

Educator to the Nation  
George S. Benson and Modern American Conservatism

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George S. Benson, n.d., George S. Benson Papers

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**Declaration**

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, it is my own work, and the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the career of American conservative activist George S. Benson (1898-1991), who served as President of the Church of Christ-affiliated Harding College in Searcy, Arkansas (1936-1965) and rose to national prominence in the early 1940s, when he established the National Education Program. This examination provides an interpretation of the nature, origins and influence of modern U.S. conservatism.

By focusing on the period from the 1930s to the mid-1960s, this work builds on a number of recent studies that have demonstrated the significant advantages to exploring modern conservatism beyond the social and political tumults of the 1960s and 1970s. Benson's efforts also reveal some flaws in the analytical paradigm that dominates the literature on the modern right: the transition between conservatism's marginalization in the 1930s and its recapture of the political mainstream by the late 1970s. Tempering this 'rise of the right' narrative by accepting both the importance and incompleteness of this resurgence provides the basis for the more nuanced approach that defines this work. Benson's efforts to promote conservatism were defined – perhaps in equal measure – by failures, successes, and innovations. As a result, his career provides a new perspective on the boundaries of modern conservatism.

Much of the work on conservatism focuses on either elites or grassroots activists. Benson operated within a space between these two groups that has rarely been explored. His career relied, almost exclusively, on the financial support of conservative businessmen, who shared his desire to effect a political re-education of the American public. To do this, Benson utilized a remarkable range of outlets for his message, which included a newspaper column, a radio broadcast, a relentless speaking schedule, and the production of approximately fifty films. He also made pioneering efforts to increase the influence of conservatism within the education system.

Benson's appeal to businessmen also resided in his construction of an innovative discourse for communicating the virtues of unfettered corporate capitalism and challenging its critics. Drawing on his own youthful experiences in Oklahoma, one of the last 'frontier' outposts, as well as the mythology of frontier individualism and the discourse of populism, Benson offered a folksy rebuke of 'big government' and embraced the corporate world as the heir to these virtues (despite

the obvious contradictions). Benson's faith ensured that religion became the second pillar of his 'Americanism.' His economic outlook constituted a prescient departure from Church of Christ traditions that, like those of many Southern fundamentalist and evangelical groups, harbored long-standing concerns that economic modernity constituted a destabilizing and amoral influence over a society that required order, stability and a primary dedication to non-worldly ideals. Moreover, Benson offers a new insight into the confluence of the traditionalist and libertarian wings of the right, a defining feature of the modern conservative movement.

Benson's political vision resonated most profoundly in the South and Southwest, where the heartland of modern conservatism emerged from a collision between the region's remarkable postwar economic transformation and its pre-existing religious and political culture. In a more general sense, certain themes within Benson's crusade, notably including the power and influence of organized labor, provided key successes for the right during these years. These successes were testament to the importance of favorable circumstances, but Benson's career was defined by the conviction that a more effective communication of conservatism would solve the right's problems throughout the nation; one key argument of this work is that the message itself had notable limitations. These limitations, in turn, reveal a more profound ambiguity towards conservatives' economic message within American political culture, the shortcomings of religious conservatism, and the problematic and incomplete nature of Benson's efforts to 'fuse' economic and social conservatism. On the other hand, that conservatives' ambitions were not met during this period does not suggest that Benson operated in an era of political comity; in one important respect, conservatives such as Benson helped to constrain political discourse and ensure the persistent moderation of their opponents.

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## Introduction

At nine o'clock on the morning of Saturday 28 October 1967, nine men congregated in a bank in Wichita, Kansas, for the first of ten annual meetings to discuss the distribution of \$1,300,000 left in a trust fund by the late John P. Gaty, a multimillionaire businessman. The money, Gaty specified, should be used to “promote individual liberty and incentive, as opposed to socialism and communism”. The men he selected to implement this objective were Senators Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.), John Tower (R-Tx.), and Frank Lausche (D-Ohio); William F. Buckley, founder of *National Review*; Clarence Manion, radio broadcaster, publisher and former Dean of Notre Dame Law School; Edgar Eisenhower, older brother of the former President; Louis Nichols, former assistant director of the FBI and the current head of the J. Edgar Hoover Foundation (a replacement for Hoover himself who declined the invitation); and George S. Benson, recently retired president of the Church of Christ-affiliated Harding College, and head of the National Education Program (NEP), which operated from Harding’s campus in Searcy, Arkansas, in the foothills of the Ozark mountains.<sup>1</sup> Gaty’s money, in the end, doubtless made a modest impact. Nevertheless, his selection of the head of the NEP alongside these figures whose careers permeate the vast array of literature on modern American conservatism, offers symbolic testimony to the subsequent neglect of Benson’s significance.

Benson may have been overlooked, but this thesis does not simply seek to integrate and align Benson’s career with the existing literature on the right; rather it posits that his convictions and his activities offer a striking counterpoint to a number of prominent themes and assumptions within that literature. Like a number of recent studies, its chronology, which focuses on the period from the 1930s to 1960s, is informed by the view that our understanding of modern American conservatism can be greatly enhanced by moving beyond an exclusive focus on the admittedly tempestuous upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Most of these works, however, stick to the analytical paradigm that suffuses almost the entire body of literature on this

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<sup>1</sup> William F. Buckley, “My Secret Right-Wing Conspiracy,” *New Yorker*, 10/21/1996, 120-129; “John P. Gaty Charitable Trust,” n.d. [c. 1963], GSBP

<sup>2</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*; Farber, *Rise and Fall*; Allitt, *Conservatives*; Shermer, *Sunbelt*; Lichtman, *Protestant*; Williams, *God’s Own*

topic: the transition from the right's marginalization in the 1930s to its recapture of the political mainstream by the late 1970s. Tempering this 'rise of the right' narrative by accepting both the importance and incompleteness of this conservative resurgence provides the basis for a more nuanced approach. In the end, conservatives were unable (and in some instances unwilling) to uproot much of the infrastructure of the federal government or win major victories on the cultural and religious battlefronts.<sup>3</sup> When explored through this lens, the failures, successes, and innovations that defined Benson's activities, perhaps in equal measure, offer a new perspective on the boundaries of modern conservatism.

This approach constitutes one of a number of important distinctions between this work and Edward Hicks's *Sometimes in the Wrong*, the most significant existing analysis of Benson's career.<sup>4</sup> Hicks's work provided some important foundations for this thesis, but it overlooks a number of prominent themes and issues. Some of these absences relate to the limited array of archival material available in the early 1990s; others are apparent because of the subsequent substantial expansion of the historiography of modern conservatism. While Hicks, a former student of Harding University's Graduate School of Religion, does not construct a hagiographic account, in certain areas – including, for example, race-relations – his analysis shies away from controversial issues.<sup>5</sup>

In 1936 Benson was appointed President of Harding College, having spent most of the previous decade in China as a Church of Christ missionary. The New Deal provided the immediate political backdrop, but Benson's politics were not exclusively defined by an antagonism towards New Deal liberalism. He was, after all, almost forty years old. Moving beyond the dominant analytical framework that suggests the dialectical relationship between modern conservatism and this new liberalism, enables us to see that Benson, in fact, was helping to effect a longer-term, and highly consequential, recalibration of conservatism in response to a modern society that was increasingly urban and increasingly dominated by consumer capitalism and corporations. His response, in turn, confirms the wisdom of Patrick Allitt's observation that conservatism has consistently been shaped by an anti-

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<sup>3</sup> Zelizer, "Reflections"; Mason, *Republican*, esp. 247-282; Williams, *God's Own*, 187-212

<sup>4</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*

<sup>5</sup> "L. Edward Hicks, Vitae," n.d., GSBP

utopian outlook that is suspicious of change, but that it has also been refashioned by successive generations of conservatives who have made different calculations about what is appropriate to conserve.<sup>6</sup>

Benson was not especially interested in political philosophy and was not a particularly sophisticated thinker. His efforts to reconcile conservatism with modern capitalism were principally negotiated through a creative engagement with several important cultural and political tropes. Benson was born in 1898 in a log cabin in rural Oklahoma, on one of the last outposts of the ‘frontier,’ and he drew on these experiences to construct a critique of the federal government that was steeped in a folksy ‘populist’ discourse. At the same time, however, he embraced corporate capitalism as the heir to the self-reliant individualism of ‘frontier’ mythology – he was unequivocal in his celebration of ‘bigness’ in business. His embrace of corporate capitalism was not an organic process, however. Benson’s efforts to link ‘free enterprise’ with a specific cultural memory of the ‘frontier’ were calculated to appeal to leading conservative businessmen who funded his activities.

From his business supporters’ perspective, Benson’s crusade offered a novel means of repudiating long-standing criticisms of their control of a calcified economic system, which often exploited the uneasy relationship between modern corporate capitalism and powerful individualistic and localist preferences. These concerns were exacerbated by the crisis of the 1930s and the efforts of New Dealers and the rapidly expanding labor movement to commune with the ‘common man’ and portray businessmen as self-serving ‘economic royalists.’ The NEP, whose connections with business were largely concealed, offered a means of negating the pervasive criticisms that greeted crusades by organizations such as the National Association of Manufacturers. In these respects, Benson’s career suggests a notably different trajectory for the emergence of conservative ‘populism’ than that posited by Michael Kazin who identifies its roots in the discourse of anti-communism in the early postwar period.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Benson’s connections with business serve as a reminder that generational shifts in the right’s agenda have also been shaped by the changing nature of elites’ self-interest.

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<sup>6</sup> Allitt, *Conservatives*, esp. 1-5

<sup>7</sup> Kazin, *Populist*

In reality, as his attitude towards corporate elites suggests, Benson's engagement with populist tropes was as much the product of a purposeful communication strategy, as it was derived from the assumption that virtue resided with 'ordinary' citizens. In fact, Benson exhibited elements of an elitism that historians of modern conservatism have largely overlooked (with the exception of those who have examined traditionalist intellectuals).<sup>8</sup> Benson's admiration for wealthy businessmen was partly derived from his perception that they were responsible for economic growth. "All of us ought to mourn the passing of the rich," he once declared in response to the threat of tax increases for affluent citizens; "most of all the poor will miss them."<sup>9</sup> But it also stemmed from a rather basic conservative premise. Benson's dismissal of contextual impediments to 'success' inevitably led to conflations between social status and 'virtuousness.'<sup>10</sup> From Benson's perspective, just as "businessmen, like Henry Ford, the du Ponts, and Henry Kaiser" ("men of vision, courage and initiative") decided their own destiny, so those at the other end of the economic scale, including, for example, the "swarm of idle poor" that emerged in the 1930s, must accept responsibility for theirs.<sup>11</sup> The New Deal, in short, upset the natural order.

While Benson presented himself as "an average" citizen and tailored his politics to making "some rather complicated truths plain" for ordinary Americans, the circles in which he operated were essentially from the petit bourgeois members of the small-town Kiwanis club up to the boardrooms of some of the nation's largest corporations.<sup>12</sup> In fact his direct engagement with other sections of society was limited to his efforts broadcast 'timeless' principles.

The development of a populist conservatism has conferred some notable advantages to the modern right, but this study identifies an overlooked and problematic dimension to this discourse. The right's populist critique of 'big government' has often been more successful than its attempts to illustrate the

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<sup>8</sup> On traditionalists see Nash, *Intellectual*, 36-84; Murphy, *Rebuke*. For two notable exceptions to this neglect see Allitt, *Conservatives*; Robin, *Reactionary*

<sup>9</sup> George Benson, "Looking Ahead," [hereafter "LA"], 11/2/1949, JDBP

<sup>10</sup> Benson, pamphlet reprint of speech, "National Balance Sheet," 10/1/1951, GSBP

<sup>11</sup> "LA," 7/29/1942, Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, "Real Threats to Free Enterprise," 10/1/1943, both GSBP

<sup>12</sup> Benson, speech, "America at the Crossroads", 8/5/1941, GSBP; C. D. Brown to "Dear Friend," 11/29/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

congruence of populism, the ‘free market,’ and corporate capitalism. The oxymoronic nature of Benson’s celebration of individualism, localism, and corporate capitalism, after all, was often accompanied by ample manifestations of these contradictions. Throughout Benson’s career, liberals and the labor movement often proved adept at skewering conservatives’ efforts to portray themselves as defenders of the ‘common man,’ or as the heirs to individualist ideas. The liberal rebuke to the populist critique of ‘big government’ on the other hand relies on more complex logic, which identifies government as a counterbalance to forces that impinge on individualism in a modern economic system, and posits that constraints in some respects – through taxation or regulation, for example – are ultimately consistent with the interests of individual citizens. These issues seem to explain why Benson’s ideas were sometimes most effective when deployed in a negative, oppositional fashion.

Benson’s populism overlapped with another key element of his understanding of conservatives’ problems. He was convinced that the successes of liberalism from the 1930s were substantially derived from a strategy of ‘vote buying’ and pandering to special interest groups; another widely overlooked conviction that Benson shared with many on the right. Benson’s conclusions, for instance, echoed those of Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.) who maintained that FDR’s program was “calculated to Tammanyize the whole United States.”<sup>13</sup> Reservations regarding popular democracy – based on a distinction between a ‘thinking’ and ‘unthinking’ public – often underpinned this thesis; some voters were simply drawn in by the carrot dangled in front of them.<sup>14</sup>

Conservatives’ perception that liberals were upsetting a ‘natural’ social order offers one solution to a conundrum that historians of the right have often identified but never adequately explained: why is it that conservatives’ vociferous anti-statism has so often been accompanied by a willingness to ignore, tolerate, encourage, or perpetuate certain substantial manifestations of governmental activism?<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Shermer rightly points out in her recent study that conservatives, especially conservative businessmen, have, in practice, often been more focused on whether the

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<sup>13</sup> Weed, *Nemesis*, 46-47

<sup>14</sup>“LA,” 7/29/1942, GSBP; Mason, *Republican*, 49-52, 105-106, 134-136

<sup>15</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*; Schulman, *Cotton Belt*; Shermer, *Sunbelt*

actions of government are favorable to business than whether they are consistent with ‘free market’ ideology.<sup>16</sup> Benson embodied these contradictions too, while Harding College at times relied heavily on money from the federal government. But many on the right also shared Benson’s particular concerns about elements of governmental activism – especially welfare measures – that threatened to “create a nation of dependent weaklings.”<sup>17</sup>

Economic concerns provided the motivation for business support for Benson’s endeavors, but his faith decisively influenced his worldview. His ‘Americanism,’ as he often emphasized, rested on three pillars: faith in God, ‘free enterprise,’ and constitutional government. The coalescing of this tripartite worldview was rooted in another unheralded recalibration of conservatism. Benson’s celebration of corporate capitalism represented a departure from the Church of Christ tradition that, like many of the Southern fundamentalist and evangelical groups with which it shared important sensibilities, harbored long-standing reservations about consumerism, urbanization, and to some extent the pursuit of wealth itself. In broader terms, Benson abandoned the idea that the marketplace constituted a destabilizing and amoral influence over a society that required order, stability and a primary dedication to non-worldly ideals.

In this respect, Benson offers an alternative trajectory of the emergence of the traditionalist-libertarian alliance that constitutes a defining feature of the modern conservative movement – this ‘fusionist’ vision was not, as has often been suggested, simply the product of intellectual endeavors in the 1950s, or of the machinations of politicians seeking to build a coalition of anti-statists in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>18</sup> Benson’s emergence as a pioneer of this discourse became increasingly apparent in the 1950s when religious concerns became more central to his efforts. In this respect, he also provides a window on a number of debates, perhaps most notably those relating to the education system, which stimulated conservatives’ antagonism towards social and cultural change and began to reveal the gulf between themselves

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Benson, untitled draft of congressional speech, 1945, GSBP

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Nash, *Intellectual*, 154-186; Allitt, *Conservatives*, 158-224; Himmelstein, *Right*, 28-63, 80-199

and adherents of ‘secular humanism’. These debates, in turn, foreshadowed key political debates of the following decades.

Benson’s practical approach to promoting conservatism also suggests several flaws in our understanding of conservatism in the decades after the New Deal. The NEP, for instance, constituted an important conduit between elite conservatives and their grassroots counterparts, two groups that have almost exclusively been examined independently.<sup>19</sup> As a result, this thesis adds credence to Kim Phillips-Fein’s contention that elites assisted the formation of modern conservatism in ways that make it distinguishable from other forms of ‘grassroots’ politics.<sup>20</sup>

The NEP attempted to fulfil Benson’s goal of transforming “public opinion at the grassroots” through a remarkable range of innovative endeavors.<sup>21</sup> Benson morphed into a political activist in the wake of a much-publicized Congressional testimony he delivered in 1941. He subsequently spent decades criss-crossing the nation – often in his private airplane – delivering hundreds of speeches per year to audiences often assembled by business organizations, individual companies, civic clubs, and patriotic societies. Benson’s long-running newspaper column, ‘Looking Ahead,’ was carried in thousands of rural and small-town weekly newspapers, as well as by a significant number of dailies. By the mid-1940s, his column was carried in hundreds of company-sponsored employee magazines; another version was carried in monthly NEP newsletters, which were mailed out to tens of thousands of recipients. The NEP also printed hundreds of thousands of copies of a wide array of pamphlets. In 1948 the organization released the first of several dozen films, which were bought or rented by many of the same organizations that sponsored his speaking engagements. In later years, television provided an additional outlet for these productions. Moreover, an NEP-sponsored radio broadcast was carried by hundreds of stations across the nation, from 1944 until 1955.

The collisions between Benson’s ambitions and the world around him offer significant insights into the boundaries of modern conservatism. Given the nature of

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<sup>19</sup> For influential ‘bottom-up’ studies of the modern right see, for example, McGirr, *Suburban*; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*; Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*; Lassiter, *Silent Majority*; Nickerson, *Mothers*; Durr, *Backlash*. For studies which primarily focus on political, economic or intellectual elites see, for example, Brennan, *Turning Right*; Flamm, *Law and Order*; Nash, *Intellectual*; Bogus, *Buckley*; Carter, *Rage*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Harding College, pamphlet, “Of Godliness and Patriotism,” 1963, CLGP

his efforts it is difficult to elucidate his precise impact, but it seems clear that (unsurprisingly) they were most successful when they exploited favorable circumstances. There were, in the end, only a select number of such circumstances for Benson to work with. One was created by the remarkable post-war economic transformation of the South and Southwest, the heartland of modern conservatism. Despite the NEP's legitimate claim to operate at the national level, these areas were especially significant to the organization by the 1950s. Benson's efforts overlapped with the crusade for economic development in the region, often led by conservative business and politicians. As Elizabeth Shermer and others have demonstrated, efforts to create a 'pro-business' climate resulted in the articulation and refinement of a politics that identified low wages and (generally) low taxes as the engine of progress, and wrapped this message in the language of individualism, despite the huge significance of federal investment in the region and boosters' propensity to use government for their own ends.<sup>22</sup> Benson, of course, helpfully celebrated the harmony of corporate and localist agendas, and linked his 'free enterprise' message to cultural constructs – frontier individualism, in particular – that are embedded in 'Sunbelt' conservatism.

Benson's profound hostility towards organized labor – which featured heavily in his political efforts – likewise complemented the emergence of Sunbelt conservatism. Benson's critique of 'big labor' as a self-interested pressure group that made demands inimical to economic growth resonated with elites in the South and Southwest who similarly lambasted unions and campaigned for state-level 'right-to-work' laws. Across the nation, moreover, the right's focus on labor provided a crucial source of political traction in the decades following the New Deal.<sup>23</sup>

Southern California, the epicenter of Sunbelt conservatism, offered an especially hospitable climate for the propagation of Benson's message. Darren Dochuk notably demonstrates that Benson's politics had a particular resonance for the millions of migrants to the region from the Upper South. Their attraction to conservatism, he suggests, was derived from the confluence of new-found affluence and the cultural baggage they carried with them in the shape of "Christian plain-folk

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<sup>22</sup> Schulman, *Cotton Belt*; Cobb, *Selling*; Markusen, ed., *Gunbelt*; Shermer, *Sunbelt*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; Shermer and Lichtenstein, eds., *Labor*; Witwer, *Shadow*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 87-115; Griffith, *Operation Dixie*; Honey, *Memphis*

Americanism,” a doctrine rooted in populist traditions, reverence for “pristine capitalism,” localism, and evangelical doctrine.<sup>24</sup> This argument has much to commend it. Nevertheless, while Dochuk does acknowledge the NEP’s relationship with business, Benson’s espousal of a deliberately recalibrated ‘cultural memory’ of populist and frontier tropes suggests that he overestimates the extent to which this transformation of political values was an organic process.

Although it has not received sufficient attention from historians, business patronage was crucial to a network of domestic-orientated anti-communist individuals and organizations that began to coalesce in the mid-1950s and enjoyed substantial popularity amongst grassroots activists in the South and Southwest by the turn of the following decade. Benson, whose anti-communist fervor outlasted the Red Scare in Washington, was often identified, for good reason, as one of the ringleaders of this new ‘Radical Right.’ The limited range of historical research that has been completed on the ‘Radical Right’ concludes that the discourse of anti-communism, particularly as espoused by individuals such as Benson, offered a common focal point for divergent conservative impulses – racial, religious, and economic in origin – and helped to politicize new activists. As a result, these works conclude, it constituted an important step in the emergence of the modern conservative movement.<sup>25</sup>

This argument has merit, but Benson’s crusade suggests the need for a more complex understanding. Lisa McGirr’s study of Orange County conservatives clearly illustrates the significance of anti-communism in Southern California in the early 1960s, but the trajectory of Benson’s crusade suggests that the region was only partially emblematic of political processes in motion across the South and Southwest.<sup>26</sup> Benson’s anti-communism met with a more tepid reception elsewhere during this period. In some respects, the slew of criticism and ridicule directed towards this anti-communist discourse undermined Benson’s ambitions to promote other elements of the conservative message. Moreover, Benson’s focus on

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<sup>24</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, xvii-xx, *passim*

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Brenner, “Fellow Travelers: Overlap Between ‘Mainstream’ and ‘Extremist’ Conservatives in the Early 1960s,” in Gifford and Williams, eds., *Sixties*, 83-99; Joseph Crespino, “Strom Thurmond’s Sunbelt: Rethinking Regional Politics and the Rise of the Right,” in Nickerson and Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt*, 58-81; McGirr, *Suburban*, 54-79; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 34-100

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

communism detracted from his efforts to offer a constructive argument for conservatism.

Some of the difficulties the ‘Radical Right’ encountered also reflected deeper, underlying limitations to the success of conservatism across the South and Southwest. Benson’s efforts were ultimately constrained by the limitations to the transformation of the ‘Sunbelt’ – the South’s development was, for example, less dramatic than that witnessed in the Southwest. By its very nature, as several analysts have acknowledged, the forces driving Sunbelt development often created affluence for a relative minority and increased inequality.<sup>27</sup> The significance of Sunbelt conservatism may have exceeded its instrumental impact in delivering widespread prosperity, but its appeal was surely not unrelated to individuals’ experience of the region’s growth patterns. Moreover, the limitations to this widespread affluence provide one explanation why the ‘fusionism’ that occurred in Southern California and in other parts of the Sunbelt – which was based on the confluence of faith and increasing wealth – was somewhat less successful elsewhere. At times, Benson’s efforts to suggest that the two branches of conservatism were more than anti-statist allies failed to bridge the philosophical chasm between them. Many proponents of the booster agenda, for example, remained disinterested in Benson’s moral and religious conservatism. His career, therefore, also helps to illustrate that the roots of future friction between both elements of conservatism, which became more pronounced when the right attempted to construct or implement a shared political platform, lie in the developmental patterns of earlier decades.<sup>28</sup>

Although the changing economic circumstances in the South and Southwest are crucial to understanding Benson’s crusade, his broader ambitions to shift the nation’s politics rightwards, though less successful, also reveal much about conservatism. A flawed understanding of the problems that conservatives faced undermined Benson’s wider ambitions. For one thing, he was overly optimistic about the appeal of conservative principles, a trait that he shared with many of his business

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<sup>27</sup> Shermer, *Sunbelt*; Schulman, *Cotton Belt*

<sup>28</sup> On the interaction between Sunbelt prosperity and religious conservatism see Dochuk, *Bible Belt*; Williams, “Falwell’s Sunbelt”; Miller, *Graham*. On the extent to which religious and economic conservatism constitute distinctive elements of the modern right see, for example, Robert Freedman, “Uneasy Alliance: The Religious Right and the Republican Party,” in Mason and Morgan, eds., *New Majority*; Zelizer, “Reflections”; Dionne, *Why Americans*; Burns, *Rand*

supporters and contemporary conservatives, despite their often-pessimistic exhortations. In part, this optimism reflected his status as an ideologue. He was convinced, after all, that the message was right: conservative principles offered the best route to a prosperous and virtuous society. The major barrier to their success in politics, therefore, lay in faulty lines of communication or in misunderstandings. These ideas defined Benson's activities.

The notion that liberals were 'buying votes' or pandering to special interests also offered some hope – it seemed to infer that support for liberalism as a political philosophy might be more limited than the Democratic Party's successes suggested. Moreover, the gravitation of many in the GOP towards what conservatives described as 'me-tooism' – the politics of accommodation to the New Deal – from the late 1930s onwards appeared to many on the right, including Benson, as evidence of the potential existence of untapped conservative sympathies amongst the electorate.

In practice, there was, as the travails of the GOP right confirm, limited foundation for this faith in a silent conservative majority. One persuasive explanation for the right's persistent misjudgment in this regard is the idea that a disjuncture between ideological conservatism and operational liberalism can explain much about modern American political history. In the abstract, many of the anti-statist principles Benson espoused enjoyed significant support, but, in practice, Americans offered a remarkable degree of support for specific manifestations of governmental activism.<sup>29</sup>

Benson's efforts to promote greater political participation were sometimes targeted at distinctly middle-class audiences, who he assumed would gravitate naturally towards the right. Nevertheless, he was convinced that conservative principles could be inculcated much more widely. Analysts of conservatism have often suggested that the right's working-class support has been secured through appeals to racial, ethnic, or religious sentiments.<sup>30</sup> Benson, however, clearly thought that the 'free enterprise' message could resonate amongst this demographic group – he did not believe that class shaped political convictions (though 'false' class consciousness and 'vote buying' did constitute important obstacles). Benson's populist discourse, his conflation of 'free enterprise' and the mythology of the frontier, and the innovative means he devised for delivering the conservative

<sup>29</sup> Free and Cantril, *Political Beliefs*; Mason, *Republican*; Schickler and Caughey, "Public Opinion"

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Carter, *Rage*; Edsall with Edsall, *Chain*; Formisano, *Boston*; Frank, *Kansas*

message, were all constructed with the objective of appealing to a wide variety of citizens. Indeed Benson's career, to some degree at least, serves as reminder that conservatives' unique access to political and economic resources have enabled them to exert a disproportionate influence over the formation of cultural and political ideas, to an extent that undermines the idea that social status alone defines political preferences.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, these advantages were clearly offset by unfavorable circumstances or substantial opposition to the underlying ideas. For example, Benson's significant contribution to a program of political 'reeducation' for industrial employees in the early post-war era provides an illustration of conservatives' overconfidence in the idea that repackaging their ideas and delivering them through new communication techniques would solve their problems. Moreover, Benson's crusade serves as a further reminder of the fallacious nature of the idea that there was a political 'consensus' in the aftermath of the New Deal, but it also serves as a reminder of the persistent appeal of elements of liberalism during this period. On the other hand, Benson's assaults on liberalism were part of a wider conservative effort that was significant enough to exert a moderating influence on liberal ambitions, particularly within the context of the early Cold War.

The arguments advanced in this thesis are drawn from a broad base of primary material. The most significant collection consulted was the George Benson Papers, which offer a substantial record of his political activities and those of the NEP. Nevertheless, there are important shortcomings to the collection – there is little material, for example, pertaining to Benson's life before 1936. In addition, while Benson kept systematic records, he also systematically destroyed an untold portion of them. Benson's second wife also edited the collection before its donation.<sup>32</sup> It is impossible to precisely ascertain what is 'missing,' but it seems that material deemed likely to be controversial was culled; the recent addition of a small volume of new

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<sup>31</sup> For examples of works which emphasize this dimension of conservatism, see Wrobel, *Promised Land*; Moreton, *Wal-Mart*; Roche, ed., *New West*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*; Phillips-Fein and Zelizer, eds., *What's Good*

<sup>32</sup> Garner, 'Benson,' 12-13; Marguerite Benson to Don Yongvanichjit, 4/23/1995, GSBP

material offers a record of Benson's racism that is almost entirely lacking in the first accession.

Fortunately, the shortcomings of the Benson Papers were offset by the quality of archival material in other collections. The expansive unprocessed papers of two of Benson's closest associates were crucial in this regard: the Clifton Ganus Papers at Harding and the James Bales Papers, held at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville. In addition, the Brackett Library in Searcy provided access to a broad range of resources, including Church of Christ periodicals, Harding newsletters and assorted publications. The Mullins Library in Fayetteville houses a number of collections that provided an insight into Benson's connections with local politicians and businessmen, notably including Senator J. William Fulbright and C. Hamilton Moses, the head of the Arkansas Power & Light Company. Material from the collections of Arkansas Governors at the Arkansas History Commission offered evidence about the early career of Glenn Green, a central figure in the NEP.

Outside of Arkansas, material housed in the libraries of two additional Church of Christ-affiliated universities, Oklahoma Christian University and Pepperdine University, informed the discussion of Benson's position with the Church. The business history collections at the Hagley Library in Delaware and the Monsanto Company Records at Washington University in St. Louis offered a unique record of Benson's relations with industrialists. The Library of Congress, meanwhile, provided access to the papers of a range of conservative politicians and activists, notably including those of Herbert Philbrick, an anti-communist who worked closely with the NEP. Files in the National Archives and Records Administration yielded information on Benson's wartime activities.

Online resources have contributed significantly to this project. These include the Congressional Record, a broad range of national newspapers, business publications, periodicals and magazines. Local newspaper archives also offered an effective means of tracking many of Benson's activities as well as a complete record of his newspaper columns. A recently uploaded collection of FBI files, released under the Freedom of Information Act, provided material on Benson and many of his allies and cohorts in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of the NEP's films are also available on the Internet.

## Chapter 1

### Adjusting the Line in the Sand: A Conservative's Search for a Useable Past

In June 1936, two months before George Benson returned from China to take the helm at Harding College, Franklin Roosevelt made a rare trip to Arkansas. In Little Rock, at the formal launch of the state's Centennial celebrations, the President addressed 25,000 Arkansans assembled in a hastily fashioned stadium. He used the occasion to position the New Deal, semi-inchoate though it still was, within the broader sweep of American history. His speech, in turn, was testament to the extent to which the Great Depression rekindled the embers of critiques and contests that had intermittently lit up American politics in the preceding half-century, as the nation had undergone a dramatic transformation from a predominantly producer-orientated to a consumer-orientated economy, from a "largely rural, provincial, fragmented society to a highly urban, industrial one linked together by a network of large institutions."<sup>1</sup> FDR lauded the "dauntless and intrepid pioneers" "who peopled Arkansas and laid the foundations for statehood here and throughout the vast new domain west of the Alleghenies," at a time when "there was little need of formal arrangements, or of Government interest, or action, to insure the social and economic well-being of the American people." This, he argued, was the fount of "Jacksonian democracy - the American doctrine that entrusts the general welfare to no one group or class." But the world had changed: "the roar of the airplane has replaced the rumble of the covered wagon," the 'frontier' was "gone,"

its simplicity has vanished and we are each and all of us, whether we like it or not, parts of a social civilization which ever tends to greater complexity ... [T]he imperiled well-being, the very existence, of large numbers of our people, have called for measures of organized Government assistance which the more spontaneous and personal promptings of a pioneer generosity could never alone have obtained. Our country is indeed passing through a period which is urgently in need of ardent protectors of the rights of the common man. Mechanization of industry and mass production have put unparalleled power in the hands of the few.

Roosevelt concluded with a pledge to support the independence of local and state governments, but he added the caveat that "these problems, with growing intensity, now flow past all sectional limitations ... Prices, wages, hours of labor, fair competition, conditions of employment, social security, in short, the enjoyment by

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<sup>1</sup> Brinkley, *Voices*, 152. See also, Brinkley, *Reform*; Parrish, *Anxious*

all men and women of their constitutional guaranties of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>2</sup>

Too often historians have explored conservatism within the framework of a dialectical antagonism with New Deal liberalism. In George Benson’s case, his politics constituted a response to the same set of questions raised by the broader transformations within American society that shaped the New Deal and informed FDR’s speech in Little Rock; it was just that, to Benson, liberalism offered the wrong answers and compounded the most unwelcome elements of these transformations. Contests over the cultural memory of the ‘frontier,’ as FDR also illustrated, often shaped debates over these transformations in the 1930s. This motif was even more central to Benson’s efforts than to many of his contemporaries and it was key to his success in convincing conservative businessmen that he offered a promising means of tackling New Deal liberalism. In particular, they were drawn to his deployment of a critique of ‘big labor’ and ‘big government’ that was expressed through a distinctive ‘populist’ discourse drawn largely from the mythology of frontier individualism, as well as his brazen commitment to demonstrating that the marketplace was the rightful heir to a social structure that rewarded industriousness and self-reliance. This discourse, in turn, was reinforced by his frequent reminiscences about his journey from a one-room log cabin on the ‘frontier’ in Oklahoma at the turn of the century, to his stewardship of Harding College, which he and his supporters championed as an institution that embodied the virtues of its president. Moreover, his location in Arkansas and his initial dedication to reaching out to rural and small-town America constituted an innovative response to the success of New Deal liberalism in the Northeast.<sup>3</sup>

The articulation of this discourse provided, as Darren Dochuk demonstrates, an important foundation for conservatism in the post-war Sunbelt, but its creation was a less organic process than he suggests. Benson’s politics illustrate how elites, with disproportionate access to resources, are often able to exert a disproportionate

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<sup>2</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Address at Little Rock, Arkansas,” 6/10/1936, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15297&st=arkansas&st1=#axzz1aN8qWqfC>, Accessed, 10/10/2011

<sup>3</sup> Badger, *New Deal*, 245-299; Weed, *Nemesis*, *passim*

influence over cultural memories.<sup>4</sup> It also unclear to what extent Benson saw the businessmen he celebrated as the true heirs to the cultural values he espoused, or whether he simply viewed this discourse as an effective means of communicating with the broader public in an effort to secure the position of corporations within American society. Moreover, Benson's reservations regarding mass democracy – a trope that has been woefully underestimated in relation to American conservatism – constitutes another often-overlooked oxymoronic dimension to conservative 'populism.' In addition, a close examination of the formation of Benson's worldview illustrates that there were important qualifications to his rhetorical anti-statism. In short, the complex series of influences that shaped Benson's politics belied his outward projection of simplicity, of straightforward, down-to-earth 'Americanism.'

Benson's evocation of a heritage of 'rugged individualism' was crucial to his relations with businessmen, but his search for a usable past revealed a number of other significant adaptations to modernity. This search was informed by an 'anti-utopian' skepticism that was substantially rooted in his Church of Christ faith, which was wary of 'worldly' institutions and rested on a pessimistic view of human nature. Viewed in this way, while Benson was chastising liberals for their departure from past practices, he was helping to negotiate several important transformations in American conservatism that prevented it from becoming an anachronism. This was clearly evident in his willingness to make the seemingly incongruous reconciliation between 'rugged individualism,' localism and modern corporate capitalism. Similarly, he celebrated rural America as the cradle of moral and spiritual virtue, a stance that was steeped in Church of Christ theology, but was ultimately optimistic enough to suggest that these values could be perpetuated as the nation embraced 'modernity.' Again there were compromises and contradictions in this conclusion, not least because he retained an admiration for deferred gratification and simple, pietistic living in a society that was being transformed by consumer capitalism. This constituted an important divergence within conservatism, one that distinguished Benson's conservatism from that, for example, often expressed during the tumult of the cultural and religious battles of the 1920s.<sup>5</sup> It was also a necessary precursor to

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<sup>4</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, *passim*. For a discussion of elites' influence over the construction and perpetuation of the cultural memory of the frontier see Wrobel, *Promised Lands*, esp. 1-16

<sup>5</sup> Murphy, *Rebuke*; MacLean, *Chivalry*; Miller, *New World*

the confluence of ‘libertarian’ and ‘traditionalist’ conservatism that provided the essential, though ultimately problematic, framework for the politics of the modern right.

Moreover, although Benson conflated his nationalism with white Protestantism, he rarely expressed his antagonisms towards urban ‘ethnics’ and African Americans in public. Rather, his ‘Americanism’ was expressed through the language of civic nationalism. Over the course of his political activities he frequently collaborated with other white Christians (although he retained substantial theological antagonisms, perhaps most notably directed towards Catholicism). His engagement with segregationist debates came primarily through the deployment of a ‘colorblind’ federalist discourse. By moderating – though not repudiating – the link between conservatism and (white) ethnic and sectarian divisions Benson again demonstrated another important divergence within the conservative tradition; the same can be said of his repudiation of a politics that was blatantly grounded in a defense of segregation.

Benson’s emergence as a political figure was substantially predicated on the publicity emanating from a speech he made in May 1941, before the House Ways and Means Committee, which had convened to consider the government’s fiscal strategy in light of the recent increases in defense spending. The speech revealed much about Benson’s politics. The government, he insisted, needed to offset impending tax reforms with cuts of \$2 billion in ‘non-essential’ domestic spending (defined as many key elements of the New Deal), in order to reduce government deficits. Increasing corporate and personal taxes, he maintained, was counterproductive, since it undermined two essential lubricants of a successful economy: the incentive to earn money and the availability of investment capital. The alternative was “inflation, socialism and the worst type of dictatorship.”<sup>6</sup> In November, an article in the *Arkansas Gazette* charted the remarkable impact of the testimony:

[L]ess than a year ago [Benson] was unknown outside a small circle of people who were familiar with his work at Harding. Today – as a result of a trip to Washington, network broadcasts, nationally-circulated articles, and addresses before scores of organizations in many of the larger cities of the Rockies – he is probably the most widely known citizen of Arkansas.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Congressional Hearing, House Ways and Means Committee,” 5/1941, GSBP

<sup>7</sup> Garner, “Benson,” 75

The substance of Benson's critique was hardly novel. The impact of the speech, and indeed much of his career, was derived from the nature of the constituency and cultural values he claimed to represent. Benson candidly admitted that he was not "an economist, banker, mathematician, tax expert, nor student of the law"; rather, he was the President of "a small college, located in small town, in a small state."<sup>8</sup> His indictment of deficit spending was made on the basis that it was an affront to "ordinary horse sense," while similar musings throughout the early 1940s were often praised by sympathetic observers for their characteristic "'down-to-earth' style."<sup>9</sup> The tone of Benson's critique, in turn, was intrinsically linked to his efforts to suggest that the New Deal was the epitome of the modern abnegation of self-reliant frontier individualism, the source of "America's greatness." "In the years when the western planes [sic] were being conquered," Benson wrote,

when railroads were scarce and neighbors were neighbors indeed, nobody felt underprivileged so long as he had the right to work hard, save money and use his wits to make his wealth work for him. American character in those days included industry, frugality, and ingenuity, honesty, liberality and pride in economic independence ... [P]eople were relatively poor in those days, but one small 'poor farm' in every county took care of persons not able to provide for themselves and their own. Children cared for aged parents and, in times of distress, one another. Incompetence was considered shameful. But that changed between 1930 and 1940. Since then countless people have shunted off their dependents on the government, and even men with jobs have been known to go on relief so they could subsist in idleness. Such dependents never have constituted a really large class, but its existence has been a reproach to the sturdy, self-reliant American character.<sup>10</sup>

Many conservative businessmen were impressed. In October 1941, in reference to a second Congressional appearance, the *Wall Street Journal* lauded Benson's efforts and emphasized that "it was not a capitalist nor an eastern industrialist, but President Benson of Harding College, Arkansas" who was making the case for a reduction in federal spending.<sup>11</sup> J. Howard Pew, the President of Sun Oil, who, as we shall see in the following chapter, became Benson's most significant ally during the 1940s, told a fellow businessmen that "representing, as he does, a very small college, with a salary of something like \$2,000 a year, [Benson] cannot be accused of being prejudiced"; Lewis H. Brown, the President of the Johns-Manville Corporation, and founder of the American Enterprise Association, likewise justified

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<sup>8</sup> Speech, "Congressional Hearing, House Ways and Means Committee"

<sup>9</sup> Untitled newspaper clipping, 3/16/1943, "Friday at Stadium," *Boeing - Plane Talk*, clipping, 9/4/1943, both GSBP

<sup>10</sup> "LA," 7/1/1942, GSBP

<sup>11</sup> "Review and Outlook," *Wall Street Journal*, clipping, 10/31/1941, GSBP

his financial support by citing Benson's "location and background" and "plain, common sense appeal."<sup>12</sup> Brown, like Pew, donated money to help Benson's cause and he personally intervened to encourage the Western Newspaper Union to take on Benson's syndicated newspaper column, 'Looking Ahead,' in 1943, the year the National Education Program (NEP) was officially launched.<sup>13</sup> Ward Halbert, a Tennessean member of the Church of Christ who had "worked chiefly with business magazines in the petroleum and automotive industries," came to Searcy in 1941 or 1942, and became the first of several ghostwriters who wrote an indefinable number of Benson's newspaper columns (although this was never publicly acknowledged).<sup>14</sup>

Benson's emphasis on the frontier, on the notion that diligence and ingenuity were solely responsible for economic success, flattered businessmen's perception of themselves. Pew, for instance, shared Benson's disdain for the apparent doomsayers who spoke of the death of the frontier in the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> The independent oil industry, in which Pew operated, was steeped in romantic notions of the nation's individualistic, 'pioneer' heritage and commitment to economic fluidity. Turn-of-the-century 'wildcatters' often envisaged themselves as a truer incarnation of 'Americanism' than the blatantly cartelistic Standard Oil company, with whom they competed. Sun Oil was built by Pew's father, a farm boy from Pennsylvania, who capitalized on the discovery of the Spindletop oilfield in Texas in 1901. Moreover, the Pew family was, as one sympathetic biographer noted, "of pioneer stock." J. Howard, like Benson, felt he spoke from experience when he suggested that "the only class distinction" that mattered prior to the 1930s "was one earned through ability and hard work. Men and women were rewarded in accordance with that ability and industry ... [T]he result was the building of the greatest nation on earth – a nation which enjoys the highest standard of living in all history."<sup>16</sup> The idea that businessmen deserved their wealth, that it was derived from individual initiative and endeavor, was, of course, also notably encapsulated within the self-serving mythology of the self-made man, which

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<sup>12</sup> Lewis Brown to Pew, 5/14/1943, Box 3, Folder H-1943, Pew to Charles Voigt, 1/15/1946, Box 9, Folder H-1946, both JHPP

<sup>13</sup> Brown to Pew, 5/14/1943

<sup>14</sup> It does seem likely, however, given Benson's temperament and the recollections of several associates, that he still exerted at least editorial control over the content of these columns. *Petit Jean Yearbook, 1941-1942*, HUDA; R. N. Gardner and Clinton Davidson, "How to Raise Money for Christian Colleges," 1956, JLLP, Box 5, C. Davidson Papers (Lovell), Folder 1

<sup>15</sup> Pew to Glenn Frank, 8/25/1938, JHPP, Box 110, Folder "Republican Party"

<sup>16</sup> Pew and Sennholz, *Faith*, 71

permeated throughout the business community, well beyond the confines of the independent oil industry.<sup>17</sup>

A significant proportion of the businessmen who supported Benson's crusade, including for example, Pew and Brown, were also disgruntled Republicans. Their frustration stemmed from what became a long-running source of conservative lament after the mid-1930s: the GOP's apparent unwillingness to sufficiently champion their cause, and its apparent willingness to accept substantial elements of New Deal liberalism.<sup>18</sup> Such concerns helped to fuel initiatives to remake politics from beyond the confines of the major political parties. The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), a key outlet for conservative business sentiments, increased its public relations budget from \$36,000 in 1934 to \$793,043 in 1937, while by the early 1940s businessmen had funded a vast array of radio broadcasts, films, exhibitions, billboards, newspaper advertising, community relations programs, and speakers' bureaus.<sup>19</sup>

The tone of Benson's politics resonated with conservative businessmen whose fervent opposition to the rise of New Deal liberalism was, by their own admission, largely ineffectual. Their failures contrasted sharply, they surmised, with FDR's ability to conjure up class antagonisms and position himself as the defender of the 'common man' and business elites as "economic royalists."<sup>20</sup> Pew, for example, had been a leading figure in the NAM and the Liberty League, an organization so redolent of self-interested industrialists, that James Farley, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, quipped that it "ought to be called the American Cellophane League," because "first, it's a Du Pont product, and second, you can see right through it."<sup>21</sup> Benson offered a much more opaque means of exerting influence thanks to his disingenuous assertion of independence and the fact that his connections with business were not widely known. Speaking before the Senate Finance Committee in August 1941, for example, he declared:

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<sup>17</sup> Cawelti, *Apostles*, 101-236. These ideas are notably present in a number of official and semi-official accounts of corporations and corporate leaders who sponsored Benson's initiatives. Forrestal, *Monsanto*; Kilman and Wright, *Cullen*; Girdler and Sparkes, *Boot Straps*; Pew and Sennholz, *Faith*

<sup>18</sup> Lewis Brown to James Selvage, 8/18/1943 and 8/19/1943, Lewis Brown to J. Howard Pew, 1/2/1945, J. Howard Pew to Ernest Weir, 1/28/1946, all JHPP, Box 110, Folder "Politics – Miscellaneous"; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 3-53; Mason, *Republican*

<sup>19</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 22-29; Tedlow, *Corporate*, 59-213; Fones-Wolf, *Waves*, esp. 1-37, 89-124

<sup>20</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 3-26; Harris, *Manage*, 15-41

<sup>21</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 12-13

I stand before you as an average American citizen, representing no special group, but interested in the welfare of our nation as a whole ... I do not know the attitude that *wealthy* people have regarding their part in paying for the defense of America, because 365 days in the year I associate with those having *small* incomes.<sup>22</sup>

Above all, however, the relationship between Benson and conservative businessmen was predicated on their shared conviction that Benson's politics had the potential to resonate with the political culture of the South and West, and rural and small-town areas in particular. This political culture, they surmised, carried the seeds of a rebellion against New Deal liberalism. The people of the "Great Interior," Benson declared, "love American traditions the most; are fondest of the fruits of freedom and proudest of pioneer forebears [sic]." They also, he maintained, represented an influential voting block. The politics of rural America compared favorably with the "imported" idea of a "planned economy," which was "invented in Europe" and made inroads elsewhere, for example through "the foreign labor element in the northern states" (as we shall see, these concerns were also underpinned by ethnic antagonisms).<sup>23</sup> The circulation of 'Looking Ahead,' which was carried by thousands of small weekly newspapers in the South and West, was calibrated to reach precisely this constituency.<sup>24</sup> As money from conservative businessmen flowed in after the early 1940s, fundraising letters sent out from Searcy continued to emphasize that "Benson is making some rather complicated truths plain to the people of rural America and to residents of farming villages and factory towns. He writes as one commoner to another."<sup>25</sup> Benson, for his part, privately emphasized his distinctive approach to "reaching rural America":

[It] constitutes our only hope of preserving private enterprise... Too many individuals and organizations are still using the old methods that used to work twenty years ago in their attempts to properly influence legislation. The New Deal, however, has so changed the situation that it is imperative to adopt new tactics, as the records for the past ten years definitely prove.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Benson, speech draft, "Preserving American Democracy," 8/21/1941, GSBP

<sup>23</sup> Benson, speech draft, "Post-War Planning," St. Louis Real Estate Exchange, 1/12/1944, "LA," 7/15/1942, Don Murray, "Benson Talks," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, n.d. [1943], all GSBP; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 2/6/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> C. D. Brown to "Dear Friend," 11/29/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>26</sup> Benson to Pew, 5/6/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

This mirrored an important – and overlooked – element of business conservatives’ response to the New Deal.<sup>27</sup> Lewis Brown, for instance, told Pew of a conversation with a representative of the advertising industry who had confirmed his belief that “rural America” is where “the tide can be turned.”<sup>28</sup> In 1935 Pew bought the *Farm Journal* magazine, which had a circulation of more than two million in the 1940s, in an effort to reach rural America, “the real sane and thoughtful background of our whole social order.”<sup>29</sup> Benson’s promise to emphasize the divergence between the New Deal and rural and small-town ‘Americanism’ offered a counterbalance to what political pollster Samuel Lubell described as the “revolt of the city” in the 1930s; a revolt that was characterized by the growing influence of a liberal wing of the Democratic Party in the urban Northeast and (to a lesser extent) Midwest.<sup>30</sup>

Many businessmen, like Benson and a wide variety of conservatives, were particularly perturbed by this shift because it was also informed by an alliance between the Democratic Party and the organized labor movement, which, in turn, experienced a three-fold increase during the 1930s within the new industrial relations framework established in the wake of the Wagner Act of 1935. As we shall see in more detail in the following chapter, this often-tumultuous expansion impinged very directly on managerial authority, posed a more significant threat to basic structure of American capitalism than did the New Deal, and advanced a discourse that placed the interests of workers in opposition to industrial elites.<sup>31</sup>

The tone of Benson’s antagonism towards the New Deal, moreover, appeared to be calibrated to tap into powerful traditions of populist anti-elitism and localism. In this respect, he attempted to co-opt an ethos which targeted economic elites and was suspicious of modern capitalism – in the 1930s the celebration of localism, independence, and the small producer, for example, was present in the politics of Francis Townsend, Huey Long, Charles Coughlin and old anti-monopoly progressives such as Louis Brandeis.<sup>32</sup> Benson’s attempts to create friction between these tropes and the expanded role of the federal government were part of a broader,

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<sup>27</sup> For one notable study that neglects this theme see Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*

<sup>28</sup> Lewis Brown to J. Howard Pew, 5/14/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Benson to Pew, 5/6/1943

<sup>29</sup> Lichtman, *Protestant*, 74-75

<sup>30</sup> Weed, *Nemesis*, 3

<sup>31</sup> Badger, *New Deal*, 118-147; Harris, *Manage*, esp. 3-41

<sup>32</sup> Schlesinger, *Upheaval*, 30-41; Brinkley, *Voices*, *passim*

long-term transformation of populist discourse, which increasingly incorporated antagonisms towards a liberal bureaucratic and intellectual elite.<sup>33</sup> Benson's efforts in this regard overlapped with a distinctly 'western' antipathy towards the New Deal that gathered pace in the late 1930s and was inflected with a regional political culture that was hostile towards eastern elites and grounded in the rhetoric of 'self-reliance.' As James Patterson notes, such rhetoric was deployed in opposition to the Wagner Act, urban relief spending and the minimum wage, but it generally went missing when Westerners embraced measures such as the Agricultural Adjustment Agency, the Civilian Conservation Corp, and federally funded irrigation, highway and conservation schemes. It was also generally not accompanied by the kind of full-throated embrace of 'big business' that Benson offered.<sup>34</sup>

Given Benson's hope that rural Americans would be receptive to his ideas, as well as his own farming background and his propensity to position himself "a farmer in farming community," it was perhaps inevitable that Benson often deployed this populist discourse in relation to the New Deal's impact in rural areas. In this respect at least, he offered a more consistent 'anti-statism' than many Westerners and conservative Southerners. Benson railed against New Deal agricultural policies, which essentially established a system of production controls, government payments and price-support loans that remained more-or-less intact until the 1970s.<sup>35</sup> In Arkansas, the dire economic situation on Benson's doorstep in the late 1930s – Searcy is located on the cusp of the Arkansas Delta – elicited a response from the federal government that, as elsewhere in the South, was unprecedented. Thousands of Arkansans were on relief rolls or employed in public works. Farm production and prices were shaped to an unprecedented extent by government dictate, while rural communities were also not entirely immune from old-age insurance schemes and augmented wage and hours legislation. Moreover, the Dyess Colony and the Resettlement Agency's Wright Plantation represented pioneering efforts to remodel Southern agriculture.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kazin, *Populist*

<sup>34</sup> Patterson, "New Deal," 325, *passim*

<sup>35</sup> "LA," 4/28/1943, GSBP; Badger, *New Deal*, 147-190

<sup>36</sup> Badger, *New Deal/New South*, esp. 31-44; Biles, *South and the New Deal*, 36-58; Felix Belair, Jr., "RA 'Promised Land' Dedicated in South," *NYT*, 11/21/1936, 10

According to Benson, New Deal farm policy smacked of the confusion resulting from a reliance on “city-bred farm experts.” Referring to the AAA’s crop reduction program, created “in the early days of Planned Economy,” he decried that “little pigs were being slaughtered and growing crops uprooted to create an artificial scarcity,” while “many a farmer doubted the prudence of trying to raise prices by such sinister methods.” It was also during the “Decade of the Brainstruster,” he lamented, that the concept of “‘price parity’ was invented. It was a wishing-bone with no meat on it.”<sup>37</sup> “The federal farm planning tangle,” he concluded, was a “hay-wire agglomeration that needs to be melted down and poured into a useful mould.”<sup>38</sup>

Despite his opposition to New Deal agricultural policy and his admiration for the virtues of rural society and localism, however, Benson (in practice at least) did not subscribe to a vision of society that conformed to the principles of Jeffersonian Democracy. Rather, his engagement with the idea of the frontier, in particular, was part of a much broader debate over the nature of modern society and, more specifically, the relationship between the individual, the corporation and the federal government. The passing of the frontier offered a metaphor for negotiating many of these transformations. Benson was acutely aware of these debates. “Many so-called experts” he told a radio audience in 1943, “tell us the American pioneer is dead and will stay dead because there are no more undeveloped areas for him to conquer.”<sup>39</sup>

Roosevelt’s speech in Little Rock was only one of many occasions on which the President invoked the legacy of the frontier. This was partly a reflection of the fact that he had taken Frederick Jackson Turner’s course on the subject at Harvard. For many New Dealers – of various persuasions – the frontier provided a useful motif for elucidating the ways in which the New Deal provided continuities and discontinuities with the American past. For some, the Turnerian notion that the frontier had functioned as a safety valve in times of economic crisis was used to justify government providing modest relief measures in its absence. At times, key figures in and around FDR’s administration, including Henry Wallace, Hugh Johnson, Rexford Tugwell, Harold Ickes, Alvin Hansen and Senator Lewis Schwellenbach (D-Wash.), invoked the passing of the frontier as a justification for

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<sup>37</sup> “LA,” 8/4/1943, GSBP

<sup>38</sup> “LA,” 12/30/1942, GSBP

<sup>39</sup> Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio transcript, “Postwar Pioneers,” 1943, GSBP

the development of a new reform-orientated politics.<sup>40</sup> To Hansen, a leading exponent of an emerging Keynesian liberalism, the correct course of action was to “turn to a high-consumption economy and develop that as the great frontier of the future.” Schwellenbach, meanwhile, linked the surprisingly pervasive notion that the nation’s economy had reached maturity to the death of frontier. “You have heard about the last frontier,” he told an audience in Seattle in 1938; “so long as we had an undeveloped West – new lands – new resources – new opportunities – we had no cause to worry. We could permit concentration of wealth ... but we caught up with ourselves. We reached our last frontier.”<sup>41</sup>

To the left of the New Deal in the 1930s, the perception that the frontier ‘safety valve’ had disappeared was often articulated as a source of optimism. According to this logic, the frontier had persistently siphoned off discontent and thereby limited the inroads made by radical, class-based politics.<sup>42</sup> In a slightly different vein, Robert and Philip LaFollette, Wisconsin politicians and prominent representatives of a dying breed of progressivism, also suggested that the closing of the frontier necessitated a new politics.<sup>43</sup> These debates reverberated beyond the political realm too. John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* is perhaps the most celebrated example of this theme’s exploration in the literary realm. The Joad family’s futile journey from dustbowl Oklahoma to California was framed by the crushing reality that there are no more promised lands to flee to in the west.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the depression also encouraged academics and popular pundits to ponder the relevance of ‘rugged individualism’ to the contemporary world.<sup>45</sup>

Benson offered a rather different interpretation, one that had immense appeal to conservative businessmen. He expressly suggested that since the Civil War the self-reliant spirit had transferred to “the industrial pioneer,” the entrepreneurs and businessmen who were “in fact more courageous and venturesome than [their]

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<sup>40</sup> Wrobel, *Exceptionalism*, 122-144

<sup>41</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 132, 135

<sup>42</sup> Wrobel, *Exceptionalism*, esp. 138-139

<sup>43</sup> Schlesinger, *Upheaval*, 105-107

<sup>44</sup> Steinbeck, *Grapes*

<sup>45</sup> James Truslow Adams, ‘Rugged Individualism’ Analyzed,” *NYT*, 3/18/1934, SM1; James Truslow Adams, “Planned Economy,” *NYT*, 9/30/1934, SM1; R. E. Turpin, “Five Basic Tenets,” *NYT*, 7/31/1938, 95; “Through the Editor’s Specs,” *Nation’s Business*, 1/1940, 7; Wrobel, *Exceptionalism*, 122-144

predecessor[s] the farmer pioneer[s].”<sup>46</sup> This became a persistent theme in Benson’s politics. Its most striking articulation came in a 1950 NEP film, which also encapsulated the somewhat incongruous nature of this transition. The film begins with a small boy, replete with coonskin cap, stalking his way through long grass with a toy gun pretending he is Daniel Boone, the “intrepid frontiersman.” The boy is startled by strange sounds and as he abruptly emerges from the undergrowth, the camera pans to reveal a huge industrial plant adjacent to this rural idyll. The narrator reflects the boy’s dismay by noting that he is “about 100 years too late for the particular kind of pioneering you’re looking for,” but consoles him by suggesting that “maybe you can be a new kind of Daniel Boone ... by doing some new exploring in a different direction.” The boy’s dismay is melted by his introduction to the field of industrial research, a “modern frontier,” which provides the springboard for the remainder of the film as it emphasizes the wondrous benefits of work done in this field, and, in particular, the work of Du Pont, a key sponsor of the NEP.<sup>47</sup> The idea that technological and industrial advances represented the frontier of the future mirrored the response of many conservative businessmen to debates over the future of the American economy. This suggestion, ironically, provided some common ground with New Deal liberalism, which, as it began to coalesce into a more coherent form of politics towards the close of the 1930s, moved away from elements of liberal thought that were hostile to modern, corporate capitalism.<sup>48</sup>

Benson’s vision of the future was predicated on the idea that the unfettered marketplace was the heir to the frontier’s in-built status elevator, whose doors were always open to those who demonstrated virtuous attributes; “most of our great men,” he contended, “have come from obscurity.”<sup>49</sup> Such ideas cut against the grain of his populist discourse. If success was derived from virtue and initiative, and was emphatically not influenced by circumstance or context, then social status – in accordance with a classic conservative principle – offered a clear judgment on the merits of individual citizens. “If our people hunger,” Benson declared in 1943, “it will be for the same reason that people have hungered before: because of

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<sup>46</sup> Benson and Davidson, radio transcript, “Postwar Pioneers”

<sup>47</sup> *It’s Only the Beginning, Folks*; John Sutherland to Benson, 6/30/1950, GSBP

<sup>48</sup> Kaempffert, “Boundless Frontiers of Science,” *NYT*, 5/19/1940, 109; Brinkley, *Reform, passim*

<sup>49</sup> Benson, pamphlet reprint of speech, “The National Balance Sheet,” National Convention American Bankers Association, 10/1/1951, GSBP

unwillingness to do each his own fair share of work.”<sup>50</sup> Benson attempted to transmit ideas to ‘average citizens,’ but he did not, in the end, suggest that virtue necessarily resided with them. In fact, throughout his career he persistently suggested that big businessmen exhibited the most desirable characteristics of any segment of society and were the key drivers of American prosperity.<sup>51</sup>

The limits to Benson’s celebration of the ‘common man’ were also apparent in his steadfast perception that the New Deal was underpinned by a ‘bought vote,’ a contention which he shared with many conservative Republicans and businessmen. His conclusion that New Deal reforms descended into “pauper-pampering political gravy-trains,” echoed Senator Arthur Vandenberg’s (R-Mich.) prior contention that elements of the New Deal were “calculated to Tammanize the whole United States.” (Al Smith supplied another popular metaphor, when he tersely remarked that New Deal electoral successes simply proved that “You don’t shoot Santa Claus.”) “With both ears to the ground, these present politicians conclude,” Benson wrote in 1949, “that the ‘gimme, gimme’ crowd has the most votes. Accordingly, they chose to travel the ‘gimme’ trail to power.”<sup>52</sup> Reservations regarding popular democracy – based on a distinction between a ‘thinking’ and ‘unthinking’ public – often paved the way for many conservatives to adhere to this thesis. For example, ahead of the 1936 election Sterling Morton, the head of Morton Salt, a member of the Liberty League and an important ally of Benson’s, privately suggested that “the government and administration of these United States has been placed by a dumb unthinking populace in the hands of notorious incompetents” and that businessmen and “industrious, thinking, saving and honest citizens” needed to galvanize themselves to combat these forces.<sup>53</sup> In a letter to Benson in 1945, Clinton Davidson, one of his most important allies, revealingly emphasized the importance of devising methods of

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<sup>50</sup> “LA,” clipping, 3/17/1943, GSBP

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, “LA,” 12/29/1948; “LA,” 11/2/1949, both JDBP; “LA,” *Union Springs News*, 5/5/1949

<sup>52</sup> “LA,” 7/29/1942, GSBP; “LA,” 10/19/1949, JDBP

<sup>53</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 20-21. On the broader appeal of the ‘bought vote’ see Mason, *Republican* esp. 49-52, 105-106, 134-136; Weed, *Nemesis*, 46-47; R. R. Lutz to Rogers C. Dunn, 11/30/1940, JHPP, Box 3, Folder D-1943; Brown to Selvage, 8/19/1943; The Dunn Survey, “The New Deal’s Secret Weapon,” 11/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder D-1943. For examples of the use of Al Smith’s phrase see, “An Address by B.E. Hutchinson to the Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce,” 11/7/1949, JHPP, Box 22, Folder H-1949; Mason, *Republican*, 136

communicating with “people with low intelligence.”<sup>54</sup> In some respects, therefore, Benson’s objectives smacked of an effort to immunize the susceptible masses against dangerous ideologies.

Although the New Deal and the Great Depression invigorated debates over the detachment of the frontier ethos from its supposed roots in the frontier experience, Benson was also drawing on a longer conservative engagement with this concept. The notion that frontier individualism was not dead because the ‘free market’ preserved its essence had, in fact, been intermittently invoked by a variety of conservatives from railroad baron E. H. Harriman to President Herbert Hoover.<sup>55</sup> As David Wrobel demonstrates, the idea of the self-reliant pioneer was essentially a ‘cultural memory,’ which operated quasi-independently of the frontier’s instrumental role in shaping the nation. After all, it represented a selective vision of American history. The mythology of ‘rugged individualism’ began to coalesce in the late nineteenth century, particularly in response to pioneer reminiscences, pioneer societies, and through promotional ‘booster’ literature. It is difficult, however, to disassociate its formation from the idea that certain ‘cultural memories’ tend to supersede others, in part because those who dominate the economic and political machinery of society also exert a disproportionate influence over that society’s perception of its own history and culture.<sup>56</sup> In relation to the frontier, James Truslow Adams, the popular historian and columnist, was perhaps not too far from the mark when he concluded in 1934 that

it seems the doctrine gradually emerged as a combination of a sentimental legend of the self-reliance of the farmer and the frontiersman, with the calculated policy of ruthless exploiters of big and little business enterprises. The doctrine demanded the least possible interference by government. To have based this doctrine on the plea that certain persons or interests should have the chance to become quickly rich and powerful would not have done. The doctrine of laissez-faire had to be linked with the preservation of the self-reliant virtues of the farmer and the frontiersman, the ‘typical’ American, virtues which otherwise, it was claimed, might be ruined by paternalism.<sup>57</sup>

These contests over the cultural memory of the frontier provide an important rejoinder to Darren Dochuk’s characterization of Benson’s crusade. According to Dochuk, Benson’s efforts resonated with a ‘plain folk’ Americanism that had deep

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<sup>54</sup> Clinton Davidson to Benson, 3/19/1945, GSBP

<sup>55</sup> Mody C. Boatright, “Myth of Frontier Individualism,” in Hofstadter and Lipset, eds., *Frontier*, esp. 43-44; Wrobel, *Exceptionalism*, 137-138

<sup>56</sup> Wrobel, *Promised Lands*

<sup>57</sup> Adams, “Rugged Individualism Analyzed”; Wrobel, *Exceptionalism*, 128-129

roots in the political culture of the Western South, which comprised a populist heritage steeped in localism and faith in the efficacy of “pristine capitalism.” This, he suggests, was subsequently translated into a full-fledged economic conservatism when migrants from the region journeyed westward in the post-war era and experienced rapidly rising affluence in the Sunbelt.<sup>58</sup> This argument has much merit, but the earlier efforts of Benson and many of his conservative cohorts to recalibrate the relationship between conservatism and many of these cultural tropes suggest that this transformation was perhaps less ‘organic’ than Dochuk suggests.

In fact, it is only within the context of disputes over the cultural memory of the frontier that we can properly assess the final element of Benson’s engagement with these cultural themes: his efforts to portray his own life story and Harding College as the embodiment of self-reliant frontier virtues. Benson’s appeal to conservative businessmen lay perhaps as much in these personal qualifications as it did in any other element of his endeavors – Herbert Stockham, the head of Stockham Valves and Fittings in Birmingham, noted that Benson was “demonstrating by example *and* [emphasis added] precept the old-fashioned virtues of thrift, self-reliance and individual initiative.”<sup>59</sup> Almost all that is possible to discern about Benson’s early life is filtered through the lens of his own reminiscences. These, in turn, were quite clearly tainted by presentism. They were also, perhaps, shaped by his exposure to the discourse of ‘rugged individualism’ during his formative years – Benson’s ‘frontier’ experiences came at a juncture when most of the ‘frontier’ had already closed and its cultural legacy was beginning to take hold.<sup>60</sup>

Sympathetic observers often highlighted Benson’s ‘pioneering’ pedigree. In November 1941, for example, the *Arkansas Democrat* published a fawning article celebrating his remarkable “One-Man Economy Crusade,” which concluded that it was Benson’s “life story” which ensured that he felt “duty bound to speak out.” His father, Stuart, the article declared, was one of the “land-hungry pioneers” who settled on the Oklahoma frontier and inculcated his children with the virtues of “self-reliance.” This pronouncement echoed Benson’s own:

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<sup>58</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, esp. 3-36, 60-66, citation xix-xx

<sup>59</sup> Stockham to J. Howard Pew, 1/4/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>60</sup> Wrobel, *Promised Lands*

[I]f somebody had spread a rumor in our community that my father was no longer willing to be personally responsible for himself and his family—that he thought the Government ought to accept the responsibility of providing him a job at good wages, he would have felt indignant. He would have been disgraced.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, in contrast to the restricted working week stipulated by the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), he noted that “thirty years ago the Bensons and their neighbors averaged 60-hour weeks, seed-time to harvest.”<sup>62</sup> Almost half a century later, when an interviewer asked about his formative childhood experiences, Benson pithily responded that “[t]hose were pioneer days in Oklahoma, and I was truly pioneering.”<sup>63</sup>

Stuart Benson was born into a Scots-Irish family in Staunton, Virginia in 1870. He eventually settled in Dewey County in the western Oklahoma Territory in 1897 with his newly wed wife, Missourian Emma Rogers. The quarter section of land which Stuart acquired, formerly belonged to the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians, but was opened for settlement as part of the decade-long ‘Boomer’ movement, which began in 1889. It was here, in a two-room log cabin in September 1898, nine years before Oklahoma was granted statehood, that George Benson was born.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> “Statement of Dr. George S. Benson,” Full Employment Act of 1945, House Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, 10/18/1945, Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015081304209?urlappend=%3Bseq=9>, accessed 7/10/2012

<sup>62</sup> “LA,” 2/17/1943, GSBP

<sup>63</sup> Oren Stephens, “One-Man Economy Crusade,” *AG*, 11/9/1941, 1; Watson and Benson, *Missionary*, 14

<sup>64</sup> “Obituary,” *Taloga Times-Advocate*, Oklahoma, 4/5/1956, USGenWeb Project, <http://www.okgenweb.org/~okdewey/obit/benson.html>, accessed 1/18/2012; “S. F. Benson,” *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 3/27/1956, John Gumert to Benson, 5/27/1987, both GSBP; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 1-2, 27-29; Benson and Clifton Ganus, “Interview of Dr. George S. Benson, Parts 1-4,” 2/25/1969, HUDA; Miller, *Oklahoma*, 1-9



The Benson family c. 1918: Back row, from left to right, Emma, Earl, George, and Stuart; front row, from left to right, John and Bertha. The woman pictured in the framed photograph is presumably Laura Benson, George's sister who died aged 19. John Benson died aged 5.<sup>65</sup>

The Benson homestead was fifty miles from the nearest railroad at Kingfisher, twelve miles from Seiling, the nearest settlement of any size, and three miles from the one-room country school, which George Benson attended. There were few books in the classroom or at home, but Benson later recalled that the school's "old McGuffey Readers" "made the greatest impression upon me of any of the books I had." Their "moral stories," along with those of Horatio Alger, apparently resonated with his childhood imagination. As an adult he kept a "cherished set of the original McGuffey Readers" and devoted several of his newspaper columns to reprinting a number of their "character building lessons."<sup>66</sup> Benson's philosophy in many respects mirrored that of the Readers, whose pages were filled with lessons extolling the ennobling characteristics of hard work, self-reliance, and thrift, as part of a pious (often rural) lifestyle dedicated to a simple existence and deferred gratification. William Holmes McGuffey, the author of the eponymous Readers, was born to Scots-Irish parents on a 'frontier' farm in 1800, and his textbooks reflected the image he projected of himself as an austere Calvinist (he became a Presbyterian

<sup>65</sup> Photograph, "George Benson and Family," GSBP; "Obituary," *Taloga Times-Advocate*

<sup>66</sup> Garner, "Benson," 36; Benson and Marguerite Benson to Ralph Owens, 5/16/1989, GSBP; "LA," *Malakoff News*, 11/4/55, 11/11/55, 11/25/55, all 6

minister) who embodied the industrious individualism of a true pioneer, not least through his struggles to get an education. McGuffey walked six miles to school each day, worked on the farm and in various odd jobs to pay for tuition at college, and eventually, after many years of striving, published his first Reader and gained employment at Miami University.<sup>67</sup> His five Readers sold 122 million copies between 1836 and 1920, and were especially ubiquitous throughout the Midwest.<sup>68</sup>

Benson's reminiscences, like McGuffey's, had didactic undertones. McGuffey's Readers, like Benson's crusade, were partially informed by concerns over mass democracy. They were, broadly speaking, consistent with a middle-class, Hamiltonian outlook and were aimed at inculcating a set of values to counterbalance the inroads made into the American consciousness by a more egalitarian Jeffersonian outlook, alongside the more pressing concern over mass politics seemingly acted out through Jacksonian Democracy in the 1830s.<sup>69</sup>

There was also a remarkable congruence between the details of Benson and McGuffey's personal recollections. Benson walked six miles to school each day, until he reached eighth grade, and from a young age put in long hours working on the farm. After saving money from various odd jobs, he paid for a year of high school in Seiling, before moving to eastern Oklahoma, aged just fifteen, to complete his schooling in Claremore. Benson later recalled these experiences as a triumph of hard work and independence, bragging about how he excelled in his studies and surpassed the sometimes-limited knowledge of his teachers. It was in Claremore, however, during his first time "away from home and on my own," when he worked part-time as a janitor and resided in a one-room house, that

[I] began to establish the foundation upon which my life would be built. Yes, I had the love and care of wonderful, God-fearing Christian parents, and they had done the first groundwork, but the foundation that is laid only by the individual himself began to be laid in Claremore.<sup>70</sup>

Growing up on the Oklahoma frontier, he noted, ensured that self-reliance was "just as natural to me as it is for water to run down the hill."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Westerhoff, *McGuffey*; Sullivan, *McGuffey*; Skrabec, *McGuffey*; and Mosier, *American Mind*

<sup>68</sup> Sullivan, *McGuffey*, 17

<sup>69</sup> Even after McGuffey's death revised editions of his Readers emphasized conservative values. Mosier, *American Mind*; Westerhoff, *McGuffey*

<sup>70</sup> Watson and Benson, *Missionary*, 4-19; Garner, "Benson," 264-302

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

After graduating, Benson farmed and taught high-school classes before moving to Harper, Kansas in 1920. There he studied at Harper College for several years, before transferring to Stillwater, Oklahoma to continue his education at Oklahoma A&M. In 1924, Benson was recruited to teach at Harding College at Morrilton, Arkansas. Benson was eventually awarded a bachelor's degree in economics and history after completing further study while teaching at Harding, which gave him enough academic credit for A&M to grant him a degree in 1925. Here was further proof, Benson argued, "that anybody could get an education who wanted to work hard enough for it," and that "probably most any other goal could likewise be attained through perseverance and hard work."<sup>72</sup>

A similar ethos infused Benson's boasts about his athletic prowess. At any sport, he told a later interviewer, "[I] always played awfully hard."<sup>73</sup> At Harper College, for instance, Benson joined the Koinonia Literary society, a rival to the Excelsior Society. "The Excelsior always won in athletics," he told an interviewer in the 1960s,

so that year they elected me as director of the athletics in our society ... I heard that a good way to train was to wear lead weights on your feet. So I got a pound of shot for each ankle ... Each morning when I would get up I would run two miles. My roommate would run with me the first quarter, then he would sit down and rest while I would run the next three-quarters and back ... [W]hen the day came for the track meet, I got a light pair of shoes, left my weights off and won the quarter mile, the half mile and the mile without even being really crowded.<sup>74</sup>

Fittingly, in later years Benson cultivated a reputation as an indefatigable pursuant of whatever task was at hand and mounted on his office wall a quotation from Theodore Roosevelt, the relentless advocate of a 'strenuous' life: "When you play, play hard, when you work, don't play at all!"<sup>75</sup> Just as he thought little of running a team of horses day and night during the harvest season in his youth, so he thought little of spending 18 hours a day in his office, day and night, throughout his later career.<sup>76</sup>

Benson's discussion of diligence and hard work often highlighted his penchant for deploying heavily gendered language. Success in the marketplace was also, he intimated, derived from the expression of 'masculine' virtues. The state, on

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<sup>72</sup> Cited in Hicks, *Sometimes*, 3

<sup>73</sup> Garner, "Benson," 280

<sup>74</sup> Garner, "Benson," 43-44

<sup>75</sup> Nichols, "Harding College," 64

<sup>76</sup> Garner, "Benson," 301-303, 308

the other hand, threatened to undermine them. “Strong winds are essential to the tempering of the sturdy oak,” he wrote, while the denial of hardships (the product of “emotion and sentimentalism” amongst “planners who dote on the goodness of the government”) threatened to “create a nation of dependent weaklings.”<sup>77</sup> In a speech before Congress in 1945, in which he lambasted the pending Full Employment Bill, he simply implored: “Let’s be men, true to our proud American heritage, not cringing socialistic mice.”<sup>78</sup> This gendered dimension to conservative opposition to the state has been widely overlooked within the historiography of conservatism, but it seems that, for Benson at least, his politics perhaps spoke to broader anxieties about the changing nature of masculinity in American society. Benson’s own journey from working behind a plough to working behind a desk encapsulated broader trends associated with economic modernity that threatened an idealized vision of masculinity rooted in strenuous activity, authority, and the capacity for independent action. Challenges to traditional notions of gender relations stimulated by the cultural transformations of the 1920s, the depression of the 1930s, and the social changes that occurred during World War Two, likely heightened these concerns.<sup>79</sup>

What was omitted from Benson’s reminiscences confirms the importance of presentism and perhaps also epitomizes the reality that conservatism is often assisted by individuals’ willingness to overestimate the degree to which their own endeavors have resulted in rising affluence. He conveniently ignored the fact that his pioneer father’s land was granted by the federal government, and remained silent over the government’s substantial role in establishing the essential infrastructure for westward expansion. Although this contradicted his anti-government rhetoric, it was nevertheless consistent with the reality that conservatives have, in practice, often been selective in their opposition to governmental activism.<sup>80</sup> This, as we shall see, was true for Benson too.

The political context in which Benson was raised was more diverse than he intimated. According to Benson, despite

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<sup>77</sup> “LA,” *Millbrook Round Table*, 8/27/1948; “Statement of Dr. George S. Benson,” Full Employment Act of 1945

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Parrish, *Anxious*, esp. 135-158; Miller, *New World*, *passim*; May, *Homeward*, 39-89

<sup>80</sup> For one study that notably advances this theme in relation to modern conservatism see Shermer, *Sunbelt*. See also, McGirr, *Suburban*

hardships, people were very neighborly and morale was high. Nobody went hungry and nobody felt poor and nobody complained. I have never seen people anywhere who were more contented or happier than were the people of those frontier days when neighbors joined freely to solve one another's problems and stood firmly behind one another. They were all looking forward to the days when railroads would come closer and markets would be more accessible.<sup>81</sup>

However, rural Oklahoma, and Dewey County, in particular, was far from a harmonious, self-reliant idyll in which citizens readily embraced the forces of economic 'modernity' – the region's most dynamic political force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an egalitarian, Jeffersonian populism, which was superseded by an agrarian 'socialism.' Both persuasions were not easily distinguishable, because of their shared roots in the mythology of the yeoman farmer and puritan communalism that was counterpoised against the intrusion of distant, powerful elites. This, in turn, manifested itself in opposition to the railroad and robber 'barons,' much as it did in neighbouring states. Moreover, by 1916, when Benson was eighteen, rural western Oklahoma was one of the most radical areas of the country. In that year's elections in Dewey County the Socialist Party's congressional candidate received one third of the votes; the head of the Oklahoma Socialist Party hailed from Kingfisher, barely fifty miles from the Benson homestead, where the Bensons delivered their produce to the railroad.<sup>82</sup>

Similar contradictions underpinned Benson's efforts to portray the transformation of Harding College, from poverty in the mid-1930s to stability and prosperity by the early 1940s, as testament to virtues and principles that the New Deal rebuked. On Thanksgiving Day in 1939, many of Harding College's faculty and students gathered on a lawn outside one of the administration buildings to witness a ceremonial burning of the College's mortgage, which had caused much consternation at the time of Benson's appointment three years previously. By the early 1940s money was coming into Harding at a significant rate. By the time of Benson's departure as president in 1965 the College had an endowment of twelve million dollars, had invested an approximately equal amount on new buildings and

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<sup>81</sup> Watson and Benson, *Missionary*, 6-7

<sup>82</sup> In 1912, Dewey County sent a Socialist Party member to the state legislature and socialists were elected to the positions of Justice of the Peace and Township Clerk in Seiling, twelve miles from the Benson homestead. Bissett, *Agrarian*; Green, *Grass-Roots*; esp. 378-379; Burbank, *Farmers*; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 2

renovations, and had 1,200 students.<sup>83</sup> In the early 1940s Benson used this nascent transformation to highlight Harding College as an institution which had reaped the rewards of its adherence to “the American spirit of self-reliance.” At Harding, a promotion pamphlet declared in 1942, “students have turned their backs on ease,” “work is utilized as a substitute for subsidy,” “economy is the norm,” and “needless extravagance is a crime.” Benson contrasted government profligacy with his college’s self-industrious, thrifty ways. Most of Harding’s students, he emphasized, offset their tuition fees and living costs by working, while it was emphasized “to our students every day the necessity of self-reliance, individual responsibility, and individual initiative.” “We did,” he declared before a Congressional hearing in 1945, “in student assembly and in classroom, what was done in almost every American home in the days of Abraham Lincoln.”<sup>84</sup>

Sympathetic articles in various newspapers in the early 1940s, including a series of articles syndicated by the Scripps-Howard chain, lauded the industriousness of Harding’s students who worked on the College’s three farms, in its cannery, printing factory, laundry business, in the construction of buildings (they helped to construct a two-storey, eight-bedroom house for the College’s president), or in a variety of administrative posts.<sup>85</sup> This was Benson’s prescribed antidote to a “soft generation of youth,” and supposedly ensured the wellbeing of impoverished students who often arrived at Harding, as one report in 1937 described, “from homes of the utmost poverty - mostly shacks and broken-down farms,” offering “cows, pigs, chickens, syrup, eggs, and even peanuts” for tuition, often with “just a shirt and overalls and shoes that are falling off their feet” (in the case of the men) and “one-piece cotton dresses ... with underwear made from flour sacks” (in the case of the women).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Benson to James Atteberry, 11/23/1966, CLGC; “Statement of George S. Benson,” U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization, of the Committee on the Judiciary, 8/2/1965, Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.35112104265022>, Accessed 11/2/2011; Julius Duscha, “Little College at Center of Right,” *WP*, 10/4/1964, 3

<sup>84</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Preserving American Democracy”; “Statement of Dr. George S. Benson,” Full Employment Act

<sup>85</sup> Grant McGee, “Uncle Sam Goes to School,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, 9/19/1941 and 9/20/1941; “A Berry Nice Time Was Had by All,” *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, 5/22/1942, all GSBP; Stephens, “One-Man Economy Crusade”

<sup>86</sup> “Report on Harding College Prepared for Bill Raskob Foundation, Inc.,” 5/1937, JJRP, File 1927, Box 5, Folder, “Foundation Correspondence, 1937-1938”



Benson overseeing Harding College students picking strawberries in White County in May 1942. The students were organized to harvest the strawberries on a nearby farm apparently because low demand, on account of sugar rationing during World War Two, meant that the farmer who had planted them could not afford to pick and process his produce. The image was emblematic of the ways in which Benson attempted to promote himself and his college as the heir to a self-reliant, agrarian conservatism. "Such independent self-reliance was so unusual in those days," he later claimed, "that the story made page one in newspapers from all over the country, and also appeared in a news film by both Paramount and Fox."<sup>87</sup>

The work ethic and cultural values inculcated at Harding became a central theme in Benson's repeated calls for the abolition of the National Youth Administration (NYA) and permeated into a widely publicized (and likely orchestrated) spat between Harding College and the government in 1941 over an open letter addressed to Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau. The letter was signed by 20 students who requested that their stipends from the NYA be discontinued to help reduce 'non-essential' domestic spending in the context of World War Two.<sup>88</sup> Prior to raising money from conservative businessmen, however, Benson had been happy for Harding and its students to receive funds from the NYA, which represented approximately one-eighth of the College's budget for 1936-1937. In 1937, Benson co-signed a letter explicitly stating that "practically all these students would have had to drop out of school but for Government aid ... but for this aid, it is probable that our college would have had to close its doors."<sup>89</sup> At a

<sup>87</sup> Photograph, "Strawberry Picking at Harding College," 5/1942, "A Berry Nice Time Was Had by All," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, 5/22/1942, both GSBP; Benson, speech draft, "Post-War Planning"

<sup>88</sup> "Vain Sacrifice," *New York World-Telegram*, clipping, 1/29/1942, "Object Lesson," *Rocky Mountain News*, clipping, 1/27/1942, "Harding College Economy," *Washington Daily News*, clipping, 1/29/1942, all GSBP; "Report on Harding College Prepared for Bill Raskob Foundation, Inc."

