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Russell Kirk's Column "To The Point:" Traditional Aspects of Conservatism

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Thomas Chesnutt Young
August 2004

Dr. Elwood Watson, Chair
Dr. Stephen Fritz
Dr. Colin Baxter

Keywords: Kirk, traditional conservative,
To The Point, Civil Rights, liberalism,
feminism,

ABSTRACT

Russell Kirk's Column "To The Point:" Traditional Aspects of Conservatism

by

Thomas Chesnutt Young

From 1962 to 1975, General Features Corporation distributed a column by traditional conservative Russell Kirk. The column appeared on the political page of newspapers across the country under the title "To The Point".¹ The column provided social commentary on a wide variety of topics ranging from foreign policy, to civil rights, to feminism. Papers that carried the column included *Los Angeles Times* (1962-early 1968), *New Orleans Time-Picayune* (late 1962-late 1971), *Detroit News* (early 1970-1975).² The research for this thesis included both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included articles housed at the Russell Kirk Center for Cultural Renewal, Mecosta, Michigan, the University of Tennessee library, and the Sherrod library at East Tennessee State University.

¹ Charles Brown , ed. *Russell Kirk: A Bibliography*. (Michigan: Central Michigan University, 1980) , 56.

² *Ibid.*, 56.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of
Tom Young and Tom Shelton,
a father and grandfather who's love for
history was passed on to me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of a thesis is intended to be one of the most significant undertakings faced by a scholar. The process that prepares one to write is, however, very collaborative. All the history professors at East Tennessee State University have played a role in preparing me to write my thesis. As an undergraduate and as his graduate assistant Dr. Jim Odom inspired me with his passion in the classroom. Dr. Melvin Page taught me the importance of respecting other cultures. Dr. Stephen Fritz demonstrated the importance of thoroughly knowing ones subject matter and not jumping to rash conclusions. Dr. Colin Baxter serving as my third reader provided me with a vital perspective on conservatism. If it were not for the guidance of Dr. Elwood Watson serving as my head reader this thesis never would have been completed. Through Dr. Watson I learned that all past history is worthy of documentation, not just wars and the lives of powerful men. A very special thanks must go to Annette Kirk, Lee Cheek and Charles Brown. Mrs. Kirk graciously allowed me access to copies of her late husband's column held at Kirk's library in Mecosta. The work done by Charles Brown at the library made my task there much less arduous. Dr. Cheek's guidance was instrumental in the development of this thesis. I would also like to thank my friends who have always been there to encourage me to follow my dreams. Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my mother and grandmother, who constantly remind me of my potential.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 1960s and 70s were a trying time in America due to social upheaval, and the ongoing cold war not to mention Vietnam. Conservative activist Russell Kirk was an individual who examined such issues. Throughout those decades liberals and conservatives were involved in an intense struggle to determine which would be the dominate voice of America. Twentieth century American liberals, advocating change, believed the federal government had a duty to improve the lives of all Americans. They felt that minorities and women had been denied the same opportunities afforded to affluent white men. Modern liberalism's campaign to enhance the livelihood of humanity was not limited solely to improving the lives of Americans. Liberalism believed Americans also had an obligation to improve the lives of all citizens throughout the world. Conservatives countered these views with a domestic policy centered on states rights and a foreign policy based on military dominance. Most conservatives believed all Americans had been given the opportunity to achieve the American dream. Furthermore, in their opinion, it was not within the federal government's power under the traditional interpretation of the constitution to rectify such inequalities if they did exist. Conservatives maintained that liberals had misinterpreted the term "all men are created equal" from the Declaration of Independence. This phrase was one of the reasons for the liberal belief that the federal government had an obligation to aid minorities in their quest for equality. Conservatives argued that the term "equality" as used in the Declaration of Independence, referred to in the eyes of the Creator.

Russell Kirk maintained equality of condition was not possible. He stated “Inequality is the natural condition of human beings; charity may assist those not favored by nature; but attempts to impose an artificial equality of condition and intellect, although in the long run they fail, meanwhile can work great mischief in any society, and still worse, damage human nature itself.”³ Kirk’s condemnation of liberalism was not limited to their views on social issues. He also disagreed with liberalism’s view on America’s role in foreign affairs. Like many other conservatives Kirk was concerned with the liberal goal to improve the lives of every citizen of the world. Such an idea was too utopian for a practical man like Kirk. Many conservative Americans viewed the catastrophe in Vietnam as liberal failure. From 1962 to 1975 Kirk addressed these issues as well as others in his “To The Point” column.⁴

In the 1960s the debate over America’s role in the international community intensified. Liberals felt America had an obligation to help third world countries emerging from colonial rule. They wanted to ensure a decent standard of living for citizens of these countries. Liberals wanted protection measures instituted that would prevent foreign corporations from stealing these nation’s assets. Conservatives, on the other hand, felt that American foreign policy should be directed towards promoting American interests, particularly those of American corporations. These contrasting views over the role of foreign policy led to heated debates between liberals and conservatives.

American role in third world countries was not the only area of foreign relations where liberals and conservatives clashed. Ideologically the two camps disagreed on the handling of the Cold War. Liberals differentiated from communists and socialists;

³ Russell Kirk, *Redeeming the Time*, (Willington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996) , 226.

⁴ Charles Brown, com., *Russell Kirk: A Bibliography* (Central Michigan University, 1981) , 56.

however, as a rule, conservatives did not. This difference in opinion affected how each viewed other nations. Conservatives thought liberals showed too much weakness in their policy dealing with the Soviet Union and China. They felt this weakness might allow communism the opportunity to spread across the world. Liberals considered conservatives' attitude towards foreign policy to be unyielding. They feared the conservative approach would cause the cold war to escalate into a real conflict between the major world powers.

Foreign policy was not the only issue that divided America in the 1960s and 70s. There was also considerable division over domestic issues. The civil rights movement that had emerged during the 1950s was at full force. The C.R. movement sought equality for African Americans. Activist liberals were labeled as radicals by some conservative antagonists. Conservatives trying to walk a thin line between adherence to tradition and racism questioned the objectives of the movement. All too often, many "conservatives" refused to recognize the federal government's responsibility to African Americans. Conservatives did not want to address issues like the disparity between schools attended by African Americans and whites in the south. They felt such issues should be handled on the state level and local level.

Education was not the only aspect of the Civil Rights movement that disturbed some conservatives. Concern grew as colleges began to take race into consideration when they accepted incoming students. The demands of Civil Rights supporters did not end with a call for equal opportunity in education. They expected to be afforded the same opportunity after graduating college as their white colleagues. These demands were answered through what became known as affirmative action. Conservatives were very

concerned with how affirmative action would affect society and the view that the Constitution was “color-blind”. They generally argued that it would encourage mediocrity among minorities. Liberals, on the other hand, argued that affirmative action only gave minorities the opportunity to prove what they were capable of.

The Civil Rights movement was not the sole social movement to anger conservatives in the 1960s and 70s. The goals of feminists also worried many conservatives. They feared the social changes feminists were calling for would destroy the nuclear family. The members of the feminist movement consisted of a diverse group of citizens. Their goals ranged from gaining easier access to birth control to equal opportunity in the job market. Within the movement itself there was controversy over what its primary goals should be. The rift essentially divided members along class lines. The majority of middle and upper-class women dedicated their efforts to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. These professional women hoped the passage of the amendment would help them advance in their chosen profession. Working class women and minorities feared how the ERA would be used if passed. Their belief was that the amendment might benefit their employers more than it did them. In their opinion the primary objective of feminists should be to gain birth control rights. In their view, it was untimely pregnancies that had prevented women from advancing in society. Women of the lower classes felt that until this disadvantage was addressed, there was no way for women to gain equality. Conservatives took a strong stance against all feminist demands. Many conservatives saw these demands as being immoral and counterproductive for the survival of the traditional American family.

In the following chapters, all the aforementioned issues will be addressed as seen through the eyes of Russell Kirk's column "To The Point." Kirk, a founding member of the traditionalist strand of the conservative movement was one of its most eloquent writers. Traditionalism is the belief in adherence to customs and traditions. Followers of this movement believed society risked certain doom when it departed from established edicts. Kirk used his column to disseminate the views of the conservative movement in the 1960s and 1970s. During the 1940s and 50s Kirk had concentrated his writing efforts on gaining support for conservatism from intellectuals. His effort helped conservatism make inroads into academia which had long been viewed as a citadel of liberalism. Starting in 1962, Kirk, expanded his reading audience. From 1962 to 1975 ordinary Americans were able to find Kirk's words of wisdom on the political pages of several newspapers. Kirk used this new forum to address issues from a "conservative" perspective.

Foreign Policy

Kirk's assessments on American foreign policy were a recurring subject throughout the run of *To The Point*. Due to the volume of articles the author has limited the analysis of Kirk's comments on American foreign policy to a case study of five nations. The nations discussed are the Congo, South Africa, the Soviet Union, China, and Vietnam. By looking at these particular nations one can gain a full understanding of Kirk's critique of the achievements and limitations of American foreign policy.

The Congo was chosen for two reasons. First, it was primarily dealt with through the United Nations and provides Kirk's perception of that organization. Secondly, Kirk's outlook on the Congo was strongly tied to his impression of African nationalism. South Africa was chosen due to the similarity in racial tension there and in the United States. No study of mid 20th century American foreign policy would be complete without looking at America's experience in Vietnam. The Soviet Union and China were chosen due to their participation in the Cold War and how that influenced America's actions in these other countries.

In the 1950s and 60s many African states gained their freedom from colonial rule.⁵ One of the key problems for the citizens of these new nations was determining what form of government should be established. The Western powers, led by the United States, pushed for democratic governments. The Soviet Union encouraged these new states to establish Communist forms of government. The crisis in the Congo in the early 1960s is a perfect example of how emerging nations in Africa were affected by the Cold War. The

⁵ Melvin E. Page. "The Congo Crisis: International Peacekeeping After World War II." In *Discovering The Global Past: A Look at the Evidence*. Vol. II, ed. Merry E. Wiesner, et. al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), Chap 13, 374.

Congo was a very controversial issue in the early 1960s and one Kirk commented on several times in his column.

During a Round Table Conference on January 27, 1960, the Belgian government agreed to grant the people of the Congo self rule.⁶ Less than six months after this conference the Congolese people established their own government. On June 30, 1960, the Belgian government turned over control of the Congo to the Union Nationale Congolese (U.N.C.). The U.N.C. government was headed by Joseph Kasavubu as President, and Patrice Lumumba as Prime Minister.

The primary power within the U.N.C. rested in the hands of Lumumba. As Prime Minister he had the responsibility of directing the policies of the new government. The office of President in the U.N.C. was designed to be above the everyday politics involved in policy making. The Presidency, however, was not a powerless position. If Kasavubu felt that Lumumba's government had lost control of the country, he had the power to remove Lumumba's party and install a new government. Kasavubu eventually took this action on August 5, 1960, partly due to pressures put on him by the United States and other Western powers.⁷

The U.N.C. faced many tribulations in establishing an effective government. One of the primary problems resulted from the Belgian policy of only using Europeans in administrative positions.⁸ This made it very hard for the U.N.C. to place Congolese in leadership positions within the civil service. When Congolese civil servants were given promotions it meant little more than a raise in pay. The Belgian administrators who had

⁶ Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence: January 1960 – December 1961* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁸ King Gordon, *U.N. In The Congo: A Quest For Peace*. (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1962), 13.

agreed to stay on after independence were still in charge of their old departments.⁹

Another problem resulted from the socialist programs of the new government. Such programs were a natural extension of African tribal tradition. In fact, many of them had been instituted during colonial rule by the ruling authorities due to this very fact. Despite these facts, many Westerners perceived any type of socialist program as being communist influenced. This belief led the Western powers to seek the removal of Lumumba from power because they assumed he had communist affiliations. In reality, Lumumba was a nationalist who only wanted the Congo to be granted self rule without any outside interference.¹⁰

The Congolese soldiers, unlike their civilian counterparts, were given little hope of advancement under the new government. The Force Publique was Belgian Congo's army and national police force. During Belgian rule Congolese soldiers were not allowed to advance beyond the rank of sergeant.¹¹ After independence, Lumumba chose not to Africanize the command of the Force Publique.¹² The Congolese soldiers resented this decision. They thought it was time to turn the leadership of the Force Publique over to Congolese officers.

The prospect of languishing in a force without any chance of advancement led Congolese soldiers to rebel against their Belgian officers on July 5, 1960.¹³ Some of the soldiers began to take their frustration out on the European population of the Congo. Lumumba was able to restore some order by the evening of July 8, but not before

⁹ Hoskyns, 82.

¹⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹¹ Page, 376.

¹² Hoskyns, 87.

¹³ Gordon, 13.

permanent damage had been done to the U.N.C.¹⁴ Lumumba had only been able to restore order after agreeing to meet the demands of Congolese soldiers. The principal demand of the soldiers was the Africanization of the command of the Force Publique.¹⁵

The decision to meet the demands of the rebellion soldiers angered many Western leaders. They were not confident Congolese officers had the ability to maintain order in the Congo. Some in the West claimed this was proof that Lumumba had no real desire to protect Western business interests in the Congo. Many Western leaders felt Lumumba's government was being influenced by the Soviet Union. It is true Lumumba had been involved in negotiations with the Soviets for assistance; however, he never agreed to turn the Congo into a Communist state in return for that assistance.

The western European lack of trust in Lumumba's ability to control the situation led to Belgian troops being sent to the Congo to help restore order. At first, Lumumba resisted this help but eventually agreed to take the military aid from Belgium.¹⁶ On July 10, 1960, Belgian troops began to restore order throughout the Congo. The landing of Belgian troops in the Congo was met with mixed reactions. The European population was glad to see the Belgian troops; however, many Congolese feared their presence spelled the end of Congolese independence. One Congolese who supported the Belgian intervention was Moïse Tshombe.¹⁷ As the provincial president of Katanga, Tshombe asked for military assistance from Belgium to restore order in his province. On July 11,

¹⁴ Kalb, 5.

¹⁵ Hoskyns, 91.

¹⁶ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷ Kalb, 6.

after Belgian troops had restored order in Elizabethville, the capital city of Katanga, Tshombe declared Katanga's independence.¹⁸

The secession of Katanga sent shock waves throughout the Congo. Katanga's independence was catastrophic because the resources in the region were the primary source of income for the U.N.C. The leadership of the U.N.C. had feared Belgium would find a way to retain control of Katanga. Now it seemed these fears were going to be realized. Lumumba, as well others in the Congo, alleged the Belgians intended to steal the Congo's richest province. The leadership of the U.N.C. assumed Tshombe was acting as a pawn of the Belgian government when he declared Katanga's independence.

