

The “Total Campaign”

How Ronald Reagan Overwhelmingly Won the
California Gubernatorial Election of 1966

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Submitted April 12, 2010

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
The Political Landscape.....	10
<i>The Setting</i>	10
<i>California Politics</i>	12
The Candidate.....	19
<i>Becoming Conservative</i>	19
<i>Deciding to Run</i>	21
The Consultants.....	23
<i>Political Campaigns Before 1966</i>	23
<i>Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts</i>	25
<i>Rockefeller Campaign</i>	27
<i>Educating Ronald Reagan</i>	28
<i>Campaign Style</i>	32
The Grassroots Activists.....	37
<i>Conservatives Take Over the Party of Earl Warren</i>	37
<i>Grassroots Activism in the Reagan Campaign</i>	40
Winning the Primary.....	45
<i>The Eleventh Commandment</i>	45
<i>Challenging the Establishment</i>	46
<i>Getting Out the Vote for Reagan</i>	49

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Triumph: The General Election Campaign.....	52
<i>The Democratic Primary</i>	52
<i>Framing the Debate</i>	55
<i>Reaching Beyond the Base</i>	60
<i>The Final Stretch</i>	67
Conclusion.....	71
Bibliography.....	75
<i>Secondary Sources</i>	75
<i>Archival Collections</i>	78
<i>Published Primary Sources</i>	79
<i>Interviews</i>	80

Introduction

He was a political neophyte campaigning on an eloquent message of change in a primary and general election battle against the most experienced and established candidates of the two major political parties. Condemned by his general election opponent as an extremist, his superior campaign operation brought him to victory with the aid of a shifting political climate. This description could easily refer to Barack Obama's electoral victory in 2008. However, these two sentences actually describe Ronald Reagan's triumph in the California gubernatorial election of 1966.

The popular imagination of the 1960s generally incorporates social movements, anti-Vietnam War activism, and the presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Most Americans view the 1960s as the heyday of American liberalism and leftist activism. But beyond the Democratic presidents, the various "liberation" movements, and anti-war activism, many Americans came to identify themselves with a new conservatism, and the election of Richard Nixon to the presidency in 1968 represented a turn to the right in national political discourse. In 1960, Victor Publishing Company published *The Conscience of a Conservative* under Barry Goldwater's name.¹ Four years later, Barry Goldwater stunned his own party by defeating moderate Republican stalwart Nelson Rockefeller for the presidential nomination. Conservatives had reason to celebrate this victory, but the general election proved too large a barrier to overcome for the conservative movement in 1964. Barry Goldwater suffered one of the worst defeats in the history of American presidential elections. The breakdown of the votes

¹ L. Brent Bozell, Jr. actually wrote *The Conscience of a Conservative*. Barry Goldwater merely reviewed the manuscript but nonetheless was recognized as the author when the book was published. Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 61.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

in California mirrored that of the entire country: fifty-nine percent for Johnson and forty-one percent for Goldwater.

National observers followed California closely in 1966 and for good reason. California voters repudiated the Great Society governorship of Edmund “Pat” Brown in favor of a Goldwater conservative with no political experience. This occurred only four years after voters seemingly endorsed Pat Brown’s liberal program in his 1962 reelection over former Vice President Richard Nixon and only two years after Goldwater’s overwhelming defeat. Certainly the political climate had changed over the course of those two years. The Berkeley Free Speech Movement brought student radicalism to the forefront of California political discussion in 1964, and the 1965 race riots in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles led to a widespread call for “law and order,” perhaps producing what historians and journalists at the time called the “white backlash.”² These issues benefited Ronald Reagan in his quest for the governorship, but Reagan did not win the gubernatorial election of 1966 only because the topics of political debate had changed.

Reagan’s electoral victory resulted mostly from an organized campaign that incorporated local level outreach by a passionate base of grassroots conservatives with a media campaign that developed Reagan’s image as a populist, running for the people and against big government. Barry Goldwater’s triumph in the 1964 California presidential primary resulted mostly from grassroots activism in southern California, and this base wholeheartedly supported Ronald Reagan’s run for governor in 1966. Goldwater’s primary win also helped conservatives take the leadership of the Republican organizations from party moderates, producing a stronger party apparatus that benefited Ronald Reagan in his run for governor. In addition to a passionate

² Tom Wicker, “Is the Backlash Here at Last?” *New York Times*, 7 September 1966, 46, accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Columbia University Libraries <www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb> (accessed 27 November 2009).

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

volunteer base and a supportive party organization, Reagan ran a well-disciplined and innovative campaign under the leadership of Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts.

A fairly broad historiography on American conservatism in the twentieth century exists; however, there has been far less scholarship on the political right than on the political left in the twentieth century. Alan Brinkley notes this in a chapter entitled “The Problem of American Conservatism” in his book *Liberalism and Its Discontents*:

If historians have done nothing else in the last twenty years, they have demonstrated their ability to retrieve the experiences of people and groups whose lives and ideas are not immediately visible in mainstream politics and culture. There have, for example, been long periods in the twentieth century when the left has seemed dormant, when its constituencies and goals were not immediately visible. And yet historians have very effectively portrayed the life and ideas of the left during its years in the wilderness. The same case remains to be made for the right.³

Though scholarship on modern American conservatism has expanded significantly in the decade since Brinkley wrote the above statement, one of my objectives is to contribute to this body of scholarship. My thesis offers a perspective on a significant moment when the conservative movement shifted from the political wilderness toward the political mainstream.

Many historians have highlighted the 1970s as the birthplace of the emergence of modern American conservatism, which adopted an anti-big government, free enterprise, traditional Christian values, anti-communist, law and order agenda.⁴ Kim Phillips-Fein overlooks Reagan’s 1966 gubernatorial election, moving from a discussion of Barry Goldwater’s presidential race to a discussion of leftist demonstrations in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She places the turning point for American conservatism well into the 1970s. Sean Wilentz begins his book *The Age of Reagan* in 1974, thereby also placing the turning point of the modern conservative movement

³ Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 282.

⁴ While Christian conservatism was not absent from the conservative coalition prior to 1966, the rise of evangelicalism in the 1970s contributed to the growth of religious conservatism, which was then adopted into the New Right coalition. See Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009).

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

well into the 1970s. Wilentz only briefly mentions Reagan's 1966 campaign. In his short discussion of the 1966 election, he merely notes Reagan's wealthiest donors and his platform but fails to mention anything about grassroots activists or campaign tactics.⁵

Other historians have rightfully pointed to the 1960s as the birthplace of modern American conservatism, which adopted an anti-big government, free enterprise, anti-counterculture, anti-communist, law and order agenda. Mary C. Brennan argues in *Turning Right in the Sixties* that conservatives methodically planned their path to power by first taking control of the Republican Party during the 1960s. By her logic, Barry Goldwater's nomination for the presidency in 1964 was the most important turning point of the modern conservative movement. Rick Perlstein supports this view in *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*. In *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin recognize the conservative movement as a winner of the 1960s, beginning their discussion of modern conservatism with Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative*. Conservative historian Steven Hayward traces the "self-destruction of liberalism" from 1964 to 1968 in *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980*. And in their book *The Conservative Sixties*, David Farber and Jeff Roche collected ten essays about the strength and sophistication of the conservative movement in the 1960s.⁶

Lisa McGirr and Kurt Schuparra have written specifically about the rise of the conservative movement in California. In *Triumph of the Right*, Schuparra argues that the conservative movement hit a low point in the 1958 elections, particularly in California where

⁵ Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008).

⁶ Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm*; Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980* (Roseville, California: Prima Publishing, 2001); David Farber and Jeff Roche, eds., *The Conservative Sixties* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003).

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

internal divisions within the Republican Party forced popular incumbent governor Goodwin Knight to step down and let Senator William Knowland run in his place while Richard Nixon tried to weaken both Knight and Knowland to prevent them from challenging him in the 1960 presidential primary. However, he argues that Knowland's gubernatorial run sparked the grassroots conservative activism that elected Goldwater in the 1964 primary and Reagan in the 1966 general election. Lisa McGirr begins her story of the conservative movement in Orange County around this time in her book *Suburban Warriors*. She claims that migrants from the Midwest and the South fueled conservative grassroots activism and the birth of a forward-looking "populist conservatism," which she defines as a conservatism less virulent in its anti-communism and more focused on "law and order," controlling "big government," and attacking the New Deal/Great Society welfare state. She asserts that this shift in discourse essentially elected Ronald Reagan to the governor's mansion. Schuparra ends his narrative with Reagan's 1966 election, which he explains primarily as the result of a rightward shift in public opinion.⁷

Matthew Dallek's *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* is the most comprehensive study of Ronald Reagan's gubernatorial run in 1966 to date. Dallek contends that Reagan could not have defeated Brown without the emergent issues of civil rights, Berkeley, Watts, and Vietnam. I do not refute his claim that "law and order was the hinge on which an era turned," but I take issue with his assertion that Reagan could not have defeated Brown without the Free Speech Movement and the Watts riots. Dallek does state, "Reagan's success owed much to his own decision making, his campaign's superior organization, and his ability to take advantage of events well beyond the range of his – or Brown's – control." I would replace the words "owed much to" with "mostly

⁷ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Kurt Schuparra, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

resulted from,” stressing “his campaign’s superior organization” as the most important factor in Reagan’s overwhelming victory. Dallek concludes, “In 1966 he (Brown) possessed one crippling defect: He was a liberal,” echoing the argument put forth by Schuparra. Dallek’s argument is compelling, as the student revolt and racial violence emerged in California before the rest of the country, but I disagree with the assessment that only a liberal or moderate could win before 1966 and only a conservative could win in 1966. However, I do agree that the modern American conservative movement first built a significant infrastructure to take power from the New Deal/Great Society coalition in California in 1966.⁸

In *Nixonland*, Rick Perlstein focuses on Watts as the primary factor in the 1966 California gubernatorial election, noting that “the debate (over the Watts riots) was dominated by conservatives.” As evidence, he cites a poll of California voters, which indicated that “crime, drugs, and juvenile delinquency” was the top concern of voters and forty-five percent of those polled believed Reagan could better handle those issues. Certainly, this category would also include the Berkeley issue, which Reagan more explicitly incorporated into campaign speeches. He always discussed Watts under the guise of “crime” generally. Like Dallek, Perlstein emphasizes leftist extremism and racial violence as the vehicles by which conservatism rose to prominence in American politics. Again, the issues themselves never guaranteed Reagan victory in California, but his skillful navigation of the shifting political climate with the aid of political consultants Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts allowed him to effectively take advantage of those issues on his way to victory.⁹

⁸ Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan’s First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), x-xi, 212, 239.

⁹ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 70, 92.

Reagan's nearly flawless campaign explains his overwhelming electoral victory better than ideological factors. Historians and even political scientists have regularly overlooked the agency of campaigns in explaining election results. Several historians, such as Gerard J. De Groot, credit political consultants Stuart "Stu" Spencer and William "Bill" Roberts for their direction of Reagan in the political climate of 1966 California, but nobody has offered a full picture of Reagan's gubernatorial campaign operation. I believe that both George W. Bush in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2008 won their respective presidential elections largely because they ran great campaigns. Having lived through these elections, I wanted to reexamine Reagan's first election that Dallek considers the decisive turning point in American politics. While the political discourse and key issues of debate certainly changed in this short period, an actor with no political experience would not likely have won California's highest office without the remarkable orchestration of Spencer and Roberts and the passionate activism of conservative Californians at the local level that fueled Reagan's rise to power.¹⁰

¹⁰ Gerard J. De Groot, "'A Goddamned Electable Person': The 1966 Gubernatorial Campaign of Ronald Reagan," available in *History: The Journal of the Historical Association*, Volume 82, Issue 267 (1997), 429-448, accessed online through Wiley InterScience, Columbia University Libraries <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/>> (accessed on 21 November 2009).

The Political Landscape

California and its politics have always been evolving, as population growth has been consistently massive since the Gold Rush. Resulting from federal defense contracts during World War II and with the onset of the Cold War, the post-war industrial boom brought hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and therefore new residents, to California at an incredible rate. This mass migration to California brought unprecedented economic and demographic growth to the state, producing a number of political issues that were to be debated and settled by a rapidly evolving electorate.

The Setting

In 1962, California embodied the American dream. The state passed New York as the union's most populous as millions of Americans were moving to the Golden State to pursue careers in the ever-expanding West Coast job market. As during the Gold Rush of 1849, post-war California represented the land of greatest opportunity in the United States. Mass migration to California actually began before job opportunities in defense industries arrived during World War II, as many farmers began migrating to California's Central Valley from the Midwest during the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. However, the war time economy brought migrants from across the country in pursuit of jobs. Writing in 1968, Wesley Marx notes, "An amalgam of defense and space contracts supports an extensive aerospace establishment, and this establishment dominates the state's activities in manufacturing, employment, and university research." The arrival of defense industries in California during World War II, particularly in southern California, drew

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

people and federal dollars into the state, fueling California's demographic and economic growth.¹¹

California was a much different place in 1962 than it is today. Migration to California after World War II was overwhelmingly domestic. Foreign migration would not become a significant factor in shaping California's population until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 became law. Eighty-three percent of the state's population was non-Hispanic white in 1962. Since 1962, however, California's population has more than doubled, and about eighty-five percent of migrants since 1962 have been non-white. The California in which Ronald Reagan ran for governor was not the multicultural, "majority-minority" society of today, but rather an Anglo-dominated terrain.¹²

The post-war demographic boom did not occur evenly across the state, which had profound effects on California politics. In 1860, Sacramento existed at the center of California's population center, between the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sierra Nevada foothills, where miners settled in hopes of finding gold. Each of these two regions to the west and east of Sacramento represented one-third of state's population respectively. By the 1960s, however, half of the state's population lived in the south coastal region. Only one-fifth of Californians lived in the Bay Area and only five percent lived in the Sierra Nevada foothills. Though the capital has remained in northern California, the arrival of water in southern California by aqueducts and the industrial boom brought about by World War II caused the population center to shift to southern California, a trend that has continued largely uninterrupted to the present day. Fueled by defense and space contracts, the suburban counties of southern California grew

¹¹ Peter Schrag, *California: America's High-Stakes Experiment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 22; Wesely Marx, "One-Eyed Technology," in Carey McWilliams, ed., *The California Revolution* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1968), 37.

