

GIVE WAR A CHANCE: THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION AND DOMESTIC
SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR, 1969-1973

By

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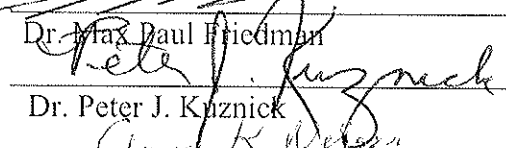
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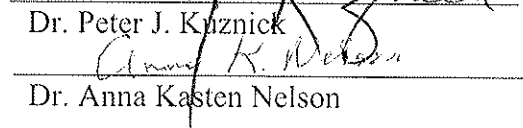
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For My Parents,
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ABSTRACT

While undeniably a foreign policy priority, the Vietnam War was a very real domestic concern for President Richard Nixon. The 1968 election campaign demonstrated the political cost of waging an unpopular war and so the new president and his aides sought to rally domestic support to counteract the growing strength of the antiwar movement. Administration officials such as H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson, Alex Butterfield, and Jeb Magruder worked with outside sympathizers including H. Ross Perot, veterans organizations, and other grassroots groups to create pro-war – and pro-Nixon – organizations from the early days of his presidency. This dissertation presents the first in-depth study based on archival research of the Nixon administration's campaign to persuade the American people to give war a chance. When substantive policy changes failed to significantly reverse domestic antipathy for the war, Nixon and his aides instead hoped that appeals to vaguely-defined patriotic sentiments would inspire a very public and visible outpouring of support for the President. The public response to their first coordinated attempt, Nixon's November 3, 1969 "Silent Majority" speech, surprised even Nixon and his staff; they were, however, quick to capitalize on the

popularity of the idea and its promotion soon shaped almost every aspect of White House public opinion efforts.

While many supporters embraced the Silent Majority, officials still sought to control the president's outside support network whenever possible, up to and including creating officially autonomous support groups out of whole cloth in the White House. These astroturf, or fake grassroots, groups complemented administration efforts to manipulate popular patriotism, redefine American national identity, and therefore secure broad popular support for both the Vietnam War and President Nixon. Initial successes in 1969 and 1970 led aides to believe that expanding these efforts beyond Vietnam could strengthen the President's 1972 reelection campaign. Although Nixon was reelected by a significant margin efforts to expand the silent majority into the new American majority weakened both identities. White House efforts to mobilize domestic support not only provided the president with political space to continue waging war in Vietnam – as well as Laos and Cambodia – but further intensified and polarized domestic debates over patriotism and national identity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although waged in Southeast Asia, the Vietnam War inspired intense domestic debates contributing to a belief that the critical battles of the war involved U.S. civilians rather than U.S. or Vietnamese soldiers. President Richard M. Nixon and his top advisors certainly believed so and they therefore undertook a sweeping effort to manipulate existing pro-war groups, create others covertly, and more broadly to reshape the American national narrative so as to link patriotism to support for the war. This dissertation presents the first in-depth study based on archival research of the Nixon administration's campaign to persuade the American people to give war a chance. Necessarily paired with policy changes, attempts to mobilize domestic public opinion behind both the president and the war took many forms. Ranging from official speeches explicitly requesting support to the careful coordination of petition and letter-writing campaigns to the rhetorical construction of a pro-war constituency to behind-the-scenes mobilization of new and existing allies, these efforts sought to secure sufficient domestic support so as to ensure Nixon maximum policy flexibility.

Although White House officials played an active role, the success of this public opinion campaign hinged on the ability of aides and outside allies to obscure the relationship between the administration and these outside support efforts. Therefore, domestic political surrogates were frequently coached "in disavowing White House contact" even as administration officials increasingly relied on their active and vocal support for Nixon's

policies.¹ The close, but hidden, relationship between the administration and its outside allies was central to White House public opinion efforts and, in many ways, such “disavowing” allies were the culmination of White House projects since Nixon’s 1969 inauguration. Not only did administration officials control their message, but masking the ties between the White House and the president’s outside supporters ensured that such astroturf, or false grassroots, efforts had maximum legitimacy.

Intended to complement, not replace, grassroots support for the war, administration-directed astroturf organizing benefitted from the continued existence of spontaneous pro-war demonstrations throughout Nixon’s presidency. One such supporter, Ben Garcia, arrived at the White House on September 6, 1970 after a doubtless harrowing drive along Interstate-95 from New York City riding on his lawnmower.² Having spent much of the summer collecting signatures on a petition in support of Nixon’s Vietnam policies, Garcia presented them to White House officials and discussed his plans to continue his “One Million” project of demonstrating domestic support for the troops in Vietnam and President Nixon.³ Not in itself a significant moment, Garcia and his petition campaign were a potent symbol to the Nixon White House. In many ways the physical embodiment of their public relations

¹ “Herb Klein to H.R. Haldeman,” August 5, 1970, 1, Tell It to Hanoi; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

² “George Bell to Ben Garcia,” September 18, 1970, Ben Garcia – “One Million” Crusade; Box 67; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Ben Garcia to George Bell,” September 25, 1970, Ben Garcia – “One Million” Crusade; Box 67; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Charles Colson to Larry Higby,” August 18, 1970, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³ As of August 12, 1970, Garcia reported that he had collected over 500,000 signatures. Marion Doyle, “‘Battling Ben’ Hopes Mower Will Help Trim War,” *The Home News* (Newark, NJ, July 14, 1970); “Ben Garcia to George Bell,” August 12, 1970, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

strategies – a “hard hat,” an ethnic, a Catholic, a Democrat, anxious for peace and yet supportive of a hawkish president – Garcia demonstrated the success of administration public opinion efforts, and as one staffer observed, “it will be a sod thing if this doesn’t pan out.”⁴ Garcia appeared just as the administration was asserting closer control over its grassroots allies and transitioning toward a greater reliance on astroturf organizing, making his lawnmower not only a symbol of, in his words, “the average American homeowner,” but also of administration efforts to control, or trim, the ambitions of the president’s grassroots supporters.⁵

This dissertation traces Nixon administration efforts to mobilize domestic support for the Vietnam War in an effort to understand how Nixon was able to continue waging an unpopular war, a war he promised to end in his 1968 campaign, into his second term. Why was he, unlike Johnson, able to convince voters to have patience for the prolonged negotiations and costs of the war? How was he reelected with the war still ongoing despite earlier promises to end U.S. involvement? More broadly, how do presidents effectively mobilize public opinion and rally domestic support behind their policies?

From an early concern with the risks domestic opposition presented to Nixon’s war policies, efforts to co-opt existing citizens groups and activists to support the President’s policies, and organizing entire support networks from the ground-up, administration aides worked to counter the growing effectiveness of the antiwar movement. This study argues that their early success in identifying and mobilizing a “Silent Majority” of pro-Nixon, pro-

⁴ “Lyn Nofziger to Charles W. Colson,” August 19, 1970, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵ Doyle, “‘Battling Ben’ Hopes Mower Will Help Trim War.”

Vietnam citizens shaped the administration's approach to public opinion beyond the Vietnam War. Initially a useful tool to rally supporters and silence opponents, the creation and promotion of a pro-President, pro-war identity rooted in a vaguely-articulated patriotism, enabled Nixon and his aides to take advantage of deep-seated national idealism and manufacture an image of broad popular support for the Vietnam War. The political utility of the Silent Majority and other patriotic appeals would in turn encourage aides to pursue more active roles in manipulating public opinion, ultimately resulting in the creation of a fake grassroots, or astroturf, support organizations. However, as this study demonstrates, as these efforts drifted away from the specific domestic debates over Vietnam, they were less effective at overcoming the differences within the various groups that made up the Silent Majority.

Vietnam: In the Oval Office and on the Streets

On Nixon's inauguration, U.S. involvement in Vietnam had outlasted three presidents. Although Nixon would claim throughout his administration that he had inherited a Democratic war, his hawkishness as President Dwight Eisenhower's Vice President and continuing hard-line anticommunism during what he termed his "wilderness years" made him a factor in Vietnam policymaking for both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. In his history of the Republican Party and Vietnam, Andrew Johns cites Nixon's hawkish critiques of Kennedy and Johnson to support his argument that while "Nixon often complained that he inherited a war not of his making ... [he] undoubtedly contributed to the situation he

confronted.”⁶ Although not initially a major domestic concern, as few Americans knew much of Vietnam when President Eisenhower quietly sent money and supplies to help the French subdue their former colony, interest increased as US commitments to South Vietnam expanded.⁷ As American involvement deepened, Kennedy sent military advisors and Johnson eventually committed ground troops.⁸ Both Kennedy and Johnson gradually escalated US involvement in Vietnam in an effort to avoid a “who lost China” situation, but Nixon had more leeway once in office. Not only did he have the hard-line anticommunist

⁶ Andrew Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 238. Scholarship on the Vietnam War is vast and constantly growing, but the best general overviews of the war remain George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979); Gary R Hess, *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990); Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

⁷ Although President Eisenhower resisted sending U.S. ground troops to Vietnam, scholarship on the war and Eisenhower's own policies sees the battle at Dien-Bien-Phu as a major turning point in U.S. involvement with the conclusion that Eisenhower was more willing to commit U.S. forces than the work of scholars such as Melanie Billings-Yun suggests. David L Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); David L Anderson, ed., “Dwight D. Eisenhower and Wholehearted Support of Ngo Dinh Diem,” in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945-1975* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 43–62; Melanie Billings-Yun, *Decision Against War: Eisenhower and Dien Bien Phu, 1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Lloyd C Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988); George C. Herring and Richard H. Immerman, “Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: ‘The Day We Didn’t Go to War’ Revisited,” *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 2 (1984): 343–363.

⁸ David E Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000). Although some scholars (such as Roger Hillman and John Newman) argue that, had he lived, Kennedy would withdrawn U.S. troops from Vietnam, most scholars see his policies as a key step in the gradual escalation of U.S. involvement leading to Johnson's more significant commitments. Lawrence J Bassett and Stephen E Pelz, “The Failed Search for Victory: Vietnam and the Politics of War,” in *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963*, ed. Thomas G Paterson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 223–52; Larry Berman, *Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York: Norton, 1982); Lawrence Freedman, *Kennedy's Wars: Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam* (Oxford University Press, 2000); David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York, Random House, 1965); Gary R Hess, “Commitment in the Age of Counter-Insurgency: Kennedy and Vietnam,” in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945-1975*, ed. David L Anderson (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 63–86; Roger Hilsman, *To Move a Nation: the Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1967); John M Newman, *JFK and Vietnam: Deception, Intrigue, and the Struggle for Power* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1992); Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

reputation that both Johnson and Kennedy had lacked, but Nixon also had a clear sense of the domestic political costs of the war, having watched the antiwar movement effectively undermine and destroy Johnson's administration.

As U.S. involvement in Vietnam increased, so too did opposition to the conflict. Although Presidents Johnson and Nixon saw the antiwar movement as a monolithic opponent in domestic debates over the war, historical studies emphasize the changing views and internal struggles of its many, and often competing, leaders and groups.⁹ Focusing as they do on the tactics and individuals actively opposing the war, these studies tend to overlook the internal debates and disagreements among presidents, their advisors, and other government officials contributing to the continuing polarization of opinion about the war long after the end of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.¹⁰ Attempts to contextualize the movement more frequently emphasize its roots in the broader scope of 1960s activism – including youth and civil rights movements.¹¹ As the war dragged on through the 1960s and into the 1970s, groups originally sympathetic to stated U.S. goals in Vietnam began to back away from their

⁹ Complementing the countless case studies and movement histories contributing to a rich literature on the antiwar activism, the best general studies of the broader movement include Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990); Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Tom Wells, *The War Within: America's Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Nancy L. Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against the War in Vietnam, 1963-1975* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984).

¹⁰ Two important exceptions are Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*; Wells, *The War Within*. Both Small and Wells explore White House efforts to influence domestic public opinion, and attempt to reconstruct White House decision-making via interviews with key participants, but both works tend to privilege the antiwar activities of the Johnson and Nixon White Houses at the expense of projects to mobilize domestic support at the core of this dissertation.

¹¹ Terry H Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); David R Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto; New York: Bantam Books, 1989); Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!: American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

initial support, further ensuring that the Nixon administration efforts analyzed in this dissertation remained a White House priority.¹² The evolving views of different domestic constituencies – including labor, women, African-Americans, conservatives, and even veterans – further supports a general, although not unchallenged, understanding that the antiwar movement was a significant factor in ending U.S. involvement in Vietnam.¹³

Domestic opposition certainly constrained Johnson's policymaking and intensified his determination to demonstrate progress in Vietnam, but contradictions between the war on the ground and the administration's positive spin soon undermined these efforts.¹⁴ Particularly damaging was the 1968 Tet Offensive, as the early images of retreating South Vietnamese troops and early North Vietnamese victories challenged the optimistic narrative promoted by

¹² Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones analyzes the changing opinions of women and African Americans, but concludes that labor remained supportive throughout the conflict, a conclusion challenged by more recent scholarship on the labor movement and the Vietnam War. Maria Graciela Abarca, "Discontented but Not Inevitably Reactionary': Organized Labor in the Nixon Years" (Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001); Christian G Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Andrew Battista, "Political Divisions in Organized Labor, 1968-1988," *Polity* 24, no. 2 (December 1, 1991): 173-197; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*; Frank F Koscielski, "Divided Loyalties: American Unions and the Vietnam War" (Ph.D., Wayne State University, 1997); John Bennett Sears, "Peace Work: The Antiwar Tradition in American Labor from the Cold War to the Iraq War," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 4 (September 2010): 699-720; Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

¹³ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*; Wells, *The War Within*. For the argument that the antiwar movement actually prolonged the Vietnam War, see Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁴ Despite Johnson's preference for domestic reform – particularly his beloved Great Society programs and civil rights legislation, the Vietnam War would ultimately define and undermine his presidency. Berman, *Planning a Tragedy*; Larry Berman, *Lyndon Johnson's War: The Road to Stalemate in Vietnam* (New York: Norton, 1989); George C Herring, "The Reluctant Warrior: Lyndon Johnson as Commander in Chief," in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945-1975*, ed. David L Anderson (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 87-112; Michael H Hunt, *Lyndon Johnson's War: America's Cold War Crusade in Vietnam, 1945-1968* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996); Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Chester Pach, "'We Need to Get a Better Story to the American People': LBJ, the Progress Campaign, and the Vietnam War on Television," in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 170-95; VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*.

official reports. Even though the offensive was ultimately a military victory for the US and South Vietnamese forces, it proved to be a powerful psychological victory for the North Vietnamese and led many citizens to question Johnson's policies. As Johnson faced increasing pressure from the antiwar movement, officials attempted to influence public discussions on Vietnam by expanding and 'improving' information available about the war as well as changing how the war was presented and "packaged," "building local heroes rather than national heroes," supporting groups such as the American Friends of Vietnam, and improving public-private coordination.¹⁵ Despite these efforts, domestic opposition to the Vietnam War – and, by extension, the incumbent Administration – increased and ultimately led Johnson to not seek reelection.

Nixon's White House

Nixon and his staff therefore arrived in Washington, DC on January 20, 1969 determined not to fall victim to the same trap. But, Vietnam proved a more difficult challenge than either Nixon or his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had expected.¹⁶ Coming into office, Nixon benefitted from both the 'honeymoon' period of a new president as well as wary patience from a public willing to give him a chance to fulfill his implied

¹⁵ Memo, Gordon Chase for the Record, 8/4/65WHCF, Office Files of Douglas Cater, Box 1, LBJ Library

¹⁶ In addition to Nixon and Kissinger's extensive memoirs, the best history of Nixon's Vietnam policies remains Jeffrey Kimball's *Nixon's Vietnam War* while Robert Dallek's *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* contextualizes Vietnam within the broader scope of Nixon administration foreign policy. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Richard M Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978); Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985).

campaign promise to bring about a speedy end of the conflict. But even as they hoped to quickly end the war, the threat of domestic opposition remained an important consideration for administration officials. Learning from Johnson's experiences, Nixon and his staff prioritized efforts to "rally the honest Americans and discredit the bad ones."¹⁷ Essentially, Nixon – and therefore his aides – saw the domestic political situation as a zero-sum power struggle in which "the true issue is the authority of the Presidency -- not any particular President."¹⁸

This view, that the antiwar movement threatened not just Nixon's Vietnam policies, but the nation itself, helps to explain the particularly aggressive attacks on the antiwar movement by the Nixon administration. Such efforts to undermine the antiwar movement – including group infiltration, intimidation, criminal investigation, agitation and other dirty tricks – have been well-documented by historians and so are not the focus of this study.¹⁹ But it is important to recognize that, as crucial as rallying public opinion was, anti-antiwar activities consistently attracted greater attention from the president and his top advisors than did pro-war activities. Because of this preoccupation with attacking the opposition, neither Nixon nor his chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman personally directed White House efforts to

¹⁷ Wells, *The War Within*, 382.

¹⁸ "Memorandum for the Record, Al Haig," October 17, 1969, 2, MemCons - Presidential/HAK June-December 1969 [1 of 2]; Box 1026; NSC: Presidential-HAK Memocons, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁹ The negative side of Nixon administration efforts to influence public opinion, or simply to punish perceived enemies beyond critics of his Vietnam policies, is a central narrative in histories of his presidency as well as of the larger antiwar movement. See, e.g.: DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*; Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1994); Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (London: Scribner, 2008); Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*; Melvin Small, "Containing Domestic Enemies: Richard M. Nixon and the War at Home," in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945-1975*, ed. David L Anderson (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 130–151; Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan, *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon* (New York: Viking, 2000); Wells, *The War Within*.

mobilize the president's supporters. Therefore Haldeman's assistant, Deputy Assistant to the President Alexander Butterfield, and Special Counsel for the President Charles W. Colson (hired in November 1969) had surprising latitude in devising these administration projects. At the same time, no member of Nixon's staff could – or would – have long pursued a policy opposed by the President and so, while Nixon was less directly involved, administration public opinion projects were effectively an outgrowth of his own views on domestic politics and public opinion.

That Nixon, by all accounts a calculating, suspicious man, worked hard as president to secure domestic support for his policies is unlikely to surprise anyone – much less a careful reader of the vast scholarship on the man and his presidency.²⁰ But, while the “why” and the “what” of Nixon's approach to public opinion are well understood, the “how” has been consistently overlooked. This is in large part due to the unusual circumstances through which Nixon's presidential records have been made available to the public. Despite legislation mandating that all White House documents be turned over to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Nixon devoted enormous amounts of time and money to ensure that his presidential papers would not be subjected to “misinterpretation” by historians.²¹ These efforts were ultimately in vain, but he did slow the

²⁰ Nixon's personality and policies are the subject of considerable and ongoing historical analysis with Joan Hoff's revisionist arguments challenging more critical studies. Melvin Small's *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* is a useful, and relatively even-handed, overview of Nixon's presidency while David Greenberg's analysis of how different groups of Americans, including historians, perceived Nixon helps to contextualize both positive and negative portrayals of the controversial president. See, e.g. David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003); Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*; Perlstein, *Nixonland*; Richard Reeves, *President Nixon: Alone in the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001); Summers and Swan, *The Arrogance of Power*; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*.

²¹ In February 1972, Nixon wrote a long memorandum to John Ehrlichman detailing his post-presidency plans and commented: “as far as the personal papers are concerned ... what is more likely I will destroy them on my death. The latter, incidentally, is a very lively option anyway as far as most of these

processing and declassification of his records down to almost a standstill. However, new materials are consistently released by the Nixon Presidential Library and Nixon's loss is historians' gain as these files – clearly never intended to be seen outside the White House, much less by professional historians – demonstrate the inner working of a secretive, but well-documented, administration. Nixon and his staff sincerely believed that their memoranda and other records would never be available to the public – an impossible dream to subsequent presidents – and so were remarkably direct and thorough in documenting, detailing and explaining their various plans and projects. While officials in every administration since Nixon's have operated knowing that NARA officials will eventually collect and process their files, Nixon's White House was an incredibly candid place.

Even so, historical analyses of Nixon administration public opinion efforts has largely focused on the “Go Public” campaign and other efforts to draw attention to the plight of U.S. prisoners-of-war (POWs) and military personnel missing-in-action (MIAs) in an effort to rally support for the Vietnam War.²² Trying, in effect, to make the troops in Vietnam a justification for continued U.S. involvement, and responding to increasingly public efforts by POW/MIA activists, aides attempted to demonstrate the president's concern for their plight

personal papers are concerned. I have no confidence whatever in the various intellectuals who might want to paw through them and misinterpret them for posterity.” “Richard Nixon to John Ehrlichman,” February 1, 1972, 4, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: P Memos 1972 [Part II]; Box 10; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA. Joan Hoff provides a concise, if somewhat dated, discussion of the challenges facing those scholars wishing to study Nixon's presidency in Joan Hoff, “Researchers' Nightmare: Studying the Nixon Presidency,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 259–275.

²² Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 13–62; H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A., or, Mythmaking in America* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: L. Hill Books, 1992), 49–53; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 222–27; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 166–68; Sandra Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration” (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005), 192–94; Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 26–38.

and to draw the movement into their larger support network. As the POW/MIA movement continues to be an active force in U.S. politics, historical focus on administration efforts to control and promote it is understandable, but this emphasis has had the unfortunate effect of making these efforts appear to be, as Joan Hoff argues, “the only area in which the administration consciously and successfully courted general public opinion over the war turned out to be the prisoner-of-war issue.”²³ However, recent scholarship on the larger POW/MIA movement minimizes the Nixon administration’s role in its early efforts and argues that the “Go Public” campaign was less successful than it initially appeared. This dissertation will demonstrate that promotion of the POW/MIA issue was just one of many White House efforts to rally popular support for Nixon’s Vietnam policies.

The Importance of Being Popular

Efforts such as the Go Public campaign and the projects analyzed in this dissertation are part of a long tradition of White House efforts to advocate on behalf of presidential policies. Although political scientist Jeffrey Tulis first described the “rhetorical presidency” in 1987, historians have been slower to analyze the intersections of domestic politics and foreign policy.²⁴ As discussed above, historians of the antiwar movement recognized the importance of domestic dissent in limiting presidential options in Vietnam, but attempts by presidents and their surrogates to rally support behind official policies are less understood. Recent scholarship has attempted to address this gap even as editors excluded Melvin Small’s chapter on domestic public opinion from a revised edition of *Explaining the History*

²³ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 221.

²⁴ Jeffrey Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

of *American Foreign Relations*.²⁵ Much of this work tends to emphasize the importance of elections and political unrest in shaping presidential policy priorities, but there is an interesting and growing field of scholarship supporting Jeremi Suri's claim that "the distinction between foreign and domestic politics is artificial."²⁶

Some of the most nuanced work on Nixon administration public opinion efforts can be found in a series of articles analyzing the growing use of polling by the White House. Lawrence Jacobs and Robert Shapiro discuss Nixon's use of public opinion polls – and the relationships his aides cultivated with prominent pollsters – and place these efforts into the broader context of post-World War II public opinion polling.²⁷ Finding that while Nixon was certainly not the first president to rely on poll data, Jacobs and Shapiro echo the conclusions of some political scientists that his presidency marked a significant turning point in the

²⁵ Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front*; Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank, eds., *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Thomas Alan Schwartz, "'Henry, ... Winning an Election Is Terribly Important.' Partisan Politics in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 173–190.

²⁶ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Detente* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 213. Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall make a similar argument claiming that the intersection of domestic and international concerns central to the Cold War contributed to what they describe as "intermestic policies." Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 12, 214.

²⁷ Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Presidential Manipulation of Polls and Public Opinion: The Nixon Administration and the Pollsters," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (1995): 519–538; Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1995): 163–195. Jacobs' recent research (with Melanie Burns) traces the growing importance of "personality polling" rather than policy which he and Burns see as a significant threat to American democracy. Lawrence R. Jacobs and Melanie Burns, "The Second Face of the Public Presidency: Presidential Polling and the Shift from Policy to Personality Polling," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2004): 536–556.

evolution of political communication.²⁸ This scholarship, while not directly engaging the specific administration projects analyzed in this dissertation, helps to situate the pro-Vietnam efforts into the larger administration public opinion campaigns. Still, the existence of this scholarship – as well as work from rhetoric scholars analyzing Nixon’s Silent Majority speech and other public pronouncements – underscores the relative lack of historical analysis of Nixon’s efforts to sell the Vietnam War. Andrew Johns explores elements of these Nixon administration efforts, but his focus is on the larger Republican Party and he therefore does not focus on Nixon’s attempts to influence broader domestic public opinion.²⁹ However, the lack of any significant discussion of Nixon’s presidency in the essays that make up the otherwise excellent *Selling War in a Media Age* is a sign of how much work must be done before scholars fully understand the historical relationship between foreign policy and public opinion.³⁰

Although Nixon’s efforts to mobilize domestic support for his Vietnam policies were also intended to challenge the antiwar movement, both he and his aides were content with creating the image of a popular pro-war movement and were disinclined to spend the time, money, and energy necessary to create a movement which could directly, and substantively, challenge the antiwar forces.³¹ Their efforts did, however, reflect the belief that the views of

²⁸ See, e.g. Adam J Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Brandice Canes-Wrone, *Who Leads Whom?: Presidents, Policy, and the Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

²⁹ Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*.

³⁰ Osgood and Frank, *Selling War in a Media Age*.

³¹ White House officials sought simply public displays of support for Nixon or opposition to the antiwar movement rather than, “a sustained *interaction* in which mobilized people, acting in the name of a defined interest, make repeated broad demands on powerful others via means which go beyond the current prescriptions of the authorities” – the definition of a social movement used by Charles DeBenedetti in his

individual U.S. citizens could be aggregated into a larger national “public opinion.”³² White House efforts to influence these national views depended in large part on the active cooperation of sympathetic individuals and organizations to spread the administration’s message as their own. Even though administration staffers and surrogates consistently emphasized the autonomy and bipartisanship of outside support groups, this dissertation will demonstrate that few of these groups truly operated independently of the White House. In the 1980s, such artificial “grassroots” groups intended to create an illusion of popular support became known as “astroturf” organizations. As the plastic grass manufactured by Monsanto and other companies grew in popularity, Senator Lloyd Bentsen used the known artificiality of the product to undermine the grassroots credentials of a mail campaign supporting large

history of the antiwar movement. This definition comes from the work of sociologist Charles Tilly and effectively underscores the difference between the support sought by the administration – particularly the issue of White House control – and a movement such as that which opposed the Vietnam War. Cited in DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 1. Scholars of public opinion and social movements are starting to examine what Debra Minkoff describes as “countermovements” (including the Black Silent Majority Committee discussed in Chapter Five) and what others describe as “counterpublics.” While both of these labels more accurately reflect the pro-Vietnam and pro-Nixon efforts, they still presume a degree of opposition to official policies which separates them from the projects described in this dissertation. Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, eds., *Counterpublics and the State* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Debra C. Minkoff, “The Organization of Survival: Women’s and Racial-Ethnic Voluntarist and Activist Organizations, 1955-1985,” *Social Forces* 71, no. 4 (June 1, 1993): 891, 895.

³² White House views of public opinion and their ability to influence it anticipate the theoretical arguments and analysis of scholars such as Jürgen Habermas, Benedict Anderson, and others. By promoting the idea of a “Silent Majority,” White House officials attempted to create an impression of broad popular support which would in turn encourage additional support – manipulating the president’s image in what Habermas would later identify as the “public sphere” enabled White House officials to create what Benedict Anderson describes as an “imagined community” of pro-Nixon, pro-Vietnam citizens who might not otherwise have seen themselves as part of a larger domestic constituency. Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Seyla Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); Berinsky, *In Time of War*; Craig J. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992); Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Theodore Lewis Glasser and Charles T. Salmon, *Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995); Carroll J. Glynn et al., *Public Opinion* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004); Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989).

insurance companies.³³ Since Bentsen's categorization of such letters as "generated mail" or "astroturf," and particularly following the rise of the Tea Party in 2009, the idea of astroturf organizing has become an important political consideration. However, while public opinion and public relations publications provide useful general information about the practice, there have been few scholarly studies of examples of such practices which predate the term.³⁴ This study's analysis of groups such as the Tell It to Hanoi Committee and Americans for Winning the Peace as well as on-going White House efforts to create a national support organization and otherwise manipulate public opinion offer useful case studies to better understand political astroturfing and how it relates to policymaking.

³³ "Tax-Overhaul Battle Follows Lawmakers Home," August 7, 1985, *Washington Post*, pg. A4

³⁴ Aside from a few studies of the National Smokers Alliance, a group formed by the major tobacco companies to challenge efforts in the 1990s to restrict the sale and advertising of cigarettes, and a growing literature on the Tea Party, most scholarly or professional discussions of astroturf attempt to identify and explain the concept to members of various industries (i.e. medicine, public relations, politics) potentially affected by such political agitation. Melinda Baker, "Grassroots, Grasstops, and ... Astroturf?," *Bulletin of the American College of Surgeons*, June 2010; Sharon Beder, "Public Relations' Role in Manufacturing Artificial Grass Roots Coalitions," *Public Relations Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 21–3; Kathy R. Fitzpatrick and Michael J. Palenchar, "Disclosing Special Interests: Constitutional Restrictions on Front Groups," *Journal of Public Relations Research* 18, no. 3 (2006): 203–224; Michael Givel, "Consent and Counter-Mobilization: The Case of the National Smokers Alliance," *Journal of Health Communication* 12, no. 4 (2007): 339–357; Jon D. Hanson and Kyle D. Logue, "The Costs of Cigarettes: The Economic Case for Ex Post Incentive-Based Regulation," *The Yale Law Journal* 107, no. 5 (March 1, 1998): 1163–1361; Robert J. Klotz, "Internet Campaigning for Grassroots and Astroturf Support," *Social Science Computer Review* 25, no. 1 (February 1, 2007): 3–12; Thomas P. Lyon and John W. Maxwell, "Astroturf: Interest Group Lobbying and Corporate Strategy," *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 561–597; Robert N. Mayer, "Winning the War of Words: The 'Front Group' Label in Contemporary Consumer Politics," *The Journal of American Culture* 30, no. 1 (March 1, 2007): 96–109; J.A. Savage, "Astroturf Lobbying Replaces Grassroots Organizing," *Business & Society Review* (00453609) no. 95 (Fall 1995): 8; Amy Showalter and Craig S. Fleisher, "Tools and Techniques of Public Affairs," in *The Handbook of Public Affairs*, ed. Phil Harris and Craig S. Fleischer (SAGE, 2005), 111.

Pro-War Patriotism: Conservatives
and Hard Hats

White House efforts to create astroturf pro-war organizations were not intended to replace existing grassroots support for the Vietnam War. Rather, aides hoped to use top-down organizing to coordinate and, of course, control domestic public opinion. Although the antiwar movement dominated contemporary headlines as well as subsequent scholarship, a majority of Americans, despite their doubts about and distaste for the conflict, were unwilling to directly challenge official policies in Vietnam. Many of these citizens made up the Silent Majority cultivated by Nixon and his aides, but still others had actively supported U.S. involvement in Vietnam since Eisenhower's presidency. While relatively understudied, conservatives were among the earliest and most vocal of the war's supporters and remained so until long after both U.S. withdrawal and South Vietnam's eventual collapse.³⁵ President Johnson received similar support from organized labor – particularly the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Although early scholarship on domestic support for Vietnam framed labor support for the war as monolithic and best represented by the thuggish “Hard Hat” construction workers who violently

³⁵ John A Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); John A Andrew, “Pro-War and Anti-Draft: Young Americans for Freedom and the War in Vietnam,” in *The Vietnam War on Campus: Other Voices, More Distant Drums*, ed. Marc Jason Gilbert (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), 1–19; Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front*; Rebecca E Klatch, *A Generation Divided the New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Seth Offenbach, “The Other Side of Vietnam: The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War” (Ph.D., History, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2010); Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement”; Sandra Scanlon, “The Conservative Lobby and Nixon's ‘Peace with Honor’ in Vietnam,” *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009): 255–276; Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

confronted antiwar activists in May 1970, subsequent work has shown that the labor movement was as divided as the rest of U.S. society over the war.³⁶

The 1968 election of a Republican president, combined with growing frustrations with the Vietnam War, exacerbated these tensions and the movement became increasingly divided over the war. Despite these divisions, the continued public support of AFL-CIO president George Meany, largely because he and his top aides shared Nixon's anticommunism and antipathy for the antiwar movement, combined with the aggressive, flag-waving support of construction workers, longshoremen, and other "Hard Hats," enabled Nixon to preserve an image of working-class support for his policies. This support from the hawkish elements of the labor movement and conservatives complemented administration efforts to cultivate single-issue support organizations such as the American Friends of Vietnam (AFV) and the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam (CCPFV).³⁷ These groups, formed in 1955 and 1967 respectively, gave Nixon's Vietnam policies a veneer of bipartisanship. The Democratic Party's ties to the CCPFV, which was covertly organized at Johnson's request, were particularly useful in balancing out the overwhelmingly conservative and Republican membership of the pro-war groups formed by Nixon

³⁶ Abarca, "Discontented but Not Inevitably Reactionary"; Appy, *Working-Class War*; Battista, "Political Divisions in Organized Labor"; Koscielski, "Divided Loyalties"; Joshua B. Freeman, "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 4 (July 1993): 725–744; Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!*; Albert Vetere Lannon and Marvin Rogoff, "We Shall Not Remain Silent: Building the Anti-Vietnam War Movement in the House of Labor," *Science & Society* 66, no. 4 (December 2002): 536–544; Philip Sheldon Foner and Philip Sheldon Foner, *U.S. labor and the Vietnam War* (New York: International Publishers, 1988); Peter B. Levy, "The New Left, Labor, and the Vietnam War," *Peace & Change* 15, no. 1 (January 1990): 46; Wehrle, *Between a River & a Mountain*; Edmund F. Wehrle, "'No More Pressing Task than Organization in Southeast Asia': The AFL-CIO Approaches the Vietnam War, 1947–64," *Labor History* 42, no. 3 (2001): 277–295; Edmund F. Wehrle, "'Partisan for the Hard Hats': Charles Colson, George Meany, and the Failed Blue-Collar Strategy," *Labor* 5, no. 3 (September 21, 2008): 45–66.

³⁷ Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Scanlon, "The Pro-Vietnam War Movement," 89–90; Wells, *The War Within*, 145–49.

administration officials. Such established groups were vital allies and this dissertation traces Nixon administration efforts to create additional Vietnam-specific organizations while continuing to cultivate ties to these earlier organizations.

Directly countering the image of students as militant antiwar activists, the members of Young Americans for Freedom actively supported both Democratic and Republican presidents on Vietnam.³⁸ When internal debates over the military draft almost derailed the group's 1969 convention, its surviving members allied themselves more closely with both the traditional conservative movement as well as with official U.S. policy in Vietnam, although the group was frequently more hawkish than both these allies and policymakers.³⁹ The support of the larger conservative movement, especially of its established leaders such as Senator Strom Thurmond and *National Review* founder and editor William F. Buckley helped secure Nixon's 1968 election and their continuing insistence on military victory complicated Nixon's efforts to negotiate an end to the conflict. Even if, as scholars have argued, presidential concerns over conservatives critiques overemphasized the strength of the movement, conservative support – and the danger of its loss – was almost as powerful a goad toward aggressive military action in Vietnam as the antiwar movement was a constraint.⁴⁰ Grassroots conservatives echoed movement leaders in emphasizing military, rather than diplomatic, solutions to Vietnam and the nationalist patriotism of groups such as YAF, Voices in Vital America (previously the Victory in Vietnam Association), the Committee for

³⁸ Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*; Andrew, "Pro-War and Anti-Draft"; Scanlon, "The Pro-Vietnam War Movement," 203–08, 211–23; Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*; Klatch, *A Generation Divided*.

³⁹ Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 8–10.

⁴⁰ See, e.g. Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front*; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*.

a Week of National Unity, the National Committee for Responsible Patriotism, and more idiosyncratic groups such as the Paoli, Pennsylvania “Committee to Get Your Kids to Wave a Flag Before Some Misguided Protest Group Nabs Them” facilitated Nixon’s rhetorical creation of a Silent Majority.⁴¹ The active and vocal support of movement conservatives reinforced administration efforts to promote a patriotism that emphasized loyalty and national pride over the idealism and dissent of the antiwar movement.⁴²

These two strains of patriotism – which one scholar has labeled “nationalist” and “humanitarian” – were central to the intensity of the domestic debates over Vietnam.⁴³ The seemingly endless war forced some citizens to question their country while others, including Nixon’s Silent Majority, clung even tighter to their ideals. As this dissertation will show, when pro-war forces claimed the flag with a series of patriotic demonstrations in 1969 and

⁴¹ Offenbach, “The Other Side of Vietnam”; Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement”; Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 146.

⁴² While conservative support was an important influence on domestic public opinion and presidential policies, scholars of the conservative movement have not closely examined its relationship to the Vietnam War, instead focusing on how the movement became central to U.S. electoral politics, the role of long-term organizing and short-term resentments in its rise, the influence of conservatives on social and political change in the 1970s and 1980s, and the various constituencies represented by the movement at different stages of its growth and evolution. For a useful overview of recent historical work on the conservative movement, see Alan Brinkley, “Conservatism as a Growing Field of Scholarship,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 748–751; Donald T. Critchlow, “Rethinking American Conservatism: Toward a New Narrative,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 752–755; Martin Durham, “On American Conservatism and Kim Phillips-Fein’s Survey of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 756–759; Matthew D. Lassiter, “Political History beyond the Red-Blue Divide,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 760–764; Wilfred M. McClay, “Less Boilerplate, More Symmetry,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 744–747; Lisa McGirr, “Now That Historians Know So Much about the Right, How Should We Best Approach the Study of Conservatism?,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 765–770; Kim Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 723–743; Leo P. Ribuffo, “Twenty Suggestions for Studying the Right Now that Studying the Right Is Trendy,” *Historically Speaking* 12, no. 1 (2011): 2–6; Julian E. Zelizer, “Reflections: Rethinking the History of American Conservatism,” *Reviews in American History* 38, no. 2 (2010): 367–392.

⁴³ Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 4–9, 230, 232–33.

1970, the war's opponents surrendered the powerful symbol. Just as concerns over flag desecration rose during times of upheaval and uncertainty – after the Civil War, World War I, during World War II, and Vietnam – conflicts over patriotism and national identity are most intense when there is not a consensus over their definitions or uncertainty over who is and is not considered an “American.”⁴⁴ This underlying tension, inescapable in a country where citizenship has been contested and redefined throughout its history, enabled Nixon to divide the country into loyal Americans who supported the U.S. war in Vietnam and un-American protesters. Promoting this interpretation of national identity and patriotism helped the president and his aides to isolate his opponents and to expand his support beyond the conservative movement and the Republican Party.

Chapter Structure

Chapter Two, “Mom, God, and Apple Pie,” explores the foundations of Nixon administration public opinion efforts. After his election, and before his inauguration, Nixon and his national security staff – including National Security Advisor Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Secretary of State William Rogers, and others – struggled to find a way to continue U.S. involvement in Vietnam without inspiring the domestic opposition which had haunted Johnson's presidency. Vietnamization, a combination of increased training and development of South Vietnamese forces combined with U.S. troop withdrawals, offered a potential solution to both military and political pressures, but the October 15 Moratorium protests effectively demonstrated that troop

⁴⁴ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory: The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Michael G Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 4.

withdrawals alone would not quiet the president's opponents. Encouraged by the limited success of efforts to undermine the October 15 protests – including organizing counterdemonstrations and letter-writing campaigns – White House officials and outside allies prepared for a more coordinated and broad-based challenge to the scheduled November 15 Moratorium/Mobilization protests. Although an outside supporter had urged the White House to create a national organization to promote Nixon's policies, the bulk of pre-speech planning relied upon established outside groups, particularly veterans organizations, as well as covertly-organized grassroots demonstrations.

Chapter Three, "Marching to the Same Drum Beat," analyzes the popular response to the president's "Silent Majority" speech on November 3, 1969. The speech attempted to situate Vietnam into a broader history and mythology of U.S. idealism and a morally-driven approach to international commitments. Although they had planned petition and letter-writing drives intended to endorse the president's position, the grassroots embrace of the idea of a "Silent Majority" surprised White House officials, but they quickly adjusted plans to reflect and promote the idea. Building on this popular identification with the Silent Majority, aides claimed the broad participation in National Unity Week demonstrated mass support for Nixon's Vietnam policies. While many of these local and national patriotic events were organized by groups and individuals without White House affiliations, administration officials worked to coordinate and control these efforts. Acting on a supporter's October suggestion, aides attempted to create and fund a national organization which would take advantage of the domestic embrace of the Silent Majority and enable White House officials to control the growing networks of grassroots supporters. Despite frustrations with overly-independent allies such as the Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot, White House officials

effectively used the popular resonance of the Silent Majority idea to unite disparate groups and individuals while reframing the questions of Vietnam into ones of patriotism and support for the president rather than substantive policy details.

Chapter Four, “To Rekindle the American Spirit of Patriotism,” traces these administration efforts to reframe patriotism so as to make support for the Vietnam War and support for Nixon key elements. In the wake of the successful mobilization of the Silent Majority, aides briefly considered whether to expand public opinion efforts beyond this group. Although anxious to grow the president’s popularity, proposals that the administration cultivate potential supporters from what one aide described as “Metroamerica” were quickly supplanted by efforts to minimize domestic opposition to Nixon’s April 30, 1970 announcement of a joint U.S. and South Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. The explosion of domestic dissent and the reinvigoration of the antiwar movement engendered by this unpopular policy were stark reminders of the limits of Silent Majority support. In the midst of administration efforts to minimize the political damage of the Kent State shootings and the rise in domestic protests, construction workers in New York offered a powerful display of the strength of patriotic rhetoric. The Hard Hat anti-student riot and the subsequent pro-administration, flag-drenched demonstrations encouraged the White House to expand their patriotic appeals, particularly as efforts to create a national support organization had been constrained by a lack of funding. Aides instead worked to both cultivate the president’s supporters within the labor movement and planned a major event for the Fourth of July, Honor America Day, which would cement the association between the president with nonpartisan ideals of leadership and nationalist patriotism.

Chapter Five, “Building a Permanent Support Apparatus,” explores the administration’s return to astroturf organizing following the success of Honor America Day. The careful creation of a network of “Americans for Winning the Peace” (AWP) committees as part of a larger campaign to defeat the antiwar initiatives in Congress, such as the McGovern-Hatfield amendment was the most involved of these efforts. In addition to this project, aides worked to strengthen administration ties to other sympathetic groups and individuals – including friendly labor leaders and the POW/MIA movement. The resulting network of outside allies not only helped create popular support for the president and his policies, but it created the foundation for electoral coalitions which would strengthen the President’s position in his 1972 reelection campaign. Although AWP claimed success in its campaign against the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, aides did not follow through with their plans to make it the centerpiece in a national public opinion effort. The uneven success of narrower programs targeting specific interest groups in the 1970 mid-term elections encouraged White House officials to redirect their efforts to such projects at the expense of more ambitious programs such as the national support organization. Consequently, the January 1971 White House Leadership Conference intended to launch AWP as the core of a national support organization was actually that group’s last major, national event.

Chapter Six, “No Longer Going to Win the Race for Middle America by Default,” traces the White House’s transition from ambitious efforts to rally domestic support for Vietnam to a more ad hoc approach to public opinion during the first half of 1971. With this shift, administration interest in patriotism declined as aides focused their attention on wooing the diverse groups and constituencies they saw as key to Middle America. Hoping to expand domestic identification with the Silent Majority into a useful electoral coalition, aides worked

to rally Nixon's supporters while minimizing the Vietnam War as a domestic issue. In this way, officials planned to unite the disparate groups – such as white ethnics, organized labor, wealthy businessmen, conservatives, and veterans – seen as crucial to the President's reelection while avoiding potentially damaging debates. Presenting Nixon as a “peacemaker” without pointing to specific foreign policies seemed an ideal way to benefit from Nixon's foreign policy strengths without debating the merits of specific policies. As aides turned away from active promotion of the Silent Majority, that group's support was still critical in countering domestic criticism inspired by the disastrous Laos invasion, Lieutenant Calley's guilty verdict for My Lai, and even the furor over the Pentagon Papers.

Chapter Seven, “Peace is too Important for Partisanship,” is the culmination of these administration public opinion efforts. In preparation for the 1972 campaign, Nixon's aides made drawing Middle America into the Nixon coalition their top priority. Building on the network of allies created by earlier efforts to promote Nixon, patriotism, the Vietnam War, and the Silent Majority, aides worked to refashion these supporters from the labor movement, veterans' organizations, suburban and small town America, and even the Democratic Party into a viable electoral bloc. Patriotic appeals had successfully linked the flag with support for Nixon and his Vietnam policies and troop withdrawals combined with growing racialism and internal divisions ensured that the antiwar movement was increasingly marginalized in domestic debates. Unable to completely remove Vietnam as a domestic issue, aides instead worked to promote the President's policies as the only way to secure a real and lasting peace. The war, in effect, became one of many Nixon policies, both foreign and domestic, promoted by allies advocating continued support and patience. While this strategy succeeded in securing a historic landslide for Nixon in the 1972 election, they limited his ability to rally

enthusiastic domestic support for the eventual peace agreement. Furthermore, distracted by the growing Watergate scandal and unsettled by recent Executive Branch reorganization efforts, White House officials failed to effectively manage domestic responses to the president's announcement. This failure combined with the official claims of having achieved "peace with honor" marked the end of organized White House efforts to mobilize domestic support for Nixon's Vietnam War policies. The lackluster response to the January 1973 announcement of the Paris Peace Agreement was the logical consequence of the decisions in the early stages of the 1972 reelection campaign to minimize the Silent Majority in favor of Middle America and a rhetorical New American Majority.

Culminating in the short-lived triumph of Nixon's 1973 announcement of the Paris Peace Accords, White House efforts to rally domestic support for the Vietnam War did succeed in creating political space for Nixon's war policies. At the same time, the politicization of patriotism and divisive policies central to the creation and promotion of the Silent Majority, and its subsequent incarnations, intensified the domestic tensions surrounding the conflict. Certainly not inevitable, these consequences of Nixon's determination to end the Vietnam War grew out of early steps – both in Vietnam and in the United States – to secure White House control over public opinion and national policies.

CHAPTER 2

“MOM, GOD, AND APPLE PIE”: IDENTIFYING AND MOBILIZING A PRO-VIETNAM WAR CONSTITUENCY

“I personally think these people are being used as tools for propaganda by the enemies of our democracy, although I also do think many are innocently duped and are not aware of their unpatriotic deeds,” wrote Mrs. Ann R. McAllister, a New Jersey homemaker, to President Richard Nixon on October 15, 1969.¹ Demonstrating the success of White House efforts to isolate the antiwar movement, she and many others chose not to join millions of their fellow citizens in donning black armbands, marching in antiwar parades, discussing the Vietnam War, or otherwise participating in the massive “Moratorium” protests. Letters from individuals such as McAllister—whose son was honorably discharged from the Navy after four years of service in Vietnam—as well as participation in “auto headlight and full-staff flag efforts” led a White House official to conclude that administration efforts to counter the Moratorium protests were both “well-received ... [and] moderately successful.” Still, “we have no reason to be satisfied or smug,” he continued and proceeded to outline a detailed plan for the administration to build on its October success in anticipation of similar protests in November.²

¹ “Ann McAllister to Richard Nixon”, October 15, 1969, President’s Handwriting, October 16 thru 31, 1969; Box 3; POF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

² “Charles West to Alex Butterfield”, n.d., 1, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

McAllister's ready adoption of the administration's criticisms of the antiwar movement – the war's opponents had been manipulated by communists, were essentially unpatriotic, and the protests themselves undermined the very foundations of the nation – ensured that these themes continued to play an important role in White House public opinion programs.

This chapter will trace early attempts by the administration and its supporters to determine the best strategies for rallying and organizing pro-war and pro-Nixon public opinion. With the Vietnam conflict a crucial domestic issue, the new president and his staff worked to find a way to both end the Vietnam War “with honor” and to keep domestic opposition from excessively limiting the president's options. Vietnamization offered one solution to the military and domestic problems facing the administration, but the October 15 Moratorium protests effectively demonstrated that limited troop withdrawals alone were insufficient. Efforts to organize counterdemonstrations and letter-writing campaigns on October 15 were fairly successful, but both White House officials and outside organizers knew that creating the image of a countermovement challenging the antiwar activists would require a more coordinated public opinion effort. Having implicitly promised voters that he had a “secret plan” to end the war, it was now, in January 1969, as Jeffrey Kimball has written, “time to pay the piper.”³ Nixon and his staff had to find a way to extricate the United States from Vietnam while avoiding any appearance of surrender as well as calm domestic tensions while simultaneously mobilizing popular support for that same war.

³ Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 62.

From Campaign Promises
to Vietnamization

The bruising, three-way campaign between Republican Richard Nixon, Democrat Hubert Humphrey and American Independent Party candidate George Wallace capped off a tumultuous year for the United States. Even as the candidates debated domestic issues in the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the violence of the Democratic National Convention, and increasing class and racial tensions, the Vietnam War overshadowed most other campaign issues.⁴ Nixon, while remaining somewhat hawkish, eventually concluded, as he told his speechwriters on March 29, 1969: “there's no way to win the war. But we can't say that, of course.”⁵ And so Nixon subtly shifted his campaign rhetoric away from the idea of “victory” in Vietnam

⁴ Although Lewis L Gould in *1968: The Election That Changed America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2012) argues that race was the key issue in the 1968 campaign (6, 12, 150, 164) and further argues that the “election was not a referendum on the war,” (163) Melvin Small in “The Election of 1968” (*Diplomatic History* 28, no. 4 [September 1, 2004]: 513-528) compellingly argues that “Vietnam was the central issue of the campaign” (513) because “even the dominant domestic issue, ‘law and order,’ related in part to unruly antiwar demonstrators” (528). For further discussion on the Vietnam War as an issue in the election, see: Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 30–32, 60–78; Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 32–36; Andrew Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 195–236; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 31–32, 40–41, 55–62, 72–76; Walter LaFeber, *The Deadly Bet: LBJ, Vietnam, and the 1968 Election* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 23–30; Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 223–29, 254–62, 276–81, 286. For a broader discussion of the election, see: Gould, *1968*; Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President, 1968* (New York: Trident Press, 1969); Richard M Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), 278–79, 285–86, 289–94; Richard J Whalen, *Catch the Falling Flag: A Republican’s Challenge to His Party* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972); Theodore H White, *The Making of the President, 1968* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969).

⁵ Quoted in Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 52.

to “peace with honor.”⁶ The details varied, and Nixon refused to clarify them during the campaign, but the survival of South Vietnam as a political entity led by President Nguyen Van Thieu was a defining characteristic.

By reframing “victory” to mean “survival of South Vietnam,” Nixon hoped to appeal to both the hawks and the doves and to ensure maximum flexibility for himself as president. His vague promises had an electoral advantage as well, since Nixon’s consistent refusal to discuss his Vietnam policies in anything other than the most general terms contributed to a widespread belief, both during the campaign and in subsequent scholarship, that he had a “secret plan” to end the war.⁷ Nixon later claimed “I never said that I had a ‘plan,’ much less a ‘secret plan,’ to end the war,” but Robert Dallek and other historians agree that the popular perception of Nixon’s having such a plan was a very useful “election ploy.”⁸ Nixon therefore, as Andrew Johns points out, “never officially denied having one” even as he consistently sidestepped requests for details by claiming that to do so would risk undermining Johnson’s negotiations and potentially tie his own hands once elected.⁹ Given the broad popular conviction that Nixon would end the war

⁶ The theme of “peace with honor” certainly played a role in the 1968 election (See: Berman, *No Peace, No Honor*, 45; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 105; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 37, 41, 52, 72–73, 97–98, 138), but its relevance to the debates over Nixon’s Vietnamization policies and the Paris peace agreements tends to overshadow its role in the 1968 election.

⁷ See, e.g., Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 68; Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 197–99, 235; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 97–98; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (London: Scribner, 2008), 236, 249, 371; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 28; Small, “The Election of 1968,” 523.

⁸ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 105; Nixon, *RN*, 298.

⁹ Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 198. Although Nixon denies having such a plan in his memoirs, he also emphasizes his belief that “As a candidate, it would have been foolhardy, and as a prospective President, improper, for me to outline specific plans in detail. ... And even if I had been able to formulate specific ‘plans,’ it would have been absurd to make them public.” Nixon, *RN*, 298.

quickly once he came into office, pressure for visible progress – or at least additional details – increased after his inauguration. However, Nixon now insisted that to make his war policies public would undermine his own negotiating position and instead worked secretly with Kissinger and other aides to find a way to end the Vietnam War with the “honorable peace” promised in the campaign.

Their approach would eventually include what Kimball describes as “big military plays,” such as the extending the war into Cambodia and Laos; Vietnamization; pacification; US troop withdrawals; and negotiations with the Soviets and Chinese as well as with the North Vietnamese. Kimball also included “counterattacks against domestic opponents” in his description of the “constants of Nixinger strategy” for Vietnam, but overlooks the administration’s efforts to simultaneously rally its supporters as both a counterweight to the antiwar movement and as a way of establishing credibility in their negotiations with the North Vietnamese.¹⁰ Both Nixon and Kissinger were confident that if they could convince the North Vietnamese that the president’s Vietnam policies had the support of a majority of Americans, they would be able to negotiate “peace with honor.”

Vietnamization, the policy at the core of many debates over the “winnability” of the Vietnam War, was central to these efforts. Combining US troop withdrawals with efforts to strengthen the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) so that it would eventually replace US troops on the ground, Vietnamization enabled the president to create a domestic impression of ending the war while continuing to pressure the North

¹⁰ Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 98–99.

Vietnamese. Echoing Nixon and Kissinger's memoirs, Lewis Sorley and other historians in what Gary Hess describes as the “lost victory” school argue that Vietnamization and Nixon’s other war policies resulted in a “better war” in which the United States could have won a military victory.¹¹ At the same time, other historians particularly Jeffrey Kimball, Robert Dallek, Melvin Small, and Andrew Johns argue the opposite and conclude that Nixon's Vietnamization strategy was, in Dallek's words, a “fig leaf for American defeat.”¹² Even so, the policy was successful in one regard: the combination of troop withdrawals, reduced US casualties, and the appearance of military progress in Vietnam quieted domestic opposition to the war and rallied supporters just enough to enable Nixon to continue the war until the January 1973 peace agreement. Using Vietnamization to shore up domestic opinion further allowed Nixon and his surrogates in

¹¹ Sorley’s work, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America’s Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), is perhaps the best scholarly example of this argument although Nixon and Kissinger’s memoirs both attempt to reframe the debate so as to cast their policies in a positive light. See: Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); Timothy J Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost--and Won: America’s Intervention in Viet Nam’s Twin Struggles* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1987); Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985); John M Shaw, *The Cambodian Campaign: The 1970 Offensive and America’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005); Harry G Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982). Gary Hess contrasts these and similar arguments with scholars in what he calls the “neither peace nor honor” school in his 2009 historiography of the Vietnam War, Gary R Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America’s Lost War* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2009), 179–206.

¹² Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 619. See also: Berman, *No Peace, No Honor*; Robert K Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006); George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979), 271–320; Gary R Hess, *Vietnam and the United States: Origins and Legacy of War* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 111–138; Arnold R Isaacs, *Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 237–323; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*; James H Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost its War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 235–99.

Paris to point to improved US opinion as evidence that the president could continue the war indefinitely and that it was therefore in the North Vietnamese's interests to negotiate.

“Three Highly Interrelated Fronts:” Balancing
the War and Public Opinion

In *No More Vietnams*, Richard Nixon claims that his “five-point strategy ... to end the war and win the peace” – Vietnamization, pacification, diplomatic isolation, peace negotiations, gradual withdrawal – evolved gradually and in response to North Vietnamese provocations during the “first months” of 1969.¹³ However, Jeffrey Kimball, in *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, persuasively argues that Nixon’s description is “disingenuous” because the core of this strategy “had actually been outlined by Nixon at least as early as August 1968, and its basic elements were set in place by” late December 1968.¹⁴ Vietnamization seemed to offer an opportunity for the administration to silence its critics on both the right and the left.¹⁵ Although troop withdrawals had the potential to discourage North Vietnamese compromises in future negotiations, a National Security Council (NSC) paper on “Vietnam Alternatives” concluded that they could, by reducing the financial and political costs of US involvement, “lead Hanoi to revise [its] estimate of

¹³ Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 104–107, quotes from pp. 104. Henry Kissinger similarly argues that the Vietnamization policy was not “born” until a March 28, 1969 National Security Council meeting, Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 81–82.

¹⁴ Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 98.

¹⁵ Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 237–77; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 72–76, 97–100; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 56–70, 81–107; Dale Van Atta, *With Honor: Melvin Laird in War, Peace, and Politics* (Univ of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 147–186.