Prior to Katanga's secession the U.N.C. had appealed to the United Nations for assistance. The Katanga situation complicated matters because Article 2 of the United Nations charter prohibited the organization from intervening in matters that involved domestic jurisdiction or sovereignty. If a foreign power had tried to invade Katanga, the United Nations reaction would most certainly have been to help the Congolese regain control of the province. In the Katanga situation the foreign force was there due to the request of Tshombe, the duly elected leader.¹⁹ If the citizens of Katanga supported Tshombe the United Nations had no authority to intervene. Lumumba, however expected the United Nations to aid his country in regaining control of Katanga. When the United Nations failed to act quickly on the matter, Lumumba began to search for other ways to regain control of the rebellious province.

To determine if Katanga's independence was indeed supported by the native population, the United Nations called for the removal of all Europeans serving in

¹⁸ Hoskyns, 97.

¹⁹ Ibid., 96.

Katanga's military. Tshombe had established a large mercenary force which he claimed was to maintain order and guard against attacks from the U.N.C. Tshombe refused to meet the U.N. demands because he thought their real goal was to turn Katanga back over to the U.N.C. Kirk agreed with Tshombe's assessment of U.N. goals in Katanga. Kirk's article on September 21, 1960, questioned the U.N. policy on Katanga. Kirk pointed out that if any single western power had tried to force Katanga to rejoin the U.N.C. it would have been seen as imperialism.²⁰

On December 17, 1962, in a column titled "U.N. Pullout Would Be Ideal Gift for Katanga," Kirk commented on the ongoing U.N. involvement in the Congo. The central concern of the article was the U.N. attempt to get Katanga to rejoin the U.N.C. According to Kirk the United Nations had no authority to dictate anything to the citizens of Katanga. To counter the U.N. complaint about Tshombe's use of mercenaries, Kirk pointed out the U.N. itself was using Gurkha troops who fought for hire.²¹ Kirk's reference to the use of Gurkhas troops overlooked the U.N. primary complaint about the mercenaries in Katanga. The United Nations did not believe the mercenaries in Katanga were there to protect the native population. They understood the mercenaries were there primarily to protect Western business interests in the region. There was general public acknowledgement about who was paying the Gurkha soldiers, but it was not clear who was bankrolling Tshombe's mercenaries.

Kirk and Tshombe were right in their assessment of the United Nations intention to return Katanga to the U.N.C. The U.N. believed the income provided from Katanga's

²⁰ Russell Kirk, "U.S. Policy on Africa May Be due for Change" *To The Point, Los Angeles Times*, 21 September 1962.

²¹ Russell Kirk, "U.N. Pullout Would Be Ideal Gift For Katanga" *To The Point, Los Angeles Times*, 17 December 1962.

mines were necessary for the survival of the U.N.C. Kirk did not believe returning Katanga to the U.N.C. would solve the country's problems.²² The best thing for the Congo, in his opinion, would be the removal of all United Nations personnel. Once they were out of the picture the Congolese might be able to reach an agreement that would benefit all the people of the region. It was Kirk's contention that the best thing for the Congo to do was to form a loose confederation that did not have an all powerful central government.²³ There was two primary reasons why Kirk advocated this solution. The first was his distrust of a strong federal government. The second was his doubt in the ability of Africans from different provinces being able to work out their differences.²⁴ In his view, Africans were very capable of working out their own problems only when they determined the boundaries of their states. Conflicts arose, however, when state boundaries were artificial creations of outside powers like the U.N.

The idea of a loose confederation was consistent with Kirk's views concerning states rights in the United States. According to Kirk, the founding fathers had never intended for the federal government to have unlimited power over the states. One of the things that led Kirk to take up the conservative cause was the growing power of the federal government. Taking into consideration Kirk's opinion on states rights, it was only natural for him to take the side of a man like Tshombe who he assumed was fighting for the rights of his region.

Kirk's support of Tshombe was not only due to his belief in states rights. One of the main reasons Kirk supported Tshombe was because he was not an African nationalist. Kirk thought African nationalists were driven by an anti-western and anti-business

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

ideology. Kirk maintained Tshombe was capable of establishing the kind of order necessary to protect Western interests in Katanga. Kirk was not alone in his support of Tshombe. *National Review* founder William F. Buckley also supported Tshombe's efforts in Katanga.²⁵ It was through the eyes of Kirk and Buckley that many Americans came to know Moise Tshombe.

In 1962 the Kennedy administration did not agree with Kirk's assessment of Tshombe. They felt it was in America's interests to support the United Nations policy in the Congo. Kirk viewed the Kennedy administration's support of the United Nations action in the Congo as a foreign policy blunder. Kirk maintained the Kennedy administration was being inconsistent in its foreign policy. In his estimation the Kennedy's administration had been more summary in its demands to Tshombe than with Castro.²⁶ Kirk, like many other Americans of his time, viewed communist Cuba as a very real threat to American freedom. He found it strange that the President of the United States was trying to remove a capitalist like Tshombe while allowing Castro to stay in power. In Kirk's opinion, America's primary foreign policy goal should have been to stop the spread of communism. In this fight he maintained America should first secure its own borders before taking the fight to the continent of Africa.

Kirk used the U.N. involvement in the Congo as an example of how ineffective the organization was as a peace keeping force.²⁷ In Kirk's opinion, the United Nations forces had hindered the peace process in the Congo instead of helping it. The December 31, 1963, "To the Point" column summed up the past years failure of the United Nations

²⁵ Stephen R. Wessman, *American Foreign Policy in the Congo: 1960-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 168.

²⁶ Russell Kirk, "U.N. Pullout Would Be Ideal Gift for Katanga."

²⁷ Russell Kirk, "Should a U.N. 'Police Force' Patrol World?" *To The Point*, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 December 1962.

to be able to bring peace to the world. Under the title “U.N. Peace Machinery Won’t Handle the Job,” Kirk described different conflicts that were currently occurring throughout the world. Kirk understood it was unrealistic to expect the United Nations to be able to handle the entire world’s problems. Kirk felt one of the primary reasons the United Nations had been unable to be more effective was due to the growing power of the Afro-Asian bloc. Because of this growing power within the United Nations, Kirk maintained the only real hope for world peace would come through a sounder American foreign policy, not the U.N.

While there were mistakes made by United Nations officials in the Congo, the organization’s mission there should not be seen as a failure. Kirk acknowledged too much had been expected of the United Nations regarding its ability to maintain peace.²⁸ The Congo operation was the largest that the United Nations had undertaken up to that time. The United Nations did not have the proper resources needed to finance such a large operation. The organization also had not been given the proper authority to deal with the problems they faced in the Congo. Many of the difficulties faced by the United Nations were due to the ongoing Cold War. If the Western powers and the Soviet bloc had been truly supportive, the situation could have been resolved much sooner than it was. In spite of its limited authority and funding, the United Nations did everything it could to bring peace to the Congo. Eventually pressure from the United States and the United Nations

²⁸ Russell Kirk, “U.N. Peace Machinery Won’t Handle the Job,” *To The Point*, Los Angeles Times, 31, 1963.

forced Katanga to rejoin the U.N.C. in January of 1963.²⁹ Kirk considered American involvement in the Congo as being no different than European colonialism.³⁰

Kirk argued that America's involvement in the United Nations was partly to blame for Kennedy's policies toward Africa. Kirk had never been a supporter of America's involvement in the United Nations. In fact, he had grown more and more critical of the United Nations. This was due in part to the dwindling influence of the U.S. over the organization. In recent years American influence in the organization had decreased. In Kirk's estimation, the Soviet and Afro-Asian blocs were responsible for this loss in power. He feared the United Nations would become even more irresponsible if the Afro-Asian bloc's demand for a seat on the Security Council were met.³¹ Kirk maintained the United States assistance in ending Katanga's independence had been done out of a desire to appease the Afro-Asian bloc. He resented America having to make concessions in order to retain control over the General Assembly of the United Nations.

The very principles the United Nations were founded on went against everything Kirk believed in. In his opinion, the United Nations was a liberal creation founded on the belief that humanity can improve upon the civilization established by past generations. The organization also held that all nations should be able to meet as equals and work out their differences through compromise. In the Congo, the Western powers went along with the demands of the Afro-Asian bloc and Soviet Union to remove Tshombe from power. According to Kirk, the United States always came out the loser when it conceded to such

²⁹ Weissman, 191.

³⁰ Russell Kirk, "American Intention in Africa Adventure," *To The Point, Los Angeles Times*, 26 February 1963.

³¹ Russell Kirk, "U.N. Peace Machinery Won't Handle the Job."

demands.³² Kirk alleged that by allowing the United Nations to remove Tshombe from power America was betraying their best supporter in the region.

Kirk's support of Tshombe seemingly was vindicated in July of 1964, when Tshombe became the Prime Minister of the Congo. By 1964, the Johnson administration had come to share Kirk's and Buckley's view of Tshombe. Despite the fear of angering other African leaders, the Johnson administration backed Tshombe's bid for Prime Minister. Tshombe was the third person to hold the office of Prime Minister. Lumumba had been removed from office primarily due to his behavior surrounding the Katanga crisis. In November 1960 U.N.C. forces had arrested Lumumba. To prevent his supporters from freeing him Lumumba had been transferred to Katanga. Sometime between his arrival in Katanga on January 17, 1961, and February 6, Lumumba was killed.³³ In August of 1961, Cyrille Adoula was appointed Prime Minister of the U.N.C. Adoula's inability to restore order to the Congo led to Tshombe's rise to power. Tshombe was able to obtain the position of Prime Minister due to his popularity among certain segments of the Congolese population and his pro-western ideology. The problems in the Congo did not end after Tshombe became president. After 1964, America began to decrease its involvement in the Congo. Kirk viewed this change in foreign policy as an improvement and far sounder than Americas' previous policies in the region.³⁴

One of the first crises Tshombe faced as Prime Minister was the siege of Stanleyville. The Congo city Stanleyville had been taken over by rebels on August 4,

³² Russell Kirk, "No Room in the Congo for Soviet Accommodation" *To The Point*, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1964.

³³ Hoskyns, 316.

³⁴ Russell Kirk, "Cheerfulness Breaks Into The Congo," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, 4 May 1965.

1964.³⁵ The rebels arrested approximately 300 Belgians and Americans. The rebels hoped to use the hostages as leverage to get the American and Belgian governments to withdraw their support of Prime Minister Tshombe. These Western powers had supported Tshombe's rise to power. Many Africans still assumed Tshombe was a stooge of the West who cared more about Western business interests than he did his own people.

Kirk interpreted the Johnson administration's reaction to the Stanleyville siege as a departure from earlier American policy in the region. Prior to the siege, Kirk thought the American objective in the Congo had been to appease the demands of African Nationalists. The means used to rescue the Western prisoners being held in Stanleyville departed from this policy. The American government supported Tshombe's use of mercenaries in Stanleyville. These were the same mercenaries whose presence had upset America and the United Nations during Katanga's struggle for independence.³⁶ Now they were going to be used by the U.N.C. to regain control of Stanleyville. The mercenaries were to serve as a spearhead for the Congolese military. On November 24, 1964, columns of mercenaries fought their way into Stanleyville.³⁷ In addition to the mercenary ground forces, Belgian paratroopers were used in the attack. The Belgian paratroopers were able to evacuate 1,600 Europeans. Only 27 of the Europeans who had been taken prisoner were killed during the liberation of Stanleyville.³⁸

Tshombe success in dealing with the Stanleyville crisis was praised by Kirk. The use of white professional soldiers to lead Congolese military units had been validated by this victory in Kirk's eyes. The native populations in his view were so undisciplined they

³⁵ 237.

³⁶ Russell Kirk, "Tshombe Proves Best Leader Against Reds," *To The Point, Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1964.

³⁷ Wessman., 247.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

could not be an effective military force.³⁹ If not for the aid of white mercenaries, the rescue at Stanleyville would have been a disaster in Kirk estimation. While it is true that the Congolese soldiers had a problem with discipline, it was not a problem without the potential of resolution. Congolese soldiers had received little or no leadership training prior to independence. Since independence, they had faced one crisis after another and had little time to organize into an effective fighting force. To further complicate matters, the soldiers were not always paid on time. Taking all this into consideration, it is remarkable the Congolese soldiers had any discipline at all.

Tshombe's action in Stanleyville was wakeup call for African nationalists throughout Africa.⁴⁰ He proved that there were still African leaders who desired a relationship with the West. This was a great relief to many in the west who had grown tired of advocates of African nationalism. Many feared African nationalists desired a revolution that would drive all Westerners from the African continent. Kirk's disdain for African nationalism was not only a result of his belief that they desired to relinquish all ties with the West. Kirk's type of conservatism was based on the belief that revolutions were evil endeavors that were led by liberals who had no respect for tradition. Liberals attacked Kirk for this belief because they maintained America was founded on the revolutionary spirit. The American Revolution was different from the ones being fought in the current age in Kirk's opinion. Unlike his liberal counterparts, Kirk did not believe the American Revolution was fought to change the existing social order. According to Kirk, unlike current revolutions, the one in America was not fought to gain new liberties

³⁹ Russell Kirk, "Tshombe Proves Best Leader Against Reds,"

⁴⁰ Ibid.,

but to retain established ones.⁴¹ In Kirk's view, the American Revolution had been led by conservative minded men who were disturbed by the changes in their relationship with England.

In the end, Kirk's view of African nationalism determined his perception of the Congo crises. Like many other conservatives, Kirk was leery of African nationalism. He was a member of the generation that had seen nationalism turn the world upside down. Nationalism in Europe had been a contributing factor in two world wars. While Kirk was a man who dearly loved his country, he was not the type of man to fall under the spell of an ideology like nationalism. Kirk thought nationalism was the greatest danger facing emerging African States.⁴² African nationalism was particularly menacing to Kirk due to his belief that it was based in communism. Many conservatives assumed that all African nationalists wanted to undermine American business interests in Africa. After they had forced Westerners out of Africa, these African nationalists would enlist the aid of communists in the Soviet Union and China. The resources of Africa would be used to help with the spread of communism around the globe. This belief dictated how many conservatives viewed the emerging countries in Africa.

Conservatives were right in their assessment of Soviet and Chinese aspirations in Africa. Both powers desired to establish a foothold in Africa during decolonization. Their attempts to convert Africans to communism were not very successful. The communist powers realized their desires were unachievable due to how Africans approached communism. For communism to work effectively, members must place more importance

⁴¹ Russell Kirk, "Revolution, or War of Independence," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, 3 July, 1971.

⁴² Russell Kirk, "Disintegration by Nationalism" *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, 8 June 1967.

on their communist beliefs than they do on their nationality. The Soviets soon learned that they could not trust Africans to be communists first and Africans second.⁴³ African nationalists were willing to take any aid the Communists were willing to give, but they had no intention of trading capitalist masters for communist ones.

