

The College Republicans – A Brief History

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"Stand up for America; devote your life to its cause; love your homes, and prove as worthy of our cherished free institutions as they are worthy of your allegiance and service. Let not the high standard of National Honor, raised by the fathers, be lowered by their sons. Let learning, liberty and law be exalted and enthroned." - William McKinley speaking to the first National Convention of the College Republicans, 1892.¹

The Founding

James Francis Burke hurried across the University of Michigan campus just before 11 o'clock the morning of May 17th, 1892. The tariff was the talk of the students and several of them argued noisily as he passed them. Burke, "a handsome man of 24," was about to graduate from law school there, but had already been active in Republican politics for quite some time, first working as a private secretary to Senator Matthew Quay of Pennsylvania, and then by organizing the first College Republican club in the nation at the University of Michigan.²

Burke strode toward the rapidly filling Newberry Hall. Since 10 AM, students had been filing into the hall. They had been arriving for the past few days from as far away as Stanford University in the West and Harvard University in the East. "Active

¹"President McKinley's Message to Students," University of Michigan Republican, 3 November, 1900.

²"The Heathen College Boys," New York Times, 15 May, 1892.

were the lobbyists in that hour," reported the *Ann Arbor Register*, and for good reason.³ Setting up a national organization of any kind was bound to stir controversy. "The hall was well filled, even in the galleries, the crowd being so large that standing room was considered very desirable," the *Register* recounted.⁴

As Burke entered the hall, he spotted Governor William McKinley of Ohio on the platform and was immediately relieved that he had arrived. Given leave from class months ago, Burke had traveled to Columbus, Ohio, to ask William McKinley if he would "christen the organization,"⁵ and McKinley had agreed.

After an overture by the band, Burke "mounted the platform" and gave a "short, enthusiastic address."⁶ Later in the afternoon, they adopted a constitution unanimously as read, and the American Republican College League came into being. The next order of business was the election of officers. Burke cannot have been worried about the outcome, for he held a wide lead of support over any challenger for the top position in the newly constituted League. The *University of Michigan Daily* wrote that "there was some opposition expected" to Burke, "but if there was any it died out, leaving him the unanimous . . . choice of the convention."⁷ The remainder of the offices were filled unanimously amid cheers from the massed students.⁸

³"A Great Day For Ann Arbor: and for the University and Republican Party," *The Ann Arbor Register*, 19 May, 1892.

⁴"Successfully Organized: The Republican League of College Clubs Created and Jas. F. Burke of the U. of M. is President," *The U. of M. Daily*, 18 May, 1892.

⁵Interview with James Burke entitled, "Political College Club Movement Date back to Year 1892," in *The College Republican Club News*, 30 October, 1924.

⁶"Successfully Organized: The Republican League of College Clubs Created and Jas. F. Burke of the U. of M. is President," *The U. of M. Daily*, 18 May, 1892; "A Great Day For Ann Arbor: and for the University and Republican Party," *The Ann Arbor Register*, 19 May, 1892.

⁷"Successfully Organized: The Republican League of College Clubs Created and Jas. F. Burke of the U. of M. is President," *The U. of M. Daily*, 18 May, 1892.

⁸Officers included: First Vice President - J. B. (D) Wallingford of Leland Stanford University, Second Vice - A.(E) M. Pollard of Nebraska University, Third Vice - A. E. Munger of Iowa University, Fourth Vice - E. G. Smith of Lafayette College, Secretary - James M. Perkins of Harvard, Treasurer - James M. McAlpin of Princeton. These were compiled from the three articles listed above and a pamphlet entitled "A Historical Glimpse of the Beginnings and Growth of the National Republican College League" by Alfred E. Lunt, circa 1916.

Those seated on the platform with Burke made a few short speeches. Among them were such contemporary luminaries as Hon. Judge John M. Thurston of Nebraska, Senator Russell A. Alger of Michigan, Congressman J. Sloat Fassett of New York, Congressman W. E. Mason of Chicago, A. J. Lester, the man who took Abraham Lincoln's seat in the state legislature, and John M. Langston of Virginia.⁹ However, the greatest cheers were reserved for the "stalwart apostle of protection," "the Napoleon of finance," William McKinley, Governor of Ohio.¹⁰ During the banquet that followed the convention, McKinley, said to the over 1,000 assembled revelers,

This will be a memorable occasion for one thing if for no other, that it is the first. I hope it may be memorable for another and more important reason, that it will be the seed planting of practical political thought which will continue to grow and find root in every educational institution in the country. There is no such school for political education as the college and university. What is inculcated here penetrates every corner of the country where the college man goes. He goes everywhere and where he goes he is a mighty force in making and molding public sentiment.¹¹

That same year, Burke was elected the youngest Secretary of the Republican National Committee. The Chairman of the RNC, James Clarkson, wrote of him in 1893, "I know, as perhaps few do, the value of the service Mr. Burke has rendered the Republican Party in the last two years. The creation of the National League of College Republican Clubs was largely his own work. He contributed life to it through his ceaseless energy and enthusiasm, and in doing so added a new and practical force of the better sort to American politics."¹² Burke later became a member of the Harrison administration and, after returning to Pennsylvania, a Congressman from 1905 through

⁹An interesting note: Langston of Virginia was introduced as the "first colored man to hold office in this country" and gave the "most intense" address of the evening banquet. As quoted in the Ann Arbor Register, "In his state, he said, 'it is no longer a question of whether the colored man may vote, but anyone may vote. Even Democrats only vote by sufferance.' If the ballot is allowed to die in the south, he maintained it would die in the north. 'How much freedom have you in New York today?' . . . Mr. Langston believed the ballot of greater importance even than protection or honest money." Ann Arbor Register, 19 May, 1892.