U.S. staying power upwards” thereby increasing the probability of a favorable settlement.¹⁶

Balancing domestic pressures favoring withdrawal with military and international obligations would, in Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs William Bundy’s words be “no mean trick” and the challenge, as ever, was to maintain domestic support long enough to carry out an orderly and successful withdrawal.¹⁷ Therefore, NSC staffer Dean Moor recommended presenting US policy so that “the public and the Congress ... continue to believe that the administration is willing to reach a fair and just settlement in Vietnam through negotiations.”¹⁸ Just two weeks later, however, Moor urged the NSC to “come to grips with the issue of where we go and what we do if our beautiful strategy

¹⁶ “Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon”, January 24, 1969, II–9, Folder “NSC Meeting, Vietnam Alternatives 1/25/69”; Box H-19; NSC: Institutional Files, NPLM, College Park, MD. A 2010 *Diplomatic History* roundtable, “The Politics of Troop Withdrawal,” *Diplomatic History*, 34, no. 3 (June 2010) examines the many issues involved in the question of troop withdrawals from John F. Kennedy Robert McNamara’s discussions (Marc J Selverstone, “It’s a Date: Kennedy and the Timetable for a Vietnam Troop Withdrawal,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 485-495) to how Vietnam-era withdrawals can inform contemporary US policies (Jeffrey P Kimball, “Out of Primordial Cultural Ooze: Inventing Political and Policy Legacies About the U.S. Exit from Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 577-587; Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Too Late or Too Soon? Debating the Withdrawal from Vietnam in the Age of Iraq,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 589-600; Jeffrey Record, “Leaving Vietnam: Insights for Iraq?,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 567-576; Melvin Small, “Bring the Boys Home Now! Antiwar Activism and Withdrawal from Vietnam—and Iraq,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 543-553; Julian E Zelizer, “Congress and the Politics of Troop Withdrawal,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 529-541) includes a number of useful articles about Nixon’s policies (Ken Hughes, “Fatal Politics: Nixon’s Political Timetable for Withdrawing from Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 497-506; Robert Jervis, “The Politics of Troop Withdrawal: Salted Peanuts, the Commitment Trap, and Buying Time,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 507-516; Robert J McMahon, “The Politics, and Geopolitics, of American Troop Withdrawals from Vietnam, 1968–1972,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 471-483; Chester Pach, “Our Worst Enemy Seems to Be the Press: TV News, the Nixon Administration, and U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Vietnam, 1969–1973,” *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 3 [June 1, 2010]: 555-565; Small, “Bring the Boys Home Now! Antiwar Activism and Withdrawal from Vietnam—and Iraq”).

¹⁷ “William Bundy to Henry Kissinger”, January 24, 1969, 5, NSC Meeting, Vietnam Alternatives 1/25/69; Box H-19; NSC: Institutional Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁸ “Dean Moor to Henry Kissinger”, February 22, 1969, 1, NSC Meeting, Vietnam 3/28/69; Box H-21; NSC: Institutional Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

gets nowhere and the public starts to holler.”¹⁹ Sidestepping Moor’s concerns, policymakers debated options for Vietnam at a March 19, 1969 National Security Council meeting. Discussing the progress of what was then referred to as “de-Americanization” in Vietnam, Kissinger later recalled that Defense Secretary Melvin Laird agreed with the assessments of the policy’s progress, but argued “What we need is a term like ‘Vietnamizing’ to put the emphasis on the right issues.” Nixon agreed, and in Kissinger’s recollection: “thus ‘Vietnamization’ was born.”²⁰ Of course, as discussed above, the basics of the policy now to be called “Vietnamization” were well established by this meeting, but Kissinger uses this anecdote to support his – and Nixon’s – arguments about the gradual move toward Vietnamization.²¹

First, though, the administration had to convince an impatient public to give Vietnamization a chance. Despite promises to end the war in six months, Nixon later claimed that he and his aides “knew it would take several years” for the policy to succeed.²² Hoping to ensure that an “informal moratorium on criticism” would last as long as possible, Kissinger met with student leaders in late April to “listen to them, let them get ‘it’ off their chests ... make them feel they are getting a sympathetic hearing.”²³

¹⁹ “Dean Moor to Dick Sneider”, March 19, 1969, NSC Meeting, Vietnam 3/28/69; Box H-21; NSC: Institutional Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²⁰ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 81–82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 81–107; Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 101–08.

²² Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 100–02; Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 135.

²³ “Bob Houdek to Henry Kissinger”, April 29, 1969, 1, HAK - Meeting with Student Leaders 4/29/69; Box 337; NSC: Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD. For the quieting of Congressional criticism, see: Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 238. For the antiwar movement, see: Wells, *The War Within*, 328.

Doing so, one of his aides argued, would enable Kissinger to “provide a welcome contrast to ... the Johnson Administration.”²⁴ Officials ultimately believed that they could convince many of their opponents – particularly young students – to come around to the administration position because “Mom, God, and apple pie die hard.”²⁵

Kissinger concluded in a September memo to Nixon that “we are attempting to solve the problem of Vietnam on three highly interrelated fronts: (1) within the U.S., (2) in Vietnam, and (3) through diplomacy.”²⁶ Success on any one front depended on at least limited success in the other two and consequently domestic public opinion would continue to be a significant factor. Given growing opposition to the war, Kissinger worried that the Nixon administration, like Johnson’s before it, would soon “be caught between the Hawks and the Doves.”²⁷ While it would probably buy the administration some breathing room in the short term, Kissinger worried that troop withdrawals would “become like salted peanuts to the American public: The more U.S. troops come home, the more will be demanded.”²⁸ The next day, Kissinger again reminded Nixon, “we are torn between the impatience of war-weary Americans and a commitment to reach a just

²⁴ “Charles Wilkinson to Henry Kissinger”, April 28, 1969, 2, HAK - Meeting with Student Leaders 4/29/69; Box 337; NSC: Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²⁵ “Bob Houdek to Henry Kissinger,” 1.

²⁶ “Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon”, September 10, 1969, 1, Discussion on Vietnam in the Cabinet Room 9:30 a.m. Sept. 12, 1969; Box 70; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁸ Ibid.

settlement.”²⁹ Vietnamization was one way for the administration to balance the contradictory demands of the pro- and anti-war movements.

“Induced to Speak up in Behalf of the President’s Position”:
The President’s Conservative Allies

For the most part, real and potential supporters were the more pressing concern for Nixon and his staff since, with the notable exception of Henry Kissinger, finding common ground with the war’s opponents was not an administration priority in 1969.³⁰ Hawks, however, were a different matter. Not only did conservative support help Nixon secure the 1968 Republican nomination, but they had proven to be some of the most vocal champions of US involvement in Vietnam before 1968. It would be a humiliating blow to Nixon’s efforts to rally domestic support if he managed to alienate the war’s most consistent boosters. And although it can be tempting to simplify the domestic debates over Vietnam to a question of Left versus Right, the reality in 1969 was that criticism of the war was growing on the right as youthful activists opposed the draft even as movement leaders pushed for military escalation.³¹

²⁹ “Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon”, September 11, 1969, 2, Discussion on Vietnam in the Cabinet Room 9:30 a.m. Sept. 12, 1969; Box 70; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁰ Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 239–40; William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 171–72; Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 162–77. For Kissinger’s more cordial relationship with the antiwar movement, see: Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 101; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 172–73, 176.

³¹ For the importance of conservative support, particularly from the southern states, in the 1968 election, see: Nixon, *RN*, 304–05, 312–13; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 283–85, 298–300; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 24. The question of conservative support for the Vietnam War is getting increasingly more attention from scholars of the conservative movement. The early view of near-blanket support for US involvement has been refined and complicated by studies of both grassroots and leadership views of the war as well as the relationship of the POW-MIA movement to the larger conservative community, see: Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill:

In this context, administration attempts to court the middle of US public opinion ran a considerable risk of alienating Nixon's right-wing and hawkish supporters. Speechwriter and Special Assistant to the President Patrick Buchanan highlighted this growing disenchantment among the "hard core and workers and True Believers of the Republican Party" as early as February 1969.³² Recognizing that "there are certainly greater pressures on the President than there were on the Candidate," Buchanan pushed for the administration to more actively court its conservative allies.³³ Vietnamization, again, offered the president a solution since, as Sandra Scanlon notes, "conservative leaders believed Vietnamization was a strategy for fighting a more conventional war, and not simply a programme [*sic*] for ending the American war in Vietnam."³⁴ At the same time, the troop withdrawals Vietnamization made possible enabled the president to temporarily calm the domestic tensions over the war.

Even so, Buchanan continued to push for more explicit engagement with the conservatives, although by September he recognized that doing so would require the

University of North Carolina Press, 2009); John A Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Rebecca E Klatch, *A Generation Divided the New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Seth Offenbach, "The Other Side of Vietnam: The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War" (Ph.D., History, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2010); Sandra Scanlon, "The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration" (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005); Sandra Scanlon, "The Conservative Lobby and Nixon's 'Peace with Honor' in Vietnam," *Journal of American Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009): 255–276; Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999). For specific discussion of the anti-draft efforts of student conservative activists, see: John A Andrew, "Pro-War and Anti-Draft: Young Americans for Freedom and the War in Vietnam," in *The Vietnam War on Campus: Other Voices, More Distant Drums*, ed. Marc Jason Gilbert (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), 1–19; Klatch, *A Generation Divided*, 5, 101.

³² "Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon", February 20, 1969, 3, Haldeman Memos for The President (Feb. 1969); Box 138; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³³ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴ Scanlon, "The Conservative Lobby," 264.

president to “say something specific directly or indirectly that is going to start the doves squawking.”³⁵ The threat of increased antiwar activity often counterbalanced Buchanan’s efforts to more closely ally the President with the movement, but conservative criticisms were a very real concern for the President and his staff.³⁶ Nixon therefore requested that Congressional liaisons Bryce Harlow and Lyn Nofziger maintain contact with his conservative allies – both to give them “reassurance that the President is not running out” and because “they need to be induced to speak up in behalf of the President’s position.”³⁷ In this way, vocal support from the hawks would hopefully counterbalance any potential “squawking” from the doves.

More telling was the president’s recognition that his supporters would not speak up without White House prompting. Nixon’s attempts to rally his allies frequently ran aground on the political reality that, as David Levy notes, “most of those who favored the war actively, or who acquiesced in it passively, did not feel much need to form organizations, march in the streets, or resort to politics.”³⁸ Levy explains this tendency, arguing that such individuals “were, after all, not challenging a national policy; they were

³⁵ “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon”, September 18, 1969, 2, VIETNAM: (General Files)-Sep 69 - Nov 69 [2 of 2 folders]; Box 74; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁶ Buchanan warned of the right’s growing disenchantment with Nixon’s policies throughout the first term, but these warnings were dismissed by many on the White House staff until conservative threats became defections which in turn would weaken the president’s 1972 reelection campaign; see Chapters Six and Seven for a discussion of how the conservative movement became a very significant factor in the administration’s domestic public opinion efforts. Even though little was done to appeal to conservatives during the early years of Nixon’s presidency, Johns accurately argues that “Nixon actually displayed more concern about conservative reactions to his policies than about antiwar forces throughout his presidency.” Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 239.

³⁷ “Bryce Harlow to Lyn Nofziger”, September 18, 1969, Memoranda (General) (September 1969); Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁸ David W. Levy, *The Debate Over Vietnam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 140.

supporting one. For them, simply declaring that they 'stood by the president' or 'backed up our fighting men' was often sufficient to locate them with respect to the Vietnam question, to make clear to their neighbors just where they stood.³⁹ Therefore, the president pushed his staff to better coordinate White House public relations efforts rather than “slide along with what I fear is an inadequate response, and an amateurish response” which the president felt would be inadequate to ensure that his message reached the American public.⁴⁰

“Tell it to Hanoi”: Challenging the Antiwar Movement

Specifically, Nixon wanted his staff prepared to respond to – and counter – the well-publicized “Moratorium” protests planned for October 15, 1969. Inspired by a Boston envelope manufacturer’s proposal for a series of monthly national strikes to continue, growing by a day each month, until the US withdrew completely from Vietnam, organizers envisioned a national day of protest in which a broad cross-section of the American population would stop their usual activities for a day to express their opposition to the Vietnam War.⁴¹ Rather than call their protest a general strike, they described it as a “Moratorium” during which, “for one day, we’re going to put aside our normal business and think about the war.”⁴² The anticipated variety of local and national

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman”, September 22, 1969, 3, P Memos 1969; Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴¹ Wells, *The War Within*, 328.

⁴² Ibid., 330.

activities would ensure broad participation which would demonstrate that antiwar activists were not “just ‘crazy radicals’ but ‘your sons and daughters.’”⁴³ If successful, such a protest would significantly undermine Nixon’s efforts to marginalize the antiwar movement and so aides were anxious to limit the scope and effectiveness of the protest.⁴⁴

Nixon’s September suggestion to Haldeman set the tone for White House efforts: “I wonder if you might game plan the possibility of having some pro-administration rallies, etc. on Vietnam on October 15, the date set by the other side. Inevitably, whenever we plan something, they are there to meet us; perhaps we can turn the trick on them.”⁴⁵ Earlier White House efforts to organize supporters to lobby for passage of the Safeguard antiballistic missile (ABM) system resulted in the creation of a false grassroots, or astroturf, organization called the Citizens Committee for Peace with Security (CCPS).⁴⁶ Officially organized by New York lawyer and longtime Nixon

⁴³ Moratorium organizer Sam Brown quoted in Ibid.

⁴⁴ While both Haldeman and Nixon describe White House efforts to prepare for the speech, there is little scholarly analysis of these same preparations, likely as a result of Nixon’s efforts to limit access to the internal memoranda and other documents of his administration as described by Joan Hoff, but continuing declassifications will doubtless add detail to these initial analyses. H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s, 1994), 91–100; Joan Hoff, “Researchers’ Nightmare: Studying the Nixon Presidency,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 259–275; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 165–66, 170; Nixon, *RN*, 399–402; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 423–28; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 182–83; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 73–74; Wells, *The War Within*, 347–55.

⁴⁵ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” 2.

⁴⁶ Wells incorrectly described this group as having “surfaced shortly before Moratorium day” when it initiated its “Tell It to Hanoi” advertisement campaign. Wells, *The War Within*, 350. For more on the debate over SAFEGUARD, including Nixon’s “New Isolationists” speech, see: Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 135–39; Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 38–40; Robert E. Hunter, “The ABM: President Nixon’s Safeguard Programme,” *The World Today* 25, no. 5 (May 1, 1969): 194–203; Nixon, *RN*, 415–18; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 136–42; Graham Spinardi, “The Rise and Fall of Safeguard: Anti-Ballistic Missile Technology and the Nixon Administration,” *History and Technology* 26, no. 4 (December 2010): 313–334.

“Astroturf,” both as a political phenomenon in general and as a Nixon administration strategy, is discussed in greater detail in the Introduction as well as Chapters Three and Five.

supporter, William J. Casey, the group did not disband after its Safeguard victory. Therefore, when Kissinger, at Nixon's request, "contacted ... him to set-up a Pro-Vietnam Committee," Casey redirected CCPS efforts toward promoting the president's Vietnam policies.⁴⁷ The CCPS pivot was part of a larger administration effort to repurpose the pro-Safeguard organizing effort in support of the Vietnam War. White House officials met with "a group of national-level executives of patriotic organizations" whose "combined constituencies number over 5,000,000" at a "special off-the-record meeting on Friday morning, October 10 ... [to] discuss: 1. Ways in which the various organizations may give support to a 'Vietnam PR' Program, 2. Dissemination of messages incorporating the 'Hanoi: Stop Stalling' theme," as well as other pro-Nixon and pro-Vietnam projects.⁴⁸

On October 15, 1969, as antiwar activists participated in the Moratorium, the Citizens Committee for Peace with Security placed newspaper advertisements across the country urging their fellow citizens to "Tell it to Hanoi" by writing to Congress and the president to voice their support for administration policies and their opposition to the

⁴⁷ "John Brown to Henry Kissinger", July 14, 1969, Memoranda Received Jan thru Sep 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD. Casey was later head of the SEC and Under Secretary of State under Nixon and the CIA under Reagan. He died shortly after testimony suggested he was complicit in Iran-Contra. "William Casey, Ex-C.I.A. Head, Is Dead at 74: William J. Casey, C.I.A. Head in the Iran-Contra Arms Affair, Is Dead at 74," *New York Times* (New York, N.Y., May 7, 1987); Joseph E Persico, *Casey: The Lives and Secrets of William J. Casey: From the OSS to the CIA* (New York: Viking, 1990).

⁴⁸ "Charles West to Alex Butterfield", October 9, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD. The "patriotic organizations" were almost exclusively veterans organizations including the American Legion, VFW, Reserve Officers Association, Military Order of the World Wars, Association of the US Army, Air Force Association, Navy League, National Guard Association, American Security Council, Fleet Reserve Association, Retired Officers Association, National Rifle Association

antiwar movement.⁴⁹ While private individuals officially sponsored these ads, the idea for both the ads and their message originated in the Nixon White House. Demonstrating the close cooperation between the officially grassroots organization and the White House, an administration aide reported that when told of plans for countering the antiwar movement, “the signers of the ‘Tell It to Hanoi’ ad ... responded, to a man, even before they knew the details.”⁵⁰ Other Nixon supporters organized counterdemonstrations, “taunted Moratorium activists, ... flew flags at full staff, and ... [a]t least one parachuted down on the Washington Mall.”⁵¹ These and other efforts to counter the antiwar movement on October 15 failed to prevent the protest from being described by one historian as “the most successful anti-war demonstration of the entire Vietnam War era, and the most successful such demonstration in American history.”⁵² Ultimately millions of citizens “rallied, leafleted, canvassed their neighbors, held candlelight vigils, attended church services, showed films, and engaged in discussions.”⁵³ Key to the Moratorium’s

⁴⁹ “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman”, October 15, 1969, Memos/Alex Butterfield (October 1969); Box 53; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Butterfield reported to Haldeman that advertisements would appear in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Washington Star*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Dallas Times*, *St. Louis Globe*, *San Diego Union*. As of this report, Butterfield still had not received confirmation that the Tell it to Hanoi Committee had also placed advertisements in the *Miami Herald*, *Minneapolis Star*, and *Rochester Times-Union*.

⁵⁰ “Charles West to Alex Butterfield”, October 15, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ Wells, *The War Within*, 374.

⁵² Melvin Small, *At the Water’s Edge: American Politics and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 141. See also: Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 254–58; Adam Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts: The Origins and Impact of the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 173–75; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 170; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 184–87; Wells, *The War Within*, 371–75.

⁵³ Wells, *The War Within*, 371.

success was that “organizers were able to arrange events that attracted a disproportionate number of middle-class adults who were nothing like the hippies and radicals that had dominated the coverage of previous rallies.”⁵⁴

The Moratorium’s powerful demonstration of popular frustrations with the Vietnam War combined with disagreements within the administration on how best to respond to North Vietnamese provocations led Nixon to cancel plans for a massive military escalation, “Duck Hook,” which would have meant the mining of Haiphong Harbor and increased bombing of North Vietnam.⁵⁵ In his memoirs, Nixon blames the protest for “undermining” his efforts to end the war in 1969 by forcing him to cancel Duck Hook, but domestic opposition was just one of many factors arguing against an escalation of the war in November 1969.⁵⁶ Not only were Secretaries Laird and Rogers as well as some NSC staffers opposed, but Kissinger later claimed that Nixon “clearly did not have his heart in it.”⁵⁷ Still, Nixon adamantly refused to “get out [of Vietnam] because of public opinion.”⁵⁸ Nixon resolve was further strengthened by the response to

⁵⁴ Small, *At the Water’s Edge*, 141.

⁵⁵ Nixon, *RN*, 393–94, 397–402; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 171–72; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 92–93, 102–03; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 163, 180–81, 186–87.

⁵⁶ Nixon, *RN*, 401.

⁵⁷ Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 172; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 93. This dramatic, if secret, about-face by the administration support the argument that the antiwar movement succeeded in influencing US policy in Vietnam. Historians sympathetic to the antiwar movement see this influence as a positive force in that domestic opposition made a negotiated settlement a more attractive way to end the war than continuing to seek a military solution; see, e.g.: DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*; Wells, *The War Within*. Conversely, a few historians follow Nixon and Kissinger’s lead and see the antiwar movement as actually preventing peace in Vietnam; see: Garfinkle, *Telltale Hearts*; James Rothrock, *Divided We Fall: How Disunity Leads to Defeat* (AuthorHouse, 2006).

⁵⁸ “Memorandum for the Record, T.H.Moorer”, October 13, 1969, 7, Haig’s Vietnam File - Vol. 3 November-December 1969 [1 of 2]; Box 1008; NSC: Haig Special Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

the Tell It to Hanoi advertisements – about 40,000 letters as of October 27, 1969 – and by reports that CCPS had already “ordered ‘Tell It to Hanoi’ lapel buttons” complementing other pro-administration efforts such as “a revival of the U.S. flag windshield stickers, ‘Tell It to Hanoi’ and similar bumper stickers, and red, white, and blue (and other) lapel buttons” coordinated by established outside organizations.⁵⁹ When Butterfield forwarded this news from New York businessman and CCPS member Jack Mulcahy, Nixon scrawled “Tell Mulcahy, et. al. good job! from RN”⁶⁰ on the memorandum, resulting in a friendly White House phone call a few days later.⁶¹

“Covertly Managed Under Some First-Class Patriots”:
Creating a National Support Organization

Hoping to build on the favorable response to the CCPS anti-Moratorium effort – as well as to ensure continued White House access – Casey wrote to Nixon in late October summarizing reactions to both the ads and the October protests as well as recommending that the White House continue to organize and coordinate domestic support activities. In Casey’s analysis, “the hope of getting Hanoi to cooperate and the

⁵⁹ “William Casey to Richard Nixon”, October 27, 1969, 1, VIETNAM: (General Files)-Sep 69 - Nov 69 [1 of 2 folders]; Box 74; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD. “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon”, October 17, 1969, President’s Handwriting, October 16 thru 31, 1969; Box 3; POF, NPLM, College Park, MD. Ibid. These organizations included: Navy League, Air Force Association, Army Association, National Guard Association, National Rifle Association, Reserve Officers Association, Retired Officers Association, Military Order of the World Wars, American Security Council, the Fleet Reserve Association, the VFW, and the American Legion

⁶⁰ “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon.”

⁶¹ “Ken Cole to Alex Butterfield”, October 21, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon [2]”, October 22, 1969, Alex Butterfield (Oct 1969); Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

desire not to tip our hand is not worth the confusion it creates in public opinion”⁶² and that, therefore, the administration must do everything possible to convince Americans to support its policies and to explain “that while all of us can have our opinions ... the President has Constitutional responsibility for American security.”⁶³ Furthermore, Casey reminded Nixon: “it is no longer enough for the President to enunciate policy once. It must be repeated and expounded almost daily at grass roots levels.”⁶⁴ Casey urged the president to create a “counter force ... a nationwide committee, in the style of the William Allen White Committee to Defend American by Defending the Allies.”⁶⁵ Such an organization would “get information out in print and through informal speakers in every area to demand time to correct distortions in the media, respond to critics and maintain a rational national dialogue.”⁶⁶ Casey was confident that existing activists – particularly community, labor, and veterans organizations – would be eager to spread the

⁶² “William Casey to Richard Nixon,” 2.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Organized by the Republican Kansas newspaper editor William Allen White in response to a request from President Franklin Roosevelt, the Committee used editorials and policy statements to lobby for increased financial and military assistance to Great Britain and the Allied forces with the eventual goal being US intervention in World War II. The organization itself was not tied to the White House, but Roosevelt and White’s public friendship gave the Committee a semi-official status. For more on the Committee see: Lise Namikas, “The Committee to Defend America and the Debate Between Internationalists and Interventionists, 1939-1941,” *The Historian* 61, no. 4 (1999): 843–863. Administration efforts to follow through on this suggestion are discussed in Chapters Three and Five. While Casey’s invocation of the William Allen White Committee demonstrates that Nixon was certainly not the first president to engage in such astroturf organizing, as Melvin Small notes in regard to other illegal and unethical activities by the administration: “although all his predecessors did some of things Nixon did some of the time, none of them did as many of those things so much of the time.” Melvin Small, “Containing Domestic Enemies: Richard M. Nixon and the War at Home,” in *Shadow on the White House: Presidents and the Vietnam War, 1945-1975*, ed. David L Anderson (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 137. The ethical and legal aspects of these efforts as well as their historical precedents are discussed in Chapter Three.

⁶⁶ “William Casey to Richard Nixon,” 2.

president's message and "ha[d] only to be activated and supplied with material."⁶⁷

Pursuing this project would create a network of local and national allies willing to actively and publicly support Nixon's policies, as well as give the White House additional control over these allies by linking them together under the auspices of a covert White House organization.

"Convinced that the President is becoming increasingly a captive of this type of counsel," Brigadier General Al Haig, Henry Kissinger's National Security Council deputy, forwarded Casey's letter with an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of such a project. In his memorandum to Kissinger, Haig agreed with Casey that "the vacuum created during the Kennedy years in which patriotic organizations formerly operated was filled by left-leaning, pseudo-intellectuals to the point where, today, the only grassroots voice ... heard is that of dissent." Given this void and the fact that outside supporters "have been standing in the wings for some time eager to move back into business in a large-scale way," Haig tentatively endorsed a "tightly controlled, covertly administered program." Even so, he was careful to warn that overly-enthusiastic (but wealthy, and therefore influential) supporters often did "not have the grasp of international affairs which is essential if such a program is to be effective and not counterproductive." While detailed knowledge of administration policy was certainly not required of administration supporters, Haig knew that incomplete knowledge of the issues could lead some of the president's most enthusiastic allies to embrace policies and public

⁶⁷ Ibid.

positions that could embarrass the administration and possibly compromise its domestic and foreign policies.⁶⁸

Recognizing that the “unfortunate part of most of these patriots is the fact that they are never self-conscious about making their own policy whether or not it might be a correct one,” Haig was wary that a White House program to mobilize its supporters might inadvertently unleash a cadre of free-lance policymakers, potentially muddying, rather than clarifying, domestic debates. Therefore, Haig encouraged Kissinger to “have a talk with the President on this subject before it gets out of hand and before the armchair strategists take over.” To be effective, Haig argued that such a group must be “covertly managed under some first-class patriots” with Kissinger “intimately, though covertly, in the driver’s seat.” If policymakers could maintain sufficient control over the project, Haig believed that it could be a real asset for the administration in that it could “provide a disciplined grassroots public information program which would serve to counter the undisciplined and frequently even conspiratorial information currently emanating from State ... and Defense.” Tellingly, Haig was not solely concerned with domestic attitudes and opponents, but in the ways such a grassroots support network could affect Kissinger’s influence in the White House and the White House’s influence in the national debate by “in effect, going to the people directly -- not through the bureaucracy, but despite the bureaucracy.” Given the influence such a group could attain, Haig argued that it was “a matter of the greatest urgency and importance not only to the country but to you personally” and argued that it was “essential that this movement which I suspect the

⁶⁸ “Al Haig to Henry Kissinger”, October 29, 1969, 1, VIETNAM: (General Files)-Sep 69 - Nov 69 [1 of 2 folders]; Box 74; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

President is quite ripe to accept be with you and not against you.” The White House would, indeed, pursue such a project the following year but meanwhile continued to rely on semi-autonomous outside organizations for its public opinion projects – particularly efforts to rally popular support for the president’s planned November 3 speech on Vietnam as well as to counter the planned November 15 antiwar protests, a continuation of the highly successful October Moratorium.⁶⁹

The Task Force on Middle America

Although many of the president’s potential supporters were unlikely to join an explicitly pro-war organization, aides were confident that they could find a way to mobilize the “unyoung, unpoor, unblack” voters alienated by the changes and upheavals of the 1960s and behind the success of candidates such as Barry Goldwater and George Wallace in the Southern states.⁷⁰ Despite the antipathy for New York Mayor John V.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2. emphasis in the original. For White House efforts to create such an organization, see Chapter Three.

⁷⁰ This specific phrase comes from an August 24, 1970 memorandum in which Patrick Buchanan reviewed *The Real Majority* (Richard M. Scammon and Ben J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* [New York: Coward-McCann, 1970]) for Nixon. The authors analyzed political orientation and demographics from 1963-1969 to identify this core population, which would likely be an important constituency in the 1972 Presidential election. *The Real Majority* outlined the ways in which the Democratic Party could best appeal to these voters and remove Nixon from the White House; Buchanan’s memorandum gave Nixon suggestions on how he and the Republican Party could best counter these efforts. “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon”, August 24, 1970, 4, Campaign of 1970; Box 6; PPF, NPLM, College Park, MD. Nixon’s efforts to appeal to the “Silent Majority” is a key element of this study while his rhetoric of a “New American Majority” in the 1972 election is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, and in much greater detail in Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). For analyses of the manipulation of white resentments for electoral gain amidst the backlash against the 1960s, particularly the Goldwater and Wallace campaigns, see Dan T Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Dan T Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the*

Lindsay's antiwar position, his August speech to a civil rights group was circulated through the White House as a "useful ... catalogue of populist issues."⁷¹ Addressing the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Lindsay described the concerns of the "quiet" and "mainstream" Americans as: declining income, education, health care costs, increasing taxes and unreliable government services, and crime.⁷² An October *Newsweek* article reached similar conclusions and Nixon directed his staff's attention to the author's argument that "if the Nixon party can develop meaningful lines of communication to these 'forgotten Americans', it may well be able to enlarge its share of middle American strength to build itself into a virtually unassailable position in the 1970s."⁷³ At Nixon's direction, White House staffers sought ways "program wise and image wise to appeal to this group"⁷⁴ of voters, many current or former Democrats, who seemed receptive to Nixon's arguments about the Vietnam War as well as domestic social and cultural issues.

One way to increase the president's appeal was to make him seem more moderate. Deputy Assistant to the President for Congressional Relations Lyn Nofziger suggested that "hawks should be urged to move to the right of the President so as to position him in the middle."⁷⁵ In this way, the right-wing received additional administration attention and

Unmaking of the American Consensus (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

⁷¹ "Len Garment to Jim Keogh, Ray Price, William Safire", October 6, 1969, [White House Memos]-October 1969; Box 1; WHCF: SMOF Garment, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷² John V. Lindsay, "Address at the Southern Christian Leadership Council", August 14, 1969, [White House Memos]-October 1969; Box 1; WHCF: SMOF Garment, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷³ "Ken Cole to Harry Dent", October 6, 1969, 1970 Middle America [1 of 2 folders]; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Dent, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Lyn Nofziger to Alex Butterfield", October 9, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

access – which conservative advisor and speechwriter Pat Buchanan had consistently advocated for throughout Nixon’s presidency – with the added bonus of moving Nixon closer to the center without an attendant change in policy or position. At the same time, White House staffers had already started to consider how best to respond to the president’s request regarding the “forgotten Americans.” The “in-house task force on how to reach Middle America”⁷⁶ had its first meeting during the Moratorium protests on October 15 and Nixon enthusiastically supported their efforts.

By limiting membership to the more conservative members of the White House staff – including speechwriter Pat Buchanan, Nofziger, and Special Counsel Harry Dent – they hoped to ensure “candid discussions and to keep the group secret.”⁷⁷ For task force members, the president was “emerging as the defender of the good old values of patriotism, hard work, morality and respect for law and order.”⁷⁸ Identifying these values more closely with both Nixon, as president, and with his administration more generally became an important goal for both the task force as well as the rest of the White House staff. This project became even more central to White House public opinion efforts as it became progressively clear that the “middle class appears willing to shift its loyalties to the party or individuals who will defend these values while seeking to solve the Nation’s serious social problems”⁷⁹ regardless of official party membership. The task force

⁷⁶ “Harry Dent to Richard Nixon”, October 13, 1969, 1, President’s Handwriting, October 1 thru 15, 1969; Box 3; POF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁷ “Harry Dent to Richard Nixon”, October 16, 1969, 1, President’s Handwriting, October 16 thru 31, 1969; Box 3; POF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

therefore concluded that linking the president to a vigorous “defense of these values should be specific and overt, drawing justification from the president’s instinctive understanding of the American heritage and his concerted attempt to respond to the wishes of those who ultimately control the Nation – the decent law-abiding, forgotten Americans.”⁸⁰

Furthermore, repackaging an existing constituency as the only true “Americans” in the country gave the Nixon White House a way to isolate their critics and limit the appeal of antiwar arguments. For, despite the peaceful and broad-based Moratorium protests happening even as the Task Force for Middle America drafted the above recommendations, dislike of the antiwar movement was still more powerful than dislike of the war itself leading Melvin Small to observe: “although most Americans were unhappy about the war, they were even more unhappy with what they perceived to be an unruly and revolutionary antiwar movement.” Small suggests that many undecided citizens may well have considered the administration’s patriotic rhetoric, looked at the unruly antiwar protests, and concluded: “If those are the sort of people who oppose Nixon, then we must be on his side.”⁸¹ The ambiguities of the 1960s had created a situation where, as the actor Charles David Forrest wrote to Haldeman: “between the left and the right is the enormous majority of voters who dont [*sic*] know what the devil to

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 69, 70. Small is certainly not the only scholar to make this point, see, e.g.: DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 264; David R Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 167–68; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 45–47; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 161, 188.

think.”⁸² Bombarded by arguments and critiques from both the left and the right, these “Middle Americans” seemed desperate for clarity. Therefore, aides worked to ensure that “we – the Administration – ... become a part of and spokesman for Middle America.”⁸³

Additionally, staffers concluded that as public protests continued to challenge existing norms and hierarchies, they would further alienate Middle Americans and therefore, to ensure their support, all the Nixon administration had to do was to be seen opposing such upheaval.⁸⁴ In this view of domestic public opinion, the details of specific policies did not matter so much as the image those policies created.⁸⁵ Burnishing Nixon’s Middle American bona fides was perhaps easiest with the Vietnam War as most of the protests explicitly challenged his decisions, policies, and authority. With the antiwar movement directly attacking the president, he and his administration did not have to argue the merits of US involvement in Vietnam. They could simply point out that their opponents were undermining the president’s ability to make policy while at the same time breaking laws and creating disorder. The alliance between the president and Middle America could grow from there as Deputy Assistant to the President for Communications Lyn Nofziger recognized that such a citizen “votes against probably more than he votes

⁸² “Charles Forrest to H.R. Haldeman”, October 23, 1969, Letters - Haldeman (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸³ “Lyn Nofziger to Harry Dent”, October 27, 1969, 1, HSD 1970 Middle America [1 of 2]; Box 5; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁸⁴ “Middle America is basically for a stable society under which things gradually get better. He is against whatever threatens that society and that trend. And he votes against it, whether it be the left or the right.” Ibid., 1–2.

⁸⁵ David Greenberg provides a useful overview of the increasing importance of appearances and image in US politics in his introduction concluding that “Nixon’s vehement disavowals of image making were a classic case of protesting too much.” David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), xxvii, xv–xxvii.

for.”⁸⁶ As the variety of administration efforts to influence public views of the president and his policies started to show results – albeit sometimes inconsistent and hard-to-track results – aides continued to “think of new ideas -- gimmicks -- ways to put across to the American public what we are trying to sell.”⁸⁷

Even as political staffers searched for ways to repackage the administration, policy advisors such as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs Marshall Green did not “think that there are any bright ideas or gimmicks”⁸⁸ that would solve the public opinion challenges facing the administration. Rather, he believed strongly that future US policy in Vietnam depended on the President’s ability to “explain our position forthrightly to the American people as only the President can do in his persuasive, articulate way.”⁸⁹ Green felt that the president should not attempt to rationalize or justify American intervention in Vietnam, but should instead seek to demonstrate meaningful progress toward peace. Such progress, Green felt, would get “Americans to put pressure on Hanoi rather than on Washington.”⁹⁰ While not a member of the administration, one of Kissinger’s Harvard colleagues, Zbigniew Brzezinski, had similar hopes that an upcoming speech on Vietnam, scheduled for November 3, would calm domestic protests. Writing to Kissinger, Brzezinski argued that in his speech, Nixon could choose to “either

⁸⁶ “Lyn Nofziger to Harry Dent,” 2.

⁸⁷ “Alex Butterfield to Jeb Magruder [1]”, October 17, 1969, 5, Memos/Alex Butterfield (October 1969); Box 53; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁸ “Marshall Green to Henry Kissinger”, October 21, 1969, 1, VIETNAM: (General Files)-Sep 69 - Nov 69 [1 of 2 folders]; Box 74; NSC, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2.

reunite the nation, or at least reduce the division in it, or intensify the developing polarization and eventually even undermine our commitment in Vietnam”⁹¹ closing with his hope that Nixon would choose unity.

The President’s “Crusade for Peace”

But rather than “promote national reconciliation,”⁹² as Brzezinski hoped, Nixon’s speech, initially scheduled to announce an escalation in US military activity in Vietnam, was instead intended to rally supporters and cast the antiwar movement as un-American. Hardly a new political strategy for an established Cold Warrior such as Nixon, framing political opponents as unpatriotic would become an important part of his administration’s efforts to influence domestic public opinion. While such tactics were not new to the Cold War either, that era – particularly Nixon’s dogged pursuit of Alger Hiss – was a formative period in Nixon’s political career and undoubtedly influenced his subsequent administration.⁹³ Building on this experience as well as his reading of the national political mood, Nixon recognized that by linking support for his policies with “traditional American values,” he could effectively “rally the honest Americans and discredit the bad

⁹¹ “Zbigniew Brzezinski to Henry Kissinger”, October 23, 1969, VIETNAM: (General Files)-Sep 69 - Nov 69 [1 of 2 folders]; Box 74; NSC, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ This tactic, framing dissent as un-American and using that critique to silence opposition is examined more thoroughly in Chapter Three. Nixon repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Alger Hiss case in his political development and discussed it in detail in his memoirs; Richard M Nixon, *Six Crises* (London: W.H. Allen, 1962); Nixon, *RN*, 47–48, 52–71; Richard M Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York, N.Y: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 190–92. There is a vast literature on McCarthyism and this scholarship helps to contextualize Nixon’s own use of brand of anticommunism. See, e.g., Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970); Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2003); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1998).

ones.”⁹⁴ In fact, the White House submitted questions to be included on a post-speech Gallup survey explicitly intended “to ‘validate what the President said’ and to ‘isolate the Vietnam protestors.’”⁹⁵

At the same time, Nixon’s staff was “trying to find something constructive for the silent Americans to do ... promoting the idea of patriotism and support of the Administration.”⁹⁶ Although not involved in drafting the speech as Nixon, “treating [it] with the seriousness of an Inaugural or an acceptance address, d[id] it all himself,”⁹⁷ speechwriter William Safire sent Haldeman a long memorandum detailing his thoughts about how best to promote the speech. Endorsing the plan as a whole, Safire quibbled with the details arguing that White House efforts – and the speech itself – “need[ed] a central theme or spark to change it from a series of mechanical reactions into a movement.” As Safire understood the situation: “We have to provide our own outlet for

⁹⁴ Wells, *The War Within*, 382.

⁹⁵ Former Deputy Assistant to the President Dwight Chapin quoted in Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, “Presidential Manipulation of Polls and Public Opinion: The Nixon Administration and the Pollsters,” *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (1995): 527.

⁹⁶ “Harry Dent to Richard Nixon”, October 21, 1969, 2, President’s Handwriting, October 16 thru 31, 1969; Box 3; POF, NPLM, College Park, MD. Even as historians recognize the White House role in ensuring a positive popular response to the president’s speech, this observation is rarely analyzed or examined in any depth. With the exception of Wells, most historical studies of Nixon’s administration and his Vietnam policies only briefly discuss the speech (including White House preparation and promotion) in the context of administration responses to the October Moratorium protests, Agnew’s attacks on the press, and the November Mobilization protests. This brevity is likely a result of limited sources as neither Nixon’s memoirs nor Haldeman’s diary discuss White House efforts in detail and many of the White House files were unavailable to historians until recently. See, e.g., Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 98–108; Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 268–76; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 173–75; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 103–105; Nixon, *RN*, 401, 403–04, 407–13; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 432–39; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 171–180; Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 93; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 187–90; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 163, 191; Wells, *The War Within*, 380–88.

⁹⁷ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 172.

the impatient, our own dream for the idealistic.” To his mind, such a project required more than informing the population or clarifying policy.

Instead, he suggested that the administration should use the November 3 speech to spark a movement he called “The President’s Peace Crusade,” recognizing that the very things that would guarantee that a professional public relations firm would not give his suggestion a second glance would make it effective: “Cornball? You bet. Reminiscent of Eisenhower campaigns? Obviously. But it will give the ‘impatient middle’ something to join, ... something other than [antiwar groups like] the moratorium crowd.” Safire’s point about giving the “impatient middle” a cause became an important aspect of administration efforts. Pre-speech planning focused on both prompting public statements of support from local and national leaders as well as on giving sympathetic citizens venues in which to actively respond to the speech.⁹⁸ Safire argued that giving supporters a role in domestic politics would be more energizing than any speech or policy announcement. Their active involvement in the “crusade” Safire envisioned would create political space for the administration to pursue those policies. First, though, these as yet passive individuals needed to be mobilized and, more importantly, they needed something to *join*.

Once organized into a national movement such as implicitly described by Casey in his October 27 letter to Nixon, these supporters would presumably overwhelm and ultimately eradicate the antiwar movement. Suggesting that many people had joined the antiwar movement out of frustration with inactivity rather than a true allegiance to the

⁹⁸ “William Safire to H.R. Haldeman”, October 22, 1969, 1, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

movement's goals, Safire planned for the administration to "give ordinary people who need to expend energy on 'helping to end the war' something to be for." Next, Safire urged that the White House "give these ordinary people who now have something specific to be for something to do." The public relations expert knew that Nixon's supporters, like his opponents, were frustrated with the situation in Vietnam and he hoped that giving them an active role would serve as "both an outlet for their impatience and an effective lever on world opinion and maybe even Hanoi." To Safire's mind, conformity in US domestic opinion was unnecessary; showing "how the American people are united behind the President on something about peace" would be enough.⁹⁹

Safire argued that the administration should therefore offer a wide variety of options for expressing pro-Nixon views including joining pro-administration organizations, signing petitions, organizing or participating in rallies, marching in parades, and even picketing the UN or Communist embassies "with signs calling for help in making the peace crusade a success."¹⁰⁰ Repetition or overlap in these efforts did not trouble him as "this is not our types against their types; this is the amalgam of the responsables [*sic*] with all those now attracted by the moratorium activity but not sold on bug-out as the answer."¹⁰¹ Essentially, the November 3 speech would be part of a larger effort to "inspire open evidence of American unity and support for the President's peace

⁹⁹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2. emphasis in the original

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 3.

plan”¹⁰² and preparation for the speech ultimately encompassed longer-term planning on the larger question of public opinion about the Vietnam War. To this end, the speech was intended to make it abundantly clear that the president both had concrete plans for Vietnam and that the country should be patient and give these policies a chance to succeed. Immediate post-speech follow-up would explicitly link Nixon, the office of the president, and his policies with an idealized, carefully-constructed version of national traditions.

Patriotism and Unity in Support of the President

Coordinating the White House effort to make backing the president’s Vietnam policies an expression of patriotism, political strategist and Special White House counsel Harry Dent would be responsible for a “revival of the ‘World War II’ type display of patriotism.”¹⁰³ By explicitly endorsing earlier expressions of war-time patriotism, the president and his staff were implicitly attempting to marginalize the patriotism embraced by some members of the antiwar movement. The construction of patriotism described in Woden Teachout’s history of the U.S. flag offers a useful way to distinguish between the patriotism of dissenters and the patriotism promoted by the Nixon administration. Arguing that opposition movement and critical citizens represent the ‘humanitarian’ strain of American patriotism, Teachout contrasts a patriotism which celebrates national

¹⁰² “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman”, October 24, 1969, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰³ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam - Game Plan in Four Phases”, n.d., 1–2, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

ideals with a “nationalist” patriotism which prioritizes loyalty to the nation, and therefore the Government. The domestic debates over the Vietnam War exacerbated underlying tensions between these two strains of patriotism and the decision of many humanitarian patriots to join the peace movement facilitated White House efforts to present their version of nationalist patriotism, one emphasizing support for the president and opposition to his critics.¹⁰⁴ To this end, Nixon’s November 3 speech would build upon Safire’s suggestion and hopefully be the “launching pad” for a great patriotic movement promoting Nixon and his policies, “a grand rally by the great (heretofore silent) majority

¹⁰⁴ Woden Teachout provides a thorough discussion of her conception of these two types of patriotism in Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 4–9, 229–30, 232–33. Scholarly studies of American patriotism have tended to focus on the Revolutionary and New Republic periods, with sometimes a brief discussion of the 1976 Bicentennial, but more recent works by Richard M. Fried, Robert Justin Goldstein, Teachout, Arnaldo Testi analyze and contextualize debates over patriotism and the flag throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, paying particular attention to the Cold War and the Vietnam War periods. Administration efforts to manipulate and control the rhetoric and symbols of patriotism, which has yet to be examined in any great detail, will be discussed further in Chapters Three and Four. Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991); John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Robert Justin Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory: The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Michael G Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1972); Michael G Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); Matthew A McNiece, “‘Un-Americans’ and ‘anti-Communists’: The Rhetorical Battle to Define Twentieth-Century America” (Ph.D., Addran College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Texas Christian University, 2008); Cecilia Elizabeth O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Robin Deich Ottoson, “The Battle Over the Flag: Protest, Community Opposition, and Silence in the Mennonite Colleges in Kansas During the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 4 (Autumn 2010): 686–711; Teachout, *Capture the Flag*; Arnaldo Testi, *Capture the Flag: The Stars and Stripes in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Len Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

of Americans to the support of the President and his plan for peace ... a visible demonstration of American unity.”¹⁰⁵

Such a campaign required significant advance planning to ensure that there were enough “U.S. Flag lapel buttons and red, white, and blue bumper stickers featuring whatever slogan is agreed upon re the theme ‘We Support the President’s Plan for Peace,’” for distribution to cooperative organizations, individuals, and at “service stations nationwide.”¹⁰⁶ In this way, the flag, a symbol of both the nation itself as well as individual patriotism, would become a marker of support for Nixon – thereby linking the man and his office with broader national loyalties. Administration officials did not attempt to tie these patriotic activities with support for specific policies or the Vietnam War, but planned instead for surrogates at the local, state, and national levels to inform the “nation that those supporting the President should display automobile lights during daylight hours, wear lapel buttons, and fly the American flag daily from November 4 through November 16.”¹⁰⁷

Kept informed of these plans, the president wrote to his Chief of Staff in late October “to be sure that some of the following thoughts are implemented in that

¹⁰⁵ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam, Master Copy”, n.d., 13, Silent Majority; Box 1; WHCF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8–9. Such symbols would become increasingly important in White House efforts to more closely link nationalist patriotism and the Nixon administration, see Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁰⁷ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam - Game Plan in Four Phases,” 6. For specific discussion of the flag and its relationship to American patriotism, see Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*; Robert Justin Goldstein, *Desecrating the American Flag: Key Documents of the Controversy from the Civil War to 1995* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Teachout, *Capture the Flag*; Testi, *Capture the Flag*.

program.”¹⁰⁸ Nixon was most concerned that his staff monitor network and print coverage of his speech and that they get “favorable comments from Governors, Senators, Congressmen, leading editors, etc. This is of vital importance.”¹⁰⁹ Dent coordinated administration efforts to convey to state Governors, regardless of party affiliation, the importance of their efforts in “rallying statewide support for the President’s Vietnam position as announced on November 3rd.”¹¹⁰ The bipartisan nature of this response would be crucial in establishing the speech as a foundation for a nation-wide pro-administration effort. If the only officials to speak out were Republicans, the speech risked being tied to partisan, rather than national, goals. Staffers therefore strove to ensure that “every GOP State Chairman ... understands that the rallying of support for the President immediately following his speech is to be wholly non-partisan and that the more help and participation they can get from the Democratic side the better.”¹¹¹

The president also suggested that his staff “see if we can get two or three leaders in the House and the same number in the Senate to try to circulate a petition or letter to me the day after the speech pledging support.” Such a letter, especially if signed by “250 Congressmen in the event they are willing to do so and by 50 or so Senators”¹¹² would be a way to accomplish a similar public endorsement as a Congressional resolution but

¹⁰⁸ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman”, October 26, 1969, P Memos 1969; Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam, Master Copy,” 12. Emphasis in the original

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman.”

without the legislative process and potentially acrimonious debates which could minimize the impact of such a statement.¹¹³ Agreeing that “this single action would go far toward serving as proof positive, to the nation and the world, that the American people are united behind their President,”¹¹⁴ White House aides laid the groundwork for cooperative Senators and Representatives to circulate such a letter immediately following the president’s speech.

Gameplanning the Response

Complementing this Congressional effort, Casey and other members of the Citizens Committee for Peace with Security (CCPS) were, in late October, “already at work preparing for November.”¹¹⁵ Antiwar activists had already announced that the October Moratorium protests would be followed by a larger protest – co-sponsored by the Moratorium organizers and the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (Mobe) – in November and so, by late October, the White House and Nixon’s outside supporters were actively planning how best to counter and undermine it.¹¹⁶ CCPS leaders worked to expand its reach, contacting former members as well as sympathetic Democrats, as “the old Committee was accused of being too heavily Republican.”¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁴ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam, Master Copy,” 3–4.

¹¹⁵ “Charles West to Alex Butterfield,” 3.

¹¹⁶ Wells, *The War Within*, 331–34. Scholarly accounts of administration planning for the November protests echo Nixon’s emphasis on Agnew’s attacks on the media as a way to limit favorable coverage. Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 175; Nixon, *RN*, 412–13; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 439–40; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 190; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 94–95.

¹¹⁷ “Charles West to Alex Butterfield,” 3.

White House officials also encouraged the president's allies to coordinate their efforts – with clear, but covert, administration control. New York supporters therefore met on October 27, 1969 – at the administration's suggestion – to “organize an informal ‘united front’ to carry on activities to support the President in his Vietnam program.”¹¹⁸ As some of these individuals had ties to Democratic presidents, their coordinated support would bolster Nixon's claims to represent majority, rather than Republican, opinion. Further seeking to expand the domestic response to the speech, aides solicited the involvement of labor and veterans organizations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, think tanks and citizens groups, the Boy and Girl Scouts of America, sororities and fraternities, student organizations and leaders, astronauts, athletes and other celebrities.¹¹⁹ White House staffers and outside partners would facilitate local preparations “for demonstrating immediate post-address support via newspaper advertisements; speeches by officials, national commanders, etc; community rallies; resolutions; etc.”¹²⁰

To ensure that its many allies stayed on message, the administration planned to establish covert oversight by recruiting local organizers who would have access to a “very limited use communication link between the W[hite] H[ouse] and the director of

¹¹⁸ “New York Organization of Private Groups”, n.d., [Briefing Memo to the President]; Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Members of the American Friends of Vietnam coordinated the meeting which was attended by representatives of the Citizens Committee for Peace with Security, Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, Student Coordinating Committee for Freedom in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and the Freedom Leadership Foundation

¹¹⁹ “Game Plan for the President's November 3rd Speech on Vietnam - Game Plan in Four Phases,” 2. “Game Plan, with notes”, n.d., 10, Notes of President's November 3, 1969 Speech; Box 79; NSC, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁰ “Game Plan for the President's November 3rd Speech on Vietnam - Game Plan in Four Phases,” 2.

the central coordinating office.”¹²¹ A central element of these follow-up efforts would be a near-constant flow of letters and telegrams from supportive citizens to the president. Nixon’s staff had already established a “‘wires and letters to the editors’ apparatus,” the so-called “Nixon Network,” and administration plans called for Special Assistant to the President Jeb Magruder to inform its members of the “support-the-President effort scheduled to begin November 4th and run through the subsequent 12-day period”¹²² and to ensure that participants were fully informed of the preferred messages and themes. The resulting supportive letters and telegrams would be a striking visual indication of domestic support for the president’s policies and White House planning emphasized these mail campaigns. Appointment secretary Dwight Chapin suggested to Butterfield that the telegraph company Western Union run ads following the president’s speech encouraging individual telegrams to the president, Senators, and Representatives as a “public service campaign.”¹²³ Although intended primarily to benefit the president, aides expected that Western Union “certainly should be amenable (profit, advertising, public service, etc.).”¹²⁴

Confident that these efforts would be successful, late-October plans included “barrage of wires and letters to the President received at the White House”¹²⁵ in the list of

¹²¹ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam, Master Copy,” 2.

¹²² Ibid., 4. For the “Nixon network,” see Small, “Containing Domestic Enemies,” 133–34; Wells, *The War Within*, 350.

¹²³ “Dwight Chapin to Alex Butterfield”, October 22, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁴ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam, Master Copy,” 9.

¹²⁵ “‘Resume’ of the November 3rd Speech Game Plan”, n.d., 1, Silent Majority; Box 1; WHCF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

results and responsibilities for the first forty-eight hours after the speech¹²⁶ and expected that “wires and letters to the editors [would] begin to flow in quantity (November 4-16).”¹²⁷ Furthermore, White House game plans directed Butterfield to “set up a schedule or plan for how we might get continual follow-up stories out to the press telling of the ‘fantastic loads of mail’ pouring into the WH every hour ... ‘all letters and wires enthusiastically supporting the President’...etc.”¹²⁸ This response was central to administration planning as it would demonstrate a broad, popular endorsement of Nixon and his policies. To better ensure that support activities unequivocally invoked the speech, administration planners worked to ensure that their outside allies used a similar slogans “giv[ing] loud and clear evidence of solid backing of the President on Vietnam ... something like ‘We Support the President’, but perhaps catchier, with a little more dash.”¹²⁹ Safire suggested inclusion of the words “peace crusade” in the president’s speech¹³⁰ so the White House could “characterize the November 3 speech as the ‘Peace Crusade speech’ and not as the ‘November 3 speech’ which would be as useless a label as the ‘May 14 speech.’”¹³¹ From his public relations experience, Safire recognized that the speech needed a “selling title”¹³² to be truly effective. If government officials referred to

¹²⁶ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam, Master Copy,” 15.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁹ “Game Plan for the President’s November 3rd Speech on Vietnam - Game Plan in Four Phases,” 3.

¹³⁰ “William Safire to H.R. Haldeman,” 1.

¹³¹ Ibid., 1–2.

¹³² Ibid., 2.

‘the President’s Peace Crusade Speech,’”¹³³ the media and then the rest of the country would follow suit.

This unified message would enable the administration to explicitly appeal to the speech’s target audience which Safire identified as “those millions of men and women and young people who work in our factories and on our farms and on the police forces and fire departments -- the solid, working foundation of our national life.”¹³⁴ Claiming that “the ringing endorsement of the AFL-CIO union is proof that the overwhelming majority of working people are proud of this country; they don’t think this war is immoral, they don’t think that the United States of America is the world’s greatest imperial aggressor nation,”¹³⁵ the speechwriter felt that a direct appeal by the president would turn these people into loyal supporters. Similarly, Safire recommended that Nixon use the antiwar protests as a way to celebrate the traditional liberties of American society: “we see protestors freely marching in America, because that is the kind of country we are; we see no protestors marching in Hanoi, because that is the kind of country they are.”¹³⁶ By using the vocal opposition movement as proof of the strength of US ideals, Safire hoped to make support for the president and his policies the default option for the majority of patriotic citizens.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ “William Safire to Jim Keogh”, October 21, 1969, Items to Discuss with the President 8/13/69 - 12/30/69; Box 334; NSC: Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “William Safire to Richard Nixon”, October 29, 1969, 3, Items to Discuss with the President 8/13/69 - 12/30/69; Box 334; NSC: Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD. The speech ultimately included “one of the strengths of our free society is that any American has a right to reach that conclusion and to advocate that point of view”

Earlier administration efforts had identified “Middle America” as a potential source of meaningful support and Nixon attempted to appeal directly to this population in his speech. To this end, Safire emphasized that the president’s message “needs to be simple and reasonable and something everyone can understand”¹³⁷ – a point Nixon had already emphasized in an earlier memorandum to Kissinger in which he reminded his National Security Advisor that “to say that our departure would inevitably invite ‘cruel retribution’ means nothing to three-fourths of the American people, who haven’t the slightest idea what retribution means.”¹³⁸ The president’s comment points to an underlying tension within White House efforts to mobilize pro-Nixon and pro-Vietnam sentiments: even as Nixon positioned himself to be the leader and representative of Middle America, he had minimal respect for the very people he claimed were most American.

Conclusion

Consequently, even as Nixon struggled to draft a speech that would quiet domestic dissent and energize his supporters, he doubted whether it would succeed. Regardless, Nixon was determined not to cave to the antiwar movement telling Kissinger: “I don’t know if the country can be led here – but we’ve got to try.”¹³⁹ The first year of his administration had been a series of attempts to rally support for continued U.S.

¹³⁷ “William Safire to H.R. Haldeman,” 2.

¹³⁸ “Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger”, October 21, 1969, President Nixon Memoranda (February 1969); Box 228; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁹ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 174.

involvement in Vietnam via troop withdrawals, Vietnamization, rallying supporters in opposition to the antiwar movement but the president in November 1969 faced a far more organized and motivated antiwar movement than he had in January of that year. White House efforts to counter the Moratorium protests did mobilize some supporters, but were insufficient to truly counterbalance the antiwar effort. Outside allies and White House officials therefore recognized that a more coordinated effort would be required to locate and organize potential supporters.

The national organization envisioned by William Casey as well as the nascent Middle American constituency identified by the White House Task Force formed the foundation of this effort. Administration aides therefore planned a detailed campaign to promote Nixon's November 3 speech and to secure a meaningful popular response. The speech itself did not offer any new policies for the US war in Vietnam, but it did give the population an alternative vision to the antiwar movement. And yet, even as Nixon prepared to ask the "great silent majority of [his] fellow Americans" to support his Vietnam policies and as his aides created detailed game-plans for ensuring an enthusiastic support, no one in the Nixon White House expected that the phrase "Silent Majority" would form the basis of the movement they hoped to inspire. In fact, initial plans chose Safire's "The President's Crusade for Peace"¹⁴⁰ as the theme for their response efforts with early follow-up projects promoting this theme through November 6.¹⁴¹ However, by

¹⁴⁰ "Dick Garbett to Alex Butterfield", October 27, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁴¹ "H.R. Haldeman to William Safire, Lyn Nofziger, Jeb Magruder, Dwight Chapin, Ron Zeigler, Herb Klein, Harry Dent, Kenneth Cole, Alex Butterfield, Margita White, John R. Brown, Charles Colson, Connie Stuart, Jim Keogh", November 6, 1969, 6, Memos/Jeb Magruder (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

late November Haldeman informed the staff that all support programs, “as a general rule, ... should be tied to the ‘Silent Majority’ over and over.”¹⁴² First, though, the president would have to give his speech and mobilize the Silent Majority.