African nationalist's willingness to take communist aid was not the only thing that caused many Westerners to accuse them of being communist. The emerging African states instituted social programs to provide for their impoverished populations. Many American conservatives saw little difference in these socialist programs and communism. Kirk had not supported the social programs instituted in his own country by the federal government. Kirk understood our founding fathers never intended for the federal government to have the power to intervene in social issues. In Kirk's opinion, such issues should be handled on a community level without aid or interference from the federal government.

The Congo was not the only African nation to be a subject of Kirk's *To The Point* commentaries. The Republic of South Africa was also a recurring topic in the column. Kirk defended the Apartheid government of South Africa more than once in his writings. It was his belief that South Africa was being treated unfairly by the international community.⁴⁴ In his opinion, the international community had no provocation to impose sanctions against South Africa for its policy of apartheid.

Kirk wrote several articles on South Africa but none of them did a better job in demonstrating his observations on the country than one titled "*Fair Play For South Africa.*" Kirk informed his readers that the white population of South Africa had been

⁴³ Weissman, 281.

⁴⁴ Russell Kirk, "Fair Play For South Africa," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, 27 November 1964.

living there as long as English-speaking people had been living in North America. The arrival date of whites in South Africa was very important to Kirk's defense of their government. Kirk was tying the legitimacy of white citizenship in South Africa with the legitimacy of white citizenship in the United States. If one group's citizenship was legitimate than the others must be as well. By establishing this point Kirk was countering the charge that South Africa was a quasi-colony. Critics of South Africa's government maintained that as long as blacks in the country were denied the right to vote, the situation there was no different than colonial rule. Kirk thought it was in the best interest of all South Africans for voting rights to be limited to the white population for the time being. He maintained tribal loyalty would prevent blacks from making educated decisions in choosing their elected officials.⁴⁵

Kirk wanted his readers to see the similarity between their own situation and the one faced by whites in South Africa. Many people in America alleged the Civil Rights movement was destroying traditional American values. It was during this time that African-Americans were finally seeing some success in their fight for equality. 1964 was a particularly important year due to the passing of the Civil Rights Bill by President Johnson with assistance from Republicans in the U.S. Senate.⁴⁶ Kirk, like many Americans, maintained the bill was unconstitutional and felt the federal government was abusing its authority. Kirk's article on fair treatment for South Africa was published a few months after the passing of the Civil Rights bill and there is little doubt it influenced his writing. In Kirk's analysis, it would be a catastrophe for the free world if apartheid

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 377 U.S. (1964.)

was abolished in South Africa.⁴⁷ Kirk also thought the Civil Rights Act had the potential to damage American society, an assessment that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In defense of the South African government's treatment of its black population, Kirk made the argument that blacks in South Africa were happy and content. Kirk maintained black South Africans enjoyed better pay than their counterparts in other African countries. Kirk pointed out that not a single black South African had ever been lynched.⁴⁸ This statement was probably intended to sway readers to believe South Africans had a better record on race relations than the United States where many lynching had occurred. It is not important whether Kirk was accurate in his assessment of South Africa's treatment of its black population. Kirk's primary argument rested in the fact that he believed America should first deal with its own race problems before casting judgment on other countries.

Kirk voiced his concern over liberal demands for the international community to place economic sanctions on South Africa. He assumed that if these demands were met it would destroy the lives of both the white and black South African population. The meddling in South Africa was done to appease leaders of emerging African nations according to Kirk. In his opinion, American foreign policy should not bend to the demands of the leaders in these emerging countries or their misguided liberal supporters in the West.

Kirk understood many people would interpret his outlook on South Africa as being racist. In an attempt to dispel such charges he provided his reasoning for his analysis. Kirk admitted there was a need in South Africa for improved race relations. In

⁴⁷ Russell Kirk, "Fair Play For South Africa.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Kirk's opinion, no authority could change the way ethnic groups interacted with each other. Kirk thought the only way to solve South Africa's racial problems was to allow its citizens to work them out on their own without any outside interference. Kirk maintained that attempts to force change would only result in provoking resentment that might lead to outbreaks of violence.⁴⁹

The opinions Kirk expressed on the Congo and South Africa were consistent with those held by most other conservatives; however, this was not the case with Vietnam. The war in Vietnam was a topic of concern for many Americans and one Kirk commented on in his column. Due to this fact, his analysis of American involvement in Vietnam is particularly important for anyone studying conservatism. In the current age, we are too quick to label a person conservative or liberal due to a particular view on a subject. Kirk's observations on Vietnam were a perfect example of the diversity of views held by conservatives of that time period. Contemporary scholars of conservative thought have neglected to include Kirk's insight in their study of conservative reactions to the Vietnam War.

Kirk was neither a hawk nor a dove; instead, he was a pragmatic man who realized the importance of diplomacy as well as the necessity of a strong military. In a 1965 column, Kirk blamed America's involvement in Vietnam on failed diplomacy.⁵⁰ Due to that failure, Kirk alleged America had to commit itself to solving the crisis through military intervention. In 1965, Kirk thought America could not withdraw from Vietnam without doing permanent damage to its reputation.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Russell Kirk, "Morgenthau vs. Bundy," *To The Point*, General Features Coporation, 28 June 1965.

⁵¹ Ibid.

By 1968, Kirk started to question American bombing policies in Vietnam. Kirk understood American bombs were destroying the cultural landmarks of South Vietnam. Kirk was not in agreement with other conservatives who supported bombing America's enemy into oblivion. Kirk felt historical sites were sacred whether they were a cathedral in Italy or a Buddhist temple in South Vietnam. During wars Kirk thought such sites should be fire free zones so these ancient monuments could be preserved for future generations. Kirk suggested if enemy personnel occupied such sites, ground forces should surround the site and starve the enemy out.⁵² Kirk assumed this policy would preserve Vietnam's cultural identity while at the same time proving to the people of South Vietnam Americans truly cared about their country. The effectiveness of such a plan was not important, but what was significant was Kirk's desire to protect South Vietnam's historical sites. Kirk, unlike other conservatives who were calling for heavier bombing to win the war, was saying "let's not destroy the people we came here to protect."⁵³ He understood that a nation and culture were more than mere political structures.

In March of 1973 Kirk started a series of articles titled "*Mr. Nixon's Promised Peace: Its Prospects*" discussing President Nixon's peace plan. The five part series provides an interesting insight into Nixon's foreign policy. In reviewing Nixon's policies Kirk provides us not only with his outlook on what has become known as "The American Century," but also some interesting examples of how Kirk's conservative beliefs differed from those held by other conservatives.

The first installment of the series stated Nixon's desire to bring peace to Vietnam and to provide the world with an enduring peace. Kirk was not an idealist who assumed

⁵² Russell Kirk, "Salvation By Destruction," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, 13 March 1968.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

America had the ability to end wars forever, but he did believe that with a prudent foreign policy America was capable of preventing another world war. Kirk viewed Nixon's plan as a departure from the liberal foreign policy of his predecessors.⁵⁴ According to Kirk, every president dating back to F.D.R. had a liberal foreign policy, even President Eisenhower. In Kirk's opinion, these administrations wanted to establish an American style government in every nation of the world.

On January 27, 1973, Nixon signed a peace pact with North Vietnam.⁵⁵ Under the terms of the pact, all United States military personnel were to be withdrawn in sixty days. The agreement also called for the ending of hostility between North and South Vietnam. The Nixon administration's main objective in the peace plan was to get America out of Vietnam without admitting defeat. Kirk was convinced that Nixon's peace plan had not only facilitated that but also allowed America to obtain peace with honor.⁵⁶ Kirk's goals for America in Vietnam were not identical to those held by other conservatives. Kirk believed that America's goals in the region were limited and did not require unconditional surrender by the North. In Kirk's opinion, such a goal in any war amounted to poor policy and was inhuman.⁵⁷

Kirk had faith in South Vietnam's ability to remain independent of North Vietnam after America withdrew her troops. Kirk was confident peace could be maintained in Vietnam due to Nixon's plan to offer economic aid packages to the governments in both the North and South.⁵⁸ These aid packages were given on the

⁵⁴ Russell Kirk, "Richard Nixon As Peacemaker." General Features Corporation, 25 March 1973.

⁵⁵ James Olson and Randy Roberts. *Where the Domino Fell: America and Vietnam 1945 to 1995* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 251.

⁵⁶ Russell Kirk, "Richard Nixon As Peacemaker."

⁵⁷ Russell Kirk, "The Diplomacy of Realism." General Features Corporation, 25 March 1973.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*,

condition neither side resumed hostilities. The side that chose to return to fighting would have their aid cut off. Kirk felt Nixon's plan hinged on China and the Soviet Union agreeing not to support North Vietnam's military objectives.

Kirk's concerns over American foreign policy were not limited to American involvement in third world countries. Kirk was concerned with America's involvement in the Cold War. In 1973 Kirk feared the world that author George Orwell described in his classic novel, 1984, was coming closer and closer to being a reality.⁵⁹ In Kirk's opinion, America was the only country able to prevent the endless wars described in Orwell's book. Kirk believed America should use its economic and military resources to maintain peace.⁶⁰ In Kirk's estimation the United States was the primary power in the world, while China and the Soviet Union were the next two most powerful nations. Kirk stated that in order to obtain world peace it would be necessary for the United States to negotiate with these two powers. World peace depended on their support and without it there was little hope for lasting peace. Kirk's estimation of Orwell's vision becoming a reality was not an uncommon belief for a conservative writer to have. The part that is unusual is a conservative voice supporting negotiating with communist powers.⁶¹ Kirk once again proved he was a voice of reason within the conservative movement.

Kirk assumed the time was right for negotiating with the Communist powers because America was no longer their primary enemy. In Kirk's assessment, the Soviets and Chinese saw each other as more a threat than they did the United States.⁶² Because the balance of power rested with the United States, neither the Soviet Union nor China

⁵⁹ Russell Kirk, "Mr. Nixon, The Bear, And The Dragon," General Features Corporation, 25 March 1973.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Russell Kirk, "Mr. Nixon, The Bear, And The Dragon.

⁶² Ibid.

could afford to go to war with the other without first knowing what America would do. Kirk thought America could use this situation to gain Chinese and Soviet support in establishing a lasting peace.

Kirk asserted that America should use every resource it possessed to maintain world peace. One such resource was American wheat. China and the Soviet Union both desired access to American wheat which they needed to feed their growing populations.⁶³ Kirk understood these countries dependence on American wheat would make them less likely to be willing to get involved in a confrontation with the United States. Kirk maintained this dependence would allow America the maneuvering room necessary to honor her treaties. China could not interfere with America's support of Taiwan, nor could Russia interfere with America's support of Israel.⁶⁴

A vibrant economy was not America's only advantage over the other superpowers. Kirk believed America had a military advantage over the other two superpowers. Kirk's confidence in the American military was partly due to the fact that it was made up entirely of volunteers. Kirk was a strong supporter of a volunteer military dating back to his own service in the Army during World War II. Kirk held that America's volunteer soldiers would be better prepared for war than the conscript soldiers of the past. Kirk envisioned this new fighting force as being highly disciplined, admirably equipped, and mobile.⁶⁵ Kirk was particularly concerned with America maintaining a strong navy. He understood it was the British Navy that had allowed England to preserve her position as the primary power during the previous century.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Russell Kirk, "Practical Tactics For Peacekeeping," General Features Corporation, 25 March 1973.

Kirk's support of a strong military does not mean he saw eye to eye with other conservatives on all national defense issues. His revelations on the arms race were somewhat unusual for a conservative. In a stance not often associated with conservatives, Kirk felt America should come to an agreement with the Soviet Union on limiting the number of nuclear weapons in their arsenals.⁶⁶ Kirk believed both countries already had more nuclear weapons than they needed.

According to Kirk, Nixon's foreign policy was "an imaginative and flexible foreign policy, conservative in the sense that similar diplomatic methods were employed by conservative statesmen in the 18th and 19th centuries."⁶⁷ The similarity of Nixon's foreign policy to those held by statesmen of the previous two centuries was the main reason Kirk gave it his support. In the *Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana*, Kirk wrote about the conservative statesmen during those centuries. Kirk alleged, unlike statesmen from the current age who supported change for the sake of change, these men relied on the wisdom of past generations. Kirk strongly believed men of the 20th century stood on the shoulders of giants. Furthermore, he felt that liberals, in their desire to create a heaven on earth, had departed from the teaching of such men. Conservative thinkers like Kirk argued that human society could not be perfected. In their view, perfection could only be achieved in the kingdom of God. This respect for Christian tradition was central to Kirk's style of conservatism.

Kirk alleged the major mistake made in foreign policy by administrations prior to Nixon's was their aspirations to remake the nations of the world in America's image. Nixon realized this objective was impossible to achieve. American policy makers on the

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Russell Kirk, "The Diplomacy of Realism," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, 25 March 1973.

left and right tried to transplant the American way of life but for different reasons. Left wing liberals held no people could truly be free if they did not live under a freely elected democratic government. Those on the right wanted to bring American style competition and free enterprise to every nation in the world. Kirk understood both sides failed to realize not every nation in the world had the same aspirations as the United States. He thought each nation had the right to determine its own future, but with this right came the responsibility to secure that future on its own. Kirk held the belief that “the world must be made safe for democracy, as the only tolerable form of government” as being a dangerous ideological belief held by many Americans.⁶⁸

Kirk addressed the dangers of ideologies in the last installment in the series on Nixon’s peace plan. In Kirk’s eyes, ideologies were the cause of wars in the 20th century.⁶⁹ Kirk defines ideology as an “inverted religion, in which a promised political salvation supplants the salvation of the souls.”⁷⁰ Throughout his writings Kirk attacked this notion that the current generation of man could create a perfect society. Kirk alleged the attempts by the followers of these ideologies to form a perfect society were in reality destroying the foundations of Western civilization. Kirk viewed North Vietnam’s victory over South Vietnam as being due to their fanatical belief in communism.⁷¹ South Vietnam failed because the people there had no strong belief system to support them in their time of need. Kirk feared that America might encounter the same fate. Kirk felt that America must return to her traditional Christian beliefs before she was destroyed by what he viewed as the fanatical beliefs held by liberals.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Russell Kirk, “Despite ‘Armed Doctrine,’ Can America Keep the Peace?,” General Features Corporation, 25 March 1973.

⁷⁰ Ibid..

⁷¹ Russell Kirk, “Why South Vietnam Lost,” *To The Point*, General Features Corporation 16 April, 1975.