¹⁰"A Great Day For Ann Arbor: and for the University and Republican Party," The Ann Arbor Register, 19 May, 1892.

¹¹McKinley, quoted by, Alfred E. Lunt, "A Historical Glimpse of the Beginnings and Growth of the National Republican College League," 1916 (?), p. 6.

¹²James Clarkson, Chairman and the Republican National Committee, quoted by Lunt, "A Historical Glimpse," p. 7.

1915. He served as General Council to the Republican National Committee and was present at the foundation of the Young Republican Roundtable in April of 1931. He died unexpectedly in Washington D.C. in 1932. Throughout his life he believed in the power of youth to sway elections. In an interview for the *College Republican Club News* in 1924, he said, "I am today more convinced than ever of the mighty force the college men of America can be in a presidential election."¹³

President Benjamin Harrison expressed the same enthusiastic sentiments to James Burke in 1892: "The wonder is that the necessity and promise of this work was not sooner appreciated by all of us. It has a disseminating power that no other political work has."¹⁴

Who we are

Thus the College Republicans began their 110 year work to bring young people into the Republican Party. We operate as the footsoldiers of the Republican Party. We put on the T-Shirts, pass out the literature, stuff the envelopes, walk the precincts, pound in the lawn signs, and make the telephone calls that drive the Republican Party forward.

We are the unions of the right.

We are the engines of democracy.

We make a difference.

Morton Blackwell once said that,

"Most people are not interested in politics.

¹³Interview with James Burke entitled, "Political College Club Movement Date back to Year 1892," in The College Republican Club News, 30 October, 1924., NACRC

¹⁴Alfred E. Lunt, "A Historical Glimpse of the Beginnings and Growth of the National Republican College League," 1916 (?), p. 6. National Archives College Republican Collection, Washington D.C., hereafter referred to as NACRC.

Most people who are interested in politics are not available for full time campaign employment.

Most people who are available for full time campaign work don't know how or where to get started."¹⁵

More Republicans received their first taste of politics in the College Republicans than any other organization in the nation. We provide the training in conservative thought, political technology and grassroots lobbying which changes young voters into principled activists for the Republican Party. At times, the leaders of the College Republican National Committee in its various forms have had stunning success in motivating young people to volunteer and involve themselves in the political process.¹⁶ That tradition is alive and well today.

Not only are young people a boundless source of energy and volunteer hours, they are also a tremendous source of enthusiasm and favorable publicity. "The media is always alive to the news value of student support," wrote Morton Blackwell, former Executive Director of the College Republican National Committee.¹⁷

The First 100 Years and Developing our Brand of Activism

College Republicans have been heralded by Presidents, countless Congressmen, Senators, and Governors. While Chairman of the Republican National

¹⁵Morton Blackwell to Potential Youth Coordinators regarding political training by Citizens for Responsible Youth Politics, 4 May, 1973, SUCRC.

¹⁶The College Republican National Committee changed names no less than thirteen times during its history. See appendix for the list of National Chairmen and the name of the organization they led.

¹⁷In "Fall Youth Campaign: Reagan/Bush '84 and the Republican National Committee, A Proposal to involve hundreds of students in the fall campaign," submitted by Morton Blackwell and Jack Abramoff, Chairman of the CRNC, 18 October, 1983., NACRC

Committee in 1972, Bob Dole referred to the College Republicans as “invaluable” and said their programs “led to victory for our party.”¹⁸ Ronald Reagan called them a “vital force in conservative politics,” and continued, “It was good to know that I could always count on such young conservatives to support our policies.”¹⁹ At a later time he wrote, “Without a doubt the College Republicans were among the most enthusiastic backers of my administration.”²⁰ Jack Kemp, often a favorite of College Republicans, wrote personally to National Chairman, Tony Zagotta in 1990, “For years, the College Republicans have been the vanguard in our fight to win control of the national agenda. Your activist efforts on the grass-roots level has helped usher a decade of Republican leadership.”²¹

As far back as 1876, young republicans on college campuses were vocally supporting Republicans. That year, Harvard freshman Theodore Roosevelt participated in a student organized torch light rally for Rutherford B. Hayes. Banner slogans read “Hooray for Hayes and Honest Ways” although one notable exception read, “Free Trade, Free Press, and Free Beer”²² Lincoln's Secretary of State, William H. Seward, organized a rally for Republican candidate for Governor of New York, Daniel D. Tompkins, then Vice President of the United States in 1818. The students in that campaign referred to

¹⁸Bob Dole to CRNC, circa 1972 in an undated, hand signed, open letter to the CRNC, Box 50 of the Stanford University Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, College Republican National Committee Collection, hereafter referred to as SUCRC.

¹⁹Ronald Reagan to CRNC, 28 July, 1990, NACRC.

²⁰Ronald Reagan to CRNC, undated, circa summer 1991, NACRC

²¹Jack Kemp, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to Tony Zagotta, National Chairman of the CRNC 1989-1991, 26 July, 1990. At the bottom of the page, Kemp scrawled in “all my best Tony,” revealing his personal tie with Mr. Zagotta and also with the CRNC and College Republicans at large.

