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The Whistles of George Wallace: Gender and Emotions in the 1968 Presidential Campaign

Maarten Zwiers

- 1 Few had foreseen it: Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election. The Republican establishment shuddered during the primaries, but then quickly fell in line behind its new leader. The rise to power of Trump – or more specifically, his political style – had been long in the making, despite the disbelief that gripped the country after Election Day. Since the 1960s, the GOP crafted a political message catering to the conservative white vote set loose by the civil rights revolution. This message was partly based on the idea of middle-class respectability. But beneath the thin veneer of this suburban American Dream, a much darker vision lurked: a hyper-masculine and racist vision finally exposed by the presidency of Donald Trump. His rhetoric about immigrants (“bad hombres” and “rapists”), women (“grab them by the pussy”), and Washington politics (“drain the swamp”) harken back to the ambitions of George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama who ran for the presidency in 1968.¹ Republicans appropriated, fine-tuned, and whitewashed his message in the following decades, hoping that people would eventually forget one of their main sources of inspiration. But with Donald Trump in the White House, it is hard to deny how a Wallaceite agenda has increasingly determined the course of the Republican Party.
- 2 George Wallace's impact on Republican politics has been a topic of debate amongst historians. Wallace's foremost biographer, Dan Carter, connects the Alabama governor's race baiting with the racialized program of the GOP. Republicans started accommodating segregationist white southerners once their old party, the Democrats, gave in to demands of the civil rights movement. Carter made this argument most explicitly in his slim volume *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, in which he draws a direct line between Wallace's “politics of anger” and the Republican agenda of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Newt Gingrich, the Republican Speaker of the House between 1995 and 1999.² A group of younger scholars challenged Carter's race-based approach, pointing out the similarities

between racial sentiments in the North and South and thus deconstructing the idea of southern exceptionalism. Their thesis rests on the fact that postwar economic development led to increased suburbanization in the South. Attitudes in southern suburbia turned out to be not that different from suburbs in the North and West; its inhabitants all shared a kindred class ideology. In his book *The Silent Majority*, historian Matthew Lassiter explained how a racially charged “Southern Strategy” was disastrous for southern Republicans running in the 1970 midterm elections.³ Political scientists Byron Shafer and Richard Johnston made a similar argument in their book *The End of Southern Exceptionalism*. They concluded that “the engine of partisan change in the postwar South was, first and foremost, economic development and an associated politics of social class.”⁴ Economic diversification and the emergence of a southern middle class explain Republican success in the region, and suburban values in the South did not differ much from suburban values in the North.

- 3 A factor that is often overlooked in efforts to explain partisan change in the South (and the development of modern conservatism in the United States more broadly) is gender, especially a gendered political style that plays on voters’ emotions. In *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, political scientists Earl Black and Merle Black devote some attention to gender, pointing out how a majority of southern white men (57 percent) and a plurality of southern white women (49 percent) can be considered core Republicans. They also concluded that besides race, gender and religion in fact trumped economic class in separating core Republicans from core Democrats in the post-Jim Crow South.⁵ Black and Black examined voting patterns, however, and did not pay much attention to the political style that attracted these voters. Other scholars have studied grassroots organizations led by women, for instance groups that fought school integration or supported Barry Goldwater’s 1964 presidential campaign.⁶ Kari Frederickson demonstrated how familial metaphors (in particular an “explosive language of sex and domesticity”) functioned in the Dixiecrat campaign of 1948.⁷ Historian Steve Estes takes a comparable approach in his examination of Citizens’ Council rhetoric, a discourse influenced by masculine ideas about honor, violence, and social control.⁸ Analyses that foreground gender as a crucial cultural factor in segregationist opposition, partisan change, and the general appeal of conservative populism remain rather sparse however, despite their strong explanatory power. “Historians are familiar with the political narrative of the modern South,” Frederickson noted, “but few have examined the cultural dimensions of political resistance and change during this tumultuous period.”⁹
- 4 This article incorporates gender as an analytical tool to examine the development of modern conservatism in the United States from an intersectional perspective.¹⁰ It suggests to move beyond the race/class binary and include gender (and sexuality) to understand the interlocking mechanisms that gave rise to a new style of conservative politics. Although intersectionality originated as a paradigm to study interdependent systems of oppression and discrimination especially women of color encounter, some scholars have recently proposed to extend its theoretical boundaries. “Framing intersectionality as only about women of color gives masculinity, whiteness, and maleness an intersectional pass,” legal scholar Devon Carbado argued.¹¹ The following text builds on Carbado’s insights and offers an intersectional analysis of a demographic that was heavily invested in the dominant power structures of U.S. society: the voters who supported George Wallace and Richard Nixon in the 1968 election. These voters felt threatened in their race, class, and gender status by groups who became more vocal in

their opposition to the heteropatriarchal system during the 1960s. A strong sense of white victimhood provided fertile ground for a recalibration of American conservatism.