¹⁴² “H.R. Haldeman to Jeb Magruder [2]”, November 21, 1969, Memos/Jeb Magruder (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

CHAPTER 3

“MARCHING TO THE SAME DRUM BEAT”: COORDINATING THE SILENT MAJORITY

After twelve drafts, countless revisions, and suggestions from throughout the White House, Nixon spoke to the nation on November 3, 1969. He traced the evolution of US involvement in Vietnam and attempted to convince his listeners that defeat would be a disaster for South Vietnam, the United States and the world. Hoping most of all to buy time for his Vietnamization policy, Nixon later claimed that he intended his speech to “appeal directly to the American people for unity.”¹ Nixon, of course, was neither the first nor the last president to bypass the journalists and other media gatekeepers and attempt to personally rally the American people behind his policies. All presidents have, to varying degrees, sought to rally domestic support for their policies since an unsympathetic electorate can quickly undermine even the strongest presidency.² Where Nixon deviates from this norm is the extent and secrecy of his efforts to mobilize the country in support of his Vietnam policies. While perhaps not technically illegal,

¹ Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 114.

² The contributors to *Selling War in a Media Age* –Geroge C. Herring, Emily S. Rosenberg, Mark A. Stoler, Robert D. Schulzinger, Marilyn B. Young, Kenneth Osgood, Chester Pach, Paul S. Boyer, Lloyd Gardner, and Robert J. McMahon – analyze presidential efforts to influence public opinion from William McKinley to George W. Bush and Andrew L. Johns provides a useful overview of earlier presidential public opinion efforts in his introduction. These analyses provide useful context for this examination of Nixon’s efforts to mobilize domestic support, but do not directly engage Nixon’s attempts to “sell” the Vietnam War to the American public. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank, eds., *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

presenting the results of detailed White House planning as a spontaneous popular endorsement of Vietnamization and the president was certainly unethical. And, as this and subsequent chapters will show, manipulating the response to a speech was a relatively mild form of White House intervention in public opinion as compared to attempting to create – and fund – a false grassroots, or astroturf, outside support organization. Even so, no amount of White House planning could secure success without a popular embrace of the ideas, arguments, and patriotism at the core of Nixon's speech.

Thus, if those citizens yet to take a side in the domestic debates over Vietnam had not seen themselves in his appeal to nationalistic patriotism, had not shared his interpretation of national duty and obligation, the speech would have been simply another presidential effort to mobilize support and quiet the opposition. Instead, letters, telegrams, and phone calls poured into the White House; local and national groups organized flag drenched pro-Vietnam, pro-president rallies to counter the growing strength of the antiwar movement. However, not all of these events grew out of administration planning and this chapter will trace White House efforts to coordinate and control these grassroots supporters. Working to create a national organization to unite the proliferating pro-Nixon groups and projects, aides hoped to solidify ties between the president and his backers. Despite frustrations with overly-independent allies such as the Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot, White House officials effectively used the popular resonance of the Silent Majority idea to unite disparate groups and individuals while reframing the questions of Vietnam into ones of patriotism and support for the president rather than substantive policy details.

“The Great Silent Majority:” Nixon’s Speech
and the Immediate Response

On November 3, 1969, therefore, Nixon reviewed the history of US involvement in the conflict and explained the efforts he had taken to end the war. He asked his audience of eighty million Americans to put aside discussions of the rightness or wrongness of American involvement in Vietnam to instead work together to find an answer to the “question facing us today [which] is now that we are in the war, what is the best way to end it?”³ Throughout the speech, the president framed the choice in Vietnam as between either a rapid withdrawal without “regard to the effects of that action” or a “just peace” via negotiations and Vietnamization.⁴ By presenting the options as such a stark either-or proposition, Nixon hoped to obscure the fact that his Vietnamization policy was essentially a slow, irregular withdrawal and therefore not a dramatically different solution than the one proposed by the war’s opponents. Even so, and although historians continue to debate whether or not the policy achieved Nixon’s promised “peace with honor,” in November 1969 it enabled the president to use his speech, as a staffer had advised in mid-October, to “seize the day and break the back of the sell-out movement.”⁵ Nixon, narrowly defining his options as either loyalty to an ally or immediate, selfish

³ Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 75; Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam”, November 3, 1969, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2303>.

⁴ Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam.”

⁵ Bill Gavin to H.R. Haldeman, quoted in: Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 380. For a discussion over the conflicting scholarly interpretations of Vietnamization, see Chapter Two.

withdrawal, isolated his opponents without addressing their substantive criticisms of the war.

Referring to both sides of the domestic debate over Vietnam, Nixon continued: “honest and patriotic Americans have reached different conclusions as to how peace should be achieved.” But this conciliatory tone soon hardened and Nixon ended his speech with a request that the “great silent majority of my fellow Americans” support his Vietnam policies. Highlighting the connections between popular opinion and peace in Vietnam, Nixon argued that the “more divided we are at home, the less likely the enemy is to negotiate at Paris.” Blaming North Vietnamese intransigence for undermining the peace process, Nixon emphasized American innocence, good intentions, and patriotism while asking the nation to unite around his policies. Although he reminded his listeners that “North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that,” Nixon was careful to end on a hopeful note. Recognizing “it may not be fashionable to speak of patriotism or national destiny these days,” the president ended his speech with a celebration of a traditionally victorious, moral, and idealized vision of the United States.⁶ Nixon would later remember the speech as the “most effective of my presidency,” an assessment which remains unchallenged even as scholars gradually expose the significant role of White House efforts, both before and after November 3, in securing the public response underlying the speech’s success.⁷

⁶ Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam.”

⁷ Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 115. While historical studies of Nixon’s administration and the Vietnam War recognize the importance of the “Silent Majority” speech in turning the tide of domestic public opinion in Nixon’s favor (see Chapter Two, note 96), the intersection between public opinion and the presidency – and specifically the role of speeches in mediating the relationship between the president and the American people – is still primarily a focus of political scientists and rhetoric scholars rather than

Administration planning, intended to ensure a very public popular endorsement of the president's policies which would, aides hoped, lessen the impact of the October Moratorium and the upcoming November protests resulted in what Haldeman described as "a long night of phone calls," following the president's speech.⁸ Ostensibly requesting individual assessments of the president's performance, these phone calls were also a way to nudge prominent and influential individuals to publicly embrace the president's position. And as aides solicited these outside endorsements, the letter and telegram campaigns planned since late October began to show immediate results. Even though administration officials had spent the past weeks ensuring a "barrage of wires and letters," Nixon recalled: "it was one thing to make a rhetorical appeal to the Silent Majority – it was another to actually hear from them."⁹ Not only did a Gallup poll

historians. While useful in explaining the processes of political communication, these works tend to focus on either quantitative analysis of public opinion data or the mechanics of the speech itself rather than the role of the administration in influencing these results with a few notable exceptions such as: Andrew Z. Katz, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Nixon Administration and the Pursuit of Peace with Honor in Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1997): 496–513; Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "Presidential Manipulation of Polls and Public Opinion: The Nixon Administration and the Pollsters," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 4 (1995): 519–538; Lawrence R. Jacobs and Robert Y. Shapiro, "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1995): 163–195; Lawrence R. Jacobs and Melanie Burns, "The Second Face of the Public Presidency: Presidential Polling and the Shift from Policy to Personality Polling," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2004): 536–556; John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York, Wiley, 1973).

⁸ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1994), 103.

⁹ "'Resume' of the November 3rd Speech Game Plan", n.d., 2, Silent Majority; Box 1; WHCF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD; Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), 410. Although understudied by historians, this question of public response to presidential rhetoric is at the root of debates among political scientists over the nature of the relationship between the president and the public. Producing a wealth of analysis and discussion about the ways that information moves between the White House and the electorate, political scientists continue to disagree about the effectiveness of presidential rhetoric at shifting domestic public opinion. Richard Neustadt's 1960 claim that "the power of the president is the power to persuade" and George Edwards' 2003 argument that rhetoric is an ineffective means by which to influence public opinion are the two extremes of the debate and while this dissertation does not analyze public opinion data, the active involvement of White House officials in both planning to promote and then promoting the speech – as well

immediately following the speech report that 77 percent of respondents approved of Nixon's Vietnam policies, compared to 58 percent shortly before the speech, but the White House received 126,555 letters and telegrams, while other Administration offices received an additional 55,945 pieces of mail in favor of the President's position over the following month.¹⁰ Based on these results, Butterfield estimated that the "grand total of known supporters to date [was] 208,886" as of November 18.¹¹

as subsequent efforts to further manipulate public opinion as discussed in Chapters Four through Seven – suggests that, in this case at least, Nixon's staff shared Edwards' views about the effectiveness of presidential rhetoric. George C Edwards, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Richard E Neustadt, *Presidential Power, the Politics of Leadership* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

¹⁰ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1999), 169; "William Hopkins to Larry Higby", December 4, 1969, Mail Tallies From Melencamp; Box 129; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹ "Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman", November 18, 1969, 2, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. While, in this instance, Butterfield used the letters and telegrams (and petitions) to simply calculate a "grand total of known supporters," White House officials certainly intended to use that total – as well as the powerful visual image of the Oval Office full of piles and bags of letters and telegrams – to influence public perceptions of domestic support for the president and his Vietnam policies. Their success in turn enabled them to, as Brandon Rottinghaus notes, "mischaracterize certain segments of the American public." Brandon Rottinghaus, "Opening the President's Mailbag: The Nixon Administration's Rhetorical Use of Public Opinion Mail," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (March 1, 2008): 61–77. Additional work by Rottinghaus further explores the political utility of presidential mail including "'Dear Mr. President': The Institutionalization and Politicization of Public Opinion Mail in the White House," *Political Science Quarterly* 121, no. 3 (October 1, 2006): 451–476; "Following the 'Mail Hawks': Alternative Measures of Public Opinion on Vietnam in the Johnson White House," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (September 21, 2007): 367–391; "What Predicts Trends in the White House Mail? The Macro Causes of Mass Political Letter Writing to the Chief Executive," *American Politics Research* (September 13, 2011).

Organizing the Silent Majority: From H. Ross
Perot to the Grassroots

Many of these responses were inspired by advertisements sponsored by the “‘Tell it to Hanoi’ boys”¹² and a promising new ally, “super-rich Dallas businessman,” H. Ross Perot.¹³ Originally recruited as part of the White House “Go Public” campaign to demonstrate presidential concern for US prisoners of war (POWs) and soldiers missing in action (MIAs), Perot first met with Nixon in May 1969 to discuss “the best use of his \$50 million in the purchase of television time” and other projects.¹⁴ Based on this conversation, Perot seemed to be an ideal ally – wealthy, creative, ambitious, conservative, patriotic, and most importantly, amenable to Administration suggestions of how best to direct his efforts. Indeed, aides hoped that Perot “might be the kind of hard-

¹² “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman [2]”, December 3, 1969, Memos/Alex Butterfield (December 1969); Box 55; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³ Jon Nordheimer, “Super-Rich Texan Fights Social Ills,” *New York Times*, November 28, 1969.

¹⁴ “John Ehrlichman to Staff Secretary”, May 15, 1969, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Perot’s early support activities were linked to White House efforts to transform POW wife Sybil Stockdale’s League of Wives of American Prisoners in Vietnam into the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia. Both Michael Allen and H. Bruce Franklin argue for the importance, and indeed the centrality, of the POW-MIA issue in Nixon’s efforts to rally domestic support for the Vietnam War, but they disagree significantly on the relative control and agency of the two groups. Franklin sees the League of Families as essentially a Nixon administration puppet group while Allen argues for a more symbiotic relationship between the League and the administration. While this study is not specifically concerned with the POW-MIA issue or the administration-League relationship, the documentary evidence seems to favor Allen’s conclusions as White House officials would eventually become very concerned with “keeping them on the reservation as a group.”* For further discussion of Perot and his involvement in the POW-MIA issue, see: Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A., or, Mythmaking in America* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: L. Hill Books, 1992); H. Bruce Franklin, “Missing in Action in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 173–201; Ken Gross, *Ross Perot: The Man Behind the Myth* (Random House, 1992); Gerald Posner, *Citizen Perot: His Life and Times*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1996); Sandra Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration” (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005). *Quote from “James Hughes to Charles Colson”, May 15, 1971, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

hitting, young individual who could set up a pro-Vietnam Committee.”¹⁵ Perot did create a support group, United We Stand, but he soon demonstrated more independence than aides had expected. Deputy Assistant to the President Alex Butterfield, the White House official coordinating the post-speech effort, reported difficulties convincing Perot to “rechannel [*sic*] some of his energy and enthusiasm for this project into something a little more in line with our game plan.”¹⁶ While Perot did insist on following his own instincts, Butterfield was eventually able to coordinate these efforts with other projects intended to rally domestic support for the president.

Perot’s television specials, newspaper advertisements, and even his United We Stand organization were part of a much larger, and in many ways more diffuse, administration-directed campaign to ensure maximum public responses to the president’s speech. In addition to Perot, Butterfield worked with members of the Tell It to Hanoi Committee, the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, veterans organizations, local business groups, and individual supporters. The resulting advertising, petition, and letter-writing campaigns had impressive results. The White House mailroom was overwhelmed in the days and weeks following the president’s speech with letters, telegrams, and petitions encouraging the President to “Keep believing in us – ‘The Silent Americans’ – and we will continue to believe in you.”¹⁷ Others linked the president’s position with the ideals of “honor and duty and sacrifice ... deeply

¹⁵ “Peter Flanigan to Staff Secretary”, June 30, 1969, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁶ “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, Henry Kissinger, Bryce Harlow”, October 24, 1969, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁷ “Larry Doyle to Richard Nixon”, November 4, 1969, 2, Alex Butterfield (Nov 1969); Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

ingrained in the heritage of America which they sustain.”¹⁸ Furthermore, another supporter argued that the US must continue to fight in Vietnam because “if we just give up now, the faith in our government will really suffer a shattering blow.”¹⁹ Agreement between the administration and the Silent Majority that the success of the opposition would result in national decline and humiliation further isolated the antiwar movement. The White House message was clear: “Thank God there are good people like you who believe what this country stands for and who believe in the President ... You have a right to speak up. These kids who come to Washington don’t.”²⁰

This response, a combination of White House planning and genuine sentiment, demonstrated that the speech which Haldeman pessimistically thought on October 23 “would under normal circumstances be very effective, and probably buy us another couple of months,”²¹ had instead given individuals frustrated by inaction and disgusted by protest a way to articulate their views. By emphasizing support for the president rather than an explicit endorsement of the Vietnam War itself, aides significantly expanded potential participation in these efforts as many who felt that the president’s policies were either too hard or too soft ultimately preferred Nixon when the alternative was the

¹⁸ “David Emerson to Richard Nixon”, November 4, 1969, Alex Butterfield (Nov 1969); Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁹ “Vivian Uhlig to Richard Nixon”, November 4, 1969, 2, Alex Butterfield (Nov 1969); Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD. Add overview of credibility question

²⁰ “Charles Colson to Mr. and Mrs. William Rowland”, November 24, 1969, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²¹ Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 102.

antiwar movement.²² Chief of Staff Haldeman would later admit to historian Tom Wells: “the silent majority thing, we really *did* crank up. ... We aided and abetted that activity, we encouraged it, and we had people volunteering to develop it.” These White House efforts effectively built what Haldeman described as a “countercampaign to the peace march stuff ... to give people who did believe in us a way of overtly rallying to the cause.” He matter-of-factly explained the significant administration role in creating this response by pointing out that most of them “weren't ... activists, so you needed to help them along.”²³ In this effort, the “silent majority” phrase gave Nixon’s supporters a useful way to identify themselves without explicitly endorsing the president’s Vietnam policies.

While aides likely did not consider the implications of these efforts beyond their short and medium-term influence on the president’s domestic popularity, by fostering and promoting the idea of a Silent Majority, they were, in effect, creating an “imagined community” of presidential supporters.²⁴ White House officials therefore promoted selected letters and telegrams invoking the themes of patriotism, national pride, and international obligation as a way of encouraging those with similar views to also claim

²² Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 264; David R Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 167–68; Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 45–47; Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 161, 188; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 69–70. This phenomenon is also discussed in Chapter Two.

²³ Wells, *The War Within*, 386.

²⁴ In his influential analysis of the creation and evolution of nationalism, Benedict Anderson gives significant credit to the rise of print capitalism and its ability to enable disparate groups to imagine themselves as part of a larger national community. Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

membership in the Silent Majority. Framing dissent as unpatriotic and un-American, Nixon and his staff cultivated a strain of American nationalism which had not only enabled the excesses of McCarthyism, but which had also contributed to the rise of the nativist Know Nothing Party in the nineteenth century as well as less formal attempts to use patriotism and citizenship to isolate perceived threats.²⁵ Having given the antiwar movement's opponents "something to be for,"²⁶ administration aides hoped the idea of belonging to the Silent Majority would encourage increased promotion and defense of the president's Vietnam policies. As his supporters embraced this idea and used their self-proclaimed membership in the Silent Majority as a reason to stop being silent, Nixon could claim that he, not his critics, spoke for the majority of Americans.

A "Resultant Rallying of Support:" National Unity Week,
Veterans Day, and Opposing the November
Moratorium/Mobilization Protests

Fortunately for administration planners, these efforts to promote and solidify the Silent Majority overlapped a series of patriotic events and displays during "National

²⁵ Ellen Schrecker's study of McCarthyism includes a discussion of pre-World War II anticommunism and her detailed discussion of this aspect of the domestic side of the Cold War is a useful complement to John Fousek's analysis of how American nationalism facilitated the creation of a foreign policy consensus in the early years of the Cold War and Richard M. Fried's examination of Cold War patriotic pageantry. While not their primary focus, Robert Justin Goldstein and Woden Teachout explore the use of patriotism and the flag to stifle dissent in the nineteenth century and its twentieth century consequences. Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Robert Justin Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory: The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1998); Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

²⁶ "William Safire to H.R. Haldeman", October 22, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Unity Week” – including both Veterans’ Day on November 11 and the second ‘Moratorium’ anti-war protest scheduled for November 15. As Sandra Scanlon has shown, these grassroots demonstrations were primarily an effort to counter the antiwar protests rather than an explicit response to Nixon’s November 3 speech, but the different motivations did not prevent White House officials from using the events to support their claims of broad popular support for the president.²⁷ Based on Committee for a Week of National Unity founder Edmund Dombrowski’s view that many “believed that the president was doing all he could to end the war, but did not want to have to parade in the streets to show their support,”²⁸ the majority of National Unity Week activities centered on smaller and more local displays of support. Proposed events such as “marches of policemen and firemen”²⁹ and a “series of patriotic rallies throughout the country”³⁰ would be complemented by “increased display of American flag[s] (offices, homes, automobile bumpers and windshields, lapel pins, etc.) ... of porch lights and automobile headlights [on] during daylight hours”³¹ These local efforts ensured that those who could not come to Washington, DC for the major rallies were still able to actively participate in

²⁷ Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 159–166. Scanlon’s work is an important corrective to the bulk of scholarship in which National Unity Week, if mentioned at all, is presented as purely a creation of the Nixon White House rather than as a true grassroots movement the administration attempted to control and direct after plans for National Unity Week were already in motion. See, e.g.: DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 258–59; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 174–75; Wells, *The War Within*, 387.

²⁸ Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 160.

²⁹ “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon”, November 12, 1969, 1, Memoranda for The President’s File (November 1969); Box 138; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

the counter-protest and therefore helped strengthen individual identification with the Silent Majority.

Although organized by groups not closely tied to the administration, aides included National Unity Week and similar activities in their plans for promoting the president's November 3 speech. Butterfield and other officials at the White House therefore worked closely with both the Committee for a Week of National Unity and the National Committee for Responsible Patriotism to ensure that planned events dovetailed with administration efforts. To this end, White House aides maintained close contact with outside allies involved in organizing the national events such as Perot, *Reader's Digest* editor Hobe Lewis, and comedian Bob Hope, the honorary chairman of the National Unity Week Committee. By providing informational and organizational assistance, White House officials secured a degree of control over these outside efforts. Despite the potential of close coordination to irritate and alienate outside organizers, most welcomed official involvement. Perot, especially, seemed to thrive on his access to the White House and submitted frequent updates of his efforts and planning for his pro-administration efforts including details on a November 16 television special with lists of participating stations and scripts.³²

While he appeared anxious for White House feedback, Perot was not as cooperative as Butterfield and other administration planners initially expected. On November 11, Butterfield reported that "Ross is leaning toward a POW theme for his November 16th ad and I have reminded him (not so gently) that our early agreement was

³² "Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman", November 14, 1969, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

for one POW ad only ... and that was run last Sunday.”³³ While the POW-MIA issue would continue to be an important part of administration public opinion efforts, Butterfield and other White House officials worked to make patriotism and the Silent Majority the central themes of the post-speech and National Unity Week activities.³⁴ They welcomed Perot’s willingness to fund television programs and newspaper advertisements, but only when those efforts furthered larger administration plans. Eager to preserve his developing relationship with the White House, Perot cooperated and Butterfield eventually gave the proposed November 16 special a “tacit okay.”³⁵ Furthermore, with Perot “already bored” after “having wrapped up final plans for this Sunday’s program,”³⁶ Butterfield encouraged the billionaire to ally himself with other outside groups since “a pooling of their resources (dollars and ideas respectively) might well result in an extravaganza the likes of which have never before been seen” which would be a significant “plus ... for our side.”³⁷

Such cooperation would be particularly useful since Butterfield reported to Haldeman that he recently “learned that the National Unity Week Committee does not have firm plans for a one-hour, half-hour, or even quarter-hour TV production.” Even so,

³³ “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman”, November 11, 1969, 2, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁴ Reflecting his focus on the grassroots POW-MIA movement, Michael J. Allen argues that the November 3 speech and its associated public opinion projects were simply part of the larger POW-MIA “Go Public” campaign, but Butterfield’s efforts to redirect Perot’s attention *away* from this issue suggest that the administration saw the POW-MIA issue as playing a much smaller role in its public opinion efforts. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 29–36.

³⁵ “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

events during Unity Week had Butterfield's desired result of "sustaining at least a moderate level of Flag waving and other visible rallying of the masses to the support of the President." Furthermore, the primary goal of the Veterans' Day and anti-Moratorium protests on November 15 was, as Nixon reminded Haldeman: "not to compete with the protesters; it is merely to get across the point that not all of the crowd is anti-Administration." *Newsweek's* coverage of the pro- and anti-war protests occurring November 10-16 led Butterfield to estimate that between five and six million people participated in the organized Veterans' Day rallies alone. The article, which Butterfield forwarded to Haldeman, argued that "America's antiwar dissidents had no monopoly on last week's demonstrating" and claimed that the prior week included "the most widespread patriotic demonstrations in recent history."³⁸

Newsweek reported that "flag-waving citizens" participated in pro-Vietnam activities to "honor the dead of Vietnam and other wars and reaffirm their faith in the U.S., its government and the ultimate rightness of the nation's course." For most, there was no room for compromise or a loyal opposition: "AMERICA, read the ubiquitous signs, LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT." The article explicitly linked these activities with the President's November 3 speech and highlighted the fact that for many participants, the popularity of the Silent Majority label proved that "traditional values controlled the destiny of the republic." Worried about their nation's future and a belief that their silence had given the antiwar movement undue authority led many to participate in rallies, marches, and other demonstrations during the second week of November. Organizers

³⁸ "Love It or Leave It," *Newsweek*, November 24, 1969. Emphasis in the original.

emphasized that these protesters were part of the Silent Majority invoked in Nixon's speech – "The silent majority has become very vocal indeed" – and argued, media portrayals to the contrary, "there are more of us patriotic Americans than those pro-Hanoicrats." At least some of these protests were shaped by the 100,000 "Veterans Day kits" mailed out by the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration, but *Newsweek's* article was careful to point out that many participants "turned out without any nudge from official Washington."³⁹ This broad involvement effectively demonstrated both the popular embrace of these ideas and the administration's success in obscuring its role in organizing and promoting National Unity Week.

Claiming the Flag for Nixon

Further encouraging local and national participation, grassroots and administration planners organized events which did not require travel or a significant disruption of daily routines to demonstrate patriotism and support for Nixon's Vietnam policies. Thus, the plethora of patriotic activities reflected local interests and concerns thereby enabling National Unity Week to tie disparate individuals and communities together within a national program without trying to construct the national effort in such a way that it explicitly addressed the myriad concerns of existing and potential members of the Silent Majority. In this way, November's pro-war demonstrations continued an established pattern of local, rather than national, patriotism promotion. In his analysis of Cold War patriotism, Richard M. Fried emphasizes the important role of local

³⁹ Ibid.

organizations and activists in ensuring that seemingly national events such as Flag Day, Loyalty Day, I am An American Day, and Armed Forces Day continued from year to year. These events, complemented by purely local efforts such as the 1968 Memorial Day parade sponsored by Paoli, Pennsylvania's "The Committee to Get Your Kid to Wave a Flag Before Some Misguided Protest Group Nabs Them," effectively laid the foundations for the 1969 patriotic parades, rallies, and activities of National Unity Week.⁴⁰

While Fried recognizes the important role of national leaders in encouraging and sometimes promoting these events, his study repeatedly emphasizes that these patriotic celebrations were almost entirely dependent on local activism and organization. At the same time, as John Fousek demonstrates, national politicians and members of the foreign policy elite were promoting an ideology of "American nationalist globalism" to ensure domestic support for an expanded US role in the post-World War II world.⁴¹ This ideology, in Fousek's analysis formed the foundation of the Cold War consensus now challenged by popular opposition to Vietnam. By delegitimizing the idea of a critical, "humanitarian" patriotism, Nixon and his staff worked to reassert this consensus in the hopes that by silencing domestic dissent the president and other policymakers would be able to secure the "peace with honor" at the core of Nixon's Vietnam policies. Thus, the

⁴⁰ Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!*. The Memorial Day Parade took place in Paoli Pennsylvania in 1968.

⁴¹ Fousek, *To Lead the Free World*.

president and his aides benefitted from domestic divisions which in turn inspired a deep, popular concern with what, exactly, it meant to be “American.”⁴²

Limiting this definition to those citizens who embraced an unquestioning, nationalist patriotism would, Nixon’s staff hoped, further delegitimize and isolate the president’s critics. The November 3 speech, the success of National Unity Week, and the popularity of the Silent Majority idea all served to reinforce this domestic division. While not as overt as the 1844 nativist riots in Philadelphia or the World War I “outbreak of forced flag kissings,” the White House campaign to promote domestic support of the president’s policies had a similar goal: namely to use patriotic appeals to elevate one group of citizens at the expense of another.⁴³ Administration efforts to promote the Silent Majority in 1969 and 1970 would continually deny the validity of humanitarian patriotism – specifically the incompatibility of dissent and patriotism. Instead of challenging this interpretation, many humanitarian patriots would eventually stop

⁴² Michael G. Kammen observes in his own study of American national identity: “only in a country where it is so unclear what is American do people worry so much about the threat of things ‘un-American.’” Michael G. Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry Concerning the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 4.

⁴³ Woden Teachout presents these riots as a key step in the evolution of the flag as a national symbol. After Irish immigrants broke up an anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant American Republican Party Rally on May 3, 1844, three thousand native-born Party supporters returned to the Irish neighborhood of Kensington. The resulting three days of riots destroyed almost the entire neighborhood. The nativists seized on the symbolism of the flag to separate themselves from the Irish immigrants and promoted it as a national, and Party, symbol during the 1844 Fourth of July parades and the fall elections. The party would eventually fade away by the end of the decade as the economy improved, but the sentiments driving the party and its electoral victories had already formed an important element in the nationalist strain of American patriotism. Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 46–50, 54–72. As Justin Goldstein notes: “During World War I, scores of suspected political dissidents and, perhaps even more often, those suspected of insufficiently enthusiastic patriotism were ... attacked by mobs that sought to compel them to kiss the flag.” Under the threat of physical violence, or even death, individuals were punished for offenses ranging from belonging to the Socialist Party to not purchasing liberty bonds to participating in antiwar demonstrations. Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*, 82, 91–93. This quote and the one in the text are from pages 91 and 93, respectively.

displaying the flag because it had become so closely tied to support for both Nixon and the Vietnam War.⁴⁴

The growing popularity of flag pins further solidified the flag's association with pro-Nixon, pro-Vietnam sentiments. While used to demonstrate support for William McKinley in the 1896 presidential election, such pins were not a common political accessory in 1969.⁴⁵ After the mayor of New Britain, Connecticut "paid \$360 out of his own pocket for 20,000 small, plastic lapel flags for his townspeople," however, administration aides quickly adopted the symbol for their own efforts to promote both Nixon and the Silent Majority.⁴⁶ On Veterans Day, Butterfield

put 110 of the tinny type lapel buttons in a dish -- between the peanuts and the peppermints -- on the table near the entrance and exit to the Staff Mess. A small sign reminded passersby that this week is 'National Unity Week' and that they would be conspicuous without displaying an American Flag on their dresses or coat lapels.⁴⁷

Eventually, these efforts to link the flag with support for the president and his policies would be so successful that not wearing a flag lapel pin became tantamount to endorsing the antiwar movement. This implication, in turn, led to a situation wherein, as Fried observed: "by wearing a flag, one could avoid being bashed with one."⁴⁸ But in 1969,

⁴⁴ This gradual delegitimization of opposition and dissent is an underlying narrative in work on US patriotism; see, e.g., Fousek, *To Lead the Free World*; Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*; Teachout, *Capture the Flag*. The decision by many antiwar activists to effectively surrender the flag to the president's supporters is discussed in Chapter Four.

⁴⁵ Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*, 19; Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 123.

⁴⁶ "Love It or ... Leave It."

⁴⁷ "Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman [2]", November 11, 1969, 1, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁸ Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!*, 147.

even though the patriotism of foreign policy dissenters was suspect and the first federal law criminalizing flag desecration was passed a year earlier, the flag was not yet conclusively the property of either side of these domestic debates.⁴⁹ Still, as the Silent Majority paralleled earlier efforts to constrain the acceptable limits of nationalism and protest through patriotic celebrations and symbols, flag pins and other patriotic displays began to indicate support for the president rather than the nation.

“Activity should be tied to the ‘Silent Majority’ over and over ... always:”
Solidifying the Idea of a Silent Majority and
Reinforcing Its Ties to the President

Echoing the use of flags to identify participants in National Unity Week and the anti-antiwar demonstrations, Nixon requested that his staff develop a Silent Majority pin so as to “keep the phrase and the concept working in our behalf.”⁵⁰ Such a lapel pin would enable the president’s supporters to both identify themselves to each other and to separate themselves from the antiwar movement. More broadly, Nixon told Haldeman: “we have a great thing going for us in the ‘Silent Majority’ ... be sure we take all possible steps to capitalize on this.”⁵¹ In response, Butterfield reported that “publicizing the phrase nationwide and trying to create elements of support for the President which might pick up the name (or at least the theme) ‘Silent Majority’ have been matters of

⁴⁹ A flag was burnt at a New York City antiwar protest on April 15, 1967 leading Congress to rush passage of a law banning flag desecration in 1968. Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*, 99–100, 118–37.

⁵⁰ “H.R. Haldeman to Alex Butterfield”, November 20, 1969, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ Ibid.

priority for the past week.”⁵² As the initial influx of letters and telegrams demonstrated its popularity, White House post-speech opinion efforts moved away from the “crusade for peace” theme proposed by speechwriter William Safire⁵³ and attempted to frame National Unity Week and anti-antiwar activities as demonstrating popular rejection of domestic criticism. Even as his staff anticipated a “second barrage of wires and letters to the President,”⁵⁴ Nixon requested a “battle plan on the basic idea of promoting the ‘Silent Majority.’”⁵⁵ Crucially, he was not thinking only in terms of maintaining the supportive responses to his November 3 speech, but specifically wanted a “long range plan for maintaining the momentum on what has become obviously the byword for the Administration at this point in time.”⁵⁶ Specifically, Nixon was particularly interested in ensuring that popular identification with the Silent Majority was interpreted as support for himself and his policies.

Haldeman therefore reminded the staff of the president’s request that Administration “activity should be tied to the ‘Silent Majority’ over and over ... always.”⁵⁷ Although Nixon would later claim that support for the speech was a result of having “hit a responsive chord in the country,” it is clear that the White House played a

⁵² “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman [2]”, November 21, 1969, Memos/Alex Butterfield (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵³ See Chapter Two

⁵⁴ “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon,” 1. “Gameplan for Post-Speech Activities – Second Post-Speech Updating”

⁵⁵ “H.R. Haldeman to Jeb Magruder”, November 21, 1969, Memos/Jeb Magruder (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “H.R. Haldeman to Jeb Magruder [2]”, November 21, 1969, Memos/Jeb Magruder (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

far greater role in influencing public opinion than is currently understood.⁵⁸ These efforts ensured that the speech, and the apparent success of White House public opinion efforts, marked an important turning point in the administration's approach to public opinion. In the short term, the speech rallied the president's supporters and demonstrated to the North Vietnamese, as Nixon would later recall, that they "could no longer count on dissent in America to give them the victory they could not win on the battlefield."⁵⁹ But its long-term implications are far more significant: the speech gave the administration a way to organize and mobilize its outside allies into a viable and self-sustaining alternative to the antiwar movement. Much of this success was due to aides' diligent efforts to "create the necessary cohesiveness among participants"⁶⁰ which would ensure the survival and growth of the Silent Majority.

As efforts to cultivate the many pro-Nixon and pro-Vietnam groups "cropping up like wild fire"⁶¹ after the president's November 3 speech became central to administration public opinion efforts, Butterfield approached Perot about Nixon's request for a Silent Majority lapel pin. Given his enthusiastic, if sometimes problematic, participation in the POW-MIA "Go Public" campaign, National Unity Week, and other efforts to promote the Silent Majority speech, Perot seemed to be an ideal candidate to fund and coordinate

⁵⁸ Nixon, *RN*, 410. See also: Ibid., 410–413; Richard M Nixon, *In the Arena: A Memoir of Victory, Defeat, and Renewal* (New York, N.Y: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 215–16, 259, 292, 332–33; Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 113–116. Although there is a vast scholarship on Nixon and the Vietnam War, administration public opinion efforts are frequently overlooked. See the Introduction for a discussion of this broad historiography.

⁵⁹ Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 116.

⁶⁰ "Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon", November 24, 1969, Alex Butterfield (Nov 1969); Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the project. Instead, he soon “made it clear that he is ‘not interested in backing the manufacture and distribution of a Silent Majority pin.’”⁶² Despite administration plans and explicit presidential interest, Butterfield reported that Perot’s view was that the “‘Silent Majority’ phrase is passé and that any of his resources which are expended for pins, buttons, bumper stickers, decals, etc. should emphasize a theme which will best serve the long-term objectives.”⁶³ Unsurprisingly given Perot’s tendency toward self-promotion, the theme he preferred, “United We Stand,” was also the name of the organization he created and funded to back the president’s policies.

In a March 1970 interview, Perot explained that after Nixon’s November speech, he had expanded his organization, which the reporter described as having until then “consisted principally of Mr. Perot and his check book,”⁶⁴ so as to promote “the views of the ‘silent majority’ and establish national priorities.”⁶⁵ Perot saw his efforts as addressing a “malaise permeating the whole society. ‘Our country is so big and complex,’ he sa[id], ‘that people turn the switches off. Apathy is our greatest national weakness.’”⁶⁶ He then proceeded to detail a list of ways to correct this trend, the bulk of which would depend on technological expertise provided by his company, Electronic Data Systems (EDS). Even as he refused to fund projects promoting the idea of a “Silent Majority,” Perot was not anxious to sever ties with the administration and so he

⁶² “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman”, December 1, 1969, Alex Butterfield (Dec 1969); Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Nordheimer, “Super-Rich Texan Fights Social Ills.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Ross Perot: Billionaire Patriot,” *Look*, March 24, 1970.

continued to claim – both publicly and in private communications with the White House – that he was willing to spend significant amounts of money from his own personal fortune even as he continued to prioritize his POW/MIA efforts over other administration proposals.

“The Same Degree of Control:” A National
Organization to Support the President

Perot’s stated intention to devote his fortune to administration projects complemented Nixon’s December 1 reminder to Haldeman that “one of our most important projects for 1970 is to see to it that our major contributors funnel all their funds through us except for nominal contributions to the campaign committees.”⁶⁷ Officials therefore worked to cultivate ties with Perot, despite Haldeman’s earlier observation of “his *total* lack of sophistication”⁶⁸ which inclined Perot toward grandiose projects – such as his television specials and later, a self-funded, third party campaign for president – rather than the more prosaic, but sustainable, efforts favored by the administration. And while the Administration’s overriding goal in late 1969 was to mobilize and document its supporters, Perot soon appeared to be more interested in raising his own profile through his promotion of the President. Even so, White House officials were not quite ready to give up on their hopes that Perot would prove to be a useful ally and turned to him in their efforts to create a national organization to coordinate pro-Nixon and pro-Vietnam groups.

⁶⁷ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [3]”, December 1, 1969, P Memos 1969; Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶⁸ Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 106. Emphasis in the original.

This project grew out of an earlier suggestion from New York supporter William J. Casey following the October 15 antiwar Moratorium protests.⁶⁹ Aides embraced Casey's idea and well before they knew the full scope of the popular response to the president's November 3 speech, had laid the foundation for "the establishment of a broadly based committee to re-affirm a bi-partisan American Foreign Policy."⁷⁰ This group would help reinforce the idea of a Silent Majority as well as Nixon's identification with the trappings of nationalist patriotism as promoted during National Unity Week. Building on the success of administration efforts to "ma[ke] the critics rather than the war the central issue in the national debate over Vietnam," further organization of Nixon's outside supporters was a logical next step.⁷¹ Not only would such a group organize additional demonstrations of popular support, but aides expected that it "would indeed go beyond this to encompass the whole range of support for America's Foreign Policy interests." Anticipating efforts to minimize the importance of Vietnam as an issue in upcoming electoral campaigns, Special Assistant to the President Jeb S. Magruder recognized that "vital to the success of this concept is the thought that it can be lifted out of the contest of Vietnam."⁷² Moreover, an umbrella group closely tied to the

⁶⁹ Wells, *The War Within*, 380; "William Safire to John Ehrlichman, H.R. Haldeman", July 24, 1969, Outside Group Effort to Back President's Programs; Box 97; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. See Chapter Two for a discussion of Casey's letter to Nixon suggesting the White House more actively organize its supporters as well as for a discussion of the October antiwar protests.

⁷⁰ "Jeb Magruder to John Brown", November 14, 1969, 1, Outside Group Effort to Back President's Programs; Box 97; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷¹ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 258.

⁷² "Jeb Magruder to John Brown," 1-2.

administration would effectively secure White House control over outside supporters even as it obscured those same ties by appearing to be independent and autonomous.

That a president would seek domestic support is not surprising. Presidents Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson all fostered groups intended to rally domestic public opinion to their side during World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. In many ways, both Nixon's own efforts and the secrecy surrounding them was the logical evolution of these earlier efforts. The Creel Committee was an official arm of the Wilson administration with members from important government departments and explicit censorship powers.⁷³ In response to popular criticism of the Creel Committee, Roosevelt encouraged the independent formation of the William Allen White committee, but did not attempt to hide his personal ties to the group or disguise his meetings with its leaders.⁷⁴ Similarly, in response to growing domestic opposition, a Johnson aide, John Roche, covertly created the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam (CCPFV). Unlike Roosevelt, however, Johnson and his staff

⁷³ Elmer E. Cornwell, "Wilson, Creel, and the Presidency," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (July 1, 1959): 189–202; George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Arno Press, 1972); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 79–81; Emily S. Rosenberg, "War and the Health of the State: The U.S. Government and the Communications Revolution During World War I," in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 49–55.

⁷⁴ John W. Masland, "Pressure Groups and American Foreign Policy," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (April 1, 1942): 115–122; Lise Namikas, "The Committee to Defend America and the Debate Between Internationalists and Interventionists, 1939–1941," *The Historian* 61, no. 4 (1999): 843–863; Richard W. Steele, "Preparing the Public for War: Efforts to Establish a National Propaganda Agency, 1940–41," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 6 (October 1, 1970): 1640–1653; Mark A. Stoler, "Selling Different Kinds of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Public Opinion During World War II," in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 72; William M. Tuttle, "Aid-to-the-Allies Short-of-War Versus American Intervention, 1940: A Reappraisal of William Allen White's Leadership," *The Journal of American History* 56, no. 4 (March 1, 1970): 840–858.

categorically denied any ties to the organization other than their common goal to ensure continued US involvement in Vietnam.⁷⁵ While the Nixon administration continued this pattern of increasing secrecy, administration goals were much broader than these previous efforts. His staff not only hoped to secure domestic support for the Vietnam War, but intended to influence all aspects of public opinion about the president. The organization, as initially conceived would essentially have been a public relations organization concerned only with promoting the president. That White House officials would control such an organization was a given, but their desire to obscure all ties between themselves and their supporters is a reflection of both the culture of secrecy within the White House and a sense among the staff that while perhaps not technically illegal, aides knew that such efforts would not be well-received if the scope of White House involvement was public.

To obscure the administration's role, Special Counsel for the President Charles Colson, the president's newly-hired domestic political liaison, anticipated that the new organization would "consist of a small, highly select group of individuals, obviously other loyalists. The finances should be structured so that no one person appears to contribute more than 20% of the overall operating budget."⁷⁶ Even as Colson eagerly anticipated the public relations advantage such an organization could provide the President, he recognized the need to ensure that it appeared to have no explicit ties to the

⁷⁵ Joseph G Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Scanlon, "The Pro-Vietnam War Movement," 89-90; Wells, *The War Within*, 145-49.

⁷⁶ "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman", November 22, 1969, 2, [Chronological Files] November 1969; Box 126; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Administration. Not only would such ties undermine its authority and impartiality, but they also had “the potential of raising the specter of the ‘Nixon slush fund,’ going back to the days when the President was a Senator from California. There is no real parallel but hostile newsmen will try to use it.”⁷⁷ In addition to avoiding a potential scandal, soliciting contributions from multiple backers would also ensure that Administration plans did not depend on any one individual. Even so, Perot’s initial promises of active and generous support made him an important factor and he seemed open – at least at first – to helping the Administration create a national pro-Nixon organization.

Using an independently formed and financed group, “the 50 States Citizens’ Committee,”⁷⁸ as a model in his conversations with Perot, Butterfield hoped to coordinate the efforts of pro-Administration groups and get “all of them marching to the same drum beat, and putting out the same theme, essentially, ‘the silent majority speaks out in support of national unity, peace with honor, etc.’”⁷⁹ Butterfield reported to Haldeman that Perot had embraced the Administration’s plans and developed a “special kit which tells interested individuals and groups how to form clubs and committees which might

⁷⁷ Ibid. Disclosure of this fund threatened Nixon’s place as Dwight Eisenhower’s running mate in the 1952 presidential election. In an effort to quiet his critics and remain on the ticket, Nixon gave a nationally-televised speech on September 23, 1952 detailing his personal financial situation, rejecting the charges of his critics, and stating his intention to remain the Vice Presidential candidate. Perhaps the most memorable moment in the speech was when Nixon acknowledged having received a personal gift from a political supporter that he had no intentions of returning: the family dog, Checkers. The response to the speech convinced Eisenhower to retain Nixon and the “Checkers Speech,” as it became known, helped cement Nixon’s ties with those voters who would later join the Silent Majority. For Nixon’s own account of the crisis and speech, see: Nixon, *RN*, 42–108; Richard M Nixon, *Six Crises* (London: W.H. Allen, 1962); Nixon, *In the Arena*, 175–78. For a discussion of how this incident shaped popular perceptions of Nixon, see: David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 31–35.

⁷⁸ “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon.”

⁷⁹ Ibid.

serve as subsidiary organizations to his Dallas-headquartered United We Stand committee.”⁸⁰ As such, local groups would “not lend themselves to the same degree of control which we must have.”⁸¹ Colson instead recommended a national foundation “located here in Washington” whose “staff would respond to our needs on given issues ... By virtue of its close working relationship with us the group would have access to data, information and research which might be available within or outside of the Administration.”⁸² It would appear to be independent and nonpartisan, but Colson anticipated that its actual role “would be to provide the public relations and communications apparatus we need to advance issues of importance to us.”⁸³

Furthermore, it would coordinate the efforts of outside groups such as the Tell it to Hanoi Committee, United We Stand, and more established groups such as Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam (CCPFV). Given the close ties between the administration and the first two groups, it was reasonable for aides to give them a central role. However, that the very partisan Nixon White House would include an organization with Democratic roots such as CCPFV is more surprising. Colson and other aides overlooked CCPFV’s ties to the Johnson administration, however, because “its founding membership is an outstanding and broadly based blue ribbon group, perhaps an even better group than we could assemble today, starting from scratch.”⁸⁴ More

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” 1.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2]”, November 22, 1969, 5, [Chronological Files] November 1969; Box 126; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

importantly, Colson insisted that the White House could “keep complete control over the functions of the committee by providing the financing from our friends and by selecting the staff. It is presently run completely by its Director and Deputy Director, both of whom we presently control.”⁸⁵ Colson’s confidence stemmed, in part, from CCPFV’s role in efforts to promote the Silent Majority speech as well as by its leadership’s attempts to strengthen ties with the administration.⁸⁶

Outside allies such as Perot’s United We Stand group and the Tell It To Hanoi Committee would continue to operate, but Colson expected them to eventually become part of either an expanded CCPFV or the proposed national organization. Even while arguing that “some of the efforts that have been undertaken by these grass roots groups could better be handled by the [proposed] Foundation or the Citizens Committee,”⁸⁷ Colson concluded that they would “continue to serve a valuable purpose in organizing and soliciting individual response [*sic*] across the country as particular issues and needs arise.”⁸⁸ Even so, the primary focus of Administration public relations efforts was to be a proposed “American Education and Editorial Foundation” whose “function ... would be to generate a favorable press, to produce and distribute public service type television and

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “H.R. Haldeman to William Safire, Lyn Nofziger, Jeb Magruder, Dwight Chapin, Ron Zeigler, Herb Klein, Harry Dent, Kenneth Cole, Alex Butterfield, Margita White, John R. Brown, Charles Colson, Connie Stuart, Jim Keogh”, November 6, 1969, Memos/Jeb Magruder (November 1969); Box 54; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Abbott Washburn to Alex Butterfield”, November 14, 1969, Memoranda Received Oct thru Dec 1969; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Fact Sheet - Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam”, November 25, 1969, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁷ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2],” 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

radio programs, to place advertisements, to take polls, to educate both the public generally and specific intellectual targets, and to provide in-depth public relations support on the outside for Administration programs.”⁸⁹ Reflecting Special Assistant to the President Jeb Magruder’s later observation that while “its name could suggest that it is a foundation, an institute or a committee; in fact, from a legal standpoint it will be a corporate entity,”⁹⁰ the proposed foundation would function almost purely as a public relations firm.

Convincing Perot

Although Colson intended for this outside support organization to be controlled by the White House and planned to limit the influence of individual donors by having them create an endowment,⁹¹ the participation of Perot and other major contributors would be critical. Therefore, in an effort to “persuade Perot ... [to] take the financial and organizational leadership”⁹² of what they anticipated would “become an effective articulate voice for the ‘silent majority,’”⁹³ Nixon and Haldeman met with the billionaire on December 4, 1969. Colson sent Haldeman a long memorandum of potential arguments intended to convince “Perot that our approach is in the national interest and his

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁰ “Jeb Magruder to Charles Colson”, December 15, 1969, 2, [Chronological Files] December 1969; Box 126; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹¹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2],” 4.

⁹² “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman”, December 3, 1969, 1, Businessmen -- Ross Perot -- Personal; Box 41; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹³ Ibid.

own interest.”⁹⁴ Colson further advised Haldeman to emphasize that its “functions will be closely coordinated with us although we will not attempt to dominate the policy (at least this is what you try to get Perot to believe).”⁹⁵ At the same time, Colson advised Haldeman to make it clear to Perot that his participation with the national foundation would not “exclude Perot’s own individual United We Stand effort which he can obviously continue if he wants to”⁹⁶ with the caveat to Haldeman that he convince Perot to agree that “United We Stand should coordinate closely with the foundation so that we get the maximum control possible.”⁹⁷

Perot’s desire for public ties to the White House led Colson to urge Haldeman to “let Perot know that he is going to have to go it alone” if he refused to cooperate with Administration plans as White House “support must be principally directed to the national foundation effort.”⁹⁸ Colson further pointed out that White House staffers would “insure [*sic*], of course, that all members are loyalists, although at this stage this may best be left unsaid.”⁹⁹ More importantly, given Perot’s ambitions, Colson urged Haldeman to emphasize the fact that the proposed effort would provide Perot with a “responsible, distinguished national platform as contrasted with his present operation which in the

⁹⁴ Ibid., cover letter.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2.

public eye is simply his own private organization.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, his involvement would give the billionaire “real respectability. ... He can be the spokesman for a very distinguished group. ... The important thing is to make Perot understand that he is joining the Big Leagues.”¹⁰¹ At the December 4 meeting, Perot agreed that the foundation could “become a central point of focus for those forces which seek to support a moderate and responsible political course for America”¹⁰² and “indicated his willingness to take on the financing and structuring of the professional PR apparatus, bringing in other fund sources as well as his own.”¹⁰³ And so, in early December, aides believed they were well on their way to creating a national organization to coordinate Administration support efforts and the president’s outside allies.

But even as he agreed to Nixon’s requests, Perot was deeply involved in planning what would eventually be a dramatic, but unsuccessful, effort to deliver Christmas presents, food, and medical supplies to US POWs in Hanoi. Although White House aides had initially approached Perot to fund POW-MIA efforts, many officials saw his efforts

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 3. “The most important point, I believe, is that Perot will want to be associated with the leading names in finance, business and education. He can be the spokesman for a very distinguished group. You are in the best position to know which names to drop in your discussion with him. I might simply suggest the Mellons, the duPonts, Don Kendall, Lewis Maytag, Roy Ash, Lucius Clay, Loren Berry, Neil McElroy, James Stewart, Bob Hope, Max Fisher, Robert Anderson, Tom Gates, Tom Dewey and from the academic community, Malcolm Moos, Edgar Shannon, Dean Guilan, and perhaps, George Gallup. We may or may not want to bring these names in as part of the policy making board or as part of a 'window dressing' advisory council. That doesn't have to be decided now.”

¹⁰² Ibid., 2.

¹⁰³ “H.R. Haldeman for the President’s File”, December 6, 1969, Memoranda for The President’s File (December 1969); Box 138; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

as “essentially cheapshot publicity gimmicks”¹⁰⁴ and distractions from the more important effort to promote the Silent Majority. At the same time, they recognized that they could not force Perot to cooperate and so Butterfield was anxious to maintain at least a small degree of control over Perot since “his activities revolve around the peripheries of some relatively sensitive areas.”¹⁰⁵ Agreeing with Kissinger assistant Brigadier General Al Haig that “the most important aspect of this whole operation is that we keep out of it,”¹⁰⁶ Butterfield further recommended that Kissinger not personally conduct a briefing “since Perot is a bit of a nut [and] could ultimately point the finger to you as the instigator of his antics or at least the sponsor.”¹⁰⁷ Butterfield therefore recommended that Kissinger “limit your meeting with him to a very few minutes and let an expendable member of the staff” brief Perot.¹⁰⁸ This way, they could continue to benefit from the increased attention Perot would draw to the POWs while distancing Nixon and his staff from any negative consequences of Perot’s efforts.

While this strategy of maintaining distance between Perot and the Administration made sense to White House aides, it frustrated Perot who expected more recognition and appreciation from the White House. He had hoped to meet with the President

¹⁰⁴ “Dean Moor to Al Haig”, n.d., Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁵ “Alex Butterfield to Henry Kissinger”, December 3, 1969, 2–3, Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ “Al Haig to John Holdridge”, December 13, 1969, Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁷ “Al Haig to Henry Kissinger”, December 9, 1969, Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

immediately following this Christmas trip but Butterfield instead argued that a visit so soon after his trip might lead “at least some newsmen ... [to] interpret the visit as a ‘return for more marching orders.’”¹⁰⁹ While able to postpone the requested meeting until February 1, 1970, contingent on a promise from Perot that he “would not make known his presence in Washington,” Butterfield was unable to convince him that public ties to the administration would undermine his efforts on behalf of the POWs and MIAs.¹¹⁰ Even more frustrating for administration planners, Perot would continue to focus his attention and money on his United We Stand organization and the POW-MIA issue rather than the administration’s Silent Majority projects.

“Rewarded by White House Attention:” Shifting Focus from
Perot to the Silent Majority

Although Perot’s POW-MIA efforts did not fit long-term administration planning, they did ensure that the issue remained in the public mind, giving Nixon and his allies another argument against the antiwar activists urging immediate withdrawal. So, too, did the growing prominence and cohesiveness of the Silent Majority. With *Time Magazine* having named the Middle Americans its Man and Woman of the Year,¹¹¹ the pro-Nixon, anti-antiwar constituency seemed to have come into its own. Late-1969 success in translating identification with the Silent Majority into support for Nixon’s Vietnam

¹⁰⁹ “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon”, January 10, 1970, 2, Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁰ “Alex Butterfield to Richard Nixon”; “Alex Butterfield for the President’s File”, February 1, 1970, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹¹ “Man and Woman of the Year: The Middle Americans,” *Time*, January 5, 1970.

policies led White House officials to prioritize “expanding and strengthening our identification with the Silent Majority.”¹¹² As did the popularity of Vice President Spiro Agnew’s attacks on the media which, as a *Wall Street Journal* editorial observed, “‘supplied a focus for the inevitable reaction’ of the ordinary American who is regularly dismissed with utter contempt by the self-styled ‘thinking people.’”¹¹³ Through these efforts, White House officials took advantage of domestic frustrations with both the antiwar movement and the broader patterns of change and upheavals associated with it.¹¹⁴

Even so, and despite the resonance of the Silent Majority identity within the American electorate, active and visible support waned over time. In part, this decline was a natural consequence of Nixon’s speech having inspired many citizens to speak out for the first time. While their opinions and support for the president did not change in the months following the speech, most felt that their letter to the president or participation in National Unity Week had been a sufficient demonstration of their views. Without the constant reminder of an opposing view created by the Moratorium and Mobilization protests, the urgent need to publicize their support for the president faded. In many ways,

¹¹² “H.R. Haldeman to Jeb Magruder”, January 13, 1970, Memos/Jeb Magruder (January 1970); Box 56; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹³ “John Brown to Jeb Magruder”, January 20, 1970, Memos/Jeb Magruder (January 1970); Box 56; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁴ The idea of a “backlash” against liberalism is a common theme in scholarship about the rise of the conservative movement and will be discussed in far greater detail in Chapter Four. In a 2011 “state of the field” essay for *The Journal of American History*, Kim Phillips-Fein contextualizes this strand of conservatism within the broader ideas of both the movement and scholarship that seeks to understand it. Kim Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (December 1, 2011): 723–743. Most relevant to this phase of administration public opinion efforts are works such as Dan T Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

the administration fell victim to its own success and the growing support for his Vietnamization policies contributed to popular “perceptions that the war was inexorably ending.” Tom Wells cites this belief as a key cause of the declining strength of the antiwar movement, but their faith in his policies also made Nixon’s supporters less inclined to speak out.¹¹⁵ Mail tallies through mid-February 1970 led Nixon to note: “it seems that our silent majority group has lost its steam,” encouraging his staff to transition from a somewhat haphazard approach to public relations to a more structured and proactive one.¹¹⁶

The developing national organization was a key part of this effort, but aides were becoming increasingly less optimistic that Perot would follow through on his promises. In a February conversation with an administration official, most likely Charles Colson, Perot outlined a litany of complaints primarily rooted in a perceived lack of gratitude or recognition from the Administration – for assistance during the campaign and the transition, for his Christmas POW trip, for confused and sometimes conflicting requests from the White House, for damage to his business interests, insubordination on the White House staff and even the fact that he didn’t receive a Christmas card from Nixon.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Wells, *The War Within*, 6.

¹¹⁶ “John Brown to H.R. Haldeman”, February 20, 1970, H.R. Haldeman A-G Memo Feb 1970; Box 57; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁷ “Memorandum to Haldeman”, February 17, 1970, 1–2, Businessmen -- Ross Perot -- Personal; Box 41; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Perot’s business concern involved a very lucrative contract for EDS, his company, to computerize Medicare records for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Perot felt that HEW lawyers were being excessively careful to avoid conflicts of interest and were therefore threatening to end the contract because of Perot’s close ties to the president. The actual memorandum is unsigned, but originated in Colson’s office and a February 23, 1970 memo from Butterfield names Colson as the White House aide most recently in contact with Perot. See: “Alex Butterfield to Charles Colson, Lyn Nofziger, Jeb Magruder, Larry Higby”, February 23, 1970, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

During their conversation, Colson attempted to appeal to Perot's patriotism in an effort to convince him to be patient, but told Haldeman, "Frankly, I don't believe Perot is anywhere near the idealist he is cracked up to be. These points never reached him."¹¹⁸ Colson therefore concluded that Perot's primary interest was not patriotism, Vietnam, the Silent Majority, or even the POWs. Rather, "his real game is to keep favorably identified with us; to project himself as a national figure."¹¹⁹ Perot's interest in maintaining and promoting his ties to the Administration gave Nixon and his aides a degree of leverage, but few staffers would have disagreed with Colson's observation that, Perot's promises aside, "I am not ready to spend the money yet, not until I see it."¹²⁰

Further contributing to Colson's skepticism was the February discovery that Perot did "not have the kind of hard cash we have been talking about."¹²¹ Conversely, a 1992 campaign biography suggests instead that Perot resisted close financial ties to the administration because "he saw that he would be tossing money down the drain, and maybe even balked at the mismanagement of the war (although not the spirit behind it)."¹²² Whatever the explanation, aides had all but given up on Perot's financial cooperation and while the lost financing constrained White House public relations

¹¹⁸ "Memorandum to Haldeman," 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹²¹ "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman", February 7, 1970, 2, Businessmen -- Ross Perot -- Personal; Box 41; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Colson was likely referring to the declining value of shares of Perot's company, EDS. As the vast majority of his wealth was in EDS stock, these losses in the winter of 1969-1970 -- as much as \$450 million in one day -- would have dramatically limited his usefulness to the administration. Gross, *Ross Perot*, 126.

