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Who We Are and How We See Ourselves: The Media, Immigration, and American Identity in the 21st Century

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Introduction: A Changing America

The United States is an anomaly in the history of the world. Despite its youthful status as a country of a mere 246 years, it has achieved a level of cultural, financial, and military dominance almost unheard of in the history of the world. It is one of the few countries throughout history to have achieved such territorial size, reaching from "sea to shining sea" (the famed phrase celebrating the country's reach across the entire expanse of the North American continent). The country's mythology has taught its citizens that they are at the helm of one of the most powerful, special, and important projects the world has always experienced. It has taught them that they – not others – are truly unique on the world stage. This rendering is a pervasive one in United States society, and one that has informed citizens' understanding of who they are and what they are meant to be. But that image is sometimes distorted.

There have been significant shifts in the country's outlook, values, and opinions to be sure, but for the most part the ship of state has moved relatively predictably, without many strong shifts. The central argument of this thesis is that the United States no longer enjoys the same stability it once did primarily because of a massive racial realignment in which whites, threatened by demographic change brought on by intense immigration from Mexico and Central America since 1990, have moved strongly to the right on a host of social, political, and economic issues.

A significant factor in this development over the last 30 years is its relationship with its neighbors to the south, particularly Mexico and Central America. Mexico is one of the, if not *the* most important, of the United States' relationships. In addition to its geographical proximity, Mexico is the United States' oldest neighbor, second most significant trading partner (trailing

Canada only slightly), most popular immigrant destination, and the country in which most Americans live outside of the United States (The reader should note that the author is conscious of a certain cultural imperialism with his use of the term "American" to describe citizens of the United States of America, given the terms broader use in other parts of the North and South American continents. After consultation with his peers, colleagues, and committee, he chooses to continue with the use of the term instead of the proposed "United Statesian," closest English equivalent to *estadounidense*, given the awkwardness and lack of precedent for use of the term in academic contexts).

For those reasons, understanding the ties which bind those two countries together (be they historical, economic, political, diplomatic, social, cultural, or otherwise), is very important, especially when trying to understand the changes the United States has been undergoing in this thesis' period of study. Most critically, understanding and putting into context immigration patterns not only of Mexicans from Mexico but also *Central Americans through Mexico* is one of this thesis's primary tasks. Knowing why that immigration takes place, the routes which it follows, and the impact that is on the ethnic and demographic composition of the United States. The intersection of three factors – the modern media environment, immigration from Mexico and Central America, and conceptions of American identity – is the subject of this thesis, all of which being important elements of Mexico-United States Studies. These arguments are explored separately in the thesis' three chapters, in the order presented here.

To understand this shift, this thesis develops a three-pronged argument: first, that the media environment has changed dramatically as a result of the three concurrent processes of commercialization of the news industry, the centralization of media company ownership into just a few hands (and the subsequent fragmentation of media offerings along identitarian lines), and

the Federal Communication Commission's deregulation of the market. While media conglomerates began buying up more media providers, and, crucially, different *kinds of media providers* (television stations and newspapers, rather than just more television stations or more newspapers, for example), the FCC began changing the market to accommodate the larger and larger appetites of growing companies. As the market for news changed and more options became available, conglomerates realized that the surest way to capture an increasingly fragmented audience was to tailor programming to specific groups, which created a series of information bubbles aligned with different groups' social and political biases.

This thesis' second argument is that, fed by the developing modern media environment, conceptions of American identity metastasized along race-, religion- and geography-based lines, forming polarized mega-identities which stand in stark opposition to each other and which have mapped with the country's two major political parties. Tracing its roots back to the great racial realignment of the parties in the wake of the Civil Rights era, racial and ethnic boundaries tightened along political lines as identity based groups shed cross-cutting cleavages.

The thesis' third and final argument is that this formation of "mega-identities" was intensified by the rapid demographic shift brought on by extremely high amounts of immigration from Mexico beginning in the 1990s and Central America beginning in the 2000s, as well as the news coverage of that immigration, which sparked fears in many white Americans that they were losing their traditionally dominant control of America's social and political character and caused them to vote sharply to the right on many social, economic, and political issues. One of the main causes of this move to the right, what I call the "conservative shift" in American politics and society, is the development of what I call the "modern media environment," essentially a new iteration of the news media, which reinforces individuals' political, social, and

economic beliefs, insulating them from differently minded people and reinforcing their attachment to their social groups.

Though its sources are often unclear and interrelated, individuals consciously and unconsciously bundle their experiences and relationships, both with other people and with the world at large, into a set of beliefs and actions which they take to be their identity. The author would like to note here that identity is addressed in a social sense in this thesis. He is aware of the vast academic literature on the subject across disciplines and, in the interest of relevance to the project, limits the understanding of identity here to a strictly social one. This schematic knowledge informs the way individuals see themselves, evaluate others, and judge their place in the world. This is not a fixed phenomenon: with the arrival of and interaction with new inputs (be they people, decisions, or situations), they change their identity and the way they see the world accordingly. This is surely a profound experience individually, and so when applied to a group of people, especially one as big as the population of a country, the results of those worldviews and decisions, and especially the impact of the sources from which those worldviews and decisions are informed, are dramatic.

Focusing that identitarian lens specifically on the population of the United States with its multitude of social, political, and economic experiences naturally brings about questions concerning what the United States is and who it is for. Though the United States has always been a country of immigrants, it has not always been a country of welcoming immigrants. Persuasive in the United Statesian mind and mythology is the idea of "the other." Less clear, however, is the concept opposite "the other." Put simply, though United Statesian do seem to have a clear sense of who we are not, there does not seem to be a clear sense of who Americans are, outside a few key data points.

This question is at the heart of this project – what exactly the United States is and who Americans are, and how that concept changes or does not change with the portrayal by the media of Mexican and Central American immigrants who come from radically different political, economic, and social situations.

In the recent past, countries of the North and Central America have been experiencing a steady drumbeat of changes: Mexico has been in a constant struggle with gang and organized crime violence, struggling to establish a true rule of law while it moves into a new position on the world stage; the Central American Northern Triangle countries struggle continuously against the corrupting influences of gang violence and international drug trade. Harboring no illusions about the pervasiveness and brutality of these crimes and the effect they have on everyday life, many from Managua to Chihuahua have been deciding that a better life awaits them in the North.

While each story is unique and each situation worthy of attention, the United States finds itself in the perhaps unenviable position of being the promised land for so many of these oppressed people throughout the region. The sheer numbers of the persecuted create a new chapter in the American story, distinct from what may be seen as similar stories of immigration to the US from other parts of the world at other times in its history.

Though there is no exact beginning to these events, continually unstable governments in general and the escalated war against Mexican drug cartels brought cameras and microphones to the United States' neighbors to the South. This profound media attention and the United States' continued inability to make any meaningful progress on reform of its immigration laws has compounded attention in and perceived import of the United States' immigration policy and those who are included (and excluded) by it.

While immigration policy dictates who gets included and excluded on the other side of the border, on the home side, things are not so clear. Such a rapid shift of attention toward immigrants so different from the stereotypical white Anglo Saxon Protestant conception of Americanness has seemed to produce a gag reflex of nationalistic, protectionist attitudes and policies.

This is particularly evident in the United States' widespread retreat from participating in the global polity: not only have former President Obama's economic plans for integration in the Asian market through participation in the Trans Pacific Partnership been overturned, but so too have diplomatic olive branches to long-standing United States adversaries like Cuba, by way of lifting of the embargo and normalizing of diplomatic relations, and a softer approach to Iran, through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action rather than the country's long-standing reliance on sanctions and international pressure. Similar in approach have been the United States' insistence on renegotiating NAFTA in favor of the more nationalistic USMCA.

Meanwhile, official discriminatory actions occur at an alarming rate and magnificent scale, with Mexican and Central American immigrants and refugee families finding only cages and separation from loved ones waiting for them at the border -- if they can even get there. While those immigrants and especially refugees battle through shocking conditions at great personal and familial hardship to even get to the border in the first place, changes in United Statesian immigration policy often keep these journeys from being completed fully while *coyotes* – human traffickers – continue lining their pockets. Though there no doubt exists a strong, outspoken opposition to these moves and decisions, the law of the land follows these principles of political nationalism, economic protectionism, and social white nationalism.

This project could not have been conceived if not for a variety of factors. First and foremost are the author's academic socialization and choice of undergraduate study in political science at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina, and his particular interest in data and trends. Equally important, though, are his companion field of undergraduate study in philosophy and subsequent interest towards larger questions concerning identity and belonging.

Lastly, and separate from my academic interests and motivations, the author feels a strong personal interest in this topic, being an American living in Mexico and experiencing these identity questions in a completely different context. All these factors reflect my allegiance toward and belief in the principles and methods of Western thought, being particularly interested in its interest in promoting relevant discourse in the current political and social atmosphere.

With this the author attempts to bring together all these dimensions of interest and motivation to produce an interdisciplinary study of the topic, including aspects of political science, sociology, and media studies to produce knowledge which informs both his understanding and the general conception of the present socio-political situation of North American relations in the last 30 years, a timeframe chosen specifically to consider the impact of the "modern media environment" and the massive uptick of immigration from Mexico and Central America to the United States.

While it is true that the 30 years since the writing of this thesis have seen the most important changes in both the organizational structure of the news media in the United States and from where and in how many numbers immigrants arrive to the United States, the seeds of those transformations were planted long before, and this thesis reflects that evolution. In the case of the media, deregulation efforts by the Federal Communications Commission began as early as the 1970s. With immigration, legislation as far back as the 1920s, which established a racial quota

system defining the country's immigration system and more in the 1960s which abolished it, ushered in the origins of that topic's modern relevance. Lastly, the great demographic shift between the parties after the Civil Rights movement began the "modern" period of identity alignment. While this thesis' analysis does not cover every detail of those periods, they do serve as important frames of reference for why the last 30 years have been so important for the changes American democracy has undergone in that period.

Although there is a wealth of literature on each of these individual concepts (media centralization, immigration, and American identity), there is thing in the literature which examines the intersections of these concepts and how they inform or explain societal currents. The primary contribution of this project is solving exactly that problem – synthesizing the currently scattered literature into a single project. This thesis aims to shed some lights on this topic by demonstrating how the interaction between these concepts can have certain effects when studied under the right circumstances.

An interdisciplinary analysis of the identity questions prevents an over-dependence on one set of metrics or another and will allow me to produce a concise picture of American identity, an important factor given its centrality to the thesis. This analysis will include a study of both quantitative polling results and qualitative accounts bby respected American and non-American writers.

I also review the last 30 years of media production and consumption trends and seek to connect those trends to immigration patterns and policy decisions made by the US government, specifically focused on how the three-pronged transformation of the media environment of centralization, commercialization, and deregulation, and how those transformations created wild competition among media organizations for audience share and how this, coupled with the profit

demand of their corporate ownership, has led to a decline in journalistic standards and the press moved toward sensationalism, entertainment, and opinion and away from traditional values of verification, proportion, relevance, depth, and quality of interpretation, all of which exacerbate rising trends of political nationalism, economic protectionism, and social white nationalism.

This thesis follows MLA style citation guidelines.

I feel that the methods used in this thesis are appropriate in that they are efficient, that is, they will produce the sort of information I need in a timely manner; they are overarching, that is, they will include a comprehensive picture of the intellectual concepts appropriate for the project; lastly, they are intellectually appropriate, that is, they are in line with the scholastic practices of social science and with the academic values of the National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Chapter 1: An Approach to Understanding Media in The United States

1.1.<u>Introduction</u>

A central feature of this thesis is the importance of context and how higher-order, often invisible processes affect the concrete reality of our existence. In large part, this project is concerned with the immense power that information gatekeepers, a small collection of media conglomerates, hold over our individual lives, the lives of our loved ones, and the well-being of society. It considers the dollars, cents, flesh, and blood which has real-world impacts in our daily lives and on the course of history.

This chapter discusses the role that information, laws, media, and media organizations play in contemporary American society. It argues that the prevailing regulatory framework, in its fundamental approach and contemporary iteration, has enabled a decades-long process of commercialization and centralization of the media since the 1990s which in turn affects the way that individuals receive, process, and interact with information. Specifically, it argues that the dissemination of information under this commercialized, centralized, and deregulated media environment moves public opinion in a pro-corporate, pro-establishment, and pro-conservative direction.

The Western world has been experiencing a period of tumult in recent decades. Once riding high in the afterglow of "End of History"- like declarations of trump over its enemies in the post-Cold War era, traditional cornerstones of the West like human rights, democracy, and neoliberal free market capitalism have come under attack and have seemed to erode in the past decades. Immigration from other parts of the world have diversified the populations of many Western countries, diluting the power of once hegemonic racial coalitions and upsetting balances

of power. On an individual level, these processes play out on front pages of newspapers and evening news programs across the country, forcing people into ideological camps fueled by radically different news sources and intensifying divisions in neighborhoods, communities, and nation states, continuing the cycle.

To understand how this all fits together, however, it is essential to have a robust understanding of what the organization and incentive structure of the modern media environment is, how that environment came to take the shape it has, and how it affects individuals' opinions and identities. In order to reach that understanding, this point will present a three-layered argument detailing how the media landscape has significantly transformed since the 1990s to become what I call "the modern media environment" – a fundamentally corporate, establishment, and conservative behemoth which has taken almost complete control of the spread of information in American society. The first layer of the argument established real and theoretical boundaries for what can be described as "media." It will also analyze how people interface with media (and its underlying system) on a day-to-day basis. The second will present a model of the modern media environment as a product of decades of commercialization, centralization and fragmentation, and deregulation and in doing so highlights the importance of the neoliberal capitalist market as a key context. The third and final point will outline how that corporate, establishment, conservative media will shade the presentation of the news in a conservative light through the use of biased sourcing and unfair framing of content.

1.2 Understanding Media

1.2.1 Definition of Terms

Media is discussed in a more technical sense here than it is outside of the academic context.

Accordingly, there are some particular technical distinctions I'll use in this project which should be named from the beginning for purposes of clarity, drawn from the media studies and communications literature. Since this project is primarily interested in the ways in which information is communicated, the business, companies, and corporations which own communication channels are of great interest. These entities, which will be called "media organizations" over the course of this thesis, are extremely large in scale (indeed, some of the biggest capitalist enterprises in the global economy), and serve as parent companies to a vast network of smaller entities like film studios, publishing companies, and broadcasting groups. While all these different entities produce things which reasonably fit Marshall McLuhan's definition of media, discussed below, this project is primarily concerned with organizations which report the news. Since these organizations are traditionally referred to as "the media," I will be referring to these specific news-reporting institutions as "media providers." Part of the work of this point will be to establish that the overall political and economic context within which these entities operate has transformed; I will refer to the product of that transformation as the "modern media environment." When referring to that overall context in general terms and not referring specifically to the modern media environment, I'll use the term "media environment" or "the media landscape."

1.2.2. Mediums and Messages

Information is essential to any organized operation. Without information, it is impossible to understand past events, make sense of any modern phenomena, or make realistic predictions about what will happen in the future. In this sense, information is critical to any kind of coherent attempt to make sense of what happens around us in the world.

Given the centrality of information to our ability to operate as agents in the world, the ability to control it necessarily brings a certain level of leverage: having something that is critical to others' ability to achieve their goals grants significant power. Considered along these lines, the current moment in history is a particularly notable one in that it marks a shift in the development of civilization to the degree to which common people have access to information.

Though the cost barriers to many around the world are still very high, more people than at any time in history both in North America and around the world can access a wealth of information unthinkable by the standards of only a generation ago. While some in the United States are kept from accessing the sources of information studied in this thesis for economic reasons, these cases are far and few between.

This difference is due both to stark changes in the amount of information available and to the structure around which that information is organized. The latter is thanks to leaps and bounds in the production of that material, the former to advances in its dissemination, particularly because of an incredibly fragmented media market, which produces a dizzying variety of broadcast and newspaper options which cater to political opinions from one end of the spectrum to another.

Inherent to this process is both understanding what media is and analyzing how its control affects the broader organization of society. On these questions, the Toronto School of Communication, particularly Marshall McLuhan (1964) and Harold Innis (2008), offer valuable insight. In my thesis, I argue that McLuhan and Innis' arguments -- and the power they describe -- have caused the development of what I call the modern media environment, which has come to exist through a three-pronged process of centralization, commercialization, and deregulation

and could dramatically affect people's opinions through biased and particularized reporting of the news.

This point is meant to clarify exactly those two topics and the relationship between them: how the modern media environment developed and the tools it has at its disposal to move people's opinions in particular directions, and fundamentally, how both can be understood from the Toronto School's arguments concerning media and how its control of information flows affect the organization of society.

This approach to understanding media, accompanied by more general arguments from Manuel Castells (2004) and Antonio Gramsci (1996) on the economic bases of how communication systems are developed and from Raymond Williams (1989) and Stuart Hall (2004) on what consequences those systems have for the flow of information throughout society, ask us to consider both the content and the context, the message and the medium:

> *In understanding a particular society from a history of communications perspective, the dominant medium has to be considered in terms of its inherent properties, be that medium spoken language in a primary oral culture; stone, clay, papyrus, or parchment in early civilization; or printed paper and electronic media in modern times. This consideration must be accompanied by an assessment of the form of communication utilized by the medium in question (Innis xxxii).*

We are both the beneficiaries and caretakers of the technology we produce as a society, but also that we are both the tool and the wielder -- we use the technology to expand our capabilities but at the same time are used by those who control it. The way that we relate to one another, and by extension, the way we relate to ourselves, is decided in part by the technologies, or the mediums, that we use, or misuse, have a significant impact on how society operates. In this sense, in McLuhan's words – "the medium is the message" – *how or through what context* information is communicated is as important as the message itself.

1.2.2.1 The Medium

In some ways, our common understanding of media, or the way that we define media, has shifted over time. In conversation, people tend to talk about media as another word for content, and for that reason, movies, TV shows, TikTok videos, and opinion columns all reasonably fit within these parameters. McLuhan thought of media in a much different way. Where we tend to equate media with content, McLuhan can be said to have thought of media as technology. Indeed, *Understanding Media*'s subtitle, *Extensions of Man*, is something of a hint: media is less necessarily words on a page or images on a screen and more extensions of the basic capacities of human beings.

For this reason, trains count as much as media as a magazine does because it innovated one of human beings' base functions, movement, into something more *extended*: "the railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure (McLuhan 4)," and so it can be said that "the personal and social consequences of any medium result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs...by any new technology (McLuhan 9)". Given such an initially broad definition of what counts as media, seemingly almost anything could be construed as a media form. For that reason, it is useful both for understanding McLuhan's thesis and the parameters of the authors' own argument by considering another dimension of the argument, which is that something is only media if it communicates information.

Along these lines, our more modern interpretation of media as being similar to content comes more into focus. McLuhan goes on to categorize different media forms as *those which communicate information and those that do not*. This distinction is key as it focuses the

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understanding of media in the sense discussed in this thesis as those which communicate information, a subgroup of all media in the McLuhan sense of extending man's natural abilities. McLuhan focuses these media as those which are extensions of the spoken word and those which are extensions of the written word (McLuhan 40); for that reason, this analysis is limited to newspapers and television broadcast programs – one piece of media extended from the written word and one from the spoken.

1.2.2.2 The Message

So far, this thesis has focused primarily on "the message" part of "the medium is the message" – the content and not the context. However, "the medium" – the context – is an essential part of this equation. I now turn my attention to "the medium" part of that thesis, which has to do with how prevailing organizations and institutions organize the distribution of media – that is, the distribution of information, the nodal points through which what we know and how we know are produced and reproduced, and how those organizations might be biased. This organization directly affects, and is affected by, interests engaged in the struggle to control force, knowledge, and wealth; inherently, this is a power-focused and political project.

Harold Innis, in his sweeping history of review of the relationship between control of communication networks in societies throughout history *Empire and Communication*, claims that the control of information and the networks that support its distribution has always been an essential feature of power; particularly, control over time and space: "the capacity of empires to reproduce themselves over large spaces and to sustain that influence through time suggested…that each empire depended upon a particular combination of technologies and administrative techniques to guide the process (Innis xxx)".

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While the modern media environment I describe in this thesis is not an empire in the Egyptian or Babylonian sense that Innis describes, the prevailing order that guides it does depend on the same principles. Given the fundamental desire of a prevailing order to maintain itself over time, it is always interested in discovering or innovating new technologies to achieve the task.

Accordingly, Innis notes that new communication structures and technologies almost always arise in a time of conflict which threatens the order, working "to draw more and more aspects of economic life, and further and further reaches of territory (Innis xxxi)" under the control of the prevailing order's information and administrative regime – "at the very moment a monopoly seems shattered – it reasserts itself (Innis xxxvi)".

This process was accelerated in the modern day by what Innis calls the "industrialization of the mass media," where "media and transportation technologies formed a necessary infrastructure for the rise of the mass society in the Western World…yielding the high-speed printing of newspapers…and television (Innis xxxi)".

This transformation brought about the modern incarnation of these "monopolies of knowledge," which is characterized by "possessing extraordinary control over what information is available" or having "a predominant influence over more complex patterns or habits of social thoughts (Innis xxxi);" in other words, an organization or group of organizations working in concert, and which has wide control over the social pool of information and how that information is used.

 Given their dominance over the organizational flows of information, they can both explicitly and implicitly control what is "known." In turn, they are able to influence the future development of the society over which they control the information – Manuel Castells calls this

a "network logic" where entities which make up the prevailing order – primarily media companies and the government – involve themselves in every aspect of society in order to have as complete a control as possible over the spatial and temporal dimensions that govern its control (Pirogan).

From this system, a *schema* becomes apparent: all societies and human activities take place in the natural world, but the natural world is in turn affected by those societies and activities. These societies and activities are determined by systems of production and reproduction, which is affected by how each society organizes its own survival (be that as simple as hunting/gathering or as complex as modern capitalism). At the center of this model are the fundamental forces of wealth, knowledge and force. This *schema* is illustrated in the model below.

Source: Innis, 2008.

Despite the ideology of the free press, this organizational regime, like others before it, develops restrictions on what is acceptable content and there fosters a particular kind of social control. "The properties of the dominant medium," continues Innis, "along with the pre-existing institutional structure, facilitate knowledge, and therefore power, being localized in such a way that it serves particular interests and is always beyond access for a large segment of the population (Innis xxxv)". Analysis of these properties and their effects must be grounded in "economics surrounding both the production of the dominant medium and the institutional framework that incorporates it (Innis xxxii-xxxii)".

1.2.3 Codes and Decodes

The status of communication media exists in part because of the distance between the senders and receivers of media products. In challenging the Marxist notion that a society's cultural products (or media, of which news is one) are merely products of the economic base and nothing else, I argue, in line with the cultural materialism of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall and Antonio Gramsci's understanding of hegemony and culture, that cultural products are instead the product of a much wider range of material circumstances; understanding that "culture is common meanings, the product of a…whole committed social experience (Williams and Pickney 1989). While it is true that economic factors, especially those concerning production, are fundamental in the schema presented in this product, they are equally fundamental to the others described by Gramsci in his model.

I argue that a complete understanding of how these cultural products are produced (specifically the news) requires an analysis of the social, political, and economic (that is to say, cultural) factors involved. This is in line with the Gramscian view of culture as "the exercise of

thought, the acquisition of general ideas, and the habit of connecting cause and effect…enlivened by organization (Kurtz 112)". Gramsci's work on traditional intellectuals and their role in quelling counter-hegemonic resistance to their prevailing order is perfectly in-line with Innis's understanding of the monopolies of knowledge and those monopolies' attempts to maintain their hegemony in society. This connection between Gramsci and Innis has particular force in the point on one particular aspect of the creation of the modern media environment, its reaction to the fragmentation of the once-unified audience.

These monopolies of knowledge which Gramsci and Innis describe as domination by prevailing orders of cultural, social, and economic facts of society define the informational reality of a society. What is still unclear is how those monopolies of knowledge communicate with individual media users.

The cultural materialism of Stuart Hall is helpful in investigating this connection, especially his analysis of how messages between senders (entities involved in the monopoly of knowledge) and receivers (individual media users) are communicated. I cite three of Hall's claims in particular: first, that the meaning of a message is not completely fixed by the sender and that the receiver is a key determinant of meaning; second, that the message is never transparent, meaning that the sort of messaging I will argue the modern media environment conveys is rarely explicit and usually subtle and masked; third, that receivers are not passive in their understanding of meanings communicated by senders. What is clear at the end of that analysis is how news as a cultural text plays a role in wider social, political, and economic processes through which society's ideas and functioning are developed.

Additionally, I subscribe to Hall's observations that sign systems, though actively and purposively curated by media providers, distorts (often to the advantage of Gramsci's traditional intellectuals in the modern media environment) meaning and evokes strong feelings as a result.

Finally, I argue that media messages accrue "common-sense status over time through their performative nature. Through the repeated performance, a culturally specific interpretation becomes not only plausible and universal but elevated to "common sense" (Procter 2004).

This transformation of media messages to popularly held beliefs has a profound impact on the operation of the American social, political, and economic orders. Indeed, predictions of public opinion are made into fact as, thanks to coverage by media providers, the majority opinion was treated as the status quo, reducing the amount of space for the expression of minority opinion. In this way, media providers give an untrue representation of what public opinion is, turning that misrepresentation into the status quo, blocking out minority opinion. This process shows how media can be used to construct or deconstruct consensus and control dissent on controversial subjects" (Pedro 2010).

McLuhan is clear that media should be understood as extensions of humans' natural abilities. Just as the train is an extension of the human ability to move and the cable news show is an extension of the human ability to communicate information, media is fundamentally a more sophisticated version of something a human being can already do. In this sense, it is very similar to technology.

Technology, like both news- and non-news-media, is a regular occurrence in our daily lives; humans have depended on it since the beginning of civilization. As our ability to produce these tools has exploded in the recent past, they have become increasingly central to the functioning of our lives and our ability to interact with the world.

Critically, for McLuhan, this means that the fundamental measurement of any medium or technology is "the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs (McLuhan 64)". The change that interested McLuhan the most, and the impact which technology has on society that this thesis is most interested in, is McLuhan's insistence that technologies necessarily have specific impacts which are direct results of their form.

An essential part of understanding not only what the media is but how it functions in the American context is having a complete vision of the network in which it operates. Just as in any system of communication, there are senders and receivers. In the media network, there are two principal senders: the media providers which produce news content and the media organizations, often the parent companies of the media providers, who tend to be giant, multinational companies which own scores of film studios, publishing companies, and other media-producing companies. In this case, the receivers are the American public which consume the products which the senders create.

1.3 The Creation of the Modern Media Environment

The importance of the access to information currently enjoyed by most modern people is a defining feature of our era. As discussed, information is central to the successful execution of almost any action taken by us as humans. Given the essentiality of information in our endeavors, the control of information is an extremely valuable asset, as those who control the information also control its dissemination, and by extension, the way the information is used and the people who are using it.

This is an essential feature of the argument of my thesis and is borne primarily from McLuhan's "medium as message" argument in that the ways in which the media we use -- that is, the extensions of our capabilities as humans -- has dramatic consequences for the patterns of ways we interact with each other and the resulting orientation of society. This is particularly true in the case of the media and its overarching structure. A decades-long process of merging, deregulating, and other processes have resulted in a completely different media environment than the one that existed merely decades ago.