- 5 The 1968 presidential campaign thus constituted a pivotal moment in the rise of a more authoritarian form of conservative politics. George Wallace and Richard Nixon ripped the New Deal coalition of the Democratic Party apart that year, with a masculine message of law and order at home and peace with honor in Southeast Asia. It was a message that combined race and class issues in a gendered discourse that defended traditionalism and white privilege. Such language evoked an emotional response from working- and middle-class whites (the so-called Silent Majority) who longed for a restoration of an orderly society based on “family values” and a return to power for the United States on the world stage.¹² Feelings of victimization and emasculation resulted in a yearning for “tough” leaders who would crack down on civil rights radicals, unruly student protesters, feminist activists, and North-Vietnamese guerrillas. As the establishment candidate, Democrat Hubert Humphrey had trouble convincing voters he could play such a role. As an outsider, Wallace was in an ideal position to attack Washington politics represented by Humphrey. Nixon had been out of the political limelight for almost six years, after his disastrous campaign for the governorship of California in 1962. In 1968, people remembered him as the hard-boiled communist hunter on the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and as Dwight Eisenhower’s vice-president. For the Silent Majority, the suburban American Dream reached its peak during the Eisenhower years. Nixon but especially Wallace practiced a political style that fed on feelings of anger, fear, and anxiety. This style was extremely powerful in attracting voters who felt they were losing control over their lives and over the destiny of their country.¹³
- 6 Historians have become increasingly interested in the role of emotions in politics, specifically how they relate to gender.¹⁴ At the same time, political scientists have begun to pay more attention to populism, studying it for instance as a thin-centered ideology dividing “the pure people” from a “corrupt elite” or as a specific political style.¹⁵ This article combines insights from gender studies, political science, and the history of emotions to explain George Wallace’s appeal in the 1968 presidential election. Wallace’s populist campaign set the stage for an emotional style of conservative politics that remains effective until this day. A focus on gender and emotions may not only offer an intersectional synthesis between the race- and class-based approaches that have dominated historiography, but it also gives an explanation for the failure of liberal politicians to find an effective response to populist conservatism – a style drenched in toxic masculinity that is now a prominent feature of political cultures across the globe.¹⁶ George Wallace was one of its most important historical agents in the United States. During the 1960s he channeled it to the national level, where it was subsequently picked up by elements within the conservative movement. As such, the whistles of Wallace can still be heard in contemporary U.S. politics – a powerful weapon in the hands of reactionary demagogues and a formidable barrier to progressive change.

1. Whistling Dixie: White Victimization and the Southern Heartland

- 7 George Wallace’s first real claim to national fame came in June 1963, when he orchestrated his Stand in the Schoolhouse Door at the University of Alabama. A few months before, in his inaugural address as governor, he had promised the white people of

his state that segregation would last forever. When a federal district court ordered the flagship school of Alabama to desegregate that summer, Wallace traveled to Tuscaloosa to prevent the registration of two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood. It was a quixotic effort from the start; the Department of Justice had dispatched Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and a contingent of federal marshals to oversee the admission process. When President Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard, Wallace finally had to give up his delaying action. Although the governor was forced to withdraw, he emerged victorious from this confrontation with federal power. In the first place, he had kept his promise to the Alabama people he would fight for segregation, even against great odds. Secondly, the stand gave him the opportunity to reframe his segregationist message into an all-American defense of constitutional values. According to Wallace, the presence of federal officers on the campus of the University of Alabama offered a

frightful example of the oppression of the rights, privileges and sovereignty of this State by officers of the Federal Government. This intrusion results solely from force, or threat of force, undignified by any reasonable application of the principle of law, reason and justice.¹⁷

- 8 Such rhetoric struck a chord outside the Jim Crow South. In contrast with the outright segregationist content of his inaugural address, Wallace's speech at the University of Alabama almost sounded dignified, although the underlying objectives of his actions were pretty clear: the denial of black students to enroll in the school. In the week following the Stand in the Schoolhouse Door, Wallace received more than 100,000 telegrams and letters congratulating the governor for his vindication (or interpretation) of constitutional principles. Wallace's attempt to stop Katzenbach and his marshals had been broadcast on national television, widening the range of his message. Over fifty percent of the correspondence he received after his stand came from outside the region and 95 percent of it was positive about the governor's performance in Tuscaloosa. Wallace began to realize the appeal of his words outside the South. "They all *hate* black people, all of them. They're all *afraid*, all of them," he discovered. "Great God! That's it! They're all Southern! The whole United States is Southern!"¹⁸ These feelings of hate and fear would be central to the national campaigns George Wallace began to wage after 1963.
- 9 Wallace's forays into the North began in earnest in 1964, when he participated in a few presidential primaries of the Democratic Party. He did surprisingly well in Wisconsin and Indiana, where he capitalized on the growing unrest among blue-collar and middle-class whites disturbed by the civil rights revolution. "Clearly the phenomenon of George Wallace was a force to reckon with in an era of sometimes violent social change," said Indiana Governor Matthew Welsh, who campaigned against Wallace as a substitute for Lyndon Johnson. "In the Milwaukee suburbs and the Calumet steel towns, where white Americans felt threatened by blacks, there was voter reprisal."¹⁹ Wallace did not campaign on an openly racist platform. He instead touted a small government program opposed to federal interference in state and local matters – the same ideas he had articulated when he tried to prevent the racial integration of the University of Alabama a year earlier. The pending Civil Rights Act served as his main target. But instead of denouncing its anti-segregationist nature, Wallace preferred to describe it as a step towards totalitarianism engineered by Washington bureaucrats hungry for power. He used southern humor to parry uncomfortable questions at rallies. His audiences greeted such responses with applause and laughter.²⁰ Wallace's states' rights agenda and his

political style created “emotional turmoil” in a state that was far removed from the civil rights battles then happening in the Deep South.²¹

