events that have fractured the Democratic party, lead to the fracturing of certain constituencies that become problematic, precisely along those rhetorical lines. The policy stuff comes later. So I think there is an underestimation in the argument that the 1960s were not the crucible compared to the late 1970s. In policy terms this is true, but in terms of the way that Nixon restructured politics to *be* about culture, to *be* about race, to *be* about resentment, and the way that the Democrats lost their basic dominant position in American politics, it isn't. No Democrat since has gotten more than about 50.2

*Donald Tannenbaum (Gettysburg College)* - I have a question for the panel. I am wondering whether the term 'policy' may be too lofty for what goes on in the American political process, because of interest groups and the way in which legislation is sliced and diced. Should we just be talking about pieces of legislation that have no necessary relation to each other, but that after the fact someone says 'Hey, here's a piece that's relevant - let's call that civil rights policy, let's call that economic policy.'

*Jeremy Johnson (Brown University)* - This question is for the historian for the panel. I was trying to tease out whether you agree with Paul Frymer's argument in *Uneasy Alliances*<sup>6</sup> that African-Americans are a captured constituency, and that no political party really wants them, because there is always a bigger block of voters going against the African-American vote.

*Rick Perlstein* - Bruce Miroff wrote a really good book on the McGovern campaign in 1972<sup>7</sup>. I ended up weaving in good bits of it into my own manuscript, practically as it was being sent to the printer. That's another place where there is one of those fascinating lag effects, which very much could be operationalized and studied profitably by more empirically oriented social scientists. This is that the confidence coming from the Democratic dominance in the 1930s through the 1960s leads to what they call then the New Politics coalition building, in which what later became the McGovern coalition, with preternatural, and what we now know to be tragic confidence, believed that the way of the future lay in this coalition of disenfranchised blacks and conscience-stricken youth. One of the tragicomic elements of the book is that these guys are always getting blindsided. They don't see it coming. To get at this notion that I support, that politicians are entrepreneurial; they put their finger in the wind; they smell smells that we don't smell because they have more sensitive noses; and that the Democrats that handed the party to McGovernites, having no notion that they were breaking up the New Deal coalition, certainly didn't do so intentionally. What Bruce explains really well in his book is that McGovern thought he could pivot back and get the white ethnics and the union leaders in the general election without any problem. That was hubristic.

The policy question - I don't think that's really true. If you think about something like taxes, the conservatives absolutely had a very coherent vision of the way that taxes should work, at least since the 1970s. There is a lot of slicing and dicing.

Just a quick point on the Big Sort into a liberal party and a conservative party, and the balancing out of the coalitions into a conservative party and a liberal party. In *hommage* to the world of political science, I actually was going to call one of my chapters, 'Issue Evolution.' *Issue Evolution*<sup>8</sup> is the landmark book by Carmines and Stimson that argues that the Republicans were seen as more the party of civil rights, and then in 1958 they were considered equal, and ever since then they have peeled away from each other.

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<sup>6</sup>Paul Frymer (1999), *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America*, Princeton University Press.

<sup>7</sup>Bruce Miroff (2007), *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party*, University Press of Kansas.

<sup>8</sup>Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson (1990), *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*, Princeton University Press.

*Eric Rauchway* - In response to Jeremy's question, this is one of the classic problems for historians - we always get accused of inventing things after the fact. So there was the 'Progressive Movement,' only there wasn't, because there were all kinds of people who wanted this kind of legislation. When we talk about the New Deal, we often talk about what's left after the Supreme Court strikes down large parts of the New Deal and so forth. So it's an ad hoc kind of thing; the same could be said about the conservative movement and the legislative framework that finally emerged. The thing is that there is of course an ideological intent about all of these things. The Progressives want to go somewhere. The New Dealers want to go somewhere. The conservatives want to go somewhere. They don't get there, because there are lots of obstacles in the various institutions. So I think it is less ad hoc than the question implies, although I am sure that can sometimes happen. That kind of touches on this question, which is whether the African Americans are a captive constituency that neither party really wants, because there are more racists than there are black people, to put it crudely. Well, yes-*ish*, except that during the golden era of the Democratic party, the New Deal Era, they managed to have *both* the racists and the black people. And that's because they were pursuing policies that were fairly class-oriented. Roosevelt wins with his massive landslide in 1936; it is probably the most clearly class-oriented electorate in modern history. So it depends on where you are looking. If you are talking about 'class, class, class,' then you can have the racists and the black people. If you talk about 'race, race, race,' then you can't.

*Rick Perlstein* - And that's part of the tragedy of the people who ended up hegemonically taking over the Democratic party in the early 1970s; they did not see an opportunity cost in reaching out to disenfranchised minority voters, because they thought that society had evolved in ways that look surreally naive to us now.

