THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

AFTER EQUALITY: CONSERVATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS FORMATION IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2016

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Acknowledgements

I am lucky to have found the love, generosity, and intellectual camaraderie of quite a few amazing people over the years as I developed my thought about politics, and navigated the academy.

As an undergraduate at Northwestern University I had the luck of meeting and learning from Samuel Weber and Ernesto Laclau. Both offered me generous support. Professor Weber invited me to take part in the intellectual and Parisian life of the Paris Critical Theory Program in 2008-9. My aspirations for intellectual camaraderie and worldbuilding are inspired by his example. Carina Archer was a sharp and exceptionally nurturing advisor for my BA thesis at Northwestern. I would not have stayed in the academy without the experience of working with her. I admired and learned from then Northwestern graduate students who became friends, Mert Arslanalp, Diego Rossello, Deborah Goldgaber, and Virgil Brower. Virgil and Debbie stuck with me. From then until now Debbie has helped me figure out how to live life with philosophy, and the politics and friendships that follow from it.

At the University of Chicago, I have to thank the wider community of theorists who have created a vibrant world of workshops, courses, and events. I have been challenged and supported in these spaces by Moishe Postone, Lisa Wedeen, William Sewell, Jennifer Pitts, John McCormick, and Gary Herrigel. Gary has offered much needed encouragement over the years, and helped me grow professionally by teaching in the *Power, Identity, and Resistance* core sequence, which he leads with vision and generosity. Thanks go also to Kathy Anderson, who is a rock of sanity and support in the Political Science Department. I am grateful for her kindness over the years.

At the University of Chicago Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, I have to thank Sarah Tuohey for her patience and friendship, and for modeling how to work as an advisor with undergraduate students. I had the opportunity to co-teach a course with Lauren Berlant, *Advanced Theories of Gender and Sexuality,* in Winter 2015. Lauren models the only sort of hopeful disposition I can imagine in the academy, managing to combine care, with a relentless expectation that others speak and think and make the world we want. I am deeply grateful for her mentorship and inspiration. With my colleagues at the Center, including Claire McKinney, Annie Heffernan, Omie Hsu, Lindsey Conklin, Michael Dango, Amanda Blair, Kathryn Hendricks, and Erin Moore, I had the chance to learn how to forge a place in the university through shared scholarly commitments and solidarity.

The research and writing of this dissertation was funded through generous grants by the University of Chicago Division of the Social Sciences and the Mellon Foundation; the University of Chicago Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality; and the Frank Edward Hydoski Political Theory Research Award.

My incredible committee guided me through this dissertation –Patchen Markell, my chair, Michael Dawson, Robert Gooding-Williams, and Linda Zerilli. I had the immense luck that Michael Dawson knew where I was coming from day one in grad school. Through the course of conversations over the years he helped me keep my perspective in view as I waded through various theories, and helped me sketch out the stakes of what I was doing. I have to thank Patchen for his patience and sharpness in listening to me and helping me formulate my project in terms sometimes more clear than my own and legible to the world of political theory. I wouldn't have been able to do a project as true to my political concerns and theoretical intuitions without him, and for that I am forever grateful. Linda has been a rock of support of me, and

trusted advice. Over the years, I came to see her acts of mentorship, straightforward feminist speech, and engagement with students, add up to a political campaign in the academy. Bob has been generous in his encouragement and I want to thank him for talking through ideas with me at the early stages of my dissertation. He always asked those little-big questions that moved my thinking forward. I am thankful to all of my committee for helping me learn how one can be political and teach political theory.

Through workshops and conferences, I have had the opportunity to meet theorists whose work I admire. I benefited from conversation and advice from Jack Jackson, Nina Hagel, Ella Myers, Paul Passavant, and Amy Allen. Marianne Constable, Lena Zuckerwise, Penny Weiss, Tamara Metz, Daniel Nichanian, and Samuel Galloway discussed earlier versions of chapters of this manuscript, and I thank them for their thoughtful and generous comments. Thanks also to participants in the Gender and Sexuality Studies Workshop, the Political Theory Workshop, the American Politics Workshop, and the Social Theory Workshop at the University of Chicago, as well as the 2014 Critical Theory Roundtable, and the 2014 Conference on Law, Culture, and Humanities.

I could not have made it through graduate school without the love and community of my colleagues and friends at the University of Chicago. I have learned about political theory, and life, from Daniel Luban, Emma Stone MacKinnon, Tania Islas Weinstein, Daniel Nichanian, Ethan Porter, Steven Klein, Samuel Galloway, Ray Noll, Ian Storey, Claire McKinney, Annie Heffernan and Omie Hsu.

Finally, I have to thank my family: my parents, Gregory and Patricia Campi; my brother, Colin Campi; my sister, Tarah Campi; and my partner, Bachar Bachara, for helping hold me together.

Abstract

This dissertation develops an account of popular articulations and receptions of economic politics and policy. Political theorists tend to view the economy from a systemic or institutional level and identify the politics of economics with elite-driven policy. The popular bases of market-based reform, on the other hand, are interpreted through the heuristic of neoliberal subjectivities. However the subjectivities approach also focuses on generalized discourses that are said to shape subjects. This project attends to the subcultural activity through which diverse groups crystallized market-reform ideologies in the US since the 1980s. Looking to sites of publicity and politicization of the family, I make the case that as actors attempted to navigate late liberal forms of work and family life, they bent towards privatizing, consumption-oriented publics in search of affirmation and a sense of control over their daily lives. I develop an account of ideology formation that emphasizes ideology's rootedness in everyday material practice.

This account is developed in two steps. First, I provide a new view of the reemergence of the liberal defense of women's 'choice' in popular feminism. Drawing on feminist analyses of 'choice' rhetoric in media, advertising, as well as sociological accounts of working mothers, I shed light on the re-privatization of the feminist subject in the wake of formal equality. Second, I track the formation of a new constellation of US conservative politics, propelled by the cultural revival of conservative Christians, and their integration into the Republican Party through the 'pro-family' alliance. My second chapter analyses organization literature and radio broadcasts of the networks of parachurch multimedia organizations through which the evangelical subculture enters politics, focusing on the subculture's most enduring and influential group, "Focus on the Family." I argue that with their penetration by new media and consumption industries, spaces of work and home serve as powerful sites of consciousness formation.

Chapters Three and Four offer an account of ideology formation, arguing that loose alliances of inchoate expectations and more formed ideologies mobilize these diverse groups behind market-based reform. Chapter Three challenges the account of neoliberal politics offered by contemporary theorists who extend Michel Foucault's theory of governmentality, and his work on ethical practices of the self, to develop a theory of neoliberal subjectivities. Offering a history of school choice politics, Chapter Four shows that the motives and ideals of actors are not reducible to the principles of free-market reforms, and must be articulated politically. I highlight two popular conservative realignments. The first has its roots in the pro-family alliance. The second, more tenuous realignment brings minority parents and African American activist groups in urban settings into alliance with elite reformers in campaigns for school choice.

Introduction

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, market-based reform approaches to public policy crystallized as a dominant force in US politics. The ascendance of these approaches, widely documented in accounts of 'neoliberalism,' depended on the formation of a new conservative politics that these accounts –due to their focus on the political subjectivities of neoliberalism –mischaracterize or neglect. This dissertation offers an account of the new US conservatism by tracking both its explicit ideological formations and its privatized modes of 'public-ness.'

While the former were articulated by diverse groups such as conservative Christians, free-market elites, and black activists in their search for alternatives to the welfare state order, the latter took form as ordinary actors, such as Christians mobilized by the evangelical subculture and working women who embrace feminist 'choice,' turned to lifestyle consumption and self-care to affirm and defend their private lives in the face of intense pressures of the late liberal socio-economic order. In developing this account of contemporary conservatism, I also make the case that a robust account of ideology formation should attend to the two dimensions I track here, namely, both the explicit ideologies articulated through recognizably political activities such as movement building and advocacy, and the inexplicit, enacted field of political consciousness, manifest in the modes of communication and shared practice that emerge as preferred forms of public-ness, shaping actors' political expectations and aspirations for public life.

In so doing, I reframe a question that has been posed in various forms by political theorists since the rise of the new right in Great Britain and the US. If in the early 1980s the quandary was support by conservative voters of free-market policies and the attack on the post-

war state welfare order, by the 2000s the problem had seemingly metastasized, as popular feminism began to embrace a depoliticized liberalism, conservative Christians firmly realigned behind a pro-business Republican Party, and market-based reforms captured the common-sense pragmatism of a variety of political groups that had lost faith in the state as the broker of the economy and the liberal American dream.

This project is deeply informed by theorists in the cultural Marxist tradition, including Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Ernesto Laclau, and Lauren Berlant, who have attempted to explain the nature of capitalist hegemonies, and the formation of consent through contemporary publics. Like these theorists, this project attends to the experiences and consciousness of ordinary political actors. Drawing on sociological accounts, as well as original analysis of movement literature and the media of distinct subcultures, my analysis of emergent conservatisms proceeds inductively. I turn to various sites where popular support for liberalization and marketization has been constructed, among women who shoulder the pressures of dual-breadwinner economies to affirm feminist 'choice' (Chapter One), evangelicals organized by the Christian Right to assert parental control as freedom from the state (Chapter Two), and low-income parents in urban settings who support market-based reform of failing public schools (Chapter Four).

These cases help shed new light on the question of neoliberal politics not only because they capture new constituencies mobilized in support of market-based reforms and welfare state retraction in recent decades, but also because they focus in on the site in which economic structures and policies meet the concerns of ordinary actors, namely, in negotiations over the norms and expectations that govern work and family life. This project tracks these negotiations by attending to the media and communication practices through which everyday concerns enter

into public discourse. In the case of the Christian Right, I look to the parachurch organizations that repoliticizied the evangelical subculture in recent decades, and the pervasive internet and radio ministries through which these organizations helped forge the conservative-neoliberal "pro-family" alliance, and mobilize a devoted base.

These accounts show the work of shaping political consciousness by reaching everyday actors in the form (pervasive multimedia) and content (everyday concerns of work and family) of discourse, and through the articulation of these discourses into wider political alliances. In so doing, I bring to light ideals, traditions, and claims of various groups that have been shaped by new conservative politics, but whose social and political meanings, I will argue, are not reducible to the political visions offered by the latter.

The articulation of 'school choice' alliances by religious parents concerned with the moral content of their children's education, and African Americans fighting for racial equality in the wake of failed public schools desegregation, are case in point. While my study of school choice politics tracks the histories of political organizing that shaped market-reform ideologies, my study of the evangelical subculture and choice feminism bring to light the privatized publics in which everyday negotiations of a new gender order, by newly politicized women in particular, played a crucial role in generating a new conservative consciousness. In the case of Christian evangelicals, the formation of pro-family ideology gave political form to this consciousness by articulating concrete stances on social issues, such as the association of religious rights and parental choice with a defense of market freedom against the state.

As the following chapters move through presenting my cases, they also make an argument about the limitations of a family of theoretical approaches to the political present that offer critiques of contemporary subjects. In these accounts, analyses of the nature of

contemporary subjectivities –as precarious, resentful, or simply neoliberal –serve as a sort of heuristic for the relationship between the subjects of everyday action, and overarching capitalist political-economic relationships and institutions. In so doing, they focus critical-theoretical attention toward the ethical precepts or rationales of action that dispose contemporary subjects to reproduce, through varying degrees of unconscious or passive assent or active affirmation, the late liberal economic order. These accounts offer holistic depictions of the economic order that render it misleadingly cohesive, and tend to overlook the intermediary cultural practices and political subcultures that I will argue play a crucial role in the construction of popular support for that order.

A case in point is William Connolly's analysis of the alignment of US evangelicals with the finance sector of American capitalism. This account shares my basic question, and my aim of linking economic institutions to the cultural formations and subjective dispositions that provide their essential underpinning. However, by locating this linkage in an ethos, this account runs into some of the pitfalls I want to highlight.

Ethos, the central analytic category of Connolly's *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style*, is a shared spirituality, a complex of dispositions to judgment and action. An ethos becomes embedded in assemblages of institutions and practices, such as those that make up the capitalist order. For Connolly, the capitalist order is defined by a minimal axiom of private wealth accumulation, the contract, wage labor, etc. These basic elements are given form in historically variant assemblages of "state policies, educational institutions, media practices, church proclivities, class experiences, and scientific practices."[1] Through their working interconnections, assemblages produce resonance between affinities of spirituality, amplifying

[1] William Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) 11.

their effects. Such is the case of US evangelicals and so-called cowboy capitalists, who share an ethos of existential revenge, which Connolly attributes to:

> Cultural induction into the idea of a vengeful God; intensification of the human fear of death; secret resentment against a world that requires it; unstated resentments against the imperious demands of your God; compensatory drives for special economic entitlements in this world.[2]

In explaining the capitalist order as an assemblage underpinned by an ethos, and diagnosing its dominant ethos as existential revenge, this account roots its answer to the question of the popular, socio-cultural dimension of contemporary capitalism in a highly speculative account of subjective tendencies toward resentment. Drawing on Nietzsche's account of the *ressentiment* that plagues mortal human life, Connolly finds instances of this tendency in prominent aspects of US evangelical culture, such as in the Revelation story's promise of final judgment.

But in moving from this undoubtedly reliable account of a tendency in contemporary right-wing politics to an analysis of the US evangelical culture and the wider evangelical-capitalist assemblages of which it forms a part, Connolly overstretches the heuristic capabilities of the ethos. Having identified a resentful ethos, Connolly neglects a more detailed analysis of the evangelical subculture. It is through such an analysis that the formation of a politicized evangelical public and histories of new right-evangelical articulation come to light, which, I argue in Chapter Two, are highly significant for understanding the cultural rejuvenation and adaptation of popular conservatisms in recent decades. A few claims follow from Connolly's analysis that misread significant features of the US evangelical subculture that this project highlights.

[2] Ibid, 53

Connolly argues that aggressive individualism is the most salient element of the US evangelical ethos, and credits this element with binding evangelicals to the neoliberal order. Among US evangelicals, Connolly argues, "male identity has now been bonded to a politics of individual aspiration;"[3] lower-class men identify with successful "men of prowess," and invest resentful energies into competing in capitalist meritocracies. This disposition is evidenced by the prevalence of the Revelation theme, which "taps heterogeneous drives to revenge against others and demand for compensatory entitlements that often circulate in life."[4] Drives targeted with special vehemence against those who "exude a feminist ethos of care," and concern for the common good.[5]

The rhetoric of divine vengeance, I would suggest, represents an extreme voice in the evangelical culture, one whose tone, at least since Jerry Falwell, has been ingenuously moderated, remixed, and mainstreamed. This process was carried out both by political elites in the Christian Right, from Ralph Reed to James Dobson, and within a wider network of churches, educational institutions, and media. [6] The conservative Christian public they helped organize is at least as focused on Christian lifestyle and moral living amidst an amoral, secular culture as it is on vengeance. Its favored rhetoric is "witnessing," in which preachers, radio hosts, or participant-listeners share personal stories of God's work in their lives, offering inspiration and

[3] Ibid, 34
[4] Ibid, 6
[5] Ibid, 55
[6] By the 90s a conservative Christian mainstream discourse emerged, bridging differences of creed and denominational rhetoric and worship styles to articulate a shared oppositional political worldview. For an analysis of Falwell's role in bringing fundamentalism into mainstream evangelical discourse, see Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell:Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) For an account of Christian Coalition's efforts to develop a ecumenical discourse, see Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997). For an analysis of Focus on the Family see chapter two of this manuscript.

practical advice.[7] As Christian Right scholars David Gutterman and Colleen McDannell have noted, these discourses dovetail with self-help genres circulating in mainstream culture.[8]

While participating in popular self-help trends, the distinctly Christian practice of witnessing helps produce a political public with shared idioms and salient themes. Like the evangelical public's other dominant rhetoric, the jeremiad, the message of witnessing depends on a distinction between cultural insiders and outsiders that it helps to reproduce. However, while this speech incites resentment, it is far from creating the kind of ossifying effects that Connolly describes as following from a purely reactionary *ressentiment*. US evangelicals participate in a long US cultural tradition in which jeremiadic speech is used to mobilize countercultural opposition.[9]

Sharing Gutterman's attention to the 'antipolitical politics' of the Christian Right, my account of the evangelical subculture attempts to specify the political work it performs. In addition to creating a vibrant counterpublic primed for political mobilization, it performs what Zizek has suggested is the fundamental political-ideological maneuver, the elevation of a sphere of sociality above the power-ridden trenches of politics.[10] The conservative-neoliberal articulation hinges on images of moralized socialities –family, civil society, small business, and

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[7] Harding, *The Book of Falwell.*
[8] Colleen McDannell "Beyond Dr. Dobson: Women, Girls, and Focus on the Family," *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism.* ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth et. al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); David S. Gutterman, "Promise Keepers: Delivering Brothers from Democracy," *Prophetic Politics:Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) 94-128. In political theory, some have argued that self-help trends are depoliticizing, promoting individualism as opposed to care for a common world. See Michelle Ferguson "Validating Women, Judging Men: The Therapeutic Non-Politics of Sheryl Sandberg's Lean-In," *The Contemporary Condition,* November 27, 2013, http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/2013/11/validating-women-judging-men.html; and Ella Myers, "Crafting a Democratic Subject? The Foucauldian Ethics of Self-Care," *Worldy Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013) 21-51.
[9] George Schulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)
[10] Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, Slavoj Zizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (New York: Zerso, 2000) 95.

productive markets, which are set in opposition to elite finance, and the excesses of the liberal state.

While Zizek views this ideological move as part of a populist fetish, constructed in accordance with an unconscious structure of desire, and Gutterman treats it as privatizing and antipolitical, my account treats contemporary conservatism's moralized socialities as part of a political hegemony: a historically constructed constellation of social forces and an ideological structure of consent. My approach is more attentive to the material bases of ideology construction in this sense, a point I will return to in what follows.

This dissertation finds 'pro-family' discourse the most salient facet of the US evangelical subculture, and locates this discourse at the center of an ideological constellation that links evangelical concerns to free-market themes. While an aggressive and pro-capitalist discourse may skirt the radical fringe of evangelical politics, I find a Christian Right that advances its own pastoral image of capitalism, in which the message of care among Christians is central. My analysis of Focus on the Family, the most influential evangelical organization of the moment, shows that Biblical living amidst everyday pressures is the central concern of its vast multimedia ministry.

I situate the US evangelical revival[11] in the wider context of the success of the feminist movement since the 70s, and the changes in work and family organization it brought about.[12] The parachurch organizations in which the subculture is rooted, from the Promise Keepers to Focus on the Family, express their public's struggles to adapt to a dual-breadwinner domestic

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[11] Between1971-1990 6 million new members joined Evangelical churches in the US while mainline Protestant church membership declined by 2.6 million. Mark A. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States* (Charlotte: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) cited in Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: Gilford Press, 1998), 10

[12] Such as a 24% increase in mothers working outside the home between 1975 and 2009, see Suzanne M. Bianchi "Changing Families Changing Workplaces." *The Future of Children* 27, n. 2 (2011).

order, voiced by women struggling to split domestic energies with work life and men reaffirming their responsibility, and authority, in the home. This media also reflects the white, lower- and middle-class profile of its listeners, for whom, unlike racial minority women, working while mothering is a new reality for many, and unlike more affluent women, opt-ing out is less of an option.

Christian women, in their efforts to protect the autonomy of their private lives from the rapidly publicized and politicized status of their mothering, sex, and work, have played a pivotal role in the late 20th century rejuvenation of conservative politics. That this role has been under-theorized in the existing literature is perhaps due to the highly ambivalent and unstable nature of the political currents that femininst 'backlash' informs, but also to inadequate attention played to the role of gender on the parts of many scholars who study the creation and growth of the conservative movement. This project tracks some of the lines of alliance and shared concern in contemporary discourses on women and families across the political spectrum, beginning with an analysis of what critics have called the 'choice' feminist trend in contemporary feminism. These realignments across the political field have been driven forward by new lines of political contestation- such as debates over the family, that work to shape political consciousness and give rise to new political constellations.

The field of cultural realignments behind contemporary politics has fallen from view in a family of post-Foucauldian approaches that are highly influential in political, feminist, and gender theory. These approaches, of which Connolly provides an example,
share the common problem of under-attending to the rich field of cultural formations and conditions in which actors form their perspectives.

Theorists such as Wendy Brown and Nikolas Rose, who I engage in Chapter Three, extend Foucault's late work on governmental rationalities and techniques of the self to provide an account of 'neoliberal subjectivities.'[13] These accounts argue that governmental rationalities apply to political-economic techniques as well as practices of the self, and take these rationalities –as they appear in trends in legal discourse, public management, or education policy –as evidence of the subjective dispositions that inhabit and support those trends. Like Connolly's ethos, the heuristic of governmental rationalities makes possible claims about the motives, concerns, and drives of subjects that are overstretched. These accounts advance the inexplicit assumption that the subjects envisioned in elite institutionalized discourses are the subjects produced once these institutional arrangements are in effect. The success of economic and social policy that presumes a self-investing subject of 'human capital,' for example, sustain the concern, and at times stand as evidence, that contemporary subjects have become thoroughgoing entrepreneurs of the self.

The theoretical short-circuit I want to draw attention to is also at work in Judith Butler's analysis of neoliberalism. In her recent critiques of neoliberal economic arrangements, Butler builds on her earlier diagnosis of the psychic dispositions to melancholia and aggression, which she attributes to the workings of normative discourses, such as gender. Such norms are foundational to the social order, and are imposed on the subject as the cost of becoming a social being. 'Melancholia' is the psychic response to the primary loss constituted through entry into the symbolic order.[14] Butler's more recent work moves away from the generalized negativity of the theory of passionate attachments to social norms, but retains the more narrow diagnosis of

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[13] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015) and Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*: *Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[14] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993)

gender melancholia.[15] In works such as *Antigone's Claim,* and *Precarious Life,* she traces a destructive dialectic of formal law and social norms in which non-normative lives are marked as 'ungrievable' and provoke ever new mechanisms of social exclusion.

Ungrievable lives are those marked by appetites and associated identities foreclosed by mainstream norms and targeted by the aggression of transformed sexual energies. The contemporary moment for Butler is a punitive turn in the "biopolitical management of the ungrievable."[16] Such management involves "an unequal distribution of precarity, one that depends upon dominant norms regarding whose life is grievable and worth protecting, and whose life is ungrievable … less worthy of protection and sustenance."[17] It is the shared condition of gender melancholia, on this account, that provokes cultural conservatives and supporters of free markets to desire the punitive expulsion of non-conforming lives from the bonds of social inclusion, condemning them to suffer the consequences of their perceived failures of personal management and responsibility.

In its broad contours, the debate I am staging with critics of contemporary US neoliberalism rehashes an ongoing debate within Marxist theory. These approaches turn to accounts of the formation of subjectivity in order to explain why subjects take up the discourses they are said to reproduce. From these accounts, each author theorizes the mediation between

[15] Butler also moves away from the account of social normativity in her own earlier work, arguing that structuralist notions of the symbolic order have the effect of naturalizing cultural norms, and calls for an account of how symbolic orders come to be taken as necessary. However the resources to answer this question cannot be found in Butler's account. While she criticizes Lacan for rendering gender a necessary product of social order, Butler herself continues to treat male and female subject positions as the product of kinship norms of heterosexual exogamy, norms which she suggests are produced through relations of power, and thus contingent. However she maintains that alternative forms of kinship, and thus alternative gender identities, are foreclosed, and thus gender melancholia persists. For example, Butler wonders suggestively if Antigone's death as a consequence of her revelation of the normative order of sovereign power, reveals "a limit that constitutes political power that *forecloses* what forms of kinship will be intelligible, what kinds of lives can be countenanced as living?" Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death.* New York: Columbia University Press. 2000. 29.

[16] Judith Butler, "Can One Lead a Good Life in a Bad Life?" *Radical Philosophy* (Nov/Dec 2012) 10.

[17] Judith Butler. "Precarity Talk" ed. Jasbir Puar *TDR: The Drama Review* 56 n. 4 (Winter 2012) 170.

subjects and social order –in terms of the ethos for Connolly, psychic dispositions for Butler, or political rationalities for Brown. These accounts of mediation, I want to suggest, tip too far towards speculation about subjects. The notion of political rationality, for instance, aims to show how we relate to ourselves, and how we conceive of ourselves as subjects. In pointing to political-economic norms, this approach moves too far from first-person accounts of action, and the rich field of ideologies and cultural practices, to provide a convincing account of a late liberal subject's understanding of self and political world. Starting from political rationalities, it is difficult to reconstruct actors' self-conceptions, political aspirations, and expectations.

By moving from a focus on discourse, in general, and discursive constructs such as the Christian Woman or the Entrepreneur, to worries about actors, in particular, these approaches tend to overstate the ways in which the concerns and ideals of actors are shaped by neoliberal economics. Surely the concerns, motives, and consciousness of actors are not identical to the concerns animating the discourses that seek to interpellate them.[18] By suggesting that actors' active or passive ascent to the neoliberal order is produced by inhabiting the general institutionalized discourses theorists describe, they assume that actors act in a way removed from their true intentions or desires.

My turn to sociological approaches in this dissertation's case studies is driven by the insight that contemporary accounts of neoliberal subjectivities offer thin accounts of the nature of popular support for neoliberalism, and how it came about, and that this follows from their thin accounts of mediation. In these accounts, neoliberal politics appears as the outcome of an iterative process between subjects and institutions, in which an ethos, psychic dispositions, or

[18] Teresa de Lauretis makes this point regarding the difference between Woman as a construct of discourse and women and social, historical, and political beings in *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984)

rationalities taken to be exemplary of neoliberal political-economy is reproduced. Accounts that do flesh out the construction of neoliberal politics, such as Connolly's, pay little attention to the social –the field of work, family, gender relations, and everyday practice. For this reason, these accounts, too, overlook the role of political contestation and subcultural ideology formation in the development of market-reform conservatisms, and in particular, they have missed the role of women in constructing this shift.

By adopting a critical sociological approach in my case studies, I develop a more complete theorization of the politics of economics in late liberalism, which is better able to explain why actors and groups have taken their contemporary positions in US politics. In so doing, I find that renegotiations around work, gender, and family life have played a central role in the politics of market-reform. I thus begin my study with the case of choice feminism.

My critique of theories of neoliberal subjectivities is informed by debates between Marxists theories of ideology as false-consciousness, and theories that emphasize the materiality of ideology, and its embeddedness in complex, relatively autonomous circuits of culture. Like theorists of false-consciousness, critiques of neoliberal subjectivities hinge on the claim that the discourses of actors are effectively false, unable to grasp economic realities because they are so thoroughly conditioned by, or psychically invested in them.

Attempting to avoid a reductive account of false-consciousness, theorists working in the cultural Marxist tradition attempt to show how the distinct forces of the capitalist socio-economic order, on the one hand, and social formations of race, gender, and modes of public practice, on the other, shape the contemporary terrain of political action. In what follows, I outline how this tradition informs the interpretive approach developed in my cases studies. Despite their commitment to theorizing the social formations of capitalism, theorists from Stuart

Hall to Nancy Fraser offer accounts of the political cultural of late liberalism that reduce its dynamics to the complex reprogramming of the capitalist social order. Due to their focus on the general trajectory of capitalist development, these accounts lose a link to the materiality of ideology, and thus, as I argue in the case of Fraser in Chapter One, are unable to account for its salience to political actors.

This project's account of ideology draws on efforts to theorize the generative force of public practices such as politics in the work of Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Raymond Williams, Michael Warner, and Lauren Berlant. Building on these theorists, I find ideology embedded in everyday material practice in two senses. First, ideologies develop through actors' responses to everyday challenges in work, family life, and education. Second, the consciousness of actors which helps form these responses is itself shaped by the discourses surrounding everyday practice, such as women's interest media and advertising, discourses of self-help and spiritual guidance, and Christian-interest multimedia ministries. This account of ideology brings to light openings for constructive political-ideological work in the everyday receptions and articulations of the politics of economics that, by viewing all popular political discourses as suspect, contemporary critical theorists have tended to foreclose.

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With his concept of hegemony, Antonio Gramsci introduced a materialist account of ideology, breaking its identification with the realm of ideas contained in the 'superstructure' or the false-consciousness of actors.[19] Theorists in the cultural Marxist tradition adapt Gramsci's concept of hegemony to explain how realignments in the cultural field track the evolution of the capitalist economic order. Faced with the successes of the British new right under the leadership

[19] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (New York, Verso, 1985) 67.

of Margaret Thatcher, Stuart Hall turned to hegemony to reframe the question these successes provoked, namely, how did the Thatcher regime gain popular support among groups whose interests it can't be said to represent? Rethinking the notion of 'interests' in its conventional, economic sense, he proposes to approach political consent as a question of popular mentalities: how people come to view "the world and their role and allegiances in it."[20]

Hall views popular mentalities as a field of cultural struggle through socialization in family, school, and media, the first field on which dominant powers work to align political hegemonies. In so doing, he captures the work performed by new conservatisms in appropriating traditions behind political reform. Hall argues that unlike traditional conservatisms, the new right "must be understood as an active political force, actively committed to the philosophy that, in order to conserve, it must reform, in order to preserve, it must revolutionize."[21] Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's notion of the processes of disarticulation and rearticulation of social groups, Hall describes the alignment of conservative social forces (defenders of nationalism, law and order, and the traditional family) behind a program of governance that granted new powers to capitalist expansion.[22]

Hall's account of the new right is informative for this project because it captures the dynamic force of 20th century conservatisms in sampling traditions to serve new ends, and because he understands conservatism as a popular mentality, avoiding the narrowly economic understanding of interests that plagues many contemporary accounts of the new right.

However, Hall presents British new right politics as part of a cohesive project of post-Keynesian capitalist restructuring. While attentive to spheres of social meaning outside of the

[20] Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists," *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 45.
[21] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (New York: Verso, 1988) 125.
[22] Hall, *Hard Road,* 9

state (qua locus of economic governance), his analysis hinges on an imagined axis on which their assembled meaning can be said to be pro or anti-capitalist. This comes forward sharply in his criticism of Laclau and Mouffe. In describing the articulation of social and cultural forces as the field of popular-democracy, Hall charges, they fail to grasp that such elements can be won to support of dominant powers.[23] Hall's position suggests that elements of tradition and cultural values that appear in popular politics, unless they are avowedly anti-capitalist, are evidence of an ideological integration behind dominant powers.

While this position belies a naïve form of ideology critique, it is not out of synch with sophisticated Marxist critics of the present. Zizek, like Hall, reads all social meaning that is not savvy to its own constitution within capitalism –understood as "the structuring principle that overdetermines the social totality" –as ideological. [24] Reducing its meaning to its supposed role in the reproduction of popular consent to capitalism.

In Hall's work, this overarching critical framework impacts his description of the field of cultural struggle, which suggests a great degree of cohesion in the construction of political meaning. Because he views such struggle as taking place within "the horizon of the taken-for-granted," the social appears as a highly integrated field where interests are socialized ideologically.[25]

Laclau and Mouffe advance an alternative view of the economic order in their own attempt to theorize late 20th century politics in terms of the construction of political

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[23] Hall, *Hard Road,* 140
[24] Zizek, *Contingency,* 96
[25] Hall summarizes his idea of the horizon of the taken for granted thus: "the circle of dominant ideas does accumulate the symbolic power to map or classify the world for others; its classifications do acquire not only the constraining power off dominance over other modes of thought but also the inertial authority of habit and instinct. It becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: what the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes." Hall, "Toad," 44

hegemonies.[26] This account specifies the socio-economic arrangements under contest in the movements it tracks. In so doing it situates both new workers struggles in Europe and new social movements –including the feminist, civil rights, and ecology movements, on a common terrain of struggle over the post-war Keynesian order.[27] These movements struggled over specific social forms, including tendencies toward bureaucratization exacerbated by the extension of the state into formerly 'private' spheres, and intensified commodification with work standardization and the expansion of consumption-driven economies under Fordism.

Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe's notion of social antagonism offers an account of political grievances as emerging in unique contexts faced by actors, contexts that are shaped by multiple forms of subordination such as gender, nationality, or race.[28] The notion of social antagonism points to the process of politicization required for distinct forms of subordination to be recognized as such, and suggests that this process, at least in part, determines which dimensions of the economic order, through their association with other forms of subordination, emerge as sites of struggle.

This project takes up Laclau and Mouffe's view of capitalism as a social order whose evolving formations are shaped by political contestation. My treatment of contemporary movements for market-based school choice reform locates these movements broadly in a turn away from the state administration of social goods and services in response to the perceived overreach of welfare-state liberalism in both its punitive and administrative forms. Countering readings of these movements as evidence of popular integration into neoliberal ideologies of free-market reform, I highlight their common opposition to the failures of public school systems,

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[26] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*
[27] Ibid, 167
[28] Ibid, 122-134

as well as their distinct grievances rooted in racial and religious experience. The notion of social antagonism helps us see these grievances as significant for democratic politics in their own right, not to be reduced to their position within a new form of capitalism.

These insights need to be recovered today, as many theories of neoliberalism working in the Marxist tradition share Hall's tendency to interpret social and political currents in terms of their relation to the reigning capitalist order, which is taken to shape the cultural field. Fraser applies such a hermeneutic to retrospectively interpret second wave feminist struggles against welfare state bureaucratization and commodification as the handmaidens of a project of capitalist restructuring.[29]

Laclau and Mouffe's notion of hegemony as assemblages of economic-social-political relations offers a view of social and political processes as equally formative as economic ones. However, this account does not go far enough in capturing dynamics within the field of culture through which relations of power and patterns of subordination are continually reformed. To do so, I engage feminist theorists who have foregrounded such dynamics. Feminist theorists such as Angela McRobbie and Beverly Skeggs share Fraser's concern with depoliticizing trends in late 20th century feminism, but differ with her diagnosis. They draw on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to bring to light contemporary reformulations of class and gender power through the public spheres of work and consumer culture. Cultural capital is the knowledge, tastes, and skills that are passed by inheritance, and thus vary in accordance with one's social position.[30] It is a main medium of the symbolic power to which Bourdieu attributes the structuring of social practice.

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[29] Nancy Fraser "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History," *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2013) 209-226.
[30] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

The spaces of work and consumer culture produce the cultural capital of successful femininity, measured by appearance, comportment, and fashion.[31] In the realm of work, this capital fuels the continual re-skilling and cultivation of self-presentation required for communication and service-based jobs, which valorize feminine coded traits of affective responsiveness, creativity, and flexibility. These trends place special demands on working and middle-class women and sexual minorities who fill these new low-income, precarious jobs.[32] Given the lack of family supports in contemporary dual-breadwinner economies, these pressures are felt by men and women of all classes.

It is in this context that Chapter One places what theorists have called 'choice' or postfeminist discourses in popular feminism. These vaguely pro-women discourses encourage professional ascendance, affirm the pleasures of domesticity, and celebrate sexual empowerment through female-targeted markets for advice and lifestyle consumption.[33] With this absorption of feminism into popular culture, a depoliticized liberalism renders persistent barriers to women's equality invisible, and, critics argue, frees contemporary women to reaffirm their individual choice to take up compromised positions in work, home life, or sexual transactions that earlier feminist generations fought against.[34]

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[31] Angela McRobbie, "Notes on 'What not to Wear' and post-feminist symbolic violence," In *Feminism After Bourdieu.* ed. Lisa Adkins and Beverly Skeggs (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 99-109; and *Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change,* (London: Sage, 2009)

[32] The literature on the feminization of labor and the feminization of poverty is vast. On the feminization of labor see Angela McRobbie, "Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labor, and the post-Fordist Regime" (*New Formations,* 2010) and Jamie Peck *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. For analyses of the impact of feminized labor on low-class women see Anita Harris, *Future Girl: Young Women in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Beverly Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997).

[33] McRobbie, *Aftermath,* and Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) For an analysis of self-help trends in American Protestantism see McDannel, *Beyond Dr. Dobson.*

[34] Michaele Ferguson, "Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics" and Nancy Hirschmann, "Choosing Betrayal," *Perspectives on Politics 8*, n.1 (2010), 247-253; 271-278.

The diagnosis of popular feminisms as reflecting the complex co-formation of the meanings and practices of gender and the wider reorganization of kinship and economy rehashes an ongoing debate over the potential agency of modern subjects as theorized by Bourdieu, or, alternatively, Anthony Giddens. In developing their account of postfeminism as an individualizing ideology, McRobbie and Scharff take direct aim at Giddens' claim that an unprecedented degree of self-reflexivity drives late modern politics and social practice.[35] For Giddens, the self-reflexivity of modern institutions, as abstract systems of coordination, allows individuals some degree of purposeful agency over their shared social conditions. In late modernity, the autonomy from traditional authorities and relations of oppression achieved by institutions allows this self-reflexivity a greater role in the lives of individuals and society. The politics of late modernity is no longer a politics of emancipation aimed at securing freedom from tradition and oppression, but a politics of choice. It is driven by collective efforts to shape ways of life, such as through adopting environmental regulations to protect the quality of our natural environment.[36]

For Giddens, late moderns face increasing pressures and possibilities for constructing their life paths. In the wake of the successes of sexual liberation and gay rights movements, he argues, individuals negotiate the terms of intimacy and family life. Against this claim, critics of postfeminism argue that discourses of individual choice put an affirmative frame on the retraction by both the state and popular movements from the politics of equality, setting the ideological stage for neoliberal restructuring.