- 10 The Welsh campaign encountered similar problems Hubert Humphrey had to deal with in 1968, when Nixon and Wallace confronted him with challenges from the right. Like Humphrey, Welsh ran as the establishment candidate. He introduced a significant tax increase during his administration (which did not enhance his popularity) and he was also an outspoken civil rights supporter. Welsh rightly feared Wallace would easily win the state Democratic primary without significant opposition, which was the reason why he entered the race. The Indiana governor made sure to inform voters he was not campaigning for personal glory, however. His slogan was “Clear The Way for LBJ. Vote for Welsh the 5th of May,” indicating he was supportive of continuity in federal politics. In order to defeat Wallace, Welsh mobilized the Democratic Party machine in Indiana and consulted with members of its congressional delegation. The governor feared a successful Wallace campaign “would revive and give credence to a racist philosophy my administration had worked very hard to defuse.”²² With Wallace barnstorming through the state, it would be hard to suppress “the latent bigotry held in check by the new social pressure for equality among all people.” For Welsh, the reputation of Indiana (and the embarrassment a Wallace victory would cause) seemed to be foremost on his mind.²³ Wallace threatened to crack the veneer of precarious racial progress that covered a long history of structural racism in the North.
- 11 George Wallace’s strong showing in Wisconsin, Indiana, and the border state of Maryland indicated the appeal of his politics outside the Jim Crow South. How can this popularity be explained? Wallace expressed the anxiety and anger many white Americans felt about civil rights concessions by the federal government, especially how it threatened their white privilege. Such emotions were not limited to working-class whites; political scientist Michael Rogin discovered how “anti-Negro feeling is even more salient in the urban middle class.” Suburbanites in Wisconsin had “sought to create homogeneous communities; the potential presence of Negroes terrifies them, as they perceive a threat both to property values and life styles.”²⁴ The Civil Rights Act (then under discussion in the U.S. Senate) not only destroyed the legal basis for segregation in the South, but also opened the door for challenges to white privilege in the North. For many years, the federal government had been actively involved in making the suburban American Dream a reality for middle- and upper-class whites by subsidizing the development of suburbs and highways and providing them with low-interest mortgages through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The results of these policies were twofold: despite massive government assistance, whites thought they had achieved their place in suburban America on the basis of hard work alone, a false sense of meritocracy. Secondly, once the federal government attempted to alter some of its racialized policies (for instance through the Civil Rights Act and later the Fair Housing Act), white suburbanites felt victimized by the Washington bureaucracy without realizing how it had helped them achieve their privileged position.²⁵
- 12 As a *deus ex machina*, George Wallace appeared on the national scene in the early sixties to give an unadulterated voice to feelings of anger and fear felt by whites in the North and South. As Welsh observed, in the North these feelings were more suppressed, because of a perceived general support for the fight against racism. Wallace broke this political correctness with language that was not outright racist, but definitely had a racialized undertone. He was saying what many white suburbanites were feeling: resentment

towards Washington for interfering in their lives. Wallace thus formed a bridge between southern and northern whites angry with the federal government. “If white southerners felt threatened by civil rights struggles prior to 1964, that threat mostly fostered fear, discomfort, and anxiety,” historian Jason Sokol observed.²⁶ Such emotions were not that different from the feelings a significant number of whites in the North had. Instead of beneficiaries from federal policy, these groups began to regard themselves as victims. They also began to look at the South in a different light: no longer as a dark and gothic bastion of American apartheid, but as a region victimized by a government eager to please minorities.

- 13 Federal support for minority rights made the “forgotten Americans” yearn for a society that appeared to be vanishing: a community based on traditionalism and white control. According to political scientist Paul Taggart, this idea of a lost “heartland” is central to (the appeal of) populist politics. “It assumes or asserts that there was a good life before the corruptions and distortions of the present,” Taggart explains. He uses the term “heartland” because “heartlands are something that is *felt* rather than reasoned, and something that is shrouded in imprecision.”²⁷ Southern segregationists often described their region as the actual heartland of Americanism, a locally controlled polity with respect for time-honored customs and under constant attack from outside forces, be it the central government, civil rights radicals, or other “un-American” elements, including communist agents. Such an idealistic Jeffersonian vision of the South was not very credible as long as it was used to defend the worst excesses of Jim Crow. However, once federal legislation dismantled institutionalized segregation, this vision became much more palatable in other parts of the country, especially when civil rights activists began to intensify their protests outside the South. Wallace’s remarkable performance in the 1964 primaries already signaled the latent presence of what Rogin described as “middle-class authoritarianism” and the potential of a right-wing populist message based on a heartland with typically southern values.²⁸ “A lot of the people attracted to George Wallace are just people who think America has passed them by, leaving them confused, screwed-up and unhappy,” journalist Pete Hamill remarked in 1968, “they want to go back.”²⁹ Governor Wallace, who defiantly stood up against federal power in 1963, promised a resurrection of the heartland these voters were longing for.