²²Edmund Morris, The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt, (New York: Ballantine, 1979), p. 81-82.

themselves as the "Buck-tails," but were unsuccessful in placing their candidate in the governor's chair.²³

The first influence of political technology used by the College Republicans was in the presidential election of 1900. In that year, the College Republican's National Campaign Manager, Fred P. Whitney, appointed under National Chairman Arnold L. Davis, began a concerted effort to get college students to their home districts to vote. They also began a campaign to register students in their college districts where allowable by law. According to historian Alfred Lunt, the College Republicans discovered that closely contested districts, including William Jennings Bryan's home precinct in Lincoln Nebraska, could be won by shipping students home. Apparently, "every effort [was] made to get students to return home and vote at these points," and "the results were that in a number of such districts the student Republican vote coming in from distant college points held the balance of power and was the dominant factor in the swinging of these districts to the Republican ticket."²⁴ This included Bryan's loss of his home district. Home district voting was apparently tested on a small scale in previous administrations of the League in several areas around the country, and the results produced legal attacks by Democrats. "Violence and intimidation were threatened," Lunt wrote, "but the net result was a clear understanding of this important feature, an understanding which was decidedly in favor of the position taken by the League."²⁵

After this initial development, the most important piece of political technology of the past 40 years for the College Republicans was the development of the "mass based" youth effort.²⁶ Throughout the 1960's, the College Republicans were developing a consistent strategy that they could use over and over again, almost like a

²³Frederick W. Seward, *Autobiography of William H. Seward From 1801 to 1834*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1877), 35-36.

²⁴Alfred E. Lunt, "Historical Glimpse," p. 10., NACRC.

²⁵Ibid. p. 10., NACRC.

²⁶The term "mass based" is one of four kinds of youth efforts that Morton Blackwell outlined in the 1980 Youth for Reagan campaign plan. Proceeding from the worst to best, the others were: Standard Useless YE, Expensive Useless YE, Cadre YE and then "Mass Based."

template, which would yield the best results for any campaign.²⁷ The general steps of the mass based youth effort are; membership tables, campus canvasses, special projects, absentee ballot voting, mock elections and Get-Out-The-Vote activities. As soon as school opens in the fall, the hired youth effort coordinator will run membership tables on every college campus in the district. He will then use those collected members to systematically discover every Republican voter on that college campus, get them registered to vote and, if possible, get them to vote absentee (so that they can work for the candidate on election day activities.) He will then use this canvass organization to run special youth oriented projects for the campaign. Finally, he will run mock elections on every college campus and prepare a Get-Out-The-Vote strategy using students as workers.²⁸ The method is deceptively simple, but when done properly it can produce, favorable publicity, votes of student supporters and their family and friends, and massive amounts of volunteers for the campaign.²⁹

This type of mass based youth effort was first tried in 1967 in the "Youth for Louie Nunn for Governor of Kentucky" campaign with startling results. That year, Morton Blackwell was retained as the Southern area fieldman for the College Republican National Committee. The CRNC sent him to Kentucky for a two week stay, but he remained for the duration of the campaign.³⁰ At that time, Kentucky was one of the few states which had the 18 year old vote, so Blackwell's efforts could be well accounted for

²⁷It is imperative to note here that the 1972 presidential election saw some deviation from the mass based youth effort according to one source. In a paper entitled, "The Development of the College Republican Movement, 1964-1972," written circa 1973 for a political science course, M. Max Bartlett, former Executive Director of the CRNC, posits that the College Republicans began with the "Politics of Ideology, 1964 - summer 1967" moved to, "The Politics of Organization, summer 1967 - fall 1970" and towards "The Politics of Personality, fall 1970 - fall 1972." I maintain that each of these factors has been present throughout the history of the College Republicans.

²⁸This information is generally simple to find, as the vast majority of College Republican material created over the last 40 years falls into this generalized pattern, but here are a few places to look: "Conservative Political Leadership Institute, Source Book," (Washington, D.C.: Leadership Institute, 1995); "College Republicans; Building the Majority of the Future," Organizational Technology Manual, Vols. I and II, (Washington, D.C.: CRNC, 1980). Interesting comparisons can be made with earlier manuals if so desired. See, "College Canvass Manual, Nixon Youth," College Republicans of Louisiana, circa 1968., NACRC.

²⁹These things are listed in many proposals to the senior party for youth efforts. One example is "Youth for Manzullo," submitted by B. G. Malamut, Jr., 13 August, 1992., NACRC.

³⁰Morton C. Blackwell, interview by the author, 25 November, 1997.

in terms of student voting support. Within the first two weeks he, "traveled to 15 colleges making leadership training addresses before club meetings, conferring at length with local club leaders, organizing new clubs" and generally helping create a strong base for the youth campaign.³¹

During the course of the Kentucky campaign, the College Republican clubs signed up approximately 5,000 volunteers on college campuses.³² The Nunn Youth Effort dropped 93,000 copies of six distinct youth pieces on college campuses. A few days before the election they posted 20,000 flyers around the state. Over 8,000 absentee ballots were processed by the youth campaign itself, out of approximately 70,000 full time college students. Campaigners also mailed 15,000 hand addressed and signed postcards to family and friends of known student supporters of Nunn.³³

The *New York Times* headline for the Kentucky campaign the Sunday before the election read, "GOP in Kentucky Expects an Upset." The Times credited the College Republicans with "spectacular results" and reviewed the mock elections.³⁴

Nunn won every mock election at major schools in Kentucky. In all, 18 were won, and only 3 were lost. The wins were all by at least 56%, and ranged up to 80%. The 48, 48, and 49 percents which Nunn received in our only losses were in the very small schools in overwhelmingly Democrat areas. Nunn's strong showings, under the circumstances, were almost as good as wins, as the news media emphasized . . . It is difficult to describe the buoying effect the mock elections had on the Republican campaign. Every county headquarters was provided with every result. Louie Nunn had mock election 'scoreboards' made on poster paper and flew them with him around the state for display at meetings in the week before the election.³⁵

Nunn eventually won the campaign by 27,000 votes out of 870,000 ballots cast. He wrote to the College Republican National Committee, "I would like to thank you for your assistance in our past campaign. The College Republican National

³¹Morton C. Blackwell and Gary Fairchild, (National Chairman 1967-1969), "The New Student Politics," Washington, D.C.: CRNC, 1969), p. 9., NACRC.