A discriminating analysis of this system, its function, actors, limitations, and their development over time reveals, according to the media scholars Michael Herman and Noam Chomsky, how the "overwhelming collective power of these firms, with their corporate interlocks and unified cultural and political values, raises troubling questions about the individual's role in the American democracy (Herman and Chomsky xii)". Such an analysis will need to focus on three overlapping and interconnected transformations: the impact of the commercialization of the media in the long term and the impact of advertising in the short term; the rapid centralization of corporate ownership of media companies in just a few hands and resulting fragmentation of individual media users' interaction with the market; and the general deregulation of laws and practices governing the media landscape. Though the story of the development of the media environment depends on the interaction of these complicated narratives, one clear throughline can be drawn: in the last few decades, the media landscape in the US has become more centralized (and by extension, more fragmented), more commercialized, and less regulated.

Indeed, Manuel Castells considers changes to the organizational structures and policies as critical factors that have led to this new paradigm: "management decisions, systems of industrial

relations, cultural and institutional environments, and government policies are such fundamental sources" (Castells 240). Indeed, as Innis noted, changing organizational structures are triggered and enabled by technological innovation; similarly, Castells observes political, economic or other social actors in the way they adapt to innovations and they are less considered in the ways they shape technologies and innovations. In this point, I discuss how both the development in the world of news reporting have resulted in a media landscape completely distinct from the one that existed just decades ago and how that new "modern media environment" shapes the American information landscape.

1.3.1 Commercialization

Commercialization is perhaps the most fundamental of these threads as it is primarily concerned with how the media makes its money. Crucial to the understanding of the media and its transformation over time is its fundamental status as a profit-dependent actor in a capitalist market. Stripped of its social-political context, this emphasis on commercial growth as the bottom line of media companies as businesses in the market is essential to a robust understanding of the origins of the modern media environment. While media companies have always acted in this way, the last hundred years, and especially the past few decades, have seen a decisive shift in the scale and scope of the commercialization of the media market: within that time frame, media providers have become powerful sources of profit; indeed, the very distinction I make in this project between culture- and entertainment-based media and news-based media is a product of that fact, as Robert McChesney, prominent media scholar, comments in his book *The Problem of the Media, U.S. Communication Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, "the modern capitalist film, music, advertising, and broadcasting

industries emerged… part and parcel of the rise of modern corporate-based capitalism in the United States (McChesney 22)". In their book "Manufacturing Consent," media scholars Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky describe it as "a guided market system" in which the government, leaders of the corporate community, and top media executives "guide" the market and the adjacent players in the direction of eternal centralization (Herman and Chomsky l5). The U.S. media system -- even its most "free market" sectors -- is the direct result of explicit government policies and in fact would not exist without those policies. (McChesney 21).

To be sure, media providers have always been commercial entities: fundamentally, news products are just that, products, having a central aim to make money. However, a difference needs to be made between making money as *a* central principle and *the* guiding principle of journalism. This distinction becomes salient when considering the growth of the newspaper industry over the course of the 19th and 20th century, where newspapers transitioned from being primarily partisan to primarily commercial, when profit margins exploded from the rapid decline in production costs and the mushrooming of advertising. This allowed for the creation of a fairly competitive market where consumer bases had a variety of options to choose from; however, over time, two important shifts in the news-based media system came to pass.

First, supply and control chains came to be controlled by fewer and fewer people; second, smaller papers with smaller readerships were squeezed out by larger ones as they were unable to generate as much profit to advertisers (McChesney 59-62; Klein 145). This created a media environment where advertising concerns were a central motivating feature for journalists, giving advertisers and other corporate interests leverage over the content media providers were able to produce, as well as the kind of media providers which survived – indeed, much of the populist and socialist press were wiped out by this model (McChesney 61, Herman and

Chomsky 14, Shah 2009) – leaving the overall media landscape looking much more conservative than the population it serves. These pressures have intensified in recent years as media stocks have become market favorites, and actual or prospective owners of newspapers and television properties have found it possible to capitalize increased audience size and advertising revenues into multiplied values of the media franchises and great wealth (Chomsky 6-7).

This dependence on advertising also plays a potent role in the concentration of the media: a market share and advertising edge on the part of one organization will give it additional revenue to compete more effectively while the disadvantaged must add expenses, they cannot afford to try to stem the cumulative process of dwindling market and revenue share. Many of the large media companies are fully integrated into the market, and for the others, too, the pressures of stockholders, directors, and bankers to focus on the bottom line are powerful. The greater profitability of the media and a deregulated environment has also led to an increase in takeovers and takeover threats. This has forced the management of the media giants to incur greater debt and to focus ever more aggressively and unequivocally on profitability in order to placate owners and reduce the attractiveness of their properties to outsiders, another important thread to which we will return later.

These control groups obviously have a special stake in the status quo by virtue of their wealth and their strategic position in one of the greatest institutions of society and they exercise the power of the strategic position, if only by establishing the general aims of the company and choosing its top management. These holdings, individually and collectively, do not convey control, but these large investors can make themselves heard, and their actions can affect the welfare of the companies and their managers. If the managers fail to pursue actions that favor shareholder returns, institutional investors will be inclined to sell the stock, depressing its price,

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or to listen sympathetically to outsiders contemplating takeovers (Herman and Chomsky 5-8; 11).

1.3.2 Centralization and Fragmentation

The control of information is a central feature of this paper. The degree to which that information is controlled by so few is at its most intense than it ever has been. Until recently, the sources which we consider to be the primary sources of information -- television and print being the most important for this thesis -- have been owned and operated by dispersed individuals or small collections of organizations, each having their own reach. Often, given their numbers, these sources were in conflict with each other, needing to compete for the widest coverage or circulation, depending on a regular audience to buy their papers and tune in to their stations. With such a dependence on that regular audience, owners had a strong incentive to make their products as palatable as possible to as many people as possible, which meant most media organizations operated with a strong pull to the center, focusing on generally neutral values of reporting, editing, and commentary.

The unraveling of this model has led to conditions of "fragmentation," where media companies, having cornered vast expanses of the market, break up the audience by creating programming or altering their journalistic approach to appeal to specific "spheres" of the news-consuming public. These concurrent processes of the consolidation of the media market into fewer and fewer hands and the fragmenting of the news-consuming public inform the development of the modern media environment. This has resulted in Manuel Castells' "network society," where dominant functions are organized in networks pertaining to a space of flows that links them up around the world, while fragmenting subordinate functions, and people, in the

multiple space of places, made of locales increasingly segregated and disconnected from each other (Castells 476)". Indeed, the network society functions around the strategic inclusion or exclusion of social groups to center specific forms of consumption based on specific identities, which in this new model are structured around the tension between the network and the self.

Given that the prevailing order which govern information networks are concerned primarily with the maintenance of their own power, as discussed in more detail in the point of this chapter, the identity-based communication model is an incredibly effective tool at allowing that order to spread its influence given communication's status as a process in which new information is actively interpreted and used selectively by the recipients who take an active role in shaping the meaning of the information. With their own unique information environments, social movements are able to form around national and demographic identities, and are key formations attempting to reassure autonomy in times of instability and structural change, caused by fluid networks.

1.3.2.1 Centralization

The market which guides the media landscape has changed dramatically over the last few decades, resulting in the consolidation of control of media into fewer and fewer companies over time. In 1983, 50 media organizations controlled most of the American media, including magazines, books, music, newspapers, movies, radio, and television. By 1992 that number had dropped by half. By 2003, five men controlled what fifty had in 1983 (Bagdikian 51) as a result being a series of policies that have facilitated ownership of the majority of the major media outlets by a small number of corporations, demonstrating the economic aspects of ownership and their effects on the content and structure of media" (Vargas 2012). These policies will be

discussed in greater detail in the following point of this chapter, but first, the view from the top: whether or not this centralization has resulted in the creation of monopolies is a slippery concept which is difficult to give a definitive yes or no answer to. What exactly constitutes a monopoly is itself a difficult to define (and inherently political) exercise. In its generally understood, non-technical definition of any one business which dominates its industry, any one of these companies would surely fit the mold. However, in the Federal Trade Commission's eyes, mere dominance is not sufficient: a business must be "unreasonably restraining competition (Staff), have engaged in improper conduct to have restricted the operation of other business, and a host of other actions which these companies have not been found to have done. Given the existence of a few different companies with dominance of the market, it would appear to be more of an oligopoly than a monopoly.

1.3.2.1.1 The Big Five

This accumulation did not happen overnight, but instead was a product of the quickly deregulating and advertising-centric shifts in the media over the last few decades. 2002 was considered to be a watershed moment in the centralization of the media landscape; since that time, the five biggest media organizations, known as "The Big Five," have grown even larger. Since last measured in 2020, these five media organizations control upwards of 90% of the total media landscape, including newspapers, magazines, book publishers, motion picture studios, and radio and television stations. Readers will note all of the original three major broadcast journalism networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), their younger competitors (CNN and Fox News), and two notable newspapers (*Wall Street Journal* and *New York Post*) amongst these organizations' holdings.

Media Organization	Notable Holdings
AT&T	Time Warner, CNN, HBO
Comcast	NBC Universal, Telemundo, Universal Pictures
Disney	ABC, ESPN, Pixar, Marvel Studios
News Corp	Fox News, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post*
ViacomCBS	CBS, Paramount Pictures

Source: Table Created By Author

1.3.2.2 Fragmentation

Interestingly, while the commercial market which governs media distribution has centralized, the audience which consumes it has fragmented. The most obvious cause of fragmentation is a steady growth in the number of media products competing for public attention. This happens when established media, such as television or newspapers, expand. Because these established organizations have such control of the market and so much capital to expand their programming, they actually fragment the audience by giving them so many options. This occurs both within the culture- and entertainment-focused realm of media organizations and

the news-focused realm of media providers and between these two realms: the latter being the more important for our purposes here.

In the old media environment, there were simply much fewer options available for media consumption. In any given media market, there were primarily three networks (CBS, NBC, and ABC) and one or two daily newspapers, meaning that the average media consumer had very little access to different media which only offered news content at certain parts of the day, and to keep those audiences coming back, the media providers would curate the tone and content of their products in such a way so as to keep most people happy. This resulted in generally inoffensive and palatable content – these newscasts offered a homogeneous and generic ''point–counterpoint'' perspective on the news, thus ensuring that exposure to the news was a common experience (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). As the market grew, media providers could devote more time to all of their different offerings with devoted channels to its entertainment and news products, and media users had an increasing amount of content to choose from (even though that content was still [and increasingly] from the same organizations), and so could choose to watch or read whatever they wanted (Starr 2012, Herman and Chomsky 5).

Indeed, "competition forces newspapers to cater to the prejudices of their readers, and greater competition typically results in more aggressive catering to such prejudices as competitors strive to divide the market'' (Mullainathan & Schleifer 2005); thus, as the audience becomes polarized over matters of politics and public policy, rational media owners stand to gain market share by injecting more rather than less political bias into the news (Iyengar and Hahn 2009)''. Polarization is a topic to which we will return in the next chapter of this thesis. Where before the key gatekeeper in the media market was *access*, advances in the market have made it *interest*.

This is particularly important for the structure of news. Now having access to basically any kind of content they desired, the amount of people consuming news content decreased dramatically, with two important consequences. First, newsroom budgets were significantly cut across the board. Data from across the board shows growth in newsrooms from the 1970s through the 1990s, followed by a sharp decline in the ensuing decades (Starr 2012, Kovach and Rosenstiel 6) a timeline completely in line with the development of the modern media environment. These cuts to newsroom budgets resulted in a dramatic change in the kind of reporting that newsrooms were able to do. Having transitioned to 24-hour news cycles at the peak of their explosion, media outlets suddenly found themselves with a lot of time to fill and much fewer resources to fill it. To fill this gap, media providers took advantage of the tendency of users to attach themselves to media providers which offer coverage sympathetic to people's political beliefs (Klein 145, Iyengar and Hahn 2009). This shift, along with the other myriad forces which had been exerting themselves on media organizations and media providers alike, moved the industry away from the old paradigm of in-depth investigative reporting, which was often costly and slow-moving, to a model centered around commentary and opinion, which is cheap to produce and easier to align with users' preferences (Kovach and Rosenstiel 62).

These topics have to do with the Theory of Structuration on how the media provides resources and agents appropriate to accomplish their purposes. To do this effectively, both parties rely heavily on information regimes (media measures) to monitor consumption; these media measures, also known as "market information regimes," are data points that provide media providers with information about user-side consumption of their products and allow them to adjust their strategies for managing attendance and monetize the results. These are the prime way by which producers in competitive markets make sense of their actions and make choices. Media

providers monetize attention in a "dual-product" marketplace, where providers sell content to consumers and "eyeballs" to advertisers. Attracting audiences is a prerequisite for achieving economic, social, or political objectives (Webster and Ksiazek 2012). In short, when a previously devoted public regularly tuning into the same few choices came to have a much more robust set of options, they began to take advantage of those choices, abandoning the traditional media providers for other sources. As a consequence, different groups began to receive not only different takes on the same information but also different kinds of information altogether.

Media users tend to act in ways which follow the concept of selective exposure, or the tendency of media users to choose the media products they prefer. Those preferences might reflect user needs, attitudes, or tastes, but their actions are "rational" in the sense that they serve psychological predispositions. This tendency feeds another which groups media users who prefer the same media into highly focused audiences consuming particular media providers and products regularly and with little exposure to other providers and products (Gitlin, Curran, and Liebes 1998). Similarly, these audiences of particular media providers end up having incredibly similar opinions, which comes in part from their centralization around like-minded media but also in part from underlying political competition, whereby political parties, movements, and individual entrepreneurs attempt to generate support by presenting their points of view. If they generate enough interest, media outlets will try to cater to the very same audiences that political entrepreneurs attract (Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005).

Anyone who participates in or uses products made by the modern media environment can be described or categorized as having certain tastes or preferences in their use, which media providers try to understand and capitalize on. Given the tendency of media users to gravitate to like-minded media, media providers use media measures and other tools to try and understand

each user's media repertoire, or the chosen set of media providers or products a user consumes regularly. Since the sheer abundance of the digital marketplace makes perfect awareness impossible, users can not consume all media available (infinite variety) and so instead choose a small number of sources and products (experience goods) which they consume regularly (Gitlin, Curran, and Liebes 1998). In the two-step process of selective exposure (described above) and self-selection, or the tendency of people to surround themselves with media providers and products seen to be like-minded or friendly to their pre-existing beliefs, each user to be said to have a User Information Regime, which are search and recommendation systems which suggest content that the user might like given their history. Selective exposure and self-selection differ in that self-selection is an active, observable process where media users consciously search, filter out, and eventually choose particular sources, and that selective exposure is more a term to describe the overall trend of media use over a user's life (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2008, Webster and Ksiazek 2012) As the viewing public moves from being a more or less monolithic entity concentrated in a small collection of sources to something more "niche" and disperse, companies react to capitalize on new audiences. Thus, a feedback loop is created -- media users go to news sources to get news which matches their beliefs and biases, and media providers offer that biased media coverage to their users, so they continue to come back.

For their part, users have responded incredibly well to this shift. Users tend to both "seek out (Iyengar and Hahn 2009)" and "appreciate, find credible, enjoy, and remember (Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005)" information which confirms their pre-existing political beliefs, so both media users and media providers have a strong incentive to invest themselves in the development of this model. Indeed, users tend to ignore contradictory information (unless it is significant enough to change their frame of reference, an important aspect to which we will

return in more detail later); users therefore seek out a cognitive consistency in messaging. This "selective exposure" has cemented media provider's transition from traditional values and styles of reporting to a model of slanted and biased reporting. While social and economic factors surely drove this transformation in part, there is one more dimension of this transition that is yet to be explained: the legal framework.

1.3.3 Deregulation

The third of these important threads is the deregulation of the media market over time. As mentioned above, the media landscape can be described as a guided market system in which the government, media companies, and their executives work together to facilitate greater profits and to design a landscape more favorable to the media companies themselves. Indeed, most dominant media firms exist because of government-granted and government-enforced monopoly broadcasting licenses, telecommunication franchises, and rights to content (McChesney 21); similarly, all business firms are interested in business taxes, interest rates, labor policies, and enforcement and non-enforcement of antitrust laws (Herman and Chomsky 13) which of course intimately tie them to the way the government is run. The regulatory landscape governing media companies is a somewhat confusing one and has shifted considerably over time. I break this development into five key eras, beginning with the establishment of the federal government's powers and interests in the industry continuing to the present day to include current government policy; what follows is a brief rundown of that development over time.

1.3.3.1 Origins: The Constitution and First Legislation

The United States Constitution provides some of the earliest guidance on this issue. The First Amendment to the Constitution specifically enumerates a freedom of the press which largely protects news organizations from Congressional action. This power protects the ability of publishers to largely avoid censure by the government in terms of things actually said -- that is, although the government is largely free to legislate over the news industry, it is mostly prohibited from blocking specific publications or points of view. The government did not actually begin to seriously regulate the industry until 1920 with the nationalization of the radio spectrum. Under this regulation, businesses must get a government license to have the right to use the airwaves. This is generally thought to be the origin of the "broadcast licensing" system. Then, in 1927, the Radio Act of 1927 nationalized airwaves and created the Federal Radio Commission (FRC), which would later become the Federal Communication Commission, a key regulatory player. These first few steps are important in that they are the first to begin to define the relationship of regulators with businessmen and set the stage for future conflicts (*Radio Act)*.

1.3.3.2 1934 -- 1975: Advances in Legislation

Whereas the first steps taken by regulators were limited to radio, the next step broadens the regulator's reach to include the entire communication system. That next step took the form of the Communications Act of 1934, which, amongst other actions, folded the Federal Radio Commission into the newly created Federal Communication Commission (FCC), which was given authority to give out licenses to broadcasters with the primary goal of "serving the public interest." which the FCC defined as "first and foremost on the interest, convenience, and the

necessity of the listening public and not on the interest, convenience, or necessity of the individual broadcaster or the advertiser (*Communications Act*)". Acting on that definition, the early FCC regulations reflected the view that "it would not be in the public's interest for a single entity to hold more than one broadcast license in the same community (Robb 2009)," meaning that the regulators' position was that the public would benefit from a diverse array of owners because it would lead to a diverse array of program and service viewpoints (Obar 501). Therefore, any licenses given by the FCC came with the requirement that broadcasters act according to the definition of public interest defined by the FCC.

1.3.3.3 1975 -- 1996: The Shift Towards Focus on Cross-Ownership

The next significant development came in 1975 with the passage of new FCC rules on cross-ownership. Generally, these rules were concerned with the ownership of one corporation of different companies with related interest or commercial aims. Specifically, the rules prohibited the ownership of a daily newspaper and any full-power broadcast station that services the same community (Obar 503). This is an example of the relevance of the First Amendment to the Constitution -- although regulators could not be explicitly regulated given their "freedom of the press" protection, they could regulate the ownership of newspapers as a preclusion against owning radio and television licenses. Again, the FCC's justification for these changes were to ensure that a sufficiently broad number of voices were given the opportunity to communicate via different outlets in each market. In order to accomplish that goal, the FCC saw preventing cross-ownership of newspapers and radio or television companies to be primarily important.

Another important step was taken in the form of the Telecommunications Act of 1996

(TA). Also concerned with cross-ownership, this Act required the FCC to conduct a biennial review of its media ownership rules and "determine whether any of such rules are necessary in the public interest as the result of competition" and was also ordered to "repeal or modify any regulation it determines to be no longer in the public interest (*Telecommunications Act*)".

This is a subtle but important departure in the FCC's guiding principles. Although "the public interest" is still front and center in (at least the presentation of) the governing body's aims, the TA adds the important element of competition as a measure of the public interest. Interestingly, the passage of the TA in 1996 resulted in less competition, rather than more, with several large companies merging, over 4,000 radio stations being bought out, and minority ownership in TV stations dropped to its lowest point since the government began tracking that data (Fair).

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 is considered as the point at which it began to become easier, rather than harder, to conduct mergers in the media landscape. Although thought to be very beneficial for the companies involved, usually the largest, the FCC itself even admitted in a study they issued that smaller companies, viewers, and future businesses widely suffered negative consequences (Shah 2009). In considering the history of the FCC and its treatment of media companies, 1996 can be seen as an important inflection point at which the ease of cross-ownership, and therefore centralization of media companies, and scope of those activities began to intensify.

1.3.3.4 1996 -- The Present: The Creation of the Modern Media Environment

Whereas past changes in the government's policy toward communications have usually

taken the form of large-scale Congressional Acts, more recent changes the government's policy rules have been smaller and more subtle in nature, while still being grand and sweeping in scope. This is particularly notable for the creation of what I call "the modern media environment" because the heavy legislative lifting, the culmination of the transformation, took place in 1996. The changes which took place in this era represent internal rules changes which confirm and completely institutionalize the transformation.

The first of these rules' changes came in 2003 when, pursuant to the review obligations specified by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the FCC voted to repeal the newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule 3-2, arguing that the rule was no longer necessary to protect the public's interest in "competition, diversity, or localism." This decision took place with only one public hearing and over two million pieces of correspondence in opposition. These changes permitted a company to own a newspaper and broadcast station in any of the nation's top 20 media markets as long as there are at least eight media outlets in the market. If the combination included a television station, that station couldn't be in the market's top four. These changes also significantly increased the percentage of a market one media organization was allowed to own, changed the weighing of that percentage to include all media forms, and dropped "public interest" considerations from license reviews (Obar 510).

Legislative Era	Relevant Legislation Effect of Legislation
1776 -- 1934: Origins	**Federal Radio Act of 1927** ● Gave licensing power of radio airwaves to the government ● Creation of Federal Radio Commission (FRC), predecessor of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
1934 -- 1975: Advances in Legislation	**Communication Act of 1934** ● Broke telephone monopolies ● Folded the FRC into the newly formed FCC ● Established the "public interest" paradigm for licensing
1975 -- 1996: The Shift Towards Cross-Ownership	**Federal Communications Act of 1996** ● Broadcast/newspaper cross-ownership rule changes resulting in mass centralization of the marker ● Implementation of rule requiring FCC to review and eliminate rules ● Modified "public interest" aim to emphasize competition
1996 -- The Present: The Creation of the Modern Media Environment	**FCC Rule Changes** ●Repeal of the newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule ● Single-company ownership of media in each market is now permitted up to 45% (formerly 35%, up from 25% in 1985) of that market ● All TV channels, magazines, newspapers, cable, and Internet services are now counted, weighted based on people's average tendency to find news on that medium. ●. Licenses are no longer reviewed for "public-interest considerations"

Source: Table Created by the Author

What is clear throughout the FCC's gradual deregulation of the market is the heightened ability of media organizations to steadily expand their reach throughout different media markets. Is this necessarily a bad thing? This debate is perhaps best exemplified by the contrasting opinions of Robert McChesney, frequently cited throughout this chapter, and Benjamin

Compaine, a Senior Research Affiliate for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The most structural of their disagreement's centers on the very framing of the question. McChesney says it is not necessarily appropriate to frame the discussion in terms of regulation or deregulation as it often is, claiming "there is every bit as much regulation by the government as before, only now it is more explicitly directed to serve large corporate interests (McChesney 49). Compaine argues that the current regulatory environment produces a highly competitive system which produces higher quality content.

On matters of the ensuing centralization, McCheseney believes this is something to be avoided -- in his mind, the goal should be a diverse, competitive commercial system with a significant nonprofit and noncommercial sector, which he claims would be a serious move in the right direction (McChesney 32). Conversely, Compaine believes that the current system is one of the most competitive in US commerce and that the general coming together of the media has been its salvation, saying that the higher amount of capital and funding brought on by media centralization has led to media companies being more competitive as they are trying to reach more users by developing and using new forms of media. Generally, Compaine's main argument is that the consolidation of media outlets, across multiple ownerships, has allowed for a better quality of content. He also stated that the news is interchangeable, and as such, making the media market less concentrated than previously thought, the idea being that since the same story is being pushed across multiple different platforms, then it can only be counted as one news story from multiple sources. Compaine also believed the news is more readily available, making it far easier for individuals to access than traditional methods (Compaine 32).

1.4 Media Bias

In the previous point, a picture was painted of the media environment as being the product of a few different concurrent processes: commercialization, namely, the media environment's fundamental nature as a capitalist enterprise reliant on market forces and having developed in great part by the pushes and pulls of advertising; centralization and fragmentation, which describe how the media organizations who produce media content, particularly news-based media providers, have become fewer and fewer over the course of the last few decades and in so doing have actually broken the audience for their products into several groups who consume products about which they have the most interest; and deregulation, which reflects the gradual weakening over time of any meaningful pro-public government oversight and concurrent slow takeover of corporate interests. I argue that these three processes, which have their roots in the very development of the capitalist media enterprise but truly took form since the 1990s, have created the modern media environment, the structural and organizational schemata that now governs Americans' experience with media.

This system has certain qualities which causes it to produce outcomes in the products it produces and in its role as a significant player in the organization and functioning of American society. Specifically, I argue that the modern media environment is corporate, specifically, as a profit-seeking actor in a capitalist system, its *raison d'être* is fundamentally to make money; establishment, specifically, it is a power center of the social, political, and economic orders and works in conjunction with other establishment entities; and conservative, specifically, it prefers social, political, and economic decisions which prefer the status quo and seeks to avoid changes to those orders.

<u>1.4.1 Corporate, Establishment, and Conservative Media</u>

Media providers have always been considered a necessary "fourth estate" in the taxonomy of democracy. Traditionally conceived, the media's role has always been one of information, transparency, and communication. These providers are expected to serve this important intermediary position, holding elected officials responsible and disseminating important information about topics relevant to the public interest. Robert McChesney understands the problem, similarly, underscoring how both the products it produces and the organizational and incentive structure which generates those products are incredibly important issues with clear consequences for the public:

> *"The media…present a political problem for any society, and an unavoidable one at that. In other words, the first problem with the media deals with its content; the second and larger problem deals with the structure that generates that content. Understood this way, the manner in which a society decides how to structure the media system, how it elects to solve the problem of the media in the second sense, becomes of paramount importance (McChesney 2004)".*

In line with their role as a pillar of society, media providers have generally been expected to hold itself to certain standards and to (or at least, to seem to) present information in a neutral, professional, matter-of-fact way, utilizing traditional values of "verification, proportion, relevance, depth, and quality of interpretation" (Kovach and Rosenstiel 9) to give the public what they need in order to be informed citizens who make informed choices about their governmental system. However, in the recent past, not only following the three trends of commercialization, centralization, and deregulation outlined in the previous point but also in tandem with the growing strength of mega-identity-based groups, discussed in more detail in the following chapter, the media has come to serve a different function and has undergone an equal change in reputation.

In its transformation into the modern media environment from the old, the "fourth estate"

has taken a much different approach to its role in the political, social, and economic order. It has designed its products and tailored the information it is responsible for communicating in such a way to cater to the values and biases of highly interested, highly activated groups. In turn, those groups in turn selectively choose their sources of information to match their values and confirm their biases. William Kovach and Tom Rosentiel, former journalists and current media critics cited frequently throughout this point, elaborates:

> *"While the press may not tell people what to think, it gives them a list of things to think about. In so doing the news culture still shapes the lines of the political playing field and the context in which citizens define meaning for political events. The rules of political and media culture alter not only how politics is conducted, but increasingly who participates, why, and the nature of what can be accomplished (Kovach and Rosenstiel 1999)".*

These structural and attitudinal changes present themselves in two categories of ways. The first set has to do with the way that media providers take their information, that is, from what kinds of sources providers build their stories; the second is how that content is then communicated.