*Paul Pierson* - I agree with Eric's answer on the policy point; I take the sentiment behind what you're expressing, and it is true that policy often looks fairly incoherent in an American context. But what we often see is an aggregation of a bunch of activities that are going on that *do* have some very distinct patterns to them that can be described in the ways that Eric suggested. I wanted to talk about Rick's argument that what you get in the shift in governance that I described that takes place in the late 1970s is primarily a lag effect of what happened in the 1960s. I *love* arguments about lags and inertia and path dependence. I wrote a whole book about nothing but time and all of that stuff,<sup>9</sup>. But here's the social science piece of this; when you make an argument about something like a lag you always have to ask yourself 'how would I know if that's the right account? How would I know if I were wrong?.' So you get people talking about how the miracle of the Reagan tax cuts led to economic growth in the Clinton administration. And I'm sure that if the economy recovers later, we'll hear about how it was the Bush tax cuts that did it, and there was just a lag. So you have to ask yourself 'how would I know?' And here are a couple of things to make one ask about that. One is - why is it that the governance effects start to show up under an unified Democratic government? That is hard to explain without bringing in some other stuff. It's not just the Long March through the institutions. One thing that it suggests is critical is that you've got to have some sort of real story about Democrats. You can get some of that from what

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<sup>9</sup>Paul Pierson (2004), *Politics in Time: History, Institutions and Social Analysis*, Princeton University Press.



we've been talking about, but I think you need more. And I totally agree with Paul Krugman - Tom Edsall's book is a *really* good place to look.

*Rick Perlstein* - Losing a landslide can have a really traumatic effect.

*Paul Pierson* - But they *won* a landslide in 1974. And they won the Presidential election in 1976. So is that when you would expect the lag effect of the 1960s to show up in policy? That's hard for me. Edsall's book is really an argument about organizational mobilization, and a different kind of backlash, which is primarily a backlash of business against government and the increase in regulation that takes place in the 1960s and early 1970s, and which works *both* through their efforts to change the Republican party *and* their efforts to change the Democratic party. I think that these accounts can be wedded together in important ways. But I think that this is a really important piece of it. And one last thing. I think that to say that Nixon just wanted to be in with the cool kids, or didn't care, is not an adequate account of why you get the patterns of policy you get in the early 1970s. I obviously don't think that domestic policies were the top priority for him, but I think that he believed politically that the thing to do was to situate himself as a certain kind of Tory - tough on the cultural stuff, but actually quite willing to reach out in a social-democratic way to try to cultivate George Meaney. Kevin Phillips saw it - on the economic issues, there's a huge gap.

*Rick Perlstein* - Wait. You're wrong about Meaney - the courting of Meaney was completely cultural, and it was a year after they went to war with each other.

*Paul Pierson* - But why does he feel a *need* to cultivate George Meaney. Ronald Reagan doesn't try to cultivate these people.

*Rick Perlstein* - That's because we have a kind of uneven development going on.

*Paul Pierson* - But that's organizational and that's my point. That's a story about the shifting *organizational* balance in American politics, which is mostly a result of what happened in the 1970s, not the 1960s.

*Rick Perlstein* - That's where Comrade Perlstein talks about the 1970s and falling rates of profit. Let me tell a quick story about the 1968 election. No-one paid attention to the Republican primaries in the 1968 Senate elections. In many ways it was more important than Bobby Kennedy versus Gene McCarthy, in that this very very far right cultural warrior named Max Rafferty knocked off

the House minority whip, Tom Kuchel, who was very much a liberal Republican. In the book, I quote someone as saying that Kuchel can't possibly lose, because businesses in California are basically clients of the state. I don't know who they funded in the 1968 election, but the fact that business no longer saw the New Deal order as a good bet is an enormous factor.

*Paul Krugman* - I'm probably going to argue partly against myself here. 'Long and variable lags' was the favorite Milton Friedman catchphrase; my favorite was when the Republicans were claiming that the prosperity of 1999 was the result of the Reagan tax cut, which as I pointed out meant that 'Morning in America' was due to something that LBJ did. One thing that is worth saying is that there is something about shifts in ideas, not ideologies, that is somewhat autonomous. There was a definite conservative shift in economic thinking during the 1970s that I think, having seen it up close, didn't have too much to do with Nixon. There is a lot of deregulation that is taking place under Carter, and it doesn't take place because you've had Republican victories in Senate races; it's taking place because a lot of Democrats are intellectually convinced that we have too much regulation.