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[35] McRobbie, *Aftermath*, 18-19 and Christina Scharff, *Repudiating Feminism: Young Women in a Neoliberal World* (Ashgate, 2012) 49.
[36] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991) see in particular chapter 7, "The Emergence of Life Politics."

There is a fine line to be walked between these two positions. To do so, I turn to sociological accounts of contemporary women who draw on choice discourse to affirm the negotiations of work and family life they make under prevailing constraints, such as lack of support from spouses and access to affordable childcare, and ongoing gender discrimination in the workplace. These negotiations, as Giddens suggests, tell something other than a story of ideological integration. Against the view of popular choice discourses as feminist failure or simple ideological integration, is there not a way to take seriously popular reinvestments in domesticity, aspirations to beauty and the currency of sexuality, even the embrace of the demands of flexible labor, without resorting to a liberal affirmation of personal choice?

Such an account is gestured to in feminist attempts to theorize new successful femininities as cultural capital. While femininity depends on dominant valuations to retain social power, Skeggs suggests that it can be deployed from a position of lesser power, that is, tactically.[37] While Skeggs does not unpack this challenge to Bourdieu, her suggestion is incisive. Tactics, she notes, following de Certeau "have more to do with constraints than possibilities" and work within existing conditions "to turn them into opportunities.[38]" Femininity, here, is multivocal, and flexibly deployed. It indexes a position linked to gender relations that vary by social context. For working-class women adopting the professional styles of dress and comportment required for service sector jobs, successful femininity promises empowerment within the confines of new precarious economies. However, contra Bourdieu, it retains alternative meanings and aspirations.

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[37] Skeggs, *Formations,* 10-11. For other feminist critiques see Judith Butler "Performativity's Social Magic," *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader* ed. R. Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999) and Elspeth Probyn, "Shame in the Habitus," *Feminism after Bourdieu* ed. Lisa Adkins and Beverly Skeggs (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 224-248.
[38] Skeggs, *Formations,* 10. Citing De Certeau, 1988.

If femininity so conceived is a tactic of empowerment, it is one among a variety of tactics deployed by women that have not always fit within a second wave program of eradicating social patterns of gender inequality. Just as re-emergent liberal feminisms denote local adaptations to a reorganization of capitalist power, so too is this the case for African American groups in urban settings, who have channeled struggles for racial equality into school choice campaigns. Like working mothers who affirm the compromises attendant on their personal choice, these parents take a gamble on the market.

The historical consciousness of choice politics is expressed in a shared set of dispositions and expectations that animate these popular re-investments in the private sphere. In addition to building on Skeggs' and McRobbie's accounts of successful femininities anchored in the public spheres of work and consumer culture, my theory of conservative consciousness is informed by Raymond William's discussion of historical consciousness as a component of capitalist hegemonies. There, the notion of historical consciousness gets at the particular qualities of relationships between individuals and in wider social worlds that embed a worldview, and make up part of an overarching structure of consent.[39] Extending this notion to capture the effect of the highly mediated virtual publics that permeate and refigure our 'real' social worlds, Lauren Berlant points to role of shared atmospheres and patterns of affective response in shaping historical sensoriums in the present.

This project employs Berlant's method of tracking shared patterns of attachment and adjustment to capture what is common in the consciousness of contemporary publics –the evangelical subculture, consumers of popular feminism, and urban supporters of school choice –

[39] Williams introduces the notion of a 'structure of feeling' to avoid the tendency of terms such as "consciousness, experience, feeling" to be reduced to fixed forms, and abstracted from social conditions. Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129.

that grounds their affinities to new conservative politics. In so doing, I find patterns of response, such as elevation of the quotidian, including its self-reflective marking through habit,[40] and renewed attachment to the familiar,[41] that Berlant identifies as forms of optimism under strain. In specifying optimism as a structure of attachment that is "invested in one's own or the world's continuity,"[42] Berlant captures a dimension of consent that remains inexplicit. Optimism often manifests in incoherencies of subjectivity with regard to political meaning or trajectories of action.[43] A hangover from postwar American politics of economic expansion and upward mobility, optimism, Berlant suggests, sustains attachments to normal conditions on the hopes they will bear out visions of the good life.

This optimism is perhaps cruel; it indeed appears to sustain a wrought wave of turns back on the self, manifest in trends of lifestyle consumption, self-help practices and revivalist discipleship. When these practices become thematized, as in the late 20th century politicizations of the family, they underwrite the moralization of sub-state socialities, and demands for the devolution of control to individuals, families, and communities.

Berlant's account of the strained attachments of the present singles in on both residual elements of postwar optimisms, and adjusted expectations and patterns of relationship that emerge in conditions of socio-economic insecurity and accelerated inequality. In so doing, it fleshes out the dynamism central to Raymond Williams' account of hegemonies, in its attention to the ongoing movement of residual and emergent modes of social meaning and practice within

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[40] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) 61-64.
[41] Berlant, *Optimism,* 161-190.
[42] Berlant, *Optimism,* 13
[43] Ibid, 53.

dominant formations.[44] Like Williams, I am interested in tracking the multilayered formations at work in political hegemonies, and the interplay between deliberate rearticulations of ideas and traditions and inexplicit mobilizations of consent. New conservative politics draws its force from both the pro-family ideologies of the Christian Right and the visions of free-market and conservative research foundations, as well as from the political consciousness mobilized by these groups, built in part on the inarticulate conservatism of everyday attachments and the optimism of convention and self-care.

While this consciousness is fueled by patterns of optimistic attachment whose political–ideological meanings remain open, it also advances a more formed ideology based on the idealization of families, markets, and communities as spaces of moral, direct action. This project tracks the deliberate articulations of this new conservative politics in its account of the political history of the pro-family politics of the Christian Right (Chapter Two), and of that movement's mobilization into wider alliances for school choice (Chapter Four). I seek out these political articulations through original readings of movement literature of school choice organizations such as Black Alliance for Education Alternatives and policy analysis and voter-information guides circulated by Christian Right groups such as Focus on the Family and the Heritage Foundation. By situating this political literature alongside existing histories and scholarly accounts, a picture of the wider historical situation comes to light that overlaps with scholarly accounts of neoliberal transition, while emphasizing political formations that coalesced in the 80s and 90s.

My account of the politics of free-market reform brings out two dimensions; first, mobilizations around choice were tactical attempts to access better quality schools by low-

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[44] Raymond Williams "Dominant, Residual, Emergent," *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 121-127

income parents dissatisfied with the poor performance and unresponsiveness of the public education system. This tactic must be considered in light of the constricted universe of possibilities open to parents; rather than taking up free-market advocacy out of ideological zeal, I argue, evangelicals as well as minority parents opt for market-based reforms after histories of struggle within the public system to gain control over curriculum, or achieve education equality in desegregated schools, respectively.

The contours of this historical moment are well known. As the successes of the Civil Rights movement reached a plateau, mobility stalled under conditions of economic restructuring and deregulation.[45] The penal turn in social services, combined with new trends to community-targeted policing and harsh sentencing laws, took heavy tolls on urban communities of color.[46]

While these conditions paved the way for a turn away from the state 'from below,' free-market politics was also driven forward by an array of elite intellectual and political organizing 'from above.' These elite-popular organizing networks are the second dimension of free-market politics that my account highlights. In Milwaukee, a testing ground for school choice, voucher movements received financial and organizational support over decades by a network of conservative research and policy foundations, including the Bradley and Friedman Foundations, among a dozen others. The Christian Coalition, the leading voice of the Christian Right at the time, threw support behind Milwaukee voucher campaigns in the 90s. The Christian Right has pioneered its own network of alliances between elite policy and popular organizations, beginning

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[45] Jim Carl, *Freedom of Choice*: *Vouchers in American Education* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011) 18-19

[46] For seminal accounts among a vast literature see: Joe Soss, Richard Fording, and Sanford Schram, *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011) and David Garland, *The Culture of Control*: *Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001). For a decisive account of the impact of late 20th century trends in welfare reform on African Americans. See also Jared Sexton "Racial Profiling and Societies of Control," and Manning Marable "Katrina's Unnatural Disaster: A Tragedy of Black Suffering and White Denial" *Warfare in the American Homeland: Prison and Policing in a Penal Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 197-218; 305-309.

with the pro-family coalition pioneered in the late 70s by Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, and mass-based organizations of the nascent Christian Right such as Concerned Women for America, and Focus on the Family.

Together, the following chapters tell the story of the politics and popular consciousness of the new conservative constellations that have shaped the American political scene in the last forty years. Chapter One, "Who are Choice Feminists?," takes up two competing diagnoses of trends in contemporary feminism, one coming from the tradition of participatory democracy, the other, critical theory. Choice feminism refers to a depoliticized liberalism in popular feminism that insulates politics from social issues by affirming the diversity of women's choices. Theorists such as Nancy Hirschmann and Michaele Ferguson associate choice feminism with the vaguely pro-woman discourse of thinkers of the third wave, and criticize its underlying, philosophically problematic equation of freedom and choice. Nancy Fraser attributes feminist depoliticization to a failure to grasp the capitalist order. Split off from systemic critique, she argues, feminist politics has contributed to recent neoliberal transformations. The second wave vision of overcoming the hierarchical, male-breadwinner model of work and welfare organization contributed to the rise of flexible service and creative economies, and helped legitimize the move to market-based forms of governance.

These critiques both offer visions of a feminist subject whose critical perspective has been lost, and seek its recovery through local political participation or capitalist critique. These responses fall short of the repoliticization they call for, I suggest, because they do not recognize choice feminism as a political discourse in its own right, highly salient to actors in our contemporary historical context. This chapter reads choice discourse as an artifact of contemporary consciousness. I argue that the public spaces of lifestyle consumption and

‘feminized’ labor markets have effected a re-privatization of the female subject in the wake for formal equality.

I situate choice rhetoric in a constellation of popular media and education discourses that associate empowerment with adaptability, continual re-skilling and the cultivation to of personal appearance and lifestyle. Building on the work of sociologists Beverly Skeggs and Pamela Stone, as well as feminist analyses of popular media, I argue that these discourses reflect the proliferating demands of work and family life in today’s dual-breadwinner economies. While narrating prevailing constraints such as lack of affordable childcare or support at home, and gender discrimination and ‘mommy-tracking,’ in the workplace, women in recent studies nonetheless affirm the personal nature of their choice. This affirmation, rooted in privatized publics of home, consumption, and precarious labor, joins some strands of mainstream feminism to a new conservative consciousness.

Just as conflicting expectations of women and the social worlds they inhabit continue to beguile popular feminisms, these concerns have been central to the repoliticization of US evangelicals in the last forty years. Chapter Two, “Servant Leaders and Working Moms,” tracks the formation of new constellation of US conservative politics that emerged in the late 1970s and remains in force today. The cultural revival of conservative Christians, and their integration into Republican Party politics through the ‘pro-family’ alliance, propels this politics. This chapter focuses on the discourses of the networks of parachurch organizations through which the evangelical subculture enters into politics, focusing on the subculture’s most enduring and influential group, Focus on the Family.

Analyzing self-help and inspirational radio broadcasts, online organizational literature, and multi-media guides for mentoring and family support from Focus and its sister organizations,

I attempt to show how everyday norms of gender, work, and caregiving are mobilized politically**.** I do so in two steps. First, I argue that by cultivating specific media-centered practices of listening and self-reflection, or implementing strategies for Biblical living, participation in Christian media serves as a powerful site for consciousness formation. Adapting Michael Warner's account of counterpublics, I argue that the evangelical subculture performs the political work of bringing everyday concerns into public discourse, and uniting opposition to mainstream culture through shared idioms and speech practices.

Second, I argue that the concerns of this subculture are mobilized politically through the formation of concrete stances on social issues. The conservative framing of opposition to federal excess and overreach in education as an issue of parental 'choice' and religious autonomy is exemplary.

After making the case for attending to subcultural processes of political consciousness formation, chapters three and four show how the pro-family constituency on the Christian Right was mobilized in support of wider political alliances for market-based reform. Chapter Three, "The Politics of Market-Based Reform: A Critique of the Neoliberal Subjectivities Approach," begins by situating my account of the politics of market-based reform in a wider analysis of neoliberalism. Michel Foucault, I argue, offers a reliable account of the mid 20th century rise of neoliberal economic theory and policy in his history of liberalism, which treats liberal political-economy as a governmental rationality shaped by the evolution of techniques aimed at the rational governance of the social. However, Foucault's account focuses on the elite neoliberal project, leaving aside the question of the popular politics of neoliberal reform, and the intermediary cultural discourses through which, I have argued, political consciousness is formed.

Before developing my account of the politics of free markets through an analysis of the school choice movement, this chapter takes up the account of neoliberal politics offered by contemporary Foucauldian theorists such as Wendy Brown, Thomas Lemke and Nikolas Rose. Noting the oversight I have pointed to but characterizing it differently, these theorists extend Foucault's theory of governmentality, and his work on ethical practices of the self, to develop a theory of neoliberal subjectivities. These accounts trace neoliberal governmental rationalities as they move from elite economic theory and policy, to institutional settings such as courts and public schools.

The analytic of governmentality –which posits continuity between techniques aimed at regulating populations, disciplining individuals, and subjecting the self, underwrites claims about the nature of political subjects who take up the discourses these accounts track. This analysis is overextended, insofar as it reads the motives, ideals, and concerns of actors off of the principles animating the institutions they inhabit.

The politics of free market reform, I suggest, can be read as something other than a negative ideology of neoliberalism. Attempting such an account, Chapter Four, "School Choice: Popular-Elite Alliances for Market-Based Reform," offers a political history of the school choice movement. This chapter aims to explain how multiple social groups came to see their interests as aligned in campaigns for charter and school voucher programs. I locate recent campaigns for school choice in a longer history of organizational and ideational alliances between conservative and neoliberal research foundations and Christian Right organizations, as well as a more recent history of mobilizations among minority parents in failing urban schools.

Drawing on sociological accounts of school choice campaigns in Milwaukee and Chicago, as well as original analysis of Christian Right school choice literature, I highlight the

popular conservative realignments behind these campaigns. The first has its roots in the pro-family alliance, for which parental choice reforms are central. The second, more tenuous realignment brings urban minority parents and African American activist groups into alliance with political reformers in support of voucher programs.

By way of conclusion, Chapter Five picks up threads from previous chapters, to thematize the role of race in constructing free-market conservative ideologies. I do so by locating these ideologies in an earlier period of Republican realignment, from the 1940s-1970s, when a new color-blind rhetoric of private freedom and market choice emerged to express resistance to African American integration. I attempt to show how the politics of race has shifted in the subsequent period, giving rise to support of free-market trends among some African Americans. This support takes varying forms, including both provisional alliances such as those described in Chapter Four, and the ideological embrace of market empowerment as the "new civil rights."

A note on my use of terms. I have not adopted the language of hegemony. This project is deeply informed by Hall and Williams' theories of the reflections of economic process in social and cultural formations in the ways outlined above. However, their notions of hegemony remain tied to a Marxist conceptualization of social order that frames their interpretations of social meaning, shaping how they ascribe significance, if not causal import. Laclau and Mouffe break with this economic determinism by elevating the autonomy of political formations within capitalist hegemonies, but this account is itself tied to a theory of social structuration. For Laclau, as well as for Zizek, the Lacanian notion of a structuring absence in the social determines the analysis of social meaning.

Without ascribing to Laclau's theory of hegemonic articulations within the social, this project takes up his notion of capitalism as a set of social-political-economic arrangements.

Social arrangements are capitalist in so far as they are based on the commodification of money and labor, but their particular social relations and institutions vary with political contestation and technological change. The technological dimension of late 20th century capitalist change, including changes in work organization, is not a focus of this project, though there is a fascinating story there, and many have begun to tell it. That story enters here at times, such as in Chapter One's discussion of the intersection of new economies and the entry of women into the labor force.

My story of late liberal transformations is a story of political contestation through shifting political constellations. I use the language of political constellations to refer to both material and organizational alliances of social groups around shared political aims, and their ideological articulations. The pro-family alliance is both organizational, creating a network between policy elite and mass-based organizations, and ideational, articulating conservative Christian concerns over the family in the language of parental autonomy and market freedom. I use the language of ideology formation to refer to the articulation of political ideologies through political movements, and their circulation through shared discursive practices, as in the case of lateral ideology formation in the evangelical subculture.

Finally, building on Williams' and Berlant's theorization of the inexplicit dimension of structures of consent, I use the language of political consciousness to refer to the ideas that are elastic, and embodied in shared subcultural practices. These ideas are rooted in everyday practices of work, intimacy, and care, and tied to the norms governing those practices. In late liberal US capitalism the reordering of the family and the acceleration of inequality put pressure on daily practice; in these conditions the pleasure of individual agency in lifestyle consumption and precarious labor fuels attachments to privatized publics. The circulation of advertising,

media, and entrepreneurial self-help and education discourses which form privatized publics are the material conditions of the new conservative consciousness this project outlines.

Political consciousness works not through formed ideas about the meaning of markets or the proper role of the state, but in fragments of discourse- such as the image of families as the ground of moral autonomy, or lifestyle consumption as a marker of success, that bend actors toward privatized publics in search of the social goods they desire. These discourse fragments form the stuff of political-ideological articulation by political movements and their savvy leaders.

But political movements often have diverse internal goals and ideologies, and it is through attention to these diverse goals that my account of new conservative constellations avoids lapsing into an account of false-consciousness. Today, the political significance of school choice politics remains somewhat open. School choice reform is an elite project, heavily supported by free-market elite in states like Colorado and Louisiana to gradually expand school privatization techniques through legislative battles and local ballot measures. The overall trajectory of reforms points to an undoing of the progressive project of universal, relatively equal education, through the extension of private networks of finance and administration. The project of universal education in the United States has failed many, most devastatingly low-income and racial minority students. School choice is also a popular movement, and it has, in some local contexts, devolved power to non-state organizations, including those activist organizations representing religious and racial minorities and low-income groups. The question remains whether education management organizations and other corporate education actors will hinder these groups' efforts, be marshaled in their interest, or both.

Chapter One

Who are ‘Choice’ Feminists? Competing Diagnoses of Contemporary Feminism

For the last two decades, feminist thinkers and scholars have engaged in a lively and divisive debate over the status of contemporary feminist politics. While some approvingly note the dispersion and diversification of feminist politics since the 80s, others point to a decline in feminist consciousness and activism.[1] In recent years, discourses affirming 'choice' have become widespread objects of study among scholars who advance a narrative of decline and attempt to diagnose it. Such discourses are cited as evidence of a 'postfeminist' or 'neoliberal' turn in the popular consciousness of women.

Diagnoses of this turn point to a variety of trends. On the heels of the achievement of formal equality and major advances in the world of work and education, popular discourses celebrate women's right to choose. Female-targeted entertainment, fashion, and beauty industries have exploded in recent decades.[2] In media and advertising conflicting ideals circulate, lauding women's successful careers, the pleasures of homemaking, and the goods of marriage, and offering strategies for finding balance amid

[1] A scholarly account that supports a popular narrative of decline is Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2000). Such narratives are incomplete, and scholars continue to debate the historiography of the feminist movement. Jane Mansbridge offers a more nuanced narrative, suggesting that the movement split over the radicalism of some feminists and the more moderate goals of equal rights that inspired more widespread support of the ERA. See Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). More recently, scholars debate 'postfeminism' as a description of the period after the heyday of the second wave. The term was first coined in the early 80s by feminist theorists to denote the emergence of a popular, vaguely pro-woman discourse that repudiated second wave feminism. See J. Stacey, "Are Feminists Afraid to Leave the Home," in *What is Feminism,* ed. Juliet Mitchell and Anne Oakley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 219-248. Today postfeminism describes a backlash against feminism attributed to the media, the conservative women's movement, and some academic feminists. The use of the term has come under fire in debates over the political efficacy of the third wave, where some have argued that the term postfeminism fails to distinguish anti-feminist backlash discourse and new feminist prioritization of issues such as gender identity, media constructions of gender, and feminist diversity with the embrace of post-colonial and black feminism. See Shelley Budgeon, "The Contradictions of Successful Femininity: Third-Wave Feminism, Postfeminism and 'New' Feminities" in *New Feminities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, ed. Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (Pelgrave Macmillan, 2011), 279-291.

[2] Angela McRobbie, "Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labor, and the post-Fordist Regime" (*New Formations,* 2010), 67.

the drive to 'have it all.' Career counselors and social workers advise women to invest in their credential profiles and customize their skills to compete in today's economies.[3] While in feminism's heyday women-of-color, queer and sex-positive advocates critiqued the movement's middle-class and sexually conservative tendencies, in recent years a parodied version of this critique has been leveled by 'equity' and 'power' feminists to advance an agenda that embraces career, status, and sexual libertarianism among a privileged, mostly white constituency.[4]

The political present in which these trends are situated is characterized by the post-Fordist reorganization of work and public policy around the model of the dual-breadwinner household, the rise of service, knowledge, and information-driven economies. The considerable challenge facing critics of feminist trends is to locate their assessment in these contemporary conditions.

To this end, this chapter attempts to shed light on the material and discursive conditions of feminine consciousness formation in the contemporary US and United Kingdom. I draw on sociological accounts of contemporary women navigating everyday contexts of work, education, and family life, as well as discourse analyses of media and advertising that associate empowerment with personal choice, tastes, and lifestyle.

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[3] See Anita Harris and Beverly Skeggs for particularly strong accounts of education and career training trends. Anita Harris, *Future Girl:Young Women in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Beverly Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997)

[4] Rebecca Walker and Naomi Wolf exemplify the embrace of feminist choice. Walker proposes that women abstain from judging one another, adapts the classical Millian harm principle, arguing that women should do what they want so long as they do not hurt others. Naomi Wolf also advises against judging other women's choices, and advocates for power feminism, which affirms the diversity of women's aspirations and pursuits. See Rebecca Walker, "Liberate Yourself from Labels: Bisexuality and Beyond," in *The Women's Movement Today: An Encyclopedia of Third-Wave Feminism Vl 2*, ed. Leslie L. Haywood (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 483-486 and Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How To Use It* (Ballatine Books, 1994). For an analysis of equity feminism see Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence form the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 87-93.

Building on the work of sociologists such as Beverly Skeggs and Pamela Stone, I argue that these discourse impact the way women view acts of choice, inciting them to affirm their investments in the new social roles brought about by the massive entry of women into the workforce and the reorganization of the family in the last 40 years.[5]

My attention to consciousness formation is motivated by a disjuncture in the critiques and responses to contemporary feminism offered by political theorists such as Nancy Hirschmann, Michaele Ferguson, and Nancy Fraser. In recent essays, each author offers a vision of the successful feminist subject, one endowed with a critical political consciousness of the forms of domination shaping her present condition. However, their political prescriptions for where such consciousness should come from are one-sided, diverging from the more complex accounts of subject formation advanced in their diagnoses of the present. In Hirschmann and Ferguson's case, I will suggest, the turn to participatory politics to revive the critical feminist subject offers a bottom-up account of consciousness formation, inadequate to oppose the force of material and discursive conditions in shaping subjects that each so richly describes.[6] Fraser's account reverses this focus, attributing to the cunning of capitalist transformation the driving force in shaping popular consciousness. For Fraser, politics must begin from a proper diagnosis of the neoliberal social order.[7]

While these perspectives appear as polar opposites, I will argue that their limitation derives from a shared lack of attention to the intermediary cultural discourses

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[5] Nancy Fraser "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History." *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2013) 209-226.

[6] Michaele Ferguson, "Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics" and Nancy Hirschmann, "Choosing Betrayal," *Perspectives on Politics 8*, n.1 (2010), 247-253; 271-278.

[7] Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism"

in which popular expectations, discontents, and aspirations are formed. Attending to these discourses as they circulate in the private-public mediating spaces of work and consumer culture, this chapter offers an account of a new popular consciousness that has taken shape as women negotiate late liberal norms of work and family life. Furthermore, I situate choice consciousness in a wider constellation of new conservative politics that has coalesced since the 80s. Choice rhetoric gave voice to liberal feminist aspirations at the moment their politics ran aground with the achievement of formal equality. It takes part in a mainstream conservatism rejuvenation that embraces the market and the private sphere as alternatives to state-centered feminist projects, perceived as removed from the demands of ordinary actors.

My account of the new political constellation around choice discourse leads me to question Hirschmann and Ferguson's return to the framework of individual choice in prescribing a response to choice feminism. Having framed choice feminism as a liberal stance that insulates politics from social issues, these authors respond with the claim that feminist politics requires participation in shaping social contexts, and judging others' personal choices from the perspective of feminist politics.

But what does a feminist perspective today entail? Second wave critiques of patriarchy and female oppression gained purchase because they were identified with specific social forms of their day, including the sexual division of labor and the Fordist-Keynesian economic order it underwrote. Today the repetition of these ideas fail to grasp new conditions, in which old forms of oppression linked to women's biological status in the division of reproductive labor co-exist with new formal protections, and major gains in the world of work and education. Postfeminist discourses such as the celebration of the

dual-breadwinner marriage appear to offer up-to-date narratives of this contemporary historical moment.

These narratives, however, are incomplete; a variety of indicators suggest that the most visible goals the feminist movement of the 60s and 70s have yet to be achieved. A majority of women across class lines are still 'tied to the home' as some have argued, and they face gender discrimination when they do enter the world of work. In the wake of popularly supported welfare reform, government supports for women's caregiving have been drastically reduced, contributing to rising poverty rates among women.[8] Furthermore, new barriers to all person's self-realization are created in late liberal political-economic conditions. The last third of the 20th century saw the erosion of economic conditions of upward mobility as well as the retraction of state supports for basic insurance, welfare, and education. Under these conditions, women's entry into the world of work and higher education was realized as part of a transition to a duel-breadwinner model of socio-economic reproduction, which places increasing demands on both men and women to balance work and family life.

The first two sections of this chapter outline the diagnosis and response to choice and neoliberal feminism offered respectively by Hirschmann and Ferguson, and Fraser.

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[8] The 2012 US census shows that white women still earn 77 cents to every dollar men earn, a gap that has been stable for the last decade (this figure falls to 64 cents to the dollar for black women, and 54 cents to the dollar for Hispanic women when compared to white men.) This remains the case, despite the inroads women have made in careers traditionally reserved for men, and despite the increasing role of women as primary breadwinners; in 2012 women provided primary economic support for 40% of families in the US. In 2002, on average half of women with graduate degrees and children under 18 worked full time, while the other half have withdrawn from the workforce fully or in part, citing family responsibilities.[8] Women do not have federally mandated paid childcare leave or universal federally subsidized childcare. In the wake of Clinton's popularly supported welfare reform, government supports for women's caregiving have been drastically reduced, contributing to rising poverty rates among women. In 2012 four in ten families headed by single mothers were poor. National Women's Law Center Analysis of 2012 Census Poverty Data. http://www.nwlc.org/nwlc-analysis-2012-census-poverty-data.

Section one focuses on Hirschmann and Ferguson's critiques of the depoliticizing force of 'choice' discourse in popular feminism, which they attribute to the underlying equation of freedom with the absence of restraints on choice. I outline their respective accounts of participation as a means of re-politicization. Section two turns to Fraser's account of contemporary feminism as the piecemeal uptake and deformation of second wave visions, and her call for a proper diagnosis of the neoliberal social order to re-form feminist social critique. Section three turns to sociological accounts of the discursive formation of contemporary feminism. I bring together a variety of analyses of the new social norms and demands on contemporary women, including diagnoses of postfeminist cultural trends among young women by Angela McRobbie and Christina Scharff, and descriptions of super-mom culture by Judith Warner and Pamela Stone. Building on this interpretation of the social meanings of choice feminism in relation to contemporary socio-economic conditions, I conclude by outlining how a sociologically informed account of consciousness formation can help shed light on the emergent political constellations of the present. I situate choice feminism in a broader conservative constellation, outlined in the following chapters.

I. 'Choice' and Feminist Depoliticization

Political theorists have tended to approach contemporary feminism from the perspective of generational change in feminist thought and action. In the transition from second to third wave feminism, critiques of second wave approaches to politics influenced the development of third wave thought.[9] The emergence of choice feminism, Ferguson points out, responds to the belief that second wave feminists failed because they

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[9] Jannet Kirkpatrick et. al., "Symposium: Women's Choices and the Future of Feminism." *Perspectives on Politics 8,* n.1 (2010), 241-278.

were too radical, and they alienated moderate women by judging their lives and personal choices based on the radical feminist aim of transforming social relations by transforming relations between men and women.[10]

This critique of second wave feminism, often emerging from feminists themselves reflecting on the movement, coincided infelicitously with a popular backlash against feminism fueled by the popular media. Backlash discourses described feminism as a naïve, radical position that was unattractive to normal women who maintained desires for heterosexual relationships, marriage and parenting alongside their aspirations to join the public world of work, media, and politics on equal footing with men. By the 80s, the media declared feminism a movement of the past.[11]

As Hirschmann has suggested, the defense of women's choice can be seen as emerging as the point of agreement between regular women as well as between feminist theorists who disagree over the value of women's role in the home versus her new place in the public sphere.[12] For some third wave feminists, the rhetoric of choice offers a frame for exploring the diversity of female experience, captured by new hyper-mediatized representations of femininity in popular culture.[13]

Choice feminism in political theorists' accounts thus comes to denote the affirmative choice rhetoric of the third wave, and it is this affirmative rhetoric that is the

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[10] Ferguson, "Choice Feminism," 248-9

[11] See Susan Faludi, *Backlash: the Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991) and Angela McRobbie, *Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change,* (London: Sage, 2009).

[12] Hirschmann, "Choosing Betrayal," 271.

[13] For examples see: Walker, "Liberate"; L. Heywood and J. Drake, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, cultural Theory and Cultural Forms* (New York: Routledge, 1997) For critical accounts see: Rebecca Munford, "Wake Up and Sell the Lipgloss': Gender, Generation and the (A) Politics of Girl Power," and Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert, "Feminist Dissonance: The Logic of Late Feminism," in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (Pelgrave Macmillan, 2004) 142-154; 37-48.

target of critique. Hirschmann offers examples in which the defense of choice leads feminists to defend a surprising array of options for women, such as the opportunity to pose for *Playboy* or to quit a high-powered career to stay at home with children.

Hirschmann and Ferguson attribute feminist depoliticization to the view articulated by theorists such as Rebecca Walker and Naomi Wolf, who define the third wave as the embrace of women's diverse personal desires and goals, including aspirations for wealth, power, and sex that second wave feminists viewed as compromised.[14] Their proposals for re-politicizing feminist politics offer a response to this view. Before outlining these proposals, I will briefly sketch the accounts of participatory politics on which they build.

Participatory Politics and the Promise of Freedom

Hirschmann: Theorizing the Free Actors of Feminist Politics

Hirschmann's account of politics brings together attention to structural constraints and social norms that shape individual choice, with her commitment to negative liberty as the ideal form of political freedom. In *The Subject of Liberty: Towards a Feminist Theory of Freedom*,[15] Hirschmann aims to provide a feminist theory of freedom that is attentive to social constraints on choice. This theory provides the background for her critique of choice feminism, by providing an in-depth analysis of when individuals can be considered free actors such that we are justified in viewing them as the agents of their choices and actions when engaging in discussion and critique. Hirschmann's philosophical work is informed by empirical research on women, such as welfare recipients. This research offers a compelling and detailed analysis of the material and

[14] Walker, "Liberate"; Wolf, *Fire*.
[15] Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty*.

ideational constraints that shape women's lives. Having identified these constraints, Hirschmann offers an account of participation that aims to take them into account.

The central aim of Hirschmann's account of feminist freedom, then, is to reconcile an account of freedom, which is defined by theorists of negative liberty as freedom from constraint, with acknowledgement of 'social construction,' which observes that our choices are constrained by the material effects of discourses in shaping both our desires and the options available to us. Given the social construction of our desires and options, this account aims to show how we can nonetheless understand ourselves as making our own choices. Hirschmann offers political participation as the solution to this dilemma. Our freedom of choice requires that we be aware of how dominant discourses shape our visions of self, and take part in revising these discourses. She defines politics as the participation in shaping social construction by contesting dominant discourse through "the concrete identification of oppressive power in specific contexts."[16]

How does social construction work, such that political participation can maintain our view of ourselves as free? In developing her account of social construction, Hirschmann cites examples of patterns of group exclusion and stigmatization. These patterns are reproduced as material effects of discourse. For example, negatively stigmatizing discourses of 'welfare queens' and 'battered women' shape women's self-conceptions. Furthermore, the visions of women that are produced through such discourses shape social conceptions of women in the culture at large. Conceptions of women translate into material barriers to freedom, such as difficulty in finding jobs at equal pay to men, disproportionate subjection to regulative welfare policies,

[16] Ibid, 219.

disproportionate apportioning of childcare responsibilities, and higher likelihood of living in poverty relative to men.

Hirschmann offers a lucid and compelling analysis of barriers to freedom faced by poor mothers. She describes these women as entrapped by structural forces of poverty including low paying jobs, lack of access to healthcare, inadequate affordable childcare, lack of transportation options, and lack of access to education and technical skills training disabling them from pursuing better employment options. Government programs could alleviate all these causes of poverty, as other feminists have recommended. Hirschmann does not focus on this solution, but prioritizes her call for greater participation of all individuals in constructing their material and discursive contexts.[17]

In sketching this view of participation, Hirschmann maintains the centrality of negative freedom and individual choice. She is committed to a view of freedom that requires that "the individual self must make her own choices."[18] To ensure this is so, she does not go as far as positive liberty theorists might in requiring that a person critically interrogate their own desires, but rather requires that "social context provide the necessary resources to permit, and even encourage, such engagement."[19]

An example of freedom-enabling participation is residents' participation in running a battered women's shelter:

> …such community, marked by equality among women, including staff, has an added benefit where battered women take part in collective decision making and responsibility for the shelter's daily operation. Shelters that treat women as agents by pointing out that they can… act for

[17] Hirschmann does defend positive rights as a viable path to removing structural barriers to freedom, she lists provision of childcare, jobs training programs, and transportation as resources the government could provide to assist poor mothers.
[18] Ibid, 236.
[19] Ibid, 237.

> themselves under conditions of patriarchal oppression can help women develop different conceptions of themselves as well as different understandings of the violence they have experienced.[20]

When residents participate in the administration of shelters, or when welfare recipients "provide insights" for lawmakers in the process of policy creation, important steps towards individual empowerment are no doubt achieved. However, in focusing on individual participation Hirschmann tends to assume that consciousness of shared conditions of oppression will emerge through such participation rather than asking after how such consciousness comes about. The challenge of the construction of a shared political consciousness is central to Ferguson's account.

Ferguson on the Challenge of Democracy

In *Sharing Democracy,* Ferguson offers an account of democratic politics that combats the worry, common to democratic and feminist theory, that the diversity of interests and perspectives in modern society threatens to undermine the creation of common political projects among all those who democracy, or feminism, claim to represent.[21] She attempts to dispel this concern by arguing that democratic politics is fueled by the competing claims and judgments that actor's extend without knowing if others will agree. Democracy, for Ferguson, is about persuading those who are differently situated than me of my perspective on our shared identity, or my judgment on our shared political situation. She argues:

> Rather than requiring commonality, the identity of the demos may be paradoxically more resilient where there are multiple, overlapping, and not entirely contiguous practices of democratic collective identity. The human activity necessary to democracy, then, extends far beyond what is typically understood as democratic political action: it includes not just participation

[20] Ibid, 135.
[21] Ferguson, *Sharing Democracy*.

> in electoral politics, or in deliberation and decision making –but also participation in myriad and often seemingly trivial practices that sustain our imaginaries of the demos.[22]

In developing an account of shared judgment, Ferguson offers a rich account of the social constitution of consciousness that precedes and informs politics, and suggests the emancipatory force of democratic participation as a response to choice feminism.

Ferguson's critique of choice feminism is based on her analysis of the political implications of efforts to develop a version of feminism compatible with the defense of the diversity of personal choices. These accounts of feminism tend to be deeply depoliticizing, Ferguson charges. Celebration of the diversity of choice discourages judgments about the value of individual choices by declaring them private matters. This view stymies feminist politics, which is guided by the insight that in socio-economic power relations "the personal is political." For Ferguson, this means that as feminists:

> Our political views and consciousness necessitate judgments about those we love: about the gendered division of labor within a friend's marriage, about the choice a sister makes to leave the workforce to stay at home with her children…[23]

These choices, Ferguson rightly notes, are constrained by wider social forces. However, her response turns back to the framework of individual choice; she proposes a vision of feminist politics that is willing to face up to the need to judge personal choices. This account is motivated by her diagnosis of choice feminism as exhibiting:

> The drive to make feminism appeal to as many people as possible and the drive to escape the dilemmas of feminism in our personal lives….The turn to choice feminism is motivated by a *fear of politics*. It aims to side-step the need to make judgments, it aims to avoid making exclusions.[24]

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[22] Ibid, 66.
[23] Ferguson, "Choice Feminism," 249.
[24] Ibid, 250.

In keeping with her account of democratic action as fueled by the exchange of diverse judgments about a shared social world, Ferguson here argues that feminist democratic politics requires feminist judgment of individual choices.

