

JOHN TOWER: THE REPUBLICAN WEDGE

Presented to the Graduate Council
of Texas State University-San Marcos
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

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San Marcos, Texas
December 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This would not be possible were it not for the contributions of certain people in my life. To my wife, Katherine Cain, I give thanks for the day to day support through this process. To my father and mother, J. Russell and Sally Cain, I express thanks for holding me to high standards from the beginning. Also to my brother and sister, Eric and Emily Cain, I give thanks for support of kinds emotional and logistical.

I give special thanks to the members of my thesis committee. My deep gratitude goes to Dr. Andrews for his teaching, editing and encouragement. Likewise, my thanks goes out to Dr. Wilson. His input and insight proved invaluable. Finally, I thank Dr. Brennan. Her patience was inestimable, and her guidance made all of this possible.

This manuscript was submitted on 15 November, 2005.

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INTRODUCTION

John Goodwin Tower was a U.S. Senator from Texas for the years 1961 through 1985. He was a politician of historical importance whose place at the forefront of the conservative shift in the Republican Party and the United States of America has been largely overlooked. He did not ascend to the highest political office in America, and finished his political career in defeat when his nomination for Secretary of Defense was rejected in 1989.¹ The negative result of the Senate's confirmation hearings in effect deflected historical attention from a deserving statesman.

John Tower was elected in 1961 to represent Texas in the U.S. Senate. Tower's election was the first for a Republican in a Texas-wide race since the end of Reconstruction. For Republicans, Tower became an important figure and his success a critical precedent. The Democrats had held nearly all of Texas's public offices for nearly ninety years, and the Republican Party was a party with little hope for the future. Tower's campaign provided an electoral guide for winning future elections in Texas. The Senator also aided the conservative movement's capture of the Texas Republican Party. Tower did not instantly set the Republican Party on a level playing field with the Democrats, nor did he immediately make the Republican Party the party of the New Right. Nevertheless, his election in 1961 created the first breach in the Democratic Party's rigid hold on Texas.

¹ Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003), 447.

This work is an examination of John Tower's 1961 campaign for a seat in the U.S. Senate. That special election, the result of Lyndon Johnson's resignation to become John F. Kennedy's Vice-President, took place amidst and because of changes in Texas and the country. Those changes, both political and ideological are examined as foundational to the understanding of Tower's success. Also integral to understanding the 1961 election is Tower's career up to that point, and his expressions of conservative thought. The overall goal of this study is to show how Tower won a statewide election as a Republican in a state long dominated by the Democratic Party, a victory of great importance to the future of the Texas Republican Party.

In the secondary literature, Tower has received little attention. Biographical snippets about Senator Tower are readily available, if internet sources are included, but all give roughly the same information in a few short paragraphs. The pamphlet at the archive of Tower's own papers includes a description akin to others found in print and online. In just over two pages of text, "A Guide to the John G. Tower Papers," offers information such as the former senator's education, family life, a brief description of his accomplishments in politics, and a few sentences on his last years.² This work is meant as a guide to researchers, yet is among the most informative works available on the life of Senator Tower. Other works which focus on the life of Tower include the entry in the *Handbook of Texas*,³ a page in the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*,⁴ and several other websites that have biographical pages on American political figures such as the

² Kathryn Stallard, *A Guide to the John G. Tower Papers* (Georgetown, TX.: A. Frank Smith, Jr. Library Center, Southwestern University, c1995), 3-6.

³ Susan Eason, "Tower, John Goodwin," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/ftoss.html>; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

⁴ "John Tower," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_G._Tower; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

*Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*⁵ and the web home for the John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies at Southern Methodist University.⁶

Even works detailing the Republican Party's history on both the national and the state level often give only a perfunctory appraisal of Tower's special election victory in 1961 and his contributions to the party. *A History of the Republican Party in Texas*, by Paul Casdorff introduces Tower as a candidate for the Texas legislature in a chapter about the early 1950s, and mentions him again briefly in a discussion of the 1958 Republican state convention. *A History* also briefly covers Tower's run in 1960 and his victory in 1961 in races for the U.S. Senate, and notes that Tower was an important figure in the state Republican Party and an ardent supporter and campaigner for Barry Goldwater in that conservative Arizonan's bid for the presidency in 1964.⁷

Another work with more than a cursory mention of Tower is *Two Party Texas. The John Tower Era 1961-1984*, which begins with an examination of Tower's race against Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1960 and victory in 1961. Tower appears throughout the work as a prominent figure in the rise of Republicanism in Texas but there are problems with *Two Party Texas* as a critical work. The author, John Knaggs, did not write *Two Party Texas* in the conventional style of historical monographs. There are no footnotes, and, as the author readily admits, the language of the work is straight out of the vernacular of political operatives. The author suggests that searching for certain of his

⁵ "Tower, John Goodwin, (1925 - 1991)," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*. Available from <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000322>; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

⁶ Tower Center, "John G. Tower (1921-1991)," Available from <http://www.smu.edu/tower/biography.asp>; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

⁷ Paul Casdorff, *A History of the Republican Party in Texas 1956-1965* (Austin: The Pemberton Press, 1965), 201, 214-25, 227-29, 232, 238-40, 244-45.

words in a dictionary will prove fruitless. Equally problematic is the author's bias, which Knaggs lays out in the preface. Knaggs suggests that readers wanting "an unbiased, nonpartisan account of this period" should look elsewhere. Knaggs was a political operative, and while he takes himself out of the narrative, the point of view is that of a partisan Republican who participated in the party's political activities in the mid to late twentieth century.⁸

Beyond the above mentioned works on the Republican Party, John Tower's accomplishments appear only as tertiary information. In David W. Reinhard's *The Republican Right since 1945*, and other similar works, Tower's election is mentioned as well as a few other moments of his political career.⁹ Overall the historical record of John Tower's contributions to conservatism and the Republican Party is light.

Tower belonged to a movement of aggressive conservative thought and action that began with a few intellectuals and blossomed into a powerful political force over the course of the mid twentieth century. This conservative faction had as one of its first goals the aim of capturing the Republican Party as its own political vehicle. The development of the conservative movement and the early stages of that movement's attempt at commandeering the GOP is covered in Chapter One.

It must be noted that throughout the twentieth century there were conservatives who were not a part of the conservative movement. In this confusion of labels lies another historiographical problem. The rise of the American conservative movement has

⁸ John R. Knaggs, *Two Party Texas. The John Tower Era 1961-1984* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986), vii, 1-15.

⁹ David Reinhard, *The Republican Right since 1945* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 168, 217, 219, 230. Other works that mention Tower in brief include Michael W. Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 280-81, Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172, 188, 223, and Paul Gottfried, *The Conservative Movement: Revised Edition* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 37.

been chronicled and studied for over twenty-five years. However, there has not been a major attempt to define conservatives who belonged to the movement and those who did not. For the purposes of this work, only those who are Republican and explicitly distinguished as a part of the conservative movement are defined as conservatives, and any Democrats mentioned in this thesis will not be classified as movement conservatives.

Tower's election was a landmark for Texas, and therefore the South, where none of the U.S. senators and only two members of the House of Representatives were Republicans in 1950. The party was desperately out of power in the eleven states of the former Confederate South at the time, but by the end of the twentieth century, Republicans had dramatically improved their situation. Republicans occupied thirteen of twenty-two Senate seats and seventy-one of one-hundred-twenty-five house seats as of the 2000 election.¹⁰ Tower, the first senator from the South in this era, was one of only seven Republicans who won at least one reelection to the Senate between 1961 and 1990.¹¹

By the first election of the twenty-first century the Republican Party had been competitive and victorious in presidential elections due to its strength in the South. The South was solid for Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, as well as for George H. W. Bush in 1988. Democrat William Jefferson Clinton won just over one-third of the southern state votes in his two successful presidential elections in

¹⁰ Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 2-3.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 72.

the nineties, proving that the Republican stranglehold was not absolute. Republican George W. Bush won back all of the southern states in 2000.¹²

Concurrent with the Republican success in the South in presidential elections in the late twentieth century were breakthroughs in congressional elections. The most dramatic example of Republican success was the capture of the House of Representatives in 1994 for the first time since 1954. The success of the campaign, dubbed “A Contract With America” by Republican House leader Newt Gingrich, ushered the Republican Party into a new era.¹³ Gingrich became Speaker of the House in the 104th Congress in January, 1995, and he, along with the other two top members of the Republican house membership, represented the high importance of southerners for the GOP. Gingrich hailed from Georgia, and both House Majority Leader Dick Armey and House Whip Tom DeLay were from Texas. In 1994, Republicans held three more southern seats than the Democrats.¹⁴ The South proved pivotal in the GOP’s takeover of the House of Representatives in 1994.

This sectional perspective underlines the importance of John Tower’s election in 1961. Texas, as a southern state, was integral to the success of the national GOP. Examples of success were needed in order to erode the stranglehold the Democratic Party had on the South. Tower provided one such example. His success helped change the status of the Republican Party in Texas. The eventual success of the GOP in Texas contributed to a dramatic reversal of fortunes for the Republican Party in the South and in the quest for national majority status. Tower, who was a Republican wedge into the

¹² *Ibid.*, 220, 330, 399.

¹³ Gould, *Grand Old Party*, 465.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

Democratic political stranglehold on Texas, was at the forefront of the GOP's surge to power in the late twentieth century.

CHAPTER 1

THE STATE AND NATIONAL SCENE

In order for John Tower to be successful as a Republican candidate for U.S. Senator in 1961 political and ideological changes had to occur. The Texas Republican Party did not run effective campaigns until the 1950s. Nationally, conservatism was reaching a critical moment in its development as an ideology and in its ability to contribute at the political level. Both of these developments were vital to the chances for Tower to break the Democratic hold on public offices in Texas.

The importance of Tower's election to the U.S. Senate is best understood in the context of the political situation in Texas and the nation. Texas was a solidly Democratic state in 1961. Tower's Republican Party had little support and an uninspiring electoral record since Reconstruction. As 1961 neared, however, internal changes in the party's structure created an improved atmosphere for a political campaign competitive with the ascendant Democrats, whose strength was deeply rooted.

The aftermath of the American Civil War left the defeated southern states in governmental disarray. The situation for the State of Texas was no different. During the interim between Lee's surrender at Appomattox and the arrival of federal troops, Texas existed without a government. Many officials fled to other countries. For example

Governor Pendleton Murrah went into exile in Mexico, and Senator Louis T. Wigfall escaped to England.¹

In succeeding years, as Texans suffered through Reconstruction, the political landscape of the state began to settle into place. Of primary importance to the decades that followed the Civil War was the supremacy of the Democratic Party after a short interregnum. Because the Republican Party was the party in domination of Texas immediately after the war, significant political issues produced factionalism within the Republican Party. Two groups arose from the first postwar state constitutional convention of 1866: the Conservatives and the Radicals.² The Conservatives represented the point of view that abhorred the kind of centralized government that the Radicals condoned. The Radicals echoed the interventionist attitudes and policies of the national faction of the same name.³ The gubernatorial campaign of 1866 was evidence that the Conservatives held the majority opinion of Texas voters. The Conservative faction standard-bearer, James W. Throckmorton, won 37,109 of the 61,455 votes cast.⁴ Throckmorton's leadership brought harsh condemnation from General Philip Sheridan, commander of the Texas-Louisiana military district, who saw the governor as a barrier to Reconstruction.⁵ Throckmorton did not align with the nationally ascendant Radical Republicans over issues such as the freedman's bureau, Indian frontier conflicts, and most importantly the provisions of the first Reconstruction Act. When the Second

¹ Paul Casdorph, *A History of The Republican Party in Texas: 1865-1965* (Austin: the Pemberton Press, 1965), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

³ Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 8-9.

⁴ Casdorph, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 2-3.

⁵ Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 7-8.

Reconstruction Act allowed him to do so, Sheridan removed Throckmorton from office.⁶ Until Reconstruction ended, Democratic politicians were held in check only by intrusive federal action in Texas affairs in much the same way. The Republican Party of Texas enjoyed a brief time as the majority party during Reconstruction, but the end of that era made the GOP a party of token opposition. The Democratic Party absorbed the Conservative faction and began dominating Texas state politics.⁷

After Reconstruction ended, The Texas Republican Party languished for nearly a century. The campaign and election of 1873 cemented Democratic supremacy in the state. Democrats won all statewide and virtually all local offices. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Richard Coke defeated Republican E. J. Davis by a margin of 85,549 to 42,663. When President Ulysses S. Grant denied a radical Republican plea for the federal government to intervene, the Democratic domination of the state began in earnest. Davis, who had been the Reconstruction governor, would be the last Republican to hold statewide office until 1961.⁸ The fact that the Republican Party, weakened by racially fueled infighting, fell behind third and fourth parties' popularity indicated the depth of Texans' hostility to it. By the 1882 election, Texas Republicans supported Greenbackers rather than field their own candidates for statewide office.⁹ In 1914, the Republican gubernatorial candidate did out poll the splinter Progressive candidate, but

⁶ Casdorph, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 2-5.

⁷ Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 8-9.

⁸ Casdorph, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 28-31.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

failed to garner even half as many votes as the Socialist candidate, who tallied over 25,000 votes.¹⁰

During the 1920s, 30s and 40s, the Republican Party's situation improved and worsened several times, but the party never actually threatened the Democrats. In the gubernatorial race of 1932, Orville Bullington took advantage of the prohibition issue to gather 312,970 votes to Democrat Miriam "Ma" Ferguson's 528,986.¹¹ The next election cycle proved how temporary the Republican's gains of 1934 were. The Republican candidate, D. E. Waggoner lost to Democrat James V. Allred 421,422 to 12,534. In 1942, the Republican candidate suffered a similar defeat as nominee C. K. McDowell lost to the Democrat Coke Stevenson 289,939 to 9,204. In 1948, the Texas GOP candidates fared somewhat better than Waggoner and McDowell had, but the Republican vote totals were not enough to make Democrats at all nervous.¹²

In the 1950s the Republican Party found reasons to hope for a change in fortunes. The decade began with the election of a Republican to the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time in nearly thirty years. Representative Eugene Worley accepted appointment as an Associate Justice of the U.S. Court of Customs and Patent Appeals, and his congressional post needed to be filled. Republican Ben H. Guill beat out ten Democrats for Worley's vacated seat. Running as an opponent to President Harry Truman's policies, such as the farm program and national health insurance, Guill won the right to serve out Worley's term in the Eighty-first Congress. In the general election of

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹¹ The Democrats, including Mrs. Ferguson, called for repeal of the eighteenth amendment, and an end to prohibition. Bullington's strong showing was a result of the "dry" vote protesting this platform plank.

¹² *Ibid.*, 128, 142-145, 156, 170.

that same year, however, Guill lost, and the seat returned to the Democrats.¹³ Largely inconsequential by itself, Guill's brief tenure in office served as a morale boost for Texas Republicans who began positioning the state party as a viable alternative.

During the same decade, the Texas GOP made a conscious effort to make itself more popular with the voting public. The most significant evidence of this repositioning came in August at the state convention in Galveston, as Republicans picked Ralph W. Currie as their gubernatorial candidate. By nominating Currie, Texas Republicans were giving credence to a new point of emphasis for the struggling party.¹⁴ For decades Texas Republicans were concerned with the issue of patronage. They thought trying to win election in Texas was impossible and instead funneled money to candidates in Midwestern and Eastern states where Republican candidates often won.¹⁵ Now Republicans claimed that representing the people in office was their main concern. The new state party line would not immediately pay dividends, as Currie lost his bid to Democrat Allan Shivers, but it was an important development for the long-term success of the Texas Republican Party. The rhetoric of representation would impart crucial successes during the succeeding decade. The party began to appeal to a broader base and to position itself to effectively oppose the overpowering Democratic Party.¹⁶

During Currie's campaign, another event occurred which pushed the state Republican Party away from simply seeking federal patronage and towards actually competing with Democrats. Colonel Rentfro Banton Creager, who had been Texas's

¹³ *Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 173-174

¹⁵ Roger M. Oliën, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1982), 78-79.

