PATRICK JOSEPH BUCHANAN, "CULTURE WAR SPEECH: ADDRESS TO THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION" (17 AUGUST 1992)

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Abstract: Patrick Buchanan's speech from the 1992 Republican National Convention is frequently cited as a definitive artifact of the culture wars of the late twentieth century. After challenging President George H.W. Bush in the Republican Primary, Buchanan agreed to endorse Bush in exchange for a primetime speaking slot at the RNC in Houston. Having attacked Bush over tax policy, Buchanan drew on social issues to stir passions and unite the GOP behind Bush's candidacy.

Keywords: Buchanan, Bush, culture war, family values, Republican National Convention

On August 17, 1992, conservative commentator Patrick J. Buchanan addressed the Republican National Convention, delivering a speech that would long be remembered as the definitive statement of the American "culture war." Diagnosing the national condition as one of spiritual decline, Buchanan neatly divided the American populace into two competing camps—one that was traditional, patriotic, and conservative, and another that was radical, deviant, and fiercely liberal. A vote for George H. W. Bush, Buchanan declared, was a vote for the former; a vote for William Jefferson Clinton was a vote for the latter. If Americans were to emerge from their spiritual descent and return to the "Judeo-Christian" values upon which the nation was founded, it was vital that they support of the Republican ticket. Couched in the language of warfare, the stakes of Buchanan's vision were unmistakably high.

But in order to understand Buchanan's argument—indeed, to understand why he was afforded a speaking slot at the RNC in the first place—one must first understand a few things about his life, career, politics, and the context in which these events unfolded. A life-long conservative, Buchanan had served as an advisor to three Republican administrations, had helped invent the art of media punditry, and had gained a national reputation as a passionate advocate of right-leaning positions. Through it all, he placed his stamp on a movement that had largely defined the political climate of the late twentieth century.[1] Like many conservative Republicans, Buchanan supported the Bush candidacy in 1988 and wished Bush the best during

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the early days of his administration. Like many conservatives, however, Buchanan was outraged at Bush's decision to raise taxes, directly reneging on a campaign pledge. As the end of Bush's first term drew near, Buchanan launched a primary challenge to express his discontent.

Though he failed to win a single state primary, Buchanan did draw enough support to make the race interesting and certainly enough to make the Bush campaign nervous. After Buchanan dropped out of the race in June of 1992, Bush operatives sought to win his endorsement and heal the internal divisions that had split the party in the preceding months. A deal was struck, but the price was high. Buchanan was granted a primetime speaking slot on the convention's opening night. He used this opportunity to deliver remarks that, for many, would come to define the party as a whole. The themes of that address continue to resonate two decades later.

This essay seeks to contextualize and interpret Patrick Buchanan's culture war speech both as an artifact of the 1992 election and an exemplar of social-issue politics near the turn of the millennium. Having harshly attacked President Bush on taxes, Buchanan could not realistically endorse him on economic grounds. Instead, he used his convention slot to motivate conservatives on social issues, stirring up moral passions and gaining sufficient notoriety to perhaps resuscitate his presidential hopes four years later. A testament to the divisive force of culture war rhetoric, Buchanan's address demonstrated how social-issue advocacy can attract some voters even as it drives others away.

Buchanan's Biography

Though life experience shapes all public figures, few have been so thoroughly, self-consciously wrought from the past as Pat Buchanan. Born on November 2, 1938 to Irish Catholic parents in Washington, D.C., Buchanan entered childhood amid the sights and sounds of a nation at war. His father, a successful accountant, and his mother, a nurse-turned-homemaker, raised a bustling household of seven boys and two girls. Pat – "Paddy Joe" to his siblings – was the third child, and one of four boys born over as many years. In his 1988 memoir, *Right from the Beginning*, Buchanan remembered his youth as a unique time in American history. Washington, D.C. in the 1940s was a "sleepy and segregated southern city," a "quiet, pleasant place that has since disappeared beneath the risen cosmopolitan capital of the West."[2] Georgetown provided an idyllic setting for Buchanan's early years, marked by family, religion, and juvenile hijinks. Violence and alcoholism abounded as well, but for Buchanan, these moral failings were either instructive or merely part of the local color. For the most part, the 1940s and 1950s afforded him a front row seat from which to observe the greatest generation in action. "I loved these years," Buchanan wrote, "nothing since has matched the singular sweetness of their memory."[3]