1.4.1.1 Sourcing

Media providers are both generators and communicators of the news. As discussed in the previous point of this chapter, one consequence of the media environment's transition since the 1990s has been the decline of the amount of content media providers generate. In addition to the transition away from reporting and toward commentary already discussed in that point, providers began to "outsource" their reporting by purveying the information provided to them by other establishment sources of power, which is problematic for a few reasons.

First, in the case of corporate interests, there are often economic incentives for providers to color the news in a way which is favorable to those interests. As discussed throughout the previous point, advertisers are routinely guilty of receiving this kind of favorable coverage;

additionally, as evidenced from the earlier discussion on centralization, media providers are often owned by parent companies with holdings that would benefit from positive coverage, something they are likely to receive when funneling information to "allied" journalists.

This is not to say that journalists are malignantly sourcing their stories, but rather that these inherent economic incentives, pressures, and constraints bias the work they produce. These corporate interests also go to great lengths to make themselves available as reliable sources of information and reduce journalists' costs in producing stories to become "routine new sources and have privileged access to the gates (Herman and Chomsky 22)".

Second, in the case of government officials, regular overreliance on official sources creates a certain self-affirming feedback loop, in which government officials (who of course have an interest in the dissemination of slants on the news) see their status as experts confirmed by being continuously sourced in stories, making it so they are sourced again in future stories, *etcetera, etcetera* (Herman and Chomsky 23).

This reliance on government sources also opens the door to political bias. A study of evening news programs conducted by media watchdog Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, for example, found that 92% of all sources interviewed were white, 85% were male, and where party affiliation was identifiable, 75% were Republican – that same study showed media providers strongly favored rightwing pundits across the board, while progressive voices were far outnumbered (Who's on The News?).

While this is by no means an exhaustive description of representation in news, it does offer a glimpse into the kind of political representation, both in terms of pure partisan ideology and demographic representation, that we see in media reports. Lastly, in a general sense, regular contact and mutual dependency allows media providers to over-rely on these sources which have

strong interest in the maintenance of the status quo, leading media providers – already similarly biased – to curate a particular kind of coverage.

One particular example of the political implications of this kind of sourcing is how media providers report on corporate activity. For one, there is very little criticism about providers' parent companies, nor about the kind of the social, political, and economic policies which benefit those organizations (Shah 2009). Indeed, criticism in news reporting is often more directed at government than at private industry, which serves the two-fold purpose of shielding private industry from unwanted scrutiny and contributing to a general anti-government sentiment.

This kind of coverage, which "favor[s] exposing governmental rather than private (corporate) wrongdoing" (Baker 106), plays into a general cynicism about the state of public life. Indeed, media providers historically have been understandably reluctant to cover their own misdeeds in their news media, and they could hardly be enthusiastic about a no-holds-barred journalism that would uncover the entire corporate crime story (McChesney 73, 96).

Political information is of course difficult to detect given that it is rarely explicitly stated and can reasonably be explained away by other, non-political decisions which are made throughout the sourcing process. However difficult to detect, these institutional biases are present, and "the self-serving censorship of political and social ideas and news… is subtle, some not even occurring at a conscious level, as when subordinates learn by habits you can form to their owners' ideas. But subtle or not, the ultimate result is distorted reality and impoverished ideas (Shah 2009)". In short, corporate news shares values, financial incentives, and control with their parent companies, and these shared assets are mutually influencing, resulting in content which reflects that bond.

1.4.1.2 Content

In the preceding discussion on the downstream effects of corporate, establishment, and conservative news media, I examined how the sourcing from which reporting is drawn is biased toward sources which are likely to produce content favorable to those kinds of entities. However, sourcing is only one step in the creation of a news story. Where media providers before had an incentive to present the news in a generally non-partisan, inoffensive style to attract and maintain the largest possible audience, the fragmented reality of the news audience in the new modern media environment has significantly changed their incentives. Unable to reform the concentrated audiences of the past, media providers now focus on maintaining a much smaller but much more devoted audience of users with strongly held political beliefs by catering the tone and style of their products to users' biases and beliefs. Doing so requires the manipulation of the news in a variety of different ways. This point deals primarily with those tools; particularly, I discuss the role of framing, priming, and bias and slant.

The first concept in question is framing. A news organization can be said to frame an issue when they curate material to bring certain ideas or details to the forefront of the viewers' attention, suggest interpretations, or encourage certain solutions to problems. Robert Entman (1993, 2007) and his two pieces on framing will be cited heavily on this topic – *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm* and *Framing Bias: Media in The Distribution Of Power*. On what framing is: "we can define framing as the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation...typically, frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe...to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral

evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the terms described (Entman 1993, Entman 2007)". Consider the image below: in reality, outside the confines of the camera, we see that the man on the right is attempting to stab the man on the left; it is clear the man on the right is the attacker and the man on the left the victim.

However, the camera only captures part of the image, communicating an event that is completely opposite of what is happening in reality: the *frame* of the camera distorts the image and communicates a misleading message, obscuring the truth. In this way, all of Entman's metrics are satisfied: the news' frame diagnoses the problem (the man on the left is trying to hurt the man on the right), evaluates the issue (the man on the left is clearly in the wrong, attacking the poor, defenseless man on the right), and prescribes what should be done (clearly we cannot have the man on the left running free, something must be done).

Source: Molloy, Tom. "International Journalism."

A critical second dimension of the framing concept is where it takes place in the communication process. Entman identifies four major locations in the communication process in

which framing occurs: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Communicators make conscious (or unconscious) judgements about how to frame things in their mental schemata. The text itself contains frames (key words, tone, themes, sources, etc.) which then guide the receiver toward particular conclusions. Lastly, the culture is the "stock of commonly invoked frames," or a set of frames common and recognizable by a similar group of people (Entman 1993, Entman 2007).

Returning to the picture above, all four of these framing locations are on display: the man behind the camera is the communicator, the image seen on the camera is the text, we are the receivers, and the culture is the unseen dimension, reminding us that we think murder is bad, guiding us to conclude that the man on the left is a bad man.

A second concept worth exploring is that of "priming." Similar to framing, priming is a process which introduces or raises the salience, or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemes that encourage audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way. This process encompasses the core business of strategic framing: to highlight the causes of problems, to encourage moral judgments (and associated affective responses), and to promote favored policies. Priming, then, is a name for the goal, the intended effect, of strategic actors' framing activities. Salience, however, also needs to be defined: it means making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences. An increase in salience enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it, and store it in memory (Entman 1993, Entman 2007). If a news organization has successfully framed a story in the way it wants, it will also have primed successfully.

The last important concepts which need to be defined have to do with bias and slant. While conceptually similar topics, there are important differences which distinguish the two.

Similarly, there are different levels at which bias applies. As has been discussed throughout this chapter of this thesis, bias is often (though certainly not always, as will be discussed in the following chapter) ingrained and unconscious rather than explicit and malicious.

In part, that has been the overarching message of this chapter: because of the slant of structural and organization realities which govern the process of producing media, and in particular producing news, a slew of almost undetectable partialities is baked in. Again, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent*:

> *"Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market, and political power. Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who adjust to the realities of source and media organization requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organizations who are chosen to implement, and have usually internalized, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centers of power (Herman and Chomsky lx).*

Herman and Chomsky reiterate a sentiment already expressed by McChesney and Entman. Because of the way the media is oriented, different levels of bias from reporters and executives filter the kind of information which is released and the way it is released.

This is closely tied with the concept of slant, which similarly describes the "visual, verbal, and even aural aspects of the text (Entman 2007)" to arrive at an understanding of how a particular piece of media is being described.

Taken together, these different but intertwined concepts can be referred to simply as "agenda setting." They reflect the ability media providers have to color or curate their product in such a way as to match the biases and values of their audience. Clearly, this is an incredibly significant power on its own. In the next point, I'll discuss how this ability is made even more potent when the consequences of users having consistently affirming information are considered.

> *"If the decision biases persistently converge with stable concentrations of political skill and resources possessed by particular interests, media frames could consistently favor certain policy*

outcomes and political actors. Such content biases could exist even where journalists and news organizations possess no conscious ideological goals, indeed where they consciously pursue balance (Entman 2007)".

With this understanding of how the modern media environment manipulates its' viewers perception of a given situation, Entman is in complete agreement with the schema proposed in the point 1.2.2 of this thesis concerning Harold Innis' monopolies of knowledge, Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony, and the cultural materialist understanding of how information is shared through the media environment between senders and receivers: given their ability to control "what is known" by their gatekeeping position of the information flows to a particular society, those in the media environment are free to frame and present the information in whatever ways they want. They utilize this power to curate their content in such a way to cater directly to their audiences' biases and values, something their audience gleefully accepts. This will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

1.5 Conclusion

Although it has always been the case that our relationships with ourselves, others, and society at large has been determined by the technology we use, it is especially true now that technology has developed in such a way to dominate every aspect of our lives. This human-technology relationship has developed in this way because of how culturally relative the development of technology is -- different cultures tend to prefer different technology based on the particular skills, contexts and preferences which are unique to each culture. These fundamental data shape how we use these media in the modern day and therefore the modern media landscape has developed.

The following point charted the course of the modern media environment's development, focusing on three major currents which took place primarily from 1990 to the present day: commercialization, centralization and fragmentation, and deregulation. The first of these three, commercialization, expands upon the status of the media environment existing as a profit-seeking enterprise within a capitalist market economy.

While this has always been true of media organizations, I make the argument that the extent of the role of profit-making and the consequences of the need to respond to market forces in the development of the industry have come at the cost of politically neutral journalism and have contributed to an ongoing process of polarization among these organizations' consumers and a growing distance between the consumers and the organizers of the market. The primary consequence of those forces is described in the following points on centralization and fragmentation.

The modern media environment is an incredibly powerful force in the organization of American social, political, and economic life. As the arbiter of the flow of information, it is a potent force in the formation of opinions and the direction of the national conversation. Since the 1990s, it has developed in such a way as to take on a severe conservative bent, both in its organizational structure as a profit-seeking entity in a capitalist market and as the subject of increasingly weak government oversight. The result, its arguably most troubling aspect, the targeting of individuals' and social groups' biases as the basis for the way they present the news and an accompanying tendency of "increased social inequality and polarization, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter II: Investigating Conceptions of American Identity

2.1 Introduction

Every person is uniquely defined by a set of characteristics. These include a person's birthplace, family, socioeconomic status, preferences, likes, dislikes, and so forth. The way in which a person socializes these aspects of their personalities – that is, how they express those unique data points about themselves in the social world – has incredible determining power regarding what a person tends to care about over the course of their lives. A benign example of this phenomenon is a person's taste in sports teams. For example, a person who follows hockey, and a particular hockey team, is more likely to associate themselves with other people who like hockey, watch hockey games, and buy tickets to go see their favorite team play when they have a chance. This is to say that the person is invested in their interest, will spend time, attention, and resources to keep up with their hobby, and have some level of emotional investment in the well-being of their team. When the team wins, they are happy. When they lose, they are sad. This is, generally speaking, a fairly low-investment hobby. A person might feel strongly about their team, but they recognize in reality that the stakes are fairly low.

Take those same tendencies and apply them to a different context, though, and the stakes can rise dramatically. This is evident in cases of strongly held attachments like racial or national identities. These attachments are entrenched further when people in these groups tend to gather their information from the same place and when those sources of information recognize that tendency and, in search of a committed audience to whom they can regularly advertise and from whom they can expect regular consumption, tailor their information to fit the preferences and biases of the group. In no sense is this group attachment so strong as in nationality. In the case of

the United States, a country which is unique both for its unusual position in world history as one of the only successful multiracial, multiethnic societies of history but also one whose identity is strongly tied to whiteness, sources of nationality are complex in their descriptions but strongly felt. When that identity is activated, and especially when threatened, whites feel that threat to their whiteness and to their American-ness. Predictably, responses are fierce and forceful. With the development of the modern media environment and the historical polarization of American society into tribes, individuals tend to merge all of their group identifications into one "mega-identity," meaning a threat to one identity, be it phone preference or nationality, is a threat to all, with each response backed by the power of numbers and informed by a modern media environment designed to cater to the preferences of its dedicated viewers.

It is important to note that this view of identity is merely one manifestation of the concept within an extremely diverse and complex academic literature of understanding identity. Identity is perhaps one of the most difficult concepts in all of the social science literature because of its centrality to the human experience; for that reason, it can be reasonably defined and have certain characteristics emphasized and still be "accurate" depending on the context in which it is examined. Anthropologists are likely to view differently than sociologists, psychologists differently than economists, and economists differently from sociologists. However, given that this thesis takes place in the political science and political psychology sphere, identity is primarily discussed in the terms that are appropriate for the limitations and purposes of those fields.

Key in this dynamic is the interplay of intergroup conflict, conformity to group norms, the conditions under which it generates collective action, and the factors that promote the categorization of oneself and others into groups. In this chapter, these processes will be explored

in detail, particularly how social identities are formed, how the role of parties have cemented these disperse attachments into a mega-identity, and finally, in the last point, how that mega-identity includes people's understanding of what it means to be an American through analysis of liberal, republican, and ethnocultural American currents of thought and their eventual reject in front of the Multiple Conceptions Approach, the operating theory of American identity for this project.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

One essential feature of human beings is our need for both positive self-aspect and differentiation from other people. In order to reach those goals, and to satisfy our fundamentally social nature, human beings organize themselves into groups of like-minded people along different lines, most having to do with having similar interests and perceived shared qualities. These group attachments, fundamental to both our social and individual lives, take on strength and become identities which people use to understand themselves and differentiate themselves from others. While we often speak of identity as singular, it is always a dizzying plural -- we have countless identities, some in active conflict with each other, some lying dormant until activated by threat or fortune.

This is true in both the social and political dimensions of people's lives. In a general sense, it is difficult to think of some factors of people's lives which are not in some way political. Specifically, multiple dimensions of our lives are explicitly political – regarding sex, women are almost universally paid less than men for doing the same work. Regarding sexuality, in many places throughout the world, the LGBT+ community are prohibited from marrying, adopting children, or donating blood. Regarding disability, many lack access to basic services due to their

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natural limitations. This is to say that almost all the different ways people identify are touched in some way by politics and are therefore political, be it someone's identity as a woman making it more likely they will be paid less or a differently abled person lacking proper infrastructure to access a bank or grocery store. However, the most powerful identities in modern politics are our political identities, precisely because of how they have, in recent decades, come to encompass and amplify a range of these other central identities as well. Over time, our partisan identities have merged with our racial, religious, geographic, ideological, and cultural identities. Those merged identities, mapped onto partisan attachments, have attained a weight that is breaking American institutions and tearing at the bonds that hold that country together. The processes which have led to such a weight being attainable is the subject of this point, particularly how the formation and realignment of the Democratic and Republican parties in the post-Civil War and post-Civil Rights eras have led to the alignment of certain social, religious, and demographic groups with certain parties.

2.1.1 Social Polarization

One feature in the formation of social mega-identities is the rate and intensity at which different social groups are moving apart. In a sense, this process of differentiation between people is natural and one which has always existed between people given the fact that humans are social animals, that is to say, although there are several layers of complex social and political processes at play, much of complex dynamics of social and political affiliation has a base in people's natural tendency to join groups of other people who are interested in the same things they are. However, this process has taken on a unique intensity in the recent past, particularly since 1990 and the development of the modern media environment and the subsequent

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proliferation of "identity-matched sources" of information, media providers which cater the presentation of the news to specific values and biases of highly interested viewers described in the previous point. Specifically, because people naturally seek to maintain a positive self-esteem, they compare themselves positively with like-minded people and their social groups, particularly "prototypical" or the "the best " members of those groups, in order to transfer those positive qualities to themselves. This positive identification with a group naturally comes with a correlating negative comparison with relevant out-groups. When in a situation where that identification, or a person's particular identity as a member of their in-group, becomes *salient*, their feeling of attachment to the group is more pronounced and intense. When that identity is threatened, group members will both feel that threat as if it were a threat to them personally and react on behalf of the group. This effect is particularly volatile when the groups to which people belong overlap significantly; that is, groups of people who share social, racial, and political characteristics will be much stronger than those who only share one or some of those characteristics.

Before group conflict can take place, individuals first need to feel a strong identification with a group, meaning individual psychology plays an important role in the development of group dynamics. Prevailing psychological research (Tafjel et. al 1979, Brewer & Roccas 2001, Huddy 2001, Mason 2013, Mason 2018) suggests that human beings satisfy two competing social needs, one of inclusion and the other of differentiation, or of inclusion and exclusion, by forming value-defined groups. Indeed, "individuals are more likely to think of themselves as members of social groups under conditions in which the use of a group label maximizes the similarities between oneself and other group members and heightens one's differences with outsiders (Turner et. al 1987)". These groups are formed around people's interests and

personality traits, and so can have to do with anything from a preference for sports teams to one's nationality. In practice, people have many identities which they switch between throughout their lives and will pay more attention to given what factors are salient. People identify with groups by comparing themselves to a group "prototypes" – either most typical group members, be it an actual or fictional person, who embodies the most common or most frequent attributes shared among group members (Huddy 2001), essentially typical members who define the group and convey information about the central characteristics of group members – and estimate how well they match the group profile based on their perceived similarity with those prototypes (Tajfel & Turner 1979, Turner et. al 1987). These categories should not be thought of as having very clear rules defining common features but rather "a fuzzy set with unclear boundaries and a graded or probabilistic structure in which some members are rated as more typical or better members of the category than others (Huddy 2001)". Researchers believe that it is one's perceived similarity to the prototypic group member that plays a key role in the formation and development of social identity (Huddy 2001).

An automatic consequence of identification with an in-group is animosity for relevant out-groups. This "minimal intergroup situation" has been well-measured within psychological and sociological literature (for a summary, see Brewer 1979) – in Tajfel's original study and in all subsequent reproductions, "the subjects believed they had been assigned to groups simply for administrative convenience;" they had no contact with each other, and no reason to believe that they held shared interests. Tajfel found that "these social groupings do not need to be based on objectively important criteria for it to become an important part of our social identity and for it to inspire loathing of those who stand outside its boundaries (Tajfel 1974); indeed, Tajfel had not even expected this situation to work and had only done so to establish a baseline of no intergroup

behavior and work from there (Turner et al., 1987). This inter- and intra-group dynamic, which

Tajfel and Turner call "social identity theory," can be summarized as follows:

1. *Individuals strive to maintain or enhance their self-esteem: they strive for a positive self-concept.*
2. *Social groups or categories and the membership of them are associated with positive or negative value connotations. Hence, social identity may be positive or negative according to the evaluations (which tend to be socially consensual, either within or across groups) of those groups that contribute to an individual's social identity.*
3. *The evaluation of one's own group is determined with reference to specific other groups through social comparisons in terms of value-laden attributes and characteristics* (Tajfel and Turner 1978).

In sun, "the premise of social identity theory is that an integral element of individuals' sense of

who they are is based on what groups they belong to or identify with. Since all -- or nearly all --

people strive for a positive self-concept, so all -- or nearly all -- are motivated to evaluate

positive groups that are the basis of their social identity (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior

2004).

Tajfel, Turner, and colleagues theorized that this tendency to view our own with favor

and outsiders with disfavor is so deeply learned that it operates independent of any reason to treat

social relations as a competition: "discriminatory intergroup behavior cannot be fully understood

if it is considered solely in terms of 'objective' conflict of interest...it is the winning that is

important (Tajfel and Turner 1979)". This is to say that an outgroup animosity is a natural

correlate to any kind of in-group preference, and so a conflict, or at least a perceived conflict, is

always present and does not need to have any particular basis: "these social groupings do not

need to be based on objectively important criteria for it to become an important part of our social

identity and for it to inspire loathing of those who stand outside its boundaries (Tajfel 1974).

Academics point to two different kinds of threat (or perceptions of threat) when studying what

causes such strong reactions from groups under pressure (Tajfel and Turner 1978, Outten et. al 2012, Huddy and Bankert 2017).

Most debates on the subject pit economic threats with cultural ones, or, put another way, that groups primarily argue over either "real" or "symbolic" resources. Someone who believes that the primary clash point between groups is on "real" resources is likely to think of the clash in primarily monetary terms: is my job secure? Do I feel safe in the economy? Do I feel like I am benefiting more from the economy, or are other groups getting more than me? Someone who places more value on "symbolic" resources is much more likely to think in very different terms: "do I feel like I am in charge? Do I feel that I have the control, power, and agency to make my environment more favorable to me and my group?" Research has generally centered on the claim that it is not the net allocation of resources between groups but *the feeling of who deserves those resources* and the feeling one gets when they feel another has what they should have, that is important. Groups are sure to react when they feel their status, especially one they feel is rightly theirs, is threatened (Jardina 49).

This motivation to protect and advance group status is a cornerstone of the social identity approach and the psychological foundation for the development of ingroup bias. Group members take action precisely because they wish to defend or elevate the party's position. Their internalized sense of group identity means that the group's failures and victories become personal. Strong group identifiers also feel more positive emotion when their group status is enhanced.

For example, strong partisans in the United States felt increased schadenfreude, a complex positive emotion of joy at others' misfortune, when they read about bad things happening to or reflecting poorly on a political candidate of the other party. The maintenance of

positive group distinctiveness is an active process, especially when a group's position or status is threatened (Huddy and Bankert 2017).

In cases where an outgroup presents a threat to the ingroup, the salience of that identity is heightened and group members respond, and members respond differently depending on the size, perceived strength, and perceived intensity of the offending group and the threat they represent. Individuals, while perhaps not personally concerned with the source of the threat, experience emotions regarding the possible status change that may come with it. These emotions are varied and depend on the content of the threat: offensive action tendencies are linked to the experience of anger or irritation, the emotion of fight or attack. Specifically, anger is felt when people appraise that an outgroup is obstructing valuable goals or taking valuable resources from them. Fear occurs when intergroup events signal uncertainty about the ingroup's future well-being (Outten et. al. 2012)". When the group experiences a success, individuals will feel happy, when they experience a loss, individuals will feel sad – "sympathy is typically directed toward others who are suffering, particularly if they are perceived to be undeserving of their misfortune...this perceived shift in power is likely to be appraised as threatening, which should heighten sympathetic feelings toward the ingroup (Outten et. al. 2012, Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000).

Emotions experienced will also depend on the individual's appraisal of whether the group is strong or weak compared to the offending outgroup; this is particularly true if the conflict is based in an apparent conflict of values or disagreement on a controversial social issue (Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000). This is especially true in cases where there is a difference in sizes amongst groups in conflict as group members make inferences based on opposing groups' social, political, and economic power based on their (perceived) group size: "in contexts where the size of a minority group is large or increasing members of dominant group are likely to believe that

their ingroup's power is threatened (Outten et. al. 2012)". Explicit attacks on a social identity can directly evoke out group derogation, and group level defensive strategies are equally apparent when the threatening behavior of the outgroup is more chronic and ingrained (Branscombe et al. 1999, Jardina 179-180).

A second dimension of how groups respond to threats has to do with the context in which the threat is presented. Threats and the perception of threats come from a combination of long- and short-term triggers. Longer term triggers come from people being predisposed toward certain beliefs or having a more deeply embedded, socialized history with a topic. Shorter-term triggers are environmental factors which activate those dispositions – "situational triggers" are active, dynamic factors which activate the more passive, dormant predispositions.

These factors may also affect completely different kinds of people: "a situational trigger may galvanize those already concerned about a particular problem…alternatively, it may mobilize citizens whether or not they already were disposed to be concerned about the problem." In a political sense, and therefore also in a *social* sense, "there is all the difference between galvanizing a core constituency and mobilizing a broader public. The former increases the intensity of support for a policy; the latter also enlarges the portion of the public in support of it (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004)".

The phenomenon of one's individual identity formation through positive group comparisons to group prototypes and negative comparisons to relevant outgroups is heightened when identity convergence occurs. As identities can also form through the merger of component demographic identities based on race, ethnicity, gender, and class, individuals of "highly overlapping groups," or those groups in which members share similar characteristics, are more reactive to group-based threats than members of groups that are not seen as overlapping (Huddy

and Bankert 2017). Indeed, Lilliana Mason demonstrates this process in detailing how evangelical, conservative, and Republican identities have merged, as have black, secular, and liberal identities:

> *"The American political parties are growing socially polarized. Religion and race, as well as class, geography, and culture, are dividing the parties in such a way that the effect of party identification is magnified. The competition is no longer only between Republicans and Democrats. A single vote can now indicate a person's partisan preference as well as his religion, race, gender, ethnicity, neighborhood, and favorite grocery store...it can now be thought of as a "mega-identity," with all of the psychological and behavioral magnifications that implies (Mason 145)".*

Here, Mason emphasizes how demographics and ideological beliefs, while themselves are merely traits, also operate as identities. What may seem as disparate traits with no connection to each other reinforce a political identity, or at least on which is easily politicized: our political identities have become political mega-identities...the merging of the identities means when you activate one you often activate all, and each time you activate them, they strengthen. Conversely, people with a lot of "cross-cutting identities," or identities which do not fit neatly into one mega-identity, tend to be more tolerant of outsiders than people with highly aligned, or "mega," identities. The more identities align, the more identities can be threatened simultaneously, which makes conflict much more threatening, and makes groups much more likely to respond (Klein 145). This process of identity convergence will be discussed in more detail in the following point.

2.3 Identity Convergence

Social Identity Theory's account of how individuals attach themselves to social groups, come to identify with the group, and react with the group against shared threats is not location-specific; it describes generally how human beings as social animals come to have

strong, socially based identities and form associations based on those identities. These groups are wide-ranging in type and intensity; examples might include Siberian fisherman, neighborhood board game groups, fans of the Carolina Hurricanes, or even American nationalists. Though the larger psychological forces that govern their creation are the same, each group exists within its own social context which makes certain outgroups and information flows relevant. This point investigates how one of those groups, American nationalists, was formed and what elements are included in their relevant social universe.

2.3.1 Partisan Polarization

One of the most relevant features of the American nationalist social universe is the role of parties. Membership in political parties is one of the most important, and most stable, attachments which Americans have. In contemporary American politics, party membership is an important signifier of who a person is and has come to represent much more than simple policy preferences; indeed, party identification is essential to understanding how citizens make sense of the political world (Nicholson 2012). It is also one of the most enduring social identities, strengthened by religious, gender, and racial affiliations which "promote an emotional attachment to the party and generate stability over time (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002)". Just as with other social identities, people as partisans are motivated to defend their group in the fact of outgroup threats. This is most clear in the case of elections, where because "elections pose threats to both a party's power and less tangible goods such as group members' collective social standing, and electoral involvement is one way in which partisans can defend their party against such potential losses or ensure gains (Huddy and Bankert 2017). But elections are not the only time in which partisans are motivated to act on behalf of their party:

"Partisans take action precisely because they wish to defend or elevate the party's political position. Their internalized sense of partisan identity means that the group's failures and victories become personal. The maintenance of positive group distinctiveness is an active process, especially when a group's position or status is threatened, helping to account for the dynamic nature of partisan political activity (Huddy and Bankert 2007)".

While elections pose one such threat to a group's tangible power position and non-tangible social goods like self-esteem and positive affect, the latent power of parties given their centrality in the social lives of members has a clear influence on members' social experience of the country and its politics: "social identities translate into political ones when the group expresses political demands (Mason 25).