¹²² Gross, *Ross Perot*, 143.

planning, it did free administration officials from any sense of obligation toward “the unpredictable H. Ross Perot and his moods of the moment.”¹²³ Growing frustration with Perot paralleled broader challenges as the administration struggled to craft a coherent approach to public relations after the initial responses to the November 3, 1969 speech started to fade. Over time, these projects evolved into the creation of pro-Administration organizations out of whole cloth, but initially started much smaller with efforts to publicly reward supporters.

At the President’s suggestion, his staff embarked on a program to recognize “teachers, judges, policemen, and others who take a strong stand against demonstrators and other militants.”¹²⁴ “Not satisfied with our program on this to date,” Nixon complained that current White House efforts were “too low key”¹²⁵ and hoped that presidential recognition would “put some backbone and education in officials and ... separate ourselves very clearly from the militants.”¹²⁶ Instead of building bridges between the Administration and its opponents, Nixon told Haldeman that he intended to separate the two sides and “to take a very aggressive ‘militant’ position against these people, not simply because the public is probably with us, but because we face a national crisis in terms of this disrespect for law, etc., at all levels.”¹²⁷ Even though this program would not win new converts to his position, the President felt that it was “time that the

¹²³ “Alex Butterfield to Charles Colson, Lyn Nofziger, Jeb Magruder, Larry Higby.”

¹²⁴ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [1]”, March 2, 1970, 1, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 2.

majority of this country...is rewarded by White House attention” rather than continuing failed efforts to convince opponents to change their minds.¹²⁸

When outlining his goals, Nixon was careful to differentiate between the supporters he did and did not intend to reward and specifically told Haldeman not to “go to the Young Americans for freedom for our people either; they are about as nutty on the other side as the militants.”¹²⁹ By carefully selecting the individuals to be recognized with this program, aides hoped to set the public agenda by rewarding those who conformed to the White House definitions of patriotism and loyalty. In this way, the idea of the Silent Majority promoted by the Administration did much to unite the President’s supporters but was ultimately very divisive for the country as a whole. Tellingly, Nixon was not interested in uniting the *nation* behind his policies so much as he wanted to ensure that his *supporters* were visibly united. As Small observes, “the president who promised to bring the nation together relied on a polarizing strategy to regain the upper hand in the battle for the hearts and minds of the American people.”¹³⁰ The Silent Majority’s public embrace of Nixon’s policies enabled his staff to minimize the importance and relevance of the antiwar movement while at the same time argue that Nixon’s approach to Vietnam reflected national preferences.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 75.

Conclusion

Targeting their public opinion efforts at what they saw as the middle of the population, rather than courting either the left or the right, Nixon and his aides worked to mobilize those citizens not yet politically active. The Silent Majority, as defined by the Nixon administration, was essentially a diffuse group of citizens who supported the president's Vietnam policies, but disinclined to speak out against the antiwar movement. Nixon's November 3 speech transformed them into a politically active constituency. They sent letters and telegrams to the White House, participated in patriotic events such as National Unity Week, and would, Nixon's aides hoped, form the membership of a countermovement to challenge the president's opponents. With financial support from businessmen like H. Ross Perot and the organizational support of outside allies such as the Tell It to Hanoi Committee and the Citizens' Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, White House officials worked to expand and strengthen the Silent Majority as well as the president's popular identification with traditional patriotic symbols such as the flag. These formerly passive supporters did not have established loyalties which would compete with administration requests and their relative political naïveté ensured that White House aides retained both control and influence.

Such a proactive approach to identifying and uniting supporters reflected the Administration's desire for reliable, consistent, and active public support. This support was, in turn, significantly strengthened by these initial successes and further intensified as the antiwar movement continued to challenge the president's Vietnam policies. The foundation of support established following the Silent Majority speech was soon crucial in containing domestic opinions following the Cambodia incursions and the subsequent

campus violence and domestic tensions. The continuing relevance of the Silent Majority as a political identity facilitated administration efforts to expand the president's domestic support and enabled him to continue his efforts to win the Vietnam War "with honor" through a combination of public negotiations, secret talks, and Vietnamization. The very success of these initial efforts resulted in a comparative decline in active public support during the spring of 1970. Reflecting a reality also faced by the leaders of the antiwar movement, a sense that war was ending led many citizens to see the issue as less urgent or worthy of sustained attention. While Nixon suspected that his supporters "probably need[ed] another demonstration,"¹³¹ he likely would have preferred that whatever motivated his allies did not similarly mobilize his opponents. But that is exactly what happened as a result of his decision to approve limited military incursions into Cambodia reigniting the domestic debate over Vietnam.

¹³¹ "John Brown to H.R. Haldeman."

CHAPTER 4

“TO REKINDLE THE AMERICAN SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM”: THE 1970 CAMBODIA INVASION AND HARD HAT SUPPORT

Disgusted by seeming inaction in the face of mounting domestic opposition to Nixon’s Vietnam policies – specifically the protests in response to the April invasion of Cambodia – Maryland Legionnaire Fred Rohrer wrote to the National Commander of the American Legion and told him “that it is about time that you and the rest of the National Executive Committee ... get off of your posteriors and stand up and be counted.” Rohrer pushed the Legion to sponsor “a massive 24 hour parade in Washington, D.C. on July 4, 1970 in support of our God, President and patriotism for our country.” Forwarding his telegram to President Nixon, Rohrer urged him not to “listen to the Neville Chamberlains in our Congress and Senate” and likely hoped for a presidential endorsement of his proposed parade.¹ Instead, Special Counsel to the President Charles Colson replied a month later thanking him on behalf of the president and urging Rohrer to join an existing effort to organize a patriotic Fourth of July celebration in Washington, D.C.² This event, dubbed Honor America Day, was closely, if covertly, controlled by the White House and

¹ “Fred Rohrer to Richard Nixon,” May 14, 1970, Cambodia-Letters, Telegrams and Correspondence; Box 42; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

² “Charles Colson to Fred Rohrer,” June 8, 1970, Cambodia-Letters, Telegrams and Correspondence; Box 42; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

was the culmination of administration public opinion efforts since the president's November 3 speech. These efforts had attempted to harness patriotic sentiment and transform it into support for the president and his Vietnam policies.

Having successfully rallied the Silent Majority to counter the November antiwar protests, aides were confident that they could use this new constituency to mobilize additional domestic support for the president. With more elaborate projects such as the creation of a national support organization stymied by insufficient funding and cooperation, aides turned to patriotism as way to mobilize domestic sympathizers without depending on significant support from sometimes-erratic allies such as H. Ross Perot. These patriotic appeals quickly dominated administration public relations efforts, at the expense of a short-lived internal debate on how best to build on the success of the Silent Majority. On April 15, 1970, domestic policy advisor John Ehrlichman sent a memorandum to Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman critiquing administration public opinion efforts. Concerned that the administration was “presenting a picture of illiberality, repression, closed-mindedness and lack of concern for the less fortunate” and therefore obscuring the strengths of its domestic policies, Ehrlichman advocated for expanding the president's base of support beyond the Silent Majority.³ The resultant proposal that the administration reach out to “Metroamericans” was soon shelved, however, as the president's announcement of US and South Vietnamese incursions into Cambodia quickly overwhelmed those White House offices responsible for public relations campaigns.

³ “John Ehrlichman to H.R. Haldeman,” April 15, 1970. Reprinted in William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 470–71.

Having mistakenly conflated support for the president and antipathy toward the antiwar movement with concrete support for the Vietnam War, Nixon and his aides were unprepared for the negative response to the Cambodia invasion. The explosion of domestic dissent and the reinvigoration of the antiwar movement were stark reminders that patriotic appeals alone were insufficient to convince the population to support these new Vietnam strategies. As aides attempted to justify the invasion and worked to frame it as a military success, construction workers in New York offered a powerful demonstration of the strength of patriotic appeals. This response ensured that aides would not return to earlier discussions of how to appeal to potential supporters who did not identify themselves as party of the Silent Majority. But it was not without costs as administration officials soon discovered that patriotism, while very useful for rallying support, did not lend itself to the kind of organized, and controlled, activities preferred by the White House. Still, pro-Nixon views among conservatives, white ethnics, and other hawks in the labor movement encouraged continued efforts to grow the Silent Majority even as they discouraged aides from looking beyond this core constituency for domestic support despite earlier requests from the president.

The “Metroamericans”

In March 1970, having observed the relative decline of Silent Majority activity, Nixon worried that his new domestic liaison, Charles Colson, had “failed adequately to get the women’s clubs, service clubs and some of the broader areas of club activity involved.” and so in early March requested that Colson and his staff “begin to mobilize a

much broader spectrum” of supporters.⁴ The activities of veterans and grassroots groups such as those associated with National Unity Week were encouraging, but four months after his speech, the president worried that while “we really mobilized the silent majority as a result of my November 3 speech, ... our side seems not to be organized and not effective” now.⁵ Plans to create a national support organization were intended to address the inevitable decline of activity and enthusiasm after a major address, but without financial support from H. Ross Perot, the project was underfunded and Haldeman therefore sought other ways to fulfill the president’s request for “more effective organization” in public opinion efforts.⁶ Recognizing that, “obviously, it is easy to delineate a problem but it is far harder to tackle it and solve it,” Haldeman pushed for almost total staff involvement in the project.⁷

Replying to his April 15 memorandum, Haldeman informed Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John D. Ehrlichman in no uncertain terms that a responsibility to promote the president was not limited to staffers with “direct operational responsibility for ... getting the word across.” Rather, he continued, “we all have the responsibility for getting this story across and ... none of us can smile at another and say ‘You haven’t gotten the story over.’”⁸ Echoing Nixon’s consistent emphasis on the

⁴ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [4],” March 2, 1970, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [2],” March 2, 1970, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶ Ibid..

⁷ “H.R. Haldeman to John Ehrlichman,” April 16, 1970, HRH-Staff Memos May/June 1970 D-G; Box 60; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸ Ibid.

importance of image in politics, Haldeman regretfully agreed with Ehrlichman's analysis that "what we accomplish is to a great degree less important than what we appear to accomplish, and that we are succeeding in the former category rather well but failing in the latter category."⁹ To address this failure, Haldeman asked Special Assistant to the President Jeb Magruder to consider how best to expand the president's domestic appeal beyond the Silent Majority. Magruder's response reflected the realization that efforts following the November 3 speech, while effective at recruiting members of "Middle America, the Silent Majority, or whatever we choose to call it," had ignored "those people who are alienated by Middle America: the young, the poor, and the Black."¹⁰ Quoting historian and former advisor to President Johnson, Eric Goldman, Magruder argued that successful appeals to the "hearts and minds of Middle America" had overlooked the so-called "'Metroamericans,' the counterpart to the Silent Majority; the under-40-college-educated urban-dwelling business and professional people who enjoy art, attend the symphony and read *The New York Times Book Review*."¹¹

As Magruder saw the situation, efforts to ensure a high profile for Silent Majority favorites such as Vice President Spiro Agnew and Attorney General John Mitchell linked the entire administration to "a Middle American [who Metroamericans] characterize as a fat, racist suburbanite sitting at home in front of the television watching a football game

⁹ Ibid. Nixon frequently claimed to reject image-based concerns, but David Greenberg argues that his "vehement disavowals of image making were a classic case of protesting too much." David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), xxvii. Kimball similarly recognizes the importance of image in Nixon's domestic political calculations; Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 4–10, 32, 160, 165–69.

¹⁰ "Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman," April 24, 1970, 1, HRH May-Aug 1970 Magruder; Box 62; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹ Ibid.

and drinking a half-case of beer.”¹² While public opinion efforts in late 1969 and early 1970 did intend to mobilize these citizens, Magruder attempted to point out the potential costs of these efforts. In his analysis, Nixon’s decision to pointedly ignore the November Moratorium/Mobilization protests in favor of watching college football not only demonstrated his view that the antiwar demonstrations were unimportant, but simultaneously painted a one-dimensional portrait of himself and his policies.¹³ To correct this trend, Magruder recommended a public relations campaign to demonstrate that Nixon “has surrounded himself with bright, young, well-educated men who care ... who, while moderate, have hearts and consciences.”¹⁴ For example, not only would draft reform advocate and Special Consultant to the President for Systems Analysis Martin Anderson appeal to a very different demographic, but drawing attention to him and similar staffers would enable them to “sell our programs where others can’t.” Magruder recommended that they take advantage of the fact that “young Metroamerica won’t listen to [Defense Secretary] Mel Laird, but they will to Marty Anderson - not because Marty’s any more liberal (he’s probably less Liberal than Laird) but because he’s got more hair, a

¹² Ibid.

¹³ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s, 1994), 107; Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 393.

¹⁴ “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman,” 2. “Thus, when the business community thinks of the Administration, it should think of [Assistant to the President and later Assistant to the President for International Economic Affairs] Pete[r M.] Flanigan. When civil rights leaders and culture buffs think of the Administration, they should think of [Special Consultant to the President concerned with domestic issues] Len Garment. Environment types should know about [Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John C.] Whitaker. Urbanologists should know more about [Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John D.] Ehrlichman and [Counselor to the President for Urban Affairs Daniel Patrick] Moynihan.”

Ph.D., a sexy wife, drives a Thunderbird, and lives in a high-rise apartment.”¹⁵ Magruder was less concerned with the apparent stature of his proposed spokesmen than with the image they would project.

Magruder argued that working to “balance the society pages with the Administration’s young swingers as well as the Mitchells and the Agnews” and sending younger staffers to speak at colleges would complicate the popular image of the Administration and expand the Silent Majority.¹⁶ Such suggestions speak to the simplistic approach of the Nixon Administration toward both public opinion and demographics. Rather than craft policies with broad popular appeal, staffers instead identified groups with superficial similarities and then devised ways to appeal to those groups. In this way, they effectively – and not entirely intentionally – subdivided the American electorate into countless, isolated groups while effectively ignoring potential overlapping interests and concerns between them. More damaging still, these divisions – reflected and perpetuated in the divisions of responsibilities within the White House – ensured that aides were rarely aware of the ways that policies intended to appeal to one group could undermine efforts to attract other supporters. And so, Magruder’s recommendation that the administration appeal to groups beyond the Silent Majority was in many ways doomed from the start.

The centrality of racial and economic appeals to Southern whites – the so-called Southern strategy – resulted in limited official support for desegregation and other civil rights initiatives; which in turn alienated African Americans as well as liberal and

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

moderate whites. Official critiques of universities and a vague “permissiveness” – particularly as related to drug-use and sexuality – as fuelling the antiwar movement similarly hindered efforts to build ties to both students and well-educated adults. Although revisionist historians have argued that Nixon’s presidency was more progressive than it initially appeared, few contemporaries would have described Nixon as a liberal. The domestic policies underlying these claims – most notably an expansion of welfare support and increasing protections for both the environment and workers – were unlikely to rally Metroamericans to his side because, as journalists Rowland Evans and Robert D. Novak observed, Nixon’s “style, his rhetoric and his tone were more important than specific actions” and policies.¹⁷ Recognizing the inherent challenges in his suggestion, as well as the usefulness of the Silent Majority in mobilizing outside allies, Magruder argued: “it’s not one or the other, it’s both at the same time.”¹⁸ But despite Haldeman’s agreement and recommendation that the administration “move ahead on this basis,” the sudden explosion of opposition following the president’s announcement of US

¹⁷ Rowland Evans and Robert D Novak, *Nixon in the White House: The Frustration of Power* (New York: Random House, 1971), 176. Joan Hoff’s *Nixon Reconsidered* is a foundational text of the “Nixon-as-liberal” revisionist school. She cites Nixon’s welfare, civil rights, economic, and environmental policies as well as his efforts to reorganize the federal bureaucracy to support her claim that Nixon “achieved more than most of us would like to admit.” Works by Melvin Small, Tom Wicker, Richard Parment reach a similar conclusion and one of Hoff’s students, Dean Kotlowski, argues for a positive interpretation of Nixon’s civil rights policies. David Greenberg traces this historiographical evolution, emphasizing the importance of a 1987 Hofstra conference on Nixon and his presidency, concluding that this view of Nixon has “some validity.” Acknowledging the criticism of scholars such as Stanley Kutler, Greenberg links acceptance of the Nixon-as-liberal argument to scholarly views of the relative importance of Watergate versus the post-Nixon rise of conservatism. Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow*, 337, 304–37; Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1994), 4, 17, 1–144; Dean J Kotlowski, *Nixon’s Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Herbert S Parmet, *Richard Nixon and his America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1991).

¹⁸ “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman,” 4.

and ARVN incursions into Cambodia meant that short-term damage control efforts took precedence over long-term public opinion thinking.¹⁹

A “Mission to Organize Support for the President’s Position”:
Managing Responses to the Cambodia Invasion

The March overthrow of Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia by a right-wing coalition under Premier Lon Nol gave the US the opportunity for a major shift in official policy in the region. Frustrated by Sihanouk’s tolerance of North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and National Liberation Front (NLF) sanctuaries in Cambodia, US officials welcomed the coup. In late April, Nixon ordered Kissinger to “do something symbolic to help him survive”²⁰ and soon moved beyond symbolic assistance by authorizing a limited invasion by US troops and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) troops to attack North Vietnamese and Viet Cong sanctuaries in Cambodia. In a meeting with senior advisors, Nixon argued that the “operation was necessary in order to sustain the continuation of the Vietnamization Program and would possibly help in, ... not detract from, U.S. efforts to negotiate peace.”²¹ Before Nixon’s speech announcing the invasion, his staff worked to prevent the “adverse reaction in some Congressional circles and some segments of the public” predicted by Secretary of State William Rogers and Secretary of

¹⁹ “H.R. Haldeman to John Ehrlichman,” April 28, 1970, HRH-Staff Memos May/June 1970 D-G; Box 60; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²⁰ “Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger [2],” April 22, 1970, 1, [Memoranda from the P, 1969-74] Memos--April 1970; Box 2; PPF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²¹ “Memorandum of Meeting - Richard Nixon, William Rogers, Melvin Laird, and George Mitchell,” April 28, 1970, 2, [Memoranda from the P, 1969-74] Memos--4/28/70 meeting; Box 2; PPF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Defense Melvin Laird.²² Echoing preparations for the Silent Majority speech, Colson and other staffers outlined pre- and post-speech activities including briefings for journalists and national leaders, speech inserts for spokesmen, coordinated letter and telegram campaigns, rallies, and other pro-Nixon demonstrations.²³ Specifically, officials wanted to “get [the] flag flown in support of President” in an effort to reestablish the domestic consensus which had given Nixon’s predecessors relatively unchallenged control over US foreign policy.²⁴

That Nixon and his aides had to repeatedly request public support speaks to how thoroughly that consensus had been “shattered” by the social and political upheavals of the 1960s as well as the ongoing domestic debate over Vietnam.²⁵ Even so, the appearance of consensus was useful and so Nixon met with national veterans organizations two days before his speech to warn them that he would soon announce a

²² Ibid., 2.

²³ “Notes,” n.d., 1, Cambodia [II]; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. As is the case with Nixon’s November 3, 1969 “Silent Majority” speech, Wells provides the most complete picture of the administration’s preparations for the April 30, 1970 announcement of the Cambodian invasion, but since the April 30 speech announced a specific policy, both scholarly studies and participant memoirs discuss, to varying degrees, White House debates and planning leading up to the speech; see, e.g., Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 191–200; Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 143–45, 154–58; George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979), 288–93; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 201–12; Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 126–41, 167–71; Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), 445–52; Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York: Arbor House, 1985), 116–22; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 180–88; Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 193–96, 199–201; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 77–79; Wells, *The War Within*, 416–420; Marilyn B. Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 245–48.

²⁴ “Notes,” 1. For a useful overview of the characteristics and evolution of this consensus from World War II to Nixon, see Richard A. Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 3–37.

²⁵ Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War*, 45.

“difficult and major decision ... with respect to the situation in Cambodia.”²⁶

Emphasizing the strategic importance of Cambodia, Nixon attempted to frame aid as an “enormous U.S. commitment” so as to position the planned invasion as a reasonable response.²⁷ After a similar meeting for outside allies with Charles Colson, attendees – including members of United We Stand (organized by H. Ross Perot following the November 3 speech), the Tell It To Hanoi Committee, the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam (CCPFV), Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), and the Freedom Foundation²⁸ – “departed with the mission to organize support for the President’s position.”²⁹

In the face of growing opposition to the invasion, informal spokesman from the Fleet Reserve Association, Disabled American Veterans, AMVETS, the College Republicans and other groups both endorsed Nixon’s policies and backed administration efforts to isolate the antiwar movement.³⁰ Echoing a common theme, Veterans of Foreign

²⁶ Melanson analyzes Nixon’s efforts to create at least the image of consensus during his administration in *Ibid.*, 43–86. Nixon met with representatives of the National Guard Association of the United States, Navy League of the United States, Reserve Officers Association of the United States, Retired Officers Association, Inc., Air Force Association, American Ordnance Association, Association of the United States Army, Marine Corps League, National Rifle Association of America, Military Order of World Wars, American Security Council, Fleet Reserve Association. “Charles Colson for the President’s File,” September 13, 1970, Military/Patriotic gps. mtg. with President, 4/28/70, 3pm; Box 20; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²⁷ “Charles Colson for the President’s File,” 1–2.

²⁸ “Notes,” 5.

²⁹ “George Bell to H.R. Haldeman,” May 1, 1970, 1, HRH Memos 1969-1970 (Complete) [3 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁰ “Mailing, Fleet Reserve Association,” May 1, 1970, Cambodia [folder 2 of 2]-Memorandums re Cambodia; Box 43; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Raymond Neal to Richard Nixon,” April 30, 1970, Cambodia [folder 2 of 2]-Memorandums re Cambodia; Box 43; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Ralph Hall and Robert Gomulinski to Richard Nixon,” n.d., Cambodia [folder 2 of 2]-Memorandums re Cambodia; Box 43; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Robert

Wars (VFW) National Commander Ray Gallagher argued that opposition to the President's policies was "the result of a cleverly organized campaign by dissident elements" which could be countered by VFW members sending letters and telegrams to Congress "showing support of the President and the men in Vietnam."³¹ Almost more important to Nixon and his staff was the strong endorsement of Nixon's decision by AFL-CIO President George Meany. While his statement stopped short of urging union members to write to the President and Congress, he unequivocally endorsed the President's decision, further stating "in this crucial hour, he should have the full support of the American people. He certainly has ours."³²

Meany's support was particularly important to Nixon and his aides because the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), like most unions, had close political ties to the Democratic Party. Prior to 1968, labor leaders such as Walter Reuther of the Union of Automobile Workers (UAW) had supported both the foreign and domestic policies of Democratic presidents, but the growing costs of the Vietnam War – both to Johnson's Great Society programs and to their grieving families and communities – led many to reconsider their views with Reuther and others actively opposing the war after Nixon's election.³³ With the movement divided over Vietnam, a

Polack to College Republican Leadership," May 1, 1970, Cambodia; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³¹ "Ray Gallagher to VFW," n.d., Cambodia-Letters, Telegrams and Correspondence; Box 42; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³² "Statement - George Meany," May 1, 1970, Cambodia - Advance; Box 44; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³³ While the vocal support of some members of the labor movement – most notably AFL-CIO president George Meany – for the Vietnam War led early scholars of the domestic side of the war to conclude that "labor," broadly defined, supported the Vietnam War, subsequent scholars have explored the

shared anticommunism laid the foundation for an alliance between the Republican Nixon and hawkish labor leaders such as Meany, New York Building and Construction Trades head Peter Brennan, International Brotherhood of Teamsters leaders Jimmy Hoffa and Frank Fitzsimmons, and International Longshoremen's Association president Thomas "Teddy" Gleason. Even as their leaders supported Nixon's policies, few rank and file union members could truly be called hawks, but class tensions underlying worker antipathy for the antiwar movement meant that opposition to the Cambodia invasion created an environment in which the White House could build what historian Edmund Wehrle describes as an "awkward, brief alliance" with the conservative wing of the labor movement.³⁴

"Tangible Displays of Patriotism:" Rallying
Supporters in the Midst of Protest

This alliance came at a crucial moment. Despite efforts to encourage positive responses to the announcement, Nixon's decision to send US troops into Cambodia triggered protests across the nation.³⁵ The heightened tensions following the President's

foreign policy divisions and disagreements within the AFL-CIO and other unions. Maria Graciela Abarca, "'Discontented but Not Inevitably Reactionary': Organized Labor in the Nixon Years" (Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2001); Christian G Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Frank F Koscielski, "Divided Loyalties: American Unions and the Vietnam War" (Ph.D., Wayne State University, 1997); Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), 429; Kieran Walsh Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class: The New Left, Black Liberation, and the United States Labor Movement (1967--1981)" (Ph.D., History, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007); Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

³⁴ Edmund F Wehrle, "'Partisan for the Hard Hats:' Charles Colson, George Meany, and the Failed Blue-Collar Strategy," *Labor* 5, no. 3 (September 21, 2008): 45.

³⁵ Although Nixon and Kissinger would later attempt to present the Cambodia decision as a response to North Vietnamese aggression, much of the subsequent scholarship supports George Herring's

announcement exploded on May 4, 1970 when the National Guard fired on student antiwar protestors at Kent State University – killing four and injuring nine. In the aftermath of the tragedy, as campus after campus shut down to avoid additional violence and as students and others streamed into DC for protests, White House aides scrambled to, as Colson urged, “avoid having the blame for Kent State hung on us completely.”³⁶ Communications Director Herb Klein recommended that Nixon directly engage his critics and prevent comparisons to Lyndon Johnson by neither appearing “to be a hand wringer” nor turning “inward, becoming more and more isolated, almost hermit-like.”³⁷ But meetings with antiwar activists – including the President speaking with student protesters gathered at the Lincoln Memorial – did little to quiet the opposition particularly as Nixon had no intention of changing the policies at the root of the protests.³⁸

conclusion that such claims are “at best misleading.” Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 191–99; Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 143–46, 154–56; Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 290, 288–93; Seymour M Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 175–83; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 201–11; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 126–41, 147–67; Nixon, *RN*, 455–51; William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990*, 245–48.

³⁶ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” May 6, 1970, HRH Memos 1969–70 (Complete) [1 of 3]; Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁷ “Herb Klein to Richard Nixon,” May 6, 1970, 2, Cambodia - Advance; Box 44; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁸ The Kent State shootings understandably dominate most analyses of the domestic response to the Cambodia invasions with Nixon’s unexpected trip to the Lincoln memorial presented as representative of the administration’s larger, failed, effort to contain its domestic critics. Nixon certainly felt that his attempt to reach out to the students flooding into Washington were an important demonstration that he was not ignoring their concerns, as shown by the long memorandum he drafted shortly after the incident to ensure that his staff recognized the moment’s significance. But most historians have presented the awkward conversation as further proof of the president’s inability to relate to, much less understand, his opponents and even Haldeman frankly described it as the start of “the weirdest day so far.” Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 279–87; Peter N Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York, N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 13–18; Dallek,

Concerned more with the public opinion implications of the protests and anxious that the president not appear callous or out of touch, aides instead focused on creating an image of responsiveness rather than addressing the root causes of the turmoil. When Colson's suggestion of a presidential statement seemed inadequate, other staffers "work[ed] out a method whereby telephone calls can come into the White House switchboard and be directly switched to ... [the Department of Health, Education and Welfare], thereby giving the impression to the caller that he is talking with someone at the White House."³⁹ In this way, staffers would not have to deal with the outpouring of responses but could still convey the appearance of a White House actively engaging its critics. Meanwhile, closing campuses and a revitalized antiwar movement reenergized the Silent Majority, proving that the furor surrounding Nixon's Cambodia decision was exactly the "demonstration" he had recommended in February.⁴⁰ Importantly, the post-Cambodia expressions of support were less focused on defending or justifying Nixon's policies and instead emphasized patriotic themes so as to draw members of the Silent Majority closer together while at the same time distancing themselves from the opposition.

Nixon and Kissinger, 200–12; Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 163, 158–66; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 213–19; Nixon, *RN*, 452–67; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 188–201; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 196, 201–10; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 79–81; Wells, *The War Within*, 421–41; "Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [2]," May 13, 1970, P Memos 1970 (2 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman," May 8, 1970, Cambodia - Advance; Box 44; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁹ "Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman," 1.

⁴⁰ "John Brown to H.R. Haldeman," February 20, 1970, H.R. Haldeman A-G Memo Feb 1970; Box 57; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

These responses suggest that National Unity Week, the Silent Majority speech, and other administration efforts had succeeded in, as Charles DeBenedetti argues, “ma[king] the critics rather than the war the central issue in the national debate over Vietnam.”⁴¹ Instead of taking a position based on their opinion of the Vietnam War, which George Gallup suggested was essentially a question of *how* not *if* the US would withdraw from Vietnam, these new recruits into the Silent Majority supported the president because they appeared to have a common enemy: the antiwar movement.⁴² Earlier success in delegitimizing the humanitarian patriotism of the antiwar movement had further distanced the president’s opponents from the nationalist, and hawkish, patriotism promoted by the administration. The growing perception that activists and protesters opposed not just the Vietnam War, but also established cultural and political norms further isolated the movement. A widening gap between moderates and activists led many citizens to embrace Nixon’s version of nationalist patriotism rather than ally themselves with groups they saw as determined to radically upend American society.⁴³

Therefore, while the letters and telegrams they sent to the White House generally endorsed the President’s policies, many went further and described their own organizing efforts. Writing from Nashville, Tennessee, Bob Lyne’s belief that “far too few Americans rise above the category of the ‘Silent Majority’” led him to embark on

⁴¹ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 258.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 271.

⁴³ Although not a central argument, most work on the Vietnam War, and particularly Nixon’s foreign and domestic policies, acknowledges the inverse relationship between public opinion about Vietnam and about the antiwar movement. In addition to Chapters Two and Three, see e.g., *Ibid.*, 264; David R Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 167–68; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 45–47; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 161, 188; Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon*, 69–70.

“OPERATION UNITY” in support of Nixon’s Cambodia policies.⁴⁴ Echoing Lyne’s plan to “help people climb out of that rut of complacency,” Oklahoma legislator Marisue Churchwell suggested a program she called “Operation Chin-Up USA.”⁴⁵ With White House support, and presidential involvement, she intended to “challenge the people in general to take positive approach with today’s youth, giving recognition and counseling from the White House to the grass roots.”⁴⁶ Churchwell did not offer details in her telegram and as Colson decided to “brush her off politely,” it is unclear exactly how she planned to mobilize “the energy of all our people” in support of the president.⁴⁷ The decision not to actively promote Operation Chin-Up U.S.A. reflected a larger administration tendency observed by Sandra Scanlon in her study of grassroots support for the Vietnam War. Scanlon notes that the administration consistently “did little to foster the allegiance” of autonomous pro-war groups even as it attempted to mobilize its domestic supporters.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ “Bob Lyne to Richard Nixon,” May 6, 1970, Cambodia-Letters, Telegrams and Correspondence; Box 42; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁵ Ibid.; “Marisue Churchwell to Rosemary Woods,” May 10, 1970, 1, Student Demonstration; Box 114; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁶ “Marisue Churchwell to Rosemary Woods,” 2.

⁴⁷ “Marisue Churchwell to Rosemary Woods.”

⁴⁸ Sandra Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration” (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005), 202. Scanlon further observes that administration efforts to organize student supporters were further complicated by the fact that aids – as well as the president and vice president – “fell victim to the tendency to cast aspersions on anti-war students, rather than provide aid to their pro-war supporters.” This administration bias toward attacking its student opponents would compromise the effectiveness of its efforts to contain the repercussions of the Kent State shootings and subsequent resurgence in antiwar activism. Students were an integral part of the antiwar movement during the Vietnam era and much scholarship on student activism is therefore subsumed in larger studies of the movement such as DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*; Wells, *The War Within*. There is a growing literature devoted to exploring student activism which explores conservative and pro-war activism as well as student participation and leadership in the antiwar movement to also examine pro-war students and student participation in other social and political movements; see, e.g.

Which is not to say that such grassroots efforts – particularly projects like Lyne’s that did not depend on active administration involvement – were unwelcome. Rather, they were an encouraging sign that efforts to foster pro-Nixon public opinion had become self-sustaining. Even so, Nixon felt that more could be done: “I believe that it could be quite useful, if when I arrived at Homestead [Florida] we could allow the local people to put on a little bigger welcome than usual with a few signs ‘we back you Mr. President’, etc.”⁴⁹ The administration certainly wanted to cultivate the appearance of grassroots support, but without the risks of unpredictability inherent in promoting projects created and controlled by individuals outside the administration. Whenever possible, White House officials worked to promote those grassroots efforts they believed they could control – the implication from Nixon’s memorandum to Haldeman is that the people in Homestead had provided similar welcomes in the past and so if given more space would likely provide a more media-friendly welcome. This request highlights the importance of control in White House public opinion efforts, as aides were unlikely to actively involve themselves, much less the president, in truly grassroots projects.

An ideal support effort, therefore, was one initiated by White House officials, but with the appearance of being a grassroots, autonomous expression of pro-Nixon and pro-

John A Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Gerard J De Groot, *Student Protest: The Sixties and After* (London; New York: Longman, 1998), 3–130, 153–200; Gael Graham, *Young activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006); Kenneth J. Heineman, *Campus Wars: The Peace Movement at American State Universities in the Vietnam Era* (NYU Press, 1994); Rebecca E Klatch, *A Generation Divided the New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 201–45; Gregory L. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of the Contemporary Right* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” May 13, 1970, 5, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Vietnam sentiment – such as the editorial and petition on the front page of the May 12, 1970 *Birmingham News*. Inspired by a call from White House, the editorial linked the President with traditional American values while presenting the antiwar movement as the work of “organized minorities.”⁵⁰ Despite claims to “respect the American right to dissent,” the editors defined it in such a way as to malign the opposition. Writing that “flag-burning is not legitimate dissent; rock-throwing and building-burning are not legitimate expressions of dissent,” the editors used extreme examples – flag-burning in particular was unpopular even with many antiwar activists – to reinforce their preference for Nixon’s version of nationalist patriotism.⁵¹ Further undermining the idea of patriotic dissent, a “large group of Silent Americans” described the antiwar movement as “an angry mob bent on disruption and turmoil” and urged their fellow citizens to “stand together as one large ‘American’.”⁵² Such unsolicited support – aides did not have “any notion as to who might have started it” and knew little more than the names of the

⁵⁰ “Robert Conkling to Charles Colson,” May 15, 1970, Cambodia-Letters, Telegrams and Correspondence; Box 42; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ “Mr. President - We Support You,” *Birmingham News*, May 12, 1970. Flag-burning, while a relatively uncommon form of protest, reinvigorated the flag protection movement in 1967. The movement, originally organized by activists seeking to prevent the use of the flag in commerce and politics had, by the twentieth century, come to agitate for legislation banning vaguely-defined “disrespect” and “desecration” in an effort to marginalize opposition, protest, and minority groups. A publicized 1967 flag-burning incident resulted in the 1968 passage of a federal law banning flag desecration which would eventually be declared unconstitutional leading to periodic efforts to amend the Constitution to prevent destroying or damaging a flag. Robert Justin Goldstein, *Burning the Flag: The Great 1989-1990 American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996).

⁵² “‘Your Fellow Americans’ to Richard Nixon,” May 15, 1970, Silent Majority Organization; Box 112; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

senders – was another sign that the administration’s top-down public opinion efforts were taking root in the general population.⁵³

“Not as Old-fashioned and as Out of Date as the ‘Know-it-Alls’
Would Have us Believe:” Patriotism and the
May 1970 Hard Hat Demonstrations

Even as the President’s staff collected telegrams and letters of support from the Silent Majority, a new group actively and aggressively claimed that identity for itself as members of the New York Construction and Building Trades marched down Wall Street on May 8 and later organized a peaceful rally for May 20, 1970. The Kent State shootings, a rallying point for the reinvigorated the antiwar movement, indirectly motivated these construction workers, building engineers, carpenters, longshoremen and other union members to more actively express their views on the Vietnam War. But instead of marching in opposition to the President’s decision to invade Cambodia, they surged down Wall Street to confront students and antiwar activists at a vigil to honor the Kent State victims. The resulting clash was a violent demonstration of support for Nixon and initiated almost two weeks of marches and demonstrations by the pro-Nixon workers culminating in a well-organized, and remarkably peaceful, march and rally on May 20.

Agreeing “that love of country and love and respect for our country’s flag are not as old-fashioned and as out of date as the ‘know-it-alls’ would have us believe,” between 60,000-150,000 construction workers took to the streets on May 20, 1970 in a powerful demonstration of support for Nixon, the war in Vietnam, and opposition to the antiwar

⁵³ “Noble Melencamp to Charles Colson,” May 18, 1970, Silent Majority Organization; Box 112; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

movement.⁵⁴ Embracing Nixon's patriotic rhetoric and foreign policies despite disagreements with his domestic policies, the construction workers proudly celebrated the soldiers in Vietnam.⁵⁵ For many of these men, regardless of age, military service was both an obligation and a rite of passage and many of their sons, brothers, friends, and neighbors were fighting in the jungles of Vietnam.⁵⁶ While personal ties to costs of war led to a pronounced frustration with the war in many working-class and ethnic communities, the hawkishness of the New York construction workers dominated contemporary and initial historical accounts and contributed to what Sandra Scanlon describes as a "stereotype of working-class support for the war."⁵⁷ The marches, rallies, and confrontations of May 8-20 encouraged continued effort to build ties between the president and the labor movement. Even as they recognized that certain antiwar and left-leaning unions would never support the president, White House aides consistently overlooked or ignored the complexities of "labor" opinion. As a consequence, administration planning effectively conflated "hard hats" – the pro-war, pro-Nixon white

⁵⁴ Homer Bigart, "Huge City Hall Rally Backs Nixon's Indochina Policies: Thousands at Rally Here Back Nixon on Vietnam," *New York Times* (New York, N.Y., May 21, 1970); "Advertisement: Official Building Trades Rally," *Daily News*, May 18, 1970.

⁵⁵ "Advertisement: Official Building Trades Rally."

⁵⁶ Appy, *Working-Class War*; Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 177–79.

⁵⁷ Scanlon, "The Pro-Vietnam War Movement," 169; Appy, *Working-Class War*, 38–43; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 135–38. Early scholarship on labor views of Vietnam share the contemporary fascination with the Hard Hat demonstrations leading these scholars to conclude that the Hard Hats were representative of broader labor views of the war. Joshua B. Freeman, "Hardhats: Construction Workers, Manliness, and the 1970 Pro-War Demonstrations," *Journal of Social History* 26, no. 4 (July 1993): 725–744; Peter B. Levy, "The New Left, Labor, and the Vietnam War," *Peace & Change* 15, no. 1 (January 1990): 46; Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Peace Now!: American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2–12, 178–221.

ethnic construction workers – with the more general labels of “workers” and “labor,” frequently using the terms interchangeably with an occasional recognition that “hard hats” were particularly supportive of the president.⁵⁸

Advertisements for the May 20 rally reinforced this view by echoing administration rhetoric which emphasized patriotic loyalty and the flag as a symbol of support for both Nixon and the Vietnam War. Organizers explicitly invited the participation of all Americans, “students and Workers - long hair or short - bald or bearded” as long as each participant brought “love for the only flag we have.”⁵⁹ Giving the US flag a starring role in the May protests further separated the pro-Nixon, pro-Vietnam workers from the antiwar movement. One worker based his participation in both the May 8 riot and the May 20 rally on his belief that “anybody who raises an enemy flag in our country is a traitor” implicitly casting the war’s opponents as unpatriotic and un-American.⁶⁰ While undoubtedly opposed to a movement they saw as dominated by privileged students – one pro-war worker later said “I guess maybe our feeling toward them might be sort of jealousy” – the Hard Hat demonstrations explicitly echoed Nixon’s rhetorical embrace of nationalist patriotism following the Silent Majority speech.

⁵⁸ I have tried to limit this confusion by using either the label “Hard Hats” or a modifier such as pro-war, hawkish, right-wing, conservative, or pro-Nixon to indicate a recognition that not all members or organized labor supported Nixon’s Vietnam policies.

⁵⁹ “Advertisement: Official Building Trades Rally.”

⁶⁰ Diana Lurie, “Underneath the Hard Hats: A Political Symposium,” *New York Magazine*, November 2, 1970, 32.

Taken together, nationalist patriotism and class resentments, rather than support for the war itself, led to the White House–Hard Hat alliance on the Vietnam War.⁶¹ Their emphasis on the patriotism and nationalism of their support allowed the Hard Hats to avoid endorsing all of Nixon’s policies and preserved their political autonomy, but few observers appreciated the nuance. White House aides and media commentators therefore interpreted the May demonstrations as proof of both the viability of the Silent Majority and of worker support for the Vietnam War. Conversely, Thomas Nolan of the International Union of Operating Engineers described the rally as a chance for individuals to show that “patriotism and love and respect for our flag is not dead.”⁶² With the hardhat itself becoming a political symbol, Nolan recommended that participants wear them on May 20 to ensure that participants were “recognized as the Construction workers we are.” At the same time, he encouraged attendees to “wear the flag lapel buttons, or bring an American flag with them.”⁶³ These workers supported Nixon, yes, but primarily as Commander-in-Chief. As on-going opposition to the Philadelphia Plan – an administration affirmative action program – and subsequent opposition to wage and price

⁶¹ Appy, *Working-Class War*, 41–43; Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 57–58; Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 135–38; Koscielski, “Divided Loyalties,” 6–8; John E Mueller, *War, Presidents, and Public Opinion* (New York, Wiley, 1973), 135; Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 179, 196–97; Wehrle, “‘Partisan for the Hard Hats’,” 55.

⁶² “Thomas Nolan to International Union of Operating Engineers,” May 18, 1970, Hard Hats; Box 69; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. As mentioned in Chapter Three, these flag pins were a relatively recent invention and a useful tool for the administration to both solidify popular identification with the Silent Majority and to more closely claim the powerful symbolism of the flag for pro-Nixon, pro-Vietnam sentiments.

⁶³ Ibid.

controls would demonstrate, the president did not have an unequivocal Hard Hat endorsement.⁶⁴

Even though these events – both the peaceful rally on May 20 and the violent near-riot of May 8 – were celebrated as spontaneous, grassroots expressions of support for the President, they grew out of broader efforts to curry favor with the unions – particularly the AFL-CIO headed by George Meany. Although historians disagree over whether or not the May 8 riot was truly “spontaneous” and over the extent of White House involvement in planning for the May 20 rally, it is undeniable that Colson and other administration aides did their best to ensure use the activities of the Hard Hats to strengthen their ties to the hawkish wing of the labor movement. Colson was in frequent contact with Meany’s foreign policy advisor Jay Lovestone, whom he claimed was responsible for “arranging the construction workers march on Wall Street” and relied on him for advice on how to best appeal to Meany and other right-leaning labor leaders.⁶⁵ Described by scholars of the labor movement at the administration’s “blue-collar strategy,” much of the focus of these efforts was on building a viable coalition for the 1970 mid-term and 1972 presidential elections.⁶⁶ But as shown by the events of May 8

⁶⁴ Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 56–70; Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 125–67; David Hamilton Golland, “Constructing Affirmative Action: Federal Contract Compliance and the Building Construction Trades, 1956–1973” (Ph.D., History, City University of New York, 2008); Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 90–93, 138–44; Bruce J Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 25–35.

⁶⁵ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” May 13, 1970, 2, HRH Memos 1969-1970 (Complete) [3 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. While Wehrle implies that Lovestone and Colson only arranged the May 20 rally, Lovestone’s biographer, Ted Morgan, gives Lovestone a significant role in both the May 8 and May 20 events. Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999); Wehrle, *Between a River & a Mountain*, 161–62.

⁶⁶ This so-called “blue-collar strategy” is not as well-studied as the Southern strategy, but recent work attempts to situate the administration’s wooing of organized labor into larger efforts to use an early

through May 20 pro-Nixon laborers had the potential to more than bring about a political realignment.⁶⁷ The enthusiastic public display of the ideals of nationalist patriotism offered concrete proof of both the existence of a Silent Majority and of their support for Nixon's Vietnam policies.

Hard Hats in the White House

Describing the May demonstrations, White House staffer and former president of Young Americans for Freedom, Tom Huston, argued in mid-May that "what we saw in New York on Friday was the first manifestation of a willingness to fight for the America the blue collar American loves: an America where people work for a living, where they respect the flag, where they appreciate what they have." Huston recommended that the administration therefore "quit talking about the great Silent Majority and start talking to it."⁶⁸ Sharing Huston's assessment of the political potential of the Silent Majority, White House Staff Secretary Steve Bull was similarly intrigued by the Hard Hat demonstrations,

form of identity politics to secure Nixon's reelection. Jefferson Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973," *Labor History* 43, no. 3 (2002): 257-283; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 125-66; Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Joe Merton, "The Politics of Symbolism: Richard Nixon's Appeal to White Ethnicity and the Frustration of Realignment 1969-72," *European Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (2008): 181-198; Wehrle, "'Partisan for the Hard Hats'"; Wehrle, *Between a River & a Mountain*, 160-66.

⁶⁷ Robert Mason argues that this quest for a political realignment was the driving force behind Nixon's efforts to rally domestic support for the Vietnam War and to build ties to organized labor. The idea of a New Majority was indeed a central theme in both White House planning and campaign rhetoric during the 1972 election, but that idea's roots in the Silent Majority projects of 1969 and 1970 suggest that Vietnam public opinion efforts play a more important role in Nixon's domestic political calculations than Mason suggests. Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*.

⁶⁸ "Tom Huston to Bryce Harlow, Harry Dent, Lyn Nofziger, Murray Chotiner, H.R. Haldeman, and John Ehrlichman," May 15, 1970, 5, HRH Memoranda For The President May 1970; Box 139; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Perhaps best known as the primary author of the "Huston Plan," an approved, but never enacted program for increased government surveillance of the antiwar movement – Tom Huston was also a former Young Americans for Freedom national chairman. Schneider, *Cadres for Conservatism*, 97-98, 149, 178-79; Wells, *The War Within*, 414-15, 448-69.

but gave much of the credit to Colson, rather than patriotism.⁶⁹ In a May 22 memorandum to Colson, Bull acknowledged that the violence of some of these demonstrations was problematic, but argued that “those portions that emphasize support and respect for the President and patriotism, are positive and constructive.”⁷⁰ Like Huston, Bull believed that “this display of emotional activity from the ‘hard hats’ provides an opportunity, if under the proper leadership, to forge a new alliance and perhaps result in the emergence of a ‘new right’.”⁷¹ Historians have subsequently agreed with Bull that both experienced and skilled leadership as well as the anger and frustration demonstrated by the Hard Hats were necessary for conservatism to establish itself in the 1970s.⁷² The overt nationalistic patriotism of the Hard Hats was key to administration efforts to strengthen ties to these newly energized supporters.

⁶⁹ “Steve Bull to Charles Colson,” May 22, 1970, Hard Hats; Box 69; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Cowie points to this memo and specifically to Bull’s comment “Obviously, more of these will be occurring throughout the Nation, perhaps partially as a result of your clandestine activity” as the only true “smoking gun” linking the administration with the Hard Hats’ May demonstrations. But as Colson gave much of the credit to Lovestone in his own reports – and certainly would not have obscured his role in organizing the protests if he had been involved – it is more likely that Bull was referring to White House plans to encourage additional displays of Hard Hat support, in effect building on this initial effort which was not organized by the White House. Cowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle,” 265.

⁷⁰ “Steve Bull to Charles Colson.”

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Initially credited almost exclusively for the rise of conservatism in the 1970s, this “backlash” against the social and political movements of the 1960s – the rise of Black Power, an increasingly radical antiwar movement, women’s and gay rights, the counterculture, increasing pressure for desegregation and affirmative action – was certainly an important element of the growth of conservatism during and after Nixon’s administration, but recent scholarship helps to contextualize this angry, resentful conservatism within a larger movement whose leaders had long worked to build a solid foundation for their movement and its eventual expansion. Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York; Berkeley, CA: Atlantic Monthly Press, Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the*

Promoting the “supposedly trite mid-America values that the liberal press likes to snicker about: love of country, respect for people as individuals, the Golden Rule, etc”⁷³ would, Bull argued, ensure continued support from the Hard Hats and other non-movement conservatives while further isolating and marginalizing the President’s opponents. Building on Bull’s observation that “the new left has created the proper conditions for a reaction that, properly controlled and channeled, can be molded into a positive and constructive movement embracing, if not glorifying, the values of decency upon which this Nation was built,”⁷⁴ the administration – from Nixon, Colson and down through the White House hierarchy – actively recruited the Hard Hats following their May demonstrations. The president called Peter Brennan, president of the New York chapter of the Building and Construction Trades to thank him for organizing the May 20 rally. Meanwhile Colson’s office considered how best to act on “the idea of some of the New York construction workers coming down to Washington to present a hard hat to the President.”⁷⁵ Described as a “symbol of freedom” in planning memorandum, Colson’s aide George Bell reported that for less hawkish members of the labor movement and the broader public, the hard hat had become a negative symbol.⁷⁶ For these citizens, the hard

Unmaking of the American Consensus (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

⁷³ “Steve Bull to Charles Colson.”

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Memorandum for George Bell,” n.d., New York Construction Workers--Building & Construction Trades Council; Box 95; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

hat was more closely identified with the violent counterdemonstration and more than the peaceful and patriotic rallies that followed.

Describing the May 20 rally as well-attended and nonviolent, the memorandum briefing Nixon about the May 26 meeting demonstrated an understanding of nuance lacking in much of the media coverage and other White House analyses of those events. Its author, likely Colson although the memorandum is unsigned, recognized, and in turn highlighted for Nixon, the fact that the Hard Hats “have been very careful to say that they back the President and back the country without necessarily endorsing all Administration policies.”⁷⁷ Therefore, based on this advice, Nixon emphasized “country rather than this Administration” during his May 26 meeting with Peter Brennan, President of the New York Building and Construction Trades Association, and other New York leaders. In the Oval Office, Brennan presented the President with a hard hat on behalf of the participants of the May 20 rally as a

symbol of our support for our fighting men and for your efforts in trying to bring the war to a proper conclusion. ... We all want peace. We all want to end this war in a safe and honorable way so that our men may come home as soon as possible to rejoin their loved ones. ... The hard hat will stand as a symbol along with our flag for freedom and patriotism to our beloved country. We pray that our fighting men will be able to exchange their helmets very soon for hard hats and join in building a greater America for all Americans.⁷⁸

In response, the President thanked the construction workers for organizing the nonviolent May 20 rally while his visitors “urged the President to take firm stands to prevent riots

⁷⁷ “Memorandum to Richard Nixon,” n.d., 2, Hard Hats; Box 20; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁸ “Ron Ziegler White House Press Conference,” May 26, 1970, 2, Hard Hats; Box 20; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

and dissent.”⁷⁹ Nixon and his aides were delighted with the meeting and used it to demonstrate “that the President is most appreciative of the support of the ‘working man.’ The courage and patriotism of the ‘Hard Hat’ workers who visited his office today meant a lot to him.”⁸⁰ Their public embrace of the President and his foreign policies reflected White House efforts to delegitimize the idea of patriotic dissent and make the flag a symbol of both the United States and uncritical embrace of Nixon’s foreign policies.

“There is no Middle Ground:” Honor America Day,
Patriotism, and the Hard Hats

These efforts benefitted from the antiwar movement’s failure to recognize that its critique of the United States alienated many citizens who otherwise disagreed with Nixon. Even as some on the left advocated a less combative approach, White House officials repeatedly underscored the differences between the Silent Majority and the antiwar movement based on an activist’s observation: “If white ethnic groups (not all of them ‘blue collar’ by any means) are told in effect that to support peace he must support the Black Panthers, women’s liberation, drugs, free love, Dr. Spock, long hair, and picketing clergymen, he may find it very difficult to put himself on the antiwar side.”⁸¹ Far from obeying Norman Thomas’ advice – “if they want an appropriate symbol they should be washing the flag, not burning it” – many in the antiwar movement by the

⁷⁹ “Charles Colson for the President’s File,” September 12, 1970, 2, Hard Hats; Box 20; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁰ “H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson, Harry Dent, Herb Klein, William Safire, Ron Ziegler,” May 27, 1970, HRH-Staff Memos May/June 1970 A-C; Box 60; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸¹ Andrew Greeley, “The War and White Ethnic Groups: Turning Off ‘The People’,” *The New Republic*, June 23, 1970, 1.

summer of 1970 had effectively surrendered the flag to the president's supporters.⁸² Intensified by the concerted campaign to claim the flag for the president and his supporters, the Vietnam War transformed the flag into a "bitter symbol of tremendous loss" for many in the antiwar movement.⁸³ The refusal of antiwar activists to attempt to reclaim the flag effectively denied them what Woden Teachout describes as "one of the most powerful ways to define a national vision."⁸⁴ Writing in 2001, activist Todd Gitlin reflected on this weakness of the antiwar movement noting that "many Americans were willing to hear our case against the war, but not to forfeit love of their America."⁸⁵

Bemoaning this trend, the editors of the *Evening Star*, a Washington, DC paper, pointed out that "one of the major ironies of this era of domestic tension is the fact that the flag, once the emblem of national unity, is well on its way to becoming a symbol of national division."⁸⁶ Even as the editors urged a return to the days when the flag stood for "a general affection for what America has been, is and can be" and argued that it was "big enough to cover us all. And all of us should be able to find our separate reasons for flying it with pride, and with thanks," few either side sought to ease tensions between

⁸² Evan Thomas quoted his father's speech to a 1969 gathering of the National Student Association, in a letter to the editor inspired by the 1989 debates over flag burning. Evan W. Thomas, "Wash, Don't Burn" (New York, N.Y., July 19, 1989). For a detailed analysis of the 1989 debates, see Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*.

⁸³ Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 8.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Ibid., 221.

⁸⁶ "Put Out More Flags," *Washington Star*, June 18, 1970.

themselves and their opponents.⁸⁷ Aided by an increasingly radical and fractured antiwar movement, whose “image of militancy,” in historian Charles DeBenedetti’s analysis, “provided a foil with which to mobilize prowar [*sic*] support,” the White House was already organizing – at the President’s direction – a major patriotic celebration for July 4, 1970.⁸⁸

Officially non-partisan and apolitical, Honor America Day was very much a Nixon administration production.⁸⁹ By mid-May 1970, a month before the press conference announcing the event, White House officials had lined up major names for the steering committee – including Bob Hope, Billy Graham, George Meany, Ross Perot, and others – as well as outside groups – such as the AFL-CIO, VFW, YAF, and other patriotic and business groups – to serve as the public face of the Fourth of July event.⁹⁰ Co-Chairmen Bob Hope and Billy Graham announced Honor America Day at a June 5, 1970 press conference. Organizers claimed that the event was “not designed to rally support either for the war in Vietnam or against it,” but rather would “show the world

⁸⁷ Ibid. DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 267–72, 280–84; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 193, 198–99, 210–11, 216; Wells, *The War Within*, 397–409, 445–46, 461–62; “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” May 14, 1970, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁸ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 282; “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman.”

⁸⁹ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 288; Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 165–66; Wells, *The War Within*, 459.

⁹⁰ Other members of the steering committee: Norman Vincent Peale, Cardinal O’Boyle, Hobe Lewis, John Connally, Irving Feist, Stan Musial, Clarence Mitchell, Henry Ford, Arthur Ashe, Glen Campbell, Clem Stone, William Paley, Johnny Cash, and Arnold Palmer. Additional sponsors were to include: the Chamber, the Jaycees, DAR, AL, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts, Amvets, Jewish War Veterans, the Catholic War Veterans, NAACP, ministers, League of Women Voters, American Society of Association Executives, NAM, UAW, Voluntary Action Group, the Elks, the Kiwanis Clubs, the Rotary Clubs, the Congress, the Legion, construction workers, ASG. “Charles Colson,” n.d., “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

that ‘Americans can put aside their honest differences and rally around the flag to show national unity.’”⁹¹ Whenever possible, therefore, planners avoided specific references to Vietnam and sought the visible participation of as many of the President’s outside supporters as possible.

And so, even though some members of the organizing committee worried about the “Hard Hats making too much noise publicly re the 4th of July,” Colson and other staffers refused to ask them to be quiet, passive participants.⁹² Instead, Colson told Jeb Magruder that “there is no middle ground. Either the Hard Hats are going to come and make a significant display on July 4th or we better tell them to do nothing.”⁹³ Most likely because Hard Hat support had become a central part of White House planning – particularly the promotion of the Silent Majority – Colson suggested that if members of the organizing committee were unable to work with the Hard Hats, “let’s get someone else to run the show.”⁹⁴ That Colson could so cavalierly propose that the administration replace the outside organizers for the event less than a month before it was to take place suggests that the bulk of the actual planning took place in the White House rather than at the initiative of the official committee. Colson further recommended that “dealings with the Hard Hats be handled by me directly,”⁹⁵ which would have the twin benefits of

⁹¹ Paul Hodge, “Washington Post,” *Washington Post*, June 5, 1970.