In 1956, Buchanan entered Georgetown University, a transition he made only reluctantly. According to biographer Timothy Stanley, Buchanan "turned twenty-one and came down with a nasty case of arrested development," marked by a series of illnesses and an "unhealthy lifestyle of drink, women, and trouble."[4] In October of 1959, he was involved in an altercation with two D.C. police officers that resulted in a broken hand and an assault charge. Georgetown promptly expelled him but agreed to a year's suspension and loss of scholarship after his father intervened. When he returned a year later, Buchanan graduated third in the

class of 1961 and enrolled in the Columbia University School of Journalism, where he quickly developed a reputation as a combative conservative. Upon graduating in 1962, he began his journalistic career with the right-leaning *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, which made him, at 23, the youngest editorial writer at any major newspaper in the United States.[5]

Though successful in St. Louis, Buchanan eventually realized the limits of his potential there. "Being an editorial writer at twenty-three was a heady experience," he wrote, "but there were drawbacks. There were no by-lines; nobody knew my name; and there was no action."[6] His prospects changed in December, 1965, when former Vice President Richard M. Nixon gave a speech in nearby Belleville, Illinois. Buchanan—who planned to support a Nixon candidacy in 1968—spoke with the former Vice President at a cocktail party following the address, expressing his support and eagerly volunteering to play a role in a future White House bid. The next week, Nixon called the *Globe-Democrat* to offer Buchanan a job, which the young writer was happy to accept. At Nixon's offices in New York City, Buchanan found the excitement he had been seeking. He also found love, in the form of Nixon secretary Shelley Ann Scarney, who became his wife three years later.

Buchanan started working for Richard Nixon during the run-up to the 1966 midterm elections and remained loyal to the "Old Man" through the Watergate affair and after. His responsibilities were varied. He was advance man, advisor, news aggregator, and speechwriter. During Nixon's presidency, Buchanan worked alongside William Safire to craft the administration's speeches and other public statements. "[Buchanan] did 'pusillanimous pussyfooters,' for Agnew alliteration," Safire later recalled, "while I did nattering nabobs of negativism.'"[7] Recognized as Nixon's "favorite son," Buchanan played an especially influential role in press relations. Advocating a brash, often confrontational posture—playing "political hardball," as he called it—Buchanan encouraged the President to challenge the "liberal elites" in the press. It was a Buchanan-coined term, "the great silent majority," that would ultimately give Nixon his most successful tool for mobilizing Americans against his critics on the left and in the media.[8] Though devoted, the relationship between the two was occasionally strained. At times, Buchanan became frustrated with Nixon's rather moderate policy choices. At other times, he wanted the President to be more aggressive in attacking his political enemies. When Nixon decided to travel to China to meet with Mao Tse-tung in 1972, Buchanan was appalled. When he signed the "Shanghai Communique," agreeing to reduce American military presence in Taiwan, Buchanan tendered his resignation. Though tempted to accept, Nixon ultimately insisted that Buchanan stay on, demonstrating a brand of loyalty that Buchanan would return to him during the Watergate scandal. After a short stint with the new Ford administration, Buchanan left the White House in September, 1974.[9]

Back in the private sector, Buchanan lived a relatively normal and quiet life until 1977, when he was offered a job hosting a Washington radio show called *Confrontation*. Representing conservative viewpoints, he was pitted against liberal commentator Frank Mankiewicz, and later, Tom Braden. Buchanan and Braden developed the show into a popular local institution, and in 1982 they took the format onto national television, rechristening it as CNN's *Crossfire*. Stanley writes that the two adversaries, "who were still doing *Confrontation* in the afternoons, picked up any argument they had started earlier and ignored whatever guest or topic they were supposed to be discussing." Pioneers of "talking head" punditry, "they were the forerunners of people like Ann Coulter, Joe Scarborough, and Tucker Carlson."[10]

Having established a professional reputation as a combative hardliner, Buchanan was an unlikely choice for a position in the Reagan administration.[11] So it came as quite a surprise when, days after the 1984 election, Chief of Staff Don Regan announced Buchanan's appointment as White House Communications Director. His arrival corresponded with what Stanley describes as a "nasty" turn in the administration, during which Reagan and many of his surrogates adopted a markedly confrontational posture in both style and substance.[12] When, during the 1986 Iran-Contra scandal, Buchanan led a spirited defense of the administration and of disgraced Colonel Oliver North, conservatives across the country began to mention him as a possible successor to Reagan.[13]