¹² Peter Schrag, *California*, 24.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

particularly fast as migrants began filling aerospace jobs and newly-developed housing tracts. Most notably, Orange County's population more than tripled during the 1950s and grew at an average annual rate of ten percent from 1960 to 1965. This demographic shift in turn caused a political shift, favoring southern California. While Americans from all parts of the country came to California in the post-war period, "the southern Californian is more mobile than the northerner, more likely to be a newcomer to the state, and, if a newcomer, more likely to be an émigré from the American Middle West, the South, or a border state." The differing and shifting demographic make-up of California's two broad sections had a profound impact on California politics, most notably in the 1960s.¹³

California Politics

Since the election of Hiram Johnson as governor in 1910, Americans have mostly identified California as a progressive, highly democratic state where party identity means very little. The election of 1910 employed the direct primary for the first time in the state's history. No longer could party bosses choose their own candidates, and Hiram Johnson benefited, bringing about an age of progressive reform in California that continued until 1966. During Johnson's first term as governor, the initiative, referendum, and recall became. Johnson also signed the crossfiling system by which candidates could run in both parties' respective primaries into law, which discouraged partisanship. This remained in place until after Edmund G. "Pat" Brown's first election as governor.¹⁴

¹³ D. B. Luten, "The Dynamics of Repulsion," in McWilliams, ed., *The California Revolution*, 16-17; Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 241; John R. Owens, Edmond Constantini, Louis F. Weschler, *California Politics and Parties* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1970), 12.

¹⁴ Owens, et al, *California Politics and Parties*, 33-48.

The Republican Party dominated California politics from 1910 to 1958, with only one gubernatorial term held by a Democrat during this period. However, the Republican Party that ruled over California prior to Pat Brown's tenure was not the party of Ronald Reagan, but rather the party of Earl Warren. Moderates and liberals controlled the California Republican Party prior to 1964, when Barry Goldwater secured California's delegation to the nominating convention. In 1946, self-proclaimed progressive and non-partisan Earl Warren won both the Democratic and Republican nominations following his first term as governor. Conservatives hoped Goodwin Knight would have been their man in the governor's mansion when he was elevated from lieutenant governor following Warren's appointment as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, but Knight turned out to be more moderate than they had hoped. In 1958, conservatives and moderates clashed within the California Republican Party. United States Senator William Knowland, favored by conservatives in the party, announced his candidacy for governor, challenging the incumbent Knight. Richard Nixon intervened, convincing Knight to run for Knowland's senate seat. The party infighting proved disastrous on election day in 1958 as both Knight and Knowland were defeated at the polls.¹⁵

The beneficiaries of the intraparty squabble between Knight, Knowland, and Nixon were Pat Brown and the Democratic Party, which gained control of both houses of the state legislature for the first time since the turn of the twentieth century. Governor Brown and the Democratic legislature pushed through a program in the progressive California tradition over the following eight years. In his inauguration speech, Brown pledged a government guided by "responsible liberalism." Over Brown's first term, the Democratic regime passed legislation that created a

¹⁵ Owens, et al, *California Politics and Parties*, 41-47. William Knowland was appointed to the US Senate by Governor Earl Warren upon the death of then Senator Hiram Johnson in 1945 as a thank you to Knowland's father, J.R. Knowland, who helped launch Earl Warren's political career as publisher of the *Oakland Tribune*; Ethan Rarick, *California Rising: The Life and Times of Pat Brown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 88.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Fair Employment and Practices Commission, increased funding to primary and secondary education, established standards for air and water quality, provided healthcare to California's poor, constructed roads and highways, and expanded and improved California's public higher education system. Brown also negotiated the highly contentious sectional debate over the construction of the California Aqueduct, which provided water to southern California's increasingly unsustainable population. Brown faced a formidable opponent in former Vice President Richard Nixon, who won California's thirty-two electoral votes in the 1960 presidential election. However, voters handed Brown a clear victory, making Pat Brown the first two-term Democratic governor in California history. Californians appeared to support Brown's program of "responsible liberalism."¹⁶

On the wave of his apparent mandate, Governor Brown pushed forward with his progressive agenda during his second term, particularly addressing the issue of civil rights. In light of a study showing California to be highly segregated, Brown introduced fair housing legislation to ban discrimination in the real estate market on account of race. He made his campaign public to pass the Rumford Act through the California State Senate, where legislators had stalled the bill in committee in hopes that the Senate floor would not get around to it by the end of the legislative session. The effort to stall the bill failed, however, and it passed committee, the Senate floor, and the Assembly in the final day of the 1963 legislative session. However, Brown's belief that California was more racially tolerant than the rest of the country came crashing down when voters overwhelmingly voted down the Rumford Act by referendum

¹⁶ Rarick, *California Rising*, 115, 123-125, 133, 135-153, 205-228; Gary A. Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign: Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 152-153.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

in the November 1964 elections. This represented one sign of trouble for Pat Brown as the 1966 gubernatorial race approached.¹⁷

While Californians overwhelmingly reelected Pat Brown in 1962, conservatism was taking hold of southern California as more and more migrants from the South and the Midwest continued settling in the region. The right-wing John Birch Society claimed thousands of members in southern California by the early 1960s. Wealthy Orange County businessman Walter Knott founded the California Free Enterprise Association, which circulated pamphlets espousing conservative views on taxes and other economic issues to workers. Ronald Reagan spoke at the Southern California School of Anti-Communism, which drew a crowd of 15,000 in late summer 1961. Many in Orange County read conservative literature such as William F. Buckley's *National Review* and shared periodicals and books and the ideas they espoused with their neighbors. In the 1962 gubernatorial election, Brown barely defeated Nixon in the eight southernmost counties and lost handily in Orange and San Diego counties. In the 1964 Republican presidential primary, 56 percent of southern Californians voted for conservative Barry Goldwater, carrying him to his narrow victory over moderate Nelson Rockefeller. And while the entire state voted for Proposition 13 in November 1964, overturning Brown's fair housing law, 69 percent of southern California voters supported the referendum compared with 60 percent of Bay Area voters. The migration of Southerners and Midwesterners to southern California, who were more likely to align with the political right, presented another obstacle for Pat Brown's reelection campaign in 1966.¹⁸

¹⁷ Rarick, *California Rising*, 255-267.

¹⁸ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 63-64, 95-99; Lee, Eugene C. & Bruce E. Keith, *California Votes, 1960-1972* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1974), A-28: In the eight southern counties, Brown won 1,672,401 votes to Nixon's 1,663,015 votes. In Orange County, Nixon defeated Brown 169,962 to 112,152 votes, and in San Diego County, Nixon defeated Brown 201,969 to 153,389 votes; Michael Paul Rogin & John L. Shover, *Political Change in California: Critical Elections and Social Movements, 1890-1966* (Westport, CT: Greenwood

The two most important events in altering the political landscape between Brown's triumphant reelection over Nixon and his stunning electoral defeat at the hands of Ronald Reagan were the Berkeley Free Speech Movement in the fall of 1964 and the Watts Riots in the summer of 1965. While Students for a Democratic Society had issued the Port Huron Statement in 1962, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement was the first major student revolt on a college campus in the 1960s, and it occurred on the flagship campus of the university system Pat Brown sought to make into a model for public higher education. Students led by Mario Savio protested the administration's ban on political activity on campus first by surrounding a police car that had come to take student activist Jack Weinberg into custody on October 1, 1964. On December 2, the student activists occupied Sproul Hall, home to the administration of the University of California, Berkeley, in hopes of obtaining concessions from the administration for their demands to freely engage in political activity on campus. 367 police officers removed 773 students from the building by force well into the following afternoon, the largest mass arrest in the history of the state. As former Attorney General of the State of California, Brown held the utmost respect for the law, and he called in the police to handle the occupation of Sproul Hall after discussing the issue with various sources.¹⁹

Matthew Dallek notes that Brown would not have suffered politically for the Free Speech Movement had it not continued and evolved into the Filthy Speech Movement. The Filthy Speech Movement began on March 3, 1965 when John Thomson, who was not a student, was arrested for holding up a piece of paper that said "Fuck." Student Art Goldberg led a 150-person protest of the arrest, during which he argued that free speech did not exist if filthy speech made

Publishing Corporation, 1970), 172 (Table 40); The Goldwater-Rockefeller primary race will be discussed more throughout the paper.

¹⁹ William J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 19-33; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 85.

one susceptible to arrest. Many Californians viewed Berkeley as a bastion of “Beatniks” as a result of the Filthy Speech Movement and hoped Brown would take a stand against the boisterous students, which he did not. As Dallek points out, however, student radicalism at Berkeley did not inevitably become part of the dialogue in the gubernatorial race. Only when Reagan learned how to frame the issue did Berkeley score him political points.²⁰

The Watts Riots occurred over a week in August 1965, leaving thirty-four people dead and about 200 million dollars worth of damage to property in Los Angeles. The riots began when California Highway patrolman, Lee Minkus, arrested a young black man named Marquette Frye for driving while intoxicated in the predominantly black neighborhood of Watts on the very hot evening of August 11. 250 of Frye’s neighbors took to the street to see why he was under arrest. Frye shouted that the police would have to kill him before they would ever arrest him. More policemen arrived on the scene, which angered the residents. One policeman then arrested a woman rumored to have been pregnant for spitting on him, and the crowd grew restless, throwing rocks at the police cars as they drove away. The riot then turned into a race war. African Americans who resented their condition in relatively run-down Watts took their frustration out on random white people passing through the neighborhood, particularly in the context of the overwhelming passage of Proposition 14. Beginning August 13, many residents began raiding and igniting white-owned businesses in the surrounding area. Authorities issued a curfew for Watts, which policemen enforced on August 14 by shooting residents who disobeyed it. The police also shot presumed rioters such as Audrey Griffin, who took eleven shots to the

²⁰ Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 101-102; Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War*, 38-41.

chest for refusing to leave his home with his hands up. The riots continued until August 18 after policemen raided a Nation of Islam temple.²¹

Brown returned to California from his vacation in Greece during the riots with tough rhetoric upholding the rule of law; however, the more Brown discussed Watts, the more he aligned himself with the rioters, at least in the public's eye. He commented that African Americans living in the ghetto suffered from racism, poor living conditions, and other social ills, which lay at the root of their dissatisfaction. He even noted the heat wave as a factor in the riots. Brown stuck by his program of "responsible liberalism," and many residents forgot his commitment to law and order as racial violence replaced Vietnam as Americans' top political concern. *New York Times* reporter Lawrence Davies predicted the riots would help Ronald Reagan's chances in the Republican primary, while noting voters' negative association with both Brown and Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty in their handling of the riots.²²

While political discourse in California certainly changed leading up to the 1966 gubernatorial race, Pat Brown was never doomed to defeat in 1966 nor was the Republican nominee guaranteed victory. Ronald Reagan was not only an unlikely winner of the gubernatorial election; his mere candidacy was improbable as well. He entered the race for governor a clear underdog, but he hired the right people to manage his campaign and proved to be a skillful politician in his own right.

²¹ Gerald Horne, *Fire this Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 3, 98, 121-122, 126-132; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 128-129.

²² Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 143-149; Lawrence E. Davies, "Riots Have Political Impact in California," *New York Times* (New York: 22 August 1965), E4. I discuss the political impact of the riots on Brown and Yorty in the Democratic primary on pages 55-57.

The Candidate

Ronald Reagan always had some interest in politics, though his ideology had evolved dramatically by the time he decided to run for governor of the country's most populous state. He came of age a liberal Democrat but gradually moved to the political right in light of the Cold War and his experience of moving into a higher tax bracket through his acting career. Many have attributed his ideological shift to his marriage to Nancy Davis. Reagan admired Franklin Roosevelt in his youth before working to undo much of what the New Deal accomplished, first by using his oratory gift on behalf of conservative candidates and causes and then by jumping into the political arena head first, seeking California's highest executive office.

Becoming Conservative

Though Reagan had never held any public office prior to the governorship of California, he was not removed from politics. Reagan joined the Screen Actors Guild in 1938 and served as the union's president for seven one-year terms. He served as SAG president during the height of communist suspicion. He testified in the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, expressing his own suspicions of communist infiltration in Hollywood: "There has been a small clique within the Screen Actors Guild which has consistently opposed the policies of the guild board and officers of the guild, as evidenced by votes on various issues. That small clique referred to has been suspected of more or less following the tactics that we associate with the Communist party." Though Reagan helped campaign against Richard Nixon for a United States Senate seat in 1950, his politics were already beginning to shift rightward.²³

²³ Bill Boyarsky, *The Rise of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1968), 75-91; Also appears in Bill Boyarsky, *Ronald Reagan: His Life and Rise to the Presidency* (New York: Random House, 1981), 59-71.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

By 1960, Reagan had become reliably conservative. He voted for moderate Republican Dwight Eisenhower for president in 1952 and 1956. He married Nancy Davis in 1952, which many attribute to his new politics as she held strong conservative convictions. Perhaps more important to his political conversion was his work for the General Electric Corporation from 1954 to 1962 as a host for the company's television show, *The G.E. Theater*. This role brought Reagan into contact with many GE workers and business leaders. Reagan discovered dissatisfaction among laborers regarding the size of the corporation and their union and likewise encountered discontent with the size of the federal government among the corporate elite. These conversations caused Reagan to change his view of the New Deal, now viewing its many social and economic programs as unnecessary, even approaching tyranny since bureaucrats were not elected officials. Reagan completed his political conversion by registering as a Republican in 1962, and serving as a California state co-chairman for Barry Goldwater's campaign for the presidency in 1964.²⁴

He first entered the American political scene by delivering a nationally televised speech on behalf of Barry Goldwater's candidacy in the final stretch of the 1964 presidential race. In his famed "A Time for Choosing" speech of October 27, 1964, Reagan conveyed his conservative ideology. He opened by acknowledging that he wrote the speech himself. He spoke of America's "tax burden," the necessity of a balanced budget, anti-communism, and individualism. He condemned "a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital," bureaucracy, public housing, and welfare. Reagan concluded:

You and I have a rendezvous with destiny. We will preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on Earth, or we will sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.

²⁴ Boyarsky, *The Rise of Ronald Reagan*, 96-104; Also in Boyarsky, *Ronald Reagan: His Life and Rise to the Presidency*, 75-81.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

We will keep in mind and remember that Barry Goldwater has faith in us. He has faith that you and I have the ability and the dignity and the right to make our own decisions and determine our own destiny.

He conveyed a softer articulation of the new conservatism embodied by Barry Goldwater, stressing individual agency instead of hostility toward government bureaucracy. Following the speech, supporters called Goldwater headquarters to praise Reagan and letters poured into his mailbox from across the country, many urging him to run for political office. While Goldwater went down in defeat on Election Day, the speech generated approximately \$8,000,000 for his campaign in the final week. In Goldwater's defeat, Reagan emerged as a tremendously popular figure within the conservative movement.²⁵

Deciding to Run

About a month after the presidential election of November 3, top officials of the Goldwater campaign, including Ronald Reagan, met in Los Angeles to discuss how to move forward from their demoralizing loss. Following the meeting, San Francisco Campaign Chairman Vernon Cristina and outgoing Young Republicans President John Gromala walked by Reagan in the parking lot and proposed that he run for governor as the best way to move the movement forward. Cristina believed of Reagan, "He's got all the ingredients to make a goddamned electable person." Unsure at first, Reagan began entertaining the idea as wealthy conservatives Henry Salvatori, Holmes Tuttle, Ed Mills, and Cy Rubel urged him to run.²⁶

²⁵ Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing" (delivered 27 October 1964 from Los Angeles), available in Martin J. Medhurst, ed., *Landmark Speeches of the American Conservative Movement* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 42-54; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 68; Boxes C1-C29 (Personal Correspondence folders), Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor Papers, 1967-1975* (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, Simi Valley, CA).