⁹² “Memorandum to Charles Colson,” n.d., “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹³ “Charles Colson to Jeb Magruder,” June 11, 1970, “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

distancing committee members – many of them prominent businessmen – from the President’s working-class supporters as well as ensuring even greater White House control over the upcoming event.

On the whole, Honor America Day was a “splendid success” from the Administration’s perspective, with between 400,000 and 500,000 people participating in the day and evening events.⁹⁶ The program included prayers, speeches, and celebrity performances as well as an “Old Glory Marathon,” a National Salute during which “whistles, bells, horns and carillons across the nation will proclaim Honor America Day,”⁹⁷ an aerial salute ending with the “sky full of tiny American Flags,”⁹⁸ and a “Procession of Flags” during which “the largest American flag in the Capitol fl[ew] over the flag of the fifty states and six U.S. territories, [as] citizens of all ages ... cross[ed] the Ellipse, symbolically placing in giant USA letters their own small American flags until the entire letters [we]re a sea of red, white, and blue.”⁹⁹ The elaborate pageant effectively cemented the administration’s claim on the flag and was an effective endorsement of its promotion of nationalist patriotism. The humanitarian patriotism and dissent of the antiwar movement had no place in the lavish celebration and aides saw the high attendance as proof that “most Americans continue to support American principles, that they have not

⁹⁶ “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman, Herb Klein,” July 6, 1970, 2, “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman and Herb Klein,” July 13, 1970, 1, HRH May-Aug 1970 Magruder; Box 62; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁷ “Fact Sheet - Honor America Day,” n.d., 2, “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

given up on the system.”¹⁰⁰ In its effort to “rekindle the American spirit of patriotism,”¹⁰¹ Honor America Day organizers succeeded largely by ignoring many of the substantive issues dividing the country.

White House officials, however, publicized “hippie attacks on ice-cream vendors, families,” and other small protests throughout the day to support their claims that the “radical, revolutionary element in America despises those things which America stands for.”¹⁰² The stark contrast between these two groups so successfully furthered administration goals that many planners saw the event as a model for future efforts. Not only would aides seek out opportunities to highlight the worst in the antiwar movement, but the active cooperation of the organizing committee – chaired by businessman J. Willard Marriott – ensured that White House control would continue to be a key factor in White House public opinion projects. Special Assistant to the President Jeb Magruder described Marriott as an ideal outside ally because he was “very concerned about how the President felt about Honor America Day ... [and] willing to work with all of us here at the White House.”¹⁰³ More importantly, Marriott “moved and changed position when we indicated it was necessary for him to do so.”¹⁰⁴ Marriott’s cooperation allowed Colson, Magruder, and other officials to control the details of Honor America Day and offered a

¹⁰⁰ “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman, Herb Klein.”

¹⁰¹ “1970/07/04,” 2.

¹⁰² “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman, Herb Klein.”

¹⁰³ “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman and Herb Klein,” 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

stark contrast to the fact that “literally none” of the promised “thousands of hard hats” were in Washington, D.C. on July 4.¹⁰⁵

Although as puzzled as Haldeman by the “inexplicable” lack of Hard Hat participation in Honor America Day, Colson confidently assured Haldeman that “we are dealing with the right labor leaders” and blamed minimal Hard Hat participation in Honor America Day on a combination of personal conflicts and miscommunication rather than diminishing support for the president.¹⁰⁶ Specifically, Colson reported that “Meany was personally incensed over the fact that Honor America Day Committee had given his participation very little publicity, had not invited him to speak, and had millions of handbills printed in a nonunion shop” which led him to withhold promised assistance.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Colson acknowledged that he and other planners – from both the committee and the White House – had ignored advice from Brennan and other labor leaders which might have adjusted their expectations for Hard Hat participation. Not only had Brennan warned Colson “at the outset that the Fourth of July weekend was historically the one weekend of the summer that construction workers took off and that it would be exceedingly difficult to get a large group from New York City,” but Gleason had also reported that the “Longshoremen were being offered double pay to work on a holiday.”¹⁰⁸ Colson told Haldeman that he had “mistakingly [*sic*], insisted they make the effort,” but

¹⁰⁵ “H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson,” July 8, 1970, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” July 9, 1970, 1, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 3.

still claimed that both he and Lovestone were “stunned” by how little participation ultimately materialized.¹⁰⁹ Looking ahead to future projects, Colson felt that the administration should recognize that the “Hard Hats turn out because of spontaneous events” and “react more to the negative than to the positive.”¹¹⁰ Consequently, Colson reluctantly concluded that an event emphasizing positive themes such as Honor America Day might not motivate them as much as a “fist fight with the students on Wall Street.”¹¹¹ All the same, Colson was confident that as long as they took care in future not to “reject their leaders’ instincts,” the Hard Hats could provide useful political assistance.¹¹²

Fertilizing the Grassroots

With the Hard Hats established as useful, but unreliable, supporters, ongoing efforts to mobilize existing friendly organizations and coordinate grassroots efforts took on a greater significance. Regional and local groups were rarely able to influence public opinion on a national scale, but their existence strengthened the image of a thriving Silent Majority. Therefore aides worked to encourage smaller groups such as the Honor America Committee, whose members “believe[d] in the American way of life, our American Flag, the Pledge of Allegiance and the Lord’s Prayer, and abhor those who are trying hard to destroy our country.”¹¹³ Even though this group was unlikely to expand

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Albert Olivia to George Bell,” July 23, 1970, “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

beyond its corner of Connecticut, aides ensured that it received Presidential telegrams for rallies,¹¹⁴ that it could present petitions to White House staffers,¹¹⁵ and arranged for Vice President Agnew to send a congratulatory telegram to their February 1971 Red, White, and Blue Ball.¹¹⁶ By cultivating ties with single-issue organizations formed to support Nixon and his policies such as the Honor America Committee, Loyal Americans on Guard, and Silent Majority Speaks the aides expanded their influence over a developing network of supporters. These local efforts reinforced national projects, but also had the potential to enable aides to mobilize pro-Nixon or pro-Vietnam sentiment at the local as well as the national level.

In the midst of this revived interest in local projects, few efforts received as much internal attention as did Ben Garcia's One Million campaign. Part-owner of a trucking business, New Jersey resident Ben Garcia started collecting signatures in support of Nixon's Vietnam policies in mid-July 1970. His plan was to gather one million signatures and then drive to Washington, D.C. on his lawnmower to present them to White House officials. While Garcia claimed to be neither a hawk nor a dove, he intended his petition campaign to say "We are with you, Mr. President."¹¹⁷ In the larger

¹¹⁴ "Albert Olivia to Ron Ziegler," June 5, 1970, "I Love America" July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Richard Nixon to Albert Olivia," June 13, 1970, "I Love America" July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Ibid.

¹¹⁵ "Charles Colson to George Bell," June 15, 1970, "I Love America" July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁶ "George Bell to Andy Lawrence," February 20, 1971, "I Love America" July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁷ Marion Doyle, "'Battling Ben' Hopes Mower Will Help Trim War," *The Home News* (Newark, NJ, July 14, 1970). "He says he feels strongly on the following points, however: That the President should pull out 1,000 troops a day and gradually let the South Vietnamese run their own war, that the United States should have an all-volunteer army, and that the top 100 U.S. companies now engaged in the war effort

context of White House efforts to cultivate grassroots support for Nixon, Colson and other aides made the most of Garcia and his lawnmower. Shortly after learning about Garcia's "One Million Campaign," Colson triumphantly told Press Secretary Ron Zeigler:

I have finally, after many months of work produced a Catholic, veteran, hard-hat all in one. He is obviously the answer to all our problems and I can have him jump out of the box any time. Of course, when he does, he will be riding on his power lawn mower. I think he should definitely, when he arrives, brief the press. I think we can get the lawn mower into the press room without any difficulty.¹¹⁸

Echoing efforts to link the President with established national and patriotic symbols, Garcia explained his "lawnmower and the red, white, and blue barbecue apron outfit ... because they represent the average American homeowner."¹¹⁹ That individuals signing Garcia's petition believed that doing so would "stop the war sooner,"¹²⁰ demonstrated that White House public opinion efforts had succeeded in presenting Nixon's policies, and not those of the antiwar movement, as the only way to end US involvement in Vietnam.

Even as aides could not resist the temptation to suggest that Garcia "cut the South Lawn of the White House ... and give the President a ride on his lawn mower," his campaign – lawnmower, barbecue apron and all – further suggested that efforts to promote both nationalist patriotism and the Silent Majority had effectively separated

should convert to peacetime programs that would be economically profitable and give jobs to returning GIs."

¹¹⁸ "Charles Colson to Ron Ziegler," August 12, 1970, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁹ Doyle, "'Battling Ben' Hopes Mower Will Help Trim War."

¹²⁰ Ibid.

support for the President from the policy details of the Vietnam War.¹²¹ Garcia's Hard Hat affiliations also underscored the continuing importance of visible support from outside the Republican Party and demonstrated the truth in AFL-CIO foreign policy advisor Jay Lovestone's observation that many leaders and members of the labor movement "feel more comfortable philosophically with us than with the Democrats."¹²² Offering further proof, Teddy Gleason, President of the International Longshoremen Association, spoke on the importance of patriotism and support for the President at a mid-August "U.S.A. - All the Way" Rally; sponsored by the New Orleans Silent Majority Committee.¹²³

Gleason opened his remarks by celebrating the fact that the President's supporters were "no longer a SILENT majority."¹²⁴ Echoing administration rhetoric, Gleason suggested that "perhaps we should now call ourselves the 'patriotic majority'. It would be a more appropriate designation."¹²⁵ Like the President and his staff, Gleason was careful to state that the Hard Hats "respect anyone's right of peaceful dissent ---- but not

¹²¹ "Charles Colson to Larry Higby," August 18, 1970, Vietnam -- Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²² "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman," July 28, 1970, 1, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Lovestone's observation reflected his biases and position in the AFL-CIO hierarchy as well as the views of a growing segment of the labor movement following the Hard Hats' demonstrations in New York City. His views encouraged Colson's promotion of the blue-collar strategy and further appeals to the white ethnic workers he and other aides saw as the president's most likely supporters from within the labor movement. Cowie, "Nixon's Class Struggle," 266-69; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 138-45; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 69-76, 96-99; Richard G Moss, "Constructing the New Right Ethnic: Cultural Politics at the Intersection of Nostalgia and Anger" (Ph.D., History, Purdue University, 2009).

¹²³ "Thomas Gleason, Speech," August 15, 1970, International Longshoreman Association; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

the right to incite violence,”¹²⁶ while still presenting the Longshoremen and other Hard Hats as true patriots in contrast to the “men and women who burn the American flag ... who bomb places of public gathering ... who curse our patriotic American leaders while deliberately inciting violence.”¹²⁷ The enthusiastic response to Gleason’s reminder that I.L.A stood for both “I Love America” and “International Longshoremen’s Association” demonstrated that Gleason was not the only Hard Hat on what Colson described as a “patriotism kick second to none.”¹²⁸ These and other similar endorsements led Colson to report to Haldeman that while they had yet to convince the labor movement to officially join the Republican Party, the “reservoir of goodwill and support for the President, both as an individual and as President, is the basis for a permanent alliance.”¹²⁹

This nascent partnership between the White House and organized labor led Colson to outline a detailed plan to “make them part of our ‘New Majority’”¹³⁰ in time for the 1972 elections, if not earlier. Colson recommended the continued cultivation of sympathetic union leaders, like Gleason or those of unions with particularly conservative memberships such as members of all the construction trades – “clearly our most fertile ground.”¹³¹ More generally, Colson recommended that Nixon “continue to talk about the

¹²⁶ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 6; “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2],” September 14, 1970, 3, Nixon and Labor/Political; Box 96; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2],” 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., 3.

‘working man’ and the ‘build America’ theme.”¹³² More important than substantive policy, Colson argued that “we can win a lot of them with proper recognition”¹³³ and that a strong “signal to the rank and file that we do intend to do something” could well be enough to bring them into the President’s camp.¹³⁴ Colson’s confident prediction that “if we can follow through on the good start we have, the labor vote can be ours in 1972,”¹³⁵ would be tested during the 1970 midterm elections and the uneven results underscored the risks associated with relying on outside allies for organized support.

Conclusion

But in the late summer and early fall of 1970, the president and his staff were understandably satisfied with their efforts to link patriotism with support for the president. Not only had these efforts strengthened ties to the hawkish wing of organized labor, a core Democratic constituency, but they had limited the political consequences of domestic opposition to the Cambodia invasion. Encouraged by the effectiveness of patriotic appeals to transform overwhelming opposition to the president’s policies into a way to rally his supporters, aides would return to these themes repeatedly throughout Nixon’s presidency. White House promotion of both patriotism and the Silent Majority led many citizens to separate the president from his own policies. They supported Nixon because he was the President, and not because of agreement with the details of his

¹³² Ibid., 4.

¹³³ Ibid., 5.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 9.

policies, and therefore few self-proclaimed members of the Silent Majority challenged the antiwar movement's substantive arguments. The popular embrace of these ideas made administration efforts to cultivate a Silent Majority of domestic support functionally self-sustaining as local groups and individuals continued to develop plans to promote the president and his policies in their communities.

At the same time, difficulties controlling the president's Hard Hat supporters pointed to the need for the administration to secure greater control over its allies and demonstrated the dangers of relying on outside groups for domestic support. Aides therefore began to devote additional time and resources to administration-directed efforts such as Honor America Day. The success of that event, effectively cementing the administration's claim on both patriotism and the flag, ensured that the aides would play an active role in any future support projects. These projects would quickly evolve into the creation of a national support organization which aides hoped would coordinate all outside pro-Nixon and pro-Vietnam efforts, thereby ensuring near-total White House control without compromising the image of grassroots support. The eventual creation of Americans for Winning the Peace was in many ways the apex of administration public opinion planning and would play an important role in White House efforts to defeat Congressional attempts to legislate an end to U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

CHAPTER 5

“BUILDING A PERMANENT SUPPORT APPARATUS AROUND THE COUNTRY”:
AMERICANS FOR WINNING THE PEACE AND ELECTORAL COALITIONS

“There’s a real quid-pro-quo,” explained Gene Bradley in a letter to White House aide George Bell.¹ Bradley, at the time the official face of an administration-sponsored support group, Americans for Winning the Peace (AWP), explained that a group of supporters from Broward County, Florida were planning a one-day lobbying trip to Washington, D.C. for October 1, 1970. Gene Whiddon, the trip organizer and president of both the county Chamber of Commerce and the Kiwanis Club, had been an early and enthusiastic support of the White House effort to organize local Nixon supporters to oppose antiwar legislation in Congress. In return for this support – Whiddon organized multiple committees in Florida – Bradley urged Bell to arrange “for part of the U.S. Marine Band to meet his group at the airport. If this is totally unfeasible, I am sure that they would appreciate an alternate – another band, reception committee, or some other VIP treatment” recognizing their efforts on behalf of the president.² While the group did not meet with either President Nixon or Vice President Agnew, they were delighted with

¹ “Gene Bradley to George Bell,” August 26, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [4 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

² “Gene Bradley to George Bell,” August 28, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [5 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

the police escort from the airport to the White House, their private White House tour, the Rose Garden ceremony surrounding the presentation of their proclamation of support, as well as the State Department and Congressional briefings coordinated by White House aides.³

Whiddon later described the trip as an “outstanding success” and personally thanked George Bell for “everything you did to assist our effort.”⁴ Although Whiddon repeatedly claimed that the trip was “strictly nonpartisan,” it certainly furthered administration projects to link the president with nonpartisan ideals of leadership and patriotism.⁵ Earlier efforts to cement these ties had all-but made patriotism a sign of support for the president and the Vietnam War, a view reinforced by the rhetoric – and repeated singing of “America, the Beautiful” – of these Floridians.⁶ Their “Salute to America” demonstrates the effectiveness of administration efforts to organize Nixon supporters in the second half of 1970.⁷ The Americans for Winning the Peace committees were a central part of this project, but aides continued to build ties to other sympathetic groups and individuals – particularly friendly labor leaders and the POW/MIA movement. The resulting network of outside allies had the additional potential

³ Matt Taylor, “268 Patriotic Demonstrators Return Satisfied From Capital,” *Miami Herald*, October 2, 1970, sec. Broward News Section; Tom Vinciguerra, “U.S.-First ‘Pilgrims’ Thrill Hill,” *Fort Lauderdale News*, October 2, 1970; “Gene Whiddon to George Bell,” November 12, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [7 of 7]; Box 37; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴ “Gene Whiddon to George Bell.”

⁵ Taylor, “268 Patriotic Demonstrators Return Satisfied From Capital.”

⁶ Vinciguerra, “U.S.-First ‘Pilgrims’ Thrill Hill.”

⁷ “Our Salute to America,” October 1, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [7 of 7]; Box 37; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

to strengthen the Republican position in the 1970 mid-term election and improve the President's position for the 1972 reelection campaign. They faced significant challenges, however, for even as US involvement in the war waned as troops were withdrawn, strong opposition simmered just below the surface of public opinion. Responses to the Cambodian announcement highlighted the need for continuing Administration efforts to unite and motivate the President's outside allies. Such organized support would, aides hoped, leverage popular opinion so as to limit opposition to official policies, especially in Congress where potential challenges to the President's policies could be discouraged by pointing out the potential electoral consequences.

AWP was a central part of the White House effort to defeat antiwar legislation in the late summer and fall of 1970. In the midst of an aggressive campaign against the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, administration officials planned for AWP to be the centerpiece in a national public opinion effort, but even though the amendment was defeated in the Senate, the long-anticipated national support organization never appeared. This chapter will trace the creation and early promotion of AWP committees as well as the White House transition in the fall of 1970 from ambitious, long-term efforts to specific, short-term programs intended to strengthen pro-Nixon candidates in the 1970 mid-term election. These efforts would continue into 1971 completing the Administration's shift toward an issue-driven approach to public opinion at the expense of AWP as White House aides attempted to ensure maximum support for the President's Vietnam policies. To this end, this chapter will consider efforts to ally the White House with the organized POW-MIA movement, including a failed, but highly publicized, attempt to rescue US POWs from North Vietnam. This chapter will also analyze the

continuing ties between Administration officials and AWP until its January 1971 White House Leadership Conference in an effort to understand why the group failed to transform into a national support organization. AWP grew out of these efforts, but its relatively rapid decline indicates a significant shift in Administration public opinion thinking and this chapter will trace the first steps of the Administration's return to a more ad hoc approach to managing domestic public opinion.

“All Responsible Groups:” The White House and
Opposition to McGovern-Hatfield

Even as the White House effectively used patriotic rhetoric and outside allies to parry the renewed antiwar challenge following the announcement of the Cambodia invasion, they struggled to contain Congressional opposition. In the midst of the Hard Hat demonstrations in New York, Senators Mark Hatfield (R-OR) and George McGovern (D-ND) bought 30 minutes of airtime on NBC to make a public appeal for their amendment to the Military Procurement Authorization Act for fiscal year 1971 which delineated a timeline for US withdrawal from Vietnam. Having paid the \$60,000 out of their own pockets (McGovern took out a second mortgage on his house), the Senators used the balance of the over \$500,000 in contributions their advertisement inspired to launch the Committee to End the War.⁸ Before debating the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, the Senate first considered what historian Andrew Johns describes as “a less drastic and more immediate proposal” sponsored by Senators John Sherman Cooper (R-KY) and Frank Church (D-ID) which would end funding and other support for military

⁸ Andrew Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 283.

action in beyond the borders of South Vietnam.⁹ In the face of domestic, and Republican, opposition to the Cambodian invasion, Nixon and his staff recognized that they were unlikely to block the Cooper-Church amendment outright and instead encouraged Senate allies to “drag out debate” so that the amendment “would essentially be a moot point.”¹⁰ Although Harlow reported in late June that the Senate “troops are tired out by the desultorily continuing debate,” they managed to postpone the final vote until June 30, the same date that Nixon announced the withdrawal of US troops from Cambodia as promised in his original announcement.¹¹

With the Cooper-Church amendment behind them, Nixon and his staff focused their attention on preventing passage of the more restrictive McGovern-Hatfield amendment, which would have legislated the end of US military actions in Vietnam by December 31, 1970 and the complete withdrawal of US troops by June 20, 1971. With the president’s approval rating a low thirty-one percent, seventy-two percent of survey respondents endorsing a “deadline for ending American involvement in Vietnam,” and a growing movement in Congress to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, defeat of the McGovern-Hatfield amendment was crucial to reasserting White House control over Vietnam War policymaking.¹² With their recent success staging the seemingly grassroots – or at least non-governmental – Honor America Day, aides considered opposing

⁹ Ibid., 284.

¹⁰ Ibid., 286.

¹¹ “Bryce Harlow to Richard Nixon,” June 22, 1970, 1, HRH Memoranda For The President June 1970; Box 139; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 286–87; Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 283.

¹² Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front*, 287–88.

McGovern-Hatfield by creating an organization that would “make vocal the Vietnam veterans” to complement existing active support from veterans of previous wars and established organizations such as the American Legion (AL) and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).¹³ Such a group would hopefully undermine the amendment even as it reinforced Nixon’s nationalist patriotism rhetoric. Despite the potential advantages, aides worried that creating a new veterans’ group would adversely affect VFW and AL recruiting and therefore “abandoned the effort.”¹⁴

Echoing earlier attempts to create a national support organization, the continuing appeal of astroturf groups speaks to an administration desire to find a viable way to control, or at least coordinate, outside allies.¹⁵ Since Perot’s noncooperation stalled the attempt to create a national pro-Nixon foundation, aides focused their attention on building ties with outside groups such as the VFW and AL, friendly labor unions such as the AFL-CIO, conservative groups such as Young Americans for Freedom, and a wide range of local organizations. While useful, the White House was unable to adequately control these supporters – as demonstrated by the disappointingly low Hard Hat participation in Honor America Day. Perhaps inspired by the 1967 exposure of the Central Intelligence Agency’s funding of domestic and international anticommunist organizations, but most likely simply anxious to secure maximum influence over their

¹³ “Abbot Washburn to Charles Colson,” July 10, 1970, 1, [Charter Company] [1 of 11]; Box 47; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; Christian G Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 314–16.

¹⁴ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” February 23, 1971, Vietnam--Miscellaneous; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁵ See the Introduction for a discussion of astroturf, or fake grassroots, organizing in general and Chapters Two and Three for earlier efforts by Nixon administration officials to create their own astroturf organization.

outside supporters, aides revived their earlier efforts to create a pro-administration organization as part of the larger anti-McGovern-Hatfield campaign.¹⁶

While he supported the creation of such an umbrella support group, Haldeman was far more concerned with the concrete results – such as news coverage, petition campaigns, and anti-amendment advertisements – and responded to an update with an acidic, “things are always underway. This time we wanted things to happen.”¹⁷ In an effort to demonstrate progress, Colson responded on July 24, 1970 with a detailed outline of efforts to organize the President’s supporters as well as plans for opposing the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment. In the very short-term, Colson reported to Haldeman that the administration would rely on “the ‘Tell it to Hanoi Committee’ to get out ads and mailings,”¹⁸ but would continue to “recruit all responsible groups ... and encourage them to work together”¹⁹ to defeat the amendment.

¹⁶ Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, Distributed by W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 381–82; Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 237. While few of these groups were truly astroturf organizations (the CIA frequently arranged funding and other assistance for useful organizations instead of creating groups from scratch), studies of these groups help contextualize the later efforts by the Nixon administration. Volker R. Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shepard Stone Between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Helen Laville and Hugh Wilford, *The US Government, Citizen Groups and the Cold War: The State-Private Network* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006); Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s War: The American Crusade against the Soviet Union* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left, and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (Routledge, 2003); Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*.

¹⁷ “Larry Higby to H.R. Haldeman,” July 17, 1970, Higby--Staff Memos June/July/Aug. 1970 B-H [2 of 2]; Box 63; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁸ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” July 24, 1970, 1, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁹ Ibid.

“Counter Battery-Fire on the Issue of Vietnam”: Americans for Winning the Peace and the Tell it to Hanoi Committee

Specifically, Colson reported early success in creating a loose federation of local and regional groups to be coordinated by a national committee of prominent, and solidly pro-Nixon, individuals. In doing so, Colson continued, he and his staff were “not trying to create any new formal organization but rather make this a citizens movement under the label of ‘Americans for Winning the Peace.’”²⁰ This project would be closely controlled by the White House, but to obscure its role, Colson hired a “man from the outside,”²¹ businessman Gene Bradley, to publicly and officially coordinate the creation of national and local Americans for Winning the Peace committees. The logical evolution of White House public opinion efforts, this project was less involved than the earlier attempt to convince H. Ross Perot to fund a high-profile national foundation, but would hopefully result in a more sustained campaign than was possible from events such as the Hard Hats’ marches or Honor America Day. Even so, the project – specifically its goal that the committees influence national debate so soon after being organized – was undeniably ambitious.

Looking beyond the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, Colson anticipated the network of local and regional groups with a common message coordinated by a national committee which was in turn closely tied to the administration would create the image of broad-based support for the President on a range of issues on request. First, though,

²⁰ Ibid., 2; Sandra Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration” (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005), 182–84; Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 459–60.

²¹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” 2.

Americans for Winning the Peace had to prove itself by successfully providing “counter battery-fire on the issue of Vietnam” – specifically by initiating local and national opposition to the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment primarily through advertisements, editorials, letters to the editor, and letter-writing campaigns.²² Therefore, with a Senate vote on the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment likely by the end of August, Bradley scrambled to find high profile individuals willing to participate in the national committee or form local committees. Highlighting both short and long-term goals, Bradley managed to recruit prominent individuals from twenty cities in two weeks.²³ In a memorandum to the growing membership, Bradley explained that the “deadline for getting organized is determined by the McGovern-Hatfield amendment”²⁴ but emphasized that “the important priority right now is to enlist enough committee members and enough money to sponsor one advertisement in one newspaper in your city before the ‘surrender amendment’ comes to a vote.”²⁵

At the same time, he worked to ensure that potential members could join AWP without “fear of getting labeled hawks, or ‘selling out to the war party’”²⁶ and therefore

²² “Peter White to Gene Bradley,” July 31, 1970, 1, Americans for Winning the Peace [4 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²³ “Gene Bradley to AWP Chairmen and Representatives,” August 10, 1970, 1, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. These cities included: Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Cleveland, OH; Dallas, TX; Detroit, MI; Houston, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Memphis, TN; Milwaukee, WI; New Orleans, LA; New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Seattle, WA; Sioux Falls, ND; St. Louis, MO; Washington, D.C.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 2.

²⁶ “Gene Bradley to Charles Colson,” August 11, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [4 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

recommended that local organizers “consider co-chairmen -- one Republican, one Democrat -- to assure broadest support.”²⁷ By officially separating AWP from the President’s policies, Colson and Bradley hoped to obscure White House involvement in – and functional control over – the national committee. With AWP appearing to be an autonomous, grassroots organization, the White House could cite its rapid expansion as proof of the broad popular appeal of the President’s position – rather than a demonstration of the effectiveness of White House organizing. The bipartisanship Bradley recommended was a key element in the public relations value of AWP and effectively furthered larger plans of reestablishing the Cold War domestic consensus which had given Presidents Truman through Johnson significant autonomy when making foreign policy.²⁸ To better facilitate local efforts, Bradley encouraged organizers to modify the basic informational materials to suit their circumstances, with the caveat that “such changes should, of course, be coordinated with us in advance.”²⁹ In this way, Americans for Winning the Peace could appeal to the broadest number of potential members while still maintaining a consistent message.

Unfortunately for Bradley, Colson’s plan that AWP “be the high level group that takes a positive line while ‘Tell It to Hanoi’ goes on the attack,” undermined these

²⁷ “Gene Bradley to AWP Chairmen and Representatives,” 1.

²⁸ John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Richard A Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 3–86.

²⁹ “Gene Bradley to AWP Chairmen and Representatives,” 2.

efforts.³⁰ With its roots in the 1969 ABM fight and its public critique of the Moratorium and Mobilization protests, the Tell it to Hanoi Committee's members had close ties to the administration. They therefore felt no need to coordinate with Bradley when planning their own campaign against the McGovern-Hatfield amendment although they continued to work closely with Colson and other White House officials. White House planning expected that the Committee would spend \$489,752.72 on newspaper and television advertisements in the summer and fall of 1970 including a newspaper advertisement claiming "McGovern-Hatfield would legislate surrender."³¹ At the press conference announcing this advertisement campaign, New York lawyer Pat O'Hara, a founding member of the New York AWP committee and Executive Director of the Tell It to Hanoi Committee, joined representatives of veterans in critiquing the antiwar amendment. Earlier, Colson had met with the veterans to "brief them in disavowing White House contact" so as to prevent the participation of these veterans from linking the White House to the Tell It to Hanoi advertisements.³² Together, O'Hara and the veterans announced their intention to oppose the efforts of "'lose the peace' forces such as the New Mobe and the Student Mobe and their allies in Congress ... [and] to tell the other side of the story --

³⁰ "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman," August 12, 1970, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³¹ "Tell It To Hanoi Committee Media Proposal," July 24, 1970, Cambodia [folder 1 of 2]-Media Proposal Tell It to Hanoi Committee 7/24/70; Box 43; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; Tell It To Hanoi committee, "Surrender," n.d., Tell It to Hanoi; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³² "Herb Klein to H.R. Haldeman," August 5, 1970, 1, Tell It to Hanoi; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

to alert the public to the propaganda being put out by the so-called peace forces.”³³ The advertisement was more explicit, arguing that the amendment would “accomplish by legislation what the enemy could never accomplish by force of arms – an American surrender” and even worse, would “not bring peace for us or for our children. ... It would weaken the president’s power to guide the world to peace.”³⁴

While it likely mobilized those already sympathetic to the President’s position to “write, wire or telephone” their Senators, the advertisement complicated efforts to coordinate opposition to the Amendment.³⁵ Bradley reported that it nearly destroyed the AWP committee in California – by causing members to ask “Why we should run ad on this subject when someone else is already doing it?”³⁶ – and he urged Colson to push for greater coordination among administration allies since conflicting efforts undermined their common goal.³⁷ Also unhappy with the “Surrender” advertisement, Morris Leibman, a Chicago lawyer, long-term collaborator with the government on public opinion issues, and founding member of the Tell It To Hanoi Committee, described it as “a disaster ... [and] completely inconsistent with our entire strategic approach” in a scathing letter to a fellow Tell It To Hanoi member, New York lawyer William “Pat”

³³ “Patrick O’Hara Statement,” n.d., 1, Vietnam--Various Groups [1]-Our Ads; Box 123; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Outgrowths of the Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, these organizations (the New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and the Student Mobilization Committee) were formed in 1969 and were responsible for the October and November 1969 antiwar protests discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

³⁴ Tell It To Hanoi committee, “Surrender.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Gene Bradley to Charles Colson [2],” August 20, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [4 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁷ Ibid.

O'Hara.³⁸ The committee's primary goal, in Leibman's eyes, was "to move the 'silent majority', and the 'undecided' and the 'moderate' votes"³⁹and he argued that the advertisement effectively "damaged the special image we had created which had successfully prevented any major or serious attack on the Committee or its credibility."⁴⁰ Most troubling, and echoing Bradley's complaints, Leibman pointed out that the ad undermined efforts to organize Americans for Winning the Peace committees.

Colson, who had drafted the ad with the help of "two ad agencies and a committee of four of ... [Haldeman's] senior staff,"⁴¹ explained away Leibman's criticisms saying: "we were in a ... situation where it was imperative to attack the other side. Morrie, of course, was not familiar with really what our aims were."⁴² These aims went beyond opposing the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, organizing AWP, or even rallying domestic public opinion behind the president. In many ways, the ultimate priority was to push its opponents, particularly the antiwar movement, to the margins of domestic debate

³⁸ "Morrie Leibman to William O'Hara," September 8, 1970, 1, Citizens Committee (Foreign Policy Groups)/Morris Leibman; Box 48; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. For Leibman's earlier efforts to support the Vietnam War, see: "Memorandum to Morris Leibman," August 16, 1965, Citizens Committee (Foreign Policy Groups)/Morris Leibman; Box 48; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Memorandum to Morrie Leibman," October 18, 1965, Citizens Committee (Foreign Policy Groups)/Morris Leibman; Box 48; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Morrie Leibman to Bryce Harlow," November 10, 1969, Citizens Committee (Foreign Policy Groups)/Morris Leibman; Box 48; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; Joseph G Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 117, 135.

³⁹ "Morrie Leibman to William O'Hara," 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman," August 8, 1970, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴² "Charles Colson to William O'Hara," September 13, 1970, Citizens Committee (Foreign Policy Groups)/Morris Leibman; Box 48; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

and therefore ensure that Nixon secured the loyalties of any remaining moderates. White House staffers and some of their outside allies understood that accomplishing this goal necessarily risked alienating those who did not agree with the President's policies, but they believed that polarizing public opinion would, on the whole, benefit the President.⁴³ However, publicizing such views was not good politics and so the AWP committees, and Bradley's hope that the organization would "bring the nation back together again," provided a positive way for Nixon's supporters to oppose the antiwar movement.⁴⁴

Not a "Brain-Washing Operation," but Close Cooperation:
AWP and the White House

Using administration-compiled and NSC-cleared fact sheets, AWP members worked throughout August to convince their fellow citizens to oppose the McGovern-Hatfield amendment.⁴⁵ Assisted by its bipartisan and moderate image, AWP expanded to twenty-seven cities by August 20, 1970.⁴⁶ This rapid growth was an encouraging sign

⁴³ Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 288–91; H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1994), 183–84, 187, 193–94; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (London: Scribner, 2008), 516–25; William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 307–15; Wells, *The War Within*, 463–67.

⁴⁴ "Gene Bradley to Peter White," August 18, 1970, 3, Americans for Winning the Peace [4 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. While Vietnam was certainly important, it was not the only source of domestic debate in mid-1970. While concerns over the economy, integration, crime, the counterculture, and other purely domestic issues further divided the population, Vietnam was still a dominant issue.

⁴⁵ "Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman," April 13, 1970, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Gene Bradley to Tom Evans," July 31, 1970, Vietnam--Various Groups [1]-Americans for Winning the Peace; Box 123; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁶ "Gene Bradley to George Bell, Frank Barnett, Charles Colson, Senator Robert J. Dole, Roscoe Drummond, Morris Leibman, Mary P. Lord, John O. Marsh, Dan McMichael, and Abbot Washburn," August 20, 1970, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman,

that Colson had found a way to realize the administration's longstanding desire to create a single entity that would control and coordinate its outside allies. In an August memorandum to Haldeman, Colson argued that rather than being the primary reason for the committee's existence, "McGovern/Hatfield should give us a good trial run ... and if it works, hopefully we are building a permanent support apparatus around the country so that we will not have to go to our same old backers everytime [*sic*] we need help."⁴⁷

Complicating this plan, however, Bradley reported that at least some AWP members "insisted that they will join this effort to support the President's plan for peace only with the understanding that this activity is separate and distinct from the United States Government."⁴⁸ Maintaining an image of bipartisanship reflected Bradley's observation that many potential members "want their own identity. They happen to agree vigorously with what the President is doing but they want the option of disagreeing with this president or some future president."⁴⁹ Fortunately for Colson and Bradley, the loose ties between the local and national committees ensured that the administration could maintain control over AWP – through Bradley's control over its agenda and policy positions – while hiding that control from the media, the public, and even members of AWP itself.

NPLM, College Park, MD. These cities included: Atlanta, GA; Baltimore, MD; Boston, MA; Buffalo, NY; Chicago, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Cleveland, OH; Dallas, TX; Denver, CO; Detroit, MI; Houston, TX; Kansas City, MO; Los Angeles, CA; Memphis, TN; Miami, FL; Minneapolis, MI; New Orleans, LA; New York, NY; Philadelphia, PA; Pittsburgh, PA; Portland, OR; St. Louis, MO; San Diego, CA; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Sioux Falls, ND; Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷ "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman."

⁴⁸ "Gene Bradley to Peter White," 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

To preserve this official distance, White House staffers were briefed on how to respond to potential questions about AWP so that the ties between it and the Administration would not be accidentally exposed by a careless staffer. These talking points would also enable aides to reinforce the larger message and goals of Americans for Winning the Peace. Specifically, officials were told to rebuff the suggestion that the new organization was “a front for the President in his attempt to push his Southeast Asia policy through the Congress without a real debate”⁵⁰ and to distance it from the Republican Party by describing AWP as “a private citizen effort involving members of both political parties, but not the political parties themselves.”⁵¹ Similarly, they were to flatly reject the ideas that AWP was a “brain-washing operation” whose “activities and positions ... [were] cleared with the White House.”⁵² Most importantly, aides were to reinforce the idea that the original impetus for the organization came from the grassroots and that the White House was involved in neither its formation nor its day-to-day activities. Instead, they were to present AWP as the logical outgrowth of the fact that “through several administrations, a number of private citizens ... from both parties urged the President to make greater use of the private sector in building bipartisan support for U.S. national security and foreign policies.”⁵³

Framing AWP as a nonpartisan organization reinforced White House claims that Nixon’s policies were in the country’s interest and were therefore above the partisan

⁵⁰ “Questions RE Americans for Winning the Peace,” n.d., 1, Americans for Winning the Peace [3 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 3–4.

politics involved in domestic debates over the Vietnam War. So too did local committees' efforts to oppose the McGovern-Hatfield amendment including articles and letters to the editor criticizing the amendment, speaking publicly against it, and placing anti-McGovern-Hatfield advertisements in local papers.⁵⁴ The bulk of these advertisements were scheduled for August 29-30, 1970, so as to better influence the September 1 Senate vote. One advertisement asked readers in Memphis, Tennessee; Dallas, Texas; and San Diego, California to "help our nation win the Peace [and to] tell your senator to vote 'no' on the McGovern-Hatfield amendment."⁵⁵ A similar advertisement directed New Yorkers to "phone, wire, or write your Senator to vote 'NO.'"⁵⁶ In addition to convincing fellow citizens to oppose the amendment and support Nixon, these advertisements were part of a larger AWP project to flood the Senate with anti-amendment mail and petitions from constituents.⁵⁷ These efforts combined with "direct, hard, personal, man-to-man

⁵⁴ "Gene Bradley to Tom Evans"; "Gene Bradley to George Bell, Frank Barnett, Charles Colson, Senator Robert J. Dole, Roscoe Drummond, Morris Leibman, Mary P. Lord, John O. Marsh, Dan McMichael, and Abbot Washburn"; "Telephone Call Recommendation from George Bell," August 19, 1970, Telephone Call Requests [2 of 2]; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson to Larry Higby," September 8, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [5 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Joseph Hall to Gene Bradley," August 26, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [5 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Gene Bradley to Gene Whiddon," August 27, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [7 of 7]; Box 37; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁵ "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," n.d., Higby--Staff Memos June/July/Aug. 1970 B-H [1 of 2]; Box 63; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁶ "Prominent New Yorkers Take Full-Page Ad in New York Times in Support of President's Vietnam Policies," August 28, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁷ "Gene Bradley to Regional Chairmen," August 13, 1970, Vietnam--Various Groups [1]-Americans for Winning the Peace; Box 123; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

contact with the Senators”⁵⁸ from veterans groups and other outside allies helped defeat the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment by a 55-39 Senate vote on September 1, 1970.

Described by Haldeman as “darn good,” their early successes encouraged Colson and Bradley to continue their efforts to develop AWP into a national support organization.⁵⁹ But even as White House officials hoped that doing so would help rally domestic support for the president’s Vietnam policies, some members advocated a different approach. Writing to Bradley in early September, the New York committee recommended that AWP “continue to move from project to project as the President builds his peace offensive,” since “we will probably have more success [doing so] than if we attempt to formalize a permanent committee.”⁶⁰ Similarly recognizing the realities of domestic public opinion, an Atlanta member reminded Bradley that although committees could unite individuals around specific initiatives, Nixon’s supporters were “at best ... swimming up-stream” on the larger issue of the Vietnam War.⁶¹ Still, AWP’s success in organizing local and national opposition to the McGovern-Hatfield amendment suggested that Vietnam could be a positive issue for the president. The challenge facing the White House in 1970 was how to frame the domestic and international issues in the November

⁵⁸ “Charles Colson to George Bell,” August 28, 1970, George Bell 1970-71 [3 of 3]; Box 5; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁹ “Charles Colson to Larry Higby.”

⁶⁰ “New York Committee to Support the President for Peace in Vietnam to Gene Bradley,” September 8, 1970, 1, New York Committee for Peace in Vietnam; Box 95; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶¹ “Peter White to Gene Bradley,” 1. Between September 1970 and January 1971, the number of poll respondents supporting withdrawal went from 55% to 72% even as the number who felt that the war had been a “mistake” only moved three percentage points (from 56% to 59%) between May 1970 and January 1971. Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 194, 214.

elections so as to ensure a friendly Congress for the remaining two years of Nixon's first term.

“Speak Out with Power far Greater than Four Letter or any Other Kind of Words”:
The 1970 Midterm Elections, Patriotism, and the Silent Majority

After their success in rallying domestic support for the Vietnam War, Nixon and his aides gambled that they could, as Haldeman noted during a planning meeting, use “patriotic themes to counter economic depression.”⁶² Believing that “there's a realignment going on,” Nixon “intervened extensively” and “campaign[ed] vigorously” for his favored candidates in 1970, in stark contrast to most presidents during a midterm election.⁶³ Not only did Vice President Agnew, with White House speechwriters Pat Buchanan and William Safire, travel the country criticizing the “nattering nabobs of negativism” and the “radical-liberals” in Congress, but Nixon actively campaigned during the last few weeks before the election.⁶⁴ Hoping to convince voters to overlook rising inflation and unemployment, Colson and other aides recommended that candidates

⁶² Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 77.

⁶³ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 316; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 77; Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front*, 291. In *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, Robert Mason writes that Nixon “waged a midterm campaign with very few parallels in American history” while Rick Perlstein, in *Nixonland*, describes 1970 as the “most active White House campaign for an off-year election since 1938.” Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 77; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 503.

⁶⁴ For Agnew, see Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 179, 192; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 99–103, 106; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 503–07, 524–28, 530; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 316–326. For Nixon, see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 145–46; DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 292–93; Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 202–07; Johns, *Vietnam's Second Front*, 291–92; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 77, 106–09; Robert Mason, “‘I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority’: Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969–73,” *Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 3 (December 2005): 467–71; Richard M Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), 491–94; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 528, 530–31, 533–35; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 327–34.

“attack the moral deterioration in our society, the loss of faith in our traditional values and our Country” and blame these trends on their Democratic opponents.⁶⁵ More positively, Colson proposed that campaign rhetoric highlight a “build and believe in America theme” while “at the same time mak[ing] the point of getting those radicals out of office because they are the ones that are causing America to lose faith in itself and to lose its traditional morality and integrity.”⁶⁶ In this formulation of the national issues likely to influence voters, Nixon’s efforts toward ending the Vietnam War became one of a variety of reasons to support the president as did White House claims that he had “closed the credibility gap” between the presidency and the public created by his Democratic predecessors.⁶⁷

Further encouraging White House officials to look to the Silent Majority for support, an early September interview with pollster Dr. George Gallup examined broader public opinion trends and endorsed the idea of a pro-war, anti-protester Silent Majority. Gallup concluded that the president’s opponents had “failed in their basic goal because they ‘enraged the majority’ and blindly refused to ‘make an appeal to majority sentiment’” and thereby encouraged White House officials to use similar strategies in the

⁶⁵ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” October 12, 1970, Haldeman Staff Memos--Cole-Dent October 1970; Box 65; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Colson was careful to separate this approach from Agnew’s “radical-liberal” critique: “we should not call them ‘radical liberals’; leave that to the Vice President”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Jeb Magruder to H.R. Haldeman and Herb Klein,” n.d., 2, HRH-Staff Memos-HRH--September 1970 K-M; Box 64; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Mason further notes that Nixon’s emphasis on foreign policy enabled him to justify not supporting Republican candidates – such as the antiwar Senator Charles Goodell who had co-sponsored the McGovern-Hatfield amendment. Goodell ultimately lost to Conservative Party candidate James Buckley in part because of active White House support for Buckley. Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 78, 87–92, 94–96.

1970 elections.⁶⁸ Similarly, Nixon recommended that his staff frame the election as an “opportunity for the silent majority to speak out with power far greater than four letter or any other kind of words – the power of their votes.”⁶⁹ In this way, the administration could use the Silent Majority idea not just to rally support for the president’s Vietnam policies, but also to build a pro-Nixon constituency and lay the foundations for his 1972 reelection campaign.⁷⁰ Instead of manufacturing “novelty and hope”⁷¹ as one staffer suggested, these efforts instead emphasized the divisions within US society, as candidates and White House spokesmen attacked “those who through their rhetoric would sell America out.”⁷² By emphasizing the nationalist patriotism shared by the president and many of his supporters – as demonstrated by the May Hard Hat protests – Nixon and his aides hoped to further isolate and marginalize the antiwar movement. Indeed, Nixon’s hawkish patriotism secured the support of former opponents such as Maritime Union leader Joe Curran, who remarked to Colson that while “he had been very anti-Nixon over

⁶⁸ Jeffrey St. John, “Silent Majority Speaks: Middle America Held In Touch with Times,” *Richmond Times*, September 6, 1970.

⁶⁹ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [2],” September 21, 1970, P Memos 1970 (2 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁰ The process of building this coalition is the central theme in Robert Mason’s *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* and while Nixon certainly attempted to create a partisan realignment with his 1972 reelection, Mason’s claim that it was his overarching goal throughout his presidency minimizes the ways that the need to rally domestic support for the Vietnam War necessarily shaped administration priorities during Nixon’s first term.

⁷¹ “H.R. Haldeman to Jeb Magruder,” September 14, 1970, HRH-Staff Memos-HRH--September 1970 K-M; Box 64; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷² “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” 3.

the year and had worked to defeat him, ... he did not see how any red-blooded American could fail to support him” now.⁷³

The new alliance with labor leaders such as Curran, AFL-CIO president George Meany, and others as well as the successful promotion of the Silent Majority led historian Kevill Yuill to describe Nixon as “the father of identity politics” even though labor historians such as Jefferson Cowie and Edmund Wehrle rightly point out that, in contrast to his effective rhetorical appeals, “the administration’s implementation of its political initiatives proved so ill-executed and transparent that they fell largely on deaf ears.”⁷⁴ This disconnect between image and substance would plague White House efforts to broaden the president’s base of support beyond the established membership of the Republican Party. The Silent Majority was effective at rallying a cross-section of citizens behind Nixon’s Vietnam policies, but as the 1970 and 1972 campaigns would demonstrate, administration efforts to expand the Silent Majority – whether via the Southern strategy, the blue-collar strategy, or less structured approaches – beyond the Vietnam question would weaken its effectiveness.⁷⁵

⁷³ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2],” August 21, 1970, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁴ Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon And the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 209; Edmund F Wehrle, “‘Partisan for the Hard Hats:’ Charles Colson, George Meany, and the Failed Blue-Collar Strategy,” *Labor* 5, no. 3 (September 21, 2008): 51; Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 145–49.

⁷⁵ See Chapters Six and Seven as well as Jefferson Cowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973,” *Labor History* 43, no. 3 (2002): 257–283; Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 125–166; Paul Frymer and John David Skrentny, “Coalition-Building and the Politics of Electoral Capture During the Nixon Administration: African Americans, Labor, Latinos,” *Studies in American Political Development* 12, no. 01 (1998): 131–161; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*; Joe Merton, “The Politics of Symbolism: Richard Nixon’s Appeal to White Ethnics and the Frustration of Realignment 1969-72,” *European Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (2008): 181–198; Wehrle, “‘Partisan for the Hard Hats’”; Yuill, *Richard Nixon And the Rise of Affirmative Action*, 209–34.

In 1970, however, aides still believed that they could create a diverse pro-Nixon constituency out of the Silent Majority. Emphasizing issues, rather than policies, White House strategists hoped to capitalize on the growing political power of what Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg called the “Social Issue.”⁷⁶ The authors had written *The Real Majority* as a guide for how Democrats could retain their electoral majority, but as Mason notes, it validated Nixon’s plans to make patriotism and “antipermissiveness” key issues in the 1970 election.⁷⁷ With Agnew “test[ing] Nixon’s theory that the best economic defense was a ‘social issue’ offense,” the network of Americans for Winning the Peace committees created during the McGovern-Hatfield fight worked to promote the president’s foreign policy and other patriotic themes. Executive Director Gene Bradley reported to Colson: “on a candidate-by-candidate basis, our people can and will go to work to upgrade the issue of winning the peace by electing a man who will support the President.” Furthermore, he suggested that such help might not even be necessary since members of the Texas AWP committee claimed that “in their territory, no one would have the guts to come out against the President’s foreign policy and advocate a phony peace.”⁷⁸ Still, support for Nixon’s foreign policies and antipathy for the antiwar movement were insufficient in 1970 to secure a significant electoral shift in favor of the Republicans. While the Republicans gained two Senate seats, the Democrats preserved their majorities in both the Senate and the House of Representatives and won twelve

⁷⁶ Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 82–86; Richard M Scammon and Ben J Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970); Wells, *The War Within*, 459.

⁷⁷ Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 82. For Nixon’s own responses to the book, see Nixon, *RN*, 490–91; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 318–19.

⁷⁸ “Gene Bradley to Charles Colson,” October 26, 1970, 2, Americans for Winning the Peace [7 of 7]; Box 37; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

additional seats in the House. Despite these disappointing returns, the election demonstrated that the Silent Majority was a potent political force and encouraged White House officials to continue their efforts to link the President with a wide variety of potentially friendly constituencies.

“Bona-Fide Nixon Supporters:” From Hard Hats and White Ethnics to the Black Silent Majority Committee

Even though the results in 1970 weren't quite what they hoped for, aides continued the outreach efforts they had begun during the mid-term campaign ultimately targeting “thirty-three separate ethnic voter groups ranging from the Armenians and Bulgarians to the Syrians and the Ukrainians” by the 1972 campaign.⁷⁹ As Cowie notes, “Nixon believed that he could bring those ethnicities together; surmount economic disagreements with organized labor; and, by presenting his cultural vision at his particular historical moment, become the workingman's president.”⁸⁰ In this quest, recruitment during the 1970 mid-terms helped build ties which would hopefully benefit pro-Nixon candidates, but more importantly would form the basis of a campaign network for the 1972 election. During the fall of 1970, therefore, the president met with various ethnic groups – such as the Polish-American Congress and the Order of the Sons of Italy – and cultivated ties with a vast, and sometimes incongruous, collection of outside individuals and organizations.⁸¹ Perhaps the most surprising of these alliances,

⁷⁹ Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 128.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Charles Colson to Hugh Sloan,” September 14, 1970, Meeting with Chicago Polish-American leaders -- September 17, 1970; Box 22; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “George Bell

particularly given the importance of the Southern strategy and a politics of white resentment to larger administration electoral goals, was the administration's support of a group calling itself the Black Silent Majority Committee.

This committee, led by Clay Claiborne, a former "head of the minorities function at the Republican National Committee," was publicly announced in October 1970.⁸² Claiborne claimed that he had organized the group to demonstrate that the "Black community has a 'silent majority' just as concerned about law and order as white citizens," but as was the case for the Americans for Winning the Peace committees, the primary organizing impetus came from the White House.⁸³ Complementing administration efforts to reach out to various white ethnic groups, aides used this "Negro Republican front group" to expand the scope of Nixon's domestic support.⁸⁴ Paralleling administration efforts to build ties to the labor movement, the Black Silent Majority Committee emphasized support for Nixon's anticommunism, patriotism, and law-and-

for the President's File," October 20, 1970, President's Meeting with Polish American Congress, October 13, [1970], 12,15; Box 22; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson to Richard Nixon," n.d., President's Meeting with Polish American Congress, October 13, [1970], 12,15; Box 22; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson for the President's File," September 15, 1970, President's Meeting with the Sons of Italy--September 11, 1970; Box 21; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson to Larry Higby," October 22, 1970, President's Meeting with the Sons of Italy--September 11, 1970; Box 21; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson to Richard Nixon," n.d., President's Meeting with the Sons of Italy--September 11, 1970; Box 21; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸² "George Bell to Jim Keogh," September 21, 1970, Black Silent Majority Committee; Box 88; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Form Black Silent Majority, Law, Order Group in D.C.," *Jet*, October 29, 1970.

⁸³ "Form Black Silent Majority, Law, Order Group in D.C."; "Robert Odle to Alex Butterfield," March 25, 1970, Memoranda Received Jul thru Dec 1970; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD; "George Bell to Jim Keogh"; Dean J Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 176–78.

⁸⁴ "Tom Lias to Harry Flemming and Harry Dent," October 12, 1970, 1970 Staff Memos – May 1970 – December 1970; Box 5; NPRMC; WHSF: SMOF Dent, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

order positions rather than questions of racial equality or civil rights.⁸⁵ In fact, Claiborne would go on to actively support Nixon's 1972 campaign despite the administration's failures to vigorously enforce both desegregation and the affirmative action programs such as the Philadelphia Plan.⁸⁶

Further complicating White House coalition-building efforts, these policies, combined with Nixon's nationalist patriotic rhetoric, formed the sometimes-unstable foundation of the alliance with organized labor. In preparation for the 1970 elections, Haldeman had approved Colson's plans to "capture the blue-collar worker" even as he cautioned against promoting the project itself, as "all that does is set up a challenge and serves no useful purpose."⁸⁷ Instead, he recommended that Colson "play to the bandwagon effect"⁸⁸ by publicizing pro-labor policies and meetings with sympathetic leaders. Although Haldeman saw the 1970 results as "at best a mixed blessing," Colson and Buchanan were still enthusiastic proponents of the blue-collar strategy.⁸⁹ During what Cowie describes as a post-election "battle of the memos," Colson defended the strategy against critics such as Acting Treasury Secretary Charles Walters who felt it was both

⁸⁵ Debra Minkoff describes it as a "countermovement organization" in her analysis of women's and racial organizing. Debra C. Minkoff, "The Organization of Survival: Women's and Racial-Ethnic Voluntarist and Activist Organizations, 1955-1985," *Social Forces* 71, no. 4 (June 1, 1993): 895.

⁸⁶ Warren Brown, "Nixon and McGovern Battle for Black Votes," *Jet*, November 2, 1972. For Nixon's affirmative action and desegregation policies, see David Hamilton Golland, "Constructing Affirmative Action: Federal Contract Compliance and the Building Construction Trades, 1956--1973" (Ph.D., History, City University of New York, 2008); Kotlowski, *Nixon's Civil Rights*, 15-43, 97-125; Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 225-75, 301-23; Yuill, *Richard Nixon And the Rise of Affirmative Action*.

⁸⁷ "H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson," September 26, 1970, HRH-Staff Memos-HRH--September 1970 B-C; Box 64; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 207.

“foolish” and “wrong” by citing the decisive role Hard Hat support played in James Buckley’s victory over the antiwar Senator Charles Goodell.⁹⁰

Buckley’s election, with covert White House assistance, supported Colson’s earlier claims that foreign policy and patriotic concerns could result in cooperation across other social, political, or economic lines, thus ensuring that “Vietnam and the Hard Hats produce strange bed fellows.”⁹¹ James Buckley’s New York Senate campaign, in which he defeated Nixon opponent Charles Goodell, was a powerful example that despite their very different economic circumstances, construction workers interviewed for a *New York Magazine* story on the 1970 election overlooked Buckley’s hereditary wealth in favor of a shared worldview when explaining their support:

Buckley is my man. He is in favor of prosecuting those so-called left-wing intellectual radicals who bomb our buildings, try to tear this country apart, destroy our flag, spit on our flag and burn our flag. If they don’t support the country, they can get the hell out. The U.S. used to be second to none. Today everybody’s looking down at us and I don’t want any part of a country like that. My only hope in New York is Buckley, who is trying to bring the country back to Number One.⁹²

Hard Hat support for Buckley demonstrated the growing primacy of social issues, including patriotism, over economic interests in domestic politics as well as White House success in presenting political opponents – including Goodell – as inherently opposed to

⁹⁰ Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 146, 147, 146–48.

⁹¹ “Charles Colson to Murray Chotiner,” July 11, 1970, Jay Lovestone--AFL-CIO [3 of 3]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 78, 94–95. In his analysis of the internal debate over the blue-collar strategy following the 1970 election, Cowie reaches a similar conclusion noting “without Vietnam, the ‘common man’ strategy might not have survived the trial stage.” Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, 147.

⁹² Diana Lurie, “Underneath the Hard Hats: A Political Symposium,” *New York Magazine*, November 2, 1970, 1.

American success and the image of America promoted by both the president and the Hard Hats.