Frustrated again by what he deemed a too-moderate Republican administration, Buchanan resigned his post in 1987. Much to his supporters' disappointment, he did not run for office the following year. Citing deference to fellow conservative Jack Kemp, Buchanan decided to avoid what would certainly have been a bruising primary. "If a Buchanan candidacy could not capture the nomination," he wrote, "but did succeed in mortally wounding the campaign of Jack Kemp, a friend, it could fairly be said that I had crippled the conservative cause by indulging myself in the worst kind of dog-in-the-manger politics."[14] Instead, he returned to *Crossfire* and continued to write columns for the *Washington Times.* When the 1988 general election came around—after Jack Kemp had withdrawn from the race—Buchanan became a full-throated supporter of candidate George H.W. Bush. But his relationship with *President* Bush would quickly become more complicated.

The Road to the 1992 Convention

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the dichotomous political struggle in the United States was being fought primarily on two fronts—one economic, the other social. Liberals—aligned with the Democratic Party—favored higher tax rates as a means of funding social programs, including an array of welfare initiatives intended to benefit the poor. Conservatives—concentrated in the Republican Party—called for lower tax rates and corresponding cuts to social programs. They advocated addressing social problems through private initiatives and philanthropies. Each side defended its position vigorously, and the battles were often heated. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that disputes over the dry details of tax policy frequently gave way to *ad hominem* attacks on the participants. Often the question of *what* should be done hinged on the more basic question of *who* advocated the position and, more importantly, who they represented.[15] Democrats routinely cast Republicans as the party of the rich and the greedy, representing big business and big money to the detriment of the less fortunate. Republicans suggested that Democrats spoke for the lazy and undeserving, as epitomized by Ronald Reagan's evocation of the "Welfare Queen."[16] In trading these accusations, each side hoped to malign the other in the public imagination.[17] The result was rhetorical combat—a war of words.

This was the condition examined by sociologist James Davison Hunter in his 1991 book, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*.[18] Noting the sizable gulf between American liberals and conservatives at the time, Hunter set out to explain their disagreements with reference to competing religious beliefs, conceptions of truth, and visions of national identity. Of these, the last is perhaps the most important. Throughout the book, Hunter continually

returns to the question of who or what America *is*, noting that political partisans in the post-war decades were engaged in a struggle of national definition. For several decades, conservatives had argued that cultural developments—particularly those of the turbulent 1960s—had shaken the nation's moral foundations, pulling America downward into permissiveness, secularism, and their attendant social problems. This narrative informed conservative thinking on many issues, including abortion, feminism, racial politics, homosexuality, and others. When American liberals gloried in the expansion of the welfare state and in new rights for women and persons of color, conservatives fought back, opposing changes that—in their view—threatened the identity and shared moral vision of the nation they loved. While much of the political discourse of the period ostensibly concerned economic policy, social disputes were never far below the surface.[19]

On August 18, 1988, when he rose to accept his party's nomination for the presidency, Vice President Bush made a pledge that would later define his one-term administration. "Read my lips," he declared, "*no new taxes*!" The line, composed by speechwriter Peggy Noonan and endorsed by campaign advisors Jack Kemp and Roger Ailes, was intended to reassure skeptics on the Republican right, who continued to question Bush's conservatism.[20] Some Bush aides, notably economic advisor Richard Darman, wanted the line removed, declaring it too rigid and a potential threat to good governance down the road. But Noonan was insistent. When others took the line out, she later recalled, "I kept putting it back in. Why? Because it's definite. It's not subject to misinterpretation. It means, I mean this."[21] The media embraced the line, repeating it frequently and reinforcing the impression that he did, in fact, "mean this." But unfortunately for Bush, conservatives were determined to hold him to his word.

Less than two years later, while embroiled in budget negotiations with the Democratic Congress, President Bush was forced to revisit and revise his pledge. As one *New York Times* editorial put it, "Read my lips" had softened to "no preconditions."[22] In May, Bush joined leaders from both parties in placing "everything on the table," opening the door for both spending cuts and tax increases in route to an acceptable deal. As part of his own budget proposal, Bush called for approximately $20 billion in new revenues, effectively breaking his campaign promise.[23] The decision won praise from moderates, who noted the difference between seeking office and actually governing. Even Walter Mondale—a Democrat who ran against Reagan in the 1984 campaign—applauded Bush for what he called an act of political courage.[24]