<sup>89</sup> "Report on Harding College Prepared for Pepperdine Foundation," 6/1937, GSBP

Congressional hearing in the early 1940s it was claimed that at one point Benson had written to the state director of the NYA to protest at the cutting of the allocation for Harding College.<sup>90</sup>

In light of the money that was pouring into Harding College from business donors by the early 1940s, Benson's assertions regarding the source of Harding's financial solvency were somewhat disingenuous. By 1942, for example, donations exceeded revenue from tuition, and dwarfed the sums of money raised through the college's various business enterprises.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the various business enterprises owned and operated by Harding were subjected to a State Supreme Court ruling in 1960, which found that the College's printing plant, laundry and dairy operations were unfairly undercutting competitors by exploiting Harding's tax exemption status. Associate Justice Paul Ward sardonically noted that this was clearly "contrary to the avowed purpose of the College to teach the benefits of 'America's private enterprise economy.'" <sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Benson's political endeavors were entangled with the affairs of the College, yet its tax exemption status relied on its disavowal of any overarching political objectives or activities. This would eventually encourage the formal separation of the NEP and Harding College in 1954, but in 1945 it appears that Benson had to call in a personal favor from Congressman Wilbur Mills (D-Ark.), to avoid the Internal Revenue Service from digging too deeply into the nature of the donations and the political activities at Harding.<sup>93</sup>

When Benson took the reins at Harding its financial situation was less perilous than has often been acknowledged by a succession of sympathetic observers – the new site and buildings had been acquired for a mortgage of \$75,000 with a down-payment of \$5,000 in the mid-1930s, but the property was valued at \$600,000

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<sup>90</sup> "Educator Who Once Asked More NYA Aid Blasts It at Hearing," *WP*, 4/15/1942, 7

<sup>91</sup> "Proposed Budget for Harding College, 1936-37," GSBP

<sup>92</sup> Arkansas Supreme Court, "Hilger v. Harding College," 2/15/1960, Arkansas Judiciary Online, <http://opinions.aoc.arkansas.gov/WebLink8/ElectronicFile.aspx?docid=104033&dbid=0>, Accessed 2/10/2012; "Court Orders Harding to Pay Business Taxes," *AG*, 2/16/1960, 1

<sup>93</sup> Roy G. Paschal to Benson, 12/6/1944, 12/27/1944, Benson to Paschal, 12/22/1944, 12/30/1944, Norman D. Cann to Benson, 4/24/1945, 5/29/1945, Benson to Cann, 4/30/1945, 6/22/1945, Benson to Wilbur D. Mills, 6/22/1945, 7/9/1945, Mills to Benson, 6/25/1945, Treasury Department (unsigned) to Benson, 7/20/1945, all GSBP

several years later.<sup>94</sup> This purchase, in fact, was aided by a ‘buyers’ market’ fostered by the bankruptcy of the plant’s previous inhabitants, Galloway College, as well as the broader context of depression. Moreover, when Harding left its plant in Morrilton, Arkansas, it too filed for bankruptcy. According to its critics, this meant leaving behind debts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The College subsequently altered its charter sufficiently to enable it to be resurrected in Searcy as a technically separate entity.<sup>95</sup>

In reality, the financial stability of Harding College was also underpinned by a relationship with American business leaders that began in 1936. This relationship predated Benson’s watershed Congressional appearance and helped to ensure that his political rise was not, as he suggested, simply an outgrowth of the resonant outpourings of an ‘ordinary’ citizen. Its emergence came largely as a consequence of a religious controversy. Benson’s predecessor at Harding, J. N. Armstrong, had exhibited significant pre-millennialist sympathies, a doctrinal stance that was highly controversial within the Church of Christ. Benson publicly repudiated pre-millennialism, but his critics highlighted his roots in the apocalyptic Stone-Lipscomb tradition, his apparent previous expression of pre-millennial sympathies, and the continued presence of pre-millennialism amongst Harding’s faculty. Moreover Armstrong, whom Benson had studied under at Harper College in the 1920s, retained a position of prominence in Benson’s administration.<sup>96</sup>

These difficulties encouraged Benson to look beyond the Church for money. In this endeavor, he relied heavily on the assistance of Clinton Davidson, a Kentuckian and fellow member of the Church of Christ, who had ventured to New York during the 1920s and made a fortune by providing life insurance and financial consultancy services to wealthy individuals.<sup>97</sup> In 1937 Harding College hosted the first in a series of lectures delivered by a selection of the nation’s “outstanding

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<sup>94</sup> Stevens, *Before*, 112-133; Clifton Ganus, “Interview of Dr. George S. Benson, Parts 1-4,” HUDA; “Report on Harding College Prepared for Pepperdine Foundation”

<sup>95</sup> Ted McElroy, “Reply to a Harding College Ultimatum,” *Bible Banner*, 12/1941, 13, 15b, BBA; A. S. Croom to Benson, 9/10/1975, JDBP-HU. Benson later noted that he voluntarily paid off over \$2,000 of these dues. Harding College, “President’s Report to the Board of Directors,” 11/1949, IDDP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155

<sup>96</sup> Editorial, “The Harding-Harper Peace Pact,” *Bible Banner*, 5/1941, 2-7, E. R. Harper, “The Objections to Harding College,” *Bible Banner*, 8/1942, 14-15, both BBA; Hughes, *Reviving*, 137-167; Clinton Davidson to James Lovell, 3/17/1939, JLLP, Box 4, Folder 1

<sup>97</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 157; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 19

industrialists, financiers and economists.” Over the next four years these events were also attended by many of Arkansas’ leading educators, politicians and businessmen.<sup>98</sup> Davidson also wrote a feature piece in the *Wall Street Journal* indicating the series was J. N. Armstrong’s brainchild, derived from his conviction that “one of the reasons ‘big business’ has been under fire from so many quarters during the past half-decade is that the youth of America is coming out of college with a grudge against successful business”; a situation Harding promised to help rectify.<sup>99</sup> Benson re-iterated this conviction when he introduced the first participant, Edwin Kemmerer, a conservative Princeton economist who had been principal economic advisor to the Liberty League.<sup>100</sup> But it was Davidson’s connections that secured the participation of Kemmerer and prominent businessmen including Sterling Morton, James Kraft (President, Kraft-Phoenix Cheese Corporation), Hugh McGill (President, American Association of Investors), Raymond Fogler (President, Montgomery-Ward), James Hunt (Director of Research Department, Du Pont Company), and Robert Henry (Assistant to J. J. Pelley, President of the American Association of Railroads).<sup>101</sup>

Davidson even donated \$10,000 to set up a public relations organ for Harding College. In 1937 Harding produced a film and an illustrated pamphlet, which stressed the College’s sympathies with the values and interests of American business and were hawked around potential wealthy donors. In addition, a testimony to the self-reliance of Harding students was featured in Robert Ripley’s syndicated ‘Believe or Not’ newspaper column, efforts were made to ensure Harding basked in the glory of its alumnus ‘Preacher’ Roe, a rising big-league baseball star, and Benson was even granted an audience with Eleanor Roosevelt in Washington, who subsequently drew attention to Harding’s plight in her newspaper column.<sup>102</sup> At first these efforts struggled to draw in large donations, though Benson did manage to raise a significant sum of money on several fundraising trips around Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma in

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<sup>98</sup> “Dr. Kemmerer Tells of Evil of Inflation,” *AG*, clipping, 4/7/1937, GSBP

<sup>99</sup> Harding College, pamphlet, “The Flame That Must Not Die,” n.d. [c. 1942], GSBP

<sup>100</sup> Benson, “Speech of Welcome for Kemmerer Lecture,” 4/6/1937, GSBP

<sup>101</sup> Congressman Samuel Pettengill (D-Ind.), who was also Director of the Committee for Constitutional Government, delivered one of these lectures. “Some of the Business Executives Who Appeared on the Harding College Lecture Program,” 1937, JDBP-HU; Harding College, “The Flame That Must Not Die”; Gardner and Davidson, “How to Raise Money”

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*; C. D. Buck to Benson, 5/27/1937, GSBP; Harding College, “Flame That Must Not Die”; Eleanor Roosevelt, “My Day,” *Pittsburgh Press*, 8/11/1939, 25

1939.<sup>103</sup> Two further donations were key to retiring the mortgage by the end of the year: one of \$25,000 made by Western Auto manufacturer, George Pepperdine, the founder of Pepperdine College, whom Benson had first met in the early 1930s, and one from an unspecified member of the Du Pont family.<sup>104</sup>

Davidson also arranged Benson's first Congressional appearance in 1941. Benson, however, offered a rather different version of events: "It occurred to me," he wrote later that year in a newspaper column, "that the viewpoint of the ordinary citizen should be presented to Congress [so] I got on a train to Washington and appeared before the committee."<sup>105</sup> As Benson would acknowledge more readily in later years, Davidson also helped to write his speech, which was clearly aimed at raising the profile of Harding College, but also chimed with the emergence of more ambitious objective: the catapulting of George Benson into the political limelight. The response to the speech, moreover, was partly derived from a well-financed and orchestrated campaign.<sup>106</sup> Davidson subsequently exploited his business connections to help launch Benson's newspaper column, which, he later recalled, "would not only be helpful as publicity but would no doubt be greatly appreciated by people who were able to make substantial gifts to the college." To get it off the ground, Davidson claimed to have raised \$21,000 with the assistance of an automobile accessory company in Detroit.<sup>107</sup> Davidson similarly had a hand in the recruitment of ghostwriter Ward Halbert, who had previously "worked chiefly with business magazines in the petroleum and automotive industries." James Lovell, an influential figure in the history of Pepperdine College, who served as a Du Pont executive in the 1930s, also facilitated Halbert's appointment. In addition, Davidson later claimed to have penned many of Benson's early newspaper articles.<sup>108</sup>

Benson's 'frontier' heritage and his administration of Harding College were key to his political rise, but behind his politics lay an array of cultural, religious and racial concerns about long-term developments in American society that only

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<sup>103</sup> "Benson Reports Great Success on Recent Campaign," *Bison*, 3/28/1939, 1; "Benson Makes Six Day Tour for Funds," *Bison*, 11/28/1939, 1; "Kiwanis Club and Businessmen Back Drive," *Bison* 11/28/1939, 1

<sup>104</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 20; Gardner and Davidson, "How to Raise Money"

<sup>105</sup> "Economy in Government," *El Paso Herald*, clipping, 9/22/1941, GSBP

<sup>106</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 19-20; Gardner and Davidson, "How to Raise Money"

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Petit Jean Yearbook, 1941-1942*, HUDA; Gardner and Davidson, "How to Raise Money"; James Lovell to William Banowsky, 4/28/1978, JLLP, Box 3, Folder 4

occasionally surfaced in public. Benson, who lived in a segregated society, presided over a segregated institution and was a member of a segregated church, had an abiding faith in racial segregation. He believed racial differences were the product of divine intent – he was convinced that African Americans were subject to the ‘Curse of Ham,’ an interpretation derived from the Book of Genesis, which had retained a degree of acceptance in the South since the antebellum period.<sup>109</sup> Like many southerners, he expressed particular anxiety regarding the potential for racial ‘miscegenation’ and offered a paternalistic defence of segregation that was underpinned by the assertion that “the colored in America are most favored colored in the world.”<sup>110</sup>

These racist sentiments were almost exclusively expressed privately or within the confines of Harding College for most of Benson’s career. The absence of racial politics from his political crusade was perhaps influenced by his ambition to establish himself as a national, not sectional, political figure (although racism was by no means a southern phenomenon). It might also have been influenced by the potential for such an attitude to alienate some of the ‘money men’ in the Northeast, or at least that it would be considered a distraction from their priority, the promotion of ‘free enterprise.’ Perhaps most importantly, it was also a reflection of the fact that Benson, as native of Oklahoma and a resident of Arkansas, represented an upper-South conservatism, which was less emphatically defined by racial matters than its ‘Deep-South’ counterpart; Benson primarily bemoaned the passing of the frontier, not the ‘lost cause’ of the Old South.

Despite this reticence, it is clear that Benson recognized the overlap between his opposition to federal government and the New Deal, and the preservation of a segregated society. This was evident in his response to initiatives to increase federal aid to education in the South. In 1943, for example, he attacked the Hill-Thomas Bill not just because the “Federal control of public schools would make one huge bureau with an army of henchmen in a maze of pyramiding salaries.” It was also dangerous because “Federal control will ride down traditions ... the South will bristle at the first official effort to seat white and colored children together at school. It might easily

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<sup>109</sup> Key, “On the Periphery”; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 192; Robinson, *Fight is On*

<sup>110</sup> Benson, “Chapel Speech: H.C. And the Colored Problem,” 1/7/1956; Benson, speech notes, “H.C. And the Negro Question,” 1/11/1958, both GSBP; Lemire, ‘*Miscegenation*’

result in widespread violence.”<sup>111</sup> This rare, overt public reference to racial matters was notably coupled with the assertion that this was a “practical” objection to the Bill. The fact that Benson offered no anti-statist objections to the far more expansive G.I. Bill, which unlike the Hill-Thomas proposal offered no direct challenge to segregation, suggests the importance of race to his approach to the issue of federal aid to education (although, from Benson’s perspective, ex-soldiers, of course, were likely also more ‘deserving’ beneficiaries of federal largess). His overwhelming public emphasis on anti-statist objections, on the other hand, suggests his recognition that racist sentiments could be activated without being directly addressed. In this respect, it seems that Benson, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, had already begun to disassociate Southern conservatism from an overt defence of segregation, in a manner which foreshadowed the emergence of an ultimately more persistent ‘color-blind’ approach to the discussion of racial issues.<sup>112</sup>

Of course, in many respects, the New Deal offered little threat to segregation. The pressing agrarian crisis in the South, catalyzed by the depression and the persistence of a near-feudal system of sharecropping, elicited a complex and sometimes contradictory response, which was, nevertheless, relatively consistent in its deference towards local elites, who were often given control of the implementation of agricultural reforms and relief initiatives. In Arkansas, the recalcitrant and paternalistic racism of Senate Majority Leader Joe Robinson and Governor J. M. Futrell provided a substantial roadblock to ameliorative action on the basis of racial grievances. More broadly, the potent combination of a lack of interest in racial issues and the electoral power of Southern Democrats, enhanced by the Congressional system of seniority, ensured that few substantive efforts to challenge the structural and racial inequities in South occurred – Roosevelt, for example, refused to endorse an anti-lynching bill or the abolition of the Poll Tax. Such ardent racists as Senator Theodore Bilbo and Congressman John Rankin (both D-Miss.), meanwhile, saw no insoluble contradiction between their support for segregation and

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<sup>111</sup> “LA,” *Aspermont Star*, 6/29/1944, Ed. 1; Daniel Kidney, “Teacher Lobby Seeks 200 Million Pay Rise,” *New York World-Telegram*, clipping 8/26/1943, both GSBP

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Carter, *Wallace*; Edsall with Edsall, *Chain Reaction*

their support for the New Deal, and in particular, its cotton benefits and rural electrification schemes.<sup>113</sup>

Despite the New Deal's limited challenge to segregation, the extent of liberals' willingness to countenance the use of federal government, along with the potential disruption associated with reform, inevitably raised hackles amongst defenders of the racial status quo. There were, after all, long-standing southern sensitivities to external meddling. FDR's speech in Little Rock in 1936 avoided any mention of race but it nevertheless illustrated the tensions inherent in advocating both an expansion of federal control and a defence of localism.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, the rhetorical flourishes of New Dealers, which often celebrated the common man in opposition to controlling elites, had implications for racial prerogatives in the South, despite the colour-blind language in which they were articulated. Along with their receipt of New Deal economic initiatives, this was a key explanation for the most dramatic political shift amongst any demographic group in the 1930s, that of African Americans in the North, two thirds of whom had voted for Hoover in 1932, but who subsequently broke with the party of Lincoln in unprecedented numbers.<sup>115</sup>

The significance of this political shift was amplified by a concurrent acceleration of black migration northwards during the depression (the migration of African Americans into urban areas in the South likewise gathered pace in the 1930s). New Deal agriculture policy in the South compounded some of the destabilising effects of these developments, and this, in turn, had implications for a system of segregation substantially grounded in a specific context.<sup>116</sup> In addition, even in the South African Americans did receive unprecedented economic assistance. Eleanor Roosevelt, Will Alexander, and Aubrey Williams provided powerful progressive voices in and around the administration; Williams' efforts to use the NYA, which Benson so conspicuously lambasted, to challenge southern racial customs "made him one of the most despised New Deal liberals."<sup>117</sup> It seems

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<sup>113</sup> Sitkoff, *New Deal*; Badger, *New Deal*; Futrell to Robinson, 2/20/1936, Robinson to Futrell, 3/22/1936, JMFP Box 434, Folder "Southern Tenant Farmers Union"

<sup>114</sup> Sitkoff, *New Deal*

<sup>115</sup> Weiss, *Farewell*, *passim*

<sup>116</sup> Badger, *New Deal*, 251-252

<sup>117</sup> Badger, *New Deal/New South*, 38-39; Biles, *South and the New Deal*, esp. 103-124

highly likely that Benson's evaluation of the New Deal – given his location, his interest in politics and his racial views – was made in light of these developments.

Developments on Benson's doorstep demonstrated additional ways in which the depression fostered racial upheaval. When Benson returned to Harding in 1936, Searcy was barely one hundred miles away from the epicenter of a substantial crisis in the Arkansas Delta. Since 1934, the Delta had played to host to a series of widely publicized protests by black and white sharecroppers who had united under the auspices of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU), to protest at crippling poverty, exploitative landowners, violent repression, the Poll Tax, and the perpetuation of these grievances through the administration of New Deal agricultural initiatives by local elites.<sup>118</sup> John Butler, the STFU's President and a native of White County, lectured at Commonwealth College in Polk County, an institution that embodied the STFU's link between economic radicalism, labor organization, and an attack on racial discrimination. At its peak, the STFU had 30,000 members. Although its influence receded after 1936, the organization typified the broader overlap between racially progressive politics and the politics of many on the enlarged American left during the 1930s. This, in turn, was complemented by the growing assertiveness of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and organizations such as the National Urban League.<sup>119</sup> As we shall see in the following chapter, World War Two accelerated many of these challenges and offered up new ones.

Race and economic issues were important facets of Benson's worldview, but it would be misleading to divorce his convictions from his religious sensibilities, which, in turn, fueled his antipathy towards liberalism. In several important respects, Benson also adapted key elements of the religious culture of the Church of Christ to reconcile them with a modern, increasingly urban, society underpinned by consumer capitalism.

The rural frontier idyll Benson so often invoked was not just the source of a self-reliant ethos; it was also the fount of a religious piousness that “offers the only

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<sup>118</sup> Biegert, “Legacy of Resistance”; Honey, *Southern Labor*, 68-70; Whayne, *Plantation*, esp. 157-220

<sup>119</sup> Biles, *South and New Deal*, 122-123; Biegert, “Legacy of Resistance,” esp. 73; Johnson, *Arkansas*, 27-32

dependable foundation for good character and satisfactory government.”<sup>120</sup> “Our forefathers came to America seeking religious freedom,” he repeatedly emphasized, and

it was on a fundamentally religious basis that they brought forth on this continent a new nation dedicated to liberty and freedom and destined to become the greatest nation in the world. It was during those days when hardships were plentiful and when wealth was scarce that men lived nearest to the teaching of the Master and when our greatest progress was made.<sup>121</sup>

Borrowing a metaphor from his beloved McGuffey Readers, Benson frequently proclaimed that American “freedom,” inspired by the nation’s pioneer past, came in one indivisible “bundle,” composed of “free enterprise,” faith in God, and constitutional government.<sup>122</sup>

At the age of eighteen Benson met Ben J. Elston, a travelling preacher, and began a life-long affiliation with the Church of Christ. He was baptized in his early twenties and held his first revival meeting shortly afterward. In 1925 he ventured to China as a missionary. At Harding, religion was a major feature of everyday life, from mandatory bible courses, to daily chapel, to the swath of rules and regulations designed to foster a ‘Christian’ atmosphere. Throughout his tenure at the College, Benson occupied an important position within the broader Church, served as an elder of the local church, and continued to preach beyond the confines of Searcy.<sup>123</sup>

The faith in which Benson immersed himself was firmly rooted in the Restoration Movement of the nineteenth century, which, in turn, was most closely associated with the revivalism of Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone. Campbell, a native of (what is now) Northern Ireland, had been raised as a Presbyterian, and was educated in Glasgow, where he immersed himself in Locke and the ‘Baconian’ school of Scottish Common Sense Realism. In 1809 he left for south-western Pennsylvania. Campbell’s idiosyncratic debt to Enlightenment rationalism led him to conclude that induction made it possible to divine the true essence of the Christian faith by stripping away the ‘distortions’ created by denominationalism and returning to the text of the Bible and to the true form of Christianity as practised in the first

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<sup>120</sup> “LA,” 1/13/1943, GSBP

<sup>121</sup> Benson, radio script, “Meeting Hardships,” 6/12/1942, GSBP

<sup>122</sup> “LA,” 8/25/1943, Benson, speech draft, “A Challenge to Americans,” 9/1951, both GSBP; “LA,” *Malakoff News*, 11/11/1955, 6; Ted Diehl, “National Education Program to Hold Freedom Forum at Purdue,” *Harding Bison*, 10/14/1950, 1

<sup>123</sup> Garner, “Benson,” 53-58; Booklet, “Education for Eternity, Harding College, 1924-1974,” HUDA

century AD (it also emanated from a repudiation of European Church-State relationships). This perspective provides the essence of the ‘primitivism’ which still largely defines the Church of Christ. But it was also sectarian; it rebuked Catholicism as the epitome of the distorted Christian message, and retained a corresponding hostility to “the little Popes” at the head of Protestant denominations.<sup>124</sup>

Church of Christ traditions undoubtedly informed Benson’s celebration of agrarian virtues, and in particular, the notion that inhabitants of rural areas lived in “close association with God’s world.”<sup>125</sup> The Church of Christ became its own distinct tradition when it formally split from the Disciples of Christ in 1906, and by 1916, the year Benson was baptized, the census confirmed the Church as the “most rural major religious group” – a remarkable 95.5 percent of its membership resided “outside of principal cities.” This figure can in large part be explained by the 1906 schism, which was defined by sectionalism (the Church of Christ being substantially more southern), by affluence (the Disciples of Christ being more wealthy), and by theological dispute (the Church of Christ generally remaining more hostile to ‘modernity’). But these schisms were also informed by the emergence of an urban-rural divide – the Disciples of Christ absorbed the vast majority of urban members of the Restoration Movement.<sup>126</sup> This, in turn, reflected the culmination of a longer-term debate over urban morality which was encapsulated by a leading editor of a Church of Christ publication in 1897. “As time advanced,” he wrote,

such of those Churches as assembled in large towns and cities gradually became proud, or, at least, sufficiently worldly-minded to desire popularity, and in order to attain that unscriptural end they adopted certain popular arrangements such as the hired pastor, the church choir, instrumental music, man-made societies to advance the gospel and human devices to raise money to support previously mentioned devices of similar origin<sup>127</sup>

As a consequence of these formative influences, the Church of Christ in the early twentieth century in many ways overlapped with the perspectives of fundamentalists with whom they shared a faith in religious primitivism and an antipathy towards modernity and secular humanism. This was especially true of those members, such as Benson, who were raised in the apocalyptic Stone-Lipscomb branch of the Church. Though it is only possible to glimpse Benson’s worldview in

<sup>124</sup> Hughes, *Reviving, passim*, citation 34

<sup>125</sup> “LA,” 8/18/1943, GSBP

<sup>126</sup> David Harrell, Jr., “Pluralism: Catholics, Jews, and Sectarians,” in Wilson, ed., *Religion*, 74-75

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, *passim*

the 1920s, it appears that he shared many of the concerns of fundamentalists as they responded a tumultuous decade often (somewhat crudely) characterized by clashes between an emerging urban, cosmopolitan, mass-consumer society (epitomized by altered cultural and sexual mores), and older provincial sensibilities rooted in prudence and piety. These disputes, for instance, manifested themselves in contests between ‘Wets’ and ‘Drys,’ religious fundamentalists and religious modernists, and ‘old stock’ WASPs and immigrant ‘ethnics.’<sup>128</sup> In series of letters from China to a fellow Church member in 1927, Benson lamented that back home people were “turning their backs on Jesus,” aided by “the devil,” who was “ravaging the faith of the Christians”; that textbooks, “written from the standpoint of the progressive evolutionist who discredits the story of true creation,” were circulating ever more widely; and that “more young infidels” were “being ground out of the colleges than ever before.” “I shudder for the future of America,” he lamented,

She cannot turn her back upon God in that way and continue to prosper very long ... Surely, the way is being prepared for the anti-Christ. You learn from Revelation that when the anti-Christ comes he will extol himself above every name that is called God and yet the great majority of mankind will be among his followers ... This must be the preparation.<sup>129</sup>

Given the nature of Church of Christ theology, Benson was likely also perturbed by many of the other cultural transformations during this era. Even in later years he retained a steadfast faith in the patriarchal family and remained firmly opposed to smoking, gambling, dancing and drinking alcohol. (Benson was a key member of the White County Temperance League, which successfully campaigned to ban the sale of alcohol within county borders in 1960.)<sup>130</sup>

Although Benson’s social conservatism chimed with many of his contemporaries back home, his experiences in China further encouraged these convictions. Benson took a sabbatical from his missionary activities in 1930-31, during which time he completed a Masters, focusing on Chinese history, at the

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<sup>128</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, esp. 255-258; MacLean, *Chivalry*; Miller, *New World*; Parrish, *Anxious*, esp. 3-217

<sup>129</sup> These contentions, along with his additional reference to the “general falling away which must precede the next coming of our Lord,” suggest Benson’s attraction to premillennialism during this period. Benson to Claude Fly, 2/20/1927, 6/20/1927, 8/23/1927, GSBP

<sup>130</sup> Benson to J. T. LaFerney, 10/18/1960, “Report on Legal Moves in Contest and Appeal on Wet-Dry Election,” n.d. [c. 1960], both GSBP

University of Chicago.<sup>131</sup> His subsequent writings demonstrated a significant interest in Chinese society, which was, he surmised, unraveling as it became increasingly enthralled to skeptical rationalism and moved away from religious and cultural dogma. The ‘Chinese Enlightenment,’ which blossomed out of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, comprised a number of philosophical perspectives, but it was significantly grounded in an attempt to emulate the secular scientific rationalism of the European Enlightenment era and shift Chinese society away from its dependence on Confucian values and dynastic rule and move it towards something approximating ‘western’ democracy.<sup>132</sup> “No change in America or Europe,” Benson wrote in reference to the complex series of twists and turns in Chinese politics and society in the 1920s,

is to be compared with it in extent or in velocity. The Chinese are reconstructing their social, political, economic, educational, and religious systems almost over night. Never before has a nation been faced with a revolution in every phase of its civilization at one time.

He recoiled at the breakdown of “old moral restraints,” at “the cult of Sun Yat-Sen [that] seems to have completely replaced that of Confucius,” at the “naïve trust in science” evident in the nation’s “modern leaders,” at the fact that the “present minister of education has no use for religion of any kind,” and, finally, because “the family or clan, which has been the unit of Chinese civilization since days immemorial, is being seriously threatened by the individualizing nature of industrialism.”<sup>133</sup>

By the late 1930s Benson had shed any pre-millennialist sentiments, while the New Deal and the Depression deflected political attention from social or cultural issues.<sup>134</sup> Yet as historian Leo Ribuffo sagely concludes,

the Depression was a cultural as well as an economic crisis. The problems of faith, personal morality, and national purpose that historians typically associate with the 1920s did not evaporate with the crash. On the contrary, these long-standing concerns affected the ways in which Americans responded to the subsequent economic slump.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Benson’s thesis was titled “The Interest of Foreign Nations in Manchuria.” “George Stuart Benson, University of Chicago, Student Transcript Record,” 11/24/1965, GBCR-OCU, Box 1

<sup>132</sup> Schwarcz, *Enlightenment*; Bailey, *China*, 68-127

<sup>133</sup> Benson, “Present Trend of Confucianism in China,” *Canton Christian*, 10/1931, 4-5

<sup>134</sup> See, for example, Gerstle, “Protean Character,” 1043-1044

<sup>135</sup> Ribuffo, *Old Christian*, xii. See also, Sutton, “Was FDR the Antichrist?”

This was as true for George Benson as it was for many leading fundamentalists.<sup>136</sup> Benson later recalled that when he returned to America in 1936 he “was astonished at the sight of our own people avidly pursuing Godless philosophies in the midst of an appalling breakdown of moral standards.”<sup>137</sup>

Benson’s religious sensibilities and his perception of American society informed his critique of liberalism in a number of significant ways. The New Deal, for example, may not have fully embraced John Dewey’s contention that the unifying creed of liberalism should emphasize a commitment to mastering nature through the deployment of scientific thought, technology, and science, but there were, nevertheless, elements of liberal thought that, at the very least, were more optimistic than Benson regarding the possibility of moulding society through worldly institutions and rational deduction (and were more willing to compartmentalize religious and cultural issues from economic questions).<sup>138</sup> “Make no mistake,” Benson warned,

There is a wisdom greater than any man possesses. There are fixed laws that limit human discretion and determine sound judgment. Men can succeed only as they discover those laws and with them [illegible] their own deeds. Men of science have succeeded because with test tube and micrometer, they have studied God’s laws and followed along. Men of government have not.<sup>139</sup>

His critique of the New Deal, therefore, was also wrapped up in the conviction that there were profound implications to the idea that “human nature is not perfect.”<sup>140</sup> This, in turn, was derived partly from the doctrine of original sin, but it was also consistent with specific aspects of the Stone-Lipscomb tradition. Lipscomb’s *Civil Government* (1889), for example, portrayed all human institutions as a departure from God’s will, and argued that reliance upon them “corrupts the church, drives out the spirit of God, destroys the sense of dependence upon God, causes the children of God to depend upon their own wisdom and devices, and the arm of violence, and the institutions of earth rather than upon God and his appointments.” This was, in part, also a reflection of Lipscomb’s identification with the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction. In addition, the Church of Christ tradition harbors powerful individualistic impulses, born largely of its antagonism towards religious hierarchy

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.; Lichtman, *Protestant*, 50-136

<sup>137</sup> “LA,” 1/13/1943, GSBP

<sup>138</sup> Cowie and Salvatore, “Long Exception,” esp. 11-12

<sup>139</sup> “LA,” *Rogersville News*, 3/4/1943, 2

<sup>140</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Today’s Challenge to Americans,” 3/5/1952, GSBP

and European Church-state relations, and reflected in its own structure, which has no ministers or bishops, and is principally held together by semi-autonomous congregations, a system of elders, and a series of influential publications.<sup>141</sup>

The Church's primitivism also had important implications for Benson's worldview. This primitivism was a defining feature of the Restoration Movement's classification as sect, but, as Richard Hughes illustrates, since the early twentieth century the Church has behaved increasingly like a denomination. This can be clearly seen in its thawing relationship with other Protestant groups, but it arguably masks an ongoing, deep-seated antagonism towards Catholicism that would abate only in the 1960s, as well as the continuing presence of a theological barrier to the acceptance of denominationalism.<sup>142</sup> George Benson embodied these tensions. He was antagonistic towards Catholicism and viewed 'restoration' as the only path to salvation, but he also collaborated with Protestants, Catholics and Jews. Nevertheless, from Benson's perspective, the limited influence of restorationist principles over the nation's religious practices encouraged pessimism regarding Americans' moral and spiritual foundations.<sup>143</sup>

These sectarian concerns, in turn, overlapped with Benson's antagonism towards the urban East as an area ignorant of America's essential self-reliant ethos, and the New Deal as a sop to their perspectives. The increasing importance of northern urban constituencies to the Democratic Party was doubly worrisome because these constituencies were often composed of 'urban ethnics,' especially those Catholics and Jews who had shifted the ethnic and religious balance of the nation's population during the wave of mass immigration during the preceding half century. Harding's publications were keen to emphasize that most of the College's students were "from old Anglo-Saxon stock" and that they "represent offspring from

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<sup>141</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 117-135 [Lipscomb quotation, 122-123], *passim*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, *passim*; "Moscow, Rome or Jerusalem," *Gospel Advocate*, 3/10/1949, 146; "Catholicism in Textbook in Tennessee," *Gospel Advocate*, 2/5/1953, 66; "4-the Catholic Church Now Operates 24 Public Schools in Kentucky," *Voice of Freedom*, 5/1953, 1; James Bales, "Failure of the Infallible Interpreter," *Voice of Freedom*, 5/1953, 71

<sup>143</sup> O.S. Boyer, "Why Evangelize Romanists?," *Oriental Christian*, 7/1932, 8; Benson, "Present Day Significance of the Restoration Movement," in *Harding College Lectures 1950*, 19-29; Benson, "State of the Church Today," *Harding College Lectures 1966*, 297-304; Benson, speech notes, "The Restoration Movement," 11/3/1968, Benson, speech notes, "Inspired Scripture for All Ages and All Lands," n.d., both GSBP

what is perhaps the purest blood of the early American settlers.”<sup>144</sup> Moreover, it was explicitly the white Protestant pioneers whom Benson celebrated – in 1965, for example, he testified in Congress against the removal of immigration restrictions created in the 1920s, noting the “wisdom” with which the existing “quota system” had been constructed to favor “our original ethnic groups.”<sup>145</sup> Prior to the conclusion of World War Two, Benson occasionally also made mention of the errant political convictions of “new-made Americans” or “the foreign labor element in the northern states.”<sup>146</sup>

In an echo of the way in which he treated racial matters, however, Benson, for the most part, did not openly link his politics with sectarian or ‘ethnic’ concerns. He, in fact, most frequently identified America’s heritage as rooted in an undifferentiated “European stock” – his opposition to the changes to the immigration system in the 1960s was seemingly mostly inspired by a concern over black immigration.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, he attempted to articulate a definition of ‘Americanism’ that was in accordance with the principles of civic nationalism (although it still had quite clear racial and ethnic boundaries). “This singular American prosperity,” he remarked in 1945, “is not due merely to our excellent heritage. We are chiefly of European stock. Nor are our unique achievements due merely to our varied national resources, ... [T]he American Indians had the same resources for centuries ... [W]hat’s different in America is our measure of individual initiative, freedom and liberty.”<sup>148</sup> This stance, along with Benson’s partial repudiation of sectarianism, marked an important advance from the religious and ethnic tribalism of the 1920s. At the same time the incompleteness of his personal shift away from a white Protestant nationalism also serves as a reminder of the persistence of some of these tribal concerns. Nevertheless, in the longer term, this transformation was an essential prerequisite to the collaboration between members of the ‘Judeo-Christian’ faith who

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<sup>144</sup> Harding College, “Flame That Must Not Die”

<sup>145</sup> “Statement of George S. Benson,” U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization; “Statement of Dr. George S. Benson,” Full Employment Act of 1945

<sup>146</sup> “LA,” *Hemphill County News*, 7/27/1945, 3

<sup>147</sup> “Statement of George S. Benson,” U.S. Senate, Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization

<sup>148</sup> Benson, draft of Congressional speech, 1945, GSBP

shared a common antagonism towards secular humanism and certain manifestations of governmental activism.<sup>149</sup>

The religious dimensions to Benson's politics, along with his reservations regarding mass 'tendencies,' ensured that his critique of New Deal liberalism and American society overlapped with major themes in Burkean traditionalism, including a celebration of tradition, hierarchy and the necessity of religious institutions and cultural mores to inculcate moral restraint and engender political stability.<sup>150</sup> The traditionalist dimensions of Benson's politics, however, were antithetical to his reverence for the dynamism of the free market. One of Benson's endlessly repeated anecdotes demonstrates this tension. In 1936 Benson returned from China, a land of "glaring poverty," filled with "beggars and in filth and rags" and children whose "hunger was never satisfied." The Bensons disembarked in New York in the midst of the Great Depression. Benson's eight-year-old daughter Lois, who barely knew her homeland, looked around at the "those great skyscrapers, those clean, wide streets, those beautiful new automobiles[,] the well-fed and well-dressed people," before turning to her father to proclaim, "Daddy, I just hope heaven will be this nice!"<sup>151</sup> This rather saccharine tale stood at odds with Benson's celebration of a rural, small-town, pietistic society, with his disquiet at the loss of "thriftiness," about the decline of localism, about urbanization and urban morality, and about the fact that Americans had come to "love luxury and hate hardship."<sup>152</sup>

Benson actually measured American exceptionalism by the availability of material things, by the very growth of the large and bureaucratic corporations that occupied much of the Manhattan skyline and directly or indirectly fed off mass consumption, advertising, and the stimulation of decidedly 'un-puritanical' desires. In fact, perhaps the only other passage in Benson's often repetitious speeches that was repeated more frequently prior to the 1960s was his list of America's share of the world's consumer durables: the nation had only six percent of the world's

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<sup>149</sup> Kevin M. Kruse "Beyond the Southern Cross: The National Origins of the Religious Right," in Lassiter and Crespino, eds., *Exceptionalism*, 286-307; Davis, *Mountain*, 433-449

<sup>150</sup> Nash, *Intellectual*, 36-84

<sup>151</sup> Benson, "It's up to Us What Becomes of U.S.," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 9/23/1941, 1. See also, for example, Benson, speech draft, "Post-War Planning"; "Dr. G. S. Benson Addresses Pupils," *Salem News*, clipping, 1/11/1951, GSBP; Benson, "A Challenge to Take Home," 4/10/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 2

<sup>152</sup> "LA," 7/29/1942, Benson, speech draft, "Thrift and American Prosperity," 1/17/1950, both GSBP

population, he would declare, but it had a vastly disproportionate number of its automobiles, refrigerators, electric lights, radios, and so on.<sup>153</sup> Yet Benson claimed to live by the maxim of “living within your means,” another pearl of wisdom passed down from his father, and boasted of driving an old automobile because he “never bought anything on the installment plan.”<sup>154</sup>

Benson, in short, not only absolved capitalism of any responsibility for the elements of modernity that fuelled much of his disquiet, he revered its transformative powers. Despite their profound philosophical incompatibility, Benson’s praise for corporate capitalism, when placed in the broader context of conservatism, appears innovative. Just as it was not a foregone conclusion that liberalism would ultimately reconcile itself to the basic elements of corporate capitalism in the 1930s, so it was for conservatives with ‘traditionalist’ tendencies. The New Humanism of Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, and the Southern Agrarians’ iconoclastic *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930), echoed Benson’s concerns over modernity, social and moral decay, and the apparent decline in the influence of religion, but pointed to modernity and consumer capitalism as important contributors to these ills.<sup>155</sup>

The Church of Christ, like many Protestant denominations, was steeped in traditions of self-restraint and an admiration for simple pietistic living, which sat uncomfortably alongside an emerging consumer-orientated economic system that actively encouraged the accumulation of wealth and suggested that the fulfilment of personal desires through consumption offered the path to personal happiness.<sup>156</sup> David Lipscomb had, for instance, called for “a full surrender of the soul, mind, and body up to God” epitomized by “the spirit of self-denial, of self-sacrifice,” and had retained a distinct hostility towards men of wealth. Cornelius Vanderbilt and John Rockefeller were particularly despised. “It is the rich,” Lipscomb bluntly concluded, “that are out of their element in Christ’s Church.”<sup>157</sup>

By bringing together a cultural and economic conservatism, George Benson’s politics sometimes jarred in a manner reminiscent of Henry Ford, a man he deeply

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<sup>153</sup> Benson, “It’s up to Us”

<sup>154</sup> Benson, reprint of speech, “America at the Crossroads,” Rotary Club of Chicago, 8/5/1941, GSBP

<sup>155</sup> Murphy, *Rebuke*; Allitt, *Conservatives*, 127-156; Horowitz, *Spending*, esp. 1-4, 185-205; Parrish, *Anxious*, 194-196, 422

<sup>156</sup> On conservative morality and modern capitalism see, for example, Horowitz, *Spending*

<sup>157</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 122-123, 131-132

admired, but who also epitomized the awkward reconciliation of tradition and modernity in the first half of the twentieth century. Ford's motorcars were inextricably linked with urbanization and the revolution in consumption, advertising, and mass production. The Model T symbolized 'modernity' perhaps more than anything else. But Ford himself was deeply disaffected with the modern world he was helping to create. As Michael Parrish suggests, in the 1920s "the *Dearborn Independent* [Ford's newspaper] regularly denounced the Charleston, jazz, smoking, and drinking, but Ford helped to put sex, booze, and music on wheels."<sup>158</sup>

Like Benson, Ford romanticized diligence, restraint, self-reliance and an agrarian lifestyle, and like Benson and a myriad of other conservative industrialists of his generation (including, for example, Lamot du Pont), he lionized the old McGuffey Readers as the source of his success and as the epitome of more virtuous past. Ford collected many editions, started a school with lessons drawn from the Readers, and even transported William Holmes McGuffey's log cabin to his outdoor museum in Dearborn to form the centrepiece of a permanent 'McGuffeyland' exhibition.<sup>159</sup>

In the end, unlike Henry Ford, Benson, who was a generation younger, left behind his conclusion that 'traditionalism' needed a specific social context to flourish – his celebration of rural areas (though not the ideals he associated it them) largely petered out after the early 1940s. In this respect, Benson's worldview, which incorporated both economic and social concerns, was ultimately optimistic enough to suggest that the ideals of past could be divorced from the environment that fostered them and projected onto a dynamic and changing world. This was also myopic – it did little to resolve the fundamental philosophical antagonism between these two branches of conservatism. But sidestepping the elements of the traditionalist heritage which were hostile to modern capitalism constituted a crucial transition within conservatism, which would have profound consequences for the modern right, since the ability to appeal to both traditions simultaneously has enabled the creation of a broad-based political movement (although this 'big tent' definition has caused major difficulties). The formation of Benson's politics, however, suggests that there were

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<sup>158</sup> Benson, "LA," 9/8/1943, GSBP; Parrish, *Anxious*, 38-43; Horowitz, *Morality*, 135-136

<sup>159</sup> "McGuffey's Readers Thrill Ford," *NYT*, 3, 7/3/1938; Skrabec, *McGuffey*, 9-10, *passim*; Bird, *Better Living*, 98

important origins of this composite vision long before intellectual ‘fusionism.’<sup>160</sup> On balance, however, Benson was no optimist. He retained a substantial skepticism that suggested that American’s adherence to the ideals he revered, now devoid of their formative context, would remain unstable.

It was this deceptively complex range of influences and calculations that Benson attempted to distil into his ‘Americanism’ and which would shape the contours, for better and worse, of the career that he embarked on in the early 1940s.

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<sup>160</sup> For an influential overview of intellectual fusionism see, Nash, *Intellectual*, 84-347

## Chapter 2 Forgotten Battles on the Homefront, 1939-1945

Few historians of the American right have devoted significant attention to politics during World War Two. Many, if not most, have tended to implicitly or explicitly adhere to Jerome Himmelstein's contention that World War Two essentially "put domestic political conflict on ice"; the post-war era, by contrast, remains a ubiquitous starting point for many of these narratives – an end to the hiatus of 'conventional' political antagonisms.<sup>1</sup> This dichotomy, however, is highly problematic. The political terrain may have shifted during World War Two, but the political battles on the home front were nevertheless fought with familiar weapons, wielded by familiar foes, and were characterized by a familiar intensity. Benson's 'frontier populism' constituted an innovative approach to dealing with conservatism's problems, but it was the context of war that facilitated the take-off of his career. Benson, like many of his contemporaries, was consumed by the question of how best to transform the nation into the 'arsenal of democracy' (and, later, to maintain this status). But this, in turn, stimulated ideologically charged debates. New Deal-era antagonisms regarding the appropriate relationship between the state, the private sector, the agricultural sector and labor unions scarcely abated – they often defined wartime disputes over the most effective methods of ensuring that prices, consumption, production, wages, inflation, deficits, profits, taxation, and employment were kept in equilibrium (and, indeed, how such an equilibrium should be defined). Moreover, mobilization for war demanded a hitherto unprecedented degree of government control over the economy, epitomized by a remarkable expansion of bureaucratic infrastructures and budgets, sweeping restrictions on wages and prices, and carefully calibrated dictates for production and employment. Benson's hostility toward these temporary controls, shared by many others on the right, was underpinned by the perception that they represented a barbed threat – easy to swallow in a national emergency, but difficult to disgorge under normal conditions. This fear was clearly exaggerated, in part as a result of an effort to portray New Deal liberals as radicals. It also glossed over the degree to which business leaders and business prerogatives dominated the various war agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> Himmelstein, *To the Right*, 19

Nevertheless, Benson, like many conservatives, harbored a genuine pessimism about the future, and he was right that there were some, within the Democratic Party and the labor movement in particular, who attempted to elaborate a reform-minded agenda and build upon New Deal-era initiatives. Moreover, 'big government' did get bigger: federal spending increased from \$9 billion to \$100 billion between 1939 and 1945, and would never again return to anything like the prewar figure.<sup>2</sup>

The remarkable expansion of the labor movement during the war helped to push the question of union power and influence to the forefront of conservative concerns (even though, in practice, union influence and power did not keep pace with this expansion). The power of 'big labor' was an issue that Benson endlessly exploited. His efforts in this regard dovetailed with a notable rightward swing in popular perceptions of unions' merits, a swing that was most profound in the South, where the NEP's influence was most prominent. This emerging anti-union conservatism, in turn, provided a key foundation for the post-war right. On fiscal matters in Congress, Benson's perspectives enjoyed some notable successes, and conservative pressure helped to constrain the development of a reform-minded liberalism. Benson's contribution to political debate during this period is impossible to accurately discern; the scope of his efforts was relatively modest, however. In any case, despite the ingenuity of his approach, Benson's politics were constrained by a broader context that made it a relatively inauspicious moment for the propagation of conservatism. For all his doomsaying, Benson was overly optimistic about the power of the ideas that underpinned 'free enterprise' conservatism; the problem, in the end, did not simply lie, as he surmised, with the means of communication, or in liberals' misrepresentation of conservatism, or in mobilization of powerful constituencies through 'vote buying.' In these respects, Benson's problematic understanding of the conservative problem mirrored the convictions of many of his cohorts on the right.

Pearl Harbor was still seven months away when George Benson made his watershed appearance before the House Ways and Means Committee in May 1941. Nevertheless, defense spending had already grown significantly since 1939, and in early 1941 FDR, who had just been re-elected, submitted a budget to Congress that included \$10 billion for defense spending, more than five times the amount

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<sup>2</sup> Blum, *Victory*, 91

earmarked for that purpose in 1940.<sup>3</sup> In December 1940, as the Axis forces gathered momentum, Roosevelt publicly unveiled his desire to provide direct aid to Britain. Consequently, Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, a bold initiative that cost more in the six years of its operation than had all of the various New Deal initiatives combined in the decade after the 1932 election.<sup>4</sup> Taxes had already been raised in 1939 and 1940, but these unprecedented commitments provoked much consternation over how they should be financed. These were issues that defined proceedings at the Ways and Means hearings.<sup>5</sup>

Benson's solution was characteristically blunt: the federal government should cut "nonessential," non-defense expenditure by \$2 billion. More specifically, he called for the elimination of the National Youth Administration (NYA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), soil conservation schemes, "federal aid to roads," and reducing, by up to one half, the money allocated for the Works Progress Administration (WPA), "rivers, harbors and flood control", the food stamp program, "rural rehabilitation" (presumably a reference to the work of the Farm Security Agency, FSA), and "export bounties". From Benson's perspective, this was the most palatable alternative to raising taxes, running deficits or increasing federal debts, which would inevitably lead to "inflation, socialism and the worst kind of dictatorship".<sup>6</sup> In essence, he did little more than reiterate long-established conservative diatribes against the New Deal, but he attempted to use the new context to bolster these critiques; somewhat paradoxically he argued that these agencies and programs were both conceptually flawed (because they propagated a "relief psychology" and undermined the machinations of the marketplace), and no longer necessary (because the defense industry was creating jobs).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> W. H. Lawrence, "10 Billion Voted to Push Defense," *NYT*, 12/13/1941, 1, 11

<sup>4</sup> Sparrow, *Warfare*, 6

<sup>5</sup> Altman, "Contributions," 58-59

<sup>6</sup> Benson, speech draft, "Congressional Hearing, House Ways and Means Committee," 5/1941, GSBP

<sup>7</sup> Benson, speech draft, "America at the Crossroads," 1941, Benson, speech draft, "Senate Committee on Education and Labor," 4/14/1942, both GSBP



**“Is It Worth While to Keep Him at a Time Like This?”**

This cartoon, published in the *Arkansas Democrat* in the spring of 1942, captured the essence of Benson’s political message. It reflected his cultivated image as an earnest citizen and purveyor of simplistic, ‘common sense’ economics, as well as his predilection for using agrarian metaphors.<sup>8</sup>

Benson’s exhortations regarding non-defense spending were never accompanied by any engagement with the bitterly disputed question of American intervention in World War Two. Benson’s views on the matter are not entirely clear. His anxieties regarding the implications of mobilization for the expansion of the state remained the sole focus of his endeavors, a fact that suggests that, at the very least, he harbored significant reservations regarding interventionism. In a radio interview in the fall of 1941 he came close to revealing his hand. National debt, inflationary tendencies and continued non-defense expenditures, he declared, were in danger of “creat[ing] an emergency which I fear far more than I fear the entire axis combination”.<sup>9</sup> In later years too, as we shall see, Benson harbored substantial reservations regarding interventionist foreign policy, based largely on financial considerations. Although conservative anti-interventionism drew on several

<sup>8</sup> Clipping, *AD*, 4/16/1942, GSBP

<sup>9</sup> Benson, speech, “America at the Crossroads”

additional impulses – including a reluctance to ‘aid’ Communist Russia, traditions of unilateralism and the avoidance of ‘entangling alliances,’ or more prosaic calculation of American interests that simply contradicted the stance of interventionists – most of its advocates expressed the anxiety that American involvement, particularly with FDR at the helm, would damage ‘free enterprise’ and endanger liberty at home. Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-Mich.), for example, warned that “participation in another world war would swiftly and necessarily force our government into the strait-jacket of an American dictatorship”.<sup>10</sup>

Benson’s reluctance to engage with the interventionist debate was perhaps derived not from a lack of conviction, but from his ambition and his pragmatism. Within the Church of Christ there was a strong tradition of pacifism and, although this tradition waned after World War One, at least some faculty members at Harding College were stridently anti-interventionist.<sup>11</sup> More significantly, by 1941 the business community, whose support Benson relied on, did not share a common opinion on the matter. Businessmen harbored divergent individual convictions, but their distinctive viewpoints also emanated from, for example, the size, location and nature of their business, or their relative interest in foreign trade and munitions manufacturing; many, as we shall see, gained substantial influence within the bureaucratic agencies in charge of war production.<sup>12</sup>

Benson’s emphasis on ‘non-defense’ expenditure, however, provided an important means of transcending debates over intervention. More broadly, this focus helped to establish a source of renewed consensus for conservatives during 1940-1942. In particular, opposition to ‘non-defense’ spending helped to rekindle the congressional alliance between the Republican right and Southern Democrats, which had provided a considerable roadblock to liberal reform since the mid-term elections of 1938.<sup>13</sup> It also enabled Benson to secure support and patronage from both parties (Benson’s crusade was non-partisan). In the wake of Benson’s first Congressional

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<sup>10</sup> Lichtman, *Protestant*, 104-116 [Vandenberg quotation 105]; Doenecke, *Storm*, *passim*; Cole, *America First*, *passim*; Moser, *Right Turn*, 123-137

<sup>11</sup> Cled Wallace, “Big President of a Little College,” *Bible Banner*, 6/1944, 1-4; “The Advocate Editor and the Texas Brother,” *Bible Banner*, 3/1943, 12-15; Hughes, *Reviving*, esp. 145-149, 210-214, 260-261

<sup>12</sup> Cole, *America First*, *passim*; Lichtman, *Protestant*, 107-108; Burk, *Corporate*, esp. 278-279; Doenecke, *Storm*, *passim*

<sup>13</sup> Weed, *Nemesis*, 169-204

speech, Senator Vandenberg recommended that he run for Congress, while the issue of non-defense expenditure also enabled Benson to align himself with Senators Harry Byrd (D-Va.) and Walter George (D-Ga.), and Congressman Wesley Disney (D-Ok.). These three powerful Southern Democrats cautiously supported intervention but demanded that New Deal-era measures – especially those of a ‘relief’ nature – be dismantled as a prerequisite to discussion of revenue-raising strategies.<sup>14</sup>

Benson’s opposition to New Deal-era measures in the early 1940s was in fact part of a much broader conservative crusade, which demonstrated conservatives’ commitment to regrouping and adapting their critiques of liberalism in the midst of a new political climate. Byrd, a large landowner and businessman, also campaigned for a reduction of \$2 billion in nondefense spending ahead of the Revenue Act of 1941. He also chaired the Joint Committee on Reduction of Non-essential Federal Expenditure, which was established in September 1941 and was dominated by leading conservative southerners such as Senators George, Kenneth McKellar (D-Tenn.), and Carter Glass (D-Va.), along with Congressman Robert Doughton (D-N.C.), who headed the House Ways and Means Committee.<sup>15</sup> Byrd’s committee operated throughout the war, as one biographer noted, as “a hatchet job on big government”. In the early 1940s Byrd delivered paeans for ‘economy in government’ before countless audiences of “taxpayers associations, bankers, manufacturers, or other business groups”.<sup>16</sup> Byrd also arranged for Benson’s appearance before the Senate Finance Committee in August 1941 (when Benson essentially repeated his first Congressional testimony); he spoke on Benson’s behalf during the row that erupted in the wake of a letter sent to Aubrey Williams in early 1942, signed by Harding students, which demanded that the NYA be abolished; and he inserted at least one of Benson’s speeches in the Congressional Record.<sup>17</sup> Benson, for his part, promoted the Senator’s committee and perspectives in his newspaper columns and other work.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Albright, “George Calls for Leadership,” *WP*, 8/22/1941, 1; “Nondefense Economies Spiked,” *WP*, 8/26/1941, 1; Heinemann, *Byrd*, 215-246

<sup>15</sup> Heinemann, *Byrd*, 219

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 220; “Byrd Charges War Cloaks ‘Reforms,’” *NYT*, 12/13/1942, 67

<sup>17</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 40-43

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, “LA,” 2/3/1943, GSBP

Walter George, who presided over the Senate Finance Committee at the time of Benson's appearance in the fall of 1941, offered another powerful voice in the campaign against the continuation of New Deal initiatives. Benson proudly supported George's efforts on behalf of the "Private Enterprise system", describing him as the "personification of diligence," "a small-town boy" who had undoubtedly "seen more sides of the phenomena of life than his city cousins, who see more passing before their eyes but see it less completely."<sup>19</sup> In reality, George was close ally of business and plantation elites in his state, including Coca Cola and the Georgia Power Company, while his opposition to liberalism was heightened by FDR's 'descent' on Georgia in 1938 in an effort to ensure the Senator's defeat in that year's election.<sup>20</sup>

Wesley Disney, meanwhile, sat on the Ways and Means Committee and, like Benson, campaigned for a \$2 billion reduction in non-defense spending.<sup>21</sup> Once again, Disney offered public support for Benson, a favor the latter would often return. During a broadcast on NBC's Red Network in November 1941, in which both men discussed "unnecessary and wasteful nondefense expenditures", the Congressman recalled the "thrill" he had experienced upon hearing the Congressional testimony of an enlightened "plain American citizen".<sup>22</sup>

This crusade united conservatives outside of Congress too. The NAM and the USCOC echoed the calls for \$2 billion in cuts to non-defense expenditures.<sup>23</sup> In July 1941 Henry Wriston, the President of Brown University, opened the headquarters of the Citizens Emergency Committee on Non-Defense Expenditures (CECNDE) in Washington, D.C. Wriston emphasized that "the business men of America" needed to "support Senator Byrd's vitally important committee". In return Byrd 'puffed' Wriston's committee.<sup>24</sup> Benson, meanwhile, promoted the work of both Wriston and

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<sup>19</sup> "LA," 7/28/1943, 11/10/1943, 12/22/1943, all GSBP

<sup>20</sup> Zeigler, "Walter George's"; "Walter F. George," *NYT*, 8/5/1957, 1, 26; Badger, *New Deal*, 263

<sup>21</sup> Disney, "Speeding toward Destruction," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 6/3/1941, 527-531

<sup>22</sup> Benson and Disney, transcript of NBC Red Network Station Broadcast, "America at the Crossroads," 10/30/1941, "LA," 7/28/1943, both GSBP; Benson, speech, "Why the Renegotiation of War Contracts Law Must Be Repealed or Materially Changed," ROSW, Army Price Adjustment Board, Decimal File, 1942-47, Box 22, Folder "Benson, George S.,"

<sup>23</sup> "Charting the Job Ahead," *Nation's Business*, 6/1941, 62; "Industry Hears Call to Defend Free Enterprise," *NYT*, 12/1/1941, 1

<sup>24</sup> "State Taxpayers Demand Economy," *NYT*, 12/5/1941, 46; "Nondefense Economies Spiked," *WP*

the CECNDE, while Byrd, Wriston and Benson were the joint recipients of the Tax Foundation's inaugural 'Distinguished Service Award' in late 1941.<sup>25</sup>

By the close of 1943, the CCC, the NYA, and WPA had either been dismantled or rendered defunct.<sup>26</sup> "A lot of good people, together with the newspapers," Benson told an audience in Little Rock, "have said that I, more than any other private citizen, was instrumental in bringing about this saving in expenditures of a non-defense nature."<sup>27</sup> In reality, the bolstering of the alliance between Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans, as a consequence of the 1942 elections, was of much greater significance.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, the demise of these agencies did not precisely represent a victory for anti-statists. They were also undermined by rising employment, and conservatives did not have a monopoly on the idea that defense spending should be prioritized.<sup>29</sup>

The issue of non-defense expenditure, however, kick-started Benson's career. It enabled him to launch a wider-ranging campaign for 'free enterprise,' coupled with a corresponding assault on liberalism, labor and the wartime state. The publicity generated by his Ways and Means appearance provided the turning point. Allen Treadway, the ranking Republican on the Committee, referred to it as the "one of the best that has ever been presented to the Committee," and reread it into the Congressional Record. The *New York Times* reprinted Benson's testimony on its editorial pages. The *Chicago Journal of Commerce* circulated two million copies.<sup>30</sup> *Barron's* carried at least one article penned by Benson, in which he reiterated the essence of his Congressional testimony, while another leading business publication, the *Wall Street Journal*, offered further favorable publicity.<sup>31</sup> In the fall of 1941, the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, owned by Roy Howard, who had turned sharply against the New Deal after 1936, carried a series of six syndicated articles written by

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<sup>25</sup> Benson, "Why the Renegotiation of War Contracts"; "LA," 2/3/1943, GSBP; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 5/6/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943. Alfred Sloan, Lewis Brown and William Farish, three leading conservative businessmen, established the Tax Foundation in 1937 with the aim of promoting conservative fiscal policies. Lichtman, *Protestant*, 128

<sup>26</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 140-141

<sup>27</sup> Benson, "Why the Renegotiation of War Contracts"

<sup>28</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 104-106

<sup>29</sup> Koistinen, *Arsenal*, *passim*

<sup>30</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 37

<sup>31</sup> Benson, "How to Cut Federal Costs by Two Billions," *Barron's*, 7/28/1941, 3; "Review and Outlook," *Wall Street Journal*, clipping, 10/31/1941, GSBP

Benson. The chain's journalists also promoted Benson's endeavors at various points throughout the war.<sup>32</sup>

These developments provided much of the momentum for the establishment of Benson's long-running syndicated column, 'Looking Ahead,' which was launched in the summer of 1942. It was distributed under the auspices of the Western Newspaper Union (WNU), the "Sears, Roebuck of the weekly newspaper field," which provided three fifths of the syndicated material carried in weekly small-town and rural newspapers.<sup>33</sup> The column's distribution was patterned, in part at least, in accordance with Benson's own conclusion, shared by many conservatives, that non-metropolitan America offered a counterbalance to the urban centers that offered greatest support to liberalism and labor unions. In 1940, in fact, the WNU's editorial director was employed by the GOP to lead their efforts to target rural constituencies, which resulted in the Party's establishment of a new rural press section within its Publicity Division.<sup>34</sup> Benson's ambitions were further assisted by the conservatism of the WNU's owner, John Perry, along with, as was discussed in the preceding chapter, the assistance of Clinton Davidson and Louis Brown, the head of Johns-Manville.

'Looking Ahead' spread rapidly. By early 1943 it was carried by 1,000 weeklies. Before the close of the year it was in 1,500 newspapers. By the fall of 1944, it was in approximately 3,000. By mid-1945 Secretary of State Henry Morgenthau's office calculated that 3,409 newspapers – one third of the nation's weekly newspapers – were carrying Benson's columns (Morgenthau had retained an interest in Benson since he had drafted a conciliatory letter to Harding College in the midst of the NYA protest).<sup>35</sup> One estimate suggests that each of these newspapers had a circulation of 2,000, which would have given Benson a potential readership of

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<sup>32</sup> "Roy Howard" *NYT*, 11/21/1964, 1; "Lesson in Thrift for Uncle Sam," *San Francisco World*, clipping, 9/22/1941, "Benson Practices What He Preaches," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, 9/29/1941, both GSBP; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 39-40; Stevens, *Before*, 30-33

<sup>33</sup> Garfrerick, "History of Weekly," esp. 118, 123

<sup>34</sup> Casey, "Republican Rural," 130

<sup>35</sup> Benson to Pew, 1/5/1943 and 10/21/1943, both JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Benson to Guy M. Rush, 2/5/1944, Benson to Pew, 10/16/1944, both JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; "Noted Prexy Plans Talk," *Detroit Free Press*, clipping, 11/20/1944, GSBP; "Purpose and Objectives of the Department of National Popular Education," 1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; "Number of Newspapers, by States, Having Made Arrangement for Running Regularly the Syndicate Weekly Column, 'Looking Ahead,'" HMD43-45, Reel 67, Vol. 843, May 1-2, 1945; Emery, *Press and America*, 681

7,000,000 by 1945.<sup>36</sup> In addition, by 1944, ‘Looking Ahead’ appeared in approximately 60 daily newspapers, including the *Cincinnati Inquirer*, which commanded a readership of just shy of 250,000 (although the columns still appeared only weekly).<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between conservatism and the press during this period has been underexplored during this period.<sup>38</sup> There are some indications that the aggregate political perspective of the public was markedly less conservative than the aggregate political perspective of newspapers editorials for several decades after 1936.<sup>39</sup> The publishing empires headed by William Randolph Hearst, Robert McCormick, Frank Gannett and Roy Howard provided powerful support to anti-New Deal forces, as did a raft of widely syndicated columnists who often received their patronage, including, for example, John T. Flynn, George Sokolsky, Westbrook Pegler, Marquis Childs and Paul Fallon.<sup>40</sup> Weekly newspapers, however, have been even more widely overlooked, despite the important influence they exerted in towns and rural communities, where local elites often pushed them towards a relatively conservative outlook (newspapers’ need for advertizing revenue encouraged this process).<sup>41</sup> By way of comparison with Benson’s efforts, however, the average daily circulation of each of the nation’s top ten syndicated columnists in 1945 was 12,000,000 (although Benson’s columns generally constituted a greater percentage of total newspaper content – ‘weeklies’ typically had only eight pages).<sup>42</sup>

Of course, the impact of Benson’s columns, like that of any journalist’s output, was complicated by factors that are impossible to accurately quantify. Since their rise to prominence in the 1920s, syndicated columns provided a unique and important conduit between politics and the public, but it is certainly possible that commentators simply attracted readers who already shared their views, while circulation statistics do not reveal how many read each editorial or with what consequences.

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<sup>36</sup> Garfrerick, “History of Weekly,” 117

<sup>37</sup> Invitation to “Luncheon of National Importance,” Peabody Hotel; Benson to Pew, 10/16/1944, Box 5, Folder H-1944

<sup>38</sup> For two exceptions, see Moser, *Right Turn*; Witwer, *Shadow*

<sup>39</sup> Emery, *Press and America*, 714-715

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*; Fisher, *Columnists*; Jan Spiess, “People and Ideas,” *Vogue*, 8/1/1940, 36-37, 75-76

<sup>41</sup> Garfrerick, “History of Weekly,” *passim*

<sup>42</sup> Untitled list of columnist circulation, HMD43-45, Reel 67, Vol. 843, May 1-2, 1945; Garfrerick, “History of Weekly,” 133

At the same time as his newspaper column began to take off Benson launched *Our Two Battlefronts*, a fifteen-minute radio broadcast. It began on stations in Little Rock and Memphis in 1942, but by the following year it was carried by another nine, mostly located, it seems, in the South and Midwest.<sup>43</sup> These programs typically featured a discussion between Benson and Clinton Davidson, though occasionally there were other participants such as conservative economist Alfred Haake.<sup>44</sup> In 1944 Benson recorded a series of broadcasts entitled *What Am I Fighting For?*, which was carried on 15 stations in 10 states. Both of these series were supplanted by *Land of the Free*, a fifteen-minute drama series, which was also launched in 1944 and featured Horatio-Alger style tales of businessmen's rise to success. The broadcasts, which were recorded in New York and concluded with a personal message from Benson, were carried by 64 stations in 31 states by 1946. Two years later, 191 stations carried the program.<sup>45</sup>

During the war, Benson also appeared on a variety of radio broadcasts that were not sponsored by the NEP. These included recordings of his speeches, live broadcasts, and coincidental appearances on stations in the vicinity of his speaking engagements.<sup>46</sup> He also appeared on several national shows, including the American Economic Foundation's 'Wake Up America!' series on ABC and NBC's popular 'America's Town Meeting of the Air.'<sup>47</sup> Benson's radio endeavors reflected a broader conservative commitment to use the airwaves for political purposes, which had first emerged in earnest in the 1930s. 'Land of the Free,' for instance, bore many

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<sup>43</sup> "Benson Ends Speaking Tour," *Bison*, 1, 10/19/1943; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 40; "Noted Prexy Plans Talk"

<sup>44</sup> Benson and Clinton Davidson, reprinted transcript, *Our Two Battlefronts: The Renegotiation Law*, 10/9/1942, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Benson and Haake, transcript, *Our Two Battle Fronts*, 10/16/1942 GSBP

<sup>45</sup> Benson, speech, "Looking Ahead," Texas Cottonseed Crushers' Association, 6/8/1944, Division of Popular Education, "Land of the Free," 1944, "Purpose and Objectives of the Department of National Popular Education," "Stations Using "Land of the Free," 5/25/1948, "List of People Featured on *Land of the Free*," 1/26/1949, all GSBP; Ives, "Persuasive Techniques," 89-93

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, "1943 Annual Meeting," newspaper clipping, 3/16/1943, GSBP; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 39-48

<sup>47</sup> Fred G. Clark et al., "Is the War Destroying the American System of Free Enterprise?," *Wake Up America*, NBC Blue, 6/21/1942, radiogoldindex, <http://radiogoldindex.com/cgi-local/p2.cgi?ProgramName=Wake+Up+America>, accessed 8/8/2014; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 6/10/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Stevens, *Before*, 62; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 40

similarities with the more-widely syndicated ‘Cavalcade of America,’ the long-running CBS show, which was sponsored by Du Pont.<sup>48</sup>

For decades after his breakthrough Congressional appearance, Benson spent much of each year crisscrossing the nation to fulfill a wide variety of speaking engagements, which were typically attended by at least several hundred individuals. Between April and October 1942 – a not untypical period – he made 48 speeches in 26 states.<sup>49</sup> A substantial proportion of these appearances, perhaps more than half, were made before audiences assembled by civic clubs, in particular Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis clubs, in small towns and suburban areas, mostly in the industrial Midwest and the South (Benson was also active in Searcy’s Kiwanis Club).<sup>50</sup>

Despite civic clubs’ separate identities, they were all largely populated by local elites – professionals, small businessmen and manufacturers. Since the first phase of their expansion in the 1920s, civic clubs had provided a significant arena for the development of shared identities and the creation of important networks. Local clubs were also often intimately involved in local politics, and frequently lent their weight to ‘booster’ initiatives and the establishment of local Chambers of Commerce.<sup>51</sup> Oftentimes they engaged with national political debates too. During the war, for example, the Kiwanis International, whose membership (which was overwhelming concentrated in the United States) increased from 100,000 to 200,000 between 1940 and 1947, sponsored initiatives such as the “Keep America American” campaign which stressed the dangers of “too much governmental interference in the economic life of a people” and celebrated virtues that made the nation “great”: “individual initiative, industry, inventiveness, love of liberty and proud self-reliance.”<sup>52</sup>

On closer inspection, Benson’s relationship with civic clubs resided on more than a broad ideological overlap. As Jeffrey Charles illustrates, civic clubs advanced

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<sup>48</sup> Bird, *Better Living*, 60-71; Fones-Wolf, *Waves*

<sup>49</sup> “LA,” 10/21/1942, GSBP

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, “Benson Ends Speaking Tour,” *Bison*, 10/19/1943, 1; “Dr. George Benson to Be Speaker,” *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 9/27/1943, 1; “Dr. Benson Will Speak in Akron,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, clipping, 10/7/1943, “Private Enterprise Great Pillar of U.S. Strength,” *Indianapolis Star*, clipping, 1/26/1944, both GSBP; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 12/22/1943, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; Garner, “Benson,” 9, 134-135

<sup>51</sup> “Kiwanis Observes 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 1/22/1940, 4; Charles, *Clubs*, *passim*

<sup>52</sup> “Kiwanis Observes 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary”; “Perpetuation of Americanism,” *WP*, 12/3/1943, 1; “Keep His America American,” *Spokesman Review*, 5/28/1944, 8; “This Is No Idle Dream Either,” *Deseret News*, 1/24/1944, 4; “Kiwanis Told to Combat Foreign Isms,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 10/10/1947, 4

several significant adaptations to economic modernity that mirrored key features of Benson's worldview. According to Charles, civic clubs were defined by two impulses – “to preserve and to progress.” On the one hand, they often displayed “an aggressive traditional moralism,” which was rooted in anxieties over the destabilizing new influences on small-town life that accompanied the rise of an increasingly integrated economy, fueled by consumer capitalism. On the other hand, however, “their Madison Avenue-inspired rhetoric smacked of the consumer society,” and, particularly after the 1920s, their ‘free enterprise’ rhetoric made little distinction between large and small business. In fact, representatives of corporations enrolled in local clubs.<sup>53</sup> While Kim Phillips-Fein and others have helpfully outlined the relationship between business elites and conservatism, these transformations at the local level have gone unnoticed.<sup>54</sup>

The same might be said of the local Chambers of Commerce that also sponsored countless events at which Benson spoke. Benson was given honorary membership of the Little Rock Chamber in 1939.<sup>55</sup> Across the nation, Benson was also in demand at luncheons, conventions and public meetings arranged by a myriad of larger business organizations. He spoke, for example, before the Dallas Petroleum Club in Texas; at the national convention of the National Founders Association, in the Waldorf Astoria in New York; at the annual convention of the New Jersey Taxpayers Association (alongside Harry Byrd) in Newark; at the annual banquet of the St. Louis Real Estate Exchange in Missouri; before oilmen from the American Petroleum Institute in Tulsa, Oklahoma; and to a gathering of various businessmen and professionals at the Hotel Statler in Detroit.<sup>56</sup>

Benson's effectiveness as a speaker defined his success in these engagements. He rarely delved into the finer details of politics or political theory. There were few nuances in his speeches, just as there were few nuances in his worldview – there was truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and little in between. His speaking style was a qualified success. Benson's hard-to-place accent was

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<sup>53</sup> Charles, *Clubs, passim* [quotations, 6]

<sup>54</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*; Jacoby, *Manors*; Miller, *Voice*

<sup>55</sup> Stevens, *Before*, 131

<sup>56</sup> “Dr. Benson Gives Report on Recent Trip to Dallas,” *Bison*, 1, 1/19/1943; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 4/10/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; “Exchange to Hear Dr. G. S. Benson,” clipping, *St. Louis Globe*, 1/12/1944, “Annual Session Speech Wins Nation-Wide Attention”, newspaper clipping, undated [1944], “Noted Prexy Plans Talk,” *Detroit Free Press*, clipping, 11/20/1944, all GSBP

accompanied by a lilt that reflected his years of experience in the pulpit. There was something perhaps distinctively ecumenical about the aura of confidence and conviction that accompanied Benson's articulation of the conservative 'gospel.' (Benson made no distinction between the sacred and profane when it came to political matters – he often declared that 'free enterprise' was divinely inspired). His fervent gesticulations and predilection for rocking slightly forwards by shifting his weight to the balls of his feet at key moments, encapsulated a speaking style that was, nevertheless, characterized by an effective equilibrium between enthusiasm and restraint.<sup>57</sup>

Benson, however, was also infrequently humorous, sometimes appeared hesitant, and endlessly repeated statistics and anecdotes.<sup>58</sup> A long-time Harding associate astutely noted that Benson's speeches were "always very direct, sometimes even blunt, never flowery."<sup>59</sup> Earnestness was his greatest virtue. "Obviously he is very sincere," Franklyn Waltman, Sun Oil's publicity director told his boss J. Howard Pew, and "this sincerity is evident when he is talking, thus making him an impressive speaker."<sup>60</sup> Pew's cousin John G. Pew was more effusive: "[Benson] is an excellent speaker. He gets his points over very forcefully and effectively."<sup>61</sup> Reports of Benson's addresses also occasionally testified to his effectiveness. The *Tulsa Daily World*, for example, praised Benson's address before the local Chamber of Commerce, describing him as a "dynamic" speaker, and noted that at close of proceedings "the crowd refused to leave, and shouted 'more, more.'"<sup>62</sup> Cyrus Crane Willmore, the President of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, was similarly impressed. He contacted Benson shortly after hearing Harding's president speak: "Your address at St. Louis, Wednesday night," he wrote,

was one I shall never forget. I know of no man in America who is doing so much for the American system of private enterprise and our American way of life. At least seventy-five people came to me and thanked me for suggesting you as guest speaker. I had never had such an experience before.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For an example of Benson's speaking style see, "War We Are In, Communism vs. Capitalism," televised address, n.d. [1961]. See also, Garner, "Benson," 314-324

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*

<sup>59</sup> Garner, "Benson," 51

<sup>60</sup> Franklyn Waltman to J. Howard Pew, 11/19/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>61</sup> Pew to J. Howard Pew, 1/22/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>62</sup> "New Threat to Business," *Tulsa Daily World*, clipping, 5/20/1944, GSBP

<sup>63</sup> Willmore to Benson, 1/15/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944

Many of Benson's audiences were already sympathetic to his message, but he did, nevertheless, deliver it packaged up in a distinctive 'populist' discourse.