Reflecting on the 1970 election in his memoir, Nixon concluded: “Although our first efforts to consolidate a constituency based on the Social Issue had met with only mixed success, I still felt that the basic strategy was right.”⁹³ The growing alliance with the hawkish members of the labor movement was key to this project and Nixon therefore agreed to meet with AFL-CIO president George Meany soon after the election. Colson and other aides in favor of the meeting argued that it would “demonstrate ... that we call him in after campaigns as well as before” and provide Nixon an opportunity to thank Meany for his support on foreign policy issues. Further recommending an implicit recognition of the policy disagreements between the president and Meany, Colson suggested that Nixon remind Meany that he intended to “keep open and friendly communications, notwithstanding any political differences.”⁹⁴ Despite the Presidential attention and his growing disgust at the radical wing of the Democratic Party, Meany insisted that he was “not in anybody’s pocket,” implicitly reserving the right to criticize the Administration.⁹⁵

Conversely, White House aides had greater success transforming another powerful labor leader, Teddy Gleason of the International Longshoremen's Association,

⁹³ Nixon, *RN*, 495.

⁹⁴ “Charles Colson to Richard Nixon,” n.d., 1, 3, Meany, Shultz, Hodgson mtg. w/P 11/30/70--8:30 a.m.; Box 22; WHSF: SMOF Colson, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives at College Park, Maryland. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁵ “Charles Colson to Richard Nixon.”

into a “bona fide Nixon supporter (not just a Hard Hat).”⁹⁶ This shift grew out of the cultivation of close ties between top-tier staffers and major labor leaders. It also points to the important differences, especially for the purposes of the 1972 election, between a Nixon supporter and the Hard Hats increasingly linked with his Administration. The Hard Hats, mostly white longshoremen and construction workers, aggressively defended many of the President’s foreign policies even while continuing to oppose many of his economic and domestic policies. In contrast, a “bona fide Nixon supporter” such as Gleason was becoming could be relied upon to endorse both the president’s foreign and domestic policies. Building a network of such loyal Nixon allies outside of the established Republican Party became an even more important White House project following the 1970 election. AWP committees continued to be a useful resource, especially as Bradley was careful to ensure that they reflected administration interests and priorities. Even as local committees became more partisan in the mid-term campaigns, Bradley also suggested to Colson that AWP could reinforce continuing White House efforts to use the POW-MIA issue to justify continued US involvement in the Vietnam War.

POW-MIA activism, the Son Tay Rescue
Mission and H. Ross Perot

That October, Bradley shared with Colson his view that “the POW issue promises to get hotter – in Paris and elsewhere – and it’s possible that ‘Americans for Winning the

⁹⁶ “George Bell to Charles Colson,” December 8, 1970, International Longshoreman Association; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Peace' could build sentiment for our case.'"⁹⁷ Using AWP to promote Nixon's position on this issue would help the administration regain the initiative in the face of increasing grassroots pressure. Despite Colson's triumphant September claim that that "we own the Gold Star Mothers lock, stock, and barrel," other groups of POW and MIA families, most prominently the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (League of Families) proved less compliant.⁹⁸ While the national organization was not officially launched until May 1970, its spokeswoman, Sybil Stockdale had been working to draw attention to the plight of POWs and MIAs since 1966.⁹⁹ The wife of an imprisoned pilot, Stockdale worked closely with government officials throughout her husband's imprisonment and tirelessly advocated for increased governmental attention to the issue.¹⁰⁰ Although the conventional view of the League of Families, as argued by H. Bruce Franklin, is of an astroturf organization created and controlled by the White House, more recent work by Michael J. Allen emphasizes that Nixon and his aides only had limited influence over the League of Families and similar groups despite their best efforts.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," October 6, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [7 of 7]; Box 37; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁸ "Charles Colson for the President's File," September 16, 1970, Gold Star Mothers meeting with President, 9/9/70; Box 21; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁹ Michael J. Allen, "'Help Us Tell the Truth About Vietnam': POW/MIA Politics and the End of the American War," in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Mark Phillip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 261.

¹⁰⁰ Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 24–29.

¹⁰¹ Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*; H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A., or, Mythmaking in America* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: L. Hill Books, 1992).

The POW-MIA movement was still a useful ally, however, and administration officials worked to maintain cordial relationships with its leaders even as they reluctantly accepted a relative lack of control as compared with the more accommodating AWP.¹⁰² The growing popularity of the POW-MIA issue as a justification for continued US involvement in Vietnam further prioritized the need for movement-administration cooperation. Hoping to ensure that this growing sympathy for imprisoned and missing US soldiers benefitted the administration, Deputy Assistant to the President for Congressional Affairs Bryce Harlow met with the mostly-student leaders of Voices In Vital America (VIVA) in September 1970. Shortly after this meeting, the group, which had been founded in 1966 as the “Victory in Vietnam Association,” began to focus their advocacy efforts on the POW/MIA issue. While much of their early efforts involved producing informational materials and programs directed at students, VIVA unexpectedly reached a national audience with the sale of bracelets stamped with the name, rank, and other details of an imprisoned or missing soldier. These bracelets, as Scanlon demonstrates, “served as powerful means for individuals opposed to anti-war protesters to convey their continued faith in the American purpose, if not the current US strategy, in Vietnam.”¹⁰³ Reflecting this growing national concern for POWs and MIAs, Nixon authorized a dramatic, although ultimately unsuccessful raid on a POW prison in North Vietnam.

¹⁰² The administration’s difficulties with the League and other POW-MIA activists were not limited to Perot’s preference for the issue at the expense of Silent Majority efforts in 1969 and early 1970 (as discussed in Chapter Three). Perot would continue to be a source of frustration as shown in this and subsequent chapters, but the larger danger of the movement was that it would draw too much attention to the costs of the war.

¹⁰³ Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 239, 43–44, 228–39; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 56–60; Franklin, *M.I.A.*, 183.

The November 20, 1970 raid on Son Tay was intended to liberate the American POWs presumably held at the North Vietnamese prison, but the political elements of the raid – rallying domestic support for the president, punishing the North Vietnamese for breaking off talks with a two-day bombing campaign – were almost as important to the administration.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, even though the prison was empty when US forces arrived, Nixon insisted that it was “a significant psychological success” because it demonstrated his continuing commitment to a military victory despite ongoing troop withdrawals.¹⁰⁵ Although Kissinger later blamed an “egregious failure of intelligence” for the lack of rescued prisoners, an administration poll found 73% of POW wives in favor of the raid.¹⁰⁶ Despite the risk that the “POW wives will feel that they are being ‘used’ when the poll is released,” Colson recommended its circulation as an implied endorsement of the President’s Vietnam policies.¹⁰⁷ The mailing, officially from the Tell It to Hanoi Committee, would include the survey results as well as a request that recipients take action to “support the President; support those brave men languishing in enemy camps;

¹⁰⁴ While Haldeman’s contemporary and subsequent memoirs from both Kissinger and Nixon support the historical consensus that the Son Tay raid was intended to send a message to North Vietnam and the US public as well as rescue prisoners, there is very little discussion of the administration’s subsequent attempts to promote the raid. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 49; Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 212–13; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 237–38; Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 185–86; Nixon, *RN*, 859–60; Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 197–98; Wells, *The War Within*, 463.

¹⁰⁵ Nixon, *RN*, 860.

¹⁰⁶ Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 186; “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” December 5, 1970, Sontay Rescue Mission (issue) (Statements); Box 113; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. The undated poll was attached to this and other internal memoranda relating to public responses to the raid.

¹⁰⁷ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman.”

support our men in Vietnam.”¹⁰⁸ Not only that, but “when the Fulbrights, Kennedys, and Muskies stand by and criticize Nixon’s actions, suggest to them what we have been suggesting all along: ‘Don’t tell us, tell it to Hanoi!’”¹⁰⁹ The expectation was that the resulting favorable letters and telegrams would further overwhelm the relatively few critiques received in the first week after the announcement, thereby reinforcing a positive image of both the raid and the president.¹¹⁰

Beyond this effort, Haldeman was determined to closely manage popular perceptions of the Son Tay raid and expected White House officials to ensure that critics were “pinned tight ... properly classified where they belong and that we don't again let them get off the hook.”¹¹¹ Additionally, national veterans’ groups, and individual supporters quickly endorsed the raid in telegrams and letters sent to the White House as well as in public statements applauding the decision, praising the President’s commitment to POWs and attacking the critics.¹¹² These responses demonstrated the domestic political

¹⁰⁸ “Letter to go out under ‘Tell It to Hanoi’ auspices,” December 8, 1970, Memorandums for the President 1972 [1 of 2]; Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “Unknown to Alex Butterfield,” November 28, 1970, Memoranda Received Jul thru Dec 1970; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD. Without engaging the question of whether the favorable responses were programmed in this way, Joan Hoff notes that “almost 90 percent of the letters received about this failed raid were favorable, with some 58 percent coming from relatives of POWs or MIAs.” Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1994), 226.

¹¹¹ “H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson,” November 30, 1970, Sontay Rescue Mission (issue) (Statements); Box 113; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹² Telegrams and letters: “John Gray to George Bell,” December 2, 1970, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Cecil Stevenson to Richard Nixon,” December 3, 1970, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Herbert Rainwater to Richard Nixon,” December 8, 1970, Veterans of Foreign Wars--VFW [2 of 3]; Box 120; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Public statements: “Alfred Chamie to Richard Nixon,” November 24, 1970, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Ralph Hall to George Bell,” November 24, 1970, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Reserve Officers Association Statement,” November 25, 1970,

success of the raid even as activism on behalf of the prisoners became increasingly resistant to White House coordination. Not only was H. Ross Perot continuing his own very public efforts, but the raid inspired a flurry of POW campaigns by VIVA, the League of Families, veterans groups, the AFL-CIO, and other organizations.¹¹³ Aides hoped that a “POW/MIA coordinating group” drawn from existing White House staff members would contain the “pressure ... coming from all angles for the President to act on behalf of these men or their families.”¹¹⁴

While the most public lobbying on the POW-MIA issue came from veterans groups or the League of Families, the coordinating group’s main challenge would be containing Perot’s more extreme suggestions for addressing the POW-MIA issue. These ideas, particularly those suggested in a late December 1970 telephone conversation, ranged from the reasonable – promoting “the Swedish agreement to act as a holding location for American POWs” – to the potentially useful – staging demonstrations with “responsible and disciplined” individuals outside the North Vietnamese Embassy in Paris – to the immediately-rejected suggestion that “another group ... obtain POW lists and other information by ransacking several embassies and bringing out documents and

Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “News Release, Retired Officers Association,” December 2, 1970, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹³ “Alex Butterfield to Dwight Chapin,” November 24, 1970, Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD. Emphasis in the original. For the POW campaigns, see: “Charles Colson to Alex Butterfield, Al Haig, John Holdridge, and James Hughes,” December 11, 1970, Charles Stephens; Box 114; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Charles Colson to General Hughes, John Holdridge, Alex Butterfield, and Larry Higby,” December 12, 1970, Jay Lovestone--AFL-CIO [2 of 3]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “James Hughes to Charles Colson,” December 15, 1970, Charles Stephens; Box 114; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁴ “James Hughes to Alex Butterfield,” December 18, 1970, Memoranda Received Jul thru Dec 1970; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Butterfield, NPLM, College Park, MD.

files.”¹¹⁵ Jon Howe, Perot’s primary White House contact at this time, promised that officials would consider his suggestions, but rejecting this last proposal outright telling Perot that the administration “could not condone such a thing and that he should drop this idea.”¹¹⁶ Even so, Howe did tentatively endorse, after consultation with NSC staffers, Perot’s idea of a demonstration outside the North Vietnamese embassy in Paris with the caveat that the White House would maintain final, but covert, control over the operation.¹¹⁷

But in a follow-up conversation, Perot “revealed that the group he had in mind consisted of pro football players ... [and] longshoremen although he was not sure that he could control them as well.” Which was likely enough to undermine White House enthusiasm for the proposal, but “Perot then threw out the idea that there was a trophy case inside the Viet Cong [*sic*] Embassy near the entrance which would be a tempting target for the demonstrators as they left.”¹¹⁸ This last comment led Howe to quickly inform Perot: “such an act would change the character of the exercise completely and would be counterproductive.”¹¹⁹ Happily for planners who knew such an effort would reflect poorly on the White House no matter how carefully its ties to Perot were disguised, Howe reported that “upon reflection [Perot] agreed that it was not a good

¹¹⁵ “Memorandum for the Record, Jon Howe,” December 28, 1970, Perot, Ross [Folder 1 of 2]; Box 117; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

idea.”¹²⁰ In contrast to the failed attempt to secure funding for a national support organization, Perot’s short attention span, usually a source of frustration, combined with his desire to maintain his privileged access to the White House ensured that Perot soon abandoned that particular plan.

Despite the irritations, Perot’s personal efforts on behalf of the prisoners and missing were broadly helpful to White House as they reinforced an image of activity and sympathy on behalf of US soldiers. This image would in turn enhance outside attempts to rally domestic support for the POW-MIA issue within carefully constrained bounds. Too much emphasis on the issue would draw popular attention away from the successes of Vietnamization and the President’s withdrawal policies and back to the more negative aspects of the war.¹²¹ Therefore aides encouraged outside allies to pursue projects that did not advocate for increased US military involvement in Vietnam and instead paralleled efforts such as American Youth for a Just Peace’s plan to “launch a world-wide crusade”¹²² to pressure North Vietnam to release US prisoners. This advertising and petition campaign explicitly framed any compromise with North Vietnam as a national betrayal quoting the wife of a POW saying, “Sure we want our husbands back --- but not at the price of selling out our country.”¹²³ Encouraged by the White House, the effort reinforced the official use of the prisoners as a justification for continuing the war, giving

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Joan Hoff referred to this dilemma as the “double-edged sword” of the prisoner issue. I discuss administration recognition of these risks in more depth in Chapter Six. Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 222, 222–31, 237–42.

¹²² “Charles Colson to Alex Butterfield, Al Haig, John Holdridge, and James Hughes,” 5.

¹²³ Ibid., 4.

potential supporters a relatively noncontroversial way to explain their embrace of the President's Vietnam policies. Likely at least somewhat motivated by a desire to maintain continued White House support for his organization, Bradley included the POW-MIA question in plans for the upcoming AWP National Leadership Conference which would be held in January 1971.¹²⁴

“Not Just a Useful Collection of Ad Hoc Committees”:
AWP Struggles to Move Beyond Vietnam

Despite the difficulties inherent in coordinating a wide range of outside allies, White House officials continued their efforts to pursue the idea of a national support organization. While its success in the McGovern-Hatfield fight was an encouraging sign that Americans for Winning the Peace would fulfill this goal, the 1970 election and growing attention to the POW-MIA issue diluted Administration efforts to guide AWP's transformation from a single-issue pressure group to a more general foreign policy advocacy group. As a consequence, the White House Leadership Conference, intended to be its debut, ultimately marked the end of AWP's close relationship with the White House. At the time, however, the conference planners – both from the White House and from AWP – considered the success of the national conference a strong signal of AWP's continuing relevance and future contributions. In Bradley's eyes, the January 11, 1971 event would transform AWP “into a national bipartisan movement, not just a useful

¹²⁴ “Gene Bradley to Charles Colson,” December 1, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [2 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

collection of ad hoc committees.”¹²⁵ To this end, Colson arranged the participation of National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, Vice President Spiro Agnew and other high-level Government officials despite his agreement with Haldeman that if AWP “lost its autonomy it would be virtually useless to us.”¹²⁶

Despite this concern, Colson rejected the idea that administration involvement would make AWP “too much our creature” and instead argued that the participation of policymakers and White House officials ensured that the organization would realize its potential to be a “strong viable bipartisan support apparatus.”¹²⁷ Even though Nixon was not in Washington during the AWP conference, Colson’s assistant George Bell reported that it was still “the most successful and impressive occasion of its kind I have witnessed during the past 2 years.”¹²⁸ In Bell’s opinion, the conference achieved its stated goal of motivating participants to return home and promote Nixon’s policies in their communities. Bradley was similarly enthusiastic and told Colson that although he had “worked in and out of Government for a number of years, ... never have I seen an event, in the national interest, which better exemplifies how the Government and the private sector can work together for the national interest.”¹²⁹ The conference successfully tied

¹²⁵ “Gene Bradley to Charles Colson,” November 13, 1970, 1, Americans for Winning the Peace [7 of 7]; Box 37; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁶ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” December 10, 1970, 1, Americans for Winning the Peace [2 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Charles Colson to George Bell,” January 12, 1971, George Bell 1970-71 [3 of 3]; Box 5; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁷ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” 2, 1.

¹²⁸ “George Bell to Charles Colson,” January 12, 1971, 2, Americans for Winning the Peace [3 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁹ “Gene Bradley to Charles Colson,” January 19, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

members of local and regional AWP committees more closely to the Administration, but as demonstrated by requests for speakers, telegrams from high-ranking officials and even that the US Marine Band to greet a group of Florida members at the airport,¹³⁰ such close ties risked monopolizing already-scarce resources. In an effort to maintain AWP's privileged access, and as conference participants began to request White House involvement in regional activities, Bradley suggested that he "do the sorting out of reasonable from unreasonable"¹³¹ requests before they reached the White House.

While Bradley recognized that "we cannot afford to dampen the spirits of our regional committees and kill their enthusiasm,"¹³² he knew that AWP continued to depend on its White House ties and could ill afford to alienate itself by being too demanding. Bradley's suggestion that he mediate future requests was an attempt to minimize the costs of continued sponsorship as he struggled to arrange outside financing. AWP's initial organizing success was due in large part to generous financial backing from the White House, but even as he acknowledged that Bradley had "gotten a good thing started for us and we shouldn't drop the ball,"¹³³ Colson refused to "assume any further responsibility for his funding"¹³⁴ beyond December 31, 1970. After that date, Colson insisted that

¹³⁰ "Gene Bradley to Gene Whiddon"; "Gene Bradley to George Bell"; "Gene Whiddon to Gene Bradley," August 29, 1970, Americans for Winning the Peace [5 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³¹ "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," January 27, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ "Charles Colson to Dan McMichael," January 4, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [2 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

AWP's financial "support will have to come from the group he has built and friends outside,"¹³⁵ reminding Bradley in mid-January 1971 that given its membership, "it should not be difficult to get the group self-sustaining."¹³⁶ Even as he encouraged Bradley "to keep the momentum that you have now achieved,"¹³⁷ Colson's refusal to continue subsidizing AWP was a consequence of both shifting priorities – the 1972 election campaign was drawing closer – and the reality of the unexpected demands and expenses of running an astroturf organization.

While never quite relinquishing its desire to create a national support organization, the administration's most successful attempt monopolized more resources than initially expected. Additionally, with Bradley's resignation, the post-McGovern-Hatfield iteration of AWP, under former Treasury Secretary Joe Fowler, was significantly less cooperative. Most damaging, Fowler was determined that AWP, under his leadership, would not be an "organization working with someone at the White House."¹³⁸ This growing independence might well have contributed to Colson's insistence on outside financial backing which in turn distanced AWP from the White House following the Leadership Conference. It was never a complete separation, however, as Colson and his assistant George Bell maintained a degree of contact with the organization. More prosaically, these ties persisted until Bradley's consulting fees – for the time he spent

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ "Charles Colson to Gene Bradley," January 14, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [2 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ "Tom Evans to Charles Colson," February 16, 1971, 4, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

forming AWP – were paid in full.¹³⁹ Low-level contact with AWP, primarily maintained through efforts to arrange a meeting with the President for Bradley and the new Director, Joe Fowler,¹⁴⁰ had the added benefit of ensuring that the Administration could remobilize the group if needed.

Conclusion

As AWP grew increasingly distant from the administration, aides were seemingly unconcerned at the lost opportunity to create the national public opinion organization discussed since late 1969. Instead, they focused their attentions on cultivating existing groups in the hopes of building a network of outside allies which would ensure the President's reelection in 1972. This network had its first trial with the 1970 Congressional elections and although the results did not match White House expectations, they did demonstrate the potential of issue-based organizing and targeted public appeals. With this return to an *ad hoc*, issue-by-issue and group-by-group, approach to public opinion efforts, subsidizing an organization such as AWP became less important as aides prioritized building ties to constituency groups such as students,

¹³⁹ "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," April 20, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," April 25, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson to Gene Bradley," April 28, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," April 30, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," May 8, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Gene Bradley to Charles Colson," May 23, 1971, Americans for Winning the Peace [1 of 7]; Box 36; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁴⁰ "Charles Colson to George Bell," April 7, 1971, George Bell 1970-71 [2 of 3]; Box 5; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Dwight Chapin to George Bell," June 16, 1971, George Bell 1970-71 [2 of 3]; Box 5; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

veterans, workers, and the POW/MIA movement. These ties would also, aides hoped, help establish a degree of administration control over outside supporters, particularly advocates for the POWs and MIAs. In the face of increasing domestic tensions and frustrations over the Vietnam War, Nixon could ill-afford public critiques from the most prominent advocates for the men he increasingly pointed to as the reason for ongoing US military involvement in Southeast Asia.

This focus on the POW issue, developing opposition from prominent conservatives discussed in the next chapter, and an increased focus on preparing for the 1972 campaign ensured that AWP and the national support organization aides hoped to create became increasingly marginalized. The decline of AWP demonstrates the dramatic shift in White House public opinion efforts in the winter of 1970-71. Before the 1970 elections, aides prioritized the development of a national public opinion organization, yet even while finalizing the details for the official launch of such group – with AWP’s January 1971 White House Leadership Conference – aides were more concerned with maintaining and enhancing ties to existing pressure groups. The growing resonance of the POW/MIA issue soon combined with developing frustrations within the conservative movement to ensure that AWP, despite its flaws and limited scope, was the closest staffers would come to creating an umbrella organization to coordinate outside support efforts.

CHAPTER 6

“WE ARE NO LONGER GOING TO WIN THE RACE FOR MIDDLE AMERICA BY
DEFAULT”: PREPARING FOR NIXON’S RE-ELECTION

Despite limited influence – it did not again mount a significant, national lobbying campaign after the defeat of the McGovern-Hatfield Amendment – Americans for Winning the Peace (AWP) was in many ways the apex of White House efforts to promote the Silent Majority. With it, aides realized, albeit in a limited fashion, their much-discussed goal of creating a national support organization with the potential to unite disparate pro-Nixon and pro-Vietnam individuals mobilized since 1969. However, creating even such a small-scale astroturf group proved to be a significant drain on administration resources, precluding its expansion into a truly viable national resource. At the same time, and notwithstanding the importance of patriotic appeals in previous efforts to rally the Silent Majority, aides grew less interested in grassroots patriotic events. While the Honor American Committee’s plans for a February 1971 “Red, White, and Blue Ball” including the “largest American flag cake ever made” would have received an enthusiastic welcome in 1969 or 1970, aides secured a Vice Presidential

telegram for the event more out of appreciation for prior assistance than in the hopes of encouraging future projects.¹

Instead, in early 1971, Nixon and his staff turned their attention to planning for the 1972 election. With this shift to electoral calculations, aides attempted to retain key elements of the Silent Majority idea – specifically nationalist patriotism and support for the President – while minimizing the Vietnam War as a factor in domestic debates. In this way, officials hoped to unite the disparate groups – ethnics, organized labor, wealthy businessmen, conservatives, veterans, etc. – seen as crucial to the President’s reelection while avoiding potentially damaging debates over the Vietnam War. Although these efforts had produced uneven results in the 1970 mid-term elections, Nixon was optimistic that, with the proper cultivation, these groups would combine to form what he would later refer to as the New American Majority. Such a project necessarily built on the Silent Majority campaigns of the previous two years, but as Vietnam was certainly not a positive issue for the president, Colson worked to expand these projects to encompass Middle America.² Seeking to balance the risks and benefits of incorporating the Vietnam War into the campaign, speechwriter William Safire recommended a “peacemaker”

¹ “Press Release - Honor America Committee,” n.d., “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Barbara J.B. Zanesky to George Bell,” February 9, 1971, “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “George Bell to Andy Lawrence,” February 20, 1971, “I Love America” July 4th [1970]; Box 73; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

² In many ways, the administration conception of “Middle America” was very much the same as its understanding of the “Silent Majority,” with a key difference being the importance of the Vietnam War. Therefore, most of the Silent Majority would be part of Middle America while not all Middle Americans – such as members of the Union of Automotive Workers and other antiwar unions – would be part of the Silent Majority. For the election, aides chose to emphasize the broader group both because it represented a greater number of potential votes and because doing so allowed them to minimize Vietnam in Nixon’s campaign.

theme for 1972. Allowing vague references to progress in Vietnam without promising additional withdrawals, such a construction had the potential to mollify the president's conservative supporters frustrated by the president's economic policies as well as the continued troop withdrawals.

Since administration public opinion planning would no longer emphasize the idea, Colson opted to allow White House control over the name "Silent Majority, Inc." to lapse in March 1971 even though self-described members of the Silent Majority had actively supported both the Laos invasion and the president's position in the domestic debates over My Lai. The June 1971 publication of excerpts of a top-secret study of U.S. Vietnam policies in the *New York Times* further undermined White House efforts to minimize the Vietnam War leading up to the 1972 election. Although aides attempted to reframe the so-called "Pentagon Papers" as the "Kennedy-Johnson Papers" so as to underscore that the deceptions and flawed policies they documented happened under Democratic presidents, they repeatedly attempted to marginalize the Vietnam War as a domestic political issue. Their failures would ensure that the idea of the Silent Majority continued to shape administration public opinion efforts and this chapter will examine how it influenced White House efforts to promote Middle America as a key constituency in the 1972 campaign.

Winning Middle America: "Mr. Peace" Builds his Majority

Having learned from the 1970 mid-term elections that Silent Majority support for Nixon's patriotic rhetoric and Vietnam policies did not automatically translate into votes, the White House set out in 1971 to expand that group into the more broadly-defined, and

they hoped more politically relevant, “Middle America.” Although Nixon’s Vietnamization and withdrawal policies had quieted domestic opposition to the Vietnam War, maintaining an image of broad-based support for these policies was still an important consideration. Even so, the president reminded his staff: “We can’t pretend to want to unify everybody, we’ve got to build our majority.”³ Particularly as the 1970 mid-term election had demonstrated the truth in Buchanan’s warning that “we can no longer count on our democratic [*sic*] friends to co-operate in their own demise ... We are no longer going to win the race for Middle America by default.”⁴ White House officials therefore spent much of their time in the days and weeks following the 1970 election considering how best to position Nixon for the 1972 campaign, now less than two years away. Having already started to build ties to some of the key groups in the Middle America constituency –including primarily “Labor Union Members, Agriculture, Ethnics/Catholic, Veterans, Suburbs, Chamber of Commerce, The Aged”⁵ – Colson and his staff worked to modify existing appeals to the Silent Majority to reflect the concerns of these groups.

Reflecting the realities of a public divided over domestic issues, aides attempted to promote the president’s foreign policies as a way to overcome domestic policy debates

³ William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 341. Robert Mason provides a nuanced overview of administration efforts to appeal to the many constituencies that made up this pro-Nixon majority in Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 113–60.

⁴ “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” August 24, 1970, Campaign of 1970; Box 6; PPF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵ “Jeb Magruder to the Attorney General,” November 2, 1971, 10, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: LH - FYI 1971 (Late); Box 16; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

and build a pro-Nixon majority. No longer attempting to rally support specifically for the Vietnam War, which Colson argued had “become something of a non-issue,” aides instead worked to minimize domestic opposition and promote the broad themes of Nixon’s policies.⁶ In this effort, speechwriter and public relations expert William Safire urged that the administration “press our strengths” particularly “surefootedness in foreign affairs” by framing the president as “Mr. Peace” even as he recognized that “the achievement of peace is a wasting political asset: The more secure the peace, the less gratitude goes to those who bring it about.”⁷ But, with war continuing in Vietnam, Safire endorsed the development of the “peace theme” for the 1972 campaign.

Not only would it be a constant reminder of Nixon’s troop withdrawals, but it emphasized the president’s foreign policy expertise and would hopefully obscure growing divisions over domestic policies.⁸ Furthermore, Safire argued that it would give the campaign a positive, even uplifting, tone:

The President has already sounded the tocsin for ‘a full generation of peace.’ This cannot be allowed to be dropped as only a ‘70 campaign phrase -- it is a phrase central to his Administration, and ... has in it what the Silent Majority, the Forgotten American, the New Federalism and Forward Together never had -- a specific, realizable promise of hope. When we in the Administration are completely tired of it, we will know that we have just begun to get it across, and

⁶ “Memorandum for the President,” November 6, 1970, 2, Campaign of 1970; Box 6; WHSF: SMOF PPF, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷ “H.R. Haldeman to Henry Kissinger,” November 25, 1970, 2, HRH-Staff Memos--November 1970 J-M; Box 67; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸ While she does not focus exclusively on the 1971-1972 period, Joan Hoff offers a useful overview of the administration’s primary domestic concerns – including inflation, welfare, unemployment, civil rights and desegregation, and the environment – in her larger study of Nixon’s presidency. It is just these domestic policies that leads her to see Nixon as a much more progressive president than do most other historians who focus on either his foreign policies or Watergate. Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1994), 17–144. Mason offers a similar analysis of domestic issues, but with a more narrow focus on administration efforts to create a “New American Revolution” for the 1972 election. Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 113–60.

we should then redouble our efforts. This is our own ‘war to end wars’ and we must not let it go.⁹

Therefore, Safire urged: “We cannot permit peace to limp in unheralded, causing people to wonder retrospectively, ‘When did the war end?’ Absent a break in negotiations and a formal truce-signing, we must create a war’s ending of our own.”¹⁰ Such an ending, Safire believed, would involve “a national parade ... with veterans of the war marching alongside the last detachment of troops coming home”¹¹ from Vietnam as well as recommending that “the following year, when the last of the remaining troops come home, we should declare ‘Homecoming Day’ with appropriate festivities.”¹² These suggestions were not, ultimately, carried out during the campaign – primarily because Nixon did not announce the peace agreement until 1973 – but likely influenced the eventual “Operation Homecoming” celebrations for returning POWs.¹³

Aides did, however, make the President’s plans to end the Vietnam War an important part of their efforts to promote his image as the “personification of lasting peace.”¹⁴ Burnishing Nixon’s peacemaker credentials complemented earlier attempts to frame Nixon as the preeminent defender of nationalist patriotism and traditional

⁹ “H.R. Haldeman to Henry Kissinger,” 3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 63–69, 82–84; Richard M Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), 860–69; Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 28, 38–44.

¹⁴ “H.R. Haldeman to Henry Kissinger,” 4.

American values.¹⁵ Additionally, emphasizing the idea of “peace” rather than promoting specific policies would hopefully enable Nixon to benefit from recent progress in Vietnam without reminding voters of his earlier, and as yet unrealized, promises to end the war. The broader theme would also permit Nixon’s campaign to capitalize on fears of future conflicts so as to ensure his reelection. Safire therefore urged that aides work to “bridge the gap between making the peace and keeping the peace ... we must continually point out the continuing danger to the peace that requires a vigilant, strong President to counter.”¹⁶ In this way, Nixon could benefit from established Cold War fears while continuing his Vietnamization and withdrawal policies.

“Neither Fish Nor Fowl:” Nixon and the Conservatives

Even as Colson, Safire and other aides proposed campaign themes that would unite the greatest number of citizens behind Nixon, neither they nor the president ignored the reality of domestic divisions. Bemoaning the fact that the remaining liberals on the White House staff were “more concerned about ... bringing the country together,” Nixon urged Haldeman to get them “thinking realistically about the fact that we are always going to have differences, that in bringing the country together all we're doing is to try and de-escalate the rhetoric.”¹⁷ His next request, however, would complicate any attempt

¹⁵ See Chapters Three and Four for a discussion of these earlier efforts.

¹⁶ “H.R. Haldeman to Henry Kissinger,” 5.

¹⁷ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [3],” December 11, 1970, 1, Memos From The President (Typed by H. Office)--1970; Box 164; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Safire records Nixon as saying: “Get the word out, we’re not afraid of controversy. Oh, they’ll say, ‘What about “Bring Us Together”?’ That’s fine about patriotism and all the great goals, and we should never stop reminding everybody about that. But all the people aren’t going to come together, old and young, black and white,

to create even an image of unity as Nixon pushed Haldeman to “really charge up those who are willing to be charged up. I don't mean charge them up so that all go off and be two-bit Agnews. Charge them up so that they know that politics over the next two years is ... going to be cold steel with the amenities engaged in only for the purposes of appearances and not for purposes of action.”¹⁸ Implicitly rejecting assessments that Agnew's negative campaigning had contributed to the disappointing results in the 1970 election, Nixon instead pushed his staff toward what Safire would later describe as “the most far-reaching and ultimately self-destructive political decision” of Nixon's presidency.¹⁹ Safire cites Nixon's decision to “abandon the role of President as party leader, and to infuse his ‘new American majority’ with an ideological fervor” at the expense of party loyalty as the source of both a lack of Republican support during Nixon's second term and the president's decision to more actively embrace an overtly conservative agenda.²⁰

rich and poor – not on the bread and butter issues where interests are different.” Safire, *Before the Fall*, 341.

¹⁸ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [3],” 2. This request contradicts

¹⁹ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1994), 208; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 113; Nixon, *RN*, 495; Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (London: Scribner, 2008), 536; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 542.

²⁰ Safire explicitly relates Nixon's decision to prioritize his own, personal, political gain over the good of the Republican party for the fact that “when the lid blew off [Watergate], there were no troops to rally. Republicans, shortchanged, were angry at him anyway; conservative True Believers, toward whom he was turning, lashed out at him to pay him back for past ideological impurities; the moderates in the party took heart at his buffeting; and the New Minority quaffed the wine of vindication.” Safire, *Before the Fall*, 542, 549, 552. Robert Mason offers a nuanced historical analysis of this same process in a 2005 article in the *Journal of American Studies* and his 2004 book places Nixon's role as party leader into the larger context of his, in Mason's view, overarching goal to bring about a political realignment in his 2004 book. Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*; Robert Mason, “‘I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority’: Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969-73,” *Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 3 (December 2005): 463–483.

Safire recognizes that “Nixon had an affection for most of the conservative values,” but much of the credit for Nixon’s rightward shift goes to speechwriter, and hardline conservative, Patrick Buchanan’s repeated requests that the administration stop assuming that conservatives had “nowhere else to go.”²¹ Appealing to what Safire described as Nixon’s “conservative gut feelings,” Buchanan reminded his boss and his colleagues in early January 1971 that many conservatives were starting to believe that “the squeaky wheel in the Nixon Administration gets the grease -- and there are a variety of plans floating about for them to start squeaking publicly.”²² To prevent this, Buchanan recommended that the President give conservative leaders, writers, legislators and ideas more of his time and attention. Doing so would, Buchanan argued, capitalize on the fact that, in his analysis, many in the conservative movement, “having been out of power and favor in Washington for so long, want to be an integral part of the Administration.”²³

Once reminded of Nixon’s conservative credentials, Buchanan believed that the

²¹ “H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson,” January 18, 1971, 6, White House Strategy Memos; Box 14; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. For Buchanan’s earlier warnings, see “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” February 20, 1969, Haldeman Memos for The President (Feb. 1969); Box 138; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” September 18, 1969, VIETNAM: (General Files)-Sep 69 - Nov 69 [2 of 2 folders]; Box 74; NSC: Vietnam Subject Files, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman,” February 12, 1970, H.R. Haldeman A-G Memo Feb 1970; Box 57; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” March 3, 1970, HRH-July-August 1970--Staff Memos - Cole-D; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman,” June 4, 1970, HRH Memoranda For The President June 1970; Box 139; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman,” June 30, 1970, HRH July-Aug. 1970--Staff Memos - A-Chotiner; Box 61; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Although few studies of the conservative movement focus on Nixon’s relationship with its leaders, Allen Lichtman and William Berman do put these frustrations into a broader context. William C Berman, *America’s Right Turn: From Nixon to Bush* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 21–36; Allan J Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York; Berkeley, CA: Atlantic Monthly Press, Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2008), 281–83, 288–302.

²² Safire, *Before the Fall*, 544; “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” January 6, 1971, 3, Pat Buchanan January 1971; Box 71; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²³ “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” 6.

President's former critics would "become the best defenders of the White House in the conservative community we have."²⁴ Buchanan would expand on these views in a long memorandum sent anonymously to those administration officials – including Safire and Colson – responsible for public opinion efforts.²⁵

The "Neither Fish Nor Fowl" memorandum, circulated by Haldeman to White House staffers in mid-January 1971, was presented to White House staffers as from "one of Nixon's strong Conservative supporters."²⁶ In it, Buchanan argued that many conservatives saw the President as "the quintessential political pragmatist, standing before an ideological buffet, picking some from this tray and some from that."²⁷ This perception ensured that for movement conservatives, Nixon was functionally "neither liberal nor conservative, neither fish nor fowl ... [Someone] whose zigging and zagging has succeeded in winning the enthusiasm and loyalty of neither left nor right, but the suspicion and distrust of both."²⁸ Recognizing that claiming the middle ground might be politically appropriate for the 1972 election, especially as the conservatives did not have

²⁴ Ibid. Although he does name these potential converts, Buchanan is likely referring to individuals mentioned elsewhere in his six-page memorandum to Nixon such as William F. Buckley, Jr. and William Rusher of the *National Review*, Jeff Bell and Senator John Ashbrook of the American Conservative Union, as well as "the old YAF crowd" or the "Reaganites at the [1968] Miami Convention." Despite Buchanan's warnings, Buckley, Rusher, and Bell joined with nine other conservative leaders to express their unhappiness with Nixon's policies – particularly his seeming economic liberalism and decision to visit the People's Republic of China in 1972 – in July 1971. Sandra Scanlon, "The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration" (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005), 140–43; Timothy J Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism: Redrawing Party Lines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 144–45.

²⁵ Safire, *Before the Fall*, 543–47; "H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson."

²⁶ "H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson." Safire identifies Buchanan as the author of this "polemic." Safire, *Before the Fall*, 543.

²⁷ "H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson," 2.

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

a viable alternative to Nixon, Buchanan claimed that such a shift to the middle – never mind the left – would, in the long run, alienate the President’s conservative supporters leaving him vulnerable to challenges from the Right. More immediately damaging, by courting the middle, the President had “conspicuously abandoned many of the sustaining traditions of the Republican Party,” making him “no longer a credible custodian of the conservative political tradition of the GOP.”²⁹

Despite this harsh critique and Nixon’s implied agreement, few White House officials other than Buchanan were seriously concerned about their frustrations in early 1971. Responding to the “Neither Fish nor Fowl” memorandum, Colson was sanguine about conservative critiques and contrary to Buchanan’s argument that these frustrations stemmed from a failure to embrace conservative leaders and ideas, felt that “moderate conservatives are by and large not uncomfortable with what we are doing; they may, however, be concerned with the way we appear to be doing it.”³⁰ Thus, in Colson’s analysis, the administration’s problems with its conservative critics stemmed from style rather than substance. Colson argued that a tendency to “mount a major campaign, using all of our resources to promote an issue ... [until] we drop it and go on to something else” created the appearance of inconsistency and fickleness critiqued in the “Neither Fish Nor Fowl” memorandum.³¹ Colson’s solution, therefore, involved greater public relations coordination rather than the focused effort to cultivate ties to the conservative movement

²⁹ Ibid., 7–8. Emphasis in the original

³⁰ “Charles Colson to Richard Nixon,” February 3, 1971, 1, White House Strategy Memos; Box 14; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Emphasis in original.

³¹ Ibid., 1–2.

advocated by Buchanan. To this end, Colson proposed “The Peaceful American Revolution” and “A Generation of Peace” as potential themes around which the administration could organize its various initiatives and in so doing “avoid the appearance of zig-zagging, or flipping from issue to issue” which he, overlooking more substantive complaints, saw as the source of conservative critiques.³²

The Laos Invasion

While Colson minimized conservative grievances, Haldeman flatly rejected conservative critiques of Nixon’s foreign policy critiques as “absolutely ridiculous” and pushed White House officials to emphasize the President’s hawkish foreign policy positions to counter their arguments.³³ He reminded Buchanan: “this is the President who went in to Cambodia, who conceived and ordered the Son Tay raid, who fought the ABM through ... who fought the cuts in the Defense budget and got through the supplemental for Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam.”³⁴ All of the policies in Haldeman’s list were popular with conservatives, but the increasing importance of domestic issues in the early 1970s meant that Nixon’s hawkish anticommunism could not guarantee their support. Furthermore, Nixon and Kissinger’s plans to continue to build ties with both the People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union transformed Vietnam, a source of domestic division, into one of the few policies on which conservatives and the president might still

³² Ibid., 4. Emphasis in original.

³³ “H.R. Haldeman to Pat Buchanan,” January 21, 1971, 2, Presidential Memos Buchanan 1971; Box 81; WHSF: SMOF Staff Secretary, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁴ Ibid.

agree.³⁵ The resulting importance of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in securing continued conservative support complicated plans to deemphasize the war in the 1972 election.

Nixon therefore had to find a way to continue withdrawing troops without appearing to be surrendering in Vietnam. With lowered casualties an important contributor to decreased domestic tensions, Nixon increasingly relied upon bombing campaigns, ARVN ground troops and secret, high-level negotiations.³⁶

Seeking “something ‘dramatic ... that maybe will make the other side negotiate,’” Nixon, Kissinger, and other advisors discussed US involvement in an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) invasion of Laos intended to disrupt North Vietnamese supply lines and suspected preparations for a spring 1971 offensive.³⁷ Lam Son 719, the U.S. code-name for the invasion, was also intended to serve as a powerful demonstration of the success of Nixon’s Vietnamization policies. Nixon and his aides

³⁵ Indeed, Nixon’s announcement in July 1971 would be the immediate cause of the Manhattan 12’s “suspension of support” (discussed later in this chapter) which was followed by a similar statement from the New York Conservative Party (discussed in Chapter Seven; Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 143–47, 149–51; and Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 145–49). For a thoughtful and nuanced discussion of Nixon’s foreign policies, particularly the Vietnam War and détente, see Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

³⁶ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 187–213, 252–64; Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 177–241; Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 108–88. Kissinger would certainly disagree with Kimball’s and Dallek’s view that, by early 1971, these efforts were less interested in ensuring the survival of South Vietnam than with ensuring that it survived *long enough* after the U.S. withdrew to let Nixon and Kissinger claim to have ended the war “with honor.” Their new acceptance of an idea first proposed in 1968 reflects the realities of domestic public opinion. Despite their success in mobilizing the Silent Majority and hindering antiwar organizing, there was little support for continued U.S. involvement. Nixon’s and Kissinger’s plans for withdrawal reflected, in Kimball’s analysis “their acceptance, at last, of the decent-interval solution, for with the departure of American combat troops near the end of 1972, there could be no guarantees that Thieu’s government would survive permanently. They now seemed prepared to countenance his demise, as long as it would take place after an appropriately extended period following American withdrawal, thereby salvaging American credibility and Nixon’s honor.” Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 257, 263; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, xii, 93, 240.

³⁷ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 257.

anticipated domestic opposition, but believed that the operation had the potential to “prove decisive in the overall conduct of the war” so Nixon therefore approved U.S. air and artillery support. Hoping that the decision not to send U.S. ground troops into Laos would limit domestic objections, Nixon approved the final plans for the invasion and ARVN troops moved into Laos on February 8 1971. Despite initial success, the invasion soon “proved to be a disaster” as North Vietnamese resistance combined with South Vietnamese hesitations and inexperience led to an embarrassing and disastrous ARVN retreat. In fact, instead of validating Nixon’s approach to the war, the invasion “exposed lingering deficiencies in Vietnamization.”³⁸ But even though Kissinger later described Lam Son 719 as “conceived in ambivalence and assailed by skepticism, [and which] proceeded in confusion,” White House officials from Nixon down through the hierarchy were determined to frame it as a success.³⁹

Since Nixon did not want to appear to be expanding the war, White House efforts to demonstrate popular support for the Laos invasion were significantly less involved than those surrounding both the 1970 Cambodian invasion and the 1969 Silent Majority speech. Aides, of course, continued to work closely with established allies, but Haldeman’s assistant, Larry Higby, told Colson to embrace a “low key effort that concentrates on rifle-shooting the things we want to do well rather than trying to throw

³⁸ Ibid., 259; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 247; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 205.

³⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 257–64; Andrew Johns, *Vietnam’s Second Front: Domestic Politics, the Republican Party, and the War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 293–94; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 241–48; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 188–209; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 497–99.

up a mass campaign” in his efforts to promote Nixon’s policies.⁴⁰ This relatively understated White House campaign was also likely a consequence of problems with the Laos invasion itself as the invading troops faced strong Laotian and North Vietnamese resistance, requiring more active US involvement than originally planned.⁴¹ Despite discouraging reports from Laos and Vietnam, Nixon and his top aides saw it as a chance to rehabilitate the earlier Cambodian invasion by framing both efforts as central to the success of Vietnamization and therefore “good news from the standpoint of the future in Southeast Asia.”⁴² Nixon went so far as to describe the invasion as “a blow like the landing in Europe on D-Day”⁴³ and Haldeman passed along the President’s request that aides “please line up the appropriate members of the House and Senate to make this point.”⁴⁴

Specifically, White House officials wanted to target the President’s potential opponents in the 1972 election and, as Haldeman told Colson, “keep them out on the limb that they are now on because of the ridiculous statements they’ve made.”⁴⁵ These efforts as well as statements from Senators, Representatives and outside allies did not result in a

⁴⁰ “Larry Higby to Charles Colson,” February 8, 1971, Chuck [Charles W.] Colson May 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Dallek notes, “From the start of the operation, Nixon was determined to give it the appearance of success. He wanted any dissent from this view to be sharply attacked.” Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 261.

⁴¹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 259–61; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 245–47.

⁴² “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” February 8, 1971, P Memos 1971; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ “H.R. Haldeman to Jeb Magruder,” February 8, 1971, Lam Son / Laos; Box 77; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁵ “H.R. Haldeman to Clark MacGregor and Charles Colson,” February 9, 1971, Chuck [Charles W.] Colson May 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

broad, national outpouring of support, but Colson reported that “media play was very much with us, both last week and over the weekend. Surprisingly, the other side never got any momentum at all.”⁴⁶ Colson explained this relatively quiet national response – in contrast with the opposition triggered by the earlier Cambodia invasion – telling Haldeman, “we have succeeded over the past year in making the war pretty much a non-issue. Hence even what we know to be favorable can hardly be expected to cause excitement.”⁴⁷ Since “the public is convinced we are ending the war” and simultaneously “the public opposes the war,” Colson concluded that “it is difficult even with a brilliant and successful strategic move to produce a great deal of elation.”⁴⁸ Supporting his claims, Colson was careful to point that the “critics [also] came through with a dull thud. The absence of passion on either side is more the result of public attitudes and media attitudes than it is our failure to get a story across.”⁴⁹ In this way, Colson argued, earlier success in depoliticizing Vietnam – at least for the president’s supporters – resulted in failure when trying to mobilize those same supporters.

The Silent Majority defends Lieutenant Calley

Even as Laos failed to energize the Silent Majority, aides sought a way to maintain the president’s links to that group while still redirecting administration attention and resources away from promoting the Vietnam War. Although Nixon had earlier

⁴⁶ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” February 18, 1971, 1, Lam Son / Laos; Box 77; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

proposed the “New Majority”⁵⁰ as an alternative to the Silent Majority, the groups and individuals of Middle America came to be the central focus of White House support efforts. Therefore despite committing \$1,566.58 to “protect” the name “Silent Majority, Inc.” in all fifty States because “it has served the purpose very well for us to control its name and at the very least, deny its use to others,”⁵¹ Colson later told his staff to “cancel it out.”⁵² Although changes in administration priorities were a consideration, the immediate impetus for Colson’s pivot was the news that the approved fee did not cover the entire cost of maintaining shadow organizations in all fifty states, which would cost an additional \$6,020.00.⁵³ Likely reflecting its rhetorical and symbolic association with the Vietnam War, the Silent Majority identity so carefully fostered after the President’s November 1969 speech was, by 1971, well on its way to being transformed into a broader concept of “Middle America.” This shift, combined with the new approach to public opinion efforts surrounding the Laos invasion, likely informed the administration’s handling of the public responses to Lieutenant William J. Calley’s court martial over the massacre at My Lai.

On March 16, 1968, as part of a larger U.S. offensive against Communist forces after the January 1968 Tet Offensive, a group of U.S. soldiers – including a platoon

⁵⁰ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman [7],” March 2, 1970, P Memos 1970 (1 of 2); Box 229; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ “Charles Colson to Joe Tauro,” January 4, 1971, Silent Majority Organization [1 of 2]; Box 112; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵² “Unsigned Memorandum,” March 25, 1971, Silent Majority Organization [1 of 2]; Box 112; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵³ “Joe Tauro to Charles Colson,” April 5, 1971, Silent Majority Organization [1 of 2]; Box 112; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

commanded by Lieutenant William J. Calley – moved into the hamlet of My Lai. Later claiming that they believed they faced enemy combatants, the soldiers killed hundreds of villagers, the majority of whom were women, children, and aged or infirm men. If not for a November 1969 series of articles by journalist Seymour Hersh, describing the actions of US soldiers and military officials surrounding the event, the US public might never have learned of the killings at My Lai. Although these and subsequent coverage of wartime atrocities strengthened antiwar arguments, the administration and the Army managed to contain public debate over My Lai until Calley was found guilty of murdering twenty-two civilians on March 29, 1971.⁵⁴

Reflecting the domestic debates over the Vietnam War, historian Jeffrey Kimball notes, “an overwhelming but divided majority of the public opposed the verdict.”⁵⁵ While the war’s opponents felt that the investigation should not have stopped with Calley, members of the Silent Majority argued that Calley should not be punished for doing his “duty.”⁵⁶ While Hersh’s 1972 analysis of the Army’s attempts to limit public

⁵⁴ Although historical and contemporary accounts generally agree on the basic outline of the events surrounding the My Lai massacre, scholars and observers continue to disagree over the question of causality. Kissinger claims that “the Mylai incident tarnished the image of an American Army that had generally - though not always - been compassionate in dealing with the civilian population” and Gershen argued at the time that My Lai was an “accident of war.” Most scholarship supports the conclusion that the massacre was in many ways what Hersh calls “a logical result of the war in Vietnam.” Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 185–86, 305; Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (New York: Viking, 1992); Martin Gershen, *Destroy or Die; the True Story of Mylai* (New Rochelle, N.Y., Arlington House, 1971), 301; William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1968-1973* (Government Printing Office, 1996), 217–60; Seymour M Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (New York: Random House, 1970), 187; Seymour M Hersh, *Cover-up: The Army’s Secret Investigation of the Massacre at My Lai 4* (New York, Random House, 1972); Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 176, 249–51; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 558; Kendrick Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006). Many thanks to Patrick Hagopian for helping me better understand the complexities and nuance of My Lai.

⁵⁵ Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 249–50.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 250.

discussion of My Lai concludes that the “the Army as an institution ... made so much of My Lai 4 inevitable,” Nixon and his aides chose to emphasize the opposition of the Silent Majority and other hawks.⁵⁷ Responding to their support – Butterfield reported that of the 5,510 telegrams received as of March 31, only five approved of the verdict⁵⁸ – Nixon announced that Calley would be released from the stockade and placed under house arrest for the duration of the appeal process. Kendrick Oliver argues in *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory* that the guilty verdict implicitly “challenged national myths” of American innocence and morality leading those most invested in those myths to aggressively defend Calley.⁵⁹ Given the very public embrace of these myths by veterans and hawkish members of organized labor, it is not surprising that these groups were among Calley’s most ardent defenders.⁶⁰ While union leaders released public statements endorsing the President’s decision, Oliver points out that “it was the

⁵⁷ Hersh, *Cover-up*, xi.

⁵⁸ “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman,” March 31, 1971, Butterfield Correspondence 2-15-71 to 6-30-71 [III]; Box 81; WHSF: SMOF Staff Secretary, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁹ Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory*, 104.

⁶⁰ See Chapter Four for a discussion of labor support for Nixon and Vietnam. While the organized veterans groups actively supported Nixon’s Vietnam policies from the start of his administration, there is very little scholarship on their efforts or their relationship to the administration. This is likely, or at least partially, caused by the limited sources available – representatives from both the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, while very friendly and helpful, directed this researcher to their magazines and other publications when approached about archival access – as well as the larger historiographical trends of the Vietnam War. Just as scholars have tended to prioritize research on the antiwar movement at the expense of pro-war groups and individuals (see the Introduction), so too have scholars focused their attentions on the antiwar veterans movements – particularly Vietnam Veterans Against the War. David Cortright, “The Winter Soldiers Movement: GIs and Veterans Against the Vietnam War,” *Peace & Change* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 118–124; Andrew Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (NYU Press, 2001); Richard R. Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent During the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, discussed later in this chapter, is an exception, but as a Nixon administration astroturf organization, it is not representative of the efforts of the more established veterans organizations. Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 186–89; Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 489–90, 517.

traditional veterans' community which ... provided a clearing-house for public dissent from the verdict and an organization framework for subsequent demonstrations and petitions."⁶¹ Colson reported that the veteran response to the President's announcement that Calley would be held under house arrest during his appeals as "nothing short of euphoric" while the VFW promised to "leave no stone unturned in support of Lieutenant Calley."⁶²

Even as he reported the enthusiastic efforts of organized veterans groups, Colson warned that their opposition to the conviction at times risked becoming opposition to the war since, as he told Haldeman, some of the veterans' leaders had "decided to demand to see the President to express their unanimous feeling that if this is the way we treat our Military [*sic*] personnel, we should stop fighting immediately."⁶³ Only by reminding the veterans that such a request "would play directly into the hands of the Doves"⁶⁴ was Colson able to prevent the confrontation. The veterans similarly jumped to the President's defense after criticism from the Army prosecutor about Nixon's announced plans to review the case when the VFW Commander in Chief "called for the immediate resignation of Secretary of the Army Stanley R. Resor."⁶⁵ Such a decision would have

⁶¹ "Andre LeTendre to Charles Colson," April 13, 1971, Bell April 1971; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; Oliver, *The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory*, 158.

⁶² "Charles Colson to Larry Higby," April 1, 1971, Larry Higby; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Herbert Rainwater to VFW Commanders," April 1, 1971, Veterans of Foreign Wars--VFW [2 of 3]; Box 120; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶³ "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman," April 1, 1971, [Chuck Colson April 1971] [Part 2 of 2]; Box 77; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ "Press Release - Veterans of Foreign Wars," April 7, 1971, Veterans of Foreign Wars--VFW [2 of 3]; Box 120; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Press Release - Veterans of Foreign

delighted Colson who had earlier pushed for the White House to regain “control over ... the five-sided squirrel cage on the other side of the river.”⁶⁶ Well before the verdict against Calley, Colson suggested that Resor’s position was “one place where we could put a fat contributor with no ability at all and he would do better than Resor is doing” and it was unlikely that the Calley case changed his views.⁶⁷

“We Should Not ... Try to Create any New, Very
Dramatic, Very Creative Kinds of Reactions”:
Vietnamization and Antiwar Protests

In the midst of the storm around the Calley verdict and the failures of the Laos invasion, Nixon attempted to frame both Laos and Vietnamization as successes in an April 7 speech announcing the withdrawal of an additional 100,000 troops from Vietnam by the end of December 1971. Unlike earlier speeches on Vietnam – most notably the November 3, 1968 Silent Majority speech and the President’s April 30, 1970 announcement of the Cambodia invasion – Nixon’s aides did “not try to build any kind of strong emotional reaction.”⁶⁸ Colson explained this recommendation by reminding Haldeman that the “mood today is not comparable” to the circumstances surrounding earlier speeches. Therefore, the consensus amongst the staffers with whom Colson had discussed the question was that since “this speech is a continuation of an existing - albeit

Wars,” n.d., Veterans of Foreign Wars--VFW [2 of 3]; Box 120; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶⁶ “Charles Colson to Fred Malek,” March 1, 1971, Fred Malek [1 of 2]; Box 10; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” April 6, 1971, 1, [Chuck Colson April 1971] [Part 2 of 2]; Box 77; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

very successful policy - it just isn't going to trigger an emotional outburst."⁶⁹ More importantly given earlier efforts to produce expressions of support on demand, they argued "very strongly that we should not attempt to create one unless it is a natural reaction."⁷⁰

This did not mean that Colson was advocating a shift away from an activist approach to public opinion and he promised Haldeman that "if the President hits an emotional spark, then we should move in and do everything humanly possible to capitalize on it."⁷¹ Further complicating speech planning, Colson reminded Haldeman that the "country is spent after the emotional binge that it went on last week with the Calley affair."⁷² While the President's handling of the Calley verdict "triggered some of the 'old fashioned American pride' which might have been weakening a little," Colson argued that taking a low-key approach with the speech would help "cool the issue" until such time as they could more effectively rally supporters.⁷³ That said, Colson was not recommending passivity: "None of the foregoing is intended to suggest that we should not mobilize our forces as effectively as possible to back the President vigorously in whatever he does. What the consensus is, however, is that we should not look for hardhat demonstrations or try to create any new, very dramatic, very creative kinds of

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷² Ibid., 1.

⁷³ Ibid., 2.

reactions.”⁷⁴ Even so, the close ties between the White House and its more established allies helped create an image of public support for the policies announced on April 7.

Aides spoke with veteran and labor leaders as well as political, business, and athletic figures before the speech to solicit favorable statements, such as from Alfred Chamie, American Legion National Commander. Chamie strongly endorsed Nixon’s decision and claimed that it would end “American participation in the Vietnam conflict on honorable and acceptable terms.”⁷⁵ He further described Nixon’s as “the only acceptable course in the light of history” for ending US involvement in Vietnam.⁷⁶ This support encouraged Colson to cancel a scheduled press conference for Secretary of State William Rogers because it “would tend only to re-escalate an issue that the President has beautifully defused.”⁷⁷ Colson and his staff attempted to walk a fine line between promoting Nixon’s policies by framing the Laos invasion in a positive light without drawing undue attention to the weaknesses of that same policy. Domestic criticism could, if left unchallenged, undercut larger efforts to reframe the Vietnam War as a chance to demonstrate popular support for the President and instead give potential and wavering Nixon supporters a reason to either withdraw from the debate, or worse, start to

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Alfred Chamie to Richard Nixon,” April 8, 1971, Chuck Colson April 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Bart Porter to Henry Cashen,” April 8, 1971, Chuck Colson April 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Henry Cashen to Charles Colson,” April 9, 1971, Chuck Colson April 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Robert Nolan to Charles Colson,” April 8, 1971, Chuck Colson April 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁶ “Alfred Chamie to Richard Nixon.”