For conservatives, however, Bush's decision was an act of betrayal. By the end of June, Republicans in Congress were openly criticizing the President and publicly distancing themselves from the administration. Three of these, Representatives Dick Armey (R-TX), Toby Roth (R-WI), and Robert Walker (R-PA), declared their intent to vote against Bush's foreign aid bill in protest over taxes. Others, led by Senators Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Trent Lott (R-MS), composed a letter to Bush declaring their disappointment and vowing to vote against any increase in revenue.[25] By December, conservative activists Richard Viguerie and Steve Allen were able to declare that "Bush has lost all credibility with conservatives." Citing the President's duplicity, they announced that the search for his replacement had already begun.[26]

The next year, in November 1991, Pat Buchanan's sister and political advisor Angela "Bay" Buchanan informed members of the press that her brother was exploring a primary challenge.[27] The nation's first woman Treasurer under Reagan, Bay Buchanan was enthusiastic

about her brother's prospects, and he deferred to her advice. Joined by aides Greg Mueller, Paul Erickson, and a handful of others, Team Buchanan decided to launch its campaign in New Hampshire, a small and conservative state with a floundering economy. Even before the official announcement in December, Buchanan had drawn support from conservative groups and disgruntled Republicans. He also received an endorsement from the influential *Manchester Union-Leader*, which frequently lauded him in editorials. One representative piece proclaimed that Buchanan was "a true believer in the mainstream conservatism that the President chose to disavow when he reneged on his 'no new taxes' pledge."[28] Citing the enthusiasm driving the "protest vote," New Hampshire Governor and Bush aide Judd Gregg estimated that Buchanan would draw approximately 30 percent of the ballots.[29] On Election Day, February 18, Buchanan took 37 percent, a figure that galvanized his campaign.[30]

After New Hampshire, the campaign moved south, stumping in Georgia and appealing to conservative voters in "Super Tuesday" states such as Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Much of this region enjoyed a stronger economic climate than New Hampshire, prompting Buchanan to change course, emphasizing his social views and traditional values. In Georgia, the campaign ran a television ad blasting the National Endowment for the Arts, featuring footage of leather-clad gay dancers, several of whom were black. Often referred to as the "leather-daddy" ad, it accused the Bush administration of using tax dollars to fund art that has "glorified homosexuality, exploited children, and perverted the image of Jesus Christ."[31] An early indicator of the culture war theme that would come to define Buchanan's run, the ad also revealed his willingness to participate in gay-bashing and race-baiting to secure the support of southern social conservatives. For the remainder of the primary season, Buchanan did satisfactorily, winning between 17 and 32 percent of the vote in the remaining primaries while ceding some of the far-right vote to former Klansman David Duke. His dilemma, according to Stanley, was that Buchanan was "running too badly to win but too well to quit."[32]

Buchanan finally exited the race following the June 2 California primary, when he underwent heart surgery to treat an undisclosed case of angina. Bay Buchanan became a political pundit for *Good Morning America*, affording her the opportunity to report from the Democratic National Convention in July. It was during this assignment that she was first contacted by Bush operatives Charlie Black and Jim Lake, who were seeking her brother's endorsement. The two camps failed to reach a deal right away because Buchanan demanded a primetime speaking slot at the Republican Convention. The paucity of primetime slots, coupled with Buchanan's well-known liabilities, made the Bush campaign hesitant. Ultimately, however, the potential rewards of the deal must have offset the risks. In late July, the campaign offered Buchanan a 30-minute slot on the Convention's opening night. He agreed to speak just before Ronald Reagan.[33]

The Culture War Speech

Undoubtedly the most memorable speech of the 1992 convention, Buchanan's address—popularly known as his culture war speech—sought to reunite the Republican Party and channel its collective energy behind the candidacy of George H. W. Bush. Having led a strong primary challenge, Buchanan used his convention address to develop common ground on social issues. Indeed, taxes went completely unmentioned in the speech, replaced by

frequent invocations of what Dana Cloud has termed the rhetoric of "family values."[34] In creating contrasts between Bush and Clinton, Buchanan relied primarily on *moral* arguments, drawing on the already-established culture war lexicon to stir the passions of his audience.