The exponential increase in Benson's various activities, along with the day-to-day running of Harding, created a heavy workload; one that was only made bearable by substantial assistance from Harding College itself. Ward Halbert, who, as we saw in the preceding chapter, was recruited as a ghost-writer for 'Looking Ahead,' was appointed in February 1942 as "assistant to the President" at Harding. It seems that Halbert's primary responsibility was to facilitate Benson's wider political activities (presumably, however, his wages were paid by Harding).<sup>64</sup> By the early 1940s, C. D. Brown, Harding's bursar and business manager, who oversaw the operation of the College's laundry and farm businesses, was also engaged in the promotion of Benson's political activities.<sup>65</sup> Similar assistance came from L.C. Sears, Harding's Dean, a lieutenant governor of the Kiwanis International, and a board member of the Searcy Chamber. Sears, for example, appeared on *Our Two Battlefronts*, and, along with two other members of the faculty, was included in the Division of Popular Education's speakers' bureau (the DPE was a forerunner of the NEP).<sup>66</sup> Clinton Davidson was also a member of the speakers' bureau, a position he combined with a seat on the College's board. More generally, Davidson remained an important ally for Benson during this period, not least because of his relationships with many leading businessmen.<sup>67</sup> Davidson's work, in turn, was complemented by the appointment of Guy M. Rush, a wealthy, retired real estate and investment

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<sup>64</sup> *Petit Jean Yearbook, 1942*, HUDA; R. N. Gardner and Clinton Davidson, "How to Raise Money for Christian Colleges," 1956, JLLP, Box 5, C. Davidson Papers (Lovell), Folder 1

<sup>65</sup> *Petit Jean Yearbook, 1936*, HUDA; "Harding College Bulletin," 9/1942, C. D. Brown to multiple, 3/29/1943, both ROSW, Army Price Adjustment Board, Decimal File, 1942-47, Box 22, Folder "Benson, George S."; "Bulletin -- Harding College," 1/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; C. D. Brown to J. William Fulbright, 1/21/1943, JWFP, Box 51, Folder 7; C. D. Brown to "Dear Friend," 11/29/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; C. D. Brown to J. Howard Pew, 2/8/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

<sup>66</sup> Benson and Sears, radio script, *Our Two Battle Fronts*, 6/12/1942, GSBP; Division of Popular Education, "Announcement," 8/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; "Dr. L.C. Sears Was Dean" in "Education for Eternity, Harding College, 1924-1974," 2/15/1974, HUDA

<sup>67</sup> Clinton Davidson to Fiduciary Counsel Field Executives, 10/23/1942, ROSW, Army Price Adjustment Board, Decimal File, 1942-47, Box 22, Folder "Benson, George S."; "Advocate Editor and the Texas Brother," *Bible Banner*, 3/1943, 12-15, BBA; Gardner and Davidson, "How to Raise Money"

counsellor, who operated as a ‘field representative’ for Benson from 1943 until the early 1950s.<sup>68</sup>

Rush’s importance to Harding College was underlined by his interactions with J. Howard Pew, who was Benson’s most important ally in the corporate world by early 1943.<sup>69</sup> Pew had an almost peerless reputation as a trenchant critic of New Deal liberalism amongst conservative businessmen, a reputation forged through his involvement with the Liberty League, the NAM and the GOP. For more than three decades after the mid-1930s, he helped to fund a myriad of political initiatives.<sup>70</sup> Pew and Guy Rush, with assistance from Benson and Davidson, organized series of businessmen’s luncheons in cities across the nation in an effort to secure donations for Harding and connect Benson with leading conservative businessmen and industrialists. The basic framework for these events was established during a series of luncheons in Texas in early 1943 (just before the establishment of the NEP), which were arranged by an associate of Davidson.<sup>71</sup> Rush subsequently took the reins and traveled across the country to stimulate local interest and make practical arrangements for Benson’s arrival. In Akron, Ohio in late 1943, a rubber company sponsored a meeting that raised \$10,000, while Rush organized another in Toledo shortly afterwards.<sup>72</sup>

The following year Rush and Pew organized a luncheon in Philadelphia (where Sun Oil was headquartered) and raised \$20,000, with \$5,000 each pledged by Pew and Edward G. Budd, the head of the Budd Manufacturing Company, which primarily made automobile bodies and parts in Philadelphia and Detroit.<sup>73</sup> In the spring of 1944 a similar gathering assembled in Cleveland, Ohio, with sponsorship

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Rush to J. Howard Pew, 4/25/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944

<sup>69</sup> H. C. Stockham to J. Howard Pew, 1/4/1943, John G. Pew to J. Howard Pew, 1/22/1943, J. Howard Pew to Lewis H. Brown, 5/10/1943, all JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>70</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 46, 48, 59, 70-71, 76-77, 226; Lichtman, *Protestant*, 81-329; Pew and Sennholz, *Faith*

<sup>71</sup> Benson to J. Howard Pew, 4/10/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Division of Popular Education, “Announcement,” 8/1943

<sup>72</sup> Benson to J. Howard Pew, 11/23/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; It seems likely that the sponsor was the B. F. Goodrich Company, headed by David Goodrich, a founder of the Foundation for Economic Education. Goodrich sponsored a similar gathering two years later. Henry Hazlitt, “Early History of Fee,” *Freeman*, 3/1984, 143-147; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 51, 79; “Benson Speaks in Four Cities This Week,” *Bison*, 11/1945, 4

<sup>73</sup> Guy M. Rush to J. Howard Pew, n.d. and 4/17/1944, “Invitation to Private Luncheon at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel in Honor of Dr. Benson,” 3/3/1944, all JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; “Edward G. Budd” *NYT*, 12/2/1946, 25

from local industrialists, notably including F. C. Crawford, a staunchly conservative former NAM President (1942-1943) and the Chairman of the Board of Thompson Products, which made precision automotive and aircraft parts.<sup>74</sup> James H. McGraw, Jr., President of McGraw-Hill, the powerful publishing company, was instrumental in organizing another luncheon in New York City in early 1944. Letters of introduction to potential attendees were provided by Pew, Rush, and Lewis H. Brown, President of Johns-Manville, who had assisted with the launch of 'Looking Ahead' and co-founded both the Tax Foundation (Brown had presented the organization's annual award to Benson in 1941) and the American Enterprise Association (AEA), which was launched in 1943.<sup>75</sup> The meeting resulted in donations totaling between \$40,000 and \$50,000.<sup>76</sup> By VJ Day, Rush and Pew had attempted to organize further luncheons in Chicago, Newark, Indianapolis, and again in the state of Texas, although no records exist that suggest the outcome of these efforts.<sup>77</sup> One estimate, however, suggested that in 1945 these luncheons raised \$240,000.<sup>78</sup>

Revenue poured into Harding College too. Sterling Morton donated money to buy a farm worth \$50,000 in 1945, while during the war tax-exempt donations were made by Du Pont, General Motors, Spencer Kellogg & Sons, U.S. Steel, Republic Steel, Bethlehem Steel, Armco Steel, International Harvester, Quaker Oats, and one of the Standard Oil companies (it is not clear which one).<sup>79</sup> There are no systematic financial records for this period, so it is difficult to gauge either the size of these donations or the overall funding that Benson received during this period, or indeed

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<sup>74</sup> Crawford served on the NAM-sponsored National Industrial Information Committee, alongside J. Howard Pew. James S. Adams to Alfred P. Sloan, 6/21/1943, NAMF, Series III, Box 844, Folder "Report to Mr. Sloan, 6/21/43"; Jacoby, *Manors*, 38; Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 4/25/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944

<sup>75</sup> Benson to J. Howard Pew, 5/6/1943 Pew to Brown, 5/10/1943 Brown to Pew, 5/14/1943 all JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 4/17/1944, 6/4/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; Lichtman, *Protestant*, 128

<sup>76</sup> Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 8/13/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., J. Howard Pew to Guy Rush, 8/18/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 12/22/1943, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 4/17/1945, JHPP, Box 7, Folder H-1945

<sup>78</sup> "Expansion Plan Approved by Cleveland Committee for National Education Program," 10/10/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

<sup>79</sup> Morton, "Government Handicaps Private Education"; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 46; James Wickstead to Benson, 2/23/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944

how much was allocated to the extension department (and later the NEP) and how much was spent on Harding.

As we have seen, businessmen's willingness to underwrite Benson's endeavors emanated his promise to make an innovative contribution their extensive efforts to combat the rise of liberalism and the labor movement in the 1930s. Benson's "plain, common sense appeal," as Lewis H. Brown described it, which was rooted in a fusion of the discourse of populism and frontier individualism, offered an innovative means of communing with 'average citizens.'<sup>80</sup> Benson's status as an arms'-length advocate of businesses' 'free enterprise' message also notably helped his relations with industry. During the war he turned down opportunities to work more closely with the NAM and the AEF. Benson's focus on the non-metropolitan South and Midwest, moreover, offered a way of challenging the increasingly Northeastern, metropolitan forces of liberalism.<sup>81</sup>

The expansion of Benson's relations with conservative businessmen during the war epitomized the extent to which businessmen saw both new opportunities and new challenges in this changed political context. The issue of 'non-defense' spending was just an opening salvo. Many sensed that mobilization offered a unique opportunity to 'sell free enterprise,' and a way of reestablishing the idea that 'business prerogatives' were central to prosperity. The potential for substantial changes to the state's activities in the marketplace, on the other hand, reinforced conservative businessmen's perceptions of the need for action. Anxiety and opportunism, in short, were the most prominent motivations for their actions. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Donaldson Brown, who was General Motor's Vice Chairman, an ex-Liberty League member, a current NAM member, and an attendee at Benson's New York luncheon in 1944, encapsulated this sentiment when he privately expressed the concern that those with "ulterior motives" were going to "seize the occasion to contend that the wartime system under which industrial production has worked such wonders could be extended and applied with equal benefit and effectiveness in the post-war economy."<sup>82</sup> Even before American intervention,

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<sup>80</sup> Brown to J. Howard Pew, 5/14/1944, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>81</sup> John G. Pew to J. Howard Pew, 1/22/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 26; Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 6/4/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; "Subscribers to the American Liberty League," JJRP, File 61, Box 1, Folder, "American Liberty League, Organization and Charter - 1934"; Michael J. Kane, "Minutes, NAM Committee on

leading businessmen, including Pew and Alfred P. Sloan, the President of General Motors, consistently emphasized the long-term consequences of a wartime economy: “the time to begin to fight to win the peace,” Sloan declared two days before Pearl Harbor, “is now.”<sup>83</sup>

At the core of businesses’ resulting efforts, which dovetailed with Benson’s crusade, was the persistent emphasis on their endeavors on behalf of the nation and their responsibility for the wartime ‘miracle of production.’ Institutional advertising and public relations represented an important aspect of these activities – in mid-1942 the Treasury announced that expenditure on advertising costs could be deducted from corporate income prior to the calculation of profits (a ruling that was especially significant given the 90 percent excess profits tax). Consequently, spending on institutional advertising or public relations advertising increased from \$1,000,000 in 1939 to \$17,000,000 in 1943.<sup>84</sup>

These efforts, which were often orchestrated by the War Advertising Council, were not always explicitly political, but they incorporated a discernable effort to promote “free enterprise” as ‘the fifth freedom,’ an adjunct to FDR’s ‘Four Freedoms’ (Benson, in fact, borrowed this phrase).<sup>85</sup> Republic Steel, which became a key ally of the NEP in the post-war era, ran an advertising campaign which included the tale of “Leatherneck Joe,” a fictitious enlisted soldier whose thoughts turn to his homeland and his prospects for re-employment after demobilization; “we’re fighting,” the GI declared, for “the right to work out our own futures, in our own way, without a lot of unnecessary interference and regulation” (his employer “old Bill,” the piece pointedly noted, had “started from scratch with nothing”).<sup>86</sup> In 1943, the NAM launched ‘Soldiers of Production,’ one of the most significant wartime business propaganda initiatives, which arranged rallies on company time for hundreds of thousands of workers.<sup>87</sup>

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Labor-Management Relations,” 6/13/1945, NAM, Series III, Box 844, Folder “Labor Problem - Speech Material, 1943-1945”

<sup>83</sup> “Sloan Bids Industry Act Swiftly,” *NYT*, 12/5/1941, 1, 18; “Industry Hears Call,” *NYT*, 12/1/1941, 1

<sup>84</sup> Marchand, *Soul*, 320

<sup>85</sup> Tedlow, *Corporate Image*, 111-149; Leff, “Politics of Sacrifice,” *passim*; Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “Fifth Freedom,” 8/7/1943, GSBP

<sup>86</sup> Marchand, *Soul*, 312-356

<sup>87</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 27-28

Combating the specter of organized labor's power and influence was central to Benson's relations with businessmen. Benson, in essence, sought to advance the idea that labor's 'unpatriotic' actions during the war unveiled the movement's true identity as a 'special interest' pressure group seeking power for its leaders and benefits for its members, irrespective of whether this agenda overlapped with the interests of the nation. These arguments more-or-less chimed with those articulated by a range of powerful anti-labor spokesmen and organizations including H. V. Kaltenborn, whose daily radio broadcasts, sponsored by Pure Oil, received nine million listeners; Westbrook Pegler, who wrote for Scripps-Howard and received a Pulitzer Prize in 1941 for his *exposé* of corruption within the labor movement; the NAM and (to a slightly lesser extent) the USCOC; individual corporate leaders and host of business-led organizations; and numerous Southern Democrats and conservative Republicans.<sup>88</sup> The anti-labor dimension to Benson's crusade was one of the most promising aspects of his activities. On the question of organized labor, as numerous public opinion polls demonstrated and contemporary analysts attested to, American citizens made a considerable rightward shift during this period.<sup>89</sup> This shift, in turn, helped to cement the place of labor issues in conservative politics.

In a number of respects, of course, the wartime conservative attack on 'big labor' represented a continuation of existing efforts. Just after the outbreak of war in Europe, a series of opinion poll surveys conducted by Elmo Roper, charted the views of a "national cross-section of businessmen" on individual pieces of New Deal legislation. The Wagner Act was, by a considerable margin, most frequently identified as "the worst" of these initiatives, while more than 80 percent of those surveyed indicated that it should be either repealed outright or modified (of this 80 percent, half favored its repeal).<sup>90</sup> In part, this antagonism was derived from the more-or-less accurate conclusion that the Act offered the potential for a more profound reorientation of politics than many other New Deal initiatives. Though this potential was never fully realized, union membership trebled during the 1930s, particularly after the formation of the Committee for Industrial Organization in 1935

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<sup>88</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Waves*, 89-124; Witwer, "Westbrook Pegler"; Brinkley, *Reform*, esp. 201-227; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War*, *passim*; Spiess, "People and Ideas"

<sup>89</sup> Farhang and Katznelson, "Southern Imposition"; Schickler and Caughey, "Public Opinion"

<sup>90</sup> Cantril and Strunk, eds., *Public Opinion, 1935-1946*, 405

(later Congress of Industrial Organizations, both CIO), which represented a more formidable challenge to the status quo than the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the more moderate, craft-orientated organization that had long dominated union activity.<sup>91</sup>

The sit-down strikes organized by the United Automobile Workers (UAW) in 1937, provided a dramatic demonstration of the growing success of labor's collective bargaining drive, a drive that was also punctuated by bitter industrial disputes and occasional violent clashes that involved strikers, 'scabs,' company-hired 'goons' and less-than-impartial local police forces. Much to the disgust of conservative industrialists, the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee brought many indignant employers to testify and publicly revealed the details of many of these sometimes-clandestine confrontations, as well as more subtle business efforts to forestall union organization.<sup>92</sup>

The Wagner Act also impinged on businessmen's immediate environment in a clearly discernable fashion, and ensured that, as Howell Harris astutely observes, "labor relations problems were particularly able to probe sensitive spots in the businessman's psyche, because they challenged his justifications of his own authority."<sup>93</sup> As the Roper polls intimated, and as Howell Harris, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf and Sanford Jacoby have successfully demonstrated, businessmen responded in divergent ways to labor unions; some favored 'accommodationist' tactics, some attempted to block the advance of unions. Most, however, whether they were temperamentally militant or pragmatic, were dismayed by union influence and anxious to prevent its extension.<sup>94</sup> Benson's best supporters in the corporate world, including Pew, Brown, Crawford, Budd, and the Du Ponts, were all renowned for their hostility towards organized labor and operated almost without exception in the sectors of the economy that were most affected by industrial relations disputes in the

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<sup>91</sup> Badger, *New Deal*, 118-147

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-147; Lichtenstein, *State*, 20-54; "Anti-Labor Drive Charged to N.A.M.," *NYT*, 8/15/1939, 5; "Editorial Newspaper Clippings Relating to the La Follette Civil Liberties Committee Investigation of N.A.M. Activities," 3/25/1938, NAMP, Series I, Box 79, Folder "LaFollette Committee"

<sup>93</sup> Harris, *Manage*, 8

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*; Jacoby, *Manors*

decade following 1935; many had experience of fighting against unionization and union demands in their own companies.<sup>95</sup>

Business hostility towards unions was gathering momentum by the outbreak of World War Two, despite the slow-down in union growth in the wake of the depression of 1938. In 1937 the Supreme Court adjudged the Wagner Act constitutional. The following year's elections increased the number of conservatives in Congress, but they failed to deliver any reform of labor legislation. In addition, the precise modus operandi of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which mediated labor disputes, only became apparent during its formative years between 1937 and 1939. Further hackles were raised by the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), which reduced employer's hegemony over working conditions by outlawing child labor, limiting the length of the working week and establishing a minimum wage (although agricultural and domestic workers were exempted from the latter two provisions).<sup>96</sup>

The conversion to a wartime economy ensured both the perpetuation and modification of conservatives' anti-labor efforts. Benson, like his compatriots on the right, realized that labor harbored ambitions to become a key participant in debates over how conversion should occur, and, more significantly, over who should be assigned administrative responsibility for industrial production. Over the course of 1940 Phillip Murray, who became CIO President in November, and Walter Reuther, the rambunctious president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), offered separate blueprints for a quasi-corporatist arrangement for the administration of vital industries. An amalgamated version of these blueprints, the 'Murray-Reuther Plan,' helped to ensure that the issue of labor's influence over defense production remained an especially contentious issue throughout 1941 and early 1942.<sup>97</sup> Frustration at the outcome of such endeavors, along with rising corporate profits in a rapidly

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<sup>95</sup> "Budd Strike Ends with Compromise," *NYT*, 3/30/1934, 6; William Blair, "Free Speech Ruled Employer's Right," *NYT*, 5/14/1944, 6; Herbert Corey, "He Beat a Path to Their Door," *Nation's Business*, 8/1944, 32; Jacoby, *Manors*, *passim*; Harris, *Manage*, *passim*; Badger, *New Deal*, 118-147, Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, esp. 3-26; Lichtenstein, *Labor's War*, *passim*. Although the independent oil sector was relatively unaffected by labor strife, the Sun Shipbuilding business experienced notable battles with the CIO. Pew also served on the NAM's Labor-Management Relations Committee. Kane, "Minutes, Nam Committee on Labor-Management Relations"; "CIO Wins Election at Sun Shipbuilding Yard," *Chicago Defender*, 7/10/1943, 3

<sup>96</sup> Weed, *Nemesis*, 175-176

<sup>97</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War*, 41-42, 83-89

expanding industrial sector and limited changes in wages provided the impetus to the escalation of industrial disputes. In January 1941 the UAW struck at the Allis-Chalmers plant in Milwaukee, which was fulfilling large contracts with both the Navy and the Army. The strike lasted for seventy-six days. By the close of the year more than two million workers had struck – more than any previous year bar 1919 and 1937.<sup>98</sup>

In January 1942, after the United States formally joined the conflict, FDR established the War Labor Board (WLB) to moderate industrial disputes in defense industries, as well as the War Production Board (WPB), which was charged with overseeing conversion to wartime production. Organized labor, under severe pressure from conservative critics and the administration, and in deference to public opinion, agreed to a ‘no-strike’ policy. Within these arrangements there were a few signs of encouragement for labor. Sidney Hillman was appointed as head of the labor division of the WPB, and he remained an important conduit between the administration and labor throughout the War. The WLB, meanwhile, was instrumental in establishing industry-wide wage patterns, a form of regulation that had been absent under the Wagner Act.<sup>99</sup> On balance, however, labor’s direct influence over production and mobilization paled in comparison to the authority assigned to representatives of private industry. Donald Nelson, the Sears, Roebuck executive, headed the WPB, whose staff was heavily populated by ‘dollar-a-year’ businessmen, while Henry Stimson and Frank Knox, two business-friendly conservative Republicans, were appointed to the top posts in the war and navy departments, respectively.<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, the WLB demonstrated a lukewarm attitude towards labor’s concerns. In many ways, therefore, World War Two was an inauspicious moment for organized labor.<sup>101</sup>

Nevertheless, as Benson’s career began to take off, labor featured heavily in his pronouncements. The opportunity to exploit the difficulties the labor movement was experiencing likely encouraged this. But there were other mitigating factors. Most importantly, the labor movement continued to attempt to shape the wartime

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 49-50, 209-210

<sup>99</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War*, 51

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 37; Brinkley, *Reform*, 178-200; Jacoby, *Manors*, 35

<sup>101</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War*, *passim*

economy. In April 1942 Benson warned that “the leadership of organized labor seems unaware of the gravity of this emergency and instead of going all out for production, they still are fighting for the closed shop, higher wages and overtime.”<sup>102</sup> This statement came against the backdrop of heated debates over the WLB’s role in deliberating over wage increases. The matter was settled in July, thanks to the ‘Little Steel’ decision, which offered a limited wage increase, well below what most labor leaders hoped for, and fixed wages at this new level for the remainder of the War. However, as a result of this agreement and labor’s consent to a ‘no-strike’ pledge, an important concession was offered: a ‘maintenance of membership’ statute, which assisted labor organizing in defense industries. As a consequence, union membership, which had already grown from 3 million in 1933 to 8.5 million in 1940 and 10.5 million in 1941, expanded to 14.8 million by the close of the War, a figure that represented close to one third of the workforce.<sup>103</sup>

The ‘Little Steel’ decision also did not end labor’s protests. For the remainder of the war Benson, once again like many of his allies on the right, continually hammered away at three central themes in his efforts to illustrate the dangers of union’s self-interested nature: labor’s demands regarding wages and working conditions, strikes in defense industries (which, of course was linked to the first theme), and union’s political influence over the Democratic Party. Persistent wildcat strikes (despite the ‘no-strike’ pledge), provided helpful fodder.<sup>104</sup> “Selfishness,” Benson responded, was the principal threat to the War effort, as well as the motivating factor behind these ‘unpatriotic’ strikes.<sup>105</sup> “The American worker is fighting the Nazi worker in this war,” he declared in a radio broadcast in the fall of 1942, “just as much as the American soldier is fighting the Nazi soldier.” In Germany on the other hand, he continued, there had been “no strikes” “for nine years,” and German laborers received far lower remuneration for their endeavors in addition to “working 60 hours a week, while the American is still working only 48 hours a week and getting extra pay for every hour above forty.” American workers, Benson maintained, needed to provide a powerful rebuke to the ideas emanating from “Herr

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<sup>102</sup> Virginia Lightle, “Honored at Banquet,” *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 4/10/1942, GSBP

<sup>103</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 210-212; Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War*, 67-81

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*

<sup>105</sup> “LA,” 10/7/1942, GSBP

Goebbles' [sic] propaganda office," which suggested that "Americans are soft and degenerate," "used to luxuries," and incapable of "making patriotic sacrifices comparable to Germany's."<sup>106</sup>

Benson's 'populist' tone inflected his wartime critique of organized labor. For the most part, he attempted to place himself on the side of the labor worker and in opposition to the "soft-handed labor lords."<sup>107</sup> "Pompous organizers," Benson wrote, "do not represent labor and cannot speak for the workers of America."<sup>108</sup> Despite this, occasionally his disdain and condescending attitude shone through. Benson maintained, for example, that workers had a history of "slowing down production to make more work for union members." His metaphors were also sometimes revealingly clumsy. Comparing workers with donkeys and employers with farmers, in an effort to demonstrate their harmonious interests, he contended that "a man who owns a strong mule, doesn't starve the mule and put a heavy weight on its back when he hitches it to his wagon. Instead he feeds a good mule well, and does everything he can to help the mule pull heavier loads greater distances."<sup>109</sup>

Benson even began to directly target union members, in a way that foreshadowed a notable shift in the focus of the NEP's activities in the early post-war period. By 1944, for example, 'Looking Ahead' appeared in 400 business and 'in-house' company publications and in 10,000 "monthly bulletins to employers of labor."<sup>110</sup> From the fall of 1943, Benson made some forays into addressing crowds of industrial employees. In September, at the behest of six manufacturing companies with significant defense contracts (including Beech Aircraft and Boeing), Benson delivered his "down-to-earth" eulogy to 'free enterprise' before 6,000 workers at Lawrence Stadium in Wichita, Kansas. The following day he spoke to another 1,500. The following month, he spoke to 1,700 "war plant employees" in Rockford, Illinois (having missed the train en route, Benson arrived on time courtesy of a private aircraft secured by the Chicago Rotary Club).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Benson and Clinton Davidson, transcript, *Our Two Battle Fronts, Labor's Part in This War*, 7/24/1942, GSBP

<sup>107</sup> "LA," 10/14/1942, GSBP

<sup>108</sup> "LA," 9/2/1942, GSBP

<sup>109</sup> Benson and Davidson, *Our Two Battle Fronts, Labor's Part*

<sup>110</sup> Invitation to "Luncheon of National Importance," Peabody Hotel

<sup>111</sup> "Enterprise of Free America Emphasized," *AG*, clipping, 9/12/1943, "Friday at Stadium," *Boeing - Plane Talk*, clipping, 9/4/1943, "Rotary Service by Air," *Gyrator*, clipping, 10/15/1943, all GSBP

The NEP's efforts to target workers were, as we shall see in the next chapter, highly problematic, but the popularity of Benson's anti-labor message was clearly evident in the campaign for legal restrictions on union's ability to strike during wartime, a theme that had animated the right since a Bill aimed at outlawing strikes failed to pass Congress in 1941.<sup>112</sup> Action was needed, Benson claimed, to "take the club from the hands of self-seeking labor racketeers" and to circumvent the influence of "Congressmen [who] have been bullied by labor leaders and have avoided the issue [of wildcat strikes]." "One strike at a craftily chosen time and place," he added, "might paralyze Uncle Sam's war effort."<sup>113</sup> As usual, corporate conservatives were at the vanguard of calls for such restrictions. At the close of 1942 W. P. Witherow, the President of the NAM, demanded that labor to be "put in an official position to keep their no-strike pledge." Harry Byrd, one of many conservative proponents of such restrictions in Washington, even called for a 'work or fight' bill in early 1943, which would have resulted in the automatic conscription of workers striking in defense industries.<sup>114</sup>

In 1943 these voices grew louder, principally in response to the significant increase in the prevalence of 'wildcat' industrial action, which culminated with John Lewis leading the United Mine Workers (UMW) out on a six-month-long coal strike which constituted the most substantial industrial dispute to occur throughout the War (coal workers were particularly disgruntled at the wage freeze of the previous year, given the industry's low wages).<sup>115</sup> As the public mood turned increasingly against unions, Benson and other advocates of legislative constraints on the labor movement were encouraged by the elections of 1942, which bolstered the southern Democratic-Conservative Republican alliance. The results, Benson claimed, were evidence of a "growing political conservatism" and constituted a severe blow to "left-wingers."<sup>116</sup> The Smith-Connally Act, which was passed in mid-1943, despite FDR's attempted veto, represented one of the right's most significant victories during the war.<sup>117</sup> The

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<sup>112</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War*, 95-96

<sup>113</sup> "LA", 8/26/1942, 9/2/1942, both GSBP

<sup>114</sup> "Full War Support Pledged by N.A.M.," *NYT*, 12/3/1942, 14; Heinemann, *Byrd*, 229; "Support for Work-or-Fight Bill Gathers Momentum at Capitol," *WP*, 3/2/1943, 1

<sup>115</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 215

<sup>116</sup> Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, "Real Threats to Free Enterprise," 10/1/1943, GSBP; Mason, *Republican*, 104-106

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107

Act, which Benson praised for restricting the powers of “dictatorial labor union leaders” (despite the fact that labor leaders had persistently attempted to prevent industrial action), enabled government to seize struck defense production plants, introduced criminal penalties for persons deemed to be encouraging strikes in defense industries, required workers in non-war plants to fulfill a 30-day cooling-off period before striking, and prohibited unions from making contributions to political campaigns.<sup>118</sup>

Conservative antagonisms towards union activities did not cease with the passage of the Smith-Connally Act. Benson and other conservatives if anything heightened their criticisms of labor’s political influence. In its wake, the steadily increasing labor membership encouraged these condemnations, but the formation of the CIO’s Political Action Committee (CIO-PAC) in 1943 was also significant, particularly by 1944 when its efforts to influence the Presidential election were the subject of much speculation. Moreover, for many on the right, the CIO-PAC and the increasing number of union members, appeared to confirm the strength and persistence of the alliance between the New Deal liberals and the labor movement. But most importantly of all, as we shall see, Benson and many other conservatives feared that labor was gearing itself up to promote an expansive post-war liberal agenda, or even to transform itself into the handmaiden of a more “revolutionary” post-war politics (though there was undoubtedly a purposeful degree of hyperbole in the latter suggestion).<sup>119</sup>

Across the nation there was a rightward swing in the public perception of organized labor’s merits, but this swing was most substantial in the South.<sup>120</sup> Benson’s anti-labor politics, in fact, was shaped by some distinctively southern stimulants. His message also likely resonated in subtly different ways in the region. Mobilization in the South significantly increased the proportion of the population engaged in industrial employment, while the accompanying efforts of unions to introduce collective bargaining practices reinforced the relevance of debates that had been tempered in the 1930s by the exclusion of agricultural and domestic workers

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<sup>118</sup> Benson and Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “Real Threats to Free Enterprise”; Brinkley, *Reform*, 216-217

<sup>119</sup> Blum, *Victory*, 252; Harris, *Manage*, 72-73; Kazin, *Populist*, 159-160; Benson and Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “Real Threats to Free Enterprise”

<sup>120</sup> Farhang and Katznelson, “Southern Imposition”

from labor reform initiatives. During the war, with the aid of the WLB, the number of unionized workers in the South increased from 1.6 to 2.4 million (there were 2.3 million within two years of Pearl Harbor), although the more conservative AFL predominated.<sup>121</sup>

Southern antagonism towards labor was also predicated on the conviction, pervasive amongst the region's economic elites, that low wages and low taxation were prerequisites to economic growth and investment. Among plantation and agrarian elites, in particular, these concerns were often compounded by the anxiety that labor expansion threatened to unbalance an existing 'broker state' relationship between government and the agendas of unions, farmers, and businessmen. Moreover, they likely concluded that increased industrial wages would have knock-on effects for farm workers.<sup>122</sup> During the war, Benson developed important alliances with many of these Southern elites. In the spring of 1942, for example, he was appointed President of the newly formed Arkansas Public Expenditure Council (APEC), an organization dedicated to promoting 'economy in government' (at the state level), which established chapters across the state and was dominated by business and plantation elites. Benson remained President until 1944 and he engaged in several tours of the state under its auspices.<sup>123</sup>

Although Benson avoided couching his opposition to unions in racial terms, the overlap between racial concerns and Southern anti-labor sentiment was substantial. Over the course of the war, across the nation as a whole, two million African Americans were employed in defense plants, while black union membership doubled to 1.25 million.<sup>124</sup> Although the majority of these new black members were outside the South, the labor movement, and the CIO, in particular, contained some of the nation's most outspoken advocates of greater racial equality. At times, labor's expansion into the South also threatened to disrupt the system of differentiated wages for whites and blacks. In the minds of segregationists, the link between labor,

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<sup>121</sup> Honey, *Southern Labor*, 214; Farhang and Katznelson, "Southern Imposition," 22

<sup>122</sup> Cobb, *Selling*, esp. 1-34, Honey, *Southern Labor*, passim

<sup>123</sup> "Benson Heads Tax Council," *Bison*, 3/17/1942, 1; "Rotary and Lions Club in Joint Meeting," *De Witt Era-Enterprise*, clipping, 12/17/1942, "Dr. Benson to Speak Here on Sept. 8," clipping, title missing, 8/27/1943, "Leaders of Wide Area to Hear Benson," clipping, title missing, clipping, 9/6/1943, "You – Are Invited to Hear Dr. Benson," *Ashley County Leader*, clipping, 1/13/1944, all GSBP; Sophie Ellis, "Arkansas Taxpayers Organize," *AG*, 10/24/1943, 4

<sup>124</sup> Sitkoff, *Black Equality*, 11-12

wartime liberalism and race relations was epitomized by the by Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) – the first substantial federal initiative focused on racial matters since Reconstruction – which attempted (not, in the end, especially successfully) to facilitate challenges to racial discrimination in defense industries and governmental agencies.<sup>125</sup>

The challenges posed by organized labor to the Southern status quo were epitomized by developments in Memphis, which lay 100 miles east of Harding across the Delta, and represented the nearest city with a significant industrial base. It was a place that Benson frequently visited and where he retained significant allies; in 1946 a number of local businessmen and the city’s mayor even offered to finance the relocation of Harding to Memphis.<sup>126</sup> By 1940 the city was a key strategic target for the CIO in the South. Unions, however, faced substantial, sometimes violent, opposition from the city’s notorious political boss, E. H. Crump, and recalcitrant employers such as the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, which had opened a plant there in 1937 in an effort to evade union organizing in Akron, Ohio. Firestone paid its workers half as much as those employed in their remaining northern enterprises, and operated a racially iniquitous pay scale. The defence industry, however, created 19,000 jobs in the city and provided the impetus for the CIO, against the backdrop of racially charged debates, to successfully organize 32,000 workers by the close of the War, including those at the Firestone plant.<sup>127</sup>

In Benson’s adopted home state, the pattern of union disputes was somewhat different. Arkansas received approximately 1 percent of total investment in defense plants during the war, but even this modest transformation provided challenges that caught Benson’s attention.<sup>128</sup> In the fall of 1942, he lambasted the union organizers who had “descended on Walnut Ridge,” an \$11 million Marine Air Corps facility

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<sup>125</sup> Lowndes, *New Deal*, esp. 23-24; Honey, *Southern Labor*, esp. 193-194; Frederickson, *Dixiecrat*, 32-33; Farhang and Katznelson, “Southern Imposition”, 24-25; Blum, *Victory*, 196-199; Lichtenstein, *State*, 85-88

<sup>126</sup> “Harding College for Memphis,” *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, clipping, 7/4/1946, Invitation to “Luncheon of National Importance,” Peabody Hotel, “Labor-Management Charter Is Lauded,” both GSBP; *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 4/14/1945, 1. Two northern companies which provided financial assistance to Benson also had plants in Memphis. Quaker Oats established a plant there during the War, as did DuPont (which also had a substantial interest in General Motors, which opened a plant in Memphis in the 1920s). “Allied Powder Plant Planned at Memphis,” *NYT*, 6/5/1940, 16; Green, *Plantation*, 50; Honey, *Southern Labor*, 21-22

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 150-213

<sup>128</sup> Bolton, “Turning Point,” 129

located less than 100 miles northeast of Searcy.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, despite the limited expansion of industry in Arkansas, the CIO did launch its first significant effort to mobilize in the state by targeting agricultural workers in the Delta, where the tumultuous protests of the bi-racial STFU were still etched in the memory.<sup>130</sup> These efforts, which gathered pace in 1942, galvanized plantation elites in eastern Arkansas who, primarily under the banner of the state Farm Bureau, successfully campaigned for the Abington Anti-Violence Law in the state legislature in 1943 (the reform's sponsor hailed from Beebe, less than 20 miles from Searcy).<sup>131</sup> The following year, Arkansas passed a 'right-to-work' initiative, with the assistance of a \$47,000 advertising campaign orchestrated by the Texas-based Christian American Association (CAA), along with the backing of local business and (more significantly) agricultural elites (the CAA's campaign emphasized the UMW's 1943 strike).<sup>132</sup>

It is unclear if Benson actively campaigned for either of these reforms, but he frequently criticized unions on his regular jaunts across the state under the auspices of the APEC; his newspaper columns and radio broadcasts, of course, also circulated widely across the state and the South more generally.<sup>133</sup> Arkansas was, in fact, at the forefront of a number of state-level efforts to block union organization. In 1943 a similar 'right-to-work' measure was passed after a state referendum in Florida, while state-level restrictions of various kinds were fervently debated during this period in Colorado, South Dakota, Idaho, Texas, Kansas, and California. Benson's anti-labor credentials were such that he was invited to Florida in 1943, where he testified in favor of the 'right-to-work' initiative in the state's legislature. These campaigns provided a critically important – and underexplored – forerunner to the right's anti-labor crusades in the post-war era, which, in turn, were central to conservative booster strategies that often focused on 'right-to-work' laws and helped to shape 'Sunbelt' conservatism.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> "LA," 9/16/1942, GSBP; Bolton, "Turning Point," 134

<sup>130</sup> Frederickson, *Dixiecrat*, 36; Smith, *Wartime*, 109-118

<sup>131</sup> Woodruff, "Pick or Fight"; Smith, *Wartime*, 111-113

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 116; Johnson, *Arkansas*, 78-81

<sup>133</sup> See, for example, "Dr. George Benson to Be Speaker at Citizens Rally," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 9/27/1943, 1; Don Murray, "Benson Talks," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, n.d. [c. 1943], GSBP

<sup>134</sup> Shermer, "Counter-Organizing," esp. 93-96; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 76

Challenges to the South's system of segregation during the war, which stretched well beyond those offered by the labor movement, ensured another important regional dimension to Benson's crusade. One issue that brought Benson's racism to the fore during World War Two was the federal government's role in funding education. The Hill-Thomas Bill was introduced in 1943 and promised to provide \$200 million to supplement state provisions for teachers' salaries, with an extra \$100 million to be allocated according to states' relative financial need. The South, whose education system operated on meager budgets, was destined to be the chief beneficiary. An amendment introduced by Senator William Langer (R-N. D.) effectively stipulated that the money would be equitably distributed to black and white schools. Benson's response to the bill, in part, bore the hallmarks of his fiscal conservatism and anti-statism. He balked at the expense of the measure and declared that there was "no point" in "Nazifying our public schools by placing the whole educational system in bondage to bureaucracy," a bureaucracy that would, in turn, be dominated by a centralized commissioner with the power to "crack a whip over state school authorities in general" and "determine courses of study, stipulate text books, license teachers, appoint them to positions and man-handle the schools." During a debate with Arkansas' state commissioner for education, which was hosted by the Little Rock Kiwanis Club, Benson suggested that it would be better to augment existing funding by slashing local spending on other initiatives.<sup>135</sup> Other conservatives, including Southern Democrats, also stressed their opposition on the basis of fiscal conservatism or federalism; Robert Taft called it a "revolutionary proposal" and declared, "education is not and has never been a federal function."<sup>136</sup>

The issue of race, however, was crucial to its defeat, as it was to Benson's opposition. Senator John McClellan (D-Ark.), an important future ally of Harding College, was one of a number of Southern senators who helped to defeat the Bill. McClellan justified his opposition on the grounds that it was intended to force "the amalgamation of the white and Negro schools in the nation ... [and] sacrifice our dual education in the South."<sup>137</sup> Benson expressed similar sentiments, though the

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<sup>135</sup> "Kiwanians Hear Debate on U.S. Aid to Federal Schools," *AG*, clipping, 12/8/1943, Daniel M. Kidney, "Teacher Lobby Seeks 200 Million Pay Rise," *NYWT*, clipping, 8/26/1943, both GSBP

<sup>136</sup> Patterson, *Republican*, 261-262

<sup>137</sup> Smith, *Wartime*, 45

terms in which he did so revealed his ambition to evade accusations of ‘race baiting.’ The Amendment, he correctly surmised, demanded that “no part of the federal funds therein provided nor any part of the local funds thereby supplemented could be used to make or maintain any distinction between the races.” In Arkansas black teachers were, on average, paid less than half as much as their white counterparts. But Benson followed this statement with the caveat that he was “not discussing the merits of the amendment,” but merely highlighting it as another example of how “federal control” would “follow federal aid, as night follows day” and thus would provide a “handy stepping stone toward political dictatorship.”<sup>138</sup>

In more general discussions of federal aid to education, Benson maintained that if “federal control of public schools” were enacted then “the South will bristle at the first official effort to seat white and colored children together at school. It might easily result in widespread violence.” Again, he was careful to note that this was a “practical” objection to the idea.<sup>139</sup> During the latter years of the war Benson continued to express anxiety about educational issues, largely because federal aid to education was included within the package of post-war reforms advocated by many liberals.<sup>140</sup> In 1945 Benson lamented that “the subject” was “alive again,” because of discussions within committees in both the House and Senate.<sup>141</sup> In May he appeared before the House Education Committee, with the backing of the APEC, and declared that, despite the fact that Arkansas’s education budget equated to \$34.18 per student per year (only Mississippi spent less), federal aid to education was “neither necessary nor desirable.” When quizzed by committee members about the racial implications of these measures, Benson provided noticeably evasive responses.<sup>142</sup> The centrality of race to Benson’s engagement in these debates was evident in his willingness to accept federal aid for other projects (notably including highways and infrastructure),

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<sup>138</sup> “LA,” *Picket Line Post*, 7/6/1945, 3; Smith, *Wartime*, 45

<sup>139</sup> “LA,” *Aspermont Star*, 6/29/1944, ed. 1

<sup>140</sup> “College President Columnist Speaks against Federal Aid,” *Scottish Rite News Bulletin*, clipping, 7/5/1945, GSBP; “LA,” *Portville Review*, 7/26/1945, 8; Stevens, *Before*, 58-62

<sup>141</sup> “LA,” 7/6/1945; Brinkley, *Reform*, 257-259

<sup>142</sup> “Statement of Dr. George S. Benson,” House Committee on Education and Labor, 5/3/1945, Congressional Record, 537-568

and his acceptance of the G.I. Bill, which offered little threat to segregation, and was essential to the post-war expansion of Harding College.<sup>143</sup>

As the issue of federal aid to education demonstrated, Benson recognized the potential to exploit the overlap between anti-statist concerns and the concerns of defenders of the existing racial order. During World War Two the salience of racial issues increased in ways that, on the one hand, likely informed Benson's politics, and on the other, likely increased the resonance of his anti-statism and opposition to New Deal liberalism. With wartime elections scheduled for both 1942 and 1944 Congress debated initiatives ostensibly aimed at clarifying the voting rights of enlisted soldiers, but which also threatened the integrity of the South's system of poll taxes and harbored the potential to enfranchise many African Americans. Benson's ally Harry Byrd spoke for many Southern Democrats when he (privately) declared that they were destined to "destroy the last vestige of States Rights and would give the New Deal, with its 3,000,000 civilian employees, the Negroes, and the labor unions, control of the country."<sup>144</sup> Of course, such concerns were exacerbated by remarkable demographic changes in the South, which brought many African Americans into towns and cities, but which also resulted in an increase in the black population of the North by one million.<sup>145</sup>

There were substantial limitations to liberals' efforts to challenge segregation or discrimination during the war, but there were some signs that attitudes were changing. The battle against fascism, along with the participation of African American soldiers (admittedly mostly in segregated units), enabled advocates of racial change to stress the hypocrisy of an American civic identity that prized 'freedom' yet ignored the reality of segregation in the South.<sup>146</sup> This contention, in tandem with the electoral calculations that Harry Byrd feared, helped to ensure that white liberals, particularly in the North, were also beginning to move in the direction

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<sup>143</sup> "Over 100 from Searcy before Highway Body," clipping, title missing, 1941, GSBP; Statement of George S. Benson, "Full Employment Act of 1945," House Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments, 10/18/1945, Congressional Record, 503-533; Ted W. McElroy, "Harding College Appeal for Blood Money," *Bible Banner*, 10/1945, 24-25; Federal Communications Commission Report, "In re Application of Harding College (WHBQ), Memphis, Tenn., for Construction Permit," 9/9/1948, Docket No. 8047, Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112083830288>, accessed 8/8/2014

<sup>144</sup> Heinemann, *Byrd*, 230-232

<sup>145</sup> Frederickson, *Dixiecrat*, 53

<sup>146</sup> Sugrue, *Sweet Land*, 77-82

of considering greater equality a pressing political issue. This transition was notably evident in the response to Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944).<sup>147</sup>

Several additional developments raised sensitivities to racial change. In 1944 the Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Smith v. Allwright*, for example, outlawed, in theory at least, the all-white primary system that was lynchpin of segregation in the South. In practice, Southern black voter registration increased, mostly in urban areas, from 3 percent to almost 17 percent.<sup>148</sup> African Americans were also increasingly exerting pressure for reform. In Arkansas, for instance, the Committee on Negro Organizations (CNO) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) expanded efforts to enfranchise African Americans and managed to secure record numbers of black voters in elections. In 1942 the two organizations were also instrumental in ensuring victory in a landmark legal case launched on behalf of a black schoolteacher who was paid substantially less than her white counterparts. Wartime migration also helped to foster more assertive Civil Rights activism in urban areas; during this period in Little Rock, for example, Daisy and L.C. Bates began to emerge as leaders of a new generation of black activists. The growth of the NAACP in Arkansas during these years mirrored broader developments – the organization experienced a tenfold increase in its membership during the War years, while the formation of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942 also testified to the growing political assertiveness of African Americans.<sup>149</sup> In 1944 the Arkansas legislature attempted to pass two bills designed to restrict African American voting, while the two candidates for the U.S. Senate that year, John McClellan and J. William Fulbright, both sought to garner support through their fervent opposition to the Supreme Court ruling and measures such as the FEPC.<sup>150</sup>

Conservatives' exploitation of racial antagonisms and the rise in anti-labor sentiment offered an effective means of exerting influence, but it did not precisely equate to a victory for conservatives' broader goal of promoting the 'free market,'

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<sup>147</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, esp. 168-170; Kruse and Tuck, eds., *Fog of War*; Harvard Sitkoff, "African American Militancy in the World War Two American South: Another Perspective," in McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie*, 70-92

<sup>148</sup> Bartley, *New South*, 26; Sparrow, *Warfare*, 116

<sup>149</sup> Kirk, "Little Rock Crisis"; Smith, *Wartime*, 76-101

<sup>150</sup> John Young, "Arkansas Assembly Moves to Disfranchise Negroes," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 3/31/1945, 12; Smith, *Wartime*, 128

nor a wholesale repudiation of New Deal liberalism. In fact, Benson's crusade against the wartime state and over issues pertaining to reconversion reveals some important barriers to these grander ambitions. On the other hand, on fiscal matters, Benson's ideas show some signs of promise, and it seems that the right's efforts were at least reasonably effective in undermining their opponents' grander ambitions.

As a result of the remarkable expansion of the wartime state, taxation occupied a central position within Benson's efforts. During 1942 the percentage of economic activity dedicated to war production jumped from 15 to 33 percent. Between 1939 and 1945 the federal budget increased more than tenfold; GNP increased over the same period from \$91 billion to \$166 billion.<sup>151</sup> In the end, much of the war effort was paid for by deficit financing – taxes covered approximately only half of expenditures. By 1941 the national debt had already reached an unprecedented high of \$58 billion (with a deficit of \$5 billion); by 1945 it was \$260 billion (with a deficit of \$45 billion).<sup>152</sup>

Echoing the fiscal conservatism of the GOP right, Southern Democrats and business conservatives, Benson stressed the need for a 'pay-as-you-go' approach to facilitating the war effort, one that would ensure, as far as possible, a balanced budget.<sup>153</sup> Consequently, conservatives, who were also wary of run-away inflation, were prepared to countenance tax increases. Benson, for his part, called for "all out taxation," a phrase borrowed from Henry Morgenthau. He related the specter of deficit financing to the pervasive conservative perception that it would spell disaster when the war concluded – many analysts, including liberals, were anxious that demobilization would also cause a depression. "We must have the smallest possible debt at the close of the present war," Benson told the Senate Finance Committee in 1941, before the U.S. had even formally entered the conflict, "in order to avoid extreme inflation and heavy taxes at a time when people can't pay them and when many would repudiate heavy taxes, thus starting severe disorder."<sup>154</sup> Throughout the war Benson was persistently dismayed by successive budgets and railed against

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<sup>151</sup> Blum, *Victory*, 91

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91; Patterson, *Expectations*, 55-56; Renshaw, "Was There a Keynesian Economy," 342

<sup>153</sup> "LA," 8/5/1942, GSBP; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 5/19/JHPP, Box 7, Folder H-1945; Heinemann, *Byrd*, 223-246

<sup>154</sup> Benson, speech reprint, "Preserving American Democracy," Senate Finance Committee, 8/21/1941 GSBP

rising deficits as a threat to “America’s private enterprise system,” and the potential harbinger of socialism and dictatorship.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the fact that there was some consensus that tax increases were necessary, conservatives and liberals were still polarized by the issue of how much debt was permissible, how much extra taxation was necessary, and who should bear the burden of new taxes. The 1942 Revenue Act established a framework for all of these variables. It boosted the Excess Profits Tax (EPT) paid by corporations from 60 percent to 90 percent, although Walter George, as head of the Senate Finance Committee, was instrumental in ensuring that corporations paid half of the taxes the Treasury had recommended, while individuals paid twice as much. The EPT was coupled with a 10 percent rebate when the war ended, and was further offset by a corporate tax rate set to 40 percent, while corporations’ total tax liability was capped at 80 percent.<sup>156</sup> In the end, despite massive increases in revenue garnered from federal contracts, corporations paid an aggregate of 49 percent of their profits in taxation and were granted significant rebates thanks to two complex ‘carryback’ provisions embedded in wartime tax policy.<sup>157</sup> The favorable terms granted to big business, however, did not satiate many conservatives, who were anxious about ‘wartime precedents’ and the process of reconversion.<sup>158</sup>

What irked conservatives, including George Benson, most about wartime corporate tax policy was the practice of Renegotiation, which was introduced in April 1942. Essentially, the law, which was designed to operate in tandem with the EPT, inserted a clause into all defense contracts worth more than \$100,000 that enabled representatives of the War Department to examine company records and recoup profits that were deemed to be excessive. The measure was also backdated to ensure that it applied to all contracts yet to be completed, and the precise nature of what constituted an excessive amount was never defined. In the end Renegotiation helped to reduce corporate pre-tax profits on war contracts to between 10 and 14 percent, a level that was still highly favorable to business – the overall size of the

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<sup>155</sup> See, for example, “Benson Sees America,” *Blytheville Courier*, 8/27/1942, 1; “LA,” clipping, 9/15/1943, GSBP; “LA,” *Aspermont Star*, 4/27/1944, ed. 1

<sup>156</sup> Marc R. Wilson, “The Advantages of Obscurity: World War II Tax Carryback Provisions and the Normalization of Corporate Welfare,” in Phillips-Fein and Zelizer, eds., *What's Good*, esp. 23, 27-29

<sup>157</sup> Wilson, “Advantages,” 17, *passim*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*; Wilson, “Taking a Nickel,” *passim*

contracts ensured that after tax profits still rose exponentially.<sup>159</sup> Benson, however, argued that the measure represented a “fiendishly clever thrust ... at American freedom” and he declared that it should be “abolished” or at least “drastically amended.”<sup>160</sup> Consequently, he entered in a long-running and fractious correspondence with Maurice Karker, the Chairman of the War Department Price Adjustment Board (WDPAB), which was principally charged with implementing the Renegotiation clause.<sup>161</sup> Benson claimed that it had only been implemented as a knee-jerk reaction to public anxieties regarding “war profiteering,” despite the fact that at the time of its passage only “one manufacturer out of thousands in this country was being charged with having made huge profits.”<sup>162</sup>

Although Benson undoubtedly realized that it was potentially politically toxic to vociferously assert that corporations should profit handsomely from war contracts (the memory of World War One ensured political sensitivity towards the issue), his critique of Renegotiation dovetailed with his ambition to suggest the harmonious interests of big business and the nation. “Businessmen who work hard and intelligently or build up efficient big businesses,” he declared in a radio broadcast in 1943, “deserve the money reward of bigger profits and the honor of being called benefactors rather than profiteers.”<sup>163</sup> Besides, Benson argued, the EPT harvested enough of business’ profits to ensure that corporations paid their fair share.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, “if private enterprise,” he wrote in 1943, “is to be depended upon quickly to re-convert, to carry its labor through the transition period, to develop civilian production, to find markets, and to take care of unemployment, then tax laws should be so formulated as to permit the accumulation of the necessary capital for that purpose.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Koistinen, *Arsenal*, 434-437

<sup>160</sup> “LA,” 10/28/1942, GSBP; Benson to Maurice Karker, 11/2/1942, ROSW, Army Price Adjustment Board, Decimal File, 1942-47, Box 22, Folder “Benson, George S.”

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.; Maurice Karker to Benson, 10/16/1942, 11/16/1942, 12/13/1942, 1/1/1943, 1/5/1943, 2/5/1943, Eliot Sharp to Karker, 1/1/1943, Benson to Karker, 11/20/1942, 12/31/1942, all ROSW, Army Price Adjustment Board, Decimal File, 1942-47, Box 22, Folder “Benson, George S.”

<sup>162</sup> Benson, “Why the Renegotiation of War Contracts”

<sup>163</sup> Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “Secret of America’s Production Miracles,” 10/8/1943, GSBP

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, Statement of George S. Benson, Renegotiation of War Contracts, First Session, House Committee on Ways and Means, Seventy-Eighth Congress, Congressional Record, 1943, 733-736

<sup>165</sup> Benson, radio broadcast transcript, *Our Two Battle Fronts, Announcement of Policy Needed*, 1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

Between 1942 and 1944 Renegotiation remained a key focus of Benson's political pronouncements.<sup>166</sup> In this he was not alone. Renegotiation served as a lightning rod for conservative dissatisfaction with the administration's wartime policies. No fewer than four Congressional Committees assembled in an effort to amend or repeal it. Benson, in fact, testified before the House Ways and Means Committee for a second time in the fall of 1943 and called for its outright repeal. From the GOP right Robert Taft warned of a "dangerous" expansion of federal authority, while Senator George was also a vocal opponent, and made several attempts to use his authority as Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee to initiate legislative change. In the fall of 1942, *Business Week* declared that "war contractors, large and small are up in arms," while the NAM and the USCOC both called for it to be altered or rescinded.<sup>167</sup> Like Benson, these conservative critics expressed the concern that Renegotiation constituted a precedent for government control over industry and would deplete businesses' reserves of investment capital that would fuel post-war economic growth. In the shorter term, they argued, it undermined the economic incentives necessary for defense production. Many conservatives ultimately shared the sentiment behind Henry Stimson's conclusion that "if you are going to go to war, or prepare for war, in a capitalist country you have to let business make money out of the process or business won't work".<sup>168</sup> Though they could not get the measure repealed, congressional conservatives did manage to decrease the number of contracts that were subjected to renegotiation by raising the threshold contract size to \$500,000 in 1943.<sup>169</sup>

The issue of corporate taxation provides further testimony to the extent to which ideological divisions underpinned debates over wartime strategies for revenue raising. To Benson, liberals' approach to corporate taxation was also consistent with their ambitions to permanently expand the role of the state, and further evidence of New Dealers' predilection for basing fiscal policy on electoral calculations. Benson's adherence to the latter perspective was secured through his faith in the 'bought vote,'

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<sup>166</sup> See, for example, Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, "The Renegotiation Law," 10/9/1942, "LA," 10/21/1942, both GSBP

<sup>167</sup> Stevens, *Before*, 55-57; Wilson, "Taking a Nickel", *passim*; "Full War Support Pledged by N.A.M.," *NYT*, 12/3/1942, 14; Lewis H. Brown, "Renegotiation of War Contracts Poses Serious Problem," *NYT*, 9/26/1943, 1

<sup>168</sup> Lichtenstein, *Labor's War*, 39

<sup>169</sup> Wilson, "Taking a Nickel," 376-377

which was beginning, subtly, but significantly, to be modified by conservatives during the war. The demise of many of the New Deal-era relief initiatives during this period seemed to undermine the most obvious cases of ‘vote-buying,’ but the essential idea was retained through a critique of policies that were allegedly designed to mobilize special interests and specific constituencies (notably including labor). Benson followed this trend. The major impulse behind the administration’s wartime revenue proposals, he declared, was “get the money, somewhere and somehow not [sic] to anger a powerful voting class.”<sup>170</sup> A similar calculation was apparent in his virulent opposition to FDR’s proposed \$25,000 cap on wartime incomes, which was killed by Congress in 1943.<sup>171</sup> Harry Byrd, meanwhile, called the cap “another instance of so-called reform” that was masquerading as a wartime necessity, while the head of the NAM declared that it “was unblushingly borrowed from the public platform of the Communist Party in 1928.”<sup>172</sup>

Wartime debates over corporate taxation and the taxation of the wealthy were intrinsically linked to broader disputes over what tax burden should be brought to bear on individual citizens. The 1942 Revenue Act – one of the most significant departures in the history of taxation in the United States – massively expanded the number of persons paying income tax, while from mid-1943 Americans, for the first time, had their taxes deducted from their pay on a ‘pay-as-you-go’ basis (previously taxes had been paid at the end of each financial year).<sup>173</sup> Over the course of World War Two, the number of citizens paying income taxes increased from 4 million to 40 million.<sup>174</sup> From the revenue debates of 1942 onwards, Benson retained reservations regarding utilizing income taxes as a primary source of revenue. Instead, he became an advocate of sales taxes, a conviction that he shared with familiar foes of liberalism in the business community and on the right of both the GOP and the Democratic Party.<sup>175</sup> “Most of today’s complicated tax mechanism,” Benson

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<sup>170</sup> “LA,” 11/10/1943, GSBP; Mason, *Republican*, 75-78, 105-106

<sup>171</sup> Leff, “Politics of Sacrifice,” esp. 1298-1307; “Bulletin -- Harding College,” 1/1943

<sup>172</sup> “Byrd Charges War Cloaks ‘Reforms,’” *NYT*, 12/13/1942, 67; “Full War Support Pledged by N.A.M.,” *NYT*, 12/3/1942, 14; Patterson, *Republican*, 256

<sup>173</sup> Blum, *Victory*, 241-243

<sup>174</sup> Wilson, “Advantages of Obscurity,” 16

<sup>175</sup> John MacCormac, “Senators Consider 3 Sales-Tax Plans,” *NYT*, 9/5/1942, 1; “Sales Tax Urged by Taft as Need to Stop Inflation,” *NYT*, 8/24/1942, 1, 9; Samuel Bledsoe, “Business Leaders Back 10% Sales Tax,” *NYT*, 10/13/1943, 18; Samuel Bledsoe, “Support for Sales Tax Growing in Congress,” *NYT*, 10/17/1943, 1; Blum, *Victory*, 228-230; Patterson, *Republican*, 257, 260

declared in early 1943, “should be junked and replaced with a sales tax.” “The fairness of a sales tax is so obvious,” he continued, because

everybody knows people pay in proportion as they spend ... sales taxes are not hidden. They neither fool the poor nor soak the rich. Everybody can see how big they are and who pays them ... Sales taxes overcome personal inequalities. Not all who pay the same income tax are equally able to pay. But a sales tax is always in line with what the taxpayer knows he can spend.<sup>176</sup>

Sales taxes would also operate as an anti-inflationary “break on spending,” in contrast to “income taxes,” which he “opposed for all but the very well paid class” and considered to be “a draft on [the] savings” that would provide a cushion for the bumpy road to reconversion (unlike many of his contemporaries, Benson did not apparently fear the inflationary consequences of pent-up post-war consumer demand).<sup>177</sup>

In some respects, it seems that conservatives’ opposition to wartime taxation policies laid the foundations for the political landscape of the early post-war era, in which some of their concerns gained traction. This transition, in turn, perhaps suggests the importance of the context of national emergency to citizens’ initial willingness to accept – as opinion polls consistently demonstrated – measures such as the new income tax.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, there were, as we shall see in the following chapter, significant limitations to these post-war protests, just as there were important limitations to the appeal of conservatives’ stance on taxation during the war. Moreover, in areas where conservatives were more successful in legislative terms during the war – for example, on corporate rates – it seems that this was less a reflection of popular sentiment, and more a product of conservatives’ unique power in Congress. Southern Democrats such as Walter George, who were notably to the fore in these efforts, were, of course, the beneficiaries of a system of seniority that favored those who were usually handily reelected thanks to the limited democracy permitted by the Southern electoral system.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, as Mark Wilson demonstrates, the sheer complexity of corporate taxation offered certain strategic advantages to corporate lawyers and their acolytes who provided expert assistance in

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<sup>176</sup> “LA,” 9/1/1943, GSBP

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.; “LA,” *Aspermont Star*, 4/27/1944, ed. 1. See also, “LA,” 2/24/1943, Benson, radio broadcast transcript, “What a Sales Tax Means to You,” n.d. [c. 1943], both GSBP

<sup>178</sup> Sparrow, *Warfare*, 147, 245-246; Mason, *Republican*, 112-147

<sup>179</sup> Dewey W. Grantham, “The South and Congressional Politics,” in McMillen, ed., *Remaking Dixie*, 21-32

relation to important elements of these policies.<sup>180</sup> Perhaps most importantly, the desire for favorable and cooperative relations with corporate leaders encouraged acquiescence amongst even some of the more liberal members of the Democratic Party.<sup>181</sup>

The success of Benson's prescriptions on taxation were confined by these broader parameters, but they were also hampered by some problems that were more specifically associated with his own endeavors and the nature of the conservative alternatives. Most obviously, Benson invoked questionable logic. He never offered anything approximating a practical alternative to the deficit spending that he so abhorred. Given the scale of defense spending, which he implicitly supported, and given his opposition to raising corporate and income taxes, it is difficult to see how Benson's often vague proposals to implement a sales tax, even with the assistance of greatly reduced nondefense spending and the negation of bureaucratic 'inefficiencies,' would have made any discernable difference to the nation's deficit or debt. In part, this issue was related to the fact that Benson never developed a sophisticated, internally consistent understanding of economic theory; even J. Howard Pew was convinced that Benson "had an awful lot to learn about the problem before he could hope to accomplish the things he had in mind."<sup>182</sup> Of course, this contradiction typified much of conservatives' rhetoric more generally during these years, even those who contemplated politics in a more complex fashion. Moreover, Benson's favored means of revenue raising – sales taxes – for a time enjoyed a degree of popular support as an alternative to the income tax, but the idea that it represented an equitable means of distributing the tax load was also often easily skewered, even when it was concealed behind a veil of populist discourse. Henry Morgenthau, for instance, who was by no means the most liberal member of the administration, astutely concluded that a

general sales tax falls on scarce and plentiful commodities alike. It strikes at necessities and luxuries alike. It bears disproportionately on the low-income groups whose incomes are almost wholly spent on consumer goods. It is, therefore, regressive and encroaches harmfully upon the standard of living.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Wilson, "Advantages of Obscurity"

<sup>181</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 175-200

<sup>182</sup> J. Howard Pew to Lewis H. Brown, 5/10/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>183</sup> Bledsoe, "Support for Sales Tax Growing in Congress"; George Gallup, "Sales Tax Leads in Gallup's Poll," *NYT*, 11/3/1943, 23; Sparrow, *Warfare*, 153

Concerns over taxation were intrinsically linked to another issue that defined Benson's crusade during this period: the massive wartime expansion of the nation's bureaucratic infrastructure.<sup>184</sup> His opposition was based on three propositions: firstly, that bureaucracy was consuming too much of the money allocated to the war effort, secondly, that the government was an inherently poor manager of the economy, and, thirdly, that it would not be easy to unravel this bureaucracy at the war's conclusion. Such was his emphasis on this issue that Benson suggested that "growing bureaucracy is the tallest hurdle between the United States and victory." There were, he argued, "literally thousands of government employees in admittedly essential industries [who] are having a hard time trying to justify the existence of their highfalutin' jobs."<sup>185</sup>

The idea that "trying to remedy the evils the bureaucracy is [as] useless as perfuming a skunk," was one that Benson brought to bear, for example, in his critique of Renegotiation, which, of course, also brought bureaucracy very clearly into conflict, as Benson saw it at least, with managerial authority. Renegotiation, he warned prior to its passage, would create "four boards, many branch offices and possibly 200,000 jobs for auditors, investigators, etc," and was in danger of starting "a new epidemic of bureaucracy in government." To no avail, Maurice Karker attempted to correct Benson's wild overestimation of the number of employees the law would create. In the end, one of Karker's associates lamented that Benson was "more interested in making a name for himself than in being accurate, and probably he is a hopeless case."<sup>186</sup>

More than any other agency, the Office of Price Administration (OPA) epitomized the ways in which the war expanded the state's influence over the economy. As Alan Brinkley surmises, the OPA "may have been the most intrusive federal bureaucracy ever created in America."<sup>187</sup> The Emergency Price Control Act of January 1941 made the OPA an independent agency; in April FDR announced the introduction of 'General Max,' which authorized it to hold prices at their March 1942

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<sup>184</sup> On the expansion of bureaucracy, see Koistinen, *Arsenal*, *passim*

<sup>185</sup> "LA," 12/30/1942, "LA," 2/3/1943, both GSBP

<sup>186</sup> "Harding College Bulletin," 9/1942; "LA," 10/21/1942, 12/30/1942, both GSBP; Sharp to Karker, 1/1/1943

<sup>187</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 147

level; in October ‘General Max’ was extended to include the vast majority of agricultural products; and by the close of the War nearly 60,000 commodities, equivalent to 90 percent of all goods sold, were covered by OPA regulations. At its peak, the OPA employed 75,000 people and relied on the assistance of 300,000 volunteers across the country.<sup>188</sup> Moreover, the agency was headed by Leon Henderson, an outspoken liberal (though Henderson resigned in late 1942, due primarily to conservative pressure).<sup>189</sup>

Benson often delved into the activities of the OPA to find illustrative examples of “bureaucratic blunder.”<sup>190</sup> The OPA compounded Benson’s more general perception that the war was encouraging the proliferation of the “evils of bureaucracy” and strangling the economy and defense production with “red tape, overlapping authorities and unnecessary regulations.” These problems, he argued, were exacerbated by the increasing numbers of federal employees, who were imbued with a vested interest in the perpetuation of governmental bureaucracy.<sup>191</sup> Benson even joked that Harding College would erect a commemorative bust of Bruce MacNamee, the head of the United States Travel Bureau, who supposedly abolished his own department after concluding that it was “useless.”<sup>192</sup> In the context of manpower shortages, Benson suggested that the “arbitrary reduction of government personnel by one third” should be introduced as a penalty for “bureaucratic idleness,” a proposal that mirrored Harry Byrd’s perspective on the subject (absenteeism, Benson suggested, should be punished by a court-martial and offenders sentenced “to hard work at low pay”).<sup>193</sup> In tandem with his anxieties regarding the rising national debt, the expanding bureaucratic infrastructure provided a crucial stimulant to Benson’s assertion that the nation was “moving toward some form of state socialism,” and that there was a real danger that Americans would be forced to live under the yoke of a “planned economy” when the war concluded.

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<sup>188</sup> Jacobs, “How About Some Meat?” *passim*; Cohen, *Consumers’*, 62-109; Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War*, xx

<sup>189</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, esp. 146-148

<sup>190</sup> “LA,” 5/26/1943, 7/14/1943, 7/21/1943, all GSBP

<sup>191</sup> “LA,” 8/11/1943, GSBP

<sup>192</sup> “LA,” 12/30/1942, GSBP

<sup>193</sup> “LA,” 3/17/1943, GSBP; Heinemann, *Byrd*, 227

“Certain big bureaucrats,” he claimed, “openly favor some form of state socialism to take the place of our present system of government.”<sup>194</sup>

In light of his particular ambition to reach rural America, where he thought his message might resonate most profoundly, Benson also offered a persistent critique of bureaucratic ‘mismanagement’ of farm policy and food production. “The farmers of America are thinkers,” he wrote

they read more than most classes of people and listen to their radios some. When a farmer receives callers from so many different government agencies in one day that he feels the need of a reception clerk, he knows one thing for sure: There are too many bureaucrats driving around on gravel roads who ought to be saving rubber.<sup>195</sup>

At the same time, he targeted New Deal-era and wartime subsidies and incentives. “The federal farm planning tangle,” a “haywire agglomeration,” “needs to be melted down and poured into a useful mould,” he wrote.<sup>196</sup> Such assistance was not only economically unsound; ceding power to “bureaucrat[s]” undermined farmers’ “economic independence and personal self respect.” “Independence,” he concluded, “is a primary farm product: destroy it and you destroy democracy.”<sup>197</sup> At the same time, in his newspaper column, in particular, Benson often addressed broader concerns through agrarian metaphors. For example, in 1944, he penned a newspaper column entitled “Seed Corn,” which suggested that

we need good seed for our post-war employment crop. Representative, constitutional government; government by law and not by a man’s directive. Freedom to own property and operate businesses in the hope of profit! These are a few kernels that must live if freedom lives.<sup>198</sup>

Congressional conservatives shared Benson’s anxieties regarding the expansion of bureaucratic infrastructure. Wesley Disney, for example, railed against the government’s

bureaus, boards, commissions, departments, and divisions [that] grow and grow like the Rose of Sharon. Each head of a subdivision is working industriously to justify his division’s existence, to be promoted in salary, and to enlarge the jurisdiction, scope and appropriation of his division, be it big or little.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> “Benson Sees America Facing Tremendous Economic Upsets,” *Blytheville Courier*, 8/27/1942, 1; Benson, radio broadcast transcript, *Our Two Battle Fronts: Announcement of Policy Needed*, n.d. [1943], JHPP, Box 3, Folder H; “LA,” 5/5/1943, GSBP

<sup>195</sup> “LA,” 12/30/1942, GSBP

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> “LA,” 3/10/1943

<sup>198</sup> “LA,” *Rogersville Review*, 10/19/1944, 6

<sup>199</sup> Disney, “Speeding Toward Destruction”

Harry Byrd's committee charted the rise of bureaucracy in great detail, while business conservatives offered scarcely more measured criticisms. *Nation's Business*, the Chamber of Commerce organ, lamented the presence of "a fat and often heady bureaucracy in wartime Washington," and reiterated Byrd's warnings regarding the lasting implications of the fact that the federal payroll expanded from just over half a million in 1933 to 3.3 million by 1944. To the NAM, the USCOC, and other business groups, the OPA epitomized an expansionist bureaucracy that threatened to inflict lasting damage on the 'free enterprise' system, as well as a precedential infringement of their control. This issue demonstrated, once again, the degree to which conservatives evaluated emergency measures within the broader context of a long-running ideological battle with their liberal counterparts.<sup>200</sup>

This sense that temporary wartime changes might permanently alter American politics pervaded almost all of George Benson's pronouncements and ensured his sensitivity to signs that liberals were openly contemplating retaining significant aspects of wartime economic controls, or seeking to develop a program of new reform-minded initiatives for the post-war era. In a number of important respects, Benson was correct in his perception that some liberals were seeking to articulate a more expansive definition for New Deal liberalism, a vision that, at times, even overlapped with a social democratic impulse (though, of course, Benson also grossly exaggerated the radicalism of his opponents).<sup>201</sup> The National Resources Planning Board (NRPB), which offered a focal point for many of these liberal ambitions, was of particular concern to Benson and other conservatives. In early 1943, the NRPB released a 600-page report, dubbed the "American Beveridge Plan" by contemporary observers. The fiscal strategy it advocated bore the hallmark of Alvin Hansen, an eminent Keynesian New Dealer, who had played an important role in its creation. The report was substantially focused on the post-war economy and called for generous peacetime federal investment in health, education,

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<sup>200</sup> Arne Sigrid, "Byrd, Ace Economy Sleuth," *WP*, 8/15/1943, B5; "Bureaucracy after the War," *Nation's Business*, 2/1944, 79; Brinkley, *Reform*, 146-148

<sup>201</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, esp. xiii-85; Brinkley, *Reform*, 174-200

unemployment insurance and federal works programs.<sup>202</sup> In response to the NRPB, E. F. Hutton, who offered support to the NEP in early post-war period (if not before), privately circulated a characteristically virulent call-to-arms to a number of fellow business conservatives, including J. Howard Pew. “The Government’s post-war recovery plan, as projected by the National Resources Planning Board,” Hutton decried,

disregards the guarantees of freedom for the private enterpriser. It ignores the American constitution and proposes to set up a Collective or Corporate State ... [and would result in] a death sentence on our way of life ... industry cannot maintain silence in the face of such a plan.<sup>203</sup>

The head of the USCOC called it a “totalitarian scheme.” Congressional conservatives, notably including Robert Taft, exploited the general furore and helped to ensure the NRPB’s termination in the summer of 1943, with the proviso of a committee headed by Walter George to continue the administration’s deliberations on reconversion.<sup>204</sup>

Despite the dissolution of the NRPB, its lengthy report, along with another issued in early 1943, Hansen’s *After the War—Full Employment*, made important contributions to the programs outlined by reform-minded liberals in the Democratic Party, the Union for Democratic Action (UDA), labor unions and, to a lesser extent, within the agricultural sector.<sup>205</sup> Hansen’s report, for example, envisaged economic growth as the offshoot of high levels of consumption facilitated by, if necessary, counter-cyclical deficit spending that would maintain full employment. Hansen’s work provided important stimulus to the introduction of the Full Employment Bill in early 1945. Inevitably, the measure elicited trenchant opposition from the right.<sup>206</sup> Shortly after the war concluded, Benson testified before the House Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments in relation to the Bill. He castigated the Act’s provisions for old age pensions and its acceptance of government

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<sup>202</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 250-253; Benson, radio broadcast transcript, *Our Two Battle Fronts: Announcement of Policy Needed*; Benson and Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “The Fifth Freedom”

<sup>203</sup> Hutton, “Shall We Drift?,” memorandum, Hutton to J. Howard Pew, 9/15/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder “Books,” 1943; Benson to J. William Fulbright, 3/25/1948, JWFP, Box 48, Folder 6

<sup>204</sup> “Taft Gives His View,” *NYT*, 3/15/1943, 3; “Abolition of NRPB Voted by Congress,” *NYT*, 6/19/1943, 1; Brinkley, *Reform*, 245-258; Patterson, *Republican*, 259-260

<sup>205</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, esp. xiii-85

<sup>206</sup> Brinkley, *Reform*, 227-264; Robert Taft, “Statement on the Full Employment Bill,” 1/18/1945, in Wunderlin, ed., *Taft*, Volume 3, 9-12

responsibility for employment – this Benson described as “a guaranty by the Federal Government that even though an individual is a lazy, untrustworthy drunkard most of the time, yet whenever he sobers up and looks for a job, one will be waiting for him.” The bill appeared, he insisted, to represent the infiltration of “foreign philosophies,” it was an affront to “self-reliance,” and it encouraged “our two-fisted, two-legged upright Americans” to accept “the old crutch upon which decadent civilizations have traditionally hobbled to their graves.”<sup>207</sup>

The Full Employment Bill symbolized the degree to which politics, more generally, had become even more focused on the issue of reconversion during 1944 and 1945 (from the summer of 1944 the war appeared to have turned decisively in the Allies’ favor). The rhetoric that punctuated the 1944 Presidential campaign often testified to vitriolic debates over how reconversion should be effected. “Shall we expose our country,” Thomas Dewey declared in September, “to a return of the seven years of New Deal depression because my opponent is indispensable to the ill-assorted, power-hungry conglomeration of city bosses, Communists and career bureaucrats which now compose the New Deal?”<sup>208</sup> Dewey’s deployment of anti-communist rhetoric was also part of rising tide of red-baiting, which would break over the political establishment and the labor movement in the post-war era. Benson’s efforts were also increasing punctuated with this discourse as the war went on. “We in American are today moving toward some form of state socialism,” he warned in 1943. As a result, he called for renewed efforts to root out subversives that would surpass the work of the Dies Committee, which released an inflammatory report that year allegedly detailing the power of subversives in government (it resulted in the dismissal of three employees). “We must go deeper,” Benson declared on *Our Two Battlefronts*, “text books must be examined, teachers must be selected with greater care, American history and government must be properly taught.”<sup>209</sup>

This anti-communism permeated through many of the debates over a number of specific issues pertaining to reconversion. Benson joined conservatives in demanding that the OPA be immediately dismantled at the close of the war, while

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<sup>207</sup> Benson statement, “Full Employment Act of 1945”

<sup>208</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 107-108

<sup>209</sup> Benson, radio broadcast transcript, *Our Two Battle Fronts, Announcement of Policy Needed*, n.d. [1943], JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Blum, *Victory*, 140

the specter of some form of federal provision for healthcare – “Socialized Medicine” as Benson, like many on the right, referred to it – likewise became increasingly important, particularly after Senator Robert Wagner (D-N.Y.) sponsored a bill in 1943, which, in turn, morphed into the Murray-Wagner-Dingell bill of 1945.<sup>210</sup> Moreover, similar antagonisms, as we have seen, abounded in response to plans to expand federal assistance to education. In short, many of the contests that defined the post-war political landscape had already begun.

In the end, Benson’s efforts to promulgate anti-statism during World War Two had important limitations. As with his approach to taxation, some of these were rooted in the nature of his efforts. Benson’s critiques, for example, flitted between two contradictory assertions. On the one hand, he claimed that the ‘miracle of production’ was principally due to the virtuous actions of the marketplace and American businesses; on the other, he claimed that liberals had used the pretext of mobilization to ensure that ‘free enterprise’ was effectively inoperative. This contradiction was linked to another problem that undermined Benson’s efforts – the willingness of many businesses to forgo their anti-statist principles in favor of lucrative relationships with the government. Conservative industrialists, including ‘brass hat’ anti-statists such as Pew, the Republic Steel company and virtually all of Benson’s business sponsors, offered platitudes regarding the virtues of the marketplace, but enjoyed extraordinarily profitable wartime relations with ‘big government’ and availed of government-built facilities at well below market rates when the war concluded.<sup>211</sup>

As with his views on taxation, Benson’s anti-statism revealed a notable disjuncture between his ‘populist’ tone and substance of his critiques. Benson occasionally decried “profiteering opportunist[s]” and contended that “free private enterprise is NOT freedom to ignore the rights of labor; not the right to organize giant monopolies, nor cartels, but the right of every man to forge ahead for

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<sup>210</sup> Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “The Fifth Freedom,” 8/7/1943, GSBP; “LA,” *Putnam County Republican*, 1/26/1945, 4; Jacobs, “How About Some Meat?,” *passim* Bell, *Liberal*, esp. 67-74

<sup>211</sup> Blum, *Victory*, 110-116; Brinkley, *Reform*, 240-245; “Plant Costing 91 Million Sold for 35 Million,” *WP*, 7, 12/21/1946; “Earnings Listed by Budd Companies,” *NYT*, 22, 7/13/1944; “Budd Manufacturing Gets Loan,” *Barron’s*, 8, 2/26/1945

himself.”<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, after a spat with Thurman Arnold, the former head of the Anti-Trust Division, which occurred after a radio broadcast in 1943, Benson informed Pew that “realizing the attitude toward big business on the part of men like Arnold, I am determined to draw the issue closer and to fight the case harder in my weekly column.”<sup>213</sup> In fact, alongside his eulogies to the meritocratic foundations of unregulated capitalism, Benson openly supported corporations whose cartelistic practices were well publicized. He was also apparently unperturbed by the degree to which wartime contracts bolstered a relatively small number of corporations’ hegemonic position within the American economy.<sup>214</sup> Benson had taken particular exception to Arnold’s criticism of Du Pont, which provided an important source of funding for Harding and drew praise from Benson for their contributions to ‘free enterprise.’ The Justice Department, however, finally filed a widely publicized anti-trust suit in 1944 over the company’s participation – which had lasted for several decades – in an international cartel.<sup>215</sup>

The fate of Benson’s anti-statist endeavors during the war, however, was ultimately intertwined with the broader direction of political opinion during these years. There were indications that concerns about expanding bureaucracy and an expansive post-war reform agenda enjoyed a degree of popular support, but there is little evidence of a wider increase in hostility towards the federal government.<sup>216</sup> Benson’s more specific ambition to foster conservatism amongst rural and small-town America is difficult to assess, but it seems that outside of the South these areas were already Republican strongholds (although, of course, the GOP was not wholly synonymous with conservatism).<sup>217</sup> The farm bloc notably shared Benson’s opposition to OPA regulations and its related food subsidy program, largely because of a concern that it would impose a ceiling on farm prices.<sup>218</sup> Many farmers, however, did not share his opposition to the system of price supports that emerged in

<sup>212</sup> “LA,” 10/14/1942, “Nation’s Private Enterprise Is at Crossroads,” clipping, title missing, 2/7/1944, both GSBP

<sup>213</sup> Benson to J. Howard Pew, 6/25/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943

<sup>214</sup> Benson to Pew, 6/25/1943; Brinkley, *Reform*, 175-200, 236-245; Blum, *Victory*, 140

<sup>215</sup> Blum, *Victory*, 137-139; Edward Ranzal, “Du Pont and 3 Others Ruled Violators of Anti-Trust Law,” *NYT*, 9/29/1951, 1; Benson and Clinton Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “Postwar Pioneers,” 1943, GSBP; Benson to J. Howard Pew, 6/25/1943, JHPP, Box 3, Folder H-1943; Benson and Davidson, radio broadcast transcript, “Real Threats to Free Enterprise”

<sup>216</sup> Schickler and Caughey, “Public Opinion,” esp. 185-186; Mason, *Republican*, 79-111

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 109-110

<sup>218</sup> Grantham, “South and Congressional Politics,” 23-24

the 1930s, which also constituted a key link between Southern Democrats and the New Deal. From the perspective of wider demographic trends, population decline in rural areas was also diluting the political clout of non-metropolitan voters. A focus on rural regions also detracted from efforts to undermine liberalism and labor unions in their urban heartlands.