2. Dog Whistles from the Deep South: Wallace and the Advent of American Authoritarianism

- 14 The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 dealt a fatal blow to the laws and many of the customs that upheld segregation, clearing the way for a “northern” revamping of the region. The South finally appeared to be ready to move into the American mainstream. But what defined this mainstream? With Jim Crow gone, it suddenly became clear the North was not without sin either – a fact foreshadowed by Wallace’s success in the 1964 primaries. The North “was no longer, and perhaps never had been, quite the picture of health it had always seemed,” famed southern historian James Cobb pointed out. The angry campaigns against racial integration that happened in northern states during the late 1960s “made it all too apparent that white racism was hardly confined to white southerners.”³⁰ By 1968, a general apprehension about the direction of the country took hold in Middle America. This process had been going on for some time: according to historian James Patterson, the year 1965 served as the hinge for

the sixties. The early 1960s had much more in common with the consensus climate of the Eisenhower years, Patterson claimed. The tumultuous change we now associate with “the Sixties” began in 1965, with the military escalation in Vietnam, the riots in Watts, the fracturing (and radicalization) of the civil rights movement, and cultural transformations that led to increased polarization in U.S. society. Three years later, these developments had reached a boiling point.³¹ The simultaneous politicization of evangelical religion increased public awareness of traditional values and bolstered opposition to progressivism.³² The political climate was thus favorable to a southern populist like George Wallace: the country seemed to be spinning out of control, creating anxiety among a significant number of voters.

- 15 In October 1968 *Time* magazine reported that 81 percent “of the public believe that law enforcement has broken down. Even more believe that a ‘strong’ President can do something about it.”³³ Since the Stand in the Schoolhouse Door, Wallace had been crafting an image of himself as a tough leader who dared to stand up to federal intrusion, and as a champion of police power. In 1968, this image made him popular in the North. At campaign stops in Illinois and Missouri he told cheering crowds how an Alabama-style police state might be the solution to the nation’s law and order problem. “If they [the police] could run this country for about two years... they’d straighten it out,” he shouted.³⁴ Hostility to government interference and enthusiasm for law enforcement totalitarianism seems contradictory, but for Wallace supporters they were in fact complementary; what these voters wanted was an end to the lawlessness and permissiveness they associated with Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. The masculine message and performance of George Wallace gave Americans estranged from establishment politics hope to reclaim control over their lives. Such sentiments (being in control and resisting the domination of others) define manhood in the Western world and especially in the United States.³⁵ Right-wing populists like Wallace use a masculine posture to present themselves as “strong male leaders who are vigorous in nature, plain-spoken and authoritarian in character and style,” social scientist Susi Meret noted. These politicians offer seemingly simple answers “to the growing feelings of dispossession, insecurity and distrust that frequently emerge in times of crisis.”³⁶ In short, anxious voters distressed by rapid social change turn to strong masculine leaders who promise a restoration of control and order.
- 16 The problem for Hubert Humphrey was his complete identification with the Johnson administration and its policies at home and abroad. He initially seemed reluctant to challenge LBJ’s decisions, especially with regard to U.S. military conduct in Vietnam. “We don’t need another Aaron Burr in this Republic,” Humphrey told reporters in July 1968, referring to Thomas Jefferson’s troublesome vice president. “Of course I want to look to the future – on everything... But that doesn’t mean I want to repudiate the past. I want to start with what we got, in every area, and build on it.” Such statements provoked the ire of antiwar protesters, who brought picket signs to Humphrey rallies saying: “Hubert Has A Military-Industrial Complex.”³⁷ Blue-collar and middle-class voters, anguished about social unrest and dissatisfied with Great Society programs geared towards minorities and the poor, turned to Wallace or Republican candidate Richard Nixon, who campaigned on a more toned-down program of states’ rights and law and order. The riots that accompanied the Democratic National Convention in Chicago only exacerbated the image many Americans had of Humphrey and his party: wherever the Democrats went, chaos erupted. A telephone poll indicated approval of the harsh police response against the

demonstrators. Only 21.3 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “Chicago Police and National Guardsmen are using excessive force in suppressing these demonstrations,” while almost 59 percent disagreed.³⁸