²⁶ Vernon J. Cristina, "A Northern Californian Views Conservative Politics and Policies, 1963-1970" (Interview conducted by Sarah Sharp, 1983), in *Republican Campaigns and Party Issues* (Oral history transcript, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 1986), 21; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 71.

Salvatori, Tuttle, Mills, and Rubel were all well connected financially and politically. Their similar rags-to-riches backgrounds fueled their conservative ethos. Born in Italy, Salvatori escaped his modest immigrant upbringing, entering the oil industry after getting a master's degree in physics from Columbia University. He started his own company, Western Geophysical, and struck gold after the company discovered untapped oil fields in California. Mills immigrated to the United States from the Netherlands and worked his way to the top of Van de Kamp's Bakery. Holmes Tuttle was born into a poor Native American family in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). He moved out to California, where he worked at a car dealership, which survived the Great Depression. He entered war manufacturing during World War II, making dump trucks, and returned to selling cars on Los Angeles's Westside during the post-war economic boom. These men became involved in California Republican circles by the 1950s, and they formed the core of Friends of Ronald Reagan, which primarily aided in fundraising efforts. Ed Mills served as Southern California Finance Committee Chairman throughout the campaign.²⁷

Though the most prominent conservatives in the state of California tried to court Reagan to join the gubernatorial race by the start of 1965, he had yet to make a decision on whether or not to campaign. He embarked on a statewide speaking tour to appease his persistent supporters. The enthusiastic crowds that turned out to hear the actor speak ultimately convinced Reagan that he could be a viable candidate for governor. By the summer of 1965, it became clear that Ronald Reagan intended to run for California's highest office without any former political experience.²⁸

²⁷ Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 72-75.

²⁸ Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 76-77.

The Consultants

In 1965, both Ronald Reagan's advisors and those of George Christopher talked to Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts about potentially managing their candidates' respective campaigns. The two political consultants decided to go with Reagan because they viewed him as the more electable candidate, representing something other than the same old politics. Their decision to manage the campaign for Reagan rather than for Christopher benefited Reagan as Spencer and Roberts were the most adroit Republican electioneers in the state of California. Their skillful management and innovative campaign techniques only improved over the course of the 1966 campaign, resulting in a masterfully executed campaign that brought Reagan into the governor's mansion.

Political Campaigns Before 1966

Former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neil claimed that political campaigns in the 1950s involved shaking hands, making deals, and asking people for their vote. Campaigns depended on local party activists and people close to the candidate going door to door. Historian Gary A. Donaldson writes of the 1948 presidential campaign:

Truman won that year the way candidates had won elections for decades. He built a coalition, pandered for endorsements from party bigwigs, labor leaders, and urban machines; and he made deals behind the scenes and in smoke-filled rooms. To off his campaign, he took to the political hustings by train, speaking to the nation and making news from the platform of the rear car.

Prior to 1960, campaigns were won by combining aggressive outreach to political elites and voters. Politicians often won their party's nomination by promising to make certain appointments, adopt certain policies, or make other such deals with elites out of the public eye. In the South, winning the Democratic nomination was tantamount to winning the general

election. Candidates reached the public through door-to-door canvassing, campaign literature drops, and occasional speeches.²⁹

Technological improvements in the post-war period allowed for a new kind of campaign. Air travel allowed candidates to cover more territory much more quickly, resulting in an increased demand on the candidate to give speeches. Dwight Eisenhower first made effective use of television in 1952, employing an advertising team that produced “I like Ike” spots. Donaldson argues that the 1960 presidential campaign was the first modern campaign because image played such an important role: “Growing directly out of this election would be the manufactured candidate, someone who could look good for cameras, whose image could be manipulated for American voters, a candidate who could be made to appear to be something he was not.” Political scientist Richard J. Semiatin supports Donaldson’s view: “For the first 150 years, U.S. campaigns were largely the domain of party organizations. The birth of television and the advent of advertising spawned personality-driven campaigns.”

Political campaigns changed dramatically between 1950 and 1966. While television first played an important role in Dwight Eisenhower’s campaigns for the presidency, the presidential election of 1960 was the fulcrum between the old style campaign and the modern campaign, first exemplified by Reagan’s run for governor of California. In 1960, party bosses still controlled nominations to a large extent. Primaries existed in some states, but a candidate with strong primary support was not guaranteed the nomination. Kennedy had to cajole party leaders, amass primary support and a massive campaign treasury, register and reach out to new voters, and develop his image through the medium of television. While maintaining many tactics of traditional campaigning, Kennedy assembled many aspects of a modern campaign, particularly

²⁹ Daniel M. Shea and Michael John Burton, *Campaign Craft: The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign Management, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 3; Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign*, 1.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

targeting and registering blocs of voters and tailoring an image for television. In New York City, the Kennedy campaign registered black and Puerto Rican voters despite Tammany Hall's disapproval. But while the media made much out of John F. Kennedy's image in 1960, Kennedy did not have people behind the scenes deliberately shaping the candidate's image. Political consulting first developed in the 1960s to perform that among other functions, and Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts led the political consulting revolution in California.³⁰

Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts

William Roberts arrived in California from St. Louis as a boy. While he graduated from high school, he never attended college. Roberts worked as a television salesman from 1949 to 1955. During this time, he volunteered with the California Young Republicans, where he first met Stu Spencer. Prior to entering political consulting, Stuart Spencer was the director of parks and recreation for the city of Alhambra, in Los Angeles County. After 1955, Spencer and Roberts served together on the Los Angeles County Republican Committee. They learned much from their shared experiences in these local party organizations, and they applied this knowledge as political consultants.³¹

In 1960, Spencer and Roberts formed the political consulting firm Spencer-Roberts. While they worked exclusively with Republican candidates, they cared little about their candidates' ideology, as evidenced by their decision to work for the conservative Ronald Reagan after working against Barry Goldwater in favor of the moderate to liberal Nelson Rockefeller in

³⁰ Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign*, 1-3; Richard J. Semiatin, "Introduction – Campaigns on the Cutting Edge," in Richard J. Semiatin, ed., *Campaigns on the Cutting Edge* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008), 3; William J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon, and the 1960 Election* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 157, 197-204.

³¹ William E. Roberts, "Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966" (Interview conducted by Sarah Sharp, 1979), in *Issues and Innovations in the 1966 Republican Gubernatorial Campaign* (Oral history transcript, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 1980), ii; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 120.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

the 1964 presidential primary. Spencer viewed Spencer-Roberts as a trendsetter in the organization and techniques of American electoral campaigns:

I'm not very old, but I'm one of the oldest hands in the business now (1979). Most of the people in the business have worked for me at some point along the line...There are probably more of them (political consulting firms) in California than other parts of the country—although it is a phenomenon of the late '60s and early '70s that there are so many.

Despite their lack of any formal training in marketing or demographic research, the pair quickly rose to prominence among Republicans for their ability to win campaigns. They combined their knowledge of campaign operations with a willingness to experiment with new methods.³²

Spencer-Roberts began working on local campaigns in Los Angeles County in 1960, and they succeeded in electing their candidates from the start. Journalist Susan Fraker noted in 1976, “They take – and probably deserve – most of the credit for electing their first two clients, Alphonzo Bell and John Rousselot, to Congress.” Rousselot was a conservative who joined the far right John Birch Society following his election in 1960, and Spencer and Roberts agreed that they would not manage his campaign in 1962 as a result of his membership in that organization because they believed that a John Birch Society member could not win an election. They successfully worked on local city council races in 1961. Their first statewide campaign came in 1962 when moderate Senator Thomas Kuchel hired them for his reelection race, which they also won.³³

Following Kuchel's reelection, Spencer and Roberts managed special congressional election campaigns to replace deceased Democratic congressmen – one in northern California for

³² Susan Fraker with Stephen Leshner and Martin Kasindorf, “The Backroom Boys,” in *Newsweek* (New York: 22 March 1976), 20, available in William E. Roberts, “Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate,” insert between pages 1 and 2; Stuart K. Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization” (Interview conducted by Gabrielle Morris, 1979), in *Issues and Innovations in the 1966 Republican Gubernatorial Campaign*, 16.

³³ Fraker, “The Backroom Boys,” 20; William E. Roberts, “Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966” (Interview conducted by Sarah Sharpe, 1979), available in *Issues and Innovations in the 1966 Republican Gubernatorial Campaign* (Oral history transcript, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, 1980), 1; Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 5-8.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Don Clausen and one in southern California for Del Clawson. Don Clausen won the election in California's First Congressional District, which covered the coastal counties from Marin County, across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco, to Del Norte County, along the Oregon border. Clawson won in the Twenty-Third District in south Los Angeles County. These victories replaced House Democrats with Republicans, bringing national attention to Spencer-Roberts within Republican circles. George Hinman, a close political advisor to Nelson Rockefeller, approached Spencer and Roberts, who agreed to lend their help in the California primary campaign of 1964.³⁴

Rockefeller Campaign

As Bill Roberts has acknowledged, the money from the Rockefeller campaign allowed the pair to make campaign decisions without any concern for raising the funds. They could run an innovative campaign because the national campaign was primarily preoccupied with contests in other states. They divided up roles between them; for example, Roberts handled press while Spencer dealt with the organization of the campaign and developing campaign schedules. They also established a northern California office, and they hired Fred Haffner to serve as the chief political consultant in San Francisco. The money supply allowed them to experiment with modern techniques such as survey research, which became more sophisticated and instrumental in the 1966 gubernatorial campaign.³⁵

Spencer and Roberts attempted to organize a grassroots volunteer base by signing up volunteers by holding receptions and sending direct mail to registered Republicans. These

³⁴ Roberts, "Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966," 2-3; Earl G. Waters, *Handbook: California Legislature, 1963 Regular Session* (Convened Jan. 7, 1963), congressional district map insert, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*, California State Archives, Sacramento.

³⁵ Roberts, "Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966," 4-7, 11; Spencer, "Developing a Campaign Management Organization," 15.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

tactics seem normal in the campaign culture of today, but they were uncommon in the 1960s. They had difficulty fundraising, but Rockefeller's wealth allowed them to match the Goldwater campaign financially despite Goldwater's fundraising advantage. Spencer considered a grassroots base essential to any successful campaign, though he acknowledged that "we didn't have any troops" in the Rockefeller campaign. By his own estimate, Spencer did succeed in registering about 50,000 black voters as Republicans in Los Angeles County to enable them to vote for Rockefeller in the primary. The recruiting techniques they used in the Rockefeller campaign improved during the Reagan campaign.³⁶

When Hinman hired Spencer-Roberts in November 1963, Rockefeller was down in internal campaign polls to Goldwater 68 percent to 23 percent. In January 1964, polls showed Rockefeller down 58 percent to 27 percent. Through the use of their innovative campaign techniques, Spencer-Roberts helped Rockefeller come within two and a half percentage points of winning the California Republican primary. Roberts said in an oral history interview, "The Rockefeller campaign was, I think, and I think Stu might agree with me, the best campaign that we ever ran." Impressed by Rockefeller's final push, Goldwater recommended that Ronald Reagan hire Spencer-Roberts to manage his gubernatorial campaign.³⁷

Educating Ronald Reagan

While Ronald Reagan had the skills necessary to be an effective campaigner, Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts provided guidance that quickly developed these skills. This training made

³⁶ Roberts, "Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966," 6-7; Spencer, "Developing a Campaign Management Organization," 6, 22.

³⁷ Fraker, "The Backroom Boys," 20; Roberts, "Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966," 4, 15; Spencer, "Developing a Campaign Management Organization," 21; Frank M. Jordan, *State of California Statement of Vote: Consolidated Primary Election, June 2, 1964* (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 11 July 1964), 6-7, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Reagan appear less like a political novice and more like someone who could realistically be governor. When asked, “How much of Mr. Reagan’s victory was due to the packaging supplied by Spencer-Roberts?” Republican State Central Committee Chairman Gaylord Parkinson replied, “A lot. A lot.” Historian Gerard De Groot argues that the research and training conducted by Spencer-Roberts made Ronald Reagan the perfect candidate for a media campaign, which enabled Reagan to overcome his status as a political neophyte.³⁸

In 1965, Spencer and Roberts hired the Behavioral Science Corporation (BASICO) to research campaign issues and public opinion to educate Reagan and organized meetings between Reagan and State Assemblyman Charles Conrad to teach Reagan how to navigate Sacramento. Conrad taught Reagan about the structure and basic functions of state government. BASICO compiled about thirteen binders on issues ranging from water and agriculture to the Vietnam War. Reagan read through each of the binders, educating himself on the many issues facing the state of California. According to the Operations Manual for the Southern California Reagan for Governor Committee, BASICO’s purpose was to “put into the hands of our Candidate and his supporters the materials which they will need to wage a winning Campaign.” BASICO’s analysis of public opinion helped shape Reagan’s rhetoric on the key issues of the campaign, and they helped the campaign produce effective position papers, public statements, and campaign materials. Before the election year had even started, Reagan developed an understanding of state

³⁸ Gaylord B. Parkinson, “California Republican Party Official, 1962-1967” (Interview conducted by Sarah Sharpe, 1978), available in *Issues and Innovations in the 1966 Republican Gubernatorial Campaign*, 37; Gerard J. De Groot, “‘A Goddamned Electable Person’: The 1966 Gubernatorial Campaign of Ronald Reagan”: While De Groot recognizes the importance of Spencer and Roberts in the making of Ronald Reagan as a gubernatorial candidate, he entirely ignores the role of the grassroots in Reagan’s electoral victory.

government and the important issues through the many resources supplied by Spencer-Roberts, allowing him to sound like an experienced politician.³⁹

Spencer and Roberts set out to educate Reagan on the issues and train him for a media campaign, and the candidate proved to be a quick learner. The public knew him as a celebrity who endorsed Goldwater for president, so his most significant challenge was to distance himself from the extreme right. Reflecting on the campaign, Spencer said, “I think how he handled the media and how he handled the extremism question, was probably the biggest contribution we made.” He added, “In his ’66 campaign, he said everything Barry Goldwater said, but he said it better—not as harsh.” Without abandoning his conservative ideology, Reagan shaped his rhetoric with the help of Spencer and Roberts to make conservatism more appealing to moderates who had not embraced Goldwater.⁴⁰