On this vision for feminist politics, Ferguson's view aligns with Hirschmann. As noted above, Hirschmann offers a view of political action that acknowledges forces of social construction while retaining a view of women's choices as free choices. In the context of feminist politics, this account allows Hirschmann to acknowledge social construction while proposing that feminist politics requires us to make public judgments about the impact of others' choices on the aim of reducing gender based oppression.

This vision of feminist politics is made explicit in Hirschmann's critique of choice feminism. There, Hirschmann identifies choice feminism as the 'anything goes' defense of women's choice, and argues that this stance undermines feminist politics, which requires participants to make critical judgments about their own and others' lives. She argues: "you cannot be nonjudgmental and oppose patriarchy at the same time; that requires public, political engagement. And without politics, where is critical self-reflection going to come from?"[25]

Hirschmann and Ferguson's defense of judging personal choices is based on the argument that 'the personal is political,' and aims to bring to light how personal choices are impacted by constraining gender norms. To remain true to this insight, they argue, feminists must not shy away from making judgments about others' personal choices.

This call for the politicization of personal choice, I want to suggest, comes to quickly. In its reliance on participation, this view is inattentive to inequalities in social

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[25] Ibid, 274.

power that shape political engagement. Participants will have different exposure to political critique and consciousness raising, as well as differing education and experience in the arts of rhetoric and public speaking that will put some in stronger positions than others to articulate judgments persuasively.[26] Furthermore, without exposure to feminist analyses of social power, women may not have the frameworks in which to see their personal choices as shaped by social norms.

Perhaps the structural and psychological dimensions of consciousness formation are bracketed in both Ferguson and Hirschmann's critiques of choice feminism, because both focus on the example of privileged women who have chosen to leave careers in order to care for their children.[27] Implicit in this example is the assumption that these women should have known that their choice renders them dependent on their husbands, and had the resources and political consciousness to make a more 'feminist' choice.

But what does a feminist choice under these contemporary conditions entail? Which shared conditions of oppression are today's potential feminist subjects supposed to challenge? If we consider the transformations in work and family life in today's late liberal economies, the call for feminist accountability appears less straightforward than these accounts suggest. Nancy Fraser's recent work offers a powerful sketch of the transformation from a post-war to neoliberal social order, a transformation that calls for updated feminist analysis and critique.

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[26] For a similar critique of the deliberative democracy approach, see Lynn Sanders "Against Deliberation" *Political Theory* 25, n. 3, 1997, 347-376.

[27] Both Ferguson and Hirschmann frame their critiques as a dialogue with Linda Hirschman's diagnosis and critique of choice feminism in *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World* (New York: Penguin, 2006). Hirschman sees the choice to leave careers as a betrayal of feminist politics by contemporary women who benefited from an earlier generation's activism. She advocated measures such as reproductive strike to alter power dynamics in the home. In education and career, she recommends that young women cut out all traditionally female heavy humanities aspects of their education and specialize in practical trades and professions that are more surer paths to social power.

II. Fraser on Neoliberal Feminism

Fraser's recent work develops a critique of contemporary trends in popular feminism by situating these trends in the wider political-economic context of the rise of neoliberal forms of work organization, public policy, and economic governance. These transitions impact feminist politics, Fraser notes, because some of the most salient targets of second wave feminist critique –the androcentrism of the male-breadwinner model that informed post-war state welfare and work regulation, and the undemocratic and elite-bureaucratic character of Keynesian economic policy and nationalist-developmental politics –were eclipsed in the late 20th century. The rise of financial capitalism brought with it a corresponding neoliberal form of capitalist social order, characterized by the replacement of Keynesian-protectionist economic policy by global free trade and deregulation, the retraction of the welfare state, and the rise in financial and information economies over traditional manufacturing.

While this narrative of the transition from post-war to late liberalism in the West is by now well established, Fraser's account has commanded scholarly attention because it positions contemporary feminist politics in relation to this narrative. The analysis of contemporary feminism I offer in what follows shares Fraser's aim of locating contemporary feminism in relation to the neoliberal shift in capitalist social order. I will argue that this aim requires a further elaboration of the popular –potentially 'feminist,' consciousness of contemporary political subjects.

Fraser sets up her account of feminist historical transition as an attempt to explain the "disturbing convergence of some of its [second wave feminism's] ideals with the

demands of an emerging new form of capitalism."[28] To do so, she tracks neoliberal "resignifications" of second wave ideals, which she argues emerge from the "split-off" of contemporary critique from the multidimensional "political-economic-cultural" critique advanced by the second wave.[29] Having posited a dynamic of split-off and resignification, Fraser argues that feminist critiques "unwittingly," "served to legitimate a structural transformation of capitalist society."[30] Second wave vision of overcoming the male-breadwinner model of work and welfare organization contributed to the rise of flexible service, creative, and tech-based economies, which employ men and women in increasingly precarious and stratified jobs. Similarly, the vision of replacing state-administered socio-economic governance with a less hierarchical, more diversified form of order helped legitimize the retraction of the state, and its integration with market models of governance through privatization and subcontracting.

The answer to the implied question of what went wrong with feminist politics, on this account, is that feminists were unable to grasp capitalist transformation, a transformation for which through "the cunning of history," they thus became the historical agent. Having traced the trajectory of feminism, understood as a social movement for gender justice, Fraser interprets feminist discourse in terms of its adequate, or illusory, conception of its own historical conditions. This history shows that feminist politics requires an analysis of capitalism as a social order.

My quarrel with Fraser is not so much with the call for an analysis of capitalist social order with which she concludes, which is indeed welcome, but with the vision of

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[28] Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism," 210.
[29] Ibid, 219-219.
[30] Ibid, 210-211.

political consciousness formation underlying this account. Fraser views the formulation of feminist politics and ideals in terms of political critique. In describing popular feminism today she speaks of, on the one hand, a split-off form of critique focused on "cultural" concerns, and on the other, a "general discursive construct… which can and will be invoked to legitimate a variety of different scenarios, not all of which promote gender justice."[31] If the revival of feminist politics begins from rearticulating a "three-dimensional" account of gender injustice, where is this account to come from? And what will this account have to say to those popular subjects who invoke 'feminism' for other "rogue" ends?

I have argued that Fraser has a top-down conception of feminist consciousness, because she stakes feminist politics on systemic critique, articulated in the terms of critical theory. While this is indeed an important dimension of the history of feminist politics, it needs to be supplemented to account for feminism as a social movement, or indeed, as a term of popular discourse that has taken on a variety of cultural and political meanings beyond one movement's aims. Such an account requires a broader sociological perspective of the discursive conditions of the contemporary moment, and the forms of subjectivity available for the potential construction of political consciousness. Turning to late 20th century trends in women's popular discourses, including ideals and expectations of work, lifestyle and family, the following section provides such an account.

III. New Femininities: Sociological Accounts

A number of recent sociological accounts of contemporary women in the US and the UK attempt to capture the new challenges and pressures facing women today. Those

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[31] Ibid, 224.

women in the 30-40 age range, when many are at the early to mid stage of their careers and are raising children, are the third generation of women to enter the labor force and higher education, and attempt to combine work and family life. Women's entry into the workforce over the last four decades has brought about a transformation of family life and coincided with changes in work organization. During this period the model of the male breadwinner, with family-wage salary and benefits was eclipsed by a model of flexible and contract based work, which has contributed both to corporate norms of long hours, near constant on-the-job responsiveness and competitive compensation, as well as the organization of precarious demand-based employment and low-paid, no-benefits labor.[32]

This section brings together two areas of research on contemporary women, the first draws on Judith Warner and Pamela Stone, who document women's experiences attempting to combine professional careers with the responsibilities of marriage and raising children. The second documents popular conceptions of femininity circulated by media and advertising industries, which target new roles of women and new ideals of femininity to fuel rapid growth in beauty, fashion, and women's interest media industries since the 90s.[33] Theorist such as Angela McRobbie and Beverly Skeggs point to the role of popular representations of successful femininity in shaping the expectations women of all classes set for themselves.

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[32] Colin Williams, *Rethinking the Future of Work: Directions and Visions* (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2007). For analyses of the political rhetoric supporting the flexible labor-market and tax-incentives for labor see: John Clarke, "New Labour's Citizens: Activated, Empowered, Responsibilized, Abandoned?," *Critical Social Policy 25*, n. 4, (2005), 447-463; Ruth Lister, "Towards a New Welfare Settlement?" in *British Politics Today,* ed. C. Hay, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
[33] McRobbie, "Reflections," 60-76.

While my analysis tracks trends in work and lifestyle as they impact women across class lines, it should be noted that this analysis only partially accounts for the experiences of women of color, whose discursive worlds are distinctly marked by both separate political traditions and socio-economic histories. The shifts around norms and expectations of femininity have been punitively intensified for women of color, particularly black women, during this period. As scholars have noted, this shift requires a specially focused analysis, though one which scholars have located within the wider trends identified here. [34]

If we take women's experiences into account, choice feminism comes into focus as not only a politically atomized popular liberalism but also, and perhaps more importantly, a central element of popular discourse and government rhetoric in a period when norms regarding work and family life were in flux, and calls for parental choice and individual responsibility mobilized cuts to government support for childcare and education. Together, I will argue, these trends point to a new conservative constellation that shapes contemporary politics.

Warner and Stone view choice feminism as part of period of declining feminist activism and media parodying of second wave feminism. They note the influence of the anti-feminism of the conservative women's movement, and conservative media voices more generally, but focus on more moderate and vague 'watered-down' feminist discourse, which they suggest shapes the views of adult women today. This

[34] For exemplary accounts of the racial construction of neoliberal moral subjectivities see Michael C. Dawson and Megan Ming Francis, "Black Politics and the Neoliberal Racial Order" unpublished manuscript, Pepperdine University and the University of Chicago; and Roderick Ferguson *Aberrations in Black, Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.). For an analysis of women in particular see: Grace Kyungwon Hong "Existentially Surplus: Women of Color Feminism and the New Crises of Capitalism" *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 18, n. 1 2021, 87-106.

‘postfeminist’ discourse includes highly mediatized debates over ‘women’s issues’ such as the ‘mommy-wars’ and the ‘opt-out revolution.’ Media glamorize the lives of moms who choose to stay at home,[35] and caution women against the folly of attempting to have it all. Others have noted that the mainstreaming of feminist ideals since the 80s gave rise to a cultural ethos, present in the media and in schools, in which equal opportunity for women is assumed as an accomplished goal, while the current social status of women is left unexamined. This makes possible the coupling of feminist ideals such as empowerment and self-realization with neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and competition.[36]

Mainstream activism during this period narrowed around anti-abortion campaigns, which shifted the focus of feminist demands. Feminism came to be understood as the struggle for women’s control over their bodies and their right to self-definition.[37] These discourses dovetailed with a rising consumerism and the explosion of media targeted at women’s consumption. Personal choices over lifestyle and consumption came to stand in as a marker and standard of women’s empowerment. The embrace of career and wealth-oriented visions of empowerment was reinforced by the anti-welfare-pro-work politics launched in the Reagan/Thatcher era. The economic boom of the 90s further reinforced the privatized, consumption based model of American

[35] Jannet Kirkpatrick, “Introduction: Selling Out? Solidarity and Choice in the American Feminist Movement,” *Perspectives on Politics 8,* n.1 March (2010), 241.

[36] Budgeon described ‘postfeminist’ popular discourse in these terms. See Shelley Budgeon, “Emergent Feminist Identities (?): Young Women and the Practice of Micropolitics,” in *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* 8, n. 1 (2001), 7-28. Skeggs attributed contradictory evocations of feminism among women she interviewed to the marketization of ‘popular feminism’ in the 80s, at a moment when activism declines and ‘academic’ and ‘professional’ feminism splits off from public discourses. In this context values such as ‘autonomy’ and ‘empowerment’ are split off from narratives about social structure and become associated with a variety of claims. Skeggs, *Formations*, 144. See also Christina Scharff, *Repudiating Feminism: Young Women in a Neoliberal World* (Ashgate, 2012).

[37] Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (Riverhead Trade, 2005). 44-46.

success, represented by the upper-middle class and defined by luxury consumption to which all classes aspired, and for the sake of which many racked up unprecedented levels of household debt.[38]

McRobbie's analysis further specifies the link between new expectations for women and post-Keynesian economic shifts in the organization of employment and education. Noting the investments by governments in the education and training of young girls, McRobbie makes the case that women's increasing visibility and participation in the world of work is molded to fit the demands of new global economies, which require flexible and entrepreneurial individuals, ready to tailor their capacities through ongoing training, perform a variety of types of tasks and adapt to new projects, work irregular hours, and negotiate individualized compensations.[39]

On this account, the choice and opportunity open to young women comes with the invocation to invest in ongoing training and develop a personal life-plan. While these demands are often couched in feminist rhetoric, they work to shape women to the requirements of new organizations of work where life-long, full-time employment, on-the-job training, and formalized job-classifications and standardized contracts are no longer the norm.[40]

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[38] Warner, *Perfect Madnes*.

[39] See Harris, *Future Girl*; McRobbie, *Aftermath*; and C. T. Mohanty, who argues that transnational human rights politics in the context of declining women's movements has led to a lack of critical attention to the implications of women's, especially non-first world women's, entry into the global labor market. See C. T. Mohanty, ' "Under Western Eyes" Revisited: Feminist Solidarity Through Anti-Capitalist Struggles.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28*,* n. 2 (2002), 499-535.

[40] See Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), for a celebratory account of investment in the capacities of young women as a development strategy for post-Keynesian economies. Harris, *Future Girl,* contextualizes these investments as part of a political-economic reorganization of post-Keynesian post-Fordist capitalism which cuts state support for and regulation of education and employment while integrating those women able to access skills, qualifications, and connections into new forms of work.

Reforms in welfare and tax policy, as well as job-market norms reflect the new expectation that women, like men, should be life long wage-earners. However, a variety of formal policies and informal prejudices sustain the expectation that women maintain their social role as primary caregiver in duel-income family units, and thus take on less demanding or part-time work. In the wake of welfare reforms, single mothers are not exempt from stringent work requirements, and poor mothers often cycle from welfare to work, unable to find quality childcare on low wages. Those who do sustain moderate to high-income employment also tend to compromise careers for the demands of caregiving, as they too lack access to regulated, high-quality childcare or long-term government support for caregiving.[41] While women are encouraged and expected to work, tax policies in the US penalize women who contribute more than moderate part-time salaries to joint family income, thus encouraging one partner, overwhelmingly women, to devote part time energies to homemaking.[42] This constellation of social policies and norms works to maintain the socio-economic model of duel-income households. Recent research helps illuminate how women and men of different classes are faring under this model.

In recent years, women's performance in secondary education and participation in higher education have risen to equal those of men by a variety of accounts.[43] Since the

[41] Orloff argues that welfare reform reflects the new social norm that women are expected to work, and that women's caregiving is no longer a socially supported role. She suggests that this transition is the outcome of women's efforts to enter the world of work and that a political defense of caregiving not tied to work is unfeasible (and perhaps also undesirable) today. Ann Shola Orloff, "Explaining US Welfare Reform: Power, Gender, Race and the US Policy Legacy," *Critical Social Policy* 22, no. 1 (2002): 96-118.
[42] Ronnee Schreiber, *Righting Feminism: Conservative Women and American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
[43] Andy Furlong and Fred Cartmel, *Young People and Social Change: Individualization and Risk in Late Modernity* (Buckingham, U.K.: Open University Press, 1997). See also Budgeon, "Emergent Feminist Identities,"10 and Harris, *Future Girl*.

80s, women also began earning degrees in law and business at equal rates with men.[44] Despite these gains, women today are not participating in the workforce on equal footing with men. The primary reason women give for reducing their work to part-time or stopping work completely is the responsibility of family and raising children. The factors pushing women into part-time or flexible contract work are numerous and impact women of all classes.

Many women in professional careers, who have the right to parental leave, and income to support childcare and a variety of other domestic services, are leaving careers for part-time work, or dropping out of the workforce completely. A survey of women with graduate or bachelor's degrees from top-ranked universities found that 43% had taken at least two years off of work early in their careers for family reasons. Such absences from the workforce result in an on average 30% reduction in pay, and many women find their bosses resistant to restore former responsibilities or job-track after returning from leave. Another widely cited study of Harvard Business School graduates between 1981 and 1991 found that only 38% pursued full-time careers.[45]

Temporary leave for childcare is a significant factor in explaining what scholars have termed the 'leaky pipeline' problem of women dropping out of the workforce. Stone and Warner's studies found that women often find the psychic and financial costs of maintaining fulfilling work lives once they have been forced into 'mommy-track' career paths not worth the substantial difficulties of combining work and mothering. Stone found that women struggled to maintain careers, but multiple factors led them home after having children, including hostile bosses and unaccommodating work environments, lack

[44] Stone, *Opting-Out.*
[45] Ibid, 9-10.

of support from working husbands, unreliable quality childcare, and psychological pressures.

Lower-middle class women such as those profiled in Beverly Skeggs and Anita Harris's work are also heavily impacted by the shift away from the Fordist era full-time model of employment. Statistics suggest that they, too, have difficulties maintaining full-time careers.[46] Unable to reduce their work due to lack of other income or government supports, these women are often unable to find and maintain quality full-time employment.[47] Credential-inflation required in growing sectors of communications and service work further burden the job market options of these women.[48] Without the support of a high-income spouse, these women are often forced to stay in the workforce despite the lack of fulfilling jobs available to them. Hirschmann's profile of welfare recipients documents the barriers, such as lack of quality affordable child-care and training and transportations options, that poor women face in attempting to secure employment. Statistics suggest that the shift towards flexible labor contracts has not improved the economic status of lower-income women; in 2012 one in seven women in the US lived in poverty.[49]

Policy changes in the US that replace state programs and services with tax incentives, and exchange entitlements for benefits tied to work have made it increasingly

[46] Statistics for women of all economic classes show that fully 54% of women with children under one have left the workforce or changed to part-time work, and this figure only shrinks to 41% for mothers of children under 18 years of age, suggesting that many women do not return to full-time work after having children. Hirschman, *Get to Work*, 7-8.

[47] A Canadian study cited by Dwyer and Wyn found that only 33% of female university graduates were in full-time career-track jobs three years after graduation. Peter Dwyer, and Johanna Wyn, *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future* (London: Routledge Falmer, 2001).

[48] Furlong and Cartmel, *Young People.*

[49] "Insecure and Unequal: Poverty Among Women and Families 2000-2012," *National Women's Law Center,* December 2013, http://www.nwlc.org/resource/insecure-unequal-poverty-among-women-and-families-2000-2012.

difficult for individuals and families aspiring to achieve a livable 'work-life balance.' In lieu of federally regulated paid work leave or childcare services, federal support of individuals and families has been repackaged in the form of tax incentives, such as George W. Bush's $500 per child tax credit, and the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit as the primary federal program for supporting low-income individuals. In addition, new labor market regulations such as Bush's Fair Labor Standards Act of 2004 continue the erosion of entitlements in private contracts by casting the conversion of overtime to comp time hours as a benefit to employees who gain the option of storing accumulated hours to use for paid personal leave.[50] This act also stripped low-level supervisors to their right to overtime pay by reclassifying them as "executives."[51]

Ann Orloff has noted that welfare reforms eliminate the status of the caregiver as a recognized social role that can make a claim to entitlement.[52] More generally, these policy shifts essentially replace the idea of entitlement to social supports for basic needs of social reproduction –time off work to attend to personal life –with the formal demand that individuals earn such benefits through work, and de facto labor market conditions in which most low-paid and part time employment offer no benefits.

Incitements to Choice

Young women today are expected to invent success, and instructed by career counselors and social workers to construct a life-plan, what some researchers have called

[50] Schreiber notes that this act was opposed by feminist organizations such as NOW. See Schreiber, *Righting*, 90-92.
[51] "Pay and Leave: Fact Sheet, Compensatory Time Off," *United States Office of Personnel Management*, February 20, 2014, http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/pay-administration/fact-sheets/compensatory-time-off/.
[52] Orloff, "Explaining US Welfare," 100.

a ‘choice-biography.’[53] Through popular postfeminist discourses, which invite women to identify as responsible subjects of choice, young women are faced with the challenge that their identities are for a large part open to their own self-construction.[54] This formal opening places a new psychological pressure, Anite Harris notes: “Nonachievement is thus personalized to a greater extent than before. These young women are faced with taking responsibility for their choices and failures.”[55]

Accounts of women of all classes show that the pressure of the social demand to construct an identity and devise an individual life plan are exacerbated by the conflict between the considerable constraints caused by lack of resources and time, and the often overwhelming expectations that women serve as both multi-skilled and flexible workers and primary caregivers.

Liberal rhetoric of choice gains salience in these conditions. When asked to describe their lives, women draw on the language of individualism and choice. Christina Scharff and Shelley Budgeon both found that women press individualistic explanations for the choices and trajectories of their lives, especially when faced with the suggestion that external factors, such as gender discrimination, may play a role.[56] In Stone and Warner’s interviews, choice rhetoric allows women to protect the fragile positive self-

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[53] Harris, *Future Girl*, 39. Cites the 2001 report of the European Group for Integrated Social Research, which describes the divergent paths of young women in terms of their ‘choice-biographies,’ noting that lower-income women have less access to training beyond secondary school required for well-paying jobs.
[54] Budgeon, “Emergent Feminist Identities.” While she acknowledges the existence of external constraints, Budgeon sees identity construction as following from our increased self-reflexivity, and thus as a real possibility and challenge for contemporary women. Her account draws on Anthony Giddeons, who distinguishes late-modernity by the development of individual self-reflexivity that emerges out of the breakdown of traditional social hierarchies and roles and the potential increase in autonomy that results from that transition.
[55] Harris, *Future Girl,* 53.
[56] Scharff, *Repudiating Feminism*; Budgeon, “Emergent Feminist Identities.” Sandra Smith documents similar tendency among low-income African American to blame themselves rather than ‘the system’ for the economic hardships they faced. See Sandra Smith, *Lone Pursuit: Distrust and Defensive Individualism among the Black Poor* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007).

images they construct around choices that they themselves describe as heavily influenced by constraining factors. These factors include husbands' busy work schedules that disallow them from contributing equally to housework, dissatisfaction at work due to reassignments and informal demotions preceding or following pregnancy leave, lack of quality and affordable childcare, and pervasive feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

Stone observes that "choice rhetoric appeals to women's strong sense of personal agency. Even and especially when their agency and effectiveness had been compromised, women turned to their individual personality, tastes and preferences to understand and make sense of their decisions."[57]

An alternative account of the power of choice feminism emerges out of these sociological profiles. These studies bring to light the pressures women of all classes face in navigating new contexts of work and family life. Perhaps more strikingly, these studies suggest that the language of self-development and personal responsibility that emerged in the transition to post-Fordism to justify employment deregulation and cuts to education and welfare support resonates with women's experience. In the wake of women's entry into the public world of work, media, and higher education, women are often the favored targets of such rhetoric, which is coupled with appeals to feminist ideals of autonomy and empowerment, and celebrated by some prominent feminist thinkers.[58]

Why do women invest in postfeminist discourses? The rhetoric of individualism and choice is invoked to provide an affirmative framing of women's life decisions. This rhetoric is invoked even, and sometimes especially, when women cite obstacles –such as lack of healthcare that compels a low-income woman to quit work and return to welfare

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[57] Stone, *Opting Out,*125.
[58] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*.

after a child's illness, or forced reassignment and workplace prejudice after pregnancy leave, that compel life decisions.

When women narrate these difficult decisions, they often describe feelings of inadequacy, guilt and loss of identity. Stone suggests that feminist choice rhetoric allows women to affirm their choices and maintain a sense of personal agency.

Building on Stone's analysis, I want to argue that the rhetoric of choice draws its force from women's desire to affirm the value of the work or home activities and tasks that make up their daily lives. Instead of focusing on constraints and lack of power, women invest in their choices, and claim them as part of the idiosyncrasy of their lives.[59]

This explanation becomes more compelling when we take into account the wider social discourses that invite women to construct identities through their individual choices. As we have seen, the framing of women as responsible subjects of choice through education discourses of self-investment invites women to see their successes and failures as results of their personal choices.

Media and advertising representations of female beauty and fashion provide another powerful site for women to develop an (however illusory) sense of self-agency through identification with given aesthetic norms and styles. Lower-middle class women in Beverly Skegg's studies attempt to represent their own agency in rising towards middle class status by identifying themselves with bodily fitness, professional dress, and

[59] Mary Pattillo has noticed similar tendencies among low-income parents who embrace the rhetoric of school 'choice' policies. Despite disappointment at the outcome of participating in school choice processes, these parents affirmed their efforts to exert some control over their children's schooling. See Mary Pattillo "Everyday Politics of School Choice in the Black Community" *Du Bois Review* 21, n. 1 (2015) 41-71. For an analysis of school choice politics see Chapter Four.

fashionable tastes they associate with success and affluence.[60] Such associations are offered by booming entertainment, beauty and fashion industries targeted at women. These industries circulate ideals of bodily appearance, dress, and lifestyle modeled on middle-upper-class consumption patterns.

Female-target fashion, beauty, cosmetics and media industries grew rapidly in the 90s.[61] These industries catered to the newly upwardly mobile career women with disposable income to spend on personal appearance as well as on new markets in domestic services to ease the burden of managing professional and domestic work. Skeggs' work powerfully shows that these industries shape the self-image and consumption patterns of lower-income women as well, as these women began to view working class femininity as a sign of failure and lifestyle consumption as a marker of success. Indeed, McRobbie argues that consumption has become the defining female activity and site of self-development. Just as popular journalism intermixes contradictory messages in profiles celebrating women's new social power and stories of the perils of trying to 'do it all' and the joys and even glamour of domesticity, advertisements evoke female pleasure, entitlement, personal values, and personal choice to sell both products for idealized domestic moms and diamonds rings for rich single-women, as in DeBeer's "Raise your Right Hand" ad campaign, which launched a 15% increase in non-bridal diamond sales.[62]

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[60] Skeggs, *Formations*.
[61] A number of feminist scholars analyze the impact of these industries in shaping the self-image and aspirations of women see: Munford, "Wake Up," Howie and Tauchert, "Feminist Dissonance" and Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, "'It's All about the Benjamins': Economic Determinants of Third Wave Feminism in the United States," in *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (Pelgrave Macmillan, 2004). See also McRobbie, "Reflections" and *Aftermath,* and Harris, *Future Girl.*
[62] Katherine Bindley, "Single Women Targeted by Citibank and Honda Ads," *Huffington Post,* January 24, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/23/single-women-citibank-honda_n_1224780.html.

Like government and education discourses, media and advertising invite women to construct a self-image of freedom and empowerment through consumption practices and assertions of choice. Against this invitation, countervailing forces such as social policies and norms actually make the ideal of the career women as free and working for self-sufficiency impossible for a majority of women.

IV. Conclusion: The Political Consciousness of Late Liberalism

This chapter began with two diagnoses of contemporary feminist political consciousness, and its perceived failures. For Hirschmann and Ferguson, affirmative discourses of choice are evidence of a reemergent, depoliticizing liberalism within popular and academic feminism. They call for women's engagement in a variety of contexts of action in order to identify, and potentially collectively alter, their shared conditions. Fraser traces feminist depoliticization to the decline in political-economic critique, which has impeded a feminist response to the new social order of neoliberal capitalism. While Hirschmann and Ferguson outline possibilities for bottom-up processes of political consciousness formation, Fraser cautions that such projects should remain rooted in a historically informed account the political-economic forms that shape our shared conditions of action.

These solutions, I want to suggest, move too quickly to amend a political consciousness whose contours and significance is not well fleshed out. Choice feminist discourse tells something other than a story of the dissipation of second wave critical consciousness. This chapter reads choice feminism as a form of contemporary political consciousness, an artifact of the political constellations of the present.

Pointing to the material and discursive context of choice feminism, I have argued that women today are addressed by powerful discourses offering personal choice and self-development as a site of investment and affirmation of female identity. This invitation comes at a time when liberal feminist goals have been achieved, but women face increased pressures to invent a model of success and fulfillment in their intimacies and work life. Contemporary actors renegotiate social norms regarding work and family life, and neoliberal reforms reshape the relationship between the individual and the state, mediated by the economic unit of the family. Debate over these changes is reflected in the messages about women circulating in popular media and the academy. Power-feminism praises the pursuit of wealth and status, resonating with the emphasis of neoliberal politics on work, career, and individual investment; both conservative and feminist thinkers and organizations offer defenses of mothering and domestic life; advertising and women's interest journalism promote sexuality and style as visions of female empowerment.

The political significance of these messages as fragments of a newly forming conservative constellation becomes salient if we consider the popular postfeminist narrative in which these messages are framed. This popular narrative embraces a feminism whose moment has passed, and celebrates a present of equality, opportunity, and diversity of life paths. The radical or socialist-feminist narrative of the 60s ad 70s that provided a link between personal life and politics via the analysis of the family as the political-economic unit of the state, wherein women's domestic work supported men's wage-labor, has not been updated to speak to the present moment, in which formal equality has been won and women are visible participants in public life. Without an

account in popular consciousness that links political-economic order to one's daily life, norms of family and work life are viewed as private matters, and the intense efforts of the state to shape these norms through economic and social policy are rendered invisible, past under the guise of tax and welfare reform, and labor market deregulation.

It is in this context that we can see the limitations of local political participation as a means of political empowerment. Various sociological studies cited in this paper suggest that women today do not see their life circumstances in terms of common norms and common constraints, but rather as shaped by personal factors. Women ascribe personal meaning to their choices and seek to affirm the roles, responsibilities, and daily tasks they take up. Indeed, in various studies, the suggestion that women's choices were shaped by social norms such as gender inequality provoked interviewees to affirm more strongly the personal nature of their choice.[63] Given the postfeminist political consciousness expressed in interviews and media analyses, these interviews suggest that evaluating women's choices by the standards of a feminist politics might provoke women to defend their choices rather than dispose them to think about a world in which other choices were possible. To women, such as the woman who has left a career to care for her children, or the low-income woman who learns the polished femininity and middle-class appearance required for service work, it is not self-evident that the pressures she faces are caused in part by a mutable gender order.

Critiques that hope to chasten, and even persuade mainstream women who have attached the banner of feminism to individual choice are likely to fall on deaf ears. For what these critiques don't consider is the perhaps more plausible explanation that

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[63] Budgeon, "Emergent Feminist Identities,"14; Scharff, *Repudiating*; Stone, *Opting Out*, 124-6.

contemporary women, of various social positions and for various reasons, have willfully chosen a path other than the path of feminism, understood as a universal movement of women. Many ordinary women do not support progressive feminist goals because they do not support the measures required to achieve them, such as, for instance, extensive state-driven redistribution.[64] While women of color have long highlighted female oppression in its intersectional race and class dimensions, their movements from the outset understood this focus as challenging the priorities of mainstream white feminism, and today these conflicting priorities have led them, too, down divergent political paths, toward more local struggles around racial equality in education (Chapter Four), labor, and police violence.

Choice feminists, for their part, often implicitly opt-out of feminist solidarity and align behind the center-right of an ideologically refigured political field, which this chapter has begun to outline. While in the postwar period consumption and professional life tracked a more clear gender division of home and work, today new consumption and education industries increasingly penetrate work and home life, helping blur the boundary between the two, and rendering them intense sites of pressure in which actors adapt new forms of consciousness. Under such conditions the pleasures of convention, of individual agency exercised through self-care and lifestyle maintenance, anchors ordinary actors in what I have called privatized publics. The new consciousness this chapter has attempted

[64] A recent study found no rise in support for redistribution among women in the US since the 1970s, despite the staggering rise in inequality during this period. This result was especially surprising given the enormous income growth among women during this period, relative to men. See Vivekinan Ashok, et. al. "Support for Redistribution in an Age of Inequality: New Stylized Facts and Some Tentative Explanations" *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity Conference,* March 19-20 2015) 7. A 2015 Gallup survey found that 46% of adults in the US are 'strong redistributionists,' they believe wealth is unfairly distributed and should be redistributed through higher taxes on the wealthy. See Frank Newport, "Americans Continue to Say Wealth Distribution is Unfair," *Gallup,* May 4, 2015, accessed December 7, 2015, http://www.gallup.com/poll/182987/americans-continue-say-wealth-distribution-unfair.aspx

to delineate is inextricable from the privatized publics in which it is formed, and to which it is directed, those spaces through which daily acts of self-production –lifestyle consumption, flexible work, and ongoing entrepreneurship –become sites for articulating one's life to a wider public. These spaces provide agentive subject positions not only for feminist subjects re-atomized in the wake of formal equality, but for low-income and minority women for whom barriers to participating in universalist political projects are high, and incentives are low.

To read this political consciousness, this chapter has tracked expectations and aspirations expressed in mainstream media and advertising, and in the testimonials of women struggling to balance work, education, and family life. In their own attempts to cope with contemporary conditions, conservative women, too, have created privatized publics, for instance, in the evangelical subculture. Focusing on that subculture, the following chapter specifies the role of new media such as radio and the internet in transforming the spaces of everyday life into sites of public discourse, and further explores the mediations through which self-care can become a site of politicization, albeit serving conservative ends, in the case of evangelical discourses on the family.

Chapter Two

Servant Leaders and Working Moms: Conservative Consciousness Formation in the US Evangelical Subculture

In the last third of the twentieth century, the socio-cultural and institutional support base of the US Republican Party, as well as its ruling ideologies, underwent a profound transformation. During this period, political and religious elites and movement leaders forged practical and ideological alliances around the defense of free markets and fiscal responsibility, and around opposition to secular, elite-driven big government. In the political discourses of an emerging conservative movement in the 1970s, these themes came together around the morally laden, affectively charged rhetoric of the family. The image of the virtuous family served as the anchor of free markets, the model of fiscal responsibility, the center of spiritual life, and the main object of concern for an exploding network of parachurch organizations and multi-media 'ministries' that provided a grassroots base of social order outside of the encroaching mechanisms of the liberal state.

Many theories of US politics concerned with trends to free-market reform during this period attribute such trends to a broad 'neoliberal' political-cultural transformation. This focus precludes from view the unique role of US conservatives in paving the way for the rise of free-market politics and policies. As the following chapters show, market-reform politics rose to state power through ideological and organization alliances with US conservatives, and, and this chapter will argue, these alliance were made possible by a concurrent transformation in US conservatism, in which US evangelicals played a crucial role.

This chapter attempts to explain the transformation in US conservative politics by focusing on evangelical pro-family rhetoric, which, in the late 1970s, captured the core ideological oppositions, and mobilized the base, of a new conservative politics. To do so, I turn to the discourses and organizations of the network of non-profits through which the

evangelical subculture enters into politics. Focusing on the subculture's most enduring and influential group, Focus on the Family, I tell the story of how Christian parachurch organizations and media industries constructed an ecumenical, devoted base of followers who turn out to support the political campaigns of the wider Christian Right.

Analyzing radio broadcasts, online organizational literature, and newsletters from Focus and its sister organizations, I show how multimedia 'ministries' have extended evangelical discourses into the everyday lives of their Christian listeners, and provided mediums for these actors to address the concerns of work, marriage, and raising children. I make the case that the articulation of these concerns with political ideals of parental choice and religious freedom in areas such as education and healthcare provide the bridging discourse through which popular investments in family norms are channeled into electoral and legislative projects. The successful mobilization of popular investments in the family into conservative political projects played a central role in the recent rejuvenation of the Republican Party, and its ideological transformation.

I situate my account of pro-family politics in the social and political moment beginning in the 1970s, when norms of work and family life crystallized as widespread objects of contestation. At the decade's outset, President Nixon tapped into growing unease around racial integration, student protest, and an overtaxed economy to mobilize mainstream conservative values. As I will argue in Chapter Five, Nixon's rhetoric is exemplary of a move from explicit racist organizing in opposition to desegregation that shaped the period of post-war Republican realignment, to a color-blind rhetoric of "law and order" and "family values" that mobilized the new conservatism in the period treated here. In the 70s, conservative women, led by Phyllis Schlafly, organized an oppositional

movement around the charge that feminists and liberals were attacking the traditional family and its values.[1] By the end of the decade, 'new right' Republican elites such as Paul Weyrich took notice of the successes of 'pro-family' mass-based organizing, and reached out to movement leaders such as Beverly LaHaye and James Dobson to join a coalition, and bring the pro-family voice to Washington, and its support base to the polls.[2]

The story of Republican rejuvenation intersects with another story of political-cultural transformation that has been little attended to in accounts of the late 20th century politics of economics, the story of the revival of the US evangelical subculture. In tapping into popular concerns that the wider liberal culture was unable to sustain the moral basis of American society, Christian Right groups such as Focus took part in a religious revival and cultural transformation within the evangelical community whose influence has endured into the 21st century.[3] In what follows, I provide an account of the evangelical cultural discourse on the family in which Christian Right political appeals are framed. I point to the responsiveness of these discourses to historical conditions, such as the adaptation of biblical norms of male headship to dual-breadwinner households, and the attention to the decline of the domestic sphere as a privileged space of spiritual and moral reproduction with the encroachment of a cultural valuation of work and public achievement for both men and women.

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[1]Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 214.

[2] Ruth Murray Brown, *A History of the Religious Right: For a "Christian America"*(Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 141-3.

[3] Between1971-1990 6 million new members joined Evangelical churches in the US while mainline Protestant church membership declined by 2.6 million. Mark A. Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States* (Charlotte: University of South Carolina Press, 1996) cited in Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: Gilford Press, 1998), 10.