*Rick Perlstein* - But there's still something going on politically. A lot of Nixon's policy liberalism was nakedly clientelistic. He literally sliced and diced according to ethnic groups, and he saw it as a better bet to have a certain welfare policy because it pleased Italian-Americans etc etc. The fact is that there is a different way of thinking about who benefits from policy in the 1970s, which is driven by a better way of explaining it that comes from intellectuals, and a different story about who the clients of politics are, and who wins.

*Paul Krugman* - But on top of it, there is this general revived belief in markets that is not solely political. And stagflation in the 1970s had an enormous impact on people's attitudes. The extent to which seven bad years colored everybody's views about economics for thirty years after is weird.

*Rick Perlstein* - But if you believe that inflation is caused by out-of-control government, which is a very Republican story, and that inflation is something that hurts the people who are most vulnerable to bracket creep, you are talking about a new political agent; the people who are the victims of bracket creep.

*Eric Rauchway* - I seem to recall from reading a book with 'prosperity' in the title by Paul Krugman<sup>10</sup> that these intellectual shifts are not without their political origins either. That Friedman is pushed by the New Deal to say certain things, and then these things are borne out by the emergence of stagflation, so that a lot of people say that Friedman must have been right. Isn't that in that book?

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<sup>10</sup>Paul Krugman (1994), *Peddling Prosperity: Economic Sense and Nonsense in an Age of Diminished Expectations*, W.W. Norton.

*Paul Krugman* - Yeah, yeah, that's there.

*Henry Farrell* - Mark Blyth has an interesting book<sup>11</sup> that tries to trace these ideas back to business groups.

*Nolan McCarty* - I just wanted to respond to Bruce's point about interpreting elections and deciding which elections are turning points and which ones aren't. This is a very difficult thing to do. Are they Reagan Democrats or are they Agnew Democrats? We only get to observe the data at specified intervals. There's lots of fluctuations - from 1972 to 1976; the 1974 election is unusual because of Watergate; 1978 is unusual because of the economy. So it's a very hard thing to do. The point that I'll stick with is that if we use the standard ways by which we characterize elections, the case for 1966 and 1972 is not as obvious as some of these other elections. How do we know that the Democratic coalition would not have reformed around its normal roots if a different type of Republican had been nominated in 1980. The fact is that we don't see these white ethnic cleavages transforming Congressional elections or urban elections. People like Sam Yorty and others stay in the Democratic party. George Wallace returns to the Democratic party. It is just a very difficult thing to know. My only criticism of the book on this, incidentally, is that it is a very hard thing to know, and it is a very hard thing to know if we stop on November 6, 1972, because we can only evaluate these things in hindsight, and the narrative structure that ends on a specific date makes it very hard to evaluate them in the terms that political scientists usually evaluate them.

*Rick Perlstein* - Watch this space.

*Nolan McCarty* - I look forward to it.

*Henry Farrell* - There are two different stories here. There's the Paul Pierson story about policy changes, and there's the electoral politics story, and how they intersect. Part of Paul's story is about the policy lags and so on, but part of it has to be about the groups that actually shape policy and shape politics. The Paul Pierson story is more about how interest groups do this, and Rick's story is more about electoral strategists seeking to change things. When I think about these lags, I think that Paul has two somewhat different and somewhat incompatible stories. In some of his work he basically argues that politicians tend to have short attention spans. They tend to be interested in the near to immediate future; Paul has this great story about David Stockman looking at a problem and asking why the hell he should expend his political capital on solving this problem for some other asshole twenty years down the line. Then you get the Hacker/Pierson story about 'starve the beast' and these groups having long term objectives. So the lag story maybe depends on

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<sup>11</sup>Mark Blyth (2002), *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Political Change in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge University Press.

who people like Nixon are listening to. If they're listening to the political strategists, they're going to be interested in the short term electoral gains, but if they're listening to the interest groups, the interest groups are able to afford to take a much longer term perspective, and the story of the 1970s is of interest groups through Cato, the American Enterprise Institute and others really looking towards the longer term, and beginning this slow careful process of changing the message and changing the fundamentals of the policy debate. Maybe the third book needs a better story about how these different things intersect, and of which groups are dominant in the political debate and what are the structures through which these messages are mediated, so that politicians maybe listen to one set of messages at one stage, and another set of messages at another.