Kirk's analysis of American foreign policy was only one indication of how diverse conservatives were and are as a group. During the Congo situation Kirk's writings primarily can be described as representing mainstream conservatism. Like most other conservatives he resented America having to work through the United Nations. It goes without saying that one reason he was critical of America's policies in the Congo had to do with his disdain for what he viewed as liberal administrations. By the late 1960s, with a Republican President in the White House, Kirk was less critical of American foreign policy. This does not mean he never spoke out against conservatives. When other conservatives voiced opinions he found problematic Kirk did not hesitate to disagree with them. As has been pointed out Kirk disagreed with other conservatives on many different issues ranging from what America's objectives should be in Vietnam to American business interests overseas. The diversity of Kirk's views is what makes him so interesting to study. His views on the federal government's obligation to American business interests overseas are diverse. In the Congo, where America had existing business ties, he advocated American foreign policy protecting those interests. In other areas of the world where American business had not already established ties, he did not believe America had the right to force those nations to open their markets to American business. On that issue alone, Kirk proved that he looked at the world around him in a different way than most other conservatives.

CHAPTER 2

CIVIL RIGHTS

One of the primary goals of Kirk's "To The Point" column was to provide the American public with a conservative perspective on social issues. During the early years of Kirk's column the civil rights movement was a major issue in American society. African Americans across this nation were standing up and demanding that they be recognized as full citizens. They believed the time had come for American society to grant her children of color the same rights and privileges held by her white children.

Conservatives and liberals disagreed on how African American equality should be achieved. In general, conservatives did not judge it to be within the constitutional power of the federal government to grant such demands. Conservatives felt many of the complaints made by African Americans could not be solved by legislation even on the state level. In their analysis, the only way for African Americans to make advancements in American society was on the individual level. No law could force white Americans to accept African Americans as equals. If laws or institutions did exist that hampered African Americans ability to achieve equality, they needed to be addressed on the state level. The conservative belief was that local governments better understood the needs of all their citizens.

Liberals held that the federal government did have the constitutional authority to aid African Americans in their quest for equality. They believed that not only did the federal government have the power to do this but also had an obligation to do it as well. These white liberals joined African Americans to form the Civil Rights movement. Their objectives were broad and included many topics among them being education,

matrimony, and voting. Kirk frequently commented on such issues in his “To The Point” column.

There is much debate over when the Civil Rights Movement actually began. Arguably its roots can be traced to the early abolitionists who had found slavery an abomination from its origins in colonial America. While some disagree with this approach, there was no denying African Americans have struggled since their arrival in this country to be recognized as equals to whites. In 1868, with the signing of the fourteenth amendment, the African American dream of full citizenship was finally achieved. Sadly the dream was short lived. In 1877, with the ending of Reconstruction, nearly all advancements made by African Americans were eliminated. The story of African Americans struggle to achieve equality in American society is filled with similar events.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court made its controversial ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.⁷² The Court ruled it was unconstitutional for school systems to base student enrollment solely on race. The case had been brought before the court by legendary African American lawyer Thurgood Marshall in an attempt to outlaw the Southern practice of segregation.⁷³ The winning of the Brown case was a watershed event in this country; it dramatically changed people’s perception of what was possible. Through his victory, Thurgood Marshall proved to his fellow Americans that advancement for African Americans could be won if one was willing to fight long and hard to see those advancements achieved.

⁷² 347 U.S. (1954)

⁷³ James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) , chap 2 passim.

Since its inception in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) had led the fight for African American equality. It was the N.A.A.C.P. legal defense and educational fund, known as the Fund, that had brought the Brown case before the Supreme Court.⁷⁴ After Brown new groups and individuals got involved in the fight for equality. Although many of the members of these groups belonged to the N.A.A.C.P., they did not take their orders from the organization. The methods of these newcomers departed dramatically from the tactics previously used. These new activists wanted change and they wanted it now, not at some undisclosed time in the future.

In 1953, Russell Kirk's The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana was first published. Kirk's book was very important to an emerging political and social entity known as conservatism.⁷⁵ The members of this new movement were extremely concerned with the direction American society was headed. They felt Liberals were trying to turn America away from long standing traditions and replace them with the fads of the moment. In the coming years conservatives would come into direct confrontation with the Civil Rights movement.

It would be unfair to suggest that conservatism's problem with the Civil Rights movement was racially based. A major problem they had with the movement was the speed at which change was expected to happen. Traditionalists like Kirk feared change for change's sake and thought even when change was needed, it should be done gradually and not overnight. Conservatives had no desire to become the racist entity the Democratic party had been in the South following Reconstruction. Despite this desire, many racists

⁷⁴ Ibid., 21-45.

⁷⁵ George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 74.

became involved in the conservative movement. The conflict between conservatives and Civil Rights workers led to many racist individuals joining the Conservative ranks. This was particularly true after the 1964 Republican National Convention. At this convention right wing members of the Republican Party began to outnumber moderates.⁷⁶ Due to the rhetoric of this particular group, racist individuals assumed the conservative movement provided the best hope of halting the advancements being sought by African Americans.

Reaction to the Supreme Court's ruling in the Brown case across America. In the North, the reaction of whites differed with some supporting the court's decision while others did not. One of the primary reasons some northerners supported the decision was the belief that school segregation was a southern issue. The court decision at that time had no direct effect on northern schools. Schools in the North were nearly as segregated as the ones in the South, but it was done by de facto segregation not by de jure segregation.⁷⁷ The Court decision only applied to school systems that used laws to separate students based on race.

In northern schools segregation was accomplished through school zoning. African American communities were zoned to have their children go to certain schools, while white communities sent their children to other schools. In 1954 there were no fair housing laws so it was very difficult for African American families, regardless of income, to live in racially integrated neighborhoods. The first national laws governing fair housing were not passed until 1968 and were not fully enforced until many years later. As long as white officials in the North had the ability to determine where African Americans lived, they did not need to implement laws to keep schools separated along racial lines.

⁷⁶ Jackie Robinson and Alfred Duckett, *I Never Had It Made* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 181.

⁷⁷ Patterson, 131.

The primary reason northern schools were not affected by Brown decision was due to class issues. In the South, wealthy whites required the support of working and lower class whites to maintain a segregated society. This relationship had always existed in the South. Due to their reliance on the white lower class, whites in power put forth the idea that the poorest white person held a higher place in southern society than the richest African American. Due to this and along with the fact Southern cities in general had a smaller population than Northern ones, all white children went to the same schools.

In the North, rich whites did not need an alliance with poor whites to maintain the social system. The wealthy white families who controlled the system had little more regard for whites on the lower end of the social ladder than they did for African Americans. Poor whites lived near or in the same community as African Americans thus, due to zoning laws, they were designated to go to the same schools. This ensured that the best public education would be reserved for upper and middle class white families. In the years after Brown this practice had an added bonus. Because at least a small number of poor whites went to the same schools as African Americans, northern schools were not violating segregation laws.

Kirk was one of the northerners who had disagreed with the Supreme Court decision in the Brown case from day one.⁷⁸ In Kirk's estimation, the court had overstepped its intended constitutional power to make such a ruling. He believed that regulation of schools was within the domain of the individual states.⁷⁹ In fact, Kirk felt each community should be allowed to educate its children as it saw fit. As the

⁷⁸ Russell Kirk, "Now Perhaps Schools Can Get Down To Education," *To The Point*, General Features Division, August 11 1974.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

ramifications of the Brown decision grew, many whites in the North who had previously supported the ruling began to reevaluate their initial stance on the decision.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, desegregation was primarily a southern issue. To southerners, the Brown decision was groundbreaking. It meant the dual system that had been established in the South after the end of reconstruction was illegal. While the Brown decision spelled the end for segregation, it stopped well short of demanding immediate desegregation. In the Brown decision the court gave school systems an unspecified amount of time to complete desegregation. In rendering the verdict in the Brown case chief justice Earl Warren had stated schools must desegregate with “all deliberate speed”.⁸⁰ This statement may be the most confusing statement ever made by the court. The ambiguity of this statement made it easier for school systems to put off desegregation.

In the South the Brown decision was met with mixed reactions. Many southerners, while not entirely happy with the decision, were willing to obey the court order. Their voice of reason, however, was overshadowed by the more vocal group of whites who violently opposed desegregation.⁸¹ The Brown decision did not even receive total support from the African American community. While most African Americans saw it as a positive a small minority questioned the benefits of sending their children to a school where they were unwelcome.⁸²

There was very little consistency among the members of both the white and African American communities when it came to Brown. The only thing everyone was in agreement on was that the upcoming days would be filled with a mixture of fear and hate.

⁸⁰ 347 U.S. (1954)

⁸¹ Patterson, 89.

⁸² Ibid., 119.

Some African Americans feared what white society might do if they tried to enroll their children in white schools. Despite this fear, they hated the idea of their children being denied the education they were entitled to receive. The majority of white communities feared the changes Brown would bring but due to their respect for the law were reluctantly willing to go along with the desegregation process.⁸³ A small percentage of Southerners, driven by prejudice, hated African Americans for demanding equality.

Shortly after the rendering of the Brown case, school boards across the South began to discuss what they should do in light of the new law. Many systems opted to delay desegregation for as long as possible. There were several ways school systems went about this. Some began to allow African American students to enter one grade in school and gradually, as time progressed, the system would become totally desegregated. Another approach was to open white schools to African Americans and then use intimidation to keep them from seeking entrance. Intimidation was one of the oldest and most used tools by segregationists.

The replacing of public education with private education was one way many Southern school boards tried to circumvent the requirements of Brown. Following the decision, many private schools opened throughout the South. School systems closed the doors to their public schools and paid the tuition for white students to go to private institutions.⁸⁴ Kirk never directly commented on this practice in his column, but he did comment on tax funds sustaining parochial and private schools. Kirk commended parents who sought public funding to send their children to private schools.⁸⁵ Kirk alleged not

⁸³ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁴ Patterson, 109.

⁸⁵ Russell Kirk, "Non-Public Schools Press For State Aid," *To The Point* *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, 16 May, 1970, sec 1, p. 11.

providing the funding was a violation of the First Amendment prohibiting state interference with religion. Due to his disdain for the Brown decision and his support of the voucher system, it is not unreasonable to assume Kirk supported the actions of the white residents in Prince Edwards County, Virginia when they closed their schools and set up “private” schools for whites.⁸⁶

Many of the whites who opposed desegregation justified their beliefs by saying they were looking out for the best interest of their children. The main problem with that argument was African Americans had originally sought desegregation for the same reasons. As American citizens, they expected the same quality of education to be provided for their children as for white children. The Brown case would have most likely never gone to trial if school systems in the South had truly been providing equal education.

Kirk did not start writing his “To The Point” column until 1962, so his observations on desegregation in the South as seen through the column are limited. Kirk did claim in his column that the Brown decision had resulted in the lowering of academic standards in schools across America.⁸⁷ Some white parents in the South had expressed such fears shortly after the ruling in the Brown case. Many southerners lived under the false belief that African American children did not have the same ability to learn as white children. They argued teachers would be forced to lower academic standards to accommodate African American students if desegregation was implemented.

Desegregation in the South was far from being completely implemented in 1962, but Kirk seldom mentioned it in the early years of his column. His column primarily dealt

⁸⁶ Patterson, 99.

⁸⁷ Russell Kirk, “Now Perhaps Schools Can Get Down To Education.”

with how the policy of busing affected schools in the North. In the latter part of the 1960s liberals began to call for desegregation in all schools across the nation. They felt a more racially balanced school population would help children of all races. These liberals proposed busing children if it was necessary to get the desired racial balance in schools. Many of the northerners who had previously supported the Brown decision came to the conclusion Kirk had been right all along.

Many of the early supporters of Brown had alleged America's race problems were primarily a southern issue. Popular consensus held that African Americans living in the North already enjoyed equality. Kirk was not in agreement with this viewpoint. In fact, Kirk felt that the gravest racial problems facing America were "in the Northern industrial centers, not in the South."⁸⁸ Kirk maintained the South had been unfairly judged by many people in the North for its treatment of African Americans. Kirk realized the Civil Rights activists who were pushing for social changes in the South would soon focus their attention on the North. Kirk's conclusions were drawn from multiple aspects of his conservative beliefs. Kirk had always questioned the value of an industrial based economy. In his opinion, the rapid industrialization of the North in the early 20th century resulted in America losing many traditional values. Kirk had a problem with the speed at which many Civil Rights activist expected change to occur. At the heart of Kirk's belief system was the adherence to traditions set by past generations.

In the 1970s, just as Kirk had predicted, Liberals started to question the level of social equality African Americans enjoyed in the North. African Americans living in the North suffered from a different form of discrimination than blacks the South. An old African American saying summed up the situation they lived under in America, "In the

⁸⁸ Russell Kirk, "Riot Bares Some Hard Truths," To The Point, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 August 1964,.

South, white people don't mind how close a Negro gets to them as long as he doesn't rise too high, while in the North people don't mind how high a Negro gets as long as he doesn't get too close."⁸⁹ State supported discrimination in the South had been made illegal in 1964 with the passing of the Civil Rights Act.⁹⁰ The Act had been pushed through Congress by President Lyndon Johnson with aid from northern Republicans. This Republican aid was given due to the belief the Act would primarily deal with discrimination in the South.

Starting in the late 1960s the Civil Rights Act was used to attack de facto segregation in the North. A bill that was intended to promote a color blind society started to have the opposite effect. President Johnson, along with other liberals, realized just guaranteeing equal opportunity for African Americans was not enough. Since the first Africans had arrived in America, they had suffered under the yoke of white oppression. No single law could undo all the damage that had been done to African Americans; not even a guarantee of full citizenship. What was truly necessary to provide African Americans with a level playing field in regards to opportunity was a plan that would eventually become known as affirmative action. Under this plan guidelines were created that called on employers and unions to take race and gender into consideration.⁹¹ In education these guidelines called for a racially balanced student body. Many school systems had to resort to busing students long distances to achieve this goal.

Busing was a hotly debated subject. Conservatives like Kirk thought it was ridiculous to try to create a racially balanced student body. Kirk believed students should go to the school closest to their own neighborhood. He maintained the local schoolhouse

⁸⁹ Patterson, xx-xxi.

⁹⁰ 377 U.S. (1964).

⁹¹ Patterson, 127.

was a time honored tradition in America and should not be departed from for some social experiment. Kirk assumed such an experiment was harmful to students of both races. He did not think African Americans had any more desire to go to school outside their neighborhoods than white children did. One of Kirk's key complaints against busing was the fact that students spent hours going and coming from school due to the distances they had to be bused to achieve these balances. On these long bus rides, Kirk alleged students were exposed to many of the worst elements in society, such as alcohol and pornography, which gangs of boys forced on younger students.⁹²

The long bus ride was not the only complaint Kirk had about busing policies. He also thought schools had reduced instruction to the lowest common denominator.⁹³ Kirk was afraid that in the long run the United States would have a general deterioration of knowledge and imagination due to busing. Kirk doubted if anyone in society benefited from busing. He alleged white liberals were the only people who saw any benefit from the practice. According to Kirk, liberals advocated busing due to their belief that the "African American is a constitutional inferior, who can be improved only by being submerged in a crowd of white people."⁹⁴

Kirk was not the only one making complaints about what was seen as liberal paternalism. Some African Americans were in agreement with him on this issue. In the latter part of the 1960s many African Americans began to embrace Black Power. The Black Power movement primarily emerged in northern industrial centers and on the West Coast. This group resented the suggestion that their children could get a better education

⁹² Russell Kirk, "Nothing Good Is Learned On A Bus," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, April 24 1972.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Russell Kirk, "Why Not Abandon Compulsory Congregation," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, September 13 1969.

in a predominantly white school than they could get in a school in their own neighborhood.