⁷⁷ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman, ‘Follow-up on President’s speech,’” April 9, 1971, HRH Memos-1971 January-June 1971 [2 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

actively oppose the president's policies. Therefore, although he did not mount a large-scale effort to mobilize domestic opinion, Colson did promise that he and his staff would, "of course, pick up the Rogers' press conference and other ideas if and when dove criticism mounts, as it might particularly during the demonstration period" of April 19-May 5.⁷⁸

These overlapping protests sponsored by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, the National Peace Action Coalition, and the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice were intended to rally growing antiwar sentiments in the wake of the Calley trial and the Laos invasion.⁷⁹ Despite internal divisions, and unpopular radical elements, the protests as a whole were, in historian Tom Wells' analysis "an undeniable political success for the movement" as far more people participated in the nonviolent, mainstream protests than in the radical "May Days" events.⁸⁰ Hoping to use the more chaotic and extremist elements of the protests to rally the Silent Majority, Colson complained that the Administration was poorly prepared to "exploit the demonstrations, public relations-wise,"⁸¹ but did attempt to "get out the line that these are not nice, clean cut kids who are coming to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ranging from the public theater of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War's Dewey Canyon III (April 19-24), the Moratorium-style march on April 24, to the "People's Lobby" of April 25-30, to the chaotic and occasionally violent "May Day" protests May 1-5, the antiwar "spring offensive" reflected both the many divisions within the broader movement as well as the growing mainstream unpopularity for the Vietnam War. Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 301-11; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 251-52; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 553-54, 561-68; Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 213-18; Wells, *The War Within*, 492-515.

⁸⁰ Wells, *The War Within*, 512.

⁸¹ "Charles Colson to Dick Moore," April 19, 1971, [Chuck Colson April 1971] [Part 2 of 2]; Box 77; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Washington; these are pretty reckless militants.”⁸² Reflecting the diminishing importance of the Silent Majority, plans for the spring protests centered on attacking the antiwar movement rather than rallying the President’s supporters. But even as aides no longer attempted to organize the Silent Majority, they sought to limit media coverage of the protests since coverage had “a deleterious effect on the nation’s spirit and image of itself.” Even more dangerous, “such reports are direct assaults on the President’s policy and public tolerance of the war in any degree.”⁸³

Although the “tested patriotism” of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the “impressive mass protest” of April 24 were generally positively received, Colson believed that emphasizing the dramatic radicalism of the “Days of Rage” could, in the long run, help rather than hinder administration public opinion efforts.⁸⁴ On May 5, Colson informed Haldeman that he “had a number of phone calls today from people in various walks of life and in various parts of the country congratulating us on our handling the demonstrations.”⁸⁵ Reporting that “the gist of the comments is: Good work, don’t let them get out of hand, be firm and three cheers for you guys,”⁸⁶ Colson claimed that the antiwar protests “really turned out to be a great plus for us.”⁸⁷ Therefore, aides circulated

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Mort Allin to Charles Colson,” April 28, 1971, 3, Chuck Colson April 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁴ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 310; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 217.

⁸⁵ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [2],” May 5, 1971, Chuck [Charles W.] Colson May 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

a poll sharing their view that “the recent anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in Washington, D.C. obviously did not sit well with the American people. 71% of those polled by Opinion Research Corporation, on May 6-7, said they disapproved of the demonstrations, while only 18% approved.”⁸⁸ Even as poll respondents criticized the spring protests, these results coexisted with what Buchanan had earlier described as the “growing war-weariness, the sense of impatience and frustration that permeates our society.”⁸⁹ This mood was almost impervious to effort to rally support for the President using either reasoned justifications for continued US involvement or by appeals to patriotism and national pride.

Alliances and Justifications: POWs,
Conservatives, and Veterans

Reflecting the increasingly mainstream nature of domestic opposition to the Vietnam War – not to be confused with participation in the antiwar movement – another aide reported: “the great majority of Americans want Vietnam to go away as quickly and quietly as possible. The sooner the better. Those I talked to believe that in the minds of almost all Americans no reasons justify our continued presence in Vietnam.”⁹⁰ Even one of the most effective arguments for staying in Vietnam – the POW and MIA issue – seemed vulnerable. Not only did Buchanan warn that for many conservative hawks, “the

⁸⁸ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” May 20, 1971, Chuck [Charles W.] Colson May 1971 [Part 2 of 2]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁹ “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” April 1, 1971, 3, Patrick Buchanan April 1971; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁰ “Andre LeTendre to Charles Colson,” 3. Charles DeBenedetti traces the gradual “normalization of dissent” in his history of the antiwar movement, a conclusion shared by both subsequent scholarship and the Nixon administration itself. DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 272, 311–47. Emphasis in original.

prisoners issue alone is a weak intellectual and political reed on which to hang the ‘residual force,’” but aides struggled to maintain the public support of members of the League of Families and other POW/MIA organizations.⁹¹ Primarily concerned with the plight of imprisoned US soldiers, activists rarely shared Nixon’s goal of preserving South Vietnam and while few joined the peace movement, White House officials were painfully aware that with the POW/MIA movement was made up of “1659 individuals, each with great frustration and each with a newsworthy story to tell.”⁹²

But even as aides worked to “maintain and build the initiative on the POW matter,”⁹³ Haig warned his colleagues of the dangers of what historian Joan Hoff later described as the “double-edged sword” of the prisoner issue.⁹⁴ Recognizing that danger, Haig was anxious to ensure that “any publicity initiatives ... not contribute to the overall U.S. attitude of war weariness and frustration with respect to the conflict itself.” Echoing Michael Allen’s conclusion that the POW/MIA issue ultimately “backfired” for the administration, Haig argued “it is self-defeating to beat our breasts about the dilemma of the POWs in a way which contributes to public frustration about our involvement in the

⁹¹ “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” April 1, 1971, 1, Patrick Buchanan April 1971; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 50–56. In addition to proposals for a White House vigil for the POWs, frustrated members formed the POA/MIA Families for Immediate Release and the Ad Hoc Committee for POWs and MIAs as antiwar alternatives to the League. “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman [1],” April 27, 1971, Chuck Colson April 1971 [Part 1 of 2]; Box 76; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 51–52.

⁹² “James Hughes to H.R. Haldeman,” May 22, 1971, Prisoner of War (POW); Box 104; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹³ “H.R. Haldeman to James Hughes, Charles Colson, John Scali, and Al Haig,” May 4, 1971, Chuck [Charles W.] Colson May 1971 [Part 2 of 2]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁴ Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 222.

war and adds momentum to the current surge of demands that the President need merely fix a date to solve the overall problem.”⁹⁵ Sharing Haig’s concerns, few White House aides were sympathetic to H. Ross Perot’s arguments that “he should receive credit for his POW activities.”⁹⁶ But although frustrated with his constant demands, Haldeman and other staffers worked to maintain ties to the billionaire because as one staffer pointed out “with Perot’s monumental ego he could ‘suddenly take it into his mind and take his money ... and go to Muskie or candidate X.’”⁹⁷ Therefore, instead of meeting Perot himself, Haldeman had another staffer meet him for lunch and explain that “we [the White House] understand his quid pro quo attitude and feel that we are even.”⁹⁸ The essential dynamic between the wealthy Texan and the White House remained constant through the rest of 1971 with Perot trying to see the President to offer suggestions and assistance but these requests were politely declined or postponed.⁹⁹

In an effort to capitalize on one of the few positives attached to the Vietnam War, the Silent Majority’s embrace of the military, aides worked to create yet another astroturf

⁹⁵ “Al Haig to H.R. Haldeman,” May 5, 1971, Chuck [Charles W.] Colson May 1971 [Part 2 of 2]; Box 78; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. In his analysis of the POW/MIA movement, Michael Allen argues that “in the end, his [Nixon’s] attempt to use the prisoners to prolong the war backfired. By focusing on POWs, Nixon only increased their value and raised more questions as to why he did not withdraw in order to win their return.” Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 50.

⁹⁶ “Gordon Strachan to H.R. Haldeman,” April 19, 1971, 2, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “H.R. Haldeman to Peter Flanigan,” April 26, 1971, H. Ross Perot; Box 133; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹⁹ Perot’s campaign biography offers a very different explanation for his distance from the administration: “But in the end, he saw that he would be tossing money down the drain, and maybe even balked at the mismanagement of the war (although not the spirit behind it) and gently backed away from intimate identification with the lost cause of Richard Nixon.” Ken Gross, *Ross Perot: The Man Behind the Myth* (Random House, 1992), 143.

organization to support the President. After the decline of AWP and the shift toward “Middle America,” aides had focused their public opinion efforts on coordinating established groups rather than organizing Nixon’s supporters themselves, but Haldeman’s request that “with all the ‘Veterans for Peace’ groups around, why not organize some to support us?” eventually resulted in a June 1, 1971 press conference announcing the formation of Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace (VVJP).¹⁰⁰ Although Colson’s assistant George T. Bell requested and received cooperation from established veterans groups – resulting in a May 27 mailing encouraging Fleet Reserve Association members to join the new organization – VVJP’s leaders were careful to obscure their ties to the White House.¹⁰¹ Instead, they claimed to have formed the group because, in spokesman John O’Neill’s words, “I believe in America. I believe in the principle of self-determination, and from my own experience, I believe that the Vietnamization policy of the President is the correct way to achieve this goal. So do the great majority of Vietnam veterans.”¹⁰²

In a memorandum requesting that the President meet with O’Neill, Colson described VVJP as “an organization specifically set up to counter [Vietnam Veterans Against the War leader John] Kerry.”¹⁰³ More tellingly, Colson explicitly requested the

¹⁰⁰ “H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson,” March 9, 1971, HRH Memos-1971 January-June 1971 [2 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Fleet Reserve Association National President to National Mailing List, Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace,” May 27, 1971, HRH Memos-1971 January-June 1971 [1 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Veterans Forming Group to Back Nixon,” *The Evening Star* (Washington, DC, June 2, 1971); “New Vets Group Backs Nixon Plan,” *Denver Post*, June 2, 1971.

¹⁰¹ “Fleet Reserve Association National President to National Mailing List, Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace”; Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 295–96; Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 186–89.

¹⁰² “Veterans Forming Group to Back Nixon.”

¹⁰³ “Charles Colson to Richard Nixon,” n.d., 1, HRH Memos-1971 January-June 1971 [2 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. O’Neill would again challenge Kerry by

meeting because even though O'Neill "feels that he has done his job and wants to go home to Texas and get away from the eastern establishment," aides were "trying very hard to keep him fighting because we can continue to keep him out front on TV through the summer months."¹⁰⁴ A meeting with the President would likely accomplish this goal as O'Neill "has a strong sense of duty and will continue if he feels it is important to you and the country."¹⁰⁵ Therefore, at the June 16, 1971 meeting, Nixon urged O'Neill to "continue to speak out because the American public needs to be made aware that John Kerry and the other anti-war groups do not speak for most of the Vietnam veterans." The president further "noted that O'Neill would take brickbats but that he must continue because what he says is right, and not because it is necessarily the popular or winning view."¹⁰⁶ In response to a question from Nixon, Kissinger argued that the "country was in real trouble"¹⁰⁷ and vulnerable to the Communists and O'Neill contributed, "the American people were tired of the negativism of the decade and searching for a return to sensible values" after the upheavals of the 1960s.¹⁰⁸

forming Swift Boat Veterans for Truth during the 2004 presidential election. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home*, 295–99.

¹⁰⁴ "Charles Colson to Richard Nixon," 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Memorandum for the President's File," June 25, 1971, 1, HRH Memos-1971 January-June 1971 [2 of 3]; Box 2; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. emphasis in the original

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The Pentagon Papers and the
Roots of Watergate

Nixon and O'Neill also discussed the recent publication of government documents and the VVJP leader shared the administration's view that the person responsible for supplying classified material to the *New York Times* was both "treasonous and dangerous."¹⁰⁹ That individual, Daniel Ellsberg, a former Marine and a past employee of both the State and Defense Departments, had started photocopying a 7,000-page top-secret Defense Department study of the decisions behind the U.S. involvement in Vietnam in October 1969. Days after Nixon's "Silent Majority" speech, Ellsberg then gave the study to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator William Fulbright in the hopes that he would make the study the focus of a Congressional hearing on the war. When Fulbright, and later Senator George McGovern, failed to make the material public, he gave a copy to *New York Times* reporter Neil Sheehan in March 1971 and the first set of documents were published on June 13, 1971.¹¹⁰ Although there was no danger to Nixon personally – the Pentagon Papers covered policymaking between 1945 and 1967 – Nixon and his aides quickly moved to prevent publication. As historian Jeffrey Kimball later observed, their efforts soon "expanded in ways that endangered the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ellsberg traces his evolution from Cold War hawk to antiwar dove in his memoir, devoting the second half of the book to a detailed account of his decision to publish the study in Daniel Ellsberg, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Viking, 2002). Seymour Hersh offers a thorough account, centered on Kissinger's role, of Ellsberg's efforts to make the papers public as well as the White House campaign to both prevent their release and to discredit or otherwise silence Ellsberg in Seymour M Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 314–33, 383–401. The Pentagon Papers and the White House efforts against Ellsberg are woven throughout memoirs of Watergate participants as the primary goal of the cover-up efforts was to keep these projects from being discovered; see, e.g. Charles W Colson, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, N.J: Chosen Books, Distributed by F.H. Revell Co., 1976); John W Dean, *Blind Ambition: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976); H. R Haldeman and Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: Times Books, 1978); Nixon, *RN*, 508–15.

administration and its war effort much more than the publication of the papers,” as the quest to discredit Ellsberg and prevent future leaks constituted the first steps toward Watergate and Nixon’s eventual resignation.¹¹¹

Surprisingly, but, there was no significant effort to mobilize the Silent Majority and other supporters to oppose Ellsberg and the publication of the Pentagon Papers. Instead, in addition to Ellsberg’s indictment and a court order preventing continued publication, Nixon repeatedly demanded that his staff recover Johnson-era Vietnam War documents believed to be at the Brookings Institute.¹¹² While supporting these efforts, Colson initially argued for a restrained response to actual publication of the Pentagon Papers. Pointing out that the material in the Pentagon Papers “simply confirms what many people think anyway” Colson suggested that the release of the documents “offers us opportunities in ways we perhaps did not initially appreciate, that we can turn what appeared to be an issue that would impair Presidential credibility into one that we can use by effective contrast to improve the credibility of this Administration.”¹¹³ Furthermore, Colson suggested that the White House could strengthen Nixon’s position by releasing more recent documents which would prove that unlike, his Democratic predecessors, this

¹¹¹ Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 253. In her revisionist biography of Nixon, Joan Hoff reaches a similar conclusion writing: “The handling of the Pentagon Papers was key to the transformation of the Plumbers into an illegal unit within the White House and led White House staff to lie under oath and even to the president himself. It also set the stage for the administration to undertake a cover-up – not of its activities directed at external enemies but of an embarrassing case of spying within the executive branch itself.” Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 296. The “Plumbers” was the nickname for the White House Special Investigations Unit created following the release of the Pentagon Papers.

¹¹² While never carried out, the most extreme of these plans involved firebombing the Institute with the assumption being that White House agents dressed as firefighters would be able to retrieve the documents in the resulting confusion. Dean, *Blind ambition*, 44–48; Haldeman and DiMona, *The Ends of Power*, 251–53; Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 383, 386–87, 390–91; Nixon, *RN*, 512–13.

¹¹³ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” June 25, 1971, 5, 9, White House Strategy Memos; Box 14; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

president was not attempting to deceive the public. At the same time, Colson recognized that “the heartland isn’t really aroused over this issue”¹¹⁴ and so while it would likely “continue to be a very major issue with very important political ramifications,”¹¹⁵ the main potential advantage lay in finding a way to use the situation to “discredit the Democrats, to keep them fighting and to keep ourselves above it so that we do not appear to be either covering up or exploiting” it.¹¹⁶

To this end, aides encouraged outside “letter writing campaigns to newspapers,” drafted speech inserts and statements for spokesmen, circulated talking papers, and generally attempted to “get across our positions on the K-J papers case.”¹¹⁷ Throughout this particular memorandum and occasionally in other internal documents, the phrase “Pentagon Papers” was crossed out and replaced with “Kennedy-Johnson Papers” in an inconsistent effort to further distance the information in the leaked materials from the current administration. By emphasizing that the papers covered the previous Democratic Presidents, Nixon and his aides hoped to use them to bolster the President’s own Vietnam policies. Echoing this White House construction, the Republican Party magazine, *First Monday*, referred to the “McNamara Papers” while other domestic supporters presented the Pentagon Papers as proof that, as William F. Buckley observed, “we did what had to be done.”¹¹⁸ Buckley and his fellow pro-war editors of *National Review* proceeded to

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁷ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” June 25, 1971, Charles Colson June 1971; Box 80; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 134.

publish another set of documents that they claimed demonstrated that advocates of more aggressive military action had been disregarded by policymakers in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. At a July 21 press conference, Buckley announced that the documents were forgeries, but that the failure of alleged authors to confidently challenge their legitimacy meant that “we were dead on target ... it was altogether possible that the memoranda were genuine.”¹¹⁹

Although heartening, the *National Review* forgeries did not distract Nixon and his aides from their efforts to undermine and discredit Ellsberg, who by now had become a stand-in for the antiwar movement, political critics as well as a hostile press. When, on June 30, the Supreme Court ruled against the administration-backed injunction, Nixon’s staff redoubled their extralegal efforts against Ellsberg. The publication of the Pentagon Papers demonstrated that earlier attempts to contain foreign policy leaks through wiretaps and FBI investigations of government officials – many of them Kissinger aides – journalists, and the antiwar movement had been insufficient.¹²⁰ Nixon therefore pushed his staff to expand their efforts, resulting in the creation of the White House Investigations Unit, or “Plumbers,” tasked with stopping such leaks.¹²¹ Both Nixon and

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 137 n. 131.

¹²⁰ Earlier wiretaps seeking the source for an article on the 1969 Cambodia bombings by William Beecher in the *New York Times* targeted current and former White House officials – including Morton Halperin and other Kissinger aides – as well as journalists such as Joseph Kraft and Beecher. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 121–24; Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 314, 318–24, 397–401; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 285–87, 294–96.

¹²¹ Headed by Ehrlichman aide Egil “Bud” Krogh and former Kissinger assistant David Young, the group soon included two key figures in the eventual Watergate break-in: E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy. Hunt and Liddy, with Ehrlichman’s approval, broke into the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, Ellsberg’s psychiatrist, in September 1971 in the hopes that material in Ellsberg’s file would help establish him as mentally unstable and therefore untrustworthy. They failed to even find Ellsberg’s records although Fielding later reported finding them on the floor of his ransacked office, but this setback did not prevent additional illegal efforts culminating in the Watergate burglaries and bugging. Hersh’s overview of the

Kissinger later insisted that the “intensity”¹²² of the White House response was inspired by foreign policy and national security concerns, but subsequent scholarship suggests instead that that administration was motivated primarily by a desire for revenge against domestic opponents.¹²³ At the time, arguing that “there were higher issues involved than any political consideration,” in the effort to block publication of the papers, the president and his staff tried to frame the leak of the papers as a threat to not only the President’s Vietnam policies, but to “peace for the future.”¹²⁴ In this way, aides linked a principled opposition to the release of the *Pentagon Papers* with ideas they planned to emphasize during the 1972 campaign.

formation of the Special Investigations Unit, although focused on Kissinger’s role, contextualizes the accounts in memoirs and more general histories. Haldeman and DiMona, *The Ends of Power*, 140–41; Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 383–401; Wells, *The War Within*, 519–20; Nixon, *RN*, 514–15. For the Fielding break-in, see Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 315–16; Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 395; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 141–43. In his memoirs, Nixon implies that he first heard about the Fielding break-in after the Watergate burglaries, but is careful not to categorically deny advance knowledge writing, “I do not believe I was told about the break-in at the time, but it is clear that it was at least in part an outgrowth of my sense of urgency about discrediting what Ellsberg had done and finding out what he might do next.” Haldeman suggests that this cautious phrasing reflects his desire not to be later contradicted by the tapes reporting that Nixon told him during a November 13, 1976: “I was so damn mad at Ellsberg in those days. And Henry [Kissinger] was jumping up and down. I’ve been thinking – and maybe I did order that break-in.” Haldeman and DiMona, *The Ends of Power*, 142, 141–43.

¹²² Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 212; Nixon, *RN*, 508–15.

¹²³ Kimball concludes that the “primary motive seemed to be that of taking revenge on the press” while Hersh argues “The Pentagon Papers posed no threat to national security but provided a vital opportunity to score political points against the antiwar movement and the liberal Democrats.” Hersh, *The Price of Power*, 386; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 255. For Kissinger’s quote and Nixon’s own assertion of the national security implications of the leak, see Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 212; Nixon, *RN*, 509, 511.

¹²⁴ “Charles Colson to Ray Price,” July 3, 1971, Ray Price [1971]; Box 10; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

“A Solid Hand on the Controls of War and Peace”:
Preparing for the 1972 Campaign

Although aides had hoped to use economic and social issues to build ties to Middle America, the publication of the *Pentagon Papers* ensured that the Vietnam War would continue to be an issue. Therefore, Colson urged that campaign rhetoric “should argue that with 4 [*sic*] more years, we can indeed make it a more secure, safer world” since the perception of a “fully accomplished” peace could result in voters becoming complacent and minimizing the importance of Nixon’s foreign policy expertise.¹²⁵ These efforts built upon the 1969-1970 cultivation of the Silent Majority and although this idea eventually disappeared from administration rhetoric and planning, close cooperation between outside allies and the White House was an important element of the upcoming campaign. But, in the wake of the *Pentagon Papers* leak, control, always important, became an absolute priority. Domestic support was still crucial, but Colson and other aides were now much more selective in their assistance to outside supporters.

He was therefore less than enthusiastic about a proposed third visit to Vietnam by the Citizen’s Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam (CCPFV), a Johnson-era support group. While their two previous trips had been coordinated with the White House, and the resulting reports had endorsed Nixon’s policies, by late July 1971 Colson felt that another visit “may not be a good idea.”¹²⁶ He was particularly concerned that the administration would have insufficient control over the group and by CCPFV’s

¹²⁵ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” July 6, 1971, 2, Charles Colson July 1971 [Part II of II]; Box 81; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁶ “Charles Colson to Al Haig,” July 16, 1971, [Charter Company] [1 of 11]; Box 47; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

expectation that he “come up with the \$20,000 needed to finance the trip.”¹²⁷ However, as Kissinger’s assistant Al Haig had already encouraged members of the committee to plan the trip, Colson decided to endorse the group’s plans without officially committing White House resources to the project.¹²⁸ Despite Colson’s doubts, CCPFV’s plans did fit within some White House thinking about the 1972 campaign, particularly Buchanan’s suggestion that “we may want to make Vietnam an issue -- if it is resolved”¹²⁹ and another staffer’s belief that “our whole election strategy in terms of portraying the President should be one of a solid hand on the controls of war and peace.”¹³⁰

Additionally, emphasizing the President’s foreign policy experience and track record might help lure restless conservatives back into the fold. Earlier successes at creating pro-Nixon groups such as AWP, the Tell It To Hanoi Committee, the Citizens Committee for Peace with Security, and Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace encouraged Haldeman to propose a similar solution to conservative defections in the fall of 1971. In response to the July announcement of a “suspension of support” by leading conservatives, Haldeman hoped to organize a “‘Conservatives for the President’ group ... to counter-balance the offensive now being launched in other directions by some of the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ “Al Haig to Charles Colson,” August 10, 1971, Eyes Only/Miscellaneous Memos; Box 13; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁹ “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman,” July 23, 1971, Buchanan July 1971; Box 81; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁰ “Ken Khachigian to Pat Buchanan,” July 22, 1971, 2, Buchanan July 1971; Box 81; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

conservative publications.”¹³¹ Although he shared Haldeman’s concerns, Colson felt that creating such a group was “inadvisable.” He instead argued that they would be better off attempting to repair relationships with individual conservatives, to “to give them room to come back in, not to set up a situation where it’s ‘our conservatives’ against ‘The conservatives.’”¹³² Buchanan agreed, and in an August 2, 1971 memorandum to the President, argued for “tak[ing] these conservative defections more seriously than we have to date” because even though a conservative primary challenge would be unlikely to succeed, it had the potential to “carve us up so badly that the election would be over before it started.”¹³³

Recognizing that Nixon was unlikely to change the policies that most enraged the conservatives – his 1972 trip to China and his seemingly liberal economic policies – Buchanan instead recommended “a major political confrontation against the Left, where the President was clearly and visibly upholding the Right position.”¹³⁴ By publicly endorsing conservative positions – Buchanan suggested “some good nationalistic pro-

¹³¹ “H.R. Haldeman, Action Paper,” August 2, 1971, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman. Action Memos 1971; Box 7; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA. The group, dubbed the “Manhattan 12,” met at William F. Buckley’s New York City home and included Buckley, Frank Meyer, William Rusher and James Burnham from the *National Review*; Allan Ryskind and Tom Winter of Human Events; John Jones and Jeff Bell of the ACU144; Randal Teague, of YAF; Neil McCaffrey of the Conservative Book Club; Anthony Harrigan of the Southern States Industrial Council and J. Daniel Mahoney, chair of the New York Conservative Party. The immediate cause of their decision was Nixon’s announcement of his 1972 visit to China, but conservative opposition to Nixon’s presidency had been growing since 1969. Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 141–47; Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 144–45; “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman,” July 28, 1971, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³² “Charles Colson to Larry Higby,” August 10, 1971, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Emphasis in the original

¹³³ “Pat Buchanan to Richard Nixon,” August 4, 1971, 1, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁴ “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson,” September 13, 1971, 2, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

America, anti-UN rhetoric”¹³⁵ – Nixon could emphasize the contrast between himself and his opponents. On a similar note, Colson reported that “in regard to the VFW convention, if we can get about 500 signs, [Executive Director] Cooper Holt will see that they are strategically placed throughout the audience ... Make them obviously the spontaneous kind backing the President in national defense, national security, foreign policy areas. ... this could turn into a pretty good rally.”¹³⁶ Despite opposition from some White House officials, Colson defended the idea arguing, “if we are concerned about right wing reactions to China, what could possibly be better than a pro-Nixon demonstration among the most hawkish, traditionally anti-Red China group ... that the press will assume may have cooled off on us.”¹³⁷ These efforts to generate very general support for Nixon’s foreign policies marked the final stage in the administration’s transition from promoting the Silent Majority and rallying support for Nixon’s Vietnam policies to using those same efforts to secure Nixon’s reelection.

Conclusion

As Colson and other officials repeatedly attempted to redirect their efforts toward the themes and issues they intended to emphasize in the 1972 campaign, events in the first half of 1972 seemed to conspire against them. Developments in Vietnam – particularly the disastrous invasion of Laos – and the summer publication of the Pentagon

¹³⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁶ “Charles Colson to Dick Howard,” August 3, 1971, Dick Howard [1 of 2]; Box 8; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁷ “Charles Colson to Dwight Chapin,” August 10, 1971, Dwight Chapin [11/12/70 - 11/1/71]; Box 6; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Papers ensured that the war continued to be an issue. The on-going domestic debates meant that aides could not simply redirect their public opinion efforts toward the Middle American voters they planned to target in the 1972 campaign. Instead, they frequently returned to earlier Silent Majority programs to address domestic responses to the perceived expansion of the war signaled by the Laos invasion and to rally popular support for Nixon's position on Lieutenant Calley's verdict in the My Lai massacre. The reliance on the Silent Majority – even as overt appeals to this group declined – enabled the administration to avoid significant political costs of the continuing conflict even as aides worked to more closely identify the administration with Middle America.

This broader conception of Nixon's domestic constituency would, they hoped, include already-mobilized allies while at the same time expanding White House ties to groups less inclined to speak out in support of Nixon's Vietnam policies. At the same time, aides continued to promote the non-Vietnam elements of the Silent Majority idea – patriotism, traditional values, a hawkish foreign policy and veneration of the military – in the belief that a reminder of shared ideals and values would convince conservatives and other potential supporters to overlook disagreements and actively work for Nixon's reelection. The failure to dissuade prominent conservatives from publicly breaking with the president underscored the risks associated in attempting to expand and redefine the Silent Majority while minimizing Vietnam as a domestic issue. By the fall, administration efforts to move its public opinion projects beyond rallying support for the Vietnam War, the initial impetus beyond public embrace of the idea of a pro-Nixon Silent Majority, had effectively, although unintentionally, diluted the idea as an organizing tool.

But even as the rhetoric of a “Silent Majority” declined within the White House, the issues it represented continued to be central to public opinion efforts. They would, in the end, define the administration approach to Nixon’s reelection campaign even as aides focused their attention on Middle America rather than the Silent Majority. With Vietnam the major difference between these two groups, staffers hoped to ensure that the war would not again dominate domestic politics even as they worked to repackage the President’s foreign and domestic policies to best appeal to Middle America. These changing priorities necessarily decentered Vietnam in public opinion projects, but the war continued to influence these efforts as well as developing campaign planning. With the concrete need to secure votes in the election, rather than vague expressions and demonstrations of support, aides also took criticism from within the pro-Nixon coalition much more seriously than they had previously, leading to a more active effort to recruit conservative supporters before the election. These efforts, built on the earlier promotion of the Silent Majority would ultimately result in Nixon’s landslide reelection in 1972 which in turn ensured the survival of those ideas in domestic politics even as Nixon and his staff attempted to promote Middle America and later the New Majority.

CHAPTER 7

“PEACE IS TOO IMPORTANT FOR PATRISANSHIP”: NIXON’S RE-ELECTION AND THE 1973 PEACE AGREEMENT

On January 23, 1973, Richard Nixon started his second term with good news: “We today have concluded an agreement to end the war and bring peace with honor in Vietnam and in Southeast Asia.” Nixon continued, emphasizing that this settlement created “the right kind of peace” and thanked the American people for their support and their refusal to “settle for a peace that would have betrayed our allies, that would have abandoned our prisoners of war, or that would have ended the war for us but would have continued the war for the 50 million people of Indochina.”¹ Nixon’s announcement, the culmination of years of negotiations, diplomacy, and military initiatives, left antiwar activists “skeptical,” “not under any illusions,” rather than convinced that their opposition of his policies had been misguided.² Distracted by the growing Watergate scandal and unsettled by recent Executive Branch reorganization efforts, White House officials failed to effectively manage domestic responses to the president’s announcement. This failure combined with the official claims of having achieved “peace with honor” marked the end

¹ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation Announcing Conclusion of an Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam,” January 23, 1973, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3808>.

² Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 564–65.

of organized White House efforts to mobilize domestic support for Nixon's Vietnam War policies. The lackluster response to the January 1973 announcement was the logical consequence of the decisions in the early stages of the 1972 reelection campaign to minimize the Silent Majority in favor of Middle America and a rhetorical New American Majority.

With non-campaign activities increasingly marginalized by the fall of 1971, White House aides made drawing Middle America into the Nixon coalition their top priority. Earlier projects to create and promote the Silent Majority following the President's November 3, 1969 speech resulted in a network of outside allies from the labor movement, veterans' organizations, suburban and small town America, and even the Democratic Party. Successful efforts by Nixon and his staff to claim the flag and traditional patriotism for the President heightened domestic divisions and Nixon's Vietnamization policies ensured that declining casualty numbers and regular troop withdrawals effectively isolated the antiwar movement from the broader population. Promoting his efforts to end the Vietnam War, Nixon hoped to convince those citizens frustrated by the Vietnam War, but even less sympathetic to the radical image of the antiwar movement, to support his efforts to negotiate "peace with honor." By extension, White House officials worked to simultaneously promote the President's Vietnam policies as the only way to secure a real and lasting peace while at the same time minimizing the Vietnam War as an election issue. Aides and outside sympathizers would continue to promote the official line on major announcements and just as Nixon would invoke his efforts to end the Vietnam War as an argument in favor of a second term, but the war would not again dominate public opinion efforts as it had during key moments in

Nixon's first term. Instead, Vietnam became one of many Nixon policies, both foreign and domestic, promoted by allies advocating continued support and patience.

Having thus downgraded the Vietnam War as a campaign issue, aides similarly deemphasized their efforts to mobilize the President's supporters to endorse his Vietnam policies. Despite its removal from administration rhetoric on the war, aides counted on popular identification with the Silent Majority to secure for the president its members' active participation in his reelection campaign allowing White House staffers to focus their attention on refining public opinion appeals to the different constituencies that would eventually make up the "New American Majority" described in the President's August 1972 speech at the Republican National Convention. This shift to promoting the "New American Majority" required that aides redirect their earlier efforts to promote both the Silent Majority and the President's Vietnam policies outside of the larger context of his foreign policy successes. Reflecting the decision to deemphasize the Vietnam War among its preferred campaign themes, this chapter will necessarily focus on those moments when Vietnam became a significant issue and therefore will not provide a detailed analysis of the election in its entirety. It will instead consider how the foundational "Silent Majority" identity established between 1969-1971 informed official efforts to create and mobilize a broad constituency to support Nixon in the 1972 election and beyond.

Appealing to Conservatives and “Other
Miscellaneous Cats and Dogs”

Having successfully popularized the idea of a Silent Majority, aides hoped to transform support for the President’s Vietnam policies into reelection votes and worked to recruit supporters from the many different groups that made up Middle America.³ Targeting these constituencies had long been Colson’s responsibility, but earlier appeals had focused on rallying displays of support for Nixon policies. Now Colson intended to convince these voters and others of the personal and patriotic advantages of reelecting Nixon. Colson’s single-minded approach to the President’s reelection – and to politics more generally – resulted in a “reputation,” in the words of one assistant, “for being a mean, ornery, hard-line son of a bitch who never uses a razor blade when he has available a two-ton howitzer.”⁴ But in the aggressive political environment of the Nixon White House, such ruthlessness was a virtue leading to Colson’s rapid rise through the administration hierarchy.⁵ The grudging respect Colson received from many of his

³ “Charles Colson to Ken Cole,” July 26, 1971, Ken Cole [1971]; Box 6; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. The transition from promoting the Silent Majority to cultivating Middle America is discussed in Chapter Six. Rather than being an outgrowth of successful appeals for Silent Majority support for the Vietnam War, Robert Mason situates these and other coalition-building efforts within the large administration project to create a political realignment in favor of Nixon’s own brand of pragmatic conservatism. This effort was inspired, in Mason’s analysis, by Nixon’s instinctive understanding that the late-1960s and early 1970s presented a unique opportunity to reshape party allegiances, supported by the work of political scientists such as V.O. Key, Jr. V. O. Key, “A Theory of Critical Elections,” *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1 (February 1, 1955): 3–18; Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁴ “Doug Hallett to Dwight Chapin,” August 27, 1971, 2, Dwight Chapin [11/12/70 - 11/1/71]; Box 6; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵ Hired in late 1969, Colson was one of the few aides regularly meeting with Nixon by 1971 which Haldeman obliquely suggests directly contributed to the excesses of Watergate as Colson subverted Haldeman’s carefully constructed wall around Nixon’s less positive traits. H. R. Haldeman and Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 83–85. For Colson’s own description of his rise through the White House hierarchy, see Charles W Colson, *Born Again* (Old Tappan, N.J: Chosen Books, Distributed by F.H. Revell Co., 1976), 34–36. Speechwriter William Safire does not disguise his disapproval of Colson’s penchant for hardball politics, but is more sympathetic in his description than

fellow White House staffers ensured his active role in planning the 1972 reelection campaign. Even as his office juggled all aspects of the relationship between the White House and the domestic public, a Haldeman assistant recommended that “Colson could better spend his time working on the hard Campaign questions” likely contributing to a significant reorganization of White House responsibilities to reflect reelection priorities.⁶ But even as Colson shifted his attention to the campaign, earlier efforts to promote the Silent Majority informed his attempts to present Nixon as the ideal candidate for Middle America.

An experienced campaigner, Colson easily transitioned from organizing pro-Vietnam public opinion efforts to redirecting White House initiatives to secure Nixon’s reelection. The gradual expansion of the Silent Majority project from rallying support for the Vietnam War to a more generalized celebrations of flag, country, and president informed the upcoming election campaign even as invocations of the Silent Majority declined. The pro-war public opinion projects combined with Vietnamization and troop withdrawals had quieted domestic opposition and built important bridges between the president and veterans groups, hawkish labor unions, and countless grassroots

Haldeman. William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 486–96.

⁶ “Gordon Strachan to H.R. Haldeman,” September 30, 1971, 1, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: LH - FYI 1971-1972 Misc. and Kehrli - Huntsman Transition and Elect Year Eve Analysis; Box 16; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA. Although the Committee to Re-elect the President was officially in charge of the president’s campaign, White House officials were actively involved; for internal discussions of the politics of the 1972 campaign, see “George Bell to Charles Colson,” September 30, 1971, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: LH - FYI 1971-1972 Misc. and Kehrli - Huntsman Transition and Elect Year Eve Analysis; Box 16; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA; “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” February 1, 1972, HRH Memos-January 1972; Box 3; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Comments on Chuck Colson’s Memo,” n.d., WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: Comments on Preparing for 1972 Election Campaign; Box 17; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

organizations across the country, but aides knew that these successes would not guarantee votes for Nixon in 1972.⁷ Colson therefore urged his staff to “explore substantively what we should be doing for farmers, hard hats, the elderly and other miscellaneous cats and dogs.”⁸ He would later urge early implementation of these policies so as to ensure that “whatever [policies] we choose to push later will not be perceived as gimmicky, campaign-oriented, etc. They will, instead, be seen as fundamental to our over-all approach and philosophy.”⁹ More immediately, Colson worked to organize, at Haldeman’s request, “a ‘crew of hatchet men’ who will fire back automatically at our Democratic adversaries.”¹⁰ It would ideally include representatives of target constituency groups such as pro-Nixon union members, veterans, “certain categories of the ethnic vote” and conservatives.¹¹

Although these groups could be counted upon to actively support the Vietnam War, other Nixon policies – such as his visit to China, wage-and-price controls, and détente with the Soviet Union – complicated efforts to build an electoral coalition.¹²

⁷ Both Melvin Small and Charles DeBenedetti link the decline of the organized antiwar movement with the rise in mainstream opposition to the war, culminating in McGovern’s nomination as the Democratic presidential candidate. Charles DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 272, 311, 312–47.

⁸ “Charles Colson to Ken Cole.”

⁹ “Jeb Magruder to the Attorney General,” November 2, 1971, 7, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: LH - FYI 1971 (Late); Box 16; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹⁰ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” September 13, 1971, 1, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: Charles Colson – Sept. 1971; Box 7; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

¹¹ “Charles Colson to Ken Cole.”

¹² Mason concludes that despite the effort and attention directed at coalition-building, “the record – as opposed to the rhetoric – of the Nixon administration was unimpressive overall. The administration lacked a sturdy foundation on which to base a new majority.” Mason’s analysis helps to situate the various administration policies and public relations efforts relative to each other, but for more on Nixon’s foreign

Conservatives would prove to be particularly troublesome as administration responses to a July “suspension of support” more “alienated than appeased” key leaders.¹³ Having warned of just such an outcome, speechwriter and de facto conservative liaison Pat Buchanan countered Colson’s suggestions of policy “cosmetics” or “significant gesture[s],” arguing that most of the President’s right-wing critics were “ideologues concerned with substance and policy, more likely to be alienated than appeased by gestures and cosmetics in the absence of action.”¹⁴ More damaging, Buchanan argued that they were “past the point where gestures and rhetoric will be sufficient. To bank upon that is to delude ourselves and insult these conservatives. We are not going to buy them off with beads and trinkets.”¹⁵ He anticipated that repairing relations would be difficult – the recent United Nations (UN) recognition of the People’s Republic of China had left many in the conservative movement “really stunned and embittered” – but insisted that unless the White House repaired its relationships, “many thousands of hard-

and economic policies, see, e.g. Robert Dallek and Allen Matusow. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 160, 113–160, 168–78; Allen J Matusow, *Nixon’s Economy: Booms, Busts, Dollars, and Votes* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

¹³ “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson,” September 13, 1971, 1, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. The conservative leaders behind the July announcement were: William F. Buckley, Frank Meyer, William Rusher and James Burnham from *National Review*; Allan Ryskind and Tom Winter of Human Events; John Jones and Jeff Bell of the ACU144; Randal Teague, of YAF; Neil McCaffrey of the Conservative Book Club; Anthony Harrigan of the Southern States Industrial Council and J. Daniel Mahoney, chair of the New York Conservative Party. For more on the July suspension of support, see Chapter Six; Sandra Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement During the Nixon Administration” (Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Cambridge, 2005), 141–46; Timothy J Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism: Redrawing Party Lines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 144–45.

¹⁴ “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson,” 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

line conservatives ... are going to be sitting on their hands in 1972 – or worse.”¹⁶

Without substantive policy changes, and Buchanan knew that Nixon had no intention of changing his policies, there was no guarantee that efforts to persuade conservatives to abandon plans to “force the administration to the right” would succeed.¹⁷

Identifying and mobilizing the constituent parts of Middle America took on an even greater importance in the face of these conservative defections. Rallying the groups believed to make up Middle America – including members of organized labor, farmers, white ethnics, Catholics, veterans, suburban whites, business groups and the elderly – would, officials hoped, counterbalance opposition to the President from both the Right and the Left.¹⁸ At the same time, Colson and other members of his staff recognized that “as a strategy concept, Middle America is smaller than the sum of its parts ... the interests it encompasses all have unique attributes which are independent of the Middle

¹⁶ “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson,” October 26, 1971, 2, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁷ Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 145.

¹⁸ “Jeb Magruder to the Attorney General,” 10. Although closely followed at the time, the 1972 presidential election is rarely the primary focus of scholarly analysis. Mason is a notable exception and provides a thorough discussion of administration efforts to cultivate Middle American constituencies. Although not their focus, these administration projects are an important factor in analyses of labor and civil rights policies in the early 1970s. Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 85–124, 125–66; Jefferson Cowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969–1973,” *Labor History* 43, no. 3 (2002): 257–283; Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 113–91; Robert Mason, “‘I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority’: Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969–73,” *Journal of American Studies* 39, no. 3 (December 2005): 463–483; Joe Merton, “The Politics of Symbolism: Richard Nixon’s Appeal to White Ethnics and the Frustration of Realignment 1969–72,” *European Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (2008): 181–198; Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 160–66; Edmund F. Wehrle, “‘Partisan for the Hard Hats’: Charles Colson, George Meany, and the Failed Blue-Collar Strategy,” *Labor* 5, no. 3 (September 21, 2008): 45–66; Kevin L. Yuill, *Richard Nixon And the Rise of Affirmative Action: The Pursuit of Racial Equality in an Era of Limits* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

American framework.”¹⁹ Thus, wooing this group depended upon policies designed to appeal to an abstracted idea of the Middle American voter, specifically “his concern for his social security and his concern for his own pocketbook.”²⁰ In contrast to the effort to build the Silent Majority, aides could not rely on patriotic appeals to mobilize support and so only promoted those policies likely to improve Nixon’s standing with Middle America and other constituent groups.

This shift from rallying support for policies to embracing policies because of their popularity required significant changes in internal White House organization and so, in November 1971, Colson submitted to H.R. Haldeman a report on the responsibilities of his office and how they could “be more effectively directed to the campaign year ahead.”²¹ In Colson’s analysis, he and his staff were already “directed to the President’s reelection”²² and argued that “very few of the foregoing activities should be curtailed in an election year ... In fact I think that some of the activities need more emphasis particularly in the counter attack department and in the cultivation of key voting blocs, specifically labor, aging and ethnics.”²³ More specifically, Colson urged White House planners to “identify the gut issues for next year and then not permit this phase of our

¹⁹ “Jeb Magruder to the Attorney General,” 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” November 4, 1971, 1, HRH Memos-January 1972; Box 3; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²² *Ibid.* Colson listed his primary responsibilities as: “News Planning and Coordination ... Major Administrative PR Initiatives and Political Project Follow Through ... Political Liaison and Cultivation of Interest Groups and Key Individuals ... The Counter Attack Against our Critics ... Maximize Media Coverage for the Political Promotion of the President ... Maximize Administration Resources ... and Dessiminate [*sic*] Information Throughout the Administration”

²³ *Ibid.*, 9.

operation to be side tracked into things that are not politically profitable.”²⁴ Rather than pursuing a true ideological majority, described by pollster Louis Harris as “probably well nigh impossible for anyone to put together,” aides worked to construct an electoral majority.²⁵ Building ties between the president and a cross-section of US citizens, they hoped to make his policies appear to reflect national, rather than partisan, interests and priorities. Embracing Harris’ recommendation that the president avoid “nationalistic or fortress America appeals to some Silent Majority out in the hinterland,” aides promoted those projects and policies most popular with potential Nixon supporters.²⁶

Unfortunately for the president, the “literally radical steps in foreign policy” celebrated by Harris as well as Nixon’s embrace of wage-and-price controls, revenue sharing and other liberal economic policies were the source of right-wing discontent.²⁷ The clear signs that Nixon did not intend to change these policies led the Conservative Party of New York to announce on December 9 that it was “aligning itself with the broader group of conservative spokesmen who declared their suspension of presidential support last summer, and are currently considering the entry of a candidate in various presidential primaries throughout the nation.”²⁸ Motivated, in Timothy Sullivan’s view, by “a foreign policy insufficiently anti-communist and an economic policy too

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁵ “Louis Harris speech to Congress of American Industry,” December 2, 1971, 1, Lou Harris & Associates [Accordion Folder]; Box 69; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “News Release, Conservative Party of New York State,” December 9, 1971, 1, Conservatives; Box 52; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. Scanlon, “The Pro-Vietnam War Movement,” 143–47, 149–51; Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 145–49.

Keynesian,” rather than a specific issue, the announcement was the culmination of months of failed negotiations with the administration.²⁹

Although they did not criticize Nixon’s Vietnam policies, the New York conservatives stressed their view that “the Nation's deteriorating defense posture threatens the very foundation of our foreign policy.”³⁰ Since the announcement did not explicitly endorse a specific candidate, Buchanan hoped that he, Colson, Vice President Agnew and other administration officials might still be able to avoid a primary challenge. Although this was unlikely to actually unseat the president, it could still be a disaster since, as Buchanan reminded the president: “if the Far Right of our party goes charging off in New Hampshire, and is humiliated and routed, a good many people will be embittered; wounds will have been opened within the party which may not have healed in time for November when we need everyone.”³¹ Aides therefore embraced Buchanan’s earlier reminder that “what happens to Vietnam is still a concern to the silent right-wing in this country” in the hopes that “the inevitable chasm between the views of the President on defense and foreign policy -- and those of his Democratic opponent” would lead many conservatives to support him in 1972.³²

²⁹ Sullivan, *New York State and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 145; “News Release, Conservative Party of New York State.”

³⁰ “News Release, Conservative Party of New York State,” 1.

³¹ “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Attorney General,” December 13, 1971, 3, WHSF: SMOF: H.R. Haldeman: Patrick Buchanan – Dec. 1971; Box 7; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

³² “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman, Charles Colson,” 3.

Explaining and Reframing Vietnam
for the Campaign

Aides and strategists therefore sought to publicize Nixon's Vietnam policies in such a way as to convince conservatives he deserved their support without appearing to so hawkish as to reignite domestic opposition. These efforts reflected Harris' conclusion that "even if he extricates this country from the war, Mr. Nixon is unlikely to win many votes for his handling of Vietnam. At best he can escape a Lyndon Johnson type political disaster on the issue."³³ Officials therefore worked to remind voters that "Indochina is but one part of the broad structure of world peace"³⁴ and to reframe the conflict as a powerful demonstration of the president's diplomatic skills. The resulting desire to force North Vietnamese negotiating concessions as well as demonstrate Nixon's commitment to South Vietnam likely contributed to Nixon's decision to approve an increase in bombing raids on North Vietnam.³⁵ However, White House aides reported "even ... confirmed Hawks ... wonder what gives when we (1) step up the bombing of the north and (2) call off the Paris peace talks."³⁶ Hoping to address this confusion, reclaim the initiative in the stalled negotiations with Hanoi, and mollify critics on both sides of the domestic debates over Vietnam, Nixon's televised January 25, 1972 speech explicitly

³³ "Louis Harris speech to Congress of American Industry," 2.

³⁴ "Kenneth Khachigian to Patrick Buchanan," October 19, 1971, Patrick Buchanan February 1972; Box 92; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

³⁵ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 254–55; Jeffrey P Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 293–95.

³⁶ "Van Shumway to Charles Colson," December 28, 1971, Meetings and Conversations [12/15/1971-12/31/1971]; Box 16; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

outlined his peace proposals and gave US citizens an overview of the public and secret negotiations with North Vietnam.

Nixon attempted to demonstrate that the US – as represented by himself and Henry Kissinger – was sincerely pursuing an end to the conflict, thereby bringing home US soldiers and POWs, but without agreeing to, in his words, “overthrow the South Vietnamese Government.”³⁷ By publicly articulating his peace plans while highlighting the difference between “settlement and surrender,”³⁸ Nixon hoped to undermine his critics and lay the foundation for a reelection campaign emphasizing the need for Americans, regardless of disagreements over Vietnam, to unite behind his peace plan as the best way to end the conflict. After the speech, of course, Nixon’s aides were responsible for ensuring that the President’s arguments reached potential voters. Specifically, Haldeman’s assistant, Larry Higby, urged Colson to follow up with supporters in the press, Congress, business community, academia, and the like “making sure that they get something out.”³⁹ At the same time, Nixon himself recognized that “the attack line will be more effective than the positive line”⁴⁰ and urged Haldeman and Colson to remind spokesmen to aggressively counter critics of the President’s peace plan.

³⁷ “Address to the Nation Making Public a Plan for Peace in Vietnam,” January 25, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3475>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Larry Higby to Charles Colson,” January 26, 1972, President’s 8-point Peace Proposal, Jan. 25, 1972; Box 103; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁰ “Richard Nixon to Charles Colson, H.R. Haldeman,” January 28, 1972, 2, HRH 1972 Memos From The President; Box 162; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

With incoming mail indicating broad support for the President's speech,⁴¹ Colson concluded that "we are better off than perhaps the President believes" on the Vietnam issue heading into 1972 campaign.⁴² Recognizing that "public attitudes are so volatile today that any analysis such as this is perhaps good for only a limited period,"⁴³ Colson concluded that White House staff and Presidential spokesmen should "continue to assert our line positively, ... capitalize on our success in ending American involvement and that we not be scared off of our position by a noisy minority."⁴⁴ This charge that the President's opposition represented a small fraction of the domestic population echoes earlier promotion of the Silent Majority despite the near-total abandonment of that idea in planning for the 1972 election campaign. Efforts to appeal to Middle America, however, demonstrate that the disappearance of the "Silent Majority" phrase did not represent a major shift in White House priorities. Rather, the changing rhetoric shows how aides attempted to refashion a public opinion project centered on the Vietnam War into one which would win the President votes even as they attempted to minimize the war as an issue in domestic political debates.

⁴¹ "Roland Elliott to Ray Price," February 3, 1972, President's 8-point Peace Proposal, Jan. 25, 1972; Box 103; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman," February 16, 1972, Charles Colson February 1972; Box 92; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Although the reaction was not universal, Kimball concludes that the disclosure that "Nixon had engaged in secret talks, some who had criticized him in the past and many in the larger public came to believe, for a time at least, that he had striven to end the war with honor." Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 290.

⁴² "Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman."

⁴³ "Charles Colson to Richard Nixon," February 16, 1972, 6, Charles Colson February 1972; Box 92; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

With declining US involvement in Vietnam, Nixon and his aides hoped that promoting troop withdrawals and Vietnamization would prevent the war from playing an overwhelmingly negative role in the election. Although the failures of Vietnamization are well-documented, Nixon and his aides consistently presented it as a success so as to justify continuing the policy.⁴⁵ Scholars have since argued that Nixon and Kissinger were simply attempting to postpone the inevitable collapse of South Vietnam so that it would not become an issue in the 1972 campaign. Historian Jeffrey Kimball argues that Nixon and Kissinger embraced this “decent interval solution” by early 1971 with Kissinger repeatedly emphasizing the potential electoral risks of a 1971 withdrawal.⁴⁶ Still, troop withdrawals, and the subsequent lower US casualty numbers, were a compelling argument against the antiwar movement and the President’s more mainstream political opponents. Although accepting Kissinger’s late-1970 argument that “if we pull them out by the end of '71, trouble can start mounting in '72 that we won't be able to deal with and which we'll have to answer for at the elections,” Nixon still planned to make troop withdrawals an important part of his reelection campaign.⁴⁷ Nixon therefore urged Kissinger to ensure that they would be able to make a strong argument for the success of his Vietnam policies before the Democratic National Committee (DNC) Convention in July.

⁴⁵ See Chapter Two for a discussion of the historiographical debate over the merits of Vietnamization.

⁴⁶ Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 240. The “decent interval” idea is also discussed in Chapter Six.

⁴⁷ H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1994), 223.

In a March 11 memo, Nixon told Kissinger that such an “announcement must be one which indicates that all American combat forces have left, that the residual force will be retained there until we get our POWs, that the residual force will be a solely volunteer force, and whatever else we can develop along those lines.”⁴⁸ Nixon’s emphasis on the DNC Convention for the timing of such a major foreign policy announcement demonstrates the significant relationship between domestic politics and the Vietnam War throughout Nixon’s presidency and particularly in the lead-up to the 1972 election. As the White House shifted to a campaign footing, Nixon and his aides focused administration resources – legislative, political, and financial – only on those projects most likely to influence the 1972 election. Therefore, although the 1970 Honor America Day activities had successfully finalized administration identification with the flag and nationalist patriotism, there was minimal White House involvement in 1971 and 1972.⁴⁹ Not only had the programs become progressively more elaborate and expensive, but increasing expectations of presidential participation led Butterfield to recommend limited

⁴⁸ “Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger,” March 11, 1972, 2, P Memos 1972 II; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁴⁹ See Chapter Three for a discussion of the Administration’s active role in the first Honor America Day event. As mentioned earlier, the Honor America Day committee chairman, J. Willard Marriott, was eager to ensure that his efforts reflected White House priorities. Although pressing Butterfield assistant David Hoopes to determine whether or not the president would participate in the 1972 events at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, Hoopes reported that Marriott was careful to clarify that it was “not a request by Mr. Marriott personally. ... that he (1) would want the President to participate only ‘if it would help the President and the country.’” He further stated that if the President were not interested in the continuation of the Honor America Day programs, Mr. Marriott would drop it as a program. He reminded me that he became involved in the Honor America Day program at the request of the White House and would terminate his involvement or move onto something else at the request of the White House.” “David Hoopes to Alex Butterfield,” March 28, 1972, 1–2, Alex Butterfield March 1972; Box 93; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Marriott provided a brief summary of the 1970 and 1971 events in a letter to potential participants in the 1972 events, but did not include specific details about the upcoming 1972 events. “J. Willard Marriott to Community Leaders,” May 19, 1972, Honor America Day; Box 163; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

White House involvement so as to “redirect what money we can to the campaign coffers” rather than support the patriotic Fourth of July event for another year.⁵⁰

Responding to the Easter Offensive

Even as Nixon, Kissinger, and other White House officials worked best to situate the war as a campaign issue, the North Vietnamese, who had been relatively quiet following the December 1971 bombings, invaded South Vietnam on March 30, 1972. This “Easter Offensive” would continue through October 1972 despite US and South Vietnamese efforts to counter the North Vietnamese campaigns.⁵¹ With Vietnam again dominating domestic news and political debates, Nixon and his aides scrambled to prevent North Vietnamese victories from undermining the President’s Vietnamization policies and domestic support for continued US involvement. Although Colson reported that the invasion led to a “resurgence of hawkish feeling in the country,” an assistant argued that Nixon’s decision to aggressively bomb targets in North Vietnam was contributing to both an increase in campus activism and a “strong negative public

⁵⁰ “Alex Butterfield to H.R. Haldeman,” March 29, 1972, Alex Butterfield March 1972; Box 93; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵¹ Frustrated by the stalled negotiations, Nixon and Kissinger were anxious to use the invasion as a justification for major U.S. military activities reflecting their belief that, as Kissinger would later explain, “Hanoi had committed so many resources to the effort that, once stopped, it would almost certainly be obliged to settle.” Such a response would have the additional benefit of signaling U.S. determination not only to the North Vietnamese, but to the Soviet Union during the final negotiations over that summer’s summit meeting as well as to reassure domestic hawks that Nixon was still committed to South Vietnam’s survival. Nixon and Kissinger are careful to minimize the significance of the domestic political calculations in favor of their negotiations and planning for the Moscow summit. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 371–88; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 302–11; Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 233–68; Richard M Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), 583–95.

reaction to what we are doing.”⁵² Colson’s aide, Doug Hallett, was primarily responsible for student outreach programs, but his report on domestic reactions to the renewed US bombing campaigns reflected the increasingly mainstream nature of domestic opposition to the war: “As my mother said to me, ‘If the President thinks this is limited to the campuses and the New York Times editorial offices, he’s crazy. You’re hearing it also in the beauty parlors and the PTA meetings’.” Hallett suggested that the reaction – “far stronger than to Cambodia potentially” – was largely a product of the perceived success of Vietnamization and other Nixon policies. Because so many citizens believed the war was almost over, the bombings were “perceived more as an escalation [rather than retaliation for North Vietnamese aggression] and I think it undermines the President’s credibility much more.”⁵³

Hoping to counter such critiques and, more importantly, to rally support for his aggressive response to the North Vietnamese invasion, Nixon addressed the nation on April 26. Emphasizing that US ground troops were not involved, and in fact announcing that an additional 20,000 troops would be withdrawn, Nixon urged Americans to “unite as a nation in a firm and wise policy of real peace--not the peace of surrender, but peace with honor--not just peace in our time, but peace for generations to come.”⁵⁴ Although his speech did not explicitly challenge his opponents, Nixon told Haldeman: “It is vitally

⁵² “Charles Colson to Richard Nixon,” April 14, 1972, Memorandums for the President [1 of 2]; Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Doug Hallett to Charles Colson,” April 19, 1972, Presidential Meetings and Conversations [4/1/72-4/28/72]; Box 17; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵³ “Doug Hallett to Charles Colson,” 1.