¹⁶ Casdorff, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 173-174.

representative on the Republican national committee since 1923, died in Brownsville. His death left a vacuum at the top of the state party's power structure, and a factional struggle ensued. Henry Zwiefel and H. J. Porter led the two opposing forces within the party: Zwiefel leading the old faction, Porter leading the charge for a party that sought to win elections. At the committee meeting at the Driskill Hotel in Austin, Porter realized he stood no chance to gain the nomination for the Texas position in the national committee, and bowed out of the race.¹⁷ Zwiefel and the old-timers did not realize right away that they had won the battle for just a short while. During the 1952 presidential election, the Porter faction would upend Zwiefel and take control of the state party.

Nationally, the Republican Party had an internecine battle analogous to that of the Texas's party. The Old Guard, centered in the Midwest, fought with the group that would come to be called the Eastern Establishment. At this time the Eastern Establishment was the upstart faction intent on redefining the GOP away from Old Guard Republicanism while making sure not to embrace liberalism. This element sought and achieved a banner-holder of the highest stature, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, while the Old Guard backed Ohio Senator Robert A. Taft. As the Taft-Eisenhower battle raged, the Zwiefel-Porter split settled into a state-level representation of the national Republican scene. At stake were the mechanisms for state Republicans, but the rhetoric and the public face of the fight centered wholly on the nomination of the Republican candidate for President in 1952.¹⁸

Eisenhower's growing popularity put Zwiefel in a difficult position. In the period between May 1950 and May 1951, Eisenhower's support grew enormously. A statewide

¹⁷ Casdorph, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 174-176.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176-178.

poll in May 1951 showed that President Truman would lose to the General by thirty-six points, a turnaround from a poll the year before which showed the President held a four-point advantage.¹⁹ This swing put Zwiefel in a difficult position since he had been staunchly in the Taft camp. In the end, Zwiefel stood his ground and seemingly ignored both the intractability of backing Taft over Eisenhower and the possibilities for a Republican revival in Texas. In order to somehow prevent Texas from backing Eisenhower for the Republican nomination, Zwiefel concocted a pledge meant to keep Democrats and non-affiliated voters from participating in the precinct conventions.²⁰ Porter led the opposition to the pledge resolution, but the Old Guard gathered fifty-six state committee votes, against six by the reformers. Still, Zwiefel misjudged the strength of sentiment for Eisenhower; many Democrats took part despite the pledge requirement. Zwiefel stood firm in a position that embraced a minority status for Texas Republicans. Despite being beaten soundly in yet another internal party issue, Porter continued his reforming advocacy. Throughout the winter and early spring, pro-Eisenhower Texas Republicans and Democrats soundly defeated Taft supporters at precinct conventions. Porter became Eisenhower's campaign manager in Texas, and when the precinct meetings concluded Eisenhower had a clear majority of candidates for the state convention. However, the Old Guard did not concede defeat easily.²¹

Because of intra-party politics, competing factions of the Texas Republican Party sent their own delegates to the national convention in Chicago. In a statement that

¹⁹ In both polls, a large number of respondents were undecided. Twenty percent in May 1950, and fourteen percent in 1951 did not choose between Truman and Eisenhower. *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁰ The pledge read: "I am a Republican, and desire to participate in Republican Party activities in the year 1952." *Ibid.*, 180.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 178-183.

included the phrase “‘Majority rule’ is not always right,” Zwiefel used his power as Chair of the Executive Committee to prevent hundreds of pro-Eisenhower delegates from taking their seats. The state convention thus easily backed Taft. The delegation of thirty-eight had among them thirty supporters of the Ohioan to only four for Eisenhower and four for General Douglas MacArthur. During the state convention, held at Mineral Wells in May of 1952, most Eisenhower supporters marched out, convening their own protest convention at which votes for the General came in the form of “Ike” rather than the customary “Aye.” This protest convention nominated thirty-eight delegates, instructing thirty-three to vote for Eisenhower and five for Taft. The convention wanted the results of the county conventions to retain their legitimacy in full.²² The actions of Zwiefel, portrayed in the national press as “the Texas steal” would help to slow down Taft’s momentum in seeking the nomination.²³

In the end, the intricacies of parliamentary procedure settled the battles that raged both nationwide and in Texas between the Taft and Eisenhower factions. The national convention focused on the competing Texas delegations. The credentials committee, the deciding body in the case of the Texas delegation, took a full day and a half longer than scheduled to complete its report on the matter. A majority report found in favor of the Taft delegation and a minority report for the Eisenhower group. Persuasive arguments for the pro-Eisenhower group, however, succeeded in swaying convention sentiment to their side. It was the minority report that passed by voice vote. Convention politics thus resulted in victory for Porter; the Eisenhower delegation took their seats at the national

²² *Ibid.*, 184-185.

²³ Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920*, 127.

convention. Shortly thereafter, General Eisenhower won the Republican nomination on the first roll call ballot.²⁴

The subsequent state convention saw Porter and his pro-Eisenhower forces victorious and furthered the cause of reforming the Texas Republican Party and making it competitive with the Democratic Party on the state level.²⁵ The Texas GOP leadership accepted their weakness and opted to help Eisenhower rather than try to win state-level elections. The party nominated for state offices candidates already on the ballot for those offices as Democrats. Porter and the pro-Eisenhower team had sought this end, and their victory in obtaining control of the state party meant that the party apparatus could focus on the presidential race.²⁶

The efforts of the state party, along with Eisenhower's campaigning, resulted in the General turning a seventeen-point disadvantage to the Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson in early August into a three-point advantage as October began. Eisenhower's nationally televised speeches, most notably the one in San Antonio in which he outlined his foreign policy, helped forge support of conservative Texans of both parties. Another factor helping Eisenhower in Texas was the support of Governor Shivers and other leading Texas Democrats, or "Shivercrats," who actively campaigned for the general. In November, Eisenhower carried Texas by over 130,000 votes, becoming the first Republican since Herbert Hoover in 1928 to carry the state in a presidential election.²⁷

The remaining years of the 1950s would bring only one significant positive

²⁴ Casdorff, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 189-193.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

²⁶ Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920*, 134.

²⁷ Casdorff, *The Republican Party in Texas*, 195-197.

development for the Texas Republican Party. Statewide races proved easy contests for Democrats, with Republicans garnering only a pittance of votes in many cases. In the 1956 election, the Republicans on the ballot were actual Republicans, not simply simultaneously nominated Democrats. Despite another Eisenhower victory in Texas, only a single Republican won. Bruce Alger, of Dallas, won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1954 midterm elections, and retained his seat until 1964, when he lost his bid for a sixth term.²⁸ Tokenism subsided as the party clearly began focusing on winning elections, rather than only seeking national patronage, but Texans were not ready to see Republicans as viable candidates in appreciable numbers. Only the heroic stature and enormous popularity of Dwight Eisenhower had been able to withstand Texan prejudice against Republicans.

As the 1960s began, the Texas Republican Party had moved only incrementally in the direction of parity with the Democrats. This progress, however, proved opportune for a strong candidate who could take advantage of them. Gone was a stifling party apparatus, replaced by a group of national figures whom a Texan candidate could call upon to help bring votes to the Republican side of a ballot. These developments were important for the success of John Tower in 1961, but there was something more essential to success in a Texas election than any change in the Texas and national Republican Party. The emergence of an ideological faction that Texans could identify with was just starting to come into strong focus as the 1960s opened. Conservatism was a major part of John Tower's success in May 1961, and a primary reason for the candidate's victory.

American conservatism was not a cohesive movement before World War II, but consisted of many different individuals adding their insight and participating in politics

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 198-224; 246.

outside of any unified group. Changes in the American political landscape gave conservatism its first nudge towards organization. The Great Depression created a shift in American perception of what government could and should do. As Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration grappled with overwhelming economic problems, he experimented by introducing a variety of programs, commonly labeled the New Deal. Although only a few of these programs included socialistic elements, the willingness of the administration to take an active role in the economy and to accept responsibility for the well-being of the citizens gave the entire program a left-wing slant. For a certain minority the movement to the left was too much. Conservatism, although without the power to enact legislation that would "correct" America's course, found new strength during these years. By 1960, conservatism had gained enough vitality to begin to attempt to gain control of the Republican Party, and therefore achieve entry into American political life as an organized force. Conservatism grew first as an intellectual sentiment, finding roots in America's past. Along its path to political power, conservatism faced many obstacles. Finally finding a strong leader, the Right began the 1960s ready to take control of the GOP and accelerate the ideological reorganization of the American two-party system.

The modern American conservative movement had its roots in the political events of the 1930s. For many Americans, the programs of Franklin Delano Roosevelt were antithetical to the ideals of American governance. Roosevelt fashioned a tenuous yet powerful political coalition that moved the United States to the left for half a century. Conservatives saw this leftward move as an outright attack against freedom. Fearing what they perceived to be a dangerous tendency toward regimentation and

collectivization, right-wingers argued that the New Deal reforms represented the socialistic reorganization of American society. Conservatives compared FDR's liberal reforms to the workings of both communist and fascist states, and warned against the long-term effects on the American government and way of life.²⁹

The Republican Party, the vessel of eventual conservative resurgence, had suffered mightily through much of the 1930s. Defeats in the congressional elections of 1930, 1932, 1934 and 1936 reduced the GOP to near insignificance. After the last of these four elections, only sixteen Republicans remained in the Senate and eighty-nine in the House. The lingering Republican officeholders could do little but sulk and acquiesce as the Democrats under Roosevelt dealt with the problems of the Great Depression. Those Republicans who opposed the New Deal legislation before its passage either attuned themselves to the reorganization, or hardened themselves along a spectrum of opposition to the New Deal. These two options represented two of the three classifications of Republicans during this decade: the "Eastern" type, who had readjusted, and the "regular Republicans," who generally hailed from the Midwest and the West.³⁰ This last type became the new Republican base, composed of people whose goals ranged from simple reacquisition of political power to a return to pre-New Deal governance. The American conservative movement had its beginnings in this type of 1930s Republicanism. The movement's humble origin is apparent when considering that it originated out of only one of three wings of a party severely in the minority.³¹

²⁹ Michael W. Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3.

³⁰ The third type, the "Western Progressives," generally backed the New Deal social legislation but opposed intervention in World War II.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

Through FDR's first term and half of his second, attacks from the right were tentative and gained little traction with the public. Open attacks on the early New Deal resulted in defeat for many congressmen in the elections of 1934 and 1936. William Randolph Hearst, at first a Roosevelt backer, attempted to sway the readers of his twenty-eight newspapers, but suffered financial difficulties throughout the 1930s. The American Liberty League, a bipartisan conservative group of well-heeled interests, based its New Deal criticisms on the Constitution. The League stressed the liberties the founding document afforded and exhorted a return to the free market. The group hurt its own cause, however, when the Roosevelt campaign turned the affluence of the Liberty League constituents against it by painting them as wealthy, condescending snobs. Because the League took the lead in GOP opposition to FDR, their discredited status translated into poor Republican showings.³² The failure of the League to oppose FDR led to its collapse and left the right-wing lacking in organization and momentum.³³

Another factor that prevented a concerted right-wing effort to combat Roosevelt and his coalition was Herbert Hoover's insistence on maintaining his position of power within the GOP. Hoover installed his man, Henry P. Fletcher, as Chair of the Republican National Committee, and Fletcher led the party in harsh attacks on the New Deal during the 1934 mid-term campaign. The Democrats made significant gains in both houses of Congress that year. The immediate result for the GOP was presidential candidacy of the more moderate Alf Landon in 1936, even though Landon's candidacy was not clearly detached from the Hoover faction of the GOP. Republican leaders and the Republican

³² *Ibid.*, 29-32.

³³ David W. Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 170.

press accused the New Deal of Socialist propensities. This tactic of the Old Guard became increasingly conflated with the Landon campaign's views. Eventually Landon himself accused FDR's administration of socialist leanings, and the Republican candidate seemed to the public as simply another Hooverite. Hoover tried once again to push for control in the 1938 campaign, but party leaders blocked his move. The first half-decade of FDR's presidency saw Hoover struggle with his own party for control, and the former president made counterproductive decisions in the process. Hoover proved to be an impediment to ideological reorganization during the 1930s.³⁴

The recession of 1937, combined with a series of Rooseveltian missteps in that year, created an opening for more concerted opposition. During FDR's first term, economic recovery had been substantial. Although unemployment remained at a relatively high fourteen percent in the beginning of 1937, that and other economic indicators were much improved. That year, however, significant drops in industrial production and the GDP, and the resulting increased unemployment, damaged the appeal of the New Deal. Concurrent with these economic setbacks were two moves by the Roosevelt administration that hurt public opinion of the president.³⁵ The Congress of Industrial Organizations attempted to organize labor in the automobile industry in 1936 and 1937. Auto workers in Flint, Michigan resisted General Motors's attempts to break the strike.³⁶ These "sit-down" strikes were extremely unpopular, especially with the middle class, and FDR's refusal to intervene cost him political capital. This was also the

³⁴ Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right*, 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

³⁶ "The 1936 - 37 Flint, Michigan Sit-Down Strike." 28 January 2002. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A672310>, Internet; accessed 20 October 2005.

year that FDR attempted to “pack” the Supreme Court. Because the Supreme Court had been declaring some New Deal legislation unconstitutional, Roosevelt proposed legislation to add up to six new justices to the court. The plan called for an additional justice for every sitting justice with over ten years on the Supreme Court who did not retire within six months after he turned seventy.³⁷ Roosevelt gave conservatives an easy avenue of attack in defense of the constitution and as resistance to dictatorial aggression. Roosevelt’s approval ratings dipped by ten points over the next year and a half. On top of this, his defeat on the court issue had come at the hands of conservatives in his own party. The president responded by attempting to “purge,” or bring about the primary election defeat of, certain Democrats in Congress. The result was a relatively more fractured Democratic Party and a GOP resurgence.³⁸

Although conservatives joined liberals in supporting Roosevelt and then Truman during World War II, war’s end and the beginning of Cold War tensions with the Soviet Union opened a new path for conservative critiques of liberalism. George Kennan and other officials of the Truman administration outlined a policy of containment. The title for the strategy first appeared in George Kennan’s “long telegram,” and the strategy was further outlined in the National Security Council’s Document 68. The underlying premise was that the Soviet Union and worldwide communism could be defeated through means other than a conventional war. Rather than lead the country into another worldwide conflict, communism’s spread should be halted and contained. Implementing this policy required massive military expenditures as well as economic aid to non

³⁷ James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 85-86.

³⁸ Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right*, 33-35.

communist nations endangered by Soviet expansion. The Marshall Plan was an example of foreign aid meant to stop communism in its tracks.