The busing debate came to a head in Kirk's home state of Michigan in 1973. In an attempt to counter white flight, liberals had called for the merging of Detroit's school system with the suburban districts to create a metropolitan-wide district.⁹⁵ The goal of this plan was to achieve a more racially balanced student body. At the time of its proposed implementation, the Detroit school system had a student body that was 72 percent African American.⁹⁶ The remaining 28 percent of the student body was made up of lower class whites and other ethnic groups that were shunned by middle and upper-class white society. By 1973 most whites who were economically able had vacated urban areas and moved to the suburbs. This process, which became known as white flight, was an attempt by whites to separate themselves and their families from groups they viewed as undesirable.

According to Kirk, busing was an attempt by Liberals to institute integration not desegregation. Kirk argued the Brown decision had not called for integration based on race. Kirk maintained the Brown decision only required schools not to be racially segregated. This meant that as long as no laws prohibited African Americans and whites from going to school together Brown was not being violated. To eliminate the confusion over the differences in integration and desegregation, Kirk provided his readers with his definition for the two terms. Kirk defined desegregation as meaning "pupils in public schools cannot be segregated on racial basis that is assigned to white or black schools on the basis of the color of their skin. Schools must be colorblind; they must accept pupils

⁹⁵ Patterson, 178.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

within their district simply on the basis of their being American children, entitled to equal protection of the law.”⁹⁷

Kirk defined “racial integration of schools as meaning pupils must be assigned to particular schools on the basis of their race or color.”⁹⁸ Kirk alleged integration made people more color conscious and created racial tensions. In his opinion, families should be allowed to determine who their children associated with. The family that had moved out of the city had done so for a reason and Kirk maintained they had that right. The Supreme Court affirmed this right in 1974 when they said district lines could not be rewritten to achieve integration.⁹⁹ By this time the Supreme Court was becoming more conservative due to appointees by President Richard Nixon.

In the busing debate, conservatives often relied on a loose definition on the intent of the Brown decision. When Marshall had brought the Brown cases before the Supreme Court, the goal was to obtain equal opportunity in education for all American children. In the South segregation had been blatant. Southern segregationists did not mince words. They came right out and said, “We do not want our children going to school with African Americans.” The one good thing you can say about the Southern approach is at least it was honest. In the North, supporters of segregation did not want to be associated with southern racists like Eugene “Bull” Connor. In fact, they did not even view themselves as segregationists. They used school zoning and white flight to keep their children from attending school with African American children. By doing this they were not honest with themselves or anyone else. In truth, northerners harbored many racist ideologies about African Americans. The debate over busing exposed these racist beliefs.

⁹⁷ Kirk, “Now Perhaps Schools Can Get Down To Education.”

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Patterson, 180-181.

The busing dispute was particularly interesting for southerners who had tired of northerners scolding them for their racism. Since the founding of this country, many northerners held the belief that racism toward African Americans did not exist in their region of the country. These individuals felt they were more enlightened than the people from the South. When confronted with racial integration, they proved not to be any better than the racists in the South. When people in the South pointed to their de facto practice of segregation, these northern whites tried to hide behind school zoning. When all was said and done, African Americans in the North were not receiving as good an education as most whites. It is irrelevant how these schools became predominately White or Black. What is of importance is the fact that northern school systems, if not violating the letter of the law, were at the very least violating the spirit of the law.

The controversy surrounding busing in the North was very intriguing for many southerners. Following Brown, many northerners were quick to judge the South's segregated society. Many whites in the North were of the opinion the southern practice of segregation gave the world a negative impression of the United States. This opinion was repeated often following Brown. There was a deliberate attempt by Northerners to put forth the idea racism did not exist north of the Mason-Dixon Line. When busing became an issue in the North, southerners began to wonder whether northerners were concerned about long bus rides or was their culture just as racist as the one in the South. This very question was put forth to Kirk by an old friend of his from South Carolina.¹⁰⁰ Kirk did his best to dispel his friend's notion that the anti-busing movement in the North was racially based.

¹⁰⁰ Russell Kirk, "Nothing Good Is Learned On A Bus."

Kirk maintained the liberal goal in busing was not to provide African American students with a better education. He felt Liberals were using both African American and white students to conduct sociological experiments to see how a desegregated education would affect children. This argument is not without some merit. Sociology was an emerging field in the second half of the twentieth century. One of the arguments in the Brown case was segregated education had caused African American children to feel they were inferior to white children.¹⁰¹ There is no doubt some Liberals assumed desegregation and busing would allow children of both races a better opportunity to understand one another. Even if this was true, Kirk argued that it was not the traditional purpose of schools in America to help achieve such a goal. According to Kirk, the school systems in America were intended to educate not to facilitate better race relations. In fact, Kirk alleged busing had produced more racial problems than it had resolved.¹⁰² In 1969, Kirk proposed a two-part settlement in the busing debate he thought would be tolerable for all parties involved. First, “ensure that children of ‘racial minorities’ can attend schools in their neighborhood, even if those schools are predominantly white; and may be transported to other schools if that clearly would be to their advantage, and their parents desire it.”¹⁰³ Secondly, “Abandon doctrinaire attempts at compulsory congregation; accept the natural neighborhood school pattern; and work hard to improve those neighborhoods schools that, for whatever reason, seem inferior.”¹⁰⁴ Kirk was convinced if this plan was adopted, public schools could resume their intended purpose of

¹⁰¹ Juan Williams, *Eyes On The Prize: America's Civil Rights Years 1945-1965*. (New York: Penguin Book, 1987) , 23.

¹⁰² Kirk, “Why Not Abandon Compulsory Congregation?”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

educating children. Schools would not continue to be used to conduct psychological experiments in an attempt to transform society.

Kirk was very concerned with the direction education had taken in the United States. He held he was among the last generation to receive a good public education. Kirk maintained that his sister, who was only seven years younger, had not received the same classical education he had.¹⁰⁵ Kirk attributed much of his later success to his well rounded public education. To fully understand Kirk's outlook on busing, integration, and desegregation one must look to Kirk's own experience with public education. Kirk's experiences in school had been reasonably pleasant.¹⁰⁶ He attributed this to the orderly and safe environment his school provided.

The Starkweather School Kirk attended in Plymouth, Michigan had a student body which primarily came from working class families. Kirk's own father was a railroad engineman who had left school in the sixth grade.¹⁰⁷ Kirk was from a generation that not only had to walk to and from school at the beginning and end of each day but also had to go home to eat lunch. Walking was not an inconvenience for Kirk and throughout his life he preferred walking to riding in an automobile. On these walks, and while playing in the railroad yards, Kirk developed his imagination. Throughout his life Kirk considered his imagination his greatest asset. Kirk believed the changes being made in the education system were robbing Americans of their imagination. Kirk said individuals without imagination were doomed to live out their lives in a modernized world absent of any traditions that tied them to past and future generations.

¹⁰⁵ Russell Kirk, *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 26.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

The practice of busing was not a result of a generation being devoid of an imagination. It was a turning away from an established tradition just as Kirk had pointed out in his writings. It was time for American society to turn from that tradition. In past generations, minorities and lower class white Americans, in general, did not receive the same level of education as upper middle class and rich whites. The education they received was sub par. Their educational experiences did not provide them the abilities needed to rise in American society. The intent of busing was not to force white children to play with African American children and become their friends. The goal of the plan was to allow all children in America the same level of public education.

Kirk was not convinced by liberal arguments that busing placed children from disadvantaged situations in a better learning environment. He had received his own education at a school close to his home that did not have the same level of resources schools in wealthier neighborhoods had. Men like his maternal grandfather, who was president of the Plymouth school board, made sure their neighborhood school provided the local children a good education. Kirk expected people of the current age to provide children in their neighborhoods the same education his grandfather had helped him receive. Kirk believed it was the responsibility of each generation to assure that their children receive a good education in their own neighborhood without aid or interference from the federal government.

Kirk's desire to maintain the neighborhood school was admirable, but not realistic. In the 1920s, when Kirk was a student, schools were in walking distance of one's home. Families at that time did not have the resources to transport their children long distances to school. Kirk's success in the neighborhood school was due in no small

part to his own natural ability. Kirk achieved much of his education through extensive reading. Regardless of the Brown decision, neighborhood schools were on their way out by the 1970s. Due to improvements in transportation, small communities were finding it more practical to bus students to centrally located schools. The idyllic school of Kirk's childhood was destroyed by modernization, not the Brown decision.

Kirk's objection over Brown and busing plans did not acknowledge the realities of the time. The reality of the matter was the white power structure had done everything it could to keep the races separated. Kirk, like many other Americans, never came to terms with this aspect of American society. Northern communities were just as guilty of segregation as Southern communities. Riots resulting from confrontations between African Americans and whites over Civil Rights marches in northern cities "crumpled once and for all the myth of the racist South and the moderate North."¹⁰⁸

The justification and excuses used to support the practice of segregation have previously been stated. There is a grain of truth in many of them; however, one of the main reasons whites were so adamant in supporting segregation has not been addressed. In reality, segregation was practiced due to fear; more specifically the fear of the oversexed African American male. White fathers' feared desegregation and busing would bring their daughters into contact with these individuals and in the end their daughters would be exploited by them. While African American females were also assumed to be promiscuous, it did not influence whites' support of segregation. There was a long standing tradition in the South for white fathers to take their teenage sons to African American women to have their first sexual experience. These same white fathers would have had no problem with their sons forming sexual relationships with African American

¹⁰⁸ Los Angeles Times, "Perspective" 14 August 1966, sec G, p 4.

girls. The only time a problem would arise in such a situation was if the son actually started to show any feelings for the girl. There is a long tradition in the South of white men sexually exploiting young African American girls.

In the South, African Americans were forced to attend separate and most definitely inferior educational institutions. The segregated society of the South was costly to maintain. Despite the shameful condition of African American educational facilities, it would have been more cost effective for tax payers to have one integrated system instead of the dual segregated one. Some southerners tried to argue the dual system was necessary because African Americans could not keep up with white students. If this was the true reason for segregation, “why were the African American students who showed high aptitude not allowed to attend the white schools?” The answer lies in the fact that the aptitude of African American students was a result of segregation not a justification for the practice. Why, then, were tax payers willing to support such a costly system? While it may have not been the only reason, the myth of the oversexed African American male strongly influenced this decision. This myth not only affected how education was approached, it also controlled every aspect of interaction between Whites and Blacks in the South.

In the South the tradition of a dual system stretches back to before American independence. The only time prior to the Civil Rights Movement that African Americans living in the South enjoyed anything resembling equality was during Reconstruction. If there was ever any doubt about the severity of the African American plight in the deep south, the Emmett Till murder in 1955 dispelled all such doubts. Till, a boy barely fourteen years old, was brutally killed for talking to a white woman at a store. The guilt

of his murderers was evident to everyone involved, but the all white jury found the defendants not guilty.¹⁰⁹ The jury was upholding the Southern tradition that any African American male, regardless of age, was a sexual predator who lusted after white women. In regard to the Brown decision, the murder of Till is important for two reasons. First, it occurred the year following Brown and to a degree represented a Southern backlash against the federal government affirming states rights. Secondly, the murder was committed under the pretence of protecting white womanhood, the same protection many southerners thought segregated schools provided their white daughters.

The fear of the promiscuous African American male was not only a myth that blinded whites to reality in the South. This fear was just as prevalent in the North. Prior to the early 20th century, due to the small African American population in the North, there was very little fear of the African American male by white society. This would soon change during the great migration when African American families packed up and left the South in the hope of finding a better life in the North. In New York alone, the African American population increased by 66 percent between 1910 and 1920.¹¹⁰ While northern cities offered many African Americans a chance at a better life, they had not escaped racism. In the North, racism was more subtle, but it was still there. Despite this fact, the African American population in the North continued to grow. The increase in the African American population resulted in new laws being passed for the purpose of protecting white women from African American men.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, 52.

¹¹⁰ Kevin J. Mumford, *Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the early Twentieth Century: Interzones*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) , xviii.

The rise in the African American population, even in states where the increase was negligible, led many of those states to pass anti-miscegenation laws.¹¹¹ Thirty states passed such laws which stayed on the books until the start of the Civil Rights movement. On their own, fourteen of these thirty states removed laws barring interracial marriage. Just because a state did not have anti-miscegenation laws, however, did not mean it was not an issue. During a 1966 civil rights march in Chicago, Illinois National State Rights Party protesters carried signs proclaiming, “Defend white womanhood.”¹¹² In 1967, the Supreme Court ruled anti-miscegenation unconstitutional.¹¹³ Despite this fact, twelve states still had anti-miscegenation laws in the 1970s. It is important to remember that these laws existed all across America and were not limited to one region. California, which is hailed as the bastion of liberalism, had anti-miscegenation laws until 1948. North Carolina did not ratify the ban on miscegenation until 1998.¹¹⁴

While interracial couples still face much adversity in American society, it is hard to believe only a few decades ago such unions were illegal in many states. The historical significance of miscegenation should not be overlooked. To understand how polarizing the issue was one only has to look at the subject matter of one of the most talked about movies from the time period. The controversy surrounding interracial marriage helped “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?” to become the second highest-grossing film in 1967.¹¹⁵ In the movie Sidney Poitier plays a successful African American doctor who announces his intent to marry the daughter of a white liberal. The movie depicts the

¹¹¹ Mumford., 166.

¹¹² Los Angeles Times, “Perspective” 14 August 1966, sec G, p 4.

¹¹³ Crystal Whites, “The Color of Love.” [<http://www.dailyillini.com/oct00/oct11/opinions/co101.shtml>] 10 Feb 2004.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Mason Wiley and Damien Bona, *Inside Oscar: The Unofficial History of the Academy Awards*, 10th ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996) , 405.

reaction of both sets of parents upon hearing their children's plan to wed. At the 1968 academy awards, the movie received two Oscars, one for best original screenplay, and a best actress award for Katharine Hepburn.¹¹⁶ Probably the most important thing the movie did for America was to show how far this country had to go when it came to accepting interracial couples. "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" brought home the fact ethnicity and political alignment matter very little when it comes to a parents' ability to accept the idea of their offspring marrying someone outside their race.