More importantly, although Benson's anti-statism resonated with powerful tropes in American political culture, the notion that an unencumbered marketplace was the most effective method of ensuring prosperity was still overshadowed by the memory of the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression. Moreover, rising prosperity and increasing employment during a period in which government very clearly impinged on the marketplace also likely undercut the right's efforts. In addition, as a number of commentators have demonstrated, the wartime experience seems to confirm the wisdom of the notion that, since the New Deal, the American populace at large, though often sympathetic to the abstract notion of small government, has not always displayed a commensurate hostility towards specific manifestations of governmental activism.<sup>219</sup> The most intrusive wartime bureaucracy, the OPA, retained substantial popular support even beyond VJ Day, in spite of conservatives' considerable efforts.<sup>220</sup> Benson's efforts, for all his pessimism, were informed by a miscalculation that the principal barrier to the right's political rehabilitation lay not in the basic message, but in its communication. "Our people will not intentionally turn away from our private enterprise system," he confided to Guy Rush in 1944, "but they are about to do it without knowing what is happening."<sup>221</sup> In some ways, therefore, it is tempting to conclude that Benson's efforts were most effectively calibrated to encourage donations from conservative businessmen.

Despite the fact that the right was unable to achieve the ultimate ends it desired, conservative pressure during the war was not inconsequential. Conservatives' most important contribution to politics during these years was arguably in helping to shape – albeit in a relatively modest way – the New Deal liberalism that emerged from the War. In some respects, this period marked a key

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<sup>219</sup> Schickler and Caughey, "Public Opinion," esp. 184; Mason, *Republican*, 79-111

<sup>220</sup> Jacobs, "How About Some Meat?," esp. 928-933

<sup>221</sup> Benson to Rush, 2/5/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944

phase in the emergence of a more settled, internally consistent vision of New Deal liberalism, which largely revolved around a mild Keynesianism – a politics which demanded limited expansion of the state beyond the parameters established in the 1930s, but which sought to preserve a role for government through the deployment of a compensatory fiscal strategy. The strong arm of government, in short, would be largely restricted to the operation of a macro-economic lever. The experience of deficit spending during the war was an important stimulant to this. But the shift towards a more moderate definition of liberalism was, to some degree at least, advanced as means of short-circuiting conservative opposition to state expansion (important elements within the New Deal coalition, of course, had also always been wary of state expansion).<sup>222</sup>

Benson's efforts to rehabilitate the image of American business did coincide with a rise in their popularity, but this rehabilitation did not occur precisely on the terms the right hoped for.<sup>223</sup> Moderate or corporate Keynesianism, in fact, provided the basis for an emerging wartime rapprochement between more pragmatic members of the business community and moderate New Deal liberals. The Committee for Economic Development (CED) was the most prominent business-orientated organization to voice the pragmatic perspective, and its members' experiences of wartime mobilization often encouraged them to consider that collaboration with government within this framework could nurture consumption-led economic growth, and better meet their objectives than the conservative fundamentalism articulated by the 'brass hats' (though, of course, many of these more pragmatic business leaders remained far more keen for spending to be allocated to defense industries rather than, say, welfare).<sup>224</sup>

Despite these developments within liberalism, the impulse to enact reforms that went beyond corporate Keynesianism was retained beyond the close of the war by a powerful coterie of political activists, labor unions and liberal politicians.<sup>225</sup> Conservatives, of course, were keen on neither liberal vision. As result, in the early

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<sup>222</sup> Brinkley, *Reform, passim*

<sup>223</sup> In a March 1945 Gallup Poll 32 percent of respondents declared they were more favorable in their attitudes towards "business concerns" than they had been prior to the War; 19 percent declared they were less favorable, and 49 percent were unchanged. Schickler and Caughey, "Public Opinion," 177

<sup>224</sup> Collins, *Business Response, 77-112, passim*

<sup>225</sup> Bell, *Liberal*

post-war years George Benson's activities expanded further, while the new context offered an array of novel opportunities and challenges. But, for all the political idiosyncrasies of the period, conservatives' experiences during World War Two offered a reasonable guide for what was to come in the following decade; they would win some notable victories (particularly on labor-relations issues), and effectively blockade potential avenues of progressive reform, but, ultimately, they would also remain frustrated at their inability to inaugurate a paradigm shift in American politics. Benson, to an extent, would chart his own course through the coming period, but, in the end, he too would share in these frustrations.

### Chapter 3 Innovation and Impasse, 1945-1952

An obscure denominational college in the Southwest may well be exerting a greater influence on the economic thinking of the American people than most of our great universities. Drop into a movie house anywhere, or into a women's-club meeting or a Main Street lecture hall, or pick up a small-town weekly newspaper, and you are likely to be introduced to the hoary economic theories adapted to modern use by the sage of Harding College. Harold Knight, "Whooping It up for Adam Smith," *The Nation*, 8/2/1952, 87-89

Between V-J Day and the close of the Truman presidency, more Americans were exposed to Benson's efforts than at perhaps any other stage in his career. There was also a subtle shift in his target audience. Benson was still convinced (for good reason) of the power exerted by liberals and labor unions in urban areas, but he partially revised his conclusion that non-metropolitan America offered the best counterbalance, perhaps in recognition of the shortcomings of his wartime efforts and the declining electoral significance of rural and small-town America. This shift was also informed by the increasing centrality of labor to Benson's efforts, which resulted in a novel emphasis on unions' primary spheres of influence.

The results of Benson's endeavors during this period were mixed. On the positive side of the ledger, from Benson's perspective, he contributed to a powerful conservative surge that helped to undermine liberals' ambitions to expand the New Deal state, particularly in relation to the continuation of wartime price controls, greater federal provisions for healthcare and education, and the development of a more ambitious agricultural policy. At the same time, this surge inflicted serious damage on the organized labor movement, and had some successes with regards taxation.

Benson's efforts to voice a populist critique of 'big government' during this period were increasingly punctuated with a militant anti-communism, which was characterized by an attempt to portray reform-minded liberals and organized labor as the harbingers of a more radical, and fundamentally un-American, politics that threatened to undermine both political liberties and the 'free market' system. In some respects, therefore, the NEP's work became less distinctive. Nevertheless, the contours of Benson's anti-communism do not precisely match those outlined in the existing historiography. The ways in which religion and reservations regarding mass

democracy shaped his ideas constitute a case in point. Another central element of Benson's anti-statism during these years has been even more widely neglected. The direction of post-war politics in Europe bolstered his anxieties and provided an essential rhetorical strategy for the promotion of his objectives. Nor was he alone in this regard. "Russia, of course, is still 'the enemy,'" Carey McWilliams wrote in an expose of the right in early 1951, "but Britain has become the Dreadful Case History."<sup>1</sup>

When historians have addressed conservatism in the context of the early post-war era it has generally been in reference to anti-communism, the taming of liberalism and the labor movement, or the building of institutions and intellectual rationales orientated towards longer-term transformations. This chapter, however, also moves beyond this analytical framework to examine Benson's broader ambitions, which most closely mirrored those of his business supporters, for a reorientation of American politics, one predicated on the ascendancy of 'free enterprise.' These ambitions, for the most part, went unfulfilled, despite the extraordinary resources allocated to a broad-sweeping campaign to 'sell' 'free enterprise.'

Benson continued to draw inspiration from the power of anti-statist tropes amongst the American electorate, but his efforts to activate this 'potential' continued to be offset by their co-existence alongside a popular faith in specific manifestations of governmental activism. Benson also continued to believe that conservatives' travails were principally derived from popular misunderstandings or ignorance regarding conservatism. In the early 1950s, William Whyte, a *Fortune* columnist, conducted an investigation of business's 'free enterprise' campaign and sagely concluded: "it is based on the attractively plausible idea that the cure for negative attitudes and misinformation is information. Unfortunately, in matters where sentiment enters too, it is not..."<sup>2</sup>

Liberals' ultimate adherence to moderate Keynesianism and their exploitation of conservatives' association with the politics that led to the Great Depression constituted important barriers to Benson's objectives. Perhaps more fundamentally, liberals' criticisms of the attempts of Benson and others to portray their vision of

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<sup>1</sup> McWilliams, "Knights in Shining Buicks," *The Nation*, 1/6/1951, 9-11

<sup>2</sup> Whyte, *Listening?*, 13

‘free enterprise’ as consistent with the values of individualism and political liberty that they so often invoked seemed relatively persuasive. This, in turn, offers one additional explanation as to why conservatives enjoyed greatest success in opposing liberalism.

### **Building a New Arsenal**

In May 1948 the *Washington Post* reported that the Board of Harding College had signed a \$1,000,000 life insurance policy to cover George Benson.<sup>3</sup> The policy encapsulated Benson’s remarkable success in garnering financial support from conservative businessmen. J. Howard Pew and Guy Rush continued to provide crucial assistance. Pew’s letters of introduction to oilmen and industrialists enabled Rush, essentially a rarified traveling salesman for Benson’s cause, to arrange fundraising luncheons. Rush, with the assistance of a personal secretary and another roving business-liaison recruit, Rodney Chipp, who came onto the NEP’s payroll in 1946, arranged fruitful meetings in, for example, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Wilmington on the eastern seaboard; Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and St. Louis in the industrial heartland; Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Wichita (KS), Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco in the Midwest and West; and in a number of the largest cities in Texas, which reflected a significant, though not widespread, foray into the South.

These luncheons greatly increased contributions from the oil industry. Donations were solicited from the Standard Oil companies of New Jersey, Indiana, New York and California, Pure Oil, Shell Oil, the Tidewater Oil Company, Phillips Oil & Gas, Humble Oil & Refining Company, Atlantic Refining, the Quintana Petroleum Corporation, Lion Oil, and the Texas Company. The precise nature of their support is unclear – a few contributed more than \$10,000 per annum, which was the official tax-exempt limit, while most gave perhaps \$5,000 or less.<sup>4</sup> Like Pew, the generosity of those in the oil industry (especially those with concerns in the South and West), was likely informed by Benson’s celebration of frontier individualism

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<sup>3</sup> “Harding College Head Insured for \$1 Million,” *WP*, 5/2/1948, 1

<sup>4</sup> Rush to Pew, 10/24/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; Rush to Pew, 5/26/1947, 11/13/1947, both JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947

and the ways in which independent oilmen, in particular, often draped themselves in a romantic cloak woven from the same cultural fabric.<sup>5</sup> Hugh Roy Cullen, the Texan oil baron, who was essential to garnering support for the NEP in Houston, was “among the most rugged of individualists,” a *New York Times* journalist gushed: “He started as a poor man in the tough game of wildcatting for oil.” In 1949 Cullen pledged \$125,000 to Harding College.<sup>6</sup> The *Independent Petroleum Association of America Monthly* began carrying ‘Looking Ahead,’ while Benson delivered speeches at various oil industry functions, including, for example, the keynote address at the Southwestern production division of the American Petroleum Institute’s spring meeting in San Antonio in 1948.<sup>7</sup> In addition to providing financial support, Frank Abrams, Chairman of Standard Oil of New Jersey, became chairman of a committee for the expansion of the NEP (which also notably included Cullen).<sup>8</sup>

The most remarkable growth in Benson’s support base in the early post-war period, however, came from the recruitment of industrialists in the Steel Belt. While Pew was helping to roundup oilmen, Rush gleefully noted in the summer of 1947, Charles M. White, who became President of Republic Steel in 1945 and was one of the industry’s most outspoken conservatives, was “right after the steel masters”. White had a perhaps more legitimate claim to the mantle of the ‘self-made man’ than many of Benson’s supporters (he started “driving a team of mules in West Virginia lumber camps” at the age of 12 and never possessed a high school diploma), but his outlook was nevertheless typical of the industrialists who backed the NEP.<sup>9</sup> In later years, he was also willing, like many corporate conservatives, to seek and accept substantial assistance for Republic from the federal government.<sup>10</sup> At Republic White’s outlook was shaped by the tutelage of his predecessor, Tom Girdler, one of the NAM’s leading ‘brass-hats,’ and by his experiences of the labor-relations

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<sup>5</sup> Pew and Sennholz, *Faith*, esp. 1-37; Kilman and Wright, *Cullen*; Dochuk, “Blessed by Oil”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; Lewis Nordyke, “He Made a Billion,” *NYT*, 12/5/1954, 1; J. Howard Pew to Benson, 12/12/1949, JHPP, Box 22, Folder H-1949; H. R. Cullen to Guy Rush, 8/14/1947, JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, “LA,” *Independent Petroleum Association of America Monthly*, 5/1948, 65; “West Texans Will Attend Oil Meet,” *Big Spring Herald*, 4/14/1948, 2

<sup>8</sup> Pew to Rush, 9/24/1946, 9/27/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

<sup>9</sup> Rush to Pew, 7/23/1947, JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947; Robert McG. Thomas, Jr., “Charles White,” *NYT*, 1/11/1977, 30

<sup>10</sup> “Plant Costing 91 Million Sold for 35 Million,” *WP*, 12/21/1946, 7; H. Walton Cloke, “Kaiser Lease Fight Taken to Truman,” *NYT*, 8/25/1948, 37

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*; White to Grace, 6/6/1947

<sup>15</sup> Benson to J. William Fulbright, 3/25/1948, JWFP, Box 48, Folder 6; Benson to Weir, 3/14/1952

<sup>16</sup> Benson to Clifton L. Ganus, 9/17/1968, CLGP; Benson to R. Otis McClintock, 10/15/1951, GSBP; R. N. Gardner and Clinton Davidson, "How to Raise Money for Christian Colleges," 1956, JLLP, Box 5, C. Davidson Papers (Lovell), Folder 1; Tebbel, *Human Touch*, esp. 160-164

### Chapter 3 Innovation and Impasse, 1945-1952

An obscure denominational college in the Southwest may well be exerting a greater influence on the economic thinking of the American people than most of our great universities. Drop into a movie house anywhere, or into a women's-club meeting or a Main Street lecture hall, or pick up a small-town weekly newspaper, and you are likely to be introduced to the hoary economic theories adapted to modern use by the sage of Harding College. Harold Knight, "Whooping It up for Adam Smith," *The Nation*, 8/2/1952, 87-89

Between V-J Day and the close of the Truman presidency, more Americans were exposed to Benson's efforts than at perhaps any other stage in his career. There was also a subtle shift in his target audience. Benson was still convinced (for good reason) of the power exerted by liberals and labor unions in urban areas, but he partially revised his conclusion that non-metropolitan America offered the best counterbalance, perhaps in recognition of the shortcomings of his wartime efforts and the declining electoral significance of rural and small-town America. This shift was also informed by the increasing centrality of labor to Benson's efforts, which resulted in a novel emphasis on unions' primary spheres of influence.

The results of Benson's endeavors during this period were mixed. On the positive side of the ledger, from Benson's perspective, he contributed to a powerful conservative surge that helped to undermine liberals' ambitions to expand the New Deal state, particularly in relation to the continuation of wartime price controls, greater federal provisions for healthcare and education, and the development of a more ambitious agricultural policy. At the same time, this surge inflicted serious damage on the organized labor movement, and had some successes with regards taxation.

Benson's efforts to voice a populist critique of 'big government' during this period were increasingly punctuated with a militant anti-communism, which was characterized by an attempt to portray reform-minded liberals and organized labor as the harbingers of a more radical, and fundamentally un-American, politics that threatened to undermine both political liberties and the 'free market' system. In some respects, therefore, the NEP's work became less distinctive. Nevertheless, the contours of Benson's anti-communism do not precisely match those outlined in the existing historiography. The ways in which religion and reservations regarding mass

democracy shaped his ideas constitute a case in point. Another central element of Benson's anti-statism during these years has been even more widely neglected. The direction of post-war politics in Europe bolstered his anxieties and provided an essential rhetorical strategy for the promotion of his objectives. Nor was he alone in this regard. "Russia, of course, is still 'the enemy,'" Carey McWilliams wrote in an expose of the right in early 1951, "but Britain has become the Dreadful Case History."<sup>1</sup>

When historians have addressed conservatism in the context of the early post-war era it has generally been in reference to anti-communism, the taming of liberalism and the labor movement, or the building of institutions and intellectual rationales orientated towards longer-term transformations. This chapter, however, also moves beyond this analytical framework to examine Benson's broader ambitions, which most closely mirrored those of his business supporters, for a reorientation of American politics, one predicated on the ascendancy of 'free enterprise.' These ambitions, for the most part, went unfulfilled, despite the extraordinary resources allocated to a broad-sweeping campaign to 'sell' 'free enterprise.'

Benson continued to draw inspiration from the power of anti-statist tropes amongst the American electorate, but his efforts to activate this 'potential' continued to be offset by their co-existence alongside a popular faith in specific manifestations of governmental activism. Benson also continued to believe that conservatives' travails were principally derived from popular misunderstandings or ignorance regarding conservatism. In the early 1950s, William Whyte, a *Fortune* columnist, conducted an investigation of business's 'free enterprise' campaign and sagely concluded: "it is based on the attractively plausible idea that the cure for negative attitudes and misinformation is information. Unfortunately, in matters where sentiment enters too, it is not..."<sup>2</sup>

Liberals' ultimate adherence to moderate Keynesianism and their exploitation of conservatives' association with the politics that led to the Great Depression constituted important barriers to Benson's objectives. Perhaps more fundamentally, liberals' criticisms of the attempts of Benson and others to portray their vision of

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<sup>1</sup> McWilliams, "Knights in Shining Buicks," *The Nation*, 1/6/1951, 9-11

<sup>2</sup> Whyte, *Listening?*, 13

‘free enterprise’ as consistent with the values of individualism and political liberty that they so often invoked seemed relatively persuasive. This, in turn, offers one additional explanation as to why conservatives enjoyed greatest success in opposing liberalism.

### **Building a New Arsenal**

In May 1948 the *Washington Post* reported that the Board of Harding College had signed a \$1,000,000 life insurance policy to cover George Benson.<sup>3</sup> The policy encapsulated Benson’s remarkable success in garnering financial support from conservative businessmen. J. Howard Pew and Guy Rush continued to provide crucial assistance. Pew’s letters of introduction to oilmen and industrialists enabled Rush, essentially a rarified traveling salesman for Benson’s cause, to arrange fundraising luncheons. Rush, with the assistance of a personal secretary and another roving business-liaison recruit, Rodney Chipp, who came onto the NEP’s payroll in 1946, arranged fruitful meetings in, for example, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Wilmington on the eastern seaboard; Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and St. Louis in the industrial heartland; Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Wichita (KS), Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco in the Midwest and West; and in a number of the largest cities in Texas, which reflected a significant, though not widespread, foray into the South.

These luncheons greatly increased contributions from the oil industry. Donations were solicited from the Standard Oil companies of New Jersey, Indiana, New York and California, Pure Oil, Shell Oil, the Tidewater Oil Company, Phillips Oil & Gas, Humble Oil & Refining Company, Atlantic Refining, the Quintana Petroleum Corporation, Lion Oil, and the Texas Company. The precise nature of their support is unclear – a few contributed more than \$10,000 per annum, which was the official tax-exempt limit, while most gave perhaps \$5,000 or less.<sup>4</sup> Like Pew, the generosity of those in the oil industry (especially those with concerns in the South and West), was likely informed by Benson’s celebration of frontier individualism

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<sup>3</sup> “Harding College Head Insured for \$1 Million,” *WP*, 5/2/1948, 1

<sup>4</sup> Rush to Pew, 10/24/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; Rush to Pew, 5/26/1947, 11/13/1947, both JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947

and the ways in which independent oilmen, in particular, often draped themselves in a romantic cloak woven from the same cultural fabric.<sup>5</sup> Hugh Roy Cullen, the Texan oil baron, who was essential to garnering support for the NEP in Houston, was “among the most rugged of individualists,” a *New York Times* journalist gushed: “He started as a poor man in the tough game of wildcatting for oil.” In 1949 Cullen pledged \$125,000 to Harding College.<sup>6</sup> The *Independent Petroleum Association of America Monthly* began carrying ‘Looking Ahead,’ while Benson delivered speeches at various oil industry functions, including, for example, the keynote address at the Southwestern production division of the American Petroleum Institute’s spring meeting in San Antonio in 1948.<sup>7</sup> In addition to providing financial support, Frank Abrams, Chairman of Standard Oil of New Jersey, became chairman of a committee for the expansion of the NEP (which also notably included Cullen).<sup>8</sup>

The most remarkable growth in Benson’s support base in the early post-war period, however, came from the recruitment of industrialists in the Steel Belt. While Pew was helping to roundup oilmen, Rush gleefully noted in the summer of 1947, Charles M. White, who became President of Republic Steel in 1945 and was one of the industry’s most outspoken conservatives, was “right after the steel masters”. White had a perhaps more legitimate claim to the mantle of the ‘self-made man’ than many of Benson’s supporters (he started “driving a team of mules in West Virginia lumber camps” at the age of 12 and never possessed a high school diploma), but his outlook was nevertheless typical of the industrialists who backed the NEP.<sup>9</sup> In later years, he was also willing, like many corporate conservatives, to seek and accept substantial assistance for Republic from the federal government.<sup>10</sup> At Republic White’s outlook was shaped by the tutelage of his predecessor, Tom Girdler, one of the NAM’s leading ‘brass-hats,’ and by his experiences of the labor-relations

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<sup>5</sup> Pew and Sennholz, *Faith*, esp. 1-37; Kilman and Wright, *Cullen*; Dochuk, “Blessed by Oil”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*; Lewis Nordyke, “He Made a Billion,” *NYT*, 12/5/1954, 1; J. Howard Pew to Benson, 12/12/1949, JHPP, Box 22, Folder H-1949; H. R. Cullen to Guy Rush, 8/14/1947, JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, “LA,” *Independent Petroleum Association of America Monthly*, 5/1948, 65; “West Texans Will Attend Oil Meet,” *Big Spring Herald*, 4/14/1948, 2

<sup>8</sup> Pew to Rush, 9/24/1946, 9/27/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

<sup>9</sup> Rush to Pew, 7/23/1947, JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947; Robert McG. Thomas, Jr., “Charles White,” *NYT*, 1/11/1977, 30

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disputes that were rife in the steel industry in the 1930s and during the War.<sup>11</sup> The infamous Memorial Day Massacre of 1937 occurred outside Republic's Chicago plant and cemented the company's reputation for using violence, intimidation, and company unions to thwart labor organizers. White was subsequently hauled before the Senate's La Follette inquiry to explain Republic's practices, an experience that resulted in an embarrassing, terse, and widely-publicized series of exchanges. White, it was revealed, had even been involved in a fistfight with a labor organizer outside one of the company's factories.<sup>12</sup>

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Dinner of the American Iron and Steel Institute, Waldorf-Astoria, New York, May 22, 1947. Benson provided one of the key addresses, in which he warned that unless industry was successful in “re-selling our own people on the fundamentals of our way of life” then the nation would likely slide towards a “Government-managed economy.” Benson is seated on stage, front row, eighth from left. Charles White is also on stage, as are many of the leading figures in the steel industry who flocked to Benson’s cause in the early post-war era.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Photograph, GSBP; “Resell U.S. System, Industry Is Urged,” *NYT*, 5/23/1947, 33

It was not just the oil and steel industries that became increasingly interested in Benson's efforts during this period. The NEP's financial records are incomplete, but between 1945 and 1952 Benson secured (often on the basis of rolling annual subscriptions) donations of up to \$10,000 from companies and business organizations including Lone Star Cement, Joy Manufacturing, the National Bank of New York, the William Volker Fund, Olin Industries, and Chrysler.<sup>18</sup> Edgar Queeny of Monsanto, whose long running affiliation with the NEP began during World War Two, continued to send checks and, in conjunction with John Olin, hosted fundraising luncheons in St. Louis.<sup>19</sup> The leaders of the aforementioned companies were also included on the NEP's expansion committee, where they were joined by a host of other corporate donors. These included Charles Adams (Air Reduction Sales), William Bell (American Cyanamid), W. Gibson Carey, Jr. (Yale & Towne Manufacturing), Carl Dietz, (Lamson), Raymond Fogler (W. T. Grant), George Gillies (Adams Express), Marcus Goodbody (Goodbody & Company), B. E. Hutchinson (Chrysler), Jasper Crane (Du Pont), Edward Hutton (E. F. Hutton), Edward Little (Colgate Palmolive Peet), Clinton Lutkins, (R.S. Pressprich), Edward Merkle (Shearson Hammill & Co.), Henry Sturgis (First National Bank, New York), Benjamin Tate (United Collieries), and Roy Tomlinson (National Biscuit).<sup>20</sup> From Guy Rush's correspondence it seems that Borg-Warner, Pullman-Standard Car Manufacturing, International Harvester, John Deere & Co., and H. J. Heinz, also provided financial assistance during this period.<sup>21</sup>

To a remarkable extent, the corporate leaders who supported the NEP were also engaged in a wide variety of political activities during this period, from their support for new intellectual institutions such as the Foundation for Economic Education and the Mont Pelerin Society, and pioneering conservative periodicals such as *The Freeman*, to their participation in the extensive campaigns of

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<sup>18</sup> Rush to Pew, 5/26/1947, 11/13/1947, JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947; Group Research Inc., "Special Review, Harding College and the National Education Program," 1/15/1964, GSBP

<sup>19</sup> Benson to Weir, 3/14/1952; "Monsanto Chemical Co. & Edgar M. Queeny, Donations to NEP, 1942-1960," GSBP

<sup>20</sup> Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 9/27/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; Edward Merkle to J. Howard Pew, 10/4/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

<sup>21</sup> Guy Rush to J. Howard Pew, 11/13/1947, 11/27/1947, Pew to Rush, 11/17/1947, all JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947

organizations such as the NAM and the wider drive to ‘sell’ free enterprise to the American public.<sup>22</sup>

The cap on donations to the NEP encouraged Benson’s establishment of an extensive network of supporters, whose combined efforts nevertheless provided ample funds. Between 1947 and 1952 the NEP’s average annual budget was close to \$500,000. Roughly half of this revenue was earmarked for the production of ten, ten-minute animated Technicolor cartoons, one of the NEP’s most audacious initiatives, which cost approximately \$70,000 each. The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation contributed approximately 90 percent of the funding for the cartoons; the remainder came from the Falk Foundation.<sup>23</sup> Alfred Sloan, the head of General Motors and former leading light in the NAM and the Liberty League, was intimately involved in their production. Sloan’s Foundation was distributing approximately \$1,000,000 per year by this point – roughly half of the money went to the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research, much of the remainder went to develop new techniques of reaching “millions of people at the ‘grass-roots,’” to improve “mass understanding of the simple economic truths by which we live.”<sup>24</sup> The films, with their reliance on “the Disney technique,” as Sloan described it, fitted neatly with this latter ambition.<sup>25</sup> Cartoons, meanwhile, had notably been used for political purposes during the war, for example when Donald Duck had helped explain the new mass income tax.<sup>26</sup>

Each cartoon, the first of which was released in 1948, was produced through a collaboration between the Sloan Foundation, the NEP, and John Sutherland, their producer and chief scriptwriter, who had worked for Disney until 1940 and made public information films during World War Two, before setting up an eponymous production company in 1945, which specialized in producing corporate-sponsored

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<sup>22</sup> “Freedom Foundation Announces \$100,000 Award Program Recipients for 1951,” JHPP, Box 15, Folder W, 1947; Henry Hazlitt, “Early History of FEE,” *Freeman*, 3/1984, 143-147; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 3-115; Fones-Wolf, *Selling, passim*; Harris, *Manage, passim*; Griffith, “Selling of America,” *passim*

<sup>23</sup> Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, “Report for 1947-1948,” GSBP; Group Research, “Harding College”

<sup>24</sup> Farber, *Sloan*, esp. 154-220; Sloan to Benson, 9/23 and 10/9/1946, Sloan Foundation Report for 1947-1948, both GSBP

<sup>25</sup> Sloan to Benson, 10/9/1946, GSBP

<sup>26</sup> Zelizer, “The Uneasy Relationship: Democracy, Taxation, and State Building Since the New Deal,” in Jacobs, Novak, and Zelizer, eds., *Democratic Experiment*, 283

films.<sup>27</sup> Sloan's association with the NEP also offered a means of undercutting accusations of bias: "I have, as a matter of deliberate policy," he confided to Benson,

kept our name out of anything that we are doing. I do this not because I believe my personal position, as an industrialist, rather prejudices what I am trying to do in the economic area because [sic] so many people look upon it as a selfish move, whereas of course it is nothing of the kind.<sup>28</sup>

Sloan's interest in the series also reflected the post-war proliferation of corporate-sponsored films with a political or a more narrowly defined 'institutional advertising' agenda. GM was something of a pioneer in this regard, while by 1951 business showings of (mostly 16mm) films had an estimated audience of twenty million per week, a 500 percent increase since 1946.<sup>29</sup> The popularity of 16mm films increased exponentially during the 1940s, in part as a result of World War Two; it is estimated that by 1953 there were between 250,000 and 400,000 16mm projectors in the United States.<sup>30</sup> To capitalize on this market, the NEP recruited Carl Nater, another former Disney employee, to become director of its 'films division.' Nater, bizarrely, pointed to Hitler's use of films to inculcate Nazi ideology in German youth as evidence that films could be used to educate Americans in Americanism.<sup>31</sup> Civic clubs, patriotic groups, and educational institutions, and business organizations facilitated countless showings of the cartoons, often using copies of the films loaned from the NEP's considerable stockpile. Between April 1949 and July 1950, with the assistance of Modern Talking Picture Service, two of the cartoons were rented out a total of 7,890 times with an estimated audience of 1,215,680; in the first three months of the following year another 541,000 viewed the first three films.<sup>32</sup>

A similar array of organizations purchased 16mm spools. For example, within six months of its release, 63 prints of *Going Places* (1948), the second film in the series, had been sold. Businesses bought 56. Swift & Company bought 19; International Harvester bought 8. Within this timeframe the NEP showed *Going*

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<sup>27</sup> "Animating Ideas," *Hogan's Alley*, 5/14/2012, cartoonician.com, <http://cartoonician.com/animating-ideas-the-john-sutherland-story/>, accessed 8/8/2014; Richard MacCann, "Cartoons Animate Ideas in Business-Subject Films," *CSM*, 8/29/1957, 9

<sup>28</sup> Sloan to Benson, 12/29/1949, GSBP

<sup>29</sup> Film Council of America, *16mm Film*, esp. 10-13, 92-96; Prelinger, *Field Guide*; Bird, "Better Living," 121-181; Jehring, "Audio-Visual," esp. 79; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 53

<sup>30</sup> Film Council of America, *16mm Film*, 12

<sup>31</sup> "Pictures," *Variety*, 6/18/1947, 4; Benson to Sloan, n.d. [1947], GSBP; "Tax Source Given Forum Emphasis," *LAT*, 7/15/1949, 16; "Nater Transferred to West Coast," *Harding Bison*, 10/14/1950, 1

<sup>32</sup> Doyle T. Swain to Benson, 9/30/1950, NEP, "Your Grassroots Report," 1951, both GSBP

*Places* to 137,421 individuals, and planned to reach 500,000 in the following six months, while the Kiwanis International promoted the film to 3,000 of its clubs.<sup>33</sup>

Local businesses in Los Angeles bought 38 prints of the first three films and donated them to local public schools, which had a total enrollment of 750,000, where they became a required element of classroom courses. Similar arrangements were made in San Francisco and were under discussion in Texas by 1951, while the Extension Service Film Library of the University of California was “servicing the Harding movies to 200,000 film users in six western states, including the schools.”<sup>34</sup> In 1950 the Navy bought 80 prints each of *Make Mine Freedom* and *Going Places*.<sup>35</sup> By the late 1940s the growth of television provided another outlet: independent and UHF television stations, which were struggling to fill program schedules, willingly broadcast sponsored films. By 1952, *Going Places* had been aired on 67 of the 107 stations operating in the United States.<sup>36</sup>

The NEP’s cartoons had a professional sheen that easily distinguished them from most company-sponsored productions and at least one was also put through audience testing by the Psychological Corporation.<sup>37</sup> Their quality undoubtedly influenced MGM’s decision to distribute the films in 10,000 cinemas across the nation. Louis B. Mayer was also apparently sympathetic to Benson’s crusade and arranged a fundraising luncheon for the NEP in Los Angeles in 1951.<sup>38</sup> George Sokolsky, the widely-syndicated Hearst columnist, watched *Make Mine Freedom*, the first of the series, and devoted his subsequent column to encouraging his readers to see a production that was “full of humor” but “nevertheless hits the nail squarely on the head.” The American Legion ‘puffed’ the cartoons in its magazine, while the Long Island chapter even sent a Drum and Fife Corps to perform in front of the local theater.<sup>39</sup> In the end, however, perhaps only half of the series were given cinematic

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<sup>33</sup> “Distribution Report on Film ‘Going Places,’” 6/24/1949, GSBP

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.; NEP, “Your Grassroots Report,” 1951, GSBP

<sup>35</sup> NEP, “Your Grassroots Report,” 11/1950, GSBP

<sup>36</sup> Prelinger, *Field ix*; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 64; American Film Council, *16mm Film*, 97

<sup>37</sup> Amidi, *Cartoon Modern*, 46; Psychological Corporation, “Audience Reaction to ‘Why Play Leapfrog?’ April 28-29, 1950,” GSBP

<sup>38</sup> Frank Hughes, “Rights Sold to Harding College Film,” *CDT*, 1/25/1948, 6; Benson to Mayer, 6/27/1951, Arnold Zurcher to Alfred Sloan, 5/5/1952, both GSBP

<sup>39</sup> Sokolsky, “Make Mine Freedom,” *Post Standard*, 5/8/1948, 4; “Legion’s Attention Is Called to Film,” *Morning Herald*, 7/3/1948; “Astoria Post Drum Corps to Salute Freedom Film,” *Long Island Star-Journal*, 6/14/1948, 7

release and the MGM contract stipulated a delay in the release of 16mm versions of those that were.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Zurcher to Sloan, 5/5/1952

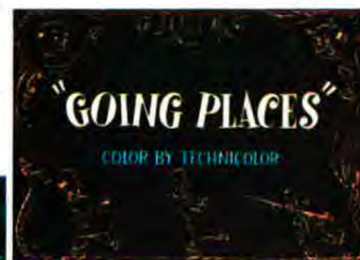


### curing political ills

*Dr. Utopia offers his patent medicine "Dr. Utopia's Ism" for curing all political ills. Those who take it soon find themselves living under totalitarian government with troubles far worse than those they were trying to cure. Stresses the importance of preserving the free enterprise system and the American way of life.*

### profit motive and free enterprise

*A cleverly animated cartoon explaining the theory and workings of the profit motive and the capitalistic system of free enterprise in a highly simplified form. Freddy Fudso helped his mother make soap as a boy, became interested in improving the method, went into soap industry, was spurred on by profits to expand factory and distribution, and tried to establish a monopoly but was checked by a competitor and by legal restraints of government.*



### king of the world's workers

*King Joe is the average working man, who, with his high wages and short hours, is king of the world's workers. This is so because he has machines to help him with the hard, heavy work. As an individual he enjoys the benefits of the private enterprise system. American workman is compared with the Chinese coolie in respect to pay and working conditions. Business and capitalism help Joe attain his status.*

### when wages and prices rise

*Animated cartoon shows the relationship between increased wages and increased prices. When wage increases are based on increased productivity, then purchasing power also increases, but if wage raises are made without a corresponding increase in production, then purchasing prices go even higher. Hence prices and wages can play leapfrog.*





## free America vs. police state

Through the medium of a dream, Albert, an American worker is transported to Antrovia, a police state. Albert learns the real nature of a life in a police state with its political, economic and social impact. Albert's violation of some of the decrees of the Antrovian state result in his being sentenced by the minister of justice to be executed. The firing squad causes an awakening from the dream and helps him to crystallize his own thinking on the merits of our free system in America.

## living under economic controls

This film deals with the efforts of a pitchman to correct a down-turn in the over-all economic life of a community called Eggville. Among the many plans set forth by the pitchman are wage and price controls, rationing, and other controls which eventually result in the closing of business establishments and the unemployment of much of the community's work force. The controls result in the strangulation of the economic life of the town.



## needs and effects of product research

This film deals with the importance of company profits in making possible the establishment of reserve funds for the purpose of conducting research on new ideas, products and processes. The film discusses the story of one typical company and its struggle to develop a new product. Millions of dollars are spent before a marketable product is realized. The beneficial effects on our own over-all economy of industrial research are dramatized.

## how competition benefits economy

This film tells the story of competing companies in a typical community and of their efforts to maintain a favorable position in the market by means of research, product innovation, product designing and packaging, and attractive pricing.

Competition is shown to be a driving force in the advance of our economy, and benefits of our competitive system to the consuming public are emphasized.





### taxes . . . taxes . . . taxes

*An illustration of the nature and incidence of the many taxes in America, especially of so-called "hidden taxes" and income taxes. The film deals with the plight of the business man, the laborer and the farmer in meeting the tax bills levied on each by Uncle Sam to pay for a variety of government projects and services. According to Uncle Sam's statement, every individual must work three months each year to pay his share of government expenses with not one dime being paid on the national debt.*

### inflation, Communism and the devil!

*A discussion of the nature and dangers of inflation.*

*In this film Lucifer joins forces with the international conspiracy of Communism in order to destroy the United States. The strategy recommended by Lucifer is for the Communists to keep trouble brewing in Asia and Europe and for the Devil to go to work on the United States from the inside. He is reasonably successful until John Q. Public sets out on crusade to explain the fallacies of sky-rocketing prices, unlimited credit and ever diminishing purchasing power.*



Overview of cartoon series, NEP promotional Pamphlet<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> n.d., GSBP

Alongside the cartoon series the NEP consolidated and expanded many of its existing endeavors. Throughout the early post-war period Benson's weekly column appeared in approximately 3,500 weekly newspapers and city dailies, including the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, *Cincinnati Inquirer* and *Daily Oklahoman*. His weekly radio program, 'Land of the Free,' grew significantly – in 1946 64 stations carried it; 127 were added over the following two years.<sup>42</sup> Though many of the stations carrying the broadcast were located in the South and West (by 1948, 51 were located in Texas, California or North Carolina), this increase was, in fact, more decisively influenced by a concerted effort to expand its scope in the nation's "industrial centers" (by 1948, 45 stations across New York, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin carried the broadcast).<sup>43</sup> By 1950 the number of stations carrying the program reached an all-time high of 345.<sup>44</sup>

This subtle shift of focus was also evident in the insertion of Benson's column into more than twenty labor journals (one apparently with a monthly circulation of more than 400,000), into "House Organs from coast to coast" (by 1949 the NEP estimated as many as 1,000), and into the mailboxes of thousands of employees of sympathetic companies.<sup>45</sup> By 1946, 25,000 subscribers received the NEP's monthly newsletter; by 1949, 40,000 did so.<sup>46</sup> The NEP also continued to print tens of thousands of pamphlets, often containing Benson's speeches; between March and November 1950 the NEP stamped 576,380 pieces of mail.<sup>47</sup> Given the expanded remit of the NEP, its payroll also grew; for much of this period the organization employed approximately half a dozen people.<sup>48</sup>

These staff augmented Benson's schedule of speaking engagements, which, for the most part, mirrored the patterns of his wartime efforts. He addressed

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<sup>42</sup> "Purpose and Objectives of the Department of National Popular Education," n.d. [1946] JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; "Stations Using 'Land of the Free,'" 6/25/1948, GSBP; "Your Grassroots Report," 11/1950

<sup>43</sup> Rush to Pew, 6/4/1946, 9/27/1946, Clinton Davidson to Pew 7/1/1946, all JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; "Stations Using 'Land of the Free'" 6/25/1948

<sup>44</sup> "Your Grassroots Report," 11/1950

<sup>45</sup> Rush to Paul Zen and Edward G. Budd, 5/30/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946; "Purpose and Objectives of the Department of National Popular Education." See, for example, "LA," *Pacific Electric Magazine*, 7-8/1948, 9, PEMA

<sup>46</sup> "Purpose and Objectives of the Department of National Popular Education"; Harding College, "President's Report to the Board of Directors," 11/1949, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155

<sup>47</sup> "Your Grassroots Report," 11/1950

<sup>48</sup> "Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forums I through VIII," 10/27/1950, GSBP; Stevens, *Before*, 155-156

audiences assembled by business organizations and companies from a wide variety of industries, as well as civic clubs, taxpayers organizations, women's organizations, local Chambers of Commerce, high schools, Church groups and crowds of industrial employees, foremen and supervisors.<sup>49</sup> In early 1950 Benson estimated that in the previous fifteen months he had spoken to 85,000 people across 100 cities in 30 states; over the course of 1951 he claimed to have spoken to 127,750 people (thanks to the Chicago Public School System 50,000 high school students sat in special assemblies and listened to one of Benson's broadcasts).<sup>50</sup> Benson also continued to make radio appearances coincidental to some of his speaking engagements.<sup>51</sup> Between 1945 and 1952, he delivered perhaps on average two speeches per week, which were typically attended by at least several hundred, sometimes more than a thousand, and once, at a rally at Madison Square Garden in 1946, by 20,000.<sup>52</sup> Though Benson could legitimately claim to head a national organization, his speaking engagements were most frequently located in the industrial heartlands around the Great Lakes, in Texas and California, and in the upper South. The scope of his efforts was significantly aided by the fact that in 1947 unspecified "friends" of Harding donated a Cessna plane, which Benson used for two decades (it replaced a plane donated by Beech Aircraft in 1944).<sup>53</sup>

The donation of the airplane epitomized the way in which the NEP benefited from 'in kind' assistance. The organization also continued to benefit from its symbiotic relationship with Harding College. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the donations to the NEP were often matched or surpassed by those directed towards Harding – sometimes by businessmen less interested in the NEP. Harding provided free offices, secretarial services, hosted events, and many faculty members

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<sup>49</sup> See, for example, "Purpose and Objectives of the Department of National Popular Education," 1946; "Taxpayers Association Annual Meeting Set," *LAT*, 3/24/1946, A3; "Expect 5 Day Bank Week to Be Defeated," *CDT*, 5/21/1947, 33; "Educate Youth to American Way, Bankers Urged," *DBG*, 12/10/1947, 8; "Appointments for Dr. Geo S. Benson, 1948," List of Speaking Engagements Fulfilled by Benson, 9/7/1948 to 9/19/1949, "Appointments for Dr. Geo S. Benson - 1947," "Dr. G. S. Benson Addresses Pupils," clipping, *Salem News*, 1/11/1951, all GSBP; "Harding College Head Addresses C of C Today," *LAT*, 7/11/1949, A7; "About Agents," *Daily Record*, 10/2/1950, 1; "400 Hear Dr. Benson in Canton Address," *Evening Independent*, 5/4/1949, 9

<sup>50</sup> Benson, speech draft, "Three Cardinal Issues," 2/1950, GSBP; "Your Grassroots Report," 1951

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, "Your Grassroots Report," 11/1950

<sup>52</sup> *Harding College Bulletin*, 4/1946, HUDA; "Living Cost Brake Cited to Bankers," *NYT*, 5/5/1950, 31; "Your Grassroots Report," 11/1950

<sup>53</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 47; *Harding College Bulletin*, 9/15/1947, HUDA

contributed to Benson's political endeavors, for example by fulfilling speaking engagements (Benson exerted almost complete control over faculty appointments).<sup>54</sup> Neil Cope, head of Journalism at Harding, became a long-serving ghostwriter for 'Looking Ahead' after Ward Halbert died in 1946 (Cope also claimed credit for the NYA-related furore in 1942).<sup>55</sup> Occasionally, even Harding students served as NEP auxiliaries.<sup>56</sup>

### The Means of Attack

The NEP's mission in the early post-war era continued to be underpinned by the basic premise that conservatives' political woes could only be resolved by a groundswell of conservatism amongst the public at large. This sentiment likewise continued to mesh neatly with the perspective of many of Benson's business supporters. Many were disgruntled Republicans. As B. E. Hutchinson confided to Pew in late 1947 (despite the passage of Taft-Hartley Act): "[the Republicans] are up to their same old tricks - they are perfectly willing to be Republican New Dealers if they think it will help get them elected ... I can't understand why the boys in Washington can't get the idea that the thing which has made America great is competition in a free market."<sup>57</sup> By the 1950 midterms conservative Republicans had been instrumental in creating a political platform that promised a defense of 'liberty' against 'socialism.' Even this campaign, however, did not incorporate a sufficiently robust defense of 'free enterprise' to dispel the frustrations of many business conservatives.<sup>58</sup> It was up to businessmen themselves, with the help of men like Benson, to assert the beneficence of 'free enterprise.'

For those who chose the path of 'selling free enterprise,' however, there were major obstacles to their success. Benson's efforts had much in common with those of his business supporters, who, as Elizabeth Fones-Wolf demonstrates, spent millions

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<sup>54</sup> Frank Hughes, "How College Finds Pro-U.S. Instructors," *CDT*, 1/21/1948, 10

<sup>55</sup> *Petit Jean Yearbook, 1941-1942*, HUDA; Garner, "Benson," 157-159

<sup>56</sup> *Harding College Bulletin*, 7/1948, HUDA. See also, for example, "The Evils of Labor Strikes," *Bison*, 4/1946, 1

<sup>57</sup> Hutchinson to Pew, 12/12/1947, JHPP, Box 13, Folder H-1947. See also, W. R. Coe to Guy Gabrielson, 12/20/1949, JHPP, Box 22, Folder H-1949; Mason, *Republican*, esp. 1-147

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-147

promoting pro-business ideology in the early post-war period.<sup>59</sup> Underpinning many of these efforts was a desire to undercut criticisms of corporations on the basis that, firstly, they operated strictly according to the cold law of the ‘bottom line,’ which often set their interests at odds with those of their employees and society at large, and, secondly, that their size choked out smaller competitors and rendered them capable of wielding great power. These were concerns that corporations had been grappling with for many decades, but they were especially perturbed by the perception that the New Deal, the labor movement, and, as we shall see, the Fair Deal, relied on these themes to secure the support of the ‘common man.’<sup>60</sup> As Ernest Weir told Pew in 1946: “the individuals and organizations that sponsor radical propaganda manage to identify themselves with the ‘rank and file.’ The sponsors of conservative propaganda (such as the National Association of Manufacturers) are regarded by the public as representatives of the ‘fortunate few.’”<sup>61</sup> As a result, Benson’s aura of independence remained especially appealing.

To a significant degree, businesses’ response resembled a remarkably simple inversion of these critiques – they proposed that their interests were identical to those of their workers and society at large. Consequently, ‘folksy’ images of main street Americans and ‘average Joe’ employees permeated the vast array of material that business churned out, from films, pamphlets, newspaper advertisements and articles, to employee and company magazines.<sup>62</sup> Benson’s appeal to business, of course, was substantially predicated on his ability to channel a particular version of this ‘populist’ discourse, which he too hoped would undermine criticisms of “soulless corporation[s]” and destroy the legacy of the “fashion to make business the ‘goat’” in the 1930s.<sup>63</sup> The cartoon series epitomized this desire to identify with the ‘common man’ and undercut criticisms of business by demonstrating how the system of ‘free enterprise’ worked and why it had conferred upon the nation the greatest standard of living that any humans had ever known.<sup>64</sup> One of the “guiding principles” of the series, Arnold Zucher of the Sloan Foundation told Sutherland,

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<sup>59</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, passim

<sup>60</sup> Marchand, *Soul*, passim; Harris, *Manage*, esp. 184-199

<sup>61</sup> Weir to Pew, 1/23/1946, JHPP, Box 110, Folder “Politics - Miscellaneous”

<sup>62</sup> Whyte, *Listening?*, esp. 21-80

<sup>63</sup> “LA,” *Ocean City Sentinel-Ledger*, 10/6/1949

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, *Meet King Joe; Inside Cackle Corner*

has been that of appealing to the mass audience, that is, the workmen, farmers and the man-in-the-street. Always we have sought to show that the average man has a stake in the aspect of enterprise which was being portrayed. Indeed we have normally made him the hero of the cartoon.<sup>65</sup>

Benson's newspaper columns, which offered relatively abstract lessons about the merits of free enterprise, as often as they provided a commentary on current affairs, were characterized by a similar ambition. Benson, for instance, declared:

Many critics of our American system use big business as a special target for their attacks. According to their charges, big business throttles competition, creates monopolies, maltreats labor, and kills small enterprises ... Big business is nothing but small business grown big. They grew up because the public allowed them to do so. No business can become big business without public approval. Public approval cannot be bought. It is earned through the hard-work process of competing against scores of other companies and giving John Q. Public a better washing machine, dress, or automobile for his money.<sup>66</sup>

Too many "folks," Benson typically argued, "look at profit as lacking in morals and as the worst kind of sin" and noted, by contrast, that "if I were an employe of a company or working in an industry, I would be very much concerned that my employer makes a profit. I would do all I could to make a profit for him."<sup>67</sup>

Businesses' efforts to change public opinion were characterized by varying degrees of sophistication and subtlety, but their efforts to articulate a 'folksy' conservatism were often successfully lampooned, as William Whyte demonstrated.<sup>68</sup> Part of the problem – ironically given the calculations that inspired them – was the perception that business spoke from a self-interested perspective. Benson's critics, although they identified him as a pro-business propagandist, appeared not to be fully aware of the NEP's lucrative relationship with business, although the *New York Times* revealed Sloan's funding of the cartoons in 1951.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, this was undoubtedly offset by the fact that NEP material was often distributed by businesses.

In the end, for Benson and the stand-pat businessmen drawn to his initiatives, the crudeness of their crusade for 'free enterprise' was intrinsically linked to a flawed understanding of the problems they faced. As Howell Harris aptly summarizes, conservative businessmen were "convinced that the American public –

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<sup>65</sup> Zurcher to Sutherland, 5/7/1951, GSBP

<sup>66</sup> "LA," *Union Springs News*, 5/5/1949

<sup>67</sup> "LA," *Pacific Electric Magazine*, 7-8/1948

<sup>68</sup> Whyte, *Listening?*

<sup>69</sup> A. H. Weiler, "Sloan Foundation Backed Moot Film," *NYT*, 3/19/1951, 17

especially the working class – was ignorant, misinformed, and had been misled.”<sup>70</sup> Proponents of “radical propaganda,” Ernest Weir suggested, were successful because they appealed “to instincts of vengeance and envy in individuals and groups. It is easy to ‘smear’ the successful and competent; the unsuccessful and incompetent gain advantage through pity.”<sup>71</sup> Suspicions of mass democracy sometimes surfaced in relation to a widespread perception on the right that New Deal liberals had corralled specific sections of society into their electoral coalition in exchange for expensive political programs. B. E. Hutchinson even privately admitted that he favored “the elimination of the primary and the abandonment of the direct election of senators.”<sup>72</sup>

Benson’s convictions regarding liberals’ efforts to ‘buy votes’ were shared by the GOP right, conservative Southern Democrats and conservative businessmen, as they had been during World War Two. The bought vote idea overlapped with several paradoxical sentiments. On the one hand, it suggested the difficulty of competing with liberalism. On the other, the idea that votes for liberal candidates were not precisely grounded in ideological conviction appears to have acted as a source of optimism. Optimism also arose from the popular, but ultimately problematic, assumption amongst conservatives, including Benson, that there existed a popular appetite for ‘free enterprise.’

Benson and his business cohorts were also confident that ‘free enterprise’ was self-evidently the best basis for a political system, and were convinced that class antagonisms were a projected illusion that could be challenged. As we shall see, this logic was most clearly expressed by efforts to ‘re-educate’ American workers, to which the NEP made an important contribution. From the perspective of Benson and his supporters, what mattered most was spreading the message far and wide, in tandem with paying attention to the way in which it was articulated (hence the attractiveness of advertising, public relations, and a ‘folksy’ discourse). Conservative businessmen’s confidence also emanated from their remarkable access to resources and their expertise in shaping public preferences for consumer products.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Harris, *Manage*, 189

<sup>71</sup> Weir to J. Howard Pew, 1/23/1946, JHPP, Box 110, Folder “Politics - Miscellaneous”

<sup>72</sup> Hutchinson to Joseph N. Pew, Jr., 2/5/1946, JHPP, Box 110, Folder “Politics - Miscellaneous”

<sup>73</sup> Harris, *Manage*, 177-201

It is difficult to measure the impact of the multifarious and pervasive ‘free enterprise’ campaigns. There was no great rightward swing during the early post-war period, however, and “public opinion towards business,” as Howell Harris notes, “seems to have remained stubbornly suspicious.”<sup>74</sup> Conceptual flaws in conservatives’ initiatives played their part, but the problem was as much the message itself. There appeared to be relatively little appetite for rolling back the New Deal state. Liberals and the labor movement continued to be reasonably adept at puncturing the idea of conservatives as the heirs to some of the powerful individualistic or ‘populist’ tropes in American political culture, or even to the concept of “free private enterprise,” a mantle Truman placed around his own politics. Rather, they argued, conservatism was the politics preferred by the “gluttons of privilege” and self-interested corporations.<sup>75</sup>

Conservatives’ dissatisfaction throughout the Truman presidency was partly a consequence of the scale of their ambitions, for their efforts did make several important contributions to political discourse during this period. For the most part, however, these successes were confined to constraining the political agenda of liberalism and the labor movement. Benson’s efforts offer a fresh perspective on the reasons for conservatives’ greater success as an oppositional force. His appeals to powerful sentiments rooted in individualism, the romanticized ‘frontier,’ segregation, and localism were better suited to attacks on liberalism and the labor movement, than they were to bolstering support for his vision of ‘free enterprise.’ Benson, for example, continued to lambast liberals for attempting to make “a ‘robber baron’ of the government,” and for continuing to preside over a “sprawling bureaucracy.”<sup>76</sup> The cartoons, meanwhile, encapsulated his continuing ‘populist’ critique of bureaucratic elites. *Albert in Blunderland* and *Fresh Laid Plans*, for example, both explore the inefficiencies of an overly bureaucratic society, run by aloof, effete, almost Anglicized, bow-tie-wearing academic elites who possess little ‘common sense.’<sup>77</sup> Liberal elites, he lamented, were ensuring that “grassroots local government

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 193; Mason, *Republican*, 112-148

<sup>75</sup> Patterson, *Expectations*, 148-164; Truman, “Address in Pendleton, Oregon,” 5/10/1950, American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13482>, accessed 8/8/2014; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 49-51

<sup>76</sup> “LA,” 2/27/1952, JDBP; “LA,” *Journal Advance*, 5/26/1949, 5

<sup>77</sup> *Albert in Blunderland*; *Fresh Laid Plans*

is disappearing and [that] the preponderance of power is being gathered into the hands of a far-away Federal bureaucracy.”<sup>78</sup>

In the early post-war period, Benson’s oppositional conservatism was underpinned by an increasing predilection for framing liberalism as an enemy of American political freedoms. The centrality of anti-communism to Benson’s efforts reflected the broader political climate in which this discourse moved towards political orthodoxy, particularly after 1947. The focus on ‘liberty,’ of course, detracted somewhat from his efforts to sell ‘free enterprise’ as a system of intrinsic merit, a better way of providing prosperity. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the anti-statist logic of anti-communist discourse ensured that conservatives’ exploitation of these concerns against the backdrop of the Cold War and the ‘Red Scare’ provided a powerful constraint on liberalism and the labor movement.

The roots of Benson’s anti-communism provide several novel insights into the phenomenon. Of course, as the voluminous literature on anti-communism illustrates, Benson’s efforts came in the midst of the maelstrom produced by the convergence of a series of spy cases; the increasingly apparent ‘Cold War’ epitomized by the Truman Doctrine, the articulation of containment strategies, the ‘Fall of China’ in 1949, and the outbreak of the Korean War; the exploitation of anti-communism as a politically expedient tool by politicians from the political right and the center ground, from President Truman to near-fanatics such as Pat McCarran and Joseph McCarthy; the machinations of empire builders such as J. Edgar Hoover; and the exploitation of the issue by a wide array of conservatives representing business, civic, religious, and media organizations.<sup>79</sup>

Benson’s anti-communism was also consistent with a long-established pattern of conservative exploitation of concerns over radicalism.<sup>80</sup> He lived through the ‘First Red Scare,’ and was raised in a “strongly socialist” Oklahoman county where the local branch of the Oklahoma Council for Defense forced radical, anti-war schoolteachers from their posts during World War One and helped to convict socialist leaders on charges of sedition. Oklahoma’s political landscape during this

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<sup>78</sup> “LA,” *Caledonia Advertiser*, 5/29/1952, 2

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Griffith, “Political Context,” 24-35; Reeves, *McCarthy*; Oshinsky, *Conspiracy*; Freeland, *McCarthyism*; Fried, *Nightmare*; Powers, *Honor*; Schrecker, *Crimes*; Heale, *Anticommunism*, esp. 122-166; Haynes, “Cold War,” 76-115; Doody, “Grappling with Secularism”

<sup>80</sup> Heale, *Anticommunism*, 3-145

period was often dominated by strike waves, red-baiting and repression.<sup>81</sup>

Benson, of course, had also used this tactic during the war, but now, amidst a rising tide of anti-communism he could also, for example, point to ‘compelling’ evidence from ‘authoritative’ sources. By early 1947, for example, he was regularly citing J. Edgar Hoover’s pronouncements on “the growing menace of Communism” (for the following two decades Benson identified Hoover as the preeminent authority on subversion).<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Benson often lauded the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which, he noted in 1948, had “done a great service to the American people” by “open[ing] the dark secrets of Communist conspirators.”<sup>83</sup> These sources, he maintained, confirmed that Communists had infiltrated strategic positions in government, labor unions, the education system and many of the nation’s churches.<sup>84</sup> This infiltration was the product, Benson told an audience of businessmen in Evansville, Indiana, of “propagandists [that] have been at work [in the United States] for 30 years,” whose efforts were now being augmented by 1,300 Russian-trained Communists in America, 800 American-trained Soviet agents, [and] 80,000 ‘native’ communists.<sup>85</sup>

Benson’s elastic definition of ‘fellow-travelers,’ of whom he estimated there were 800,000, illustrated his desire to utilize anti-communism as an ideological weapon:

The fellow-travelers [are the ones] who will take their orders from the party and who will help carry out its program. They are the ones who can fold their arms and say ‘Oh, I’m not a communist; but - I don’t believe in the profit system. Oh, I’m not a communist; but - I don’t believe in competition. I’m not a communist; but - I don’t believe in religion. I’m not a communist; but - the government ought to be taking care of our medical needs, providing for the education of our children, and so forth and so on.’<sup>86</sup>

Benson’s efforts to blur the lines between socialism, liberalism and Communism were part of a broader attempt to convey the dangers of ‘socialistic drift,’ which operated quasi-independently from anxieties about infiltration. This idea was, for

<sup>81</sup> Green, *Grass-Roots*, 377-378; Burbank, *Farmers*, 133; Lehr, “Terror,” esp. 12-229

<sup>82</sup> “LA,” *Indian Journal*, 1/2/1947, 6. See also, for example, Benson, speech draft, “American Way,” 10/20/1947, Benson, speech transcript, “National Balance Sheet,” 10/1/1951, both GSBP; “LA,” 2/25/1959, “LA,” 10/26/1966, both JDBP

<sup>83</sup> “LA” *Picket Line Post*, 12/3/1948

<sup>84</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Evansville, Ind.,” 4/22/1949, GSBP

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* See also, “LA,” 10/19/1949, JDBP; Benson, speech draft, “The Job Now,” 1950, GSBP; Benson, speech notes, “Marion Hotel, 3/7/50,” CHMP, Series 4, Box 18, Folder 14; Benson, speech transcript, “National Balance Sheet”

<sup>86</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Evansville, Ind.”; Benson, speech draft, “The Job Now”

example, notably evident in John T. Flynn's multi-million selling tome, *The Road Ahead*, a publication Benson promoted, and, within a more intellectual framework, in Frederick Von Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*.<sup>87</sup> "How is it," Benson asked readers of his column in 1948, "that those who claim liberalism as their doctrine are found waving the banner for the very worst enemies of all liberty?" The "sorry mess" of liberals, he continued, wanted to

to improve this arrangement by 'planning' us into either a socialistic or a communist or even a fascist society in which all signs of human freedoms must certainly vanish ... These liberals ... care nothing for the Constitution. They are all totalitarians at heart. Their aim is political power to suppress the personal liberty that belongs to the individual.<sup>88</sup>

Benson's recognition of the expediency of anti-communism was notably illustrated by his participation in a notorious episode of orchestrated red-baiting in 1949. That year he appeared as a witness at a Senate Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce regarding the re-nomination of Leland Olds to the Federal Power Commission. Olds, Benson declared, was "to the far left" and "has a record which in my opinion definitely places him on the side of those who would destroy the very foundation of our way life" – in a "critical period" of the Cold War, he concluded, Americans should "tolerate no doubt with regard to the loyalties of all members of the Federal Power Commission."<sup>89</sup> Olds' appointment was particularly opposed by oil and gas interests in the Southwest, who provided substantial support to the NEP, as did representatives of other industries whose activities came under the remit of the FPC, including, for example, Hamilton Moses, President of the Arkansas Power & Light Company and a key supporter of Benson's. Senator Lyndon Johnson (D-Tx.), who led the chorus of red-baiting, had, in fact, apparently orchestrated the hostile hearings in an effort to appease oil interests in Texas.<sup>90</sup>

Benson's willingness to participate in political repression was part of wider pattern of conservative activities that provide another reminder of the limits of the right's reverence for individualism, political liberty and dislike of federal

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<sup>87</sup> Llewellyn White, "Syndicated Savior," *The Reporter*, 8/1/1950, 28-31; Kazin, *Populist*, 173, Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 34-44; Flynn, *Road Ahead*; Von Hayek, *Serfdom*

<sup>88</sup> "LA," *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 1/27/1948, 4. See also, for example, "LA," *Fort Covington Sun*, 11/11/1948; "LA," *Picket Line Post*, 3/11/1949, 3; "LA," *Casa Grande Dispatch*, 5/7/1948, 6; Benson, speech draft, "Three Cardinal Issues"

<sup>89</sup> Benson, testimony transcript, Sub-Committee, Senate Committee of Interstate and Foreign Commerce, 9/1949, GSBP

<sup>90</sup> Harris, "Leland Olds"; Caro, *Master*, 232-304

government. Benson, like many on the right, supported HUAC and the McCarran Act, which “gives the Justice Department for the first time something with teeth in it with which to protect our nation from a deadly internal force,” and expressed no reservations regarding the massive expansion of the FBI. He even favored outlawing the CPUSA.<sup>91</sup>

There was more to Benson’s post-war anti-communism, however, than can be explained by expediency. It was, in short, underpinned by a degree of sincerity that is at odds with conventional wisdom regarding conservative anti-communism. This sincerity, however, was not, as traditionalist historians such as John Haynes have suggested, a reflection of a threat that was more ‘genuine’ than liberal and leftist historians have accepted.<sup>92</sup> Rather Benson’s perception of the danger of communism was enhanced by two elements of his worldview: his ongoing concerns over mass democracy and his religiosity.

In the 1910s a significant number of Church of Christ members in Texas and Oklahoma, in particular, aligned themselves with socialist or radical politics, but the Church also offered Benson a well-defined heritage of anti-communism. In the 1920s, G. C. Brewer fused the apocalyptic elements of the Stone-Lipscomb tradition with a militant anti-communism, a perspective that he sustained for three decades. The two men’s careers intersected at various points and Benson, in fact, co-conducted the service at Brewer’s funeral in 1957.<sup>93</sup> Benson retreated from the apocalyptic premillennialism he appeared to accept in the 1920s, but, like Brewer, he retained a profound pessimism regarding “imperfect” human nature and was convinced that the nation was “drifting towards paganism.” Although Benson did not yet make religious concerns a major focus of the NEP’s work, he nevertheless publicly expressed his conviction that “Godliness offers the only dependable

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<sup>91</sup> “LA,” *Waterville Times*, 2/1/1951, 4; Irene Powers, “3 Principles of American Life Told DAR,” *CDT*, 3/11/1954, C10. On Benson’s opposition to civil libertarian objections to HUAC see “How the Reds Go Fishing for Intellectual Suckers, Extension Remarks of Hon. Karl E. Mundt,” House of Representatives, Appendix to the Congressional Record, 7/27/1948, 4649-4645

<sup>92</sup> Haynes, “Cold War”

<sup>93</sup> Casey, “Insiders,” 459-461; “Biographical Sketch of the Life of G. C. Brewer,” [therestorationmovement.com](http://www.therestorationmovement.com), [http://www.therestorationmovement.com/brewer\\_gc.htm](http://www.therestorationmovement.com/brewer_gc.htm), Accessed 2/13/12; Hughes, *Reviving*, 258-263; “Harding College for Memphis,” *Commercial Appeal*, clipping, 7/4/1946, GSBP; *Harding College Lectures, Volume Two, 1948*

foundation for good character and satisfactory government.”<sup>94</sup> According to this logic, society’s questionable foundations made it more likely to be toppled by errant ideas – individual citizens, prone also to relativism, were less likely to be able to recognize and dismiss communism or radicalism as inherently corrosive.<sup>95</sup> This perception dovetailed with Benson’s more straightforward anxieties regarding the political wisdom of the American public, which had already been misled by the ‘siren call’ of New Deal liberalism.

The theological dimensions to Benson’s anti-communism chimed with the theologically inspired musings of post-war ‘traditionalist’ intellectuals, whose convictions, as Peter Viereck astutely noted, in many ways represented “the political secularization of the doctrine of original sin,” as well as with large swathes of the population whose anti-communist convictions have often, as Colleen Doody suggests, been explored without adequate reference to their religiosity.<sup>96</sup> Benson’s profound antipathy towards secular rationalism, which was shared by traditionalist intellectuals and by many Catholics, evangelicals and fundamentalists, conceivably also encouraged his perception of the limited distance between liberalism and communism – both were on the same side of philosophical schism that had existed since the enlightenment; both shared the same rootless morality.<sup>97</sup> Benson’s anti-communist activities, in a fashion that would become more pronounced later in the 1950s, illustrated how shared theological antagonisms towards Communism brought together conservative (white) Christians in ways that marked a significant departure from previous hostility and foreshadowed their more formal collaboration in the 1960s and 1970s. Benson retained a sectarian outlook, a reminder of the limits of these alliances, but there was a notable tapering off in his efforts to conflate Americanism and an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ heritage during the early Cold War.

There was also one important idiosyncratic stimulant to Benson’s anti-communism, which he consistently pointed to when asked about the formative

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<sup>94</sup> “LA,” 1/13/1943, Benson, speech outline, “Religion and Citizenship,” 12/11/1944, both GSBP; Benson, speech draft, “The Job Now”

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Benson, “Major Problems Facing American Today,” 1959, JDBP

<sup>96</sup> Viereck, *Conservatism*, 81; Doody, “Grappling,” 53-71; Nash, *Intellectual*, esp. 36-131

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-131; Cowie and Salvatore, “Exception,” esp. 10-11; Williams, *God’s Own, passim*

influences over his politics: his experiences in China.<sup>98</sup> In particular, Benson often recalled the hostility and deviousness of Communists in Kwei Hsein, who were keen to undermine the influence of foreign missionaries, and ultimately forced the Bensons to flee to Hong Kong in the mid-1920s. It is difficult to assess the relative significance of these experiences since Benson used his recollections to bolster his anti-communist credentials. An account written by his wife appears more reticent about the particular role of communists in their plight, but, on the other hand, fragmentary documentary evidence from this period does show Benson's hostility towards Communism.<sup>99</sup>

Benson also frequently looked beyond America, to Europe, in an effort to construct a plausible vision of how a 'socialistic' drift might occur and how terrible its consequences would be. Benson briefly traveled through Europe in the 1930s, but his interest in European affairs was likely inspired by the context of World War Two, reconversion, and the early Cold War, which ensured that Americans (including liberal politicians) were unusually attuned to developments overseas.<sup>100</sup> His critique of European political and economic systems, like his anti-communism, emerged from a well-defined anti-radical tradition. Benson's celebration of the America's growth "from thirteen settlements of hardy pioneers to ... a world power that towers above all nations of people throughout all the years of recorded history," was frequently underpinned by the corresponding assertion that even the "plain working people" in the United States were "rich in contrast to the manicured aristocracy of other continents" – a perspective that overlapped with a hostility towards effete eastern liberals, often portrayed as seeking to emulate European ideology and culture (such assertions were also a reminder of the gendered language that Benson often deployed).<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Benson, pamphlet reprint of speech, "The National Balance Sheet, National Convention, American Bankers Association," 10/1/1951, GSBP

<sup>99</sup> Sally Benson, *China*; Benson to Claude Fly, 2/20/1927, GSBP; Watson and Benson, *Missionary, passim*; Clifton L. Ganus, "Interview of Dr. Benson, Parts 1-4," 2/25/1969, HUDA; Stevens, *Before*, 146; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 6-10; Garner, "Benson," 22, 59-60

<sup>100</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, esp. 5-7, 60-61, 99, 160-197; Mason, *Republican*, 112-113; European Affairs Division, Library of Congress, "The United States and Postwar Europe: A Bibliographical Examination of Thought Expressed in American Publications During 1948," Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.35112203932811>, accessed 8/8/2014

<sup>101</sup> Benson, "Liberty Is No Political Issue," *National Defense News*, clipping, 3-4/1945, "LA," 8/26/1942, both GSBP

By the close of the war, Benson's focus on Europe, and Britain, in particular, was increasing.<sup>102</sup> In the summer of 1946 he embarked on an eight-week tour of Europe. Benson visited major cities in Holland, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, and France, but he spent most time in London.<sup>103</sup> In England he met and interviewed "labor leaders, government officials, [and] industrialists," as well as Lord Beaverbrook, the rightwing press baron, Averell Harriman, the American Ambassador, and various British conservatives, including Philip D'Ambrumenil, the deputy chairman of Lloyds of London, the insurance 'stock exchange.'<sup>104</sup> In London, Benson stayed in the luxurious Grosvenor Hotel, a reflection of the well-financed nature of his trip, which was likely funded by his business supporters. American allies and contacts also arranged introductions. Senator J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), for example, facilitated the meeting with Beaverbrook.<sup>105</sup>



Benson in Sweden, 1946. Benson intended to use his experiences to write a book, but, in the end, the trip resulted in a series of didactic reports that were carried in 'Looking Ahead' for several months. It also helped to ensure that European politics remained a central facet of Benson's political pronouncements for much of the following decade.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> "LA," *Picket Line Post*, 5/12/1945, 3; "LA," *Portville Review*, 8/9/1945, 8; "Draft Fundraising Letter," 9/27/1945, JHPP, Box 7, Folder H-1945; "LA," *Montrose Herald*, 3/8/1946, 8

<sup>103</sup> "Dr. Benson Returns from Survey Tour of European Scene," *Bison*, 10/3/1946, 1

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*; H. N. Fairfield to Benson, 7/18/1946, GSBP

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*; Fulbright to Beaverbrook, 7/8/1946, JWFP, Box 25, Folder 9

<sup>106</sup> Photograph, "George Benson in Sweden," Benson, speech transcript, "Crisis of Our Generation," 10/22/1954, Benson, "America and the Welfare State," *American Agency Bulletin*, clipping, 11/1950, all GSBP; Rush to Zen and Budd, 5/30/1946; "LA," *Journal-Advance*, 10/2/1947, 3; "LA,"

The reforms inaugurated by Britain's Labour government, which was elected in July 1945, became a particular focus of Benson's efforts. "An examination of the underlying causes of the crisis in England," he summarized, "ought to make a good treatise favoring the American economic system."<sup>107</sup> Moreover, he drew parallels between advocates of state building on both sides of the Atlantic, and emphasized the political power of labor unions in the United Kingdom.<sup>108</sup> Britain demonstrated, he maintained, that those who sought to regulate capitalism and expand the role of the state pushed politics, inexorably, in one direction. "England and France, in a stage of transition," Benson told 800 businessmen gathered at the Merchants and Manufacturers Association annual meeting in California in 1948, "are practically halfway between [the United States and Russia]. No nation, however, has yet been able to long remain in that state of transition. England and France are moving towards the Russian pattern."<sup>109</sup>

Many others on the right shared Benson's emphasis on European politics. It was, for instance, a defining feature of Flynn's *The Road Ahead*. "We are following, not in the footsteps of Russia," Flynn wrote, "but in the footsteps of England. We are being drawn into socialism on the British gradualist model."<sup>110</sup> Business conservatives, especially anxious about nationalization and the power of British labor unions, often expressed similar concerns, as did the GOP right and a sizeable assortment of conservative organizations, spokesmen and economists.<sup>111</sup> By the 1950 mid-terms, when the Republican Party as whole had yoked itself to a strategy of espousing 'Liberty vs. Socialism,' these assertions became even more commonplace.