More pressing than his association with Goldwater, Reagan had to distance himself from the ultraconservative John Birch Society, which had endorsed his candidacy. Reagan had delivered a speech at a fundraiser for John Roussetot in 1962 after Spencer-Roberts dropped the congressman as a client because he had become a member of the society. Roussetot’s offer to help Reagan’s campaign however Spencer saw fit, either by endorsing or attacking Reagan, leaked into the press in the summer of 1965. Reagan had not yet formally entered the race for governor, and his apparent ties to the John Birch Society could have effectively kept him out. Reagan responded brilliantly the following month, referencing the “lunatic fringe” of the society

³⁹ Roberts, “Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966,” 16-18; De Groot, “A Goddamned Electable Person,” 438-439. De Groot may falsely credit BASICO with “candidate coaching.” According to Roberts, “Another way we did help him (Reagan) with issues was to hire BASICO – not to do what they claimed later that they did for him—they were hired strictly to do research on issues, and for no other reason” (17); Letter from Kenneth B. Holden, PhD to Reagan for Governor Headquarters, Folder “RR Committee (1),” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Operations Manual: Southern California Reagan for Governor Committee,” 8, Folder “1966 Campaign Roster,” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁴⁰ Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 30-31, 27.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

and repudiating founder Robert Welch for his extremist indictments against President Dwight Eisenhower. He also noted “in fairness to the members of this society” that J. Edgar Hoover had determined the organization not to be subversive. The most important sentence of the response follows: “It would be my intention if I seek public office, to seek the support of individuals by persuading them of my philosophy, not by accepting theirs.” He managed to distance himself from the extremism of the John Birch Society and Robert Welch without alienating the organization’s membership.⁴¹

Spencer-Roberts contributed significantly to Reagan’s image in the media by developing his image as a “citizen-politician,” contrasting Reagan as a political outsider against Republican establishment candidate George Christopher and two-term Governor Pat Brown. Spencer reasoned, “We felt that that’s what people wanted for a change—somebody that wasn’t a bureaucrat or in the present system.” This became the dominant image they tried to associate with Reagan as the campaign unfolded. Naming the campaign organization “Citizens Committee to Elect Ronald Reagan Governor” furthered this image. The “citizen-politician” propagated Reagan’s image as an anti-government “populist” with which regular citizens could relate. By the fall of 1965, Spencer and Roberts had developed Reagan into an effective, knowledgeable media campaigner.⁴²

⁴¹ Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 38; Carl Greenberg, “Reagan Quoted as Boasting of Rousselot Aid,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles: 25 August 1965), 3, accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Columbia University Libraries <<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/>> (accessed 24 November 2009); “Statement of Ronald Reagan Regarding the John Birch Society” (24 September 1965), Folder “Birch Society (1/2),” Box C31 (Subject Files), 1966 Campaign Files, *Ronald Reagan Governor Papers, 1967-1975* (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, Simi Valley, CA).

⁴² Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 30; Letterhead, “News Release...” (23 March 1966), Folder “John Birch Society (1/2),” Box C31, Series “1966 Campaign,” *Ronald Reagan Governor Papers*.

Campaign Style

Stu Spencer described the campaign he managed with Bill Roberts as “the total campaign,” synthesizing an effective media campaign with “troops,” or an effective on-the-ground grassroots campaign. Spencer and Roberts had trouble developing the latter element of the Rockefeller campaign, but they had an easier time developing and orchestrating a successful grassroots campaign for Reagan. This resulted from a combination of Reagan’s populist appeal, the willingness of Goldwater activists to work on behalf of Reagan, and the aggressive recruitment of new activists. In addition to the “citizen-politician” image, Spencer-Roberts developed the media side of the campaign by researching important issues to voters. This kind of research is routine in political campaigns today, but Spencer-Roberts developed these research techniques that had not been used before the 1960s.⁴³

Spencer-Roberts hired advertising firm McCann-Erickson to aid in running an effective media campaign, granting the firm authority to “develop and purchase the statewide advertising in the Reagan Campaign.” McCann-Erickson developed a framework for Reagan’s platform as “common sense answers to California’s problems.” The advertising firm appointed Craig Campbell as advertising manager for the campaign. Campbell worked out of the statewide campaign headquarters in Los Angeles. The advertising campaign left no source of media untouched, targeting television, radio, signboards, newspapers, and even bus cards. Spencer-Roberts sought exposure through all media outlets across the state by calling on county and regional chairmen of the campaign to assist in reaching out to local media. The wealth of

⁴³ Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 6, 16.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Reagan's earliest backers, such as Henry Salvatori, Holmes Tuttle, Ed Mills, and Cy Rubel, made this expansive advertising campaign possible.⁴⁴

While Reagan had a handful of wealthy donors behind him before he had even made the decision to run, Spencer and Roberts aggressively went after small donations. They had largely failed at attracting small donors during the Rockefeller campaign, but they had much greater success obtaining a large number of donors across socio-economic classes for Reagan. Spencer described the purpose of asking for donations through direct mail:

To feel connected. It was not a major source of funds, but it was unusual in the aspect that you could make a cold mailing to seventy-five thousand Republican households in an assembly district and get back more money than that mailer cost you. Usually that's just a loss. The dollars that came in were not big enough to be meaningful in terms of what the needs were.

Intended more as a recruitment tool than a true fundraising apparatus, direct mail gave the campaign a grassroots character and made a few extra dollars in the process.⁴⁵

While Spencer-Roberts did arrange expensive fundraising dinners and large speaking events for Reagan, the largest number of campaign events, especially during the primary campaign, had a grassroots emphasis. These events served to recruit and mobilize grassroots activists while perpetuating the "citizen-politician" image. Ronald and Nancy Reagan attended many "coffee hours" over the course of the campaign. Generally hosted by a local organization or Republican group, these informal events were often free and admission was never more than a couple dollars. These coffee hours brought Ronald Reagan into intimate contact with local activists, making the candidate appear as though he were one of them. Spencer-Roberts also arranged small, town hall-style gatherings with a few hundred in attendance. College Republican groups often hosted these kinds of events. On May 4, 1966, Reagan's campaign

⁴⁴ Inter-Office Communication to All County and Regional Chairman from Thomas P. Pike and Dirk C. Eldredge (22 August 1966), "Ronald Reagan's common sense answers to California's problems (draft)," Folder "66 Campaign: RR," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; Folder "RR-Staff Inter-Office Memos," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

⁴⁵ Spencer, "Developing a Campaign Management Organization," 33-34.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

schedule even included a thirty minute block for shaking hands with the public. Campaign events did not exclusively serve to fundraise or give the candidate exposure to the public but also to mobilize the troops that would be crucial to the campaign.⁴⁶

Spencer-Roberts also employed sophisticated research techniques to determine which geographic areas to target, especially “precinct index priorities” to establish which areas the campaign should focus its efforts, a common practice in campaigns today. This entailed compiling a profile of individual precincts based on past voting trends and socioeconomic factors such as average salary and housing costs. Then after assembling these profiles, each precinct would be listed in order of priority based on how well the candidate’s platform would likely resonate with the local population. Spencer and Roberts hired Vince Barraba, who later went to work for the Census Bureau, to compile the data. They often prioritized the precincts in conjunction with local congressional campaigns. In addition to precinct index priorities, Spencer-Roberts started what Spencer called “thought-leader research” to find out where the incumbent did and did not have support. A “thought-leader” was a person of influence in a given area, such as a wealthy businessman, a politician, or a religious leader. Spencer-Roberts would compile a list of thought-leaders and interview them to get their views on the incumbent. In conjunction with precinct index priorities, thought-leader research helped Spencer-Roberts determine where they would focus their campaign efforts.⁴⁷

Spencer and Roberts learned early in the campaign how adept Reagan was without a script. As a result, question-and-answer sessions became a staple at Reagan campaign events from coffee hours to large speeches. Spencer noticed that questions about student unrest at the University of California, Berkeley became commonplace in these question-and-answer sessions

⁴⁶ “Wednesday, May 4,” Folder “Schedules: [Ronald Reagan] (1),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor Papers, 1967-1975* (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, Simi Valley, CA).

⁴⁷ Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 13.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

even though the issue never appeared in the polls. Spencer and Roberts decided to make an issue of it. When Reagan started including statements about Berkeley in his regular speeches, student unrest began to show up in the polls as an important issue to voters. One of the key campaign themes came about not through sophisticated research techniques but as a result of common citizens asking questions. Without incorporating question-and-answer into almost every campaign event, perhaps Reagan never would have developed his anti-student radical stance that became a central tenet of his campaign. The Berkeley issue proved Spencer and Roberts's openness to suggestions from grassroots activists.⁴⁸

The invention of "the Creative Society" as an alternative to Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" came about as a campaign theme by the suggestion of radio news analyst Rev. W.S. McBirney. Rev. McBirney wrote to Ronald Reagan on November 30, 1965, "It is going to take a program which fires the imagination of the voters in order to overcome your lack of governmental experience and get you elected." Later in the letter, McBirney suggested the name "The Creative Society" to denote smaller government. Reagan forwarded the letter to Roberts, and the Creative Society became a central campaign theme. An essay on the Creative Society stated:

Paternalistic government can solve many problems for the people; but the inexorable price it must extract is power over them, ever increasing power at the cost of ever decreasing individual freedom. The Creative Society idea is that the government shall lead and encourage the people to participate in a partnership to solve their own problems, as close to home as possible.

The Creative Society emphasized the notions that citizens can act on their own accord without bureaucrats telling them what to do and local and state government are more suitable than federal government for tackling society's problems.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Folder "Schedules [Ronald Reagan] (1-5)," Box C29, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor Papers*.

⁴⁹ Folder "66: The Creative Society," Box C31, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

Spencer and Roberts split the state into southern and northern campaign operations with separate campaign committee chairmen. Phil Battaglia served as Southern California Chairman during the primary, and Tom Reed served as Northern California Chairman. Battaglia became Campaign Committee Chairman for the entire state during the general election campaign, and Thomas Pike and Dirk Eldredge filled in as Southern California Co-Chairmen. As during the Rockefeller campaign, Fred Haffner oversaw campaign operations in northern California. Spencer and Roberts directed the entire campaign, but as far as day-to-day operation, they focused on southern California and left northern California in Haffner's hands. The regional division of the campaign allowed for more effective operation, as travel between northern and southern California requires a lot of time that could be spent doing something productive.⁵⁰

Through grassroots outreach, innovative research methods, and receptiveness to outsiders' ideas, Spencer and Roberts organized an ambitious campaign touting the "citizen-politician" image of Ronald Reagan. The campaign placed the candidate in direct contact with a wide range of people around California, building his populist credibility. Their early outreach to grassroots organizations in particular brought together a massive army of volunteers.

⁵⁰ Memo to Kathy (Davis) from Fred/Ruth (Fred Haffner) (9 September 1966), Folder "RR-Staff Inter-Office Memos," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; Memo to All County and Regional Chairmen from Thomas P. Pike and Dirk C. Eldredge re: Registration Round-Up (9 August 1966), Folder "RR-Staff Inter-Office Memos (4)," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

The Grassroots Activists

Stu Spencer noted that “we didn’t have any troops” in the primary effort for Nelson Rockefeller. The hardcore activists belonged to the Goldwater campaign. In 1966, however, Reagan’s alignment with the conservative cause immediately brought together a core base of committed Goldwater activists into the campaign, which Spencer-Roberts used to their fullest advantage in their campaign to elect Ronald Reagan governor. These grassroots activists organized most of Reagan’s campaign events, registered new Republican voters, canvassed door-to-door, and made phone calls on Reagan’s behalf.⁵¹

Conservatives Take Over the Party of Earl Warren

Nelson Rockefeller fit the mold of the old progressive California Republican Party, but the post-war influx of Southerners and Midwesterners into southern California changed the scope of Republicanism in the state. Southerners and Midwesterners who had arrived in California as Democrats found themselves out of place in Pat Brown’s Democratic Party. In Orange County, Democrats outnumbered Republicans for a brief period from 1960 to 1962 by a small margin as a result of Southern migration to the county. However, Orange County remained decidedly conservative. Lisa McGirr argues that the mere fact that migrants made the move implies a certain core belief in the possibility of social mobility by one’s own agency. Goldwater’s mobilization of conservatives, particularly in southern California, brought many conservative Democrats over to the Republican Party and had profound consequences on the make-up of the state party apparatus to Reagan’s benefit.⁵²

⁵¹ Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 22.

⁵² McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 47, 94.

California conservatives began organizing around Goldwater in February 1964, circulating petitions to qualify him for the June 2 California Republican Primary. “Operation Q” enlisted thousands of volunteers who knocked on doors across the state, particularly in southern California. In Orange County, the density of conservative Republicans allowed for organized “coffees,” informal gatherings at CRA members’ homes where petitions were circulated. The Rockefeller campaign hired professionals who slowly obtained the necessary 13,000 signatures to qualify their candidate for the June ballot. “Operation Q” gathered 86,000 signatures in its first two days. These passionate grassroots activists proved to be a resource that the Rockefeller campaign ultimately could not overcome, despite the masterful direction of Spencer and Roberts.⁵³

Conservative activists first made inroads into the California GOP establishment at the California Republican Assembly (CRA) Convention in Fresno on March 13, 1964. While the Republican State Central Committee (RSCC) could not legally support candidates in the primaries, the CRA could. The CRA represented the California Republican establishment as much as the RSCC and generally favored moderate candidates before 1964. However, grassroots conservatives fought aggressively to recruit members to the CRA in the early 1960s, and this recruitment paid off at the Fresno convention. Following a bitter fight between Rockefeller and Goldwater supporters, Goldwater backer Nolan Frizzelle of Newport Beach became president of the CRA and Goldwater won the organization’s endorsement for the nomination by a sizeable margin.⁵⁴

The Goldwater campaign focused its efforts on southern California, home to the vast majority of Goldwater’s grassroots volunteer base and about 40 percent of the state’s

⁵³ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 124.

⁵⁴ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 111, 126.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

registered Republicans. Most notable was the Goldwater campaigns' get-out-the-vote drive during the week preceding the June 2 primary, which organized local activists in a canvassing drive like those commonplace in today's political campaigns, complete with official lists of registered Republicans indicating known Goldwater backers and neighborhood maps.