After opening his remarks with some quick humor and congratulations to the nominee, Buchanan immediately went to work crafting a dichotomous vision of the parties. Dismissively referring to the Democratic National Convention as "that giant masquerade ball," Buchanan charged that "20,000 liberals and radicals came dressed up as moderates and centrists in the greatest single exhibition of cross-dressing in American political history" (4).[35] Here the accusation of duplicity and false moderation took the form of an anti-gay slur, tacitly aligning the Democratic Party with social deviance. Buchanan then built on this line by cementing the connection between the Democrats and a radical ideology, declaring, "The American people are not going to go back to the discredited liberalism of the 1960s and the failed liberalism of the 1970s, no matter how slick the package in 1992" (6).

Buchanan's persistent attempts to brand Clinton a "liberal" revealed his desire to polarize the electorate in ways favorable to the GOP. Robert C. Rowland and John Jones have noted that "the key terms in Buchanan's speech are 'we' and an often implied 'they,'" each carefully invoked to draw a sharp contrast between friend and enemy groups.[36] Often, Buchanan deployed "we" as a stand-in for his "Buchanan Brigades"; at other times, "we" represented the American people as a whole. The two were also frequently conflated, a rhetorical move that was subtle but probably not accidental. By casting "we" against a sinister "they"—a "they" comprised of radical feminists, environmental extremists, and militant homosexuals—Buchanan dismissed his foes on moral grounds while aligning his listeners with an appealing and nostalgic traditionalism.

Much of the moral contrast in Buchanan's address was drawn from his enumeration of important presidential qualities, to which he referred as the "many roles" of the office (13). In the first place, he said, the president is "our first diplomat, the architect of American foreign policy" (14). Touting Bush's experience as a U.N. Ambassador, Director of the CIA, envoy to China, and Vice President during the end of the Cold War, Buchanan attacked Clinton for failing to address foreign policy concerns in his own convention speech. "Bill Clinton's foreign policy experience," Buchanan quipped, "is pretty much confined to having had breakfast once at the International House of Pancakes" (14). That Clinton would have the nerve to criticize Bush on foreign policy was to Buchanan an indication of shallow character. Such criticism amounted only to "the cheap political rhetoric of politicians who only know how to build themselves up by tearing America down" (15). This character flaw served as a transitional device, allowing Buchanan to turn his attention more directly to the importance of the presidency as a "bully pulpit" and "a place of moral leadership" (16). After praising Bush as "a defender of right-to-life, and a champion of the Judeo-Christian values and beliefs upon which America was founded" (16), he criticized Clinton's support for abortion and opposition to state funding for religious schools, also declaring that Clinton headed up "the most pro-lesbian and pro-gay ticket in history" (19).

Buchanan's critique of *Bill* Clinton incorporated Hillary Clinton as well. Though attacks on potential first ladies are rarely made so directly, Buchanan pulled no punches in claiming that "Hillary believes that 12-year-olds should have the right to sue their parents," and that she "has compared marriage and the family as institutions to slavery and life on an Indian

reservation" (21). Dismissing Hillary Clintons' views as "radical feminism," Buchanan accused the couple of plotting a sinister agenda of "abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, [and] women in combat units" (23). This, he concluded, was "not the kind of change we can abide in a nation that we still call 'God's Country'" (23).

Moral character was especially important to the president's role as Commander-in-Chief, Buchanan then argued. The office demanded someone who could be trusted when sending "fathers and sons and brothers and friends into battle" (24). Since Bush had served in the U.S. Navy as a younger man—indeed, he was "the youngest fighter pilot in the Pacific war" (25)—

Buchanan claimed that Bush had proven himself worthy of such trust. By comparison, Buchanan posed the following question about Bush's opponent: "And Mr. Clinton?" Yet, before Buchanan could answer his own question, the chants of "Where was Bill?" drowned him out. After a lengthy pause, Buchanan struggled to regain the floor, reiterating the phrase, "I'll tell you where he was" five times before the crowd finally quieted (25). He then explained that during the Vietnam War Clinton "sat up in a dormitory room in Oxford, England, and figured out how to dodge the draft" (25). This charge—that Clinton had "dodged" the draft while hiding on foreign soil—reinforced the larger image of selfishness and cowardice that Republicans sought to impose upon their rival. Buchanan finally asked, "Which of these two men has won the moral authority to send young Americans into battle?" The answer was a foregone conclusion (26).