While parties have always been important facets of American political life, the role they play in the country's modern political landscape has developed significantly over the course of American history, particularly since the reintegration of the would-be Confederate states after their defeat in the Civil War in 1865. Two important changes have taken place in the organization of parties since that time: first, from the immediate post-war period to the 1960s, the internal makeup of both major parties changed as a result of stances on Civil Rights legislation; second, following an influential report from the American Political Science Association in 1950, the parties have moved to make themselves more ideologically consistent. The strengthening of these already potent identity groups, alongside the development of the modern media environment which provides members of those groups with "identity-matched" sources of information, or media providers which cater to the specific values and biases of particular groups, has resulted in the hardening of partisan divisions and the drawing of conflict lines around those divisions.

The foundation of this partisan hardening took place in the post-Civil War era with the integration of former Confederate states into the Democratic Party. After their military defeat and

forced reintegration into the country, the South's (specifically South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina, or those eleven states which broke away from the Union) political goals were realigned along a populist mix of social white supremacy (animated by absolute animosity for Abraham Lincoln and his Republican party) and economic redistribution. This mix of priorities allowed for a marriage of convenience between national Democrats and Southern Democrats (known generally and referred to for the rest of this project as *Dixiecrats)* where the South benefitted from the national party's redistributionist policies and the national party agreed to table race as a national issue in order to guarantee Southern votes for their projects, particularly the New Deal: "[Dixiecrats] were essentially populist. The questions of redistribution at that time were from a relatively well-off North to a poor South; race was not on the table as an area of disagreement in Congress (Klein 28)".

This arrangement came to define the internal organization of the Democratic Party as a governing institution. In the era between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War II, Dixiecrats enjoyed numerical domination of the Democratic Party: "from 1896 to 1932, Southerners (i.e., Dixiecrats) made up two-thirds of the Democratic House Caucus; from 1933 to 1953, that number never slipped below 40% (Klein 27). This numerical domination had two important consequences for how the party as a whole could operate. First, any bills the national party wanted to pass obviously needed Dixiecrat votes to succeed, meaning that the tone and content of that legislation first had to pass through the Dixiecrat filter, resulting in the overall character and individual content of legislation being extremely favorable to Southern interests.

Second, given the seniority-centric orientation of Congress at that time, Dixiecrats dominated Congressional committees: in addition to Dixiecrats' numerical domination of the

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House, they also "chaired twenty-nine of the forty-seven committees in the House, including Appropriations, Banking and Currency, Judiciary, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Military Affairs, and Ways and Means;" in the Senate, they held "thirteen of thirty-three committees, including Agriculture, Appropriations, Banking and Currency, Commerce, Finance, and Military Affairs (Klein 27)". Crucially, Dixiecrats also chaired the Rules committees, meaning they had control over which bills reached the floor, an obvious "curating" power which shaped what the national party was and was not able to do. This was a mutually beneficial arrangement – national Democrats were able to enact what was perhaps the most dramatic expansion of the federal government in the entire history of the country with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal; southern Democrats were able to maintain what was essentially one-party autocratic rule of white supremacy supported by a combination of established legislation and state-sponsored violence.

The first signs of the Dixiecrat-Democrat compact came in 1948 with President Harry Truman's decision to desegregate the military, defying the national party's compact with the Dixiecrats. Relations continued to dissolve as the national Democratic Party became more and more interested in social justice issues, particularly those concerning race. While the reasons for this shift are complex, many, and largely outside the scope of this project, three points stick out: first, in some sense Democrats' focus on economic progressivism reached its logical end, requiring that attention to the poor necessarily focus on what was making people poor; second, the integration of many nonwhite poor voters into the Democratic Party; third, Republicans in that time, particularly Barry Goldwater in his unsuccessful run for president against Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, began to reshape *their* party into an "ideological vehicle defined by mistrust of the federal government, opposition to redistribution, and faith in local and state rule (Klein 29)".

A second important process in the shaping of the modern parties was the general desire for parties to take a stronger role in American society. Calls of this nature began to become more popular in the Progressive Era and again after WWII: As the needs of the modern state grew increasingly complex and the federalist design of the American system began to produce policy drift and division, it was argued that parties must become "more cohesive and pragmatic (Rosenfield 12-13)". These sentiments were echoed with the release of a report by the American Political Science Association in 1950 titled *Towards a More Responsible Two-Party System*. Published by a collection of some of the nation's most prominent political scientists and covered widely by the (not yet modern) media environment, most prominently in the *New York Times* (Klein 2), the report argued that parties were not ideologically distinct enough and as a result voters were unable to make a meaningful distinction between them, a role which the report argued is fundamental to parties' existence: "popular government in a nation of more than 150 million people requires political parties which provide the electorate with a proper range of choice between alternatives of action;" in short, the paper argued, "unless the parties identify themselves with programs, the public is unable to make an intelligent choice between them ("Part 1")". These calls for more internally cohesive and defined parties were taken into account by national parties, coinciding with the parties' split on racial justice issues which was already underway but still in its infancy.

2.3.2 Social Polarization

There are three key concepts involved in social partisanship: ideology, sorting, and polarization. New research, conducted primarily by Liliana Mason and assorted colleagues (Mason 2013, 2018, Mason and Wronski 2018) and Leonie Huddy and assorted colleagues

(Huddy 2001, Huddy and Khatib 2007, Huddy, and Bankert 2017), demonstrates that there are two dimensions to these concepts – one social and one issue-based. Generally, the social dimension of these concepts describes "people's feelings of social attachment to a group of others" whereas the issue-based dimension is "limited to individual policy attitudes (Mason 22)". Social (or symbolic) ideology refers to a sense of belonging to groups called liberal and conservative regardless of policy attitudes. Issue-based ideology refers explicitly to policy attitudes and the degree to which they fall under one of those two categories. Social polarization refers to an increasing social distance between Democrats and Republicans, characterized primarily by increased partisan bias, increased reactivity, and increased activism; accordingly, issue-based polarization refers to the increase in difference in average issue positions between members of those two parties.

The final of these three concepts is sorting. Generally, social sorting is defined by increased social homogeneity within the parties "such that religious, racial, and ideological divides tend to line up along partisan lines," an issue to be explored in detail below, and issue-based sorting is the product of the Civil Rights- and APSA-report era realignment of liberals moving themselves to the Democratic Party and conservatives moving themselves to the Republican Party. It is worth clarifying that in each of these three issue areas there is both a social and issue-based dimension which are connected but not necessarily dependent on one another. In the case of ideology, for example, feeling more connected to the group of conservatives does not necessarily lead to having more conservative policy views: "ideology is not simply a system of values and preferences that constrain policy positions. It is also an identity that, like party identity, can guide political behavior without relying on policy preferences (Mason 28-29)".

The centrality of social identity to the formation of social groups and the direct link between social and partisan identities in the United States and the organization of partisan groups is of great importance. Democracies rely on people of opposing political groups sharing other social bonds. Stable societies require these "cross-cutting cleavages" where members of opposing political parties share social bonds which tamp down political animosity: "the available evidence suggests that the chances for stable democracy are enhanced to the extent that groups and individuals have a number of crosscutting, politically relevant affiliations (Lipset 77)," a system which where (a) party loyalties are not related to social, economic, or geographical differences and (b) party loyalties are not consistently related to policy opinion differences.

In the pre-Civil Rights, APSA-report party alignment, ideological divides were more consistent with this system. The Democratic Party has strong liberal and conservative factions which are geographically aligned (conservative Democrats in the South and liberal Democrats in the north). Given the ideological divide that persisted despite shared party identity, Southern Democrats could have some connection with both Republicans and liberals; similarly, northern Republican liberals could occasionally cooperate with Democrats and conservatives, given their geographical and ideological similarities. This is what the ASPA report wanted to address: "due to the parties' many cross-cutting cleavages, voters received ambiguous cues, making it more difficult to make clear electoral choices (Mason 33)". This is to say that social cleavages between parties were not so neatly arranged: along with the partisan and ideological misalignment described above, parties did not align with class nor party with region. It was still the case that people felt those individual social identities, but because their identities did not neatly align with a particular party, each group had superordinate goals which encouraged inter-identity collaboration.

President Truman's 1948 decision to desegregate the military (referenced above) and reverse the long-standing agreement national Democrats had with Southern Dixiecrats is considered to have caused a rupture in the party and set off a rapid polarization of ideological sentiments which has only grown in modern time.

The next step in the realignment came in 1954 with the Supreme Court's ruling against segregation in schools with national Democrats' strong support of the decision and Dixiecrats' promise of "massive resistance." While as late as 1960 Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy was attempting to remain relatively centrist in order to placate the intransigent Southerners on race, the coalition broke in 1964 when Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, chose to fully embrace race as an issue of top concern. Stanley, Bianco, and Niemi (1986) recognize this is a watershed moment which caused southern states to vote heavily Republican in the 1964 election and suggest a "racially inspired shift in the group basis on the Democratic Party." Johnson and

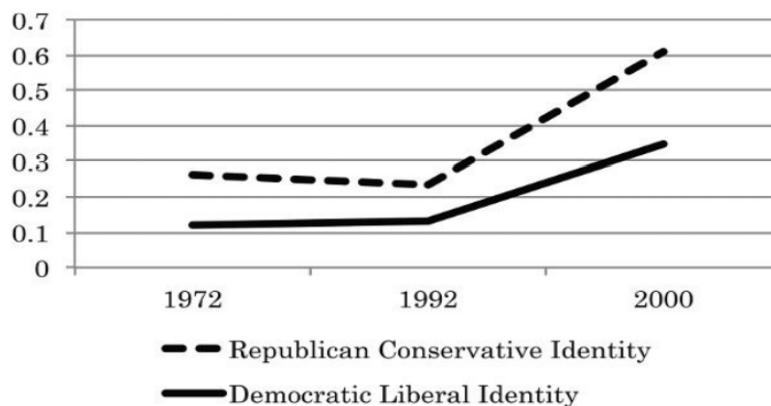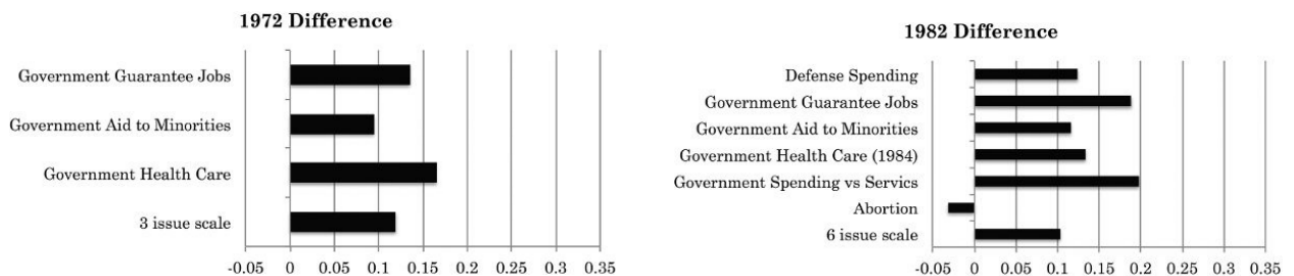**Figure 3.2.** Identity-based ideology
Note: Data drawn from the American National Election Studies from 1972, 1992, and 2000. Democrats and Republicans include independents who lean toward one party. Vertical axis represents the percentage of Democrats/Republicans who identify with liberals/conservatives, respectively.
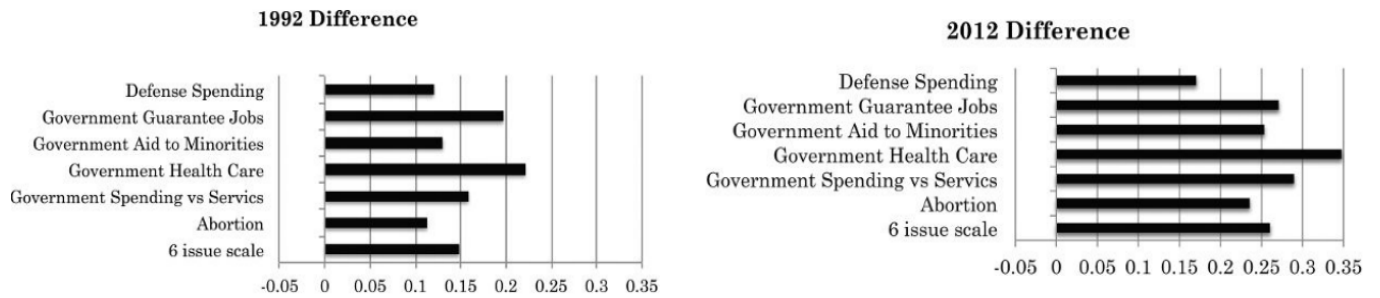
Source: Mason, Lilliana. "Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity." (2018).

the national Democrats' decision to embrace racial justice, itself a choice caused in part by the movement of non-white liberal northerners to the party, caused massive numbers of white, conservative, southerners to leave for the Republican party. Indeed, the cross-cutting cleavages described in the previous paragraph have become less and less common over time. When asked which group, liberals or conservatives, people feel most attached to in "their ideas, interests, and feelings about things," Republicans have increasingly identified with conservatives and Democrats with liberals over the last thirty years.

Both Democrats and Republicans have become substantially more aligned with their corresponding ideological groups. While this shift seemed to begin in the aftermath of the Civil Rights era, the shift was much more pronounced beginning in the 1990s – an interesting correlation to the development of the modern media environment and explosion of "identity-matched sources." Another notable trend is that Republicans feel much significantly more aligned with conservatives than Democrats do with liberals, with a change of 35 points in ideological attachment compared to 24 from Democrats, resulting in Republicans being almost twice as likely as Democrats to feel socially connected with their group.

Notably, this increase in partisan-ideological-identity differences is more than double the increase in partisan policy differences. When asked about a battery of social positions between 1972 and 2012, a 16 percent difference between Democrats and Republicans has emerged – notable and significant, but not nearly as significant as the increase in *social* ideology within the same period of time.

1992 Difference

Defense Spending
Government Guarantee Jobs
Government Aid to Minorities
Government Health Care
Government Spending vs Services
Abortion
6 issue scale

-0.05 0 0.05 0.1 0.15 0.2 0.25 0.3 0.35

2012 Difference

Defense Spending
Government Guarantee Jobs
Government Aid to Minorities
Government Health Care
Government Spending vs Services
Abortion
6 issue scale

-0.05 0 0.05 0.1 0.15 0.2 0.25 0.3 0.35

Source: Mason, Lilliana. "Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity." (2018).

This sense of social division is one that radiates out to many other social cleavages between the parties. As parties became more sorted across dimensions of ideology, race, class, geography, and religion, people have come to identify much more strongly with their partisan identities as Republicans or Democrats as they see more people like them in those groups as opposed to the other.

While racial sorting certainly plays a central role in the story of social polarization in the United States, a full account requires a brief description of two other developments as well: decline in trust in institutions and increased ability of party elites to communicate group messages. The 1960s and 1970s, in addition to being a time of significant demographic sorting, also saw the widespread decline in trust in traditional American social and civic institutions (Mason 57). Throughout this period into the 90s and early 2000s, long-cherished organizations like the Elks Club, Scouts, professional organization, politically diverse churches, and others saw significant decline in membership (Putnam 2000), leading Americans to feel more socially isolated. The sixties brought not only value change but individualism.

Divorce rates doubled between 1965 and 1976, and the proportion of unmarried twentysomethings jumped two to three times between 1970 and 1987. This was accompanied by the emergence of what Robert Bellah terms 'lifestyle enclaves. These are subcultural identities with their own identity narratives which displace those of ethnic group and nation. For instance, the hippies were a lifestyle group which came to encompass millions of young Americans in the late 1960s. Where the Young Intellectuals of the 1910s or New York Intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s were small enough to form social circles, millions now participated in a countercultural identity. Other lifestyle enclaves formed around fashions and consumer tastes.

The new subcultural identities were what Daniel Bell terms 'modernist' in sensibility, emphasizing novelty, immediacy and diversity of experience rather than tradition. They were necessarily disconnected from older multi-generational communities of ethnic group and nation (Kaufmann 67). The lack of strongly binding ties left Americans feeling detached from their communities and country, compelling them to seek connection in more homogeneous neighborhoods, churches, and other social groups, disengaging from their old community-centered groups and forming new associations which were tailored exactly to meet their needs (Mason 58). This phenomenon added a geographical element to the social sorting already underway.

The second important development is one that was discussed at length in the previous point but is worth exploring more in depth in the immediate context of social sorting: the impact of information flows and "identity-matched sources." While Americans continued to disengage socially, both the Democratic and Republican Parties stepped in and, paying attention to the significant demographic shifts taking place throughout the country, began to "provide clearer partisan, ideological, and social clues to the electorate," particularly the Republican Party.

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Saunders and Abramowirz (2004) found that "as the parties' ideological cues grew more distinct and more potent, more partisans were motivated to participate, particularly within the Republican Party." Essentially, the Republican Party did a better job of organizing the social groups sympathetic to it, partially because of their much more sophisticated media infrastructure and partially because of the systemic biases they enjoy for having values, positions, and the backing of social groups much more in line with those of the corporate, establishment, and conservative, modern media environment.

Though this topic was covered extensively in the previous point, it is worth restating the role of the modern media environment in the formation of these groups. The concept of media fragmentation, or the process by which media consumers, faced with an unprecedented amount of diversity of sources to consume, self-sorted into different programming both by level of interest (that is to say, those who are most interested in sports consume sports, those who are the most interested in news consume the news) and by ideological preference; that is, they found identity-matched sources of programming.

These "identity-matched sources" provide consumers with coverage of current events which support their values and biases, particularly, they cover the news in such a way which supports their identities as members of their respective political parties and give party elites a direct line of communication with their supporters adding an element of informational isolation in addition to the already existing ideological, demographic, and geographical isolation. Matthew Levendusky found that "partisan media have multiplier effects that allow a relatively limited medium that speaks to a narrow segment of the market to have an outsize influence on American politics (2013)". Like the variations in intensity of attachment to different identities, the amount

of force that a group under threat is capable of depends on that group's position in the overall hierarchy.

2.4 Conceptions of American Identity

Though a relative newcomer to the world stage, the United States has become one of the most powerful and pervasive countries in history. While its economic and political power are clear and its military might felt throughout the globe over the course of its brief 246-year history, it is also unique for one other reason. Along with India, the United States is one of the rare examples of a successful multi-ethnic, multi-racial democracy which has existed throughout the modern period. Given the country's ethnic and racial diversity, it is one of the few countries in the world which defines its citizenship in a civic, rather than ethnic, sense: one does not need to be born an American to become an American.

Given that lack of clear ethnic requirement for being an American, defining American identity becomes more difficult and requires the consideration of a myriad of social, economic, and political identities and characteristics, which, despite the lack of a formal requirement, necessarily have racial consequences or dimensions to them.

Like any other group of people, the quality of being an American is a social attachment around which an identity is formed, with its own qualities, ingroup favoritisms, and outgroup animosities. As discussed earlier in this point, all social groups, seeking positive distinction from others, will react to protect themselves in the face of threat or perceived threat. Given not only the deeply felt ties that many have to that identity and the massive consequences any mobilization of a group that size and which feels that intensely, the social, political, and economic consequences could be and are extremely significant.

For that reason, it is critically important to understand what features make up the American identity and what its relevant outgroups might be. Alexis de Tocqueville marveled in *Democracy in America* at what he perceived to be the country's unusually free and egalitarian ideals and material as the basis for a promising future and unparalleled prosperity in comparison to the dusty empires and kingdoms of Europe. These "liberalist" conceptions of identity mark abstract liberal democratic principles as the stuff of which Americans are made. Others center on a "republicanist" (distinct from the political party) approach of Americans' tendency to build institutions and insist on a robust civic life. Finally, the more ethnically based "ethnocultural American" conception of American identity insists upon Northern European, Christian, white, and patriarchal origins. In the "multiple traditions" conception of American identity, other writers such as Rogers M. Smith (1988, 1993)and Jack Citrin (1990, 2001, 2008) claim that national identity in general and American identity in particular are much more complex and multi-dimensional, including aspects of all of the above approaches. What they agree on is that there is clearly some set of characteristics that can be said to identify Americans from other nations and peoples of the world; their disagreement is what those characteristics are. Those qualities and that disagreement is the substance of this point.

2.4.1 The Formation of National Identity

While the American national identity is unique for the reasons discussed above, it is still a national identity amongst others; for that reason, some value can be gained from analyzing it in that sense. One insight is the concept of nationality itself. The United States is a product of the Westphalian order, and so came into being in a world which took for granted the existence of nations, each of which is separate, sovereign, and the only legitimate source of political power.

On a macroscale, this system divided the world into several potent in- and outgroups and necessitated the concept of "the other" – the existence of a group which is the nation requires there be a group that is not itself.

Each nation has "finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations…no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind (Triandafyllidou 2012)." In this sense, the nation is an "imagined political community" in which other members, despite never having seen or met the vast majority of them, "lives the image of communion (Anderson 6)". The foundations of the nation are complex and historically intertwined, making them difficult to describe as separate phenomena, but Benedict Anderson (2006) largely attributes the development of this system to the development of unifying languages which superseded local dialects, the prominence of organized religion and its use of collective language to described similarly minded peoples, and the increased inclusion of lower classes in political matters over time (Anderson 17-19, 32-36, 47-56).

Anderson describes how these myriad forces promoted the coming together of previous separate groups along mutually shared traits, be they linguistic, social, or political – essentially, things to which people are "naturally tied (Anderson 143)". The nation is a group of people who share more things in common than they share with outsiders." These things shared in common might also be ethnic, historical, land-based, legal, or economic (Triandafyllidou 2012).

Diverse though these foundations might be, the result is the same: the creation of a "sociological organism moving calendrically though homogenous, empty time" in which "members can be even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected Anderson 25". The representation below shows how different actors within the same sociological context coexist, share the same space, and move together

without actually fully interacting. This is a precise analog for the nation, in which each actor has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity. (Anderson 25-26).

Time:	I	II	III
Events:	A quarrels with B	A telephones C	D gets drunk in a bar
	C and D make love	B shops	A dines at home with B
		D plays pool	C has an ominous dream

Source: Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*.

These shared social, political, and economic ties – this "sociological organism" – create the group and foster an ingroup social communication, which continues to be an essential feature of nationality in the present day. Developments in sophistication of social communication, similar to the ones that Harold Innis described in the previous chapter of this thesis, creates a communicative efficiency. This has a double effect of increasing ingroup bonds and strengthening outgroup animosity: "the more effective a system of social communication is, the more separate it becomes from those groups that it cannot incorporate unable to bear promiscuity, it must choose marriage or divorce (Triandafyllidou 2012)".

National identity is always constituted through interaction. This interaction is both internal and external, in which members of the nation communicate its values and characteristics with each other through its interaction with outgroups. Given the United States' unique multiethnic, multiracial position, the hierarchical arrangement of racial and ethnic groups fundamentally significantly informs social communication and structures the way Americans

understand their own group, their identification with that group, and their group in relation to others. These group orientations subsequently organize and frame the way individuals view the political and social world (Jardina 22).

This is particularly true in the United States where White Americans benefit tremendously from their position at the top of the hierarchy. Their group, on average, receives greater material benefits, social esteem, and political accommodation. This dominant status also means that both whites – and those socially aligned with predominantly white groups – have come to accept this arrangement as "normal;" they view whites as the "default category." When these cherished privileges -- ones that the white coalition regard as almost natural -- are challenged, many in the coalition react defensively, condemning and resisting changes to the racial status quo.

Today, many scholars (Smith 1988, 1993; Citrin and Sides 2008; Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990; Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001) agree that the "American culture" into which these groups assimilated was narrowly defined in the nineteenth century as Anglo-Protestant. Individuals of European descent who were not initially considered white by early nineteenth-century terms were eventually subsumed under the umbrella of whiteness, in part by distancing themselves from blacks in the United States and by abandoning their European ethnic identities. This process of assimilation, coupled with the way in which group dominance shapes group identities, means that whiteness became largely characterized not merely as invisible, but as contentless and indistinguishable from national identity.

This means that whites who identify with their racial group and those who share social bonds with those groups share a set of common ideas about their group and attach meaning to their race and construct their whiteness around three themes: its relationship with a particular

conception of American identity, the adoption of a sense of pride and entitlement, and the prevalence of a sense of grievance and deprivation (Jardina 119). In this sense, *whiteness comes to be understood as Americanness* because whites have historically been so dominant in the American hierarchy that their ideas and conceptions of who they are have been unquestionably dominant, and until the emergence of a significant challenge to that status, unexamined. In this sense national identity and racial identity are tied together. The next point will discuss the major currents in the definition of American identity.

A brief note on terminology: the works cited in this chapter use the terms "liberalist," "republicanist," and "ethnocultural Americanist" to describe the different academic schools of identity. The author has chosen to use those exact terms instead of more common terms like "liberal" and "republican" to avoid confusion with the more popularly used political terms.

2.4.1.1 Liberalism

Broadly defined, liberalism is properly identified with the general values and aspirations of the Enlightenment: its concerns for universal human rights, religious toleration, the promotion of commerce and the sciences, and rejection of the theocratic and martial medieval ethos (Smith 1988).

Samuel Huntington (1999) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1831) are perhaps the most cited advocates (and at times, defenders) of the liberalist camp of national identity. Both writers, experiencing a very different United States at very different times, pointed to ideas and ideals as that which made the United States special, what Huntington calls "the American Creed:" "the English language; Christianity; religious commitment; English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, and the rights of individuals; and dissenting Protestant values of

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individualism, the work ethic, and the belief that humans have the ability and the duty to create a heaven on earth, a "city on a hill (Huntington xv-xvi)". Though not as explicit in his writings, de Tocqueville similarly identifies a unifying spirit which motivates American action:

> *"Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of dispositions are forever forming associations ... at the head of any new undertaking. Where in France you would find the government or in England some territorial magnate, in the United States you are sure to find an association...an all-pervading and restless activity, a superabundant force, and an energy which is inseparable from it and which may, however unfavorable circumstances may be, produce wonders."better use has been made of association and this powerful instrument of action has been applied for more varied aims in America than anywhere else in the world. (de Tocqueville 198)".*

America was so advanced in the democratic revolution, Tocqueville argued, because of several elements that conspired to produce its egalitarian point of departure. The vast stretches of land "inhabited only by wandering tribes who had not thought of exploiting" the soil enabled European immigrants to spread out and make their fortune-as opposed to nations where most lands formed parts of large hereditary estates.

Settlers came chiefly from England, where they had "unusual acquaintance with notions of rights and principles of true liberty," reinforced in New England particularly by "democratic and republican" Protestant beliefs. They also came without any "idea of any superiority of some over others," because great lords did not relocate to the colonies and because the large landowners who did lacked aristocratic privileges. Instead, a "middle class and democratic freedom" flourished almost from the outset.

This combination of comparatively equal and open economic and social conditions and an ideological legacy conducive to republicanism and personal liberties made America the perfect laboratory to study the tendencies of a society that from the start was decisively free, egalitarian, and democratic in theory and practice (Smith 1988; de Tocqueville 145, 160, 180). Supporters of the liberalist conception of identity claim that this common creed ties the country

together with a national identity with no need for exclusionary ethnic bonds as some ethnic and ethno-cultural identities of other countries do in hopes to avoid what Huntington calls "Frenchism," "Britishism," or "Germanism," shorthand for the kind of identity forged in countries with stronger ethnic roots or those dominated by single ethnic groups. This concept was perhaps most famously illustrated by Ronald Reagan in his farewell speech as President: "You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American."