³²Morton C. Blackwell, "The 1967 Kentucky College Campaign," December 1967., NACRC.

³³Morton Blackwell and Gary Fairchild, (National Chairman 1967-1969), "The New Student Politics," CRNC, 1969, p. 9., NACRC.

³⁴"GOP in Kentucky Expects an Upset," *New York Times*, 5 November, 1967.

³⁵Morton C. Blackwell, "The 1967 Kentucky College Campaign," December 1967., NACRC.

Committee, through the services of Morton Blackwell, contributed in large measure to our victory on November 7."³⁶

In 1971, the campaign manager for Governor David Treen of Louisiana likewise credited the College Republicans for their achievements, claiming that students did 90% of the work of the campaign.³⁷ As the election approached, mock election victories on college campuses became more and more apparent in the newspapers. "Treen Surprise Winner in Student's Mock Election," screamed the headline in *The Daily Reveille*.³⁸

Partially due to the success of the developing mass based youth effort, the College Republican National Committee officially separated from the Young Republican National Federation in 1970 after various forms of connection since the middle of the 1920's. The Republican National Convention in 1972 made the College Republican National Committee the third official auxiliary to the Party, with the Chairman as ex officio member of the Executive Committee of the Republican National Committee.³⁹

As the College Republican National Committee continued to grow and change even President Gerald Ford took notice in 1975,

As active Republicans on college campuses across our nation, each of you communicates to other young voters the philosophy of the Republican Party. In the months ahead you can play an important role in expanding our Party's goals in the American political system. As Republicans working together we have a great opportunity to build on programs now underway for a better America and a better world.

My best wishes to each of you, and keep up the great work.⁴⁰

³⁶Governor Elect Louie Nunn to Gary Fairchild, 11 November, 1967., NACRC.

³⁷CRYP Flyer Comment by John Rivers, Campaign manager for Dave Treen for Congress 1971. SUCRC.

³⁸*The Daily Reveille*, December 1, 1971.

³⁹See Official Minutes of the Republican National Convention, 1972., NACRC.

⁴⁰Gerald Ford to The CRNC June 13, 1975. Printed in the Biennial Convention materials., NACRC.

"The College Republicans have been credited with Ronald Reagan's paper-slim victory in Massachusetts" in 1980 as well.⁴¹ As head of the Massachusetts Federation of College Republican Clubs, Jack Abramoff (elected National Chairman in 1981) produced over 10,000 youth votes. Reagan won by only 3,000 votes.⁴² In 1978, John Warner carried the state of Virginia by only 4,711 votes. The College Republican Youth Effort produced over 5,000 votes.⁴³ Texas Congressman Joe Barton's youth effort of 1984 provided over 9,500 votes from Texas A&M University alone.⁴⁴ The youth effort for Strom Thurmond in 1972 printed up thousands of fliers that headlined, "Strom Thurmond . . . In Step With the Times." Senator Thurmond was 69 years old then, but was shown in the flier youthfully trotting along next to several well dressed, enthusiastic, students.⁴⁵ A *Charlotte Observer* columnist wrote, "The conventional wisdom among Democrats was that with 18-year-olds eligible to vote, the 69-year-old Thurmond would hold little appeal for young voters," but "the evidence to date suggests otherwise, and Zeigler's [his opponent] staff privately admits they underrated Thurmond's appeal to young voters."⁴⁶ After listing several mock election victories, *The Greenville News* quoted Thurmond youth coordinator, John Carbaugh, as saying, "further proof . . . that the youth of our state have not been misled by the spurious charges being made about Sen. Thurmond."⁴⁷ The political technology used to create this image was clearly successful. Thurmond won the election with the help of thousands of student volunteers.

Financing our cause

⁴¹Jack Abramoff, interview by author, 24 November, 1997.

⁴²"Youth for Dornan, Campaign Proposal," submitted 15 June, 1984, by Stephen O. Goodrick., NACRC.

⁴³"Fall Youth Campaign, Senator James Abdnor," submitted by Rob Metry, 2 September, 1986., NACRC.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Thurmond Flier, circa 1972, SUCRC.

⁴⁶"Many Young Voters Supporting Thurmond," *The Charlotte Observer*, 22 October, 1972.

⁴⁷"Mock Election Won by Thurmond," *The Greenville News*, 12 October, 1972.

College Republicans were never an expensive investment for a political campaign or for the Republican National Committee. As Senator Carl T. Curtis suggested, "I can think of no other political organization which can give conservatives a bigger 'bang per buck.'"⁴⁸

The first year that monetary records of the College Republicans are available is 1965, but we can speculate about funding before that year, particularly during good years for the College Republicans. Some money must have been available to James Francis Burke through the Republican National Committee, for he was able to set up a national office in New York and arrange ratification meetings for the League's constitution in Boston, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco.⁴⁹ Apparently the League was well financed at least through the 1908 elections. They retained some sort of headquarters throughout that time and two (one in Chicago and one in New York) by 1908. There was likewise an influx of funding in 1924. That year saw the reemergence of the College Republicans as the Associated University Republican Clubs, with John Hamlin as its Director. They worked out of the Republican National Committee office and had enough money to send out their newsletter, the "College Republican Club News," across the country.⁵⁰

In 1980, a trained Youth Effort Coordinator named Steve Antosh organized a national youth effort for Reagan with Morton Blackwell's help. They spent \$150,000 and produced remarkable results.⁵¹ Reagan won 98 of 105 mock elections held on college campuses around the nation, including Carter's home campus of Georgia, and brought thousands of students to the campaigns and to the polls.⁵² However, the "Youth for Reagan '80" campaign originally requested almost \$423,000 with the promise of

⁴⁸Quoted from a CRNC Brochure circa 1974, SUCRC.