⁵⁴ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on Vietnam,” April 26, 1972, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3384&st=&st1=#axzz1gikr7uCP>.

important that you follow-up on the Colson group to see that they continue, particularly at this time, a strong assault on the press, on the Democratic candidates, and our opponents generally in the Congress and in the country on the Vietnam issue.”⁵⁵ The primary goal was to limit public opposition to Nixon’s policies, but the president reminded his Chief of Staff: “if the attack is made effectively and successfully now, it will have an enormously great impact on the primaries and on the Democratic Convention.”⁵⁶ Once again, the upcoming election defined administration planning even as the US and South Vietnamese struggled to halt the ongoing offensive. In an April 30 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon concluded that as the North Vietnamese showed no signs of discontinuing their offensive, the US would have pursue more aggressive action, which given the timelines of the domestic election and the Moscow Summit meant that “unless we hit the Hanoi-Haiphong complex this weekend, we probably are not going to be able to hit it at all before the election.”⁵⁷

In addition to avoiding conflicts with either the DNC convention or the Moscow Summit, Nixon worried that delaying such a major strike would mean that “support for taking a hard line, while relatively strong now, will erode day by day, ... so that people get a sense of hopelessness, and then would assume that we were only striking out in

⁵⁵ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” April 30, 1972, 1, HRH 1972 Memos From The President; Box 162; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁷ “Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger,” April 30, 1972, 1, P Memos 1972 II; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. For these negotiations, see Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 373–80; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 305–11; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 256–68; Nixon, *RN*, 587–88, 591–92, 599–608.

desperation.”⁵⁸ These calculations support historian Robert Dallek’s conclusion that for Nixon and Kissinger, “the real issue was Nixon’s reelection, not world peace. They could not let South Vietnam ‘unravel before November,’ Nixon and Kissinger agreed.”⁵⁹ The President therefore announced on May 8, 1972 his decision not only to continue bombing North Vietnam, but also to mine its ports and increase attacks against rail and communications lines.⁶⁰ Nixon carefully framed this decision as the only responsible option, the only way to ensure that North Vietnam negotiates after Nixon had already “offered the maximum of what any President of the United States could offer.”⁶¹ The President therefore urged the American people to “stand together in purpose and resolve”⁶² and support his efforts to end the Vietnam War with “a genuine peace, not a peace that is merely a prelude to another war.”⁶³

⁵⁸ “Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger,” 2.

⁵⁹ Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 372. Jeffrey Kimball offers a similar conclusion:

⁶⁰ Echoing Dallek’s conclusions about the 1972 presidential election guiding Nixon and Kissinger’s response to the North Vietnamese invasion, Jeffrey Kimball concludes that this escalation, “was aimed less at stopping the invasion and more at pleasing his constituents, frightening the North Vietnamese and Soviets, influencing the negotiations, and diminishing Hanoi’s future war-fighting capability in the struggle that lay ahead for the South Vietnamese.” Nixon and Kissinger, of course, insist that they had no other alternative. *Ibid.*, 384–88; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 311–16; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 268–88; Nixon, *RN*, 604–08.

⁶¹ Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the Situation in Southeast Asia,” May 8, 1972, Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3404>.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

“Do Everything Within our Power to Follow Up”:
Explaining the Escalation

In a marked contrast to more recent policy announcements, but clearly learning from the Laos and Cambodia announcements, White House planning for the May 8 speech was almost as involved as were efforts surrounding the November 3, 1969 speech. In a memorandum sent the day before the speech, Nixon insisted that his staff “do everything within our power to follow up -- with an effort far exceeding the speech of November 3”⁶⁴ to ensure that their preferred lines and interpretation of the speech shaped public discussions. To this end, Nixon insisted, “all of the hawks, not only in the Congress but in the media and among the Governors, etc., be mobilized.” He demanded advertisements from “the 'Tell it to Hanoi' group or any other group we can think of” and pushed his aides to focus on “getting out positive reactions if such reactions can possibly be obtained.” Furthermore, remembering the importance of letter and telegram responses to the Silent Majority speech, Nixon reminded his aides that a successful response to his speech “requires stimulating mail and wire response to the speech to the White House so that we can use it as we did after November 3.”⁶⁵ Based on reactions to the 1969 speech, aides expected individuals and outside groups to “stage demonstrations and rallies, [and] letter operations around the country through political operation and old advance operation.”⁶⁶ While agreeing that White House officials should pursue a broad range of

⁶⁴ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” May 7, 1972, 2, P Memos 1972 II; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2–3.

⁶⁶ “Planning Notes,” n.d., 3, Vietnam Speech 5/8/72 [3 of 4]; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

efforts to ensure popular support for the policies announced in the President's May 8 speech, Colson recommended that "we should avoid the crisis atmosphere now ... we should radiate stability, we should radiate calmness."⁶⁷ By avoiding an image of panic from within the White House, aides would better be able to present the President as truly in control of the Vietnam War.

With polls, letters, and telegrams to the White House endorsing his announcement, Nixon pushed for more aggressive efforts against the North Vietnamese telling Kissinger, "I cannot emphasize too strongly that I have determined that we should go for broke. ... Our greatest failure now would be to do too little too late. It is far more important to do too much at a time that we will have maximum public support for what we do."⁶⁸ Subsequent polling and public responses validated Nixon's analysis – particularly the arrival of over 143,000 letters and telegrams to the White House, "the heaviest response to a Presidential speech in two and a half years ... exceeded only by the response to the President's November 3, 1969 nationwide address."⁶⁹ A sizable number

⁶⁷ "Larry Higby to Charles Colson," May 9, 1972, 3, Charles Colson May 1972; Box 96; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. The Higby memorandum included a list of post-speech suggestions from Colson annotated by Haldeman including "Right" next to the quoted suggestion.

⁶⁸ "Richard Nixon the Henry Kissinger," May 9, 1972, 3, P Memos 1972 II; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. Of the 5,827 telegrams recorded by the White House staff as of 5:00pm on May 9, 1972, 4,390 supported the President's actions while 1,390 opposed with 16,000 telegrams not yet processed. "Bruce Kehrli to Charles Colson," May 9, 1972, Vietnam Speech Western Union Situation [4 of 4]; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁶⁹ "ABC News Poll," n.d., Vietnam Speech 5/8/72 [3 of 4]; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Public Opinion Strongly Behind President Nixon on Vietnam," n.d., Vietnam Speech 5/8/72 [3 of 4]; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Charles Colson, Conversation with Lou Harris," May 11, 1972, Presidential Meetings and Conversations [5/1/72-5/31/72]; Box 17; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Roland Elliott to Charles Colson, John Ehrlichman, H.R. Haldeman, Herb Klein, Clark MacGregor, Richard Moore, Ray Price, Ron Ziegler," June 1, 1972, Presidential Meetings and Conversations [6/1/72-6/10/72]; Box 17; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

of these letters and telegrams had likely originated in the offices of the Committee to Re-elect the President, the continuation of earlier astroturf mail campaigns in support of presidential announcements in 1969 through 1971.⁷⁰ This response demonstrated both a popular agreement with Nixon's policies and his staff's growing skill at reliably producing such public demonstrations.⁷¹

Responses to earlier speeches had taught Nixon's aides that support from veterans organizations and labor leaders was insufficient on its own to guarantee the favorable press coverage needed to ensure that the decision entered popular memory as a positive, rather than a negative, move by the President.⁷² Colson therefore encouraged Secretary of Transportation John Volpe to use his upcoming speeches to address Vietnam, as "we really need to have the entire Administration speaking on this issue and hitting our points very hard."⁷³ As defined by Nixon in a mid-May memorandum to Haldeman, these points included "recognition that the decision was a courageous one in which the President put his country above politics and was willing to risk his own personal future in order to do what he thought was right for the country," POWs, troops still in Vietnam,

⁷⁰ Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 221–22.

⁷¹ These favorable responses did not entirely overwhelm domestic criticism, particularly from Congress and the media, which Nixon would later describe as "immediate and shrill." Although Charles DeBenedetti argues that the Linebacker bombing campaign as well as the earlier response to the North Vietnamese invasion meant that the "country rediscovered its capacity for protest," both Melvin Small and Tom Wells conclude that these protests were, in Small's words, "drowned out by public expressions of approval for the president." DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 328, 328–32; Nixon, *RN*, 606; Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves*, 221, 221–22; Wells, *The War Within*, 542–47.

⁷² "Cooper Holt to Charles Colson," May 15, 1972, Veterans of Foreign Wars [1 of 3]; Box 120; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD; "Teddy Gleason to Richard Nixon," May 9, 1972, Vietnam Speech 5/8/72 [3 of 4]; Box 122; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷³ "Charles Colson to John Volpe," May 10, 1972, Department of Transportation; Box 57; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

“for the 17 million Vietnamese who do not want a Communist government, and, most important of all, for the preservation of the credibility of American foreign policy in the years ahead.”⁷⁴ These arguments shaped official public opinion efforts following the President’s May 8 speech with Safire encouraging a more controlled effort so as to unite pro-Nixon arguments around a single theme – which he argued should be that of “courageous action taken by a man who is doing what he considers right for the country, after carefully calculating the risks.”⁷⁵

Safire’s long memorandum about post-speech public opinion strategies emphasized the President’s courage, experience and brilliance in marked contrast to previous public opinion efforts centered on patriotic appeals to the Silent Majority. Indeed, he only mentioned the Silent Majority once in his seven-page strategy memo – pointing to “the will of the people ---- dominated by the plain people, or silent majority”⁷⁶ as the defining force in a democracy. Apart from this reference, and an earlier request that he coin a “new catch phrase like the ‘Silent Majority,’”⁷⁷ there was a marked lack of overt appeals to the Silent Majority and a similarly minimal use of patriotic rhetoric in White House post-speech efforts. This shift demonstrates both a greater confidence in domestic support for Nixon’s Vietnam policies as well as the change in the administration’s approach to public opinion. This change in strategy – from promoting

⁷⁴ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” May 15, 1972, 1, HRH 1972 Memos From The President; Box 162; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁵ “William Safire to H.R. Haldeman,” May 13, 1972, 3, William Safire May 1972; Box 97; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁷ “Planning Notes,” 2.

the *President* to promoting *Nixon* – reflected the broader shift toward emphasizing Middle America rather than the Silent Majority in the 1972 election.

Creating a “New American Majority Bound Together by Our
Common Ideals”: The 1972 Presidential Election

These efforts were aided by a powerful demonstration of support for Nixon’s Vietnam policies on May 31, 1972. Early that morning, members of the Printing Pressmen’s International Union, Local No. 2, charging that a two-page paid advertisement from the National Committee for Impeachment was tantamount to “stabbing our boys in Vietnam in the back”⁷⁸ stopped the *New York Times* presses for almost fifteen minutes. Describing the printers as “just the kind of people we want to encourage,”⁷⁹ Colson recommended that Nixon personally thank union chairman Richard Siemers as a way of “perhaps encouraging others to do similar patriotic actions.”⁸⁰ Although Haldeman initially rejected Colson’s suggestion,⁸¹ Nixon did thank Siemers, resulting in “considerable resentment in the press,” for the “encouragement for future wildcat strikes” implied by Nixon’s letter to the union leader.⁸² Even with this very visible support, the Nixon campaign was unwilling to leave anything to chance. Only a

⁷⁸ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” June 1, 1972, 1, Charles Colson June 1972; Box 98; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman.” Haldeman wrote “No. File,” at the top of the memorandum.

⁸² “Herb Klein to H.R. Haldeman,” July 14, 1972, 1, New York Times Ad to Impeach the President, May 31, 1972; Box 95; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

few days after the *New York Times* strike, five men were arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters in the Watergate building. The presumption at the time was that the men had bugged the office looking for political intelligence on the McGovern campaign, but the investigation and subsequent scholarship has been unable to determine, in Nixon's words, "why, of all the places, the Democratic National Committee" was targeted.⁸³ But regardless of why, the press soon uncovered ties between the arrested men and the Campaign to Reelect the President. As the investigation grew closer to the White House with the arrest of G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, men with close ties to earlier illegal administration activities, White House Counsel John Dean, Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs John Ehrlichman, Special Counsel to the President Charles Colson, and other aides worked, in both Dean and Haldeman's words, to "contain" the investigation to the Watergate burglary and prevent it from becoming a campaign issue.⁸⁴

⁸³ Nixon, *RN*, 629. At the time, according to their memoirs, even White House officials were unsure of all the details, with the days immediately after the break-in spent trying to figure out for themselves exactly what had happened and who was involved. The uncertainty surrounding the actual break-in at the highest levels of the White House hierarchy has ensured that subsequent scholarship has been unable to definitively determine these details. The details of the cover-up and "containment" efforts, however are both more clear and more relevant as the White House efforts to obscure earlier illegal activities and ties to the burglars led to the impeachable crimes of Watergate. Colson, *Born Again*; John W. Dean, *Blind Ambition: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976); Haldeman and DiMona, *The Ends of Power*; Nixon, *RN*, 625–46, *passim*. The scholarly literature on Watergate is vast and the most authoritative study is still Stanley I. Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate: The Last Crisis of Richard Nixon* (New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1990). Revisionist scholars seeking to exonerate Nixon frequently limit their examination to the Watergate burglaries and do not engage the larger question of the White House cover-up; see, e.g. Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985); Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin, *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). More recent revisionist works have attempted to situate Watergate within the larger context of Nixon's administration, implicitly minimizing the importance of the break-in and cover-up in assessing Nixon as president; see, e.g. Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1994); Herbert S. Parmet, *Richard Nixon and his America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); Tom Wicker, *One of Us: Richard Nixon and the American Dream* (New York: Random House, 1991).

⁸⁴ Dean, *Blind ambition*, 127–30, 141, 147–49; Nixon, *RN*, 628–29, 631–32, 635, 641–42, 675, 707–11.

In the midst of the growing crisis, aides continued their efforts to cultivate visible, organized support for the president's reelection. While aides struggled to incorporate the POW/MIA issue into the Republican Convention – to “pay homage to the prisoners but not appear to be using their families” – inclusion of other groups such as sympathetic veterans and Democrats was more straightforward.⁸⁵ On July 29, 1972, John Todd and other Vietnam veterans announced the creation of Concerned Vietnam Veterans for Nixon, an organization at least partially inspired by the earlier creation of Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace.⁸⁶ Colson and his office additionally worked to build ties with sympathetic groups from throughout Middle America – ultimately organizing over thirty individual ethnicities into pro-Nixon committees.⁸⁷ Clay Claiborne's Black Silent Majority Committee drafted and circulated campaign materials as well in an effort to woo the African American community away from the Democratic Party.⁸⁸ Furthering these efforts, the proliferation of local “Democrats for Nixon” groups – described by Colson as a “spontaneous thing” – created an ideal opportunity to promote the image of Nixon as a unifying, bipartisan figure.⁸⁹ And although neither he nor his advisors were anxious to draw too much attention to the continuing war in Vietnam, Nixon did plan to announce

⁸⁵ “Charles Colson to Dwight Chapin,” July 25, 1972, Republican Convention--Miami, Florida, 8/21/72; Box 107; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁸⁶ “Charles Colson, Telephone Call Recommendation,” July 29, 1972, Telephone Call Requests [2 of 2]; Box 116; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. For the creation of Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, see Chapter Six.

⁸⁷ Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 128.

⁸⁸ Warren Brown, “Nixon and McGovern Battle for Black Votes,” *Jet*, November 2, 1972.

⁸⁹ “Charles Colson to John Connally,” July 31, 1972, Democrats for Nixon [2 of 2]; Box 55; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD. This image of bipartisanship came at the expense of active support for other Republican candidates. Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 161–62, 164–68; Mason, “I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority.”

the end of the draft during the campaign to “very significant effect” further ensuring that his opponent, Democrat George McGovern, could not rely on opposition to the Vietnam War to defeat the president.⁹⁰

Aides therefore planned to make Nixon’s success in “bring[ing] peace to the world – ending our involvement in Vietnam, stability in the Middle East, new relationships with China and Russia, SALT, etc.” a key issue for the upcoming campaign.⁹¹ The important difference between the campaign’s attention to Vietnam and to previous efforts to create and promote the Silent Majority was that aides now included Vietnam in a laundry list of presidential accomplishments rather than working to mobilize outside supporters to publicly endorse the president’s Vietnam policies. In this context, the lack of a final peace agreement or ceasefire was actually a strength and Colson recommended that campaign workers tell voters that “this is merely an unfinished agenda. We have only begun. Our goals ... will be realized in the next four years.”⁹² In this way, aides hoped to transform the stalled and frustrating peace process into a reason to vote for Nixon in the hopes he would negotiate a final peace in his second term.

Building a bipartisan coalition further enabled Nixon and his supporters to claim that his first term “restored domestic tranquility” by calming internal tensions over the war as well as domestic issues.⁹³ The President’s acceptance speech at the 1972 RNC

⁹⁰ “Richard Nixon to H.R. Haldeman,” August 14, 1972, P Memos 1971; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹¹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” August 7, 1972, 1, Political Strategy 1972; Box 99; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

National Convention made this explicit with the president claiming that “peace is too important for partisanship.”⁹⁴ In this way, he hoped that his foreign policy accomplishments – including high-profile trips to China and the Soviet Union as well as progress with negotiations on the Vietnam War – would lead citizens who did not share McGovern’s strident antiwar views to vote for him, regardless of individual party affiliation. In proposing a “new American majority bound together by our common ideals,”⁹⁵ Nixon echoed earlier appeals to the Silent Majority but took pains to be more inclusive than he was in his 1969 speech. On August 23, 1972 Nixon urged “everyone listening to me tonight – Democrats, Republicans, Independents, to join our new majority – not on the basis of the party label you wear in your lapel, but on the basis of what you believe in your hearts.”⁹⁶ Even though aides reported the next day that only a small fraction of the President’s listeners picked up on his “New American Majority” theme, they assured Nixon that “those that did liked it” encouraging its continued use throughout the campaign.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Richard Nixon, “Remarks on Accepting the Presidential Nomination of the Republican National Convention,” August 23, 1972, Gerhard Peters and John T. Wooley, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=3537>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ “Howard Cohen to Charles Colson,” August 24, 1972, Presidential Meetings and Conversations [8/15/72-8/31/72]; Box 18; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Patriotism and Nonpartisanship: Framing the
Candidate in 1972

To underscore Nixon's continuing commitment to the nationalist patriotism that had united the Silent Majority in 1969, campaign and White House aides worked to deepen the association between the president and the American flag. One of Haldeman's aides therefore pressured the Citizens Committee to Re-Elect the President to get "moving now hard and quickly to push the idea of the American Flag Lapel Pin."⁹⁸ Not only should "all of our people ... be wearing American Flags," but "they should be on all our speakers."⁹⁹ Furthermore, "each speaker should have a supply of them to give to the people who ask for them."¹⁰⁰ In this way, the flag – a traditional symbol of the nation – would be explicitly linked with Nixon's reelection campaign. Nixon would later explain his decision to wear a flag lapel pin "come hell or high water" in an effort to push back against what he saw as a concerted effort by liberals and other critics to "undermin[e] the traditional concept of patriotism."¹⁰¹ He insisted, "this was not a politically motivated prejudice on my part," but commented in his diary, "Of course, this must be carefully done so that there is no indication of throwing doubts on the patriotism of people who are on the other side."¹⁰² Which was exactly what the very well-publicized celebration of the

⁹⁸ "Gordon Strachan to Jeb Magruder," September 12, 1972, WHSF: SMOF; H. R. Haldeman: Strachan Chron. M-Z July 1972; Box 14; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

⁹⁹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 212–13. For earlier White House efforts to promote flag lapel pins and other patriotic displays, see Chapters Three and Four.

¹⁰¹ Nixon, *RN*, 763. In a diary entry extracted in his memoirs, Nixon remembers that he and Haldeman had been discussing the association between negative characters and flag lapel pins in the recent films *The Man* and *The Candidate*.

flag by pro-war and pro-Nixon groups ultimately accomplished, laying the foundation for the re-politicization of the flag following the September 11, 2001 attacks.¹⁰³ In 1972, however, Nixon and his aides were anxious to minimize his ties to the Republican Party, whose candidates were generally less popular than the president.¹⁰⁴

Efforts to frame Nixon as an *American* President, rather than a *Republican* President were further enhanced by the active involvement of the highly publicized Democrats for Nixon committees. At a dinner honoring former Secretary of the Treasury and Democrats for Nixon Chairman, John Connally, the President offered the “proposition that Democrats for Nixon are really Democrats for America.”¹⁰⁵ While reinforcing broader campaign themes, a staffer worried that such claims risked the critique that the president was actually “suggesting that any Democrat who is not for Nixon is not for America.”¹⁰⁶ And even though aides likely hoped to subtly imply such a charge, “any hook on which to base the claim that the President is being divisive” would weaken his campaign.¹⁰⁷ The idea of a “New American Majority,” therefore, would ideally benefit from the popularity of the Silent Majority without explicitly reminding the voting population of the divisions and upheavals triggered by domestic debates over the

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 207, 211–15.

¹⁰⁴ Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 161–62, 164–68; Mason, “I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority.”

¹⁰⁵ “Dick Moore to H.R. Haldeman,” September 25, 1972, Democrats for Nixon [1 of 2]; Box 55; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Vietnam War. Instead, the campaign increasingly emphasized issues such as crime, drugs, taxes, desegregation and other domestic policies even as Nixon cited the ongoing negotiations as an argument for his reelection. Additionally, with a schedule intended to “keep the President busy on things he ought to be working on as President,”¹⁰⁸ Colson and other aides ensured that Nixon maintained a less-partisan Presidential posture during the final month of the campaign.

As additional ties between the White House and the Watergate break-in were uncovered, this strategy had the added benefit of limiting Nixon’s contact with the press and others who might push the president to comment, thus drawing attention back to the developing scandal. Aides still believed they could “contain” the investigation to the break-in itself, but Nixon blamed a series of *Washington Post* articles on “corruption in government” as enabling McGovern and other Democrats to reframe the election since, Nixon recalled, they had been “ignore[d] or rebuked by the majority of voters on the Vietnam war and nearly every other issue.”¹⁰⁹ The October announcement of a draft peace agreement between the United States and North Vietnam effectively limited the domestic appeal of McGovern’s antiwar position. The agreement was a significant boost to Nixon’s campaign and strengthened pro-Nixon arguments that the President needed a significant victory over McGovern to solidify his negotiating position and to ensure a

¹⁰⁸ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” October 18, 1972, HRH Memos January 1972 [1 of 4]; Box 3; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁰⁹ Nixon, *RN*, 707. Nixon is careful to point out that “these stories reached their peak two weeks before the election, on October 25, and then ended as soon as the election was over.”

final ceasefire and settlement as soon as possible.¹¹⁰ Kissinger's late October announcement gave credence to claims that a vote for Nixon was "a vote of confidence behind the President"¹¹¹ and therefore a vote for peace in Vietnam. Framing Nixon's domestic and foreign policies as overwhelming successes in the national interest ensured that he was able to, in Colson's words, "end up the campaign smiling confidently, allowing the contrast to be drawn with McGovern looking mean and scornful."¹¹² Limited success at the negotiating table and declining US casualties as well as internal Democratic Party divisions undermined McGovern's antiwar candidacy ultimately resulting in Nixon's reelection with over 60% of the popular vote.

White House Reorganization and the New Majority

The day after Nixon's landslide reelection, senior White House staffers gathered in the Roosevelt Room in the White House for what Haldeman described as the "ritual speech of thanks for their efforts."¹¹³ However, the sleepy, hung-over crowd was startled when Nixon, with an oblique reference to "exhausted volcanoes," suddenly "called for

¹¹⁰ Despite contemporary speculation, both Nixon and Kissinger vehemently deny that the October announcement was an attempt to influence the upcoming election. Kimball and Dallek agree, but not for the reasons Nixon and Kissinger provide. Rather, the historians conclude that Nixon did not *want* to finalize an agreement for the election and so would have preferred to limit speculation on this front. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 407, 421–30; Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 343–48; Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War*, 372–76; Nixon, *RN*, 704–07.

¹¹¹ "Charles Colson, Conversation with John Connally," October 31, 1972, Democrats for Nixon [1 of 2]; Box 55; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹² "Charles Colson to Richard Nixon," November 4, 1972, Memorandums for the President [1 of 2]; Box 1; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹¹³ Haldeman and DiMona, *The Ends of Power*, 197.

the resignation of every non-career employee in the executive branch.”¹¹⁴ Nixon and Haldeman would both claim that the request was not punitive, but Nixon later acknowledged that it was “a mistake.” Neither he nor his senior staff had anticipated “the chilling effect this action would have on the morale of people who had worked so hard during the election and who were naturally expecting a chance to savor the tremendous victory instead of suddenly having to worry about keeping their jobs.”¹¹⁵ At the time, however, Nixon and his senior aides were primarily concerned with regaining control over the bureaucracy. The resignations were intended, Nixon wrote, “to be symbolic of a completely new beginning” and, indeed, most of the resignations were not accepted.¹¹⁶ Domestic liaison Charles Colson, although recalling Nixon crediting him with the victory on election night – “Those are your votes that are pouring in, the Catholics, the union members, the blue-collars, *our* votes, boy. It was your strategy and it’s a landslide!” – tendered his resignation with the rest of the White House staff.¹¹⁷

Although describing himself as “one of those ‘exhausted volcanoes’ the President spoke about in his strange speech,” Colson seriously considered staying on through Nixon’s second term.¹¹⁸ Although he had told Nixon during the election that he planned to return to his private law practice, Colson was tempted to stay primarily because he “believe[d] we are on the threshold of one of the most significant realignments in

¹¹⁴ Nixon, *RN*, 768.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 769.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 768.

¹¹⁷ Colson, *Born Again*, 15.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

American political history.”¹¹⁹ Explaining his position in a memorandum to Haldeman, requested by the president, Colson argued that not only had Nixon’s reelection “cracked the solid foundation of the Democratic Party; [but] its traditional base of labor, blue-collar, white ethnics have now become part of the Nixon Majority.”¹²⁰ It was cultivating this new constituency that made Colson reconsider his plans to leave the administration. Writing, “our challenge, it seems to me, is to convert the Nixon personal New Majority into a permanent institutional majority” Colson urged that the White House “use these four years ... to solidify the middle-America constituency that has now rallied behind the Nixon leadership. It is a huge job.”¹²¹ As his primary White House responsibility was to cultivate the key groups in the New Majority – particularly veterans, white ethnics, and labor unionists – Colson felt that he was uniquely situated to ensure that the successful “conver[sion of] a personal triumph into a fundamental political realignment” in Nixon’s second term.¹²²

He therefore considered whether he would be most useful to the President by staying in the White House, becoming Secretary of Labor, or by moving to the Republican National Committee, but he was careful to remind Haldeman “I am not looking for a job; I am ready to go back to private life, but I do not want to fail in serving

¹¹⁹ “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” November 10, 1972, 2, Charles Colson November 1972; Box 105; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. Mason traces the initial White House effort to solidify the New Majority, until the unfolding Watergate scandal forced Nixon’s resignation. Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*, 189–210.

¹²² “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” 2.

the President if that is what he wants.”¹²³ Ultimately, Colson left the White House to return to his Washington, DC law practice and was eventually indicted and imprisoned for his role in Watergate.¹²⁴ Upon his departure, then-Assistant to the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense William J. Baroody, Jr. would take over as White House domestic liaison. Until he left the White House in March 1973, however, Colson continued to be the White House staffer primarily responsible for “establishing the ‘New Majority’ by contacting those people who were involved with us during the campaign ... the Union-types, different ethnic groups, Catholics, youth, etc.”¹²⁵ He anticipated that his efforts would transform the varied coalition of voters who reelected Nixon into a viable constituency group which an assistant described as “very close to reality.”¹²⁶

Publicly rewarding prominent New Majority allies was Colson’s primary responsibility as he was tasked with creating a “program to follow up on top people” among the groups who had supported the President in the recent election and he was specifically to plan how best to honor and reward key members of the New Majority at

¹²³ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁴ As E. Howard Hunt’s primary point of contact in the White House and an enthusiastic proponent of political “dirty tricks,” Colson was deeply involved in the Watergate cover-up. He would eventually plead guilty to obstruction of justice charges for his role in the administration’s efforts against Ellsberg. Having become an evangelical Christian during the height of the Watergate scandal, Colson would go on to found Prison Fellowship Ministries after his release. His memoir, *Born Again*, describes his role in the Nixon White House and involvement in Watergate and traces his post-Watergate evangelicalism to his experiences at the end of his time in the administration and subsequent trial and imprisonment. Colson, *Born Again*; Tim Weiner, “Charles W. Colson, Watergate Felon Who Became Evangelical Leader, Dies at 80,” *The New York Times*, April 21, 2012, sec. U.S. / Politics, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/22/us/politics/charles-w-colson-watergate-felon-who-became-evangelical-leader-dies-at-80.html>.

¹²⁵ “Larry Higby to Charles Colson,” November 13, 1972, New American Majority; Box 6; WHSF: SMOF Howard, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁶ “Don Rogers to Charles Colson,” November 20, 1972, 1, Don Rodgers; Box 11; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

Nixon's second inauguration on January 20, 1973. Otherwise, Haldeman warned, "we will simply end up with the more aggressive people at all the Inaugural events ... and others who have done far more but who are more restrained in asking for things will be left out."¹²⁷ More immediately, Nixon chose Peter J. Brennan, the President of the New York City and State Building and Construction Trades Councils, AFL-CIO to be his next Secretary of Labor.¹²⁸ The President was careful, however, not to officially nominate Brennan until after Colson secured a promise from the powerful labor leader that even if he disagreed with a specific policy, Brennan "would be a team player and once a decision was made he would, of course, abide by it."¹²⁹ This high-profile recognition of his allies in the labor movement combined with Meany's refusal to endorse McGovern in the 1972 campaign demonstrated the central role of such support in the creation of the New Majority. Brennan's leadership in the May 1970 Hard Hat protests following the US invasion of Cambodia was a powerful counterpoint to the domestic protests opposing that policy and laid the foundation for Nixon's successful appeal to hawkish laborers in the 1972 campaign. The choice of Brennan to represent labor interests during Nixon's second term was at least partially a grateful acknowledgment of Brennan's role in initiating labor identification with the President.

¹²⁷ "H.R. Haldeman to Charles Colson," November 21, 1972, 2, New American Majority; Box 6; WHSF: SMOF Howard, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁸ "Press Release - White House," November 29, 1972, Department of Labor; Box 56; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹²⁹ "Charles Colson to Richard Nixon," November 27, 1972, 1, Department of Labor; Box 56; WHSF: SMOF Colson, NPLM, College Park, MD.

“The President Won’t be Able to Just Mobilize the
Country Again”: Capitalizing on the
Paris Peace Agreement

After Nixon’s landslide reelection, aides anticipated that promotion of the New American Majority would secure domestic support for a range of Nixon policies long after the Vietnam War ceased to be an active issue in domestic politics. Although he agreed that Nixon’s landslide reelection was a powerful endorsement of his policies, Director of Communications Herb Klein argued that the administration would have better served had staffers “approached our opponents with more olive branches and fewer hammers.”¹³⁰ Instead, Nixon and his staff embraced a hardline position against the antiwar movement and domestic critics. Therefore, in the face of increasing impatience at the slow pace of negotiations following Kissinger’s October “peace is at hand,” Nixon tried to force the North Vietnamese to restart negotiations on a final settlement. The resultant LINEBACKER II bombings were, Nixon insisted in his announcement, intended to prevent Hanoi from “gain[ing] advantages at the peace table it has not and cannot gain on the battlefield.” Nixon authorized an aggressive bombing campaign of North Vietnam which he hoped would force the North Vietnamese into finalizing the ceasefire.¹³¹ Although Buchanan reported that the bombing raids had the “entire dovecote screaming,” there was no massive antiwar mobilization in opposition to the bombings.¹³²

¹³⁰ Herbert G. Klein, *Making It Perfectly Clear* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 388.

¹³¹ “Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger,” December 16, 1972, 2, P Memos 1971; Box 230; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 440–47; Kimball, *Nixon’s Vietnam War*, 358–64.

¹³² “Pat Buchanan to H.R. Haldeman,” December 19, 1972, Patrick Buchanan December 1972; Box 105; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 342–46; Wells, *The War Within*, 558–64.

Still, when Nixon announced the ceasefire agreement on January 23, 1973, he urged his aides and spokesmen to “get across the point that the reason for the success of the negotiations was the bombing and the converse point that we did not halt the bombing until we had the negotiations back on track.”¹³³

Specifically, Nixon urged that “our first objective should be to develop pride in the settlement – its soundness, etc., and to counteract the effort that will be made by the liberal opposition to kill our whole foreign policy program which is based on patriotism and national honor.”¹³⁴ Reflecting the experience gained with the Cambodia and Laos announcements and building on the successful mobilization of public opinion following the President’s November 3, 1969 and May 8, 1972 announcements, aides quickly shifted into top gear to ensure maximum popular support for the President’s announcement. Following the President’s January 23rd announcement of the peace agreement, White House officials solicited statements from Congressional allies, friendly journalists, and POW wives. Additionally, Colson’s successor Bill Baroody reported that he and Colson had “reconstituted the Americans for Winning the Peace Committee ... and mobilized them to issue supporting statements and generate telegrams, letters of support, etc.”¹³⁵ Reactivating the local and national Americans for Winning the Peace (AWP) committees marked a partial return to earlier efforts to organize the President’s outside allies under the larger umbrella of the Silent Majority. In contrast to earlier efforts to inspire broad

¹³³ “Action Memo, H.R. Haldeman [1],” January 19, 1973, Action Memos 1/73; Box 179; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD. emphasis in the original

¹³⁴ “Action Memo, H.R. Haldeman [3],” January 19, 1973, Action Memos 1/73; Box 179; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁵ “Bill Baroody to H.R. Haldeman,” January 26, 1973, 1, Vietnam; Box 178; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

popular endorsement of Nixon's policies, Haldeman urged White House aides to "stop worrying about defending the agreement. It either works or it doesn't and it doesn't make any difference one way or the other what we say."¹³⁶ At the same time, he stressed that public support for the agreement – and for the nation of South Vietnam more broadly – would be crucial if the US was to honor the President's promise "to go back in to back up Vietnam. The President won't be able to just mobilize the country again."¹³⁷

Echoing earlier efforts to isolate the antiwar movement, Haldeman reminded staffers that "the other point to make is the difference between a peace with honor and a bug-out."¹³⁸ By promoting the settlement in such black and white terms, spokesmen continued earlier efforts to isolate and marginalize the antiwar movement even when the apparent success of the President's Vietnam policies might have reunited the nation around the new peace in Vietnam. Still, as Charles DeBenedetti has observed, "very few Americans felt like celebrating the peace accord itself. Most ... were relieved; many felt a gnawing sadness."¹³⁹ Administration officials, of course, blamed the lack of public celebration on the "shocking attitude of the press on the Vietnam settlement."¹⁴⁰ Additionally, in contrast to other major Vietnam initiatives throughout Nixon's presidency, White House aides did not mount a full-scale public opinion campaign in

¹³⁶ "PR Memorandum, H.R. Haldeman," January 30, 1973, 2, Action Memos 1/73; Box 179; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ DeBenedetti, *An American Ordeal*, 349, 348–49; Wells, *The War Within*, 564–65.

¹⁴⁰ "Action Memo, H.R. Haldeman," January 30, 1973, Action Memos 2/73; Box 179; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

support of the Paris Peace Agreement. Likely distracted by the trials and Congressional investigations related to Watergate – Haldeman lists the “original Watergate trial,” the Ervin Committee investigation, Ellsberg’s trial, and confirmation hearings for a new FBI Director as the four primary White House concerns in January and February 1973 – this oversight limited the effectiveness of the few support programs initiated after Nixon’s announcement.¹⁴¹ Explaining this failure, Colson also blamed an “unsettled staff arrangement,” a consequence of the reorganization efforts for their continuing failure to “exploit” the Vietnam issue.¹⁴² Whatever the cause, whether Watergate-related distractions or internal White House conflicts, Nixon and his staff failed to effectively “rid[e] the crest of some favorable euphoria regarding the POWs, the ending of the war, etc.” and translate the enthusiasm for the Vietnam ceasefire into political advantages for other Nixon policies and the continued promotion of the New American Majority.¹⁴³

Conclusion

Following his reelection victory in November 1972, Nixon’s January 1973 ceasefire announcement made good on his campaign promises and would, aides hoped, effectively rally his supporters to help make the New American Majority permanent. But, while the successful conclusion of the Vietnam War bolstered Nixon’s image as a peacemaker, the claimed “peace with honor” failed to translate into the political

¹⁴¹ Haldeman and DiMona, *The Ends of Power*, 263.

¹⁴² “Charles Colson to H.R. Haldeman,” January 31, 1973, 2, Attack/Counterattack; Box 160; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

¹⁴³ “H.R. Haldeman to Ray Price,” February 20, 1973, VN Settlement Euphoria; Box 178; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD; “Ray Price to H.R. Haldeman,” February 27, 1973, VN Settlement Euphoria; Box 178; WHSF: SMOF Haldeman, NPLM, College Park, MD.

realignment sought by Nixon and his staff. Instead, the initial euphoria following the President's ceasefire January 25 announcement quickly faded in the face of mounting evidence of Presidential wrongdoing in the Watergate burglary and cover-up. Unlike the November 3, 1969 speech that effectively created a new constituency, the Silent Majority, the President's 1973 ceasefire announcement created only a short-lived outpouring of domestic support for the President and his policies. Once it was clear that the Vietnam War was truly over, and as the final US troops returned home, popular exhaustion over the long-standing domestic debates over the war gave way to relief that the longest conflict in US history was finally over. Public praise of the President's foreign policy abilities was soon overshadowed by economic and social problems as well as the growing disclosures of the Watergate investigations. Even though White House officials and outside allies actively promoted the President's foreign policy successes – aided by the very public Operation Homecoming events marking the return of the POWs – the end of the Vietnam War was seen by many citizens as a chance to put the conflict firmly in the past rather than dwell on it to transform domestic politics.

Thus, the White House belief that the New American Majority had the potential to reshape not just the Republican Party but the national political system soon foundered in the face of popular disgust at the Watergate revelations. Aides explicitly blamed Watergate for low ticket sales at the Republican National Committee's annual fundraising dinner, renamed the "New Majority Dinner" in 1973, but advised the President to take a confident tone and remind the loyal attendees that "those whose faith

has faltered will envy those who stayed to fight.”¹⁴⁴ Watergate similarly overshadowed the Vietnam War effectively erasing popular memories of the support for the President’s peace announcement. The erasure of this support combined with revelations of Watergate re-invigorated Congressional opponents of the war who blocked efforts to carry out Nixon’s secret promises of continued U.S assistance for President Thieu in the face of a significant North Vietnamese offensive following the US withdrawal. White House officials likely hoped that the public celebrations surrounding the return of US POWs from Vietnam would cast the end of the Vietnam War, and the President who had brought it about, in a positive and patriotic light. And while the country was pleased with the return of the POWs, their pleasure at the end of the Vietnam War did not equate into a sense of US responsibility for the continued survival of its ally. Having achieved “peace with honor,” Nixon effectively ensured that the US would not return to Vietnam – not even to block Communist expansion and the eventual collapse of the Southern government. The Silent Majority had spoken and ensured Nixon’s reelection and the end of the Vietnam War, but was not inclined to speak up yet again in defense of a beleaguered President Nixon or a crumbling South Vietnam.

¹⁴⁴ “David Gergen to Richard Nixon,” May 8, 1973, 7, WHSF: SMOF; H.R. Haldeman: Misc. Memos – April-May 1973; Box 10; NPRMC: WHSF: Contested Materials, NPLM, Yorba Linda, CA.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the careful creation and cultivation of the Silent Majority did not give Nixon the free hand he sought for his foreign policy. His November 3, 1969 speech successfully reframed the domestic debate, but failed to reverse the growing tide of public opinion in favor of US disengagement. Constrained by the need to reconcile popular demands for signs of progress with his own insistence on “peace with honor,” Nixon and his aides increasingly relied on overt appeals to patriotism and national pride combined with covert organizing to mobilize his supporters and counter his opponents. Capitalizing on frustrations with Democratic policies – both in Vietnam and at home, as with Johnson’s Great Society programs – Nixon and his aides benefitted from growing anti-antiwar sentiment in mobilizing support for the president’s Vietnam policies. Building ties to traditional Democratic constituencies, officials encouraged breakaway Nixon Democrats to support a Republican president while urging citizens otherwise unenthusiastic about U.S. involvement in Vietnam to see the worst in its critics, thereby contributing to the surprising success of the Silent Majority speech. Further developing the new pro-Nixon, anti-antiwar constituency, the president and his staff sought maximum control over the president’s outside allies, resulting in astroturf organizing and other forms of top-down mobilization as aides worked to ensure that domestic public

opinion furthered administration goals. Perhaps their most effective resource in these projects was the president's national stature. As a symbol as well as a political leader, Nixon could effectively appeal to patriotic sentiments and he urged his aides to ensure that public opinion efforts closely associated him – as well as his office – with other patriotic symbols, most notably the flag. Transforming support for the president into an act of patriotism, rather than one of partisanship, Nixon and his aides hoped to ensure maximum domestic support for his policies despite growing impatience with the Vietnam War.

After the drama of Watergate and Nixon's resignation, the new president, Gerald Ford, struggled to convince Congress and the country to continue to support South Vietnam as North Vietnamese forces closed in around Saigon in 1975. Eschewing Nixon's more explicit patriotic appeals and not attempting to rally the Silent Majority, Ford appealed to reason and obligation in an ultimately failed attempt to justify renewed US involvement in Vietnam.¹ After the subsequent humiliation of the helicopter evacuation of the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, most Americans tried to forget Vietnam. Even so, the war would live on as a powerful force in US society long after the fall of Saigon. The POW/MIA movement grew stronger in the wake of Vietnam, insisting that US prisoners remained in the country and made a full accounting of all missing-in-action a condition for the normalization of relations between the two countries.² Furthermore,

¹ George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Wiley, 1979), 327–39; Richard A. Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War: The Search for Consensus from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 58–82.

² Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); H. Bruce Franklin, *M.I.A., or, Mythmaking in America* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: L. Hill Books, 1992); H. Bruce Franklin, "Missing in Action in the Twenty-First

U.S. failures in Vietnam demonstrated the dangers of military intervention and counterinsurgency warfare offering a useful counterargument to claims that the lessons of World War II demanded active U.S. involvement in international conflicts. Thus, an abstract idea of “Vietnam” quickly provided a compelling counter to references to World War II used to justify an interventionist foreign policy. Although these so-called “Munich” and “Vietnam” analogies would repeatedly influence domestic debates over intervention through the rest of the Twentieth Century and into the Twenty-first, Nixon’s domestic public opinion efforts are a more lasting, if less obvious, inheritance from that era.³

Unlike earlier Cold War presidents, both Johnson and Nixon faced increased domestic discussion over presidential foreign policy decisions. The resulting opposition and protest reflected the breakdown of the Cold War policy consensus, making Nixon the first post-Vietnam president even as he sought a way out of the conflict.⁴ Entering the White House with a divided public, Nixon struggled to sell his version of Vietnam to the American people. Quickly learning, as had Johnson, that arguments on the merits of the war would not inspire the necessary support, Nixon pushed his staff to find alternative

Century,” in *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 173–201.

³ Gary R Hess, *Presidential Decisions for War: Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 153–230; Richard E Neustadt and Ernest R May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York; London: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1986); Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2002). For a discussion of how historical analogies helped deepen U.S. involvement in Vietnam, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁴ Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War*, 43–86.

ways to rally public opinion behind him and his policies. The resulting creation of the Silent Majority and careful use of presidential speeches and outside allies created a model for subsequent presidents. Despite Nixon's success in mobilizing public support for his foreign policies, both Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter attempted to break away from the secrecy and populist appeals associated with his administration.⁵ Both men would, in turn, struggle to effectively rally public opinion behind their policies, likely discouraging later presidents from following their examples and indirectly facilitating a return to a more Nixonian approach to public opinion. Therefore, when President Ronald Reagan introduced the Strategic Defense Initiative, known as both "Star Wars" or by its acronym SDI, his 1983 address echoed Nixon's 1969 Silent Majority speech. The words and official message were different, of course, but both speeches were designed more to mobilize support than to inform.⁶ Nixon's invocation of the Silent Majority in November 1969 might have been more overt than Reagan's use of rhetorical questions to create what one scholar has called a "participatory moment," but both presidents effectively appealed to national mythologies and patriotisms to marginalize their opposition and rally their supporters.⁷

In many ways, Reagan had the easier task. He was proposing research and could therefore avoid discussing specifics and potential negative consequences. Nixon on the other hand, was desperately trying to create a political climate which would enable him to

⁵ Ibid., 58–128.

⁶ Paul S Boyer, "Selling Star Wars: Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative," in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 196–223.

⁷ Gordon R. Mitchell, *Strategic Deception: Rhetoric, Science, and Politics in Missile Defense Advocacy* (Michigan State University Press, 2000), 63–78.

continue U.S. involvement in Vietnam despite mounting domestic opposition. For many citizens, the Vietnam War was a failure and although the conflict continued until the declaration of “peace with honor” in 1973, Nixon never really convinced Americans of the merits of the conflict. He relied on patriotism and national pride and a dislike for the antiwar movement to create political space for Vietnamization and even military escalation in Vietnam. The growing “war-weariness” of the American public demonstrated the truth in journalist David Halberstam’s 2007 observation that “in the long run you cannot sell a war that doesn’t work. The truth goes out, despite those who attack it.”⁸ Unfortunately, instead of encouraging presidents to pursue only “workable” wars, the policy lesson of Vietnam was to privilege short conflicts – or, more damaging yet, to attempt to obscure the full extent of U.S. involvement so as to avoid politically damaging domestic debates.

Or, when those options failed and the U.S. did intervene militarily – as in the 1991 Gulf War – presidents sought to prevent domestic opposition entirely. After repeated public relations convolutions, the U.S. moved to force Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The process of framing the conflict, and then justifying it to the American people – particularly the reliance on outside astroturf organizations and public relations campaigns – echoed Nixon’s efforts to continue U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Directly learning from that more contentious conflict, Bush and his supporters quickly framed those U.S. troops already in the Persian Gulf region, as well as those on their way, as a primary reason for the conflict. Echoing Nixon’s efforts to frame the

⁸ David Halberstam, “Afterword. Worm’s-Eye View,” in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 273.

POWs and MIAs in Vietnam as a justification for continued U.S. involvement, Bush and his advisors argued that the U.S. needed to challenge Hussein so as to protect troops already in the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, George H.W. Bush and his supporters quickly moved to delegitimize domestic opposition with local and national “yellow ribbon campaigns.”⁹ More so even than the flag had during Nixon’s administration, displaying a yellow ribbon – officially to “support the troops” – came to represent agreement with the Gulf War. Therefore, opponents of the conflict – no less admiring of the individuals on the ground – were forced to choose between implicitly endorsing official policy or appearing to reject the troops.¹⁰ Having already framed Iraq as a “good war,” privileging the Munich analogy over Vietnam parallels, the pro-war forces prevented the creation of a viable opposition movement. Central to their success, however, was the short duration and officially “successful” outcome. Had the conflict lasted even a few months longer, it is likely that Bush would have faced many of the same problems as both Nixon and Johnson. He therefore worked to prevent such an occurrence, appealing to the same patriotic and nationalist rhetoric as Nixon used so successfully to mobilize the Silent Majority.¹¹

Following that initial 1969 success, Nixon and his staff repeatedly attempted to recreate the response to the president’s November 3 speech. But the combination of careful planning and genuine grassroots sentiment behind letter-writing and petition

⁹ Jerry Lembcke, *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory, and the Legacy of Vietnam* (NYU Press, 2000), 11–26.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Lloyd Gardner, “The Ministry of Fear: Selling the Gulf Wars,” in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 230–37.

campaigns as well as local and national organization could not be replicated and aides struggled to find an acceptable substitute. For a time, they achieved a degree of success by building on the speech, with a patriotic, identity-based appeal to the Silent Majority. The group of citizens eventually united under this label included the “forgotten Americans” referred to in Nixon’s rhetoric before and during the 1968 Presidential campaign as well as wealthy business leaders, suburban homeowners, veterans, factory and construction workers, hard-line conservatives, frustrated Democrats and established Republicans. Explicitly appealing to these potential supporters, the President’s November 3, 1969 speech on Vietnam united these disparate groups into an impressively broad coalition.

This popular embrace of the Silent Majority idea surprised those White House officials responsible for organizing domestic responses to the speech, but they quickly integrated the idea into their large plans to organize a counterpoint to the November 15, 1969 antiwar Moratorium and Mobilization protests. The resulting letters and telegrams encouraged further, and increasingly elaborate, efforts modeled in large part on the suggestions of outside supporters that the administration more closely and proactively organize its supporters. This is not to say that those supporters of the Vietnam War who wrote to the White House following his November 3, 1969 speech had not supported the war on November 2, but rather that Nixon helped them find each other. Organizing and game-planning the massive response to the Silent Majority speech ensured maximum media and domestic attention to the idea, but the primary goal before the speech was simply to create a demonstration of support for Nixon’s policies. Although aides proposed the idea of creating a pro-war, pro-Nixon movement, they were ultimately

content with the appearance of such a movement rather than the real thing. The overwhelming need for control over message and ideas likely ensured that truly grassroots efforts received minimal White House support.

Once identified, Nixon's assistants attempted to capitalize on the broad-based support of this new constituency. This effort exposed inherent tensions between government officials and citizens groups crucial to creating a pro-war counter-movement. Such a movement, Nixon White House officials hoped, would undermine the arguments and appeal of the antiwar movement. To this end, White House staffers worked with established citizens' groups and also attempted to create pseudo-grassroots organizations that publicly – and vocally – supported Nixon's Vietnam policies. To be truly effective, the groups and individuals who spoke out in support of the President needed to appear to do so without any prompting from the administration.

The resulting combination of grassroots and astroturf organizations – including the Tell It To Hanoi Committee, Americans for Winning the Peace, Vietnam Veterans for a Just Peace, Young Americans for Freedom, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Longshoremen's Association, various building and construction unions, the AFL-CIO, and others – addressed specific concerns and tended to matter in administration planning for only as long as their relevant issue seemed pressing to White House staffers. Although these groups had varying levels of success in the broader political and policy debates, many of them fulfilled the initial goals of Nixon administration officials. They added pro-administration voices to the public policy debates and in doing so, gave policymakers crucial public support. Additionally, and perhaps more relevant today, these groups were a key part of a larger Nixon

administration project to control public debates and discourse – about the war as well as other domestic and international issues. They gave Nixon a way to coordinate outside funding projects and also linked his administration directly to national and local leaders, bypassing traditional party structures.

Active support from outside allies led aides to hope that they could create a national domestic support organization which would assume the burden of pro-Nixon public opinion efforts. However, the grand plans initially proposed would require far more financial support than outside supporters such as H. Ross Perot were willing to provide so aides returned to a populist rhetoric of nationalist patriotism to mobilize the Silent Majority. Effectively rallying hawkish laborers as well as Middle Americans and other key constituencies to the president's position, these patriotic appeals helped cement the domestic divisions engendered by the Vietnam War. Linking his 1968 election to Lyndon Johnson's failures to justify continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Nixon prioritized undermining the antiwar movement and mobilizing his supporters rather than attempting to convince the country to support the Vietnam War on its merits. Aides therefore worked to frame domestic opponents as un-American in an effort to delegitimize the antiwar movement as well as dissent more broadly. Even as they worked to silence domestic critics, the president and his staff sought to encourage his supporters to become more vocal. Although domestic frustration with the Vietnam War increased throughout Nixon's presidency, many citizens not yet aligned on either side of the domestic debate were fiercely loyal to their country as they perceived it.

Therefore, administration promotion of nationalist patriotism helped to convince many citizens that supporting Nixon was the best way to ensure a successful end to the

Vietnam War. Emphasizing nationalist patriotism, aides and the president solidified the appeal of the Silent Majority and “temporarily won the battle for public opinion” by late 1970.¹² And as the mid-term and presidential elections drew near, White House officials moved from specific promotion of Nixon’s Vietnam policies to a broader promotion of the president so as to minimize the war as a domestic issue. White House cultivation of the Silent Majority similarly transitioned to more electorally focused attempts to create a New Majority by building ties to “Middle America” and the labor movement.¹³

Unfortunately for the administration, this decision effectively diluted the appeal of the Silent Majority and efforts to create a political realignment on the back of the New Majority ultimately failed in the long term although they played a significant role in securing Nixon’s 1972 landslide reelection.¹⁴

Although not a primary goal, administration efforts to rally domestic support for the Vietnam War effectively divided the nation and politicized both the flag and patriotism. Beyond rallying domestic support for Vietnam and his policies, Nixon’s repeated invocations of patriotism and his ostentatious embrace of the flag further exacerbated domestic tensions over patriotism and national identity. By branding his opponents and critics as un-American, Nixon ensured that domestic debates over

¹² Melvin Small, *Johnson, Nixon, and the Doves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 163.

¹³ Jefferson Cowie, “Nixon’s Class Struggle: Romancing the New Right Worker, 1969-1973,” *Labor History* 43, no. 3 (2002): 257–283; Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 125–66; Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Edmund F. Wehrle, “‘No More Pressing Task than Organization in Southeast Asia’: The AFL–CIO Approaches the Vietnam War, 1947–64,” *Labor History* 42, no. 3 (2001): 277–295; Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 160–66.

¹⁴ Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority*.

Vietnam reached beyond the conflict and attempted to make patriotism contingent upon support for his policies. Aided by the frustrated disillusionment of antiwar activists, Nixon's patriotic appeals effectively politicized the flag. Even so, partisan patriotic appeals declined following Nixon's resignation. Ford, likely hoping to prevent comparisons to Nixon, did not wear a flag pin, and there was a brief decline in overtly partisan patriotism until President Ronald Reagan's effective use of flag imagery in his 1980 and 1984 campaigns.¹⁵ Further drawing the flag back into political debates, the 1984 conviction of Gregory Lee Johnson for the burning of an American flag as part of a Revolutionary Communist Party protest triggered a resurgence of patriotic anxiety and domestic debates over flag-burning.¹⁶ The resulting series of Congressional debates over flag-burning legislation followed a similar pattern as the domestic debates encouraged by Nixon and his aides during the Vietnam War.¹⁷

Even the seemingly apolitical embrace of the flag in the days following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks soon echoed earlier efforts to use the flag to separate "them" from "us." As Americans displayed flags purchased from the corner store, gas stations, bookstores, and even Tiffany's, those less prepared scrambled to find some way of showing their solidarity – or at least of silencing their neighbor's implicit critiques. Even as former antiwar activist Todd Gitlin embraced the flag now hanging off his New

¹⁵ Woden Teachout, *Capture the Flag: A Political History of American Patriotism* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 201–02.

¹⁶ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory: The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 195–226; Robert Justin Goldstein, *Burning the Flag: The Great 1989-1990 American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996); Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 202–05.

¹⁷ Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory*, 195–226; Goldstein, *Burning the Flag*.

York apartment's balcony, the novelist David Foster Wallace was scouring Bloomington, Indiana increasingly desperate to find a flag.¹⁸ Remembering the sudden proliferation of flags in the days following what he describes as "the Horror," Wallace describes "a weird accretive pressure to have a flag out. If the purpose of a flag is to make a statement, it seems like at a certain point of density of flags you're making more of a statement if you *don't* have a flag out."¹⁹ Although unsure of what, exactly, this statement would be, the growing pressure to display a flag demonstrates the effectiveness of Nixon's efforts to politicize the flag in support of his Vietnam policies. While Gitlin proudly unfurled his own flag in 2001 and Wallace eventually followed the advice of a friendly Pakistani convenience store owner to use "construction paper and 'magical markers'" to make his own, the banner was soon reclaimed by pro-war forces in the domestic debate over the proper response to the attacks.²⁰ And so it stands today: the flag is firmly the property of Nixon's Silent Majority, a way "to show we're Americans and we're not going to bow down to nobody" rather than a symbol representing the full range of U.S. opinions and citizens.²¹

¹⁸ Teachout, *Capture the Flag*, 208; David Foster Wallace, "The View from Mrs. Thompson's," in *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (New York: Little, Brown, 2005), 128–140.

¹⁹ Wallace, "The View from Mrs. Thompson's," 130.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 131–32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 130n.

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