This distinction does merit a mention: the United States citizenship (rather than identity) is considered *civic*, as opposed to some other countries like Germany, Turkey, or Japan's citizenship being *national*, is a have much more lax immigration and citizenship laws which allow any person from any place in the world to become and be considered as a American based on only their willingness to be sponsored by a current citizen, pass through the process, score sufficiently high on a test concerning United States history and culture, and attend a swearing-in ceremony.

Other countries have different standards, requiring familial bonds or ancestry within the country. Liberalist thinkers like Huntington and de Tocqueville, noting this process ruled by ideas and not place, arrive at the conclusion that identity is therefore ideals-based.

In order to fully understand the liberalist tradition, though, more specificity is needed regarding the particular values and beliefs which make up this camp's understanding of American national identity. While Huntington's "American Creed" gives a somewhat ethnically charged version of this belief (his emphasis on "Protestant" beliefs somewhat challenges his

claims of the Creed being ethnically neutral, for example), some dimensions of liberalist thought are omitted in his account.

In addition to the "Protest" individualism and self-reliance, liberal thinkers throughout history including Samuel Lipset and Alfie Kohn have counted democracy (republicanism, popular sovereignty), liberty (freedom), and equality (of opportunity, in manners) amongst the list as well. In psychological terms, the liberal version of the concept "sense of American identity" thus refers to the strength of emotional attachments to these symbols and to the institutions and practices that embody them (Citrin, Reingold, and Green 1990)". However, that which is commonly understood to be the most attractive feature of liberal ideology, individual rights and the emphasis on equality of opportunity and respect for the rights of others, is logically in tension with another liberalist belief of the importance of memberships, including citizenship itself. Indeed, as Smith continues,

> *"A cursory review of the nation's historic laws of citizenship indicates that many qualities Huntington holds not to be definitive of American nationality have often been requirements to become a full American citizen. Place of birth, ethnicity, gender, special skills, and will- ingness to subscribe to political propositions much more exacting than those of the "American Creed" - all have figured prominently in America's immigration and naturalization laws (Smith 1998)".*

Scholars of national identity agree that while Huntington, de Tocqueville, and other liberal thinkers' ideologies do indeed capture important truths, they do not tell the whole story. Opponents like Citrin, Sears, and Smith argue that liberalists fail to recognize that both the practice of the United States' historically unrealizable values has created a gulf between practice in principal and that its adherents fail to give due weight to inegalitarian ideologies and conditions that have shaped the participants and the substance of American politics just as deeply (Smith 1993)".

2.4.1.2 Republicanism

Where liberalism is focused on the individual and his, her, or their rights and liberties, republicanism emphasizes building institutions and practices that make self-government of a community possible. In other words, where liberalists prize the individual, *republicanists* value the collective. Republicanists usually argue that in order to make such a system work, the population must have two sets of characteristics: first, that it be relatively socially homogeneous, consisting of relatively similar, like-minded people; second, that the people be a small group of citizens bound to other people only in a loose empire or confederation. Montesquieu would characterize the ideal citizenry as a "small family" with a pervasive civic education in patriotism reinforced by frequent public rites and ceremonies, censorship of dissenting ideas, preservation of a single religion if possible, limits on divisive and privatizing economic pursuits, and strict restraints on the addition of aliens to the citizenry (Smith 1988). Republicanists argue that a body of citizens expanded too greatly in number of territories would eventually succumb to sectarian differences devoid of any real social solidarity. In addition to being more collectively minded than liberalism, republicanism tends to place a stronger emphasis on shared virtuous endeavor and social togetherness.

2.4.1.3Ethnocultural Americanism

John Jay is quoted in *The Federalist Papers* as describing his new countrymen as "a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs (Huntington 44).

Indeed, from the Revolutionary era on, many American leaders deliberately promoted the popular notion that Americans had a distinctive character, born of their freedom-loving Anglo-Saxon ancestors and heightened by the favorable conditions of the new world and many under their rule agreed with many Americans chiefly identifying membership in their political community not with freedom for personal liberal callings or republican self-governance per se, but with a whole array of particular cultural origins and customs - with northern European, if not English, ancestry; with Christianity, especially dissenting Protestantism, and its message for the world; with the white race; with patriarchal familial leadership and female domesticity; and with all the economic and social arrangements that came to be seen as the true, traditional "American way of life (Smith 1993)".

This is emblematic of the ethnoculturalist notion of identity, identifying American identity with that of a particular ethnocultural identity. For many, these beliefs arose with their German or English heritage and Protestant beliefs, tracing their lineage back to fierce and freedom-loving roaming Germanic tribes and the Anglo-Saxon orientation toward liberty. This appeal surely reflects in part widespread human desires to esteem and affirm our particular communal origins. The common endorsement by ethnocultural Americanists of religious beliefs that God has "shed His grace" on America also helps this civic conception provide a profoundly meaningful sense of personal and communal identity for many of those eligible to share it (Smith 1988)".

While these three conceptions of American identity are in conflict, none has seemed to have taken clear preeminence over the other. Liberalists consider republicanists and ethnoculturalists to be too restrictive and dismissive of individual rights and personal liberties; republicanists see liberalists as perhaps too egotistic and ethnoculturalists as not devoted enough

to political activity; ethnoculturalists might see the others as either (depending on their ethnicity) inferior or perhaps too accommodating of what he, she, or they might consider "un-American."

It is generally considered that, although through the history of the country none of the three views won out, on the national level the Federalists' liberal emphases won preeminence: the Constitution created a new national government that stressed private rights and commercial development more than democratic participation or agrarian civic virtue. Liberal commitments were thus largely allied in law with national citizenship, with an insistence on the primacy of membership in the nation. But the republican legacy of notions on the importance of small sovereign states and a close-knit citizenry gave priority to state citizenship, and republicanism, too, remained influential in legal definitions of American citizenship (Smith 1993)".

2.4.1.4 Analysis: The Multiple Conceptions Approach

What it means to be an American is a central question in this thesis. American identity, like the concept of identity itself, is a complex and multilayered issue which draws upon a variety of information and experience, contemporary and historical. Despite the complexity of the issue, however, certain characteristics become apparent upon investigation. The primary thrusts of this complex national identity are the three "conceptions" discussed above: the liberalist tradition, with its emphasis on concerns for universal human rights, religious toleration, the promotion of commerce and the sciences, and rejection of the theocratic and martial medieval ethos; the republicanist tradition and its focus on institution-building; and ethnocultural Americanism and its insistence on the centrality of whiteness and white heritage. In final consideration, four primary trends emerge. First, on this view, purely liberal and republican conceptions of civic identity are seen as frequently unsatisfying to many Americans, because

they contain elements that threaten, rather than affirm, sincere, reputable beliefs in the propriety of the privileged positions that whites, Christianity, Anglo-Saxon traditions, and patriarchy have had in the United States.

At the same time, even Americans deeply attached to those inegalitarian arrangements have also had liberal democratic values. Second, it has therefore been typical, not aberrational, for Americans to embody strikingly opposed beliefs in their institutions, such as doctrines that blacks should and should not be full and equal citizens. But though American efforts to blend aspects of opposing views have often been remarkably stable, the resulting tensions have still been important sources of change. Third, when older types of ascriptive inequality, such as slavery, have been rejected as unduly illiberal, it has been normal, not anomalous, for many Americans to embrace new doctrines and institutions that reinvigorate the hierarchies they esteem in modified form. Changes toward greater inequality and exclusion, as well as toward greater equality and inclusiveness, thus can and do occur. Finally, the dynamics of American development cannot simply be seen as a rising tide of liberalizing forces progressively submerging contrary beliefs and practices: "the national course has been more serpentine (Smith 1993)". In order to integrate the apparent failings of liberalism, republicanism, and ethnocultural Americanism, Rogers M. Smith proposes an alternative model: the multiple conceptions approach.

Advocates of the multiple traditions approach recognize and accept the importance of the abstract ideas and institutions that the liberalists place at their center of their conception of American identity but argue both that those abstractions are not sufficient to form a meaningful, important identity and that there is more needed to accurately reflect the history and full complexity of the subject. One important level of this analysis has to do with the demographic

and power constitution of the country at the time of its founding. The people who made up what became the United States, and certainly the people wielding the levers of power, were predominantly white men. With that fact in mind, it must be considered that the foundations of the country as well as much of its early and middle history was dominated by the ideologies and practices employed by white men to deal with subordinate groups and how those groups interacted amongst each other. "With these elements kept in view," writes Smith, "the flat plain of American egalitarianism mapped by Tocqueville and others suddenly looks quite different. We instead perceive America's initial conditions as exhibiting only a rather small, recently leveled valley of relative equality nestled amid steep mountains of hierarchy (Smith 1993)". Smith and others construct the multiple traditions view with that in mind, arguing that Americans do share a common culture, but one involving more dimensions and contributions than is usually considered. This approach holds that many different groups across time have contributed to the American character, and by extension its identity, but at the same have often taken self-serving positions which argue that their own ascriptive traits are "essential" in ways that those of others are not. Recognizing these essentialist tendencies, advocates still argue that America's liberal and democratic traditions have had great normative and political lasting power.

These conceptions, especially the Multiple Conceptions Approach, are essential to the argument of the thesis because they define specifically the contours of American identity. As has been hinted at up to this point in the thesis and explained in more detail further on, the source of the conservative shift in American social, political, and economic life is fundamentally a threat to American identity, therefore, a clear understanding of American identity and its primary characteristics is essential.

Smith mentions the various peoples and groups which have contributed to the national character over time. This is a key factor in the understanding of the American racial order, because of how the United States' hierarchical arrangement of racial and ethnic groups fundamentally significantly informs social communication and structures the way Americans understand their own group, their identification with that group, and their group in relation to others. These group orientations subsequently organize and frame the way individuals view the political and social world (Jardina 22). This is particularly true in the United States where White Americans benefit tremendously from their position at the top of the hierarchy. Their group, on average, receives greater material benefits, social esteem, and political accommodation. This dominant status also means that both whites – and those socially aligned with predominantly white groups – have come to accept this arrangement as "normal;" they view whites as the "default category". When these cherished privileges -- ones that the white coalition regard as almost natural -- are challenged, many in the coalition react defensively, condemning and resisting changes to the racial status quo.

This process of assimilation, coupled with the way in which group dominance shapes group identities, means that whiteness became largely characterized not merely as invisible, but as contentless and indistinguishable from national identity. This means that whites who identify with their racial group and those who share social bonds with those groups share a set of common ideas about their group and attach meaning to their race, and construct their whiteness around three themes: its relationship with a particular conception of American identity, the adoption of a sense of pride and entitlement, and the prevalence of a sense of grievance and deprivation, which arises because the context in which people who identify strongly with

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whiteness do so in large part as a reaction to the threat to their status on top of the racial hierarchy(Jardina 119). In this sense, *whiteness comes to be understood as Americanness* because whites have historically been so dominant in the American hierarchy that their ideas and conceptions of who they have been unquestionably dominant, and until the emergence of a significant challenge to that status, unexamined. In this sense national identity and racial identity are tied together.

Members of the nation communicate its values and characteristics with each other through its interaction with outgroups. Because the axis of power in defining the American national identity has been controlled by white-and white-aligned groups, ethnic minorities and immigrant communities are considered to be the primary "other." These communities usually have distinct language, traditions, and myths of origin and are therefore seen by the dominant majority as a threat to "its cultural unity and authenticity, when they assert their right to difference and thus disrupt the cultural and political order of the nation-state. The nation-state is likely to engage in a process of reaffirmation of its identity and seek to redefine it so as to differentiate the ingroup from the newcomers during periods of instability and crisis; the nation-state is likely to feel that is territorial or symbolic integrity is under threat (Triandafyllidou 2012). Through the confirmation with its "other," the nation unites itself in reminding itself "who we are" by clarifying the boundaries and of the ingroup and reinforcing its sense of belonging.

2.5 Conclusion

Attachment to and the mobilization of groups is an essential feature of human social behavior. For as long as there have been humans, they organized themselves into like-minded

groups, "uses and thems". This needs to organize stems primarily from humans' need both for internal validation and external differentiation. These groups can center around any kind of shared characteristic, from something as banal as a preference for a certain kind of cellphone over another to something as central as a person's nationality. The dynamics of how people form group identities,

Each school of thought contributes an important dimension of the United Statesian experience: the liberalist conception offers its focus on emancipating aspirations of the Enlightenment and its concerns for universal human rights, religious toleration, the promotion of commerce and the sciences, and rejection of the theocratic and martial medieval ethos; the republicanism conceptions offers emphasis on achieving institutions and practices that make collective self-governance in pursuit of a common good possible for the community as a whole; and the ethnocultural approach offers its fierce pride for the United States.

Chapter III: Demographic Change and its Consequences for American Society

3.1 Introduction

Over the course of the last two chapters of this paper, an argument has been developed that changes in the political, social, and economic fabric of the United States have created a new set of contexts which have been moving the country in particular directions. The material covered up to this point has dealt with wide-ranging systemic issues concerning the organization of the United States' media infrastructure as well as the way Americans organize themselves into groups and conceive themselves *as Americans*. This chapter will have more to do with a particular subgroup of Americans: their defining characteristics, their concerns and interests in contemporary American politics, and the impact they have had and continue to have on the direction of American politics.

Two demographic groups have dominated this conversation: racial groups and political parties, particularly how white Americans have largely moved from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party since the Civil Rights era, being replaced by racial minorities like blacks and Latinos who came to constitute a much more significant part of that party's voting bloc. This racial realignment did not completely remove white Democrats, who remained strong allies of the new racial coalition's preferences. This white solidarity with the Democratic Party, though, has again come to deteriorate as the issue of immigration and accompanying demographic change has come to be more salient in the period since the 1990s. As the country's population begins to shift away from the white dominance of the past, many long-time Democratic Party-associated whites have come to feel their status and power under threat and have changed

their political preferences (and their votes), with dramatic consequences for the political, social, and economic direction of the country.

3.2 World, Regional, and National Context for Immigration

The United States, at least in its popular conception, has always considered itself a "nation of immigrants." The stories told in classrooms around the country, the figures who appear in national myths, and the image the country projects to the world all show strong, smiling figures from lands faraway laboring together in the effort of a common dream. What is fact and what is fluff is debatable, but it certainly is true that the country, uniquely amongst others in world history, owes its history to a wide variety of peoples from the golden coasts of Portugal to the frozen wilds of Russia and from the Cape of Good Hope to the Arctic Circle. As time has gone on and opinions have changed, different peoples have found their way, one way or another, to the United States. In the beginning, angry religious refugees stormed over the sea in search of more tolerant lands, enslaved Africans shuffled reluctantly off boats to Southern ports, and others from all over sought a new life or a new fortune in the Americas. In that beginning, the *willing* migrants -- that is, those who came of their own accord -- were largely white Northern Europeans, some escaping famine, some debts, others boredom. Over time, the scope expanded, with the new migrant waves showing different skin tones and different reasons for coming.

Later still, the West Coast states like California and others saw migration from the East, bringing primarily Chinese immigrants over to work the land and build the railroads of the ever-developing country. Any number of other events inside and outside of the country have brought new waves of immigrants. New trends, new peoples -- not only is this the history of

immigration to the United States, this story is still unraveling today. Just as people sought to escape the troubles of their homelands in days past, a new wave of immigrants seeks the same today. The only difference between those two groups is where they come from. The motive of this point is to establish not only what kind of factors inform the movement of peoples between countries, but also to recognize where they are coming from.

3.2.1 World Context: The Larger Picture

Relative to other great powers, the United States is a young country -- only 245 years old as of the time of this writing. In all that time, though of course with limits shifting and reforming in different periods, the country has been a popular destination for peoples seeking a new life. However, it is important for the purposes of this project that the period of immigration and the peoples within that period be specifically defined so as to be clear in drawing connections between the phenomena it produces and the other tenets of this project. Before arriving at the importance of that year, however, certain larger-order contextual elements need to be introduced so as to place this trend in its proper place.

3.2.1.1 Population Explosions

Population change, or considered more broadly as demography, is one of the most central elements which informs movement between places, especially how many people there are in total and where those people are being born. Concerning the total number of people in the world, this figure is one that has risen dramatically in an equally dramatic period of time. It wasn't until 1804 -- after many thousands of years of human existence -- that the total population reached 1 billion. In 1960, a mere 150 years after the 1 billion milestone, that figure had tripled to 3 billion.

And now, according to the most recent latest figures available, that number has risen by orders of magnitude to 7.5 billion only 60 years later (Kaufmann 26). In terms of both scale and speed, these are astounding figures. More interesting yet, however, is how the distribution of those billions have changed over time. Life proliferates when circumstances allow it too, and the development of human civilization certainly has not been even. As such, each region's relative share of the population, measured in birth rates and death rates, has fluctuated wildly over time as circumstances have permitted. These shifting circumstances can produce population explosions, or significant transitions in demographic balances, where birth rates are temporarily much higher than death rates (Kaufmann 34). The first of these explosions happened in Western Europe between 1750 and 1950, but because health and sanitation measures were not then what they are now, many of the people born of that explosion died before reaching child-rearing age, meaning that trend had a muted impact on the world population share. Another explosion under different circumstances is happening now in the Global South, particularly in Latin America. Demographer Vegard Skirbekk draws a helpful comparison between these explosions, using 1775 Denmark and 1990s Guatemala as examples:

> *"In 1775, prior to the onset of its transition, Denmark had a population of 1 million and a population density of about twenty people per square kilometer. In Guatemala in 1900, these numbers were about the same. Because Denmark's population boomed earlier, just two to three children per woman survived to adulthood during its transition. By the time Denmark's total fertility rate fell below 2.1 in the 1950s, its population had expanded to 5 million. By contrast, Guatemala's transition only began in 1900. By the 1990s, the average Guatemalan woman was giving birth to five children who survived to childbearing age. Today there are 15.5 million Guatemalans. When Guatemala's transition is complete, it is projected to have a population of about 24 million. Its transition will have produced a population expansion five times that of Denmark. Multiplied across many countries, this explains why the West's share of world population dropped so rapidly after 1950 (Kaufmann 24)".*

In short, "the West," or in terms more specific to the dimensions of the project, the ethnically white countries which produced the people who eventually immigrated to what became the United States and who founded what is historically and considered to be the foundational members and core principles and value systems of that country, are producing much lower numbers of people than non-ethnically white countries.

Discussion of these trends usually include total fertility rates (TFR), an important tool for the measurement of birth and death rates. Defined specifically as the total number of children a woman bears over the course of her lifetime, this measurement offers us a view of how different regions of the world contribute to the overall world population. A 2.1 TFR is needed to naturally replace the population of a country without any immigration. If countries fall short of that ratio, they will need to take some action -- be it incentivizing having more children or immigration programs -- to make their mark. Failure to do so will produce cases like Spain, in which a lopsided share of the population is aged. Whereas developed countries in Europe and the Americas have TFRs well below the rates needed to naturally replace their populations, "ninety-seven per cent of global population growth takes place in a tropical belt from Central America through Africa and into West Asia, where TFR is well above the 2.1 level needed to replace the population (Kirk and Pillet 1998)," as is demonstrated in the figure below.
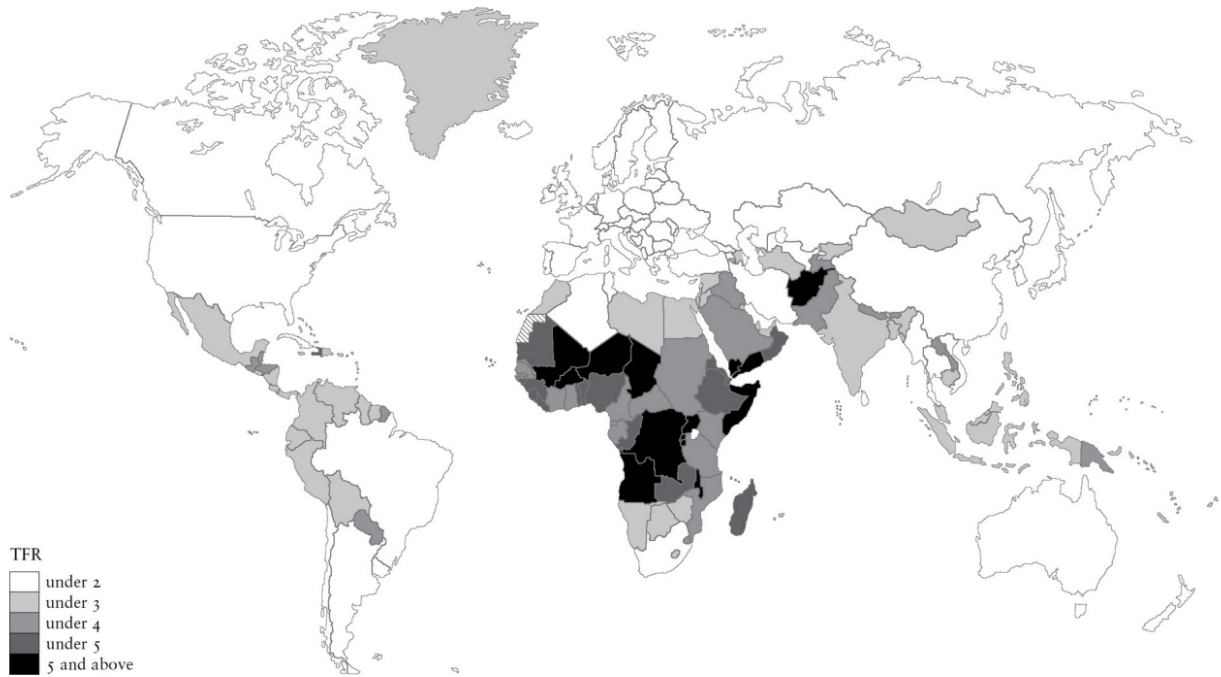
Source: Kaufmann, Eric. *Whiteshift: Populism, immigration and the future of white majorities*. Penguin UK, 2018.

While Africa has produced the most dramatic birth/date rate differences, Latin America is not far behind. Specifically, Mexico, the Central American Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala (whose particular situation has already been previewed above in the comparison with Denmark), the Caribbean, and the Andean Cone countries of South America all show TFRs significantly above those of the United States, producing an obvious population disparity.

3.2.1.2 Other World Trends

The population explosions happening in these regions are occurring at the same time as a myriad of other factors: the decline of inter-state warfare since 1945, of organized religion since the 1960s, and of communism since 1989. Each of these factors were important loci of political attention and movement in the world before their declines, and the absence of these factors in the

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geopolitical sphere has changed the patterns of war, particularly why wars are fought and who is fighting them. Concerning interstate warfare, over 90 percent of wars since 1945 have taken place within rather than between countries. Of these, most have been ethnic wars. In developed countries the same forces tend to produce contestation rather than violence, raising the importance of ethnicity in politics and society.

With the decline of organized religion, the world has experienced less conflict between religious groups, at least on the scale seen in previous eras, removing some of its salience from the world stage. This is particularly true in the case of the fall of the Soviet Union and the larger collapse of communism as a formidable world foe since the late 1980s and early 1990s: where before the world was organized around religious grounds before the end of World War II, states' primary geopolitical position was their stance on the capitalist/communist struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. With the collapse of that system, these primary organizing characteristics collapsed and left a vacuum for other principles to take up more oxygen in the discussion and conflicts between groups: ethnicity.

3.2.2 Regional Context

3.2.2.1 Push and Pull Factors

The reasons a would-be migrant might decide to undergo the migration process are divided into two kinds: push factors and pull factors. Push factors generally refer to negative features of a sending country which motivate a would-be migrant to leave and pull factors generally refer to positive features, or the hope of positive features, within a receiving country which inspire them to attempt the journey. These factors spring from one or more of many dimensions of the experience of living in a place, be they social, political, or economic. Migrants

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and scholars of the immigration process frequently cite low wages and insufficient formal-sector employment, poor investment opportunities, and inadequate access to credit, finance, and insurance systems as a popular push factor of immigration, as in addition to the user-end economic difficulties, these factors are often symptoms of a larger economic system which is unable to provide the traditional markets, community relationships, and basic capital which would keep a person from wanting to leave an area. Economic factors are not the only ones which motivate would-be migrants to leave their homes, however, and those social and political factors such as authoritarian or corrupt governments, wars, and natural disasters can be equally important reasons that people emigrate, and "have played a significant role in the first waves of Central American migration to the United States (Rosenblum and Brick 2011);" this is particularly true for Central American countries such as El Salvador, where transnational circulations of migrants and deported gang members and zero-tolerance policing strategies are embedded within a longer legacy of U.S. involvement in the region (Brian and Loczko 47, Zilberg 2011, Vogt 2013).

Pull factors naturally mirror push factors in that they provide (or give the appearance of providing) the resources and opportunities that are missing in would-be migrant's country of origin. Chief among these factors is the availability of jobs and associated economic opportunities for immigrants and their families. Though these jobs are what immigration scholars refer to as "3-D jobs" -- dirty, difficult, and dangerous -- the promise of regular paid work creates a sense of opportunity. including safety, limited government, and equality before the law. Additionally, would-be migrants are attracted to the prospect of stable government, the rule of law, and the political and human rights often not present in their countries of origin.

3.2.2.2 Migratory Paths

Migration routes in the North American context also come with their own risks related to the elements and to direct violence. Similar in consequence but unique in context, migrants face a multitude of environmental hazards in their trip northwards:

> *Migrants face a number of deadly risks when crossing the United States-Mexico border. They drown in irrigation canals and rivers; they die in motor vehicle accidents or struck by vehicles as they attempt to cross busy highways on foot; they follow their deaths from mountain cliffs, and they freeze to death in the mountains of Arizona and California. The vast majority of migrants who died on the US side of the border with Mexico parish from heat stroke and dehydration in the deserts of the Southwest (Vogt 2013).*

Though they come from the same source as I will discuss in more detail further below, these environmental hazards are unfortunately only one set of problems amongst many. The journey through the interior of Mexico to the United States, for example, is one marked by a range of hazards, chief among them organized crime. Kidnappers who specifically target migrants due to their vulnerable status and violence from drug cartels are particularly problematic. Given their non-legal status and their general vulnerability for all the reasons described in previous points of this chapter, migrants are easy targets for kidnappers who seek to exploit migrants' bodies, organs, and relatives for cash. A study conducted in 2009 by the Mexican National Human Rights Commission reported that nearly 10,000 people had been victims of kidnapping, most of them Central American migrants, over a period of six months (Staff 2009). To avoid these kidnappers, migrants are often forced to contract the services of a smuggler for a hefty fee, often upwards of $6,000-$8,000. Those who do not face down disappearance or death. Engaging with these smugglers naturally brings about its own share of risks from unequal power relationships to betrayal and being left to die. Stories circulate among migrants of others who were taken, having their bodies opened up on makeshift tables in hotel rooms and their organs extracted. This is only

one particularly gruesome example of migrants becoming valuable commodities to be exchanged for handsome ransoms or to have their bodies or body parts sold, trafficked, or discarded (Brian and Lazcko 16 and 48; Vogt 2013).