Volunteers representing the CRA, the California Young Republicans (CYR), and the United Republicans of California (UROC) went door to door, reaching every Republican voter in metropolitan southern California. On election day, these activists hit the homes of known Goldwater supporters to ensure that they had voted. When the election returns came in, Goldwater had narrowly won the primary by winning only four of California's 58 counties: Los Angeles, Riverside, Orange, and San Diego. However, his overwhelming majorities in Los Angeles and Orange Counties handed him the victory; he won Los Angeles County 493,616 votes to Rockefeller's 326,420, and he won Orange County by a two-to-one margin, 101,636 to 51,878. Goldwater's grassroots army in southern California carried him to victory in California, which ultimately won him the nomination.⁵⁵

While Lyndon Johnson trounced Barry Goldwater in the November 3 general election both in California and nationwide, conservatives remained optimistic. The overwhelming passage of Proposition 14 overturned the Rumford Fair Housing Act, the major legislative victory of Brown's second term to that point. Republican actor-turned-politician George Murphy won a U.S. Senate seat over Democrat Pierre Salinger. Salinger won the June primary before Pat Brown appointed him to the very seat for which he was running to fill the vacancy created by the death of incumbent Democrat Clair Engle. Murphy's election provided precedent for the election of an actor as a representative of the entire state of California. Most important,

⁵⁵ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 112, 138-139; Frank M. Jordan, *State of California Statement of Vote: Consolidated Primary Election, June 2, 1964* (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 11 July 1964), 6-7, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

conservative Californians could claim the star of the late Goldwater campaign as one of their own. As Goldwater's wealthy backers were pushing Reagan to run for governor, many local activists also begged him to run through letters.⁵⁶

Grassroots Activism in the Reagan Campaign

As in the Goldwater campaign, grassroots activists played an invaluable role in Reagan's quest for the governorship. They organized smaller events, helped with larger events, registered Republican voters, walked precincts, distributed campaign literature, called voters, and worked tables outside supermarkets and department stores. While Reagan traveled extensively across the state, California's vast size and population required that an army of volunteers hit the streets in order for the campaign to reach every potential voter.

Much of Reagan's grassroots army was already in place in southern California as a result of the Goldwater campaign, but the "Register for Reagan" drive sought to maximize the number of volunteers for Reagan. The drive asked supporters to register six more supporters with the goal of signing up one million people. In addition, registrants could check a box if they wanted to volunteer, and the local county or regional office would follow up to explain various volunteer opportunities. All registrants received campaign newsletters with a one dollar contribution. While Spencer-Roberts blindly mailed out this kind of registration form to all registered Republicans during the 1964 primary race, the "Register for Reagan" drive used preexisting

⁵⁶ Letters urging Reagan to run for governor are sprinkled throughout Boxes C1-C29, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor Papers, 1967-1975* (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library, Simi Valley, CA).

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

supporters to recruit additional supporters, making the campaign more personal and effective in recruiting additional supporters and volunteers.⁵⁷

While the Goldwater campaign organized grassroots activists into an orchestrated get-out-the-vote campaign in southern California during for the final week before the primary, the Reagan campaign organized many of its troops from the outset. Each county had its own organization, headed by a county chairman. Los Angeles County was divided into seven regions, San Bernardino County was divided into five regions, and Santa Barbara County was divided into a north and south region. The Northern California and Southern California Campaign Committees assigned dates to each county or region, and the county or region organization would decide how Ronald Reagan and, when applicable, Nancy Reagan would spend their time in their area, distributing the day-to-day work down to the grassroots level. In addition, local grassroots organizations organized most of the events, taking some of the burden off the shoulders of the county and regional headquarters.⁵⁸

Grassroots organizations outside of the immediate campaign organization contributed in significant ways, particularly groups of Republican Women and Young Republicans. Republican Women's Clubs often hosted informal events such as coffees and luncheons. Ronald and Nancy Reagan often attended as many as four or five in one day when no larger events were on the schedule. Local chapters of the Republican Federation of Women and the Young Republicans often worked together. Conservative activist Thomas Fuentes, who graduated from high school in 1966 and later served as chairman of the Orange County Republican Party from

⁵⁷ "Register for Reagan," Folder "1966 Campaign Roster," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; "Register for Reagan" mailer and cover letter, Folder "1966 Campaign Roster," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

⁵⁸ "Roster of County Chairmen for Southern California," "Roster of Regional Chairmen in Los Angeles County," "Operations Manual: Southern California Reagan for Governor Committee," 1-2, Folder "1966 Campaign Roster," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

1984 to 2004, recalls, “We worked right alongside the Federation of Republican Women. We helped out at rallies, we helped out at events, we walked precincts, we registered voters, we helped get out the vote – hands on, grassroots activity.” College Republican groups also played a significant role, organizing on-campus speaking engagements for Reagan.⁵⁹

Within the campaign organization, Youth for Reagan (YFR) played a significant role. The Reagan campaign explicitly sought to have a YFR chairman in every county. Reagan sought the youth vote and believed that “to have an effective campaign, we must have the help and support of California’s youth.” These chairmen would aim to establish chapters in every high school and college in their county as well as in churches, labor unions, businesses, and agricultural groups. YFR groups performed important work at the grassroots level, including literature and bumper sticker distribution, voter registration, precinct walking, volunteering at county headquarters, and working on other campaign projects.⁶⁰

Within YFR were the Reagan Girls, an organization of young women ages 16 to 25 who supported Reagan’s bid for governor. Cherie Adams founded the group, born out of the Goldwater Girls, which she had organized in 1964. While the Reagan Girls largely participated in the same activities as other YFR volunteers through the same county campaign offices, their purpose was the “addition of beauty, personality and energy to political campaigning.” Not any young woman could join the Reagan Girls; rather members were recruited and selected “after thorough interviews” on the basis of their “appearance, intelligence, and friendliness.” Selected

⁵⁹ Folders “Schedules [Ronald Reagan] (1-5),” “Schedules [Nancy Reagan],” “[Northern California Campaign Schedules] (1-3),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Thomas Fuentes, interview with author (27 December 2009): Thomas Fuentes first worked on the campaign of a local congressman at age thirteen in Los Angeles before his family moved to Orange County. He volunteered in the Nixon gubernatorial campaign of 1962 and the Goldwater campaign of 1964 as a high school student. Upon graduation from high school, he attended Santa Ana College, a community college in Orange County, where he continued to volunteer in as a College Republican.

⁶⁰ “Youth for Reagan,” Folder “1966 Campaign Roster,” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

by Nancy Reagan, “the most attractive campaign outfit ever designed” would be worn by all Reagan Girls at campaign events, and their appearance otherwise was also highly regulated. In addition to their YFR volunteer work, Reagan Girls rode cars in parades, served as hostesses, waitresses, and “usherettes” at campaign events, served as receptionists at campaign headquarters, and baby sat on election day so mothers could vote. The Reagan Girls manual even stipulated that Reagan Girls should attend campaign meetings, as “their presence is an added attraction for the males in your group!”⁶¹

The handling of the Reagan Girls demonstrated how the campaign’s desire to control and organize the grassroots effectively could potentially backfire by upsetting the leadership of grassroots organizations. Cherie Adams served as chairwoman throughout the primary, and campaign official George Young assured her that she would continue to lead the statewide organization. After Young made that promise to Adams, however, Campaign Committee Chairman Phil Battaglia decided to replace her. This prompted an angry letter from Adams’s father Chuck to Reagan, threatening to withdraw his support from the candidate. Chuck Adams also accused statewide YFR chairman Jack Wheeler of trying to undermine Cherie’s role throughout the primary. This gaffe was rare, however, and ultimately the leadership of the campaign developed an effective organization, incorporating these grassroots activists.⁶²

The Reagan campaign also took advantage of passionate grassroots activists through the Speaker’s Bureau. Headed by Assemblyman Charles Conrad, the Speaker’s Bureau employed speakers to events and meetings on Reagan’s behalf. The campaign clearly laid out the guidelines for these speakers. The campaign asked that speakers prepare by outlining the issues

⁶¹ “Reagan Girls Manual,” Folder “RR Committee (1),” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁶² Letter from Chuck Adams to Ronald Reagan (10 July 1966), Folder “Correspondence: Aaronson-Adams,” Box C1, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

familiar to them, learn about their audience, and prepare campaign literature to distribute at the event. The manual provided the speaker with Reagan's stance on all the issues to inform the speaker for question and answer sessions and with the suggestion that the speaker bring a few friends with them who could ask planted questions. The manual instructed the speaker to have a positive attitude and avoid any negative attacks on other candidates or an argumentative tone. The campaign also asked that any talk be accompanied by a request for volunteers. The Speaker's Bureau provided a task force of volunteers who could articulately and carefully spread Reagan's message to wide array of people, recruiting a few extra volunteers in the process.⁶³

The Goldwater campaign of 1964 not only provided Reagan the platform that made his candidacy for governor possible; the Goldwater campaign also mobilized conservatives at the grassroots level who continued to volunteer passionately for Ronald Reagan in 1966. The Reagan campaign sought to recruit and organize activists into an effective army that could reach every voter in the state of California. These activists proved to be a valuable resource in reaching out to voters, maximizing the vote for Reagan in both the primary and general elections.

⁶³ "Personnel Roster for Southern California Headquarters," Folder "RR-Staff," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; "Speaker's Bureau Manual," Folder "1966 Campaign Roster," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

Winning the Primary

The Republican gubernatorial primary of 1966 mirrored the Republican presidential primary of 1964. George Christopher represented the liberal to moderate Rockefeller coalition of the California Republican Party, with his base in northern California. Ronald Reagan represented the conservative Goldwater constituency, based primarily in southern California. Christopher represented the establishment, having served two terms as mayor of San Francisco; Reagan had no political experience but rather ran on a message of change. In this regard, the long 2008 Democratic primary battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton resembled the California gubernatorial primary of 1966. And just as Barack Obama's message of change resonated more with voters in 2008 over Hillary Clinton's argument for experience, so did Ronald Reagan's argument in the 1966 primary. As Goldwater in 1964 and Obama in 2008, Reagan prevailed through fresh political rhetoric and the mobilization of a core group of grassroots activists, who fought aggressively on his behalf.

The Eleventh Commandment

In 1964 the chairmanship of the Republican State Central Committee (RSCC), a collection of party elites including elected officials, county chairmen, and heads of some Republican volunteer organizations, changed hands from northern California moderate Caspar Weinberger to a more conservative southern Californian Gaylord Parkinson. Parkinson first became interested in politics during the Alger Hiss case; he regularly went to Washington from Philadelphia, where he attended Temple University Medical School, to watch the House Un-American Committee hearings. In his younger years, he organized the Young Republicans of

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

San Diego. He became elected vice chairman of the RSCC in 1962 after founding the Republican Associates, a group of businessmen and women that aimed to bring business-like practices into Republican Party politics in San Diego as Spencer and Roberts did in Los Angeles in the early 1960s. Parkinson was not a staunch Goldwaterite, but his politics were undoubtedly to the right of his predecessor. Upon becoming chairman, he sought to unite the party after the divisive Goldwater-Rockefeller race.⁶⁴

Parkinson devised the “Eleventh Commandment,” “Thou shalt not speak ill of any other Republican” banning Republican candidates from negative attacks on their opponents in the primary. This benefited Reagan as he was the candidate more vulnerable to attack due to his inexperience and more extreme ideology. Reagan’s press secretary Lyn Nofziger said of Gaylord Parkinson, “‘Parky’ was the state chairman, and was supposed to be neutral, but was nevertheless quietly on our side...by not helping George Christopher, and with this one thing, the ‘Eleventh Commandment,’ Parkinson pretty much helped assure a Reagan victory.” George Christopher could not portray Reagan as an extremist and had to be careful to tout his experience without attacking Reagan too vehemently for his lack thereof.⁶⁵

Challenging the Establishment

George Christopher arrived in San Francisco from his native Greece in 1911 at the age of three. Family circumstances required him to drop out of high school at age sixteen, though he continued to attend night classes until he graduated. He then attended Golden Gate University, where he obtained a degree in accounting. Bored with accounting, he bought a dairy farm for

⁶⁴ Parkinson, “California Republican Party Official, 1962-1967,” 3-5.

⁶⁵ Parkinson, “California Republican Party Official, 1962-1967,” 13; Franklyn C. Nofziger, “Press Secretary for Ronald Reagan, 1966” (Interview conducted by Sarah Sharp, 1978), in *Issues and Innovations in the 1966 Republican Gubernatorial Campaign*, 13.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

\$3,000, which he built into a successful business that made him a multimillionaire. San Franciscans elected him to their Board of Supervisors in 1945 and mayor in 1955. In 1959, he earned the distinction of winning the mayoralty of San Francisco by the largest margin to date. Many prominent national figures praised Christopher for his administration of the city, including Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower, and J. Edgar Hoover. Among the moderate Republican establishment, he was a natural choice to challenge Brown in 1966. Moderate Republican United States Senator Thomas Kuchel considered entering the race, but he ended up throwing his support behind Christopher.⁶⁶

When asked about the 1966 campaign, Christopher responded, “I had terrible management, I had no money, and again the old axiom of the ardent conservative getting the Republican support worked.” However, in California, that axiom was at most eight years old, when conservative William Knowland forced moderate incumbent Goodwin Knight out of the race for governor. But that primary was not contested, and Barry Goldwater barely won the nomination in 1964. The conservative message may have resonated with more voters post-Free Speech Movement and post-Watts, but ultimately Christopher’s demise was a combination of an inferior campaign operation and his own hubris; he believed voters would choose the candidate with experience. While the Reagan campaign combined skillful management, a volunteer army, and ample financial resources to run a successful statewide campaign, Christopher fell short on all three counts.⁶⁷

George Christopher’s campaign relied on two central arguments: experience and electability. A Christopher mailer included a picture of the candidate on the outside of the

⁶⁶ George Christopher, “Mayor of San Francisco and Republican Party Candidate” (Interview conducted by Sarah Sharp and Miriam Stein, 1977, 1978), in *San Francisco Republicans* (Oral history transcript, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1980), iii-iv; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 194.

⁶⁷ Christopher, “Mayor of San Francisco and Republican Party Candidate,” 42.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

pamphlet with one word: “Experience!” Below the address of the recipient, the mailer read, “Join the Christopher for Governor Crusade now – and win in 1966.” The inside of the mailer touted the praise he received for his leadership as mayor in San Francisco, “a distinguished record of accomplishment!” Unable to attack Reagan under the Eleventh Commandment, he believed he could win by presenting himself as the more qualified, winnable candidate. However, both of these arguments fell flat for George Christopher in 1966 as they did for Hillary Clinton in the long primary battle of 2008. California Republicans rather favored the citizen-politician image of Ronald Reagan.⁶⁸

In a letter to Ronald Reagan dated April 15, 1966, Assemblymen William T. Bagley, George W. Miliias, and Alan G. Pattee asked that Reagan suspend his campaign, citing polls that indicated Christopher would beat Brown by a sizeable margin in the general election while Reagan trailed Brown. The letter concluded, “We again repeat our sincere and overriding desire for a Republican victory in November. You can help this become a reality now, and thus do the greatest service of your life for the people of the State of California and for your fellow Republicans.” Bagley, Miliias, and Pattee all represented districts in northern California and belonged to the progressive wing of the party that had dominated California. Reagan, of course, rejected this request and forged ahead with his primary campaign, reaching out to his conservative base.⁶⁹

By espousing the idea of the “citizen-politician,” Reagan challenged the political establishment as well as the notion that experience in government was a necessary prerequisite to hold higher executive office. He portrayed himself as a nonpartisan, less interested in pleasing

⁶⁸ Folder “George Christopher (1),” Box C31, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁶⁹ Folder “Gov. Personal Correspondence: Letters of Particular Interest [A-L],” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

the party than the citizens of the state of California. When he officially announced his candidacy on January 4, 1966, he offered the following indictment of the political establishment:

Modern political dialogue isn't based on legitimate debate anymore, or disagreement on views. There's a great deal of false image-making and an effort made not to dispute the views you really hold, but to invent some and hang them on you with the hope the false image will appear real.