Some conservatives took umbrage with the assumption that communism should be waited out, and emphasized the cost of inviting a stalemate for the foreseeable future. James Burnham, a New York University philosophy professor, fashioned an extremely hawkish policy proposal in his *The Coming Defeat of Communism* (1947). Burnham called for America to use Soviet methods of insurgency, training and supplying guerillas in the Soviet sphere. He also backed the use of “preventative war” in cases where diplomatic action proved unfruitful. Burnham’s ideas did receive attention enough in the press and created debate at the Pentagon, but the result was increased resolve for containment methods. The idea of a war to prevent a war proved to be a major sticking point.³⁹ Burnham’s writing was a step forward for conservatives and provided emphasis for their movement: anti-communism. On that point and others the modern conservative movement was based and emerged from the printed page.

The development of the conservative movement was spurred on by writers expounding a philosophy in opposition to liberalism. These intellectuals countered the notion that conservatism had disappeared from American thought and provided a framework for conservative philosophical and political discussion. Before the movement began its political action, conservatism began to rise in books, magazines, and journals that established the movement’s focus and momentum.

As the 1950s opened, many intellectuals argued that liberalism justifiably dominated scholarly thought because conservatism offered no genuine alternative.

³⁹ Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing the Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23-27.

Lionel Trilling boldly declared conservatism dead in 1950. Other scholars, including Daniel Bell, David Riesman, and Richard Hofstadter, repeated Trilling's proclamation. Focusing exclusively on McCarthyism, liberal pundits attempted to identify the conservative "impulses" which led some Americans to support the Wisconsin senator and others of his cohort. Naming the lingering sentiment "pseudo-conservatism," authors such as Bell and Hofstadter sought an explanation for the reactions of Americans to a changing world that did not fit the liberal mindset. In such ways did liberal thinkers dismiss conservative thought as mere psychosis. Liberals did not see that the possibility of a conservative resurgence loomed.⁴⁰ The overconfidence of liberal intellectuals indicated the entrenchment of that ideology. The task for conservatives - to establish themselves and their philosophical contributions as a mainstream, acceptable alternative to liberal thought - was a difficult one.

Compounding the problem of combating liberalism was a schism inherent in American conservative thought. In order to coalesce an American conservative movement, the ideological factions among conservatives needed reconciliation. In general terms, conservatives belonged to one of two camps in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Traditionalists thought of social order in terms of religious mores or through reliance on narrow interpretations of traditional social constructions. The other strain of conservatism, classical liberalism, had as its foundation the premise that the individual should stand superior to any institution or order. Each type of conservatism could not stand on its own as a viable political ideology to combat the center-left status quo of the middle twentieth century. Adherents to both strains were as vehement in their insistence that their type was the true conservatism as they were dedicated to combating

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

liberalism. If conservatives hoped to attack the primacy of liberalism, they would have to unite.⁴¹

Intellectuals of the classically liberal type began writing more frequently as World War II was coming to a close. In 1944, Austrian Friedrich von Hayek published his *The Road to Serfdom*, an apology for free enterprise aimed at an American audience. The polemic attacked socialism and socialistic reordering of society as an assault on human autonomy. In part responding to Hayek's book, some conservatives formed the Mt. Pelerin Society in 1949, intending to meet annually to discuss classically liberal economic and social theories. In the same year that Hayek published *Serfdom*, the journal *Human Events* began its reporting, originally on foreign policy matters, but eventually on social and economic matters with the libertarian viewpoint in mind. Then the *Freeman* began anew as a classically liberal periodical in 1950. In 1953, the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists began publishing conservative tracts, mostly with a libertarian bent. All of these publications helped nurse a nascent conservatism. On their pages was the intellectual brainstorming necessary to the formation of a new ideology, especially one whose bold purpose was to upend the status quo.⁴²

Representing the earliest stages of the traditionalist type of modern conservative were Richard M. Weaver and (more prolifically) Russell Kirk. Influenced by an agrarian type of nineteenth century conservatism, Weaver's critiques stemmed from regret about the commercialization of American society, and separation from both the land and inherited traditions. The schism Weaver lamented inherently led to an American polity

⁴¹ Gregory L. Schneider, *Conservatism in America since 1930* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 169.

⁴² Paul Gottfried and Thomas Fleming, *The Conservative Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 2-3.

without sufficient moral and spiritual grounding. Partially because he was influenced by the agrarian tradition that saw little hope in a commercialized world unconnected to the land, Weaver held out little hope for reclamation of the past. Russell Kirk, on the other hand, thought redemption possible. *The Conservative Mind*, published in 1953, was an important contribution to the formation of political thought to oppose the liberal establishment. Kirk traced a conservative tradition back to America's British roots, arguing that men such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, John C. Calhoun, and Henry Adams carried on the traditions of Edmund Burke and T.S. Eliot. In defining conservatism, Kirk maintained the requirement of a social hierarchy in a suitably ordered world. Behind that social order should rightly stand an understanding that the divine had guided history and had created the moral framework of tradition.⁴³ Railing against the "modern barbarian," Kirk exhorted people who would be conservatives to take up the defense of a "life worth living" by reaching back to the past for political inspiration.⁴⁴

Synthesis came about with the help of an infusion into the American political dialogue of conservative intellectual arguments from men and women intent on building a movement. Frank S. Meyer tried to explain that the contradiction between classical liberalism and traditionalism was not naturally inherent; in reality, the assumptions of both strains were necessary for making a true conservative position.⁴⁵ One of the most influential moments of consolidating strains of conservatism arrived with the November,

⁴³ *Ibid*, 20-24.

⁴⁴ Russell Kirk, *The Portable Conservative Reader* (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 709.

⁴⁵ Frank S. Meyer, "A Rebel Finds His Tradition," in *Conservatism in America since 1930*, ed. Gregory L. Schneider (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 175-76.

1955 founding of *National Review* by William F. Buckley, Jr.⁴⁶ Seeing a major hurdle for conservative thought in the prevalence of liberal thought in established media, Buckley proposed that the only recourse was a national journal of conservative opposition.⁴⁷ Buckley thought his new magazine could be for the Right what *New Republic*, *Nation*, and *New Yorker* had been for the Left and for the formation of the liberal consensus.⁴⁸ For the remainder of the 1950s Buckley's *Review* helped create a conservative movement culture and helped anoint a new leader for the cause.

Conservatism did suffer internal disputes from the 1960s onward, but the quest for fusion did empower the movement to begin accelerating politicization of the ideology. There would continue to be conservatives who drew more heavily from either the traditionalist or classical liberal strains of American conservatism. Groups would from time to time suffer a revolt from one or another type of conservative that occasionally threatened the vitality of that organization.⁴⁹ Despite the continuing internal struggle, the new conservative movement had found strong intellectual leadership and was ready for serious political action.

Conservatives attempted throughout their period of infancy to capture the Republican Party. Robert A. Taft, U.S. Senator from Ohio, twice tried to seize control of the GOP for his conservative forces. He failed in both 1948 and 1952 to capture the

⁴⁶ Schneider, *Conservatism in America since 1930*, 134.

⁴⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr., "National Review: Statement of Intentions," in *Conservatism in America since 1930*, ed. Gregory L. Schneider (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 197.

⁴⁸ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: the Rise of Modern American Conservatism*, 167.

⁴⁹ Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right*, 256.

Republican nomination for president due to his own political shortcomings.⁵⁰

Eisenhower prevailed in 1952 as the Republican presidential nominee with the support of the Eastern establishment, and represented the kind of internationalism incompatible with some aspects of conservatism. Both Taft and Eisenhower won enough primaries that the national convention decided a close race only by skillful maneuver.⁵¹ Initially, the first ballot was not sufficient to produce a candidate. Eisenhower drew five-hundred-ninety-five votes, nine short of the number necessary to gain the nomination and only ninety-five more than Taft. However, before the balloting ended, several state delegations switched their votes and the final tally had Eisenhower winning with eight-hundred-forty-five votes and Taft receiving only two-hundred-eighty.⁵² That the Right, represented by Taft, was able to take the hero of the European Theater down to the wire indicated the rising strength of conservatism.

Taft's defeat in 1952, and his death a year later, left a void at the highest level of leadership for conservative forces. For most of the 1950s no conservative political figure arose to take Taft's place, at least not one of sufficient stature to fill such a prominent national role. Instead, those years saw the reactionary rambling and imprudent denunciations of Joseph McCarthy and an era that far outlived that eponymous figure.⁵³ Conservative publications defended the overzealous searches for communist infiltration, in the process stalling the development of a broader, more powerful conservative message. Periodicals ran articles with charges of communist diffusion deep into

⁵⁰ Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 9.

⁵¹ Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right*, 189-190.

⁵² Reinhard, *The Republican Right Since 1945*, 89.

⁵³ Schneider, *Conservatism in America since 1930*, 207.

American life, and the Right looked at public officials from the top to the bottom of the political structure. While not reaching out to a wider base, and not lending itself to a sustainable political message, this activity did play a crucial role. Conservatives themselves agreed on the issue of anticommunism.⁵⁴

The undercurrent of conservative thought increased steadily during those years. While no national conservative leader would come to the fore until 1959, the movement continued to gradually gain momentum. As mentioned above, conservatism found new strength as ideologues came together to form a more unified political thought during the late 1950s. What the conservative movement lacked was a national figure to rally behind. As the 1950s came to a close, such a person emerged to guide conservatism into the national spotlight.

A senator since 1952, Arizona's Barry Goldwater became the national figure to transform conservatism from a minority position within the Republican Party into the leading force in the GOP and a serious national opponent of the liberal coalition. Goldwater was an unconventional politico, offering up unvarnished thoughts to the public with regular frequency. His frankness proved endearing to many Americans, and his star rose quickly. By the late 1950s he held the chair of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, a position that afforded the Arizonan a high-profile. In 1960, Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative* found considerable success, selling 700,000 copies in its first year of publication. While the movement to make the conservative Goldwater the head of the GOP would not come to fruition until 1964, the sentiment to do so arose directly after Richard M. Nixon's defeat in the 1960 presidential election. By the early

⁵⁴ Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP*, 10-11.

months of 1961, Goldwater was the clear leader of the rising conservative movement.⁵⁵

With growing grassroots conservatism on the rise, and a burgeoning conservative intellectual dialogue, the movement stood poised to challenge liberals on the American political scene.

Conservative youth attempted to put Goldwater on the 1960 ticket as the vice-presidential candidate. The growth of a strong youth segment of the overall movement helped make it possible for conservatism to move directly into the political realm. William F. Buckley spurred on young conservatives and helped found the Young Americans for Freedom in 1960 at his family's longtime home in Sharon, Connecticut.⁵⁶ The Sharon Statement, the YAF's charter document, outlined and echoed many aspects of the new conservative faith. According to their charter, the YAF was to be a group acting with God's grace in mind, striving to expand freedom in all aspects of life, and helping to maintain order and America's national security. In the Sharon Statement were principles of small government and denunciations of communism.⁵⁷ Conservatives were organizing in many different segments of American life by the early 1960s.

Even liberal victories provided fodder for the burgeoning conservative movement. In 1961, John Kennedy was sworn in as President of the United States, and his persona and program would become an easy target for conservative criticism. In his inaugural speech, Kennedy uttered the now famous line exhorting Americans to actively support their government, rather than seeking aid from it. Economist Milton Freedman saw this

⁵⁵ Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: the Rise of Modern American Conservatism*, 125-126.

⁵⁶ Schneider, *Conservatism in America since 1930*, 207-208.

⁵⁷ *The Sharon Statement* [on-line]; available from <http://www.fiu.edu/~yaf/sharon.html>; Internet; accessed 26 May 2005.

line as a symbol of how liberalism had attacked the freedoms Americans should enjoy. In this statement, Friedman saw a juxtaposition of two equally heinous sentiments about the place of state and government. On the one hand, there was the paternalism implicit in not asking “what your country can do for you.” On the other hand, Friedman thought “what you can do for your country” presupposed a superiority of country over individual, adversative to the very ideals that a free person should value. Friedman perceived a false dichotomy in Kennedy’s statement.⁵⁸

While conservatives could only attack the new president in 1961, their time for mere rhetorical opposition was drawing closer. Kennedy’s ascendance only changed the face of conservatives’ opposition. The president’s New Frontier replaced the New Deal as the subject that drew the right’s condemnation. The ease with which conservatives were able to modify their rhetoric indicated the sophistication of the Right’s new style and its methods. As the 1960s began, the American conservative movement had grown to a level sufficient for easy use in political critique and polemical attack. A task for the rising ideology was to help win elections. An especially important task for the eventual ascendancy of the conservative ideology was to win elections in the South. Through the use of conservative rhetoric the South would become the strength of the GOP by the end of the twentieth century. By winning the South the conservatives shoved aside one of the vital components of FDR’s New Deal coalition that had helped entrench the liberalism they so despised.

Important changes had taken place in Texas and nationally by the time John Tower ran for the U.S. Senate in 1961. Factions within the Republican Party in the state

⁵⁸ Milton Friedman, “Defining Principles: Capitalism and Freedom,” in *Conservatism in America since 1930*, ed. Gregory L. Schneider (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 68.

of Texas had fought for control, and the victorious faction was well-suited for supporting a candidacy like Tower's. The party had been unwilling to mount a serious opposition to the Democrats, but new leadership changed that disposition. Nationally, a new organization of conservatives was forming. The upswing of this ideology was also to prove useful to Tower in his bid for public office. In the following chapter is an examination of Tower as a Texas Republican and conservative. This investigation will show why the aforementioned political and ideological developments are keys to understanding the importance of Tower's success in 1961.

CHAPTER 2

JOHN GOODWIN TOWER: REPUBLICAN AND CONSERVATIVE

Forces for change of the Texas and American political landscapes were beginning to have great effect in the early 1960s. Those forces would prove advantageous for John Tower in his bid for a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1961. Tower was a man learned in the ways of politics and receptive to the conservative movement arising in the mid-twentieth century. Tower's early life equipped him for a life in politics and the Texan allied himself with the conservative message.

Tower was born on September 29, 1925, in Houston, Texas. His mother was Beryl Goodwin Tower and his father Dr. Joe Z. Tower. The Towers moved frequently, as Dr. Tower was a Methodist minister who was assigned to many different stations during John's formative years. Dr. Tower and his family lived in Houston, Doucette, Alvin, Jacksonville, Tyler and Beaumont. In Beaumont, John finished his secondary education, graduating from Beaumont High School in 1942. After graduation, the future senator joined the U.S. Navy, serving in the Pacific theater and seeing combat aboard an amphibious gunboat. Tower served until his honorable discharge in March of 1946, and he remained a member of the Naval Reserve until retiring in 1989 with the rank of Master

Chief Boatswain's Mate. Tower's time in and love for the military would shape his public life, ultimately leading to his failed bid for the office of Secretary of Defense.¹

After his service in the Navy, Tower began his post-secondary education. The future senator studied political science at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, where he earned a bachelor's degree at Southwestern in 1948. According to some sources, young Mr. Tower was not highly interested in politics, but found history intriguing. Tower especially admired Thomas Jefferson.² However, in a 1971 interview Tower admitted to being "politically interested, even when [he] was a little boy"³ The choice of political science for his major was thus a natural one, given his long-standing curiosity. After receiving his BA, Tower then moved into the private sector.⁴

Following graduation, Tower held several different jobs as he searched for his "calling." He first worked as a radio announcer in Beaumont and then Taylor.⁵ Although Tower worked in the radio business only briefly, his time on-air returned the benefit of a strong and practiced speaking voice, which would aid him in political campaigns.⁶ Tower was then an insurance agent from 1950 to 1951 in Dallas. This work coincided with the resumption of his education.⁷

¹ Harry James Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas; an examination of events leading to his election in 1961 and his reelection in 1966" (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1968), 63.