Though danger of this kind has always been present in the area, circumstances have been made worse by a series of government policies both related and unrelated to immigration. Chief among these policies is those initiated by former Mexican President Felipe Calderon in his attempt to counter narco violence in the country's interior. Though his administration claimed to have increased citizen security throughout the region, the data shows otherwise. Data from the region between 2006 and 2013, the period directly after the implementation of Calderon's policies, shows between 60,000 and 100,000 people killed and over 26,000 disappeared (Staff 2009). Apart from the obvious humanitarian horror brought on by these numbers, Calderon's policies brought about a context of what scholar's call "low-intensity conflicts" or "new wars" in which the distinctions between armed conflict, organized crime, and large-scale human rights violations are blurred (Kaldor 2006).

This phenomenon is made worse by another shift within Mexican authorities, that which political scientist Peter Andreas calls "narco-corruption," in which authorities profit from increased militarization of drug policies by involving themselves with the exact groups they are supposed to be fighting (Andreas 1998). Although the difference in the risk's migrants face in Mexico versus the United States are complex, they can be summarized as follows: migrants face structural violence when crossing to the United States, and they face direct violence in Mexico. Structural violence, a term coined by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, refers to social, legal, or otherwise structured processes that lead to disproportionate levels of risk for some, often

while protecting others (Galtung and Höivik 1971). How this structural violence is generated from American and Mexican immigration policies will be discussed in the following point.

3.2.2.3 Governance Structure

Though Mexican presidential administrations often chastise their American counterparts for harsh immigration policies, they have usually created situations either equally or more harmful to migrants. This is true as far back as 1974, when the *Ley General de la Población* made unauthorized entry a criminal offense carrying prison time and financial penalties in addition to significant investments in enforcement infrastructure on its Southern border (Ogren 2007). Meanwhile, appetite was quickly being lost in the United States for the generous work programs, family reunification policies, and lax border enforcement protocols that had governed its migration system since the 60s.

Throughout the 80s and 90s, the US began moving away from that paradigm toward more restrictive measures, leaning more toward stricter enforcement both in terms of border security and penalties for businesses using unauthorized labor (Rosenblum and Brick 2011). The most significant shift in the United States, and the one most relevant for the purposes of this investigation, are the changes in American immigration policy which began to take place in the 1990s: the dramatic increase in funding and operational capacity of the US Customs and Border Control (USCBP) and the development of the "prevention through deterrence" strategy, the latter of which being essential to the North American response to immigration for the last three decades. The idea of "prevention through deterrence" is that newly minted USCBP resources (approximately tripled every 5 years) would be best spent in the creation and deployment of large-scale and highly visible enforcement resources along the most heavily trafficked parts of

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the border. This change in direction resulted in about 650 miles of border fencing and hundreds of high-tech cameras, lights, and motion detectors have been installed in heavily trafficked border corridors (Cornelius 2001, Rosenblum and Brick 2011, Vogt 2013). Strangely, the decision to enact this policy universally came from a study of a test case in El Paso which demonstrated that the policy was mostly affecting people from neighboring Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, who crossed the border regularly to work service industry jobs in El Paso and not having any significant effect on migrants attempting to move to the United States from deeper in Mexico or from Central America.

Despite its near baselessness in reality, enforcement and prevention through deterrence came to be the United States' primary approach to immigration. At about the same time, Mexico took a similar zero tolerance approach in the *Plan Sur* of 2001, which focused Mexican efforts on apprehension, deportation, and drug-interdiction efforts (Ogren 2007). The *Plan Sur* and its constitutive elements have created in Mexico a paradigm which scholars refer to as the "security of violence" in which the state is not only ineffective in the prevention of but also actively complicit in a culture of violence surrounding migrants:

> *The Mexican state legitimizes the implementation of regulatory and repressive policies—framed as securitization—that, in effect, allow new forms of violence to flourish...this "violence of security" whereby, through security policies, migrants are equated with drugs, weapons, terrorists, and gangs, thus becoming targets of state violence. Anti–drug trafficking and organized crime efforts become blurred with immigration measures at the national level (Kovic and Kelly 2017).*

By this point in the early 2000s, doubts about both Mexico and the United States' sharp turns toward enforcement were beginning to arise. While the horrors of Mexico's policies had been clear since the beginning and routinely documented by international human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the results of the United States' policies took a little longer to become clear. The number of migrant deaths reported on the US-Mexico border

skyrocketed throughout the late 90s as the prevention through deterrence strategy rerouted migrant flows away from urban areas and into the unforgiving desert and mountain environments of Arizona and California and some were becoming queasy about the human rights implications of the program (Cornelius 2001). American President George W. Bush and Mexican President Vicente Fox seemed to be nearing a bilateral agreement in mid-2001 to change the region's approach, but the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September completely changed the context in which border security and national security were viewed, eliminating any chance of a change in focus.

Instead, both the US individually and the region as a whole doubled down on its "security"-focused, enforcement-driven strategies. The US passed another slate of restrictive immigration measures from 2001 to 2006 (Rosenblum and Brick 2011), despite some flirtations with more humanitarian policies, Mexico has reinforced its security policy up to and including the current administration, and regional plans including the United States, Mexico, and the Central American countries such as the Mérida Initiative and the Caribbean Security Initiative have been signed funneling billions into programs designed to combat illegality, crime, smuggling, and trafficking through funding, supplies, and training. Though often advertised to voters as a new paradigm of cooperation, these plans have proven to be little more than the increased militarization, policing, and discipline of everyday life, the results of which have been well documented as neither reducing immigrant deaths (in fact, often contributing to the increase of those numbers) nor the number of entries of undocumented people.

The governance approach taken by the region has not produced any meaningful progress in their stated goals of reducing unauthorized immigration or reducing the human suffering and death on the part of immigrants. Instead, the region has seen a steady increase in migrant deaths,

attempts at unauthorized immigration, and the decreasing stability of the region as a whole (Cornelius 2001; Rosenblum and Brick 2011; Vogt 2013)

3.2.3 The National Context

As has been discussed in earlier points of this chapter, the United States has, for the entirety of its history, has had a large white majority which has made up the lion's share of the population. With obvious important contributions from its minority populations, this majority has been responsible for producing the nation's normative character and is generally seen by both Americans and foreigners as being the operatively dominant portion of the population. From that dominant position, different understandings of American national identities, also discussed in previous points of this chapter, have emerged.

Though there is some disagreement as to the relative contribution of each of the conceptions of national identity discussed, the country's long standing white majority is generally understood to have formed the controlling share of that balance. Later analysis in this discussion will investigate that group in more detail, but for now only an initial understanding of the existence of that white majority is necessary. The trends discussed above, namely the dramatic differences in population production in different parts of the world and the tendency of those higher populations to migrate to other parts of the world where circumstances are more favorable, has obvious consequences when applied to the case of the United States and its southern neighbors listed above (Mexico and the Central American Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala).

3.2.3.1 Immigration Law

One important feature of the American immigration system is the battery of legislation passed throughout the 20th century which governs who is permitted into the country, how they get here, and from where they come. The first of these laws is the Immigration Act of 1924, which established racial quotas which limited the amount of people of certain ethnicities which could be let into the country. Known as the National Origins Formula, this discriminatory policy specifically curtailed immigration from Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, and Asia, regions of the world from which large amounts of people wanted to immigrate, in order to "preserve national homogeneity (*Milestones*)". The Formula's stated goal was that of national homogeneity, or in more direct terms, the pursuit of preserving whiteness.

Similar sentiment continued into the following decades. Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Republican Party's presidential nominee in the 1950 election, sought to "strike an intelligent, unbigoted balance between the immigration welfare in America and the prayerful hopes of the unhappy and oppressed (Tiechnor and Harris 2002)".

After his eventual success in that election, Eisenhower's Republican party was able to cement both quotas and white European preference into law with the passage of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, with Democratic support. However, a rapidly racially realigning Democratic Party quickly changed its tune, and "in an effort to bring in more constituents who would ultimately support the party, Democrats undertook a sharp reversal of position" as well and supported the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 (Abrajano and Hajnal 8).

The Hart-Cellar Act significantly changed the country's immigration system; most relevant to this project, it abolished the national quota system (*Villazor*). The United States, behind its southern neighbors in population production and enjoying far better circumstances, is

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an attractive option for the many of the new generations of Hispanic America. An interesting case study in this field is that of California, which has undergone a significant demographic change over the course of the last few decades:

> *The state was 80 per cent non-Hispanic white as recently as 1970 and fell below the 50 per cent mark sometime in the late 1990s. By 2050, California's department of finance projects that Hispanics will form 52 per cent of the population, with whites down to only a quarter. Hispanic growth was driven by immigration and higher fertility. In the year 2000, the number of children an average Hispanic woman was expected to bear over her lifetime (TFR) was 2.75 compared to around 2 for non-Hispanic whites and 2.1 for black Americans* (Smith 64).

These changing racial circumstances throughout the post-Civil Rights era realignment period significantly informed the legislation of the following decades. Lines of disagreement shifted from being primarily about the racial makeup of immigrants to how to facilitate their entrance into society. Chief among these concerns were limiting the number of total immigrants permitted each year (favored by Republicans) and sanctions for businesses employing undocumented immigrants (supported by Democrats) with amnesty for undocumented immigrants already in the US enjoying bipartisan support.

These new contours produced three pieces of immigration-related legislation. The first of these was the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Broad in its scope, the IRCA included legalization programs for people who had entered the United States prior to 1982 and for certain unauthorized farm workers, new funding for border enforcement, and new civil and criminal penalties against employers who hire unauthorized workers. Congress then passed the Immigration Act of 1990, which reversed the lowering of the annual cap on immigration, doubled work visas, and created the new H1-B program for highly skilled immigrants.

Some speculate this favorable-seeming immigration landscape, alongside the push and pull factors described above, may have encouraged more people to attempt the journey. This

landscape was not so sunny, though, as immigration votes in Congress became much more racially aligned in this period and anti-immigration interests' groups like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) were formed and beginning to take hold (Abrajano and Hajnal 7-8, Kaufmann 73). These circumstances also informed the passage of President Bill Clinton's Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, which beefed up border enforcement.

3.2.3.2 Immigration to the United States Since 1995

Given ethnicity's centrality to the national, regional, and world discourse, an analysis of the actual immigration trends is called for. Specifically, while contemporary discussions often portray US immigration as an overwhelmingly Mexican and Central American phenomenon, the region is in fact a relatively new contributor to US immigration flows. As Figure 1 illustrates, Latin Americans accounted for less than 10 percent of US immigrants prior to World War II (WWII), and were only a quarter of US immigrants in the early postwar period -- before climbing to about 40 percent beginning in the 1960s and half of all US immigrants in the 1990s. Most of this change is a function of a surge in Mexican and Central American migration since the 1970s. Indeed, fewer than 300,000 Mexicans and 40,000 Central Americans gained legal permanent residence in the United States per year prior to the 1970s. If we include legal and unauthorized immigrants, fewer than 1 million Mexicans and Central Americans lived in the United States at the time of the 1970 census.

Figure 2. Mexican and Central American Immigrants in the United States, Legal Permanent Immigration Flows and Total Population, 1900s-2000s
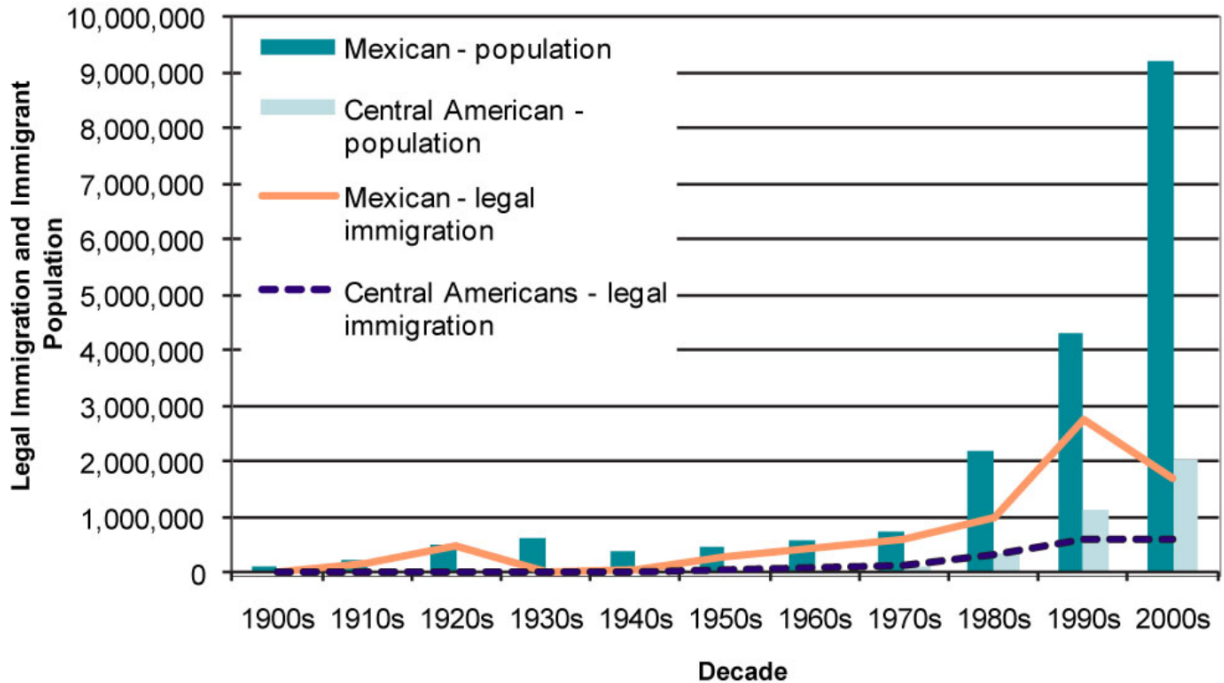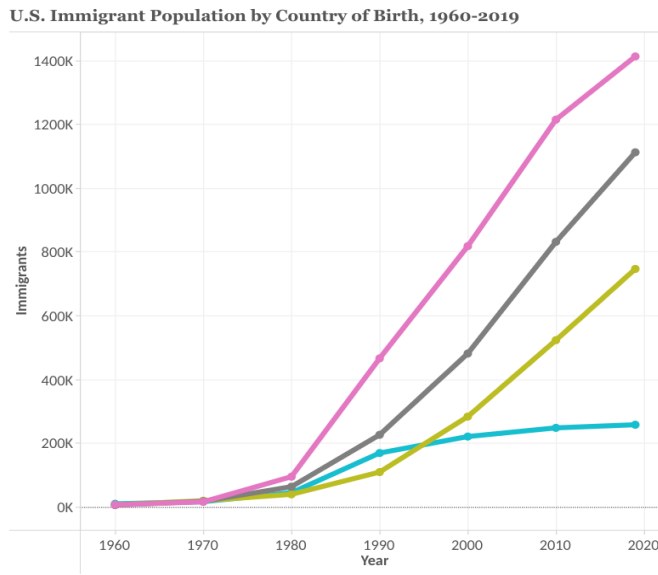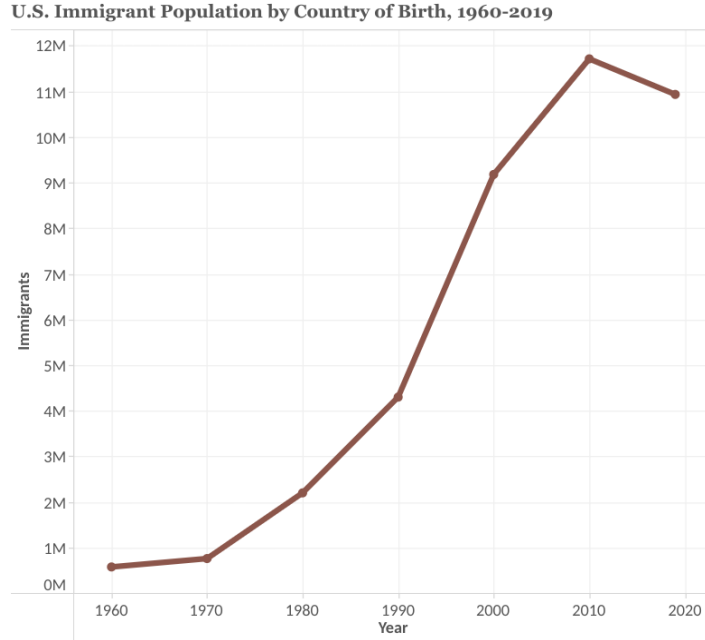

Source: Mexican and Central American Immigrants in the United States, 2011

Yet as Figure 2 also illustrates, legal permanent immigration from Mexico and Central America to the United States roughly doubled during each of the next two decades, and the total Mexican and Central American populations in the United States doubled during each of the next three decades. The rise in Mexican and Central American legal inflows to the United States and the even larger rise in the stock of these immigrants (including those without legal status) remaining in the United States reflects changes to the structural pushes and pulls that motivate international migration, as well as changes to US immigration policy.

Mexico and the Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua are the main countries of study in this thesis. While the data above highlights the

general regional and demographic inflows of mostly non-white Latinos from that region, the graphs below show the migration specifically from the countries specific countries of study

U.S. Immigrant Population by Country of Birth, 1960-2019

U.S. Immigrant Population by Country of Birth, 1960-2019

Source: Migration Policy Institute, 2011

It is worth noting that although trends for both Mexican and Central American immigration began to grow at the same time, Mexican immigration has actually reversed since the 1990s. Indeed, in 2015, it was reported that more Mexicans were actually *leaving* the United States than were entering it (Gonzalez-Barrera). For that reason, the author feels compelled to reiterate that while Mexico and Mexicans are a part of this analysis, indeed an integral one, it is not the *only* part of the group under analysis. It should be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 has affected these numbers slightly, but this analysis only includes data from 1990-2020.

3.2.3.3. Third Demographic Transition

Consider the case of California. The state's non-Hispanic population as recently as 1970 was 80%. That fell to below 50% in the late 1990s, and by 2050, is projected to be as low as 25% of the population (Kaufmann 61). Notably, the case of California is not a unique one. Other southwestern states like Arizona and New Mexico have followed similar paths, though perhaps not at the same pace. These states are experiencing what some project (and others fear) to be the future of the country, a "third demographic transition" wherein the country loses its long-standing white majority and becomes a "majority-minority" country in which no ethnic group has a majority share, an increasing trend in countries traditionally dominated by white majorities and which are now experiencing a declining white share of the population in Western countries.

Whites are already a minority in most major cities of North America. Together with New Zealand, North America is projected to be 'majority-minority' by 2050, with Western Europe and Australia following suit later in the century. This shift is replacing the self-confidence of white majorities with an existential insecurity channeled by the lightning rod of immigration. It

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is increasingly difficult to deny that white majority's concern over immigration is the main cause of the rise of the populist right in the West (Kaufmann 7). This is primarily explained by concern over identity, not economic threat, a discussion which will follow in more detail in the next point where the consequences of these trends and growing white nervousness at the prospect of the loss of their power will follow.

> *In our more peaceful, post-ideological, demographically turbulent world, migration-led ethnic change is altering the basis of politics from class to ethnicity. On one side is a conservative coalition of whites who are attached to their heritage joined by minorities who value the white tradition; on the other side a progressive alliance of minorities who identify with their ethnic identity combined with whites who are agnostic or hostile towards theirs. Among whites, ethno-demographic change polarizes people between 'tribal' ethnics who value their particularity and 'religious' post-ethnics who prioritize universalist creeds such as John McWhorter's 'religion of anti-racism.'*

What has been established up to this point is that the world is a very dynamic place. People and populations are always on the move, and those movements are often governed by sometimes abstract, far-off feeling factors like balances of population, shifts in relations between countries, the relative force of ideologies, and the perception of one's ability to make a life in different parts of the world. Though these factors may feel far removed from the goings-on of day-to-day life, they have real consequences for people, how they consider their place in the world, and the social and political actions they take to change or preserve their circumstances. In the next point of this chapter, a closer look will be taken on the United States and its neighbors to the south.

3.3 White, Democratic, and American

The global, regional, and national circumstances of today have created a context in which populations in less-developed parts of the world like Mexico and Central America have strong

incentives, despite treacherous conditions and a hostile political atmosphere, to attempt the journey to the United States. Whites in the United States enjoy a particularly favorable position on the top of the nation's racial hierarchy. In the United States, the prominent white majority sees this trend, and the demographic change that it represents, as not only a threat to their status as the dominant racial group but also as a challenge to the very identity of the country, which they internalize as necessarily tied into their whiteness. Not only have they been the most prosperous, most powerful, and most dominant faction of the country's patchwork racial hierarchy for all of the country's history, they have also been able to leverage that position into forming the conception of the "prototypical American" in their image.

While the general dynamics of intergroup conflict and the factors which motivate it were established in the previous point, this point will discuss in more detail the specific dimensions of *this* conflict between whites and demographic change brought on by Mexican and Central American immigrants. In particular, this point will discuss the primary features of the demographic change threat, which are its large scope and size, the negative and inherently threatening nature of the modern media environment's coverage of immigration and demographic change or the "migrant threat narrative," and the demographic realignment it has brought on within the parties, both in its constitutive elements and as a consequence of the distance between party elites' messaging on the issue. It will also discuss in more detail the subgroup of whites who are most affected by this conflict, their specific social, political, and demographic circumstances which make them particularly sensitive to immigration- and demographic change-related issues, and whose mass conversion from a traditionally Democratic bloc to a primarily Republican-sympathetic one is and has been responsible for a general social, political, and economic shift in American politics over the last three decades.

While immigration is a salient issue nationwide, it is more relevant for a particular group of whites who identify more strongly with their racial group than others. Ashley Jardina (2016) distinguishes between two categories of whites in the United States: those with white racial *identity* and white racial *consciousness*. White *identifiers* are those who are simply those who both recognize their status as white people and recognize themselves as one of many others, while those with white *consciousness* fulfill those requirements and mobilize that identity into a specific set of political attitudes and behaviors. They "feel attached to the group," "believe their group experiences some type of deprivation," and want to "work…within the political system to address the group's grievances (Jardina 23)".

These beliefs are founded on a more complex mixture of feelings and positions, however. Though the United States is often thought of as a "melting pot" where people from all over the world come and live together more or less harmoniously, the racial reality of the situation is much different. Inherent in this idea is the difference between white identity and white consciousness is the recognition of the racial hierarchy pervasive throughout all dimensions of American society, as well as beliefs that whites are and should remain at the top of that racial hierarchy and that they occupy that position legitimately, and feelings of grievance and injustice at the perception of that status being threatened by racial minorities Most importantly, these factors tie the racial identity of those with white consciousness to their identity as Americans, since this position at the top of the racial hierarchy and whites' ability to cast themselves as "mainstream" or "archetypal" Americans (Jardina 44).

Given the United States' long history as a predominantly, but by no means entirely, white country in terms of both racial composition and power structure, whiteness, especially to whites themselves, has come to form an essential piece of what makes an American an American. Given

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their continued dominance of nearly every facet of American society, whites tend to have a blurred conception of ethnicity and nationhood since their status as white has never been distinctive enough to matter; for them, their ethnicity forms the national archetype. This ethnic component to American identity is evident in the presentation of traditional national symbols like Thanksgiving or apple pie which double as white symbols. When these symbols are challenged or co-opted by American racial minorities, the salience of white Americans' racial identity is made more salient. When whiteness and Americanness are so intimately tied together, or more in the parlance of this thesis, when an identity is so central to one's positive self-concept and so tied-up with other cherished identities, a threat to that identity is likely to produce an intensely strong reaction. These "sociotropic" and "symbolic" concerns about the nation have a clear potential to "mobilize broad swaths of the electorate" and "destabilize existing political alignments" (Hainnueller and Hopkins 2014).

The group in question can thus be described as being primarily defined as white psychological conservatives. People who fall in this group seek to "secure their multi-generational group attachments" – that is, their enduring dominant position at the top of the racial hierarchy – "and identity reference points for posterity (Kaufmann 60)". Crucially, this psychological conservatism is not necessarily political conservatism. Though many psychological conservatives identify with right wing parties, a significant number of cultural conservatives have left-wing economic interests which cause them to identify with liberal groups, for the purposes of this project, with the Democratic Party. They measure their nation as how similar it looks to the nation of their childhoods and are disturbed by the rupture of their local, ethnic, group and national attachments caused by the demographic change brought on by immigration: for them, "rising diversity leads to a sense of white American demise and a fading

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connection between local referents and the white American presence," where "a fading of white cultural predominance adds to the conservative malaise (Kaufmann 60)".

3.3.1 Prominent Features of Immigration

There are a few different factors which make immigration and demographic change so problematic for this group: its effect on the composition and perception of parties, its effect of the elite messaging coming from those parties, its size and scope, and the way its coverage in the modern media environment. One key dimension of immigration and demographic change is how it has racially realigned the parties. The first step of this transformation was the previously discussed white/minority realignment in the Civil Rights era with whites moving significantly to the Republican Party as blacks, Latinos, and other racial minorities increasingly began voting with Democrats. The realignment continued even after the Civil Rights era faded into history, however. After 1980 (notably, the year in which Ronald Reagan, who spoke and legislated significantly around the issue of immigration), whites began to migrate in even more significantly than they did before to the Republican Party, with more whites identifying with Republicans than Democrats for the first time in recent American political history in 1992. In just a few decades, whites went from identifying with Democrats by a margin of 39%-25% to identifying with Republicans 36%-29%.
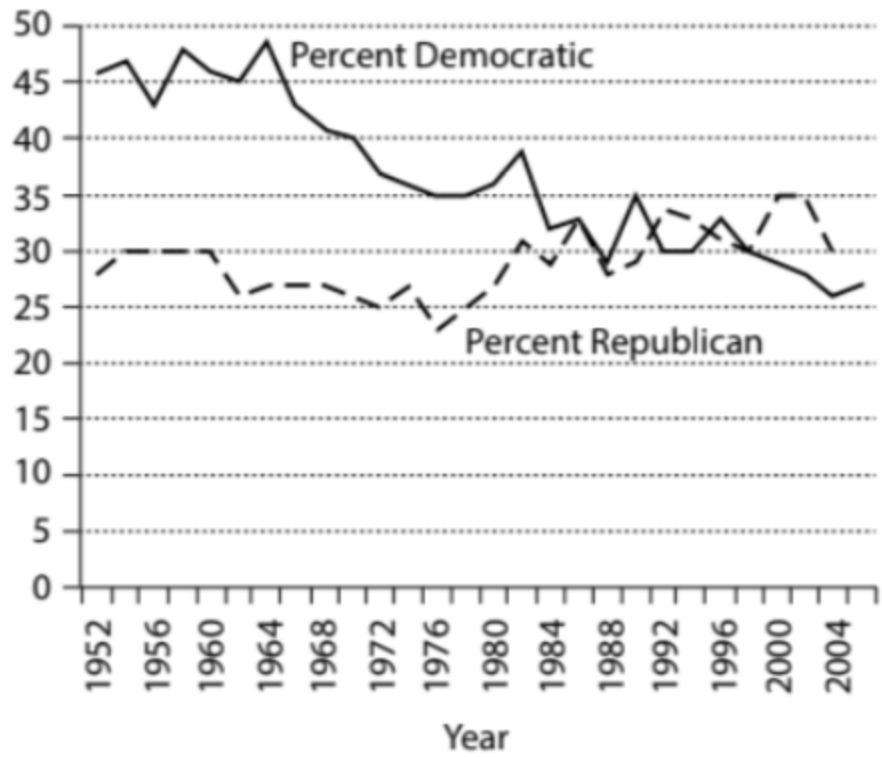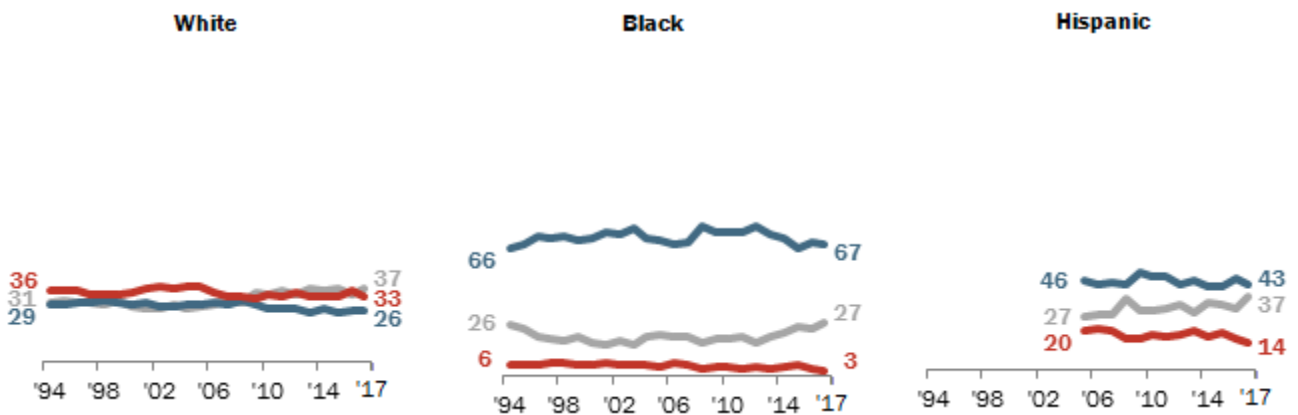
Figure 2.2 White Partisanship over Time

Soure: Abrajano, Marisa, and Zoltan L. Hajnal. *White Backlash*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

This trend has only continued in the contemporary era, with the gap expanding slightly to 37%-26% and with both Blacks and Hispanics sorting clearly into the Democratic Party (*Trends*).