There is little indication in Kirk's writings of his views on interracial marriage. His problems with the busing debate and desegregation most likely were not influenced by such fears. During his lifetime, Kirk's home was a safe haven for refugees from many different ethnic backgrounds. If Kirk had believed these men represented any kind of threat, he would never have allowed them into the home he shared with his wife and four daughters.

Kirk dealt with several race issues in his column including voter registration drives to register African American voters. Traditionally, citizens had taken the initiative to register to vote. Kirk realized in the past African Americans living in the South had not always been allowed to register to vote. Poll taxes and reading requirements were two popular methods in the South to prevent African Americans from registering to vote. Despite this fact, he still questioned the practice of massive registration of African American voters.¹¹⁷ Kirk was not only targeting Civil Rights workers in the South who were registering African Americans to vote. He was also directing his opposition toward organizations like the Ford Foundation. In Cleveland "the organization had paid for a

¹¹⁶ Wiley, 412.

¹¹⁷ Kirk, "Riots Bare Some Hard Truths."

voter-registration drive in African American neighborhoods.¹¹⁸ Kirk alleged such drives were unfair to conservative candidates. In Kirk's opinion, the populations being targeted for such drives were much more likely to vote for liberal candidates than conservative ones.

Kirk was a strong supporter of philanthropic organizations. Kirk felt such "institutions were distinctively American in their inspiration and intention."¹¹⁹ Kirk assumed these institutions were more adept at solving society's social problems than the federal government. Kirk was adamantly opposed to social programs instituted by the federal government. Kirk had no appreciation for Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal or Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Despite Kirk's admiration for the charitable works done by the Ford Foundation and organizations like it, he did not support such organizations getting involved in politics. If these organizations insisted on getting involved in voter registration they should have to target unregistered voters from all walks of life. This type of voter registration would end up registering conservative minded voters as well as liberal ones.¹²⁰

In the 1970s affirmative action emerged as a central issue in the African American battle for equality. The term affirmative action traces its roots to the National Labor Act of 1935 where it first appeared as a legal term. The act was designed to prevent racial discrimination in employment. The act had no real meaning at the time because no government agency had the power necessary to enforce it. The meaning of affirmative action would dramatically change because of the Civil Rights movement.

¹¹⁸ Russell Kirk, "Stifling Foundation: Bad Public Policy" *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, August 30 1969.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

President John F. Kennedy initiated this change with executive order 10925 in March of 1961. The order established the President committee on Equal Employment Opportunity.¹²¹ The committee was given the duty to determine what degree race played in someone's ability to gain employment and what should be done to rectify inequalities if they did exist. Kennedy did not live to see the end result of the committee's findings or how it would change America.

At the time of President Kennedy's death no one knew how Lyndon B. Johnson would handle the race issues facing America. Many feared because President Johnson was a native Texan he would have very little compassion for the plight of African Americans. President Johnson proved such beliefs wrong and did more for African Americans during his term as President than any other American President since Lincoln.¹²² In 1964, with the passing of the Civil Rights Act, the stage was set for developing laws that would ensure African American employment under affirmative action.¹²³

Prior to the Civil Rights Bill being passed, Kirk commented on it in his column. Kirk acknowledged there was a great need for improvement in the conditions African Americans lived under but he doubted if merely passing new laws would help.¹²⁴ The only way such laws could be enforced, in Kirk's view, was by establishing a national police force. This force would receive all its orders from Washington and state governments would have no authority over them. A police force of this type would do more harm than good in Kirk's estimation. He pointed out this police force would be a

¹²¹ Seven M. Cahan, *The Affirmative Action Debates* (New York: Routledge, 1995) , xi.

¹²² Patterson, 124.

¹²³ 377 U.S. (1964)

¹²⁴ Russell Kirk, "Civil Rights Bill Delay Might Not Be Harmful," *To The Point*, *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December, 1963, sec G, p. 7.

double edged sword to all Americans. When the force was used in your defense it provided great protection, but once it was turned against you it could do you great harm.¹²⁵

Kirk predicted a white backlash would occur if the Civil Rights Bill was passed. Many whites were already upset over action taken by the Civil Rights movement. Kirk was particularly upset with the movement's policy of staging sit-ins. Kirk felt such demonstrations disrupted the orderly practice of business in the places they were staged and were a violation of the law. Kirk was convinced such tactics were doing the Civil Rights movement more harm than good.¹²⁶ In his view, many of the demonstrators taking part in these sit-ins were there more for the novelty than to achieve any advancement for African Americans.

The prediction Kirk made about a white backlash did indeed come to pass. The Civil Rights Act angered many white Americans and caused many of them to leave the Democratic party. The immediate backlash toward African Americans was no worse than what had been done to them prior to the passing of the bill. In fact, a white backlash had been occurring ever since the ruling in the Brown case. A major backlash, however, did not come about until the 1980s. During that decade, many of the old hostilities that existed toward minorities resurfaced. Many whites said the Civil Rights Act was preventing them from advancing in their chosen field because it gave an unfair advantage to minorities.

Colleges honoring the spirit of the Civil Rights Act attempted to create cultural diversity on their campuses. To achieve this diversity many colleges started taking things

¹²⁵ Ibid.,

¹²⁶ Russell Kirk, "Lawless Acts Hinder Cause of Civil Rights," *To The Point*, *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December, 1963, part.II, p. 5.

besides G.P.A. and scores on entrance tests into consideration when selecting incoming students. Some whites assumed such policies allowed African American students with poor academic records to get spots that should have gone to their child. These same whites thought that too much of their tax dollars were going to programs like welfare and head start. There was a perception among some whites that most beneficiaries of such programs were African Americans.

Kirk despised the idea of colleges lowering standards for incoming freshmen. He also had little use for any social programs; but for him race had nothing to do with it. He had not supported the New Deal social programs of President Franklin Roosevelt, and those had primarily benefited whites. Kirk believed the new entrance standards being used by universities were a scheme drawn up by liberals to improve race relations. Kirk not only maintained that the plan would fail, but he insisted it violated the intended purpose of the American university system. Kirk understood true racial harmony could only be achieved by knowing people as individuals and not by viewing them as anonymous members of some group. He believed liberals did not understand this and through their social experiments were hurting the cause of African American equality. Eventually, many whites started to resent African Americans due to these programs. Despite this white backlash, there is no doubt minorities greatly benefited from the passing of the Civil Rights Bill and the programs that it inspired.

In 1965, President Johnson established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The commission required companies to set numerical racial hiring goals. These were goals not requirements, so most companies paid them very little heed. Several years passed before the Commission asked for laws to be passed requiring

companies to adopt affirmative action policies. By that time, Lyndon Johnson was no longer President.

History is filled with many ironies and the story of affirmative action is one of them. Today affirmative action is seen as an entity created by liberal Democrats. While it is true Democrats helped with the creation of affirmative action, it was a Republican President who signed it into law. In December 1971, President Richard M. Nixon issued Revised Order No 4.¹²⁷ It was this order that made affirmative action what it is today. It required employers to institute affirmative action policies which made sure minorities and women were allowed the same employment opportunities as white men.

It is generally accepted that Nixon was lukewarm at best when it came to Affirmative Action. Most conservatives claim Affirmative Action was a burden left to him from the previous administration. Kirk viewed Nixon as being a true conservative. One example Kirk gives of Nixon's conservative nature was his ordering federal government agencies not to use racial quotas to fill vacancies in the Civil Service.¹²⁸ Kirk was supportive of this departure from racial quotas. In previous decades, he felt too much preference had been given to minorities applying for civil service jobs.¹²⁹

Kirk disagreed with hiring anyone based on their sex, race, or religion. He felt that any policy which encouraged employers to hire based on these categories was unconstitutional. According to Kirk, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare(HEW) was pushing for these categories to be taken into consideration in hiring and promotion. Colleges and universities were being hurt by this policy in Kirk's

¹²⁷ Cahan., xii.

¹²⁸ Russell Kirk, "Ethnic Quotas For University Professors," *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, November 9 1972.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

opinion. In these institutions, HEW was demanding that more of their faculty and staff be made up of minorities.¹³⁰ Kirk was of the opinion minorities, especially women, were being elevated to professional posts lacking the required credentials. Kirk claimed the Department of English at a well-known southern university had listed in the qualifications for a new hire “that the candidate must be a member of a minority or ethnic group.”¹³¹ The university did however require the candidate to have a Ph.D. in English. Hiring policies like this were due to the policies of the Health, Education, and Welfare department as far as Kirk was concerned. He maintained universities had little choice but to meet HEW requirements due to the organizations ability to prohibit federal aid to the university.¹³² Kirk viewed the actions of HEW as a threat to a white male’s ability to get jobs and advance in academia. Kirk feared one’s ability to do their job was no longer important in academia. All universities were concerned about was meeting racial and gender quotas even if that meant hiring the less qualified applicant. Kirk was convinced if universities continued to follow this policy they would no longer be able to impart a proper education to their students.

The complaints Kirk had against affirmative action were fairly common among white males, especially ones who identified themselves as conservatives. Kirk was a traditionalist and his observations must be evaluated in that context. There is little doubt many white men resented having to compete with women and minorities, but this however was not the case with Kirk. As far as he was concerned the best qualified applicants should be hired, and sex and race should not be a factor one way or the other.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.,

¹³² Russell Kirk, “Discrimination Against Jews Through ‘Affirmative Action,’” *To The Point*, General Features Corporation, February 28 1974.

The Civil Rights movement brought about many changes in American society. Kirk's resistance to that change was not due to any racist beliefs. Kirk was raised to judge a man by his actions not the pigmentation of his skin. If Kirk held any disdain for members of the Civil Rights movement, it had nothing to do with the color of their skin. His dislike for individuals in the movement, whether they are African American or white liberals, was how they went about achieving change. In Kirk's view, a protester staging sit-ins and the passing of federal laws were no means to achieve equality for African Americans. Kirk maintained you could not compel white America to accept African Americans through force. Kirk held that given time different ethnic groups of Americans would come together on their own, but as long as the federal government and liberals tried to force such change, it would never occur.

If Kirk guilty of anything regarding the Civil Rights movement it was that he overestimated the character of man in matters of race relations. The white male power structure was not ever going to relinquish its preferred status until it was forced to. The changes brought about by the Civil Rights movement improved the lives of all Americans. Policies like affirmative action put whites in greater contact with minorities. At first, these meetings were difficult for all parties involved, but over time, much was gained from these experiences. Through them whites and African Americans came to know each other as individuals. This was the one thing Kirk had argued was needed for American society to achieve racial harmony.

CHAPTER 3

FEMINISM

American society was in turmoil during the 1960s and 70s. Women all over the nation were beginning to question their place in society. Feminism was born out of this discontent. The aspirations of a large number of feminists shocked many older Americans, including Kirk. Like other members of his generation, Kirk believed if the feminist vision for the future was realized it would destroy the moral fiber of society.

A diverse collection of individuals and organizations identified themselves as feminists. The goals and aspirations of each varied greatly. The aim of several of these groups was to break away from outdated gender roles. They alleged these roles had prevented women from achieving equality in American society. This belief inspired numerous women's organizations to push for the passage of an equal rights amendment (ERA). They felt such legislation was needed to guarantee women equal status in American society. Countless other women thought attaining reproductive control of their bodies ought to be the primary concern of feminists.¹³³ These women wanted access to affordable birth control and legal abortions.

The feminist movement was not devoid of men; in fact it had many male supporters. Some of them aided women in their efforts for equality while others had agendas of their own. Numerous men used the sexual revolution to further exploit females. Pornography was one such avenue where sexual exploitation occurred. Pornography has always existed in American society, but during the sexual revolution, it emerged into the mainstream. Magazines sensationalizing sex popped up on newsstands across America and the adult film industry experienced tremendous growth. During this

¹³³ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), 70.

same time period, mainstream movies began to expose more and more nudity. Kirk found this overt merchandising of sex particularly disturbing.

Kirk, like many of his fellow citizens, was concerned with the direction American society took in the 1960s. As a traditionalist, some of the extreme behavior was particularly offensive to him. Through his “*To The Point*” column Kirk warned his readers of the perils this path could lead to. The majority of the changes feminists were calling for were troubling to Kirk, such as women calling for an equal rights amendment or coed housing on college campuses. Kirk addressed all these issues at one time or another in his column.

The start of the quest for an (ERA) for women predates the sexual revolution by nearly five decades. In 1923, Alice Paul, the leader of the National Women’s Party (NWP), submitted the ERA to Congress.¹³⁴ The members of the NWP had little in common with the average American woman. The organization consisted of upper-class and professional women who had little understanding of the problems facing working poor and minority women.¹³⁵ The NWP believed, with the passing of the ERA, all the problems women faced would be solved. This belief was over optimistic at best and did not take into account the problems endured by the average woman. To the majority of feminists who had fought long and hard to obtain protective legislation for women, the ERA was an appalling idea.¹³⁶ They were not willing to risk losing newly obtained rights for a bill they felt would primarily benefit upper-class women. This division in the

¹³⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 66.

¹³⁶ Robert L. Daniel, *American Women in the 20th Century: The Festival of Life* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1987), 52.

feminist movement in the 1920s made it impossible to get the ERA passed.¹³⁷ During the next three decades little was said about ERA.

In the 1960s the push for the passage of the ERA intensified again. There are several reasons this occurred. First, while the ERA had disappeared from the minds of many Americans, a core group of feminists had never wavered from actively seeking passage of the amendment. As mentioned earlier, there was very little support among women for the ERA. In the early part of the 20th century, the Progressive movement had pushed for the passage of laws that would protect women from the worst aspects of industrialization. One such law was established in Oregon which limited the workday to ten hours for women in laundries and factories.¹³⁸ Businessmen claimed the law was unconstitutional and took their case to the Supreme Court. In 1908, the court ruled that due to a woman's physical structure and maternal functions, states could pass laws limiting the number of hours they worked.¹³⁹ If the ERA was passed, working women feared employers would be free to work women as long and hard as they did men in their employment.

Secondly, many white women who had taken part in the civil rights movement began to sever their ties with the cause. Their departure was due to the black radicals who were prevalent within civil rights organizations. Black militants resented the involvement of white people and called for their resignation.¹⁴⁰ White women who had taken part in the civil rights movement gained a sense of purpose through their participation. Once pushed out they looked for other causes to support. It was only natural for many of them

¹³⁷ Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Touchstone Book, 1991), 31.

¹³⁸ "Backgrounder on the Court Opinion on the Muller v. Oregon Case, 1," [online] , cited 16 April, 2004, available from <<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/30.htm>>.

¹³⁹ 208 U.S. 412 (1908).