Perhaps the most striking moments came in the final third of the speech, when Buchanan reiterated his call for party unity. He vaguely acknowledged his "disagreement" with Bush, while urging the Buchanan Brigades to "come home" to the Republican Party (34-35). In the section of the speech that followed, Buchanan highlighted important areas of agreement between the president and himself, talking exclusively about *social issues*:

> Yes, we disagreed with President Bush, but we stand with him for the freedom to choose religious schools, and we stand with him against the amoral idea that gay and lesbian couples should have the same standing in law as married men and women. We stand with President Bush—We stand with President Bush for right-to-life and for voluntary prayer in the public schools, and we stand against putting our wives and daughters and sisters into combat units of the United States Army. And we stand with President Bush in favor of the right of small towns and communities to control the raw sewage of pornography that so terribly pollutes our popular culture. We stand with President Bush in favor of federal judges who interpret the law as written, and against would-be Supreme Court justices like Mario Cuomo who think they have a mandate to rewrite the Constitution (36-38).

Having enumerated the points on which "we" still stood with Bush, Buchanan uttered the most famous lines of his address, framing the election as a key battle in a larger cultural war:

> My friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America (39).

In drawing on Hunter's culture war vocabulary, Buchanan deviated from Hunter in telling fashion. Though Hunter described a polarized political situation defined by competing strands of American religious thought, Buchanan argued that only one of these strands was actually religious. The other—represented by the Clintons and their party—was either areligious or anti-religious, representing an imminent threat to all God-fearing Americans. This was an important twist. For Hunter, the rhetorical "war" pervading American culture was regrettably divisive. For Buchanan, it was a useful tool for rallying the partisan troops.

As he drew his speech to a close, Buchanan deployed a series of brief anecdotes about people he had met on the campaign trail—factory workers, the unemployed, those whose livelihoods were threatened by invasive environmental regulations. These people, he said, were "our people," and though they "don't read Adam Smith or Edmund Burke," they do "share our beliefs and our convictions, our hopes and our dreams." These people, he declared, "are the conservatives of the heart," and "we need to reconnect with them" (43-44). Among these were "the brave people of Koreatown who took the worst of the L.A. riots, but still live the family values we treasure, and who still deeply believe in the American dream" (45).[37] Buchanan did not explain why the people of Koreatown were exemplary of conservative "family values." But by mentioning them, he was able to transition into his final vignette, recounting the courage of the National Guard, those "19-year-old boys ready to lay down their lives" in defiance of the mob (49). Rowland and Jones have cited this portion of the speech as "arguably racist," given its presumption of white force as the only answer to black violence.[38] Cloud makes the same point,[39] and Buchanan's checkered history with race relations does lend itself to these readings. Still, perhaps the most pragmatic function of Buchanan's closing paragraphs is that they provided a timely military metaphor for his call to cultural war. Just "as those boys took back the streets of Los Angeles, block by block," he said, so "we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country" (49).

Reception and Legacy of the Culture War Speech

On the evening of its delivery, reviews of Buchanan's speech were generally positive. Veteran journalists, including David Brinkley, Hal Bruno, Sander Vanocur, and Ted Koppel, all raved about Buchanan's performance, emphasizing his force and effectiveness.[40] The mood within the Bush camp was described as "electric," and President Bush personally congratulated and thanked Buchanan at a party following the proceedings. Stanley points out that, if Buchanan's speech was polarizing, it was not unique. Earlier that same evening, Pat Robertson had accused Hillary Clinton of working to "destroy the American family," and Marilyn Quayle had maligned the Clintons as being products of the 1960s "counterculture." Later, President Bush himself would call for an America that looks a lot more "like the Waltons and a lot less like the Simpsons."[41]

But even as many celebrated Buchanan as the engineer of party unity, moderate Republicans began to express their irritation at what they perceived to be the speech's divisive and angry tone. Asked how the speech would play in his home state of Wisconsin, Governor Tommy Thompson replied simply, "I don't think it will." Richard Lugar, the Republican senator from Indiana, stated that the speech was "not a winning message," adding "you don't build majorities by excluding whole groups of people, and you don't have to be nasty to be conservative."[42] Ronald Reagan was rumored to have been offended by Buchanan's gay-bashing, and Barry Goldwater objected to his dismissal of pro-choice views.[43] Such negative assessments were soon echoed by members of the press. Writing in the *New York Times,* Michael Lind identified Buchanan as the exemplar of what he called "conservatism with an ugly face,"[44] and R.W. Apple Jr., adopting the same metaphor, wrote that Buchanan "epitomized the scowling face of conservatism."[45] Much of the media coverage following the speech linked it with anger and ugliness, reflecting an unnervingly militant mood pervading the convention itself. Though their candidate was a reputed centrist, many Republicans sought to remake him into something more extreme—something more like his primary challenger. Indeed, William Safire declared that Buchanan's extremism had "hurt Mr. Bush's moderate self-image more than anything said at the Democratic Convention."[46] For the remainder of the week, Republican speakers sought to soften the party's tone. Housing Secretary Jack Kemp stressed the need to "inspire our nation to a better future," and Texas Senator Phil Gramm pledged that "America's third century will be our greatest century."[47] But despite their best efforts, Buchanan continued to dominate the news.