White	Black	Hispanic

White:
36
31
29
37
33
26
'94 '98 '02 '06 '10 '14 '17

Black:
66
26
6
67
27
3
'94 '98 '02 '06 '10 '14 '17

Hispanic:
46
27
20
43
37
14
'94 '98 '02 '06 '10 '14 '17

Notes: Based on registered voters. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Data for Hispanics shown only for years in which interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish.
Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data (U.S. adults).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Pew Research, 2020.

While whites have slowly but surely sorted into the Republican Party, helping to foment that party's reputation as a party almost exclusively of whites and therefore taking on a much more racial character throughout the modern period, Latinos, what is arguably the largest and most visible immigrant group, have come to overwhelmingly identify and vote as Democrats. This development began in the Civil Rights era but has continued on as immigration has become a more nationally salient issue with legislation from the Reagan era, through the period of massive immigration from Mexico and Central America, up to the modern day. This changing of group imagery began in the 1990s and accelerated into the 21st century, resulting in a two-pronged effect: first, the actual composition of the parties changed significantly; second, the *image* the Republican Party had of the Democratic Party changed significantly. As the growing Latino population shifted significantly to the Democratic Party in the 1990s, by the 2010s, racial

minorities made up just 10% of the Republican electorate while Republicans estimated that number of black voters made up more than double of the Democratic Party than (46% to the actual 24%) and queer voters by over *six times* their actual numbers (37% to the actual 6%) (Kaufmann 97).

A second key dimension to immigration and demographic change politics is elite messaging. Given its continued prevalence in American politics in the post-Civil Right era, both political parties express a variety of views on immigration. However, Republicans have been much more vocal and forceful on this issue than Democrats, speaking to the issue with much more frequency and intensity. This is true of both Republican politicians and media figures. Figures like Former Representative Tom Tancredo in the early 2000s to more recent figures like former President Donald J. Trump have long espoused virulent rhetoric on the role of immigrants and immigration in society, helped along by prominent conservative media figures like Bill O'Reilly, Ann Coulter, and Tucker Carlson bemoaning the ills of immigration and urging for current immigrants to be deported and prospective ones from being prevented from coming in radio, television, and print. Even a moderate figure like Mitt Romney adopted a harsh immigration stances like self-deportation and denial of services to children of undocumented immigrants in his 2012 presidential bid. On the other hand, Democratic elites have had very little to offer voters concerned by these issues, either offering half-hearted support for a limited set of immigrant's right issues or choosing to avoid the issue, signaling to anxious whites who is more willing and able to address their anxiety: while "Republican leaders criticize immigrants, condemn their actions, and bemoan the costs to the United States, Democratic leaders either ignore immigration or offer lukewarm support for the plight of immigrant…present[ing] individual white Americans with a compelling partisan logic…anyone who is anxious about

immigration and the growing population of Latinos has a strong incentive to favor the Republican Party (Abrajano and Hajnal 41)".

A third notable aspect of immigration and demographic change is its massive size and scope. The impact of this issue is massive, omnipotent, and long-term. In addition to the menacing threat of loss of status and social control that it represents for some whites, its mind-boggling size and pervasiveness throughout American society is overwhelming. Though there exists a diversity of opinion of Mexico and Central Americans specifically and immigration generally throughout the country, white opinion is almost universally negative. Opinion polls taken over throughout the 21st century show that "over half of white Americans feel that immigrants are a burden on the nation, a slight majority think that Latinos add to the crime problem, and about half believe they take jobs away from Americans ("Immigration")".

Americans especially take note when their own communities are changing: not only are sharp, sudden increases in the number of immigrants, or the perceived number of immigrants, in a person's locality is the most powerful predictor of which localities consider anti-immigrant ordinances (Hopkins 2010), but communities with strong white majorities express greater punitiveness towards Latinos in counties in which Latinos are, or are perceived to be, more prevalent and growing in number (Stewart et. al 2015). Experiencing a sudden, significant increase in the number of immigrants in a person's local community can reduce support for immigrants and immigration. That is true chiefly when immigration is a salient national issue. Daniel Hopkins (2010) shows that respondents in quickly changing counties are 10 percentage points (or 18%) more likely to want to restrict immigration when the issue is nationally salient than those in static counties – in other words, when immigration is more a part of the national

conversation, those who live in a place with an increasing population of immigrants tend to become more restrictionism in their views.

This relationship introduces the fourth and, for within the context of this project, the most important aspect of immigration: its regular negative presentation in the modern media environment as the "migrant threat narrative." Sudden demographic changes, be they experiential first-hand ones or larger-order general ones, generate anxiety. When those changes receive coverage in the media, it can politicize those changes in people's minds: it is usually not enough that demographics are changing; that change might not be immediately connected to politics. Media frames which "define what the problem is and how to think about it" (Kinder 1998)make political ramifications clearer: "hostile political reactions to immigrants are most likely when communities undergo sudden influxes of immigrants and when salient national rhetoric reinforces the threat (Hopkins 2010)". In agreement with the "agenda setting" phenomena described in Chapter I, the news media "suggests" to consumers what topics are important by paying more attention to certain issues rather than others (Baumgartner and Jones 2010; Iyengar 1991). When the news media decides to pay more attention to some issues, the public perceives those issues to be of greater importance than others and they are more salient in their minds (Dunaway, Abrajano, and Branton 2010). Accessibility to an issue is key to the way people evaluate issues (Zaller 1992). Even when that issue is not an immediate concern, constant media attention primes people to have certain information more accessible in their mind and increase the amount of importance they attach to that information. Media and elite discourse clearly have a notable effect on how people respond to immigration and demographic change. In fact, research shows that the degree to which people are concerned about immigration increases and decreases in accordance with the number of stories related to immigration in the news.

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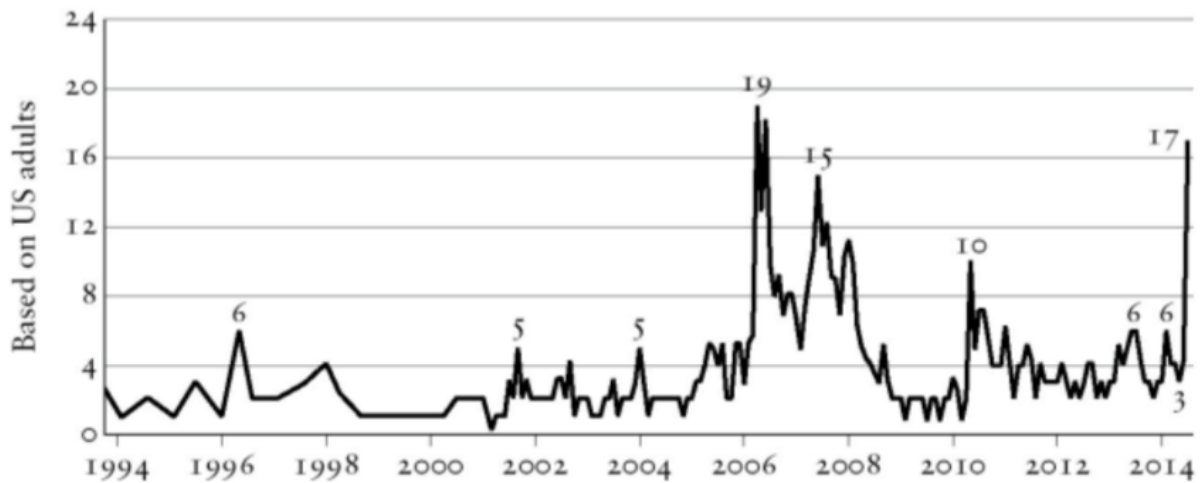
3.3. Percentage naming immigration as the United States' most important problem (based on US adults)

Source: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2694508/Number-Americans-calling-illegal-immigration-important-problem-U-S-grows-SIX-FOLD-May-tops-issues.html

Source: Kaufmann, Eric. *Whiteshift: Populism, immigration and the future of white majorities*. Penguin UK, 2018.

The analysis shows that only 7 percent of those polled during a month with few immigration stories considered immigration to be the most important issue facing the country while a whopping 43 per cent named it was the number-one issue when there was a preponderance of immigration-related stories. The defining feature in months with few stories versus those with many is how prevalent the issue in people's minds – salience. When an issue is salient in the minds of voters, parties act to shift policy (Kaufmann 86). Given the centrality of media coverage in immigration and demographic change opinion formation, the nature of that coverage takes on a special importance.

3.3.1.1 Migrant Threat Narrative

The analysis above shows that people not only pay more attention to – and feel more threatened by – immigration when it receives frequent media coverage and feel more politically activated to action against immigrants. This is caused in part by the overwhelmingly negative nature of both tone and content featuring migrants and immigration. Crucially, this frame is not only used in rightwing sources like Fox News or *The Wall Street Journal* – it is a frame common throughout the modern media environment, galvanizing those who consume rightwing media sources but already primed to dislike migrants and oppose immigration but also, and most importantly for the purposes of this project, those whites who consume either centrist- or leftwing-minded media and who are worried about immigration as a threat to their place on the top of the country's racial hierarchy. White Americans' attitudes about illegal immigration are quite sensitive to racial cues (Segovia 2009).

The migrant threat narrative is a way of covering immigration and demographic change in the US which emphasizes a variety of negative social, political, and economic downsides of immigration, particularly those which have to do with the economy (immigrants are overly reliant on welfare), law and order (immigrants commit lots of crimes), health and education (immigrants use social services for which they do not pay), and cultural dissimilarity (immigrants do not care to assimilate and come from far-off, undesirable places). They have all the features of compelling news items, typically emotional and attention-getting, and aim to stoke fear and anxiety toward immigrants, immigration, and demographic change (Abrajano and Hajnal 15). Indeed, this rhetoric costs or downsides of immigration and rarely shows the benefits like new taxpayers or low-wage labor. (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). Bad news about Latino immigrants, and notably not about other groups, tends to cause anxiety in whites – an

anxiety that is crucial to understanding white opposition to Latinos and immigrants. Indeed, work done on racial priming theory (Mendelberg 2008; Valentino, Hutchings, & White 2002) has shown that negative cues against minority racial groups activate racial attitudes and boost their impact on political judgments. These out-group judgments are powerful enough to drive political opinion when that group is made salient enough by media frames: the whiter respondents favor their own group over Hispanics, the more restrictive their preference on immigration policy becomes.

Attitudes about Latinos in particular, not general ethnocentrism, are associated with policy opinions about immigration – Latino immigrant cues trigger stronger anxiety than White European ones (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Valentino, Brader, and h Jardina 2013). The Latino threat narrative by the media is correlated with significant defection away from the Democratic Party along with increases in the proportion of the public that identifies as Republicans and Independents. Indeed, "when respondents were exposed to news that was about Latino immigrants and negative in tone, they responded with increased anxiety and became more concerned about immigration as a consequence (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014)".

3.3.1.1.1 Content Analyses

Two analyses (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013; Abrajano and Hajnal 2015) have surveyed large swaths of immigration-related stories in newspapers and broadcast television to find empirical support for the existence and effects of the migrant threat narrative. Below is a brief sketch of each study and its findings.

Analysis #1 – Valentino, Brader, and Jardina: analysis samples mentions of immigration in any section of the New York Times, the Houston Chronicle, the Chicago Tribune, the

Charlotte Observer, the Seattle Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, and the Washington Post between 1985 and 2009. These sources were used because of their status as prominent regional or national publications with large readerships which cover large areas of the country without overrepresenting a single region, particularly the Southwest, where a disproportionate amount of attention might be given to Latino immigration.

Regarding frequency, the findings are consistent with the argument of this paper: between 1985 and 1993, when immigration salience was relatively low, the number of stories about not only Latinos but all immigrant groups were relatively low. In the years following 1994, when Proposition 187 in California sparked state- and nationwide outrage and the issue became more salient throughout the country, the number of stories began to rise. By 2000, a year in which the number of immigrants from Mexico and Central American immigrants reached its highest point, coverage regarding specifically Latin American immigrants became much more common than coverage regarding other groups. Corresponding with expectations regarding media and elite discourse and issue salience, "news mentions of Latino immigrants peaked in 2006 in the wake of elite debate and mass protests surrounding the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act. This bill, which was not passed into law, would have increased federal penalties for violating immigration laws and raised the classification of illegal immigration to felony status. The legislation was the catalyst for widespread protests over U.S. immigration policy throughout 2006." Despite a brief drop in 2009, coverage of Latin American immigrants remained frequent and significantly more frequent than coverage of other groups. Regarding tone, the researcher's findings confirm the hypothesis of this paper: coverage was "largely negative, largely focused on Latinos, and largely attentive to the negative policy issues

associated with immigration." Such findings confirm the hypothesis of the immigrant threat narrative.

Analysis 2 – Abrajano and Hajnal: Their analysis centers on the *New York Times* as a specific test of where the immigrant threat narrative is a phenomenon limited to conservative media. They identify 6,778 articles – roughly 227 articles per year – between 1980 and 2011 that discuss immigration. They note the increase in the volume of articles over time. Their analysis finds negative news stories to be four times as prominent as positive ones, with 48.9% of stories having a negative tone and 12.1% of stories having a positive tone. They find the immigrant threat narrative, which they define in terms of any story having a negative tone regarding issues of the economy, law and order, health and education, and cultural dissimilarity, to be prevalent, and argue that this "skewed coverage makes it difficult for the majority of Americans to consider the full spectrum of immigrants' contributions to society, particularly with respect to the positive contributions that they can impart (Abrajano and Zoltan 166)".

To analyze the consequences of that effect, they go on to measure how exposure to the immigrant threat narrative affects partisan beliefs of the US public using macro partisanship data from the CBS/New York Times poll series. Notably, they find that when the coverage is framed to emphasize Latinos, it negatively impacts the percentage of Democratic identifiers, and results in greater independence and more support for the Republican Party (Abrajano and Zoltan 156). As expected, there is a positive relationship between the prevalence of the immigrant threat narrative and white macro partisanship. The more that stories focus on Latino immigrants, the more likely whites are to subsequently shift away from the Democratic Party and move to the Republican Party.
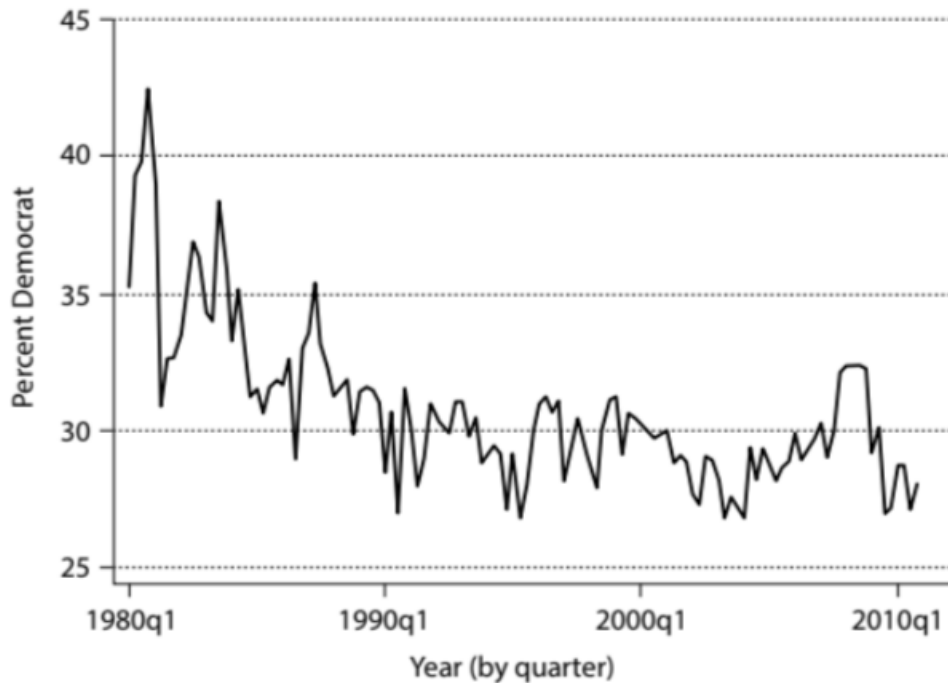
Figure 5.4 Percentage of Democratic Identifiers, 1980–2011
Source: CBS/*New York Times* poll series, cited in Roper 2014.

Source: Abrajano, Marisa, and Zoltan L. Hajnal. *White Backlash*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

In line with other data presented in this thesis, white attachment to the Democratic Party fell from a high of 43 percent in 1980 all the way down to about 28 percent in 2010. These gains accrue both to Independents and the Republican Party, though the model suggests these defections are primarily to the Republican Party: "the model predicts a 7 percent increase in white Republican identity in the quarter after New York Times coverage centers exclusively on Latino immigration as compared to the quarter after coverage focuses on non-Latino immigration. Similarly, the Latino frames reduce the proportion of whites identifying as Democratic in the next quarter by about 3 percent (Abrajano and Zoltan 170)". To validate the connection, the researchers control for the state of the economy, as measured by national

unemployment rates as well as the political climate of the time (captured via presidential approval ratings), the two factors that have been found to exert a strong influence on macro partisanship (Abarajano and Zoltan 171).

On this topic, a pair of studies done by H. Robert Outten and his colleagues have been particularly enlightening. In the first study, a group of White American participants were randomly assigned either to receive ethnic demographic projections for 2060 indicating that Whites would then be less than half of the U.S. population or to a condition in which they were not exposed to such projections. Participants completed measures of their feelings toward ethnic minorities as well as their feelings toward their ingroup. In a second study, a similar group was presented with either real projections that show that Whites will be a numerical minority in Vancouver in 2058 or bogus projections suggesting that Whites will still be a majority in 2058, which also studied appraisals of intergroup threat to examine whether appraisals of threat mediate the effect of condition on intergroup emotions, meaning that both studies examined how members of the group under study in this paper react in exactly the situation described in the previous points of this chapter.

Crucially, the study measures not only Whites' change of opinion toward the (perceived) threatening outgroup but also Whites' opinion of their own group: "it was demonstrated that appraisals of intergroup threat mediated the effects of demographic condition on how whites feel toward ethnic minorities and they're in group" – that is to say, feeling their advantaged position threatened (Outten et. al. 2012). Indeed, not only did whites report feeling more angry and fearful toward the offending outgroup -- a result completely in line with what both social identity theory and intergroup emotions theory posits -- they also reported feeling more sympathy toward their own group, a feeling which is also consistent with the arguments of these theories:

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"sympathy is typically directed toward others who are suffering, particularly if they are perceived to be undeserving of their misfortune (Outten et. al. 2012). While judging minority ethnic groups more harshly, Whites in turn demonstrate more sympathy to their fellow Whites, who they see as being unjustly and undeservedly disadvantaged.

	Study 1	Study 2
Design	1. Participants randomly assigned article on ethnic demographic projections for 2060 indicating that Whites would be less than half of the U.S. population OR an article not containing those projections. 2. Participants completed measures of their feelings toward ethnic minorities and feelings toward their ingroup.	1. Participants randomly assigned false article showing continued white dominance or real article showing the opposite. 2. Participants completed measures of their feelings toward ethnic minorities and feelings toward their ingroup
Result	1. Fear and anger toward ethnic minorities. 2. Heightened sympathy toward ingroup.	1. Fear and anger toward ethnic minorities. 2. Heightened sympathy toward ingroup.

Source: Table By The Author

Whites, *regardless of political partisanship*, come to interpret the rising visibility and power of foreign racial groups as a threat to both their racial and national identities. Whites interpret social

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instability, uncertainty, and demographic change as challenges not only to their position on top of society's racial hierarchy but also as challenges to their way of life, resulting in a significant conservative shift in both attitudes toward their racial group and in their votes. A particularly notable study on this subject comes from Maureen A. Craig and Jennifer Richeson in their study *On the Precipice of a "Majority-Minority" America: Perceived Status Threat from the Racial Demographic Shift Affects White Americans' Political Ideology* .

Craig and Richeson's study design a three-layered methodology in which Whites' attitudinal and political responses to the threat of the United States becoming a minority-majority country are analyzed. In the first study, a nationally representative survey wherein self-identified politically independent White respondents were randomly assigned to learn about a majority-minority racial shift or not to learn about the shift; they were then asked about their political-party leanings and ideology. In the second, participants read about the projected U.S. racial shift or a national shift in geographic mobility.

They then completed measures assessing the potential mediators and reported their support for several policies. Finally, in the third and final study, participants read an article about the U.S. racial shift (as in Study 2), a control article, or a third article designed to allay concerns about group status. The methodology is specifically designed to measure the individual effects racial concerns, group concerns, and national identity concerns, but also the interaction of those concerns together. The results produced three particularly notable insights: first, researchers note a greater endorsement of conservative policies among the population for whom demographic change was made more salient than with the population that was not; second, the effects of this heightened support for conservative policies was more pronounced when they were framed in way which suggested that the demographic change was likely to come at the cost of White

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societal status; third, perceived group-status threat, triggered by exposure to the majority-minority shift, increases Whites' endorsement of conservative political ideology and policy positions (Craig and Richeson 2014).

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
Design	1. White respondents were randomly assigned to learn or not learn about a majority-minority racial shift. 2. Participants asked about their political-party leanings and ideology.	1. Participants read about the projected U.S. racial shift or a national shift in geographic mobility. 2. Participants completed measures assessing the potential mediators and reported their support for several policies.	1. Participants read an article about the U.S. racial shift, a control article, or a third article designed to allay concerns about group status. 2. Participants report on their feelings on ingroup and outgroups.
Interest Area	Racial concerns	Racial and in-group concerns	Racial, in-group, and national identity concerns
Results	Greater endorsement of conservative policies	Endorsement heightened when framing focuses on loss of societal status	Increased endorsement of wider conservative ideology

Source: Table Created By Author

These findings are in line with the model of situational triggers (in this case, articles about demographic shift) activating predisposing factors (white, immigration-concerned Democrats) sketched in the previous chapter of this thesis. The clear implication of all this work,

of course, is that immigration-concerned whites who see both their racial and national identities threatened, are increasingly likely and motivated to support conservative candidates and policies, in response to the changing racial demographics. This means that the social, economic, and political power and very identity of the nation is inextricably tied up in the cultural and racial identity of white Americans.

3.4 The Conservative Shift

The story being told in this thesis is one of change: changing racial composition of the country, changing racial dynamics amongst political parties, and, most importantly, changing political circumstances for the country. As immigration becomes more and more salient with an ever-increasing number of immigrants from Mexico and Central America entering the country, the United States' white majority, particularly those who feel most identified with their racial group, take more frequent and more intense measures to protect both their position at the top of the racial hierarchy and the notion of what they believe the United States is. This transformation is a product of the racialization of the political process in the United States over the last 30 years, as well as the other major processes discussed in this thesis: a dramatic demographic realignment of whites to the Republican Party and the reconstituting of the Democratic Party as a coalition of diverse racial groups, the formation of an identity-aligned media landscape which confirm the beliefs and prejudices of tightly-bound ideological groups, and the massive immigration from Mexico and Central America and the resulting demographic change which has transformed the United States into a country where whites have less relative power than they had before. As part of that attempt to protect what they believe is rightfully theirs from people they consider to be undeservedly taking it from them, immigration-concerned whites, especially those who are

traditionally Democratic voters, have both adopted increasingly conservative positions on a range of issues from trade to public assistance to education. In the process, their movement right has fundamentally transformed the social, economic, and political landscape.

A central feature unifying all of the disperse issues on which immigration-concerned whites have moved right is the racial dimension surrounding the political landscape. While race is and has always been a salient issue in the United States, the surge of Mexican and Central American immigration has transformed American racial dynamics from being white, black to white-black-Latino. This is partially a product of pure demographic fact and partially a product of elite messaging. Taken together, these results lend further support for the argument that white racial solidarity influences opinion on policies that benefit whites as a group, but not uniformly on those that help racial and ethnic minorities. Indeed, the greatest affectual difference between whites and any other group is with Latinos on impact on a range of issues from harm to American jobs and values, immigration restrictions, immigrant employment, and immigrant government benefits (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). While it is rare for government or media figures to explicitly frame issues as zero-sum games between racial groups, associations throughout time (Reagan's "welfare queen," for example) signal to whites which policies are "for them" and "for others." For this reason, while whites strike a balance between supporting policies which favor them and opposing policies which support racial minorities (Valentino, Brader, and Jardina 2013). These cues, signals, and associations are mobilizing, influencing and activating even those that are not initially anti-immigration. Neiman et al. (2006), for example, find that Republicans "may be able to use the immigration issue as a wedge to attract support from people who tend to support Democratic candidates." Jaridna (2017) finds that anti-immigrant sentiment in every case should lead directly to more conservative policy

preferences and that the same sentiment is tied to increased support for Republican gubernatorial, congressional, and presidential candidates, explaining the slow but steady support of white support from Democratic to Republican candidates over the past thirty years, less generous and more punitive policy preferences across the board, and rightward shift in party identification (Jardina 19, 37, 152).