- 17 Calls for small government and stronger law enforcement can be interpreted as coded race words. GOP strategist Lee Atwater gave a striking description of these so-called dog whistles in an interview that addressed the 1968 campaign. “You start out in 1954 by saying ‘Nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can’t say ‘nigger’ – that hurts you. Backfires,” Atwater explained. “So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff.”³⁹ Wallace supporters had little trouble decoding the dog whistles of their champion. “Y’all know about law and order,” one of them said. “It’s spelled n-i-g-g-e-r-s.”⁴⁰ Yet racial appeals alone do not explain the popularity of Wallace. Republican Congresswoman Catherine May of Washington for instance wondered why so many people in her state – according to her, a liberal state without profound racial problems – had Wallace stickers on their cars. Racism undoubtedly formed the core of Wallace’s attraction; a millwright and Wallace supporter working at Ford’s Rouge factory near Detroit unabashedly declared: “I guess I’m what you might call a racist.”⁴¹ But also middle-class whites with a decent income and education had warm feelings for the governor, because he promised a return of traditional American values, which implied a restoration of white control. At the same time, Wallace voters did not just oppose black militancy, but all sorts of protests against the dominant culture. A blue-collar suburbanite from Los Angeles said: “punks, the queers, the demonstrators and the hippies – we’re going to put them on a barge and ship ’em off to China. Or better, sink it.” He believed Wallace would be elected president.⁴² Working-class parents who had saved money for years to put their children through college felt a similar resentment towards affluent students who rebelled against a “rotten system.” They considered student activists “spoiled brats, profane, obnoxious, unwashed, promiscuous, to whom everything was offered and from whom nothing has been demanded.”⁴³ Not just government support for minorities, but also entitled youth and establishment politicians aroused the ire of Middle America and of Wallace voters in particular.⁴⁴
- 18 The American Independent Party (AIP) of George Wallace played on such outrage and promised a solution to the “riots, minority group rebellions, domestic disorders, student protests, spiraling living costs, soaring interest rates, a frightening increase in the crime rate, war abroad and loss of personal liberty at home.” Although racial matters were important for the AIP, it was not a single-issue party. Its platform gave hope to white Americans who felt ignored by Republicans and Democrats. A vote for Wallace would result in a return of the United States to “its accustomed and deserved position of leadership among the community of nations” and “relief from the continued turmoil, frustration, and confusion” caused by “the fearful and inept leadership of our national political parties.”⁴⁵ Before formulating policy proposals, the AIP platform first described the feelings (of fear, frustration, and confusion) experienced by its target audience. George Wallace articulated these feelings again in one of his final campaign speeches, delivered on October 24, 1968, in a sold-out Madison Square Garden. He also pledged to give the “average man on the street” control back over his life. “We are going to turn back to you, the people of the states, the right to control our domestic institutions,” Wallace declared.⁴⁶ George Wallace and the AIP thus offered strong leadership in dealing with social problems and foreign entanglements that caused the negative emotional state of Middle America.

- 19 Besides the content of Wallace's message, his style and performance also stirred the emotions of audiences at AIP rallies. Wallace biographer Dan Carter characterized it as "a kind of soft-porn racism in which fear and hatred could be mobilized without mentioning race itself."⁴⁷ The huge crowd at Madison Square Garden, swept up by roaring renditions of "Dixie" and "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy," responded passionately whenever their leader attacked the federal government, intellectuals, or left-wing hecklers who had managed to enter the hall. In the meantime, Wallace bumped up and down the stage, switching effortlessly between angry rhetoric and crude jokes meant to emasculate his opponents. "That's alright," he told a longhaired protester. "That's alright honey – that's right sweetie-pie – oh, that's a he. I thought you were a she."⁴⁸ Gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson described Wallace rallies like the one in Madison Square Garden as a combination between a religious revival and a political "Janis Joplin Concert."⁴⁹ Supporters sometimes used biblical language to laud the Alabama governor. An admirer from the industrial heartland of Pennsylvania even claimed, "Wallace is a new Messiah!"⁵⁰
- 20 Wallace's showmanship contrasted sharply with the dour speeches of Richard Nixon, whose campaign staff called his appearances "drills."⁵¹ Yet in the end, Nixon narrowly beat Humphrey in the race for the presidency. During the final weeks of the campaign, the Democratic candidate had made an impressive comeback. In a speech in Salt Lake City at the end of September, he declared his independence from the Johnson administration by saying he would consider a bombing halt of North Vietnam if it offered a reasonable chance for peace. The labor unions eventually also began to campaign more actively for Humphrey in order to stop the "Wallace infection."⁵² Many blue-collar voters returned to the Democratic Party in November, while suburbanites often chose for the lite version of law and order presented by Richard Nixon.⁵³ George Wallace had nonetheless waged a formidable campaign, winning 13.5 percent of the national vote and 46 ballots in the Electoral College. Moreover, with Nixon in the White House, at least parts of his Deep South program reached the highest levels of the federal government. According to Hubert Humphrey, a "perfumed, deodorized" version of Wallace had won the presidential election of 1968.⁵⁴ Although Nixon initially belied Humphrey's disparaging description (he advocated a guaranteed minimum income for poor families and endorsed a bill lifting federal compulsory minimum sentences for the sale and possession of drugs), a merciless attitude towards welfare and crime eventually took hold during the 1970s and 1980s. Gendered and racialized notions about poverty and criminal behavior discredited "maternalist social welfare programs." Its proponents demanded tough policies that disproportionately targeted minorities and simultaneously buttressed the power of dominant groups in U.S. society.⁵⁵ In the long run, such masculinist and racist visions of law and order – visions that constituted the core of the Wallace campaign – were implemented throughout the nation.