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2/16/1949, JDBP; "Socialism's Threat to U.S. Pictured," *LAT*, 7/12/1949, A1; "LA," *Valley Morning Star*, 11/22/1951, 4

<sup>107</sup> "LA," 3/12/1947, JDBP

<sup>108</sup> "LA," *Eastern Progress*, 11/16/1946, 6; "LA," *Eastern Progress*, 11/27/1946, 2

<sup>109</sup> "M & M Told of Struggle," *LAT*, 4/9/1948, A1

<sup>110</sup> Flynn, *Road*, 10

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, "Progress toward Socialism in Britain and Here," *Railway Age*, 8/11/1945, 341; A. Wyn Williams, "Great Britain's Vicious Circle," *Nation's Business*, 10/1946, 50-52, 100-102; USCOC, "Economic Intelligence," 8/1948, USCOCR, Series II, Box 4, News Letters, 1944-49; B.E. Hutchinson, speech manuscript, "Wisconsin State Chamber of Commerce," 11/7/1949, JHPP, Box 22, Folder H-1949; "Economic Intelligence," 1/1952, USCOCR, Series II, Box 4, News Letters, 1952-53; Chicago Industrial Advertisers Association, pamphlet, "Europe's Unprecedented Plight," 2/11/1952, GSBP; Lichtman, *Protestant*, 158; Miller, *Business*, 55

For instance, Joseph Martin Jr., the House Republican leader, charged that British socialism and Soviet communism were “insidious Siamese twins.”<sup>112</sup>

Carey McWilliam’s article in *The Nation* also described the substantial number of British conservatives trailing the country “bent on describing Britain’s agony in the throes of socialism.” Leading the way was Cecil Palmer, a publisher and founder of the Society of Individualists, whose first trip was arranged by Merwin Hart, head of the National Economic Council. Palmer principally addressed business audiences. He received a standing ovation at the NAM’s annual convention, while the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce printed a widely-distributed pamphlet of a speech he delivered at one of their luncheons. His book, *The Illfare State*, was published shortly after his death in 1952, and later reprinted by H. L. Hunt’s Facts Forum.<sup>113</sup>

The NEP, meanwhile, provided a ‘traveling fellowship’ for Christopher Daniels, a British doctor, who spoke to large gatherings “from coast to coast” in 1950. Daniels warned gatherings assembled by organizations such as the Miami Beach Board of Realtors, the Milwaukee Association of Commerce, the Chicagoland Council National Association of Foremen, and the Electric Club in San Francisco, that the nation needed to be on guard against “the first and apparently innocuous step” towards the type of socialism that had brought Britain to the “brink of disaster.”<sup>114</sup> In addition, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce printed pamphlets based on Daniels’ speech entitled ‘Socialism is Like Polio,’ while General Motors circulated another of his speeches amongst its workforce.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, the NEP partially funded William Bean, a high school principal and head of the local Rotary Club in Butler, Pennsylvania, to embark on a six-month fact-finding mission to Europe in 1949. The

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<sup>112</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 112-147; Bell, *Liberal*, esp. 160-238; “Check Socialism, Dewey Urges Here,” *NYT*, 12/1/1949, 34; W. H. Lawrence, “Socialists Likened to Reds by Martin,” *NYT*, 3/17/1951, 24; Walter Ruch, “Taft Starts Fight to Stay in Senate,” *NYT*, 9/5/1949, 1; Coe to Gabrielson, 12/20/1949

<sup>113</sup> McWilliams, “Knights,” 9-11; “Society of Individualists,” *Manchester Guardian*, 6/15/1945, 8; John Williams to Irénée du Pont, 5/12/1949, IDPP, Accession 228, Series J, Box 104, Folder “261 - Politics and Legislation, 1949”; “Cecil Palmer Is Dead,” *NYT*, 1/20/1952, 85; “A *Facts Forum News* Condensation of the British Socialist Ill-Fare State,” 6/1956, JDBP

<sup>114</sup> “Brokers to Hear London Barrister,” *Miami Sunday News*, 2/26/1950, C14; “London Doctor to Talk,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 6/21/1950, M23; “Briton Reveals His Country’s Socialist Evils,” *CDT*, 6/22/1950, A1; “British Surgeon Says Socialism ‘is like Polio,’” *Daily Review*, 6/13/1950, 4

<sup>115</sup> McWilliams, “Knights”; Daniels, *Socialism is Like Polio*, Ohio Chamber of Commerce, 1950, catalogue record, Ohio Historical Society, <http://www.ohiohistory.org/collections--archives/online-collections-catalog>, accessed 8/8/2014; Daniels and General Motors Employee Relations Staff, “Quicksand,” n.d. [c. 1950], copy in author’s possession

trip resulted in an NEP-issued pamphlet entitled ‘Socialism – Europe’s Lost Cause,’ which went through three printings. U.S. Steel alone ordered 13,500 copies.<sup>116</sup>

### The Collision with Liberal Ambitions

Benson’s deployment of European comparisons and anti-communism inflected much of his politics, but these themes did not solely define his assaults on the agenda of post-war liberals. His approach to fiscal policy, for instance, encapsulated both the continuities and subtle transitions in his politics during this period. It was also an issue on which conservatives made notable inroads. The 1945 Revenue Act resembled a partial victory for the right, as did the 1946 midterms. Nevertheless, Benson’s concern that the federal government’s revenue increased “nine times” between 1939 and 1947, ensured that he continued his relentless calls for swingeing spending cuts to facilitate reducing taxes as part of a conservative fiscal orthodoxy that prioritized balanced budgets.<sup>117</sup> “Big Government” was, he argued, the “destroyer that feeds on taxes.”<sup>118</sup> *Dear Uncle*, one of the NEP’s cartoons, encapsulated Benson’s additional attempts to portray ‘excessive taxation’ as an affront to the political liberties of average Americans.<sup>119</sup>

Benson, however, now increasingly also raised the specter of European politics, socialism and communism to bolster his call for tax reduction. “Unwise tax laws, which steal the fruits of labor from those who work, can cause stagnation in America,” he maintained, “just as they have done in Europe - in France, in Italy, and in England.”<sup>120</sup> Conditions in Europe, in fact, also helped to provide Benson with a response to his own rhetorical question: “Can high taxes take us down the road to socialism?.” “Yes,” he told readers of his column in 1949, “a whole lot further than most people think.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Pamphlet, “Socialism: Europe’s Lost Cause,” n.d. [c. 1950], JDBP; “Your Grassroots Report,” 1951

<sup>117</sup> Benson, speech draft, “The Job Now,” 1950, GSBP

<sup>118</sup> “LA,” 2/16/1949, JDBP

<sup>119</sup> *Dear Uncle*

<sup>120</sup> “LA,” 2/16/1949, JDBP

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. See also, “Socialism’s Threat to U.S. Pictured,” *LAT*; Edward Halline, “U.S. Can Double Living Standard or Lose It,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 6/20/1950, 7

Benson's calls for tax cuts constituted one element of anti-statism that developed substantial popular appeal after the War. Gallup Polls, for example, suggested the number of Americans who considered income taxes unfair increased from 15 percent to 38 percent between February 1943 and February 1946. Similar surveys suggested that 54 percent thought taxes were too high by 1947.<sup>122</sup> That year two bills aimed at reducing income taxes were introduced by the new Congress, with the backing of the NAM and USCOC, and while both were vetoed by Truman (much to Benson's disgust), a third passed over another attempted veto in January 1948 and reduced federal taxes by \$5 billion, in relative terms a cut as substantial as that of 1964.<sup>123</sup> Despite this, against the backdrop of the demands of Cold War defense policies and the outbreak of the Korean War, Truman called for \$4 billion in new taxes in 1949 (again much to Benson's disgust) and dissatisfaction with taxation levels continued to increase – a 1952 Gallup Poll suggested that 71 percent of Americans thought taxes were too high.<sup>124</sup>

There were, however, some important qualifications to the success of the anti-tax ethos propounded by Benson and others during these years. The other half of Benson's fiscal strategy – a massive decrease in spending commitments to facilitate a balanced budget – seems to have been less appealing.<sup>125</sup> In part, this provides another reminder of the disjuncture between Americans' propensity for ideological conservatism and operational liberalism. *Dear Uncle*, in fact, was wholly dedicated to straightening out this kink. When taxes on the cartoon's leading characters – a businessman, a farmer, and a factory worker – are increased, they are all enraged and round on "Uncle Sam," who admonishes them by replying that "you fellas seem to forget, the more benefits you demand the higher your taxes have to be."<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, while Benson made efforts to suggest the populist dimensions of tax cuts and their congruence with 'liberty,' when he offered a practical outline of how cuts might be made he pointed to "taxes on incomes in the high brackets" and corporation taxes. Taxes on corporations and the wealthy, Benson suggested, constituted "good politics," but ignored the reality that they were a drain on the "risk

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<sup>122</sup> Zelizer, "Uneasy," 284-285

<sup>123</sup> "LA," 7/2/1947, JDBP; Collins, *Keynes*, 123-124; Bell, *Liberal*, 47-52

<sup>124</sup> Zelizer, "Uneasy," 285; "LA," 2/16/1949, JDBP

<sup>125</sup> On limited appeal of conservatives' attack on the New Deal state see Mason, *Republican*, 112-147

<sup>126</sup> *Dear Uncle*

capital” that “must continually flow into new enterprises.”<sup>127</sup> He also suggested that graduated taxation rates interfered with the system of rewards in the marketplace. “Perhaps it is an economic law,” he wrote, “that there shall be people at both ends of the [economic] scale.”<sup>128</sup> These arguments, of course, were not necessarily the ethos at the root of popular anti-tax sentiment, a notion that is supported by the consistently limited appeal of the ‘free enterprise’ message. In these respects, fiscal policy provides an excellent window on the ongoing difficulties that Benson, like many other conservatives, faced when he attempted to move beyond oppositional anti-statism. In a more straightforward sense, liberals, aided by rising prosperity and the memory of the Depression, were also rather good at deflating the idea that slashing government programs and cutting taxes to create an untrammelled marketplace constituted the best means of creating prosperity.<sup>129</sup>

Oppositional anti-statism, rooted in a patriotic defense of ‘liberty’ and appeals to individualism, did, however, have a significant impact on liberals’ ambitions to pursue new reforms during Truman’s presidency. By 1946 the nation faced a substantial housing crisis.<sup>130</sup> In November, the Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill was introduced, a measure that included a commitment to build 1.25 million housing units every year for ten years.<sup>131</sup> The bill, which Benson vehemently opposed, was killed by conservatives in Congress (despite Senator Robert Taft’s co-sponsorship), but resurfaced in 1948, by which point anti-communism was increasingly prevalent.<sup>132</sup> Benson emphasized that “if government would get out of the scramble private building would soon meet the demand for rental units,” and that liberals’ true motivation was derived from their calculation that “there are votes to be had by making some 12 million families think the government is giving them rent below the market value.”<sup>133</sup> But he now also increasingly emphasized that

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<sup>127</sup> “LA,” 2/16/1949, JDBP. See also “LA,” 3/5/1947, 11/2/1949, both JDBP; “LA,” *Portville Review*, 6/26/1947, 5

<sup>128</sup> “LA,” *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 11/10/1949, 4

<sup>129</sup> Patterson, *Expectations*, 148-164

<sup>130</sup> Patterson, *Republican*, 315

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-320

<sup>132</sup> “LA,” *Eastern Progress*, 2/15/1946, 5

<sup>133</sup> “LA,” *Journal-Advance*, 10/21/1948, 6; “LA,” 10/19/1949, JDBP

rent control and public housing are two pieces out of the jig-saw picture puzzle of socialist and collectivist controls that the agitators are trying to foist upon the nation ... the Socialists and Communists know that it sounds good to plead for 'adequate' housing.<sup>134</sup>

Patriotic appeals, rooted in a conflation between economic and political liberty, pervaded many conservatives' responses to housing reform. "These ideas did not originate in America, the land of the free," Benson concluded, "they came from Europe and from Russia." William Bean, meanwhile, faithfully reported the 'disaster' of Aneurin Bevan's public housing provisions in Britain.<sup>135</sup> Congressman Ralph Gwinn (R-NY) similarly argued that "public housing was used as the central highway on which socialist cabinets and parliaments and dictators rode to power in Europe."<sup>136</sup> The real estate industry, in which Guy Rush had long operated, also offered substantial opposition – the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) even claimed that the bill demonstrated that Senator Taft was "at heart a socialist." To mark Constitution Day in 1950, Benson supplied the NAREB with 60 copies of *Make Mine Freedom* to be shown at local board meetings.<sup>137</sup> Conservative pressure of this nature helped to water down the housing act of 1949, but it could not stop its passage.<sup>138</sup>

These pressures had a more profound impact on liberal ambitions to extend government provision of healthcare and other social security measures. When healthcare debates returned to center stage as a key component of the slate of Fair Deal reforms proposed in 1948, Benson castigated the proposals in by now familiar terms:

The trouble with compulsory health insurance programs lies chiefly in the fact that such fancy government plans have so little in common with our American way of life ... the catch is that health is politically desirable. As a goal of the government for its citizens it means 'votes.' Just like most any handout the government can think up ... [some Americans think that] a little of Europe's socialism and communism here and there will bring America up to date.<sup>139</sup>

Britain's recently created National Health Service (NHS) loomed large in discussions of 'socialized medicine.' Christopher Daniels, a medical doctor, often focused on the

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<sup>134</sup> "LA," *Journal-Advance*, 10/21/1948, 6. See also, "LA," *Cedar Rapids Tribune*, 8/5/1948, 4; "LA," *Millbrook Round Table*, 8/27/1948

<sup>135</sup> Pamphlet, "Socialism: Europe's Lost Cause"; "LA," 7/28/1948, JDBP

<sup>136</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, 174

<sup>137</sup> Patterson, *Republican*, 319; "Your Grassroots Report," 11/1950

<sup>138</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, 174

<sup>139</sup> "LA," 5/4/1949, JDBP

NHS's alleged failings.<sup>140</sup> In 1950, the Committee for Constitutional Government agreed to distribute 125,000 copies of *Compulsory Medical Care and The Welfare State*, a book written by Melchior Palyi, a Hungarian émigré and an economist. Drawing on his travels through Europe the previous year, Palyi warned of the dangers of being drawn into the “blind confusion that is Europe, the tragic austerity that is England and the Godless despair that is Russia.”<sup>141</sup> It is “a very good book,” Benson wrote Robert E. Wood, the head of Sears, Roebuck. By 1952 Palyi was employed by Harding College.<sup>142</sup>

The American Medical Association (AMA), meanwhile, spearheaded the right's drive against an extension of healthcare provisions. The AMA launched a \$1.1 million advertising campaign in 1950 (an expenditure almost matched by its donations to candidates in that year's midterms) that was riddled with the anti-communist language of the period. The organization also furnished Benson with information and advice ahead of his testimony before the Senate Finance Committee in relation to H.R. 6000, a measure aimed principally at expanding the provisions of the existing Social Security Act.<sup>143</sup> In the end, despite an expansion of social security provisions, the goal of federally mandated healthcare fell outside the boundaries of the narrowing definition of the state's appropriate role.<sup>144</sup>

Federal aid to education, another central strand of Fair Deal reform proposals, met with a similar fate. Benson's opposition was again often expressed through the rubric of anti-communism, while he also emphasized the proposed measure's incongruence of ‘free enterprise,’ and complained that its primary advocates were vote-seeking politicians.<sup>145</sup> As they had done during the war, debates regarding federal aid to education also highlighted the overlap between the right's anti-statist agenda and the interests of southern segregationists – an overlap that sometimes bolstered Benson's efforts. Some new challenges heightened sensitivity to racial changes by the late 1940s. Increasing signs of civil rights activism were coupled with

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<sup>140</sup> “Briton Reveals His Country's Socialist Evils,” *CDT*

<sup>141</sup> Palyi, *Compulsory*, quotation in publisher's note

<sup>142</sup> Benson to Wood, 6/3/1952, Benson to Herb Cornuelle, n.d., [c. 1952], both GSBP

<sup>143</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, 172, 209; Joseph Lawrence to Benson, 3/1/1950, GSBP; Testimony of George S. Benson, H.R. 6000, Senate Committee on Finance, 2/1950, Congressional Record, 1728-1734

<sup>144</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, esp. 71-76

<sup>145</sup> Benson to “Dear Friend,” 4/25/1948, IDDP, Accession 228, Series J, Box 104, Folder “261-Politics and Legislation, 1948”; “LA,” 4/21/1948, 10/19/1949, both JDBP; “LA,” *Journal Advance*, 9/2/1948, 4

Truman's unprecedented commitment to racial reform in early 1948, which included the creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). Southern dismay was encapsulated by the Dixiecrats' third party campaign in 1948.<sup>146</sup>

Although the heyday of anti-communism in the South was delayed until the mid-1950s, when challenges to segregation were even more significant, Benson's efforts provide a reminder of the synergy between redbaiting and racism even in this earlier period.<sup>147</sup> Benson made few explicit links between segregation and, for example, his opposition to federal aid to education, and only rarely did he emphasize Communists' desire to divide Americans by pitting "colored against white."<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, he surely recognized the potential for his anti-statism to resonate with segregationist sentiments. A journalist writing in a South Carolinian newspaper in 1949 demonstrated this potential when he bolstered a straightforward segregationist critique of federal aid to education by citing Benson's pronouncements on the matter as evidence that the scheme was a "Trojan Horse" for communism.<sup>149</sup> Given the convergence of these various pressures, it was perhaps unsurprising that the proposed reforms ran aground.

Benson also joined the conservative chorus that helped to kill the Brannan Plan, an ambitious agricultural program unveiled in April 1949, which sought to offer farmers direct subsidies without price or production controls, and which stood to disproportionately benefit smaller-scale farmers.<sup>150</sup> In 1950 the NEP produced its fifth cartoon, *Fresh Laid Plans*, which tells the story of Dr. Owlsy Hoot, a bungling, aloof bureaucrat, who, as *Time* magazine summarized, exposes "a community of farming chickens to the rigors of Fair Dealing price control, farm subsidies and other bureaucratic gimmicks," which, in turn, leads to the creation of a dictatorial police state.<sup>151</sup> The Brannan Plan was not mentioned, but the obvious satirical overlap fostered a widespread controversy, particularly across the Farm Belt. Sutherland, for his part, denied that the film was "aimed specifically at the . . . Brannan Plan, but if

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<sup>146</sup> Frederickson, *Dixiecrat*, 57-187

<sup>147</sup> Woods, *Struggle*, 1-143

<sup>148</sup> Benson, speech draft, "The Job Now"

<sup>149</sup> Roland Harper, "Federal Aid to Education Checkup May Save a Life," *News and Courier*, 4/3/1949, 1

<sup>150</sup> Dean, "Brannan Plan," *passim*; Hamilton, *Trucking*, esp. 83-88

<sup>151</sup> *Fresh Laid Plans*; "Cinema: Well-Shod Owl," *Time*, 3/26/1951

the shoe fits, they can wear it.”<sup>152</sup> In addition to being circulated by MGM, the cartoon was picked up by the Farm Film Foundation, an organization funded by representatives of Curtis Publishing, Quaker Oats, United Aircraft Corporation, and International Harvester (with the exception of United, each company provided assistance to Benson’s efforts in other ways too during the 1940s and 1950s).<sup>153</sup> An article about the film in the *New York Times* encouraged the International Baby Chick Association to show a copy to the 6,000 members who attended the Association’s annual conference in St. Louis.<sup>154</sup>

The vociferous campaign against the Brannan Plan, however, was led by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), an organization that principally represented the nation’s increasingly influential larger-scale farmers, and is often overlooked as a proponent of conservatism, despite its leadership’s vociferous opposition to an array of issues from “socialized medicine” to federal aid to education.<sup>155</sup> Leading lights in the AFBF, who became increasingly important allies for the NEP as the 1950s wore on, were not always adverse to federal aid to agriculture, despite their professed ideological convictions, but the specific nature of the Brannan Plan (and the fact that it was part of a self-conscious effort to expand the New Deal-Fair Deal coalition) irked them in the extreme. Conservative Republicans and businessmen completed a powerful assortment of opponents of the measure. They also emphasized that this experimental offshoot of the Fair Deal revealed that the movement, as a whole, was infected with a radical canker. In this context, liberal Democrats retreated and the initiative was abandoned.<sup>156</sup>

In a more general sense, conservative pressure was important to liberals’ broader retreat towards the ‘vital center’ of American politics during the early post-war period. Indeed the anti-statist logic of anti-communist discourse, as Jonathan Bell demonstrates, undermined a reformist impulse that persisted after the war to an

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.; Thomas Brady, “Cartoon Film Stirs Dispute in West,” *NYT*, 3/18/1951, 1; A. H. Weiler, “Sloan Foundation Backed Moot Film,” *NYT*, 3/19/1951, 17; “An Educational Program,” *NYT*, 3/19/1951, 17; “Metro Won’t Yank Cartoon in Farm Rap,” *Variety*, 3/21/1951, 3, 20; “Cinema: Well-Shod Owl,” *Time*

<sup>153</sup> “Farmers to See Film Satirizing Controls,” *NYT*, 1/15/1952, 11; Sam B. Hall, pamphlet, “The Truth About the Farm Bureau,” 1953, HAPP, Box 33, Folder 10; “Invitation to Private Luncheon at the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel,” 3/3/1944, JHPP, Box 5, Folder H-1944; Benson to R. Douglas Stuart, 4/7/1952, Benson to Morton May, 7/14/1952, both GSBP

<sup>154</sup> Don Turnbull to Benson, 4/13/1951, GSBP

<sup>155</sup> Hall, “Farm Bureau”; “Farm Bureau Convention Highlights Given,” *Newberry Observer*, 1/6/1950

<sup>156</sup> Bell, *Liberal*, 179-181

extent that has sometimes been underestimated. The early Cold War, in fact, constituted another important phase in the emergence of moderate Keynesianism as the defining element of the liberal creed.<sup>157</sup> These developments, in turn, damaged the broader ambitions of Benson and other conservatives. Moderation insulated liberals from anti-statist assaults. To an extent, liberals' own fervent anti-communism also made it more difficult for Benson and others on the right to suggest that there were only "two basic philosophies of life" – 'Americanism' and Communism, a statist, collectivist, and atheist philosophy that inverted all the virtues that had made America the greatest nation on earth.<sup>158</sup> Occasionally, Benson even used liberals' anti-communism to support his own perspective; he identified Tom Clark and George Marshall, though he could have also pointed to President Truman, to leading figures in the AFL, or to the newly formed Americans for Democratic Action.<sup>159</sup>

### **The Crusade Against Labor**

Benson's opposition to organized labor constituted perhaps the most promising element of the NEP's efforts during this period. It was also an issue that occupied much of his time, a reflection, to some degree at least, of its importance to his business funders. Many businessmen were receptive to the idea that Lemuel Boulware, the architect of General Electric's pioneering anti-labor initiatives in the late 1940s and 1950s, expressed to Benson's associate Carl Nater.<sup>160</sup> "The bad economics now in the minds of our citizens and being further pumped into their minds," he wrote, "has its source [sic] the labor unions and the politicians they dominate."<sup>161</sup> Benson retained his wartime critique of 'big labor' as a political special interest group, led by headstrong union bosses who rode roughshod over the concerns of ordinary citizens and advanced a dangerous political program. Against

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<sup>157</sup> Bell, *Liberal*. For an account that suggests liberals' moderation by 1945 see Brinkley, *Reform*

<sup>158</sup> Benson, speech draft: "Seattle," 6/25/1948, GSBP; "M&M Told of Struggle between Two Basic Philosophies," *LAT*, 4/9/1948, 2-A1

<sup>159</sup> Benson, speech draft, "American Way," 10/20/1947, GSBP; Heale, *Anticommunism*, 122-166

<sup>160</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 97-103

<sup>161</sup> Boulware to Nater, 1/19/1950, GSBP; Kimberly Phillips-Fein, "American Counterrevolutionary: Lemuel Ricketts Boulware and General Electric, 1950-1960," in Lichtenstein, ed., *American Capitalism*, 249-270

the backdrop of the ‘Red Scare’ and the Cold War, however, he now increasingly emphasized labor’s ‘radicalism’ and supposed attraction to un-American ideas that undermined political liberty. Consequential though these efforts were, they did not provide a springboard to a more fundamental rehabilitation of conservative principles.

By 1945 close to a third of the nation’s workforce paid union dues, while the labor movement was committed to expanding its membership and achieving a slate of political objectives.<sup>162</sup> This situation provided the backdrop to the most obvious stimulus to conservative anti-labor sentiment in the early post-war era: industrial disputes. Workers were caught between declining industrial production and a consequent rise in unemployment, and a desire for wage increases, which had been limited during the war, to counterbalance rampant price inflation. In 1945 there were 4,750 strikes.<sup>163</sup> “Not since the Civil War has the United States of America faced a graver crisis than the one confronting it now,” Benson declared in November; “the current scourge of industrial disputes has truly brought America to the crossroads.”<sup>164</sup>

The year 1946 was even more tempestuous. In fact, in no other year in American history had so many workers – in excess of four million – struck.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps the most notable labor-management dispute during this period occurred between Walter Reuther’s United Automobile Workers and General Motors, a development that likely encouraged Alfred Sloan to support Benson’s efforts.<sup>166</sup> In the midst of the strike wave, Benson emphasized to potential supporters that the NEP’s efforts were now directed – to an unprecedented extent – towards the “critical industrial centers,” “where there is such great unrest and so much misinformation being disseminated.”<sup>167</sup>

During reconversion Benson, like Sloan, claimed that labor’s demands for wage increases would cause inflation and were unrealistic given the squeeze on industrial profits. By contrast, conservatives suggested, if conditions were made

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<sup>162</sup> Patterson, *Expectations*, 39-51

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-44; Sparrow, *Warfare*, 242

<sup>164</sup> C. D. Brown to Multiple, 11/20/1945, GSBP

<sup>165</sup> Patterson, *Expectations*, 43-44; Heale, *Anticommunism*, 135

<sup>166</sup> Doody, *Detroit’s*, 96-98

<sup>167</sup> Rush to Pew, 9/27/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

favorable to private investment than the much-maligned Office of Price Administration (OPA) could be dismantled without a consequent price spiral caused by pent-up consumer demand emanating from wartime savings.<sup>168</sup> “Such attitudes as that of Secretary of Labor Schwollenbach calling for 15% wage increases while depriving industry of the right to raise prices,” Benson wrote in late 1945, confirmed that the Democratic Party was “selling industry down the river” and was surreptitiously engaging in the “‘vote buying’ of labor.”<sup>169</sup> Benson, of course, was also at pains to point out that he was “a life-long friend of labor.” “Labor knows,” he told an audience of businessmen in Denver in February 1946, “that if free enterprise isn’t restored, labor gains are dead.”<sup>170</sup> In a similar vein he declared, “I am a man of relatively small earning and I believe I can speak for millions of Americans who don’t care how high wages go so long as they don’t upset the national economy.”<sup>171</sup> The OPA remained a favorite target of Benson and the right until it was destroyed in the aftermath of the 1946 mid-term elections.<sup>172</sup>

It was in this context that Benson also increasingly deployed an anti-communist critique of labor based on the premise that radicals were influential within movement and that unions were a strategic target for subversives. Such assertions were, for example, central to an article Benson had published in *Reader’s Digest* in 1946, which was simply titled, “If I Were a Communist.”<sup>173</sup> A ‘Looking Ahead’ column from the spring of 1946 also encapsulated this perspective:

Already this year, news wires have carried a story about leaders in the Communist movement addressing large audiences of working men and ‘whooping it up’ for strikes, more strikes and bigger strikes ... It is not that Labor, considered broadly, is destructive in character or shot through with Communistic ideas ... It is true, however, that working people are numerous and therefore a powerful segment of American society. People who want to overthrow the only system on earth that gives the working man a chance are very wise to ask the workers’ help. It can’t be done without them.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> See, for example, “NAM Press Release, August 3, 1946, and Thereafter,” NAMR, Series I, Box 1, Folder “Bennett Material - Indirect Approach”

<sup>169</sup> “Trend Toward Socialism Seen,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 10/4/1945, 7

<sup>170</sup> “Harding College Monthly Letter,” 11/20/1945, “‘Socialistic Legislation’ Blamed as Cause of U.S. Labor Turmoil,” *Rocky Mountain News*, clipping, 2/4/1946, both GSBP

<sup>171</sup> “Harding College Monthly Letter,” 11/20/1945

<sup>172</sup> Jacobs, “Some Meat?,” 933-941; “LA,” *South Amboy Citizen*, 9/13/1946, 6; “LA,” *Journal-Advance*, 10/3/1946, 2

<sup>173</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 75

<sup>174</sup> “LA,” *The Courier*, 3/21/1946, 4

Strikes remained central to Benson's calls for legislative action to redress the 'imbalance' in labor-management relations that allegedly emerged in the 1930s. "Capital is no match for Labor ... Labor has a club that management can't use, the strike."<sup>175</sup> Benson was mostly circumspect in his advocacy of a specific legislative remedy, perhaps as a consequence of his desire to appear 'above' political squabbles. Occasionally, however, he candidly called for the repeal of the Wagner Act, expressed hostility towards the idea of the "closed shop" (he also pointed to the positive effects of its absence in Sweden), and demanded curbs on the CIO-PAC.<sup>176</sup> Such assertions, along with his more generalized anti-labor diatribes, merged with a broader conservative drive to secure the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947.<sup>177</sup> Privately, meanwhile, Benson lobbied Senator Fulbright – allegedly on behalf of "the people of Arkansas" – to vote against Truman's attempted veto.<sup>178</sup>

Benson's claim to speak for Arkansans was presumptuous, but Southern hostility towards labor accelerated during the early post-war era. This was partly a reflection of the trajectory of national political debate, but the South, as ever, had its idiosyncrasies. Perhaps most obviously, labor's political power threatened to dilute Southern Democrats' influence over their party. Such anxieties were exacerbated by the CIO's launching of 'Operation Dixie' in early 1946, an ambitious million-dollar plan to build upon wartime gains in the region.<sup>179</sup> In the end, the organizing drive peaked by the close of the year and resulted in scant net gains in union membership, thanks, in no small part, to Southern businessmen, plantation elites, politicians, and religious leaders who launched a counteroffensive that depicted the union movement as a threat to segregation and a purveyor of dangerously radical 'un-American' politics.<sup>180</sup> Anti-communism, in fact, represented a staple feature of opposition to 'Operation Dixie.' It also sometimes informed disputes within the labor movement –

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<sup>175</sup> "Harding College Monthly Letter," 11/20/1945

<sup>176</sup> "Socialistic Legislation Blamed," *Rocky Mountain News*; "LA," *Journal-Advance*, 5/8/1947, 4; Benson to A. J. Hagan, 3/17/1947, JWFP, Box 48, Folder 32; "LA," *The Courier*, 1/23/1947, 4; "Man's Gains Seen Gauged by Freedom," *LAT*, 7/16/1949, 6; "LA," *Corunna News*, 2/13/1947, 5

<sup>177</sup> See, for example, "LA," 1/1/1947, JDBP; "LA," *The Jeffersonian*, 2/14/1947, 2

<sup>178</sup> Benson to Fulbright, 6/21/1947, JWFP, Box 48, Folder 50

<sup>179</sup> Griffith, *Crisis*; Honey, "Dixie," *passim*

<sup>180</sup> Griffith, *Crisis*, *passim*

William Green, the AFL's President, who had ambitions of his own in the South, railed against the "Communists in the CIO."<sup>181</sup>

Operation Dixie, however, was more successful in some areas than others. In Arkansas the CIO doubled its membership.<sup>182</sup> These developments intersected with Benson's efforts in two significant ways; firstly, they likely encouraged the receptivity of his Southern audience to his anti-labor message (though he did not often specifically focus on labor relations in the South), and secondly, they further encouraged Benson's focus on labor-relations issues. Benson, for example, privately rejoiced at the formation of the Veterans Industrial Association (VIA) in Arkansas in February 1946. The VIA, which claimed that it was a new type of labor union, soon had 6,000 members. James Karam, the VIA's leader, also described the organization as a "vigilance committee" dedicated to fighting against the imposition of the closed shop and committed to "hand[ling] any so-called 'labor goon squads' and 'labor agitators' who seem determined to cause race trouble and class trouble here in the South." "We are not going to start any trouble," he warned, "[b]ut, if and when it does come, we are ready."<sup>183</sup> In keeping with the broader southern response to 'Operation Dixie,' the VIA also bluntly warned that unions were "Communist-dominated."<sup>184</sup>

Benson assisted the VIA's efforts. His endorsement appeared in an advertisement in the *Arkansas Gazette*, while John Carlson, a muckraking journalist, maintained that NEP materials were used by the VIA. Carlson also wrote Benson under pretense that he was a veteran interested in joining the organization. In reply he received copies of VIA literature, and Benson informed him that the organization "guarantees the open-shop and prohibits the check-off" and

allows an individual to work whether he wishes to belong to a union or not and ... protects him from penalty in the event he decides to quit a union ... I believe this is a good organization and one that will make a contribution to the industrial field in America.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, *passim*; Honey, "Dixie," *passim*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 222

<sup>183</sup> "New Southern Labor Group Set to Fight," *WP*, 5/23/1946, 2; "Open Shop," *The Star*, 6/7/1946, 4; Harold B. Hinton, "GI Group in South Hits at Employers," *NYT*, 8/26/1946, 15; Benson to Pew, 3/27/1946, JHPP, Box 9, Folder H-1946

<sup>184</sup> Carlson, *Plotters*, 263

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 260-265; Group Research Inc., "The National Right to Work Committee," 1962, copy in author's possession

The VIA attempted to organize elsewhere in the South, in Mississippi, Alabama, and, most significantly, in Florida, where Benson and Karam had both offered their testimonies in favor of the state's pioneering 'right-to-work' initiative, which, in turn, was now coming under strain thanks to what Karam described as the CIO's planned "invasion."<sup>186</sup>

Operation Dixie aided those clamoring for Taft-Hartley. At the national level, the NAM led the charge, with many of Benson's business allies to the fore. In 1944 J. Howard Pew was appointed chairman of the NAM's National Industrial Information Committee. Concurrently, the NAM doubled its staff and boosted its public relations budget with a view to the impending conclusion of hostilities (Pew also sat on the NAM's Labor-Relations Committee).<sup>187</sup> Shortly after VJ Day, Pew confided to E. F. Hutton, another of Benson's supporters, that

the Wagner Act gives labor a preferred position under the law ... [T]he conspiracy that exists between the Administration and labor is scandalous; and, if we are to continue to have a free economy, Congress must in the very near future put labor on exactly the same basis as are all other segments in our economy.<sup>188</sup>

In 1946 the NAM spent \$3,000,000 on various public relations initiatives. The following year, as the new Congress debated Taft-Hartley, it allocated an equivalent amount for lobbying and more public relations initiatives.<sup>189</sup> The NAM was not short of allies within the business community – support for Taft-Hartley often served to unify a range of business conservatives who held otherwise divergent views on the best strategy for responding to New Deal liberalism and the labor movement.<sup>190</sup>

The efforts of business conservatives in many respects mirrored those of their cohorts on Capitol Hill. Conservative Southern Democrats and the Republican right illustrated their commitment to legislative action to curb strikes through their support of the Case Bill in early 1946, which was vetoed by Truman.<sup>191</sup> Conservatives' successes in the subsequent midterm elections were partly derived from their

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<sup>186</sup> "Open Shop," *The Star*; Hinton, "GI Group in South Hits at Employers"; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 76

<sup>187</sup> Lichtman, *Protestant*, 137; Workman, "Manufacturing," *passim*; Michael Kane, "Minutes, Nam Committee on Labor-Management Relations," 6/13/1945, NAMR, Series III, Box 844, Folder "Labor Problem - Speech Material, 1943-1945"

<sup>188</sup> Pew to Hutton, 11/27/1945, JHPP, Box 7, Folder H-1945

<sup>189</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 34, 41-43; Harris, *Manage*, 121-127; Jacoby, *Manors*, 200-201

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 42-43, 193

<sup>191</sup> Heinemann, *Byrd*, 274-285; Bell, *Liberal*, 25-27

exploitation of rising anti-labor sentiment.<sup>192</sup> In Ohio, Robert Taft emphasized the “strong communist connections” of leading figures in the CIO-PAC and preponderance of “Communist thinking” amongst its members. Their desire to increase power in Washington, he added, was particularly dangerous because “J. Edgar Hoover and many others admit that even Communists hold appointments in a number of government departments.”<sup>193</sup> In Virginia, Benson’s erstwhile ally Harry Byrd responded to Operation Dixie, the post-war strike wave, and the opposition of the CIO-PAC in Virginia, by making labor “the major issue” of his primary campaign. In late 1946, Byrd told the NAM’s annual conference that the midterm results were testament “to the belief on the part of millions of Americans that the government has yielded so much power to great labor leaders as to build up a labor dictatorship which seriously menaces our future above all else.” The results therefore also, he added, represented a “mandate” for “both Republicans and Democrats” to do something about it.<sup>194</sup> On the first day of the new Congress 17 labor bills were pushed into the ‘hopper.’<sup>195</sup> Against the backdrop of subsequent debates in Congress, Benson continued to emphasize that “the extent to which Communist ideology has penetrated gradually the councils of labor is not doubt much greater than labor itself is aware.”<sup>196</sup>

The Taft-Hartley Act, the most significant conservative legislative victory since the New Deal, was finally passed in the summer of 1947. Although the act had some limitations that conservatives lamented, it nevertheless marked the culmination of efforts that Benson and others had accelerated during the war.<sup>197</sup> Taft-Hartley notably outlawed the secondary boycott, placed restrictions on sympathy strikes, undermined unions’ ability to use industrial action as a tool to achieve collective bargaining objectives, barred supervisors and foremen from joining unions, and outlawed the closed shop (though in practice this was often negated).<sup>198</sup> The act’s 14(b) clause also enabled individual states to pass ‘right to work’ laws, a

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 25-28

<sup>193</sup> Taft, “Radio Broadcast on CIO-PAC,” 10/26/1946, in Wunderlin, ed., *Taft, Volume 3*, 217-221

<sup>194</sup> NAM press release, Harry Byrd, “What Should the New Congress to Be Convened on January Third Do?,” 12/5/1946, NAMR, Series I, Box 1, Folder “Bennett Material–‘Indirect Approach’”

<sup>195</sup> Patterson, *Republican*, 352-353

<sup>196</sup> “LA,” *The Courier*, 1/23/1947, 4

<sup>197</sup> Harris, *Manage*, 125-127; Bell, *Liberal*, 55-59; Reinhard, *Republican*, 26-27

<sup>198</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 31-32; Cherny, Issel, and Taylor, “Introduction,” in Cherny, Issel, and Taylor, eds., *American Labor*, 1-6, 2-3

development that greatly bolstered the nascent right-to-work movement and laid important foundations for post-war Sunbelt conservatism. As we shall see in the following chapter, this regional anti-labor agenda intersected with Benson's endeavors in a number of significant ways.<sup>199</sup>

Section 9-H, which required labor leaders to sign an anti-communist affidavit, reflected conservatives' success in linking 'big labor' with the 'red menace.' By the late 1940s, when the 'Red Scare' occupied an even more central position in the political landscape, Benson was more persistent and explicit in his anti-communist critiques of the labor movement. Communists, he typically declared, "make good union workers" and "know how to take over [unions]" "whose leadership is untrained, or members uninterested." Consequently, they were well placed to "set worker against employer [and] create costly strikes and walkouts."<sup>200</sup> Such criticisms now chimed with, for example, countless HUAC investigations of left-leaning unions, and the CIO's purge of eleven Communist-or-radical-led unions in 1949 (which Benson celebrated), a development that epitomized the degree to which anti-communism was fuelling internecine conflicts within the labor movement.<sup>201</sup>

The peculiar confluence of political circumstances by the late 1940s created a context that favored the moderation of union objectives. As Nelson Lichtenstein and others have illustrated, in the early post-war period the labor movement moved away from its prior commitment to economic corporatism and elements of a social democratic politics. Walter Reuther's decision to sign the 'Treaty of Detroit' with GM in 1950 is often cited as a watershed moment, one which appeared to confirm the labor movement's narrowing ideological focus and its preoccupation with collective bargaining over wages. Benson expressed tentative optimism that the GM contract would stabilize industrial relations and limit labor's advance.<sup>202</sup>

Unquestionably, the labor movement changed significantly during the early post-war era, but this did not inaugurate a period of uniform harmony between capital and labor. In fact, as Benson's continued anti-labor politics illustrated, it did

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<sup>199</sup> See, for example, Shermer, *Sunbelt*

<sup>200</sup> "LA," *Corunna News*, 2/13/1947, 5; "LA," 6/16/1948, JDBP

<sup>201</sup> Ellen Schrecker, "Labor and the Cold War," in Cherny, Issel, and Taylor, eds., *American Labor*, 7-25; "LA," *Picket Line Post*, 3/11/1949, 3

<sup>202</sup> Lichtenstein, *State*, 98-114; Halline, "U.S. Can Double"

not satiate many conservatives' yearnings. Rather, as Howell Harris aptly notes with regard to many business conservatives, the period is best viewed as one in which the right achieved the "recovery of the initiative" on labor matters. Frustrations at the limitations of Taft-Hartley provided one explanation for such continued dissatisfaction, as did the relative stability of union membership during Truman's presidency.<sup>203</sup> Labor unions may have been embarking on a period of protracted decline, but this was likely not readily apparent to contemporary observers. Conservatives, including Benson, of course, purposefully glossed over some of the difficulties the movement was experiencing, not least because it was their identification of its strength that had contributed greatly to their successes.

There were, however, ongoing, tangible sources of antagonism for the right. Truman's call for the repeal of Taft-Hartley in 1949 testified to the continuing significance – and indeed seeming permanence – of the alliance between labor and the Democratic Party.<sup>204</sup> At the annual dinner of the Binghamton Chamber of Commerce in early 1949, Benson declared that labor's "noticeable effect on the outcome of the [1948] election" illustrated the continued need for business activism.<sup>205</sup> His perception of labor's contribution was substantially accurate. During the election campaign the President often made bellicose stump speeches designed to appeal to his labor constituency. In Detroit, for instance, he declared that Taft-Hartley was "a dangerous weapon" in the hands of corporations and warned that "anything short of an all-out vote in November would be a betrayal of labor's own interests. If labor produces a smashing victory at the polls, it has much to hope for." Still smarting from Taft-Hartley, the CIO-PAC and the labor movement turned out in force.<sup>206</sup>

Industrial disputes, while they did not reach the intensity of 1946, continued well into the following decade, to an extent that has often been underestimated.<sup>207</sup> Benson became personally embroiled in one of these disputes. In 1946 Harding College bought a Memphis radio station, WHBQ, for \$300,000 cash, which it later

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<sup>203</sup> Patterson, *Expectations*, 46

<sup>204</sup> Frederickson, *Dixiecrat*, 190

<sup>205</sup> "400 at Annual Meeting," *Binghamton Press*, 2/9/1949, 5

<sup>206</sup> "Labor Told to Watch for GOP 'Body Blows,'" *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 9/6/1948, 1. See also Harris, *Manage*, 130-131, Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 48-50

<sup>207</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 88

expanded, at a cost of \$185,000, and sold in 1954 for \$2.5 million.<sup>208</sup> In 1951, however, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, which had attempted to organize the station's employees, filed a successful suit to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which, in turn, ordered the defendant, "Harding College, WHBQ Radio Station," to "cease and desist" from "interrogating" employees about their union connections and sympathies and to re-instate an employee who had been sacked on account of his relationship with the union.<sup>209</sup>

When John Lewis led hundreds of thousands of United Mine Workers members out on strike in March 1949 Benson responded by contending that

within his field, [Lewis] possesses the nearest approach [sic] to dictatorial powers of anyone to appear on the American scene. He has defied Presidents and Congresses, crippled production in the face of economic crises, and flouted the war effort by strikes in wartime

The UMW's activities, he continued, demonstrated the need for further (unspecified) legislative action since it epitomized "what can happen when [the] irresponsible leadership of a great body of influence - American labor - goes on the rampage."<sup>210</sup> Similar sentiments animated his ongoing rebukes to Lewis and Walter Reuther, the head of the United Auto Workers (UAW), while he greeted Truman's threatened intervention in a protracted and fractious steel industry dispute in 1949, which foreshadowed a major showdown in 1952, with typical bluntness: "Mr Truman's proposition - that the government get into the steel business - is nothing more nor less than socialism pure and simple."<sup>211</sup>

Conservatives' impact on the labor movement, profound though it was, offered little evidence that it was contributing to a wider shift to the right. To some extent, legislative successes were the product of conservative lobbying and the power of the Congressional alliance between Republicans and Southern Democrats, whose influence reflected the peculiarly undemocratic political system in the South.

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<sup>208</sup> "At Deadline," *Broadcasting, Telecasting*, 5/20/1946, 94; Harding College, "President's Report to the Board of Directors," 11/1949, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155; "Radio Review," *Variety*, 4/28/1954, 30

<sup>209</sup> "National Labor Relations Board V. Harding College, WHBQ Radio Station," 6/26/1952, GSBP

<sup>210</sup> "LA," *Picket Line Post*, 5/13/1949, 4

<sup>211</sup> "LA," 2/16/1949, JDBP; Benson, speech draft, "A Nation Imperiled," n.d., [c. 1950], Benson, speech draft, "Three Cardinal Issues," Benson, speech draft, "Today's Challenge to American Youth," 5/10/1951, all GSBP; H. Walton Cloke, "Control of Steel Held Truman Aim," *NYT*, 1/6/1949, 3; Lewis Stark, "Truman and Steel Still Deadlocked," *NYT*, 7/15/1949, 1, 2; Lewis Stark, "Truman Asks Steel Truce," *NYT*, 9/22/1949, 1, 34; Miller, *Voice*, 91-119.

Nevertheless, the public did become more hostile to unions. It seems, however, that this hostility primarily emanated from the combination of the context of the Cold War and the ‘Red Scare,’ which helped efforts to conflate individualism and American ‘liberty,’ in tandem with the notion that unions constituted a powerful, undemocratic special interest. In the South, race offered a powerful additional source of anti-labor sentiment. Once again, however, the idea that the ‘free enterprise’ alternative – which, in practice, demanded the restoration of business hegemony over production, wages and prices – represented a true inversion of the sentiments that underpinned conservative critiques of labor, or at least offered a better route to prosperity, remained problematic. Finally, the moderation of labor ambitions also undercut many of the right’s efforts.

The Taft-Hartley Act produced one other twist in business’ ‘free enterprise’ crusade, one that created significant new opportunities for Benson but ultimately revealed the extent of business’ flawed reliance on the power of communication. As Benson later recalled, “[the Wagner Act] made it very difficult for an industry to even talk to their employees ... then came the Taft-Hartley Act and that allowed industry to ... talk to their employees without being penalized for it.”<sup>212</sup> Benson was not alone in sensing the opportunities embedded in the act’s ‘free speech clause.’ Fred Clark of the American Economic Foundation (AEF), for instance, informed Irénée du Pont that “if America is to avoid a government by labor unions, it will be done through the enlightenment of the workers themselves,” and requested funding for an initiative to facilitate workplace ‘education.’<sup>213</sup> In fact, a massive program of ‘economic education’ arrived in the wake of Taft-Hartley. As ever, the USCOC and NAM augmented the efforts of individual companies. The NAM, for instance, conducted 1,000 ‘communication clinics’ and conferences across the country between 1948 and 1950.<sup>214</sup> Benson’s various endeavors, of course, already targeted labor audiences but this change in policy enabled NEP materials to be used more frequently in the workplace. It greatly encouraged, for example, the sale of the NEP films.

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<sup>212</sup> Ganus, “Interview of Dr. George S. Benson”

<sup>213</sup> Clark to du Pont, 12/27/1949, IDPP, Accession 228, Series J, Box 104, Folder “261 - Politics and Legislation, 1949”

<sup>214</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, esp. 78-98

Benson's recollection, however, was specifically related to the context in which the NEP launched a long-running series of 'Freedom Forums,' which essentially constituted "five-day seminars for 'policy making' management personnel." The first was held in February 1949.<sup>215</sup> By mid-1952, a dozen had been held at various locations – most were hosted by Harding, but they also appeared in Los Angeles (at the University of Southern California in association with the Advertisers Association of the West), at a resort in Sun Valley (in conjunction with the College of Idaho), in Waukesha, Wisconsin (on the campus of Carroll College), in Lafayette, Indiana (on the campus of Purdue University), and in Detroit (at the Cranbrook School with sponsorship from the YMCA and the Detroit Institute of Technology).<sup>216</sup> Benson and Don Belding, the director of the Advertising Council, conceived the idea for the Forums in 1948.<sup>217</sup> Kenneth Wells, a leading figure in the Council, directed some of the early Forums, while Wells and Belding delivered many keynote lectures. The Council was also in the midst of coordinating its own campaign on behalf of "the American system," which devoted significant attention to workplace initiatives. By 1950 there were 360 companies utilizing "plant and community programs devised by major advertising groups" under the Ad Council's direction.<sup>218</sup>

The Forums were attended by perhaps an average of 100 representatives of a reasonably diverse range of large and mid-sized companies, hailing predominately from the industrial heartland around the Great Lakes. Attendees exchanged information and strategies used to dampen worker (and union) hostility towards employers and to propagate conservative ideas in the workplace and in local communities. Keynote speakers hailed from companies including ARMCO, Republic Steel, Inland Steel, International Harvester, General Electric, Du Pont, Swift & Company, and Southwestern Bell Telephone, where they were typically employed as management consultants, advertising and publicity directors, supervisor of company

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<sup>215</sup> Harding College, "President's Report to the Board of Directors," 11/1949

<sup>216</sup> "Third Freedom Forum to Be in California," *Bison*, 5/17/1949, 1; "Sixth Freedom Forum to Open," *Bison*, 4/8/1950, 1; Halline, "U.S. Can Double"; Ted Diehl, "National Education Program to Hold Freedom Forum at Purdue," *Bison*, 10/14/1950, 1; "Your Grassroots Report," 1951

<sup>217</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 52-53; "To Study 'American Way,'" *NYT*, 1/21/1949, 36

<sup>218</sup> Griffith, "Selling," *passim*; Brendan Jones, "Community Drives in 150 New Plants," *NYT*, 6/5/1949, F1; Diehl, "National Education Program"; "Combined Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forums I through VII," 10/27/1950, GSBP

publications, or industrial relations directors.<sup>219</sup> These speakers notably included Lemuel Boulware and economists Alfred Haake (a consultant to GM), Orval Watts (an affiliate of the FEE), and Walter Spahr (the head of the economics department at New York University). Attendees were also addressed by a number of prominent anti-communists, including J. B. Matthews and Louis Budenz (two ex-Communists), Edward Gibbons (the publisher of *Alert*) and T.C. Kirkpatrick (the managing editor of *Counterattack*).<sup>220</sup>

At the first Forum two employees of Swift & Company designed an hour-long ‘Flannelboard’ presentation entitled ‘This is Our Problem,’ which was used on their own employees, but, with the assistance of the NEP, was turned into a speaking kit that was adopted by 300 companies, as well as by organizations such as the Junior Chamber of Commerce. It was also broadcast to a potential audience of 1,000,000 on television; the NEP, meanwhile, estimated that 12,000,000 Americans had seen the presentation by the close of 1951.<sup>221</sup> Republic Steel developed several initiatives as a result of the Forums, as part of widespread program that Charles White personally oversaw. ARMCO noted that the NEP “sparked many fine programs” used by the company, including its own series of Freedom Forums, which produced a program called ‘Barnyard Economics,’ a “down to earth discussion of the facts of business,” that was delivered to employees, civic clubs, “in ARMCO communities,” and to “Barbers, taxi drivers, service clubs, home-maker groups [who] were invited to the plants.”<sup>222</sup> In these respects, the NEP made a substantial contribution to business’ efforts to ensure that “millions of workers” participated in “economic education programs” after 1947.<sup>223</sup>

The impact of these endeavors, like those of businesses’ broader ‘free enterprise’ campaign, is difficult to assess. They were clearly limited by widespread opposition to the basic message. At best, perhaps, they muted some opposition to

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.; “Final Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum IX,” 3/22/1951, GSBP

<sup>220</sup> “Rockville Boy Wins National 4-H Award,” *WP*, 12/5/1946, 18; “Cox Is Honored with Invitation to Speak,” *Breckenridge American*, 4/24/1952; Spahr, speech transcript, “Long-Range Implications of Welfare State Measures,” 10/18/1951, GSBP; “Your Grassroots Report,” 1951; “Sixth Freedom Forum to Open,” *Bison*; Diehl, “National Education Program”

<sup>221</sup> “Mt. V. Men to Attend Second Freedom Forum,” *Mt. Vernon Register-News*, 9/14/1950, 6; “Your Grassroots Report,” 11/1950; “Your Grassroots Report,” 1951; Benson, speech manuscript, “A Challenge to Take Home,” 4/10/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 2

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.; “Management: Facts of Life,” *Time*, 10/15/1951, 114; William Verity, “Faith in Men,” *Personnel Journal*, 10/1952, 167-174

<sup>223</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 1, *passim*

business. Labor, in particular, rebuked and ridiculed efforts to articulate a folksy conservatism.<sup>224</sup> Part of the problem – ironically given the calculations that inspired them – was the perception that business spoke from a self-interested perspective. Tellingly, Benson was not immune from the criticism that management propaganda attracted. The CIO-PAC used descriptions of the Freedom Forums as a recruiting tool; the *CIO News* claimed that sponsors of the Forums were tied up with “Fascist front groups”; the CIO set up a “Captive Audience Department” to deal with complaints from workers required to listen to lectures or watch films; and labor publications also claimed that workers responded negatively to NEP materials.<sup>225</sup> By 1953, the Perfect Circle Company, which had extensively used the NEP’s materials as part of its “economic education” drive, had accepted the limited impact of these efforts and changed course.<sup>226</sup> Despite the limitations of business efforts to convince their workers of the merits of ‘free enterprise,’ it seems that, as a number of historians have demonstrated, more pragmatic businessmen made consequential efforts to treat the workplace as a political arena during this period, through, for example, more subtle efforts to promote business prerogatives, or by increasing their devotion to human relations techniques and elements of corporate welfare capitalism.<sup>227</sup>

### **A Strange and Revealing Embrace: the NEP and the Eisenhower Campaign**

A scrapbook compiled by George Benson’s wife, Sally, in the 1950s contains a photograph of a grinning President Eisenhower delivering a two-fingered victory salute. It is accompanied by a handwritten caption declaring that “George & I voted for ‘Ike’ real early in the morning of Nov. 4, 1952.”<sup>228</sup> A week after the election Benson informed readers of ‘Looking Ahead’ that “the present Republican philosophy,” unlike that of the Democratic Party, was in accordance with the reality

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<sup>224</sup> Harris, *Manage*, 184-201; Whyte, *Listening?*

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 8; Samuel Sherman, “American Way Is Urged as Message to Workers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 1/13/1950, 20; Albert Jenkins, “Black Propaganda,” *Machinists Monthly Journal*, 3/1950, 90-91, AIAMAW

<sup>226</sup> Anderson, “Things are Different,” 114-115

<sup>227</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*; Jacoby, *Manors*; Klein, *Rights*; Harris, *Manage*, 159-184

<sup>228</sup> Sally Ellis Benson, Scrapbook, “1947 thru’ 1954, #2,” HUDA

that “government’s prime responsibility [is] the improving and widening of the citizen’s opportunity to provide his own economic needs and wants for himself.” Even “non-partisan observers,” he added, were in agreement “that a great underlying issue in the contest was the Welfare State philosophy. By their votes, 55 per cent of the American electorate apparently rejected it.”<sup>229</sup>



Dwight Eisenhower presenting a Freedoms Foundation award to Benson in 1949. Freedoms Foundation was incorporated in March 1949 and was headquartered on a fifty-five-acre estate in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, which was purchased by E. F. Hutton, an important sponsor of the NEP (Charles White also served as a trustee). Guy Rush served as its Chairman between 1948 and 1953, while Ken Wells (center) headed the foundation, in addition to his responsibilities with the Advertising Council and his involvement with the Freedom Forums. Each year the Foundation presented awards, along with cash prizes, to conservative activists and organizations. The NEP was perennially successful in many categories. Eisenhower’s participation likely influenced Benson’s admiration for the future President and encouraged his perception of Ike’s conservative sympathies (which was not entirely unfounded).<sup>230</sup>

Expediency likely inspired Benson’s assertion that Eisenhower’s election constituted a mandate for ‘free enterprise,’ but there was more to his response. To him, it marked the culmination of the right’s efforts to remake public opinion. “From an educator’s viewpoint,” he wrote, “the most important fact [arising from Eisenhower’s victory] is that the vast majority of the American people can be reached and influenced by educational facts.”<sup>231</sup> In addition to his wider efforts to promote ‘free enterprise,’ Benson participated in several ideologically motivated

<sup>229</sup> “LA,” 11/19/1952, JDBP

<sup>230</sup> Photograph, “Presentation of Freedoms Foundation Award,” 1949, “Summary of Freedoms Foundation Awards to Benson, Harding College and the NEP,” 1978, both GSBP; “Freedom Awards Raised to \$84,000,” *NYT*, 8/3/1949, 21; “Freedom Foundation Announces \$100,000 Award Program Recipients for 1951”; “Guy Rush, 80,” *LAT*, 12/2/1962, B9; Mason, *Republican*, 148-181

<sup>231</sup> “Guy Rush, 80,” *LAT*, 12/2/1962

initiatives aimed at increasing voter turnout ahead of the election. “For the past 50 years,” he told readers in May 1952, “our Federal government has been growing bigger and more powerful at just about the same rate that the citizens have been growing apathetic and lazy in carrying out the vitally important responsibility of voting.”<sup>232</sup> Such an assertion again testified to the widely-held conservative conviction that there was, in fact, a dormant section of society, whose latent conservatism could, if sufficiently stimulated, catalyze a successful revolt against the well-marshaled troops on the other side, the supposedly tight-knit legions of union members and New Deal special interests. The low turnout in 1948 also seemed to suggest the potential to animate new voters.<sup>233</sup>

Benson’s efforts dovetailed with those of a number of other conservative-leaning organizations which developed expansive ‘get-out-the-vote’ campaigns that attempted to fuse the language of civic responsibility with specific political goals. For example, the American Heritage Foundation joined forces with the Advertising Council to launch a major initiative, as did a number of leading businesses including Quaker Oats. *Nation’s Business* offered the following justification of the USCOC’s campaign: “in our last Presidential election more than 45,000,000 registered voters failed to go to the polls ... This is no partisan campaign ... it is a nationwide movement to arouse the interest and sense of responsibility of business and professional men and women in their government, to get out their vote.”<sup>234</sup>

The most straightforward element of Benson’s ‘get-out-the-vote’ drive consisted of a campaign to create a national holiday for voter registration. The NEP also sponsored a ‘Tag Day’ initiative that attempted to get voters to pin a badge to their lapels declaring “I’ve Voted! Have You?” By the beginning of 1952, Benson claimed that 2,000 people had already volunteered to help with its implementation.<sup>235</sup> The idea of stimulating local communities to sponsor ‘Tag Days,’ in turn, became a centerpiece of a more ambitious initiative, a flannel-board presentation entitled ‘The Power of Your Vote.’ The presentation was accompanied by a standardized,

<sup>232</sup> “LA,” *Caledonia Advertiser*, 5/29/1952, 2

<sup>233</sup> Mason, *Republican*, esp. 112-148

<sup>234</sup> “This Is Our Pattern,” *Nation’s Business*, 10/1952, 104; “Vote Drive under Way,” *NYT*, 8/11/1952, 8; “Get out the Vote Campaigns,” *NYT*, 11/2/1952, 83

<sup>235</sup> Russell Daley, “Dr. Benson Urges Tagging of Voters,” clipping, *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, 1/3/1952, GSBP; “LA,” *Britt News-Tribune*, 2/6/1952, 1; “LA,” *Rockaway Record*, 2/14/1952, 3; “LA,” *Caledonia Advertiser*, 5/29/1952, 2

mimeographed talk, which, Benson declared, was designed to “to get more people to vote and to assist all voters to become intelligent voters in their measuring of candidates and issues” (the inference that Americans had been voting ‘unintelligently’ was consistent with Benson’s worldview).<sup>236</sup> Although the transcript does not appear to have survived, a press photograph of its presentation to employees at a General Tire and Rubber plant in Indiana reveals that at one stage a ‘Political Yardstick,’ by which to measure political proposals, appeared on the left-hand side of the flannelboard, accompanied by the following questions: “Needed? Cost? Financed? Liberty?”<sup>237</sup> To many conservatives, including Benson, these were precisely the kinds of questions that the masses, under the spell of unions and New Dealers, had not thought through.

Copies of the ‘Power of Your Vote’ sold for \$50 and were distributed through the same channels as the NEP’s previous flannelboard kits, which had been used by “more than 2,000 ... speakers scattered through the 48 states.”<sup>238</sup> The same class of “personnel managers” and industrial relations experts who attended the Freedom Forums, were recruited to arrange and deliver presentations. Swift and Company purchased 75 copies, trained 10 men in their presentation who, in turn, delivered the lecture at over 600 Swift units across the country on company time.<sup>239</sup> The General Tire and Rubber Company, headquartered in Indiana, instigated a similar program.<sup>240</sup> The efforts of the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation were rewarded by a Medal of Honor from Freedoms Foundation, presented by Richard Nixon, the newly elected Vice President, in early 1953. The Corporation’s five-man team gave the NEP’s presentation at “various cities served by the utility,” and made 76 appearances “before civic clubs, churches, schools, and employee groups totaling 13,476 people.”<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> “LA,” *Rockaway Record*, 2/14/1952, 3

<sup>237</sup> “Local Plant Promoting Voting Interest of Workers,” *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, 9/25/1952, 2

<sup>238</sup> “LA,” *Rockaway Record*, 2/14/1952, 3

<sup>239</sup> “Swift Workers Told,” *CDT*, 3/7/1952, 7

<sup>240</sup> “Local Plant Promoting Voting,” *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*

<sup>241</sup> “Speaking Team Gives Program to Get out the Vote,” *Sheboygan Press*, 10/10/1952, 23; “WPSC Gets Award for Vote Drive,” *Rhineland Daily News*, 2/25/1953, 7



The training director of Swift & Co's industrial relations department delivering 'The Power of Your Vote' to the company's employees.<sup>242</sup>

As the work of these companies demonstrated, the 'Power of Your Vote' was not just deployed on the 'shop floor.' While Benson clearly hoped to inculcate conservatism across all sections of society, this initiative was more directly targeted at elements of society whose political affinities were more likely to tilt towards the GOP and conservatism. This focus chimed with the sentiments of many Republicans, especially those on the party's right wing, who were often convinced that they were being 'let down' by elements of society, primarily its middle and professional classes, who were insufficiently political engaged (for conservatives this was related to the GOP's apparent unwillingness to mount a sufficient challenge to New Deal liberalism).<sup>243</sup> Local newspapers provide an insight into the remarkable reach of the 'Power of Your Vote.' Representatives of Perfect Circle, for example, delivered it to citizens in the vicinity of Tipton, Indiana, who attended meetings and rallies throughout October at the St. John's Ladies Club, the Rotary Club, the

<sup>242</sup> "Swift Workers Told," *CDT*, 3/7/1952, 7

<sup>243</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 134-136

Tipton/Atlanta PTA, the Lions Club of Sheridan, the Biddle Machine Works, or the Kiwanis Club of Tipton. A similar array of organizations, with civic clubs notably to the fore, sponsored the presentation of the ‘Power of Your Vote’ at events in towns and suburbs in states including (but very likely not limited to) Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Colorado, Missouri, West Virginia, Indiana, and Tennessee. For the most part these were the result of collaborations with local businesses and business-led organizations, including the Independent Oil Producers and Land Owners Association, the Hoover Company, Quaker Oats, the Appalachian Electric Power Company, and the West Penn Power Company.<sup>244</sup> The national Jaycees, meanwhile, officially adopted the program and facilitated its broadcast to audiences across the nation.<sup>245</sup> Local Republican Party clubs also frequently used it. A meeting of Clark County Republicans in Nevada, for instance, listened to the flannelboard talk, “designed,” as a local newspaper described it, “by Harding College of Searcy, Arkansas, now famous for its get out the vote campaign.”<sup>246</sup>

In the end, these efforts were as flawed as Benson’s analysis of Eisenhower’s success. Voter turnout did increase, but this was not a reflection of the activation of a hidden conservative vote. Benson and others on the right overlooked the role of Eisenhower’s personality, the incumbency problem hampering the Democratic Party, the context of Korea, and the extent to which the GOP’s electoral gains were made in the center ground, where they garnered the support of disaffected moderate Democrats and independents.<sup>247</sup> The 1952 election, therefore, offered additional testimony to the problematic aspects of Benson’s convictions regarding the power of communication and the underlying power of the conservative message in the early post-war era.

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<sup>244</sup> “Lions Club to Meet Monday Evening,” *Daily Courier*, 8/9/1952, 1; “Voters Complacency,” *News-Dispatch*, 3/26/1952, 1-2; “Newsettes,” *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, 9/12/1952; R.D. Mancy, “Round Town,” *Tipton Daily Tribune*, 9/24/1952, 2; “Local Plant Promoting Voting Interest of Workers”; “Woman’s Club Calendar,” *Evening Independent*, 9/29/1952, 7; “Women’s Page,” *Greeley Daily Tribune*, 10/4/1952, 9; “Jack Pihl Will Be BPW Speaker,” *Anderson Daily Bulletin*, 10/11/1952, 2; “Southtown Club to Learn Power of Your Vote,” *CDT*, 10/30/1952, A9; “Thornton to Speak,” *Beckley Post-Herald*, 10/31/1952, 12; “Week’s Club Events,” *Kingsport Times-News*, 10/5/1952, 2

<sup>245</sup> “LA,” *Britt News-Tribune*, 2/6/1952, 1; “Jack Pihl Will Be BPW Speaker”

<sup>246</sup> “Republicans Get Election Minded,” *Henderson Home News*, 5/29/1952. See also, “Hear the Freedom Forum,” *Mt. Vernon Register-News*, 9/24/1952, 14; “Women’s Page,” *Greeley Daily Tribune*

<sup>247</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 144-148

Much less changed between 1945 and 1952 than Benson hoped or anticipated. His efforts to promote 'free enterprise' serve as a reminder of the extent of conservatives' commitment to changing public opinion and the extent to which this was far from an era of political harmony. Unique access to money and resources, and innovative means of communication could not, however, overcome the stubborn appeal of central tenets of liberalism. Conservatives, on the other hand, could claim significant credit for the way in which liberalism and the labor movement emerged from this period with a more stable, moderate vision that largely dispensed with ideas that interfered more directly in the marketplace. The labor movement was also significantly wounded. This period confirms the complexity of conservatism's status within the public at large. In the abstract, at least, the right's position on taxation enjoyed an increasing degree of popularity. Nevertheless, as Benson's contributions demonstrated, the Lockean sensibilities that conservatives often appealed to were more convincingly translated into an attack on 'big government' than they were into a rationale for the kind of 'free enterprise' vision they outlined – in fact, their opponents were consistently effective at pointing out inconsistencies in this vision. Moreover, Benson's increasing propensity to conflate economic and political freedoms – a process that arguably constitutes a key legacy of this period for the right more broadly – had some potential, but it made it more tricky to provide a convincing alternative vision of how to create a prosperous society.

By the close of 1952, Benson was in a rare state of tentative optimism, and while it was largely misplaced and short-lived, for the remainder of the decade he increasingly tacked his efforts to some more promising winds blowing through the South and Southwest. Even amidst this generally more propitious situation, however, many of these shortcomings would continue to undermine his ambitions.

## Chapter 4

### To the South, West and Right of Mainstream Politics: 'Americanism' in the 1950s

Benson's efforts in the early post-war era were essentially hampered by the mismatch between his ambitions and the constrained appeal of his message. To a degree this discrepancy persisted into the 1950s, but there were some more encouraging signs. The dramatic economic transformation of the South and Southwest, which gathered pace after World War Two, at last provided a context favorable to substantial elements of Benson's message. Here, his anti-labor politics and his faith in localism, low taxes, and 'business prerogatives' resonated with a 'pro-growth' politics, which ultimately helped to turn the region into the heartland of the modern right. Moreover, as Darren Dochuk demonstrates, Benson's 'frontier' 'populism' contributed to the creation of a relatively distinctive conservatism that emerged from this transformation. The conflicted nature of Benson's efforts to portray his vision of 'free enterprise' as the heir to Lockean principles was seemingly less significant in this context, where conservatives grafted them onto existing cultural constructs.<sup>1</sup>

The shifting regional focus of Benson's efforts also enabled him to contribute to a domestic-orientated grassroots anti-communism that emerged in the South, Southwest and West, just as the Red Scare's was waning in Washington. In addition to mobilizing new constituencies, this anti-communism increasingly incorporated an important shift in Benson's antonymic definition of 'Americanism.' Religion had always been important to Benson's worldview, but he now more consistently emphasized "faith in God" as one of the "fundamental factors" at the core of the nation's exceptional status among the nations of the world. To some extent, this anti-communist movement also helped to establish the idea that religious, racial, and economic conservatism were sensible bedfellows. Moreover, Benson's growing focus on the American education system was particularly remarkable because it brought to the fore clear philosophical divisions between religious conservatives and liberalism, and because it brought together a similar range of conservative perspectives as the anti-communist movement. At Harding College, meanwhile, his

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<sup>1</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*

efforts to align the institution with his political vision accelerated and offered a model that had been emulated by three additional Church of Christ institutions in the South and Southwest by the close of the decade.

Important though these developments were, Benson's efforts still exhibited substantial shortcomings. Some of these related to the uneven pattern of growth in the 'proto-Sunbelt.' Economic transformations, in short, were much more dramatic in the Southwest, than they were in the area east of Texas, the Southern half of the 'proto-Sunbelt.' Moreover, the NEP did not fully orientate itself towards capitalizing on these economic transformations. Benson's domestic-orientated anti-communism may have created links between the NEP and important new grassroots movements, but this discourse, more broadly, was divisive and controversial, and likely damaged other elements of the organization's efforts. Finally, his efforts to fuse social and economic conservatism remained problematic – to an important extent the wider confluence of these two elements of conservatism during this period was underpinned more by shared antagonisms than by the resolution of the fundamental philosophical contradictions that separated them.

### **Dispensing with Optimism: The Reality of the Eisenhower Administration**

Benson's response to Eisenhower's election in 1952, as was discussed in the previous chapter, emanated from the faulty interpretation that it represented a rising tide of conservative sentiment. While Benson's affinity with the GOP lasted, his tentative optimism was more transient. His hopes for the dawn of a new political era were rooted in the perception that the administration was showing signs of conservative sympathies, and, perhaps most importantly, because he thought he might be able to cultivate some personal influence within the GOP.

Although its precise nature remains unclear, a modest relationship did develop between Benson and the Eisenhower administration. One important conduit was established when Benson appointed Brigadier General William P. Campbell in 1953 as the NEP's "Executive Assistance for Finance," one of a number of key positions he held until 1967. Campbell had been stationed in Europe, where he had been under Eisenhower's command as Assistant Chief of the Army's Finance

Division. It was Campbell who corresponded most frequently with the White House.<sup>2</sup> In early 1953, Benson met Sherman Adams, the President's Chief of Staff.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this meeting, it seems, Benson's spent much of the spring of 1953 in Washington "talking to treasury department officials, and key men in the Department of Defense, the Post Office Department, the agriculture department, and others." He came away apparently convinced that the government was "going to drastically cut expenses." From spring to late summer 'Looking Ahead' was dominated by fawning profiles of leading figures in the administration.<sup>4</sup> After meeting with Ezra Taft Benson, one of the most conservative cabinet members, Benson issued a column that lauded the Secretary of Agriculture as "a strapping six-footer, handsome [and] vigorous," with vital experience of farming, who prefaced staff meetings with prayers, and was committed to "strengthen[ing] self-reliance, thus halting the disease of government handouts."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Campbell to J. Howard Pew, 9/15/1953, JHPP, Box 34, Folder H-1953; Campbell to Revilo P. Oliver, 9/9/1970, RPOP; "Cross Reference Sheet, 2-11-55," DEPRWHCF53-61, Alphabetical Files Series, "Harding College," Folder 22, Box 250; Bell, ed., *Here's How*, 28

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum from Sherman Adams to Bernard Stanley, 3/11/1953, DEPRWHCF53-61, Alphabetical Files Series, "Benson, George S.," Folder 21, Box 250

<sup>4</sup> "LA," 3/18/1953, 3/25/1953, 4/8/1953, 4/22/1953, 5/6/1953, 6/3/1953, all JDBP; "Benson in Washington," *Freeport Facts*, 4/13/1953, 5; "LA," *Evening Independent*, 5/13/1953, 15

<sup>5</sup> "LA," 3/18/1953, JDBP



William Campbell, one of the most influential employees of the NEP after 1953, seated at George Benson's desk amidst an array of awards given to the NEP, many by Freedoms Foundation.<sup>6</sup>

Benson's admiration for Eisenhower's cabinet was also derived from their wealth and business experience. For instance, he described Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, the former CEO of General Motors, as a man with exemplary "character and ... business know-how and experience in big operations," and delighted in the notion that Secretary of the Interior, Douglas McKay was an Oregonian whose "Scotch forebears helped to settle the west," and who's own successes in business illustrated that endeavor can negate an impoverished background.<sup>7</sup> Charles Hook, the ARMCO executive, former President of the NAM, and stalwart backer of the NEP, was praised by Benson after his appointment as Deputy Postmaster General.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the administration's ties with the business community were such that men like Charles White, whose relationship with Truman had been based on mutual hostility, could at least now gleefully report to one of

<sup>6</sup> Untitled photograph, GSBP

<sup>7</sup> "LA," 3/11/1953, 3/25/1953, 5/20/1953, all JDBP

<sup>8</sup> "LA," *Evening Independent*, 4/8/1953, 10

Benson's close associates about his cordial exploits with the President on the golf course.<sup>9</sup>

Benson acolytes, particularly those in business community, lobbied the administration to appoint him to various positions, including that of Secretary of Labor, while he was purportedly offered the position of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a post he declined for reasons that have not been recorded.<sup>10</sup> In addition, Benson was invited to at least one of the president's 'stag dinners' as well as a Citizens for Eisenhower, Congressional Committee "dinner meeting" with the President.<sup>11</sup> Benson also attempted to lobby the President and the administration in relation to a variety of issues, testament perhaps to a misplaced sense of self-importance.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Benson's enthusiasm dwindled over the course of the decade. Although far from universally critical, he increasingly voiced dissatisfaction with the GOP's "failure to balance the budget."<sup>13</sup> In the end, therefore, the 1952 election did not significantly undermine Benson's career-defining conviction that the New Deal order would only be upended if politicians were nudged rightwards by the creation of a popular appetite for conservatism. In fact, even in the heyday of Benson's optimism the NEP was as active as ever.

### The Continuing Crusade

Benson's supporters also showed few signs of being mollified by Eisenhower's presence in the White House. Throughout the 1950s the NEP operated on a budget of approximately \$160,000 to \$200,000 per annum.<sup>14</sup> 'Looking Ahead' continued in more than 3,000 newspapers and more than 600 company publications,

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<sup>9</sup> "Cross Reference Sheet: Campbell, Brig. Gen. William P., 6-5-56," DEPRWHCF53-61, Alphabetical Files Series, "Harding College," Folder 22, Box 1324

<sup>10</sup> Stevens, *Before*, 225; "Correspondence—Endorsements and Applications for Some Position in Government," 3/19/1953, "Cross Reference Sheet, 10-1-53," both DEPRWHCF53-61, Alphabetical Files Series, "Benson, George S.," Folder 21, Box 250

<sup>11</sup> "Cross Reference Sheet, 2-11-55," DEPRWHCF53-61, Alphabetical Files Series, "Benson, George S.," Folder 21, Box 250; Sally Ellis Benson, Scrapbook, "1947 thru' 1954, #2," HUDA

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Sherman Adams to Benson, 3/21/1955, DEPRWHCF53-61, Alphabetical Files Series, "Benson, George S.," Folder 21, Box 250

<sup>13</sup> Benson, "Listen Americans!," *Morgan County News*, 12/24/1954, 2. See, for example, "LA," *Sikeston Herald*, 4/18/1957, 4; "LA," *Evening Independent*, 11/6/1957, 33

<sup>14</sup> NEP, Income and Expense Statements for Years Ending August 31, 1955, 1956, 1958, 1960, "1958-59, Expenditures," all GSBP

while the NEP circulated 45,000 copies of its monthly bulletin.<sup>15</sup> The NEP also continued to produce flannelboard presentations, including three released in 1956. Three million citizens sat through the presentations in their first year of circulation.<sup>16</sup> The cartoon series continued to be widely used. In 1956 5,000,000 people were shown the films through “schools, industries, union locals, clubs and employer groups,” while many more copies were sold or broadcast on television.<sup>17</sup> Business, in particular, retained a significant interest in using films for political ends.<sup>18</sup>

*Land of the Free* was discontinued in 1955, but the NEP simultaneously began work on a series of twelve short films. Produced on a tighter budget than the cartoon series, and consequently lacking the same professional sheen, they covered similar ground, juxtaposing the benefits of “the American way of life” with dire warnings regarding the threat of socialism and Communism.<sup>19</sup> Benson introduced each film, which comprised a lecture given by Clifton Ganus, “noted young historian,” live action segments, and stilted questions from the audience. Ganus had returned to Harding, his *alma mater*, as a professor of History in 1946, and became one of Benson’s most important allies. He later served as the College’s Vice President for almost a decade and succeeded Benson as President in 1965. Ganus’ worldview had much in common with Benson’s. Ganus recalled how his father, a long-serving member of the Board of Trustees, had “start[ed] with nothing” in rural Hillsboro, Texas, but ended up owning a chain of restaurants and cafeterias in the South, a journey that testified to the reality that industriousness could make “the American dream” come true.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Robert McCord, “For Benson, a New Ally for an Old Campaign,” *Arkansas Democrat*, clipping, 1/23/1955, GSBP; NEP, “Your Grassroots Report,” 1/1957, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 8

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

<sup>17</sup> “Your Grassroots Report,” 1/1957

<sup>18</sup> “Cinema: The Painless Plug,” *Time*, 5/6/1957; Prelinger, *Field Guide*

<sup>19</sup> Benson, “A-B-C’s of America,” *Beckley Post-Herald*, 1/31/1956, 4; Anderson, “Film: The American Adventure,” 217-221

<sup>20</sup> Ganus recorded interview with author, 4/27/2011, copy in author’s possession; Emily Van Zandt, “Clifton Ganus Jr.,” *Arkansasonline.com*, 9/23/2012, <http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2012/sep/23/clifton-ganus-jr-harding-chancellor-recalls-lifeti/>, Accessed 9/28/12



Top: Still from *Why Kill the Goose?*, a film in the *American Adventures Series* featuring Clifton Ganus. The film's emphasis on the size of corporate profits, the degree to which they were reinvested, and a dubious claim about their wide distribution through stockholders, was indicative of the NEP's emphasis on correcting 'misconceptions' regarding business. Bottom: Ganus on set.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Untitled photographs, GSBP; *Why Kill the Goose?*

The NEP boasted that by 1957 18,000,000 people had seen the *American Adventure Series* through the same range of outlets that facilitated the distribution of the cartoons.<sup>22</sup> Based on material that Ganus helped to gather during a visit to Europe in 1957, the NEP produced *Camera Inside Europe* and *Two Berlins*, two films focused on European ‘statism.’<sup>23</sup> The Freedom Forums, meanwhile, continued to attract supervisors and industrial relations leaders, and to provide a meeting place in which their ideas and techniques could be discussed, refined and disseminated.<sup>24</sup> The connection between the NEP and this agenda was cemented by the recruitment of Howard Bennett, who left General Electric to join the NEP in February 1958 (Bennett operated under a variety of titles, including Director of Field Services and Vice President for Industrial-Relations). Under the auspices of GE’s Employee Relations Division, and under the authority of Lemuel Boulware, Bennett spearheaded, as an NEP pamphlet described it, “one of the most extensive economic education programs in American industry, reaching GE’s 220,000 employees and supplying materials for similar programs in industries employing several million persons.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “National Program Letter,” 4/1956, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 4; “Your Grassroots Report,” 7/1957; “Saturday, July 30,” *Boston Globe*, 7/24/1960, A21; “5-Channel Cable TV,” *Cumberland Evening Times*, 3/2/1962, 7; “TV,” *Miami News*, 5/17/1962, 3

<sup>23</sup> “List of Clifton Ganus Speaking Engagements, 1951-1973,” CLGP; Ganus to Herbert Philbrick, 4/27/1959, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 3

<sup>24</sup> NEP “Your Grassroots Report,” 7/1955, “Your Invitation to Freedom Forum XIX,” 4/7/1958, both HAPP, Box 147, Folder 8

<sup>25</sup> NEP, “Your Grassroots Report,” 7/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 8; Kathleen Hall to Author, email, 10/30/2011, author’s possession; “Education Program Raises G. E. Morale,” *NYT*, 4/30/1952, 42; Howard Bennett, speech manuscript, “Businessmen in Public Affairs,” 4/1960, JDBP



Top: Howard Bennett at one of the Freedom Forums, probably in 1956, demonstrating the famous How Our Business System Operates (HOBOS) program, which was designed by Du Pont and was one of the most widely used programs to ‘re-educate’ workers in the 1950s. Bottom: Bennett, Forum conferees, and an oversized book detailing GE’s “Economic Education Program.”<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Untitled photograph, GSBP; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 83-84; “National Program Letter,” 4/1956

### Arkansas, Free Enterprise and the 'Proto-Sunbelt'

Benson's location in Arkansas had profound consequences for his politics during the decade-and-a-half after the war. His interaction with Arkansas' elites, who were attempting to impose their own conservative 'pro-growth' philosophy, demonstrated the essential congruence between the NEP's efforts and forces that, in various forms and to varying degrees, were remaking much of the South and West.

By the late 1940s Benson was firmly allied with the most influential businessman in the state, C. Hamilton Moses, the President of the Arkansas Power and Light Company (AP&L). Moses was ten years Benson's senior, but was a fellow 'farm boy,' and a man of firm religious conviction (a Baptist) who laced his conservatism with a 'folksy' tone and references to the 'frontier.'<sup>27</sup> One leading Arkansas journalist aptly recalled that Moses "employed the style of a country preacher on behalf of the public utilities' crusade against the 'creeping socialism' public power."<sup>28</sup> In addition to denouncing the TVA, rural electric cooperatives, and proposals for similar schemes on the Arkansas River, Moses provided substantial funds for Harding College and the NEP. He also delivered keynote addresses at Freedom Forums and ensured that representatives of the AP&L were consistently present at these gatherings.<sup>29</sup>

Benson was also useful to Moses. In 1943 Moses launched the Arkansas Economic Council, which soon merged with the Chamber of Commerce to form the Arkansas Economic Council–Chamber of Commerce (AEC-CC), an organization charged with bolstering industrial development. Moses was anxious that the increased demand for electricity, derived from industrial expansion during the War, would be sustained and expanded in peacetime. Electricity was also the AP&L's chief product. Moses' 'Arkansas Plan' sought local community involvement in building and attracting industry, while he positioned himself at the nexus of a range of private interests, politicians and public bodies. In 1945, Governor Ben Laney, an arch-conservative, created the Arkansas Resources and Development Commission

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<sup>27</sup> Moses, "It's up to You, St. Louis Traffic Club," 1/15/1945, CHMP, Series 3, Box 16, Folder 4; "Biographical Sketch, C. Hamilton Moses," 1966, CHMP, Series 5, Box 19, Folder 12; "Hamilton Moses, Lawyer, 79, Dies," *NYT*, 7/27/1966, 39

<sup>28</sup> Ashmore, *Civil Rights*, 104

<sup>29</sup> John Callahan, "Socializing Seen in Power Project," *NYT*, 10/4/1947, 21; Moses, "Address, American Farm Bureau Federation, Chicago," 12/14/1955, CHMP, Series 4, Box 17, Folder 8

(ARDC), and the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.<sup>30</sup> Business periodicals and mainstream publications such as *Time* ran feature pieces on the ‘Arkansas Plan,’ while in 1948, thanks to nominations from Laney and business allies, Moses was named ‘Man of the South’ by *Dixie Business*.<sup>31</sup>

According to Moses and his cohorts, low wages, low taxes and Arkansas’ abundant natural resources provided the foundation for prosperity. Moreover, Moses posited, “the South has an abundance of rugged individuals – the greatest reservoir of labor still untainted by ‘isms’ and false philosophies – willing to give an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay – the most favorable business climate in the nation.” Moses, like his fellow boosters, persistently campaigned to keep Arkansas “free from labor strife.”<sup>32</sup>

Benson’s efforts mostly focused on national-level politics or on the espousal of a more abstract ‘Americanism,’ but his ‘free enterprise’ message nevertheless resonated with this ‘booster’ agenda. In 1946 the ARDC orchestrated a ‘puff’ piece on Arkansas in *National Geographic*, which encapsulated this overlap. “Compared with a busy neighbor State, like Texas,” one resident declared, “I reckon we did oversleep a bit ... But we woke up in time to join that industrial parade now marching all the way to the Mississippi Valley.” The article paid homage to the state and Moses’ benevolent leadership, but its author also interviewed Benson, a “good new voice from here,” whose emphasis on “individual effort and self-reliance” epitomized the ethos that would underpin Arkansas’ transformation.<sup>33</sup> Of course, Benson’s newspaper column, radio broadcasts and the multifarious materials produced by the NEP, circulated widely within Arkansas. His hectic speaking schedule also did not neglect his adopted home state. Benson frequently addressed local chambers of commerce and civic clubs, particularly after 1952 when he

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<sup>30</sup> AEC-CC, “Arkansas Industrial News: A Moses Leads Arkansas,” 5/12/1945, JWFP, BCN 28, (Loc. ov A26), Folder 2; Johnson, *Arkansas*, 72-82

<sup>31</sup> T.H. Barton to Hubert Lee, 9/28/1948, Benjamin Laney to Hubert Lee, 9/2/1948, both CHMP, Series 5, Box 18, Folder 4; “Address by C. H. Moses, Searcy, Arkansas,” 4/28/1949, CHMP, Series 4, Box 17, Folder 6; Frederick Simpich, “Arkansas Rolls up Its Sleeves,” *National Geographic*, 9/1946, 273-312; Norman Kuhne, “What This Town Needs,” *Nation’s Business*, 2/1950, 41-43, 68; Mercedes Hurst, “Arkansas in Action,” *Harvester World*, 12/1950, 18-22, 273-312, MCIHC; “Industry,” *Time*, 2/9/1953, 90

<sup>32</sup> Moses, speech draft, Philadelphia Rotary Club, 12/1/1943, CHMP, Series 3, Box 16, Folder 4; Moses, “South’s Role in the Building of the Nation,” n.d., CHMP, Series 4, Box 17, Folder 9

<sup>33</sup> Simpich, “Arkansas Rolls”

embarked on his second stint as president of the APEC.<sup>34</sup> As we shall see, many businessmen in Arkansas were also impressed by Benson's efforts to ensure that Harding offered an appealing education for the State's youth, a pool of potential future employees.