Existing accounts of the Christian Right tend to focus on its oppositional politics,[4] the position of its various groups within the wider ideological and political culture,[5] or within evangelical political and theological traditions.[6] These accounts tend to view Christian Right politics as primarily oppositional, fueled by moral condemnation or resentment. For theorists of the politics of economics in late liberalism, this resentful, moralizing dimension of contemporary conservatism ostensibly explains its affinity with free-market politics.[7] While moral opposition is an important motor of Christian Right politics, the focus on this aspect often stands in for a fuller account of the discursive, political processes through which actors come to identify their personal lives, and interpret their personal experiences through the lens of cultural activism offered by the evangelical subculture, and groups such as Focus.[8] In short, these accounts lack an account of political consciousness formation.

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[4] See for example Jean Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment: Conservative Resurgence form the John Birch Society to the Promise Keepers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999) and Esther Kaplan, *With God on Their Side: How Christian Fundamentalists Trampled Science, Policy, and Democracy in George W. Bush's White House.* (New York: The New Press, 2004)

[5] A variety of historical accounts situate the Christian Right within late twentieth century socio-political transformations. For an account that focuses on the women's movement see Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly* and Brown, *Christian America;* Sara Diamond offers detailed accounts of the political activities of a variety of Christian Right groups in *Facing the Wrath: Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1996), and situates their politics in the framework of social movement building in *Not By Politics Alone;* Dan Gilgoff profiles the politics of Dobson and Focus on the Family in *The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America Are Winning the Culture War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007)

[6] See Colleen McDannell "Beyond Dr. Dobson: Women, Girls, and Focus on the Family," *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism.* ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth et. al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); John Green et. al. "The Characteristics of Christian Political Activists: An Interest Group Analysis," *Christian Political Activism at the Crossroads.* ed. Willaim R. Stevenson (Lanham: Calvin Center Series, 1994.); Anneke Stassen, "The Politicization of Family Life: How Headship Became Essential to Evangelical Family Identity in the Late Twentieth Century." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 24, n. 1 (2014), 100-138.

[7] William Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). See in particular 39-59 on the disposition to resentment, and Wendy Brown, "American Nightmare: Neoliberlism, Neoconservative, and De-Democratization." *Political Theory* 34, n. 6 (2006), 690-714.

[8] This oversight is more a question of the limitations of genre than a flaw in most political histories I draw on here. To supplement my analyses of the discursive construction of pro-family politics, I draw on

By attending to the parachurch, media-centered practices of counseling, mentoring, tuning-in to daily radio for practical and inspirational guidance, or implementing strategies to help family members develop their spiritual lives and uphold biblical values, this chapter aims to provide an account of the intermediary cultural processes of consciousness formation through which political power is formed. My account of consciousness formation attends to what Susan Harding calls the "reiterative conditions," of evangelical discourses.[9] These conditions include the everyday contexts of uptake and lateral relations through which discourses circulate outside of central authorities or formal institutions. While reaching geographically diverse and anonymous media publics, parachurch networks are nonetheless the bases of communities of support and collective action that have provided an enduring constituency for the Christian Right. Here I build on Michael Warner's account of counterpublics to sharpen my attention to the particular rhetoric, idioms, and narrative traditions through which US evangelicals constitute themselves as a distinct political subculture.[10]

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sociological accounts of the evangelical subculture, which attend to the co-adaptation of religious practices and teachings and family life in the evangelical subculture. For excellent accounts of shifts in marriage and family norms see W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003). For an account of theological adaptation within evangelical sectors of the women's movement see Nancy A. Hardesty, "Mutual Submission, Active Discipleship, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 134-141, and Shibley, *Resurgent Evangelicism.*

[9] Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell:Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 12.

[10] Warner maintains an unstable distinction between religious subcultures, on the one hand, and "liberal" publics and "counterpublics of sex and gender," on the other. In the former the pre-given character of members qua Christians distinguishes them from publics and counterpublics that are characterized by "historical rather than timeless belonging, and of active participation rather than ascriptive belonging." Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002) 89. I am working against this distinction, which has thin support in his text, and perhaps should be taken as referring narrowly to the 18th and 19th century revivalist practices he references. My description of the late 20th century evangelical subculture specifies the ways it functions as a counterpublic in the sense Warner astutely outlines, in fact I would argue that the evangelical subculture shares features more specifically of counterpublics of sexuality

The following proceeds in four sections. Drawing on Warner's insight into the public-making effects of the circulation of discourse through everyday communication media and practice, I set up my account of the evangelical subculture's role in formulating the conservative politics of the family (I). Section two offers a historical sketch of pro-family politics. James Dobson and his massive Focus media ministry have been key players in the movement since its inception, and branched out to take on the role of the central mass-based political organization of the Christian Right in the last decade. This political history leaves us wondering how the quotidian concerns of the pro-family movement have consistently activated widespread political energies over a quarter century. To answer this question, section three and four turn to the US evangelical subculture, and the network of multimedia 'ministries' and parachurch organizations in which everyday negotiations of work and family norms are the object of common concern and practical counsel (III), and offers an analysis of Focus on the Family discourse (IV). I conclude by summarizing my argument that the evangelical subculture is powerful base of political consciousness formation, and of new conservative ideologies in particular.

I. Subcultural Discourse: a Study in Lateral Ideology Formation

In turning to the popular discourse of the evangelical subculture, I aim to show how ideologies are constructed in everyday contexts. This account depicts the construction of a new conservative constellation in US politics, 'pro-family' politics, which combines conservative and free-market ideals. Various theorists have attempted to explain such novel 'neoliberal' constellations by offering accounts of recent shifts in

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and gender, in that it is a "scene of association and identity that transforms the private lives they [it] mediates." 57.

political subjectivities, asking after how subjects come to be driven to invest in neoliberal ideals. Theorists such as Wendy Brown, whom I engage in the following chapter, extend the Foucauldian theory of 'governmentality' to theorize the novel forms of subjectivity that they argue are constitutive of neoliberalism, namely, the replacement of democratic subjectivities by the self-investing model of human capital.[11] William Connolly argues that underlying resentment disposes some subjects to the vindictive judgments that 'resonate' in late liberalism between competitive capitalism and religion's moralizing condemnation of outsiders.[12] Judith Butler extends her earlier theories of the aggression-fueling effects of gender melancholia to explain the psychic mechanism through which non-normative lives come to be marked as 'ungrievable,' thereby justifying the retractions of social solidarity and state support that define late liberal conditions of 'precarity.'[13]

In turning to the coldly economic, resentful, or melancholic nature of subjects to explain the successes of neoliberal politics, these theories assume the subjective investments that need to be explained, or, more precisely, they explain such investments through a theory of subjectivity abstracted from a social-historical account of the construction of political ideologies. The pitfalls of this move, as I argue in the introduction, are most pronounced in Butler's work. By turning to an account of the psyche to explain the reproduction of social norms, Butler foregoes an analysis of the social character of norms, and the particular practices, traditions, and media in which normative investments inhere. What results is a troublingly decontextualized account of

[11] Brown, *Undoing,* 44-5.
[12] Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity.*
[13] Judith Butler, "Precarity Talk," ed. Jasbir Puar, *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, n. 4 (2012).

the subject, abstracted from any of the cultural materials through which we might see new norms being articulated, or old values grafted onto new patterns of practice.

Late 20th century transformations in US right-wing politics can't be robustly explained by the nature of subjects, but rather requires an account of political ideologies, the actors who construct them, and the contexts in which such ideology formation is possible. In the circulation of evangelical subculture discourse such as Focus radio, we see political consciousness formation at work. As the following analysis will show, pro-family ideologies are produced through the diffuse networks of parachurch multimedia, organizational rallies, prayer groups, and in home life, as messages move from pulpits and stadiums to video, radio, and kitchen tables. These networks create powerful spaces of ideational construction, alongside the more centralized authority of church and political organizations, in non-hierarchical, informal circulation of discourse.

Evangelical norms and ideas take on a life in public discourse, they are resilient and adaptive. This ideological resilience can be traced to the pervasive forms of evangelical discourse in multimedia that saturates everyday practices, as well as its salient content, rooted in the everyday struggles and intimate concerns of believers and potential converts. In his study of the Promise Keepers', a 1990s US evangelical movement aimed at helping men restore their role as leaders in the home, David Gutterman refers to this combination of 'private' concerns with public religious mobilization as "anti-political politics,"[14] and worries that the focus on moral and personal dimension of problems such as gender relations or abortion is depoliticizing.

[14] David S. Gutterman, "Promise Keepers: Delivering Brothers from Democracy," *Prophetic Politics: Christian Social Movements and American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005) 96-7.

This worry, widespread in accounts of the Christian Right, stems from the idea that speaking in the personal or moral register about social problems is depoliticizing because it encourages private or therapeutic solutions to social problems. Bracketing for the moment the question of what sort of solutions Christian Right discourses prescribe, I want to contest the idea that personal or moral speech is necessarily depoliticizing. This chapter highlights the powerfully politicizing effect of evangelical discourse as a making-public of 'private' concerns and spaces of action.

Evangelical discourses are politicizing insofar as they create a distinct worldview and discourse community by bringing everyday issues of family, work, and home life, and into public discourse through a variety of media that both bring public speech into private spaces (radio, books) and create public discursive spaces to address personal issues, such as through biblical narrative traditions and revival practices such as rallies and conferences. Scholars of the evangelical subculture note this popular power. Susan Harding describes the diffuse and pervasive 'reiterative conditions' of evangelical discourse in her study of Jerry Falwell's followers. Harding describes the movement of ideas across media and contexts:

> "Preachers convert the ancient recorded speech of the Bible once again into spoken language, translating it into local theological and cultural idioms and placing present events inside the sequence of Biblical stories. Church people, in their turn, borrow, customize, and reproduce the Bible-based speech of their preachers and other leaders in their daily lives. Preaches appropriate each other's sermons piecemeal and wholesale, while church people assimilate their preachers' language at the level of grammar, semantics, and style.[15]

In an exemplary instance of this process, Falwell, alongside Billy Graham, helped define abortion as a biblical issue through the circulation of widely popular books and video

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[15] Harding, *Falwell,* 12.

series that popularized the pro-life 'gospel,' aligning the hardline pro-life stance with respect for the sanctity of life. This new commonsense defined conservative Christian abortion politics in the 90s.[16]

As in the case of the pro-life gospel, evangelical parachurch discourses follow in the tradition of biblical speech and literature insofar as they are made for citation. In the case of the Promise Keepers, Gutterman points to the use of popular military and sports metaphors in movement literature, which facilitate discursive uptake by ordinary actors into spaces beyond movement rallies. Friends and neighbors are encouraged to take on the 'platoon challenge' in recruiting for accountability prayer groups.[17]

The revivalist practices of US Protestants, such as the citation of political sermons by listeners, exemplify the public-making proliferation and circulation of discourse described by Michael Warner. Warner argues that the traditions constituted during the First Great Awakening created a new public life for American Protestantism:

> [The] revival context and itinerant preaching made the publicness of the sermon much more salient, in a way that was perceived at the time to be scandalous. By the end of the century, as something like a modern sense of denominational confession became current in the US, all congregations could be understood implicitly as belonging to a churchgoing public of strangers.[18]

The particular forms of lateral ideology formation that constitute the evangelical subculture are captured by Warner's description of publics, or more specifically, counterpublics. For Warner, publics are created through the circulation of discourse whose reach is indefinite and extends to potential strangers, strangers who nonetheless share a social position, idioms and rhetoric. In counterpublics, such as among

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[16] Harding, *Falwell,* 183-209.
[17] Gutterman, *Prophetic,* 100.
[18] Warner notes revivalist contexts had the effect of transforming the sermon from a more private encounter between preacher and listener to a public event. Warner, *Publics*, 84.

evangelicals, these idioms and rhetoric are marked as distinct from those of the mainstream. Counterpublics further mark themselves from the mainstream by proposing different forms of sociality among strangers than forms offered by the dominant public. Counterpublic socialities, Warner argues, tend to be more embodied practices of self-presentation and self-making-together rather than rational-critical discourse oriented toward judgment. As we shall see, such alternative socialities are at the center of the evangelical practices of speaking to the heart, witnessing through inspirational stories and jeremiadic speech, and collective prayer.

Finally, the evangelical subculture is highly self-reflective regarding its marginal position in relation to the dominant culture. The thematization of this marginal status is a crucial feature of the re-politicization of American evangelicals in the late 20th century. Borrowing Warner's words, it is fair to say that American evangelicals "hope that their spaces of circulation and poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely."[19] In cultivating a subculture that persists through cultural change, US evangelicals have also taken part in constructing a new conservative politics –a powerful force in directing that change.

II. Pro-Family Politics

> "Women's lib is a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the family as the basic unit of society.
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> Women's libbers are trying to make wives and mothers unhappy with their career, make them feel that they are "second-class citizens" and "abject salves." Women's libbers are promising free sex instead of the "slavery" of marriage. They are promoting Federal "day-care centers" for babies instead of homes. They are promoting abortions instead of families."

[19] Warner, *Publics,* 122.

Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?" *Phyllis Schlafly Report* 5, no. 7 (February 1972) quoted in Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, 104.

In 1972, when Phyllis Schlafly first turned her organizing energies to the fight against feminism, she tapped a wave of conservative discontents with the secular current of popular culture, and the overreach of the liberal political order. A series of Supreme Court rulings in the 60s had banned mandatory school prayer and Bible study in public schools.[20] By the decade's end, federal enforcement of desegregation orders broke the last remnants of Southern allegiance to the Democratic Party, which depended on the security of the segregation order in the South from federal challenge.[21] Tax revolts in California spurred a national movement for a Balanced Budget constitutional amendment, which by 1982 had won the support of 32 states.[22] Civil rights legislation secured protections for women and minorities from employment discrimination, and granted women equal rights to education.[23] As this legislation went into effect, women from the middle and upper classes began to pursue careers, contributing to a 21% increase in women working outside of the home from 1962 to 1978.[24]

Under Schlafly's leadership, the Equal Rights Amendment became the focal point of conservative women's opposition to liberal-secular influence in politics. The

[20] Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson, *Onward Christian Soldiers? The Religious Right in American Politics* (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2011), 133.
[21] Joseph Lowndes, "Goldwater was the Horsepower": *National Review* and the New Southern GOP," *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 45-76.
[22] Critchlow, *Schlafly,* 283.
[23] The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned employment discrimination. This right was further supported by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 72. Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 guaranteed federal education funding for women.
[24] Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 105.

amendment, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, passed the Senate in 1972 and awaited ratification by the states. While Schlafly's conservative organizing efforts concentrated on anti-communism in the post-war period, the threat of ERA ratification prompted her turn to social issues such as marriage and family. These 'bread and butter' issues served as a powerful basis for bringing conservative women, particularly religious women, into politics.[25] Indeed, by the late 70s religious women played an increasingly prominent role in the conservative women's movement, joining alongside Schlafly's network of Republican women, the Eagle Forum.[26] Beverly LaHaye's Christian women's organization, Concerned Women for America, took the helm of movement in the 80s, and continues to be a central actor today.[27]

In the late 70s, the Eagle Forum and the emerging network of religious women activists mobilized by the ERA launched a number of campaigns to challenge the feminist agenda. They first sought to win conservative representation in a series of state and regional International Women's Year conferences, sponsored by the White House and the United Nations. Conservative leaders drew recruits to state based IWY Citizen's Review Committees by widely publicizing what the saw as the anti-family, sexually radical feminist goals of IWY organizers. The movement's broader pro-family agenda grew out of these organizing efforts, which culminated in a pro-family counter-rally outside of the feminist-dominated Huston conference in 1977.[28]

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[25] Critchlow, *Phyllis*.
[26] Mansbridge recounts that by 1976 Christian women organized through churches and home-based tactics such as phone and letter campaigns, and drawing on STOP-ERA literature, became the central force of anti-ERA organizing. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost,* 174-176.
[27] Hardisty, *Resentment,* 72-86
[28] Brown, *Christian America,* 103-137.

When the Carter White House announced a plan for a Conference on Women and Families to be held in 1979, conservative activists again mobilized their state and local network to elect pro-family delegates. By this time, the movement had gained the attention of political elite in Washington, and new right leader Paul Weyrich reached out to Beverly LaHaye to join his Pro-Family Coalition.[29] Dobson became involved in Conference planning after promoting the cause on his Focus on the Family radio show, prompting eighty thousand listeners to write letters encouraging his selection by the White House.[30]

Pro-family politics served as the unifying rhetoric and agenda of Weyrich's elite policy organs, the Heritage Foundation and the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, and the mass-based organizations of the nascent Christian Right.[31] The ideological assemblage behind the appeal to the family had a profound and lasting role in shaping Republican party and wider conservative politics, and remains in force today. This assemblage links religious or traditional views of marriage and family to a variety of populist and libertarian attacks on federal bureaucrats and the waste and overreach of government regulation and social programs. Legislative projects such as school vouchers to direct public funding to private and charter schools, and opposition to state mandated child care and Social Security, are framed as efforts to restore the power of parents over

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[29] Ibid, 141-146. In an interview with Brown, Weyrich admits that earlier in the ERA fight he suspected the Schlafly was "on a fool's errand" in her attempt to organize the grassroots, p. 136.
[30] Diamond, *Not by Politics,* 32.
[31] The women and family policy experts at Weyrich's Free Congress Research and Education Foundation (Connaught Marshner) and the Heritage Foundation (Onalee McGraw) were prominent early voices in the pro-family movement. Each wrote highly influential policy statements that helped set the new right agenda on family issues, including the demand for free-market alternatives to public eduction that is the focus of the following chapter. See Onalee McGraw, *Family Choice in Education: The New Imperative* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1978) and for the Free Congress Research and Education see: Connaught Marshner, *The New Traditional Woman* (Washington: The Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1982).

family moralities and economies. Reagan's Republican Party platform of 1979 was the first to pit itself on the right side of a stark opposition between moral families and "federal bureaucracies with ominous power." The party "insist[s] that all domestic policies, from child care and schooling to Social Security, and the tax code, must be formulated with the family in mind."[32]

In addition to providing a pointed political and ideological agenda, the Pro-Family Coalition created working relationships and organizational ties between economic conservatives and libertarians of the new right and their Christian movement-building partners. Weyrich consistently serves as the center that links a variety of movement-based Christian organizations to policy and party elites. Since its formation, the alliance between these camps, widely credited with securing George W. Bush's second presidency in 2004, has become more politically sophisticated and institutionally resilient through a number of organizational shifts.

The Pioneering Organizations of the Christian Right

The Moral Majority, launched by Southern Baptist minister Jerry Falwell with the encouragement of Weyrich and prominent evangelical pastors of the Religious Roundtable, effectively served the task of convincing evangelical pastors that their religious mission required them to bring their congregations into politics, a role explicitly eschewed by conservative Protestants in the mid-century.[33] Falwell's network of pastors,

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[32] "The Republican Party Platform," *Phyllis Schlafly Report,* August 1980, quoted in Critchlow, *Phyllis,* 265.

[33] Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997) Conservative Protestants, which were primarily evangelicals and adherents to 'fundamentalist' interpretations of the Bible, as opposed to 'mainline' Protestant, which adapted Christian beliefs and traditions to align with a modern, scientific worldview. After their public embarrassment in the Scopes Monkey Trail of 1925, conservative Protestants largely retreat from politics, and anti-communism was the only active political cause until the 70s.

and the churches they represented, served as the main constituency of the Moral Majority. In some instances, churches even provided directories of churchgoers for Moral Majority direct-mail campaigns, which instructed Christians to register and vote on moral issues such as abortion. These efforts are estimated to have registered two million new voters for the 1980 election.[34]

Falwell played a central role in blending fundamentalist themes into the more moderate rhetoric of evangelism, and helping create a discourse that appealed broadly to audiences who began to identify simply as conservative or 'born again' Christians.[35] However Falwell did not go far enough in appealing beyond his fundamentalist base, and the divisive message of the Moral Majority, as well as its reliance on a mostly Southern Baptist network of churches for membership and infrastructure, hindered the organization's ability to sustain a broad base of conservative Christian support, and it was disbanded in 1988.[36] The organization that emerged as the central organizing body of the Christian Right in the 1990s, the Christian Coalition, was significantly more sophisticated than its predecessors. Organizationally, the Coalition built a network of state affiliates and local chapters and equipped leaders with political organizing skills through local training sessions designed by the national office. Ideologically, the group avoided theologically divisive subjects and concentrated on moral issues of broad ecumenical appeal.[37]

To this end, Ralph Reed, the lead political strategist behind the Coalition, expanded the group's message beyond the hot button issues of abortion and anti-

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[34] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 84.
[35] Harding, *The Book of Falwell,* 17-18.
[36] Wilcox, *Onward,* 43-45.
[37] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 94.

pornography to embrace more quotidian economic issues such as tax and welfare reform, and opposition to Clinton's federal healthcare plan.[38] By adopting a broader pro-family agenda, the Coalition found common ground with economic conservatives in Congress, and endorsed the Republican Party's Contract with America. The Contract defined the party platform for the 1994 midterm elections, which gave Republicans 52 seats and control of the House for the first time in a generation. Christian Right voters, who the Coalition reached out to in 120 Congressional races, comprised one third of the electorate and contributed to a massive increase in GOP turnout in what was dubbed the 'Republican Revolution' of '94.[39]

The trajectory Reed set for the Christian Right during his leadership of the Coalition is debated. The Coalition trained a broad base of Christian activists who since the early 90s have gained positions in state and local politics, as well as in Congress, exerting a strong conservative influence on the Republican Party.[40] For such efforts, Reed is credited by some with integrating the Christian grassroots into the party infrastructure of the GOP. However, for many evangelical leaders, Reed signed on to readily to the Party agenda, compromising the movement's ability to press for legislative action on moral issues perceived as posing immediate threats to the social fabric of American life.[41] In addition to ideological disputes, a financial crisis brought on by IRS and FEC

[38] Ralph Reed, "The Future of the Religious Right" in *Christian Political Activism at the Crossroads,* ed. Willaim R. Stevenson (Lanham: Calvin Center Series, 1994)
[39] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 100-101.
[40] Diamond, *Not by Politics,* 30. In 1995 30% of voters identified as evangelical, up from 15% in 1990, of these, 69% voted Republican.
[41] The Coalition attempted to fend off this claim by proposing an alternative *Contract with the American Family* in 1995, but this legislative agenda was too soft on social issues for most conservative leaders. Reed's resistance to push for a unqualified ban on abortion in order to build alliances with more moderate Republicans grew widespread charged of 'deception' and 'treachery' from evangelical leaders. Watson, *Christian Coalition*, 72-76.

investigations for political activity by a non-profit precipitated Reed's departure in 1997, and the Coalition's rapid decline.[42]

Among conservative leaders incensed by Reed's concessions to the Republican mainstream, James Dobson was uniquely positioned to redirect the influence of the religious grassroots in electoral politics. Since its founding in 1977, Dobson's multimedia ministry Focus on the Family established itself as respected voice, and its radio, publishing, and online programming helped frame the Christian approach to living within the pressures of secular society for a growing evangelical subculture. By the mid-90s a mailing list of nearly two million listeners received the flagship Focus magazine, one among nearly a dozen Focus magazines devoted to Christian-interest content.[43] Dobson's daily radio program was broadcast on four thousand stations, and a team of correspondents at Focus headquarters responded to 250,000 letters from listeners seeking advice per month.[44]

Focus programming and literature is organized around topics of concern for Christian living, referred to as 'ministries.' As I elaborate below, the vast majority of Focus discourse and listener engagement concerns quotidian questions of how to anchor a spiritual relationship with God in one's relationship practices with spouses and children. By all accounts Dobson is committed to his role in providing spiritual guidance and practical advice to Christian families, and he sustained a clear division between Focus' family ministries, of which he was the defining voice, and the political outreach and

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[42] The organization was eventually found guilt of engaging in partisan political activity and forced to pay back taxes and penalties to the IRS, leaving the Coalition massively indebted at the end of the 90s. Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 103.
[43] Diamond, *Not Politics,* 31-2.
[44] Diamond, *Wrath,* 71.

organizing with which he became increasingly engaged throughout the 90s.[45] In 1989, with the encouragement of new president Gary Bauer, Dobson reinvested in the Washington D.C. based Family Research Council, and began to devote Focus resources and media networks to raise the Council's public profile.[46] The Council provided policy research and analysis, and devised political issue campaigns that were taken up by Focus affiliated Family Policy Councils, as well as non-affiliated ally organizations across the country. In the 90s, Focus and its affiliates displayed their political influence in successful anti-gay rights referenda in Colorado, and campaigns in variety of states, and through the passage of the child tax credit and the gay marriage ban at the federal level.

In the late 90s, Dobson became increasingly willing to leverage his public profile and widespread network of devoted listeners to pressure for legislative action on issues such as gay rights and abortion. Reaching out to evangelical leaders whose support waned during Bob Dole's presidential campaign, leading House Republican's launched a 'Values Action Team' of conservative Republicans in 1998. The group established open lines of communication and coordination between CR leaders and lawmakers, with Dobson and the FRC serving as the lead liaisons.[47]

In 2004, with an eye to influencing that year's presidential election, Dobson founded Focus on Family Action, a sister organization of Focus on the Family that concentrated on fundraising and campaigning for conservative candidates and causes. The central rallying point of CR organizing for the 2004 election was gay marriage. Targeting values voters in key states, Focus Action, Focus state affiliates, and the FRC

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[45] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine.*
[46] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 117.
[47] Ibid, 114-120.

sent out mailings and held rallies casting homosexuality as a dangerous and immoral lifestyle choice, antithetical to the values of marriage and family. The success of gay-marriage amendments in thirteen states, as well as the importance of the Federal Marriage Amendment in Republican electoral campaigns, attests to the political power of the CR and the salience of the pro-family message. By mobilizing conservative Christians to register and vote, the CR contributed to a nine percent increase in evangelical turnout in 2004 over 2000, and gave Bush a crucial electoral margin.[48]

III. The Evangelical Subculture

> "The greatest innovation in the last twenty years is the development of the giant shopping centers. Here is the synergetic principle of placing at least two or more services at one location to attract the customers."
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> Jerry Falwell commenting on his innovation of parachurch platforms and special interest ministries to popularize his religious message, quoted in Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell,* 16.

While many scholars note that the political successes of Christian Right campaigns attest to the power of pro-family discourses in the late twentieth century, the question remains as to why appeals to the family gained such widespread salience. Responses to this question in social-scientific accounts are partial and varied. Various authors credit the lure of authoritarianism,[49] or moral outrage,[50] which they associate with evangelical politics. In the following two chapters, I challenge these characterizations. Some helpfully point to the skill and effectiveness of political organizing and movement

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[48] Ibid, 194. The Bush-Cheney team recognized the importance of the evangelical vote, and headed up their own efforts to mobilize these voters. Ralph Reed headed up their outreach to conservative churches, p. 188-196

[49] Brown "American Nightmare;" Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

[50] Hardisty, *Mobilizing Resentment* and Leslie Dorrough Smith *Righteous Rhetoric: Sex, Speech, and the Politics of Concerned Women for America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

building in spreading the pro-family message.[51] Others have argued that Christian Right politics appeal to deeply rooted ideologies of religious and cultural traditionalism.[52] Christian Right groups indeed draw openly on traditions such as American Republicanism, libertarianism, and Protestant theology in constructing their political message. However, as my account will show, contemporary pioneers of pro-family discourse adapt these traditions to respond to particular historical circumstances and contests for political power.

To explain the up-take of pro-family discourses, I turn to the discourses and practices of the evangelical subculture. On the radio, in newsletters and in rallies, religious leaders offer counsel on spiritual and family centered living, and call on listeners to 'vote values' and donate to pro-family causes. My account of these discourses attempts to capture the highly adaptive character of the evangelical subculture. Since the 1970s, the growth of parachurch organizations, and Christian broadcasting and web-based media has transformed not only forms of religious association, but also the content of religious discourse. This section profiles the evangelical cultural network, and its central player, Focus on the Family.

The Rise of the Neoevangelicals

At the outset of the 1970s, with the prestige of American liberalism significantly diminished, a variety of cultural movements reformed the social bases, and re-polished the political moniker of conservatism.[53] A wave of new preaching and worship styles

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[51] Diamond, *Not by Politics*.
[52] Critchlow, *Phyllis,* 8.
[53] For a general account of this trend see Critchlow, *Phyllis,* 10. On the shifting profile of individuals who identify as conservative, see a Wilcox and Norrander study from the 70s to 2008, which found that at the later survey one's view on gender roles was more likely to predict conservative identification than socio-

drew congregants to evangelical churches. In the West, evangelical churches drawing on young adult crowds with soft-rock devotionals and casual dress, and an inspirational, Jesus-centered message, pioneered a new mode of evangelical religious practice.[54] In growing numbers of congregations, charismatic preachers and their followers practiced channeling the 'gifts of spirit,' and attested to the power of prayer by recounting miracles and extra-biblical revelations.[55] From 1971-1990, six million new members joined evangelical churches in the US.[56]

The growth of evangelical practices and teachings in this period was a mark of religious revival, but also of a reorientation of American Protestantism to popular culture. In the previous period Protestant public engagement was at a low after a split in the 1920s between fundamentalist and 'mainline' or modernizing Protestant churches, in which fundamentalists were derided in wider popular culture. In the middle of the twentieth century, political activism by Protestant groups was largely limited to anti-communist activism.[57] When Protestant churches reentered politics beginning in the 1960s and 70s, they did so with the aid of new networks of parachurch organizations, such as Focus on the Family (1977) and Concerned Women for America (1979), and new public platforms on TV and radio, such as Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (1959). Parachurch organizations, which specialized in Christian-tailored social interest and

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economic status, and that conservative men were more likely to be lower and middle-class than in the earlier period, when they were more upper-class. Clyde Wilcox and Barbara Norrander, "The Gender Gap in Ideology." *Political Behavior* 31, n. 4 (2008).

[54] Diamond, *Not Politics*, 10.

[55] Perhaps the most visible charismatic figure was Pat Robertson. While leading prayer sessions on his *700 Club* show Robertson frequently revealed messages he received from God, and took accounts of miracles from callers.

[56] During this same period mainline Protestant churches saw a 2.6 million decline in membership. Diamond, *Not Politics,* 10. Citing Shibley, *Resurgent.*

[57] Watson, *Christian Coalition*, 9-10.

activism, distributed religious teaching and news via mail, at conferences and rallies, and on radio programs.

Christian media was a central pillar of these new organizations, and a significant cultural force in its own rights. Breaking with the televised sermon format of religious programming, Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network and his flagship show *The 700 Club*, pioneered the Christian talk show format for delivering news, interviews, and call-in prayer sessions. Christian broadcasting grew tremendously in the 70s, with the number of Christian radio stations jumping from 399 in 1972 to 1,463 in 1996.[58] In 1996, Robertson's Family Channel reached 59 million homes, and the second major network, Trinity Broadcasting, reached 27 million.[59] In addition to radio and TV broadcasting, American evangelicals in the 2000s support a multi-billion dollar publishing industry.[60]

Focus on the Family, its political branch CitizenLink, and its state affiliates were among the most important political organizing networks of the Christian Right in the 2000s. To fully account for the success of this political network, I want to suggest, one needs to understand Focus as a parachurch ministry, and part of a broader evangelical subcultural movement.

Parachurch industries rival traditional churches in their import in shaping the evangelical subculture.[61] By purchasing a Christian-themed novel, attending a school or

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[58] The number has decreased slightly since, and there have been a significant concentration in ownership of Christian radio stations. Diamond, *Not Politics,* 39.
[59] Ibid, 21
[60] W. Bradford Wilcox, "How Focused on the Family? Evangelical Protestants, the Family, and Sexuality" in *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*, ed. Steven Brint and Jean Schroedel (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 257.
[61] In her 1996 study of US evangelicals, Gallagher found that a vast majority of evangelicals cite belief in bible (48%) and personal relationship with God (44%) as source of religious teaching, while only 6% rely on the church, see Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*, 67. In 2002, Wilcox found that of 22% of the US

conference, working in retail, presenting at a training institute, or sharing a mentoring CD at a church group meeting, Christians integrate religion into their everyday lives. As women have entered public life as employees, producers, and consumers, these industries provide venues for women to enter public institutions of religion.[62] As we saw in the previous chapter, a rise in lifestyle and self-help centered media in recent decades tapped into new markets of women consumers.[63]As a media empire, Focus media takes part in this trend.

The vast majority of Focus resources and operations are devoted to multimedia. Dobson first gained a reputation when he published *Dare to Discipline* in 1970*,* a biblically inspired parenting guide that pushed back against the anti-authority cultural currents of the era. Under his leadership, Focus remained committed to providing practical advice to parents struggling to lead spiritually committed lives.

Focus media content is organized around 'ministries,' or campaigns targeted at Christian-interest issues such as winning homosexuals to God ("Love Won Out"), placing ultrasound machines in abortion centers, or providing Christian-friendly entertainment for young adults. In the 2000s, Focus had nine magazines for children, parents, and young adults, focused on advice, entertainment, and politics. In addition, Focus ran twenty websites, such as Commit2Vote and CitizenLink, and hosted a variety of online resources. Citizenlink and Focus distribute online newsletters as well as politically focused email alerts. The daily Focus radio program runs today on over two thousand

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population who identified as evangelical, less than half, or 10% attend church once a month or less, and 12% attend several times or more, see Wilcox, "How Focused," 263.

[62] McDannell, "Beyond Dr. Dobson: Women," 116-120.

[63] Angela McRobbie, "Reflections on Feminism, Immaterial Labor, and the post-Fordist Regime" (*New Formations,* 2010)

stations, down from as many as four thousand in the 90s, and Citizenlink launched a short political program on 650 stations in 2012.[64] Their message is also distributed through hundreds of books, DVDs and CDs that range from political-issue analysis to guided mentoring programs for couples, and counseling for troubled teens. In addition to being marketed for private consumption, Focus media provides content for the organization's rallies, conferences, and political outreach.

A plethora of media formats, as well as conferences, rallies, and local political organizing provide a strong infrastructure for cultivating Christian lifestyle outside of the church. Focus has arguably done more than any other parachurch organization to integrate Christian-interest media, spiritual and self-help counseling, and political organizing. Despite its influence, the Christian subculture is almost invisible in the mainstream press. Perhaps the subculture's most visible moment came with the Promise Keepers movement of the 90s. Founder Bill McCartney credits his on-air appearance on Focus radio with launching the movement,[65] in which an estimated 3.5 million men participated in stadium events and rallies throughout the country.[66] The Promise Keepers are noteworthy not only because of their astounding level of public support, but also because, like Focus, they advanced a message that combined gender and racially progressive themes with advise for how to maintain a traditional, though revised, moral order in the family.

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[64] According to self-reported numbers, see "Citizenlink Newsletter," *Citizenlink* (Colorado Springs, CO) February 2013. Citizenlink is the predecessor of Family News in Focus which ran in the early 2000s.
[65] Dale Buss, *Family Man: The Biography of Dr. James Dobson* (Weaton: Tyndon House Publishers, 2005), 218. Focus on the Family published the Promise Keeper's *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* pamphlet, and Dobson spoke at PK rallies.
[66] Melanie Heath "Soft-Boiled Masculinity: Renegotiating Gender and Racial Ideologies in the Promise Keepers Movement." *Gender and Society* 17, n. 3 (2003), 242.

Changing views on the meaning of male 'headship' are exemplary of this balancing act. While in the early 20th century 'headship' referred to the male's role as primary breadwinner in contrast to the woman's role in domestic care, these roles were recast in a revived discourse on headship emerging in the 80s.[67] Recent accounts show that headship discourses draw on mainstream progressive themes such as gender equality and the call for men to take a more active role at home. Male headship, as well as gendered role differentiation based on presumed essential male and female qualities, are cast as part of a complementary arrangement.[68] By basing male headship in leading spiritual life at home rather than breadwinning, these discourses retain male authority while accommodating the fact of women working outside of the home.

As we will see below in the case of the Focus message, biblical teachings about male spiritual leadership and essentialist views of gendered dispositions combine with acknowledgement of the demands facing working mothers and fathers, and practical advice.