² *Ibid.*, 63-64.

³ Transcript, John G. Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

⁴ Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas," 63-64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

In the spring of 1949 Tower moved to Dallas to enroll in graduate courses at Southern Methodist University. While working on his master's, Tower attended the London School of Economics. In London he researched the Conservative Party, using that research in his master's thesis titled "The Conservative Worker in Britain."⁸ In that thesis Tower openly admitted his interest in studying the Conservative Party derived from political admiration. Frankly stating his position, he wrote that he "honestly attempted an objective presentation of this study of Tory political opinion, but he would be dishonest if he did not admit what the reader has no doubt already divined, that his sympathies are profoundly pro-Tory."⁹ Tower finished his master's degree in political science in 1953 and then accepted a teaching position at Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, where he would remain employed until 1960.¹⁰

While in graduate school in Dallas, Tower met and married his first wife, Lou Bullington. The Towers were married in Wichita Falls in March of 1952, and would have three children during their stay in that city. They would divorce in 1976. Tower's other marriage, to Lilla Burt, began the following year, only to end in divorce in 1987.¹¹

Tower's first marriage proved to be advantageous for both his political career and the Texas Republican Party. Grover Bullington, Lou's father, was the first cousin of Orville Bullington, a principal leader of the Texas Republican Party since shortly after

⁸ Susan Eason, "Tower, John Goodwin." Handbook of Texas Online. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/ftoss.html>; Internet, accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

⁹ Tower, John Goodwin, "The Conservative Worker in Britain (M A thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1953), 117.

¹⁰ Susan Eason, "Tower, John Goodwin." Handbook of Texas Online. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/ftoss.html>; Internet, accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

World War I.¹² He was the Republican nominee for Governor of Texas in 1932, and, although unsuccessful in his bid, received more votes than any other Republican gubernatorial candidate to that point in Texas's history. A vociferous opponent of the New Deal, Bullington accused the the Roosevelt administration of being communists. Bullington remained a key figure in Texas Republican politics, serving as a delegate to eight national conventions as well as being a member of the state executive committee from 1947 to 1952, serving as chair from 1951 to 1952. Bullington was among the group who tried to block the presidential nomination of Eisenhower in favor of Robert Taft.¹³

Tower was not always a Republican. As a young man he stated that he was a Democrat because he "didn't know there was an alternative." His grandfather, who grew up in Reconstruction Louisiana, shaped his early political views. Tower "grew up a Southern Democrat like every well-bred Texas lad."¹⁴ During Tower's education he realized that the GOP on the national level better represented his own views on governance than the Democratic one did. Tower identified his "conservative, capitalist, particularist, oriented ideas" as reason enough to change to the Republican Party, a change he says he made in 1951.¹⁵

Tower's association with Orville Bullington fueled a nascent political ambition, and armed the young future senator with the connections and knowledge necessary for a successful career in politics. After all, political science had been Tower's academic field

¹² Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas," 64.

¹³ Louise Kelly, "Bullington, Orville" Handbook of Texas Online. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/BB/fbu18.html>; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

¹⁴ Transcript, John G Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

before his marriage to Lou Bullington. Additionally, Tower fondly remembered participating in political activities as a young age.¹⁶ In 1938, at the age of thirteen, Tower passed out campaign materials in Democrat Ralph Yarborough's bid to be Texas's Attorney General.¹⁷ After his marriage, Tower became familiar with Republican politics at a higher level than simply distributing leaflets. Close proximity to the inner workings of the political machine changed Tower's purely academic interest in politics into a desire to participate. In 1952, he attended the Republican National Convention with Orville Bullington. His connection with such a high-ranking member of the Texas Republican Party took Tower quickly into high levels of party operations.¹⁸

While teaching in Wichita Falls, Tower began his political career. His first venture was an unsuccessful bid for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives in 1954. Tower gained experience in running a campaign and appealing to voters, but was defeated handily by Democrat Vernon J. Stewart. In 1956, Tower moved a little higher up the chain of Texas Republican authority when he was elected to the Republican State Executive Committee, and from there became co-chair then chair of the State Committee on Education and Research.¹⁹ Also in that year, Tower represented Texas at the Republican National Convention.²⁰

¹⁶ Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas," 65.

¹⁷ Transcript, John G. Tower Oral History Interview I, 8/8/71, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, LBJ Library.

¹⁸ Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas," 65.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

²⁰ Susan Eason, "Tower, John Goodwin." Handbook of Texas Online. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/toss.html>; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

Like other Texans, John Tower had to be convinced that the Republican Party had something to offer. The change took much less time for the future senator. The party switch and personal contacts Tower made moved him into position for a run at public office. A significant reason why Tower made the then unpopular change to the Republican Party was also a major reason for his success in 1961. He had beliefs about government that the Democratic Party could not represent. Conservatism was an ideology on the rise at this time, as shown in Chapter One. John Tower's conservatism fit very much in the mold of that growing national ideology which is evident in his electoral statements, and in more thorough policy proposals he made following his election.

Tower's election to the U.S. Senate in 1961 was a landmark event because of his partisan affiliation, but also because of his ideological stance. His rise into the more exclusive legislative chamber represented another step in the continuation of conservatism's rise to national prominence. Plainly seen in Tower's policy statements before and after his election is the usage of the new conservatism of the mid-twentieth century. Tower's election came at the beginning of the GOP penetration of the solid Democratic South. With Tower's election another conservative voice gained a national outlet. In Tower's policy declarations, the kind of thinking that facilitated Republican advances in the South in the mid-to late-twentieth century is apparent.

After Tower's victory, he wrote and published a manual of sorts for conservative citizens. His *Program for Conservatives* included a foreword by Barry Goldwater, an explanation of his ideology and a series of legislative proposals. This small book touched on the major conservative issues of the early 1960s, from communism and a stronger

more aggressive foreign policy to decreased taxation and other areas where Tower felt the federal government should shrink in size and scope. This *Program* expanded upon the issues Tower referred to during his campaign. In his run for office the candidate did not present the kind of in-depth explanation for his rationale nor did he outline what legislative proposals he would make. Both in the short and memorable electoral pronouncements and in the fleshed-out post-election policy outlines Tower showed how in-tune he was with the conservative movement that he claimed to be a part of.

Of importance to the growing conservative movement was defining the essence of that ideology. The movement was growing, yet far from the political mainstream at the beginning of the 1960s. For many, even those who would identify with the new political thinking, the basis for conservative ideas was unknown. Tower tackled this problem unsatisfactorily in the campaign, and addressed the issue more adequately in his *Program*.

In Tower's book, the senator had ample space and was not under the pressure inherent in a political campaign to be concise. Thus what took the place of an intellectual discussion on conservatism were attacks on liberals and liberalism. These sound-bite-length attacks hint at the discussion of conservatism Tower would present following his election. Liberals, Tower claimed, "see themselves presiding over the people." Tower warned of movement by the Kennedy administration "closer and closer to what might be called a benevolent dictatorship."²¹ The confines of electoral rhetoric made definition of conservatism in a straight-forward manner impossible. Since Tower was pitted against another politician calling himself a conservative, albeit from the Democratic Party, he

²¹ "From the Office of John G. Tower, U S. Senator," Folder 11, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers, A. Frank Smith Jr. Library Center, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas.

had to clarify his views. Electoral rhetoric mainly came down to a short quotable phrase. Tower was able to have the press repeat his phrase “New Frontier Conservative” as the Republican’s description of his opponent, William A. Blakley. This phrase implied that an irreconcilable contradiction existed in Tower’s opponent: he would represent Texas as a conservative beholden to liberal party leaders.²²

Addressing the definition problem after the election, Tower showed recognition of the inchoate nature of his own political ideology in the minds of the American people. In ways similar to many other conservatives during this period, the senator laid out a definition of the new American conservatism. As a starting point, he pointed out the shift in the meaning of the term “liberal” from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, identifying the new conservatism with the old liberalism. The new liberal was for a “coercive” federal government that used high taxes, central economic planning and the concentration of power in the executive branch to meet his or her goals. Tower hinted that liberals really wanted to abolish federalism and create a “unitary” government. In his foundations for defining conservatism, Tower uses such innuendos of dastardly liberal designs for the purpose of identifying conservatism as the true heir of the American governmental tradition.²³

Drawing on familiar conservative themes, Tower juxtaposed his ideology with the authoritarianism of the opposition. Sir Edmund Burke, identified by many conservative pundits as a great father of their beliefs, had outlined a method for change without radical destruction of traditional methods and institutions. Tower championed the Irishman’s

²² “Tower Labels Sen. Blakley ‘New Frontier Conservative,’” *The Dallas Morning News*, 11 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

²³ John G. Tower, *A Program for Conservatives* (New York: MacFadden Capital Hill), 11.

prudent philosophy. Moving back across the Atlantic, Tower inserted the work of Thomas Jefferson into the picture. The equality of all men, namely in their ability to vote, was an addition Jefferson made to the Burkean conservative tradition. The Jeffersonian supplement to conservative thinking allowed Tower to segue into other discussions of liberty. The participatory angle led Tower to talk directly about the virtues of a minimalist government, federalism, liberty and what he argued was the logical conclusion of these three: free market capitalism. As the protector of capitalism, the conservative was thus the protector against authoritarianism.²⁴

The twentieth century, according to Tower, saw an infiltration of “anti-capitalists” in the works of historians, an allegation that hampered the effectiveness of the conservative message. Historical writing by the 1960s had, Tower thought, masked certain important truths about the preceding century and a half. The industrial revolution and “subsequent Economic Revolution” were a boon to the standards of human life. The inability of conservatives to talk frankly about this development directly hindered the cause of pro-capitalism. By painting historians as a group critical of capitalist accomplishments, Tower hoped to align them with failures abroad. Europe, Tower contended, began its decline when it moved toward socialism. The wrong-headedness of twentieth century historians was obvious since they advocated socialistic policies through condemnation of capitalism’s shortcomings.²⁵

Concluding his definition of conservatism, Tower painted liberals as the true reactionaries of the day. Continuing the theme of authoritarianism, Tower portrays the “Liberal Establishment” as afraid of the exigencies of the Cold War and the new nuclear

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

age. Liberals' terror combined with their natural suspiciousness of an individual's ability to make rational choices to create a desire for an ordered society. Therefore it was understandable that liberals pined for economic planning and a high-level of power of the upper echelons of government over the day-to-day lives of the citizenry. Making the liberal conceit for liberty more insidious, according to Tower, was the extent to which they hoodwinked the American populace. Liberals employed techniques of advertising that presented the people with false information and artificial hope for social and economic improvement. Tower contended that liberal suasion had, by that time, made progressive action antithetic to conservative thought in the estimation of the average American. In so doing, the truth had been masked, and the time for reconciliation had come.²⁶

Tower's definition of his political ideology was more in the vein of classical liberalism, or libertarianism, but still had references to and admitted admiration for, the traditionalist mode of conservatism. The Texas senator made thinly veiled attacks of creeping authoritarianism during his 1961 campaign, and stated bluntly his distaste for socialism in his political tract. Like Hayek and other classical liberals, Tower had strong beliefs in the advantages of capitalism. In adding to his discussion and publication of conservative intellectual thought, Tower's contributions fit squarely within the classically liberal form of the rising conservatism of the mid-twentieth century. He also had a place for the more structured society called for by Edmund Burke and other traditionalists. Although he did not address the often-perceived contradictions inherent in the broad fusionist conservative movement, Tower's definition identified him with William F. Buckley and others who sought a unified conservatism able to fight political battles.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15-17.

A primary concern of conservatives in the early Cold War period was world communism, and Tower was no different in this regard. Tower used this campaign issue as a way to underscore his conservatism and as a way to differentiate himself from Democrats. Tower saw the United States' test of wills against the Soviet Union as a starker contrast than the Kennedy Administration. In a press release, the Tower campaign claimed that "coexistence . . . [was] not possible with Communism." He used the then-recent situation in Cuba as an opening for attack and as an opportunity to call for action. In the release, Tower was quoted as saying, "The Administration has obviously failed to learn from the lessons of its Cuban invasion fiasco." Tower then calls for recognition of "a Cuban government in exile, composed of all anti-Castro faction of Cubans in exile."²⁷

Following his successful election, Tower expanded on the theme of anti-communism with a more detailed agenda. One of his concerns was that the containment effort against the Soviet Union suffered from a lack of resolve to carry on towards victory. Tower decried "defeatist, passive half-measures" and an overall air of complacency surrounding the prosecution of the Cold War. The result, Tower thought, was appeasement and acceptance of an insufferable enemy. He noted the aforementioned policy debate over preemptive wars against communist expansion, and thought it dangerous that there was not a similar debate against what he perceived as a policy of meager defiance. Instead, the debate, as Tower saw it, consisted only "between resistance and surrender."²⁸ Clearly, Tower was in line with the growing conservative

²⁷ "From the Office of John G. Tower, U.S. Senator," Folder 11, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers.

²⁸ Tower, *A Program for Conservatives*, 19-20.

foreign policy sentiments, ideas that called for more aggressive strategies and a resolve to defeat, rather than contain, the Soviets.

To make clear why such a strategy and outlook were possible, Tower outlined a case for the intractability of the communist world view, arguing the point that the very nature of communism made it a military threat. Tower recalled the words of Lenin in which he stated clearly the inability of communism to coexist alongside “imperialist states.” Tower then added Stalin’s words on the matter, as well as Khrushchev’s famous outburst at the United Nations in late 1960, both of which made it clear to Tower that communists saw themselves as in a conflict in which either they or capitalists would win. Tower saw the need to bring such statements to light because of recent mainstream sentiment that had lessened American alarm over the communist threat. The fracture of the communist world, specifically between China and the Soviet Union, gave some cause to rethink how to handle the worldwide threat. Tower insisted this fracture gave no such reason, insisting “that the quarrel is not over whether to do us in, but how and when.” Such evidence, Tower thought, made it evident that a “strategy of victory” was imperative.²⁹

Although Tower clearly called for this “strategy of victory,” he did not clarify what that would entail. Much of his foreign policy sentiment in *A Program for Conservatives* was little more than a denunciation of the continued strategy of containment. Tower used President Kennedy’s handling of the Berlin incident in 1961 as an example of Democratic weaknesses. Soviet aggression was bald-faced, and the threat was met with what Tower thought was continuation of a submissive policy insufficient to the task of achieving victory. What Tower did definitively call for was a “declaration for

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

victory.” This announcement of intent, Tower thought, was a necessary step to vanquish the Soviets and other communists. The declaration would lead to an infusion of positive sentiment that would re-energize American morale. Only by reinforcing American will in this way and only by meeting communist expansion with aggressive countermeasures would America be victorious.³⁰ Beyond this affirmation of intent, however, Tower had little more to offer. Overall, his differences with liberals and the established foreign policy of the early 1960s seemed only to attack the tone of the prosecution. Undoubtedly, Tower would have recommended different courses of action, but he failed to do so in his tract on conservatism. In another area of foreign policy, Tower offered more concrete solutions to American problems.