¹⁴⁰ Dorothy Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir*, with a foreword by Maya Angelou (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 151.

to turn to the feminist movement. Once involved, many of these women recognized the importance of the ERA and began to campaign for its passage.

A third factor that led to the reemergence of the ERA as a central issue in American society was the Civil Rights Movement. People's eyes had been opened to the mistreatment African Americans had endured in American society. This led them to scrutinize how other groups had been treated throughout American history. Many Americans came to the conclusion that white women had not fared as well as their male counterparts. It was quite obvious that women of all races held lower status in American society than men of their own race.

African American women were somewhat put in the middle due to the emergence of the feminist movement. Being a double minority put them in a unique situation. They were forced to ask themselves, "which movement do I owe my loyalties too?" African American men told them race should take priority over gender. Feminists told them that as long as they served a movement dominated by men they would never have true freedom. Eventually, most African American women chose to concentrate their efforts in the civil rights movement. Ultimately, most African American women concluded they suffered more discrimination as a result of their race than they did because of their gender.

In what has become known as the second wave of feminism, women in the 1960s started to question their role in society.¹⁴¹ Betty Friedan, author of the 1963 groundbreaking study, *The Feminine Mystique*, played a leading role in recruiting middle class women into this second wave. Friedan asked her readers to consider why society forced women to think they were betraying their family if they wanted a career outside

¹⁴¹ Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 27.

their home.¹⁴² She believed it was not enough that women were now being allowed to pursue educational goals. She felt higher education did women little good if after graduation they were trapped in marriages where they were expected to be homemakers. Friedan's book struck a cord with women who felt their lives had no real purpose. These women, many of whom were college educated, found their sole purpose in life was serving the needs of their husbands and children. Countless women felt society had forced them into marriage and in doing so they gave up their dreams and ambitions.¹⁴³ One of the primary goals of these women was to assure their daughters the choices they had been denied. This feeling became known as the Bored Housewife Syndrome.

When John F. Kennedy was sworn in as President in 1961, women believed they had a President who would do something to improve their position in American society. This hope was soon dashed when President Kennedy did not include women when he issued Executive Order 10925 in March 1961. The order mandated that employers with federal contracts could not refuse to hire applicants based on their race, creed, color, or national origin. Initially, some in Kennedy's administration wanted to include sex and age among the categories but decided against it.¹⁴⁴ Kennedy's refusal to include women angered many supporters of women's rights. Due to this outcry, Kennedy reluctantly established the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in December 1961. The PCSW only met eight times in the following two years.¹⁴⁵ In October 1963, the Commission presented its conclusions to President Kennedy. They found there existed great disparity between the earning abilities of women and men. Despite this fact, their

¹⁴² Betty Friedan, *Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 9.

¹⁴³ Davis, 17.

¹⁴⁴ Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 212.

¹⁴⁵ Davis, 35.

recommendation was not to pursue a constitutional amendment to ensure equality for women.¹⁴⁶

The conclusions of the Commission angered supporters of the ERA but also served to strengthen their determination to get legislation passed to protect women's rights. They concluded the next logical step was to get women included in the Civil Rights Act that was currently being debated in Congress. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin by private employers. The women of the NWP led the fight to get sex added as a category in Title VII.¹⁴⁷ This action angered many in the Civil Rights movement. Some felt the NWP was trying to make gains for women on the backs of African Americans who had fought long and hard to get the Civil Rights Act this far. Others feared the actions of the NWP would cause the bill not to pass.

The struggle to get the word sex added to Title VII is filled with many ironies that make up American history. The NWP had to find a member of Congress willing to propose adding sex as a category to Title VII. The obvious choice would have been Congresswomen Martha Griffiths of Michigan.¹⁴⁸ While willing to support the cause, she felt it would be best if someone else made the recommendation. The Congressman who finally made the proposal was Howard Smith.¹⁴⁹ Congressman Smith was not a supporter of women's rights. The only reason he added sex as a category was because he hoped it would help defeat the bill. In the end his plan did not work. Due to the efforts of the NWP and Congresswoman Griffiths, President Johnson signed the Civil Right Act into

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁷ 377 U.S. (1964).

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 40.

¹⁴⁹ Rosen, 71.

law on July 2, 1964.¹⁵⁰ The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) established to handle complaints regarding the law had no real power. The slight power it did have was used to address discrimination against African American males. The organizations did not take the complaints made by women serious.¹⁵¹

The unwillingness of the EEOC to address the complaints of women led to the creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. The organization's primary objective was to get the ERA passed. Due to their efforts, along with those of other pro-ERA organizations, Congress passed the ERA in 1972. By mid May thirteen states had ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. Russell Kirk thought a more appropriate name for the amendment would have been Equal Misery Amendment.¹⁵²

Kirk held women would not gain any new rights by the passage of the ERA. Instead it would impose on them requirements of citizenship that had previously only been placed on men. One such requirement was military conscription.¹⁵³ Kirk was against military conscription for both sexes. The question of military conscription had plagued the women's movement throughout the 20th century. The idea of sending young women to fight in war had always been a stumbling block for the pro-ERA movement. In truth, women had already been serving in the military for some time. During World War I, 13,000 women enlisted in the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps.¹⁵⁴ Although these women did not serve in combat, their support to the war effort should not be overlooked.

Through their service they proved patriotism rested in the hearts of women as strongly as

¹⁵⁰ 377 U.S. (1964).

¹⁵¹ Davis, 47.

¹⁵² Russell Kirk, "This Women's Equal Misery Amendment," General Features Corporation, 10 May 1972, .

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Barbara A. Wilson, "WWI Thirty Thousand Women Were There/1," [online] Women in World War One, 1996, cited 26 April 2004, available from <<http://userpages.aug.com?captbarb/femvets4.html>>.

it did in men. Their devotion might have been even greater since they were serving their country at a time when they could not vote.

During World War II, women made up 3 percent of U.S. forces.¹⁵⁵ These women, like Kirk, served in non-combat units. Kirk was drafted into the army in 1942. He spent most his time in the service assigned to Dugway Proving Ground in Utah's Great Salt Lake Desert.¹⁵⁶ Kirk's assignment to this unit was not due to any unwillingness on his part to serve in combat. The army decided Kirk could best serve his country recording classified documents in the desert. Women who served in the military during the Second World War had a variety of duties. Their duties ranged from ferrying plans from place to place to working in hospitals. Five hundred and sixty-five women were awarded the Bronze Star at the end of the war.¹⁵⁷

In 1972, when states were debating the ERA, women were serving in Vietnam. The number of women who were injured or killed during the war is unknown.¹⁵⁸ The numbers are still unknown today. The deficiencies in accurate information might have a direct correlation with the ERA debate. Political and military leaders could not afford to admit America's military dependence on women service members. The debate was not over, "will women serve in the military, but how they will serve". A vast majority of Americans were uncomfortable with the idea of putting women in combat units and this caused them to be apprehensive over the ERA. This fear was premature. Even if the ERA was passed it would not necessarily mean women would have to serve in combat. The

¹⁵⁵ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 88.

¹⁵⁶ Russell Kirk, *The Sword of Imagination: Memoirs of a Half-Century of Literary Conflict* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 57.

¹⁵⁷ Barbara A. Wilson, "Women in World War II/4," [online] Women in World War II, 1996, cited 26 April 2004, available from <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets5.html>>.

¹⁵⁸ Barbara A. Wilson, "Vietnam Southeast Asia/1," [online] Military Women in Vietnam, 1996, cited 26 April 2004, available from <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvesnam.html>>.

military has always assessed recruit's abilities to determine where they should serve. This process greatly influenced whether a recruit served in support units rather than in combat ones. As long as male and female recruits went through the same placement process, the ERA would not had been violated.

Kirk's lack of support for the ERA does not mean he was unsympathetic to women's status in American society. Kirk declared on more than one occasion that women had not been given a fair shake in America.¹⁵⁹ In Kirk's mind, the ERA would not alleviate the barriers that prevented women from advancing in society. Kirk was quick to point out that the ERA would benefit women in professional occupations. The vast majority of women who supported their family through employment in the service industries would be harmed if ERA passed. Kirk had nothing against professional women, as demonstrated by his admiration for women like Flannery O'Connor. Kirk proclaimed her one of the greatest writers in modern America.¹⁶⁰ After her death in 1964, Kirk dedicated an edition of his column to her memory.

Kirk questioned what the future held for women when thirty states had ratified the ERA by the end of 1973.¹⁶¹ Kirk believed if the ERA was passed, it would only be a matter of time before the supporters of the amendment would demand freedom from the consequences of equality.¹⁶² In the end, even with a three year extension, the ERA fell three states short of the number required to become a constitutional amendment.

The ERA was not the only controversial issue facing American society in the 1960s and 70s. The laws regulating distribution of birth control and abortion information were a concern to many Americans at that time. Women in America had been fighting for

¹⁵⁹ Russell Kirk, "This Women's Equal Misery Amendment," *General Features Corporation*, 10 May 1972, .

¹⁶⁰ Russell Kirk, "In Memoriam: Flannery O'Connor," *General Features Corporation*, 10 September 1964, .

¹⁶¹ Daniel, 326.

¹⁶² Russell Kirk, "This Women's Equal Misery Amendment."

the right to have access to birth control since before the start of the 20th century. Activists such as Margaret Sanger dedicated their lives to obtaining women access to such information because they believed it could improve the quality of their lives.

In 1873, Congress passed the Comstock Act. Among other things the Comstock Act defined information about birth control as pornography and made it illegal to distribute.¹⁶³ The law effectively prevented women living at the turn of the century from getting information about birth control. This lack of information caused many social problems, especially for the poor. Married couples who could barely afford to feed one child had three or more. Margaret Sanger, while working as a visiting nurse, saw firsthand how unwanted pregnancies were destroying women's lives. Due to her tireless efforts the ban on distributing birth control information was lifted in 1938.¹⁶⁴

The run of Kirk's "To The Point" series from 1962-1975 coincided with a tremendous change in how birth control was practiced in America. In 1960, an oral contraceptive received governmental approval. Before its approval, virtually all contraceptive practices were coitus related.¹⁶⁵ Over the next decade, the way Americans viewed sex went through a drastic change. The pill, as the oral contraceptive became known, made birth control more accessible. The freedom the pill allowed was not enough for many women. They still believed they did not have adequate control over their fertility.¹⁶⁶ These women believed they would not have true control over their lives until

¹⁶³ Comstock Act, March 3, 1973 Ch 258, 17 Stat. 598.

¹⁶⁴ Johnson Lewis, "Comstock Law," [online] Comstock Law - Encyclopedia of Women's History, 2004, cited 26 April 2004, available from <http://womenshistory.about.com/library/ency/blwh_comstock.htm>.

¹⁶⁵ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matter: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 251.

¹⁶⁶ D'Emilio, 253.

abortion was legalized. They were granted this control in 1973 when the Supreme Court made its ruling in *Roe v. Wade*.¹⁶⁷

Kirk's opinion on the issue of birth control and abortion was complex and not limited just to an argument about a woman's rights over control of her own body. During the mid 20th century there was a growing concern that the world would become over populated. These concerns led the United Nations to convene a meeting in Paris in the fall of 1968.¹⁶⁸ During that same year Kirk expressed his own concerns about the birth rate in America. Unlike the scientists who were meeting in Paris, Kirk was not worried about a population explosion. In fact he was afraid of just the opposite. Kirk based his fears on the fact that in 1967 19% fewer babies had been born than in 1961.¹⁶⁹ Despite the fact that the birth rate drop coincided with the introduction of the pill, Kirk indicated he did not believe birth-control devices were the problem.

In 1970, the population control debate came to Kirk's home state of Michigan. Michigan's director of natural resources, Ralph MacMullan, suggested that it was morally wrong for any woman to bear more than two children.¹⁷⁰ This statement seriously angered numerous Michiganders. Kirk argued that limiting family size put America at risk of extinguishing itself.¹⁷¹ Kirk was not the only person who had this concern. The members of one group who shared this view had little in common with the conservative movement. On this one issue traditional conservatives and members of the Black Power movement were in agreement.

¹⁶⁷ 410 U.S. (1973).

¹⁶⁸ "Unitarian Universalist Statement on Survival and Population Control: 1970 General Resolution/1," [online] Unitarian Universalist Statement on Survival and Population Control: 1970 UUA General, 2002, cited 27 April 2004, available from <<http://www.uua.org/actions/population/70survival.html>>.

¹⁶⁹ Russell Kirk, "Are Children Worth Conceiving," *General Features Corporation*, 11 or 12 May 1968, .

¹⁷⁰ Russell Kirk, "Population Control Debated in Michigan," *New Orleans Time-Picayune*, 22 April 1970, sec. 1, .

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

An element within the Black Power movement was very concerned with population control. Many within the group felt the drive to limit births was a genocidal endeavor by white supremacists to eliminate the African American community.¹⁷² They maintained birth control was being pushed more forcefully in their communities than it was in the white communities. These men thought African American women who took the birth control pill were contributing to the genocide of their own people.¹⁷³

The fears of men in the Black Power movement over population control were not totally without merit. Kirk admitted some population control zealots were motivated by fears of growth in the African American community.¹⁷⁴ Kirk did not agree that their objective was to exterminate African Americans. In Kirk's view, the objective was only to limit its growth. Kirk believed contraceptives and easy abortions were affecting all sectors of society.¹⁷⁵ In general, African American women resented advocates from both sides of the issue. They did not need social scientists from the white community telling them about the hardships African American women faced. From childhood they had been fully aware of the difficulties African American women historically faced. They also resented the call by African American men for them not to practice birth control. In their minds, if anyone was betraying the African American community it was African American men who did not stick around to support their children.¹⁷⁶ Despite this view, African Americans did not let the issue of birth control divide them as a community.

¹⁷² Patricia Harden and others, "Birth Control and Black Children: The Sisters Reply," in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, ed. Albert, Judith and Stewart Albert (New York: Praeger, 1984).

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Russell Kirk, "Census Still Shows Decrease of Cities," *New Orleans Time-Picayune*, 25 August 1970, sec. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Kirk, Russell, "Do We Have a Right to Bring Children into this World," *General Features Corporation*, 5 or 6 May 1973, .

¹⁷⁶ Patricia Harden and others, "Birth Control and Black Children: The Sisters Reply," in *The Sixties Papers: Documents of a Rebellious Decade*, ed. Albert, Judith and Stewart Albert (New York: Praeger, 1984).