IV. Focus on the Family: Constituting a Subculture

Everyday, the radio program *Focus on the Family* reaches thousands of listeners across the country, beaming into their homes, offices, and cars on more than two thousand stations.[69] On-air since 1977, Focus's half hour radio program is the central platform through which the organization ministers the message of strengthening

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[67] Stassen, *Headship.*
[68] Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity.*
[69] "Focus on the Family Daily Broadcast," *Focusonthefamily.com*, accessed Oct. 24, 2014. http://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast#?curPage=1

marriages and families to its 2.5 million active followers.[70] Hosts James Dobson, and his successors Jim Daly and John Fuller offer spiritual guidance and practical advice, presented through personal experience and recounted in anecdotes. The program seems to serve a persistent need. In a typical month in 2005, 50,000 callers contacted Focus, most prompted by the day's broadcast. In addition, the organization receives and responds to183,000 letters a month by post and email.[71]

Letters and calls come from listeners seeking advice for how to cope with personal challenges such as a child using drugs or a distant spouse, or wishing to purchase Focus guidance resources. Hundreds of specially trained staff dispense advice by mail or over the phone, drawing on a database of advice culled from Dobson's radio programs, books, tapes, and DVDs and indexed by topic.[72] Callers with more severe problems are referred to one of Focus' 16 licensed counselors. [73] By its own account, Focus radio responded to three quarters of a million parents in need of support in 2013.[74]

The daily program is typically a conversation between the hosts, presently Jim Daly and John Fuller, and the pastors, family counselors, child psychologists, and various religious experts in spiritual living they invite as guests.[75] Conversations are framed by the guests' accounts of their experiences helping families and couples confront particular issues. The hosts frequently push their guests to offer practical advice, for instance by

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[70] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 46. The number of individuals who were on the active mailing list because they contacted the ministry within the last 18 months as of 2005.
[71] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 43-48.
[72] Differing accounts cite half to one third of Focus' 1300 personnel as devoted to mail and phone correspondence with followers. See Gilgoff, Ibid and McDannel, *Evangelical Identity,* 126.
[73] McDannel, *Evangelical Identity,* 126-7.
[74] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Loving Kids for Who They Are," radio, *Focus on the Family,* August 20, 2014.
[75] James Dobson stepped down from hosting the show, as well as relinquishing all other Focus related responsibilities, in 2010, a year after stepping down from the Board. He had previously stepped down from the Focus presidency to head Focus on the Family Action, the organization's political wing, in 2004.

interrupting a reflection on moral principles to ask: "how do I put this in action? Say I am sitting with my daughter over breakfast, what do I say to her?"[76] Towards the end of most shows, John Fuller encourages listeners facing challenges like those discussed in the program to call Focus counselors, or go online to find specialized Focus resources.

The overarching cultural-moral perspective that frames the show is the perceived crisis in marriage in the US, and the sense that American families are embattled by various social trends, which particular broadcasts attempt to explore.[77] For evangelical listeners, who receive Focus' message as part of an American Protestant tradition of preaching, the charge of social and moral crisis is recognized in the narrative frame of a jeremiad, in which the charge of crisis inspires a call for God's people to return to his path.[78] This narrative frame serves to distinguish those who take up the path of redemption from non-believers, thereby casting the latter as part of a lost and sinful existence, a point I will return to. Focus discourse takes part in the rhetoric and idioms of American Protestantism, but adopts moderate tones. Speakers tend to frame their appeals to everyday worries and struggles not in strident and threatening tones associated with the revival traditions but in sober moral language. In do doing, Focus discourse combines the biblical narrative tradition of teaching through mundane stories with therapeutic self-help idioms from popular culture.[79]

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[76] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Being the Intentional Parent Your Child Needs," radio, *Focus on the Family,* Sept. 17, 2014.

[77] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Building a Stronger Marriage," radio, *Focus on the Family,* Sept. 5, 2014. This ad for a Focus marriage program argues that US has the highest divorce rate in the world.

[78] For a exemplary study of the American tradition of prophetic narrative see George Schulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

[79] Gutterman describes this blending of jeremiadic speech traditions and popular self-help and therapeutic themes in his study of the Promise Keepers'. Gutterman, "Promise Keepers," 94-128.

The trends that provoke the most persistent attention and concern are the high levels of stress and pressure facing parents, overvaluation of achievement and over-commitment to work, and the disorientation and lack of guidance men and women face in attempting to lead successful marriages, devote time to children, and manage work life. Daly, Fuller, and their guests present anecdotes to attest to these trends, and illustrate how commitment to personal relationships, including first and foremost a personal relationship with Christ, can help listeners confront these pressures and push against these trends.

These personal anecdotes are at once pragmatic, and inspirational. They partake in a preacherly tradition of 'witnessing,' in which believers recount how their relationship with Christ helped them overcome trials, thus witnessing God's intervention in worldly affairs. According to these testimonials, the practices through which one fosters a personal relationship with God serve as a model and stepping stone for developing a more intentional and responsive relationship to oneself, one's family, and one's friends. Understanding what God says also requires "getting to know yourself, and getting him to know you," and thus requires a confrontation with oneself.[80] Furthermore, to hear what God is saying, one has to slow down, for, as one speaker attests, "the holy spirit works in our lives through contemplation.[81]" A relationship with God requires a person to take the time to articulate what is 'inward' and face their issues rather than leaning on an 'external identity' drawn from the world, in order to cover them up.

[80] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Transformed: Overcoming my Dark Past," radio, *Focus on the Family,* Sept. 3, 2014.
[81] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Breaking the Business Habit," radio, *Focus on the Family,* Sept. 22, 2014.

The broadcast repeatedly attempts to show through examples that living in relation to God is practiced through relationships, for God "speaks through friends,"[82] and Christians follow Christ's model of love and grace by helping family and friends lead biblical lives. In addition to offering strategies for communication between husbands and wives, parents and children, Focus also responds to the concern that young people in the contemporary US lack models and teachers to show them how to have successful relationships by encouraging listeners to engage in mentoring. The broadcast occasionally showcases mentoring relationships, advising that they require only a willingness to listen, share experiences, and express one's vulnerability, and directing listeners to mentoring workbooks and DVDs for further guidance.[83]

An underlying theme that Fuller, Daly, and their guests point to in diagnosing challenges facing the family is the breakdown of traditional norms of male breadwinning and female domesticity, and the power arrangement, sexual ethos, and patterns of home practices these roles helped sustain. While this cultural shift is never named explicitly in these terms, it is referenced when Focus conversations describe the specific pressures facing men and women today, and prescribe remedies. A number of examples illustrate this point.

Tony Evans, a well-know African-American Evangelical pastor, came on the Focus program to speak about the role of fathers in "Raising Kids with a Kingdom Perspective."[84] At issue in this conversation was the need for spiritual leadership in the

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Saving Marriages Before They Start," radio, *Focus on the Family,* August 28, 2014.
[84] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Raising Kids with a Kingdom Perspective," radio, *Focus on the Family,* Sept. 8, 2014.

family, a task the bible assigns to men in their roles as husbands and fathers. Like many guests, Evans is himself the president of the parachurch ministry "Urban Alternative" and the author of guides for Christian living such as *Kingdom Men.* Evans addresses the theme of paternal responsibility that has long been central to Focus teaching, perhaps most popularized by Dobson's mass success TV spot, *Where's Dad?*, which remained popular in the 2000s, three decades after its release,[85] and the Promise Keepers movement.[86] This message combines a religious conservative view of 'servant leadership,' according to which men serve God by acting as the leader and conduits of His word in the family, on the one hand, with a call for men to take up their responsibilities in the home, resonant with contemporary gender-progressive discourse, on the other.

Evans' approach also illustrates well the consistent Focus attempt to integrate spirituality and biblically guided living into one's daily life, and to give biblical rules a living significance by rooting them in practices of relationship and discipleship. Evans inspires listeners to aim not for a "legalistic" conformity to God's rules, but to "hold on" to his rules because they value the relationships with God, family, and community that are strengthened by biblical living.

The male over-commitment to work is described in gender essentialist terms when raised on the show. Hosts and guests are careful to note that men, by their 'nature,' are driven to find fulfillment in their work lives, and desire to 'make something' of themselves in the world. This male character trait is contrasted to women, who tend to find fulfillment through relationships. Such gender essentialist views are further

[85] Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 23-4.
[86] Current hosts John Fuller and Jim Daly both have books on parenting for fathers.

reinforced through advice. Jill Savage, who has a ministry targeted at mothers in the form of parenting guidance books such as *My Hearts At Home*, counsels women to be mindful of these gendered differences in need and disposition.[87] While reinforcing a gendered division of domestic and wordly work, Savage and the hosts nonetheless stress that it is "not fair" for men to choose to work late, and encourage women to confront their husbands to establish expectations for spending time at home with children. Furthermore, Fuller, Daly, and Dobson consistently note that women today often work outside the home, and are under the pressure of balancing their own jobs with caring for children and supporting their spouses. They seek to address this pressure through communication strategies and intentional relationship practices.

The gender philosophy embraced by Focus also views women as endowed with God-given natures to be 'submissive' to their husbands. A July 2014 broadcast explored the practice of submission. The female 'submissive' guest argued for a revival of this practice, which she suggested was losing ground among Christians due to the influence of female-empowered culture.[88] The emasculation of men in popular culture was also blamed for the "unstable sexual appetites" exhibited by women. The broadcast "Exposing the Lure of Erotica," responded to the 2012 survey by a leading Christian publisher, which found that Christian women voted *50 Shades of Gray*, an erotic novel about sadomasochist sexual practice, the most influential book of the year. Two female guests who lead a ministry for women suggested that narrative sadomasochist 'pornography' provided a perverted gratification of women's desire for male leadership. Unable to find

[87] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Making Your Home Safe and Healthy," radio, *Focus on the Family,* Sept. 5, 2014.
[88] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Submission: Finding Strength in God's Design," radio, *Focus on the Family,* June 14 2011.

healthy practices of submission with their husbands, they suggested, women were increasingly lapsing in their traditional role as "stabilizers," entrusted with "subduing sex into its Godly place in marriage."[89]

V. Conclusion: Servant Leaders and Working Moms

> The New Traditional Woman is not the syrupy caricature that Hollywood of the 1950's beamed into our living rooms. She is new, because she is of the current era, with all of its pressures and fast pace and rapid change. She is traditional because, in the face of unremitting cultural change, she is oriented around the eternal truths of faith and family. Her values are timeless and true to human nature.
> Connaught Marshner, *The New Traditional Woman*, Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, 1982

The evangelical subculture constitutes a vibrant public, and performs the definitive public function of bringing into collective discourse concerns of work and family associated with the private sphere. By tending to the circulation of discourse through media such as radio, books, online resources, as well as practices of communication such as mentoring and discipleship among networks of family, friends, or fellow participants in church services, rallies, or conferences, I have brought into view the subcultural practices that form the powerful basis of evangelical politics.

This view of the evangelical subculture allows me to situate the widely noted moralizing character of new conservative ideologies in relational practices of guidance and self-reflection. In addition to fueling moral judgments, such practices are sustaining for the individuals who perform them. Scholars have noted that evangelical claims to "eternal truth" such as "faith and family" underwrite a moral distinction through which

[89] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Exposing the Lure of Erotica," radio, *Focus on the Family,* August 25, 2014.

fellows in Christian political publics are distinguished from outsiders. In the biblical narrative frame, and the rhetoric of witnessing and jeremiadic speech, descriptions of worldly trails are oriented toward the promise of redemption through Christ, and thus chart a distinction between the lost and the redeemed.[90] Speaking in this tradition, Focus argues that "we" need to strengthen families because "we don't want government transferring values and faith to our children."[91]

Furthermore, I have suggested that the widespread salience of pro-family discourses can be explained in part by their responsiveness to the changing conditions facing actors. As we have seen, as Christian media and organizing have brought religious messages into the production and consumption circuits of everyday life since the 70s, these discourses frequently framed themselves around everyday concerns of marriage and family. Debates about the family extend beyond evangelical discourses to the wider culture. As I suggested in the last chapter, these debates have been fueled by socio-economic change, such as a 24% increase in mothers working outside the home between 1975 and 2009,[92] as well as declining rates of marriage and increased rates of divorce during this period.[93] As the traditional family declined, so to did beliefs about gender roles on which it was founded, leading to a 49% decrease between the late 70s and early

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[90] This is a prominent feature of US evangelical discourse, as noted in Gutterman and Harding's accounts cited here. Political theorists such as William Connolly and Paul Apostolidis read this feature as part of what Apostolidis calls the authoritarian quality of evangelical politics, and Connolly describes as its aggressive disposition. I would suggest that these accounts overstate the aggressive, authoritarian character of evangelical ideology. I therefore also differ with the force each ascribes to this characteristic in explaining the affinity between free-market and evangelical ideologies. See Paul Apostolidis, *Stations of the Cross: Adorno and Christian Right Radio* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) and Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity*.
[91] Focus on the Family, Jim Daly and John Fuller, "Helping Kids Thrive in Middle School," radio, *Focus on the Family,* August 8, 2014.
[92] Suzanne M. Bianchi "Changing Families Changing Workplaces." *The Future of Children* 27, n. 2 (2011)
[93] A demographic survey of US adults from1998-2002 estimates that 45% of total adults married, and 54% of evangelicals, see Wilcox, "How Focused," 266.

90s in Americans who reported to believe in the gendered division of labor.[94] During this period pro-family discourses exerted a counter-ideological force; evangelical moral views about the family became more extreme, with 57% up from 49% opposed to premarital sex, and 70% up from 58% opining that divorce should be made more difficult.[95]

This account problematizes critiques of contemporary right-wing US politics that foreground the presumed aggression-fueled curtailing of contemporary subjects' critical-democratic capacities. This chapter's account of the Christian Right as based in a highly adaptive and relationally rich subculture both renders its widespread appeal more plausible, and suggests that its alliance with de-democratizing, pro-market reformers requires further explanation.

To do so requires an account of the new conservative constellations of which the Christian Right forms a part. Contemporary conservatism advances a vision of social transformation through reform of the state. This vision upholds the autonomy of civil society, and its units of family, community, and churches, in opposition to social-democratic regulations and state programs, understood as the overreach of 'liberal governance.' As critics have charged, the political ideology that 'pro-family' rhetoric advances is indeed opposed to 'politics' understood in the social-democratic sense, or more specifically to the vision of politics that underwrites the American liberal-democratic project of the 20th century, a vision of expanded formal inclusion through the protection of political and civil rights.

The following two chapters telescope out, tracking the articulation of conservative family politics with neoliberal trends, such as economic conservative and free market

[94] Stassen, *Headship,* 112.
[95] Ibid, 263.

reform strategies advanced through the politics of ‘school choice.’ In so doing I attend to the ideological constellations and political alliances through which the Christian Right expanded its impact on the contemporary political scene.

Chapter Three

The Politics of Market-Based Reform:

A Critique of the Neoliberal Subjectivities Approach

Among the political projects that US Christian Right organizations and evangelical parachurch networks[1] have thrown their support in recent decades, campaigns for 'school choice' have been among the most enduring and successful. School choice campaigns seek to reform public schools through mechanisms such as voucher and charter programs that create semi-private structures of funding and administration. Promising to restore power to parents over the content and quality of their children's education, school choice campaigns appeal to a variety of constituencies dissatisfied with existing public school systems around the country, including popular movements of urban minority parents and conservative Christians, as well as conservative and free-market think tanks and foundations, and state-level neoliberal reformers.

Scholars of neoliberalism view market-based reforms trends such as school choice as evidence of a negative ideology or rationality of governance. Viewed as such, the politics of school choice appears to transform the motives and concerns of actors into alignment with market-driven reforms, and school choice policies are said to keep these alignments in place through the consolidation of new subjectivities. Can we understand school choice as something other than a negative ideology, a subject-forming rationality of neoliberalism? Accounts of neoliberal rationalities tend to overlook the diverse alliances behind these reforms, and the recent history of contestation that has shaped US politics. The following chapter offers an account of ideology that attends to the formative role of actors in aligning diverse aspirations and visions around the school choice

[1] Evangelical parachurch organizations are non-profits that distribute Christian-interest media and host rallies, conferences, and workshops. Focus on the Family and Concerned Women for America are two such organizations prominent in the contemporary evangelical subculture. The speakers hosted by such media are pastors and other popular subcultural figures, who often lead churches or author their own media 'ministries.' See Chapter Two for an account of political ideology formation in the US evangelical subculture.

movement, and in so doing, sheds light on new conservative constellations that have coalesced in the US since the 1980s, of which school choice forms a part.

Before delving into the political history of school choice, this chapter considers the ‘governmentality’ explanation of market-based reforms. The task of this chapter is twofold. The first aim is to analytically extricate Foucault’s account of neoliberalism from theories of neoliberal subjectivity offered by contemporary Foucauldian theorists, in order to specify what I will argue are the problematic claims of the latter. In his novel treatment of liberalism as a governmental rationality shaped by the evolution of techniques aimed at the rational governance of the social, Foucault offers a prescient account of the emergence of neoliberal forms of political-economic thought and policy in the mid-20th century. However, Foucault’s history of liberalism treats neoliberal governance as a trend in elite economic thought and policy, overlooking its relation to popular politics, and the wider socio-cultural moment.

Seeking to amend this oversight, contemporary theorists apply the framework of governmental rationalities to track neoliberal discourses in diverse institutional spaces such as courts, schools, and hospitals. Theorists such as Nikolas Rose, Wendy Brown, and Colin Gordon build on Foucault’s late work, which proposes the analytic of ‘governance’ as an overarching framework for understand power as it works through regulating populations, disciplining individuals, and subjecting the self. They posit continuity between contemporary practices of the self, noted for their entrepreneurial, self-investing character, and novel forms of political-economic governance. This continuity is theorized as ‘techniques of governance,’ or ‘political rationalities,’ that are

at once institutional and subjective.[2] While seemingly solving the problem of uptake that has long plagued Foucauldian theory,[3] these theories repeat the problem in different form by assuming the motives and concerns of ordinary actors can be read off of the rationalities contained in governmental discourse, which ostensibly shape them as subjects. This framework has led to a focus on subjectivities, and self-formative 'practices of the self,' in scholarly interpretations of neoliberal cultural and political trends in particular, and informs a broader ethical turn in critical and political theory.

This chapter's second aim is to point to the limitations of the neoliberal subjectivities approach for interpreting free-market politics. This critique motivates my move past Foucault in the following chapter, to offer an alternative account of ideologically shaped political action.

This chapter proceeds in four sections. I begin by situating the theory of governance in the themes of Foucault's late work, including his effort to foreground questions of subject formation by reframing his historical inquiry around the relationship between knowledge, truth, and freedom. Section two gives an overview of Foucault's genealogy of the modern state from the perspective of governance, and the theory of liberal and neoliberal governmentality that emerges from that account. This is a reliable,

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[2] Such analyses have been popularized in the work of Thomas Lemke, Nicholas Rose, Wendy Brown, and Michel Feher. See Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)**,** Thomas Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2011), Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," Public Culture 21:1 2009, Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

[3] For foundational critiques see Charles Taylor and Jürgen Habermas, who argue that Foucault collapses the distinction between knowledge, including moral-traditions, and power, and thus cannot sustain a standpoint from which to distinguish agentive actions guided by knowledge from actions produced by power. Such critiques reject the theory of power as philosophically incoherent. See Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Polity Press, 1990) and Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Political Theory* 12, no. 2 (1984):152-183.

but partial account of market-reform trends. Section three shows how theorists of governmentality have deployed this method to ground claims about the formation of neoliberal subjects. I conclude by returning to my opening inquiry into the mobilization of diverse constituencies into alliances for market-based reform, and offer a critique of the elision of elite discourse and policy with popular political subjectivities at work in contemporary studies of neoliberal governmentality.

I. Subjects of Freedom and Governance

Foucault offers a framework for understanding the continuity between institutional techniques and practices of the self in a series of late essays on method.[4] These essays ground the shift in Foucauldian scholarship from the analysis of power to the study of practices of governance and their corollary regimes of truth, or rationalities. In this framework, 'truth' is produced through discursive formations, and ideals and concepts come to be taken as true insofar as they serve as a solution to a given problem as formulated by a system of governance. Such systems include practical systems for the governance of wordly processes and things, others, and ourselves. Foucault suggests that we can trace the effects of such systems in constructing our social world along different axes, he asks: "How are we constituted as subjects of our own knowledge? How are we constituted as subjects who exercise or submit to power relations? How are we constituted as moral subjects of our own actions?"[5]

Foucault's late work takes up the analytic perspective of governance laid out in his methodological writings, though nowhere do his analyses extend to all three axes of

[4] Michel Foucualt, "What is Enlightenment?" and "What is Critique?" In *The Essential Foucault,* ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: Editions Gallimard, 1994) 43-57 and 263-278.
[5] Foucault, "Enlightenment," 55-6.

knowledge, discipline, and ethics. Rather, his late lectures pursue two parallel studies, one concentrated on the evolving relationship between knowledge and disciplinary power in the modern state,[6] and the other concentrated on ethical practices of the self in the ancient and early Christian period.[7] The major transition separating these two studies is the ascendance of the Christian pastoral, which on Foucault's telling brings about an epistemological shift from the subject of practical self-knowledge, developed through relations of self-presentation and truth-telling, to the subject of self-reflection, mediated by the transcendent knowledge of religious authorities. The diffusion of the authority of the Christian pastoral into the modern sciences and disciplines of sexuality, criminality, and madness described in Foucault's earlier genealogies forms the background of these studies.

By asking after the transformation from ancient to modern epistemologies and subjectivities Foucault frames his genealogies in a broader critical-philosophical inquiry into the history of reason. Whether or not one signs onto some version of an enlightenment narrative committed to the specificity of modern rationalities, the nature of ethical practices of the self in the modern context cannot be explained without unpacking the relation of such practices to the institutions for regulating and disciplining individuals that pervade social relations in the modern state. While one line of scholarship on

[6] The Collège de France lectures are published in English as: *Society Must be Defended*: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-6* (New York: Picador, 2003); *Security*, *Territory, Population*: *Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-8.* Ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2007); and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979.* Ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[7] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-2.* trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2005); *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France 1982-3* trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2011); *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II.* trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2011).

neoliberalism displaces the problematic of knowledge and subjectivity by re-conceptualizing the figures of subjects, systems, and discourses in Deleuzian-inspired ontologies of affect,[8] in most contemporary work the notion of governance works to bracket this problematic.

This chapter focuses on analyses of governmentality that bring together analyses of contemporary practices of the self, noted for the entrepreneurial, self-investing character, and analyses of novel forms of 'neoliberal' political-economic governance by positing a continuity between the two with references to 'techniques of governance' or 'political rationalities' that are at once institutional and subjective. Such analyses have been popularized in the work of Thomas Lemke, Nicholas Rose, Wendy Brown, and Michel Feher.[9] Lemke states the perspective of governmentality studies concisely:

> While many forms of contemporary critique are still organized around the dualisms of freedom and constraint, consensus and violence, from the perspective of governmentality the polarity of subjectivity and power ceases to be plausible: government refers to a continuum, which extends from political government right through forms of self-guidance, namely "technologies of the self."[10]

He goes on to argue that this perspective directs attention to "indirect techniques for leading individuals…to give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form."[11] Lemke brings into relief tensions in the analysis of governmentality. On the one hand, he takes up the theoretical innovation of the move from the focus on power to the focus on

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[8] Gilles Deleuze articulates his notion of 'societies of control' as an adaptation of Foucault's theory of disciplinary society. "Postscript on Societies of Control." *October* 59 (1992) 3-7. Much work in affect theory on neoliberalism departs from this framework in divergent theoretical lineages. Foundational works include Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Lauren Berlant *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011)

[9] See Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013) and Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality;* Feher, "Self-Appreciation;" Brown, *Undoing.*

[10] Lemke, *Foucault,* 85.

[11] Ibid.

knowledge, truth, and freedom in Foucault's late work by arguing that Foucault offers a form of critique not organized "around dualisms of freedom and constraint, consensus and violence," but aimed at illuminating how the subject practices freedom by taking part in constructing knowledges, authorities, and constellations of political power. On the other hand, he signs on to the diagnosis of neoliberal governance as "leading individuals…to give their lives specific entrepreneurial form" through techniques "which extend from political government right through forms of self-guidance."

Recent Foucauldian scholarship has consolidated an account of the individual as the locus of critique and freedom while at once describing the neoliberal subject as abandoned to market logics that construct self-maximizing subjects of human capital. This abandonment follows from the ascendance of neoliberal political rationalities, which replace liberalism's mutually limiting logics –whereby political-economic stability and growth depended on the far reaching pursuits of what Kant famously described as the 'ends of humanity,' by individuals exercising their private freedom[12]–with a novel redescription of the social in economic terms. This diagnosis has led to a political-theoretic impasse, combining pessimism regarding the totalizing reach of neoliberal subjectivities and a sort of desperate optimism that locates critical-ethical practices as the locus of political transformation. Before explaining how the rubric of 'governmental rationalities,' stages the ground for this impasse, I outline Foucault's account of liberal governmental rationality in his history of the modern state.

II. Governance in the Late Foucault

[12] Foucault, "Enlightenment?"

Foucault introduces the notion of 'government' in his late lectures to further specify the particular power of the modern European state, an entity that loomed, omnipresent but vague, in the background in his earlier genealogies of modern institutions. In the 1975-6 lectures, he argues that modern state power works through at once predicting and regulating processes on the level of the population, and controlling individual conduct. In combining these totalizing and individualize foci, modern power carries on the governance strategy of the Christian pastoral, which took in its charge the salvation of all of God's people, as well as the salvation of each and every individual soul. In order to bring about worldly salvation in the form of "health, well-being, and security" the modern pastoral "has spread and multiplied outside of the ecclesiastical institution," into the various institutions of the factory, asylum, prison, and hospital that occupied Foucault's earlier genealogies.[13]

The theory of modern power in terms of government situates modern institutions (in their spread and multiplicity) as mediating between the governing logics of the state and the contexts of everyday life in which norms and patterns of individual conduct are shaped. This framework allows Foucault to sharpen his account of governance through subjectivity. It is through "practices of the self," that subjects "comes to recognize themselves as subjects," by fashioning themselves in relation to self-objectifying discourses and sets of practices, such as discourses on sexuality.[14] Foucault places systems of self-governance and self-knowledge alongside "relations of control over things, and relations of action upon others,"[15] which are informed by sciences of human

[13] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no.4 (1982): 784.
[14] Ibid, 778.
[15] Foucault, "Enlightenment?," 55.

and social processes such as economics, linguistics, and medicine. The study of governance differentiates modes of power within a general analysis of "strategies of power" from which various institutions of governance and their corollary sciences are viewed as "modes of action upon possible action."[16]

Foucault historicizes the particular imbrications of governance of individuals, populations, and 'souls,' through techniques of discipline, security, and techniques of the self, as a defining achievement of the modern state. Indeed, this achievement is described as an achievement *of governance*, in which states attempted to rationalize their use of techniques to direct the domain that gradually became defined as 'the social.'

The challenge of governance in the early modern period was to "assert a continuity" between "the government of the self (morality), the government of the family (economy), and government of society by the state."[17] The central aim of Foucault's genealogy is to chart how this challenge was fundamentally altered with the introduction of the sciences of society, such as political-economy, and their corollary liberal governmental techniques. He argues "it is thanks to the perception of the specific problem of the population, and thanks to the isolation of the level of reality that we call the economy, that it was possible to think, reflect, and calculate the problem of government outside the juridical framework of sovereignty."[18] Whereas prior state management of the economy, such as early mercantilist and cameralist strategies, envisioned sovereign management of national supplies of basic commodities for the body

[16] Foucault, "Subject," 794.
[17] Foucault, *Security,* 94.
[18] Ibid, 104.

politic on the model of paternal oversight, techniques such as statistics bring about a shift in the way the population, and economic processes, were envisioned and governed.

> In fact, statistics, which had hitherto functioned within administrative frameworks, and so in terms of the functioning of sovereignty, now discovers and gradually reveals that the population possesses its own regularities: its death rate, its incidence of disease, its regularities of accidents. Statistics also shows that the population also involves specific, aggregate effects and that these phenomena are irreducible to those of the family: major epidemics, endemic expansions, the spiral of labor and wealth. Statistics [further] shows that, through its movements, its customs, and its activity, population has specific economic effects.[19]

It is through the development of sciences of population that the market becomes a site where rational orders of social processes could be observed, and thus a "site of veridication."[20] Economic accounts of the market are linked to and informed by auxiliary sciences such as psychology, epidemiology, or criminology. Foucault emphasizes the historical shifts in which the study of man as economic actor, and as potential victim of illness, both lend each other legitimacy and share theoretical models and measurement techniques, and through this interaction serve on occasion to limit one another's claims. It is these sciences that liberal governmental rationalities draw on in attempting to answer their central question: "how to found the principle of rationalization of the art of government on the rational behavior of those who are governed"[21]

Liberal rationality is informed by the interaction between various competing accounts of what constitutes, and facilitates, the rational behavior of the governed. The

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Sciences such as statistics aim to "tell the truth in relation to governmental practice…it is its role of veridiction that will command, dictate, and prescribe the jurisdictional mechanisms, or absence of such mechanisms, on which [the market] must be articulated." Foucault, *Biopolitics,* 32.

[21] Ibid, 312.

centrality of debates over civil society in the development of European and American liberalism showcase the range of government practice that is at stake in the historical development of 'liberal' rationalities. Indeed, this range spans from a high degree of positive nation-building and security-enhancing policies and programs, on the one hand, to US 'neoliberal' calls for deregulation and social service privatization in order to free the natural entrepreneurial order of civil society, on the other.

Foucault frames the spectrum –from state-capitalist planning to 'neoliberal' trade, currency and labor deregulation –as differentiated according to schemes for representing the underlying rationality of the social. These schemes concern the rationality of the social insofar as they make claims regarding the nature of human action and the social processes through which that action is mediated to produce aggregate effects. From this perspective, moral and political discourse such as theories of rights and utilitarian theories of government are placed within a larger problematic of governmental rationalities, as marking internal limits and qualifications on those rationalities.[22] Because liberalism poses the question: why govern?, and asks after the limits of government as such, Foucault poses liberalism as the crowning governmental rationality, and defines it as "a tool for the criticism of reality: criticism of a previous governmentality from which one is trying to get free; of a present governmentality that one is trying to reform and rationalize by scaling it down; or of a governmentality to which one is opposed and whose abuses one wants to limit."[23]

Foucault's account of liberalism as rationalized governance can be distinguished from political philosophical accounts that view liberalism as a governing ideology

[22] Ibid, 39-47.
[23] Ibid, 319-320.

grounded in the presupposition of autonomous rational subjects. As an art of rationalized governance, liberalism creates the overarching conditions in which social-democratic projects aimed at shaping individuals for pursuit of lives and livelihoods, broadly conceived, take shape. While from the political-philosophic perspective the freedom of the governed is a normative postulate of liberal governance, Foucault emphasizes the constructivist character of freedom, its dependence on effective regimes of governance.[24] Effective liberal governance relies on disciplinary, regulatory, and welfare-enhancing policies to foster and direct the capacities of subjects.[25]

Foucault's view of liberal freedom as not a norm but rather a productive construct of liberal governance emerges from his focus on the history of political-economy. Tracing the emergence of a distinct domain of economic governance he argues that liberal governance depends on the free pursuits of the governed, which it aims to secure. It does so through apparatuses (*dispositifs*) of security, which take natural, necessary processes delineated in economic study and intervenes in their workings to achieve stability on the level of population.[26]

While the postulate of governance through freedom is well suited to the ends of economic governance, it poses a dilemma for the liberal state, which Hindess describes as "the practical problem of sovereignty:"

> How to ensure that the politically oriented activities [actions undertaken by individuals and groups who are to some degree free from control by the state to direct the actions of the state] of the governed population do not disrupt

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[24] Hindess makes this helpful distinction. See Bary Hindess, "Politics and Governmentality," *Economy and Society* 26, n. 2 (2006): 263.

[25] On a Marxist rendering of this argument in Foucault, Feher argues that liberal rationality is sustained by the idea that moral and religious norms are autonomous, whereas in fact they serve to regenerate individuals for entry into the market. Feher, "Self-Appreciation," 32.

[26] Foucault, *Security,* 44-5.

> the proper workings of the various state agencies. Some such problem will be faced by any system of rule, but we should expect it to exhibit a peculiar complexity when members of the subject population are regarded as free persons.[27]

By showing how states answer this dilemma through exerting control over populations and individuals, Foucault's thesis of liberal governmentality provides an overarching framework in which to place his earlier studies of discrete modern institutions and the disciplinary sciences they employ. It also offers a positive definition of freedom absent from those accounts. If there is no outside of governance, freedom must be defined on its terms.[28]

Neoliberalism is conceived in the lectures both in terms of continuity with liberal governance as a framework for constructing individual freedom and as a break with certain liberal logics. Neoliberalism inaugurates a *break* with liberal governmentality insofar as it replaces the social aims of state governance –security, welfare, and human flourishing, aims which had to be harmonized with economic governance in the classical paradigm –with the narrowly economic aim of facilitating capital growth. Critiques of neoliberalism tend to focus on this break. A crucial *continuity* concerns the claim of governance as a condition of possibility for freedom. On Foucault's account, for liberalism, freedom is "the possibility of movement, change of place, and process of circulation of both people and things…one of the facets, aspects, or dimensions of the deployment of apparatuses of security."[29] Liberal regimes create individual freedom as freedom to exercise rights, and engage in exchange, and thus depend on the abstraction that renders individuals commensurate qua bearers of rights and capital. The notion of

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[27] Ibid, 262.
[28] The same strategy was widely criticized from the perspective of the theory of power. For foundational critiques see Taylor, "Foucault," and Habermas, *Philosophical Discourses.*
[29] Foucault, *Security,* 49.

individuals as human capital, which is the cornerstone of neoliberal policy for Foucault, radicalizes this dynamic in which the freedom of the individual is constructed through, and action of the state is limited to, intervention on the individual qua citizen.

Conceived as a bearer of human capital, the subject is not a partner in exchange who retains a private existence outside of the economic act, but an earner of income whose choices in all areas of life can be calculated in terms of contribution to future earning potential.[30] Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism attempts to unpack the form of political-economic regulation the notion of human capital entails. His lectures include analyses of existing polices proposed in the neoliberal vein and conjecture about the types of policies this political rationality might entail. In subsequent accounts of neoliberalism as governmental rationality, scholars have applied this analysis to diagnose contemporary economic and socio-cultural transitions. This literature raises the question of how far the Foucauldian analysis can be extended: what sorts of transformation in policy and social power can be reliably understood as rooted in the underlying rationality of 'neoliberal' economics?

Foucault's analyses focus on political-economic theory and policy. His conjectures on policy proposals such as the 'negative tax' in France, in keeping with his analysis of liberalism, focus on the form of freedom these policies construct. 'Negative tax' policies aim to replace welfare and social insurance programs such as unemployment, job training, and Social Security, which are based on income and depend on screening of recipients, with a guaranteed minimum income provided universally regardless of the economic behavior of individuals. In negative tax policies "the only

[30] For an analysis that contrast the liberal individual to individual as bearer of human capital see Feher, "Self-Appreciation."

thing that matters is that the individual has fallen below a given level…so without having to make all those bureaucratic, police, or inquisitorial investigations, the problem becomes one of granting him a subsidy."[31]

Foucault underscores that this approach breaks with centuries of Western social policy that has tried to establish a distinction between "the good and bad poor, between voluntary and involuntary unemployed."[32] Many scholars point to this portion of Foucault's lectures as evidence of his support of neoliberal policy.[33] More precisely, in the analysis of liberal governance in which they are situated, Foucault considers neoliberal, like liberal and disciplinary modes of governance, in terms the variable subject-producing powers they employ, and freedoms they construct.

Foucault shows neoliberal policies as radicalizing the logic through which the figure of the economic actor is abstracted from the socio-culturally embedded citizen. In neoliberal analyses the subject of human capital is "a grid of intelligibility, the anthropological figure who carries a biographical subjectivity is now gone."[34]
Just as liberal governance established indirect control through regulation of processes at the level of population, thereby supplementing, and to some extent replacing intensive governance through institutions of discipline directed at individual bodies, neoliberal policies carry this process forward, subjecting social realms such as family life and education to economic calculus and intervening in the social only through indirect measures. By redescribing the social in terms of the figure of human capital, neoliberal

[31] Foucault, *Biopolitics,* 205.
[32] Ibid, 204-5.
[33] For a balanced assessment of this claim see Paul Patton, "Foucault and Normative Political Philosophy: Liberal and Neo-liberal Governmentality and Public Reason," in *Foucault and Philosophy,* ed. Timothy O'Leary and Christopher Falzon (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
[34] Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neo-liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics," *Foucault Studies* no. 12 (2011): 136.

policies enable a replacement of direct disciplinary institutions, such as traditional forms of welfare or public schooling, with purely economic policies such as the negative tax or subsidies for private education in the form of school vouchers.

Liberal and neoliberal techniques of governance represent an alternative or compliment to disciplinary forms of power. In Andrew Dilts' words "it is this enabling subjectivity [of the subject of human capital] that allowed for economic analysis of social phenomena outside the traditional confines of the market to be subjected to a thorough economic analysis, and for the reconfiguration of governmental policy as "environmental" rather than juridical or disciplinary."[35] Dilts singles in on the construction of the subject as the locus of systemic power and individual freedom at the heart of the history of liberalism lectures. He thus aptly situates the lectures in Foucault's late turn from a focus on the dominating effects of power to the more encompassing framework of governance.