⁴⁹"College League Officers," *New York Times*, 26 May, 1892.

⁵⁰At least twice per month from May through the election in November of 1924, mailings were sent out to the over 200 clubs which were involved at some point in the youth effort for Coolidge.

⁵¹Steve Antosh and Morton Blackwell to Drew Lewis, RE: Joint RNC/Reagan -Bush funding for the Youth Effort, memo and detailed budget, 21 August, 1980., NACRC.

⁵²Figures published by the Leadership Institute, *Source Book*, 1995.

organizing 500,000 student volunteers for the campaign.⁵³ They were able to accomplish this with approximately a third of what they thought they needed.

In the summer of 1981, the College Republican National Committee received \$290,000 in aid from the senior party. This was primarily to implement newly elected Chairman, Jack Abramoff's field program. Through an aggressive fundraising program, the CRNC was able to spend \$550,000 in the 1982 midterm elections and then \$610,000 in 1983. These years were later known as some of the best in College Republican history.

According to the Annual Report of the CRNC 1983, only 10% of the money received in 1983 was from the RNC. The CRNC reported that 70% was received from private donors.⁵⁴ This showed that the College Republicans could create an almost self sufficient organization under the best conditions. The 1984 "Youth for Reagan" campaign originally asked for almost \$1,000,000 and unfortunately it is unclear what they spent in total, but it was likely far less than that amount. The 1986 Annual Report stated that the College Republicans received 12% from the RNC, but only 47% from private donors. This is probably because they raised significantly less money.⁵⁵

The next accounting available is for 1987. In that year, the CRNC spent only around \$170,000, with \$100,000 coming from the RNC. They asked for \$286,000 in 1988 and were approved again for \$100,000.⁵⁶

In fact almost every year from 1970 until today that CRNC has received roughly \$100,000 per year in support from the RNC, barring the one blip in 1981. That

⁵³Steve M. Antosh, National Youth Coordinator, Reagan For President, and Morton C. Blackwell, "Budget and Structure for the National Youth Effort, 1980 General Election," presented 9 July, 1980., NACRC.

⁵⁴"College Republican National Committee, 1983 Annual Report," Jack Abramoff, Chairman, NACRC.

⁵⁵There are no figures on exactly how much money was spent in 1986, but the above mentioned percentages come from the 1986 Annual Report, "College Republicans: The New Republican Generation," David Minor, Chairman, NACRC.

⁵⁶Figures based upon confidential memos between Chairman Stockton Reeves and Executive Director Susan Brackin. Only one was dated, "CRNC Proposed Budget 1988, October 1, 1987," To Jay Banning, From Stockton Reeves, National Chairman. The others were not dated, but titled "Support from the Republican National Committee," "CRNC, Statement of Financial Performance, August 1, 1987 - March 15, 1988," and "CRNC, Proposed Budget April 1, 1988 - April 1, 1989.", NACRC.

year was heralded as a golden age by College Republican activists.⁵⁷ Slightly more was given during election years for special programs. 1970, 1980, and 1981 were banner years for the College Republicans across the country partly because they spent more money than ever before.

Membership Ups and Downs

When the College Republicans began with the formation of the American Republican College League, members included students from every major college and university in the country, according to the *New York Times*.⁵⁸ Throughout the years, they have had massive fluctuations in membership. After a crash in membership in the late 1970s, the College Republicans retained only 250 viable clubs by the summer of 1980. Due to renewed leadership, that number was around 1,000 by the November election and, by the end of the summer of 1981, the College Republicans reached their peak of 1,100 clubs and approximately 110,000 members.⁵⁹ That was also the period when funding from the Republican Party jumped upward. It made the College Republicans the largest student political organization in the country.

There were no signs that their counterparts, the College Democrats, reached the same numbers. In 1986, the College Democrats reached a membership high of 55,000, mostly because of renewed funding motivated by a fear that campus conservatives were winning lifelong Republican voters.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Interviews with Jack Abramoff, 24 November, 1997; Peter Roff, 25 November, 1997; and Morton Blackwell, 25 November, 1997.

⁵⁸"The College Republican League, Organized at Ann Arbor and Addressed by Gov. McKinley," *New York Times*, 17 May, 1892.

⁵⁹Annual Reports of the CRNC from 1980, 1983, 1986, 1991, NACRC.

⁶⁰*U.S. News and World Report*, 13 January, 1986.

The vast majority of candidates wrote to the RNC using phrases like, "without them our chances of victory would be minimal,"⁶¹ "the College Republican National Committee is an organization that has proved its worth,"⁶² or "College Republicans have helped change the course of history -- and change it for the better."⁶³

The leaders who tend to be remembered from the College Republican's history were successful in running good youth programs or for changing the politics around them in a real way. James Francis Burke created the American Republican College League. Alfred Lunt retained the National Chairmanship for eight years between 1900 and 1908, ran a successful youth effort for Roosevelt and then Taft, and built the organization up to 100,000 members on 314 campuses across the nation.⁶⁴ John Hamlin ran a youth effort for Coolidge in 1924. Many leaders in the Republican Party today got their start in the 1964 youth effort for Barry Goldwater.⁶⁵ The power of the Goldwater movement can be shown in the fact that over 1,000 students attended the Midwest Federation convention in 1961. This was "to contest just one section of a college political organization."⁶⁶ One historian called the event the "Siege of St. Paul," because of the numbers of students and their intensity.⁶⁷ In 1970, Joseph Abate separated the College Republican National Committee from the Young Republican National Federation.⁶⁸ Steve Gibble won an

⁶¹Newly elected Congressman Vic Veysey of California to Ron Romans, Chairman of the Young Republicans, 1 October, 1970., SUCRC.