Improvements in American trade, Tower contended, were necessary for a strong nation, and American competitive advantages in competition were dwindling. Tower, again attacking President Kennedy’s policies, saw opportunities for strengthening American trade in the European Common Market other than the ways outlined by the Democratic administration. Tower charged that the trade situation in the early 1960s would inevitably lead to a severe decline in the American standard of living. Western Europe had been successfully rebuilt, through American aid and through its own efforts, and with the common market system had emerged as a strong competitor in many fields. The actions of the Kennedy administration, Tower charged, had made matters worse for American industry, especially in steel and car making. Kennedy refused to let the steel industry raise its prices, and high labor prices combined with unequal trade standards were hampering the competitive edge of Ford and General Motors over the likes of

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Volkswagen. In several areas, Tower saw a need for conservative thinking to reestablish American business on the world market.³¹

Some of Tower's proposals on trade were obvious in their conservative nature. Others seem simply to be partisan gripes. For instance, on specific trade agreements, Tower belittled the agreement the Kennedy administration made with Europe on car imports and exports. European vehicles were given a six-point-five percent duty whereas American cars had a twenty-two percent surcharge.³² This kind of iniquity was clearly a case of diplomatic negotiation going Europe's way, rather than the proper place for a conservative critique of a liberal program or policy. But Tower did infuse his ideology into such critiques on trade. Subsidies, Tower contended, were detrimental because of the high taxes necessary to provide them. Tower pointed to the growing costs of the farm subsidies begun haltingly in 1926 and institutionalized during the Great Depression as evidence that such payments only led to further grants and an endless cycle of business reliance on governmental help. He argued that subsidies should be constrained in amount and over a set period of time so as to prevent devolution into continual payments, but still allow for necessary help in times of short-term crisis. Tower also proposed that tax breaks be given to American business in the form of a depreciation allowance on capital goods. Pointing to the existence of such a tax-break policy in common market countries, Tower argued for setting policy that would restore competitive balance for American industry.³³

³¹ *Ibid.*, 35-40.

³² *Ibid.*, 40.

³³ *Ibid.*, 44-46.

In the campaign, Tower showed little inclination to take on trade and subsidy issues. The few short pronouncements on those issues were mainly limited to specific cases where Tower and the campaign felt they could effectively undermine their opponent. For instance the Tower campaign attacked Blakley over his affiliation with Braniff Airways, which “received over \$22 million in federal subsidy.” The campaign chose this theme as an avenue of attack because Blakley claimed he was against subsidies.³⁴ As in other areas, clarification of conservative values was best handled outside the environment of a heated contest for public office.

Restoring American business to prominence was a continual theme for Tower, who also had strong feelings about how the federal government should handle labor and antitrust issues. In the campaign Tower stated his views plainly and succinctly but not with great detail. In one article, he stated that he believed that “anti-trust laws should be extended to cover labor organizations.”³⁵ Within the framework of a speech in which he decried the growing power of the executive, the Republican attacked President Kennedy’s “suggestion that all federal employees . . . be unionized” as an attempt to create a “political weapon” for a president.³⁶ Tower allied himself with conservatism, but left greater explanation of his labor and anti-trust views for after his election.

In *A Program for Conservatives* Tower outlined the purported reasons necessitating labor unions and then attacked those premises, charging that conditions had changed to the point that labor had achieved too much power. Tower believed that labor

³⁴ Tower campaign leaflet, “LBJ’s Boy,” Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

³⁵ Mike Quinn, “Tower Sees Threat in Executive Power,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 18 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, The John G. Tower Papers.

³⁶ “From the Office of John G. Tower, U.S. Senator,” Folder 11, Box 437, The John G. Tower Papers.

unions had overreached their intended purpose. By force of their monopolistic stranglehold over certain industries, unions had begun heavily to influence matters beyond what Tower identified should be their primary and sole purpose: negotiating wage and labor conditions for their members. Tower thought that labor was going beyond this duty in the early 1960s, and was acting in ways that hurt American business. Antitrust legislation, Tower argued, had helped American business to thrive in the early decades of the twentieth century, and now because of the overreaching activities of labor it was time to readjust how antitrust legislation affected trade unions. Tower put trade union monopolies in the same light as corporate monopolies on industry in terms of the adverse effects they had on the market. His insistence on a freer marketplace was a clear conservative critique of the status quo and of liberal policies regarding labor.³⁷

The government enacted and continued programs in the early 1960s that Tower alleged were in direct competition with American business. This issue was not overtly covered in the campaign, but was taken up in Tower's post-election policy tract. According to the conservative, governmental activities that led to interference in the market place had become so pervasive that no one had accurately appraised the entire situation. Tower charged that every federal agency competed with business in every possible sphere of the economy. Not only was this activity harmful to American business, but it cost the tax payers heavily. Tower made his case by drawing on investigations into federal programs, investigations whose findings concurred with Tower's wishes. In study after study, commissions found thousands of cases where the government was producing goods and materials that private industry could provide.

³⁷ Tower, *A Program for Conservatives*, 51-52.

Tower proposed that Congress pass legislation limiting government production where it was not needed.³⁸

Tower also exhibited his conservatism in statements on the federal budget and taxation. Tower expressed concern for the staggering public debt incurred by the government. In the campaign Tower addressed the deficit as a primary reason why the income tax could not be repealed, despite his aversion to that form and level of taxation.³⁹ After the campaign, Tower would reveal a more comprehensive plan to address these interlocking issues.

Tower attacked the logic of deficit spending to prime the economic pump to prevent or ease recession. The conservative took the line that the policy of governmental spending outside its means, coupled with inflation sufficient to mitigate the cost of repaying deficits, would lead to an eventual catastrophe. At a time when money was still backed by gold, Tower's alarmist argument warned of a depleted federal reserve. He would propose, after taking office, a bill that required Congress to have a balanced budget with exceptions for war or "other grave national emergencies."⁴⁰

In terms of taxation, Tower saw a basic liberal misunderstanding behind a tax code that hampered U.S. economic growth. The indicator Tower pointed to was that of "capital formation" as a percentage of GDP. Using a CIA estimate, Tower pointed out that the nation was reinvesting at about half the rate of the Soviet Union and at several percentage points below many Western nations. This low number, Tower concluded,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 65-78.

³⁹ Mike Quinn, "Tower Swings Through Panhandle, Urges Stand for Conservatism," *The Dallas Morning News*, 19 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, The John G Tower Papers.

⁴⁰ Tower, *A Program for Conservatives*, 85-92.

was a major factor in the lagging American economy, and proved why the other nations enjoyed GDP growth at several percentage points higher than the United States. The liberal conclusion that Tower railed against was the idea that “excess capital was a surplus commodity.” Liberals thus justified their high tax rates, which were the culprit behind slow economic growth. Tower argued for a tax code that would decrease the tax burden on the American people, slowly, so as not to incur further debt.⁴¹

States’ rights was a common theme for conservatives, including Tower. In the campaign, he often simply affirmed his states’ rights position and occasionally made statements on specific cases where such a stance was important. Tower stated that he was “opposed to additional legislation on civil rights” and to a fair employment practices committee.⁴² Specific civil rights issues rarely came up in the press or in Tower campaign releases, but the few opportunities Tower had to speak on this issue showed that he was with conservatives in terms of federalism.

In *A Program for Conservatives* Tower showed that the campaign rhetoric was simply a preview of his states’ rights views. The Senator specifically took umbrage with the actions of federal courts which, he claimed, had exceeded their constitutional power by too frequently and too capriciously nullifying state laws. Tower’s proposal was legislation that would constrain the Supreme Court of the United States from overturning state laws except if one of two criteria was met. If the state law “direct[ly]” contradicted federal law, or if federal laws already addressed the issue of the state law in question, the high court would be allowed to act as it saw fit. Tower insisted his legislation would not

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 94-98.

⁴² Quinn, “Tower Sees Threat in Executive Power,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 18 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, The John G. Tower Papers.

“tell the Supreme Court what to do,” nor would it “trespass on Federal powers.” His denial, however, flew in the face of reality. The legislation would “require” the Supreme Court to act in a certain way, as the Texan himself put it. Tower clearly tried to mask his solution with an air of constitutionality it did not really have.⁴³ This flaw sets this critique of Tower’s *Program* apart from his other proposals. For the most part, what he wanted was workable within the existing system of government at that time.

In brief statements which were often simply attacks on his opponent, Tower’s conservatism was apparent in his campaign rhetoric. His statements were harsh when directed at the Kennedy Administration. His tone was similar to that of intellectual conservatives in the mid-twentieth century. The themes Tower touched upon were also those of writers such as Friedrich von Hayek, William F. Buckley and Milton Friedman. Tower, during his electoral campaign, allied himself with these and other conservatives in a way specific to running for office that represented only an outline of an ideological stance. As will be shown in chapter 3, Tower’s conservative rhetoric during his campaign had to be resonant. His opponent, William Blakely, was a Democrat who sought the conservative label for himself. Tower had to show his conservatism as distinct from his opponent’s and as justification for Texans to make the then extraordinary measure of voting for a Republican. After the election, he filled in the empty space with weightier arguments and specific proposals for action.

Tower’s conservatism came through in his *Program* as measured and cautious, while still retaining the harsh denunciations that partly defined the rising ideology. The inclusion of Barry Goldwater’s introduction gave credence to the proposition that Tower’s tract was appropriate reading for those interested in the new conservatism.

⁴³ Tower, *A Program for Conservatives*, 145-149.

Goldwater had just recently ascended to the fore of the political side of the conservative movement, and was shortly to become the leading Republican in the nation. In many areas, Tower spoke of gradually reducing the government's reach and scope. His tax plan called for lower taxes, but not so low as to signify a radical change in federal receipts.⁴⁴ He clearly wanted to end farm subsidies, but his proposed legislation would have only made adjustments within the already well-entrenched framework of heavy government involvement.⁴⁵ His anti-containment views led him to call for a more vehement U.S. stance against worldwide communism, but while rebuking liberals and President Kennedy as soft, he proposed legislation that would have been merely rhetorical in effect and in reality not so much of a divergence from the current foreign policy.⁴⁶

In Tower, Texans had a truly viable conservative choice for their U.S. Senator. As a Republican, he would not be encumbered with having to deal with an entrenched liberal leadership in the same manner as conservative Democrats. By his declaration, and clearly through his rhetoric, Tower presented conservative options that contrasted with the liberal status quo. Moreover, the propositions Tower proffered were not too radical in effect for an immediate out-of-hand dismissal by the political mainstream. For a rising ideology, branded by those in power as reactionary, this temperate conservatism was important. To beat liberals at the polls and begin to affect the American political scene, conservatism needed to be seen as workable, and not as a road back to the dark days of the Great Depression. In Texas, Tower would further the conservative cause by winning

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 105-119.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32-34.

a statewide race. Tower, who began his political career as a conservative at a time when conservatism was scratching its way into the mainstream of American political life, waged a vigorous campaign in 1961, laid bare his credentials, and proved appealing.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPECIAL ELECTION OF 1961

In the spring of 1961 John Tower realized a great moment of unprecedented success for the Republican Party of Texas. In the special election and runoff that followed he became the first Republican to win a statewide election in Texas since Reconstruction. This momentous event did not take place capriciously; many factors were involved. Tower was a particularly capable candidate, and his political proficiency was aided by various dynamics in place at the time. Tower took advantage of the salutary climate and exploited Democratic weaknesses to begin the process of creating a two-party state.

On January 3, 1961, Lyndon Baines Johnson, Vice President-elect of the United States of America, resigned his post as U.S. Senator-elect from Texas. Johnson had run concurrently for the Vice Presidency and the Senate in 1960. Texans would vote to fill the vacated seat on April 4 of that year.¹ Early appraisals of the race showed no clear favorite; both nationally and in-state, the race was considered wide open. This special election was impromptu in comparison with other American elections. This fact and the

¹ Harry James Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas; an examination of events leading to his election in 1961 and his reelection in 1966," (M.A. thesis, University of Maryland, 1968), 80.

Texas guidelines for carrying out this kind of election contributed to the circus atmosphere that would arise in the early weeks of the campaign.²

First, there was the ease of getting on the ballot. Texas law stipulated that special elections of this kind would not carry party designations. This meant no primaries or conventions to pare down the field. All one needed was \$50 and the ability to fill out the proper form by the deadline of March 4. Many people who had not one whit of political viability opted to put themselves on the ballot. Texas had just carried out a special election also for a vacant U.S. Senate seat in 1957. In that contest, twenty-three candidates signed up. To date, the highest number of people to run in a race for the U.S. Senate was twenty-nine. In 1961, the number of candidates topped seventy.³ As interviewers learned, some of the candidates for the U.S. Senate admitted to taking advantage of the easy path to candidacy for reasons of pure vanity. They did not intend to actually campaign, but had entered the race on a whim. Others claimed to have policy stances, but in reality, their proposals were shallow and undeveloped. One candidate had previously been confined to a mental hospital for threatening President Eisenhower. Another listed his fitness for office as ability “to pound on the table just as loud as Khrushchev.”⁴ Later that year the Texas Legislature would raise the filing fee for running for state-wide office to \$1,000 in an effort to discourage frivolous candidacies.⁵

One restraint on the wide-open nature of the 1961 election was the new requirement that special election candidates achieve a majority of the vote or face a

² *Ibid.*, 80-81.

³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴ “D.T. Sampson 34th Entry in Senate Race,” Folder 4, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers, A. Frank Smith Jr. Library Center, Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas.

⁵ Thompson, “Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas,” 81.

runoff. Previous special elections of this kind only required a plurality. The 1957 special senatorial election saw Ralph Yarborough win with only 38% of the vote. In fact, the law changing the requirement to win special elections from a plurality to a majority had been changed because of the liberal Yarborough's victory. Conservatives in the Texas Legislature pushed through the change as a way to prevent liberals from backing into office.⁶

In the 1960 presidential election, just over 2.2 million votes were cast in Texas. For the special senatorial election of 1961, less than half that number were recorded. This reflected the general trend in non-presidential election years. At this time in Texas, there still was a poll tax, and this tax had to be paid by December 31 of the year before the election. Because there were no presidential or biennial congressional elections, people often opted not to pay their poll taxes in odd-numbered years. The turnout of less than half of the previous year's tally thus fell in line with Texas voting patterns.⁷

In a poll conducted before any candidates had declared, and shortly after the general election of 1960, Tower came away as the front-runner, although he had far from the necessary support to make him a favorite. He led in the poll due to name recognition and the fact that he was the only Republican on the list of choices. The poll had two parts. In the first part, pollsters asked respondents who they would vote for without presenting a single name for their consideration. In this part, Tower polled 15 percent. William Blakley was behind Tower with 5 percent, Jim Wright with 4 percent and Will Wilson with 3 percent, with many other notable Texas politicians drawing similar numbers. The low numbers are easily explained by the fact that less than half of those

⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

polled could name a candidate in this part of the poll. In the second part of the poll, respondents were shown a list of names. Tower again led in this section, getting 19 percent of the tally. Blakley, Wilson, and Wright moved up a tick, but still none of those three topped either Martin Dies (8 percent) or Allan Shivers (9 percent), and neither of the latter would run in this special election. The final line on this poll, "No Opinion," tied Tower at 19 percent. Taken as a whole, this poll showed that Tower had made a name for himself running against Johnson, but that a strong Democratic candidate could still beat him handily.⁸

By Republican standards of the day, Tower had run a successful campaign against LBJ in 1960. Having won over forty-one percent of the vote the previous November made him an obvious choice to take up the Republican banner again in 1961. Before Tower would do so, however, he wanted to make sure this was not an exercise in futility. People close to Tower thought that former Governor Allan Shivers might run for the vacant office. Shivers was an influential Democratic conservative power broker in Texas who had helped President Eisenhower campaign in Texas in both 1952 and 1956. Because of this, Texas Republicans were grateful to him. If Shivers were to run, the Republicans did not plan to run a candidate against him. The former governor announced that he would not run for the senate, and thus opened the door for another Tower campaign.⁹

On December 13, 1960, Tower announced his candidacy for the unexpired senatorial term of Vice President-elect Johnson. In a statement announcing his entry,

⁸ Joe Beldon, "Race for Senate is Wide Open," *The Houston Post*, 1 December, 1960, Folder 2, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁹ Thompson, "Senator John Goodwin Tower of Texas", 81-82.