Conclusion

- 21 In the spring of 2016, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild attended a Trump rally in New Orleans, Louisiana. Two to three thousand people were waiting in the Lakefront Airport hangar, carrying placards that said "TRUMP: MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" or "SILENT MAJORITY STANDS WITH TRUMP!" Cheers broke out when the candidate climbed the stage. The crowd kept cheering as Trump delivered the punch lines of his stump speech. "Our country is going to hell," he yelled. "But we're going to make it great again!" The

audience was primarily white. An older Trump admirer showed a sign with the words “KKK FOR TRUMP.” During previous rallies, Trump had called protesters “bad, bad people... you hear that weak voice out there? That’s a protestor... They aren’t protestors. I call them disruptors.” Sometimes he even asked for violent retribution against hecklers, instructing his supporters to knock “the crap out of him, would you?” Such aggressive and masculine rhetoric proved to be very effective. Trump beat Texas evangelical Ted Cruz in the Louisiana primary and eventually won the election for president of the United States.⁵⁶

- 22 In many ways, Donald Trump’s presidential campaign resembled George Wallace’s attempt to become president in 1968. Hochschild described Trump as an “emotions candidate,” whose speeches evoked “dominance, bravado, clarity, national pride, and personal uplift,” thus inspiring “an emotional transformation.” Angry and distraught Americans who went to his rallies no longer felt abandoned, but thought they could reclaim control over their lives. Negative sentiments had been transformed into positive emotions; they were no longer strangers in their own land.⁵⁷ Hochschild developed a so-called “deep story” to uncover the feelings of her conservative respondents. This deep story revolves around average white Americans (Christian, heterosexual, monogamous, predominantly male) standing in line to climb a hill and reach the American Dream. But then people of color, women, and refugees start cutting in line, often with the assistance of the federal government; Barack Obama is helping them. Hochschild’s respondents strongly identified with the white male Americans in the deep story.⁵⁸ Their sense of betrayal and abandonment by the political establishment led to desperation, nostalgia for the past, and a vote for Donald Trump.
- 23 Similar feelings characterized the people who voted (or who contemplated voting) for George Wallace. His appeal was based on “the ethos of the locker room,” a masculine code that attracted young white males (between eighteen and thirty-five years old) to the AIP.⁵⁹ But white women opposed to busing were enamored with the Alabama governor as well. After all, he voiced “the unease of the housewife who does not want to see her child bussed to an integrated school.”⁶⁰ The National Action Group (NAG), an anti-busing organization founded by women in the Detroit suburb of Pontiac, invited Wallace as keynote speaker and he also traveled to South Boston to proclaim his opposition to busing there, an indication of his nationwide appeal by the early 1970s.⁶¹ Although Wallace did not win in 1968 and his presidential aspirations were cut short by an assassin’s bullet in 1972, the Republican Party continued to nurture his style and program, while the Democrats slowly turned away from its blue-collar and lower middle-class base. The consequence of these decisions on the right and left was the development of a very volatile political climate in which a significant number of white voters began to feel estranged and under threat – a climate comparable to the mid- and late 1960s. Back then, labor unions were still strong enough to convince their members to vote for the Democratic candidate. But in 2016, the old industrial heartland of the United States (and a former Democratic stronghold) backed Donald Trump, who also had substantial support in the suburbs.⁶²
- 24 Trump’s victory was the result of long-term structural developments in U.S. society and its economy. The demise of the heavy industry sector and the concomitant outsourcing of blue-collar jobs that started in the 1970s left many working-class Americans without any perspective. The global flow of work and people brought other challenges too; the influx of migrants from across the world (but especially from Latin America) made the United

States a more diverse country, but it also caused anxiety among Americans who identified with the Silent Majority. With jobs going out and immigrants coming in, they felt that their idea of America was disappearing – that they were losing control. The Republican Party, taking stock of Wallace’s successful politics of rage, continued to encourage such feelings, while the Democrats embarked on a more neoliberal course after the disastrous 1972 campaign of George McGovern. These political responses to social change generated potential for a populist reaction, either from the left or the right. For decades, Democrats managed to hold on to their “blue wall” states in the Rust Belt – Bill Clinton on the basis of a progressive economic platform (that was quickly toned down once he had won the White House) and Barack Obama with a grassroots coalition after the financial crisis of 2007-2008.⁶³ But the socially progressive character of the Obama administration and the fact that he was the first black president also created resentment, evidenced by an explosive growth of right-wing militia groups since his election.⁶⁴ These latent white supremacist sentiments – articulated by George Wallace, cultivated by the Republicans, and ignored or disparaged by the Democrats – finally burst into the open in 2016, when the establishment of both parties was caught unawares by a phenomenon they had created: a *déjà vu* of the 1968 campaign, but this time, the demagogue won. The presidential elections of 1968 and 2016 indicate how right-wing populism based on authoritarianism and toxic masculinity can effectively arouse lurking feelings of alienation, anger, anxiety, and fear. As such, they demonstrate the remarkable power of gender and emotions in political campaigns.

25 **Proper names:**

Lee Atwater, Aaron Burr, Bill Clinton, Ted Cruz, Dwight Eisenhower, Newt Gingrich, Barry Goldwater, Pete Hamill, James Hood, Hubert Humphrey, Thomas Jefferson, Lyndon B. Johnson, Nicholas Katzenbach, John F. Kennedy, Vivian Malone, Catherine May, George McGovern, Richard Nixon, Barack Obama, Ronald Reagan, Michael Rogin, Hunter S. Thompson, Donald Trump, George Wallace, Matthew Welsh.