*Rick Perlstein* - Nixon was obsessed with time horizons; he was enormously self-conscious about them. You can chop it up in different ways; how he thought about different things in terms of different time horizons. When you talk about geo-strategy (and if I was at a different kind of conference, the criticisms just be about he doesn't talk about policy, they would be about where's detente), He definitely, self-consciously and on the record, thought in ten, twenty, forty fifty and even a hundred-year terms. When it came to domestic policy, obviously, his short sightedness could be astonishing. He knew exactly what would happen when wage and price controls ended. But he could be also very self-conscious, strategic, shrewd and tactical on domestic issues. Here I stand on the shoulders of Allen Matusow's excellent book<sup>12</sup>, which describes how he wanted to do whatever it took to make the economy boom by Autumn 1972, so that he could win a second term and do these things that had a long term impact. He thought about time in very sophisticated ways. So once he got elected in 1973 and supposedly had his mandate, he was going to sound like Jimmy Carter and say that America had to learn to live within its limits, and that we weren't going to be a great power any more. Then there are some fascinating, tantalizing hints that they saw a conservative policy backlash coming around the bend; John Mitchell saying that this country is going so far to the right that you're not even going to recognize it. But he was such a disciplined politician; so obsessed with power and keeping it and hoarding it; not spending it but hoarding it; that he was willing to make policy decisions that literally went 180 degrees against what he thought should be happening. Because he wanted to transform in the long term. It's a very fertile question when it comes to Nixon. And then the Watergate thing is so fascinating, because it screws up his schedule.

*Paul Pierson* - I think that's a great question to think about - the role of time horizons and how they are connected to the structure of a political situation. I actually don't think that there's a contradiction in the stuff that we're arguing. It depends on how you think about what structures the incentives that politicians have. One of the most interesting papers that I've read in the last few years is one by Kathleen Bawn and David Karol and John Zaller and a number of other authors called 'A Theory of Political Parties'<sup>13</sup> in which they argue that the dominant way in which students of American politics have studied parties is as something quite loose that connects freewheeling politicians with short time horizons, who just want to win elections and operate as

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<sup>12</sup>Allen J. Matusow (1998), *Nixon's Economy: Booms, Busts, Dollars, and Votes*, University Press of Kansas.

<sup>13</sup>See Kathleen Bawn, Marty Cohen, David Karol, Seth Masket, Hans Noel and John Zaller (2006), *A Theory of Political Parties*. The most recent draft can be downloaded from <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/hcn4/Downloads/ToP%20October%205.pdf>.

individual actors, against the backdrop of an equally atomized electorate. Parties allow politicians to establish a brand and connect to voters. What this paper argues is that we need to think at least much about parties as coalitions of policy-demanding interest groups, who use the party as a vehicle to discipline politicians and get what they want out of office. And often the coalitions are bizarre - one of the fruitful things that come out of this theory is an answer to why gun control and abortion are over there with free market policies. There's no particular reason why those things are connected, but it happens to be the way that those coalitional alliances have been drawn, how the particular deals have been cut and how they've stabilized. From the interest group's perspective, the trick is to give the politicians just enough leeway so that they can win elections; what you want is very far away from what the majority might want. But also to keep them somewhat in your grip, because you care about the policy outcomes. That is the dance that is being played there. I think that this is a very fruitful way to think about the connections among voters, politicians, interest groups and policy outcomes, and it helps make sense of what has been going on. One of the things that has happened over the last forty years is a tremendous strengthening of parties, and of the connections between parties, interest groups and policy outcomes. One of the striking findings in Larry Bartels' recent book<sup>14</sup> is that if you take a pair of Republican and Democratic Senators elected from the same state (forget about the House, gerrymandering and all that), there is a huge difference in policy perspectives between Republican and Democratic senators representing exactly the same electorate. It makes a much bigger difference to shift from the Democrat to the Republican in that state than to shift from, say, Mississippi to Oregon. This is so, even though the same electorate is choosing those politicians. There are ways of connecting these stories - I don't want to say that elections and voters and campaigns don't matter - but what this kind of story tells you you have to do is to bring in those organizations that *really* care about what government does, and connect that up to what government does.

*Paul Krugman* - Politicians are people, and their careers don't necessarily end when they leave office. I have no formal evidence, but I think impressionistically that this is true, particularly in the modern Republican party. There is a safety net; 'wingnut welfare' as people sometimes call it. The classic case is Rick Santorum, who was *way* to the right of his state, but when he left office, there is a job waiting for him at some think-tank you've never heard of that has Scaife funding, and he has a newly created 'America's Enemies' program.

*Rick Perlstein* - To link these two stories up, interest groups, to use a metaphor that I'm not sure works, are politicians too. Voters didn't magically grasp the notion that the Civil Rights Bill was going to destroy their neighborhoods and lives - they were quite literally lobbied by lobbyists - the National Association of Real Estate Boards - who gave them a story. A lot of the entrepreneurship comes in finding those felicities between an interest group and a voting bloc and a politician.

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<sup>14</sup>Larry Bartels (2008), *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age*, Princeton University Press.