Dilts is careful to point to the affinity between the notion of governance through freedom underlying Foucault's analysis of both human capital theory and ancient practices of the self, arguing the latter may be drawn on to criticize, on ethical grounds, the model of human action entailed by the former. Many analyses of neoliberalism rest on a distinct claim concerning the interpretation of contemporary politics, which the following section aims to draw attention to and challenge. Namely, these authors claim that human capital is not merely a figure of elite economic thought and policy, but also a

[35] Ibid, 131.

form of popular subjectivity diffused through practices of the self, propagated not only by the state, but through the nebulous non-state institutions and circuits of culture.[36]

III. Studies in Governmentality

Method of Analysis

To this point, I have tracked the emergence of the problematic of governance in Foucault's thought, and sketched the account of liberalism and neoliberalism that emerges out of this problematic. Foucault offers a reliable history of liberalism as a form of political-economic thought and state practice, but does not provide an account of popular consciousness or politics. In treating neoliberalism as a political subjectivity, I want to suggest, recent scholarship offers a problematic solution to this oversight. To unpack this claim, this section outlines the methodological approach derived from Foucault's analyses of liberal governmentality that underpins the field of governmentality studies, and offers an overview of analyses of 'neoliberalism' undertaken with this method.[37]

I begin with the claim common to these theories, and derived from Foucault, that analyses of governance differ from Marxist and neo-Marxist forms of ideology critique

[36] While Foucault notes that the human capital theory posits a notion of self as enterprise, he does not describe neoliberalism as working through the diffusion of practices of the self, but only offers an analysis of elite economic thought and policy. The claim that Foucault offers practices of the self as a challenge to neoliberal social control confuses the analysis of neoliberalism as subjectivity that animates the governmentality literature with Foucault's account, which does not speak of neoliberal subjectivity or neoliberal practices of the self. Lois McNay's critique of Foucault rests on just this claim see Lois McNay, "Self as Enterprise: Dilemmas of Control and Resistance in Foucault's The Birth of Biopolitics." *Theory, Culture, Society* 26, no. 55 (2009). This confusion speaks to the theoretical unclarity underlying account of neoliberalism as subjectivity.

[37] The governmentality approach was introduced to English language scholarship with the publication of Foucault's February 1978 lecture by that name published in *The Foucault Effect*. This compilation, published in 1991 by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, compiled essays by Foucault and other French and English language authors that took up his method to study topics such as insurance, statistics, and the conceptualization of poverty in the history of social governance. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, ed. *The Foucualt Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

bound to an 'analytics of truth' insofar as they focus on the construction of rationalities.[38] These rationalities come into view from a critical-historical perspective that tracks political ideas and governance techniques, and the problems of governance to which they respond; an overarching rationality can be discerned in the formulation of such problems and solutions.

Rationalities of governance, sometimes called political rationalities by Foucault and his interlocutors, are more generalized than rationalities operating in specific fields. Distinguishing the study of governmentality from his genealogies of modern institutions of punishment, psychiatry, and health (qua sexuality), Foucault asks:

> "Is there an encompassing point of view with regard to the state as there was with regard to local and definite institutions?...do not these general technologies of power, which we have attempted to reconstruct by moving outside the institution, ultimately fall under a global, totalizing institution that is, precisely, the state?"[39]

The notion of governmental reason posits just such a totalizing rationality centered in the state. Colin Gordon, whose work helped codify the governmentality studies perspective in English language scholarship, describes governmentality as "a more englobing element," in which disciplines of economics and jurisprudence are "situated as relative moments."[40] Summarizing her analysis of US neoliberalism as a governing rationality, Wendy Brown also emphasizes the more generalized perspective this approach provides, distinguishing it from more local studies of institutions and discourses. She states: "a governing rationality, while operating discursively, exceeds this emphasis [on discourses operating in particular fields] to capture the way a normative

[38] Lemke, *Foucault,* 63.
[39] Foucault, *Security,* 118
[40] Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," *The Foucualt Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* ed. Graham Burchell et. al. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991)*,* 22.

order of reason comes to legitimately govern as well as structure life and activity as a whole."[41] While for Brown, as for many theorists of governmentality, political rationalities do not originate in the state, they do represent an overarching form of order which "conditions" and "orders" political action, including the action of the state.[42]

For neo-Marxist theorists such as Brown and Gordon, analyses of rationalities of governance point to the conditioning of society and politics by political-economy. These accounts, in so far as they note changes in political ideals and movements, subsume them within epochal political-economic shifts. The Foucauldian account of the rise of the social state is exemplary of this perspective. Gordon describes the social state as emerging in the European context out of a mid-19th century crisis in state reason; with the decline of "reason of state," or the logic of sovereign power, the social state emerges as a readjustment in liberal governmentality based on the claim to facilitate the disparate ends of an increasingly autonomous social sphere. In this account, the rise of socialist, communist and social-democratic parties in Europe is epiphenomenal to the reprogramming of liberal governmentality.[43] Foucauldian critiques of the US welfare state of the 20th century also bracket alternative social and political meanings of welfare, and view welfare policy as fundamentally a regulatory tool of the capitalist state. Foucauldian accounts of neoliberalism repeat this move by casting neoliberalism as a

[41] Brown, *Undoing,* 117
[42] Brown, *Undoing,* 118. Brown specifies that for her neoliberalism as a political rationality denotes something "apart from" 'governmentality' which she notes, refers to the form of rationalized governance of the social that emerges with the modern state. Brown parts with Foucault here, who views neoliberalism as a species of liberal governmentality. Brown makes a more radical argument that neoliberalism marks a break with liberalism, insofar as market rationale replace the democratic and humanist rationale that put a check on market logics in liberal-democratic traditions of politics and jurisprudence.
[43] Gordon, "Governmental," 29-30.

market-based rationality of governance, and concurrent social and political trends as conditioned by this rationality.

Non-Marxist approaches within governmentality studies de-emphasize the role of economic governance centered in the state in driving developments in political rationalities. These approaches share with neo-Marxist theorists the emphasis on political rationalities as an alternative to vulgar Marxist forms of ideology critique, insofar as they avoid economic determinism while still allowing for a generalized account of social power. However, unlike neo-Marxist analyses, these accounts of social power do not prioritize shifts in economic thought and policy, but track minor socio-cultural shifts and more local trends in institutions. Nikolas Rose's work on the rise in social movements and public policies oriented around 'community,' is exemplary.[44] Here political rationality is more akin to Foucault's account of discourse; it attends to diverse traditions and practices while tracking their articulation into dominant discourses. In Rose's words: "political rationalities are discursive fields characterized by a shared vocabulary within which disputes can be organized, by ethical principles that can communicate with one another, by mutually intelligible explanatory logics."[45]

Neoliberalism as Governmental Reason

Despite these differences, neo-Marxist and liberal theorists of governmentality share significant ground in their analyses of neoliberalism. The most basic shared claim is that contemporary governance in the Euro-American context represents the coalescence

[44] Rose, *Powers.* Thomas Lemke also points to the need for social theory and social histories to accompany studies of governmentality, which tend to be narrowly focused on state policy see Lemke, *Foucault,* 94-100.
[45] Rose, *Powers,* 28.

around “a new way to rationalize governance,”[46] and that this rationality pervades various social fields, transforming the self-understanding of subjects participating in those fields. On this narrative, the claims of the citizen-subjects to civil and political rights that mobilized and justified welfare and social insurance policies are undone in the mid to late 20th century by the transformation of the citizen-subject into the “autonomous ‘deep’ subject of choice and self-identity,” and resultant social fragmentation and individualization.[47]

Brown describes this transformation in stark terms. She argues “with neoliberalism, the market becomes *the* rather than *a* site of veridiction and becomes so for every arena and type of human activity.”[48] Tracking the ‘economization’ of democratic practices and principles, Brown argues that “speech, deliberation, law, and popular sovereignty,” are replaced by “capital value, competitive position, and credit ratings.”[49] This transition does not merely entail the pervasive expansion of market principles to spheres previously –at least partially –organized by principles of deliberation or collective legal protections, but also entails “evacuating” the desire for ideals such as freedom, equality, and democratic rule from the polity.[50]

Human Capital

The defining economic logic of neoliberal governance on these accounts is found in Chicago School economists Gary Becker and George Schultz, whose line of thought is traced through economist Friedrich Hayek and the post-war German ordoliberal school.

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[46] Ibid, 27.
[47] Ibid, 46.
[48] Brown, *Undoing,* 67.
[49] Ibid, 10.
[50] Ibid, 18.

Becker and Schultz's notion of human capital aims to render all human behavior open to economic measurement by viewing human choice in personal relationships, education, career or criminal activity, as governed by a calculus of potential loss or gain in profit or earning potential. By proposing a "global redescription of the social as a form of the economic,"[51] human capital theory is posited as the linchpin between elite economic thought and a pervasive view of human action in terms of economic calculus that is taken up in social policy, private enterprise, and popular trends in self-improvement and self-help.[52]

On these accounts, human capital is described as structuring neighboring discourses that serve commensurate ends, such as discourses of entrepreneurship, and "ethics of lifestyle maximization and wealth management."[53] Understood in this expansive sense, as a rationality of self-investment and self-advertisement, one could cite the informal demand for sociality and networking in new creative and information based economies described by Marxist Autonomist theorists, [54] or liberal discourses of feminist 'choice' described in Chapter Two, as evidence of the pervasive reach of human capital rationalities. But the diagnosis of a rationality of governance involves a specific set of claims about the relationship between state, economy, and wider cultural discourses that

[51] Gordon, "Governmental," 43-4.

[52] For an account focused on social policy see John Clarke "New Labour's Citizens: Activated, Empowered, Responsibilized, Abandoned?" *Social Policy* 25, no. 4 (2005): 447-463. For a reading of popular trends in bodily self-improvement among women through the framework of practices of the self see Cressida Heyes, *Self-Transformations: Foucault, Ethics, and Normalized Bodies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[53] Rose, *Powers,* 342.

[54] For optimistic accounts see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2001) and Paolo Virno, *Grammer of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 2004). For a more pessimistic view see Franco Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and Pathologies of Post-Alpha-Generation* (Autonomomedia, 2009).

differ from these accounts. Namely, for theorists of neoliberal governance, discourses of self-investment are forms of governance. With the uptake of such discourses:

> It is therefore possible to govern subjects seeking to increase the value of their human capital, or, more precisely, to act on the way they govern themselves, by inciting them to adopt conducts deemed valorizing or to follow models for self-valuation that modify their priorities and inflect their strategic choices.[55]

Analyses of human capital bring to bear the central conceit of governmentality studies, namely, that there is a continuity between principles articulated at the level of political rationality, as traced in elite discourse such as Becker's economic theory of human choice, on the one hand, and political subjectivity, as cited in popular discourses of self-improvement or political discourses of citizen-consumers, on the other. It is this claim that is the most sweeping, analytically vague, and philosophically problematic in Foucauldian accounts of neoliberalism. Furthermore, the elision of rationality and subjectivity, I want to argue, seems to render mute inquiry into the political traditions and movements that have framed free-market principles and mobilized widespread investment by disparate social groups.

Subjectivity, Governance, and Critique

From the perspective of governmentality, the overarching logic of the practices, ideals, and forms of relation that shape contemporary subjects can be read off of dominant political rationalities. This move, formulated differently by various authors, follows from the three-pronged conception of governance as including the governance of aggregates of people and things, governance of individual conduct, and governance of the self. On these accounts, practices of the self, which are constitutive of subjectivities, are shaped by ideals and practices of self-governance offered by the wider culture. These

[55] Feher, "Self-Appreciation," 28.

practices of self-governance are shaped by logics of governance in other domains, setting up continuity between logics employed to govern society and logics we employ to govern ourselves. In Rose's words: "government, here, refers to all endeavors to shape, guide, and direct the conduct of others, whether these be the crew of a ship, the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family, or the inhabitants of a territory. And it also embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one's own passions, to control one's own instincts, to govern oneself."[56] For Gordon this alignment between self and social governance is constitutive of liberalism, insofar as liberal governance stakes its rationale on knowledge claims concerning the positive impact of governance on society and individuals qua members of society, as described above.[57]

Most authors who use governance rationalities to explain political subjectivities understand this analysis as moving past Foucault, whose work on neoliberalism focused on political-economic theory and policy. On Brown's account, Foucault's history of liberalism does not give due justice to the specificity of political rationalities, and thus fails to recognize their eclipse –their displacement by market logics –with the rise of neoliberalism.[58] In pointing to the displacement of the democratic valuation of popular sovereignty and public speech, Brown extends Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism to attend to politics, employing the thesis of governance rationalities to do so.

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[56] Rose, *Powers,* 3. This formulation is exemplary. In Gordon's words: "government as an activity could concern the relations between self and self, private interpersonal relations involving some for of control or guidance, relations within social institutions and communities, and finally, relations concerned with the exercise of political sovereignty." Gordon, "Governmental," 2-3.
[57] Gordon, "Governmental," 42.
[58] Brown, *Undoing,* 79-111.

Brown's argues that in neoliberalism the homology between individual and city life infamously posited by Plato has returned; today, "both persons and states are construed on the model of the contemporary firm."[59] Individuals produce neoliberal rationality at the level of personal conduct by treating life choices in terms of an economic logic of maximizing their value as human capital.

The claim that neoliberal governance works through new forms of subjectivation finds common ground with the 'ethical turn' in political theorizing, in which Foucauldian theorists such as Lemke, Colin Koopman, and Amy Allen have played a central role. These theorists draw from the constructivist theory of freedom a radical new ground of the subject's capacities for critique not in transcendent reason but in an ethical standpoint that recognizes the contingency of historically constructed rationalities and their entwinement with relations of power.[60] Complementing the pessimism of the thesis that governmental rationalities produce subjectivities, these authors aim to root transformative politics in practices of the self.

Practices of the self count as ethical, for Foucault, if a subject adopts them in freedom, if she engages the relational dynamic of practices of reflection and discipline as a form of self-formation.[61] Following this definition, theorists of ethical resistance argue that the subject's critical relationship to the institutional norms and practices that seek to form his judgment and shape his conduct is the primary locus for the transformation or reproduction of governmental power. Such critique is ethical insofar as it does not draw

[59] Brown, *Undoing,* 22.
[60] Amy Allen, *The Politics of Ourselves: Power, Autonomy and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Lemke, *Foucault;* Koopman, *Genealogy.*
[61] Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 12, no. 112 (1984).

on purportedly universal moral norms to justify its claims but rather is responsive to specific contexts and relations of power. This sort responsiveness, vigilant and experimental, is described as an 'ethical-critical' task for modern subjects.[62] Ethics as critical responsiveness must also be self-transformative, Koopman points out, if it is to work through a form of power understood as shaping the subject's relation to himself.[63] As in the study of neoliberal subjectivities, the critical focus on the quality of subjective self-relation in new ethical approaches depends largely on the claim of continuity between practices of the self and governmental power.

IV. Political Meaning-Making and the Construction of New Conservative Alliances

Market-based reforms transformed public policy in the Anglo-American world in the last third of the 20th century. The claim that neoliberal reason is reproduced on the level of political subjectivities drives interpretation of the politics behind these reforms. Starting from this claim, demands for choice, directed at state programs, as well as discourses of self-improvement in popular culture, appear as the uptake of neoliberal market logics by political subjects. Theories of neoliberalism as governmental rationality have led to dilemmas both for political-theoretic attempts to interpret the political present, and to imagine alternatives.

The notion of rationalities of governance shares with the Foucauldian notion of discourse the move to generalize the logics of practices, to locate a homogenizing,

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[62] Lemke, *Foucault.*
[63] Koopman, *Genealogy*, 169-181. Koopman carefully tracks the evolution in Foucault's thinking about freedom from his critique of the notion of freedom as liberation deployed in the psych- disciplines to his positive notion of freedom as transformative resistance and experimentation. Koopman suggests this transition begins in 1977-1981, during this period Foucault offers his account of neoliberalism as both continuity and break with the entwinement of the construction of 'liberties' and discipline in liberal governance, and subsequently begins to develop a positive account of self-formation as a practices of freedom in his study of ancient practices of the self.

systematizing force of knowledge-techniques that shapes the social order. The discourse of neoliberal political-economy, for instance, and its corollary governance techniques is suspected of bringing about an epochal shift in social practice. Foucault's genealogy of liberalism, this chapter has argued, captures a 20th century shift in economic thought and government policy, the emergence of a unique rationale of governance. When applied to diverse fields of social practice, however, the thesis of neoliberal rationalities is overstretched. This thesis is particularly unreliable, this chapter has argued, when it grounds claims about the motives and concerns of contemporary political subjects.

The interpretive overreach I want to point to hear shares features with the Marxist tradition of ideology critique. Such critiques, though diverse, share the basic notion that capitalist society produces ideas and ideals shaped by the ruling principles of political economy, such that actions that are in-line with the directives of the capitalist economy can be attributed to a consciousness shaped by that system. Like the governmental reason diagnosis of subjects who take up principles such as choice, or demands for community autonomy, Marxist critics of the present attribute to neoliberalism the emergence of a new false-consciousness. Nancy Fraser's critique of neoliberal feminism, considered in Chapter One, is exemplary. There, by looking to the intermediary discourses in which political consciousness is formed, I show that the feminist embrace of political idiom of 'choice,' rather than marking the ideological integration of contemporary women into a reprogrammed social order, appears as part of a messier story. In the wake of feminist gains, and in the struggle to renegotiate the norms of a new gender order, various strands of mainstream feminism turned away from state, creating shared idioms of affirmation in privatized spaces of labor and home life.

As with the new conservative consciousness shared by conservative women and some strands of the feminist mainstream, the politics of market-based reform has been built on a shift right by diverse social groups. The following chapter attempts to shed light on the complex political meanings of this shift. Movements for school choice suggest that free-market politics are carried forward not by a thoroughgoing rationality, but by ideological constellations whose rhetoric is loose, and whose terms are elastic. The actors who take up market reform politics adopt some of its principles, such as the promise of choice, while at once pursuing other ideals, such as the demand for justice in education. Charting the political history of school choice politics, my next chapter will attempt to show the political alliances and ideological articulations through which free-market and conservative economic interests tapped into the popular politics of religious revival and socio-economic and racial unrest in the wake of failure and retrenchment of welfare and state-driven desegregation.

Chapter Four

School Choice: Popular-Elite Alliances for Market-Based Reform

"My sympathies are wholly with the black parents in NY and Watts and Chicago who say they want to run their own school… Many of them will do a lousy job –but the governmental authorities are doing a lousy job. There will be some among them who will do a good job and they will help pull up the rest."

Milton Friedman, letter to Henry Levin, Oct 24, 1968

cited in Jim Carl *Freedom of Choice: Vouchers in American Education* (2011) p. 69

The history of market-based policies for reforming public schools can be traced to two political lineages. The first lineage has its roots in Southern resistance to federal desegregation orders, and attempts by white parents to secure publicly funded tuition grants to fund private schools outside the reach of these orders. As Jim Carl recounts in his commanding history of US voucher politics, the tuition grant strategy waned as the federal government enforced integration.[1] This history of parental choice is rooted in a popular movement for control over education, directed against the integrationist liberalism of public schools. A second lineage of market-based school reform can be traced in neoliberal economic policy, formulated most prominently by Milton Friedman in a series of academic and popular writings beginning in the 50s.[2] This history of school choice politics is ostensibly rooted in the elite intellectual belief in the efficiency and innovative force of the competitive market form, which was subsequently developed by economic conservative and neoliberal policy and research foundations.

[1] Jim Carl, *Freedom of Choice*: *Vouchers in American Education* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011)

[2] Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," *Economics and the Public Interest* ed. Robert Solo (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1955) 123-144 and *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 85-98.

This chapter attempts to chart the political history in which movements for parental and community control provided the popular political idioms for an elite economic policy project of free-market reform. Existing accounts of contemporary trends toward market-based reform of public policy offer robust histories and analyses of the economic and political thought behind these trends.[3] However, focusing on elite thought and policy, these accounts stop short of exploring the wider political context in which the endorsement of markets against the state emerged as an attractive political stance for diverse sets of actors. Even for economists such as Friedman, the vision of free-market reform was articulated most persuasively when framed as a response to socio-economic challenges of the moment, such as the prevailing legal and moral imperative in 1968 to bus children across residentially segregated districts to integrate public schools. While distancing himself from southern segregationists, Friedman framed his school voucher proposal in seemingly neutral economic terms, lauding choice as both a freedom for parents and a form of consumer power that would produce better schools. Against the

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[3]For Foucauldian analyses, see: Barry, Andrew, Osborne, Thomas, Rose, Nikolas, ed. *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1996) Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, ed. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michel Feher, "Self-Appreciation; or, The Aspirations of Human Capital," *Public Culture* 21, no. 1 (2009); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015) and "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory & Event* 7, no.1 (2003); Timothy Mitchell, "The Work of Economics: How a Discipline Makes Its World," *European Journal of Sociology* 46 no. 2 (2005): 297-320.
For analyses that treat the rise of free-market trends in accounts of neoliberalism as hegemonic discourse see: Blyth, Mark, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the 20th Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Mark Ruccio, "Economic Representations: What's at Stake?" *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 6(2008): 892-912; Stuart Hall, "The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism among the Theorists," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). See also Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford University Press, 2010) for a discourse analysis that does not draw on an explicit theory of discourse as a form of social power.

backdrop of mob violence against blacks and whites who dared enter integrated schools in cities from Oxford, Mississippi to Boston, Friedman wagered that, armed with "freedom to choose" parents would "desert in droves any school that could not maintain order."[4] Vouchers promised to replace a system of forced busing to achieve racial integration planned by government bureaucrats with a system of diverse school options, driven by parental choice and local control.

As I argued in my last chapter, Foucauldian analyses of neoliberalism read contemporary politics in terms of 'governmental rationalities,' overlooking the divergent traditions and subcultural discourse through which actors construct political ideas and ideals. The governmentality approach leads to a flawed view of political action, this chapter will show, because in treating market-based reform as a generalized rationality that shapes action, this approach forestalls an account of the concrete challenges facing actors, and the political terrain in which certain paths of action appear as viable responses to those challenges. It is on this terrain, I will argue, that political ideologies are formed.

While the school voucher proposal has been supported by Republican administrations since Nixon, vouchers did not gain widespread success until the 1990s, through an alliance of longstanding Catholic defenders of private schools, evangelical movements for parental rights dating to the 70s, movements for African American community empowerment, and, perhaps most crucially, neoliberal and conservative research and policy foundations that provided research, funding and organizational support for school choice campaigns in cities across the country.

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[4] Carl, *Freedom,* 69.

Drawing on sociological accounts and primary analyses of movement literature from prominent evangelical and African American organizations, this chapter shows how demands for religious curriculum, parental control, and education equality, originally pursued through demands for rights directed at public schools, came to be channeled into movements for market-based education alternatives. By attending to the process of political ideology formation, I show that school choice alliances are loose but resilient, allowing groups to come together for the aim of gaining more control over education, without articulating cohesive agreement over the nature of the markets or the proper role of the state. Furthermore, this paper's approach allows me to develop a more compelling account of ideologically-shaped political action than that offered by theorists of neoliberalism; such action is not plausibly explained as a straightforward function of the discursive constitution of political subjects by elite discourses, but as the contingent, overdetermined consequence of political subjects' ongoing articulation and suturing of the expectations, ideals, and traditions that condition their self-understanding and action.

This chapter proceeds in four sections. I begin with an overview of school choice policies and the trajectory of reforms. I then offer brief political histories of the mobilization of evangelicals and African Americans into school choice politics. I conclude with a sketch of the new conservative ideology constructed through the articulation of free-market ideals with the political imaginaries of family and community empowerment, as well as the immediate, practical demands for parental control, advanced by these two groups.

School Choice: A Case Study in Market-Based Reform

In the 1980s, a host of market-driven strategies for public school reform in the United States coalesced under the banner of 'school choice.' The most radical of these reforms, known as 'private school choice,' divert public funds to private schools. These include voucher programs that distribute public funds per-pupil to private schools run by community organizations or for-profit education management organizations (EMOs), and education tax credits that allow individuals and corporations to write-off contributions to student tuition organizations (STOs) that fund vouchers.[5] Programs known as 'public school choice' use strategies of public-business partnerships and management sub-contracting to outsource school administration to charter schools, or 'turn-around' programs to reform failing public schools, often run by EMOs. Public school choice is paired with open-enrollment policies, which allow students to move schools within or across districts, doing away with the traditional model of locality-based funding and provision of services in public education, and introducing selective and competitive processes for enrollment in highly desired public schools.[6]

The move to market-based funding and administration in districts across the country was facilitated by a coinciding push for universal standards, testing, and performance based funding. These reforms, supported by a diverse alliance of conservative advocates of universal curriculum as well as pragmatic reformers stressing measurement and accountability, provided metrics to measure school performance and

[5] As of 2011, 9 states had voucher school programs and 9 provided education tax breaks for contributing to private voucher funds. See Burke, Lindsey and Sheffield, Rachel, "School Choice in America 2011: Educational Opportunity Reaches New Heights," *The Heritage Foundation,* www.heritage.org.
[6] Carl, *Freedom*. xviiii.

justify school closures and de-funding.[7] While education policy in the US has largely embraced this approach to reform, a body of research questions the impact of the push to standards and testing, attacks on teacher professionalism, and closures of poor performing schools, arguing that these reforms reproduce education inequalities for the most disadvantaged students, while advancing reductive standards for education achievement.[8] In recent years a movement of parents opposed to common core curriculum and standardized testing chose to 'opt-out' of testing for their children, joining an ideologically diverse popular push-back against standards based reforms.[9]

The transformation in US public education currently underway has been driven forward by a novel conservative ideological constellation. Education scholars describe a new conservatism in education policy forged by the neoconservative push for universal standards and common curricula, popular Christian movements for local control, and neoliberal reformers.[10] Supplementing these analyses, Thomas Pedroni and Mary

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[7] Michael Apple, "Producing Inequality: Conservative Modernization in Policy and Practice," *Educating the 'Right' Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2001). The move to identify failing schools was launched nationally with Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, and various states have implemented their own metrics to mark schools for closure. For instance in Louisiana's voucher program launched in 2008, students in poorly ranked schools formed the pool of potential recipients of vouchers. http://www.edchoice.org/School-Choice/Programs/Student-Scholarships-for-Educational-Excellence-Program.aspx.

[8] Apple, *Educating*, 90-94. See also: Elizabeth DeBray-Pelot and Patrick McGinn "The New Politics of Education: Analyzing the Federal Education Policy Landscape in the post-NCLB Era," *Educational Policy* 22, no.1 (2009): 15-42; Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe, "From New Deal to No Deal: No Child Left Behind and the Devolution of Responsibility for Equal Opportunity," *Harvard Educational Review* 76, no. 4 (2006): 474-502; Robert Linn. "Assessment and Accountability," *Educational Researcher* 29, no. 2 (2000); Wells, Lopez, Scott, Holme, "Charter Schools as Postmodern Paradox: Rethinking Social Stratification in the Age of Deregulated School Choice," *Harvard Educational Review* 69, no. 2 (1999): 172-205. For a book length study focused on standards based reform in Texas see Linda McNeil *Contradictions of School Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

[9] Motoko Rich and Tamar Lewin, "No Child Left Behind Law Faces its Own Reckoning," *The New York Times*, March 20, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/us/politics/schools-wait-to-see-what-becomes-of-no-child-left-behind-law.html?mwrsm=Email&_r=0 .

[10] Apple, *Educating.* Apple refers to this alliance as a new conservative 'hegemonic' bloc driving a move right in American politics. On the confluence of the accountability movement and neoliberal reforms see also John Ambrosio, "Changing the Subject: Neoliberalism and Accountability in Public Education"

Patillo's work on the participation of African-Americans in political alliances for school choice stresses the histories of political organizing and socio-economic marginalization that shape contemporary political possibilities in which these alliances are formed.[11] Beginning in the 80s, the conservative voucher coalition reached out to African-Americans dissatisfied with the enduring environment of racial inequality, disrespect, and unresponsiveness in public schools. The voucher movement mobilized both low-income African Americans by offering schooling alternative in the form of vouchers for private schools,[12] and formed tenuous alliances with African American leaders, thereby tapping into networks and traditions of organizing for independent African American community schools.

The move to claim vouchers as a solution to failing urban public schools made possible the mobilization of disadvantaged, largely minority populations, as well as pragmatic reformers behind market-based reforms. As Jim Carl notes in his history of school choice, the emergence of market-based approaches to social policy championed by figures such as Milton Friedman framed voucher schemes as part of a new political vision, mitigating their association with Jim Crow.[13] Friedman supported vouchers as part of a wider proposal to undo the traditional model of public education supported by universal taxation, which he viewed as flawed both because it is redistributive, and

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Educational Studies 49 (2013): 316-333; and Jessee Hessler Rhodes, "Progressive Policy Making in a Conservative Age? Civil Rights and the Politics of Federal Education Standards, Testing, and Accountability," *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 3 (2011): 519-544.

[11] Thomas C. Pedroni, *Market Movements: African American Involvement in School Voucher Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2007) and Mary Pattillo "Everyday Politics of School Choice in the Black Community" *Du Bois Review* 21, no. 1 (2015): 41-71.

[12] Pedroni notes that as of 2003 the Bradley Foundation donated 14.5 million dollars to Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), an organization that funds vouchers for children to attend private sectarian schools. This fund launched and sustained the Milwaukee voucher program, paving the way for the passage of public voucher funding in 1995. Pedroni, *Movements,* 59

[13] Ibid, 17.

because it tends to be combined with government administration of schools.[14] This model takes away the incentive to provide quality education by delinking school funding from school outcomes and family payments from student outcomes, where the latter is conceptualized as the education service delivered. Later policy scholars such as Paul Peterson applied Friedman's hypothesis to city schools, arguing that suburban school districts approximate a model of efficient expenditure by concentrating increased school spending in areas where parents are willing to pay more for educational services in the form of higher local taxes. Compared to cities with more redistributive models of funding, these suburbs achieved better student outcomes.[15] Rational choice scholars such as Peterson reasoned that the redistributive mechanism failed to provide an efficient model for achieving quality education, those who pay more in urban areas subsidize the education of the poor.

Prior to their embrace in the 80s as part of a wider trend to rational choice approaches to social policy, school voucher programs had a violent history, dating to desegregation era use of tuition grants to establish whites-only networks of private schools exempt from desegregation orders in Louisiana, and similar attempts across the south.

The school choice stance elaborated by economic conservatives, centered on the autonomy of families, schools and communities in controlling education, provided a framework for the emerging evangelical pro-family movement emerging in the 70s to cast its opposition to liberal dominated public education. Like their market-reformist allies, evangelical pro-family groups distanced themselves from the racist history of

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[14] Friedman, *Capitalism,* 85-98.
[15] Paul Peterson, *City Limits* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 93-106.

school choice reforms, casting school choice as a solution to the problems with public schooling facing whites and blacks alike. In what follows I sketch the contemporary histories of two constituencies of school choice politics, African Americans and evangelical Christians organized by the Christian Right. Following analyses by Pedroni and Carl, I focus on the political histories of school choice in order to show how a set of ideas about freedom, choice, and private sphere and community-based alternatives came to articulate a loose and contingent, but widespread alliance behind elite proposals for market-based policy reform. In the case of Milwaukee, the dismal state of desegregation era public schools and the steep costs of relying on an unresponsive state bureaucracy paved the way for this alliance. In the pro-family politics of the Christian Right, discontents with the amoral secularism of public education, articulated with the vision of school choice advanced by conservative think tanks and policy organizations, propelled a turn to demands for religious autonomy and alternatives to public schools.

Before elaborating this political history, I want to briefly specify the impact and trajectory of school choice reforms. In terms of student performance, the impact of voucher and charter school programs is notoriously difficult to measure, and researchers on both sides of the policy battle claim results in their favor.[16] A number of studies found that class size was the main factor in improving student performance,

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[16] Using a randomized field trial, a preferred method in education research given its ability to control for measurable factors, Howell and Peterson found no measurable test score gains among white and Latino voucher students, but moderate gains among African Americans. Building on data from that study to test schooling differences, Wolf found increased exposure to white peers, more homework, and better teacher performance could explain improved scores. See William Howell and Paul Peterson, *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institute, 2006); P.J. Wolf and D.S. Hoople "Looking Inside the Black Box: What School Factors Explain Voucher Gains in Washington D.C.?" *Peabody Journal of Education* 81, no. 1 (2006): 7-26.

weather reduced size was achieved in private schools with voucher funding, or public schools with supplementary funding for reform programs.[17]

In measuring the impact of school choice reforms on racial and socio-economic equality, evidence suggests that charter schools tend to be less ethnically and socio-economically diverse that public schools,[18] and choice measures have been found to increase or keep intact economic and racial stratification.[19] In Milwaukee and Cleveland, voucher programs maintain patterns of racially segregated enrollment existing in public schools.[20] Worries about equality in school choice programs stem from fact that private voucher schools avoid federal oversight and regulations aimed to enforce racial and gender equality in schools. The Obama administration's efforts to seek a court injunction against Louisiana's voucher program on the grounds that removing voucher students from targeted districts may violate standing federal desegregation orders speaks to this concern.[21] While the administration later relinquished these efforts, it continues to pursue oversight of voucher-receiving schools to enforce federal legal protections for disadvantaged groups, most recently by

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[17] Bernard Wasow, "Recent Evidence of the Effectiveness of School Voucher Programs," *Public School Choice vs. Private School Vouchers,* ed. Richard Kahlenberg (New York: The Century Foundation, 2003), 45.
[18] Wells, Holme, Lopez and Cooper, *Public School Choice,* 84.
[19] Kristie J.R. Phillips et. al. "School Choice and Social Stratification: How Intra-District Transfers Shift the Racial/Ethnic and Economic Composition of Schools" *Social Science Research* 51 (2015): 30-50. On racial integration in particular see N. Anderson, "Hood Politics: Charter Schools, Race, and Gentrification in Fort Green," in J. DeSena and T. Shortell ed. *The World in Brooklyn: Gentrification, Immigration, and Ethnic Politics in a Global City* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 363-378; Janelle Scott and Rand Quinn, "The Politics of Education in the Post-*Brown* Era: Race, Markets, and the Struggle for Equitable Schooling," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 50, no. 5 (2014): 749-763.
[20] Carl, *Freedom,* 19.
[21] Michael Warren, "DOJ 'Abandons Suit' Against Louisiana School Voucher Program," *The Weekly Standard*, November 19th, 2003, http://www.weeklystandard.com/print/blogs/doj-abandons-suit-against-louisiana-school-voucher-program_767878.html.

requiring compliance with the Disabilities Act by voucher schools in Milwaukee.[22] Advocates of school choice policy by and large oppose such oversight.[23]

In cities like Chicago where voucher programs have been defeated at the state legislature, school choice takes the form of the replacement of neighborhood-based enrollment with a combination of school and parental choice to determine a child's school, and the implementation of diversified models for public schools, such as charter schools, contract, performance schools, and 'turn around' schools overseen by private or public reform organizations.[24] This range of reforms, implemented since 2006, has resulted in improved academic performance and student retention rates in 'turn around' schools. However, recent studies suggest that at least a fourth of these schools served more high-income and high performance students, and less students with special needs after the reform, displacing disadvantaged students to poorer performing schools.[25] In all reform schools staff and leadership were replaced by younger, more white, and less experienced staff.

Another set of barriers to equality of access impacting voucher and charter school programs are informal, resulting from prevailing socio-economic factors that constrain parental school choice. In her study of disadvantaged African American populations in Chicago Public Schools, Mary Patillo found that 'choice' processes

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[22] Ramesh Ponnuru, "Obama's Misguided War Against School Choice," *Bloomberg,* September 09, 2013, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-09-09/obama-s-misguided-war-against-school-choice.

[23] The Center for Education Reform ranks strong charter school laws as those that allow the most flexibility, or require the least regulation. Apple*, Educating,* 87.

[24] Marisa de la Torre and Julia Gwynne, "When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools," *Consortium on Chicago School Research Report* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Urban Education Institute, 2009)

[25] de la Torre, Allensworth, et. al., "Turning Around Low Performing Schools in Chicago," *Consortium on Chicago School Research* and *American Institute for Research Report, February 2013* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2013).

require parents' efforts to research school options, reach out to potential schools, prepare their children for selective enrollment processes, and seek out specific services. Most parents in her study were unable to overcome conditions such as unstable, low-paid work, poor health, and lack of transportation and resources to help their children compete in selective enrollment processes.[26] Other studies of voucher parents and children noted similar consistent barriers impacting low-income parents.[27]

School choice reforms today are pitched as mechanisms to improve schooling, provide diversified models to suit student needs, and devolve control to families and communities. However, since their inception, the prevalence of private foundations and for-profit actors such as education management organizations in school choice programs complicates, and likely undermines, their purported empowerment of families and communities. Researchers suggest that school choice reforms aim to reduce the state to one among various mechanisms for funding privately administered schools.[28] The evolution of choice policies shows a gradual scaling back of the state's traditional role in using taxation to provide universal education, while increasing the avenues for private networks, and private funds, to exacerbate inequalities in school systems. Recent examples confirm this trajectory. Colorado's school choice pilot program provides public vouchers that are not need based, and allows private schools

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[26] Pattillo, "Everyday Politics."

[27] Pedroni, *Markets,* 80. Studies of magnet schools reiterate these findings, noting that parent's who apply tend to be more highly educated, had higher incomes, and were less likely to be on welfare than parents in other public schools, see *Public School Choice,* 90; Osamudia R. James, "Opt-Out Education: School Choice as Racial Subordination," *Iowa Law Review* 99 (2014): 1083-1135; and for a study of students rejected after applying for select admission see Susan Rosenbloom, "My So-Called Choice: The Trappings of School Choice for Non-Admits," *Urban Review* 42, no. 1(2010): 1-21.