NOTES

1. “From Mexican Rapists to Bad Hombres, the Trump Campaign in Two Moments,” *Washington Post*, October 20, 2016, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://wapo.st/2MPcwna>; “Trump Calls to ‘Drain the Swamp’ of Washington,” *USA Today*, October 18, 2016, accessed September 6, 2018, <https://usat.ly/2CAjrw7>. George Corley Wallace (1919-1998) was governor of Alabama from 1963 till 1967, from 1971 till 1979, and from 1983 till 1987. Wallace was a populist who toned down his segregationist message in the 1970s. He participated in the Democratic presidential primaries of 1964, 1972, and 1976. In 1968, Wallace ran as a third-party candidate for the presidency. He was shot in 1972 at a rally in Maryland, paralyzing him from the waist down and ending a very successful primary campaign.

2. See Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995) and *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, The Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (2nd ed., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

3. Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), especially chapter 10. For a short description of this newer scholarship, see Patricia Cohen, "Interpreting Some Overlooked Stories From the South," *New York Times*, May 1, 2007. For a critical discussion of their work, see Glenn Feldman, review of *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, *Journal of Southern History* 77, no. 3 (August 2011): 783-786.
4. Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2.
5. Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 251, 373. On page 373 they write: "Low-income religious whites, for instance, were almost as pro-Republican as high-income secular white men." Both Carter and Shafer and Johnston also began to underscore the importance of religion in understanding southern political culture. See their contributions in Angie Maxwell and Todd G. Shields, *Unlocking V.O. Key Jr.: Southern Politics for the Twenty-First Century* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011).
6. See for instance Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) and Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 24-25.
7. Kari Frederickson, "'As a Man, I Am Interested in States' Rights': Gender, Race, and the Family in the Dixiecrat Party, 1948-1950," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 261.
8. Steve Estes, "A Question of Honor: Masculinity and Massive Resistance to Integration," in *White Masculinity in the Recent South*, ed. Trent Watts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 69, EBSCO Academic Collection.
9. Frederickson, "'As a Man, I Am Interested in States' Rights,'" 261. A more recent study that "positions Jim Crow as a system of cultural exchange and power" is Stephen A. Berry, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 4. Gender also remains an understudied category in the research on populism. See Niels Spierings et. al., "Gender and Populist Radical-Right Politics: An Introduction," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49, nos. 1-2 (2015): 4, 5-6.
10. A central element of intersectionality theory "is the idea that all of us have multiple identities – race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on – and these multiple social identities intersect in ways that shape the form and extent of discrimination we experience." See Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati, *Acting White? Rethinking Race in "Post-Racial" America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 69.
11. Devon W. Carbado, "Colorblind Intersectionality," *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013): 841. On the same page Carbado concluded: "The point of departure for this essay was the idea that many scholars frame intersectionality more narrowly than is theoretically necessary... My hope is that this engagement will end some of the abstract debates about what intersectionality can and cannot do and encourage more scholars to push the theoretical boundaries of intersectionality rather than disciplining and policing them."
12. Richard Nixon popularized the term "Silent Majority" on November 3, 1969, in a speech on the Vietnam War.
13. Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), xii.
14. A recent example of this "emotional turn" scholarship in political history is Frank Costigliola, "'I React Intensely to Everything': Russia and the Frustrated Emotions of George F. Kennan, 1933-1958," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 4 (March 2016): 1075-1106. See also Barbara Keys, "Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman," *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 4 (September 2011): 587-609.

15. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5-6; Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 25-37. EBSCO Academic Collection.
16. Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2017), 8, 75-76. Toxic masculinity can be described as “the harmful impact of masculinities that emphasize dominance, the use of violence to solve problems, and the suppression of emphatic emotions, like sadness, fear and compassion.” Kyle C. Ashlee et. al., “Fostering Critical Awareness of Masculinity around the World,” in *Global Agenda for Social Justice*, ed. Glenn W. Muschert et. al. (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), 1: 73.
17. E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation’s Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 256; “Statement and Proclamation by Governor George C. Wallace, University of Alabama, June 11, 1963,” Alabama Department of Archives and History, accessed August 18, 2018, http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/schooldoor.html.
18. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 6. Emphasis mine.
19. Matthew E. Welsh, “Civil Rights and the Primary Election of 1964 in Indiana: The Wallace Challenge,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 75, no. 1 (March 1979): 27. President Johnson was already sure of the nomination and did not participate in the Indiana primary.
20. Ibid., 17, 27. For the use of humor in politics, see for example Chris Smith and Ben Voth, “The Role of Humor in Political Argument: How ‘Strategy’ and ‘Lockboxes’ Changed a Political Campaign,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 39, no. 2 (2002): 110-129, and David M. Rhea, “There They Go Again: The Use of Humor in Presidential Debates, 1960-2008,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 49, no. 2 (2012): 115-131.
21. Welsh, “Civil Rights and the Primary Election of 1964 in Indiana,” 26.
22. Ibid., 2.
23. Ibid., 8-9.
24. Michael Rogin, “Wallace and the Middle Class: The White Backlash in Wisconsin,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1966): 106.
25. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 3-5; Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 43-44; Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 224-227; Jeanne Theoharis, “Hidden in Plain Sight: The Civil Rights Movement outside the South,” in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 52.
26. Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 225.
27. Paul Taggart, “Populism and Representative Politics in Contemporary Europe,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 274. Emphasis mine.
28. Rogin, “Wallace and the Middle Class,” 100.
29. Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (London and New York: New Press, 2010), 131-132.
30. James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 217. See also Theoharis, “Hidden in Plain Sight,” 51.
31. James T. Patterson, *The Eve of Destruction: How 1965 Transformed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), xiii-xv.
32. For a comprehensive study on the advent of (Sunbelt) evangelical politics, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2011), especially part IV.
33. “The Fear Campaign,” *Time*, October 4, 1968.
34. “Neither Tweedledum, Nor Tweedledee,” *Time*, September 20, 1968.

35. Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe, "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (August 2009): 280.
36. Susi Meret, "Charismatic Female Leadership and Gender: Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People's Party," *Patterns of Prejudice* 49, nos. 1-2 (2015): 83.
37. "In Search of Political Miracles," *Time*, July 26, 1968. The same article described Humphrey as "a liberal in the New Deal-Fair Deal-Great Society sense of the term. Solution-by-government does not alarm him, and neither does the rustle of federal billions leaving the Treasury."
38. Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 246.
39. Alexander P. Lamis, "The Two-Party South: From the 1960s to the 1990s," in *Southern Politics in the 1990s*, ed. Alexander P. Lamis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 8. According to legal scholar Ian Haney López, dog whistle politics "simply means speaking in code to a target audience." Although he examines "coded talk centered on race... the term could encompass clandestine solicitations on any number of bases." See Ian Haney López, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.
40. "Nixon's Hard-Won Chance to Lead," *Time*, November 15, 1968.
41. "The Wallace Factor," *Time*, September 27, 1968. "Even in such relatively tranquil and liberal states as Connecticut, Kansas, and Washington, support [for Wallace] is abundantly in evidence," the reporter discovered.
42. "The Fear Campaign," *Time*, October 4, 1968.
43. Ibid.
44. Marshall Frady, "The American Independent Party," in *History of U.S. Political Parties*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (New York and London: Chelsea House Publishers, 1973), 4: 3430-3431.
45. "American Independent Platform of 1968," in *History of U.S. Political Parties*, 4: 3447.
46. George C. Wallace, "Speech at Madison Square Garden, October 24, 1968," in *History of U.S. Political Parties*, 4: 3492-3493.
47. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 4.
48. Wallace, "Speech at Madison Square Garden," 3496; "Alabamian Given Lengthy Ovation," *New York Times*, October 25, 1968.
49. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich*, 18.
50. "Support from the Guts," *Time*, March 1, 1968.
51. "In Search of Political Miracles," *Time*, July 26, 1968.
52. Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 351-352; Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 388-389.
53. J. Michael Ross, Reeve D. Vanneman, and Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Patterns of Support for George Wallace: Implications for Racial Change," *Journal of Social Studies* 36, no. 2 (1976): 85-86. The authors concluded on these pages that "Republicans liked him [Wallace] far better than was thought to be the case... Many voters who liked Wallace were even more positively inclined toward Nixon and voted for the Republican candidate." See also Joseph Lowndes, "From Founding Violence to Political Hegemony: The Conservative Populism of George Wallace," in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 163.
54. David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), 226.
55. Julilly Kohler-Hausmann, *Getting Tough: Welfare and Imprisonment in 1970s America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 4-5; Ross, Vanneman, and Pettigrew, "Patterns of Support for George Wallace," 89-90.
56. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York and London: Free Press, 2016), 222-224.

57. *Ibid.*, 225. Hochschild does not mention Wallace in her book.
58. *Ibid.*, 135-145.
59. Dan T. Carter, "Legacy of Rage: George Wallace and the Transformation of American Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 1 (February 1996): 10-11. Trump dismissed his lewd comments about women as "locker room talk." See Louis Nelson, "From 'Locker Room Talk' On, Trump Fends Off Misconduct Claims," *Politico*, December 12, 2017, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://politi.co/2VFAGLy>.
60. "Wallace's Army: The Coalition of Frustration," *Time*, October 18, 1968.
61. Elizabeth Gillespie McRae, *Mothers of Massive Resistance: White Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 222, 227, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190271718.003.0010>.
62. Christine J. Walley, "Trump's Election and the 'White Working Class': What We Missed," *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 2 (2017): 234-235.
63. Joshua Mound, "What Democrats Still Don't Get About George McGovern," *The New Republic*, February 29, 2016, accessed January 17, 2019, <https://bit.ly/1QGTSEw>. See also Oscar Winberg, "Insult Politics: Donald Trump, Right-Wing Populism, and Incendiary Language," *European Journal of American Studies* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 4-5, par. 11-13, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.12132>.
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ABSTRACTS

Gender and emotions are important factors in the rise of modern U.S. conservatism. This article examines the 1968 presidential election as a pivotal moment in the development of the New Right. During that campaign, George Wallace practiced a masculine political style that evoked an emotional response from anxious voters who felt alienated and angry. Wallace set the stage for a conservative political strategy that remains effective until this day.

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Keywords: emotions, gender, masculinity, populism, U.S. South, conservatism

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