⁶²Ken Towery, Campaign Manager for Senator John Tower of Texas, to John Brady and the CRNC, 28 April, 1978., SUCRC.

⁶³Reagan to David Minor, National Chairman, CRNC, 1986., NACRC.

⁶⁴Lunt, "A Historical Glimpse," p. 12. It was possible to have the 100,000 members Lunt claimed on such few campuses organized because "Republican percentages in the colleges were swelled to an average, all over the United States, of 84 per cent." This seems impossible today, but the era was the most Republican in history., NACRC.

⁶⁵In, Stephen Hess and David S. Broder. The Republican Establishment: The Present and Future of the G.O.P. (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); William C. Berman, America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Bush. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

⁶⁶M. Stanton Evans, Revolt on the Campus. (Chicago: Henry Regener Company, 1961), 207.

⁶⁷Richard S. Wheeler, "Thou Shalt Not Steal, The Siege of St. Paul," Rally Magazine, May 1966, 1-20.

⁶⁸This is a fascinating subject. The minutes of the 1970 CRNC National Board Meeting should be seen as well as the Separation Resolution for the process of separation. According to Blackwell, the main reason that the separation succeeded was that the Republican National Committee was about to recognize the CRNC as separate in order to end the fighting between it and the YRNF. Then YRNF National Chairman, Ron Romans was very much against it, but the YRNF repealed the section of their constitution governing

eleventh hour campaign for National Chairman in 1979.⁶⁹ Jack Abramoff won Massachusetts for Reagan in 1980 and oversaw the growth of the largest and most active College Republican National Committee ever.⁷⁰

The Reagan Campaigns – Our Greatest Years

President Ronald Reagan wrote this to the Biennial Convention of 1987,

I am delighted to send warmest greetings and congratulations to the College Republicans for your 95th anniversary. I wish I could join you as you gather in Philadelphia during the Bicentennial of the Constitution, our charter of limited government.

College Republicans are a vital force in conservative politics. You are the vanguard of the Republican Party. I know that the strength of young people's support for our Party will ensure the continued success of Republican goals as you begin to assume leadership roles in the Party and in our Nation.

Without a doubt, you have been among the most enthusiastic backers of my Administration's policies, especially over the last few months. I look to you to keep campus support strong for the Administration and our party, and to translate that into Republican victories in 1988!

Meanwhile, good luck with your convention. Make the most of it, and know that Nancy and I are grateful for your outstanding work for the goals we share for our beloved country. God bless you, and God bless America.⁷¹

The College Republicans entered the 1980 elections with the right balance of tools. The Youth Effort for Reagan played a prominent roll in the Governor's victory. By the time the 1984 election was over, the College Republicans were saying about the College Democrats, "Those guys are just out of it. They don't realize that it's cool to be conservative."⁷² Just as it was cool to be in the Students for a Democratic Society in the 1960's, it was cool to be conservative in the 1980's. The 1980 election ushered in this

the CRNC at their next board meeting. The 1972 National Convention saw the CRNC recognized as only the third official auxiliary of the RNC, with ex officio status., NACRC, SUCRC.

⁶⁹Gibble's campaign did not begin until after the credentials committee meeting to decide how many votes each state would receive, just a few hours before the official voting would take place.

⁷⁰Jack Abramoff registered 12,000 conservative student voters; Reagan won the state by 3,000. Eisenhower was the last Republican to take Massachusetts.

⁷¹Ronald Reagan to the CRNC, 2 June, 1987. Printed in the Biennial Convention materials., NACRC.

⁷²Ibid., p. 14.

mentality, interestingly enough, with similar technology to the SDS movement of the 1960s. "We looked to Lenin and Mao for how to run a successful protest," said one activist of the College Republicans.⁷³

During the 1980 campaign newspapers pumped out headlines like, "Youth Embrace GOP,"⁷⁴ "The GOP - Big Club on Campus,"⁷⁵ and "Young Voters Ready to Crown Reagan."⁷⁶

The Republican National Committee and the Reagan campaign launched the "Youth for Reagan" campaign with well over \$150,000, roughly twice what the College Republicans received the year before and three times more than the College Democrats spent that year.⁷⁷ The Youth for Reagan director, Steve Antosh, proposed to identify "825,000 student supporters," provide "500,000 total youth volunteers," and "300,000 absentee ballots for Ronald Reagan."⁷⁸ The 1980 "Youth for Reagan" effort was the most ambitious mass based youth effort in College Republican history.

The major theme of the "Youth for Reagan" campaign was peace through strength, lower taxes, less government, and more individual freedom and opportunity. The College Republicans attacked the issues with hard hitting posters. One showed Russian troops marching with the caption, "The Soviet Union Needs You . . . Support a Nuclear Freeze."⁷⁹ The College Republicans also had Reagan himself. Students were enthralled with him throughout the 1980's. Reports said that his popularity stemmed from the "jaunty, manly confidence that inspires" Americans.⁸⁰ Reagan's role in making Republicanism "hip" cannot be overlooked.⁸¹

⁷³Peter Roff, interviewed by author, 25 November, 1997.

⁷⁴Falundi, "Right Turn," The Atlanta Weekly, 14.