[28] Carl, *Freedom.* This is the basic thesis of Carl's assessment of the history of school choice reforms in the United States.

to use admissions criteria in selecting students.[29] In Milwaukee and Colorado, public vouchers were extended to private religious schools.[30] In 2011, Arizona implemented education savings accounts, which allow parents to withdraw students from public school and receive 90% of their per-pupil public funding in a private account to be used on a range of school options of their choosing, including private school tuition, tutoring, or online learning.[31] One of the most respected scholars of school vouchers, Paul Peterson, advocates voucher programs provide an equal subsidy to all urban parents regardless of need.[32]

While a strong case can be made that school choice reforms erode the legal and institutional bases for the state provision of a free, relatively equal, universal education, this is not the central argument of this chapter. My analysis of school choice politics aims to shed light on what I will argue is the new ideological constellation that has driven forward market-based reforms. Diverging from accounts that view reforms such as school choice as exemplary of the expansion of market-based principles and techniques through the pervasive uptake of neoliberal reasoning, my account uncovers the contextually rooted political ideals and traditions in which market reforms become articulated with the political consciousness of various groups, to form the basis of loose alliances. In evangelical subcultural discourses on the family, for instance, school choice policies are sold to conservative Christians not

[29] "Douglas County Vouchers," The Independence Institute Education Policy Center, http://education.i2i.org/douglas-county-vouchers/

[30] The Wisconsin Supreme Court accepted the inclusion of religious schools in the Milwaukee program in 1998. The US Supreme Court accepted the use of vouchers for religious schools in 2002. Religious school vouchers are currently held up in Colorado pending a court decision on whether this use of public funds violates Colorado state law prohibiting state funding of religious activities.

[31] "Arizona –Empowerment Scholarship Accounts," The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, http://www.edchoice.org/School-Choice/Programs/Empowerment-Scholarship-Accounts.aspx

[32] Howell and Peterson, *Education Gap,* 207.

through straightforward appeals to market principles, but through promises to restore parental control over the moral education of their children.

My focus on the ideational articulations and alliances that form the history of school choice politics leads me to emphasize two features of US market-based reform movements that cannot be adequately grasped if, like recent theorists engaged in Chapter Three, we view neoliberalism as a governing rationality. The first is the crucial role of new conservative alliances between elite economic reformers and the grassroots mass-based organizations of the Christian Right in articulating a conservative free-market consciousness and channeling evangelical political energies into support of free-market policies. The second is the highly contextually constrained support of market-based reforms by disadvantaged groups such as African Americans in urban public schools. Read in the context of the recent history of the soft-paternalism of mid-century welfare and the more recent punitive turn in welfare and social services, the embrace of market alternatives appears in part as a response to the growing costs of turning to the state to redress socio-economic marginalization.[33] Indeed, in cities like Milwaukee, Pedroni argues that low-income African Americans turned to school choice after a history of failed attempts to achieve racial equality, most recently in desegregation era public schools.

The Political Histories of School Choice

The Christian Right

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[33] As welfare provisions were reduced and restricted through work-training and parental counseling requirements, the surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms in welfare provision dovetail with probationary surveillance of the criminal justice system, which increasingly targeted an overlapping population during this period. See Joe Soss, Richard Fording, and Sanford Schram, *Disciplining the Poor: Neoliberal Paternalism and the Persistent Power of Race* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011) for a decisive account of the impact of late 20th century trends in welfare reform on African Americans.

The central theme animating both popular evangelical discourse and elite policy on school choice is parental control and family autonomy, themes that have been central to the political mobilizations of evangelicals since the late 70s.[34] Congress' threat to remove IRS tax exemptions for Christian parochial schools helped spur political mobilization among evangelicals in 1978, tapping into early organizing efforts by pro-family groups in opposition to secularism and sexual liberalism in school curriculum.[35] By the early 90s the strategy of fighting to transform public schools through curriculum battles and legal challenges to bans on religion was largely eclipsed by the demand for parental choice in education, and the focus on developing alternatives to the traditional model of public schooling.[36] This shift in popular rhetoric, political focus, and legal strategy took place as political organizing by religious conservatives became mobilized into reform movements for school choice led by conservative and neoliberal foundations and policy organization, such as the Bradley Foundation and the Heritage Foundation.

In 1978 an agenda-setting Heritage Foundation report on education reform, *Family Choice in Education,* laid out a contest over the First Amendment and control over curriculum against 'vested interests groups' such as liberal bureaucrats, teachers unions, and the National Education Association. The central reform agenda was too free up tax dollars for parents' to use on schooling alternatives for their children. The author speaks for a movement already exasperated with attempts to wrest control from

[34] Before becoming original members of the Pro-Family Coalition in 1979, Tim and Beverly LaHaye led a network of private Christian schools. Ruth Murray Brown, *A History of the Religious Right: For a "Christian America"*(Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 167-174.
[35] Dan Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America Are Winning the Culture War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 75; See Brown for a concise history of early Christian Right efforts to support alternative to public schools. Brown, *For a Christian,* 253-268.
[36] Brown, *For a Christian.*

liberal-dominated state power, including "pervasive juridical intervention to achieve a social engineering concept of racial balance." The resistance to racial integration that motivated demands for local control disappeared from the explicit politics of school choice in the following years.[37]

While the Heritage agenda of pursuing private market alternatives to public schools would become the central conservative reform agenda in subsequent decades, local battles over school curriculum formed the basis of Christian Right organizing in the 80s and 90s. Conservative political organizations such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, the Christian Coalition, and Focus on the Family worked through local affiliates or chapters to provide parents with training, funds, and legal support to gain influence over public schools through school boards, or at the state level.[38] Legislation passed in Texas stipulated that textbooks shall not "include selections or works which encourage or condone civil disobedience, social strife, or disregard of law; " and "shall not encourage lifestyles deviating from generally accepted standards of society."[39] By the mid-90s, such efforts had succeeded in blocking Head Start programs, multicultural curriculum, and sex education in districts across the country.[40]

In addition to drawing conservative parents into education reform at the local level, public school curriculum battles provided a context to develop the demand for parental control that formed the basis of market-based school choice campaigns.

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[37] Onalee McGraw, *Family Choice in Education: The New Imperative* (Washington DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1978), 4.

[38] Michael Apple, *Cultural Politics and Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), 42-52. For the Christian Coalition see Justin Watson, *The Christian Coalition: Dreams of Restoration, Demands for Recognition* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997).

[39] Apple, *Cultural Politics,* 48, citing Joan Delfattore *What Jonnny Shouldn't Read* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

[40] Sara Diamond, *Facing the Wrath*: *Confronting the Right in Dangerous Times* (Maine: Common Courage Press, 1996), 57.

Organizing around the right to parental consent, Eagle Forum chapters provided parents with form letters to send to their public schools, informing them of their right to provide consent for certain public school programs.[41] In the 90s, conservative legal organizations drafted parental rights legislation to protect parents' control over the education, religion, and healthcare of their children,[42] and developed legal arguments to defend claims that state institutions violated parental rights.[43]

Reports of violations of parent rights have been a common theme of conservative organizing and media since the 80s, giving voice to, and working to reinforce, widespread distrust of the state. McDannell, a scholar of US evangelicals, has noted that struggles for control over children took the place of debates over the proper role of women that animated an earlier era of pro-family evangelical rhetoric.[44] The opposition between family and state control over children crystalized in conservative attacks on the Clinton administration's "It takes a village to raise a child" campaign for a social safety net for children. In opposition to the Democratic Party in the 1996 campaign season, the conservative policy organization The Family Research Council championed the imperative to strengthen "moms and dads," against "the village," figured as governing circles in Washington.[45]

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[41] This right was established in the Pupil Right's Amendment fought for by the Eagle Forum. Apple, *Cultural Politics,* 42-52.

[42] Michel Ferris, a lawyer and founder of the Home School Legal Defense Association, drafted parental rights legislation in the 90s, and a weak version of this legislation was adopted in about two dozen states. Sara Diamond, *Not By Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1998), 118.

[43] James Dobson of Focus on the Family helped found the Alliance Defending Freedom Fund in 1994, Pat Robertson of the Christian Coalition helped found the American Center for Law and Justice in 1990. Each organization relied previously on internal legal arms.

[44] Colleen McDannell, "Beyond Dr. Dobson: Women, Girls, and Focus on the Family," in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism,* ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth et. al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002)

[45] Diamond, *Politics Alone*,114.

By the 90s, parental control became synonymous with market-based reform. This ideological suturing, paradigmatic of pro-family politics, is the result of a history of political organizing that stretches beyond the Christian Right. A range of libertarian, conservative, and free-market foundations and policy organizations provided the political rationale and funds to advance the school choice movement in both elite policy circles and through local initiatives. Economic conservatives provided the bulk of funds and organizational force to school choice campaigns at the local level, from the long established practice of funding private schools to massive flows of grants to support city-based voucher school campaigns in the last decades. The largest US conservative donor in the 90s, the Bradley Foundation, awarded funds to a variety of organizations that work for school choice reforms, including 11 million to the Heritage Foundation and 14.5 million to the American Enterprise Institute. 1.7 million in Bradley funds helped the Milwaukee based Institute for the Transformation of Learning develop voucher policies in that city. Prior to the expansion of public vouchers to sectarian schools, Bradley helped sustain the private religious school alternative, providing 14.5 million in grants to fund vouchers for low-income children to attend these schools. The Walton Family Foundation has also been a major supporter of think tanks devoted to school choice, local voucher initiatives, and private vouching-granting institutions.[46]

On the free-market side of the voucher-reform spectrum, Milton Friedman and his Foundation for Educational Choice have been major players. Friedman authored some of the most influential popular and scholarly writings on voucher policy.

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[46] Pedroni, *Movements*, 58-9; Janelle T. Scott, "Market-Driven Education Reform and the Racial Politics of Advocacy," *Peabody Journal of Education* 86, no. 5 (2011): 580-599.

Friedman's proposal, which came to be know as 'the Friedmanite voucher' in policy circles, removes checks on inequality such as income-based stipulations for public voucher funding, and regulations that prohibit voucher-receiving schools from charging tuition in excess of the voucher. He also supports the use of public vouchers for religious schools.[47] The libertarian policy foundation, Cato, took credit in a late 90s report for advancing public school liberalization by articulating the school choice position.[48]

The participation of religious groups in campaigns for school choice has both shaped popular conservative consciousness on education reform, and influenced the character of choice initiatives. Mainstream Catholic groups gradually came around to support of vouchers in the face of declining enrollment and financial hardship in Catholic schools. Despite this trend, this constituency forms the vast majority of private school supporters; of the nearly 4.5 million students attending private school in 2011, 42.9% attended Catholic schools.[49]

While the traditional private school support base of middle and upper-class Catholics has been an important element in various campaigns, the constituencies that have propelled the movement include lower-income and evangelical Christian parents. In cities like Milwaukee, Cleveland, and in Louisiana, voucher programs help low-income students access private religious education. In those districts that allowed for voucher use in religious schools, a vast majority of recipients chose that option; in

[47] Carl, *Freedom*, 68-70.
[48] Hardisty, *Mobilizing,* 176-7.
[49] The survey by the US Department of Education found 80.2% of all private school students attended religious schools, of them 23.2% attended non-Christian schools and 14% Conservative Christian schools. http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic/statistics.html

Milwaukee 70% of voucher schools are sectarian in nature,[50] and in Cleveland 76.8% of voucher students attend sectarian schools.[51] Among evangelicals in particular, the move toward school choice has been taken up through legal advocacy for home schooling, contributing to a precipitous rise in the number of home school students in recent years.[52] Brown's anecdotal report speaks to the mobilization of evangelical's around school choice. Of evangelical pro-family activists profiled in her research, none had children or grandchildren in Christian private or home schooling in 1980, while by 1997 ninety percent of her contacts utilized these alternatives.[53]

The attention to school choice by groups such as Focus on the Family attest to the salience of the issue within the wider evangelical subculture.[54] Focus, as Chapter Two describes, is one of the most influential among a host of evangelical parachurch organizations that has given voice to, and helped articulate the cultural and political concerns of US evangelicals in the last three decades. Furthermore, during this period Focus was affiliated with the other major players in evangelical politics, including the aforementioned Family Research Council.

The Focus message on school choice echoes themes of the wider evangelical movement, foregrounding the importance of "protecting parent's constitutional rights"

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[50] Data from 1999. Pedroni, *Movements,* 11-12.
[51] Data from 1996. Carl, *Freedom,* 173. The Cleveland program earmarks a portion of vouchers for low-income parents, but the program extends to parents of any income.
[52] In 2011 1.77 million students were in home schooling, according to the US Department of Education, an increase of .5 % from 2007. http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic/statistics.html
This is more than five times the number of home school students in the early 90s, according to DOE estimates quoted in Diamond, *Facing the Wrath*, 57.
[53] Brown, *For a Christian,* 264.
[54] The Focus affiliated Family Policy Council in Pennsylvania, Penn Family Institute reported that 90% of letters and calls from constituents were about education, spurring their attention to the issue. Interview cited in Hurbert Morken and Jo Renée Formicola, *The Politics of School Choice* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 178.

to educate their children "according to the values, principles, and religious convictions they hold dear."[55] The 'social issues' information section on the Focus website casts school choice in terms of an opposition between the bureaucratic state, on the one hand, and children and their families, on the other. The article explains that with voucher policies in place "the money now follows the child rather than a bureaucracy."

In addition to criticizing public schools for their excessive spending, Focus reiterates a defining liberal motif of school choice politics by tapping into concern over poor student outcomes for low-income and racial minority students in public schools. Their site points out that in the US: "we spend nearly 500 billion on public schools, and yet graduation rates are as low as 52 to 56 percent for minority students," and argues that school choice will "level the playing field for families of different incomes by allowing parents to redirect their tax dollars to schools of their choice."

While such references put a moderate, and productively vague public face on Focus' school reform position for their base of listeners and members, coverage of school choice by Focus' political branch, CitizenLink, strikes a different tone.[56] Only a small fraction of Focus members and listeners access the in-depth political content of Citizenlink, though it is there one can find the policy details of the positions Focus

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[55] Focus on the Family, "Social Issues: School Choice," http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/social-issues/school-choice/school-choice-issue

[56] Gilgoff reports that only an estimated 10% of the Focus mailing list opted to subscribe to Citizen Magazine at its launch in the late 80s, and numbers only slightly increased when the subscription fee was waived. Gilgoff, *Jesus Machine,* 36. According to Focus numbers, CitizenLink radio shorts are picked up by 650 radio stations at their launch in 2012, while Focus' flagship half hour radio show, focused on Christian interest family advice, is carried by over 2,000 stations. See "Focus on the Family Daily Broadcast." *Focusonthefamily.com*, accessed Oct. 24, 2014, http://www.focusonthefamily.com/media/daily-broadcast#?curPage=1, and "Citizenlink Newsletter," *Citizenlink* (Colorado Springs, CO) February 2013.

supports. Coverage of school choice in Citizen Magazine suggests that Focus takes a market-based reformist approach to school choice. A recent article celebrates the pioneering Douglas County, Colorado voucher program that is not need-based, and argues that support for school choice boils down to opposition to using tax increases to support failing public schools. The article quotes a Colorado reformer who describes the need to "break the death grip of teacher's unions" on public schools.[57]

Mobilizations around school choice took up the themes of parental rights, and suspicion of liberal state power and excessive spending that are popular motifs in Christian Right organizing. Drawing on the organizing history of the Christian Right as well as Catholic private-school networks, conservative and free-market organizations have provided the funds and policy proposals to articulate these themes into a new conservative ideological alliance, and build a successful movement for education reform.

From *Brown* to School Choice: A History of Anti-Racist Education Struggles

In Milwaukee, a path-breaking city for school choice reform, African American community leaders and political representatives joined alliances for school choice, and low-income African Americans mobilized in support of voucher programs. The politics of school choice in Milwaukee is a case study in the complex nature of political ideology formation. The role of African American leaders in school choice alliances speaks to the internally incongruous and unstable character of dominant ideological constellations for school choice; the support of school vouchers by low-income parents show how actors seek agentive subject positions in response to concrete challenges. Drawing on Thomas

[57] "A Good Night for Education Reform," *Citizen Magazine*, March 2014, http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/citizen-magazine/education/a-good-night-for-school-reform-march-2014

Pedroni's study of African American voucher-supporters and histories of the Milwaukee program, this section further develops my account of political ideologies, specifying their elastic and ideationally layered character, and showing how this character is produced in actors' attempts to navigate material and discursive conditions.

For African American's in urban centers like Milwaukee, education politics take place against a background of continued racial segregation, poor student performance, and widespread complaints of racism in public schools. Poor outcomes for black students, and disproportionate numbers of black students in public schools, is tied up with the continued economic marginalization of the African American population in American cities.[58]

In his study of low-income African American students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), Pedroni found that parents primarily viewed vouchers as a way to help their children escape from the racial bias and educational failure they experienced in public schools. When the school choice movement got underway in the late 80s, the dismal state of public schools lended the movement's promise of schooling alternatives great appeal. Furthermore, the private school alternative was already part of the imaginary, and in some cases the reality, for low-income parents, who received vouchers from the Bradley-financed Partners Advancing Values in Education to attend private religious schools.[59] The conservative coalition behind the voucher movement succeeded in mobilizing low-income African Americans, drawing this constituency away from their

[58] In 2014, 60 years after the *Brown* decision ending school segregation, just under ½ of black children attended schools more than 90% non-white, 75% attended majority non-white school. See Janelle Scott and Rand Quinn, "The Politics of Education in the Post-*Brown* Era: Race, Markets, and the Struggle for Equitable Schooling," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 50, no. 5 (2014): 749-763.
[59] Pedroni, *Movements*, 59.

established alignment with liberal education policies advanced by groups such as teachers unions and the NAACP.[60]

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was founded in 1990 and has been growing ever since. It was formally expanded in 1995 to include sectarian schools, and ease restrictions on enrollment limits.[61] The original alliance for MPCP was spearheaded by the Bradley-funded Institute for the Transformation of Learning, and supported by a wide alliance of various religious groups including the Christian Coalition, the Catholic Archdiocese and the National Catholic Educators Association, and political leaders such as governor Tommy Thompson and African American state representative Polly Williams.[62] Milwaukee's program paved the way for voucher reform; in subsequent years programs were launched in Cleveland (1996) Washington DC (2004) and New Orleans (2008). Carl points out that these campaigns sought support among African American in a period when socio-economic gains of the Civil Rights era came to a standstill. In the wake of the federal government's retreat from desegregation enforcement in the 70s, African Americans leaned increasingly towards markets in their search for strategies to achieve equality in education.[63]

When enforced integration came to cities in the north, in the form of school busing across racially divided urban-suburban lines,[64] many whites boycotted schools and took to the streets in protest, some shot at busses, and a mob led by mothers formed a

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[60] Ibid, 44-5.
[61] Ibid, 10-11.
[62] Ibid, 16-38.
[63] Carl, *Freedom of Choice*, 18-19.
[64] In 1971 the Supreme Court ordered in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education that desegregation required achieving racial balance even if this required moving students across municipal lines. While Milliken v. Bradley put a halt to cross-municipal busing in 1974, busing among city districts continued. Lawrence McAndrews, "The Politics of Principle: Richard Nixon and School Desegregation" *The Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 3 (1998): 190-191.

human blockade against black students.[65] When Milwaukee began widespread busing in 1976, the system of 'forced-voluntary' transfers placed the burden on blacks to commute, sometimes an hour across the city, or closed majority black schools, in majority black neighborhoods. When these schools reopened as magnets, they displaced neighborhood students by drawing whites from neighboring districts.[66]

Since the early days of voucher policy advocacy, proponents such as Christopher Jencks and Friedman argued that independent minority schools, supported by public vouchers, would do away with the problems of federally enforced desegregation by giving parents the option to choose.[67] Pioneered by black and Latino activists in the late 60s, the model of independent community schools did not emerged as the most viable option for these groups to access quality education until the late 80s, as desegregation efforts waned. In Milwaukee, while only two black and one Latino school from the original Federation of Independent Community Schools survived through the 70s, these schools emerged as a model for serving minority youth. Indeed, a year after the MPCP was finally passed, 88% of voucher receiving students attended former FICS schools.[68] Carl suggests that the opportunity for conservatives to gain support by African Americans exasperated with public schools in Milwaukee, as well as the city's tradition of

[65] Richard Perlstein *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 287-292.
[66] Carl, *Freedom of Choice,* 104.
[67] Jencks argues in a *New York Times* editorial, "allow [black] nationalists to create their own private schools, outside the regular public system, and to encourage this by making such schools eligible for substantial public support." Cited in Carl, *Freedom of Choice,* 65. Jencks headed the report on school vouchers for the Office of Economic Opportunity, headed by Donald Rumsfeld under President Nixon. The OEO aggressively pursued federally supported experiments in voucher reform, but due to opposition by teachers unions and school districts across the country, the experiment was only partially implemented in New Hampshire.
[68] Carl, *Freedom of Choice,* 108.

independent schools, made it an ideal battleground for shaping the national debate over school choice.[69]

One of the most powerful supporters of school choice, Howard Fuller, is a long champion of black empowerment and former leader of the Black Power movement. Fuller helped broker alliances between conservative voucher supporters and the African American community during his tenure as superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools. With the support of free-market and conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation, the Bradley Foundation, and the Friedman Foundation, Fuller helped found the ITL, and subsequently the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) in 2000. The BAEO combines leftist themes of black empowerment with free-market rhetoric that links freedom and market choice with suspicion of the state and wealthy elite.[70] According to its website, BAEO has chapters in seven states and is involved in local organizing in various others.[71] BAEO represents the free-market fundamentalist side of the spectrum of voucher reform and advocates for expansive voucher policies. Other African American leaders have pushed against the expansion of vouchers beyond the targeted focus on low-income students in the original MPCP.[72]

Pedroni's study is precise in tracking the ideological and material conditions of both the existing school system and the wider socio-economic landscape in which African Americans have helped forge the MPCP. Amending the model of conservative ideology formation in education politics set out by Apple and Oliver, Pedroni shows that

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[69] Pedroni, *Movements*, 43-47.
[70] Pedroni, 49-53.
[71] "Organizational History," Black Alliance for Education Opportunity, http://www.baeo.org/?ns_ref=14&id=5458
[72] Polly Williams and other black leaders withdraw support from MPCP when it was extended to religious schools in 1995. Pedroni, *Movements,* 68.

African Americans do not fit into the model of dominant vs. hegemonically integrated groups. On this model, dominant groups such as conservative and free-market foundations are described as producers of ‘formed’ ideologies, and parents mobilized into education reform are described as taking-up conservative ‘good sense.’

Pedroni argues that African Americans fill a third space, they are distinct from ordinary parents mobilized by conservative good sense because they engage in strategic ideological suturing with dominant groups, however, like conservative parents, they enter politics from a subordinate status and are “pushed toward Rightist social movements by an unresponsive state.”[73]

Pedroni draws out nuances in the field of ideology, alliance building, consciousness formation, and political power that are of crucial importance for understanding the novel conservative ideological constellations behind school choice. By attending to the ‘everyday dilemmas’ of voucher supporters, and the subject positions and practical options available to them, Pedroni shows how parents tactically develop ‘relatively formed’ ideologies that take up parts of conservative voucher rhetoric, such as the ‘taxpayer’ subject position, with ideals rooted in local political traditions such as the belief that all children should have access to quality education, and that black families have to struggle against racism to achieve this.

This process of consciousness formation is captured in Pedroni’s interviews, in which African American voucher parents brought together descriptions of choice policies with accounts of their life situations and political aspirations. Most parents couched the need for choice policies in descriptions of overcrowding in public schools and the

[73] Ibid, 33.

challenges facing teachers. After offering such a description, one parent described her understanding of school 'choice:' "it seems as if there are some who say that certain children shouldn't have a certain type of education. And it seems to me that choice is saying every child should have the best education that they can get.[74]" Others reiterate the social importance of quality schooling; one middle class parent argued that vouchers could be used as a means of redistributing income to ensure quality education for all. She noted that the wealthy dodged this responsibility, but that the state should reinforce it.[75] Summarizing his interviews, Pedroni argues that parents did not take on conservative education and economic ideologies, but tactically appropriated their terms, as in the use of 'choice,' to index universal education.

Furthermore, parents frame their support of choice in their experiences of racial and economic marginalization, and foreground the need for new opportunities. A parent involved in organizing to defend voucher programs saw them as a resource for low-income black families that were stigmatized by the perception that they rely on welfare, and that "all the men are in jail." Another explained: " I resented that being African-American –and of course I live in one of the poorest neighborhoods –my children were stigmatized by that. And they felt like they were giving you something. I'm a working mother. I pay taxes….and I was looking in search of something different.[76]"

For participants in the Milwaukee's Parental Choice Program, taking part in school choice means assuming an agentive subject position. In embracing market-based reforms, parents take on an affirmative political consciousness. Like the women

[74] Ibid, 41.
[75] Ibid, 91-93.
[76] Ibid, 71.

navigating the pressures of work and family life profiled in Chapter One, for whom feminist celebration of the diversity of female choice provided an affirmative framing for their efforts, African American parents contrast the agency provided by choice policies to the prevailing constraints that shaped their life situations. In interactions with public schools, parents experience marginalization, disrespect, and lack of power. Parents who describe similar obstacles in MCPC schools still retain the positive assessment of school choice, further suggesting that the investment in choice politics hinges on the promise of empowerment, rather than eventual outcomes. [77]

Conclusion:

In unpacking the political histories of contemporary alliances for school choice, I have attempted to offer an account of political ideology formation. Political ideologies are loose and partially articulated, allowing divergent groups to join without requiring full articulation of programs and philosophies. Furthermore, ideological constellations develop to track social change; they adapt political demands and ideals in response to challenges that emerge in their socio-economic moment.

By viewing market-based reform in light of these histories of ideology formation, I also hope to draw attention to the particular nature of the new conservative political constellations that animate our political present. These ideologies bring together figures and principles from political imaginaries democratic, free-market, conservative, and libertarian in an unstable alliance whose political trajectories, we might note optimistically, are open for reworking. What contemporary critics of neoliberalism get right, is that by the early 20th century these alliances have worked to significantly undo

[77] Pedroni, *Movements,* 71-120.

basic mechanisms for ensuring social and political equality, such as the state provision of universal public education.

In whose name has this universal good been undone? New conservative ideologies speak of the name of civil society, communities, or families, and occasionally, the American nation, lauding these spheres as the ground of moral action and free choice. These ideologies appeal to, and help reinforce, a widespread sense of government excess and failure, offering pastoral socialities as an alternative to the social anomie wrought by the corrupt, elitist liberal state. As exemplified by the African American parents interviewed by Pedroni and Patillo, these ideologies offer to the ordinary, politically marginalized actor the consumerist agency of a subject empowered with market choice.

While school choice policies were first designed in the South with the aim of maintaining racial segregation through privatization mechanisms that would make integration "a matter of parental control and not a policy of the State."[78] Today this ingenious move has expanded into a politics of broad appeal; supporters of school choice are mobilized as parents, families, and communities, with the promise of restoring control over the basic institutions that shape their everyday lives.

In addition to its rhetorical appeal, school choice politics have no doubt experienced success because many groups have good reason to be fed up with the dismal quality of education provided them by public schools. Movement literature foregrounds the failures of public schools, in particular for low-income and racial minority students.

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[78] An advocate of segregation summed up Texas' proposed response to the *Brown* decision in 1954. The Texas proposal implemented voluntary choice for parents to enroll students in segregated or integrated schools, thereby technically avoiding the state's direct role in segregation. This proposal was circulated to attorney generals and governors across the South, as most Southern states considering legislative proposals to maintain segregation during this period. Carl, *Freedom,* 29.

Mission statements and policy summaries by organizations such as the Black Alliance for Education Opportunities or the American Federation for Children call for pointed interventions on behalf of disadvantaged students who need education alternatives.[79]

Behind the popular face of school choice, movement leaders and policy experts articulate more formed ideologies of market reform. Organizations such as BAEO, AFC and Focus who are involved in mass-based organizing for school choice direct overt partisan messages not to mass-based campaigning, but to more politically savvy audiences, such as the readership of Focus' *Citizen* magazine or attendees of private BAEO events.[80] These messages go beyond broad appeal to parental and community control to place blame on teachers unions, rich liberals, and wasteful taxation for the poor performance of public schools.

To judge the political-economic implications of school choice organizations such as AFC or BAEO requires some knowledge of the tradition and trajectory of economic thought and policy in which they participate that is not provided through their movement literature. Specifying the sorts of policies they support to advance their mission of providing equal opportunity to African American students, the BAEO website states: "BAEO not only advocates for the creation of quality educational options that have an immediate impact on low-income and working-class Black families, but also seeks to expand opportunities for communities and individuals to empower themselves."[81] This open-ended wording accords with BAEO's support for the expansion of voucher

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[79] "Mission and Activities," *Alliance for School Choice*, http://allianceforschoolchoice.org/about-us/mission-activities/.

[80] For example see "A Good Night for Education Reform," *Citizen Magazine*, March 2014, http://www.focusonthefamily.com/socialissues/citizen-magazine/education/a-good-night-for-school-reform-march-2014; and Pedroni's profile of the BAEO. Pedroni, *Movements,* 49-57.

[81] "How We Work," Black Alliance for Education Opportunities, http://www.baeo.org/?ns_ref=13&id=5526#sthash.8URwBs63.dpuf.

programs in cities like Milwaukee, as noted above. In a similar fashion, AFC states their goal as aiding low-income students, but supports policies that move beyond this aim by transferring funding from public schools to individuals of any income to use on the private education option of their choice. Such programs include scholarship tax credit programs and education savings accounts. With few exceptions school choice organizations and research foundations who advocate for school choice do not specify mechanisms that would limit the creation of economically stratified school systems, such as stipulations that public funding can not be used in private schools that practice selective enrollment or charge tuition in excess of the public voucher. Rather, the trajectory of reforms has been to expand beyond income-based grants to 'choice' mechanisms for all, absent such protections.

The divergence between the policy of school choice, and its popular political language does not expose the false-consciousness of supporters of school choice, nor their formation as neoliberal subjects, but rather, I have argued, points to the multilayered, partially articulated, and elastic quality of ideologies as they are constructed through public political practice.

In the case of school choice, this account also explains how policies whose broad trajectory and political-economic aims, some argue, pose a threat to equal access to education, can be supported by others on the grounds that they serve this same end. School choice politics is carried out on a field of action that blurs overt partisan and religious appeals, diffuse rhetoric, earnest pragmatism, and strategic class interest, barring any holistic diagnosis of the movement, if not the policy's, broader political implications. If, as I have suggested, school choice politics represents a new

conservatism, it is conservatism whose investments, at least for some, are the stuff of everyday struggle and political articulation rather than thoroughgoing identity or steadfast affiliation.

The rise of school choice politics can be traced to a history of political organizing. In tracking that history, this chapter has shown how groups with diverse interests, including low-income African American and Latino parents, evangelical Christians, elite neoliberal reformers, and conservative foundations aligned in a powerful political movement. To attribute this alignment to the sweeping force of neoliberal economic principles and market rationalities, as the neoliberal subjectivities approach suggests, does not go far in helping explain the political ascendance of free-market politics. The ascendance of the market-reform approach to public education was achieved through the ongoing suturing of ideologies, such as ideologies of religious autonomy, community empowerment, and market choice, through movements of the Christian Right and racial minority groups described here; as well as the alignment of economic conservatives such as the Walton and Bradley foundations with a program of incremental privatization through choice reforms envisioned by academics and policy elite.

These alignments are contingent, political achievements. By attending to these alignments, this chapter not only gives an account of why different groups took up the positions they did, but also brings to light opportunities for political contestation. If we view free-market politics as evidence of the success of neoliberal governmentality in shaping political subjects, it appears more cohesive, and less contestable, than my account of ideology formation suggests. The critique of free-market politics this chapter has outlined requires not the condemnation of free-market principles wherever they

appear, but a critical dialogue that meets the actors that take up these principles in their challenges and aspirations, and engages them on the field of political practice.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: After Equality?

A young woman with an junior-level job at a law firm decides to take maternity leave to care for her new child. Her choice to step back from work to take time for her family sets off a series of reactions from coworkers and her boss. She returns to work to find herself placed on less-demanding projects, in a supporting role to male colleagues, formerly her equals. Steeling herself for a day's battles, she looks around, seeking anchors to reaffirm herself. She conjures an image that constellates her loves and achievements –her pantsuit sits neatly ironed next to a lace-lined crib, wide eyes gaze out. She has made choices, made a life.

A mother searches through her son's backpack when he returns from school. At the recent school fair, she received information about a variety of high-performing high schools her son might be able to attend. She signed up to receive information from nearly every school. When a couple brochures arrived, she followed the instructions, placing her son's name in various lotteries. Now the news finally comes that he was selected to remain in their troubled neighborhood school. She resolves to apply to more schools when her younger daughter has the chance, so that she might see the benefits of this school choice opportunity.

I.

In the last couple of decades, as the effects of welfare state retraction and the transition to dual-breadwinner economies cascaded, and inequality accelerated, American neoliberalism coalesced into a durable, mainstream political orientation. Ordinary actors, as they sought out empowerment through market-reform, and networks of affirmation through feminist and Christian-themed practices of lifestyle consumption and self-help, worked to suture free-market ideals of choice and empowerment to the idioms and values

of distinct milieus. This suturing takes place through the lateral circuits of media and consumption that permeate actors' everyday lives, reproducing the free-market conservative ideologies woven together by technocratic reformers, political entrepreneurs, and preachers. These ideologies elevate images of the rising middle-class family and the resilience of working mothers. In a happy coincidence of form and content crystallized in the mantra "hold on to what you've got!," these circuits both enact and affirm actors' daily investments in the privatized publics of home, work, and consumption.

The salience of new neoliberal orientations can be best understood by looking to the experience and consciousness of ordinary actors, in particular American women. A couple of generations after securing formal equality, with the widespread entry of women into the labor force, the ideal of the independent woman working for self-sufficiency remains unattainable for most. In a highly stratified labor force, women in high-status professions face gender discrimination mixed with competitive pressures, and less affluent women face depressed wages, or fill the ranks of low-paid, precarious jobs. Yet while women across classes are strained by the contemporary economy, they lack a shared feminist project. Mainstream liberal feminism no longer provides a vision for change.[1] Group that combat the intersections of class, race, and gender oppression, such as *Black Lives Matter,* the Domestic Workers' Alliance, and *Occupy*, have come to the forefront of progressive politics. These groups keep radical feminist traditions alive –such

[1] Of course important policies such as paid family leave and early childhood education are part of the mainstream liberal feminist agenda in the US. Such programs have long been guaranteed as basic rights by other Western nations. See Anne Orloff, "Women's Employment and Welfare Regimes" (Social Policy and Development Programme Paper, *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development*, 2002), 17; 23-27.

such as Black, Latina, and socialist-feminist traditions –though the language of feminism, due in part to the persistent limits of solidarity exemplified by currents such as choice feminism, is not their organizing idiom.

Paralleling some effects of generational change in the women's liberation movement, black politics after the Civil Rights and Black Power movements is marked by the upward mobility of some African Americans and increasing inequality among African Americans on the whole. Leaving to one side the question of the sincerity of black political leaders in seeking black empowerment through alliances with neoliberal reformers, or the penal state,[2] I would highlight the historical conditions that facilitated these new alliances. These conditions include the absence of a justice-oriented popular movement, and the increasing divergence of class experience among African Americans. This new ideological terrain in turn made possible the mobilization of some segments of economically disadvantaged black actors behind market-based reform.

This dissertation has made a theoretical argument about how we should understand the ideological terrain of advanced liberal capitalist societies. Mainstream ideologies include explicit, though loosely aligned articulations of political ideals

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[2] Michelle Alexander points to support among some blacks for law and order polices in the 60s and 70s, and harsh drug laws in particular. She argues that this support "provide[ed] political cover for conservative politicians who saw an opening to turn back the clock on racial progress," by developing penal policy designed to contain blacks. See Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New York Press, 2012), 42. It is certainly true that black support provided cover for the new conservative majority, which claimed to be color-blind. However Alexander's account, by emphasizing continuities with older racist orders, tends to overlook the fact that mass incarceration involves the creation of a new racialized underclass in which the one's status as a surplus poor, unemployed or underemployed person intersects with racial differences to create a targeted status. On the insufficiency of anti-racism for understanding race as a mutable "ideology of ascriptive difference" which intersects with class, see Adolf Reed, "Race, Marx, Neoliberalism," *New Labor Forum* 44, no. 1 (2013): 49-57. On black support of the punitive turn see Vanessa Barker, *The Politics of Imprisonment: How the Democratic Process Shapes the Way America Punishes Offenders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) cited in Alexander. See also Michael Javen Fortner, *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Harvard University Press, 2015).

concerning the role of the state and markets. Free-market conservative ideology was formed as diverse groups such as the Christian Right, conservative research foundations, and their political allies wove a novel constellation of values, aligning the moral autonomy of families and entrepreneurial vitality with market freedom against the excess of the liberal-democratic state. My accounts of the Christian Right and the school choice movement track this politically organized, often elite-driven dimension of ideology formation. These accounts are informed by the tradition of Marxist theorizing about hegemony, in particular the work of Ernesto Laclau.