While Reagan publicly opposed this political practice and successfully legitimated his claim to being a political outsider, his campaign worked hard to do exactly what Reagan condemned by making him appear more moderate and qualified for the job. In fact, the above quotation describes perfectly how the 1966 Republican gubernatorial primary campaign ensued: the central themes of both campaigns relied less on issues than on images. Spencer-Roberts's masterful image-making co-opted the electability and experience arguments offered by George Christopher, turning such arguments into negative associations with the political establishment.⁷⁰

Getting Out the Vote for Reagan

To run an effective get-out-the-vote campaign, Spencer-Roberts developed the "precinct plan," derived from the Goldwater get-out-the-vote operation. The plan outlined three phases to ensure maximum turnout for Reagan on election day. The first phase required the precinct chairman in each county or regional office to recruit precinct captains for as many precincts as possible and precinct captains to canvass their precincts to identify as many Reagan voters as possible by May 31. Phase two involved phone banking to reach every Republican voter who had not already been reached by door-to-door canvassing, also to identify Reagan voters before election day. The final phase was an election day blitz by "Victory Squads" of volunteers in each precinct to ensure that every identified Reagan voter made it to the polls before they closed.

⁷⁰ Ronald Reagan, "A Plan for Action" (4 January 1966), Folder "RR Speeches & Statements, Book 1 (1)," Box C30, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

The effective organization of this effort, beginning in April, contributed to a landslide victory for Ronald Reagan in the primary election.⁷¹

In addition to the on-the-ground volunteer army, the Reagan campaign organized massive events meant to attract many attendees and press coverage in the two days before election day. On Sunday, June 5, the campaign held a massive rally at a stadium in Santa Ana, the heart of Reagan's southern California base. The rally featured celebrity endorsements, the Reagan Girls, and Reagan's "major speech of the campaign." A flyer advertising the rally attracted attendees by marketing the event as "California's BIGGEST rally," and 4,000 supporters did attend the rally. Pat Brown held his own rally in Los Angeles that day, but it was hardly the spectacle that Reagan's was, only drawing a few hundred spectators. The news coverage of Brown's rally focused on intraparty fighting over who could speak at the rally. The following day, Reagan flew across the state, holding rallies at eight airports, culminating with a massive rally at Los Angeles International Airport.⁷²

On the primary held June 7, 1966, Ronald Reagan won the Republican nomination for governor of California by a margin greater than two-to-one over George Christopher: 1,417,623 votes to 675,683 votes. While Christopher had trouble developing a statewide campaign, the Reagan campaign built an organization down to the precinct level, employing masses of grassroots level volunteers. The "total campaign" combined skillful use of the media that turned Reagan's inexperience into an advantage with a well organized grassroots-driven operation that reached nearly every registered Republican either through door-to-door canvassing or by phone.

⁷¹ "Southern California Precinct Plan," Folder "1966 Campaign Roster," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

⁷² Flyer "Come to California's BIGGEST Rally for RONALD REAGAN," Folder "RR Material (2)," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; Paul Beck, "Actor Confident of Victory at Polls on Tuesday," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles: 6 June 1966), 3; Carl Greenberg, "Brown Sidesteps Intra-Party Feuds at Fairfax Ave. Rally," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles: 6 June 1966), 3; "Ronald Reagan for Governor – Newsletter," Folder "RR Committee (2)," Box C33, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

While the magnitude of Reagan's victory set him apart from Goldwater's two and a half point victory, the accomplishment of winning a primary election had already been achieved by the conservative movement two years earlier, while a post-war conservative Republican had yet to win the governorship of any state. Ronald Reagan's "total campaign" pushed forward with the goal of setting that precedent.⁷³

⁷³ Frank M. Jordan, *State of California Statement of Vote: Direct Primary Election, June 7, 1966* (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 15 July 1966), 6, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.

Triumph: The General Election Campaign

As Matthew Dallek has argued, Reagan's election represented the major turning point for the modern conservative movement in the United States. An inexperienced candidate whose politics were considered put to rest by much of the liberal political establishment and the press following Goldwater's overwhelming defeat in 1964 not only defeated an incumbent whose governorship was perceived by most residents to be a success, but defeated that incumbent soundly. Pat Brown hoped voters would remember the many things he did to benefit California and endorse his program of "responsible liberalism" once again. However, his campaign's focus on portraying Reagan as an inexperienced extremist turned off many California voters, and Reagan's outsider, populist image carried the day with the assistance of outreach to constituencies of Brown's 1962 coalition and an unprecedented statewide get-out-the-vote campaign. Reagan did not need a perfect campaign to defeat Brown in 1966, as the Brown campaign took some major missteps that likely would have lost the election for Brown against a comparable campaign operation. However, Reagan's nearly flawless "total campaign" produced election returns that shocked the nation, as he defeated an effective liberal governor about as soundly as Johnson had defeated Goldwater only two years earlier.

The Democratic Primary

Elected Mayor of Los Angeles in 1961, Sam Yorty represented the conservative wing of the Democratic Party, having endorsed Richard Nixon for president in 1960. Yorty avoided any political confrontation with Pat Brown in 1962, as a clear majority of Californians approved of Brown's first term as governor. However, in March 1964, Yorty filed an uncommitted slate of

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

delegates for Lyndon Johnson in the primary campaign to challenge Brown's uncommitted slate for Johnson, accusing Brown of seeking the nomination for Vice President and hoping to prevent Brown from appointing Yorty's political rival Eugene Wyman, husband of outspoken anti-Yorty Los Angeles Councilwoman Roz Wyman, to the Democratic National Committee. Yorty fired vicious attacks at Brown, publicly accusing him of attempting to build a political machine. Brown's slate soundly defeated Yorty's 68 to 32 percent, even winning in Los Angeles County by a 62 to 38 percent margin. Yorty declared his slate a protest candidacy in response, and thus began Brown's problems with Yorty.⁷⁴

Brown hoped to oust Yorty from the mayoralty of Los Angeles in 1965, supporting Franklin Delano Roosevelt's eldest son Jimmy, then a congressman from Los Angeles. However, Speaker of the Assembly Jesse Unruh feared that Jimmy Roosevelt would challenge him for higher office one day, and he endorsed Yorty. Though Roosevelt resided in California for more than a quarter century, Yorty successfully cast him as a carpetbagger. Roosevelt also suffered from his association with Washington, and Yorty won the election by a margin greater than 20 percent of the vote. The Democratic Party was beginning to look like the Republican Party in 1958 with the gubernatorial primary one year away, and Yorty came out on top.⁷⁵

The Watts riots provided Yorty an opportunity and a platform to attack Brown, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Great Society for "telling them (African Americans) they are being abused and mistreated without expecting them to react." Brown had been on vacation in Greece when the riots broke out, but he flew back to California as soon as he heard the news. Brown first came out firmly in favor of law and order, as he had with the Free Speech Movement. Again as he had with the Free Speech Movement, his language shifted toward a sympathetic tone

⁷⁴ John C. Bollens and Grant B. Geyer, *Yorty: Politics of a Constant Candidate* (Pacific Palisades, CA: Palisades Publishers, 1973), 136-141.

⁷⁵ Bollens and Geyer, *Yorty*, 142-148.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

once order had been reinstated, blaming racism and noting that many problems plagued Watts. Yorty never gave up his virulent law and order stance, and he launched his campaign stressing the issue in February 1966. While the Republican primary abided by the Eleventh Commandment, Yorty viciously attacked Brown, dissolving the united Democratic coalition that elected Brown to two terms as governor.⁷⁶

Don Bradley, who had managed the Johnson campaign in California in 1964, badly mismanaged Brown's campaign from the start by advising Brown that he need not worry about Yorty and should rather focus his attention on the general election. He also completely underestimated Reagan's ability to defeat Brown. Therefore, Bradley devised a campaign against George Christopher during the primary campaign season. Brown's campaign leaked a story about Christopher's conviction for violating milk price-stabilization laws in 1940 and subsequently released campaign materials that simply depicted Christopher's mug shot with the word "wanted." The negative attack hurt Brown's rapport with the electorate. Meanwhile, Yorty continued his attacks on Brown, even suggesting Brown was a communist.⁷⁷

When small racial disturbances broke out in Watts in March and May 1966, Yorty managed to take advantage of the issue, even though he was mayor of the city in which these riots occurred. He reminded voters that Brown was on vacation when the riots broke out the previous August, even though Yorty himself was absent from Los Angeles during the first two days of the riot, choosing instead to go forth with previously arranged engagements in San Diego, Tijuana, and San Francisco. Moderate and conservative Democrats overwhelmingly came to blame Brown for the racial violence rather than Yorty. Meanwhile, much of the political left also grew upset with Brown for actively seeing California Democratic Council President

⁷⁶ Bollens and Geyer, *Yorty*, 149-154, 157; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 145.

⁷⁷ Owens, et al, *California Politics and Parties*, 150; Bollens and Geyer, *Yorty: Politics of a Constant Candidate*, 158.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Simon Casady expelled from his post for speaking out vehemently against the Vietnam War.

When the votes were tallied on June 7, Brown had barely garnered a majority of his party's vote and won fewer votes that day than Ronald Reagan in a state with a 57 to 40 percent Democratic voter registration advantage; Yorty won 38 percent of the vote.⁷⁸

Framing the Debate

Having won their respective primaries, Reagan and Brown looked toward November. While Reagan had no need to change his rhetoric as he faced a candidate remarkably similar to the one he defeated in the primary, Brown's performance in the primary indicated that his campaign needed a change of tune. Reagan continued to run as a "citizen-politician" against a man whose smearing tactics made him appear more "political," caring more about his political career than serving the public in voters' minds, than he had at any point prior to his third gubernatorial campaign. Brown's eight-year incumbency made Reagan's argument for change all the more effective. Brown shifted away from civil rights and toward "law and order," publicly supporting Yorty's proposal for a firm antiriot law. The Brown campaign hoped they could recover from the Yorty challenge by attacking Reagan's inexperience and effectively labeling him an extremist while reminding voters of the tremendous accomplishments of the Brown administration.⁷⁹

Reagan continued to espouse his idea of a Creative Society, stressing that individuals are capable of making decisions for themselves without elitist intellectual bureaucrats interfering in their lives. Reagan positioned himself as a populist, challenging the elitist Brown. Former

⁷⁸ Bollens and Geyer, *Yorty*, 151-152, 158-159; Frank M. Jordan, *State of California Statement of Vote: Direct Primary Election, June 7, 1966* (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 15 July 1966), 3, 6, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA: Brown won 1,355,262 votes to Yorty's 981,088 votes.

⁷⁹ Owens, et al, *California Politics and Parties*, 150-151.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

California Assemblyman and Orange County Supervisor Bruce Nestande, who worked in Reagan's gubernatorial administration, recalled that Reagan once told him, "If I am getting my message across to a truck driver, then I know I am delivering my message effectively." Rather than defend himself as an extremist as Goldwater did, Reagan believed he could win converts to his conservative political philosophy. And Reagan's oratory ability brought him a large degree of success in that endeavor. Matthew Dallek quotes Lou Harris in *The Right Moment*, "Before this year, southern California was 40 percent conservative. The rest of the state was 18 percent conservative. Now southern California has increased to 50 percent conservative and the rest to 30 percent conservative."⁸⁰

BASICO provided Reagan ways of framing the issues of Berkeley and Watts in attractive ways to voters. The corporation made student unrest become an issue of "academic freedom," drafting a campaign statement on the issue. BASICO's draft included an indictment against speech "designed to embarrass our government's foreign policy or promote an alien ideology." A campaign handout on academic freedom modified the above statement to make reference to "beatniks, and advocates of sexual orgies, drug usage and filthy speech," painting Berkeley as an out of control environment paid for by Californians' tax dollars. The handout also ensured that free speech allowed for "the right to criticize every aspect of national policy" so long as that criticism did not give "comfort and aid to the enemy," softening the language in BASICO's draft. Most importantly, the statement on "academic freedom" made reference to student unrest as evidence of the "'leadership gap' in Sacramento," associating negative views towards Berkeley with the Brown administration. Reagan effectively framed his attack on Berkeley as a

⁸⁰ Bruce Nestande, interview with author (8 January 2010); Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 210.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

defense of something positive – “academic freedom” – while blaming Brown for the student revolt without a direct attack on Brown himself.⁸¹

Reagan discussed Watts indirectly through statements on crime, which he expanded into a discussion of the cost and unnecessary centralization government and “moral” issues. The “Crime” handout pointed out that crime costs the average family of four \$1,000 per year. Reagan blamed the increased prevalence of crime on “judicial rulings that took much of the law enforcement authority away from the local police and left them handicapped in their efforts to protect the law-abiding citizen from the increasingly insolent criminal element.” Reagan supported placing law enforcement authority back in the hands of county and city government, meshing with his Creative Society theme of decentralized government. He also attacked pornography and drug use. The leaflet notably addressed the fact that Brown vetoed a “crime prevention bill” as governor, linking Brown to the Watts riots without explicitly saying so.⁸²

While Reagan attacked Brown indirectly using the issues, the Brown campaign launched personal attacks on Reagan, taking a negative tone that made him appear bitter and angry next to the affable Ronald Reagan, much to the effect of John McCain’s attacks on Barack Obama in 2008. Brown’s campaign portrayed Reagan as “just an actor” who would endanger the state of California as its chief executive. One pamphlet produced by the Committee to Re-Elect Governor Brown entitled “The Target is Your Family” opened with the question “Governor Pat Brown or Actor Ronald Reagan?” as though convey that the idea of an actor as governor was

⁸¹ Kenneth B. Holden, PhD, “Academic Freedom” (Rough Draft), Folder “RR Committee (1),” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Ronald Reagan Speaks Out on the Issues: Academic Freedom,” Folder “[Handouts: Issue Statements],” Box C30, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁸² The handout on “crime” does not use the word “moral.” Rather, I use quotes around “moral” to emphasize that what is and is not moral is highly subjective; “Ronald Reagan Speaks Out on the Issues: Crime,” Folder “[Handouts: Issue Statements],” Box C30, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

ridiculous. However, George Murphy's first two years in the United States Senate demonstrated that an actor could effectively represent the state of California.⁸³