When Bush lost the election that November, Buchanan's "hard right" constituency shouldered much of the blame.[48] Many—both within the GOP and outside of it—saw the speech as confirmation of Garry Wills' claim that Bush had become the "prisoner of the crazies."[49] But Buchanan remained unrepentant. Reflecting on the address years later, he concluded that "America was still basically conservative and Clinton was too liberal. Bush went up in the polls when he hit Clinton on his past and on the social issues."[50] It may also have been the case that many Americans just did not like the choice offered them by their two major parties. Though Clinton defeated Bush by a margin of 43 to 38 percent, 19 percent of the electorate turned out for third party candidate Ross Perot. Crazy or not, there was plenty of blame to go around.

Ultimately, Buchanan's culture war speech remains notable because it gave expression to the frustrations of millions of conservative Americans who believed—then as now—that their country was founded on conservative Christian principles. By assigning these citizens militant roles in a life-or-death struggle, Buchanan realized the emotive force of social issue activism. Though the culture war did not begin when he took the stage in Houston, it did suddenly adopt a clearer, more definitive shape. And while this view of the struggle may not have helped Bush in the election, it did help solidify the rhetorical structure of a brand of Christian conservatism that became a force in American politics in the decades that followed. Despite its reputation as a "radical" speech—indeed, *because* of that reputation—Buchanan's address lives on as a notable piece of American oratory.

Author's Note: Eric C. Miller is an Instructor in the Department of Communication Studies at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania. He would like to thank J. Michael Hogan and Shawn Parry-Giles for their assistance with this essay.

Notes

[1] When citing Patrick Buchanan as a member of the conservative movement, it is important to note that he was not purely representative of the movement's breadth. Indeed, American conservatism in the twentieth century was marked by important internal disagreements and a diversity of views. These included libertarianism, traditionalism, neoconservatism, and paleoconservatism, among others. Buchanan's thinking was closely aligned with the last of these, marked by localism, anticommunism, isolationist foreign policy, populist suspicion of elites, and a basic secularism that nonetheless lauded the influence of religious belief on public morality. But in disagreeing with other conservatives on some of these points, Buchanan and other paleoconservatives were bound to the movement by a shared commitment to core beliefs. These included insistence on small government, low taxes, domestic free markets, and traditionalist social policy, among others. Bonded by these commitments, they often differed from—and struggled against—"moderates" within their own party. As we will see, the contest between Buchanan and Bush is illustrative of that difference. For more information on the conservative tradition, see Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (New York: Regnery, 1953); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); and Eugene Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Harvard, 1994). For more on paleoconservatism specifically, see Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993); Edward Ashbee, "Politics of Paleoconservatism," *Society* 37 (2000): 75-84; and Joseph Scotchie, *Revolt from the Heartland* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002).

[2] Patrick J. Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1988), 13.

[3] Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning*, 13.

[4] Timothy Stanley, *The Crusader: The Life and Tumultuous Times of Pat Buchanan* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2012), 24.

[5] "Biography," *Patrick J. Buchanan Official Website*, http://buchanan.org/blog/biography (accessed 11 July 2013).

[6] Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning*, 294.

[7] William Safire, "Buchanan's Campaign," *The New York Times,* December 16, 1991, A19.

[8] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 50-51.

[9] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 80.

[10] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 89.

[11] Buchanan was also dogged by accusations of anti-Semitism, stemming from his spirited defense of accused Nazi war criminals Karl Linnas and John Demjanjuk. See: Philip Shenon, "The Buchanan Aggravation," *The New York Times,* February 19, 1987, A28.

[12] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 104.

[13] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 122.

[14] Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning*, 5.

[15] For more on culture war era identity politics, see Sonja K. Foss, "Equal Rights Amendment: Two Worlds in Conflict," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 275-288.

[16] "Welfare Queen Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign," *The New York Times*, February 15, 1976, 51.