Freedom Forum, 1951. Left to right, Benson, New York University economist and former advisor to the Liberty League, Walter Spahr, and C. Hamilton Moses. The presence of men such as Spahr and Moses illustrates how the Freedom Forums, like Benson's other political activities, secured his location at a relatively unique nexus of local, regional and national business and political interests.<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes Benson's assistance was more direct. With increasing frequency during the 1950s, he argued that American competitiveness in world markets was being undermined by high wages, causing capital and industrial flight to bypass the South altogether.<sup>36</sup> He also wrote newspaper columns lauding Moses' "dynamic

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, "Arkansas News Briefs," *Blytheville Courier News*, 9/9/1952, 12; "APEC President to Speak Here Tuesday," clipping, *Lincoln Ledger*, 2/26/1953, GSBP; "Benson Urges Participation in Government," *Hope Star*, 11/3/1953, 1; NEP, "Your Grassroots Report," 1/1955, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 8

<sup>35</sup> Photograph, 1951, GSBP-OCC, Box 1, loose material; "Platform and Organization of the American Liberty League," JJRP, File 61, Box 1, Folder, "American Liberty League, Organization and Charter-1934"

<sup>36</sup> "LA," 10/6/1948, JDBP; Benson, "An American Citizen's Responsibility," 6/22/1959, GSBP; "LA," 12/30/1959, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155; "LA," *Beckley Post-Herald*, 1/7/1960, 4

leadership” and the “public-spirited businessmen” in the AEC-CC.<sup>37</sup> In 1949 the AEC-CC, along with the Searcy Chamber, the Association of Arkansas Industries (AAI), and MGM sponsored the official premiere of *Meet King Joe* in Searcy. Moses and the head of the AEC-CC were amongst the guests at an associated dinner function.<sup>38</sup> The following year Benson sat, alongside Moses, on the policy committee for a study published by the AEC-CC and the University of Arkansas’s College of Business Administration, which outlined the significance of tax rates in Arkansas relative to other Southern states.<sup>39</sup> Benson also appeared alongside Moses at various events. For example, Moses and Benson provided the keynote addresses when the AEC-CC hosted a gathering of 200 state Chamber of Commerce officials from across the country in Hot Springs in 1953.<sup>40</sup> Ewing Pyeatt, the President of the Searcy Bank, and head of the Searcy Chamber of Commerce, had served as Benson’s vice president in the APEC during World War Two, and now provided an important link to the AEC-CC. He was appointed AEC-CC vice-president in 1952, and became head of the State Chamber of Commerce in 1957.<sup>41</sup> At Freedom Forum XIV in 1953, Pyeatt and the Searcy Chamber sponsored ‘Arkansas Day,’ to which 75 local businessmen were invited. Moses was toastmaster at the evening dinner.<sup>42</sup>

In early 1955, Harding hosted a “Small Business Management Conference,” which was co-sponsored by the AEC-CC, the AAI, and various national small-business organizations.<sup>43</sup> In the mid-1950s the APEC was absorbed by the AEC-CC, which was rebranded the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce (ACC). Benson, a member of the Searcy and Little Rock Chambers, was appointed chairman of the ACC’s Committee on Taxation and Government Expenditures.<sup>44</sup> When the ACC and

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<sup>37</sup> “LA,” 2/20/1952, JDBP; “LA,” *Rusk Cherokeean*, 2/10/1955, 1

<sup>38</sup> “Meet King Joe World Premiere,” *Bison*, 5/17/1949, 1

<sup>39</sup> Edward Reed, “Comparative Analysis of the Arkansas Tax System,” 1950, Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008522317>, accessed 8/8/2014

<sup>40</sup> “State Chamber Heads to Meet,” *Hope Star*, 8/22/1953, 1

<sup>41</sup> Sophie Ellis, “Arkansas Taxpayers Organize,” *AG*, 10/24/1943, 4; “Group Renames Moses as Head,” *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 1/26/1952, 8; “Pyeatt Preaches Industrialization Gospel of Moses,” *Courier News*, 7/12 1957, 1

<sup>42</sup> “Searcy Sponsors Arkansas Day,” *Bison*, 10/17/1953, 1

<sup>43</sup> “Your Grassroots Report,” 1/1955

<sup>44</sup> “APEC Merges with C. Of C.,” *Blytheville Courier News*, 12/12/1956, 12; Benson to J. William Fulbright, 2/14/1957, JWFP, Box 112, Folder 31

AAI held a joint meeting in 1960, Benson and Governor Orval Faubus provided the opening addresses.<sup>45</sup>

Benson also established substantial connections with businesses that were heavily involved with Arkansas' booster project. These included Lion Oil, based in El Dorado, which significantly expanded after the war, and was headed by T.H. Barton, a leading figure in the AEC-CC.<sup>46</sup> Barton served on various committees dedicated to Harding College's expansion and made personal donations, including an endowment for student scholarships.<sup>47</sup> In 1955 Barton was given a position on the board of Monsanto, one of Benson's best corporate allies, after Lion Oil was taken over.<sup>48</sup> Harding, meanwhile, gave Barton an honorary degree and Benson dedicated an episode of *Land of the Free* to his life story.<sup>49</sup>

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, companies such as Southwestern Bell Telephone and International Shoe followed in Lion Oil's footsteps by coupling their efforts to expand their presence in Arkansas with support for Benson's crusade, either through financial donations or by sending representatives to the NEP's Forums. The support of all three of these companies came against the backdrop of industrial disputes at their Arkansas plants.<sup>50</sup> International Shoe, in fact, were involved in a hard-fought battle with the CIO in Searcy, where the company had opened a new plant in 1947 (the Searcy Chamber raised \$100,000 to build the

<sup>45</sup> "Faubus, Benson Cite Danger of Communism," clipping, *AG*, 10/12/1960, GSBP

<sup>46</sup> "Arkansas Urged Not to Rest on Its Laurels," *Hope Star*, 5/24/1949, 2; Reed, *Arkansas Tax System*, Hurst, "Arkansas in Action," "Group Renames Moses as Head," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 8, 1/26/1952; Edmond Morse, "Lion Oil," *Barron's*, 11/8/1954, 15

<sup>47</sup> Benson to J. William Fulbright, 3/25/1948, JWFP, Box 48, Folder 6; "Contributors to School in American Studies Fund," 1951, Benson to Morton May, 7/14/1952, Benson to C. Hamilton Moses, 5/19/1952, all GSBP; Benson to J. William Fulbright, 7/2/1956, JWFP, Box 106, Folder 14; William Teague to Irénée du Pont, 12/15/1958, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155; Stevens, *Before*, 143-144

<sup>48</sup> "T.H. Barton, 79, Dead," *NYT*, 12/25/1960, 42

<sup>49</sup> "Pearson and Barton Given New Honors," *Camden News*, 8/31/1948, 9; "Land of the Free Program Listings, 1950-," Radiogoldindex, <http://radiogoldindex.com/cgi-local/p2.cgi?ProgramName=The+Land+Of+The+Free>, accessed, 7/8/2014

<sup>50</sup> T.H. Barton to J. William Fulbright, 7/3/1947, JWFP, BCN 48, Folder 41; "Wage Dispute Closes Lion Oil Plant," *Hope Star*, 3/3/1949, 3; "Lion Oil Shows Drop in Income," *Hope Star*, 8/13/1951, 3; Lion Oil Company, Petitioner, V. National Labor Relations Board, Respondent, United States Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit, No. 15158, 4/22/1955, plainsite.org, <http://www.plainsite.org/dockets/8zfqco9n/court-of-appeals-for-the-eighth-circuit/lion-oil-company-v-national-labor-relations-board/>, accessed 8/8/2014; "Final Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum IX," 3/22/1951, "Preliminary Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XVIII," 4/1957, "Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXII," 4/1961, all GSBP; "Southwestern Bell Accepts," *NYT*, 4/24/1947, 17; "U. S. Enters Phone Fight," *NYT*, 12/20/1949, 54; "53,000 Phone Workers Strike," *NYT*, 8/21/1953, 8

factory premises). An NLRB investigation exposed a variety of coercive strategies deployed by International, which opened 13 plants in Arkansas during this period, and ruled in favor of the union's efforts to organize the 400 workers.<sup>51</sup>

Benson's links with local business elites were cemented by the appointment of Glenn A. Green as director of the NEP in late 1949. Green became a ghostwriter for 'Looking Ahead,' a public spokesman, a researcher, the director of many Freedom Forums, and was deeply involved in the production of the NEP's films. 'Bud' Green was born in Montgomery County, Arkansas, in 1905 and graduated from Staunton Military Academy and then Draughon School of Business in Little Rock, before embarking on a career as a "tire builder, bank clerk and owner of a small business." In the early 1930s he left Arkansas to become a journalist with the United Press Agency. At the beginning of the 1940s, Green returned to work for the *Arkansas Gazette* and *Arkansas Democrat*. He subsequently served as a political advisor to Arkansas Governors Homer Adkins and Benjamin Laney, and Publicity Director for the ARDC.<sup>52</sup> Green also briefly worked for Lion Oil.<sup>53</sup>

It was Green, in fact, who led the *National Geographic* reporter around Arkansas in 1946. In 1948 he was appointed Executive Director of the Arkansas Free Enterprise Association (AFEA), an organization dominated by delta planters and businessmen that claimed to have more than 3,000 members.<sup>54</sup> The AFEA had been instrumental in the passage of Arkansas' pioneering right-to-work initiative in 1944 and in 1947 it led the campaign to secure the passage of an enabling act.<sup>55</sup> In the year of Green's appointment, prominent figures in the AFEA were involved in the 'Dixiecrat' campaign, an alliance that reflected their mutual aversion to civil rights measures and 'big government.'<sup>56</sup> Under Green's leadership the AFEA pursued a similar course. The closed shop, Green told Senator J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), was "utterly un-American" and would lead to "an absolute labor government" (in

<sup>51</sup> Johnson, *Arkansas*, 76; Thednel Garner, "History of Searcy," 5/5/1991, White County Historical Society, [http://www.argenweb.net/white/wchs/History\\_Of\\_Searcy\\_files/History\\_Of\\_Searcy.html](http://www.argenweb.net/white/wchs/History_Of_Searcy_files/History_Of_Searcy.html), accessed 7/8/2014; Boyles and Pipkin, *Searcy*, 103

<sup>52</sup> "Noted Journalist," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 7/22/1974, GSBP

<sup>53</sup> "Green Returns to Job as State Publicity Director," *Blytheville Courier News*, 7/1/1947, 16

<sup>54</sup> Michael Pierce, "John McClellan, the Teamsters, and Biracial Labor Politics in Arkansas, 1947-1959," in Zieger, ed., *Life and Labor*, 45-76, 47; *Going Places: A Journal of Action for Free Enterprising Arkansans*, 4/1949, JWFP, BCN 48, Folder 47

<sup>55</sup> Bob Brown, "Labor Battle in Arkansas near Head," *Hope Star*, 10/10/1946, 1; "Arkansas Works on Closed Shop Teeth," *Daily Capital News*, 1/30/1947, 10; Frederickson, *Dixiecrat*, 152-153

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154

1962 Green left the NEP to become vice president of the National Right to Work Committee).<sup>57</sup> Green urged Fulbright to rally Democratic Party support for the retention of Taft-Hartley in exchange for Republican opposition to Truman's civil rights proposals.<sup>58</sup> Under his leadership the AFEA also purchased a copy of *Going Places*.<sup>59</sup>

In 1948 Sid McMath was elected Governor of Arkansas. Benson, like many conservatives, detested McMath, who had notable links with the labor movement, was politically moderate, and constructed a bi-racial support base.<sup>60</sup> In 1952 Benson openly endorsed McMath's opponent, Francis Cherry, an inept politician who nevertheless was conservative and had links with the AP&L.<sup>61</sup> Cherry, in turn, used Benson's endorsement in his campaign.<sup>62</sup> When Cherry took office, Benson continued to express support, sometimes under the auspices of the APEC, for Cherry's commitment to a balanced budget, financed by slashing welfare rolls. These efforts, Benson argued in 'Looking Ahead,' were an example to the nation.<sup>63</sup> Green served as a "close advisor" to Cherry during his campaign, and was named on the Governor's Publicity and Information Commission, while Benson was appointed to the Committee to Survey Arkansas's Mental Health Needs and Resources.<sup>64</sup>

In 1953, Cherry, along with Senator John McClellan (D-Ark.), presented Benson with a plaque commemorating his selection as 'Arkansan of the Year,' an award bestowed after a poll conducted by the *Arkansas Democrat*. The plaque, which was presented at the APEC's annual meeting, carried the following inscription: "for your untiring interest in the advancement of education, and the promotion of economic and industrial relations between employer and employee on a

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<sup>57</sup> Green to Fulbright, 12/31/1948, 2/2/1949, both JWFP, BCN 48, Folder 47; Group Research Inc., "National Right to Work Committee," 1962, copy in author's possession

<sup>58</sup> Green to Fulbright, 2/22/1949, JWFP, BCN 48, Folder 47

<sup>59</sup> "Distribution Report on Film *Going Places*," 6/24/1949, GSBP

<sup>60</sup> Johnson, *Arkansas*, 101-103; Pierce, "McClellan," 45-76

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 50; Johnson, *Arkansas*, 106-107; Reed, *Faubus*, 141-142; "LA," *Evening Independent*, 8/30/1952, 5

<sup>62</sup> "Cherry Tells Worried Voter He Should Chose McMath," *Blytheville Courier News*, 8/7/1952, 7

<sup>63</sup> Benson, "Arkansas Sets Example of Official Spending," *Sikeston Herald*, 9/24/1953, 6; "Benson Urges Participation in Government," *Hope Star*, 11/3/1953, 1; "LA," *Evening Independent*, 6/30/1954, 25

<sup>64</sup> "Appointees May Lose Jobs," *Camden News*, 10/28/1954, 11; Governor's Committee, "Mental Health Needs and Resources of Arkansas," 1/1955, archive.org,

<http://www.archive.org/details/reportmentalhe00gove>, accessed 7/8/2014

national level.”<sup>65</sup> Cherry lost to Orval Faibus in the 1954 gubernatorial contest, but Benson remained close to many Arkansas politicians, including Faibus, McClellan, and Congressman Wilbur Mills.<sup>66</sup> Benson’s appointment as chairman of the Arkansas Citizens Committee for the Hoover Report in 1956 enabled him to conduct another campaign for ‘economy in government’ at the “grassroots” level.<sup>67</sup>

In 1955 Winthrop Rockefeller, a member of the Rockefeller dynasty who moved to Arkansas in 1952, created the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission (AIDC). The AIDC, bolstered by a budget of approximately \$500,000 per year, was more effective than its predecessors, although it ran in accordance with similar principles.<sup>68</sup> In Searcy, as in many other parts of the state, a local Industrial Development Commission (with Ewing Pyeatt heavily involved) was formed and drew in companies such as the Clary Corporation, by financing the building of plants through local fundraising drives, by issuing bonds and by borrowing money from the AIDC. As a result, the town’s population doubled in size to 7,000 within several years.<sup>69</sup> The Executive Director of the AIDC delivered several addresses at Freedom Forums in the early 1960s, members of the NEP established connections with companies such as the Clary Corporation, Rockefeller donated \$50,000 to Harding in the mid-1960s, and in later years Lott Tucker, a long-serving member of the Harding faculty (appointed by Benson) became chairman of the Searcy Industrial Development Committee.<sup>70</sup> Overall, however, there was less direct interaction between Benson and this generation of boosters. Nevertheless their efforts ran parallel in many respects.

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<sup>65</sup> “Arkansan of the Year, Commemorative Plaque,” 1953, display item, History House Museum, Harding University; “Dr. Benson Named Arkansan of the Year,” *Daily Citizen*, 11/30/1953, clipping, GSBP

<sup>66</sup> See, for example, “Big Tax Cut under Study,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 4/11/1958, 17; Faibus to Benson, 2/24/1960, OEFP, Series 5, Subseries 10, Box 150, Folder 5. McClellan’s relationship with Benson is discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>67</sup> “Dr. Benson Named Hoover Committee State Chairman,” *Harding Bison*, clipping, 1/11/1956, GSBP

<sup>68</sup> AIDC, *Industrial History*; Johnson, *Arkansas*, 112-113

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113; Perrin Jones, “Industries Bring Boom Atmosphere to Bustling Searcy,” *Blytheville Courier News*, 3/20/1957, 6; “Ewing P. Pyeatt,” *Courier News*, 7/11/1957, 1; AIDC, *Industrial History*; “Business: Arkansas Catalyst,” *Time*, 3/11/1957

<sup>70</sup> William Campbell to Orval Faibus, 1/31/1959, OEFP, Series 7, Subseries 2, Box 244, Folder 10; “Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXII,” 4/1961, “Little Rock Hosts Freedom Forum Beginning Tuesday,” *AG*, clipping, 2/2/1964, both GSBP; Ward, *Rockefeller*, 140; “Obituaries: Lott Tucker,” *Christian Chronicle*, 3/2004, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/obituaries-27?A>, accessed 8/8/2014

The success of Arkansas' quest for industrial development during this period was modest. The AIDC claimed responsibility for luring 437 plants to the state and expanding 277 existing businesses between mid-1955 and mid-1961, creating 62,000 jobs in the process.<sup>71</sup> Between 1946 and 1959 manufacturing employment increased by 44 percent and personal income by 81 percent; across the nation as whole, the figures were 11 percent and 116 percent, respectively.<sup>72</sup> Arkansas, however, started from a small industrial base. The actual numbers employed in manufacturing increased by 73,489 between 1935 and 1960.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, rising personal income was derived from inflation as well as growth, the state's population actually declined during the 1950s, and it retained one of the lowest per capita income levels in the nation. By the late 1950s, Arkansas was still receiving \$113 million more per year from the federal government than it was sending to Washington through taxes and fees.<sup>74</sup> The industrial growth which did occur was also a product of a number of additional factors: national economic growth; mechanization in agriculture; the kick start provided by wartime changes; and government investment in infrastructure, including Arkansas' receipt of more Reconstruction Finance Corporation loans than any other state (even the AP&L used power from publicly funded hydroelectric plants).<sup>75</sup>

After visiting Hope, Arkansas in 1981 a *New Yorker* reporter wrote of one local small businessman's proud boast that "we're not all barefooted hillbillies settin' on the front porch and spittin' tobacco juice. We're in the Sunbelt now."<sup>76</sup> In reality, Arkansas' post-war economic transformation was notably distinct from many other parts of the Sunbelt (a reminder of the problematic nature of the term), particularly the Southwest, where economic growth, population increases, defense-related investment, and the development of high-tech industries were much more remarkable. Massive federal investment, on the other hand, constituted one important continuity.<sup>77</sup> The significance of Arkansas' booster agenda, however, was not confined to its instrumental consequences. With the assistance of individuals like

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<sup>71</sup> AIDC, *Industrial History*

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, *Arkansas*, 82

<sup>73</sup> Cobb, *Selling*, 30

<sup>74</sup> Johnson, *Arkansas*, 116

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 71, 73-74; Moreton, *Wal-Mart*, 32

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Johnson, *Arkansas*, 186

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 185-210; Shermer, *Sunbelt*

Benson, it advanced a conservatism that became increasingly powerful in later years, the type of politics that underpinned Arkansas' position within 'Walmart Country,' a regional economy defined by a low-wage, anti-union ethos. Walmart, itself, of course, had its roots in the northwest of the state, as did Tyson Foods and J.B. Hunt's trucking company. All three espoused a brand of corporate 'populism' not dissimilar from that earlier promoted by Benson. Harding College established a relationship with Sam Walton's firm in the 1970s, while Searcy became home to one of the company's massive distribution centers.<sup>78</sup>

Anti-union politics in Arkansas during the 1950s was consistent with a broader conservative campaign against 'big labor,' which became increasingly significant in the 'proto-Sunbelt' South and Southwest.<sup>79</sup> This issue also continued to provide the right with a source of popular appeal. Benson's focus on unions was unrelenting. The 1950s is not often associated with industrial conflict, but his criticisms came against the backdrop of an average of 352 strikes annually.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the merger of the CIO and the AFL in 1955 in many respects represented a defense response to ongoing difficulties within the labor movement, but many conservatives ignored this (perhaps for expedient reasons) and projected the specter of an enlarged juggernaut.<sup>81</sup> A series of particularly bitter disputes broke out in the steel industry, where key NEP backers operated, in the late 1950s. At the same time, Benson's ally Senator McClellan headed a committee charged with exposing connections between 'racketeering' and labor.<sup>82</sup> Benson, like many others on the right, focused on the actions of "labor racketeers" and strikers as a means of reiterating his underlying suggestion that labor constituted a self-interested, corrupt special interest.<sup>83</sup> Freedom Forum speakers during this period included Fred Hartley, co-sponsor of the Taft-Hartley Act, Sylvester Petro, renowned for anti-labor books

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Pierce, 'Orval Faubus and the Rise of Anti-Labor Populism in Northwestern Arkansas,' in Shermer and Lichtenstein, eds., *Right and Labor*, 98-114; Johnson, *Arkansas*, 185-210; Moreton, *Wal-Mart*, 14-15, 163-167, *passim*

<sup>79</sup> Cobb, *Selling*; Shermer, *Sunbelt*; Tami J. Friedman, "Capital Flight, "States Rights," and the Anti-Labor Offensive After World War Two," in Lichtenstein and Shermer, eds., *Right and Labor*, 79-97

<sup>80</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 88

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Shermer, "Is Freedom of the Individual Un-American?": Right-to-Work Campaigns and Anti-Union Conservatism, 1943-1958," in Lichtenstein and Shermer, eds., *Right and Labor*, 130-131

<sup>82</sup> Phillips-Fein, "Right-to-Work," *passim*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*; "LA," 1/6/1960, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155; "LA," *Malakoff News*, 8/14/1959, 3

(which Benson promoted), and McClellan himself, whose 1958 address focused on the work of his Committee.<sup>84</sup> These efforts had remarkable results. They bolstered the profile of Barry Goldwater, conservatism's rising star, who served on McClellan's Committee, and facilitated the passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act in 1959, which curtailed union activities.<sup>85</sup>

The merger of the AFL-CIO coincided with the formation of the NRWC, an organization that harnessed and expanded existing campaigns for state-level legislation. In 1957 the NRWC was instrumental in the passage of a right-to-work measure in Indiana, and the following year it helped to get the issue on the ballot in Ohio and five western states.<sup>86</sup> Benson generally avoided directly engaging in right-to-work disputes but, as we have seen in Arkansas, his anti-labor message nevertheless chimed with regional anti-labor efforts.

The right-to-work movement was often tied up with a broader booster agenda in the 'proto Sunbelt,' where economic transformations often easily outpaced those occurring in Arkansas. In the South, against the backdrop of industrialization and a precipitous decline in the relative size of the rural population, per capita income increased by approximately 358 percent between 1940 and 1960.<sup>87</sup> The region still lagged behind other sections of the nation, but by 1960, as Numan Bartley concludes, "the South possessed a modern economy."<sup>88</sup> From Texas westward, economic and demographic changes during this period were particularly profound. Between 1940 and 1960 the population of Phoenix, Arizona, increased from 65,000 to 440,000, Houston's jumped from 646,869 to 1,430,394, Los Angeles' grew from 1.5 million to just shy of 2.5 million (with a metropolitan area that was home to more than 6 million). The Sunbelt had not fully emerged by 1960, but it was on its way.<sup>89</sup>

As numerous studies have demonstrated, economic growth in the South and Southwest was substantially predicated on massive investment by the federal government, not least through Cold War defense spending, which consumed more

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.; "Your Invitation to Freedom Forum XIX," 4/7/1958; "Revised Roster of Attendance of Freedom Forum XX," 4/1959, "Final Roster of Attendance, Freedom Forum XXIII," 4/1962, both GSBP

<sup>85</sup> Phillips-Fein, "Right-to-Work," *passim*

<sup>86</sup> Shermer, "Right-to-Work," 133, *passim*; Phillips-Fein, "Right-to-Work," 499

<sup>87</sup> Cobb, *Selling*, 110-111,

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 146

<sup>89</sup> Shermer, *Sunbelt*, 2; Shelton et al., *Houston*, 10; McGirr, *Suburban*, 26, 28, *passim*

than half of the federal budget in the two decades following the war.<sup>90</sup> In the South, for example, military contracts accounted for approximately 10-20 percent of income growth in six states, and more in Mississippi, between 1952 and 1960.<sup>91</sup> California received \$50 billion in defense spending between 1950 and 1960.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, southern states often received more money from Washington than they sent back in taxes, while the ‘proto-Sunbelt,’ as whole, was transformed by federal investment in highways and other infrastructure projects, loans from the RFC, and federally subsidized mortgages.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, “grasstop” boosters, corporate executives and local conservative politicians, as Elizabeth Shermer suggests, often sought to use government, whether local or national, to further their ends.<sup>94</sup> Benson made similar exceptions to his rhetorical anti-statism. When Du Pont, for example, won the contract (on highly favorable terms) to build and operate the most expensive federally funded initiative in American history, the Savannah River Plant in South Carolina, Benson commended the company for its display of “corporate citizenship.”<sup>95</sup>

Sunbelt conservatism, therefore, represented the triumph of a selective narrative of economic development. Crafting such a narrative was a task that Benson was well suited to. His ‘folksy’ anti-statism, anti-eastern sentiments, and allusions to the mythology of the ‘frontier’ had a particular resonance in the region. Moreover, rising affluence seemed to encourage receptivity to the creative re-working of cultural tropes that Benson propounded, to the idea that ‘frontier’ populism was a Janus-faced phenomenon, one that simultaneously faced backwards to a specific rural historical context and forwards to an abundant urban future underpinned by the activities of the pioneers of corporate capitalism. The power of this narrative was especially evident amongst the millions of Americans who journeyed westwards from the Midwest and the Upper and Western South to Southern California in the decades after the Depression and became increasingly affluent after the war.<sup>96</sup> In fact, the ‘frontier’ has become an essential motif for conservatives in the Southwest.

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<sup>90</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*, 26

<sup>91</sup> Schulman, *Sunbelt*, 140

<sup>92</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*, 26

<sup>93</sup> Jackson, *Crabgrass*, 190-230; Shelton et al., *Houston*; Schulman, *Sunbelt*; Shermer, *Sunbelt*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*

<sup>95</sup> “LA,” *Rusk Cherokeean*, 2/10/1955, 1; Frederickson, *Dixie*, *passim*

<sup>96</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, esp. xv-xvi; McGirr, *Suburban*, esp. 45-47

Barry Goldwater, for example, often attempted to graft self-reliant ‘frontier’ individualism onto a forward-looking ‘pro-growth’ politics. It was this sleight of hand that enabled him to suggest that “individual initiative has made the desert bloom.”<sup>97</sup> Since the 1930s liberals and labor unions had often effectively countered suggestions that conservatives offered continuity with notions of individualism, but they were both notably weak in the ‘proto-Sunbelt.’

By the 1950s, an increasing proportion of the businesses Benson consorted with opened or operated plants in South and Southwest, a development that had important consequences for the dispersal of NEP materials. The rosters of attendance at the NEP’s Forums also testified to this growing regional focus. Companies that were active boosters provided a significant number of the attendees and speakers by the second half of the decade. For example, the Mississippi Power and Light Company, which sent representatives every year after 1956, was one of the leading forces in Mississippi’s drive to create a ‘favorable business climate.’<sup>98</sup> The southern energy industry, which, like ‘Ham’ Moses, had a particular vested interest in industrialization, notably provided consistent support for the Forums.<sup>99</sup>

Texas, which experienced a more profound economic transformation than many Southern states, was particularly significant for Benson. The oil industry in Texas, at the heart of the post-war transformation, provided numerous conferees for the Freedom Forums and financial assistance for the NEP. These supporters included financier William Luse, Gulf Oil, the General Crude Oil Company, and Humble Oil, which donated \$145,000 to the NEP between 1948 and 1963.<sup>100</sup> Du Pont, Monsanto, and Goodyear Tires, all NEP supporters, opened plants in Houston after the war, while power companies such as Houston Lighting and Power and an assortment of other Texas-based industrial concerns sent representatives to the Forums.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Cited in Brinkley, “American Conservatism,” 419; Jeff Roche, “Cowboy Conservatism,” in Farber and Roche, eds., *Sixties*, 79-92

<sup>98</sup> Friedman, “Capital Flight,” 87-89; Tris Coffin, “Statesman from the New South,” *Nation’s Business*, 5/1955, 32

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, “Preliminary Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XVIII,” 4/15/1957-4/19/1957, “Preliminary Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XIX,” 5/26/1958, both GSBP

<sup>100</sup> Cunningham, *Cowboy*, esp. 22-24; Benson to J. William Fulbright, 7/2/1956, JWFP, Box 106, Folder 14; “Funding of NEP, 1942-1963,” CLGP; “Your Grassroots Report,” 7/1958; “Roster of Attendance of Freedom Forum XX,” 4/1959, GSBP

<sup>101</sup> “Houston, Texas,” Texas State Historical Association,

<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdh03>, accessed 8/8/2014; “Contributors to

Throughout the 1950s Benson made many trips to Texas, speaking before audiences in towns, cities, and suburbs across the state that were assembled by a wide range of civic clubs (he spoke at the Kiwanis national convention in Houston in 1959); business organizations from local Chambers to the Texas Manufacturers Association to individual companies; and patriotic organizations such as the Sons of the American Revolution. In 1953 the NEP sponsored an institute for international trade and finance in Houston, which was attended by junior executives hoping to go into the export business. ‘Looking Ahead’ circulated widely across the state, as did *Land of the Free*, while local television stations broadcast NEP films.<sup>102</sup>

In the end, there were important limitations to Benson’s efforts in the South and Southwest. The most obvious was that, as we shall see, he did not fully orientate the NEP towards capitalizing on the economic transformations occurring there. As the development of ‘pro-business’ ideas in Arkansas demonstrates, it is plausible that the resonance of the politics espoused by regional elites in the ‘proto-Sunbelt,’ and supplemented by figures such as Benson, was not necessarily tightly fastened to actual rising prosperity, thanks to their disproportionate power and their exploitation of cultural tropes. On the other hand, however, rising affluence was clearly relevant to individuals’ attraction to this politics. In this respect, it is important to note that by 1960 – and even in later decades – the ‘Sunbelt’ was a place of contrasts, illuminated sporadically thanks to the uneven consequences of its growth. Nowhere was this truer than in the South. Historians of conservatism who have fruitfully engaged with the ‘Sunbelt’ phenomenon have often highlighted these disparities, yet, at the same time, they have made surprisingly little effort to explore the ways in which this reality placed constraints on conservative politics.<sup>103</sup> Such discrepancies might also help to explain why efforts to portray corporate capitalism as the heir to populism, localism, or ‘frontier’ individualism have met with significant resistance. The strength of libertarian ideas in the Southwest, in particular, serves as a reminder that

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School in American Studies Fund,” 1951, “Revised Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXI,” 4/26/1960-4/29/1960, all GSBP; “Preliminary Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XIX”

<sup>102</sup> “Your Grassroots Report,” 7/1957; title missing, *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 5/10/1954, “Banker Honored as Top Citizen,” *Houston Chronicle*, clipping, 2/14/1954, “Schools Must Teach Americanism,” *Dallas Morning News*, clipping, 1/15/1957, all GSBP; “Several Speakers Scheduled at CPI Management Meeting,” *Corpus Christi Times*, 5/31/1954, B17; “Dr. Benson to Address Kiwanis International,” *Bison*, 5/14/1959, 1; “Businessmen to Hear Dr. Benson,” *Amarillo Globe-Times*, 3/12/1958, 25; “Free Enterprise Boostere [sic] to Speak,” *Amarillo Globe-Times*, 1/4/1960, 4

<sup>103</sup> Shermer, *Sunbelt*; McGirr, *Suburban*

the political culture of the West is perhaps more straightforwardly counterpoised with ‘big government.’<sup>104</sup> Even the in the Sunbelt, in other words, the message that Benson broadcast may still have been most effective as a negative, oppositional force.

While Benson championed business and ‘free enterprise,’ his efforts dovetailed with another offshoot of industrial development, which has been largely overlooked by historians of conservatism. The accelerated decline of employment in agriculture reconfigured rural society, particularly in the Great Plains, the West, the South and the Southwest. Between 1945 and 1960, there was a 32 percent decline in the number of American farms.<sup>105</sup> Between 1940 and 1960, the percentage of southerners living in metropolitan districts doubled, to 43.5 percent.<sup>106</sup> These changes, fuelled by technological advances, the consolidation of holdings and federal agricultural policies, encouraged the formation of an ‘agribusiness’ elite that was more ‘modern,’ and more attuned to the concerns of business conservatives than, say, the ‘bourbon’ plantation elites who had long held sway in the South.<sup>107</sup> By the 1950s, Benson was fully on board with this transformation. The “farm population has gone down to 12%,” he told a Lions Club in Dallas in 1959, “and we are much stronger because of it.”<sup>108</sup> Agricultural issues, notably including price supports, retained a degree of prominence in Benson’s work. These issues also brought to the surface his frustrations with party politics and his continued faith in the ‘bought vote’ thesis. “One party is afraid if it adopted a sound farm program,” he told the student body of Brigham Young University, “the other party would offer to go on buying the votes and so each one has to offer a similar program.”<sup>109</sup>

Since his emergence as a political figure, Benson had cultivated relationships with large-scale agricultural interests, from plantation elites in Arkansas to the Chicago-based Swift & Co., one of the ‘big four’ meatpacking companies which had

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<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Andrew G. Kirk, “Free Minds and Free Markets,” in Roche, ed., *New West*, 281-310

<sup>105</sup> Hamilton, *Trucking*, 100-101. Shane Hamilton’s work constitutes one important exception to this neglect.

<sup>106</sup> Bartley, *New South*, 105-146

<sup>107</sup> Hamilton, *Trucking*, *passim*

<sup>108</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Citizenship Responsibilities, Lions Club, Dallas,” 7/31/1959, GSBP

<sup>109</sup> Benson, speech transcript, “Major Current Issues,” 11/9/1959, GSBP

successfully immunized themselves from serious competition since the 1920s.<sup>110</sup> During the post-war period, and the 1950s in particular, he became closely involved with companies such as International Harvester and J. I. Case that had a substantial stake in the changing pattern of agriculture. Case and Harvester had also both entered in long-running battles against unions in the 1940s. Harvester's president, John McCaffrey, who supported many conservative endeavors, sat on NEP and Harding development committees and co-hosted fundraising luncheons in Chicago, while his company purchased NEP films and sent representatives to Freedom Forums.<sup>111</sup> In the post-war period, agriculture was also becoming more dependent on the chemicals industry. "In our free America," Benson wrote in 1954, Monsanto, Union Carbide and du Pont (all important backers of the NEP), were major contributors to the collaboration between "industry and science" that was bringing "astonishing results in farm productivity."<sup>112</sup>

During the 1950s Benson developed a productive relationship with the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), which provided a conduit to rural and small-town communities (where 'Looking Ahead' often also circulated). As agriculture was transformed in the post-war era, the AFBF expanded, became increasingly dominated by larger-scale farmers and increasingly conservative. The Bureau had 1.13 million members in 1946, half of whom were located in the Midwest, and just under half in the South; by 1976, the AFBF had more than doubled its membership, and had a clear majority of southern members.<sup>113</sup> During Truman's presidency the AFBF's head, Allen Kline, steered the organization against the Brannan Plan, but also against 'socialized medicine,' federal aid to education and a host of liberal programs. Moreover, one muckraking journalist noted Kline's particular "affinity for big business."<sup>114</sup>

Kline's successor, Charles Shuman, "whose extraordinary leadership capacity" Benson praised, occupied the post between 1954 and 1971 and cemented

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<sup>110</sup> Hamilton, *Trucking*, 10, 34-42, 135-136

<sup>111</sup> "Distribution Report on Film Going Places," 6/24/1949, "Combined Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forums I through VIII," 10/27/1950, Benson to Phillip Pillsbury, 3/14/1952, Benson to McCaffrey, 3/24/1952, all GSBP; Benson to J. William Fulbright, 7/2/1956, JWFP, Box 106, Folder 14; Harris, *Manage*, 25, 31-32, 127, 131, 148, 152-154; Fones, *Selling*, 95, 148, 158-159, 170

<sup>112</sup> "LA," *Attica News*, 5, 1/7/1954; Benson, "Science and the World's Food"

<sup>113</sup> Saloutos, "Farm Policy," 380-381

<sup>114</sup> "Farm Bureau Convention Highlights Given," *Newberry Observer*, 1/6/1950; Sam Hall, "The Truth About the Farm Bureau," 1953, HAPP, Box 33, Folder 10

the AFBF's commitment to conservatism.<sup>115</sup> From the mid-1950s the AFBF vehemently opposed the labor movement, partly because of the threat of unionization amongst farm workers. The Bureau, for instance, made important contributions to several right-to-work initiatives. In Kansas the state Bureau was at the center of an alliance between business and farmers that helped secure the passage of right-to-work legislation.<sup>116</sup> At the Virginia State Farm Bureau convention in 1959, Fred Hartley delivered a rebuke to opponents of right-to-work that was greeted with a standing ovation; delegates, in turn, adopted a slate of anti-labor resolutions.<sup>117</sup>

A year after Shuman's appointment, Benson and Clifton Ganus were invited to the AFBF's annual "Institute" at Purdue University in Indiana, attended by 300 officials from state Bureaus, where they helped to launch the AFBF's "comprehensive grass roots educational program in Americanism." It also provided an opportunity to showcase NEP materials. Ganus and Benson brought along 13 of the NEP's films, as well as a ten-foot-high "simulation" granite pyramid, composed of labeled Styrofoam blocks that illustrated "the Structure of the American Way of Life," a new NEP product that was accompanied by a standardized talk.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> "LA," *New Era*, 7/9/1959, 2; William Chamberlain, "Farmers for Freedom," *National Review*, 1/3/1959, 425, 430; Berger, *Harvest, passim*; "Farm Bureau Policies for 1963," 12/13/1962, HAPP, Box 33, Folder 10

<sup>116</sup> Group Research, "Right to Work"; Lee, *Farmers Vs.*, 263-164

<sup>117</sup> "Right-to-Work Law Will Be Attacked," *Virginia Farm Bureau News*, 12/1/1959, 1, 2, "33 Resolutions Adopted," *Virginia Farm Bureau News*, 12/1/1959, 1, 7, both VFBNA

<sup>118</sup> "Your Grassroots Report," 7/1955



Ganus and a version of the NEP's pyramid, which was used in the *American Adventure Series*, and accompanied him on various speaking engagements.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Untitled photograph, Program for Freedom Forum XXII, 4/17/1961-4/21/1961, both GSBP; Ganus to Glenn Green, 10/4/1960, CLGP

Benson and Ganus' appearance at the 1955 Institute ushered in a period of sustained collaboration. In 1956 the Secretary-Treasurer of the AFBF was a keynote speaker at the Freedom Forum.<sup>120</sup> State Bureaus in, for example, Iowa, Kansas, Pennsylvania and Illinois, officially adopted the NEP films as part of their political engagement programs. In Iowa, for instance, local newspapers recorded numerous instances of Bureau 'fieldmen' showing the American Adventure and cartoon series at events organized by the Bureau and civic organizations.<sup>121</sup> The Illinois Bureau distributed the *American Adventure Series* through county agents, and was instrumental in getting them broadcast on television in the western portion of the state. Fifteen-minute discussion panels, often featuring Bureau representatives, accompanied the broadcasts.<sup>122</sup> 'Looking Ahead' now appeared in Farm Bureau publications in Missouri, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Virginia, Kansas and Tennessee, and often 'puffed' the AFBF's cause – for example, praising its desire for the “economics of agriculture to get back to the free enterprise system of supply and demand” (although the AFBF was not straightforwardly anti-statist).<sup>123</sup> Throughout the 1950s, Benson, Glenn Green, and Clifton Ganus addressed numerous Bureau conventions and meetings across the Corn Belt and the Upper South.<sup>124</sup>

### The Anti-communist Umbrella

Benson's collaboration with the Farm Bureau, like his increasing focus on the South and West, was not simply predicated on a 'free enterprise' crusade. Anti-communism remained a mainstream phenomenon in relation to Cold War politics, but the variety to which Benson subscribed, one which continued to place substantial emphasis on domestic subversion, retained greater credibility in the South and

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<sup>120</sup> "LA," *Plano Daily Star-Courier*, 9/6/1956, 4

<sup>121</sup> "Dedham Serves 700," *Carroll Daily Times Herald*, 1/26/1956, 1; "TWP Meetings Set," *Carroll Daily Times Herald*, 10/8/1956, 8; "Your Grassroots Report," 1/1957; "Fenton Mixers See Colored Picture," *Kossuth County Advance*, 3/5/1957, 6; "Mott Township Meeting," *Hampton Chronicle*, 4/11/1957, 2

<sup>122</sup> "Your Grassroots Report," 1/1957

<sup>123</sup> Group Research Inc., "Special Review, Harding College and the National Education Program," 1/15/1964, GSBP; "LA," *Evening Independent*, 5/12/1956, 4

<sup>124</sup> "Farm Bureau Dinner Set for March 14," *Jackson County Farm Bureau News*, clipping, 3/1953, GSBP; Program, Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation Annual Convention, 11/22/1953, GSBP; "County to Receive Recognition," *Tipton Tribune*, 11/8/1955, 1; "Dr. Benson, Featured Speaker," *Boyd Reporter*, 10/17/1957, 6; "Farm Unit Meet Here," *Lincoln Evening Journal and Nebraska State Journal*, 11/13/1958, 8; "Freeborn Farm Bureau Will Hear Socialism Study," *Austin Daily Herald*, 2/18/1959, 14; "Ganus Speaking Engagements, 1951-1973"

Southwest after the fall of McCarthyism. The consequences of this anti-communism for Benson's ambitions were complex. On the one hand, it moved him further from the political mainstream and towards his later identification as a central figure in the 'Radical Right.' On the other, it moved him closer – for the first time – to an emerging grassroots conservative movement, one that flowered in the early 1960s. More than ever, Benson's 'Americanism' was articulated as the antonym of communism. 'Free enterprise' remained central, but it was increasingly only one part of a tripartite vision of Americanism, one that suggested that the "fundamental factors" at the root of America's unique status among the nations of the world were "Faith in God, Constitutional government, [and] our private enterprise economy."<sup>125</sup> Benson also increasingly emphasized the religious dimension to politics, a reflection of his growing disquiet at the direction of society's moral compass. In these respects, he was part of a nascent conservatism that presaged the divisions of social issues in the 1960s and offered a composite definition of conservatism that constitutes a distinctive, though not unproblematic, feature of the modern right.

From the mid-1950s onwards, Benson was anxious regarding, as he saw it, the spread of communism across the globe. "Communists," he declared in 1954, "are as certain that they shall control the world as they are that the sun shall continue to rise in East. A method of stopping them must be found or they will snuff out all freedom and rule the world."<sup>126</sup> He was also highly critical of the idea of "co-existence."<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, Benson's concerns over defense spending and his ultimate conclusion that internal subversion was at least as great a danger, increasingly distinguished him from a newer generation of conservative 'internationalists,' led by Barry Goldwater, who were more willing than their predecessors to make substantial exceptions to their anti-statism when it came to foreign policy. "We have to accept Big Government for the duration," William Buckley declared in 1952, "for neither an offensive nor defensive war can be waged ... except through the instrument of a totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Benson, speech, "Fall President's Council Luncheon Pepperdine College," 10/7/1958, NMYP, Box 56, Folder "Pepperdine Publications"

<sup>126</sup> Benson, speech transcript, "Crisis of Our Generation," 10/22/1954, GSBP

<sup>127</sup> "LA," 11/24/1954, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 1

<sup>128</sup> Lichtman, *Protestant*, 202-204

Benson avoided this contradiction, but his engagement with Cold War foreign policy was neither consistent nor coherent. In line with conservative anti-interventionists he criticized Truman's attempts "to create a permanent foreign garrison in Europe," criticized prolonged heavy spending in the region, and later supported the Bricker Amendment, a compendium of measures slanted towards non-interventionist sentiments.<sup>129</sup> In 1954 Benson was named on the policy committee of For America, an organization that hoped to combat "tragic super-interventionism" and was co-chaired by Robert Wood and Clarence Manion, two confirmed 'Taftites.'<sup>130</sup> When an *Arkansas Democrat* journalist questioned his membership of the organization, however, Benson was careful to emphasize that it was not uniformly "anti-internationalistic."<sup>131</sup>

Nevertheless, Benson's views perhaps most accurately reflected those of many nominally non-interventionist conservatives, most notably Robert Taft, who attempted to reconcile their convictions with the realities of the Cold War. By the early 1950s, Taft, like Benson, wanted to 'rollback' communism but offered little plausible explanation of how this could be achieved.<sup>132</sup> Benson's stance seemed to rely on the simple idea that the Cold War could be fought and won on a significantly more parsimonious basis. He suggested slashing non-defense expenditures, rearming Germany and Japan, and establishing a "sound program of assistance to the backward countries, [which] should not consist of handouts but be in the form of technical aid and bonafide loans."<sup>133</sup>

In the end, Benson suggested that military strength was not as important as mainstream politicians assumed. For example, he concluded "that American production is *the one restraining force* that prevents a widening of the present conflict into a world-wide struggle."<sup>134</sup> More significantly, he suggested that communist plans for advancing across the world were not principally reliant on military conquests. "Among the three chief factors," he wrote in 1956, "which have

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<sup>129</sup> "LA," 10/1/1947, JDBP

<sup>130</sup> "43 Notables Accept 'for America' Posts," *WP*, 11/14/1954, 11; Perlstein, *Storm*, 10-11

<sup>131</sup> Robert McCord, "For Benson, a New Ally for an Old Campaign," *Arkansas Democrat*, clipping, 1/23/1955, GSBP

<sup>132</sup> Dueck, *Hard Line*, 39-116

<sup>133</sup> "LA," *Waterville Times*, 9/14, 1950, 4; "LA," *Malakoff News*, 9/2/1955, 4; Benson, "State of the Nation's Thinking," clipping, *Fifth Third Union Trust*, 5/1953, GSBP; "LA," *Evening Independent*, 11/6/1957, 33

<sup>134</sup> Benson, "State of the Nation's Thinking"

placed our nation and its way of life in jeopardy, individual apathy should rank first, the Communist Fifth Column should rank second, and the Red military threat third.”<sup>135</sup> Two years later he went further: “I believe that Russia’s chief offensive arm is her infiltration and propaganda program. Such infiltration and propaganda cannot be met with guns and bombs.”<sup>136</sup> In the United States, “fifth column” “trickery” had enabled Harry Dexter White to lay the groundwork for Communist advances in Europe by securing Germany’s unconditional surrender after the war (thereby leaving Eastern Europe vulnerable), while the Institute for Pacific Affairs was created “for the purpose of defeating Chiang Kai-Shek and delivering China into the hands of the Communists.”<sup>137</sup> Moreover, Communists had engineered the Korean War in accordance with Lenin’s apparent ambition to “force America to spend herself into oblivion.”<sup>138</sup>

The NEP’s Forums reflected Benson’s devotion to militant, often domestic-orientated, anti-communism. Herbert Philbrick’s frequent participation after 1954, along with his burgeoning relationship with the NEP, typified this ongoing anti-communist fervor.<sup>139</sup> By this juncture, Philbrick was renowned for his activities as a FBI counterspy, his *New York Herald Tribune* column and the television show *I Led Three Lives* (1953-1956), which was loosely based on his memoir.<sup>140</sup> Philbrick developed close relationships with Benson and Green, and a particularly close relationship with James Bales, a Bible professor at Harding. Although the NEP never employed Bales, he became central to its anti-communist agenda. Bales made many speeches at Freedom Forums, authored countless books on the threat of communism, and shared advice, ideas, and research with Benson, Green and others. His fixation with the ‘red menace’ was so significant that even Benson felt the need to gently chide him for his Chapel addresses at Harding: “Since these kids think you can’t make a speech without a reference to COMMUNISM,” he wrote in 1962, “I’d suggest you fool them and not mention it at all.”<sup>141</sup> Philbrick, for his part, frequently

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<sup>135</sup> “LA,” *Plano Daily Star-Courier*, 7/19/1956, 8

<sup>136</sup> Benson, “President’s Council Luncheon Pepperdine College”

<sup>137</sup> Benson, speech draft, “Major Problems Facing America Today,” 1959, JDBP

<sup>138</sup> Benson, “State of the Nation’s Thinking”

<sup>139</sup> “National Education Program Letter,” 6/1954, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 4; Doyle Swain to Herbert Philbrick, 3/18/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 2

<sup>140</sup> Wilson, “Cold War Patriarchy,” 73-102

<sup>141</sup> Benson to James Bales, 5/8/1962, JDBP

promoted the NEP, while the NEP circulated pamphlets containing Philbrick's speeches and Benson often cited him as a leading authority on Communism.<sup>142</sup> In the early 1960s, Philbrick made a series of anti-Communist films with the NEP.

In 1961 Philbrick was the headline act at the infamous School of Anti-Communism held at the Hollywood Bowl. The event epitomized the degree to which anti-communism had become synonymous with a particular strain of conservatism in the Southwest.<sup>143</sup> The School's organizer was Fred Schwarz, head of the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade (CACC), who had begun to collaborate with the NEP after relocating from Australia in 1953. Schwarz delivered keynote lectures at the 1955, 1956 and 1959 Forums, the NEP circulated pamphlets of his speeches, and Benson frequently puffed Schwarz's Crusade. By 1960, as we shall see in the following chapter, leading figures in the NEP were participating in the CACC's anti-communism schools and the CACC was regularly using NEP materials.<sup>144</sup> The CACC started in Iowa but shifted its headquarters to Southern California in 1956 and opened an office in Houston in 1958.<sup>145</sup>

Schwarz's participation in the NEP's Forums was indicative of the way in which these events provided a point of convergence for a generation of anti-communists who helped to shape the grassroots anti-communism that was emerging particularly in the Southwest. Before Eisenhower left office, Forum speakers had included General Albert Wedemeyer (Ret.), a leading light in the 'China Lobby' and former commander of U.S. forces in Southeast Asia, Cleon Skousen, former police chief and author of *The Naked Communist* (1958), Richard Arens, Staff Director at HUAC and a former counsel to Joseph McCarthy, and William Mayer, an army Major in Texas, an instructor in "Neuro-psychiatry," and an 'expert' on Soviet brainwashing (the NEP had published 3 million pamphlets containing the text of Mayer's speech by the early 1960s).<sup>146</sup> The appearance of Hollington Tong, the

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<sup>142</sup> Philbrick, "Combats Complacency," *NYHT*, clipping, 1957, GSBP; Philbrick to Howard Bennett, 10/17/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 2, Philbrick to Clifton Ganus, 4/20/1959, Herbert Philbrick, "How the Communists Control Thoughts and Attitudes," 4/7/1958, both HAPP, Box 110, Folder 3; Benson, speech transcript, "Crisis of Our Generation"; "LA," 6/18/1958, JDBP

<sup>143</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers*, 151

<sup>144</sup> "National Program Letter," 3/1955, 4/1956, both HAPP, Box 147, Folder 4; "LA," 6/18/1958, JDBP; "Freedom Forum XX Program," 4/20/1959-4/24/1959; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 177-178

<sup>145</sup> Heale, *Anticommunism*, 172; "Christian Anti-Communism Crusade News Letter," 5/1958, GSBP

<sup>146</sup> "Revised Roster of Attendance of Freedom Forum XX"; "Preliminary Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XVIII," 4/15/1957-4/19/1957, "Revised Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum

American ambassador for Taiwan, serves as a reminder of the significance of China to conservative anti-communism. James Bales, in fact, visited Taiwan and interviewed Chiang Kai-Shek in 1957. Benson's long-standing interest in the region was supplemented by his interactions with Alfred Kohlberg, the textile magnate and leading figure in the China Lobby.<sup>147</sup>

A number of developments at home and abroad fueled the proliferation of grassroots anti-communism in the South and Southwest during this period. The Cold War, of course, was crucial. Conservatives lamented the USSR's intervention in Hungary, Vice President Nixon's tumultuous visit to Venezuela in 1958, the presence of Communism in decolonizing Africa, and, perhaps most significantly, Castro's victory in Cuba, which Benson argued would be used to "promote a stronger program in South America, Central America and Mexico." For Benson and many of the anti-communists in his orbit, these events were further evidence of the need for vigilance at home.<sup>148</sup> Benson, like Philbrick, did not, for example, subscribe to the idea that the launch of *Sputnik* necessitated massive increases in defense spending or investment in education.<sup>149</sup> Rather, he remained convinced that internal subversion remained the essential prerequisite for Communist aggression. "They are trying to weaken us financially, economically, and morally," he summarized in 1959, "in preparation for the final Communist take-over." The extent of this infiltration was evident in the fact that "we were persuaded to stop shipment of arms to Batista and thereby assisted Castro in taking over."<sup>150</sup>

With these concerns in mind, domestic-orientated anti-communists in the later 1950s were perturbed by dwindling interest in subversive activities. Benson was, for example, outraged at three decisions issued by the Supreme Court after 1955 that undermined the Smith Act, HUAC and various schemes for dismissing federal employees. The "long series of Supreme Court decisions favoring the Communist

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XXI," 4/26/1960-4/29/1960, both GSBP; "Army Neuropsychiatrist Speaks at Freedom Forum," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, 4/18/1962, clipping, GSBP; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 103-104; Perlstein, *Storm*, 43

<sup>147</sup> Benson, "Challenge to Take Home," 4/10/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 2; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 175; Mao, "Asia First," 55-93

<sup>148</sup> "LA," *Virginia Farm Bureau News*, 12/1958, 2, VFBNA; Benson, speech, "Challenge to Take Home," 4/10/1958

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*; Philbrick, speech, "How the Communists Control Thoughts and Attitudes," HAPP, Box 110, Folder 3

<sup>150</sup> Benson, speech, "Major Problems Facing America Today"

apparatus in America has left our country's internal security shattered," he wrote.<sup>151</sup> These decisions, especially those delivered on 'Red Monday' in mid-1957, paved the way for the success of Rosalie Gordon's *Nine Men Against America*, and helped to turn Chief Justice Earl Warren into a totemic enemy of the right.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, Benson's anti-communist 'guru,' J. Edgar Hoover, railed against growing complacency, and the FBI if anything escalated its war on Communism.<sup>153</sup> Benson remained on the Bureau's 'Special Correspondents List' and continued cite Hoover's musings on the threat of subversion, including *Masters of Deceit* (1958), a key text for the anti-communist right.<sup>154</sup> The Senate Internal Security Subcommittee and HUAC also continued to legitimize domestic-orientated anti-communism, albeit with reduced credibility, as did publications such as *U.S. News & World Report*, a favorite of Benson's.<sup>155</sup>

This was the context from which the John Birch Society (JBS) sprang forth in 1958.<sup>156</sup> Glenn Green wrote the following in a letter to Robert Welch, the organization's founder and leader:

Last night I finished reading [*The Blue Book*]. I took flight into the wonderful World of Hope, after a considerable absence. This morning I tossed my hat in the air with a 'Yipee!' The John Birch Society is a God-send. Your plan is Divinely inspired.<sup>157</sup>

Doyle Swain, another NEP employee, headed the JBS chapter in Searcy, whose members included Green and Perry Mason, Superintendent of Harding's Academy. Benson and Bales did not join, although Bales corresponded with Robert Welch, and had his membership dues paid for by other members.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, an edition of 'Looking Ahead' in early 1960 was devoted solely to praising the JBS and in subsequent years, and in first half of the decade the organization provided a crucial

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<sup>151</sup> "LA," 7/2/1958, JDBP; Heale, *Anticommunism*, 194-196

<sup>152</sup> Schoenwald, *Choosing*, esp. 35-38, 45

<sup>153</sup> Heale, *Anticommunism*, 197

<sup>154</sup> "LA," *Malakoff News*, 7/19/1957, 2; Benson, "Fall President's Council Luncheon Pepperdine College"; "LA," 2/25/1959, JDBP; Hoover to name redacted, 7/5/1961, ELFOIA, Communist Target-Youth-HQ-5

<sup>155</sup> Heale, *Anticommunism*, 197; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 37-38, "LA," *Virginia Farm Bureau News*, 12/1958, 2, VFBNA; Garner, "Benson," 165

<sup>156</sup> Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 62-99

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64

<sup>158</sup> Welch to Bales, 11/3/1959, Welch to New Member, 12, 1959, Perry Mason to Ward Pogg, 4/15/1961, Bales to Ward Pogg, 4/23/1961, all JDBP

outlet for NEP materials, while the Freedom Forums hosted many leading ‘Birchers.’<sup>159</sup>

The conspiratorial anti-communism espoused by Benson and the JBS did not seem to alienate conservative businessmen. Many, no doubt, continued to envisage anti-communist discourse as a means of slaying ‘big government’ and ‘big labor’ and enshrining ‘free enterprise’ as the epitome of patriotism. Benson, of course, continued to connect subversion with the ‘overlapping’ objectives of communists, liberals, and unions. Schwarz’s CACC received financial support from J. Howard Pew, Walter Knott, Patrick Frawley of Eversharp, Inc., F. Gano Chance of the AB Chance Company, the Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, and the Allen-Bradley Company. The latter, for example, gave \$150,000 and paid for a double-page reprint of Schwarz’s address before HUAC in 30 of the nation’s largest newspapers.<sup>160</sup> Chance epitomized the intertwined nature of conservative businessmen and various anti-communist organizations. He served alongside Benson on the board of For America, was heavily involved with the NAM and Associated Industries of Missouri, and supported the NEP and spoke at several Forums.<sup>161</sup> He also sat on the advisory board of Billy James Hargis’ Christian Crusade, was involved in Missouri’s right-to-work movement and was a member of the JBS’s council.<sup>162</sup> The JBS, itself had particularly close links with businessmen. Welch had served on the NAM’s Board of Directors between 1950 and 1957, and many of the organization’s key allies, such as William Grede and Alfred Kohlberg, hailed from similar backgrounds.<sup>163</sup>

Through the discourse of anti-communism Benson increasingly aligned his ‘free enterprise’ message with threats to segregation. “The Fifth Column is today secretly agitating and aggravating the race problem in the U.S.,” he informed readers in mid-1956.<sup>164</sup> Such declarations related to a number of important developments during Eisenhower’s presidency: the *Brown* decision of 1954; the defiant ‘Southern Manifesto’ of 1955; the desegregation of the nation’s capital and the army; increasing Civil Rights activism; and the 1957 Civil Rights Act (even though its

<sup>159</sup> “LA,” *Beckley Post-Herald*, 3/18/1960, 4

<sup>160</sup> *CACC Newsletter*, 5/1958, SRA; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” esp. 326-335

<sup>161</sup> “Final Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum IX,” 3/22/1951, GSBP; “LA,” 2/11/1953, JDBP; “Your Grassroots Report,” 1/1957

<sup>162</sup> Group Research, “Right to Work”

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 68; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” 330

<sup>164</sup> “LA,” *Plano Daily Star-Courier*, 7/19/1956, 8

impact was mostly symbolic). At Harding, Benson rebuked the student magazine for publishing an article that praised *Brown* and criticized the trial of Emmett Till's murderer.<sup>165</sup> The eruption of the Little Rock crisis in 1957 topped all of these developments. Less than 100 miles away in Searcy, many of Harding's students, led by the student body president, and some of its staff, arranged for a signed petition to be delivered to the board of trustees, in support of the 'Little Rock Nine' and demanding that their own institution should desegregate.<sup>166</sup>

Under pressure, Benson admonished the students in a chapel address in January 1958. His scrawled speech notes included the assertion that "the colored in America are most favored colored in the world" and that "educating the colored does not necessitate mixing the races in school." In Washington, D.C., he argued, desegregation and subsequent 'miscegenation' had increased instances of "pregnancy" and "venereal disease," and led to rising crime, deteriorating academic standards, and outmigration from the city. He also invoked religion. "Man didn't make the color distinction," he contended.<sup>167</sup> Benson was not the sole figure within his circle who was antagonistic towards the Civil Rights Movement. William Campbell vigorously supported Orval Faubus during the Little Rock Crisis, Clifton Ganus's dissertation on the Freedmen's Bureau betrayed several racist tropes which still appeared to inform his worldview in the 1960s, and Glenn Green's exploits in the 1940s laid bare his racial views.<sup>168</sup>

Benson's language would probably have surprised those who came in contact with his political crusade. Nevertheless, there was increasing convergence between his efforts and the segregationist cause in the 1950s. This occurred in spite of the fact that his efforts to explicitly link subversion with segregation did not become a focal point of the NEP's efforts. This absence was undoubtedly made in accordance with the calculations that informed Benson's approach in earlier years, perhaps with the added impetus caused by controversy over segregation within the Church of Christ.

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<sup>165</sup> Benson, "Chapel Speech: H.C. And the Colored Problem," 1/7/1956, GSBP

<sup>166</sup> Michael Brown, "Despite School Sentiment, Harding's Leader Said No to Integration," *Arkansas Times*, 6/6/2012, <http://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/despite-school-sentiment-hardings-leader-said-no-to-integration/Content?oid=2276428>, accessed 8/8/2014

<sup>167</sup> Benson, "H.C. And the Negro Question," 1/11/1958, GSBP; Key, "On the Periphery," 283-311

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*; Ganus, "Freedmen's Bureau"; Campbell to Faubus, 9/12/1958, Faubus to Campbell, 10/17/1958, both OEFPP, Series 5, Subseries 10, Box 150, Folder 9; Ginger Shiras, "Blacks Get up," *AG*, 3/21/1969, 1

Nevertheless, as anti-communism increased in the South after *Brown*, there was much greater scope for Benson's efforts to resonate with defenders of segregation. For example, the idea that Supreme Court, the United Nations, or an overweening federal government was doing the bidding of subversives was part of a discourse shared by segregationist anti-communists and conservative anti-communists who did not support segregation.<sup>169</sup>

Moreover, Benson's long-standing efforts to cloak antipathies to racial changes in the language of federalism were wearing increasingly thin. "States Rights is not a narrow issue concerning the present controversy raging around Southern Schools," 'Looking Ahead' declared in 1959, "nor is the need for establishing full State control over State schools founded on any individuals or group's wishes regarding segregation or integration." Localism may have an enduring appeal within American political culture, but it has also often been invoked by segregationists seeking to avoid trenchant rhetoric. Herman Talmadge (D-Ga.), a full-blooded segregationist, selected this edition of Benson's column to read into the Congressional Record.<sup>170</sup>

As the increasing inclusion of racial concerns intimated, Benson's 'Americanism' was subtly transformed during the 1950s. Benson's outward expressions of concern over the decline of religious values and 'traditional' social mores grew significantly and, in turn, were often linked to the threat of communism. As we have seen, Benson's anti-communism was often deployed for its political expediency, but it was also informed by his perception that morality was no longer sufficiently anchored to religious dogma. Americans, as a result, were less able to recognize and reject errant ideologies, a phenomenon linked to the rise of 'moral relativism.' "Religion," Benson described in his characteristically pithy fashion, "has been the foundation in our country for making people want to do right from within."<sup>171</sup> "While there are now more names on church rolls than ever before in America," he told a Lions Club meeting in Dallas, in reference to the remarkable increase in religious affiliation during the early Cold War, "it is also true that religion

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<sup>169</sup> Woods, *Black Struggle, passim*; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 35-100

<sup>170</sup> "LA," 11/12/1958, JDBP; Herman Talmadge, Control over Education, Extension Remarks, U.S. Senate, 6/22/1959, Congressional Record, Appendix, A5348

<sup>171</sup> Benson, speech, "An American Citizen's Responsibility," 6/22/1959, GSBP

has come to mean less and less to more and more people. A genuine revival of religious convictions would do more to raise the standards of behavior of our people than anything else that could happen.”<sup>172</sup>

By the close of the decade, he frequently identified signs of “moral decay” in the nation’s divorce rates, already the highest in the world, which were going “up and up and up” and were linked to the prevalence of juvenile delinquency; “even the heathen teach more respect for parents than is taught in the average community of America today,” he declared. Moreover, he noted that “every year J. Edgar Hoover announces a new crime record,” that America had become the “best market in the world for narcotics,” and that the nation was blighted by alcoholism (Benson was involved with the White County Temperance League, which successfully campaigned to make the County dry in 1960).<sup>173</sup> Benson emphasized that these problems were most prominent on both “coasts” and in “our major cities.”<sup>174</sup> Such suggestions illustrated his continued ambivalence towards urbanization, even though he accepted the decline of agricultural employment as an economic necessity. “We continually need red-blooded men and women from the farm,” he told a Farm Bureau audience in western Iowa in 1957, “to replenish the life of the cities. A man who comes from the soil is better balanced, closer to God. Farmers have always exerted the sanest influence in our nation.”<sup>175</sup> Very occasionally, and only to select audiences, Benson revealed his continued propensity to link such thinking with ethnicity. Rising divorce rates were spreading to Arkansas, he told a Church of Christ gathering in Alabama, despite the fact that the “state boasts a higher percentage of Anglo-Saxon people than any other state.”<sup>176</sup>

Such perceptions encouraged Benson to question the nation’s internal strength, which underpinned its position in the global ‘superpower’ standoff. “Modernism and worldliness are eating away” at the nation’s religious foundations, he told an audience at Abilene Christian College in 1959, at a time when Americans needed to put “their faith in God - not in big government, not in the U.N., not in

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<sup>172</sup> Benson, speech, “Citizenship Responsibilities,” 7/31/1959, GSBP

<sup>173</sup> Benson, speech, “Christ’s Challenge to American Youth Today,” 5/2/1959, Benson, “An American Citizen’s Responsibility”, Benson, speech, “America’s Future,” n.d. [c. 1959], Benson, “Major Current Issues,” all GSBP

<sup>174</sup> Benson, “Major Problems Facing America Today”

<sup>175</sup> “Farm Bureau Officers All Re-Elected,” *Sioux County Capital*, 11/7/1957, 1

<sup>176</sup> Benson, “Major Problems Facing America Today”

NATO, not in a pact for the defense of south east Asia; not in atomic and hydrogen bombs - but in God ... these things might have their place as a secondary line of defense, under God's providence ... [but] a real revival of Christian faith is the only answer to the challenge of communism."<sup>177</sup> In one form or another similar sentiments animated the concerns of many in Benson's anti-communist circle, including Philbrick, Schwarz, Skousen, and Welch, as well as many on its periphery, including Hargis, Bob Wells, J. Edgar Hoover, Phyllis Schlafly, Fulton Sheen, and Carl McIntire.<sup>178</sup> Just as historians have tended to underestimate the significance of religion to anti-communism, so they have tended to underestimate the degree to which concerns over 'moral' issues were in evidence prior to the 1960s.

Anti-communist discourse during the latter 1950s served to 'glue together,' as a number of scholars have illustrated, two often disparate and often contradictory conservative impulses: libertarianism and 'traditionalism.' Benson's increasing emphasis on social and moral issues, which more broadly had receded from the center of political debate since the 1920s, ensured that he promoted a composite definition of conservatism, one that became a distinguishing feature of the modern right. "The quality of self-reliance coupled with faith in God gives a person the only genuine security there is, self-reliance builds economic security and faith in God gives spiritual security," he declared in 1954.<sup>179</sup> Benson frequently distilled this message even further: "American freedoms," he typically declared, came in one indivisible "bundle," composed of "private enterprise," "constitutional government" and "faith in God."<sup>180</sup> This definition was a feature of conservative anti-communism in the 1950s. The confluence of rising affluence and the pre-existing strength of evangelicalism in the South and Southwest created a particularly fertile context for the propagation of this composite vision. As Darren Dochuk demonstrates, the cultural baggage carried by 'plain-folk evangelicals' – a significant number of whom were members of the Church of Christ – to the Southwest contained the seeds of

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<sup>177</sup> Benson, speech, "Today's Challenge to Christian Youth," 5/30/1959, GSBP

<sup>178</sup> Villeneuve, "Teaching," esp. 87-88; Wilson, "Cold War Patriarchy," 73-102; Critchlow, *Schlafly*, 62-88; Winsboro and Epple, "Fulton J. Sheen"; McGirr, *Suburban*, 96, 102-109

<sup>179</sup> Benson, "My Favorite Sermon," newspaper clipping, 1954, GSBP

<sup>180</sup> Benson, speech, "A Challenge to Americans," 9/1951, Benson, speech, "Communism in America," 3/31/1953, Benson, speech excerpts, "Arkansas Farm Bureau Federation, Annual Meeting," 11/23/1953, all GSBP

such a ‘fusionist’ vision.<sup>181</sup> These processes, in turn, challenge those analyses which principally identify the roots of a ‘big tent’ modern conservatism in the work of Frank Meyer and others searching for intellectual ‘fusionism’ in the 1950s, notably under the auspices of *National Review*, or with politicians seeking to diversify their support base in response to the increasing potency of social and cultural conservatism in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>182</sup>

The anti-communist ‘umbrella’ was not unproblematic, however. Domestic-orientated anti-communism was a case in point, even though it did not divide the right to the extent that it would in the subsequent decade. In the early 1950s conservative anti-communists, including Benson, had helped to narrow the spectrum of ‘acceptable’ political debate, but had been unable to utilize the issue as a means of fostering a substantial conservative political revival, thanks largely to liberals’ complicity. By contrast, by the second half of the decade, only conservative anti-communists were focused on the domestic context. The context of broader decreasing legitimacy robbed the issue of its political potency and likely damaged conservatives’ attempts to reach out beyond their own supporters in relation to other elements of their agenda. Benson’s continued focus on ‘liberty’ and subversion also detracted from his ambition to sell “free private enterprise ... on it’s own merits ... to say it will do more for you than any other system man has yet tried.”<sup>183</sup> ‘Fusionism,’ meanwhile, would cause major problems for modern conservatism. The circumstances which made a composite definition appear to represent ‘common sense’ in Southern California, were not replicated to the same extent elsewhere. Where economic and social conservatives remained distinct constituencies, it became clear that friction between them was not merely confined to the realm of philosophical discourse, particularly when conservatives moved beyond a focus on shared enemies and attempted to thrash out a positive political program.<sup>184</sup> Conversely, the newfound exclusivity of anti-communist discourse and the growing connection with grassroots activists located particularly in the South and Southwest,

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<sup>181</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, Nash, *Intellectual*, 131-186; Allitt, *Conservatives*, 158-224

<sup>183</sup> Cited in C. Hamilton Moses, speech, “Searcy, Arkansas,” 4/8/1949, CHMP, Series 4, Box 17, Folder 6

<sup>184</sup> Zelizer, “Reflections”

harbored some promise.<sup>185</sup> These were tensions that would play out in a more dramatic fashion in the coming decades.

### **Education: A Fundamental Solution**

The right's emphasis on education during the 1950s has been greatly underestimated, despite the fact that it provided a focal point for militant anti-communists, southern segregationists, 'free enterprise' aficionados, evangelicals, grassroots activists, and conservative intellectuals. Throughout the decade Benson emphasized that the education available in American schools and universities offered another explanation for the entrenched power of errant politics and morals. Education's pervasive influence also offered a potential source of salvation. Benson's efforts comprised three elements. He used the NEP to promote his views amongst the American public; he increasingly attempted to get NEP materials used in schools; and he attempted to develop a politicized program of higher education at Harding College that would be copied elsewhere. During this period he assisted several other private Church of Christ colleges in the South and Southwest to emulate Harding's relationship with business by developing their own political efforts to promote God and 'free enterprise.'

Throughout the 1950s, schools and colleges became perhaps the most significant outlet for the *American Adventure Series*, and a vitally important one for the cartoon series. By the beginning of 1957, the NEP claimed that 481 prints of the *Adventure Series* had already been sold to "school systems, colleges and universities," while "hundreds" more were renting the films. Moreover, the school systems of several states, including Georgia, bought enough copies to "supply all schools state-wide."<sup>186</sup> Sometimes businesses assisted with these endeavors – in Santa Barbara, for instance, the La Brea Securities Company sponsored the broadcast of the Series on KEYT-TV, and scheduled the programs to coincide with an essay contest on the subject of 'My American Heritage' for high students in the area.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> See, for example, McGirr, *Suburban*, esp. 54-110; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 35-99

<sup>186</sup> "National Program Letter," 2/1956, "National Program Letter," 4/1956, both HAPP, Box 147, Folder 4; "Your Grassroots Report," 7/1957

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

The percentage of ‘educators’ amongst the conferees and speakers at the Freedom Forums notably increased. In 1957, 51 attended, comprising “public school superintendents, departmental heads, college professors” (so did the 17-year-old winner of the essay contest).<sup>188</sup> Benson also worked with Perry Mason to develop a series of high school course outlines, although it is unclear how widely these were dispersed during this period.<sup>189</sup> Clifton Ganus and libertarian economist George B. de Huszar agreed to write a high school textbook in 1957, but the only thing they produced was a long-running legal wrangle.<sup>190</sup> Benson, meanwhile, increasingly focused on educational matters in ‘Looking Ahead.’

Benson’s concerns regarding secularism and morality constituted central themes in his critique of the education system. These critiques had deep roots. In the 1920s, Benson railed against the number of “young infidels [who] are being ground out of the colleges.”<sup>191</sup> Moreover, Harding College’s ethos was underpinned by the idea that there should be no separation between faith and education – under Benson’s presidency students were required to take Bible Studies, attend chapel daily, and abide by a long list of regulations relating to their ‘moral’ conduct. During the post-war era the stakes were raised. The G.I. Bill facilitated the expansion of the higher education sector, the percentage of teenagers graduating from high school jumped from 49 percent to 59 percent in the decade after 1940, and federal aid to education became a near-perennial source of political debate. The Supreme Court’s landmark decision in *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948) redrew the legal boundaries in the debate regarding the separation between religion and education and consequently drew widespread criticism from leading Catholics and evangelicals.<sup>192</sup> William Buckley’s *God and Man at Yale* (1951) collated many of these concerns. As a result, it resonated with many on the right, including Benson, who repeatedly sang its praises.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> “Your Grassroots Report,” 7/1957

<sup>189</sup> “LA,” *Lime Springs Herald*, 7/4/1957, 2; “LA,” 7/17/1957, JDBP; “LA,” *Malakoff News*, 7/19/1957, 4

<sup>190</sup> “Harding-Writer’s Row over Textbook,” *AG*, clipping, 9/30/1964, GSBP

<sup>191</sup> Benson to Claude Fly, 2/20/1927, GSBP

<sup>192</sup> Prendergast, *Catholic*, 117; Wood, “Religion and Education,” esp. 67-68; Williams, *God’s Own*, 17-18

<sup>193</sup> Buckley, *God*; Benson to Herbert Kohler, 11/10/1951, Benson, speech, “Today’s Challenge to Americans,” 3/5/1952, both GSBP

As the decade proceeded, Benson's focus on secular education increased in a manner commensurate with his anxieties about social morality. His critique of the influence of John Dewey's 'pragmatism' epitomized this trend. "Could it be," Benson asked in 1959, that the declining significance of 'true' religiosity was a consequence of "the so-called 'pragmatic' thinking which began to captivate (and, in some cases, capture) influential U.S. educational leaders 30 years ago with the rising dominance of 'Progressive Education'?"<sup>194</sup> James Bales, in fact, wrote an (unpublished) book criticizing Dewey's "instrumentalism" in 1944.<sup>195</sup> More broadly, Dewey was a *bête noire* for the right. By the mid-1950s, his philosophy had become a favored target of conservative intellectuals such as Sidney Hook and Russell Kirk, who argued that "the belligerent expansive and naturalistic tendencies of the [Enlightenment] era found their philosophical apologist in John Dewey."<sup>196</sup> Louis Budenz, a Catholic convert who spoke at the 1951 Forum, suggested that Dewey's influence was "a wonderful aid to communist infiltration in the schools."<sup>197</sup> In the decade and a half following World War Two, conservatives from Hearst columnists to PTA members in southern California, decried the influence of 'progressive education.'<sup>198</sup> The Freedom Forums provided a platform for the articulation of these concerns. In 1958, for example, John Fea, the "Instructor of Public Materials" at the Washington State Department of Education, made secularism and Dewey's influence cornerstones of his critique of the nation's education system.<sup>199</sup>

Benson's antipathy towards 'progressive' education exposed fundamental philosophical tensions between religious conservatives and political liberalism in a more clear-cut fashion than when the right expressed its more general laments regarding 'moral decay.' In the wake of the New Deal, Keynesianism emerged as a hallmark of liberalism, but in a broader sense, it was also informed by the conviction, notably espoused by John Dewey and others, that liberalism should attempt, where

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<sup>194</sup> "LA," *Waterville Times*, 1/29/1959, 4

<sup>195</sup> Bales, *The Instrumentalism of John Dewey*, 1944, manuscript draft, unprocessed material, Harding University Brackett Library Special Collections

<sup>196</sup> Kirk, *Conservative*, 418-419; Nash, *Intellectual*, *passim*

<sup>197</sup> Villeneuve, "Teaching," 207-208

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-208; Nickerson, *Mothers*, esp. 69-103; Lichtman, *Protestant*, 150-154, George Sokolsky, "No One Escapes," in Peale, ed., *Guideposts*, 90-94; Raywid, "Educational Criticism," *passim*

<sup>199</sup> John Fea, "Citizenship Education in the Public School System," 4/9/1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 2

appropriate, to master ‘nature’ through the use of scientific reasoning, expertise, technology, and science itself.<sup>200</sup> Many liberals were not secularists or atheists, but their understanding of the appropriate relationship between religion and society was substantially different from, say, that of George Benson. Debates over education in the post-war era, therefore, constituted an important precursor to the ideological divisions over moral and cultural issues that would become increasingly significant in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, educational issues also helped to create common ground for conservative Catholics and evangelicals who had a long history of antagonism.

Concern over the education system also created a common cause for social conservatives and economic conservatives. Sometimes, as in Benson’s work, or in *God and Man at Yale*, these connections were explicitly made. Sometimes, they simply shared enemies – John Dewey’s philosophy was also identified as a source of errant economic ideas.<sup>201</sup> Benson’s conclusions regarding the influence of economic heresies in high school and colleges were also long-standing. In 1945, for example, he argued that

most of the cap-and-gown folk want America made over ... evolutionists, critics of representative government, malcontents and promoters of European theories have done an amazing job in American colleges ... they [have] smoke-screened the unique prosperity of this world’s most favored people and ... spot-lighted the flaws of popular government and fumed about unfair competition.<sup>202</sup>

As it became more apparent in the post-war era that New Deal liberalism was an entrenched feature of the political landscape, so it made sense that conservatives looked for more fundamental explanations for their plight.