⁷⁵Betty Cuniberti, "The GOP - Big Club on Campus," The Los Angeles Times, 3 May, 1982.

⁷⁶Mary McGrory, "Young Voters for the President," Raleigh News and Observer, 27 September, 1984.

⁷⁷Falundi, "Right Turn," The Atlanta Weekly, 15.

⁷⁸Morton Blackwell and Steve M. Antosh, National Youth Coordinator, Reagan for President, "Budget and Structure for the National Youth Effort: 1980 General Election," 9 July, 1980., NACRC

⁷⁹Poster in the NACRC.

⁸⁰Bill Kauffman, "Making Republicanism Cool," Reason, June 1986, 24.

⁸¹Ibid. p. 24.

By the time the election was over, Republicans had made huge gains in the student vote. The youth effort continued on from 1980 until by 1984, for the first time since 18 year olds gained the right to vote in 1972, more students were voting for the Republican candidate for President than for the Democrat. Some newspapers predicted that student votes for the President could reach as high as 70%.⁸² Even the *New York Times* grudgingly admitted, "a solid majority of young people now identify with or lean toward the Republican Party."⁸³ Students identifying with the Republican Party shot up 20% between 1975 and 1985.⁸⁴

The "Youth for Reagan" campaign won 98 of 105 mock elections held on college campuses across the country. The College Republican National Committee went from 250 clubs in the spring of 1980, to 1002 clubs by the November election, a feat of organizational and leadership skill that has yet to be matched. In Massachusetts, Jack Abramoff, future National Chairman, helped win the state by registering over 10,000 new student voters and getting them to vote absentee. Reagan won the state by only 3,000 votes.

The 1984 campaign was equally impressive for the College Republicans. The youth campaign for the national convention was entitled Fritz Busters after the top movie of the summer Ghost Busters and the College Republicans received an enormous amount of media attention for their efforts.

In all, the 1980's were a heyday for College Republican style, hard hitting activist politics. Reagan's focus on winning the Cold War, cutting government and taxes resonated amongst the youth community winning him large majorities and assisting the College Republicans in growing to their largest numbers ever.

⁸²"Conservatism on Campus: 'Its cool to be square,'" The Atlanta Constitution, July 19, 1984; Darden Research Corp. Poll of the South - April 1984. The Reagan vs. Mondale portion showed 18-24 giving more support to Reagan than any other group, with 68.9% to Mondale's 29.5%.

⁸³David E Rosenbaum, "Growing Support For Republicans Found in Survey, Voters Splitting Almost Evenly on Which Party They Back - GOP Draws Youth," The New York Times, October 7, 1984.

⁸⁴"Poll: National Issues," Newsweek on Campus, March 1986.

The recent past – the 1990's

The College Republican National Committee went through enormous changes over the course of the past ten years. Out of all of these changes, we have made a stronger, brighter, more articulate voice for conservative political activism throughout the country. Our most recent National Chairmen have all assisted in making our national committee a better place.

From 1989 through 1993, Chairman Tony Zagotta ran one of our largest single programs ever supporting our troops in Desert Storm. College Republicans under his leadership ran thousands of rallies, vigils and protests across of America to show how young people felt about America and about the war. Chairman Zagotta also reignited our influence overseas in our battle against socialism and communism by twice being elected the Chairman of the International Young Democrats Union, a right of center conglomeration of youth groups similar to the College Republicans throughout the world.

Chairman Bill Spadea began a nationwide program to register students with the College Republican National Committee. Using the standard form for recruitment of College Republicans started during his term from 1993 through 1995 and helped the CRNC get a grasp on its total membership. He also kept contact with the membership through a national newspaper called the Broadside which was delivered to tens of thousands of College Republicans across the country. Bill Spadea also assisted the hundreds of youth efforts that changed the course of history by electing a Republican Congress for the first time over 40 years in 1994.

Chairman Joe Galli's term from 1995 through 1997 saw the elimination of the College Republican National Committee's long standing and substantial debt. He also established close ties to the Republican National Committee and ran a broadbased youth program at the San Diego RNC convention during the 1996 Dole campaign.

The Committee elected Adam Brohimer as its Chairman in 1997 and immediately began a reorganization of its governing document, the CRNC Constitution. Through Chairman Brohimer's leadership, the CRNC emerged from this process healthier and stronger than ever before. The Brohimer administration also developed a major effort for the fall campaigns of 1997 and managed to bus thousands of students into New Jersey for Christie Whitman. The College Republican youth effort for Gilmore that same year is still spoken of as one of the most important in Virginia history.

The College Republican National Committee Today

Due to the efforts of all of the Chairmen and administrations of the previous decade, the College Republican National Committee was prepared to embark on the largest program in history in the fall of 1999. For the first time since the middle of the 1980's the College Republican National Committee sent full time, trained staff out across the nation to create new College Republican chapters. The first program allowed for only 6 field representatives, but they had remarkable success. Over the course of 10 weeks in the fall of 1999, these first pioneers traveled to nearly 40 states and raised 220 new College Republican clubs. The field program was repeated with 10 representatives in the fall of 2000 to assist in the election of President George W. Bush and then again in the fall of 2001 with 15 field representatives.

Over the course of these first three field programs, the College Republican National Committee catapulted from 409 chapters to 944 chapters. Along the way, these field representatives directly assisted in the election of dozens of Republicans throughout the country. Particularly successful were the youth efforts for newly elected Congressmen Rob Simmons of Connecticut and Mark Kennedy of Minnesota.

This fall the College Republican National Committee will run the largest field program in our history, sending 35 full time field representatives out for eleven weeks.