Tower mentioned his strong showing in November as reason for running again and immediately made clear that he would make conservatism a defining feature of his campaign. On January 13, Tower and William Blakley, the candidate who would turn out to be his primary foe, both submitted their fifty dollar filing fees and were officially on the ballot for April 4.¹⁰

Blakley was the interim U.S. Senator from Texas in 1961. He had served in that position once before in 1957, losing in that special election to Ralph Yarborough. Blakley was a conservative, as his record during his brief stint in the Senate revealed. Blakley introduced a bill in 1961 to substitute for the education bill on the agenda. That bill would have reimbursed states for two percent of the income taxes the federal government collected. The bill garnered support from many Republicans and some southern Democrats, but was rejected 64 to 30.¹¹ Blakley's bill was designed to prevent the expansion of federal power in the area of education. He maintained that any federal aid to education would lead America down the path of "regimentation." His opposition to Kennedy's New Frontier programs demonstrated his conservative outlook.¹²

Other viable candidates in the special election exhibited the broad spectrum of ideology espoused by Texas Democrats. Texas Attorney General William Wilson ran as an "aggressive conservative," but also, a "progressive conservative, right of center."¹³ He

¹⁰ Sam Kinch, "Blakley, Tower Pay Election Filing Fees," *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, 14 January, 1961, Folder 4, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

¹¹ John Mashek, "Senate Kills School Bill By Blakley," *The Dallas Morning News*, 18 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

¹² Allen Duckworth, "Blakley Claims America Approaching Regimentation," *The Dallas Morning News*, 19 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

¹³ "Wilson Declares He's Rightist, Party Man," *The Houston Chronicle*, 2 February, 1961, Folder 5, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

was considered a moderate but was actually the most conservative of the four major candidates after Tower and Blakley. Wilson openly stressed the idea of states rights in opposition to federal legislation. Congressman Jim Wright was another moderate, and he ran as something of a centrist. In his televised message announcing his candidacy, Wright cited independence of thought and unity above ideology as reasons to vote for him.¹⁴ Maury Maverick, Jr., a San Antonio lawyer and former state representative, accepted the mantle of a liberal. "If Roosevelt was and Kennedy is a liberal, than so am I," quipped the candidate as he predicted a runoff between himself and Tower. Maverick's major backing came from labor, most publicly in the form of endorsement by C.O.P.E., the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s Texas political action group.¹⁵ State Senator Henry B. Gonzalez of San Antonio, the other major liberal in this race, also garnered labor support. In fact, Gonzalez groused that a handful of Maverick supporters had rigged the C.O.P.E. election by which Maverick gained his primary endorsement.¹⁶ These candidates would not make the runoff, but their tally in the special election is important for reaching certain conclusions about the final result.

The atmosphere preceding the special election gave no indication that anything out of the ordinary was on the horizon. The usual array of Democratic candidates was on the ballot, as was the Republican sacrificial lamb. Texas Republicans gave themselves a chance, but few others did. To most in the state, the special election to fill Johnson's Senate seat was to be a referendum on the status of the Democratic Party, and little else.

¹⁴ "Middle-of-the-Road Course Pledged by Jim Wright," *The Dallas Morning News*, 12 January, 1961, Folder 5, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

¹⁵ "Maverick Predicts Runoff With Tower." *The Houston Chronicle*, 9 February, 1961, Folder 5, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

¹⁶ Doug Freeland, "Unionists Urged To Defy Maverick Endorsement," *The Houston Post*, 11 February, 1961, Folder 5, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

The Tower campaign knew the importance that turnout would play in the senatorial election. Using election data from the 1960 election, the Tower people had likely targets in mind and had tactics ready to counter their financial disadvantage. The Republican Party of Texas sent materials to districts across the state in order to coordinate a massive telephone campaign. In these materials, the party stressed the need for a high turnout and outlined a method for exciting people for John Tower.¹⁷

One of the emerging methods that conservative Republicans across America had been using was the telephone canvass. The Tower campaign knew of the efficacy of telephone canvassing and had an understanding of how to carry one out. State Chairman Tad Smith believed that a candidate would increase his tally by “16%-24%” by undertaking telephone canvassing. This letter also indicated that the Republican Party saw this as a campaign method the Democrats did not utilize. The Tower campaign, with a head start due to having an organization in place from the previous fall, went to the phones to drum up new support and insure the turnout of the faithful.¹⁸

Telephone workers were to call each name on their list, once before election day, and again on the day of the special election. Further instructions to the county chairmen showed the discipline that Smith and the Texas Republicans felt was necessary for effective electioneering. Callers were to make specific calls on specific days, a policy meant to head off forgetfulness and other perils of an open-ended assignment. As the telephone campaign progressed, party officials reported that they were reaching more counties for this special election than they had in the 1960 campaign. The head start

¹⁷ “Tad Smith to the County Chairmen of the top 31 counties in Texas,” 16 March, 1961, Folder 11, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

from the previous fall allowed both a wider canvass and the honing of the canvassing method.¹⁹

County campaign officials kept the Tower campaign well informed as to the status of their respective canvassing operations. Telegrams and letters sent to the campaign contained whatever information they could give. Sometimes the communications conveyed very little information. One message only said what percentage of the local voters they had reached. Other memos were more informative. One such message gave a rundown of how the county was expected to vote. Many county staff sent headquarters a description of the ballot for that county, thereby keeping the campaign informed on possible tampering issues. Even those notes that indicated they could send very little information are helpful to understand the extent of the canvassing the campaign wanted. A telegram to campaign director James Bertron, dated March 28, indicated only that the campaign staff in Tyler had contacted ninety percent of eligible voters. Most of the counties targeted only strong precincts and previous Tower voters who they urged to reappear to the polls for the special election. This correspondence showed the commitment the Tower campaign had made to the canvassing procedure.²⁰

In public appearances Tower pushed his conservative vision as often as possible. His message was so strident that his campaign staff sometimes feared that opponents would find success portraying Tower as simply an obstructionist. Since a liberal Democrat sat in the White House, and his party controlled Congress, many of Tower's

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Paul R. Jameson to James A. Bertron, 28 March, 1961, Folder 3, Box 439, the John G. Tower Papers.

propositions were rebukes against the proposals of the New Frontier. One county chair, Jeanine Lewis, of Brazoria County, detailed several items she thought important for the Tower campaign to address. Lewis provided evidence that people she had contacted were not impressed with Tower's ideas. Lewis attributed this to Tower being tired on a visit to her county but noted that voters found Tower to be extremely negative in his approach. The chairwoman suggested Tower be more active in taking positive positions. Also of concern to Lewis was the effect of John Birch Society members openly backing Tower. Conversations she had with conservatives gave her cause for concern. Lewis informed the Tower campaign that in her county people were more concerned with "the far-right, these Fascists, than [they were] about the socialists." A Lake Jackson precinct chair for the Republican Party also told Lewis that he preferred one of Tower's Democratic opponents.²¹

Tower appears to have dismissed this advice and warning, since he made attacking the New Frontier a cornerstone of his campaign. "Generally speaking, I oppose all those New Frontier proposals," Tower was quoted as saying in speeches. The candidate also used Kennedy's first days in office as grist for his partisan mill. "Last fall we warned the voters Kennedy would initiate a rash of socialistic legislation. This he has done." In newspaper articles, Tower's own ideas as to how he would fulfill his duties if elected were somewhat buried beneath these attacks. Articles also gave little space to statements, mostly generalized, about loosening government restrictions and removing the government from direct competition with private enterprise. In other words, Tower left himself open to the charge of negativity, whether by calculation or by failure to

²¹ Jeanine Lewis to Tower Campaign Headquarters, 29 March, 1961, Folder 3, Box 439 the John G. Tower Papers.

properly work the press. Had this been an election that pitted liberal against conservative, or afforded a New Frontier referendum, the inability or unwillingness to place his own positive ideas ahead of anti-liberal attacks might have been a liability.²²

Besides the appearance of negativity, the Tower campaign faced another problem stemming from their candidate's ideological approach. Other candidates maintained that they were conservatives as well. Will Wilson's campaign materials stressed his record as a "States' Rights Democrat," who wanted to keep the federal government out of education, withhold recognition of "Red China," and opposed "all other encroachments that insidiously nibble away, bit by bit, at our individual and states' rights." The *Houston Chronicle's* endorsement of Wilson noted his conservative stance in key issues of the early 1960s, notably the aforementioned issues and the candidate's view that foreign aid should be pared down, and that efficiency and waste reduction be introduced into government operations.²³

Wilson argued that he was the conservative candidate who not only had the best chance of actually winning the race, but did not carry the baggage of being a Republican from a state and a region that had no tradition of voting for that party. Wilson's campaign thus showed an awareness of the strength of conservatism in Texas and possibly of the strong conservative following John Tower had gathered in recent

²² "Senate Candidates Campaign in Dallas," Newspaper clipping, Folder 1, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

²³ Editorial, "Why We Are for Will Wilson For United States Senator," *The Houston Chronicle*, 12 March, 1961, Folder 6, Box 439, The John G. Tower Papers.

months.²⁴ Obviously, Tower had to differentiate himself from other conservative candidates in order to win the election.

Combating the conservatives of the Democratic Party was as important to Tower's victory as combating liberals. Quite often, Democratic conservatives left themselves open to an easy attack. A press release from Tower campaign headquarters painted Will Wilson, Bill Blakley, and Jim Wright as sympathetic to the Kennedy administration. These three, the campaign maintained, had threatened shutting down the Convair plant in Fort Worth which made the B-58 and other defense materials unless Fort Worth supported Kennedy in November. The plant was shut down by executive order, according to the press release, and gave Tower a chance to condemn the president's "reprisals" against those who "dare to oppose the radical socialistic schemes of the New Frontier."²⁵ Tower painted Wilson, Blakley and Wright as conservatives who had supported Kennedy's campaign, and thus not truly conservative. He insinuated they would be a rubber stamp for JKF's programs should one of them be elected.

Combating other conservatives was not Tower's only chore. Candidate Maury Maverick, Jr. couched his campaign in strong liberal terms, mainly by voicing hearty support for John F. Kennedy's New Frontier programs. In a speech to the University of Houston chapter of the Young Democrats, Maverick enumerated several of the president's programs as important for the future of the country. While endorsing Kennedy's entire agenda, Maverick highlighted federal involvement in education, in easing the suffering of the elderly, and in achieving full employment. In a speech

²⁴ "Will Texas' Voice Be Heard in Moscow?" Political advertisement for Will Wilson, Folder 6, Box 439, The John G. Tower Papers.

²⁵ "Press Release I," Folder 5, Box 708, the John G. Tower Papers.

opening his own campaign office in Grayson County, the Democrat stated that “if something is not done soon all of Texas will be a depressed area.” Citing new unemployment figures, Maverick urged Texans to consider Kennedy’s ideas for economic growth.²⁶

Liberal Henry B. Gonzalez struggled to make it into the spotlight, but claimed support from local chapters of various labor unions, including steel workers, meat cutters, and garment and electrical workers.²⁷ In this election, unlike the runoff that followed, liberal Texans at least had a choice of liberals from among the viable candidates.

Tower campaigned across the state, seemingly speaking anywhere the campaign could gather a crowd. The candidate’s itineraries had him engaged to speak on a daily basis at early 6:35 A.M breakfasts and 8:00 P.M rallies. Clearly the campaign manager and Tower, himself, saw the importance of getting the candidate in front of as many voters as possible. This grinding schedule included meetings at community centers, local cafes in small Texas towns, clubs such as the Kiwanis and Methodist Church Men’s clubs, even an appearance to shake hands with workers at a shift change at a Phillips Petroleum refinery.²⁸

The election was held on April 4 and returns favored “the little college professor from Wichita Falls.” He did not actually win the election, because of the new law requiring that the winner garner a majority of votes, Tower now had to face Blakley, the interim U.S. Senator, in a runoff, which meant Texans were to choose from two

²⁶ “Maverick Says He Is For Kennedy Program,” Newspaper clipping, Folder 1, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

²⁷ Frelander, “Unionists Urged To Defy Maverick Endorsement,” *The Houston Post*, February 11, 1961, Folder 5, Box 709, The John G. Tower Papers.

²⁸ “Itinerary For John G. Tower,” Folder 2, Box 439, the John G Tower Papers.

conservatives, one from each of the major parties.²⁹ Blakley had history on his side; Texas had not chosen a Republican in a statewide election since Reconstruction. Past results proved to be a poor predictor in this case, however.

Like the first special election, no candidate had partisan designations on the ballot, but Tower was popular as a Republican, and Blakley was a Democrat, and he was currently serving in the U.S. Senate. He was the incumbent, although a temporary incumbent. At first blush, this would seem to be a race predictable in outcome. Tower's position as the front-runner, given his plurality of votes received on April 4, did not immediately make him the favorite.

The results of the April 4 special election showed the strength of conservatism in Texas. Tower and Blakley garnered over half of the roughly 1,000,000 votes cast. The four other leading candidates all fell, to varying degrees, to the left of the two slated for the May 27 runoff. Maverick and Gonzalez were liberals, Wright and Wilson more moderate to somewhat conservative. They badly split the votes of their respective contingents, but even without such splits, conservative votes were more numerous. The strength of conservatism in Texas informed popular opinion about the impending runoff. National Republican leaders believed that Tower's showing had proven extensive frustration with Kennedy's leadership.³⁰ This sentiment was an obvious overstatement, but the appeal of conservatism in Texas was evident. Ideology would play an important role in the runoff, but the interplay of ideology and political affiliation was the major issue at play in the runoff.

²⁹ William H. Gardner, "Conservative Runoff Appears In Making," *Houston Post*, May 5, 1961, Folder 7, Box 709 folder 7, the John G. Tower Papers.

³⁰ Robert E. Baskin, "Republican Leaders Hail Tower's Race," *The Dallas Morning News*, 6 April, 1961, Folder 7, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

Democratic votes still outweighed those for the Republican Tower. That the remaining Democratic candidate was himself conservative made handicapping this race easier for editors across the state. *The Dallas Morning News*, immediately after the special election, continued its prediction of a Blakley win. Tower's strong showing was considered a moral victory and a morale boost for Republicans. His run, however, was likely to end with Blakley defeating him as the Democratic Party closed ranks. Few predicted that the foundation of a two-party state was about to be laid.³¹

Tower had utilized Republican help from outside the state in the special election, and thought it wise to do so for the runoff. Some Texans close to the campaign thought bringing in "non-Texans" would be counterproductive. Shortly after the special election, Tower campaign director James Bertron received a lengthy letter from a Republican voter making this point. The sentiment conveyed in the letter was that campaigning on Tower's behalf by a "northern politician [i.e., non-Texan]" would hurt Tower immensely. Some felt that Texans were suspicious towards and even hostile to outsiders telling them how to vote. Furthermore, those Texans who would listen to the suggestions of out-of-state Republicans were probably already going to vote for Tower.³² The Tower people ruminated on this kind of reasoning before finally deciding to call on Barry Goldwater to help fundraise in Texas.³³ Notes left by campaign staff on this letter and other materials making similar arguments bear out that conclusion. But, the Tower campaign really had no choice other than to take this particular gamble because of problems securing funds.