Such concerns were notably evident in disquiet about the nation’s textbooks, an issue that had been frequently debated since the emergence of a publicly funded education system, and which, of course, spoke also to concerns over moral and spiritual authority.<sup>203</sup> In the late 1930s and early 1940s, a series of textbooks published by Harold Rugg became subjected to an outpouring of right-wing opposition, with the Hearst Press, the American Legion and the NAM to the fore.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Cowie and Salvatore, “Long Exception,” 11-12

<sup>201</sup> See, for example, Howard Whitman, “Progressive Education,” *Collier’s Weekly*, 5/14/1954, 32-37

<sup>202</sup> “LA,” *Eastern Progress*, 6/22/1945, 2; “2 Warn of Move for U. S. Rule of Schools,” *CDT*, 5/17/1946, 4

<sup>203</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America?*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-79; Parker, “Harold Rugg”

Opposition to Rugg was part of a burgeoning ‘red scare’ that was derailed by the war, but by the late 1940s textbooks once again became a focus of anti-communist sentiments. Benson, for example, published several columns praising a book by A.H. Hobbs, which detailed economic and religious ‘untruths’ contained in popular sociology textbooks. In 1953 he appeared before the Arkansas legislature to recommend the removal of several of these potentially subversive books from the state’s education system.<sup>205</sup> For the remainder of the decade Benson often focused on the textbook issue.<sup>206</sup> Similar pronouncements abounded on the right. The *Educational Reviewer*, financed by William Buckley, Sr., attempted to unveil the ‘true’ nature of what was being taught in American schools, as did organizations such as the American Legion, Merwin Hart’s National Economic Council, and popular conservative writers such as John Flynn.<sup>207</sup>

Benson’s opposition to liberal education transcended his interest in textbooks. Since the 1930s, Benson wrote in 1955, “some sincere people and some scheming Communist conspirators” had been working “to reorient education in the United States.”<sup>208</sup> In fact, Benson’s broader focus on the education system, and his continued use of anti-communism as a discursive discourse, was consistent with important developments within conservatism, particularly in the South and Southwest and amongst grassroots activists.<sup>209</sup> The idea that American POWs in Korea had been ‘brainwashed,’ which was notably advanced by William Mayer (his study also formed the basis of a film presented by Ronald Reagan), helped to galvanize opposition towards the education system, particularly in Southern California.<sup>210</sup> This opposition sometimes rested on the same idea that Benson frequently asserted – this “amazingly successful” phenomenon, he maintained, confirmed that Americans were insufficiently inculcated with moral fortitude and the ideals at the core of the nation’s heritage.<sup>211</sup> In 1958, Benson lauded the AFBF and

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<sup>205</sup> “LA,” *Rockaway Record*, 8/20/1953, 14; “Textbook Investigation Ends with Book Reviews,” clipping, *Arkansas Democrat*, 12/13/1953, GSBP

<sup>206</sup> See, for example, “LA,” 4/6/1955, GSBP

<sup>207</sup> Irene Kuhn, “Your Child Is Their Target,” reprint from *American Legion Magazine*, 6/1952, GSBP; Zimmerman, *Whose America?*, 81-106

<sup>208</sup> “LA,” 3/30/1955, GSBP

<sup>209</sup> Critchlow, *Schlaflly*, 75-78; McGirr, *Suburban*, esp. 71-75; Nickerson, *Mothers*, 69-102

<sup>210</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers*, esp. 70-71; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” esp. 206-208; *The Ultimate Weapon*, n.d. [c. 1961]

<sup>211</sup> “LA,” *Malakoff News*, 7/19/1957, 2; “LA,” 6/21/1961, JDBP

the Heritage Foundation for launching an initiative to increase “patriotism” in schools and ensure that Americans could match the “zeal with which Communists dedicate themselves to their cause.”<sup>212</sup> E. Merrill Root’s career likewise highlighted these trends. In 1952 he published ‘Darkness at Noon in America’s Colleges’ in *Human Events*, and thereafter remained a leading critic of the education system, publishing *Collectivism on the Campus* (1955) and *Brainwashing in the High Schools* (1958). He harbored a particular antipathy toward John Dewey.<sup>213</sup> Root’s speech at the 1959 Forum testified to his status on the anti-communist right, and came as his popularity was growing in the South and Southwest (where he was included in the circle of organizations such as the CACC).<sup>214</sup> Root also served on a Textbook Evaluation Committee formed by America’s Future in 1959.<sup>215</sup>

Benson’s critique of the education system, unsurprisingly, also ran parallel to the perspective of conservative businessmen. Their interest in shaping the expanding education sector was derived from the same impulses that inspired the post-war crusade for ‘free enterprise.’<sup>216</sup> High schools were subjected to a bewildering array of business initiatives in the decade-and-a-half after the close of World War Two. The NAM, for example, sent 4.5 million pamphlets to students in 1950, exposed 3.5 million students to NAM films in 1954, and by 1956 had trained 2,000 teachers to present HOBESO at their schools. The number of companies sponsoring Junior Achievement programs increased from 500 to 3,000 between 1946 and 1956; by 1954, one estimate suggested that investment in free material for schools totaled \$50 million per year (approximately half of the amount spent by public schools on regulation textbooks), while by the close of the decade one fifth of corporations supplied teaching aids.<sup>217</sup> In the late 1940s both the NAM and the USCOC began sponsoring ‘Business-Industry-Education’ (BIE) days, which typically comprised lessons in ‘free enterprise’ for teachers. By 1955, Chambers of Commerce had sponsored 693 BIE Days, involving more than 300,000 teachers.<sup>218</sup> Benson

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<sup>212</sup> “LA,” *New Era*, 9/18/1958, 2

<sup>213</sup> Root, “Sickness of Our Schools” *Human Events*, 9/15/1958, 5-8; Raywid, “Contemporary Educational Criticism,” 250-254

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*; Crespino, *Another Country*, 56-57; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” 348

<sup>215</sup> Forster and Epstein, *Danger*, 217, 269-270

<sup>216</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 189-217

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-305

<sup>218</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 201-202

participated in one of these events in Chattanooga in 1956.<sup>219</sup> Business made similar efforts to target the college and university system. Beginning in the late 1940s, the FEE and the NAM developed elaborate programs to reach students and college faculties.

The NAM also devoted substantial energy to developing a program to promote corporate giving to “worthy private schools, colleges, and universities.”<sup>220</sup> Private colleges – more than half of which were in debt by the early 1950s – were more dependent on corporate donations and, therefore, were often perceived by conservative businessmen as a malleable counterweight to the growing number of public institutions.<sup>221</sup> In 1952 the NAM began cooperating with the State Association of Independent Colleges (SAIC), a body composed of 39 state-level organizations that helped to coordinate efforts to solicit donations from business. These collaborations often had a political dimension. The Virginia Foundation of Independent Colleges, for example, noted that its successes were derived from its “allegiance to private enterprise principles and its disdain for centralized government controls.” Small, church-affiliated institutions were the most eager participants. By 1956 they comprised 81 percent of the 445 colleges collaborating with the ICFA.<sup>222</sup> The NAM’s efforts were supplemented by those of a group of leading conservative businessmen, including NEP supporters Alfred Sloan, Frank Abrams, and John McCaffrey, who formed the Council for Financial Aid to Education in 1952. The council was instrumental in boosting corporate donations to higher education institutions (it was further aided by a New Jersey court decision, which lifted restrictions on donations in 1953), and concluded that there was a “quid pro quo” between corporate giving and sympathy towards the ‘free enterprise’ system, although there were few formal restrictions on the use of this money. Businesses gave, independent of grants for industrial research, \$24 million in 1948, \$126 million in 1958, and \$280 million in 1965.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Peter Simmons, “50 Tenn. Firms Back Program,” *Afro-American*, 12/15/1956, 19

<sup>220</sup> Hassmann, “American Studies,” 34

<sup>221</sup> “Corporation’s Stake in Independent Education,” clipping, *Corporate Director*, 11/1953, GSBP; Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 193

<sup>222</sup> Hassmann, “American Studies,” 36

<sup>223</sup> Fones-Wolf, *Selling*, 193-195

Although Benson had little use for the ICFA – he had a direct line to conservative businessmen – he exploited industry’s growing commitment to higher education with remarkable consequences for Harding College. Benson purposefully blurred the lines between the NEP and Harding, even after they were technically separated in 1954. Moreover, from the beginning of his tenure, he emphasized Harding as a bastion of self-reliant individualism. Benson also candidly advertised his limited interest in pluralistic education. “Our teachers are too often afraid to leave the path of being ‘academic,’” he told the Foremen’s Club of Fort Wayne in 1954. “To many of them, being academic means not taking sides, not expressing a preference for our system of government over that of Communism and Socialism and Fascism.”<sup>224</sup> This approach informed his reign at Harding. A journalist from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* opened an article on Harding with the following rhetorical question:

Where does an American college today obtain a faculty, which ... is willing to judge economic and social ideas on a factual basis, and isn’t proselyting [sic] for government ownership, planned economy, statism, socialism, or perhaps communism, as part of the daily classroom business?

Neil Cope, head of the journalism department and a ghost-writer for ‘Looking Ahead,’ provided the rejoinder that “we ask only to be allowed to teach the truth at Harding.” “The question of ‘academic freedom,’ which is the first to be raised at larger institutions by professors who are accused of ‘selling’ socialism to the students, never has caused much comment here,” he concluded.<sup>225</sup>

Benson’s autocratic style of leadership, along with his control over faculty appointments, helped to cement the identification of Harding with economically conservative politics.<sup>226</sup> Moreover, as we have seen, faculty members contributed mightily to the NEP, while Harding’s office spaces, facilities, and secretarial services

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<sup>224</sup> Wallace Waterfall, “Foremen’s Club Speaker,” *News-Sentinel*, clipping, 2/10/1954, GSBP; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 89-90; Clifton Ganus, “Interview of Dr. George S. Benson, Parts 1-4,” 2/25/1969, HUDA; Altman, “Contributions,” 79-80

<sup>225</sup> Frank Hughes, “How College Finds Pro-U.S. Instructors,” *CDT*, 1/21/1948, 10

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*; Clifton Ganus recorded interview with author, 4/27/2011, author’s possession; Key, “On the Periphery,” *passim*

were all used by the NEP.<sup>227</sup> Moreover, Benson often invited business conservatives and anti-communists to speak to Harding's students.<sup>228</sup>

Harding's political links had a particular resonance for conservatives and boosters located in the South and Southwest. Clinton Davidson wrote to Benson at the close of World War Two to inform him that Harding should capitalize on industrialization as a solution to the reality that "there are too many people on farms." "Training young men in the problems and responsibilities of running their own business," he added, "will give them an appreciation of the businessman's economic and political viewpoint."<sup>229</sup> A similar rationale underpinned the attempts of a number of businessmen to lure Harding to Memphis in 1945 and 1946 with the promise of a \$500,000 contribution. A fundraising luncheon in Memphis was presided over by the city's mayor and was attended by J. C. Moore of International Harvester, "a leader in the movement"; G.C. Brewer, the militant anti-communist who preached to a local Church of Christ congregation; and R. B. Snowden, a planter from eastern Arkansas. Benson promised those in attendance that "from Harding College they can expect to get employes and future business partners who are not red or pink."<sup>230</sup> It seems that the 'new' Harding was intended to complement industrial development – one report suggested that it would emphasize "manual training and the mechanics of aviation and radio."<sup>231</sup> It was also likely not coincidental that the city was experiencing an unprecedented number of industrial disputes. Benson, in fact, had often spoken against labor in Memphis and his criticisms chimed with the perspective of the city's notorious 'boss,' E. H. Crump.<sup>232</sup>

The transfer to Memphis never materialized and, although the precise reasons for this are unclear, the threat of the College leaving Searcy appeared to encourage

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<sup>227</sup> See, for example, "Evils of Labor Strikes," *Bison*, 4/1946, 1; *Harding College Bulletin*, 7/1948, HUDA; Hughes, "How College Finds Pro-U.S. Instructors"; "Pastors Hear Church's Role in Free Enterprise," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 10/12/1950, 9

<sup>228</sup> See, for example, "LA," *Porterville Review*, 8/5/1948, 7; "Dr. Nyaradi Speak for Chapel Saturday," *Bison*, 11/5/1954; Herbert Philbrick to Benson, 9/19/1962, HAPP, Box 110, Folder 3; C. Hamilton Moses, "Commencement Address, Harding College," 6/3/1965, CHMP, Series 4, Box 17, Folder 10

<sup>229</sup> Davidson to Benson, 3/19/1945, GSBP

<sup>230</sup> "Harding College for Memphis," *Commercial Appeal*, clipping, 7/4/1946 GSBP

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>232</sup> See, for example, invitation, "Luncheon of National Importance at the Peabody Hotel-Memphis," 2/21/1945, JHPP, Box 7, Folder H-1945; "Labor Invited to Benson Talk," *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, clipping, 4/5/1945, GSBP; Honey, *Southern Labor*

local businessmen to remove obstacles to Harding's building program. In 1947 they pledged \$47,000 towards its expansion.<sup>233</sup> At the same time, an unnamed 84-year-old businessman donated \$50,000 towards the construction of a building to house "a new manual arts school," which would run courses to ensure that "students seeking training leading to their chosen trades or to careers in the industrial world will be able to attend a Christian college." To equip the building, Harding applied to the federal government for the donation of \$300,000 worth of tools and equipment, which had become surplus to requirements after the end of the war.<sup>234</sup>

Benson's most audacious effort to link Harding with economic conservatism, however, resulted in the creation of the School of American Studies (SAS), which opened in 1952. It was hoped that the SAS would enroll 200 students on a four-year degree program that would "integrate and coordinate the study of American history, economics and government" and would "give American history, American enterprise, and the American way of life their proper emphasis." Students were to be selected on the basis that they would "eventually hold responsible positions in business, government"; fourth-year students would select education, industry or politics as their field for specialization and complete relevant fieldwork.<sup>235</sup> Moreover, all Harding students would be required to take a year's worth of courses through the SAS, which emphasized, according to Glenn Green, "the free enterprise concept."<sup>236</sup> After 1955, the SAS ran annual summer schools for teachers each year as a means of broadening the use of 'suitable' textbooks and materials, and ensuring that the teachers had a good understanding "of our American way of life" (attending teachers received business sponsorship to cover the cost).<sup>237</sup>

In some respects, the remit of the SAS paralleled that of the expanding discipline of 'American Studies,' which blossomed in the early Cold War. The American Studies Association was created in 1951.<sup>238</sup> The discipline had a complex relationship with political ideology, but conservatives were among those

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<sup>233</sup> "Searcy to Fight for College," *Hope Star*, 11/13/1945, 1; *Harding College Bulletin*, 6/1947, HUDA

<sup>234</sup> *Harding College Bulletin*, 4/1946, 10/28/1948, both HUDA

<sup>235</sup> "LA," *Caledonia Advertiser*, 5/15/1952, 2; "Unique College to Teach the American Way of Life," *CDT*, 9/14/1952, 38; "For Education in American Principles," 9/1950, GSBP

<sup>236</sup> Green to Alice Witzel, 10/13/1952, GSBP

<sup>237</sup> Benson to 'XXXX,' draft letter, 3/27/1957, CLGP

<sup>238</sup> Davis, "American Studies," 353-374; Benjamin Fine, "American Studies Gain New Stature," *NYT*, 5/30/1954, 32

interested.<sup>239</sup> William Robertson Coe, an avid collector of “Western Americana,” whose wealth was largely derived from his father-in-law’s oil interests, was perhaps the most active conservative in this field.<sup>240</sup> His status as a disgruntled Republican encouraged him to spend his money on such projects. Coe wrote to RNC chairman Guy Gabrielson in 1949 to inform him that he was so “thoroughly disgusted with the type of campaign conducted in the past two elections, where the Republican candidate in many respects outbid the New Deal” that he would provide no further donations until the Party spoke out for “Freedom of Enterprise,” for the self-reliant ethos of the “hardy pioneers” of westward expansion, and against the “rapid trend toward State Socialism.”<sup>241</sup> Coe donated money to the American Studies programs at Yale and the University of Wyoming; the former received more than a million dollars from him. At Wyoming efforts to link the program with conservatism were largely successful – Coe was even given a veto over faculty appointments. At Yale they were not. *God and Man at Yale* singled out the university’s American Studies program as a betrayal of Coe’s ambitions.<sup>242</sup>

When Coe died in 1955 he left a large sum of money to Harding, as he did to Yale, Stanford, and Wyoming.<sup>243</sup> It is unclear how much of this donation was used specifically for the SAS, but the purpose-built building in which it was housed was named the W. R. Coe American Studies Building in his honor, while the Coe Foundation continued to assist the school’s activities.<sup>244</sup> Benson managed to secure interest in the SAS amongst a typically impressive range of businessmen. For some, such as Sterling Morton, the SAS offered a welcome alternative to a focus on the ‘shop floor’ as arena for propagating conservatism. “It is my firm belief,” he told Benson in 1951,

that most of the ammunition shot in this and similar campaigns [it is unclear precisely what he was referring to] goes into ducks already floating feet up on the water. I am much more interested in the fine educational work you are doing with young people in the college. I am sure that, over the long run, the results attained in this way will be much more important than those attained among industrial workers.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Davis, “American Studies”; Holzman, “American Studies at Yale”

<sup>240</sup> Hassmann, “American Studies,” esp. 98-99

<sup>241</sup> Coe to Gabrielson, 12/20/1949, JHPP, Box 22, Folder H-1949

<sup>242</sup> Holzman, “American Studies at Yale,” esp. 86-89

<sup>243</sup> “Philanthropies to Share in Huge W. R. Coe Estate,” *Albuquerque Journal*, 3/31/1955, 10

<sup>244</sup> “Harding College, Anniversary Report to the Nation,” 10/30/1962, OEFPP, Series 8, Subseries 4, Box 326, Folder 15

<sup>245</sup> Morton to Benson, 11/2/1951, GSBP

To raise money for the SAS, Benson utilized many of the same techniques that served the NEP so well. He also exploited the broader conservative concern over the education system. “*Man and God at Yale* [sic],” Benson told Herbert Kohler, the Wisconsin-based industrialist, “certainly illustrates the importance of a careful job in our colleges and universities in building American citizenship.”<sup>246</sup> The SAS, Benson advertised, was “a ‘pilot plant’ for education in American principles for other educational institutions.”<sup>247</sup> Benson aimed to raise over one million dollars to cover the cost of new buildings and the operating expenses for the first five years; by early 1952 \$750,000 had been pledged.<sup>248</sup> In Arkansas, T. H. Barton and Hamilton Moses became important donors and helped organize a fundraising drive.<sup>249</sup> In the 1950s some of the most substantial donations came from the Lilly Foundation (\$50,000), Republic Steel (\$35,000), Lamont du Pont (\$27,475), Robert Wood, Monsanto Chemical, the May Company (\$25,000 each), Edgar Queeny (\$16,000), Olin Industries, International Harvester, and Quaker Oats (\$10,000 each).<sup>250</sup>

This money also enabled the SAS to hire several permanent members of staff, including economist Melchior Palyi.<sup>251</sup> In conjunction with the SAS, Palyi produced a textbook, *The Dollar Dilemma*, which focused on the ‘folly’ of substantial aid to Europe and was published by Henry Regnery in 1954.<sup>252</sup> The book’s focus, Benson told J. Howard Pew, was informed by the perception

that many people are keenly prejudiced against anything which appears to disagree with New Deal philosophy. In order to be successful in getting materials into wide school-room use one must avoid directly arousing these prejudices. Therefore Dr. Palyi chose an indirect, but very effective approach ... to essential angles of the welfare state philosophy.<sup>253</sup>

In the end neither the book nor, more importantly, the SAS was especially successful. By the close of the decade, enrollment remained a fraction of that which had been expected and the building was often being used as a regular classroom for

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<sup>246</sup> Benson to Kohler, 11/10/1951, GSBP

<sup>247</sup> “For Education in American Principles,” 9/1950

<sup>248</sup> Benson to Edgar Queeny, 3/24/1952, GSBP

<sup>249</sup> Benson to C. Hamilton Moses, 5/19/1952, Moses to Benson, 5/20/1952, both GSBP

<sup>250</sup> “Contributors to School in American Studies Fund,” 1951, Benson to Morton May, 7/14/1952, J. K. Lilly to Benson, 4/23/1952, N. L. Dauby to Benson, 11/26/1951, Benson to Robert Wood, 4/5/1952, “Monsanto Chemical Co. & Edgar Queeny, Donations to NEP, 1942-1960,” Benson to C. J. Craven, 8/27/1960, all GSBP

<sup>251</sup> “How to End Korean War,” *Breckenridge American*, 2/4/1953, 1-2

<sup>252</sup> “National Education Program Letter,” 11/1954, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 4

<sup>253</sup> Benson to Pew, 7/14/1953, JHPP, Box 34, Folder “Foundation for Economic Education, 1953”

Harding students.<sup>254</sup> It is difficult to precisely ascertain why this transpired, but Harding's academic status and location constituted potential barriers to attracting students, as perhaps did the requirement for all SAS students to "take courses in Bible and ... meet daily for the chapel devotional."<sup>255</sup> On the other hand, along with the NEP, the SAS helped Benson to solicit donations for Harding. By 1960 Harding had an endowment of ten million dollars and had substantially expanded its student body and its campus.<sup>256</sup> Much of the money that facilitated this came from individuals attracted by Benson's politics. The largest single donation received by Harding came from the will of Harry Kendall, founder of the Washington National Life Insurance Company, and a long-standing NEP supporter, who left \$2.5 million when he died in 1958.<sup>257</sup>

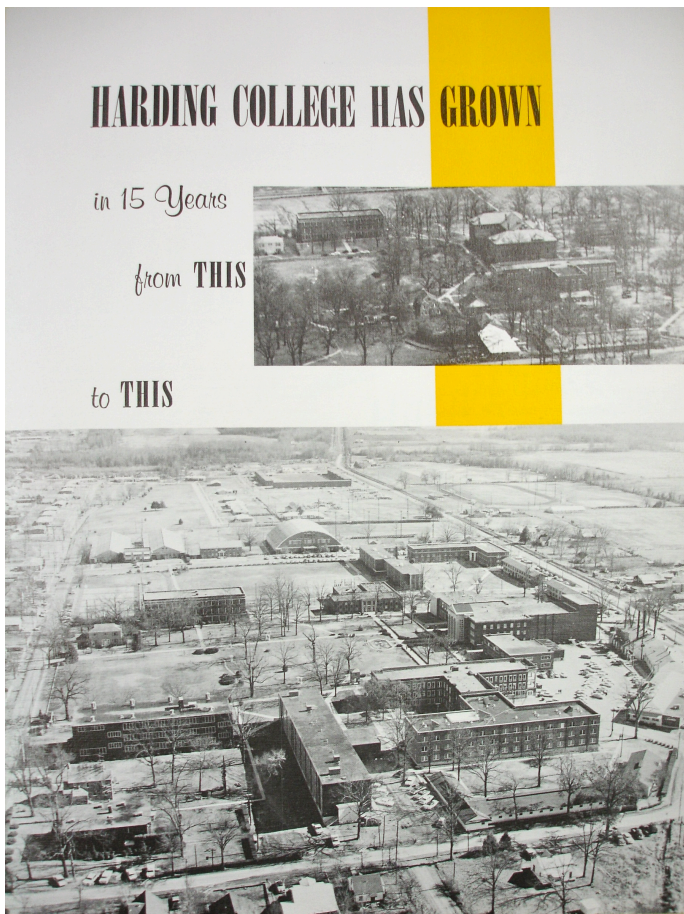
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<sup>254</sup> "List of American Studies Students from 1954-55," CLGP; Glenn Green to Benson, 12/2/1960, GSBP

<sup>255</sup> Ganus, "School of American Studies," *Gospel Advocate*, 6/25/1953, 393

<sup>256</sup> Green to Benson, 12/2/1960

<sup>257</sup> "H.R. Kendall Estate Is Set at \$13,967,227," *CDT*, 6/30/1959, A5; Benson to Harry Kendall, 7/19/1952, GSBP



“Harding College: Its Aims, Ideals, Efforts and Attainments,” n.d. [1961]. This brochure illustrates the centrality of politics to Harding’s identity, as well as the role it played in the College’s remarkable expansion under Benson’s administration.<sup>258</sup>

<sup>258</sup> CLGP

Benson's efforts to link Christian education and conservative politics were emulated by a number of Church of Christ institutions in the South and Southwest. By the mid-1950s Central Christian College, a small institution in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, was financially unstable.<sup>259</sup> Its President, James Baird, turned to Benson to lead the deliberations over a potential move to Oklahoma City, and subsequently appointed him to head the million-dollar fundraising drive. Benson, of course, had the all-important connections with businessmen. With Benson's assistance, E. K. Gaylord, head of the Oklahoma Publishing Company and one of the state's most influential businessmen, became the single most important backer of the new college (Gaylord had previously helped raise funds for the NEP).<sup>260</sup> Benson also persuaded the Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce to donate \$150,000 and to provide a site on the northeastern edge of the city free of charge.<sup>261</sup> W. O. Beeman, a businessman who served on Harding's Board of Trustees, was appointed business manager at Central (a position he had also held at Harding's radio station, WHBQ).<sup>262</sup> Despite Benson's assistance, the College also received a loan from the federal government that covered a third of the \$1.2 million that the premises cost.<sup>263</sup>

The appeal to businessmen, however, was underpinned by the College's antipathy to 'big government.' A promotional pamphlet, for instance, declared that the College "will be patterned after the famed Harding College ... Its underlying philosophy will be based on an understanding and appreciation of the system of private enterprise which has made possible our American Way of Life."<sup>264</sup> The relocation and expansion of Oklahoma Christian meshed neatly with broader efforts to create a favorable 'business climate' in the state. James Baird became the founding president of Oklahomans for the Right to Work in 1960.<sup>265</sup> Gaylord, who was deeply hostile to labor and liberalism, had long used his newspapers and influence to attract industry and federal grants.<sup>266</sup> J. G. Puterbaugh, the president of the McAlester Fuel Company, and another backer of both Oklahoma and Harding,

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<sup>259</sup> North, *Soaring*, 63-67, 73-74

<sup>260</sup> "This Is James Baird," n.d., GSBP; North, *Soaring*, 78-79

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 77

<sup>262</sup> North, *Soaring*, 64, 66, 84-85

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 81

<sup>264</sup> "Let's Move ... Central Christian College ... To Oklahoma City!," n.d., GSBP; North, *Soaring*, 66-67

<sup>265</sup> "Right-to-Work Law Asked in Oklahoma," *McIntosh County Democrat*, 8/4/1960, 2

<sup>266</sup> "Okla. Publisher E.K. Gaylord Dies," *WP*, 6/1/1974, 1

established the Oklahoma Public Expenditure Council (to which Benson was invited to speak) and was involved in the state's right-to-work movement, which battled for a narrowly defeated amendment in 1964.<sup>267</sup>

The college opened in 1958, by which time Benson had been installed as Chancellor, a position he held until 1967. He traveled back and forth between Searcy and Oklahoma City every week in his private airplane. During his daylong sojourns to Oklahoma he focused mostly on financial matters. In January 1958, with Benson's assistance, Central Christian sponsored its first Freedom Forum, at which Benson, Ganus, and Green all spoke, alongside a mix of business leaders and anti-communists that would have been familiar to attendees of the Searcy Forums. The speakers included Herbert Philbrick, Sylvester Petro, Robb Winsborough of the Middle West Service Company, and David Houston, "economic education specialist" at the Kennecott Copper Company. The 115 attendees, almost all of whom hailed from Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas, included representatives from the Farm Bureau, educational institutions, civic club officers and the business community.<sup>268</sup> The Forums continued on an annual basis for several years, often with Benson's assistance.<sup>269</sup>

In 1959, the year the College was renamed Oklahoma Christian College (OCC; now Oklahoma Christian University), the American Citizenship Center (ACC) opened on campus. It was closely modeled on the NEP and helped to cement the connection with conservative businessmen. Baird served as President of OCC and the ACC, much as Benson did with Harding and the NEP. The ACC hosted public meetings, provided materials for schools, established summer seminars for teachers and students, sponsored public events and printed a newsletter that was circulated amongst interested businessmen.<sup>270</sup> These commitments helped OCC to grow from a junior college with 181 students, at the beginning of Baird's tenure, to

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<sup>267</sup> Hugo McCord, "News Release," 1955, James Baird to Puterbaugh, 12/1/1958, 4/9/1962, Benson to Puterbaugh, 3/10/1958, 10/19/1959, Puterbaugh to Benson, 4/5/1962, Puterbaugh to Steve Stahl, 4/5/1962, Puterbaugh to Raymond Armstrong, 5/14/1962, all POCOCU, Box 3, Folder "Puterbaugh, J.G."; Benson to J. William Fulbright, 7/2/1956, JWFP, Box 106, Folder 14

<sup>268</sup> NEP, "Your Grassroots Report," 1958, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 8

<sup>269</sup> Benson and James Baird, joint address, "War We Are in," 2/7/1961, JDBP; Group Research, "Harding College"

<sup>270</sup> North, *Soaring*, 107-108

an accredited senior college with an enrollment of 1,236, when Baird departed in 1974.<sup>271</sup>

While Benson was helping OCC in the late 1950s, he was also developing a similar relationship with Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, whose president, Norvel Young, happened to be James Baird's cousin. George Pepperdine, who was born in a one-room log cabin on the plains of Kansas, helped to establish the College in 1937 after making a fortune through the Western Auto Company (he also donated \$25,000 to Harding in the late 1930s).<sup>272</sup> He gave three million dollars to get the College off the ground and made provisions for continuing support through the Pepperdine Foundation.<sup>273</sup> Pepperdine was a member of the Church of Christ, an economic conservative, and the author of mawkish poetry that extolled California as "the land where dreams come true" and hinted at his identification with the ethos of the 'frontier.'<sup>274</sup> Pepperdine College's success was significantly assisted by Restorationists' prominence amongst the stream of migrants who moved to the Southwest in the post-war era.<sup>275</sup> Religion was placed at the core of the College's identity, but from the beginning students were required to complete courses in the Department of Business Administration and Economics, the institution's largest department.<sup>276</sup>

When Norvel Young was appointed president of Pepperdine in 1957, the College faced financial difficulties.<sup>277</sup> Prior to his appointment Young, a Tennessean, had preached in Lubbock, Texas, where he had also been involved with the local Chamber of Commerce and a Citizens' Bond Committee.<sup>278</sup> Young's politics encapsulated wider conservative anxieties regarding the education system, which were particularly potent in Southern California, and he recognized the potential

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 100

<sup>272</sup> Clark and Bates, *Fortune*, *passim*; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, esp., 66-73

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 71

<sup>274</sup> "George Pepperdine College Bulletin," 6/1937, GPF, Series 11, Box 6, File 1; Pepperdine, *Fortune*; "Poems by George Pepperdine," n.d., GPF, Series 4, Box 1, Item 1, File 4; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, esp., 66-73

<sup>275</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, xv-xvi, *passim*

<sup>276</sup> "Los Angeles to Have New College," *LAE*, clipping, 1937, GPF, Series 11, Box 6, File 1; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 73

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 196-221

<sup>278</sup> Clarence Whiteside to Young, 9/9/1950, NMYP, Box 77, loose material; W. G. Alderson to Young, 8/14/1951, NMYP, Box 90, Folder "Letter Re-Church, '54 + '55"

financial benefits of developing a political dimension to the College.<sup>279</sup> Shortly after his appointment, Young enlisted Benson, whom he had known for many years, to help establish Freedom Forums in Los Angeles. Harding co-sponsored the first Forum, held in mid-1959. Pepperdine paid Glenn Green to help plan and coordinate the event.<sup>280</sup>

At the three-day Forum, which was broadcast on local television, Senator McClellan delivered the keynote address on labor ‘racketeering.’ Benson’s speech closed the Forum, while Ganus, Green, and Bennett also featured, as did Richard Arens, and Howard Kershner, the founder of the Christian Freedom Foundation.<sup>281</sup> The 110 conferees were mostly West-coast businessmen, educators, and anti-communists.<sup>282</sup> The Forum, like those which followed in the wake of its success, also provided a showcase for films and other materials produced by the NEP and helped to boost the organization’s profile.<sup>283</sup> In 1959 Young appointed William Teague, who had served as Vice President for development at Harding for the previous two years, to take charge of future Forums and to oversee the college’s “business relations.” Teague also became Pepperdine’s Vice President, a position he held for over a decade.<sup>284</sup> In 1961 an estimated 1,500 people attended Pepperdine’s third Forum, which concluded with a televised address delivered by Barry Goldwater.<sup>285</sup>

Benson’s fusion of politics and Christian education had an important, if somewhat less direct, impact over Abilene Christian College (ACC) in Lubbock, Texas. Don Morris, ACC’s president between 1940 and 1969, had much in common with Benson. He was militantly anti-communist, opposed to the Civil Rights Movement, and condemned the supposed drift towards European-style ‘socialism’

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<sup>279</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 196-221; Nickerson, *Mothers*, 69-102

<sup>280</sup> Young to Benson, 12/10/1949, NMYP, Box 77, loose material; Benson to Young, 2/20/1959, NMYP, Box 26, Folder “Benson, George, Young: Corres/Sub”

<sup>281</sup> “Senator McClellan Reports to the Nation,” 1959, “Pepperdine College Freedom Forum: Business Men’s Luncheon,” 6/23/1959, both GSBP; Norvel Young to H. W. Morrison, 7/28/1959, NMYP, Box 139, Folder “Morrison, H. W.”; “Your Freedom Forum Report,” 8/1959, NMYP, Box 56, Folder “Pepperdine Publications”

<sup>282</sup> “Senator McClellan Reports to the Nation”; Young to Morrison, 7/28/1959; “Your Freedom Forum Report,” 8/1959

<sup>283</sup> “Senator McClellan Reports to the Nation”; Edward Gilbert to Glenn Green, 7/2/1959, Norvel Young to Benson, 5/4/1960, Doyle Swain to Benson, 3/6/1961, all NMYP, Box 26, Folder “Benson, George, Young: Corres/Sub”

<sup>284</sup> “Your Freedom Forum Report,” 8/1959; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 217-218

<sup>285</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 220-221

encouraged by liberals and the labor movement.<sup>286</sup> Moreover, he persistently conflated ACC's mission and history with the values of the self-reliant 'frontier,' a land "that allowed its citizens to determine their own destiny—either success or failure."<sup>287</sup>

Between 1945 and 1958 Abilene's student population grew from 614 to 2,200, thanks in no small part to the G.I. Bill.<sup>288</sup> By the mid-1950s, however, the college's finances were struggling to keep pace. With Benson's efforts at Harding heralded as their inspiration, Morris and his vice president John Stevens, who later wrote a hagiographic biography of Benson, launched Abilene's American Studies Program in 1957.<sup>289</sup> To encourage interest, a monthly bulletin was published and Morris staked out his position by delivering paeans to 'free enterprise,' interspersed with dire warnings about the nation's future, to Chambers of Commerce, and Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs.<sup>290</sup> The chief financial benefactor of the Program at ACC was the Coe Foundation, but vital assistance also came from the Texas Education Association. The American Studies Program provided summer refresher courses for teachers, summer schools for students, and invited leading conservatives and anti-communists to speak on campus. ACC's Citizenship Center, which cost \$500,000, opened in 1960. As a result of these endeavors, ACC established relations with a wide range of conservative individuals, foundations and organizations, including, for example, the Texas Farm Bureau, various oil interests, and anti-communists such as Fred Schwarz and Robert Donner, whose controversial library of 4,000 books was inserted in the College's collection after his death.<sup>291</sup>

It is difficult to quantify the longer-term consequences of Benson's pioneering efforts to fuse private higher education and conservatism. Certainly, at Harding these connections persisted in various forms. Benson's two successors as Harding President, Clifton Ganus (1965-1987) and David Burks (1987-2013) both combined their social conservatism with a faith in 'free enterprise.' Burks, indeed,

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<sup>286</sup> Hassmann, "American Studies," 7, 44-96

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-59

<sup>288</sup> Hassmann, "American Studies," 75-76

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, esp., 76-82; Stevens, *Before*

<sup>290</sup> Hassmann, "American Studies," esp. 55, 68-69

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 86, 98-207; Abilene Christian College, "American Studies Program, Summer-1961," ACUC

had studied at the SAS.<sup>292</sup> Moreover, in 1988 the School of American Studies was transformed into the American Studies Institute, which has continued to offer a link with successive generations of business funders. The Institute has notably sponsored a long-running lecture series, hosted in the \$2.6 million “Benson Auditorium,” which was unveiled in 1980, featuring a raft of high-profile conservatives including, Dick Cheney, Margaret Thatcher, George W. Bush, William F. Buckley, Karl Rove, Laura Ingraham and George Will.<sup>293</sup> By 1992 Sam Walton chaired the advisory board of the Institute, where he sat alongside the president of Tyson Foods.<sup>294</sup> Walton also selected Harding University, along with two other private faith colleges in Arkansas, John Brown University and University of the Ozarks, to participate in the Walton International Scholarship Program, a multi-million dollar project which brings students from Latin America to the United States to provide them with a grounding in “free enterprise” amidst a Christian environment. It continues to this day.<sup>295</sup> In 1979 Harding’s business department established the Belden Center for Private Enterprise Education, which has undertaken a wide variety of initiatives on campus and beyond.<sup>296</sup> Harding students, meanwhile, have been heavily involved in organizations such as Students for Free Enterprise, which received sponsorship from, amongst others, Walmart and Tyson Foods.<sup>297</sup> It seems highly likely that relations with business have been crucial to the continued expansion of Harding since Benson’s retirement. Harding University now has an expansive campus and more students – in excess of 6,000 – than any other private higher education institution in the state.

Pepperdine’s relationship with politics likewise persisted beyond the 1950s. As Darren Dochuk demonstrates, relations with conservative businessmen facilitated the relocation of Pepperdine from Los Angeles to a multi-million dollar site in Malibu, a key development in a period of prolonged growth. At the same time, key members of the faculty developed close relations with the California GOP and the

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<sup>292</sup> “List of American Studies Students from 1954-55”

<sup>293</sup> “Former President Honored at Dedication Ceremony,” *Harding University Bulletin*, 4/1980;

“Lecture Series,” American Studies Institute, <http://www.harding.edu/asi/events>, accessed 8/8/14;

<sup>294</sup> Moreton, *Wal-Mart*, 163

<sup>295</sup> “Walton Donation,” *The Times-News*, 11/30/1986, 7A; Henry Gonzalez, “Helping Latino students Receive U.S. Education,” *Bison*, 4/17/2014

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 167

<sup>297</sup> Moreton, *Wal-Mart*, 173-221; “Walton Donation,” *Times-News*, 11/30/1986, 7A

College continued to perpetuate an ethos grounded in economic and religious conservatism.<sup>298</sup> At OCU, the ACC's efforts culminated in 1982 with the opening of 'Enterprise Square,' a \$15 million interactive theme park, designed to teach children about the merits of 'free enterprise' through a series of 'entertaining' exhibits.<sup>299</sup> Ironically, Enterprise Square was never financially secure and the number of visitors fell precipitously until the end of the decade, although by then over half a million had taken the tour. It finally closed for good in 2002.<sup>300</sup> Benson, in fact, moved the NEP to OCU in the early 1980s, although by that stage, as we shall see in the concluding chapter, the organization was in a state of disrepair. While the NEP has since vanished, the OCU's Academy of Liberty and Leadership continues to offer a link with conservative business values in much the same way that the Institute for American Studies does at Harding.<sup>301</sup> As Bethany Moreton notes, the wider proliferation of business studies and business administration courses that accompanied the burgeoning relationship between private colleges and business, provided subtler, but perhaps no less profound, stimulants to conservatism amongst students enrolled at these institutions.<sup>302</sup>

Even at Harding College, however, there have been at least some limitations to these efforts to fuse Christian education with economic conservatism. In short, social conservatism has sometimes appeared more firmly entrenched than 'free market' ideology; faith, after all, is the institution's defining characteristic. One dissenting assistant professor at Harding, encapsulated this disjuncture ahead of the 2004 election. "I believe," he declared, "that it is no less inconsistent to be a pro-life Democrat than it is to be a pro-choice Republican."<sup>303</sup> These tensions were evident under Benson's presidency too. In late 1960, Glenn Green and Doyle Swain resigned from the NEP in protest at what they saw as Benson's propensity to blur the lines between the NEP and Harding, and thereby funnel money given in response to the

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<sup>298</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 194-396; Judy Pasternak, "Republican, That Is," *LAT*, 9/19/1987

<sup>299</sup> "Entertaining Enterprise," *Time*, 11/22/1982, 96

<sup>300</sup> Moreton, *Wal-Mart*, 167-171

<sup>301</sup> "Oklahoma Christian University: 2011 President's Report," POCOCU, Box 3, Folder "Report from the President, 2011"

<sup>302</sup> Moreton, *Wal-Mart*, 145-172

<sup>303</sup> "Christian Politics: Left, Right or in Between?," *Christian Chronicle*, 7/2004, christianchronicle.org, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/christian-politics-left-right-or-in-between>, <http://www.christianchronicle.org/article/christian-politics-extended-interviews>, accessed 8/8/2014

NEP's activities to the College. One of the things that irked Green and Swain was their perception that Harding was not sufficiently aligned with the NEP's message and that Benson deceived donors into thinking otherwise.<sup>304</sup> Benson's efforts to correct 'errant' politics on campus seemed to testify to continued political diversity. "I think we need to do a better job indoctrinating this student body and faculty," he told Ganus in the early 1960s.<sup>305</sup> Similarly, Benson privately urged Ganus to "call in a few of your best boys" and get them to establish "a good, strong conservative club" that "would take care of some of these things that appear in the *Bison* [the Harding student newspaper] and elsewhere."<sup>306</sup>

There was no dramatic rightward swing during the 1950s, but Benson's efforts were nevertheless assisted by a more favorable context than they had been at any other stage in his career. His activities also suggest that historians have not yet unearthed the full range of conservative endeavors during this period, nor have they offered an entirely satisfactory account of phenomena already identified. Benson's attention to the politics of economic development in the 'proto-Sunbelt,' his growing moral and religious concerns, his anti-communism, his focus on education, and his increasing interaction with elites and grassroots constituencies in the South, West and Southwest, augured well for the 1960s and 1970s, decades in which the right made more obvious progress towards the political mainstream. At the same time, some of the problematic elements of Benson's efforts likewise portended some of the shortcomings of the right's subsequent resurgence. The limitations to the transformation of the Sunbelt, for instance, appeared more profound when viewed within the context of the nation as a whole. The coalescence of religious and economic conservatism was gathering pace in the 1950s, and in parts of the South and Southwest the collision of rising affluence and religious fervor – complemented by the efforts of Benson and others – made this process appear to represent 'common sense.' But these sentiments still often remained distinct and, at times, were simply drawn together by common antagonisms – perhaps most notably by opposition to

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<sup>304</sup> Green to Benson, 12/2/1960, GSBP

<sup>305</sup> Benson to Ganus, 9/3/1963, CLGP

<sup>306</sup> Benson to Clifton Ganus, 4/18/1962, CLGP

communism and liberal education in the 1950s. For instance, the boosters and businessmen whose efforts often dovetailed with the NEP's, frequently showed little interest in the moral or cultural antagonisms that animated Benson.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, by the close of the decade, Benson's anti-communism was becoming increasingly problematic. It had a strong appeal amongst an emerging grassroots movement in the Southwest, but elsewhere it was pushing the NEP towards becoming an outmoded political relic. As the 1960s dawned, it was this problematic anti-communism that was moving increasingly to the fore.

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<sup>307</sup> See, for example, Shermer, *Sunbelt*

## Chapter 5

### A Shooting Star of Conservatism: From the 'Radical Right' to Marginalization

Is this growing wave of conservatism going to be effective? It is, for it is rallying many Americans to fresh activity ... it is reaching the halls of Congress, for the grass roots are coming alive with this new antidote for apathy. If Washington wishes to remain sensitive to popular opinion, it must sample these new attitudes and viewpoints that are essentially conservative. (*National Program Letter*, October 1961)<sup>1</sup>

[T]he country is not going conservative. The grumbles and growls on the Right do not signify a reactionary counter-revolution ... [T]he great underlying movement in our country is once again toward liberalism. (Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., June 1962)<sup>2</sup>

During the first half of the 1960s George Benson's activities were the subject of unprecedented scrutiny. Much of it was unflattering. Benson was persistently identified as a ringleader in the 'Radical Right,' a new, pejorative and somewhat amorphous concept that nevertheless encapsulated a growing fervor amongst conservative grassroots activists who were predominantly located in the South and Southwest. "What MIT is to engineering and Harvard is to law," *Newsweek* declared in 1961, "Harding College is to the far right."<sup>3</sup> During this period anti-communism became increasingly central to Benson's efforts. As we saw in the preceding chapter, this anti-communism, expressed and shaped by individuals such as George Benson, encouraged the convergence of a number of conservative impulses. In places like Southern California, where the appetite for the NEP's materials was sharpest, these impulses invigorated a new generation of conservative activists and helped to shape the ideological contours of modern conservatism.<sup>4</sup>

For all the remarkable intensity of conservatism in Southern California, it was only partially emblematic of political processes in motion across the South and Southwest. Moreover, at times, the 'Radical Right' resembled a small dog with a loud bark, which was amplified by the echo chamber hastily constructed by its political opponents in response to both genuine concern (not least regarding the potential resumption of McCarthyite politics) and the realization that 'extremism' provided an expedient critique of conservatism. This context ensured that Benson was more intensely reviled and revered than he had ever been before. In the early

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<sup>1</sup> "National Program Letter," 10/1961, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 5

<sup>2</sup> Schlesinger, "The 'Threat' of the Radical Right," *NYT*, 6/17/1962, 10, 55, 58

<sup>3</sup> "Thunder on the Far Right," *Newsweek*, 12/4/1961, 18-20, 22, 27-28, 30

<sup>4</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*

1960s Benson's efforts to yoke his message with the threat of subversion, in particular, were accepted as part of political discourse amongst grassroots activists in the South and Southwest, but they also increasingly damaged the NEP's wider efforts, to an extent that casts some doubts on the work of historians who focus almost exclusively on the contributions grassroots anti-communism made to conservative successes in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

Although an earlier generation of historians, especially the proponents of the 'backlash thesis,' failed to account for the continuity between conservatism before and after the early 1960s, they were nevertheless correct to stress the profound impact that the subsequent period had on American politics. Barry Goldwater's success in securing the GOP's presidential candidacy and his subsequent heavy defeat, confirmed that by 1964 new stirrings on the right were still offset by important limits to the appeal of conservatism. Benson's politics was in many respects perfectly suited to the exploitation of the racial, social and economic tumult of the era that followed Goldwater's defeat, in which conservatives more broadly enjoyed greater success. There was, therefore, a certain irony to the fact that Benson's activities in this more promising context were consistently undermined by his continued domestic-orientated anti-communism, which had been jettisoned by the burgeoning conservative movement. The increasingly sophisticated nature of this movement also rendered organizations such as the NEP increasingly obsolete. This process was accelerated by the death and retirement of many of Benson's long-standing business supporters, and by his retirement from Harding College in 1965. Benson declared that "retirement should be like a vacation which doesn't last very long and is followed by continued work," but he was sixty-seven at the time of his retirement and eighty-two by the time Ronald Reagan was elected.<sup>6</sup> There were two additional problems facing Benson during this period, problems that conservatives more broadly faced despite their general upturn in fortune. Firstly, central tenets of liberalism remained popular, and secondly, liberalism itself developed during this period in ways that strengthened as well as weakened its political appeal.

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Brenner, "Fellow Travelers: Overlap Between 'Mainstream' and 'Extremist' Conservatives in the Early 1960s," in Gifford and Williams, eds., *Sixties*, 83-99; McGirr, *Suburban*, 54-79; Joseph Crespino, "Strom Thurmond's Sunbelt: Rethinking Regional Politics and the Rise of the Right," in Nickerson and Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt*, 58-81

<sup>6</sup> Benson, "Notes Prepared for Harding College Oral History Interview," n.d. [1969], GSBP

Benson's growing success in the early 1960s, like that of many other anti-communists, was predicated on the convergence of long-term socioeconomic changes in the 'Sunbelt' and more immediate developments. The year 1961 was crucially important. Since President Kennedy was sworn in, *The Nation* reported in October, "the activity on the right has been especially frenetic. In widely separated areas of the country, countless seminars, alerts, freedom forums and strategy-for-survival conferences have been held."<sup>7</sup> In Dallas alone there were more than 100 anti-communist study groups, while one report estimated that there were 1,800 'far right' groups in operation in 1961, 800 more than the previous year.<sup>8</sup> Benson had always justified the NEP's value in terms of expanding the supply of 'Americanist' materials, but now he could boast more convincingly about the response on the demand side; in fiscal 1959-1960, for example, the NEP made \$34,089 from the sale of materials, compared with almost \$150,000 for fiscal 1960-1961, a feat it emulated during the following year.<sup>9</sup> On a single day in 1961, the Searcy post office shipped out 97 prints of NEP films.<sup>10</sup>

The blossoming of conservative anti-communism was also clearly evident in the gains made by those in Benson's orbit. In 1961, Schwarz's CACC raised \$1,273,492 – more than in all of the previous years of its existence combined. The money flowing in from the increasingly successful Schools of Anti-communism increased ten-fold between 1960 and 1961, while the number of subscribers to the CACC almost doubled to 70,000 over the same period.<sup>11</sup> The JBS followed a similarly dramatic developmental trajectory. Within two years of its founding in late 1958, Welch's organization had perhaps as many as 100,000 members; by 1962 JBS income, largely derived from membership fees, the sale of publications and the operation of bookstores, was at a record high of more than \$1,000,000. One third of those enrolled in JBS chapters hailed from southern California, as did one third of the subscribers to the CACC.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Fred J. Cook, "Juggernaut: The Warfare State," *The Nation*, 10/28/1961, 276-337

<sup>8</sup> "Organizations," *Time*, 12/8/1961, 22-24; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 267

<sup>9</sup> "NEP Annual Report 1962/1963," GSBP

<sup>10</sup> "Thunder on the Far Right," *Newsweek*

<sup>11</sup> Villeneuve, "Teaching," 8-11, 436-437, *passim*; Smoot "2,000 Hear Schwarz on Communism"

<sup>12</sup> Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 62-100; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 265; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 436

The election of another Democrat to the White House – however moderate, however much he stressed his anti-communist and ‘pro-business’ credentials – perturbed Benson. Familiar warnings were expressed with renewed intensity. Nor was Benson alone in this regard. According to Lisa McGirr, in Southern California Kennedy’s ascent “shook conservatives to the core.”<sup>13</sup> Benson’s newspaper column declared in 1961 that the new administration’s fiscal policy threatened “fantastic” levels of deficit spending that could “wreck this nation.”<sup>14</sup> In similar terms he condemned increases in the minimum wage, the Area Redevelopment Act, the proposal for a National Peace Corps, efforts to bolster federal aid to education, and the (quite conservative) tax cut proposal.<sup>15</sup>

Anti-communism underpinned much of Benson’s critique of Kennedy’s domestic policy, which, he argued, was pushing the nation down the slippery slope leading “toward socialism” and beyond. Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) epitomized “the neo-Marxism in and around the New Frontier.” ‘Camelot’ insiders like Arthur Schlesinger were part of a “dangerous conspiracy on the left” that was “gaining ground,” and which most closely resembled that perpetrated by “Fabian socialists” in Britain.<sup>16</sup> Benson, moreover, suggested the proximity between the administration and an influential fifth column:

Americans should not think that because Alger Hiss was sent to prison all attempts of the Soviets to plant high level agents in the government were then discontinued ... Have we another crop of agents operating around the intellectual elite of the White House?<sup>17</sup>

Anti-communism was also at the core of the aspersions Benson cast on the labor movement. In response to Kennedy’s conflict with the steel industry, for example, he maintained that the only people “happy about the experience in the steel crisis are the Communist nations.” Even politicians in the “socialized economies” of Europe, he added, “would not dare attack their business interests so savagely.” The crisis, therefore, demonstrated that

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<sup>13</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*, 67-68

<sup>14</sup> “LA,” *Evening Independent*, 11/15/1961, 27

<sup>15</sup> “LA,” *Evening Independent*, 9/4/1963, 27; “LA,” *Beckley Post-Herald*, 10/11/1963, 4; “LA,” *Lima News*, 12/6/1963, 19; Matusow, *Unraveling*, 50-59

<sup>16</sup> “LA,” 2/28/1962, JDBP

<sup>17</sup> “National Program Letter,” 10/1961

already the President seems so desirous of labor's vote that he is not expected to deny them anything. An America run by labor bosses would perhaps not be too far away from the state socialism envisioned and espoused by the President's advisor, Arthur Schlesinger.<sup>18</sup>

Labor's wage demands, in tandem with Kennedy's efforts, he suggested, damaged productivity and international competitiveness and therefore also encouraged the advance of communism across the globe.<sup>19</sup> Communists, with this in mind, Benson frequently suggested, were actively encouraging conflict between capital and labor in the United States.<sup>20</sup> Such criticisms, expressed through the discourse of anti-communism, were the warp and woof of the grassroots conservatism of the South and Southwest.<sup>21</sup>

The Cold War, of course, also played a significant role in conservative anti-communism during this period. The 'free world,' Benson argued, was being "gobbled up" by "a rampaging, Godless despotism."<sup>22</sup> In mid-1960 the NEP released a new film, *Communism on the Map*, an hour-long exposition of the expansion of Communist influence since 1917. During its conclusion a globe coated in pink and red ink appeared, with only Switzerland and General Franco's Spain untouched; a giant question mark hovered over the encircled United States.<sup>23</sup> As we shall see, this film was the most significant produced by the NEP, but its success was assisted by a serendipitous rise in Cold War tensions during the early years of the Kennedy administration, because of, for example, the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, disputes over Berlin, and rumblings in Venezuela, Peru, Laos, and Vietnam. Benson's response to these developments, most clearly charted through his newspaper column, followed the same logic that inspired *Communism on the Map*: infiltration was key to Communists' plans.<sup>24</sup> "Without a notable exception," Benson argued, "the United States has aided the Soviet empire in its piece-by-piece gobbling

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<sup>18</sup> "National Program Letter," 6/1962; HAPP, Box 147, Folder 5

<sup>19</sup> "LA," *Copper News*, Bagdad, Arizona, clipping, 6/13/1963, 1, GSBP; NEP, *War We Are in, Part Two*, 1963

<sup>20</sup> "United States Day Speaker," *Flint Journal*, clipping, 10/26/1963, GSBP

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, McGirr, *Suburban*, 54-110, 168-176; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 62-123

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-123, and McGirr, *Suburban*, 54-110, 168-176; "National Program Letter," 10/1961; "LA," *Virginia Farm Bureau News*, 5/1960, 5, VFBNA

<sup>23</sup> Cabell Phillips, "Wide Anti-Red Drive," *NYT*, 5/18/1961, 26

<sup>24</sup> "LA," *Beckley Post-Herald*, 3/18/1960, 4; Benson and James O. Baird, joint address to OCC Freedom Forum, "War We Are In," 2/7/1961, JDBP-HU

up of ... the free world. This is dramatic testimony to the insidious power and influence of the fifth column within the U.S.A.”<sup>25</sup>

When tensions in the Cold War periodically dipped during the early 1960s and Nikita Khrushchev made efforts to “talk up peace” (as Benson put it) or Kennedy made at least rhetorical gestures towards replacing the Cold War arms race with a “peace race,” Benson reminded his fellow citizens that “when [communists] talk about peace they do not mean what we mean when we talk about peace ... there can be no peace in the world so long as capitalism prevails anywhere.” The USSR’s avoidance of a “hot war,” therefore, was simply because the United States had a superior arsenal of nuclear weapons and a stronger economy; “co-existence ... simply means ‘you let me alone till I get strong enough to knock your block off.’”<sup>26</sup>

During the early 1960s the gathering pace of the Civil Rights Movement, along with the response it elicited, somewhat grudgingly, from the Kennedy administration, added grist to Benson’s contentions that the new decade was witnessing substantial political upheaval.<sup>27</sup> These developments impinged directly on Harding College, which desegregated in the fall of 1963. Benson’s reluctant acceptance of Harding’s desegregation was informed by the support of significant factions within the Church of Christ, the student body and the staff, as well as the pragmatic impetus provided by the pending Civil Rights Bill that would likely impose sanctions on federal funding if the College remained segregated.<sup>28</sup> Benson was perhaps also aware that desegregation might not substantially alter the racial composition of the College. When Harding Academy desegregated, for example, Benson confided to Clifton Ganus that high “tuition and fees” meant that “we can probably screen out any [black] applicants and keep a white Academy for several years” (In 1965 Benson even suggested that Perry Mason, the Academy’s head, visit

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<sup>25</sup> “LA,” *Virginia Farm Bureau News*, 5/1960, 5, VFBNA

<sup>26</sup> *War We Are in, Part Two*; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 234

<sup>27</sup> Sitkoff, *Struggle*, 61-184

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, *Reviving*, 270-306; Key, “Periphery,” *passim*; Michael Brown, “Despite School Sentiment,” *Arkansas Times*, 6/6/2012, <http://www.arktimes.com/arkansas/despite-school-sentiment-hardings-leader-said-no-to-integration/Content?oid=2276428> accessed 8/8/2014; Joel E. Anderson, conference paper transcript, “Civil Rights Activism During the Ole Miss Crisis and Desegregation at Harding College,” Christian Scholars Conference, Lipscomb University, 6/8/2012, <http://ualr.edu/chancellor/index.php/reconciliation-at-the-intersection-of-scholarship-and-practice-christian-scholars-conference-june-8-2012> accessed 8/8/2014

white parents in desegregated school districts in Mississippi and Alabama and offer them a segregated education for their children in Searcy).<sup>29</sup>

In the early 1960s Benson spoke to at least one Citizens' Council gathering in Arkansas. A local newspaper, however, reported that "race mixing was not mentioned" and that Benson had focused on communism, capitalism, the national debt, and labor "troubles."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the extent to which racial issues were woven into Benson's wider politics became increasingly obvious during this period. His primary strategy for engaging with challenges to segregation was to invoke the dangers of unraveling federalism and to suggest that Communist agents and sympathizers were creating dissension "between races."<sup>31</sup> The overlap between anti-communist discourse and the defense of segregation was a defining feature of southern politics during this period and it permeated the activities of other leading anti-communists, including Robert Welch, Billy James Hargis, Dan Smoot and Phyllis Schlafly.<sup>32</sup> By the early 1960s, the increasing overlap between race and anti-communism ensured an expanded constituency for the broader discourse, which, in turn, helped to give common cause to a variety of conservatives in the South and Southwest.<sup>33</sup> Racial anti-communism perhaps also constituted another step away from a defense of segregation in favor of racially inflected appeals for support that were made using the more prosaic language of individualism, localism and 'law and order,' a language that could better unify the racial antagonisms that had long existed within and beyond the South.<sup>34</sup>

This emphasis on racial upheavals formed part of the composite definition of anti-communist conservatism that Benson broadcast into the heartland of the 'Radical Right' in the early 1960s. 'Looking Ahead,' which was carried by almost 3,000 newspapers, provided an important conduit between the NEP and grassroots

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<sup>29</sup> Benson to Ganus, 5/31/1965, CLGP

<sup>30</sup> "Benson to Talk to Citizens Group," *Hope Star*, 1/13/1962, 2; Roy Reed, "Benson Tells Racist Group of Red Aims," *Arkansas Gazette*, clipping, 1/1962, GSBP

<sup>31</sup> Mary Hoffman, "Dr. Benson Eyes Reds," *Gadsden Times*, clipping, 10/11/1961, "'United States Day' Speaker Claims," *Flint Journal*, clipping, 10/26/1963, both GSBP; *War We Are in, Part Two*, 1963

<sup>32</sup> Brenner, "Shouting at the Rain," esp. 485, Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 89-91; Woods, *Black Struggle*, *passim*

<sup>33</sup> Crespino, "Thurmond's Sunbelt"

<sup>34</sup> On the history of racism outside of the South see, for example, Sugrue, *Urban Crisis*, *passim*; Sugrue, *Sweet Land*, 3-250. For two notably different interpretations of the development of racially inflected conservatism see Carter, *Rage*; Lassiter, *Silent Majority*

conservatives.<sup>35</sup> Benson's efforts also illustrate how local and regional newspapers made a unique – and widely overlooked – contribution to fostering conservative ideas that were beyond the political mainstream. R. C. Hoiles' Freedom Newspaper chain, which comprised fourteen papers in the Midwest, Texas, and California, provided one key outlet for 'Looking Ahead.' The chain's flagship paper, the *Santa Ana Register*, had a circulation of 70,000 in Orange County and provided a forum for the dissemination and discussion of the libertarian, socially conservative and anti-communist perspectives that defined Benson's politics.<sup>36</sup> Individual newspapers often bolstered these ideas too. A resident of San Marino, for instance, wrote to the editor and publisher of the *San Marino Tribune*, to "congratulate you on your editorial policy and choice of political writers such as Tom Anderson, George S. Benson, Rosalie W. Gordon, and others. It is refreshing to see our home-town newspaper printing such excellent Pro-America, Anti-Socialist and Anti-World Government articles."<sup>37</sup> In late 1961 one critic noted with alarm that the anti-communist "ultras" received support from a host of newspapers in the southwest, including the *Los Angeles Herald Express*, the *Dallas News*, and the two prominent Phoenix dailies, the *Republic* and the *Gazette*.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the NEP continued to print almost 30,000 copies of its monthly newsletter and roughly 1,000 copies of 'Listen Americans.'<sup>39</sup>

Television offered a similarly direct outlet. The *American Adventure* and cartoon series continued to be aired on local stations throughout much of the South and West, as did newer films such as *Communist Encirclement*, a revised version of *Communism on the Map*, released in 1961, which slightly moderated its predecessor's militancy.<sup>40</sup> Television, in fact, perhaps made an important contribution to conservatism during this period, not least because, as was the case with newspapers, local stations had the capacity to reflect regional political and

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<sup>35</sup> "NEP Mailing Report," 12/30/1961, GSBP

<sup>36</sup> "LA," *Odessa American*, 3/5/1961, Ed.1; "LA," *Lima News*, 12/6/1963, 19; McGirr, *Suburban*, 109-110; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 188

<sup>37</sup> Keith Harnish, "Letters to the Editor," *San Marino Tribune*, 5/2/1962, 9

<sup>38</sup> Chalmers Roberts, "Thunder on the Right-V," *WP*, 12/22/1961, 6

<sup>39</sup> "NEP Mailing Report," 12/30/1961

<sup>40</sup> *Communist Encirclement, 1961*, Parts I & II; Benson to Erich Gottlieb, 2/13/1962, GSBP; "TV," *Miami News*, 5/17/1962, 3; "5-Channel Cable TV," *Cumberland Evening Times*, 5/11/1962, 13; "Your Television Schedule," *Brownwood Bulletin*, 12/23/1962, 12; "GOP Group Sets Election," *Express and News*, 9/6/1964, B1; "Sunday TV," *Del-Rio News-Herald*, 10/25/1964, 20

cultural perspectives, as well as the political preferences of station owners and sponsors. Dallas' mayor, Earle Cabell, for example, openly endorsed *Encirclement* and provided an introduction for the film on WFAA-TV, Channel 8 (the executive director of Blue Cross – Blue Shield in Texas helped out by sending a memo to all his employees suggesting they watch the film).<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere in Texas, NEP films appeared on the same channel as Dan Smoot's *Smoot Report*, which was carried on 31 channels in the West and Southwest; in California Walter Knott, the wealthy proprietor of Knott's Berry Farm, paid for advertising to cover the cost of broadcasts of the *Report*, as he did for Edgar Bundy's televised endeavors.<sup>42</sup> Patrick Frawley, the chairman of Technicolor, likewise paid for advertising to cover the cost of broadcasting CACC Schools, while Benson also appeared at a number of televised anti-communist events, including a School of Anti-communism in Los Angeles in late 1961.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1960s, Benson's antipathies towards the education sector gained significant traction in the South and Southwest. He continued to offer strident criticism of a system that, from his perspective, failed to inculcate oncoming generations with 'American' values – the fount of prosperity, morality, and the fortitude to meet the challenge of Communism at home and abroad. "In education," he told the Knife and Fork Club of McAlester, Oklahoma, "lies our only real hope."<sup>44</sup> As was the case in the 1950s, criticisms of the education system gave common cause to a variety of conservative impulses. This diversity, in turn, was reflected by the range of protests – often framed by anti-communism – over textbooks and 'un-American' high school courses, which were particularly widespread in Southern California and Texas, and provided crucial pathways to grassroots political activism.<sup>45</sup> Conservative sensibilities were also challenged by a number of new developments. For example, although it did not elicit near-universal condemnation from religious conservatives until the following decade, the Supreme Court's decision to outlaw school prayer in 1962 – another development repeatedly

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<sup>41</sup> McBee to All Dallas Employees, Memorandum, 10/5/1961, ECP, Mss 16, Box 10, Folder 11

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.; Hendershot, *What's Fair?*, 68

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 58; "Preview of Today's TV," *LAT*, 12/14/1961, A14; *War We Are in, Part Three*

<sup>44</sup> Benson, speech draft, "Looking through the 60s," 1/19/1961, GSBP

<sup>45</sup> Jeff Roche, "Cowboy Conservatism," in Farber and Roche, eds., *Sixties*, 80-81; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, esp. 198-210; McGirr, *Suburban*, esp. 56-60; Suall, *Ultras*, 33-39

targeted by Benson and groups such as the JBS and the Daughters of the American Revolution – helped to stimulate concern over the relationship between secularism and the nation’s schools.<sup>46</sup>

Against this backdrop, the NEP also had some growing success in getting its materials into schools. By the beginning of the decade, NEP films were already being extensively used in Southern Californian schools, but now the San Diego Unified School District placed an order, while the Los Angeles School Board approved the use of *Two Berlins* (1960), another film based on footage shot by Glenn Green, which contrasted the degree of prosperity and freedom evident in either side of the city.<sup>47</sup> Benson was also apparently instrumental in the development of an anti-communist program adopted by the Dallas Independent School District, which drew heavily on material from the CACC and J. Edgar Hoover.<sup>48</sup> The Tennessee and Florida legislatures resolved that NEP films should be included as part of anti-communist programs for their state’s high schools, while the Louisiana legislature designed a compulsory “Communism vs. Americanism” course for its schools, which utilized almost the entire catalog of NEP films, as well as taped recordings of speeches made by Benson and a host of leading anti-communists such as Schwarz, Philbrick, Noble, and Skousen.<sup>49</sup> The National Education Association, meanwhile, received many complaints from teachers being pressurized to show *Communism on the Map*.<sup>50</sup> In 1962, a *New York Times* journalist interviewed Perry Mason, avowed ‘Bircher’ and superintendent of the Harding Academy, who declared that the high school study outlines he had helped design – and which contained material from the CACC – were being used by 40 high schools and had provided a template for courses at hundreds more. Interest in these materials, Mason claimed, was “growing at a tremendous clip.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “LA,” clipping, n.d. [1962], Robert Duncan, “Statement Re Recent Supreme Court Decision Vs Prayers in Public Schools,” 6/28/1962, both JDBP; Drew Pearson, “Birchers Leap into Prayer Fray,” *WP*, 5/4/1964, 29; McGirr, *Suburban*, 159-160; Williams, *God’s Own*, esp. 62-67, 181

<sup>47</sup> Dick Turpin, “Report Asks Retention of School Films on Reds,” *LAT*, 9/8/1961, 23; “Choose Six New Films for Schools,” *Valley News*, 9/28/1961, B13; Philip Horton, “Revivalism on the Far Right,” *Reporter*, 7/20/1961, 25-29; *Two Berlins*, 1960

<sup>48</sup> Horton, “Revivalism on the Far Right”

<sup>49</sup> Zimmerman, *Whose America?*, 106; DeRosa, *Indoctrination*, 189; Eversull, “Americanism Versus Communism”

<sup>50</sup> Richard Kennan to Benson, 5/10/1962, GSBP

<sup>51</sup> Donald Janson, “Rightists Press Drive in Schools,” *NYT*, 1/29/1962, 22

At the beginning of the decade, the NEP instigated annual, weeklong Youth Citizenship Seminars for high school students that were initially held in Arkansas, but soon spread to a large number of states in the South, Southwest and Midwest. They featured Benson and NEP representatives along with Skousen, Philbrick, and other anti-communist and conservative speakers. During the 1960s, district representatives of the Civitan International provided crucial assistance with these events, while businesses in each locale often sponsored the hundreds of students who attended. State Farm Bureaus provided even greater assistance.<sup>52</sup> With the endorsement of the leadership of their parent organization, the AFBF, headed by Charles Shuman, many Farm Bureaus were busy bringing the politics of the ‘Radical Right’ to rural Americans. Bureaus established links with a host of conservative organizations, assembled reading lists, created anti-communist bookstores, and launched numerous campaigns on issues including the content of school textbooks.<sup>53</sup> Farm Bureaus continued to assist the NEP in other ways too. Benson and other NEP figures spoke at a wide variety of gatherings arranged by local and state Bureaus, while the latter distributed much of the NEP’s material, including ‘Looking Ahead’ and many of its films – the Michigan Farm Bureau, for example, showed *Communism on the Map* more than 150 times. Shuman meanwhile spoke at the 1964 Forum.<sup>54</sup>

Conservatives also sharpened their criticisms of the higher education sector. In 1960 HUAC released *Operation Abolition*, a widely circulated film, which spliced together footage of “communist-inspired” student ‘rioting’ at an anti-HUAC protest in San Francisco. For many on the right the incident epitomized widespread complacency regarding subversion and the prevalence of errant ideas amongst the nation’s youth. J. Edgar Hoover added fuel to the fire by publishing a report entitled *Communist Target – Youth*, while anti-communists from Benson to William Buckley

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<sup>52</sup> “Faculty Named for Student Freedom Forum,” *Sunday News and Tribune*, 7/15/1962, 7; “Citizenship Seminar Enrollments Coming In,” *Michigan Farm News*, 6/1/1964, 7; Benson to John Stevens, 3/8/1990, GSBP; Berger, *Harvest*, 144-148

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 139-158

<sup>54</sup> Ganus to Benson, 6/12/1961, JDBP; NEP, “Materials Ordered for Distribution, Fiscal Year Sept. 1-Aug. 31,” 1964, “Little Rock Hosts Freedom Forum Beginning Tuesday,” *Arkansas Gazette*, clipping, 2/2/1964, both GSBP; Alan Emory, “Resnick Hits Farm Unit Speakers,” *Watertown Daily Times*, 9/28/1967, 10; Berger, *Harvest*, 142

proved able deputies in this crusade.<sup>55</sup> Buckley was also instrumental in the creation of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and the Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), an organization that was founded in 1960 and incorporated ‘libertarian,’ ‘traditionalist,’ and anti-communist perspectives and exemplified conservatives’ recognition of the education sector as an essential arena for the forging of political preferences.<sup>56</sup> Anti-communism provided an important continuity between the YAF and the ‘Radical Right.’ In the early 1960s Helen Blackwell, a student at Louisiana State, was shown *Communism on the Map* by the College’s Dean. She later recalled:

[T]hat movie ... was very dramatic because it starts showing the countries as they turn red on the map as communism takes over ... I had known all that but I had never really seen it displayed in such a dramatic way. Truly the whole experience changed my life. I was just suddenly conscious that our country was in real trouble and that most people weren’t aware of it, particularly the people in the universities.