Welfare programs were one factor influencing the birth rate in America according to Kirk. His argument on how welfare was affecting the birth rate was two sided. On the one side were welfare mothers. According to Kirk these women, many of them unmarried, had multiple children to gain federal aid.¹⁷⁷ Kirk attributed the swelling population in American slums to these women. On the flipside of the coin, the average American couple was having fewer children or none at all due to the welfare state.¹⁷⁸ Before the establishment of social programs like Social Security, one reason to have children was to insure there would be someone around to take care of parents in their old age. Kirk insisted this plan could not succeed. If the population declined there would not be enough working age people to maintain the immense financial obligations of Social Security and Medicare.¹⁷⁹

The welfare state had not single-handedly caused the decline in births in Kirk's judgment. There were numerous other factors that contributed to this trend. One cause was that many young couples thought the cost and bother of raising children was too demanding.¹⁸⁰ Many conservatives believed the younger generation was lazy and unwilling to take on the same burdens their ancestors had. It is not uncommon among conservatives to blame any social problem on the young. This was especially true during the 1960s and 70s.

Another of the trends that influenced the reduction in the birth rate was that many married couples were having only one child. The reason for this development was parents with a single child could dedicate all their resources to one offspring. Kirk believed these parents were overly concerned with sending their children to the best

¹⁷⁷ Russell Kirk, "Are Children Worth Conceiving."

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

schools. Kirk held “life exists for its own sake, not for the sake of a social status certificate from the Ivy League.”¹⁸¹ Kirk was not the kind of conservative that held others to higher standards than he held himself. Kirk, a man who married late in life, had four daughters of his own. One of his reasons for having a large family was his belief that it would have been unfair to his oldest daughter to grow up without any siblings.¹⁸² Kirk’s large family was also a statement that it was possible to have one in modern times. One should not assume Kirk was able to have this large family due to being monetarily wealthy. While Kirk was a good provider for his family, writing had not made him a rich man.

Kirk realized selfish concerns were not the only reasons some American couples were choosing to remain childless. Many couples desired children but asked themselves, “Do we have the right to bring children into this world?”¹⁸³ According to Kirk these couples were reacting to convictions that they were living in a troubled age. Kirk held there were many reasons for this anxiety. Following World War II, there was a public mood “that every day, in every way, things were getting better and better.”¹⁸⁴ When people did not see this improvement in their everyday lives, they became disillusioned. Kirk maintained the expectation to turn America into a perfect society had always been a foolish endeavor. He knew it was impossible to create a utopia here on earth.

Misgivings over the state of American society in the 1970s were not without merit according to Kirk. He felt America’s great cities were in decay, ugly, and unsafe.¹⁸⁵ Kirk had never been a lover of America’s great urban centers. He felt young people living there had to numb their brains with narcotics to deal with the boredom of living in such a

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Kirk, Russell, "Do We Have a Right to Bring Children into this World."

¹⁸⁴ Russell Kirk, "Are Children Worth Conceiving."

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

place. Kirk alleged many of the problems plaguing American cities were finding their way into suburbs.¹⁸⁶ Despite these realities, Kirk asserted it was wrong for couples to let fears of the future prevent them from having children. He pointed out past generations had faced similar problems and yet had not given in to their fears. As far as Kirk was concerned, a husband and wife who chose not to have children were denying their essential function which was the rearing of children.¹⁸⁷

Kirk believed if America had anything to fear, it was not the future, but the cures some liberals advocated. One liberal cause that troubled Kirk was the pro-choice movement. Kirk was saddened when Britain legalized abortion in 1976.¹⁸⁸ He believed American liberals would use the British law to gain momentum for the pro-choice movement in America. Kirk asked if liberal's were successful in getting abortion legalized would their next step be to advocate euthanasia of the elderly.¹⁸⁹

The reason Kirk tied abortion and euthanasia together is key to understanding his thought process. Kirk felt the living, the dead, and the unborn were all united beyond the boundaries of time and space. Their lives were united together in one unbreakable chain. To him, terminating a pregnancy was no different than euthanizing an elderly person due to bad health. Kirk believed such decisions were not within the domain of mortal men. According to his convictions, only the creator held such power over life and death. Kirk's theory that abortion legislation would lead to legalization of euthanasia is not as outlandish as it may sound. He supported this conclusion by pointing out that in Britain

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Russell Kirk, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written On The Sky* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1987), 45.

¹⁸⁸ Russell Kirk, "Says Abortion Act In Britain Deplored," *New Orleans Time-Picayune*, 23 February 1970, sec. 1, .

¹⁸⁹ Russell Kirk, "First Abortion Laws, Next 'Euthanasia,'" *New Orleans Time-Picayune*, 12 April 1969, sec. 1, .

the House of Commons had passed a Voluntary Euthanasia Bill that would have been passed into law if the House of Lords had not killed it.¹⁹⁰

Kirk, a former college professor, was particularly interested in how the sexual revolution was affecting college campuses. Kirk thought women's colleges had fallen victim to the feminist movement.¹⁹¹ Kirk maintained both sexes benefited from attending same sex institutions. It bothered him to see women's institutions closing their doors due to losing students to colleges that had previously been male only. In Kirk's opinion, these all female universities were not losing students due to having lower academic standards than the predominately male institutions. Kirk pointed out his wife had received an excellent education from Molly Catholic College for Women.¹⁹² One of the primary reasons Kirk advocated single sex education was that it eliminated the many distractions created by coed education.

Being a traditionalist, one of Kirk's arguments against changes was what that change would lead to next. Kirk witnessed a perfect example of this occurring on college campuses across the country. In the 1960s and 70s, universities across the country started to tear down the barriers between their male and female students. In past generations, parents had sent their children off to college with the knowledge that university officials would closely monitor interaction between male and female students. At one time, a student of the opposite sex who wanted to talk to someone of the other sex had to ask a dorm monitor to get that person for them. In most cases this would have been a male student calling on a female student because the opposite situation would have been improper in the minds of many. Students began arguing that such practices were outdated

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Russell Kirk, "The Case for Women's Colleges," *General Features Corporation*, 19 or 20 July 1973, .

¹⁹² Ibid.

and had no place on modern campuses. Students started to demand they be allowed to visit students of the opposite sex in their dorm rooms. Kirk believed this dorm visitation plan would be a short-lived fad students themselves would put a stop to. Kirk suspected “most young women really didn’t want young men around at all hours, and most young men were even less eager for inescapable feminine companionship.”¹⁹³

The dorm visiting plan proved just to be a stepping stone for progressive students who wanted to tear down all barriers separating the sexes. Students in many universities started to ask, “why do we have to live in separate dorms?” The University of Kansas had coed dorms as early as 1959.¹⁹⁴ In the 1960s and 70s more coed dormitories emerge on campuses across America. Kirk believed this trend distracted students from their studies, and also led to premature marriages. Kirk thought many of these marriages were doomed from the start due to the immaturity of the couple.¹⁹⁵

Kirk was very concerned about the growing number of states passing legislation for no fault divorces in the 1970s. Kirk believed marriage was the fundamental bond of human society.¹⁹⁶ Kirk feared no-fault divorces would cause the number of divorces in the United States to skyrocket. He feared that husbands and wives would no longer have to prove to a judge that there had been an irretrievable breakdown in the marriage.

Kirk did not understand why feminists, who allegedly were looking out for women, supported a cause like no-fault divorce. Kirk pointed out the laws that had been passed to make divorces harder to obtain had been done for the protection of the woman. No-fault divorces would make it easier for husbands to get out of their obligation to their

¹⁹³ Russell Kirk, "Dorm Visiting Plan Believed Just Fad," *New Orleans Time-Picayune*, 9 July 1971, sec. 1, .

¹⁹⁴ Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 205.

¹⁹⁵ Russell Kirk, "Coed Dormitories Called Silly Move," *New Orleans Time-Picayune*, 30 October 1970, sec. 1, .

¹⁹⁶ Russell Kirk, "No-Fault Divorce: An Effective way to Ruin America," *General Features Corporation*, 7,8, or 9 September 1974, .

wives and children in Kirk's opinion. Kirk understood the premise behind some feminist support of no-fault divorces. Wives who had tired of being taken advantage of through the institution of marriage could dissolve their marriages and start a new life. In this fairytale vision, wives would no longer be forced to prove to a myopic male judge why they deserved to get a divorce. Once out of their oppressive marriages women would find rewarding careers.

Scores of divorced women did go on and achieve great things, but it was not an easy matter. No-fault divorces seriously decreased a man's obligation to his former wife. If there were no children she might come away from the marriage with only the clothes on her back. Reentering the job market with little or no marketable skills was not a fate most women were ready to face. These women realized if they were going to start over they would need to come away from the marriage with some assets to help them in their new life. Such assets were much easier to gain through traditional divorces where the judge took into consideration the earning ability of the wife. Kirk was upset anytime a marriage ended in divorce. He realized however, that sometimes there was no other choice. In such cases, he felt the needs of the mother and child needed to be taken into consideration. Kirk maintained no-fault divorces prevented the American court system from addressing these needs.

No- fault divorce was not the only exploitive mechanism employed in the 20th century to exploit women. Pornography underwent rapid growth and was able to enter mainstream society in the 1960s and 70s. To many, this was a further example of how women were being exploited due to declining morality in society. The topic of pornography polarized the women's movement more than any other issue.¹⁹⁷ Some

¹⁹⁷ Rosen, 191.

feminists asserted that women who worked in the adult film industry were exercising their freedom of choice. In fact, they argued these women were less exploited than the average housewife. Workers in the porn industry at least received compensation for engaging in sex while housewives did not.

A number of other feminists believed the porn industry degraded women and turned them into sexual objects. Among feminists who agreed pornography was potentially dangerous to women there was discord on how to address the issue. One faction, while dismayed over pornography, could not support outlawing it due to their belief in freedom of expression. On the other hand, feminists like Robin Morgan suggested porn was responsible for male violence against women.¹⁹⁸ Due to this, they believed pornography should not be protected by freedom of the press. Kirk was in agreement with this group of feminists who called for anti-pornography laws.¹⁹⁹

Kirk was very concerned over the message pornography was sending young people. Writers for pornographic magazines had reduced the sexual impulse to essentially a dirty, violent, and distasteful act.²⁰⁰ Kirk and his fellow conservatives were not the only ones who held this view. Many feminists felt conservatives were right about pornography and enlisted their aid to battle it. One target of this collaboration was Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy* magazine. Feminists in the anti-pornography movement found Hefner's *Playboy* particularly dangerous.²⁰¹ Because *Playboy* was less graphic than magazines like *Hustler*, it was deemed more acceptable by many. Kirk held that *Playboy*

¹⁹⁸ Davis, 328.

¹⁹⁹ Russell Kirk, "The Blight of Pornography," *General Features Corporation*, 24 January 1964, .

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 25.

used this credibility to perpetuate the idea women were Barbie doll idiots created to serve men's sexual impulses.²⁰²

Magazines like *Playboy* were not the only staple of mainstream society Kirk labeled as dangerous to the development of healthy citizens. Kirk maintained half of the films coming out in 1964 depicted sex-with-violence.²⁰³ In Kirk's opinion, such movies could corrupt the imagination and taste of a generation. Kirk believed the makers of these movies were not the only ones at fault. He also blamed parents who allowed their children to see them. According to him, a large portion of the patrons of these movies were minors. Kirk believed if parents prevented their children from patronizing such films profits would decline and film makers would stop making such filth.²⁰⁴ If that did not eliminate the blight of such films Kirk suggested an interesting alternative. Kirk, who had objected to the picketing efforts of the civil rights movement, suggested picketing be used against theaters showing such films.²⁰⁵

A few feminists agreed with Kirk on this issue of censoring mainstream films but most did not. They were troubled by the idea of one group controlling how women were portrayed. Traditional conservatives were willing to group all movies with nudity as one group; feminists in general, were not. The dispute over what was pornography led feminists to reevaluate their stance on pornography. They decided their efforts were being wasted on an issue they could never really win. If conservatives could censor mainstream films, they would also be able to censor pro-chose advocates. In the end, the union between conservatives and feminists was doomed to fail because their vision for America was so radically different.

²⁰² Russell Kirk, "What Sexual Revolution?," *General Features Corporation*, 17-18 September 1974, .

²⁰³ Russell Kirk, "Nastiness in the Movies," *General Features Corporation*, 7 July 1964, .

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Throughout the run of his “To The Point” column Kirk continued to inform his readers about the objectives of the feminist movement. The situation feminists found themselves in reflected Kirk’s own situation. The feminist movement, like the conservative movement, had many diverse voices. Both groups continued to struggle with creating a united front. By the 1980s, conservatives had overcome this problem and established themselves as the dominant voice in America. Feminists, on the other hand, experienced a backlash during this decade which, in part, was due to conservatives rise to power.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

During the 1960s and 70s, America experienced an identity crisis resulting in social turmoil. Two distinct groups were fighting for control of America. Liberals advocating an ideology of universal equality wanted to change the existing social structure. They proposed implementing leveling programs that would allow all citizens the same opportunities. Individuals who opposed what they viewed as a utopian ideology banded together to form the conservative movement. Conservatives argued that ideologies like communism and socialism were destroying western society. In fact they held that all ideologies were bad. They maintained that conservatism was not an ideology because it was based in the adherence to the tradition and was the foundation for western society. Russell Kirk was among a group of intellectuals who stepped forward and gave the movement a voice.

Kirk's "To The Point" column provided conservatives a way to get their message into American households. This was advantageous to the long term goals of the conservative movement. While conservatives maintained that the majority of Americans were conservative, they put forth the idea they currently were not using their numbers to their advantage. Conservatives desperately wanted to unify this group into a powerful voting bloc. Kirk's column was instrumental in achieving this goal.

At first glance the views expressed by Kirk in his "To The Point" column might be considered racist. This is a typical charge used against many conservative writers and while in some cases it is true, it does not apply to Kirk. His beliefs are firmly based in a deep philosophical and historical tradition. Kirk did not support the preservation of racist institutions; however, he disagreed with his liberal opponents who believed the

government could force such change. Kirk maintained such change must come from the heart and not through laws that are forced upon society.

The conservative party of today owes a great debt to Russell Kirk. Through his writings people from all walks of life were drawn into the movement. Prior to the conservative movement voters had primarily been divided regionally. Kirk and other conservative writers put forth the idea that the construction worker in Michigan had more in common with the farmer in Tennessee than they did with the liberal who lived across the road. Once united, this conservative voting bloc represented a very powerful political entity.

In 1945, many Americans viewed the conservative movement as being a non-entity with no political future due to the popularity of the New Deal programs of F.D.R. At that time, liberals had a firm grasp on American political power. Men like Kirk were seen as being eccentrics who dreamed of returning to an idyllic past. Despite his eccentricities, Kirk still helped trigger the downfall of liberalism as a political movement. In 1980, conservatives realized one of their primary goals when Ronald Ragan became President. Since that election, a number of politicians on all levels have attempted to distant themselves from the moniker of liberalism. This is a direct result of the work of men like Kirk. They took the term liberal and changed its meaning into something that represents everything that is un-American.

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