In addition to mocking Reagan's professional background, the Brown campaign and other groups supporting Brown relentlessly attacked Reagan as a dangerous extremist. The "Target is Your Family" pamphlet concludes, "THE CHOICE IS YOURS...GOVERNOR PAT BROWN, who works with moderates of both political parties to assure a better life for you and your family...or RONALD REAGAN, who condones the John Birch Society, and proposes costly disruptions to California's way of life." Brown not only painted Reagan as an extremist, he also presented himself as a moderate, distancing himself from the "responsible liberalism" of his earlier campaigns to adjust to the political climate. A Brown leaflet with the headline "Here's the REAL REAGAN!" includes Reagan quotes meant to highlight his extremism and refers to him as a "paid propagandist for Barry Goldwater." Tying Reagan to Goldwater seemed a logical strategy to Brown, as Goldwater had lost handily two years earlier; however, Reagan presented conservatism with much less militancy than Goldwater had, and Californians were more concerned with containing violence and extreme leftists in 1966 than they had been in 1964. The Los Angeles County Labor Committee to Save our State in '66, a pro-Brown group, produced a leaflet depicting "fat cat rightwing millionaires" pulling on the strings of a sinister Reagan puppet. The flyer warns, "STOP and THINK, DON'T LEAP!" Brown and his allies engaged in the kind of fear mongering tactics associated George W. Bush in 2004 and John McCain in 2008, presenting Brown as the "safe," experienced candidate.⁸⁴

⁸³ Committee to Re-Elect Governor Brown, "The Target is Your Family," Folder "RR Material (2)," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; Ruth Montgomery, "Murphy's Progress as Senator Boosts Reagan's Hopes," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (11 July 1966), available in Folder "Murphy, George," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

⁸⁴ Committee to Re-Elect Governor Brown, "The Target is Your Family"; Californians for Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, "Here's the REAL REAGAN!" Folder "RR Material (2)," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; Los Angeles County Labor Committee to Save Our State in '66, "STOP and

The Reagan campaign countered Brown's negative attacks effectively by not engaging in the same negative campaign and by stressing that California needed fresh leadership in 1966. Perhaps the single most tactful response was a television spot featuring Reagan supporter and actor John Wayne. The ad highlights three actors who served their country: Jimmy Stewart, who led 900 bombers as a colonel in World War II, Irene Dunne, who served as an alternate delegate to the United Nations, and George Murphy. Wayne concludes, "So what's this empty nonsense about Ronald Reagan being just an actor? I watched Ronald work his entire adult life preparing for public service. His will be a new, informed, dedicated leadership." The ad not only countered the idea that an actor could not serve as governor, but mentioned "new" as one of the qualities of Reagan's leadership. The ad conveyed to voters the theme of change over experience echoed by Barack Obama in 2008.⁸⁵

Ronald Reagan effectively took control of the debate with Brown. The two candidates negotiated over televised debates between them, but Brown ultimately rejected the compromise proposal in late September, probably because he thought he would lose to Reagan. While Brown raised the issues of Reagan's inexperience and extremism, Reagan countered by presenting himself as a "citizen-politician" as he had in the primary and by framing his ideology as a common sense alternative to the liberal, bureaucratic Leviathan produced by the New Deal and the Great Society. Reagan also avoided direct personal attacks, maintaining a positive, policy-oriented campaign that stressed the importance of turnover in the governor's mansion in maintaining good government. The Brown campaign, however, resorted to negative attacks on Reagan. The *Los Angeles Times* endorsement of Reagan validated his message of change while

THINK, DON'T LEAP!" Folder "RR Material (2)," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

⁸⁵ "John Wayne' Reagan" (1966), "Historic Campaign Ads," hulu.com
<<http://www.hulu.com/watch/40611/historic-campaign-ads-john-wayne-reagan-1966#s-p1-sr-i0>> (accessed 23 March 2010).

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

a follow-up editorial published two days before the election excoriated Brown's negative campaign: "The mounting intemperateness of the campaign waged by in behalf of Gov. Edmund G. Brown, particularly on television and radio, strengthens our viewpoint. As the Times said in its original endorsement, 'There comes a time in the affairs of men – and their governments – when change is not only indicated but imperative.'" On the media side of the "total campaign," Reagan prevailed.⁸⁶

Reaching Beyond the Base

Unlike Goldwater, Reagan tried very hard to attract voters outside of the conservative coalition based in suburban southern California, and this effort resulted in the opposite electoral result. Any Republican victory, let alone a conservative one, required Democratic votes. Democrats carried a four-to-three majority in California in 1966, and less than three percent of voters declined to state a party. The effort to reach beyond the base was a calculated one. Roberts noted in an oral history interview, "We did a lot of work in the Mexican-American community. Almost none in the black. There were no votes there to speak of." The Reagan campaign targeted specific groups they thought might defect from Brown and instead vote for Reagan, including moderate Republicans who voted for George Christopher in the primary, Democrats who supported Yorty, agricultural and industrial labor, and Mexican American Democrats.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Lyn Nofziger, "Citizens Committee to Elect Ronald Reagan Governor News Release" (23 September 1966), Folder "66 Campaign Debate," Box C31, Series, "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*; Times Editorials, "California Needs Reagan," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles: 6 November 2010), I6, accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers, Columbia University Libraries <www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb> (accessed 30 March 2010).

⁸⁷ Frank M. Jordan, *State of California Statement of Vote and Supplement: November 8, 1966 General Election* (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 13 December 1966), 2, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA; Roberts, "Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966," 21.

Immediately following the primary election on June 7, the Reagan campaign began reaching out to not only Christopher supporters but to his primary staff as well. Spencer recalled, “Every county chairman Reagan invited the night of the election – the county chairman on Christopher’s board, right on down the line. In other words, we were right out there in front asking Christopher people to join the Reagan campaign...people’s feelings are hurt and you got to throw the olive branch out there.” Reagan’s press secretary Lyn Nofziger noted, “The only person who remained upset was George Christopher, but all of his people came over.” Christopher staffers joined the ranks of the Reagan campaign, serving subservient roles to Reagan’s campaign staff at the county level and in the finance committee. With the exception of liberal United States Senator Thomas Kuchel’s endorsement of Brown, the California Republican Party emerged more or less united following Reagan’s stunning primary victory, especially after Christopher threw his support behind Reagan in July.⁸⁸

After uniting Republicans, the Reagan campaign targeted Democrats who had voted for Sam Yorty in the primary. Since Yorty had run primarily on a post-Watts “law and order” platform, Reagan attracted these voters by using the same arguments Yorty had used in the primary. Yorty helped Reagan by never endorsing Brown. In fact, Yorty offered this biting criticism of Brown in his post-primary statement: “The discredited Brown machine has become an albatross around the neck of the Democratic Party...Brown and his supporters appear determined to hang on until they drag the Democratic Party down to defeat.” Reagan appeared with Yorty at a birthday celebration for the City of Los Angeles, reminding the press that he had defended Yorty against the eastern Democratic establishment. Matthew Dallek argues that

⁸⁸ Spencer, “Developing a Campaign Management Organization,” 29; Nofziger, “Press Secretary for Ronald Reagan, 1966,” 12; Perlstein, *Nixonland*, 275; Earl C. Behrens, “Christopher Says He’s for Reagan,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (San Francisco, 19 July 1966), 6, available in Folder “Christopher, George (2),” Box C31, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Reagan adopted “morality” as the battle cry that attracted Brown defectors, particularly Yorty voters. Reagan’s rhetoric on crime sought to appeal to Yorty voters in addition to his own base.⁸⁹

The largest part of Brown’s coalition that Reagan went after was labor, and he did so from the opening of his campaign. Reagan crafted his comments on the economy to appeal directly to labor in the official announcement of his candidacy, highlighting California’s above average unemployment rate. Agricultural laborers in particular had good reason to seek out an ally in the governor’s mansion, as the 1965 “one man, one vote” ruling by Supreme Court led to decreased representation in the state senate from rural California. Reagan took advantage of discontent among farmers towards Johnson’s and Brown’s agricultural reform programs, asserting, “And because there is no assurance they will quit their well-meant social tinkering before next harvest season – canning and packing companies are making plans to move South across the border, and with them go jobs that will no longer be held by Californians.” While addressing farmers’ concerns directly, his rhetoric indirectly appealed to the business community, as he suggested making an economic climate in California that would attract businesses. He also noted how Democrats’ agricultural policies negatively affected industrial labor. He held up a ketchup bottle, stressing that fewer bottles were produced at a plant in Oakland as a result of lesser supply from the farms, which led to layoffs of factory workers.⁹⁰

Throughout the campaign, Reagan flaunted his experience as a union president to win labor support for his campaign. An editorial produced by the Reagan for Governor Committee entitled “The Labor Record of Reagan” raised the issue in early September. The authors noted

⁸⁹ Sam Yorty, “Post-Election Statement of Mayor Yorty” (8 June 1966), Folder “EGB (1),” Box C31, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Dallek, *The Right Moment*, 185-186.

⁹⁰ Ronald Reagan, “A Plan for Action” (4 January 1966), 2-3, Folder “RR Speeches & Statements, Book One (1),” Box C30, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

that Reagan served as president of the “actor’s union” during the only strike in its history without ever mentioning “Screen Actor’s Guild” in the editorial, probably because most workers would not identify the Screen Actor’s Guild as a labor union. The article also stretches Reagan’s commitment to the “rank-and-file” as opposed to the union bosses that contributed to the Brown campaign. A campaign pamphlet asked the question, “Which candidate is the friend of the working man?,” comparing Reagan’s record as president of the Screen Actor’s Guild to Brown’s record on labor issues as governor, including his refusal to meet with agricultural workers in Sacramento while he was vacationing in Palm Springs, the increasing unemployment rate in California, and the greater prevalence of crime in the state.⁹¹

The campaign incorporated agriculture and labor into its “Issue of the Week” schema introduced in mid-September. Reagan gave his major speech on agriculture on September 15 in Fresno, at the heart of California’s primary agricultural region in the Central Valley. Reagan made his major speech on labor on October 13 in Riverside during labor week. In it, he continued to champion the common worker, arguing for a secret union ballot to protect the rank-and-file members from making “choices that may bring on them displeasure of the union bosses.” He also proposed creating a three-person board to settle disputes between workers and employers within the state. Acknowledging union leaders support for Brown, he stressed to the rank-and-file that they were free to choose him for governor. Reagan capped off labor week with a major rally organized by the Labor-for-Reagan Committee at the International Hotel in Los Angeles on Saturday, October 15. The Reagan campaign created volunteer organizations with their own bumper stickers specifically for “Farmers for Reagan” and “Union Workers for

⁹¹ Reagan for Governor Committee, “The Labor Record of Ronald Reagan,” *Evening Outlook* (5 September 1966), 4, Folder “RR Material (2),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Pamphlet “Which Candidate is a Friend of the Working Man?” Folder “RR Material [Folder Two] (1),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

Reagan,” demonstrating the importance of these voting blocs to the campaign. Reagan’s outreach to laborers brought many over to his camp, initiating the process of building the “Reagan coalition” long before his run for the White House.⁹²

Reagan specifically reached out to senior citizens as well. The “Which Candidate is a Friend of the Working Man?” pamphlet also pointed out that Brown reduced old age pensions in California at the same time the federal government increased social security benefits. Contrary to Reagan’s general anti-government campaign, he endorsed increased social security benefits. An open letter to senior citizens of California from the campaign asked them to “help us bring back what you feel America and California should be.” The campaign also made bumper stickers that read, “Senior Citizens for Reagan.” The campaign banked on senior citizens supporting a combination of Reagan’s populist conservative agenda and his pledge to increase social security benefits.⁹³

In addition to seniors, Reagan went after students, who would have been almost exclusively voting for the first time, as the voting age was still twenty-one years in 1966. Like senior citizens, “Collegians for Reagan” had their own bumper stickers made specifically for them. The campaign hoped many California students would be as turned off by campus radicalism as the general population. To woo students, Reagan articulated the “academic freedom” argument first developed by BASICO. A Youth for Reagan leaflet featured Reagan

⁹² Memo to Paul Hanson from Tom Reed, Subject “Issue of the Week” (23 August 1966), Folder “[Northern California Campaign Schedules] (1),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Ronald Reagan Schedule, September 13-15, 1966,” 5, Folder “Schedules [Ronald Reagan] (4),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Seymour Korman, “Ronald Reagan Makes Pitch to Labor in California,” *Chicago Tribune* (14 October 1966), 23; Flyer “Reagan Rally,” Folder “RR Committee (1),” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Special Bumper Stickers,” Folder “Governor Campaign Material Catalog,” Box C30, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁹³ Pamphlet “Which Candidate is a Friend of the Working Man?” Folder “RR Material [Folder Two] (1),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Letter to Senior Citizens from Mrs. Francis X. Bushman and Charles W. Skoien, Jr. (undated), Folder “RR Material (2),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Special Bumper Stickers,” Folder “Governor Campaign Material Catalog,” Box C30, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

quotes on higher education. The leaflet announced, “STUDENTS!!! Lets look at the issues – Academic Freedom, Berkeley Turmoil and the Board of Regents – as Ronald Reagan and responsible students view them.” Reagan hoped that “responsible students” would support his proposed crackdown on the “Berkeley turmoil,” and many young, first-time voters did support Reagan.⁹⁴

The Reagan campaign also courted the Mexican-American community. In April of 1965, long before Reagan officially announced his candidacy, publisher-editor of *Mexican American* Phil Saenz wrote to Reagan, “I am confident that Mexican-American voters can be encouraged to support you, although 95% of them are Democrats. This ethnic group is susceptible to influence if the approach is right.” Spencer-Roberts hired Dr. Francisco Bravo to head Mexican-American outreach. Reagan believed he could capitalize on the canceling of the Bracero program, which forced many Mexican agricultural laborers out of the country, to attract a large number of voters from this bloc. The campaign organized a statewide Mexican-American Democrats for Reagan group, which even had its own campaign buttons and volunteer sign-up cards.⁹⁵

Spencer-Roberts devised “Ya Basta” as the major campaign theme in the Mexican-American community, meaning “enough already” in Spanish. “Ya Basta” touted the argument that change in government was good to California’s Spanish-speaking population. Bravo wrote an editorial for the Spanish language periodical *El Grito* (meaning “the cry”) entitled “La hora de

⁹⁴ “Special Bumper Stickers,” Folder “Governor Campaign Material Catalog,” Box C30, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “STUDENTS!!!,” Folder “RR Material (2),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁹⁵ Letter to Ronald Reagan from Phil Saenz (28 April 1965), Folder “Correspondence: Saab-Sanaille,” Box C21, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Letter to George Murphy from Ronald Reagan (19 August 1966), Folder “Gov. Personal Correspondence: Letters of Particular Interest [M-Z],” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Button “Mexican-American Democrats for Reagan,” Box C41, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Support card “Mexican-American Democrats for Ronald Reagan for Governor,” Folder “66 Campaign: RR (1),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

la decisión” (The Hour of Decision), in which he asked Mexican-Americans to register to vote before the deadline, critically examine the Brown administration’s policies, and vote for Ronald Reagan. A “Ya Basta” pamphlet published in English, featuring the editorial “The Labor Record of Reagan” among other articles, referred to the regional chairmen of Mexican-American Democrats for Reagan as Reaganistas and included pictures of Reagan with Mexican-Americans. Recognizing that Mexican-Americans and labor were anything but mutually exclusive categories, Reagan gave a speech hosted by Mexican-American Democrats for Reagan at East Los Angeles Junior College on October 14, the day between his two major speeches on labor during labor week. The Reagan campaign did everything in its power to appear a friend of the Mexican-American community, even riding a horse in a Mexican Independence Day parade in traditional Mexican clothing. While Reagan ran for governor in a predominantly white California, he hoped his effort in the Mexican American community would siphon off votes from Brown, and Roberts estimated that Reagan ultimately won nearly a quarter of these votes.⁹⁶

In 1966, Ronald Reagan engaged in the now commonplace practice of targeting specific groups of voters by either political or personal identity. He shaped his rhetoric and platform to appeal to certain groups such as students, seniors, laborers, and Mexican-Americans and reached out to George Christopher and Sam Yorty after the primary to attract their supporters. By selecting specific issues with which certain groups disapproved of Brown’s stance and taking the opposite position, Reagan attracted many voters who had previously voted for Brown in 1958

⁹⁶ “La hora de la decisión,” Folder “66 Campaign RR (1),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Ya Basta,” Folder “RR Material (1),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Friday, October 14,” Folder “Schedules [Ronald Reagan] (4),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Roberts, “Professional Campaign Management and the Candidate, 1960-1966,” 21; “September 16, 1966,” Folder “Schedules [Ronald Reagan] (4),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

and 1962. By going after components of Brown's coalition, Reagan reshaped the political landscape to favor his candidacy.