³¹ Editorial, "Texas Votes Conservative," *The Dallas Morning News*, 6 April, 1961, Folder 7, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

³² Joseph Newton, letter to James Bertron, 5 April, 1961, Folder 7, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers.

³³ Jack Bell, "Tower Said Relying Only on Goldwater," *Dallas Times Herald*, 12 April, 1961, the John G. Tower Papers.

The Tower campaign readily admitted that it had less financial support than the opposition. Because Texas oil interests hoped to curry favor with the White House, they sent their money to Blakley and Wilson in the special election and to Blakley again for the runoff. That meant that the fundraising efforts of Senator Goldwater were that much more important. In Houston, Tower found greater success using Goldwater to help fund his campaign. On May 15 at the Sam Houston Coliseum an estimated five thousand people turned out for a rally for Tower. Television coverage of the event allowed Goldwater and the candidate to speak to an even wider audience.³⁴

In Dallas, the Tower campaign felt they had a tough time exciting voters regarding their candidate's brand of conservatism. They expected Goldwater's visit to the city to bear tremendous fundraising fruit in the process of a large turnout. Dallas officials, however, were disappointed when they sold only 660 tickets to their event. The Goldwater dinner brought in \$12,500 for the Tower campaign, but officials thought that Blakely's campaign in Dallas were deflecting much of Tower's campaigning efforts in the area. Such lackluster fundraising efforts resulted in stalled activity in certain areas of the campaign. The Tower campaign could not expect to outspend its opponent, and had to be judicious with its allocation of funds.³⁵

As with any campaign, "Tower for Senate" had to keep an eye on behind-the-scenes types of attacks on the candidate. Chairman Bertron received an internal memo that made the campaign director aware of one George Roberts and his attempts to paint Tower as a leftist. Roberts was on a lecture tour during the early months of 1961. He

³⁴ Mike Quinn, "Goldwater Calls For Tower Victory," *The Dallas Morning News*, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

spoke on communism and used a movie entitled “Communism on the Map” as part of his performance. The movie talked about the London School of Economics and Roberts used this cue to paint Tower as a liberal of the same kind as President Kennedy. Roberts told his audience that Tower and Kennedy attended the London School and insinuated that both had received socialistic education from that institution. The memo expressed concern about how Roberts’s lectures were playing, specifically in Houston.³⁶ The Houston area was of vital importance to the Republican’s chances. An early poll of Houston voters showed strong support, overall Tower led Blakley 49 to 35 percent. To succeed, Tower needed to maintain or expand on his margin in the Houston area.³⁷

To combat its various problems, the Tower campaign designed tactics specifically to foster an air of change in Texas politics. The campaign handed out free bumper stickers that read “I’ve Switched to TOWER” to voters who had previously backed other candidates. The purpose was to create a sense of a bandwagon for Tower which people could jump on. Campaign staff also felt that this would strike Blakely where he was weakest. Because their opponent did not have such a campaign slogan floating around the state, Tower’s staff felt Blakely suffered from dissention within the Democratic Party.³⁸ Such a sticker for Blakely would indicate a “closing of ranks,” something the liberals of the state had openly stated they would not do. This proved to be one of the fatal weaknesses of the Blakley campaign.

³⁶ Bob Overstreet, letter to Jim Bertron, 14 March, 1916, Folder 9, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers.

³⁷ C. W. Skipper, “John Tower Ahead In Race for Senate,” *The Houston Post*, 5 April, 1961, Folder 7, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

³⁸ Hargrove Smith, letter to All District Committee Members, County Chairmen, Vice Chairmen and Campaign Chairmen, 24 April, 1961, Folder 11, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers.

As in the first election, the Tower campaign vigorously telephoned voters. The campaign ordered county leaders to “locate . . . every single Tower voter in [their] county.” The campaign noted that the “boiler room” style canvassing method had great and documented success in the April 4 election, and stressed that each county implement that technique. So convinced was the campaign staff of the canvass, that they instructed the county leaders to take every action necessary to make sure they could pull off the telephoning. Every other program or campaigning method was to be considered subordinate to telephone canvassing.³⁹

The telephone canvass was not, however, the only strategy the campaign directed to the county chairs. In strong language, the Tower headquarters laid forth quotas for fundraising. The staff conveyed the importance that money would play, while stressing the historic nature of the election. The campaign also detailed a plan they called “contact and endorsement.” County campaign workers were to form committees according to voter occupations for their area. For instance, a doctor in a particular county was to be asked to endorse Tower, and then gather all other doctors in the county up and formally endorse Tower through a press release. As in the bumper sticker method, the staff felt that “contact and endorsement” would foster momentum.⁴⁰

The Republican effort was fairly well funded and received national support, although not to the extent that it could have overcome steep obstacles for its candidate. The Tower campaign had a well-run organization that believed strongly in its promotional techniques. Though never flush with money, they were able to raise enough

³⁹ Tad Smith, Jim Bertron and Blaine Bailey, letter to All County Campaign Leaders, 25 April, 1961, Folder 11, Box 437, the John G. Tower Papers

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

to keep the candidate in the spotlight and in front of voters. Were it not for these aspects of the Tower effort, it seems unlikely that the Republicans would have broken through the one-party barrier. However, the organization of the Tower campaign would likely not have succeeded if other factors had not come into play.

The programs of the New Frontier were obviously at issue in this campaign, although not because the two candidates took opposing views. Since both candidates espoused conservative ideals, they held similar views about Kennedy's plans for the federal government. A *Houston Press* headline ran "TOWER: 'I'M AGIN IT' BLAKLEY: 'I AM TOO.'"⁴¹ Both candidates equated New Frontier programs with socialism and warned of the creation of a welfare state. Both candidates seemed to oppose just about everything associated with Kennedy's administration. "The Peace Corps would be too easily infiltrated by Communists," warned Blakley. Tower sounded out a similar criticism, saying that nothing could be gained by sending "a bunch of starry-eyed young radicals" abroad. Blakley, however, was still a Democrat, and this gave Tower the opening to make political hay out of liberal spending issues. Tower said he was the only conservative that could be trusted to be true to that vision and portrayed Blakley as a rubber stamp for the New Frontier. Blakley, even with evidence to contradict this charge, did a poor job articulating that fact. The fractious nature of the party that Blakley had to try to unite no doubt influenced the Blakley campaign on this issue.⁴²

⁴¹ "Fighting---With Same Brickbats," *The Houston Press*, 16 May, 1961, Folder 7, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁴² Mike Quinn, "Goldwater Calls For Tower Victory," *The Dallas Morning News*, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

Both candidates made foreign policy a part of their campaigns, but to different degrees. Blakley toed the party line and commended Kennedy for his policies and leadership. The Democrat did this despite incurring White House wrath for votes against the administration on domestic matters.⁴³ Blakley's bland foreign policy pronouncements contrasted greatly with his opponent's. Tower hammered away again and again on defense issues, especially those concerning the ongoing troubles with Cuba. Tower described as "deplorable" a deal Kennedy had tried to strike with Castro over the return of the Cuban rebel brigade in exchange for tractors. The Republican warned that this deal would "encourage other petty tyrants" and was little more than ransom. Tower also chided the Kennedy administration for squandering money that could be used for conventional arms on foreign aid to communist satellites. This last criticism was a common refrain for the Tower campaign. Time and again Tower mentioned cutbacks in defense spending and foreign aid to "red" nations in the same breath, hammering home a message that the Kennedy administration was "giving direct aid to our enemies."⁴⁴

Tower went so far in his foreign policy message as to call for a blockade or even an invasion of Cuba. In a speech in Houston, Tower called for the United States to stop all war material shipments to Cuba from the U.S.S.R. and take measures to prevent Cuba from making aggressive moves in Latin America. Blakley, for his part, invoked the Monroe Doctrine in also calling for a blockade. The Democrat called for the American

⁴³ Jim Mathis, "Blakley Praises Kennedy Handling of U.S. Affairs," *The Houston Post*, 4 May, 1961, Folder 8, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁴⁴ Mike Quinn, "Tower Calls Tractor-Prisoner Swap 'Blackmail,'" *The Dallas Morning News*, 17 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

expulsion of communists from Cuba, but reiterated his support for Kennedy's leadership.⁴⁵

Civil rights, obviously a major issue nationally, was of less relative importance in this election. Tower described himself as a moderate on the issue, and attempted to skirt the problem with imprecise answers. He did take a position on discrimination, saying that as heinous as it might be, it was a person's right to practice it. Yet he did make comments to dodge total affiliation with groups such as the John Birch Society on this issue. When asked whether those groups were best able to lead the civil rights discussion, Tower stated that it was the Republicans and the Democrats that should lead the way. Hesitant to alienate conservative societies, Tower said their members were also members of the political parties. He had to have those societies' support, yet he could not be seen as far right as those groups were considered by a great many people.⁴⁶

The only way that civil rights became an explicit issue stemmed from a misstep Blakley made during his interim appointment. Dr. Robert C. Weaver was Kennedy's nominee to head the Housing and Home Finance Agency. During the approval process, Blakley grilled Weaver a little too hard for some outspoken African-American's liking. The *Negro Labor News*, a Houston newspaper, noted this fact in endorsing Tower, but dismissed it as part of its reasoning.⁴⁷ Despite this pronouncement in the *Labor News*,

⁴⁵ Harry Provence, "Blakley Calls for U.S. Arms Blockade With Action Under Monroe Doctrine." *The Waco News-Tribune*, 6 May, 1961, Folder 8, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁴⁶ "Discrimination Views Given by GOP's Tower," *The Houston Post*, 5 May, 1961, Folder 8, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁴⁷ C.W. Rice, "As I See It." *The Negro Labor News*, 20 May, 1961, Folder 8, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

Tower's main constituency consisted of "Anglo" voters.⁴⁸ Yet Blakley's stances prevented him from attracting votes from African-Americans. Because neither candidate was willing to court the black vote, race was a negligible issue on the campaign trail, and a very minor factor in the election.

On the major issues of federal domestic spending, foreign policy and civil rights, neither of the candidates had significantly divergent views. Conservative ideas informed their opinions and their rhetoric. Yet those issues came somewhat into play precisely because of the candidates' similarity of thought. Because Blakley took a position opposite liberals and moderates within his party on all three of these issues, he had to rely purely on party loyalty for a significant number of votes. Moreover, the fact that they had no liberal choice on the ballot actually gave them freedom to vote against the Democrat. As will be shown, the rationale of many liberals was that the Democrats' one-party control of Texas hurt their cause. Tower, on the other hand, gained notoriety for his conservative views, and was able to campaign on them without the liability of having to defend his positions.

The results of the special election had, to a certain extent, led to a closing of the Democratic ranks. Out-of-state Democratic officeholders came to Texas urging "party loyalty." From Washington, Texas icon and House speaker Sam Rayburn backed Blakley's candidacy. Even the Democrats whom, Blakley had just edged out in the free-for-all, now put their defeat behind them in order to stave off Tower. Lyndon Johnson

⁴⁸ Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 90.

quickly predicted a big win for Blakley, although he had to revise his odds of a Blakley win after receiving more accurate information as to the results of the special election.⁴⁹

There were, however, major points of division within the Democratic Party, both nationally and locally. President Kennedy did offer support for Blakley, if the conservative Democrat should ask for it. The president's endorsement was not full, and its tepidity may have actually hurt Blakely. Kennedy said that Texans could make the best decision without "external advice." While the president did use his remarks to put Goldwater's assistance to Tower in a negative light, the tendency of national political figures to actively seek to support members of their own party, caused Kennedy's comments to reveal his lack of real support for Blakley.⁵⁰ The conservative Democrat had used his time as an interim appointment to fight the New Frontier at many junctures, and this opposition undoubtedly affected Kennedy's outlook regarding the 1961 runoff. Kennedy had won Texas's electoral votes a mere six months before the runoff, and his help campaigning would have certainly shored up Democratic support for Blakley. His near-total absence from the equation was a major problem for Texas Democrats who supported party unity.

There was internal division for Texas Democrats also at play in the runoff election. The liberal strain of the Democratic Party was at odds with the conservatives within the party. As these liberals saw the situation, they had already lost their chance to send a real Democrat to Washington. They did not simply encourage liberal voters to stay at home on election day, however. They went so far as to campaign for Tower.

⁴⁹ "Excerpt from speech by John Tower," Folder 5, Box 708, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁵⁰ Vernon Louviere, "Texans Can Decide on Blakley Without Outside Aid—Kennedy," *The Houston Chronicle*, 13 April, 1961, Folder 7, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

Only a Republican and a Shivers Democrat were on the ballot according to one political advertisement. Liberal campaigning reminded voters that with the candidates technically devoid of any political affiliation, they could choose to “cast two votes . . . against the ‘heads I win, tails you lose’ politics of the Shivercrats.”⁵¹ Sentiment ran so strong among those who called themselves “true Democrats” that the greater danger in this runoff was in fact Blakely. “I voted for Mr. Maverick before. I will vote for Mr. Tower this time” an unnamed African-American said in an article on Tower’s chances in Harris County. The same man explained his reasoning as disdain for Blakley since he “has never been known for his sympathy to my race.”⁵²

“Texas Liberals Are Unhappy” ran the headline of a *Dallas Morning News* editorial. Texas liberals saw defeat in the special election as final for their cause for that particular electoral cycle. However, they did come to endorse a plan for overcoming this defeat: vote Republican. Using reasoning that, considering Tower’s ensuing longevity in the Senate, ultimately worked against liberal aspirations, they reckoned that Blakley was the more insidious choice. Blakley would, they claimed, use his position to prevent liberal candidates from receiving party patronage. Tower, on the other hand, would sit outside the dominant streams of patronage and allow Texas’s other U.S. Senator, Ralph Yarborough, to move things in a liberal direction. The *Morning News* editorial identified this reasoning as coming from “extreme liberals” and claimed that these Democrats were

⁵¹ Democrats for a two party Texas, “Many Votes To Count Double In Senate Run-Off Election Saturday,” political leaflet, Folder 1, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁵² Gene Wilburn, “Tower May Run Strong Again Here Press Poll Indicates,” *The Houston Press*, Folder 1, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

openly calling for Tower's election.⁵³ The May 8 headline of the *Houston Chronicle* told the city that liberals would not be backing Blakley in the runoff. It was clear that organized liberals were set against throwing their support Blakley's way for reasons of party unity.⁵⁴

Self-described liberal candidates ousted in the special election also split their support. State Senator Henry Gonzalez did call for liberals to vote Blakley's way in the runoff, describing Tower as reactionary and out of touch with Texan voters. The more visible Maverick, however, chose a different course. He stated that only a change in Blakley's outlook towards Kennedy's programs would alter his plan to "go fishing" on May 27. This was not simply a chink in Texas's one-party armor, it was a breach inclined for exploitation.⁵⁵

Tower tried to use the limited Democratic unity and its division to his advantage. Tower commented that "on the left side are the political hacks and office holders- all for Blakley . . . and on the right side nobody but the people. . . for John Tower."⁵⁶ Thusly, Tower used his outsider status as an advantage. The candidate portrayed the Democrats as shoulder-to-shoulder, but only in that position in order to trick Texans into voting contrary to their own ideals.