I have also attempted to shed light on cultural practice as a space of consciousness and ideology formation. In practices of education, family life, religion, and consumption, meanings that are not explicitly about 'politics' or 'the economy' are formed, which shape actors' expectations and views of social order. These meanings, such as the valorization of choice as a display of capacity and lifestyle-crafting, and esteem for parochial networks and private ventures, including faith in their potency as avenues of social mobility, are tied to the contexts in which political-economic order takes form in everyday lives. In treating cultural spaces as an archive for tracking consciousness formation and the construction of consent, I build on the work of feminist and cultural Marxist theorists, including Raymond Williams, Beverly Skeggs, Angela McRobbie, and Lauren Berlant.

For ordinary actors, such as the women in the vignettes above, free-market conservatism takes form as they affirm their choice to continue their lives as they are. This affirmation is ideological: it rests on a split reality. A reality split between the truth of their view of themselves as responsible, empowered actors, and the reality of the

prevailing constraints of the political-economic order –education privatization, shifts in norms and expectations of the white-collar workplace in post-Fordism, an organization of social wealth that does not support the reproduction of life outside of work, such as through subsidized family leave or childcare –that shapes the choices open to them.

For Marx, from this split arises the distinction between class position and class-consciousness. The former denotes the consciousness of one's experience, such as one's experience as a rising middle-class professional, managing work-life balance, and seeking the satisfactions of "humanistic training" in consumption and other pay-offs of living in capitalist society.[3] The latter entails an understanding of how one's social experience is conditioned by wider political-economic formations. In taking on this problematic, feminist Marxists rejected the claim that critical awareness of the capitalist system is forged in the realm of labor. They saw that capitalist relations shape the sphere of family life and thus looked to the home as a site of ideology formation, and a potential site for raising critical consciousness. With the entry of women into the labor force and the deeper penetration of markets into the domestic sphere, for instance through the commodification of care-work, it is now Marxist common-sense that one participates in market relations not only as a worker but also as a homemaker.

But the question of ideology does not boil down to the phenomena of commodification. Following the insights of Marxist feminists that are taken up in a strand

[3] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Macmillan Education: Bassingstoke, 1988), 67. Spivak takes a fairly orthodox Marxist view of such 'humanist training,' which she describes in terms of an "'ideology of consumerism' (parading as the philosophy of the classless society)," but one that nevertheless integrates the working classes and "prepares the ground for coalitional politics," in developed countries (83).

of affect theory to theorize the workings of gender in contemporary economies,[4] I look to privatized publics to find the material of consciousness formation –namely, everyday ideas and practices of intimacy, care, and work, including the work of care, intimacy, and self-fashioning.

This dissertation's account of ideology offers a theoretical framework for understanding the political import of the historical trends of suburbanization and the expansion of middle-class consumerism noted by various scholars of American political culture. Scholars such as Matthew Lassiter and Michael Javen Fortner, who I discuss below, argue that efforts to protect their access to middle-class lifestyle such as homeownership and consumption motivated the move right by Sunbelt whites in the 60s and 70s, in Lassiter's study, and New York City blacks in the late 60s and 70s, in Fortner's account.[5] By putting these histories in the context of the formation of a new mainstream political orientation which continued to expand in subsequent decades, I hope to make the case that the 'suburbanization' of American culture which Lassiter describes denotes not just a cultural trend, or a depoliticizing shift in interests, but a new ideology, made possible by a shift in the material bases of consciousness formation.

The preceding chapters show how the political project of free-market conservatism coalesced as a variety of groups turned to the private sphere and markets as

[4] For Marxist-feminist influenced theories of affective labor see Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 89-100 and Kathi Weeks, "Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics,"*Ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007): 233-249. My approach has the most in common with theorists removed from the Marxist problematic of affective labor as a form of value-creation, but who, like theorists of affective labor, look at sites such as lifestyle consumption, self-production, and networking as spaces of ideological power and consciousness formation. See for example my discussions of Angela McRobbie and Beverly Skeggs in Chapter One of this manuscript.
[5] Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Fortner, *Black Silent Majority.* See also Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); on suburban political culture Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990).

the ideal space to pursue their goals and values. In so doing, I depart from a number of approaches that view the politics of neoliberalism as a negative space of backlash or depoliticization, marked by a reactionary, or deficient, political consciousness. These latter accounts, offered by feminist theorists discussed in Chapter One such as Nancy Fraser and Angela McRobbie, compare mainstream liberal feminism to radical movements of the past. They point to choice feminism as evidence of women's depoliticization, overlooking its salience as an incipient political orientation in its own right. I have focused on a subgenre of depoliticization stories offered by theorists of neoliberal subjectivities. Exemplified by the work of Wendy Brown, these accounts view contemporary politics as the displacement of political norms, in particular democratic norms, by economic norms. They too deny free-market conservatism its status as a political project, viewing it instead as the colonization of politics by economic principles and forms of order.

The neoliberal order is not as cohesive, nor its force on consciousness as integrative, as these accounts suggest. Free-market conservatism is an internally variegated, historically contingent political project. The women in the vignettes above are not depoliticized because they have accepted a social order based on market competition. They bend towards market-conservatism because they have provisionally taken up the idioms and tactics of market-reform –idioms and tactics that, due to decades of political articulations by political and religious leaders and popular movements, are ready at hand.

This conclusion further illuminates the recent history of free-market conservatism, and in so doing, clarifies the role of race in its construction. I do so by looking back to an earlier period of conservative realignment, when New Deal liberals were brought into a

new Republican majority. Focusing on the period from the 1980s until today, this dissertation highlighted the role of pro-family politics, and the anti-feminist defense of the private, in mobilizing a conservative base. The rhetoric of this conservatism is color-blind. After the mainstream rejection of explicitly racist politics in the 1960s and 70s, it helped form a new liberal-conservative majority.

The backlash account of contemporary conservatism emerged to explain the period from the 1940s through the late 1960s, when African American civil rights emerged as the central axis on which new political identities cleaved. While resistance to African American integration might aptly be described as a reaction or backlash among some segments of white Americans, this resistance had to be fastened to other political issues of the day, articulated with salient ideals, and fought for through new alliances in order to become a political force. The story of backlash doesn't adequately capture this protracted process of ideological formation through which the Republican Party was reformed as the standard bearer of a newly forged conservatism, which linked elite opposition to the New Deal and social democracy with a newly mobilized set of discontents with liberal governance, ignited by federal action on black civil rights.

In treating mid-century conservatism as a positive political project, recent works bring to light the durable political allegiances and ideologies forged in this period. In what follows I turn briefly to Joseph Lowndes' account of the new right, and his analysis of the role played by the construction of a particular form of anti-black racism in its rise. I suggest how Lowndes' account, which focuses on the evolution of constellations of meaning around race in elite discourse, could be supplemented to explain the role of grassroots activists and ordinary citizens, as well as the political-economic context of the

transition to post-Fordism, in shaping this evolution. Section three brings Lowndes' account together with material from my previous chapters to offer an account of how racial discourses, and the politics they informed, changed shape since the 1970s, giving rise to what scholars have called the racial politics of neoliberalism. I attempt to show how my view of ideologies helps interpret free-market trends among some groups of African Americans. I conclude by reiterating my account of the maintenance and defense of privatized publics in anchoring conservative consciousness in the present.

II.

The transformation in the Republican Party captured in Lowndes' *From the New Deal to the New Right,* was achieved through an expansion of the Party's support base, from northern elite to new middle- and working-class white constituencies in the West, Midwest, and South. Nixon's election crystallized this new Republican majority at a time of widespread opposition to busing, the overreach of Johnson's Great Society, and unease over student protest, rioting, and the integration of blacks in American cities. The presidential campaigns of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and George Wallace in 64 and 68 fomented this opposition.

Lowndes underscores the decades of political mobilization that preceded this well-known conservative breakthrough. Over the course of the 1940 and 50s, conservative elites articulated a defense of certain ideals –freedom, tradition, and the natural supremacy of whites, against dangerous ideals, which they argued American conservatism should actively oppose, namely the expansive understanding of liberal-democracy that sought to extend equality to marginalized groups. A minority of conservative elites held out opposition to the progressive, expansive governance project

of the New Deal. Among them, Charles Wallace Collins articulated the political position that would inform the *Dixicrat* revolt in the late 40s. His writings brought together a philosophical critique of New Deal liberalism with an appeal to the belief in white supremacy that had popular appeal in the South, arguing that the former aimed to "make the Negro equal to the white man economically, politically, and socially."[6] While the New Deal was well received by most Americans, including in the South, federal action on race was a wedge issue. The Federal Employment Practices Commission's 1941 act against employment discrimination in the defense industry, for instance, spurred opposition among private business in the South and the Republican elite.[7]

In the 1950s, while conservative thought leaders such as William F. Buckley openly opposed civil rights on white supremacist grounds, others, such as Milton Friedman, cast their opposition to federal action on segregation as an issue of government overreach. Buckley and his fellows at the *National Review* popularized the view of market freedom as a bastion of community and moral tradition against the state.[8] In economic policy circles, Friedman popularized a similar view, emphasizing the defense of individual choice, for example in his writings on education discussed in Chapter Four.[9] These thinkers provided a set of moral arguments and practical justifications for opposition to state planning and service provision, and egalitarianism, which could be separated from overt appeals to race.

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[6] Joseph Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 17.
[7] Ibid, 23
[8] Ibid, 48-54.
[9] Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," *Economics and the Public Interest,* ed. Robert A. Solo (Rutgers University Press, 1955).

The widely accepted account of Nixon's "Southern Strategy" suggests that the Republican Party won support among racist whites by casting itself as the party of resistance to Civil Rights. While this account is broadly reliable, it risks papering over the constellation of political meaning around racial language and identity not only in the period of Republican electoral realignment, but into the present.[10] In tracking the political appeals of conservative thinkers and candidates, and specifying the audiences to which they were directed, be they Southerners, working-class white ethnics in the rustbelt, or middle-class suburban whites, Lowndes argues that African Americans, and New Deal liberals, were cast as a common opponent against which a new conservative identity was shaped. It is Lowndes' attention to this language, and the political vision behind it, that allows him to bring out the contours of the white, anti-state, pro-market project that emerged in this period of ostensible backlash.

The political vision of the new Republican Party placed the defense of the private through the protection of personal and property rights at its center. While the New Deal and Civil Rights were targets of this oppositional vision, they were not always named. Rather, the ability to articulate a positive identity of a protected economic and social position made this vision durable and flexible, I suggest, as perceived threats to this protected position changed. In the 60s, white male privilege was under threat by the women's liberation and Civil Rights movements. At that time, while overt racist displays were prominent in mainstream political discourse, actors also drew on the rhetorical, political work of the new conservatism to elide the significance of race in their

[10] Matthew Lassiter offers a similar critique of the accepted political science narrative of Southern realignment, arguing they put too much emphasis on Republican Party strategy. His account focuses on the creation of a suburban white identity, pointing to grassroots mobilizations by these groups against both 'massive resistance' and 'massive integration.' Lassiter, *Silent Majority.*

partisanship. By associating race with a constellation of other ideals, political actors like Collins, who called race by its name, also helped dampen its salience. This rhetorical construction had the effect that racial appeals could be made without explicit racial language.

Strom Thurmond's announcement of his move from the Democratic to what he called the "Goldwater Republican Party" after Goldwater's 1964 campaign is exemplary of this rhetoric. Without speaking of Civil Rights, Thurmond blames the Democrats for "unconstitutional, unworkable and oppressive legislation which invades inalienable personal and property rights of the individual."[11] Goldwater himself, though he ran on an anti-Civil Rights platform, did not want to be made out to be a racist. He too used the language of "a free society," and trumpeted private rights. This political language has two important effects that Lowndes brings to the fore. First, by trumpeting personal freedom, and locating it in the realm of private tradition and private rights, it "brought conservative ideals together with opposition to civil rights in a way that appeared classically liberal." Second, it established a durable "color-blind logic, stating that all citizens should have the right to associate or not...while ignoring the structural conditions of racial stratification."[12]

This political idiom was able to bring new constituencies into the conservative fold because it transformed conservative discourse both by claiming the mantel of liberalism and by promising to defend insecure whites without asking them to claim their racial and class advantage, a combination that has proven resilient in to the present.

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[11] Lowndes, *New Deal,* 73.
[12] Ibid, 74.

Wallace was a master of this act of translation. His campaign brought free-market conservatism to working class whites outside of the South by speaking against federal legislation on union and housing integration. As Lowndes notes, the fact that Wallace avoided naming African Americans as the threat to neighborhoods and jobs in places like the Midwest speaks to the ambivalence around race in his audiences. More than simply standing-in for race, as critics of "racial coding" argue, Wallace's language changes the meaning of race by associating it with other values his audience holds, such as job security and established work-place hierarchies that union integration ostensibly threatens.[13] "As a key term in an emergent chain of associations," Lowndes argues, "race both saturated and was masked by this new antigovernment populism."[14]

Scholarly discussions of the rise of inexplicit appeals to race aim to explain the extent to which racist beliefs –versus, for instance, conservative beliefs, lead actors to take up the political positions they do. Some influential approaches to the study of inexplicit appeals address this question by constructing a measure to distinguish when messages appeal to listeners' unacknowledged racial "stereotypes, fears, and resentments" versus when they signal other meanings.[15] Rejecting this strategy, Lowndes' method of rhetorical analysis treats racial messaging as part of a broader constellation of meanings that mobilize a set of associations for actors. For instance in the mid-century, pride in Southern identity, or, for middle- and working-class whites in the north, belief that hard work should secure one's status, were associated with racial resentment. This rhetorical approach avoids the fallacious claim to draw a clear

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[13] Ibid, 81-86.
[14] Ibid, 81.
[15] Tali Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.

distinction between when a term or issue with a racial dimension, such as welfare, is invoked in such a way that it signals racial "stereotypes, fears, and resentments," versus when it does not. I would argue that this distinction rests on an inaccurate view of how political language and consciousness work. Political language is overdetermined; a term signifies a set of overlaid meanings, and these meanings can never be neatly separated out. The discursive history of terms such as "law and order" and "welfare dependency" in the late 20th century American context should lead us to doubt that we can judge these terms to be free of racial signaling in some instances.[16] Furthermore, as I have emphasized above, Lowndes' focus on historically evolving associations of meaning allows him to capture how not only the meaning of conservative identity, but also the meaning of race were altered as the wider constellations of meaning in which both were situated shifted in the period he describes. Namely, with the rise of free-market conservatism.

The problem with the rhetorical approach is that it tends to understate the diverse terrain in which discourses circulate, overlooking their uptake by grassroots activists and ordinary actors. Consider, for instance, Nixon's language of support for "neighborhood schools" and "law and order" and Wallace's use of the same language. Scholars of implicit messaging would note that in these two examples this language is mobilized to support different policy stances; Nixon supported a strategy of limiting and delaying

[16] Mendelberg makes the argument, supported by her results in a controlled ad experiment, that when racially laden issues are paired with counter-stereotypical images or terms, for instance if an ad about welfare uses images of white people, they no longer work to signal unacknowledged racial sentiments about welfare. The experiment found that counter-stereotypical ads made a smaller difference in spurring pre-existing racial resentment than an ad using implicit racial messaging. It seems relevant that the survey population had a much lower racial resentment that the national average, which she attributes to their abnormally high education level. Mendelberg, *Race Card,* 191-208.

forced school integration within the limits of the law, while Wallace staged a show down of resistance to federal desegregation orders. The point of comparison and contrast I want to highlight concerns the wider field of political action into which these messages were picked up and re-crafted by activists and ordinary actors. White Citizens' Councils and the Ku Klux Klan participated in violent rallies and organized grassroots campaigns in support of Wallace's various electoral campaigns. While Lowndes notes these groups' support, he does not consider the impact of grassroots actors, from activists at rallies, to private speech among citizens' groups, in reproducing and potentially altering the meanings of elite political speech.[17] Since discourses move among speakers and spaces as they circulate, their meanings can diverge for different actors. Wallace, and to a lesser extent Nixon, insofar as he too invoked racial meanings in a terrain that included mobilized massive resistance to Civil Rights, proffered a color-blind language that was readily translated into the blatant racist discourse that appealed to some ordinary actors.[18] At the same time, Nixon's ambiguous racial language allowed him to draw support from racial liberals, such as those who supported desegregation, but attempted to limit its reach in their schools and neighborhoods.[19] These divergent effects cannot easily be explained by a focus on elite discourse alone.

In addition to attending to the diverse lives of discourse among ordinary actors, my account builds on Lowndes' rhetorical approach to ideology formation by making explicit the political-economic context in which the historically evolving constellations of

[17] Lowndes, *New Deal,* 91.
[18] Mendelberg makes argument that Nixon used ambiguous language in order to maintain the view among Wallace supporters that he was "interchangeable" with their candidate. Mendelberg, *Race Card,* 98.
[19] Lassiter, *Silent Majority,* 44-93. On Atlanta's HOPE movement to save public schools, but contain integration. The movement countered the massive resistance movement and Governor Griffin's promise to close public schools to resist desegregation.

free-market conservatism took shape. The new conservatism Lowndes so pointedly illuminates, and the new Republican majority it helped bring about, is part of a broader shift in mainstream orientations to the political-economy. As I argue in Chapter Four in the case of school choice, the movement to shrink government and marketize the provision of public goods and services was first spread among neoliberal and conservative think tanks and foundations. These elite venues promoted a rearticulation of liberalism away from social-democratic ideals of equality and expansive inclusion facilitated by government initiative. As this project was carried forward by ordinary actors, they not only took on a new ideal of market-freedom, but took part in a reformation of the political by shifting the boundary of what aspects of life were proper objects of political concern and governmental action. This reaffirmation of the field of the private against the political justified the expansion of the power of markets for a new era of American capitalism, and effectively pushed back on pressures exerted by feminists and Civil Rights activists to expand public claim on what where formerly considered private domains, such as employment and marriage contracts.[20]

Theories that focus on the subject-formations necessary to carry out the demands of the neoliberal economy suggest that actors were driven to new political expectations and dispositions as they aligned behind a new political-economic order. As I have argued, such claims overstate the coherence and integrative force of American neoliberalism in part because they leave to the side the social and political realignments behind that order. These realignments, this dissertation has argued, were brought about as new economic

[20] Laclau and Mouffe make a similar argument in their description of the new right, which they as reversing the expansion of the political achieved by democratic struggles of the 20th century. See *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), 159-185.

forms created particular challenges, and actors drew on diverse political traditions, subcultural networks, and idioms, to forge a response.

In the era of Civil Rights, new conservative actors helped forge free-market conservatism by struggling over particular political-economic forms –public education, urban-suburban residential infrastructures, unions –which, if bent to federal integration mandates, threatened to wreck their fragile hold on upwardly mobile American life. While in this period the political affirmation of the private was anchored in a conservatism rejuvenated among ordinary whites, in recent decades its appeal has spread to new constituencies, as they too have sought out tools to fend off social and economic precarity.

III.

The question of neoliberal ideology –namely, how is it that a vision of reform forged in white supremacy could become an organizing idiom for marginalized actors, such as working mothers and low-income urban parents –becomes more tractable if we take a positive approach to ideology formation which I have attempted here, and as Lowndes models in his account of the new right.

Free-market conservatism developed an affirmative rhetoric of private power and freedom, which, while built through practices designed to defend white privilege and virtue, endures in contexts when these racial associations recede from view. The pro-family movement, which has propelled the Christian Right since the late 70s, exemplifies this move. As I show in Chapter Two, the pro-family movement advances a program that claims to be racially inclusive, focused on family values and traditional hierarchies of paternal and religious order and authority. These core values appeal across race lines.

Major outlets such as Focus attempt to court black audiences, occasionally featuring black preachers in their programming. In the 1990s, the Promise Keepers Movement rose to prominence on a platform that foregrounded racial reconciliation and advocated cross-race friendships among men of faith. The embrace, at least rhetorically, of racial liberalism by mainstream Christian conservatives has done little to bridge the historic institutional and cultural segregation of white and African American churches.

However, both mainstream white and African American churches have been transformed by evangelical revival in recent decades. Black churches took on elements of the neoevangelical movement, including its focus on salvation and de-emphasis of creedal differences, as well as the use of accessible worship styles that integrate popular music and encourage enthusiasm.[21] As the memory of white evangelical resistance to Civil Rights faded, some blacks have joined predominately white evangelical organizations, spearheading outreach to black communities.[22] More notable is the growth of black churches that take part in conservative evangelical trends, such as the rapid growth in black megachurches in recent decades. One study found that 149 black megachurches have emerged since the 1980s.[23] Megachurches are a form of parachurch organization that, in addition to outreach ministries and multimedia publications, also owns its own campus, often including a sanctuary, headquarters of outreach and

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[21] For a detailed look at new worship styles among Black Protestants, popularized through TV and internet see Shayne Lee, *T.D. Jakes: America's New Preacher* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
[22] Marla Frederick McGlathery and Traci Griffin, "Becoming Conservative, Becoming *White?":* Black Evangelicals and the Para-Church Movement," in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and the Christian Faith*, ed. Robert Priest (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 145-164.
[23] Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs, *The Black Megachurch: Theology, Gender, and the Politics of Public Engagement* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 6.

publications, even a recording studio.[24] Their ministries are "professional" and "consumer-like," catering to the needs of suburban middle-class black audiences.[25]

The political outlook associated with these trends in the black church[26] includes a focus on salvation, and individual effort to achieve salvation.[27] Megachurches also represent a shift in forms of public engagement fostered by the black church, a shift from protest and activism to community development projects. Many megachurches run affiliated Community Development Organizations, which provide goods and services, sometimes partnering with government to do so.[28]

Observing these trends, scholars of black politics argue that the church is a locus of a wider neoliberal ideological shift in African American politics. This shift involves a move away from the sort of social-democratic state-based solutions to racial inequality pursued by the mainstream of the Civil Rights generation. [29] The most bald-faced pro-capitalist evangelical trend, the prosperity gospel, has come to symbolize this shift, though its influence relative to broader evangelical trends has perhaps been overstated. The prosperity gospel's emphasis on strict personal economic management is mirrored in

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[24] Tucker-Worgs defines a megachurch as a church that has at least 2000 attendees weekly and owns its own sanctuary. Tucker-Worgs, *Black Megachurch,* 22-23.
[25] Ibid, 5.
[26] These trends track white evangelical revival but the term evangelical is not traditionally applied to Black Protestants, due to their distinct historical and political traditions, see Tucker-Worgs, *Black Megachurch,* 56. However most Black Protestants can theologically be considered evangelicals. Black megachurches include Black Protestant denominations, some Black congregations in white Protestant denominations, and nondenominational Protestants. However like white megachurches, most black megachurches are "functionally nondenominational," they share more in common with fellow evangelical revivalist churches than churches of their own denomination, including the influence by neo-Pentacostal movement and its styles of charismatic worship. See Scott Thumma and Dave Travis, *Beyond the Megachurch Myth: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007) cited in Tucker-Worgs, *Black Megachurch,* 32-33.
[27] Frederick and Griffin, "Becoming Conservative," 152-155.
[28] Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs, *Black Megachurch,* 103-132; Lester Spence, *Knocking the Hustle: Against the Neoliberal Turn in Black Politics* (Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 2015), 60-62.
[29] Spence, *Knocking the Hustle,* 53-72.

secular discourses by the technocratic governance solutions increasingly embraced by black political elite.

School choice politics is an exemplary technocratic approach to reform. As I discuss in Chapter Four, school choice reforms introduce market mechanisms at various stages of education-service management and provision. Education Management Organizations and Charter School Management Organizations compete for contracts to take over public schools, and parents and students act as consumers of a limited commodity as they compete in selective enrollment processes to gain entry into a quality school. Technocratic reforms, due to their use of impersonal, performance-based metrics to assess schools and distribute funding; doll out competitive contracts; and screen students for enrollment, exemplify a 'race-blind,' approach to reform. However, in contrast to the race-blind rhetoric of segregationists during the Civil Rights era, which aimed to distance policy stances, such as opposition to federal employment regulation, from their impact on racial equality, the race-blind logic of choice reforms is paired with explicit championing of the empowerment of racial minorities. Advocates of school choice, from Christian conservatives to black politicians and activists, tout voucher policies as uniquely beneficial to black and Latino students, who form the majority of low-income public school populations.

This shift is significant because it made possible the move of free-market conservatism from the right wing of American politics to the mainstream, including the mainstream of the Democratic Party. Today, while left-wing groups including traditional unions and Civil Rights groups such as the NAACP and the National Urban League continue to support public schools, other elements of the Democratic alliance have

embraced technocratic, race-blind reforms such as school choice as the "new civil rights."[30] The politics of school choice in the 2000s expanded its ideological breadth beyond the earlier new right, and even the New Democratic Consensus of the 1990s, which aligned conservatives and neoliberals, to include advocates of progressive causes such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and new civil rights groups such as the Black Alliance for Education Opportunities, and the Hispanic Council for Reform and Education Options (CREO). New civil rights groups depart from traditional Civil Rights groups in framing education in terms of community empowerment and responsibility to redress inequality, rather than as part of a broader social justice platform demanding state action to redress the intersecting socio-economic causes of inequality.[31] While the former rely on neoliberal, conservative, and progressive foundations operating as "venture philanthropists," to provide funding to firms that administer education services, the latter insist on the responsibility of governments to provide services universally through policies aimed at redistribution rather than economic efficiency.

In the case of school choice, I have sought to show that the widespread support of African American political leaders for free-market reform is most plausibly explained as a move to adopt policy solutions that are readily at hand, and promise innovative

[30]Vouchers began to be framed as a civil rights issue by Republicans under Nixon. William Bennett, Secretary of Education under Ronald Reagan called school choice the "next great civil rights arena." Jim Carl, *Freedom of Choice: Vouchers in American Education* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), 132. More recently, GOP policy advisor Frank Luntz proposed using the language of 'opportunity scholarship' rather than vouchers, and describes voucher policies "the civil rights issue of our generation." Elizabeth DeBray-Pelot et. al., "The Institutional Landscape of Interest Group Politics and School Choice," *Peabody Journal of Education* 82, no. 2/3 (2007): 211.

[31] DeBray-Pelot, "The Institutional Landscape," 213-218.

solutions to the failures of public education to serve black students.[32] In so doing, these leaders worked to remake an ideological terrain in which free-market solutions were associated with the defense of white privilege, and opposition to extending state benefits and protections to African Americans.

For many racial liberals today, the dissolution of state services into piecemeal, semi-private solutions does not appear as an instance of state retraction that reinforces class and race privilege, as it might have during the Civil Rights era. The expansion of the political meanings of race-blinds solutions to include claims that such solutions empower African Americans and other minorities has created a political landscape in which actors concerned with racial equality join forces with groups with very different goals, such as expanding the power of markets, and reducing the state's ground in intervening to redress social inequalities that are deemed market effects.

I have suggested that the conflicting emphasis on, on the one hand, empowerment through market-solutions, and, on the other hand, the role of market relations in reproducing preexisting hierarchies of race and gender, should be viewed as a core political disagreement between actors who support neoliberal solutions and their critics. I make this argument against critics of neoliberalism themselves, who suggest that the embrace of free-market conservatism by marginalized groups can be explained as bad faith among movement leaders and discursive integration of ordinary actors. This line of critique mischaracterizes the political orientations of ordinary actors, deeming them anti-

[32] I am describing one way leaders are brought into neoliberal alliances. It is also surely the case that as neoliberal reforms are implemented and once they are in place, others are driven by the promise of positions of power and financial gain to support them. Pedroni, for instance, lists leaders in school choice advocacy who also work for for-profit private and charter school corporations, and thus have a financial stake in further privatization of public schools. Thomas C. Pedroni, *Market Movements: African American Involvement in School Voucher Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 54.

democratic, incipient authoritarians who embrace a society of market competition. It does not grant due significance and attention to the political disagreements at the heart of the rise of neoliberal reform, nor the concrete socio-economic struggles around which those disagreements took shape.

It is in response to such challenges, such as ongoing racial domination through public education, that diverse actors took up free-market ideals. Their alignments behind the new mainstream conservatism are often provisional and partially articulated, leaving open a space for political dialogue and engagement that could potentially win their support for more progressive goals.

My approach joins critics of neoliberalism such as Michael Dawson in emphasizing the importance of public dialogue and common action in shaping the terrain for political approaches, neoliberal or alternative, to gain power. Noting the rise of neoliberal approaches in African American politics in recent decades, Dawson offers at least two strategies for critiquing the pursuit of empowerment through market-solutions: increasing historical knowledge, and raising awareness of the broader socio-political landscape.[33] The charge of white supremacy in contemporary anti-racist politics plays on and promotes historical awareness of the material and ideological legacies of race-based

[33] These two arguments are part of Dawson's pointed description of the role played by a mobilized black counterpublic. Such a public works to keep alive traditions of organizing against structures of racism, and raises awareness of the contemporary racial order. Dawson argues that the delegitimization of black perspectives in the mainstream public, exhibited by stark differences in black-white public opinion, showed the weakness of the black public in making-visible ongoing racial oppression. This public opinion gap is shown in perceptions of the response to Hurricane Katrina; 90% of blacks thought the disaster showed that racial inequality remains a problem, in contrast to 38% of whites (23). The racist response is evidence by the pathologization of black victims in media coverage (46-56), and the lack of efforts to help these victims in the recovery, including the decision to demolish public housing, drastically reducing available units for poor victims displaced by the hurricane, many who would never return to the city (37-40). See Michael Dawson, *Not in Our Lifetimes: The Future of Black Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

domination. Faced with Friedman's claim that equal-rights legislation curbs individual economic freedom for blacks and whites alike, a historical knowledge of the legacies of free-market reform and the economic bases of racial domination might alert a market-reform sympathizer to the racialized effects of such reforms.

A liberal market-reformer might also be persuaded to embrace a more justice-based approach to social policy if public speech and activism worked to raise their awareness of the contemporary racial-class order. The contemporary racial order intensifies the role of economic domination in recreating racial hierarchies. It builds on the "fusion of class segregation and racial discrimination embodied in the suburban-urban divide" consolidated in the late 60s and 70s.[34] At that time, grassroots movements of white homeowners and schoolparents, and their responsive government, promoted race-blind policies to subsidize suburban growth and urban renewal,[35] and the courts gave constitutional approval to new and enduring segregation patterns that were deemed socioeconomic effects.[36] The medium-term effects of such policies, along with the coinciding economic process of deindustrialization, resulted in the devastation of the black middle-class.[37] Dawson points to the destruction of the old black middle- and working-classes, as well as the loss of black radical voices in mainstream politics, as

[34] Lassiter, *The Silent Majority,* 2

[35] For a detailed look at the city of Atlanta see Lassiter, *The Silent Majority,* 50-59.

[36] Milliken v. Bradley (1974) was the Supreme Court decision that sanctioned school segregation resulting from segregated housing patterns see David R. James, "City Limits on Racial Equality: the Effects of City-Suburban Boundaries on Public School Desegregation 1968-1976," *American Sociological Review* 54 (1989).

[37] In 1970, 70% of blacks working in cities had manufacturing jobs; by 1987 industrial employment among black men fell to 28%. Alexander, *Jim Crow,* 50-51. During the subsequent period of economic growth in the 90s, 75% of job growth in service sector jobs (which by comparison with industrial labor is low wage, precarious, no benefits) went to blacks and Latinos**.** Spence, *Knocking the Hustle,* 17. Dawson points to the dramatic growth in inequality among blacks between 86-2007; in 2007 the top 5% of blacks receive 20% of income; bottom 20% receive 3% of income. Dawson, *Not in Our Lifetimes,* 122-3.

paving the way for the increasing influence of neoliberal reform strategies in black politics, including their embrace by black elites.

The strategy of direct contestation over neoliberal policy is best suited to those explicitly engaged in politics, such as policy makers, preachers, and those active in movements. But even ideologically inchoate conservative orientations leave room for potential political reorientation. I have argued that some actors support neoliberal policies as proximate solutions to immediate challenges without giving up their belief in the need for more universal solutions to inequality. Participants in school choice provisionally buy-in to choice reforms, while at the same time pointing to their failures, and holding out belief in a more inclusive system freed of racial prejudice. In his study of the urban drug crisis in 1970s New York, Michael Javen Fortner found a similar move from "liberal sentiments to conservative acts," among middle- and working-class blacks. While more affluent blacks sympathized with the urban poor and recognized the racial and economic causes of the urban crisis, their proximity to the crisis heightened its threat, and provoked their response. As drug related crime stymied movement and commerce in their neighborhoods, many African Americans sought to protect the gains of the Civil Rights era, and demanded a law enforcement response. Their mobilizations drew on black middle-class values, heavily influenced by the black church, that emphasize the personal responsibility of work and moral reform.[38] These mobilizations, Fortner argues, helped propel the Rockafeller crime policy reform of 1973, setting the precedent for a move from rehabilitation to containment-focused crime policy.

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[38] Fortner, *Black Silent Majority,* 158, 269.

The move right among supporters of punitive crime policy in 1970s New York is conditioned by their position in particular urban space, political traditions, and class hierarchy of the post-Civil Rights era. In bringing to light this political history, Fortner contributes to scholarly efforts, in which this dissertation takes part, to complicate narratives that attribute US neoliberalism neatly to the force of racial backlash,[39] or to the inexorable force of systemic economic change.

For many actors, alignment behind the new conservative mainstream does not take the form of a thorough ideological commitment, but a turn from liberal sentiments to conservative acts; a turn to spaces of family, community, and profession. Empowerment here can come through a politically engaged defense of one's social status, as in the case of African American's who have moved right, and mobilizations among evangelicals. A sense of empowerment can also come through basic acts of sociality, which, aided by circuits of media and consumption, link actors to wider social worlds.

In the context of the American political scene dominated by free-market ideologies, these parochial political orientations, which have salutary and sustaining effects for actors, also work to accommodate them to the prevailing social order of free-market conservatism. The growth of economic inequality in the last decades, felt most acutely by women and African Americans, has made parochial strategies of empowerment simultaneously more attractive, and more dangerous, for these oppressed groups.

[39] Fortner takes aim in particular at the most recent, and widely influential iteration of the racial backlash thesis, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow.* See Fortner, *Black Silent Majority,* 12-13.

Conservative orientations become more attractive as opportunities for solidaristic resistance recede from the horizon, as they did in the period treated here. The growth in inequality has had an atomizing effect across classes, as members of these groups splintered off from the more progressive identity-based movements of the previous generation. Contemporary feminism exemplifies this disintegration. Choice feminism provides the venue in which women adjust to the conservative mainstream. The ideological reorientation it signals is inexplicit; it does not articulate a stance toward markets or the state, and thus does not require actors to forego liberal-progressive identifications. Their alignment is one of passive consent to the dominant capitalist order, paired with investments in privatized publics as spaces of feminist affirmation.

Absent a cross-class movement based in identity-groups, or other forms of solidarity, it is not hard to see why individualist strategies to defend or better one's social position prevail. The consumption model of market-reform politics, exemplified in processes of school choice, is reinforced in privatized publics. Through their forms of recognition and choice, these publics provide the framework of connection and the promise of agency without the high demands of forging shared visions for change.

Conservative orientations are dangerous because they promise empowerment through the private power of individuals and communities, obscuring the role of the state in creating or mitigating conditions such as the feminization of poverty or the creation of a racialized underclass.

This dissertation has depicted the ease of uptake and salience of everyday conservatisms. I have attributed these features to the saturation of free-market conservative ideologies, and their immediate efficacy in offering affirmation and the

promise of agency. These ideologies also have fundamental weaknesses. Political ideologies work by filling a gap between the everyday realities of actors, and the prevailing political-economic formations that shape their lives. This gap –of ineffectuality, alienation, and a certain powerlessness –is a feature of social and political life that can never be finally overcome. But if, with time, ideologies fail to open practices and networks through which actors find responses to their needs, and outlets for their aspirations, this opens a space for meaning-making, and the formation of a new consciousness.

Today new movements such as *Occupy*, and *Black Lives Matter*, are providing idioms of resistance, calling out the role of state –as socio-economic infrastructure and police force –in maintaining the race-class order. Free-market conservatism is the affirmative self-consciousness of this order. To build an alternative consciousness, these movements must rework the idioms circulating in their shared ideological terrain, namely, the discourses surrounding everyday practices in churches, schools, and family. The rapid uptake and spread of their messages suggests they are doing just that. As the embrace of private freedom and individual choice is the first step in a turn towards markets and privatized publics, the insistence that "black lives matter," is the building block of rejection of the present political-economic order for too often failing to provide decent life-chances for people of color, and the call to build a more just one. Similarly, when millennials struggling with student debt and unemployment raise a claim against "the 1%," they hold up the valorization of individual merit and private initiative against the background of inherited positions of class subordination, the extremity of which has only grown in their generation.

Both of these movements have revived and transformed popular idioms of justice from generations past. In the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, the founders of *Black Lives Matter,* assaulted by the question "how do we live in a world that dehumanizes us and still be human?," drew on traditions of self-love and self-actualization taught by the black liberation movement to form a response. Founder Alicia Garza, on her own account, learned a "culture of solidarity" from her mother, taught through simple acts like looking fellow black people in the eye.[40] Idioms of resistance have persisted in the space of everyday consciousness, and today these movements are drawing on them to articulate a justice-oriented politics for the present.

[40] Mychal Denzel Smith, "A Q&A with Alicia Garza, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter," *The Nation,* March 24, 2015, http://www.thenation.com/article/qa-alicia-garza-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/.

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