The Final Stretch

While polls showed Reagan ahead of Brown by eleven percentage points immediately after the primary, Brown pulled within four points in September and was still within six or seven points in October. However, Reagan won the election by more than fifteen percent. While Reagan's massive electoral triumph resulted largely from the way he presented himself throughout the campaign and how the campaign targeted different groups of voters, a well-orchestrated final push left no doubt in anyone's head that Reagan would win on November 8; only the magnitude of the victory shocked the political establishment. As in the final days before the primary, the Reagan campaign combined massive campaign events such as rallies with an effective canvassing campaign at the grassroots level to win a stunning electoral victory. In addition, the Reagan team continued to innovate new techniques and tirelessly reached out to every possible voter through every means possible.⁹⁷

In addition to the strategies employed before the primary, the campaign began an "Issue of the Week" starting in mid-September, already mentioned with regard to labor outreach. Each week, Reagan gave a major speech on the highlighted topic. Reagan addressed the following issues during the final weeks of the campaign: agriculture, crime, taxes and cost of government, welfare and senior citizens, natural resources, labor, education, and finally, leadership and morality. In the absence of debates between the two candidates, Reagan effectively articulated

⁹⁷ Folders "Campaign Polls (2-3)," Box C32, Series "1966 Campaign Files," *Ronald Reagan Governor's Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

his positions throughout the final weeks of the campaign through the “Issue of the Week” framework.⁹⁸

In addition to increased visibility through massive rallies, Reagan increased his presence on television in the final stretch of the campaign. While previous campaigns had used television effectively, particularly the Kennedy campaign of 1960, the political uses of television had yet to be perfected by 1966. Holmes Tuttle and Cy Rubel served as Co-Chairmen of the Reagan TV Fund, which solicited donations specifically for television exposure. Reagan participated in a number of telethons through local television stations across the state beginning in September. During these telethons, he answered questions from callers. Two days before the election, he participated in a KTLA telethon, a local television station serving the Southland, the largest single television market in California covering Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Ventura, Riverside, and Orange Counties. In addition to participating in telethons, during which Reagan’s adroit question-and-answer abilities reached the homes of voters across the state, G-P Productions developed television spots and fifteen-minute “key issue films,” which also made use of question-and-answer sessions.⁹⁹

The Reagan campaign also used television effectively by devising the “Reagan Team Barbecue,” held on October 16. This was the first modern campaign house party, complete with a thirty-minute simultaneous television broadcast of Reagan and other Republican candidates from his Malibu ranch in hundreds of homes, reaching thousands of California voters. The original plan was for Republican volunteer groups to organize barbecues across the state without

⁹⁸ Memo from Paul Hanson to Tom Reed, Subject “Issue of the Week” (23 August 1966), Folder “[Northern California Campaign Schedules] (1),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

⁹⁹ Reagan TV Fund pledge card, Folder “66 Campaign: RR (1),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; Folders “Schedules [Ronald Reagan] (4-5),” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*; “Format for Reagan Key Issue Films,” G-P Productions, Folder “RR Material [Folder Two] (2),” Box C32, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

the aid of local campaign organizations, but the overwhelming enthusiasm for the statewide barbeque caused the campaign to encourage county and regional leaders to organize their own parties. The reason for the change was to “encourage many smaller Bar-B-Ques rather than a few large ones. The reason for this is to get the broadest participation possible.” The genius of this tactic was the minimal organization required to reach thousands of voters and raise funds for local campaign and volunteer organizations in addition to the statewide operation. House parties of this sort have become popular in modern campaigns, used by both Obama and McCain in the 2008 presidential election.¹⁰⁰

While Ronald Reagan mostly engaged in larger events during the final stretch of the campaign, Nancy Reagan continued to attend local coffees and luncheons as both Reagans had done throughout the primary season. Republican women’s groups hosted most of these smaller campaign functions attended by Nancy Reagan. While Ronald Reagan spoke at six airport rallies across the state the day before Election Day, Nancy Reagan embarked on a “Thank You Tour” of all regional headquarters within Los Angeles County, serving the dual purpose of thanking local campaign staff and rallying them before the final get-out-the-vote drive on Election Day.¹⁰¹

While the Reagan campaign continued to develop new tactics for communicating with voters, the Brown campaign struggled. Bradley had not only misguided Brown into ignoring Yorty and focusing instead on Christopher, he also embezzled \$85,000 from the campaign treasury, which investigators discovered several years later. Led astray by Don Bradley, Brown

¹⁰⁰ Inter-Office Communication to All County and Regional Chairmen from Thomas P. Pike and Dirk C. Eldredge re: Reagan Team Bar-B-Que (28 September 1966), Inter-Office Communication to All County and Regional Chairmen from Thomas P. Pike and Dirk C. Eldredge re: Reagan Team Bar-B-Que (6 October 1966), “Reagan Team Bar-B-Que Registration Form,” Folder “RR-Staff Inter-Office Memos (4),” Box C33, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

¹⁰¹ Folder “Schedules [Nancy Reagan],” Box C29, Series “1966 Campaign Files,” *Ronald Reagan Governor’s Papers*.

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

looked elsewhere for direction. After his relatively poor showing in the Democratic primary, Brown called his 1958 campaign manager Fred Dutton to come back out to California from Washington to save the campaign with the help of Bradley and Hale Champion, a close adviser to Brown during his years in the Governor's Mansion. This decision turned out to hurt the campaign at least as much as it helped. Brown essentially put Dutton in charge of the general election campaign without giving him the title, which Bradley resented, and the two of them fought frequently at campaign headquarters. Dutton and Champion also had disagreements over strategy. Ultimately, Brown accepted defeat a week before the election, choosing to save campaign funds to cover potential debts rather than spend the money trying to win.¹⁰²

Reagan's innovative campaign resulted in a victory for the conservative movement that few, if any, could have imagined after Barry Goldwater's defeat in 1964. Between November 1964 and November 1966, Republican voter registration increased 5.3 percent, while Democratic registration *decreased* 0.4 percent over the same period. The Reagan campaign's emphasis on voter registration resulted in this disparity. In addition, Reagan wooed a number of Democrats over to his side. On November 8, 1966, Reagan won fifty-five of California's fifty-eight counties, only losing one county by greater than one percent: Pat Brown's native San Francisco. Reagan won statewide by a margin of 56.7 percent to 41.6 percent over the two-term governor and champion of "responsible liberalism." Two short years after Goldwater's defeat supposedly discredited the conservative movement, a conservative won control over the country's most populous state.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Edmund G. Brown, Sr., "Years of Growth 1939-1966; Law Enforcement, Politics, and the Governor's Office" (Interviews conducted by Malca Chall, Amelia R. Fry, Gabrielle Morris, and James Rowland, 1977-1981), Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, 564-565, 570; Frederick G. Dutton, "Democratic Campaigns and Controversies, 1954-1966" (Interview conducted by Amelia R. Fry, 1977-1978), Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1981, 137-138.

¹⁰³ Frank M. Jordan, *California Report of Registration for November 8, 1966 General Election* (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 13 October 1966), 4, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*; Frank M. Jordan,

Conclusion

While Ronald Reagan's innate political abilities, events in Berkeley and Watts, and demographic changes played a role in the 1966 election, Reagan won primarily because his campaign incorporated all aspects of the modern campaign in a period of evolution in American electioneering. The "total campaign" organized by Stu Spencer and Bill Roberts combined effective media image-making with efficient organization of a massive volunteer army. Reagan's earliest backers provided ample financial resources to compile an innovative operation that set the trend for future political campaigns. The hiring of political consultants, advertisers, and behavioral scientists to develop a cohesive message and image has completely changed the game of politics in the last half century, producing engineered candidates whose personalities have played a more important role than their politics. First organized effectively by the Goldwater campaign in the California primary of 1964 and mastered by Reagan's team in 1966, grassroots activity, particularly door-to-door canvassing, has been central to successful candidacies for office ever since the 1960s. Reagan's biggest advantage over Brown in 1966 was the skilled and cohesive leadership of his campaign, which combined all of the elements necessary to communicate effectively to voters and thereby win elections.

California provided the perfect setting for the first thoroughly modern campaign. By 1966, California was the most populous state in the union. The state's geographic size required effective delegation of tasks and multiple campaign headquarters. This combination of people and area made California the perfect laboratory for political tactics that could then be used at the national level, as happened with those tactics employed by Spencer-Roberts in the 1966

California Statement of Vote and Supplement: November 8, 1966 General Election (Sacramento: Secretary of State, 13 December 1966), 6, available in *Elections and Political Campaigns*.

gubernatorial campaign. In addition to the state's size, machine politics had no place in California since the governorship of Hiram Johnson, so candidates had to win their party's primary to win the nomination. Unlike Kennedy in 1960, Reagan did not have to contend with party bosses to become a viable candidate. If he had been required to do so, he most likely would never have been governor. As political machines continued to lose their power over subsequent decades and particularly since the Republican Party became competitive in the South, the kind of campaign Reagan ran in 1966 became relevant for the entire country.

Other than the advent of political consulting and image-making, one of the most important contributions of Reagan's campaign that has become common political practice was the treatment of voters as cohesive blocs. This splintering of the electorate has been taken for granted in recent years, as evidenced by polling and news coverage of elections. Reagan's team isolated groups of Democratic voters they thought they could reach based on their own "thought leader" and precinct-level research. As Spencer-Roberts developed "Ya Basta" to reach out to Spanish-speaking voters, so the George W. Bush campaign of 2004 used "Viva Bush" to appeal to the Latino community. Press coverage of the primary race between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton in 2008 talked about each candidate's "coalition" of different voting blocs, which could have potentially splintered the Democratic Party after the primary if not for the effective rebuilding of a cohesive party at the hands of both Obama and Clinton between the last primaries and the Democratic National Convention. As Republicans and Democrats have essentially targeted the same blocs of "swing" voters, the party platforms have moved closer together in accordance with what these groups, such as labor, Latinos, and more recently suburban voters, find attractive politically.

As Spencer-Roberts developed direct mail and the “Register for Reagan,” so the Obama campaign mastered the political uses of the internet. Direct mail has flooded America’s mailboxes during election years since the 1960s as candidates seek to reach every possible voter. Mailers ensure that voters have some exposure to a candidate should a volunteer never reach them by phone or in person. Online campaign registration is a direct descendant of “Register for Reagan.” Obama amassed millions upon millions of dollars for his campaign through small online donations, and anybody could have gone to his website and signed up to volunteer in a variety of capacities. The Reagan team developed the best voter outreach and volunteer recruitment tactics given the available technology in 1966, while Obama developed these tactics in a twenty-first century context.

Reagan’s 1966 gubernatorial campaign was not only important in revolutionizing electoral politics; his victory also revived American conservatism following Barry Goldwater’s demoralizing defeat. Reagan articulated a demilitarized version of Goldwater conservatism that emphasized personal responsibility as the basis of American society. Reagan’s successful run for California’s highest executive office set a trend for the conservative movement, which followed Reagan’s lead across the country. Conservatives gained power by developing grassroots armies across the country, such as the one employed by the Reagan campaign, which reached out to discontented voters looking for change. They not only learned how to reach voters but also how to communicate effectively with them. The conservative movement, beginning with Reagan’s first campaign, effectively convinced lesser educated voters that the liberal state exemplified by the Kennedy, Johnson, and Brown administrations told Americans how to live their lives. Ironically, Reagan engaged in behavior policing of student protestors as

Kevin McKenna
Senior Thesis

governor and enacted policies as president that also sought to control how people lived their lives, such as the War on Drugs.

As the modern conservative movement came to power, so did Barack Obama. As Reagan and his advisers mastered the use of television and on-the-ground activism in 1966, Obama mastered the use of the internet both in image-making and in building a grassroots organization in 2008. As the political climate had shifted in favor of a conservative candidate in California in 1966, the political climate had shifted in favor of a liberal candidate nationwide in 2008, but the political debate never guaranteed Reagan or Obama victory. Brown in 1966 and McCain in 2008 could have adjusted to the changing attitudes of voters. Brown recognized years later that his emphasis on his past record as governor rather than on a future plan for California was a huge mistake. McCain tried to shape his image as a “maverick” but he offered little change in direction from the policies of the Bush administration. Both Brown and McCain pursued negative tactics that sought to belittle the other candidate as nonviable, but the electorate generally wanted a change in direction in both cases. Reagan, Obama, and their advisers behind the scenes innovated their way to victory by altering American political culture through their trendsetting campaigns, demonstrating that freshness, personality and organization can overcome a lack of political experience in winning over the American electorate.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Brown, “Years of Growth 1939-1966; Law Enforcement, Politics, and the Governor’s Office,” 566.

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Senior Thesis

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