By October, the CRNC will raise and strengthen over 550 College Republican clubs throughout the country bringing our total number of chapters to 1,200 – more than at any time in our history. They will recruit more than 25,000 new College Republicans and produce 170,000 absentee ballot votes for Republican candidates this fall.

We not only changing the face of the College Republicans, we are also changing the face of the Republican voter in America. Many of our field representatives this fall are of Hispanic or African American descent. Today's Republican voter will be younger and more diverse than ever before thanks to the work of the College Republicans.

By virtue of this success the CRNC has been able to attract an increased number of interested donors. In the 1998 the budget for the College Republican National Committee was approximately \$250,000 per year. Today, our budget is \$1,500,000. Thanks to the many contributors and believers, this year we will provide more services to our membership than ever before. New and better materials will be in the hands of every chapter by September 1, 2002 and an updated website will keep our membership connected to local and national events at all times.

Today's College Republican National Committee is on the move. We are the “unions of the right” and the fastest growing sector of Republican Party activists. For over 110 years, we have fought hard for Republican candidates through our work. You are a part of that tradition. With your help, the next 110 years will be even better.

Join the College Republicans.

Make a difference.

Bibliographical Essay

The basis for this project are two archival collections: the Stanford University Hoover Institution on War Revolution and Peace, College Republican National Committee Collection, and the National Archives, College Republican National

Committee Collection. Both are uncategorized, containing a wide variety of proposals, letters, manuals and newsletters.

The National Archives in Washington D.C. contained 57 unmarked boxes of College Republican National Committee material dating as far back as 1892. The material is not the property of the National Archives, but is being stored there by the CRNC, so permission to see the materials must be granted by the CRNC in advance. I was given permission to tag the boxes with a notes on their contents, so there are a few guidelines now, but the amount of information is vast and uncategorized. The material covered the 1980-1993 period best, with various other time periods covered less being helpful.

The Stanford University Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace contained the papers of the College Republican National Committee from 1970-1975. Deeded to the University by Alan Virta in 1985, they cover slightly more time than that, going as far back as 1967. The majority of the material is from the Joe Abate (1970-73) and Karl Rove (1973-77) chairmanships. This collection has only a preliminary inventory, comparable to the National Archives.

Particular items of interest in these collections include a pamphlet by Alfred Lunt, National Chairman 1900-08, in the NACRC. This is the best factual reference of the 1892-1908 period, including information on what the CRs did, who got elected to lead them and how. A second useful source is an academic paper written by M. Max Bartlett circa late 1972 or early 1973 for a Political Science course in San Diego, called "The Development of the College Republican Movement, 1964-1972," found at the SUCRC. The paper has quite a bit of information on the College Republicans during this period, although the primary materials for the paper can be found at the National Archives. Bartlett posited that the College Republicans went through three phases of development; the politics of ideology (1964 - summer 1967), the politics of organization (fall 1967 - fall 1970), and the politics of personality (fall 1970 - fall 1972). The

argument is compelling and impressive from his vantage point, just following the Nixon 1972 landslide. Yet, as he himself suggests towards the close of his study, it is flawed. Ideology and organization could only provide so much for the campaign. A candidate's personality and ability to woo young voters were equally important factors in College Republican success.

The third useful source was by Alan Virta, the organizer of the Stanford University gift and former Chairman of the Maryland Federation of College Republican Clubs, 1973-74. It detailed some of the information that was in the National and Stanford Archives about the early period, concluding its period of study just after the Bartlett paper, circa 1975.

The final essay worth mentioning is the History of the College Republicans written for the 100th anniversary in 1992 found in the National Archives. Compiled by, Steve Satran and Jason Miko (both Executive Directors under Tony Zagotta), it might have led to the collection of papers now housed in the National Archives. Its content has little more than the Virta and Lunt essays.

In addition, the detailed campaign proposals were perhaps the most interesting pieces of information. They were the ideas of the College Republican National Committee put into words, examples, plans, and budgets, telling the tale of what the CRs wanted to do. They did not, however, tell the tale of what was done.

Also central to this project were my interviews with Mr. Morton Blackwell. He was considered the father of the mass based youth effort and his Leadership Institute trained thousands of college students in conservative youth politics since the 1970's. He provided a wealth of information on the activities of the College Republicans from the 1960's through today. After speaking with him, I had the opportunity to interview Chairmen Jack Abramoff (1981-85), Tony Zagotta (1989-93), Joe Galli (1995-97), and Adam Brohimer (1997-present), each of whom provided a sense of the College Republicans in their time and from the vantage point of their leadership position.

There are three secondary works of particular value to the topic of College Republicans: M. Stanton Evans's, Revolt on the Campus; Howard Phillips's, The New Right at Harvard; and Seymour Martin Lipset's, Student Politics. All of these works attempt to grapple with what a conservative volunteer youth political organization does. Perhaps more interesting than what those three works say, is what the vast majority of other such works do not say. There is almost no mention of the College Republicans or the College Democrats in standard political science and history works. Even newer works, such as Barry R. Rubin's, A Citizens Guide to Politics in America: How the System Works and How to Work the System, 1994, does not mention any volunteer youth political groups in its 30 page "Grassroots Mobilization" section.

Further material on grassroots organizations can be found in: Bobo Kim, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max's, Organizing for Social Change: A Manual for Activists in the 1990's; Thomas Cronin, Direct Democracy. A different perspective on the same idea can be found in Hank Parkinson's, Winning Your Campaign: A Nuts-and-Bolts Guide to Political Victory. For an earlier American perspective, see The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North 1865-1928, by Michael McGerr. All of these books provide a broad background in direct political participation.

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