Tower also took advantage of Blakley's precarious ideological position within the Democratic Party. In some campaign materials aimed at swaying voters in conservative

⁵³ Editorial, "Texas Liberals Are Unhappy," *The Dallas Morning News*, 7 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁵⁴ Waler Mansell, "Harris Liberals Refuse to Back Blakley," *The Houston Chronicle*, 8 May, 1961, Folder 8, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers

⁵⁵ Allen Duckworth, "Two Conservatives Split Support of Texas Liberals," *The Dallas Morning News*, 12 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers

⁵⁶ "Excerpt from speech by John Tower" Folder 5, Box 708, the John G. Tower Papers.

areas, Blakley made a point of emphasizing his conservatism. He was a conservative Democrat for areas such as Dallas. In other areas, however, that descriptor was not to be found. In El Paso, for example, Blakley was simply the Democrat in the race. Blakley clearly saw it necessary somehow to woo moderate and liberal voters. Tower took advantage of the opening to talk about his own genuine conservatism and to insinuate Blakley's inability to enact conservative sensibilities under the thumb of the liberal leaders of the Democratic Party.⁵⁷

Blakley's position as interim U.S. Senator, rather than give the candidate some semblance of incumbent advantage, actually gave Tower ammunition. Blakley had, in fact, been interim senator twice. According to Tower, during Blakley's stint as interim senator in 1957, the Democrat had had been absent from votes in Congress forty-four percent of the time. During his 1961 session, Blakley missed twenty-three of thirty-three votes through May 8. Tower mercilessly hammered away in speeches and through the press at Blakley's "part-time representation" of the citizens of the state of Texas. Blakley's absences from the Senate also meant that he was not able to sign the One Million pledge, which stated that the signers would fight any recognition of communist China, and he was not able to register a vote either way on legislation that gave the president the ability to send foreign aid to communist satellite countries.⁵⁸ Failure to show in both of these cases gave Tower ample cause to portray Blakley as a threat to national security. The dual characterization of Blakley as depriving Texans of

⁵⁷ Allen Duckworth, "Conservative Candidates Out-Conserve Each Other," *The Dallas Morning News*, 7 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁵⁸ "Excerpts From Speech By John Tower, Midland, Texas," Folder 5, Box 708, the John G. Tower Papers.

representation and of being soft on communism was a major talking point of the Tower campaign.

The interim senator tried to indicate he had built up seniority in his short time in Washington, a claim that would be attractive to many voters. The Blakley campaign pointed to their candidate's membership on the judiciary and the banking and currency committees as well as five subcommittees, as such, he could claim seniority and influence.⁵⁹ Tower countered with a *Congressional Quarterly* analysis that cited Blakley as fifty-ninth out of sixty-one Democrats in terms of seniority.⁶⁰ Try as the Blakley campaign might, they could not put forward their candidate's interim experience as a consequential reason to vote their way.

Blakely tried to manipulate the liberal endorsements that went Tower's way. In campaign materials, the Democrats did what they could to paint Tower as a liberal. Tower both admitted and denied voting for Harry Truman in 1948. Harping on the admission, the Blakely campaign stated that, "real conservatives were voting for J. Strom Thurmond." The fact that, Tower spent some time studying at the "ultra liberal" London School of Economics was apparently proof enough of Tower's tepid conservatism, or at least it pointed-up the low standard of campaign materials and speeches. Tower's own involvement in the Republican Convention's Platform Committee the year before also gave Blakely ammunition. The compromises necessary created a platform "so full of

⁵⁹ Duckworth, "Conservative Candidates Out-Conserve Each Other," *The Dallas Morning News*, 7 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁶⁰ Tower campaign leaflet, "Tower Versus Blakley," Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

liberalism that it stunk,” or so said the conservative Democrat.⁶¹ The endorsements by the *Texas Observer*, an unabashedly liberal newspaper, seemed all the more damning given these other facts about and events surrounding Tower. This tactic bore little if any fruit. Tower, with sufficient exposure both in his 1960 campaign and in the 1961 sequel, was clearly identified as a conservative throughout Texas. The Goldwater endorsement and his appearances in Texas also greatly helped deflect this charge of liberalism by the Blakley campaign.

William Blakley, a conservative member of the hegemonic party of the state and section, was in the usually enticing position of incumbent. As it turned out, none of these three factors gave the Democrat an opening through which to campaign effectively. On every one of these points, his Republican opponent issued damning statements which Blakley did not adequately answer. That each of these factors were significant parts of Blakley’s campaign indicate one of the primary reasons a Republican finally broke through the one-party barrier in Texas. Blakley and his staff clearly did not fully comprehend the difficulties they faced in running against a conservative like Tower. Their message was ineffective because they did not tailor it to fit the true circumstances of the Texan voting base in 1961.

Down the stretch, neither candidate seemed the obvious pick to win, but the major endorsements went the Democrat’s way. In the final week, the *Houston Chronicle* endorsed Blakley, citing his Democratic designation as justification. “For sheer effectiveness a Democratic conservative is more likely to benefit Texas in the next six

⁶¹ “Who is this Young Punk – John Tower?” Campaign leaflet, Folder 7, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

years than a Republican conservative.”⁶² The *Dallas Morning News* appealed to voters that on the basis of experience, Blakley was the best man to represent Texas. Outside of its editorial page, however, the *Morning News* noted that Tower had strong support in various important regions of the state and that Democrats were quite anxious about the election.⁶³

Nationally, the runoff election was portrayed as too close to call, but with heavy emphasis on the historic nature of a possible Republican win. *The Wall Street Journal's* Robert Novak reported that a Tower victory was the common projection, and that such a victory “would advance by 10 years or more the hard-working Texas Republican Party’s timetable for dismantling the state’s Democratic Party and replacing it with” a two-party system along ideological lines. Novak cited the party switch of “125 prominent conservative Democrats in the lower Rio Grande Valley” as evidence enough that change was indeed on the horizon.⁶⁴ *U.S. News & World Report* postulated that the May 27 election was the most serious test of the South’s solid support of the Democratic Party, citing liberal leaders in Texas as actually favoring the idea of making Texas a two-party state. *World Report* had reason enough to speculate that a Tower victory was possible.⁶⁵

Possible it proved to be. Tower garnered 448,450 votes against Blakley’s 437,958, eking out a 1.18 percentage-point victory. The early returns had actually given

⁶² Editorial, “Chronicle Backs Senator Blakley,” *The Houston Chronicle*, 25 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁶³ Editorial, “Blakley Back to Washington,” *The Dallas Morning News*, 17 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁶⁴ Robert D. Novak, “Texas Stands A Chance Of Getting First GOP Senator Since 1870’s,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

⁶⁵ “Texas: First Republican Senator Since 1870’s?” *U.S. News & World Report*, 25 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

Blakley a sizeable lead of over 18,000 by 9 P.M. By 9:30, that lead shrank to 3,000, and by 10:00 that evening, the race was a dead heat. By midnight, only 10,000 votes remained uncouned, and Tower declared victory with his 8,167 vote lead.⁶⁶

Post-election appraisal by the national press sounded out themes of historical change and of jubilation, not only by Republicans, but by Texas liberals as well. *The Christian Science Monitor* noted the precedent, calling Texas officially a two-party state, and declaring the Republican Party the “new home” of Southern conservatives.⁶⁷ The Republican joy over cracking the Democratic hold over Texas politics was obvious, but liberals also shared in the satisfaction. They thought that the path was open for conservatives to leave the Democratic Party and have liberal standard-bearer Ralph Yarborough become the primary power broker for Texas Democrats.

Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, pointed to the low turnout as reason for the Tower victory. Apathy was this leading Democrat’s excuse for a Republican victory.⁶⁸ To many like Rayburn, Texas was still a one-party state, but time would bear out the conclusion that this was no longer so after 1961. But other Democrats saw this as not simply an isolated case. It had been seventeen years since the South voted solidly for Democratic presidential candidates. Democrats pointed to states’

⁶⁶ Keith Shelton, “Senator’s Early Lead Slips Away,” newspaper clipping, 28 May, 1961, Folder 9, Box 709, The John G. Tower Papers.

⁶⁷ Richard L. Strout, “Washington Studies Texas Vote Results,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 May, 1961, Folder 8, Box 709, The John G. Tower Papers.

⁶⁸ “Apathy Won for Tower, Says Speaker Rayburn,” Folder 1, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

rights movements and opposition to President Kennedy in 1960 as reason to be alarmed over this one Senate victory for Republicans.⁶⁹

The Republican candidate had run a successful campaign; the Democrat had not. This was new territory for Texas Republicans and a new terrifying reality for Texas Democrats. No longer could a Democrat expect to breeze through a head-to-head pairing against a Republican. The GOP would throw more resources at the Democrats, and conservative Texans would be enticed to make a party switch. This first success in Texas showed Republicans that a well-crafted electoral strategy could work. The conservative Democrats Tower ran against did not ally themselves with the rising national conservative movement. That movement had only begun its transition into politics, and Tower's victory was another milestone for the movement. Tower proved that campaigning on the kind of conservatism presented by national figures like Barry Goldwater was effective. The Texas Republican Party had finally gotten past its long-standing tokenism.

It took the confluence of many factors to produce this GOP victory. The Republicans had a conservative clear in his conviction and able to convey his commitment. The Democrats had a candidate with little electioneering savvy. Texas had a liberal contingent which yearned for a two-party state almost as much as Republicans ached to simply get in the game. Together, these conditions resulted in a Republican win for the first time since the 1870s. The GOP had gained entrance into Texas politics, and Texas liberal Democrats had their wish for a two-party Texas.

⁶⁹ "After Texas – Republicans Size Up The South," *U.S. News & World Report*, 12 June, 1961, Folder 10, Box 709, the John G. Tower Papers.

EPILOGUE

The Texas Republican Party had to undergo shifts in both structure and ideological stance in order to create an atmosphere for its own viability. John Tower took advantage of changes in the power structure of the Texas Republicans in the 1950s and infused the party with the growing strength of America's new conservative movement. Republicans in Texas up to the 1950s had been token candidates in elections, and their ambition was limited to garnering patronage from the national level. A new faction led by H.J. Porter swept Old Guard Republicans out of power in the course of the effort to nominate Dwight D. Eisenhower for president in 1952. The remainder of the decade saw Republicans increasingly anxious to win elections and make Texas a two-party state.¹ The Texas Republicans lacked many things necessary to reach their goal, and Tower helped supply the Texas GOP with one important facet of electoral strategy. Tower espoused the kind of conservatism on the rise across the nation in journals, books, and magazines, and also through some public officeholders. He identified himself strongly with Barry Goldwater, and with the politics of the New Right. Tower hammered out a place in the political spectrum sufficient to convince Texans that a Republican should be their U.S. Senator.

The results of the 1961 special election provided not only an ideological standard for Texas Republicans to rally around, but also a logistical one. Tower received over half

¹ Paul Casdorph, *A History of the Republican Party in Texas 1956-1965* (Austin: The Pemberton Press, 1965), 172-197.

of his votes from ten counties. These counties represented two different kinds of voters. Urban areas, such as Dallas, Houston, El Paso, San Antonio, Brownsville, and Amarillo went Tower's way in 1961. In addition, the so-called German counties in central Texas and a few conservative counties in the Panhandle and West Texas cast a majority of their votes for Tower. These bases proved valuable for future Republican candidates. In key counties such as Dallas, Harris and Midland, Republican candidates could almost count on winning by 1972. Republicans built a political base within these counties.²

Tower's election strengthened the Republican Party in Texas, and his leadership provided stability while the party grew. With Tower, some conservative Texas Democrats began to see an alternative to the politics that had seemingly abandoned their sensibilities. Numerous discontented Democrats took part in "resignation rallies" at which they shifted partisan affiliation to the GOP. Many of these former Democrats were important figures and included a number of precinct leaders. These very public events took place because of the proof Tower provided concerning the electability of Republicans in Texas. Tower's alliance with Barry Goldwater played an immense role in the growth of Texas Republicanism. Shortly after Tower's election, immense support arose in Texas for the national attempt to make Goldwater the GOP nominee for president in 1964. Texas Republicans developed strong support for Goldwater as early as 1962, well before the effort to draft the Arizona Senator into running for president was successful. The operatives behind the early effort for Goldwater in Texas were only associated with the Arizonan through John Tower.³

² Roger M. Olien, *From Token to Triumph: The Texas Republicans Since 1920* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1982), 196-197.

³ *Ibid*, 188-189.

The years immediately following Tower's election did not lead immediately to Republican parity with Democrats. Tower's reelection effort of 1966 is evidence of both how precarious the position of Republicans in Texas at that time and of the importance of Tower's presence in office. The Texas GOP decided not to run a slate of candidates in 1966, even for governor, and chose instead to concentrate on reelecting Tower. As the only Republican up for a statewide position, Tower was clearly the Republicans' only hope for retaining an officeholder in a high-profile position. The idea behind this strategy was to dampen Democratic turnout. By leaving all but one statewide election uncontested, the hope was that many Democratic voters would see little need to go to the polls. Also, this strategy allowed for fundraising resources to be concentrated on the election that was winnable. The Texas Republican Party saw the need to retain Tower's place in office as above all other considerations in 1966.⁴

The Texas GOP had a long climb ahead of it even after Tower's reelection. In the next few Republican primaries, turnout was low. The Democratic primary of 1978 had 1.8 million participants, while the only 150,000 turned in votes for the Republican primary. This showed voter unwillingness to identify themselves with the Republican Party, but other elections illuminate change in the Texas electorate. In the 1962 gubernatorial race the Republican candidate, John Cox, garnered 45.8 percent of the vote in his losing effort against John Connally, Jr. After that year, the race for governor was similarly competitive. In 1978 William P. Clements became the first Republican governor in Texas since Reconstruction. It was from this point on that the Republican Party in Texas began to make sizeable inroads towards parity with Texas Democrats.

⁴ John R. Knaggs, *Two Party Texas. The John Tower Era 1961-1984* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1986), 56-7.

The initial push by Tower in 1961 became an upward trending force in Texas politics by the early 1980s. The Republican primary of 1982 drew over 265,000 voters, a sizeable increase in turnout. In 1992, more than one million votes were tallied in the Republican primary, and the Democrats only drew about a half million more. Texas Republicans had obviously broken the Democrats solid hold on the state by the 1990s; the long-time goal of the party was finally achieved. According to some observers, by the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, Republicans had achieved majority status in Texas.⁵

It is clear that Tower's election was not a cataclysmic event ushering in a new era of Republican parity with Democrats or even viability with the electorate all at once. However, the special election of 1961 was an important step towards a two-party Texas. A leader had emerged for Texas Republicans. Tower became a rallying point, provided an infusion of political expertise, and offered a strong ideological foundation for the party. Tower was the man who had done what past Texas Republicans could not after Reconstruction ended, win a statewide election. A political operative and party symbol, he provided the gravitas, fundraising ability, and other such necessities for political ventures that the Texas Republicans sorely lacked during its years of tokenism. The results of Tower's campaign provided evidence of possibilities, and also evidence of specific electoral targets for other Republicans. Finally, Tower helped make the Texas Republican Party the party of the New Right in Texas. His strong conservative ideas were integral to his election. By drawing from the ideas of the conservative movement that was gaining strength across America, Tower set himself, and the party he represented, apart from Democratic opponents who called themselves conservative.

⁵ Carl H. Moneyhon, "Republican Party" *Handbook of Texas Online*. Available from <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/RR/war2.html>; Internet; accessed 5 Oct. 2005.

Tower achieved election in a way that enabled and emboldened an eventual Republican drive into power in Texas.

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