[17] For more on the process of "vilification" in culture war debates, see Marsha Vanderford, "Vilification and Social Movements: A Case Study of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 75 (1989): 166-182.

[18] James D. Hunter, *Culture Wars*: *The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books), 1991.

[19] For more on culture war history, see: William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway), 2005; J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press), 2011; and Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[20] As noted previously, the Republican Party did not enjoy strict ideological purity at this time. The party was subject to a power struggle of sorts, with various types of conservatives and increasingly besieged moderates vying for control. Conservatives gradually won out, and Bush – who had risen out of the moderate faction—was often judged insufficiently conservative by many on his right. Much of his campaign was thus devoted to negotiating the conservative demands of his colleagues and the more moderate expectations of the general population. See: Gerald M. Boyd, "Bush Seen Taking Moderate Stance: Shift Toward Center Fueling New Debate on His Views and Political Message," *The New York Times,* October 20, 1987, A30.

[21] Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (New York: Random House, 2010), 307.

[22] "If They're Serious About the Deficit," *The New York Times*, May 15, 1990, A24.

[23] Susan F. Rasky, "Tax Rise 'on the Table' in Talks on Federal Budget," *The New York Times*, May 7, 1990, A16.

[24] Walter F. Mondale, "The Lip-Reading Slogan Aside, Mr. Bush Deserves Some Applause," *The New York Times*, July 3, 1990, A17.

[25] Richard L. Berke, "G.O.P., in Revolt on Taxes, Steps Up Criticism of Bush," *The New York Times*, June 28, 1990, A20.

[26] Richard Viguerie and Steve Allen, "Bush Loses the Right Wing," *The New York Times,* December 18, 1990, A25.

[27] Robin Toner, "Buchanan Weighs Presidential Race," *The New York Times*, November 15, 1991, A19.

[28] Elizabeth Kolbert, "Buchanan Seeks 'None of the Above' Vote in New Hampshire," *The New York Times*, November 26, 1991, A18.

[29] R.W. Apple Jr., "Bush Camp's Primary Fear: A Buchanan Moral Victory," *The New York Times*, January 26, 1992, 18.

[30] Steven A. Holmes, "Mutineer Rocking the G.O.P. Boat," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1992, A17.

[31] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 175.

[32] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 185.

[33] Stanley, *The Crusader,* 207.

[34] Dana Cloud, "The Rhetoric of <Family Values>: Scapegoating, Utopia, and the Privatization of Social Responsibility," *Western Journal of Communication* 62 (1998): 387-419.

[35] The paragraph numbers coincide with the version of the speech that accompanies this essay.

[36]Robert C. Rowland and John Jones, "Entelechial and Reformative Symbolic Trajectories in Contemporary Conservatism: A Case Study of Reagan and Buchanan in Houston and Beyond," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4 (2001): 61.

[37]The Los Angeles riots played a notable role in the 1992 election, with the Bush campaign citing the lawlessness as symptomatic of the breakdown of the traditional family. Vice President Dan Quayle, in particular, would become associated with the issue thanks to a speech he gave to the Commonwealth Club of California. See Jill M. Weber, "James Danforth Quayle, III, 'Murphy Brown Speech' (19 May 1992)," *Voices of Democracy* 4 (2009): 83-96.

[38]Rowland and Jones, "Entelechial and Reformative Symbolic Trajectories in Contemporary Conservatism," 63.

[39] Cloud, "The Rhetoric of <Family Values>," 398.

[40] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 210.

[41] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 210.

[42] R.W. Apple Jr., "G.O.P. is Flirting with the Dangers of Negativism," *The New York Times,* August, 18, 1992, A13.

[43] Stanley, *The Crusader*, 210.

[44] Michael Lind, "Buchanan, Conservatism's Ugly Face," *The New York Times.* August 19, 1992, A21.

[45] Apple, "Dangers of Negativism."

[46] William Safire, "The Three Middles," *The New York Times,* August 20, 1992, A27.

[47] Apple, "Dangers of Negativism."

[48] William Safire, "Losers, Not Weepers," *The New York Times,* November 5, 1992, A35.

[49] Garry Wills, "George Bush, Prisoner of the Crazies," *The New York Times,* August 16, 1992, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/16/opinion/george-bush-prisoner-of-the-crazies.html (accessed July 9, 2013).

[50] Cited in Stanley, *The Crusader,* 211.