3.4.1 Polarized Parties

One of the clearest implications of this movement right is its polarizing effect on the parties. The social, geographic, and racial dimensions of this polarization were discussed at length in the second chapter of this thesis. Heretofore unexplored is the intellectual underpinnings of the parties which inform those changes, particularly on the part of the Democratic Party. After the Truman Administration's decision to desegregate the military, the Party's continued transformation into the party of Civil Rights over the course of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, and the diversification of the voting bloc, radical social transformation became a much more central feature of Democratic politics. The ascension of racial minorities, previously either formally disenfranchised or otherwise left without political voice, into key thought-leading and decision-making positions, has moved the Democratic Party left on a variety of social issues. Put up against the well-established conservative media, the clash produces "a growing 'culture wars' polarization between increasingly insecure white conservatives and energized white liberals. Among the most important is a growing unwillingness to indulge the anti-white ideology of the cultural left. When whites were an overwhelming majority, empirically unsupported generalizations about whites could be brushed off as amusing and mischievous but ultimately harmless. As whites decline, fewer are willing to abide such attacks. At the same time, white

decline emboldens the cultural left, with its dream of radical social transformation. The last time this blend of ethnic change and cultural contestation occurred, in fin-de-siècle America, the anti-WASP adversary culture was confined to a small circle of bohemian intellectuals. Today, the anti-majority adversary culture operates on a much larger scale, permeates major institutions and is transmitted to conservatives through social and right-wing media. This produces a growing polarization on social and cultural issues between increasingly insecure white conservatives and energized white liberals (Kaufmann 7). While Democratic cosmopolitans embrace the change, populist-right movements feed on the anti-immigration sentiment of other Democratic voters who are not so enthusiastic of changes taking place in the country.

3.4.2 Immigration

The most obvious implication of the political transformation described in this thesis has to do with social issues surrounding immigration like language issues and the rights of immigrants. For most of modern American political history, especially in the period between the Civil Rights era and the 1990s, immigration did not register as a salient issue for American voters, and with other issues dominating the political landscape, Americans' views on immigration stayed relatively steady and relatively positive. This began to change, however, in the Reagan era, when conservative activists sought to build out an intellectual position for immigration restriction. The most prominent results of these efforts were the establishment of the Center for Immigration studies, a think tank funded by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) in 1985, an anti-immigration think tank. This group is responsible for much of the groundswell of local- and state-level legislation and expansion of the immigration-restriction intelligentsia world like Voice of Citizens Together (VCT), Americans Against Illegal

Immigration (AAII), and early supporters and eventual organizers California measures Proposition 63 and Proposition 187, two of the hallmark pieces of political action against immigration in the modern period (Kaufmann 83).

3.4.2.1 Two Early California Cases

The first of these measures was Proposition 63, which sought to establish English as California's official language, riding a trend begun in Miami-Dade County, Florida, in 1981 and implemented in several states across the country. Interestingly, supporters of the measure sought to frame it in civic, rather than ethno-traditionalist terms (Kaufman 72). Its message remains popular across partisan and racial divides: "over 60 per cent of the public endorse making English the official language of the United States and only among self-identified liberals and Hispanics is a majority opposed (Schildkraut 2010). Proposition 63 was a confirmation of that support, cruising to an easy 73–27 victory in 1986, the largest margin on a popular initiative recorded to date. At that time, political and media elites were largely opposed to the measure – most notably Republican Governor George Deukmejian, his Democratic opponent and Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley, and Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates, and, on the national level, both the Republican vice-president, George H. W. Bush, and his Democratic adversary, Michael Dukakis. Nonetheless, almost everywhere, opposition to Official English was bipartisan. Mainstream progressives rather than Hispanic advocacy organizations, who tended to be weak, organized the opposition (Kaufmann 72).

Proposition 187 came hot on the heels of Pat Buchanan's 1992 presidential run, which was one the first attempts to make a campaign on the issue of immigration. Though ultimately unsuccessful in the national context, Buchanan's campaign was able to identify the fact that areas

which experienced immigration and ethnic change most directly, places like Southern California and Miami, were ripe for Republican picking when immigration was on the ticket. The particular case of California stood out in Buchanan's bid, as the state had been that most affected by undocumented immigration, it might be expected that its conservative white voters would be receptive (Kaufmann 312).

This early receptivity came to a head with Proposition 187. While also hoped to act as a deterrent, the measure's stated goal was to deny public services to illegal immigrants, serving as a tangible and symbolic response to immigration. Despite its security and economic rationale, there was an important streak of white ethno-traditionalism among grassroots 187 activists – interestingly, almost all campaign contributions came from white voters and retirees, giving a preview of the coalition now moving the country to the right – anti-Latino stereotypes, conservative self-placement and republican partisanship were the most important predictors of support. (Hood and Morris 2000, Delgado and Stefancic 1997). The initial public reception to Prop 187 was enthusiastic, with 86 percent of respondents to a Los Angeles Times poll approving of the measure, though it would eventually pass with a much lower 59 per cent of the vote after receiving sustained attacks accusing racism and nativism from opponents, demonstrating that frames are crucial in the development and critique of ideas in the public square. Of that total, sixty-four percent were whites. Interestingly, California's then-governor, Republican George Deukmejian, supported the bill, having come around since opposing the Official English bill in 1986. This was also true of his successor, Governor Pete Wilson, who after trailing his Democratic opponent Kathleen Brown by 20 points prior to the election, emerged victorious in the 1994 gubernatorial election after supporting 187. Though the courts eventually struck this initiative down, it helped shape the political agenda inside and outside

California, especially by raising immigration as a salient issue from Washington state to Washington DC.

These efforts have had lasting consequences, propelling the movement crystallized in these two California initiatives to a nationwide audience. Other states in more recent times have capitalized on that momentum and similar racial coalitions to pass similar legislation. A stellar example of that continuation took place in Alabama, which enacted the Beason-Hammon Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act in 2011, aimed at restricting undocumented immigrants from attending public schools (Rozell and Wilcox 1997). A second example is the explosion of state and local ordinances legislating either to encourage or prohibit local or state law enforcement from working with federal law enforcement, particularly Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to catch undocumented immigration (Kaufmann 98).

3.4.3 Public Assistance

A second major issue which immigration has affected over the last thirty years is that of public assistance programs like welfare, Medicare, and Social Security. This issue area is a particularly fascinating case of racialized politics, since it has carried racial connotations throughout its long history and adapted to take on new meanings beyond the black-white ones which dominated the conversation for decades before the 1990s. On the service, these and other public assistance programs are meant to support low-income Americans regardless of racial or ethnic background, providing a "social safety net" to keep Americans from economically bottoming out. However, the racialization, and especially the shift of the white-black dynamic into a white-Hispanic of the 1990s and onward, has polarized racial opinions on this subject. Here the framing effect of the modern media environment is particularly pronounced: the

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infamous image of the "welfare queen," popularized by Ronald Reagan, has remained a pervasive image of what many consider to be the main beneficiary of welfare: "black, female, and intent on fraudulently taking advantage of government assistance (Jardina 189)".

This racial dynamic has informed whites' opinions on a range of race-minded social assistance programs throughout the 20th century from affirmative action, legacy college admissions, school desegregation, racial hiring quotas, and other policies (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Kuklinski, Cobb, and Gilens 1997; Sears and Kinder 1985). A new but very similar framing effect has begun to take hold in the years since the 1990s, though featuring whites against Latinos rather than blacks. In theory, if the white-Latino divide was anything like the white-black divide, then one could image the outcome of the new racialized policy dynamic being the same: immigration-concerned whites, considering that it is "undeserving" immigrants being those primarily benefiting from public assistance while also making up more and more of the general population would be a solid basis for whites favoring these programs even less. This fits with trends in the popular presentations of immigrants since the 1990s, which have been strongly negative and filled with messages that reinforced many immigration-concerned whites' beliefs that immigrants are especially prone to being on welfare and drain public coffers (Chavez 2008).

These beliefs were held by large swaths of the white population in the early 90s: during that time, almost 70% of whites as being especially prone to use welfare, more recent work on the subject shows an even more tightening relationship between white perceptions of Latinos and perceptions of Latino welfare use, a trend which makes sense given that that most Americans believe that immigrants come primarily to use government services and welfare benefits rather than to look for jobs (Gillen 1999). These frames through which immigration was discussed were

popularized shortly before the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and other state legislation which sought to limit public services to legal immigrants.

Interestingly, though, the overall finding seems to be that immigration-concerned whites' primary interest is elevating their own group rather than denigrating other groups. That is not to say that whites are not interested in disadvantaging other groups. When frames are changed to present public assistance programs like Social Security and Medicare as programs that benefit whites, favorability of those programs improve, often significantly (Winter 2006; Winter 2008). When these frames are not present, analyses show that whites in states with highest immigration levels have been and continue to be incredibly effective in divesting from public assistance programs: "precisely where the number of immigrants is largest and where the need is greatest, these public funds have become less and less available (Abrajano and Hajnal 16)".

3.4.4 Jobs and Taxes

Another thread of immigration-concerned whites shifting the country's politics right is the manifestation of that group's worry that their group is being left behind. This is particularly evident in their opinions on employment, taxes, and globalization. On the one hand, immigration-concerned whites, following the frames popularized and repeated in the modern media environment, that immigrants take jobs meant for American natives and bring down wages due to their status as low-wage workers. These beliefs have tangible impacts on immigration-concerned whites' preferences for policies in this area. Since this group is concerned that unauthorized immigrants are entering the country illegally and not paying taxes (in addition to the concerns about public assistance described above), they are more willing to alter the way they tax themselves (Hopkins 2010). Particularly, "states with larger Latino

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populations are statistically significantly more likely to favor regressive measures like sales tax to raise revenue and less likely to increase more progressive tax structures like property taxes (Abrajano and Hajnal 189)". While a shift from regressive to progressive tax policies may now seem like a natural consequence of increased immigration and demographic change, it matches with the model of group conflict proposed in this thesis in that the dominant group seeks "to shift the costs of government onto less advantaged segments of the population as those less advantaged segments are increasingly comprised of Latinos (Abrajano and Hajnal 196)".

Even more telling on this subject is how immigration-concerned whites view the international context in which the conversation around jobs takes place: globalization. This group, for example, who feel more strongly attached to their racial and national in-group are significantly more opposed to outsourcing (Jardina 195), are more opposed to increasing trade with other countries, and are less supportive of free trade policies (Jardina 184). Indeed, the narrative of lower-class whites, especially undereducated whites – has been a popular one since the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the Clinton Administration. However, this thesis disagrees with the narrative's claim that the root of white's discontent here is racial (and therefore, national identity based) rather than economic. This dynamic was on perhaps most strongly on display during former President Donal Trump's 2016 campaign for president where he leaned hard into exactly this kind of messaging, promising to establish tariffs to discourage companies from offshoring jobs and production, canceling the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and other policies. The most powerful iteration of this appeal was Trump's ire toward NAFTA. Although the angle that and the idea that it is the source of the white-working class' demise with the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to Mexico and other parts of the world fits nicely into the narrative described above, it is not the whole story. These

immigration-concerned whites consider themselves more *culturally* left behind by the globalizing world. They lament this world in which social, economic, and political barriers are weakened, but also one in which their cultural barriers to minority racial groups are threatened as well. Predictably, these attitudes toward the rest of the world are reflected in the group's larger foreign policy preferences – high white identifiers are much more likely to want to keep the United States out of staying out of world matters (Jardina 211).

3.4.5 Crime

A final topic on which high white-identifiers have moved is on crime and corrections. Given the regularity and intensity of the immigrant threat narrative's claims regarding the propensity of immigrants from Central America and Mexico to commit crime and be otherwise involved in the criminal justice system, immigration-concerned whites have become more punitive in their preferences for how that criminal justice system should work. The fact that crime and immigration is a common immigrant threat narrative trope is an understatement: in one analysis, nearly *70%* of immigration-related coverage was crime-based, having to do with either crime, terrorism, or unauthorized immigration ("Immigration"). Although only about a quarter of the foreign-born population are undocumented, most Americans have come to believe that many immigrants are in the country illegally (Citrin and Sides 2008). These perceptions have influenced the stereotypes associated with Latinos so much that a strong part of white Americans consider that Latinos, amongst other racial groups, are unusually prone to violence (Bobo and Johnson 2000). Accordingly, both the support for and the actual amount of corrections funding, tripled between the period of 1980 and 2005 (Abrajano and Hajnal 190).

3.5 Conclusion

The foundation for how this shift took place is described in the first point. In order to make sense of how Americans came to react as they have, it was first necessary to establish the world- and regional context for what makes immigration happen. Much of this has to do with "population explosions," or sudden bursts of populations in specific times and places which knocks out of the balance the relative population of a region, causing shortages in some areas and oversupplies in others. The most recent population explosion, which took place in the southern tropical belt of the globe beginning in the middle of the 20th century, has made that part of the world particularly populated while regions outside of that belt remain particularly underpopulated. This is important when one considers that countries need their populations to reproduce at a given rate in order to naturally replace the population in the next generation. Since many outside that southern tropical belt have not while regions within the belt have done so and more, a vacuum is created, creating something of a sucking phenomenon, attracting people from overpopulated areas to underpopulated ones. Apart from this population imbalance, a variety of other global factors play in to this dynamic, particularly the vacuum created by the breaking of the Cold War-era capitalist/communist split, the decrease in religious war, and the decrease in inter-state war, all of which combine to create .a situation in which ethnicity has become a primary point of conflict between people in the place of economics, spirituality, and other factors. These are of course on top of differences in standards of living and access to resources between rich areas like the United States and "Hispanic America," from where many migrants come. Details of just how much immigration to the United States because of these factors were then elaborated.

Such a remarkable amount of immigration and subsequent interaction between very different groups could not take place without a great deal of conflict. While the conflict may have been inevitable, the characteristics and social context of this situation are important. Clashes between "us" and "them" have always happened and will always happen, but the underlying realities of this clash are critical to understanding and have immense explanatory value. Social identity theory has been a central feature of this paper from the beginning, and its position in the paper becomes central when understanding that traditional narratives of immigrants being harmful to natives economically do not factor into the conflict in any meaningful way because the particular source of tension is not goods but identity, and by consequence, power. The ability to define one's own self in one's own terms is a cornerstone of one's power, and challenges to that power are met with fierce reaction. This is particularly true in the American case, where whites have enjoyed nearly universal control from the top of the racial hierarchy, so much that they have been able to define what it means to be an American according to their racial preferences. In this sense, challenges to racial power are also challenges to national identity, and when national identity is challenged, there is sure to be intense pushback.

As expected by social identity theory, groups in power modify their behavior when encountering a threat, they deem to be existential. In the case of the immigrant-native American clash, Americans react, in a general sense, by circling the wagons. When faced with an external threat of this magnitude, American whites become more conservative in their thoughts, personal actions, and, most importantly, their voting patterns. When put in a position where they feel under demographic threat, Americans come to endorse not only individual conservative policy positions but more conservative mindsets and worldviews much more than under normal circumstances. Though this is not a completely new phenomenon, it does take on a new intensity

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and direction under the specific context of demographic threat from immigrants from Hispanic America.

Conclusion: The Conservative Shift in American Politics

Although immigration is the point at which many whites' conservative shift begins, it is rarely the point at which it ends. Indeed, research shows whites' opinions on a range of issues from social safety spending to labor policies. In some sense, this is not an entirely new phenomenon. The case of public assistance programs, for example, has a long racist past. On its face, welfare programs and other social safety spending is race-neutral: although there are certainly inequalities in terms of relative portions of racial populations living in poverty, the idea of the program is class-based, not race-based. In many cases, especially in poorer parts of the South and Midwest, whites stand to benefit significantly from improvements in the social safety net. Even with that being the case, whites tend to significantly disfavor increases in investments in public assistance, because many have tended (and still do tend) to equate poorness with blackness. They "believe these policies primarily serve African Americans, viewing them "as a handout to the undeserving poor, and to those who eschew hard work in favor of exploiting government's generosity (Jardina 189)". A particularly interesting dimension of this dislike for public assistance programs is that many that make up this contingent of loss-fearing whites is that they are usually among the least disadvantaged in American society. A natural extension of that sentiment might be to assume that these people are primarily motivated by economic factors, fearing immigration not because of immigrants' skin color but because of the threat to jobs they represent, but the "economy vs. identity" discussion of the previous chapter needs to be remembered. A more complete understanding of this phenomenon says that these groups "are the disaffected in American society, a subset of marginalized Americans who might feel left behind, perhaps economically, but even more so culturally, by a globalizing world. And not just a world

in which the barriers between trade and people and cultures are weakened, but one which politicians claim will threaten the dominant culture and the very sovereignty of the United States – and by extension, the power and status of white Americans (Jardina 209)".

From here, a path is unveiled connecting a myriad of seemingly unconnected policy preferences. In this way, former President Donald Trump's strange mix of cultural grievance and restrictive trade policy comes to make much more sense. Indeed, his focus on trade and outsourcing is entirely consistent with the broader fears and motivations of white identifiers in the United States. White racial solidarity does factor into whites' political thinking, primarily concerning policies that whites see as benefiting or harming their in-group. (Jardina 209, 213)". Whites with higher levels of racial consciousness are more opposed to increasing trade with other countries and they are less supportive of free trade policies. Either through schematic links or a growing knowledge of who benefits from the program, white identifiers are much more in favor of policies, such as Social Security, that are framed as benefiting their group (Jardina 2011, 213)". White identifiers are not overtly interested in taking resources away from out-group members, but they do display, as expected, a marked degree of in-group favoritism, but this should not be taken to suggest that white United Statesian are not merely concerned about their loss of status domestically. The threat to the United States' status in the world at large is also one about which white Americans who identify with their racial group are especially concerned. Consequently, these whites support policies framed as protecting the nation from the outside world; they are more opposed to outsourcing and increasing trade with other countries.

For most of the country's recent history, particularly in the post-WWII, Cold War-dominated period, the United States tended to be reliably stable in the directions it took with its political, social, and economic policies. This is due to many reasons, especially if one

subscribes to paradigm theories of Ronald Reagan's decades-long consensus which decides the overall bent of the country's tone after Franklin D. Roosevelt had the same position beforehand, but the same does not feel true for the present era. Unlike most other developed democracies, and especially within the last few decades, the United States has tended to swing violently from one end of the political, social, and economic pendulums in its disposition and its policies. Though citizens show fairly stable, fairly moderate positions on most topics when asked without much societally activating context, the country's direction tends to be particularly volatile, with major changes in stated policy taking place every four or eight years. The reader will remember from the first point that the seeds for this tendency were planted with the "parting of the parties" in the Civil Rights Era, but the political, social, and economic landscape surely looks much different now than it did then. This is true in two senses. The first speaks to a more general trend of *everything*, both political and non-political, coming to be more polarized and divisive which has been made reference to over the course of this paper as a general background feature of American society -- an "aggravating factor" which informs everything else discussed in the paper's argument.

The second is that topic which was discussed directly in the final point of this chapter: the overall conservative shift in the American voting population. In this dimension of this thesis' analysis, a much wider, panoramic view which includes all three main concepts in this thesis – the modern media environment, conceptions of American identity, and Mexican and Central American immigration – all of which have come to take on a special relevance since 1990. In its most direct, the argument is simple: demographic shifts which have their roots in social and partisan realignments around race in the 1960s created a dynamic which began the merging of social and political groups, socially polarizing the country into mega-identity groups. The

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strength of these groups was heightened with the development of the modern media environment in and since the 1990s, which, responding to social and market forces, changed the content and context of their programming to cater to the biases and values of those specific groups, creating an information feedback loop. These information feedback loops then began to report on the growing Mexican and Central American immigration to the United States in a demonstrably and consistently negative light, focusing on specific aspects, particularly racial and status fears of their white audiences, which has caused the country's declining but still dominant white majority to move right politically, socially, and economically in response to those fears.

This summary is somewhat deceptive in its glossing-over of the details. Each of these three key concepts have a bountiful academic literature and real-world context behind them which bears reviewing. The development of the modern media environment is one of the keys to the argument of this thesis and that is one of the primary movers in explaining how social and political organization has changed since the 1990s. The importance of the MME in this thesis has at its base the media studies of Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis, the neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, and the cultural materialism of Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Because of the media's fundamental societal role of organizing and disseminating information, it has immense power in forming the symbolic goods of a society and establishing or maintaining prevailing orders of governance. This is because cultural products like media are the result of the whole spectrum of a society's products, be they economic in a strict Marxist sense, symbolic, social, etc. These cultural products are then communicated, as a result of both the organization and the content of the media, in a complex dynamic between sender and receiver. The signs and messages which the media environment communicates are understood by the receiver to be status quo, blocking minority opinion, constructing or deconstructing consensus. To some

degree, media users pick up on this dynamic but remain dutifully attached to their news source of choice. Media users think quite poorly of the media environment in general, often attributing blame for what they consider to be a generally sorry situation of American politics and society but think highly of their media source. Media users "self-select" into particular media ecosystems, creating feedback loops and echo chambers of content with their political, social, and economic biases and values. This self-selection was not possible before the development of the modern media environment when sources were scarce and so maintained a generally neutral tone to cater to the widest possible audience. As costs of running a media source went down and ownership of media channels centralized into fewer and fewer hands, media providers fragmented their programming (both in terms of broadcast TV and in the tone of newspapers) to cater to their rapidly self-selecting audiences. Providers use a variety of tools to manipulate the beliefs of their audiences, primarily by the curation of content in specific ways to emphasize or deemphasize certain aspects of a story to encourage particular reactions. This was possible because of the intense deregulation of the industry over the course of the last thirty years.

The source of the media environment's power is the social groups which read and watch their products, and the way those groups have organized has changed alongside the development of the modern media environment. Similar to how media existed before the period of study but experienced significant changes throughout, social groups and the identities they confer have always followed similar rules but came to manifest in particular ways over the last 30 years. This identity formation around social groups has as its base Social Identity Theory and its academic universe of supporting theories like Social Categorization Theory and Intergroup Emotions Theory, which argue that people's base psychological needs of positive self-concept leads them to identify with like-minded people with whom they share interests. This group formation creates

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a positive differentiation from opposed or non-aligned groups, which serves both to grow a person's positive self-identification and foments a us/them dynamic in which one's own group is measured positively against others. These group memberships come to be an integral aspect of how a person develops who they are and how they self-identify. Critically, the salience of these different group memberships is raised when the individual or the group senses that their identity is under threat. In those cases, individuals come together to act in defense of the group, often very strongly. This reaction intensifies when multiple identities are perceived to be under threat at once and so is at its most strong when people have many overlapping identities. This is exactly what began to happen in the United States in the post-WWII period, especially in the Civil Rights era. When the Democratic Party ended its uneasy alliance with its southern faction to keep race from being a nationally litigated issue, whites in the Democratic Party moved significantly to the Republican Party and experienced a contemporaneous surge in support and membership from racial minorities. At the same time of this partisan realignment, a series of social realignments were also taking place throughout the country which fueled even further the crystallization of distinct groups along clear lines: white vs. non-white, urban vs. rural, young vs. old, etc. The concretization of these groups, of course, was helped along by the development of "identity-matched sources" – that is, fragmented news programming to cater to each individual group's biases and values. This post-Civil Rights era period saw the rapid polarization of previously blurred the identities of religious, geographical, and social groups into a struggle between Republicans and Democrats. Chief among these polarized identities is that of national identity, people's conceptions of what it means to be an American. Despite broad agreement amongst racial groups about the basics of what makes up American identity, whites tend to believe that they are emblematic of Americanness, a claim which is supported by the fact that

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whites have dominated nearly every aspect of American life for the entire history of the country, allowing them to form the national character in their image. This crucial racial element of American identity causes perceived threats from non-white groups to be understood also a threat to whites' identity as Americans, particularly their position at the top of the nation's racial hierarchy.

The rapid influx of Mexican and Central American immigration since the 1990s makes up exactly this kind of threat. Throughout the period of social and realignment which brought about the polarization of American society, Republicans and Democrats argued, in an increasingly hostile fashion, over how the country should orient its immigration system. Significant pieces of legislation, especially the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, abolished the racial quota system which favored immigration from Canada and Western Europe ("white" parts of the world), opening the door for much more diversity in who was allowed into the country. Motivated by a litany of push and pull factors such as political instability, low wages, and the promise of a brighter future outside their home country, first Mexicans and later Central Americans began to head for the United States in droves, often requiring an incredibly dangerous journey north and resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants from those places admitted into the US. With this immigration came a mind-boggling demographic shift in the racial balance of the country. Whites, taking note of the shift because of the "immigrant threat narrative" propagated across the media, but most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, on more liberal news sources like CNN and the *New York Times*, reacted strongly, shifting hard to the right on a variety of social, political, and economic issues.

A prevailing though not universal notion in the United States is that although the country's origins and early history are full of atrocities and moral stains from the mass

enslavement of African Americans and forced removal of Native Americans from their ancestral lands, the rest of its history up to and including now is a steady if slow march to improve and make good upon the lofty ideals enshrined in the Constitution and other founding documents. Some would argue that despite the setbacks of the recent past, progress is being made, and the overall trend of the country is the expansion of liberty and the continued inclusion into mainstream society of historically excluded populations. However, cracks in that narrative are becoming ever clearer -- a common example of a group seen as historically having their rights infringed upon and liberty curtailed is women and their reproductive rights. Almost nobody would argue that the current moment is one of the expansions of this group's liberty nor their inclusion into mainstream society. In this example, the answer is clear: the composition of the Supreme Court has changed radically in a short amount of time. Why? A Republican president, brought into power not only by the normal voting bloc of anti-choice Republicans but also more importantly by a newly aligned group of previously independent Americans who have been pushed to the right. A further push in this direction was only narrowly staved off by the election of a President, Joe Biden, much more friendly to pro-choice sentiments. Indeed, many would argue that Biden won the Democratic primary at least in part because of his cross-party appeal, which turned out to be almost entirely absent in his narrow victory over Donald Trump in 2020 -- instead of the widespread return of traditionally Democratic voting blocs lost to the Republicans in 2016, Biden was only able to win because of remarkably high turnout from fundamental Democratic votes like black women. Had these largely city-dwelling, young, people of color not turned out in such numbers, the lack of the "Obama-Trump voters" (low- and middle-class whites, primarily), a Biden win would have been much less likely. This is also true in Congressional races, with Democrats having fared much worse in both House of Representatives

and Senate races than was expected when most expected Biden to bring home those lost voting blocs. With that in mind, Democrats face a gloomy future knowing that it has potentially permanently lost a traditional column of its voting bloc to the broad conservative shift described in this chapter. With the consequences being so dire, the author believes that the deep, in-depth review of the material that this thesis offers is timely, actionable, and important.

With that in mind, the primary contribution of this paper is exactly that: in what may very well be considered by future historians as a period of significant social and political realignment, this thesis sketches in great detail three primary movers of the modern political transition, demonstrating the role the development of the modern media has had on not only the social organization of the country around political lines, but also how whites' strong sense of national identity has consequences for the entirety of the American people and also on the concept of what it means to be an American in the first place.

There are, of course, limitations to the analysis of this thesis. The primary limitation is that the modern media environment, conceived primarily as broadcast television and newspapers, no longer has a "monopoly of knowledge" and information in American society. The scope of this paper does not include social media, which is now a significant player in the American informational landscape as a primary means by which many get their political news. Future research should expand upon this thesis by including social media in its purview.

As discussed above, the consequences for this broad conservative shift are clear, not only in the abstract sense of "paradigms" and "consensuses," but also in very real terms of people's rights, liberties, and ability to operate in American society on equal footing to others. There have been very few significant shifts in American political, social, and economic history, especially those which have fundamentally altered the power dynamic between parties, but each time a shift

of this kind has occurred, it has fundamentally altered the direction of the country, and therefore, of world history. These are the stakes of the topics covered in this paper.

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