This experience inspired her to co-found a local YAF chapter.<sup>57</sup>

Numerous principals, teachers and other representatives of educational institutions, mostly from the South, Midwest and Southwest, also participated in the NEP’s Freedom Forums, which continued to assist the formation of a shared discourse and cooperation amongst anti-communist leaders and activists. Their role in this regard contradicts Donald Critchlow’s assertion that the emerging anti-communist movement “was for the most part diverse, decentralized, and composed of disparate organizations operating locally with little or no coordination or contact.”<sup>58</sup> In the early 1960s speakers included leading figures in the JBS, including returnees such as Tom Anderson and ‘Herb’ Philbrick, who enrolled his daughter in Harding during this period; newcomers such as Clarence Manion, presenter of the *Manion Forum*, which was carried by more than 250 radio stations and 15 TV stations; and Revilo Oliver, the controversial Texas professor. In Searcy they mingled with other mainstays of the anti-communist circuit, including Fred Schwarz, Cleon Skousen, and newcomers Eddie Rickenbacker, the former World War One ‘flying ace’ and the head of Eastern Airlines; Edward Hunter, a journalist and communist ‘brainwashing’ expert; and Anthony Bouscaren, political scientist and

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<sup>55</sup> “The Investigation: Operation Abolition,” *Time*, 3/17/1961; “LA,” *Beckley Post-Herald*, 5/11/1962, 4; Perlstein, *Storm*, 101-103; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 53-59; Andrew, *Other Side*, 29-30

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 11-31

<sup>57</sup> Klatch, *Divided*, 87-88

<sup>58</sup> Critchlow, *Schlafly*, 69

former consultant to HUAC.<sup>59</sup> Anderson's speech to the Forum in April 1962 typified the increasingly strident rhetoric. He lavished praise on the JBS, and he called for the seizure of Havana, for the repeal of the federal income tax, for Sammy Davis, Jr., a Civil Rights supporter, to be sent to the moon, and for China to be given a seat in the United Nations; "our seat."<sup>60</sup>

The Freedom Forums that Benson had helped to establish at other Church of Christ – affiliated colleges continued to provide a similar function. In the early 1960s Pepperdine's Forum speakers included Senator Goldwater; three European academic émigrés, Nicholas Nyaradi, a veteran of the Forums in Searcy, Stefan Possony of the Hoover Institution, who later helped to conceive the outline of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, and Frederick Von Hayek, economist and idol for many on the right; and representatives of business such as John McCarty of General Electric, Orval Watts, economist at the Foundation for Economic Education, and John Davenport, former editor of *Barron's* and the associate editor of *Fortune*. By 1963 1,500 executives, business representatives, and educators paid \$100 each to attend these three-day events, while the involvement of ex-NEP employees Doyle Swain and Bill Teague helped to ensure a focus on communism. Pepperdine's official newspaper reported that the 1963 Forum concentrated on "the outlawing of the Communist Party, U.S.A, the seating of Red China in the U.N., the Kennedy Peace Corps and its desirability, the merits of the John Birch Society, and the doing away with personal income tax."<sup>61</sup>

At OCC's Forums Benson, Ganus and Bales delivered familiar stump speeches, as did Skousen, Don Fernando Berckemeyer, Peruvian ambassador to the United States (who also spoke in Searcy), representatives of the United Fruit Company and the American Economic Foundation, the heads of USCOC and the AFBF, economist Milton Friedman, Congressmen Wilbur Mills and Walter Judd,

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<sup>59</sup> "Army Neuropsychiatrist Speaks at Freedom Forum," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 4/18/1962, Gene Foreman, "Forum Turns Guns on Fulbright," *AG*, clipping, 4/19/1962, Flyer for Freedom Forum XXIV, 4/22/1963-4/26/1963, all GSBP; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 150; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 207, 302-303; Perlstein, *Storm*, 120-157; Forster and Epstein, *Danger*, *passim*

<sup>60</sup> Foreman, "Forum Turns Guns on Fulbright"

<sup>61</sup> Pepperdine College Freedom Forum Promotion Flyer, 4/16/1962-4/18/1962, NMYP, Box 90, Folder "Memory Book, 1962"; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 220-221

and Senator John McClellan.<sup>62</sup> In 1960, Lubbock Christian College, another Church of Christ institution, located in Texas, launched the annual Southwestern Freedom Forum, which brought “together specialists from all over the nation to share their appraisal of the Socialist-Communist conspiracy.” These specialists included Leonard Read, president of the FEE; Fern Stukenbroeker, an FBI expert on internal security and communism; Admiral Felix Stump (Ret.), Vice-Chairman of Freedoms Foundation; representatives of an array of businesses with interests in the region; Nicholas Nyaradi; and Hans Sennholz, a protégé of Ludwig Mises.<sup>63</sup> In Utah, Brigham Young University, with the Provo Chamber of Commerce acting as co-sponsor, inaugurated its own Forum in 1960, with *Communism on the Map* a central attraction.<sup>64</sup>

The NEP also capitalized on growing anti-communist fervor by instigating a series of more frequent one-day Forums, organized in conjunction with Chambers of Commerce, religious groups, local businesses and anti-communist organizations across the South and Southwest. In fiscal 1960-1961, the NEP sponsored 12 of these Forums. Benson and NEP representatives spoke at these events, while the programs typically featured a number of the NEP’s films.<sup>65</sup> In Birmingham, for example, *Communist Encirclement* and several of the cartoons were shown, alongside *Ten Nations and the USA* (1960), which contrasted American prosperity with the economies of ten “socialist” European nations. At the same event Benson and Campbell gave speeches, as did representatives of the employee relations and training departments of the Alabama Power Company and Stockham Valves and Fittings (both were stalwart NEP backers); the city’s mayor; the executive secretary of the Civitan International; and representatives of local schools, colleges and the Birmingham Chamber.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Flyer for Freedom Forum XXIV; Group Research Inc., “Special Review, Harding College and the National Education Program,” 1/15/1964, GSBP

<sup>63</sup> “Event Sponsored by LCC,” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, 5/4/1963, 8A; “Sessions Sponsored by LCC,” *Lubbock Avalanche-Journal*, 4/29/1964, B1, B12

<sup>64</sup> “Freedom Forum Bares Communist Rule Plans,” *Daily Herald*, 11/3/1960, 3

<sup>65</sup> Glenn Green and Doyle Swain to Benson, 7/22/1960, CLGP; Swain to Benson, 1/25/1961, NMYP, Box 26, Folder “Benson, George, Young: Corres/Sub”; “National Education Program List: Materials/Services,” n.d. [c. 1962], Benson to Erich Gottlieb, 2/13/1962, both GSBP

<sup>66</sup> “200 Get Basic Lessons of Global Fight,” *Blytheville Courier News*, 7/29/1960, 1; Program, One Day Freedom Forum, Birmingham, 8/30/1961, GSBP

By cementing the NEP's position at the nexus of the anti-communist movement, the Freedom Forums also provided a critically important opportunity to showcase and disseminate the organization's materials. During fiscal 1961-1962, the NEP sold close to 1,500 copies of its films, 27,455 pamphlets, and 181 tapes comprising speeches delivered by Benson and other leading anti-communists.<sup>67</sup> The CACC, for instance, purchased multiple copies of the *American Adventure Series* featuring Clifton Ganus, who also spoke at the organization's School of Anti-communism in Houston.<sup>68</sup> At the Schools in Phoenix and Seattle, and likely many more besides, four of the five days began with one of these films.<sup>69</sup> In the winter of 1960, Benson told Irénée du Pont that "Fred Schwarz thinks 'Communism on the Map' is one of the finest things that has been done in the country so far. He is using it everywhere that he puts on a study."<sup>70</sup> The CACC also advertised NEP films in its publications, which likely explained their use at anti-communist gatherings held in conjunction with the CACC at the Yucaipa First Baptist Church in Redlands, California, organized by the Dunlap Women's Club, or at the Seminar for Christian Victory over Communism, organized by the Missouri Synod Lutheran Churches of Greater Houston.<sup>71</sup> Benson, in turn, championed Schwarz in his newspaper columns and speeches, several of the NEP's films cited Schwarz as a leading authority on communism, and the NEP distributed pamphlets of Schwarz's speeches.<sup>72</sup>

Robert Welch told NBC in May 1961 that he was "pretty sure our people have shown more of the film strip 'Communism on the Map'... over the past years than all the others put together." The JBS, he claimed, had showed the film "thousands" of times, a level of support that mirrored the organization's patronage of *Operation Abolition*.<sup>73</sup> Although they were ultimately perhaps of less significance,

<sup>67</sup> NEP Annual Report 1962/1963, GSBP

<sup>68</sup> W. P. Strube to Clifton Ganus, 4/1/1960; CLGP, Villeneuve, "Teaching," 326

<sup>69</sup> Joanne Smoot, "2,000 Hear Schwarz on Communism," *Arizona Republic*, 2/28/1961, 1, 16; "See and Hear," *Port Angeles Evening News*, 2/9/1962, 3

<sup>70</sup> Benson to du Pont, 10/10/1960, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 3, File 102; "St. Louis ACLU Issues Schwarz Crusade Text," *Civil Liberties*, 6/1962, 3; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 420, 438

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 420; Pamphlet, "What Can Students Do?," n.d. [c. 1961], Pamphlet, "Seminar for Christian Victory over Communism," 2/1962, both ELFOIA, "Fred Schwarz HQ-5"; "Anti-Communism Group to Meet in Yucaipa," *Redlands Daily Facts*, 1/3/1962, 3

<sup>72</sup> "LA," *Beckley Post-Herald*, 4/1/1960, 4; Clifton Ganus to Benson, 6/12/1961, JDBP; Janson, "Rightists Press Drive in Schools"; *What Can We Do About It? (The Threat of Communism)*, 1963

<sup>73</sup> Lawrence Spivak and Welch, transcript, "NBC Presents: Meet the Press," 5/21/1961, Scribd, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/54700041/Robert-Welch-on-NBC-Meet-the-Press-19610521>, accessed 8/8/2014

the NEP maintained mutually beneficial relations with other leading anti-communist organizations, including, for example, the Christian Crusade and the Manion Forum.<sup>74</sup>

The NEP also connected directly with smaller, local-level anti-communist groups that were springing up throughout the early 1960s. These included, for example, the Four Freedoms Study Group (FFSG) in Missouri, founded by Dane Smith, an engineer for Vickers, Inc., who regularly attended and spoke at the Forums in Searcy and Oklahoma. The FFSG provided a conduit for the dispersal of many materials produced by the NEP and the CACC. (Smith also collaborated with Schwarz's outfit on a number of projects)<sup>75</sup> In Southern California, the NEP assisted the Whittier Freedom Forum, founded in early 1961 by the owner of a plumbing company after thousands of local citizens attended a series of anti-communist meetings headlined by Cleon Skousen. To fulfill its ambition of bringing "the full realization of the threat of the criminal communist conspiracy to every resident of the Greater Whittier Area," the Forum hosted monthly meetings, published a newsletter, produced material for local schools, established study groups, hosted an eight-week night class, and developed relationships with the local Chamber and local churches. The night classes, which emphasized 'free enterprise' (linked, in turn, to the mythology of westwards expansion) and religious doctrine, relied on materials from leading anti-communist organizations including the NEP. In fact, in the first session attendees were shown *Communism on the Map*, a film the Forum also showed to audiences throughout the area. Ganus, meanwhile, traveled to California to address several events hosted by the organization in 1961.<sup>76</sup>

Elsewhere in California, the NEP's materials were proliferated by two influential organizations, the Orange County Freedom Forum and the California Free Enterprise Association, founded in 1960 and headquartered at Walter Knott's Berry

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<sup>74</sup> *Manion Forum*, transcript, 4/9/1961, OEFP, Series 5, Subseries 10, Box 150, Folder 8; Christian Crusade, "Tapes with the Ring of Freedom," 5/1962 OEFP, Series 5, Subseries 10, Box 150, Folder 7; James D. Bales, "Hindering the Gospel through Misunderstanding," n.d. [c. 1964] and "How to Solve ... America's Negro Problem," n.d. [c. 1966], both BJHP, Box 3, Folder 36; Lienesch, *Redeeming*, 6

<sup>75</sup> "Oklahoma City Freedom Forum Program," 2/7/1961-2/9/1961, CLGP; Program, Freedom Forum XXII, 4/17/1961-4/21/1961, GSBP; James Bales to Howard Bennett, 11/11/1961, JDBP; "Pleased with Seminar in Cape," *Southeastern Missourian*, 12/19/1961, 3B; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 266-267, 382

<sup>76</sup> Ray Fleischman to Ganus, 12/20/1960, Ganus to Fleischman, 1/4/1961, Dick Anderson to Ganus, 2/6/1962, all CLGP

Farm, which Benson advertised in his newspaper column as a Mecca for those interested in western ‘self-reliance.’<sup>77</sup> These organizations were likely responsible, for example, for the sale or rental of *Communism on the Map* to smaller organizations such as the Anti-Communism Study Group of the Contemporary Club, which arranged a showing at the Redlands Bowl.<sup>78</sup> As Darren Dochuk and Lisa McGirr have demonstrated, religious conservatives were often at the forefront of the anti-communist revival in Southern California, and churches throughout the region utilized their facilities and their position as communal authorities to host and arrange countless showings of NEP films.<sup>79</sup> “So rapid was the spread of right-wing activity [in Orange County] during this period,” McGirr writes, “that, in any one week, an interested citizen might have chosen from two, and possibly three, showings of such films as *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition*,” a statistic that does not include private “neighborhood” showings.<sup>80</sup>

As ever with the NEP, its successes were also substantially predicated on the assistance of the business community. In Southern California, blossoming Sunbelt businesses provided many of the foot soldiers for conservatism. Increasingly affluent managers, supervisors and engineers were often prominent activists.<sup>81</sup> In his capacity as a member of the “Watchdogs of Freedom,” Paul Kahn, an employee of the Aerojet Corporation of Azusa, California, arranged public showings of *Communism on the Map*, for example, at a Presbyterian Church in Redondo Beach in 1962.<sup>82</sup> Across the South and Southwest, civic clubs and local Chambers likewise dispersed the NEP’s films and invited its spokesmen to their events.<sup>83</sup> They extended similar assistance to many other anti-communists.<sup>84</sup> Often their input came in conjunction with other organizations, such as the Coast Cities Freedom Program, which was sponsored by

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<sup>77</sup> “LA,” *Beckley Post-Herald*, 10/7/1960, 4; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 194, 215; McGirr, *Suburban*, 62, 98-102

<sup>78</sup> “A ‘Must’ for Every American,” *Redlands Daily Facts*, 8/15/1961, 5

<sup>79</sup> “K. C. Council to Show Films,” *Torrance Herald*, 9/14/1961, 11; “Film About Communism to Be Shown Tomorrow,” *Torrance Herald*, 12/8/1961, 41; “Mothers Club Sponsors Anti-Communism Lecture,” *Torrance Herald*, 5/6/1962, 10; McGirr, *Suburban*, 103

<sup>80</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*, 62

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 81-95

<sup>82</sup> “Mothers Club Sponsors,” *Torrance Herald*

<sup>83</sup> “Communism Film Will Be Shown,” *LAT*, 5/7/1961, A21; “Here Aug. 20-22,” *Florence Times*, 8/13/1961, 3; “Sun Spots,” *Baytown Sun*, 10/11/1961, 1; “600 Will Attend Kiwanis Session,” *AG*, clipping, 9/27/1964, GSBP

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Villeneuve, “Teaching,” esp. 133, 191, 203-204

“leading civic, service and fraternal organizations of 27 coastal cities” and arranged showings of *Communist Encirclement* in California as part of its efforts to stimulate reverence for “God, our Constitution, the Free Enterprise System of America, and the American way of life.”<sup>85</sup>

Larger business concerns were also to the fore in this conservative revitalization. The *San Diego Tribune* published a series of articles on Benson’s growing influence in 1961, noting that “leaders in the anti-communism movement look to Benson and N.E.P. for much of their material ... many believe Benson’s efforts have helped generate the current anti-Communist campaign.”<sup>86</sup> The *Tribune* was well qualified to make such an assertion, given the activities of the paper and its parent company, the Copley chain, which owned 16 titles in California and Illinois. Paul Terry, a retired Naval Commander from Arkansas, who worked at the *San Diego Union*, was the key link between Copley and the NEP.<sup>87</sup> Terry, whom Copley described as its ‘director of education,’ suggested that the American press had “surrendered to the traitors in our midst.”<sup>88</sup> Terry attended his first Freedom Forum in Searcy in April 1960. By the autumn he had purchased a full set of the cartoons and 25 prints of *Communism on the Map*, which, along with *Communist Accent on Youth*, one of a series of films produced at Pepperdine in the early 1960s, were shown to Copley employees and to the public in the areas where the company’s newspapers circulated.<sup>89</sup> Terry often collaborated with the NEP to host one-day Forums. In Aurora, Illinois, in 1961 and 1962, for example, he spoke alongside Benson and other anti-communists to audiences in excess of 1,000.<sup>90</sup> Terry also encouraged schools and businesses in San Diego to purchase NEP materials, became heavily involved with Freedoms Foundation, and assisted the CACC by providing free advertisements in the *Union* and chairing its San Diego School.<sup>91</sup> Benson, for his

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<sup>85</sup> “Now Is the Time...,” *LAT*, 9/24/1961, WS4

<sup>86</sup> Reprint, “Special Report from the Evening Tribune,” 7/1961, GSBP

<sup>87</sup> Villeneuve, “Teaching,” 344-345; Paul Terry to Orval Faubus, 11/6/1962, OEFP, Series 8, Subseries 4, Box 326, Folder 15

<sup>88</sup> Chalmers Roberts, “Thunder on the Right – V,” *WP*, 12/22/1961, 6

<sup>89</sup> “Revised Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXI,” 4/26/1960-4/29/1960, GSBP; Glenn Green and Doyle Swain to Benson, 7/22/1960, CLGP; “Purpose of the Film Series “Crisis for Americas,” n.d. [c. 1961], NMYP, Box 90, Folder “Gov. Reagan”

<sup>90</sup> Terry to Edward Rickenbacker, 6/5/1962, W. P. Burns to Marguerite Shepard, 9/25/1962, both EVRP, Box 30, Folder “Invitations Accepted, A-L-1962”

<sup>91</sup> Terry to Glenn Green, 6/23/1960, Green and Swain to Benson, 7/22/1960 both CLGP; Villeneuve, 344-346

part, used his newspaper column to laud Copley for its “outstanding” contribution to “bringing about a greater appreciation of the American way of life and alerting its communities to the true nature of the communist conspiracy.”<sup>92</sup>

Expanding businesses from the ‘proto-Sunbelt’ South and Southwest, hailing from many of the same industries as those discussed in the preceding chapter, continued to send executives and public and industrial relations experts to the Freedom Forums in Searcy. Leading representatives of industry, business-orientated economists and anti-labor spokesmen continued to deliver many of the keynote addresses. These included, for example, Lemuel Boulware, John McCarty, Howard Kershner, Leo Teplow, industrial relations consultant to the Iron and Steel Institute, and William Grede, JBS founder member, founder of Grede Foundries and a former NAM President.<sup>93</sup> Boeing, a company with defense contracts worth more than a billion dollars, sent representatives from its operations in Seattle and Wichita, Kansas. Boeing’s training director in Wichita, brought Glenn Green to speak at a day-long seminar, and bought multiple copies of *Communism on the Map*, which were shown to church groups, employees, and civic clubs; in one month in the fall of 1960 the audience for these showings was in excess of 5,000. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in February 1961 that Boeing’s Seattle operation had shown their own copies more than 200 times and were fully booked until the summer.<sup>94</sup> In fact, numerous companies that sent representatives to the Forums, or had a history of supporting the NEP, provided outlets for the film. These included Puget Sound Power & Light, Goodyear, Alcoa, Jones and Laughlin Steel, Revere Copper and Brass, Texas Power and Light, Schick Safety Razor, Ohio Bell Telephone, and North American Aviation.<sup>95</sup> Nor was business’ assistance confined to films made by the NEP. Coast Federal Savings and Loan in California arranged over one hundred

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.; Terry to Rickenbacker, 6/5/1962; “LA,” *Aspermont Star*, 10/27/1960, Ed. 1

<sup>93</sup> “Freedom Forum at Searcy Told of ‘Pitfalls’ Facing U.S.,” *AG*, 4/27/1960, 6; “Revised Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXI,” Program: Freedom Forum XXII, “Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXII,” 4/18/1961-4/21/1961, “Final Roster of Attendance, Freedom Forum XXIII,” 4/16/1962-4/20/1962, “Final Roster of Attendance and Mailing Addresses, Freedom Forum XXIV,” 4/22/1963-4/26/1963, all GSBP; “National Program Letter,” 3/1964, OEFP, Series 5, Subseries 10, Box 150, Folder 9

<sup>94</sup> Ira Smith to Glenn Green, 9/13/1960, Benson to Irénée du Pont, 10/10/1960, both IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 3, File 102; “Anti-Communist Films Stir Nationwide Storm,” *LAT*, 2/26/1961, C1; “Roster of Attendance at Freedom Forum XXII; “Final Roster of Attendance, Freedom Forum XXIII”; Cook, “Juggernaut”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.; Dudley Lynch, “America’s Right-Wing Propaganda Center,” *Texas Observer*, 1/23/1970, 1-6

showings per month of films such as Pepperdine's *Communist Accent* and HUAC's *Operation Abolition* for its employees.<sup>96</sup> The CACC and JBS, along with smaller anti-communist organizations, also continued to rely heavily on the patronage of small and large businesses.<sup>97</sup>

Many of these businesses profited handsomely, either directly or indirectly, from the massive investment in defense infrastructure in the Sunbelt since the outbreak of World War Two. This investment, however, encouraged another, less heralded, contributant to the growth of conservatism: the military itself. In 1958 the National Security Council issued a directive designed to facilitate the efforts of "military personnel and facilities to arouse the public 'to the menace of the cold war.'" It produced a relatively *ad hoc* series of initiatives, a substantial number of which involved anti-communist conservatives.<sup>98</sup> One important collaborator was Vice Admiral Robert Goldthwaite who, as one exposé of the 'Radical Right' concluded, "conducted a virtual one man crusade for right wing extremism from coast to coast."<sup>99</sup> Goldthwaite was stationed in Pensacola, Florida, and had 150,000 naval airmen under his command. Hyper-patriotism, concerns over moral decay (rooted in religious fervor), and faith in 'free enterprise' informed his convictions regarding the "evils of communism."<sup>100</sup> The NEP worked closely with Goldthwaite, Vice-Admiral Walter Schindler (Ret.), and the Navy League to develop 'Project Alert,' a series of what might be best described as anti-communist revival meetings, often featuring leading anti-communist speakers, including Benson, Green, Campbell, Ganus, Rickenbacker and Skousen, and hosted in conjunction with local civic clubs, businesses, patriotic societies, and religious groups. Within its first year 520 meetings had been held. By 1962 there were one hundred Project Alert committees, mostly in the South and Southwest, which often used NEP films and materials. In Pensacola, the Project's planning committee, including Goldthwaite and his staff, regularly flew to Searcy to train with Ganus and Green, who designed the program for the initial two-day seminar and a series of follow-up meetings. The

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<sup>96</sup> Hendershot, *What's Fair?*, 60-61

<sup>97</sup> Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 62-99; Villeneuve, "Teaching," *passim*

<sup>98</sup> Perlstein, *Storm*, 146; Bogle, *Pentagon's*, 136-137, 143-145; Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed," in Bell, ed., *Radical*, 5-6

<sup>99</sup> Suall, *Ultras*, 23

<sup>100</sup> Bogle, *Pentagon's*, 149-150

Pensacola Project was sponsored by businesses such as Gulf Power, the Chemstrand Corporation and Sherrill Oil (the former two also sent representatives to the Forums in Searcy). In addition to sponsoring speaking engagements and showing anti-communist films, it orchestrated campaigns to change the state's education system (with assistance from civic clubs and church groups). An extensive "library" of NEP materials, Green and Swain reported in the summer of 1960, had been purchased and was "in wide usage in Pensacola and throughout the Gulf Coast area."<sup>101</sup>

The degree to which individual Project committees acted in a concerted manner is unclear, but they often collaborated with other anti-communist organizations, most notably the CACC.<sup>102</sup> In late 1961 in Los Angeles, for instance, Benson appeared at a School of Anti-communism, sponsored by the local Project committee, but modeled after the CACC's schools. The event also featured Bella Dodd, ex-CPUSA member; Robert Morris, President of the University of Dallas, former chief counsel of the SISS, and a former naval intelligence reserve officer; actor John Wayne; Cleon Skousen; and a number of military figures, including Rear Admiral Chester Ward (ret.), the head of the American Security Council (ASC), Admiral Felix Stump, another member of the ASC, and Colonel Mitchell Paige (ret.). Paige requested that the audience forget the clamor to have Earl Warren impeached – "a more deserving punishment would be hanging."<sup>103</sup>

The collaboration between the Navy and the anti-communist right stretched well beyond Project Alert. Robert Goldthwaite, for example, used the Navy League, the Naval Air Training Command (NATC), and "the civilian communities with which we have contact," to spread the NEP's materials. By the summer of 1960, the NATC had sent 65 "top officers," "commanding Admirals and their top staffs" to Searcy to collect NEP materials and receive training.<sup>104</sup> In October Benson boasted to Edgar Queeny that the Navy "is giving [*Communism on the Map*] very wide

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<sup>101</sup> Green and Swain to Benson, 7/22/1960; "Sarasotans Urged to Be 'Alert,'" clipping, n.d. [1960] JDBP; "Map Turns Red," *Hattiesburg American*, 3/22/1961, 8A; "Red Subversion Seminar Topic," *El Paso Post Herald*, 3/28/1961, 6; "Repudiate Communism, 'Project Alert' Speaker Urges," *Illinois State Register*, clipping, 9/26/1961, "Searcians Speak at Seminar," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 4/3/1962, both GSBP; "'Alert' Repudiates Hang Warren" Blast," *WP*, 12/14/1961, 12; Bogle, *Pentagon's*, esp. 150, 156-158; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 415-418, 435

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 415-418; Bogle, *Pentagon's*, 156-16

<sup>103</sup> "'Alert' Repudiates," *WP*; "Preview of Today's TV," *LAT*, 12/14/1961, A14; Bell, "Dispossessed,"

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<sup>104</sup> Green and Swain to Benson, 7/22/1960, CLGP

distribution on both home and foreign naval bases and they are also giving a lot of encouragement in the various communities where there are naval bases”; one estimate suggested that they purchased at least 50 copies, which were used by naval representatives throughout the South and Southwest.<sup>105</sup>

In August 1960 the Glenview Naval Air Station in Chicago’s affluent north shore area sponsored a five-day School of Anti-communism, featuring *Communism on the Map*, as well as speakers such as Richard Arens, Philbrick and Schwarz. The School was bolstered by an official endorsement by the JBS and sponsorship for some of the more than 2,000 attendees was provided by the local Chamber and Rotary Club, and companies such as General Electric and Sears, Roebuck.<sup>106</sup> A similar event took place in San Diego early the following year. There the Navy helped to facilitate a one-day Freedom Forum by providing attendees, advertising the event, and sending a vice admiral and a rear admiral to address the crowds, alongside Benson, Ganus, Edward Peterson, Kenneth Wells, William Fort, education director of the CFEA, and William Sullivan, a leading figure in the FBI.<sup>107</sup> In the Pacific Northwest Captain Kenneth Sanger, commandant of the Sand Naval Air Station, made frequent use of NEP materials, including *Communism on the Map*, in his campaign against “militantly atheistic, communistic, Soviet imperialism, and our own materialism.”<sup>108</sup> These activities were, in fact, indicative of a remarkably widespread pattern of collaboration with the anti-communist right; the CACC had a perhaps especially close relationship with the Navy.<sup>109</sup>

The Navy seemed most active, but the NEP also worked alongside other representatives of the armed forces during this period.<sup>110</sup> In 1959 Ganus was invited to Wright-Paterson Air Force Base, the headquarters of Air Materiel Command (AMC), where copies of the *American Adventure Series* were already being deployed as part of a program aimed at ensuring that AMC members and civilians in the

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.; Benson to Queeny, 10/24/1960, MCR, Series 14, Box 17, Folder “Queeny, EM - Correspondence, Harding College”; Murray Illson, “Norman Thomas Hits Birch Group,” *NYT*, 4/20/1961, 19

<sup>106</sup> Robert Welch to Fred Schwarz, 9/6/1960, HAPP, Box 121, Folder 7; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” 346-352

<sup>107</sup> Suall, *American Ultras*, 21-22

<sup>108</sup> Cook, “Juggernaut”; Bogle, *Pentagon’s*, 148-149

<sup>109</sup> Villeneuve, “Teaching,” *passim*; Suall, *American Ultras*, *passim*

<sup>110</sup> “Reading of Memorandum Submitted to Department of Defense on Propaganda Activities of Military Personnel,” U.S. Senate, 87th Congress, Congressional Record, 107, Part 11, 14433-39, 8/2/1961; “Thunder on the Far Right,” *Newsweek*; Bogle, *Pentagon’s*, 133-163

vicinity were exposed to the truth about “the ism that threatens our way of life.” By early 1960, Ganus’ contacts at Wright-Paterson had arranged a paid touring itinerary taking in similar events at Air Force bases in eight states, as well as at AMC’s Ballistic Missile Center in Englewood, California.<sup>111</sup> Leading figures in AMC, in turn, attended and spoke at the 1961 Forum in Searcy, while the NEP’s inaugural one-day Forum was held at the Blytheville Air Force Base in Arkansas, in conjunction with the Arkansas-Missouri Power Company and the local Chamber of Commerce.<sup>112</sup> Army representatives spoke at Project Alert events and Freedom Forums, while veterans in the American Legion, as they had done for decades, lent substantial assistance to the NEP, for example, by arranging showings of *Communism on the Map* “throughout” Mississippi.<sup>113</sup> In fact, as McGirr illustrates, in California, retired military officers and locally stationed military personnel were often keen participants in grassroots anti-communist activities.<sup>114</sup>

The NEP’s relationship with the military, however, also elicited substantial and consequential criticism. In the spring of 1961, Benson and Ganus participated in a ‘Strategy for Survival’ program in Arkansas, which was coordinated by Major General William Bullock. With encouragement from the Arkansas National Guard and the Armed Services Committee of the Little Rock Chamber, thousands gathered in Fort Smith, Little Rock, and Fayetteville over two consecutive days to hear Benson, Ganus, Robert Morris, and Brigadier General Clyde Watts. In Fort Smith Ganus, who was flown between venues at the Navy’s expense, reportedly declared that local Congressman J. W. Trimble “has voted eighty-nine percent of the time to aid and abet the Communist Party” (Harding and the NEP refuted this allegation).<sup>115</sup> Senator William Fulbright (D-Ark.) was alarmed. His aide, Jack Yingling – a graduate of Harding College – drafted an investigative report into the military’s involvement in propagating militant anti-communism. The result was the ‘Fulbright Memorandum.’ The document exposed NSC-68 as having provided the latitude for a

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<sup>111</sup> Ganus to Col. Paul Dolan, 7/13/1959, Dolan to Ganus, 2/15/1960, CLGP

<sup>112</sup> Program, Freedom Forum XXII; “200 Get Basic Lessons of Global Fight,” *Blytheville Courier*

<sup>113</sup> “Sarasotans Urged to Be ‘Alert’”; “Map Turns Red,” *Hattiesburg American*, 3/22/1961, 8A; “Wardle to Present Anti-Communist Program Thursday,” *Redlands Daily Facts*, 2/13/1962, 5; Benson et al. to Editor, *Kansas City Star*, 2/26/1962, JDBP; “Legion Program Will Stress American Heritage,” *Catholic Weekly*, clipping, 10/18/1963, GSBP

<sup>114</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*, 85-86; Bogle, *Pentagon’s*, 133-163

<sup>115</sup> James Bales to Benson, 7/18/1961, JDBP; Bogle, *Pentagon’s*, 134; Woods, *Fulbright*, 37; “Reading of Memorandum Submitted to Department of Defense”

host of initiatives that “made use of extremely radical rightwing speakers and/or materials.” The report cited links with the JBS, and singled out the NEP and the CACC as chief miscreants.<sup>116</sup>

The Memorandum, produced for the benefit of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, was leaked to the press in the summer of 1961 and elicited a vitriolic response from many conservatives. The vitriol also emanated from the fact that earlier in the summer Edwin Walker, commander of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Europe, had resigned after the exposure of his ‘Pro-Blue’ program that aimed at indoctrinating those under his command. Walker was stationed in Arkansas prior to this assignment, and in 1959, the year he left for Germany, he attended the Freedom Forum in Searcy and had “Harding College’s highest civilian award” bestowed upon him by Benson at a farewell reception arranged by the Little Rock Chamber. Among other things, the award marked the General’s “bold and determined fight against un-Americanism and subversion.”<sup>117</sup> Unsurprisingly, NEP materials formed a central component of Walker’s ‘Pro-Blue’ program, which, in turn, ensured his martyrdom for many on the right.<sup>118</sup>

Senator Strom Thurmond (D-S.C.), a lieutenant colonel during World War Two, kept the fire stoked over the winter of 1961. In Washington he became the leading critic of “military muzzling,” thanks largely to his involvement in a tumultuous Senate Armed Services Commission investigation. Thurmond, in fact, asked Benson for a copy of the script of *Communist Encirclement*, which he subsequently read into the Congressional Record, in an effort to demonstrate that it was “a factual, nonpartisan presentation of the Communist threat.”<sup>119</sup> Away from the capital, Thurmond found receptive audiences across the South and Southwest, amongst the audiences that were most receptive to the NEP – in Southern California, where he embarked on a speaking tour, Thurmond was idolized.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.; Alexander Holmes, “Fulbright Memo Was Written by Aide,” *LAT*, 8/14/1961, 1; J. William Fulbright Recorded Interview by Pat Holt, 7/8/1964, JFKOH

<sup>117</sup> “Walker Receives Distinguished Award,” *Kerrville Mountain Sun*, 9/24/1959 1; “Freedom Forum Facts,” 1959, IDPP, Accession 1034, Box 11, File 155

<sup>118</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 235; Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 100-123

<sup>119</sup> Ganus to Green, 7/25/1961, CLGP; Statement of Strom Thurmond, United States Senate, 87th Congress, 7/26/1961, Congressional Record, 13594-13617

<sup>120</sup> Crespino, “Thurmond’s Sunbelt”

Thurmond's efforts were at the apex of a much broader crusade. The 'muzzling' issue was persistently exploited by the NEP, grassroots activists and a host of popular anti-communist-orientated organizations and individuals including the CACC, the JBS, the Christian Crusade, Dan Smoot and Philbrick. Benson told the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, for example, that "attempts to defend the Fulbright memo as an effort to keep civilian control over the military are just a lie."<sup>121</sup> "Whether it is being accomplished by Moscow agents, by Norman Thomas and followers, or by our misguided liberals," an NEP Letter declared, "the results are the same: pleasure and satisfaction in Moscow."<sup>122</sup> James Bales was even moved to publish a manuscript entitled *Senator Fulbright's Secret Memorandum*.<sup>123</sup>

Criticisms of the NEP's relations with the military did significant damage. In April 1961, before the leaking of the Fulbright Memorandum, the *New York Times* carried an article in which Norman Thomas, perennial Socialist Party candidate for the presidency, was pictured at a news conference with several feet of film strung out between his hands. The film in question was *Communism on the Map*, and the article contained evidence of its prodigious use by the military, as well as Thomas' accusations that it constituted "paranoid" propaganda. Thomas' statement went well beyond the NEP's relationship with the military – it cited Benson's relationship with big business and charted many of his other activities.<sup>124</sup>

The tone and framework of Thomas' contentions were replicated in a swath of more consequential criticisms. From early 1961 onwards a series of journalistic exposés of the 'Radical Right' bestowed a series of increasingly familiar epithets on Harding College (few made distinctions between the College and the NEP): "perhaps the most prolific center of aggressive anti-Communist propaganda in the United States" (*New York Times*), the "Sorbonne of the ultra-rightists" (*Boston Globe*), "the West Point of the new patriotism" (*Baltimore Sun*), the "Little College at the Center of the Right" (*Washington Post*), and "in many ways in the intellectual center of all

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<sup>121</sup> "Dr. Benson Widens His Target Sights," *AG*, 9/16/1961, 4; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 9-10, 386-392; "Thunder on the Far Right," *Newsweek*; Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 234-237

<sup>122</sup> "National Program Letter," 10/1961, HAPP, Box 147, Folder 5

<sup>123</sup> Bales, *Memorandum*

<sup>124</sup> Illson, "Norman Thomas Hits Birch Group"

the new right-wing movements” (*The Reporter*).<sup>125</sup> Special features in periodicals such as *Time*, *Newsweek* and *The Nation* offered similar conclusions, as did investigations by liberal-orientated organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and Group Research Inc. This concern over the ‘ultra’ right was quickly distilled into a series of books and pamphlets that also emphasized Benson’s contribution.<sup>126</sup>

Organizations in the NEP’s orbit were subjected to similar scrutiny. Between February and December 1961, one estimate suggests, more than 700 articles focusing on the JBS were published in American newspapers.<sup>127</sup> In November, President Kennedy, whose administration had been closely following the rise of the ‘Radical Right,’ warned an audience gathered in the Hollywood Palladium of the increasingly audible “discordant voices of extremism.”<sup>128</sup> Although critics of the ‘Radical Right’ were not an entirely homogenous bunch, almost all offered some variant of the following conclusion reached in *Time*:

What distinguishes them from respectable conservatives, who are enjoying a resurgence of their own? To the ultras, the fear of Communism at home is so great that they often discount the threat of Russian arms to a ridiculous extent ... In everything that he finds displeasing in modern society and political life, the ultra sees evidence of Communist plots and subversion.<sup>129</sup>

As a number of scholars have demonstrated, ideas like those expressed in the *Time* article were often informed by the theory of ‘status anxiety,’ which permeated the liberal intellectual response to McCarthyism, and experienced a revitalization in the early 1960s, a process notably evident in the publication of an updated version of *The New American Right*, an influential set of essays edited by Daniel Bell (in which Benson now received dishonorable mention).<sup>130</sup>

Historians have since effectively dismantled the ‘status anxiety’ thesis.<sup>131</sup> Although they were right to do so, their admirable efforts to take conservatism

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<sup>125</sup> Phillips, “Wide Anti-Red Drive”; Horton, “Revivalism on the Far Right”; David Gredler, “Right Wing,” *Boston Globe*, 2/26/1962, 3; Thomas O’Neill, “Politics and People,” *The Sun*, 7/29/1962, 12; Julius Duscha, “Little College at Center of Right,” *WP*, 10/4/1964, 3

<sup>126</sup> Cook, “Juggernaut”; “Thunder on the Far Right,” *Newsweek*; “Organizations: The Ultras,” *Time*; Group Research, “Harding College”; Forster and Epstein, *Danger*; Sherwin, *Extremists*; Suall, *Ultras*; Dudman, *Far Right*

<sup>127</sup> Lichtman, *Protestant*, 236; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” 541-562

<sup>128</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*, 236

<sup>129</sup> “Organizations,” *Time*

<sup>130</sup> Bell, ed., *Radical*, 5-6

<sup>131</sup> See, for example, McGirr, *Suburban*, esp. 6-10

seriously, to portray it as a forward-looking ideological movement, leave little room for its stranger manifestations – the conspiratorial elements of ‘Radical Right,’ for instance, have been generally been unexplained in favor of an emphasis on the ways in which its constituents were just like other conservatives.<sup>132</sup> In Benson’s case, as we shall see, his faith in conspiracies became even more pronounced throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Philbrick and Schwarz followed a similar trajectory).<sup>133</sup> Such ideas lead into territory that is beyond the scope of this work, but it would seem that there is a need for new ways of explaining the appeal of conspiratorial anti-communism without recapitulating the mistakes of the ‘status anxiety’ school.

Historians’ focus on repudiating the ‘status anxiety’ thesis seems to have encouraged a neglect of the instrumental significance of the ‘extremism’ critique in the early 1960s. This failure also arguably emanates from a broader failure of scholars of conservatism to pay sufficient attention to the relationship between the right and their opponents, a relationship that reveals much about the boundaries of conservative strength. Benson’s response implicitly recognized the damage being done to the NEP. “Harding College is conservative and it is anti-communist,” he wrote to the editor of the *Kansas City Star*, in one of many such letters, “but standing for these fundamentals doesn’t make the college ‘radical,’ ‘extremist’ or ‘ultra rightist.’”<sup>134</sup> Such retorts, in fact, consumed an increasingly significant proportion of the NEP’s efforts in the early 1960s – one headline in the *Arkansas Gazette* simply read “George S. Benson: Busy on the Defensive.” James Bales produced yet another manuscript, *Americanism Under Fire*. Howard Bennett compiled a seven-page report based on an ADA meeting in New York (at which Norman Thomas discussed *Communism on the Map*), which he had ‘infiltrated’ along with Bales and Glenn Green.<sup>135</sup>

There were also more tangible consequences of Benson’s encounters with this sustained criticism. The NEP’s beneficial relations with the military, like those

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<sup>132</sup> Brenner, “Fellow Travelers”; McGirr, *Suburban*, 54-79; Crespino, “Thurmond’s Sunbelt”

<sup>133</sup> Wilson, “Philbrick,” 95-101; Villeneuve, “Teaching,” 621-686

<sup>134</sup> Benson et al. to editor, *Kansas City Star*, 2/26/1962, “From the People,” *Arkansas Gazette*, clipping, 5/3/1964, both JDBP; Benson, “Objections from Arkansas,” *The Sun*, 8/18/1962, 12; Clifton Ganus et al. to Turner Catledge, 10/1/1964, GSBP

<sup>135</sup> Bennett, “Report on Norman Thomas’ Review of *Communism on the Map*,” 8/28/1961, JDBP; Doug Smith, “George S. Benson,” *Arkansas Gazette*, clipping, 10/18/1964, GSBP; Bales to Benson, 5/3/1965, JDBP

of other anti-communists such as Fred Schwarz, were severed in the midst of this uproar.<sup>136</sup> The military forbade the official use of *Communism on the Map* and *Communist Encirclement*, a decision publicly backed by Robert McNamara, while unofficial connections with the military had largely disappeared by 1962.<sup>137</sup> Across the country protests against the NEP's films, in particular, mounted: Michigan's Democratic governor called for the state police subversive activities squads to stop using *Communism on the Map* and *Operation Abolition* as means of engaging with the public; in Seattle, 92 university professors led a successful campaign to ensure that *Communism* was not incorporated into the public school system; in Louisiana, Bales and Ganus appeared on a television debate aimed at resolving local controversy over the inclusion of *Communism* in the state's anti-communist school program.<sup>138</sup> Benson remained on the FBI's special correspondents lists, but the Bureau reviewed *Communist Encirclement* and in consequence took steps to ensure that the FBI's anti-communist materials, which Hoover often sent in response to the myriad of letters he received, would not appear at events where the NEP's films were used, lest it be construed that this constituted some form of endorsement of their content.<sup>139</sup>

In December 1961, Fred Schwarz wrote to a long-time collaborator expressing his concern over giving "ammunition" to the growing criticism of anti-communism. "Please do not officially show or advocate," he advised, "the films 'Communism on the Map' or 'Communist Encirclement.'"<sup>140</sup> The most obvious sign of the damage being done was the drop-off in the sale of NEP materials – for fiscal 1962-1963 the income from sales dropped to less than half of the figure for each of the previous two years.<sup>141</sup> The CACC too exhibited signs of the damage being done to those identified as members of the 'Radical Right.' In 1962 the CACC's revenues tumbled to half of the 1961 figure and in the coming years the number of Schools of

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<sup>136</sup> Villeneuve, "Teaching," 390-393

<sup>137</sup> Cabell Phillips, "Right-Wing Officers Worrying Pentagon," *NYT*, 6/18/1961, 1; "Dr. Benson Widens His Target Sights," *Arkansas Gazette*, 9/16/1961, 4

<sup>138</sup> "Michigan Halts Showings of 'Distorted' Films," *WP*, 19, 4/7/1961; "Anti-Communist Films Stir Nationwide Storm," *LAT*, 2/26/1961, C1

<sup>139</sup> Hoover to name redacted, 7/5/1961, ELFOIA, "Communist Target--Youth-HQ-5"

<sup>140</sup> Villeneuve, "Teaching," 533

<sup>141</sup> NEP Annual Report 1962/1963

Anti-communism was greatly reduced, largely because they now operated at a loss.<sup>142</sup>

Benson made some modest efforts to mitigate this growing criticism. He, for example, attempted to underplay his links to the JBS by rebuking Welch for his oft-cited contention that Eisenhower had been doing the Communists' bidding, and by distinguishing between the worthwhile activities of some JBS members and the unwise utterances of their leader.<sup>143</sup> This, of course, was a strategy that William Buckley and Barry Goldwater adopted in their initial efforts to insulate themselves from criticism of the 'Radical Right,' but there were even more direct and discernable links between the JBS and the NEP, as critics continued to point out.<sup>144</sup> The NEP also began to distribute *The Truth About Communism*, a film produced by Sid Fields, narrated by Ronald Reagan and released in early 1963, presumably as a replacement for *Communist Encirclement*, since it offered a broadly similar analysis of the spread of international communism since 1917, but with fewer conspiratorial overtones.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, the 1964 Freedom Forum program contained few of the hardline anti-communist speakers of previous years and gave the impression, as the increasingly hostile *Arkansas Gazette* noted, of a "sudden shift in policy and emphasis." The article concluded, however, that "if the NEP should now be undergoing some experience in moderation, it will take more than the period of the 1964 seminar to make a convincing showing of repentance."<sup>146</sup>

The 1964 Forum, however, *did* constitute the apogee of the NEP's attempts at moderation. In fact, Benson's principal response to criticism of his program and of his fellow 'Radical Rightists' exacerbated his reputation as a conspiratorial, domestic-orientated anti-communist. Offering what *Danger on the Right* concluded was a "Welchian defense," Benson persistently maintained that the "determined fight for the destruction of the anti-communist groups in America" was the "latest major

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<sup>142</sup> Villeneuve, "Teaching," 606-607

<sup>143</sup> James Bales, "C. John Birch Society - Benson," n.d., JDBP; Duscha, "Little College"

<sup>144</sup> Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 136-138; McGirr, *Suburban*, 128; Bjerre-Poulsen, *Right*, 201-208; "What Underlies Concern for Program at Harding," *Arkansas Gazette*, 9/23/1964, 6; Forster and Epstein, *Danger*, 96-98

<sup>145</sup> "Communism Film to Have Premiere," *LAT*, 2/14/1963, 15

<sup>146</sup> "What Underlies Concern for Program at Harding"

tactic” of the Communists.<sup>147</sup> This effort, he told the Daughters of the American Revolution’s annual Continental Convention, was being advanced by those

who do not intend to be doing the bidding of the communists [but] are nevertheless so brainwashed that they are unknowingly promoting certain aspects of the communist campaign. In this category would come the Fulbright Memorandum and the Reuther Memorandum [another leaked memo written by Benson’s old foe Walter Reuther and his brother Victor at the behest of Robert Kennedy, which outlined strategies for countering the ‘Radical Right’], both of which are vigorously urging the closing of the mouths of the anti-communists”<sup>148</sup>

A letter to the *New York Times*, signed by leading figures at Harding in response to another critical article, similarly concluded that “certain liberal magazines and certain newspapers, for reasons best known to themselves, have also joined in the parade.”<sup>149</sup>

Despite the ways in which anti-communism pulled together several discordant conservative impulses, at times in the early 1960s Benson – like many anti-communists – focused more on the intricacies of the communist conspiracy than on propagating the virtues of conservatism. A new series of three films, released in 1963, exemplified this problem of balancing negativity and positivity. Within the first thirty seconds of the first film, *What is Communism?*, the presenter, Herbert Philbrick, offered a concise answer to the title’s question: “I tell you, as simply and seriously as I know how, Communism is a lying, dirty, shrewd, Godless, murderous, determined, as J. Edgar Hoover says, a criminal conspiracy.” The remainder of the film and those that followed attempted to explain communist tactics, inform citizens of countervailing techniques, and ram home the threat of internal subversion.<sup>150</sup> *Communism on the Map* and *Communist Encirclement* made similarly limited efforts to offer a constructive argument in favor of ‘free enterprise’ or Benson’s socially conservative agenda.

On balance, the NEP did not abandon its commitment to promoting conservative ideas, but the degree to which the organization was now tangled up with an increasingly controversial, domestic-orientated anti-communism may well have been to the detriment of these wider objectives. Liberal politicians were undoubtedly

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<sup>147</sup> Forster and Epstein, *Danger*, 98; Benson, speech, “Revolution against Freedom,” DAR Seventy-Third Continental Congress, 4/21/1964, JDBP

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ganus et al. to Catledge, 10/1/1964

<sup>150</sup> *What Is Communism?*

genuinely perturbed by what appeared to be attempts to re-inflate McCarthyism, but their conflation of conservatism and extremism was also, in part, based on the recognition that the activities of the 'Radical Right' could damage the conservative movement.<sup>151</sup>

Amongst grassroots conservative anti-communists these critiques, of course, made little headway. In Dallas, for instance, the controversy surrounding the NEP's films resulted in a slew of letters, telegrams and phone calls to Earl Cabell's office that expressed outrage and demanded their continued use. Cabell, too, was unmoved.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, the limited political traction enjoyed by the kind of anti-communism Benson espoused provides important evidence of the wider shortcomings of this discourse. Cabell's presence in Texas was coupled with the election of a JBS mayor in Amarillo, while the presence of a JBS Congressman in California was also notable; but even in these two states, where the 'Radical Right' was most powerful, the campaigns launched by, for example, Edwin Walker or another 'Bircher' Joe Shell, who attempted to win the gubernatorial primary for the GOP in California in 1962, made little headway.<sup>153</sup> In Arkansas in 1962, Benson seriously considered running against William Fulbright, a figure much-maligned by conservative anti-communists. Benson's rationale for avoiding this battle has not been recorded, but the hefty defeat meted out to Winston Chandler who ran on a platform inspired by ideas close to Benson's (Benson was involved in promoting his candidacy) suggests that he realized the limited appeal of his politics.<sup>154</sup> In a different vein, the problematic nature of the 'Radical Right' was confirmed by the efforts made by conservatives such as Buckley and Goldwater to distinguish themselves, at least in part, from some of their more outlandish brethren; even Strom Thurmond had shifted focus by 1964.<sup>155</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1964 election, conservatives were keen to suggest that accusations of extremism had played an important role in Barry Goldwater's heavy

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<sup>151</sup> Schoenwald, *Choosing*, 100-162

<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Cabell to John Mayo, 6/10/1961, Ronald Williams to Cabell, 10/6/1961, both ECP, Mss 16, Box 10, Folder 11

<sup>153</sup> Roche, "Cowboy Conservatism," 82-83; Bell, *California*, 169-182; McGirr, *Suburban*, 119-121

<sup>154</sup> "Benson Is out of Race," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 5/2/1962, GSBP; Woods, *Fulbright*, 298

<sup>155</sup> Crespino, *Thurmond's*, 165-184

defeat.<sup>156</sup> Goldwater's efforts to defuse such accusations were offset by his infamous convention speech, and the substantial role played by JBS and similarly orientated grassroots activists in California in securing his nomination, as well as the continued support offered by representatives and supporters of the 'Radical Right.'<sup>157</sup> Benson offered a more obvious, consistent and impassioned endorsement than he had done for any other Presidential candidate. Goldwater supporters were increasingly powerful, 'Looking Ahead' declared in the summer of 1964, because

their man had expressed a positive political philosophy. It was his detractors who had labeled as extremist one who champions the rights of the individual, who would curtail expanding power in the central government, who would prefer a free enterprise economy than socialist experiments, and who would endeavor to slow the march of Communism.<sup>158</sup>

Herb Philbrick, like many of Benson's cohorts, was similarly enthused. He traveled an average of 141 miles per day for a month in early 1964 in an ultimately futile effort to 'sell' Goldwater in his home state of New Hampshire and to secure his own nomination as a pro-Goldwater delegate to the GOP convention.<sup>159</sup> Charles White and J. Howard Pew were among a host of businessmen whose money flowed into Goldwater's campaign and the coffers of the 'Radical Right.'<sup>160</sup>

Goldwater's links with the 'Radical Right' may have damaged his campaign, but they were not the primary explanation for his heavy defeat. A number of additional problems plagued his candidacy, but the most important issue was his strident conservatism.<sup>161</sup> In an admittedly imperfect fashion, the election results, therefore, also provided important indicators of the right's strength as it approached mid-decade, and, by extension, indicators of the limitations of the new grassroots conservatism that Benson and others had helped to nurture in the early 1960s. This is not to say that nothing had changed; Goldwater's nomination alone was testament to that. Indeed, although anti-communism was not entirely beneficial to the conservative cause, it was clear that it co-existed with some increasing sympathy towards economic, racial and religious conservatism, which broke free of anti-

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<sup>156</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 202

<sup>157</sup> McGirr, *Suburban*, 110-146

<sup>158</sup> "LA," *Malakoff News*, 7/24/1964, 2; "LA," 8/19/1964, JDBP

<sup>159</sup> James Bales to Barry Goldwater, 12/21/1963, JDBP; "Herbert A. Philbrick, Goldwater Delegate Campaign, New Hampshire," 3/1964, HAPP, Box 107, Folder 17

<sup>160</sup> Fendall Yerxa, "Goldwater Says President Avoids Campaign Issues," *NYT*, 9/22/1964, 1; McGirr, *Suburban*, 134-136

<sup>161</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 182-209

communism as the decade wore on. But the election results did confirm the pronounced regional discrepancies in the appeal of conservatism. Goldwater's politics, like Benson's, was noticeably more appealing in the Southwest, in Southern California and in parts of Texas and Arizona, and in the South (in the Deep South, where he won most of his votes, his opposition to the Civil Rights Act was the greatest source of his appeal).<sup>162</sup>

After 1964 the NEP faced substantial problems. The increasingly controversial nature of the organization in the early 1960s damaged Benson's relations with businessmen, many of whom had been publicly chastised for providing financial assistance to his endeavors.<sup>163</sup> At the same time, in the early 1960s the NEP's funding fell in a commensurate fashion with a multi-million-dollar campaign for new buildings on Harding's campus, which included the American Heritage Building, a new home for the NEP.<sup>164</sup> Benson seemed unable to recognize or accept the problematic nature of his message, but there was perhaps some merit to his assertion that NEP donors had reined in their contributions on the grounds that the long-term commitment of the NEP to fight their cause was less certain after his retirement from Harding in 1965; given the continued prominence of the organization on the Searcy campus it seems likely that Benson's advancing age exacerbated this concern.<sup>165</sup>

More importantly, as Benson did acknowledge, the NEP was also faced with the death or waning power of the generation of industrialists with whom he had consorted most closely, the generation who had occupied positions on the front lines of the battles with the New Deal and organized labor in the 1930s. Irénée du Pont and Charles Hook, both in their 80s, died in 1963. Charles White retired as chairman of Republic Steel in 1960 at the age of 70, and by the latter part of the decade was increasingly infirm. Republic Steel gave nothing to the NEP after 1965. By 1968, Benson maintained, steel and oil companies, who had underwritten much of the NEP's work, had almost entirely withdrawn their funding. Gulf Oil, for instance, had

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<sup>162</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 182-202

<sup>163</sup> See, for example, Group Research, "Harding College"

<sup>164</sup> Harding College, pamphlet, "Of Godliness and Patriotism," 1963, CLGP

<sup>165</sup> Benson to Ganus, 9/17/1968, CLGP

been giving \$10,000 a year for 15 years up until 1965; in 1966 the company gave \$5,000, the last donation it ever made to the NEP.<sup>166</sup>

The NEP's resources were not entirely depleted, however. Although its financial records are less complete for the period after the early 1960s, in the second half of the decade the Allen-Bradley Company, for example, continued to give generously, as did J. Howard Pew, who remained remarkably active until his death at the age of 89 in 1971. The death of friendly industrialists had some benefits when, as in the case of John P. Gaty, they left sizeable sums of money to the NEP in their wills. Moreover, by the late 1970s and early 1980s the NEP, with Benson still at the helm, had an average annual operating budget of just shy of \$300,000, a majority of which was drawn from gifts. In 1978, donations, in fact, were in excess of \$1 million, although this was a temporary spike.<sup>167</sup> The decline in Benson's relations with key industrialists also robbed him of the non-monetary benefits this relationship provided, including outlets for NEP materials and access to a broad range of networks.

These problems coincided with a decline in the NEP's activities. By 1968, for instance, the circulation of 'Looking Ahead' had fallen to just over 1,000, its lowest level since the early 1940s, while 'Listen Americans!' and the NEP's Monthly Letter persisted on a similarly reduced scale.<sup>168</sup> However, the NEP did manage, as we shall see, to produce a number of new films in the late 1960s and 1970s, and Benson launched a new syndicated radio broadcast, *Behind the News*, in 1971, which was carried on perhaps 100 stations during the 1970s.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, Harding still hosted Freedom Forums on an annual basis. Nevertheless, the waning of the NEP's influence, which continued at a steady pace until Benson's death in 1991, was predicated on far more than the issues outlined above.

The decline in the NEP's relationship with business was not part of a broader decline in business engagement with politics. The "newer and younger management," whose ambivalence towards the NEP Benson lamented, were

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> NEP Statement of Revenues and Expenses, Years Ended Aug. 31, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981, GSBP; Benson to J. Terry Johnson, 9/13/1982, AEESOCU, Box 1, Folder "NEP"

<sup>168</sup> NEP Mailing Room Report, 12/13/1961, 12/1968, both GSBP

<sup>169</sup> "NEP Radio Program Has Vast Growth," *Searcy Daily Citizen*, clipping, 12/6/1971, "Radio Stations Airing Behind the News," n.d. [c. 1976], both GSBP

spending their money and their time on more sophisticated projects. The massive proliferation and expansion of think tanks, lobbying organizations and Political Action Committees helped to establish organizational frameworks and create an intellectual edge to conservative ideas that money directed towards organizations such as the NEP could never hope to realize. To some extent, the creation of these para-political institutions also reflected the fact that conservatives had a foot in the door of the political process after 1964.<sup>170</sup> In 1969 Benson recalled that during the 1940s and 1950s “it seemed I was the only person in the country really coming out with a persistent voice for private enterprise and for big business.” Self-aggrandizing and untrue though this statement was, it provided implicit testimony to the fact that the NEP was increasingly swamped by the proliferation of new conservative endeavors.<sup>171</sup>

The most persuasive explanation for the difficulties Benson encountered was the fact that after 1964 the nascent conservative movement had more definitively uncoupled itself from domestic-orientated anti-communism. In the early part of the decade Benson’s politics had been portrayed as dangerous; now they were as often ridiculed. “Optimist Club members in Blytheville,” an Arkansas paper concluded in 1969, “needed all the optimism they could muster last night. According to the bleak picture painted by their guest speaker, Dr. George S. Benson, all of America’s problems can be traced to ‘the international Communist conspiracy.’”<sup>172</sup> The increasingly anachronistic nature of what the article concluded was Benson’s “almost obsessive fear of communism,” was, ironically, confirmed by Benson’s own perception of the marginalization of anti-communism. In a not untypical newspaper column in 1970 he wrote:

Why are there so many disbelievers of Communism’s frightening presence in America? The answer is the [sic] the American public – and the American government in somewhat more sophisticated manner – has been ‘brainwashed’ to believe that any outspoken anti-Communist should be relgated [sic] to ‘crack-pot’ category<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 150-236; Jason Stahl, “From Without to Within the Movement: Consolidating the Conservative Think Thank in the ‘Long Sixties,’” in Gifford and Williams, eds., *Right Side*, 101-118; Alice O’Connor, “Financing the Counterrevolution,” in Schulman and Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound*, 148-168; Mason, *Republican*, esp. 182-183;

<sup>171</sup> Benson, notes, “Oral History Interview,” 1969, GSBP

<sup>172</sup> Webb Laseter, “Communism Blamed for U.S. Ills,” *Courier News*, 3/4/1969, 1, 8

<sup>173</sup> “LA,” *Helper Journal*, clipping, 1/1/1970, GSBP

Benson's faith in conspiracies in fact deepened after the early 1960s. For example, in 1968 he bluntly declared that "the four men really running the Treasury Department in World War Two were all Communists." In 1977, an edition of *Looking Ahead* claimed that the U.S. Army, "through a civilian organization," had released a toxic substance near Searcy in the 1960s. "All 131 attacks," the article maintained, "were made under a liberal administration in Washington and in the area where Harding College is located. Harding College is known as one of the most conservative schools in the United States ... why was this area selected?"<sup>174</sup>

There was abundant evidence of the limited appeal of domestic-orientated anti-communism after the early 1960s. "Unbelievably," the aging, eccentric billionaire H. L. Hunt confided to J. Edgar Hoover, the aging, eccentric head of the FBI,

the majority of the anti-communists have quit. ... Every time it will be up to substantial people like you to get them back in the saddle with renewed dedication. ... They think we were in the greatest danger a few years ago and have now slowed down, when in fact now is the most dangerous time we have ever been faced with.<sup>175</sup>

Fred Schwarz, Herb Philbrick and others had, in fact, not quit, but they were, like Benson, increasingly distant from mainstream political discourse.<sup>176</sup> "The thunder on the Radical Right," the *Washington Post* reported in 1970, "has diminished to a distant rumble."<sup>177</sup>

The importance of anti-communism to Benson's decreasing effectiveness was confirmed by the suitability of other elements of his politics to the context of the 1960s and 1970s. Four new films, produced between 1967 and 1972, which focused on the gathering pace of social and racial upheaval, mirrored the range of issues deployed with increasing effectiveness against liberalism by numerous conservatives and Republicans from George Wallace to Richard Nixon to Strom Thurmond.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Benson, speech draft, "America's Gravest Problems," 1968, GSBP; "LA," *Courier*, 12/29/1977, 4

<sup>175</sup> Hunt to Hoover, 3/17/1971, ELFOIA, "Hunt, H.L.-HQ-2"

<sup>176</sup> Wilson, "Cold War Patriarchy," 95-102; Villeneuve, "Teaching," 621-686

<sup>177</sup> Hall, "Diminishing Thunder on the Radical Right," *WP*, 8/1/1970, A18

<sup>178</sup> Carter, *Rage, passim*; Crespino, *Thurmond's*, 185-229; Mason, *Nixon, passim*; Flamm, *Law and Order, passim*

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**PURCHASE \$175**

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Clipping from the NEP's catalogue of materials from the early 1970s.<sup>179</sup>

*Revolution Underway*, released in 1968, encapsulated a strand of Benson's engagement with racial issues that had emerged in the debates leading up to the Civil Rights Act. "The so-called 'civil rights movement,'" he argued, established a precedent for "riot and revolt against authority," which came to fruition during the succession of 'long hot summers' during the mid-1960s and was perpetuated under the guise of the Black Power Movement. Moreover, he highlighted African Americans' disproportionate receipt of government welfare (further encouraged by the War on Poverty) and repudiated liberals' tendency to conclude that "riots are caused by 'want, deprivation and lack of opportunity,' and [that] a dole is needed to end poverty. Americans, white or black, who swallow this line are the most misled of all." As the impetus for the creation of remedial initiatives to foster greater equality of opportunity for African Americans increased, Benson warned of the rise of "the false notion that 'equality' is something the government gives a person. ... [R]egardless of how many fair housing ordinances, employment commissions or registration drives we have, our Negro citizens are going to have to earn their regard and respect just like anybody else." This perspective inevitably led him to critique

<sup>179</sup> NEP Catalogue, n.d. [c. 1972], GSBP

the drive for affirmative action.<sup>180</sup> In the end, however, as *Revolution* demonstrated, Benson frequently explored these issues through the outmoded lens of anti-communism: “the Communist strategists,” he maintained, “always have considered the U.S. Negro Population (now 20,000,000) as their most fertile field for fomenting riots, civil strife and, ultimately, revolution.”<sup>181</sup>

The remaining three new NEP films were ultimately undermined by the same shortcomings, despite exhibiting a promising emphasis on shifting social mores that, in turn, represented an outgrowth of years of unease over the forces underpinning American society. These social concerns, for example, were prominent in his engagement with the discourse of law and order – in Benson’s hands, like those of many others, it was a sufficiently amorphous concept that it encompassed far more than racial unrest.<sup>182</sup> Rather, criminality and civil unrest were symptoms of a “general moral breakdown.” This moral breakdown, Benson claimed, was clearly evident in the activities of the counterculture and student movements, “the broad narcotics problem,” “the disorders on college campuses,” and increasing tolerance of “obscenity” and “sex permissiveness” encouraged by Supreme Court rulings.<sup>183</sup> He also joined a chorus of conservatives who criticized anti-Vietnam protests, “draft card burners,” and the Johnson administration’s “no-win policy in Vietnam,” underpinned by restrictions on bombing that effectively meant the military was “fighting a one-handed defensive war” and was dragging out a costly conflict. This conduct was, he argued, “but another dramatic example of the peril such a policy of appeasement toward the Soviet masters of World Communism.”<sup>184</sup>

Anti-Vietnam protests contributed mightily to wider conservative outrage over civil disobedience, which reached a crescendo in 1967 when, as Benson described it, “anarchy” and “total disregard for law” reigned supreme. In the midst of all the “illegal demonstrations, marches, riots, the burning of cities, widespread looting, the wanton killing of people,” he argued, the nation’s “law enforcement, [by]

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<sup>180</sup> “LA,” 9/30/1964, JDBP; “LA,” *Wellington Leader*, 11/17/1966, 9; NEP Letter, 1/1967, GSBP; *Revolution Underway, Parts I & II*

<sup>181</sup> “LA,” 10/26/1966, JDBP

<sup>182</sup> Flamm, *Law and Order, passim*

<sup>183</sup> Benson, speech, “Christianity in the Space Age,” 5/30/1965, Program, Freedom Forum XXVII, 4/18/1966-4/21/1966, Benson, speech, “Major Threat to Our American Heritage,” n.d. [c.1973], all GSBP

<sup>184</sup> NEP, pamphlet, “America’s Four Deadly Realities,” 10/1/1967, GSBP; Scanlon, *Pro-War*, esp. 43-125

shutting its eyes, ducking its head, [and] turning its back, has failed and thus set the stage for worsening acts by the mobs.” The worm had turned, he surmised, since the halcyon frontier days when “no one messed with a U.S. Marshall.”<sup>185</sup> These issues were being at best ignored and at worse perpetuated by a misguided, aloof liberal elite – Senator George McGovern (D-S. D.), the 1972 Democratic nominee for the presidency, was the embodiment of these concerns. McGovern, Benson warned, was “a college professor by profession,” who tellingly appeared at the 1972 Democratic National Convention wearing “a modish knit shirt without tie.”<sup>186</sup> Nevertheless, films such as *Communists on Campus* or newspaper columns entitled “Hippie Puppets on Red Strings” typified Benson’s propensity to weave each of these issues into a broader pattern of communist subversion. McGovern, he noted, was also a liability because he was “a strident apostle of the socialism espoused by Henry Wallace in his communism-infested campaign for the presidency.”<sup>187</sup>

Benson’s anxieties over the direction of American society were, as ever, related to his concern over the integrity of religious morality. Tackling “parental laxity” and the “breakdown of the home” (divorce rates doubled between 1965 and 1975) were issues that he explored within an explicitly Christian framework.<sup>188</sup> More importantly, he suggested, Christianity offered “the only hope for a re-invigoration of honor and integrity and morality,” without which “America will move down the Western slope as did Greece and as did Rome.”<sup>189</sup> His call for America’s churches to form “a more political power block for social change” and for the reinsertion of ‘proper’ religion into the education system, chimed with a growing – but, crucially, unifying – unease amongst fundamentalists, evangelicals and Catholics. By the 1970s, his efforts likewise chimed with the blossoming anti-feminist and ‘pro-life’ movements, as well as a more generalized disquiet among religious conservatives at the apparent marginalization of their values. This disquiet was, in part, also responsible for a notable spurt of evangelical revivalism. The Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, grew by 23 percent

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<sup>185</sup> Webb Laseter, “Communism Blamed for U.S. Ills,” *Courier News*, 3/4/1969, 1, 8

<sup>186</sup> “American Citizenship Letter,” 8/1972, AEESOCU, Box 2, Folder “1972 American Citizenship Letters”

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*; “Listen Americans,” 12/29/1968, GSBP; “Putting Down Benson,” *AG*, 3/13/1970, 6A; *Communists on Campus*

<sup>188</sup> Williams, *God’s Own*, 106

<sup>189</sup> Benson, “Christianity in the Space Age”

between 1970 and 1985. At the same time, liberalism was evolving to make a more obvious accommodation to many of the shifts in social mores during this era and their commitment to secular humanism became less oblique.<sup>190</sup> Yet again, however, Benson hit an off-key note. Citing Fred Schwarz, he noted the correlation between communists' ambitions to effect the "demoralization of U.S. society" and the fact that "the basic institution of the family is under assault from those promoting abortion, homosexuality and government interference with parents' responsibilities for their children."<sup>191</sup>

Similarly, the final pillar of Benson's conservatism, his devotion to 'free enterprise,' enjoyed a resonance during the 1960s and 1970s, thanks in part at least to the right's efforts to link Keynesian orthodoxy with the remarkable economic turmoil caused by rampant inflation, 'bracket creep,' energy crises and 'stagflation' (although Benson did not become a 'supply sider' and retained his emphasis on budget balancing, financed by, if necessary, tax increases).<sup>192</sup> But Benson again linked these developments to communism. For example, an episode of *Behind the News* contended that inflation was "a new weapon in the Cold-War."<sup>193</sup>

Benson, however, was not entirely ostracized by others on the right. Indeed, when Ed McAteer, the founder of the Religious Roundtable, one of the central organizations in the increasingly politicized 'Religious Right,' was setting up his organization in the late 1970s he turned to Benson for advice.<sup>194</sup> When the American Conservative Union wanted to establish a state branch in Arkansas in the late 1970s, they also turned to Benson for assistance.<sup>195</sup> In September 1978, Ronald Reagan, just before he announced his candidacy for the GOP nomination, recorded a message that was played at Benson's eightieth birthday celebrations. "I have been out on the 'mashed potato circuit now for a great many years," Reagan declared, "talking about the evils of big government, the conspiracy against this freedom of ours, both from

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<sup>190</sup> Williams, *God's Own*, 49-187; Paul Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in Schulman and Zelizer, eds., *Rightward*, 33, *passim*

<sup>191</sup> NEP Letter, 9/1979, GSBP

<sup>192</sup> Benson, speech, "Major Issues Facing America Today," 5/1/1976, GSBP; Iwan Morgan, "Taxation as a Republican Issue in the Era of Stagflation," in Mason and Morgan, eds., *New Majority*, 124-142; Hodgson, *Right Side*, 186-215

<sup>193</sup> Script, Radio Program #7505, "Communist Inflation," recorded 11/4/1974, GSBP

<sup>194</sup> Hicks, *Sometimes*, 111-112

<sup>195</sup> Gary Baker to Benson, 11/7/1978, 3/14/1979, 3/22/1979, Benson to Baker, 11/14/1978, RACU, MSS 176, Box 51, Folder 31

within and without – and how many times I have quoted Dr. Benson in my own speeches – I couldn't possibly count.”<sup>196</sup>

Benson's ascent to something of an elder statesman of conservatism, however, did not detract from overarching reality that his career declined just when many of his cherished political principles seemed to be gaining traction; at times, he seemed more like the movement's 'embarrassing uncle.'

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<sup>196</sup> Reagan, recording transcript, 1978, GSBP

## Conclusion

For all George Benson's efforts to cloak his politics in a discourse of simplicity and candidness, his activities and, indeed, his convictions defy straightforward categorization. He was neither a success nor a failure. Benson's career had its idiosyncrasies, but it reveals much about the modern right, about conservatism's development, the ideas and impulses that defined it, about its regional discrepancies and continuities, and, in the end, about its own successes and failures. This work, at its most basic level, seeks to complicate the 'rise of the right' narrative that has become a staple of modern American political history.

Benson, like a generation of subsequent historians, considered Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 as a rejection of liberalism and the culmination of conservatives' years of striving and, crucially, as a victory for a composite vision of conservatism that had been largely absent from mainstream politics, but which now drew together religious and economic convictions. There was also some truth to Benson's assertion that Reagan's "platform emphasized almost exactly the things [the NEP] had been emphasizing for 40 years."<sup>1</sup> Reagan's electoral success confirmed several additional lasting features of the modern political right: its geographic heartland in the South and Southwest, its appeal to working-class 'Reagan Democrats' in other areas of the nation, its linguistic turn towards an anti-government populism, its propensity to offer racially-inflected rhetoric, and its strength beyond party politics amongst grassroots activists, business, media, and religious organizations, and within what Sidney Blumenthal described as the "counter-establishment."<sup>2</sup>

Breaking free from viewing Reagan's Presidency within the 'rise of the right' narrative, however, enables us to see that while there was a conservative resurgence it was both problematic and incomplete, and, moreover, that its flaws as well as its successes should be seen as the product of a longer period of gestation, rather than as the culmination of two decades of tumult. Benson's career, despite the fact that his

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<sup>1</sup> Benson to O. A. Beech, 4/20/1989, GSBP

<sup>2</sup> Blumenthal, *Counter-Establishment*

anti-communism marginalized him after the early 1960s, reveals much about these processes.

If there has been a paradigm shift in American politics since the 1970s, it has been most evident in the realm of economics; the Democratic Party's greater affinity with 'neoliberalism' is indicative of this transformation.<sup>3</sup> In 1985 Benson wrote to Senator John Heinz (R-Pa.) and expressed his pleasure that since Reagan's election "we seldom hear a repetition of the voice of Franklin D. Roosevelt who used to condemn big business and call those who were heading our major industries 'coupon clippers,' economic royalists, and profiteers."<sup>4</sup> Ideas and circumstances contributed to this transformation, but Benson's attention to the language of economic conservatism, its tone and its cultural resonance, constitutes a facet of the right that has not been satisfactorily explored. A number of historians have correctly emphasized the significance of conservative 'populism' and its roots in 'western' political culture.<sup>5</sup> Benson's engagement with this discourse, however, suggests that greater attention needs to be paid to the ways in which, firstly, it was developed long before the 1960s, and, secondly, it was partly the product of a creative process led by economic elites who recognized the power of anti-elitist tropes in American political culture and feared that the New Deal and the labor movement would harness them for their own ends. Benson's conservative vision, which was steeped in this rhetoric, resonated most profoundly in the emerging Sunbelt South and Southwest, where he occupied a unique political space between national corporate leaders, regional businessmen and elites, and grassroots citizens.

Even on the economic side of the political ledger, however, there were limits to the conservative 'revolution.' Benson also informed Heinz that Americans still did not "understand the tremendous value of our free enterprise economy."<sup>6</sup> Similarly, he voiced frustration with the Reagan administration's efforts by the mid-1980s: "When [Congress] undertake[s] to do something about the deficit spending and about the national debt there is such a furor from the radical left that they back down and do

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<sup>3</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible*, 263-269

<sup>4</sup> Benson to Heinz, 1/23/1985, GSBP

<sup>5</sup> Dochuk, *Bible Belt*; Robert A. Goldberg, "The Western Hero in Politics: Goldwater, Ronald Reagan, and the Rise of the American Conservative Movement," in Roche, ed., *New West*, 13-50; Kazin, *Populist*

<sup>6</sup> Benson to Heinz, 1/23/1985

virtually nothing.”<sup>7</sup> Benson was certainly on the radical end of even the conservative spectrum on such matters, but he was correct in his assessment that the GOP failed to radically reduce the size of government, although the nation’s tax structure became more regressive and the allocation of spending was slanted more towards defense and business interests. This failure was perhaps, in part, an ironic tribute to the conservative constraints imposed by structure of the American system of government, as well as further evidence of conservatives’ willingness to tolerate certain manifestations of ‘big government’; but it also suggested limitations to the appeal of conservative ideas – significant elements of the New Deal state remained stubbornly popular amongst the public at large.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the shortcomings of Benson’s crusade offer significant insights into the modern right’s difficulties, and indeed why it has perhaps been most effective as an oppositional force. Benson contributed to a consequential shift in the language of conservatism, but it also seems plausible that a discourse rooted in individualism, localism, federalism, and the conflation between political and economic liberties, is more easily grafted onto critiques of ‘big government’ than it is onto an economic program that, in practice, is geared towards a ‘trickle-down’ economics in which the interests of business and economic elites – more than ‘free market’ principles – are especially prized (the same could be said of conservatives’ exploitation of racial and ethnic antagonisms). This disjuncture has often been highlighted as an ironic fact, rather than a discrepancy that has practical implications for the right’s effectiveness as a political force. At times, the right’s opponents, in Benson’s heyday and since, have effectively exploited these contradictions. Repackaging the message, it seems, cannot negate some of the shortcomings of the message itself.

Of course, American political culture is not defined by Lockean principles. Benson’s efforts often appeared to be caught between a widespread ideological anti-statism (a source of persistent hope for the right) and a widespread embrace of specific manifestations of governmental activism (a source of persistent disappointment for the right). This disjuncture has provided a recurrent pattern throughout much of the period from the New Deal to the present day. Reagan’s

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<sup>7</sup> Benson to J. Terry Johnson, 11/20/1985, AEESOCU, Box 1, Folder “NEP”

<sup>8</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 247-282; Zelizer, “Reflections”; Iwan Morgan, “Reaganomics and Its Legacy,” in Hudson and Davies, eds., *Reagan and the 1980s*, 101-119

inability to uproot much of the New Deal state provides further testimony to the explanatory power of this idea.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Benson's activities and those of his business supporters often revealed the qualified nature of even strident conservatives' anti-statism. In these respects, this study indicates that historians of the right might be wise to construct a more complex analytical framework for examining economic ideas than one defined by collisions between 'statists' and 'anti-statists.'

Moving beyond these binary antagonisms could also make space for an examination of a persistent, but neglected, strain of conservatism elitism. This elitism was present in Benson's worldview, as it was amongst many of his conservative contemporaries. Benson's suggestion that many Americans were attracted to liberalism because of the promise of special benefits seems to have remained an important conviction for many on the right, as Mitt Romney's infamous 2012 fundraising speech in Florida demonstrates. In part at least, such ideas seem to be underpinned by reservations regarding many citizens' ability to exercise their democratic privileges in a sufficiently responsible manner. In a similar fashion, the basic idea that social status represents a judgment on an individual's aptitude and endeavor – divined through the workings of the marketplace – permeates through much of conservative thought. When such thinking surfaces, as it intermittently did in Benson's case (particularly when he celebrated businessmen's unique virtues or lambasted those in receipt of welfare), it provides a divisive edge to conservatism that perhaps constitutes both an overlooked source of attraction and an overlooked source of repulsion. Acknowledging the elitist edge of the right might also reveal greater parallels with conservatism in Western Europe, where the presence of such ideas have been more readily accepted.

Promoting 'free enterprise' was always central to Benson's mission, but he also offers insights into the vexed question of the interplay between economic and social conservatism, which have been more-or-less entrenched in a political alliance since the 1970s. Benson's activities in the 1950s, particularly with regards educational issues, suggest that a schism between secular liberalism and religious conservatism was emerging outside of mainstream politics well before the full-blown

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<sup>9</sup> Mason, *Republican*, 247-282, *passim*; Free and Cantril, *Political Beliefs*; Schickler and Caughey, "Public Opinion"

‘culture wars.’ In certain circumstances, Benson’s efforts to promote the fusion of these two impulses made an important contribution to the emergence of a Christian ‘free enterprise.’ The idea that Benson propounded – that they were not two branches of conservatism, but they resided in the same trunk, with roots stretching deep in the nation’s history – seemed to make most ‘common sense’ when religious conservatism collided with affluence, as it notably did in parts of the Sunbelt. More broadly, however, Benson’s endeavors serve as a reminder of the extent to which these contradictory impulses have remained the preserve of distinct constituencies – his crusade suggests that from the 1940s to the early 1960s their confluence, while significant, was substantially predicated on a common disdain for liberalism, communism and the education system.

When the idea that these two elements of conservatism were part of the same political program moved closer to the political mainstream over the following decades, the distance between them often remained. This distance became increasingly apparent when the conservative movement attempted to transition to a position of political power and the unifying force of common antagonisms was replaced by the problem of implementing a program of reform. In fact, accepting the sometimes *ad hoc* nature of the alliance between economic and social conservatives might also lead to the fruitful exploration of additional political axes that cut across class boundaries. This conceivably points towards the complex consequences of the collision between the political right’s combination of economic and social conservatism, and citizens who may adhere to, say, an amalgam of libertarianism and social liberalism, or religious conservatism and economic liberalism.

These issues might help to explain the mixed results of the inclusion of conservative Christian ideas within the political realm, a development that Benson helped to pioneer. Hostility towards secular liberalism brought religious groups, including the Church of Christ, increasingly into the conservative fold and boosted the Republican Party, but it was less powerful than many early analysts of the ‘religious right’ suggested. Even at the high-water mark of the conservative resurgence in the 1980s the GOP was only willing or able to introduce fragments of

the reforms desired by religious conservatives.<sup>10</sup> Benson's emphasis on social and religious issues, like that of later conservatives, was in one sense testimony to the receding appeal of these ideas amongst the public. This might seem an obvious conclusion, but its implications for the right have rarely been sufficiently thought through. While the modern right incorporated anxieties over 'secular humanism' and changes in social morality, liberals were turning these developments into new sources of political support in the shape of, for example, the gay rights and feminist movements. While critics, as a result, pointed to liberalism as a politics increasingly dedicated to special interests and historians once cited similar explanations for its apparent demise, it seems that in the longer term many Americans have moved in a liberal direction on these issues. A similar process seems to have occurred in relation to tolerance of racial and ethnic diversity, despite some notable dissention. As a result, liberals have constructed their own 'big tent' politics, capable of garnering support on the basis of more than bread-and-butter issues. Southern California, for example, may have been the crucible for modern conservatism and the region where Benson was most successful by the early 1960s, but the state, as whole, was also at the forefront of the emergence of such an expansive definition of liberalism.<sup>11</sup>

Any study of political phenomena that spans an extended period of time inevitably flirts with the pitfalls of teleology. This dissertation has attempted to account for both continuity and discontinuity within conservatism between the 1930s and the early 1980s. In a similar vein, there are limitations inherent in viewing the politics of 2014 through the lens of the politics of the 1980s. In the intervening years the end of the Cold War, rising income inequality, the substantial growth of the nation's Hispanic population, and the increasing power of the financial services industry, have been prominent amongst many new shadows cast on the political landscape. Nevertheless, as George Benson's endeavors illustrate, the collisions that abound in contemporary political debates are not so dissimilar to those that shaped much of the history of the twentieth century United States.

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Freedman, "Uneasy Alliance: The Religious Right and the Republican," in Mason and Morgan, eds., *New Majority*, 124-142; Zelizer, "Reflections," *passim*; Williams, *God's Own*, 187-212; Hicks, *Sometimes*, 101-104

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*Anderson Daily Bulletin*, Indiana  
*Angeles Mesa News*, Los Angeles, California  
*Anniston Star*, Alabama  
*Antioch News*, Illinois  
*Arizona Republic*, Phoenix, Arizona  
*Arkansas Democrat*, Little Rock, Arkansas  
 [AD]  
*Arkansas Gazette*, Little Rock, Arkansas [AG]  
*Arkansas Times*, Little Rock, Arkansas  
*Ashley County Leader*, Hamburg, Arkansas  
*Atlanta Daily World*, Georgia  
*Austin Daily Herald*, Minnesota  
*Avalanche-Journal*, Lubbock, Texas  
*Baytown Sun*, Texas  
*Beaver Herald-Democrat*, Oklahoma  
*Beckley Post-Herald*, West Virginia  
*Belton Journal*, Texas  
*Big Pasture News*, Grandfield, Oklahoma  
*Big Piney Examiner*, Wyoming  
*Big Spring Herald*, Texas  
*Binghamton Press*, New York  
*Birmingham Post*, Alabama  
*Blytheville Courier*, Arkansas  
*Boston Daily Globe*, Massachusetts  
*Boyden Reporter*, Iowa  
*Britt News-Tribune*, Iowa  
*Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, New York  
*Brownwood Bulletin*, Texas  
*Caledonia Advertiser*, New York  
*Camden News*, Arkansas  
*Carroll Daily Times Herald*, Iowa  
*Casa Grande Dispatch*, Arizona  
*Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Iowa  
*Cedar Rapids Tribune*, Iowa  
*Chicago Daily Tribune*, Illinois [CDT]  
*Chicago Sun*, Illinois  
*Chickasha Daily Express*, Oklahoma  
*Christian Science Monitor*, Boston, Massachusetts [CSM]  
*Cincinnati Post*, Ohio  
*Claude News*, Texas  
*Cleveland Call and Post*, Ohio  
*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Ohio  
*Clovis News-Journal*, New Mexico  
*Corpus Christi Times*, Texas  
*Coshocton Tribune*, Ohio  
*Cumberland Evening Times*, Maryland  
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*Daily Capital News*, Jefferson City, Missouri  
*Daily Courier*, Connellsville, Pennsylvania  
*Daily Herald*, Provo, Utah  
*Daily News*, Elk City, Oklahoma  
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*Daily Oklahoman*, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
*Daily Review*, Hayward, California  
*DeWitt Era-Enterprise*, Arkansas  
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*Delta-Democrat Times*, Greenville, Mississippi  
*Des Moines Register*, Iowa  
*Detroit Free Press*, Michigan  
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*Eagle-Bulletin*, New York  
*Eastern Progress*, Richmond, Kentucky  
*Edmond Booster*, Oklahoma  
*Edwardsville Intelligencer*, Illinois  
*El Dorado Daily News*, Arkansas  
*El Paso Herald-Post*, El Paso, Texas  
*Elizabeth Daily Journal*, Elizabeth, New Jersey  
*Eugene Register-Guard*, Oregon  
*Evansville Press*, Indiana  
*Evening Independent*, Massillon, Ohio  
*Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, Florida  
*Evening Outlook*, Los Angeles, California  
*Examiner-Enterprise*, Bartlesville, Oklahoma  
*Express and News*, San Antonio, Texas  
*Fairport Herald*, New York  
*Fort Covington Sun*, New York  
*Fort Worth Star Telegram*, Texas  
*Freeport Facts*, Texas  
*Genesee Country Express*, Dansville, New York  
*Greeley Daily Tribune*, Colorado  
*Hampton Chronicle*, Iowa  
*Haskell Free Press*, Texas  
*Hattiesburg American*, Mississippi  
*Henderson Home News*, Nevada  
*Hope Star*, Arkansas  
*Houston Chronicle*, Texas  
*Houston Post*, Texas  
*Illinois State Journal*, Springfield, Illinois  
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*Independent Press-Telegram*, Long Beach, California  
*Indian Journal*, Eufaula, Oklahoma  
*Indianapolis Star*, Indiana  
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*Investor's Business Daily*, Los Angeles, California  
*Jefferson City Post-Tribune*, Missouri  
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*Journal Advance*, Gentry, Arkansas  
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*Lima News*, Ohio  
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*Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, Indiana  
*Long Island Star-Journal*, New York  
*Los Angeles Herald & Express*, California  
*Los Angeles Examiner*, California [LAE]  
*Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, California  
*Los Angeles Times*, California [LAT]  
*Malakoff News*, Texas  
*Manchester Guardian*, Manchester, United Kingdom  
*McAlester News-Capital - High School News*, Oklahoma  
*McIntosh County Democrat*, Checotah, Oklahoma  
*Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Tennessee  
*Memphis Mirror*, Tennessee  
*Memphis Press-Scimitar*, Tennessee  
*Meriden Journal*, Connecticut  
*Millbrook Round Table*, New York  
*Montrose Herald*, South Dakota  
*Morning Avalanche*, Lubbock, Texas  
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*Mt. Vernon Register-News*, Illinois  
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*New York World-Telegram*, New York  
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*Oakland Tribune*, California  
*Ocean City Sentinel-Ledger*, New Jersey  
*Odessa American*, Texas  
*Oelwein Daily Register*, Oelwein, Iowa  
*Ogden Standard-Examiner*, Iowa  
*Omaha World-Herald*, Nebraska  
*Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, Wisconsin  
*Oswego Valley News*, Fulton, New York  
*Palm Beach Daily News*, Florida  
*Phoenix Register*, Phoenix, New York  
*Picket Line Post*, Mount Morris, New York  
*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Pennsylvania  
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*Rhineland Daily News*, Wisconsin  
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*Rockford Morning Star*, Illinois  
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*Rocky Mountain News*, Denver, Colorado  
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*Roper Bradley News*, Bradley, Illinois  
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