

## WEYRICH - HUTCHINS CENTER

CAPPS: I wanted to ask you a question about the origins of the name the Moral Majority. Someone said, I've heard it said that you were the one who gave the movement its name, I've also heard the version that Jerry Falwell was the one who named the organization. Can you clarify that situation? How did the movement come into being? How did it get the name Moral Majority?

WEYRICH: Well, a fellow by the name of Ed MacIntere, who had worked for the Colgate/Palmolive Company and resigned from that position and went to work for Howard Phillips, the director of the Conservative Caucus, had for years been travelling around the country become acquainted with the leading evangelical fundamentalist preachers, knew all of them and they knew him, and they liked him. It was his mission in going to work for Howard Phillips to try to bring together some of the leaders of the so-called New Right and some of these fundamentalist evangelical preachers and so, he arranged for a series of meetings with various religious figures, and one of them was in early 1979 in Lynchburg, Virginia with Jerry Falwell - I had not met Jerry Falwell up to that point. And, so, we went down to see him, I went with Allan Dye, who is an attorney in Washington, he's been very instrumental in helping a lot of us form foundations, and lobbies and things like that, he's a tax lawyer, and I felt if Falwell was interested in founding an organization, he'd want to know all the legal requirements, because clearly, if anything like this has to be done, it has to be done correctly. So, I went with Allan Dye and Howard Phillips came by car from another location, and so he was late, and so, Falwell came in and we were sitting in this big room and he had some of his people there, and Allan Dye and I were there. And we were kind of wasting time waiting for Howard Phillips to arrive. And MacIntere said, 'Well, why don't you give Jerry a sort of an overview of where you think things are politically?' So, I said, well, in very general terms, if you analyze the population, I think we would find a majority of the population that, in general terms, supports traditional values - 60 to 63 percent of the population, not on every specific issue, but in a general nature, would support traditional values. And I said the problem is that they have never been put into any cohesive political body. They are divided denominationally and they are divided politically, and so they don't tend to elect people who would support those values. Yet, if one could get them together in any cohesive political form, there would be no stopping the kinds of things that could be done politically. So I said, in general terms, out there you might say there is a moral majority, and then I went on to say a couple things. And Falwell said - slammed his hand down on the table and said, 'Wait a minute, stop. Hold on just a minute. What did you say?' And I misinterpreted what he was interested in and I started to repeat something else that I had just said. And he said 'No, no, no, back up further. You said out there - there was something, what did you call it?' And I said, well, the moral majority, which is a term that Jeffery St. John, who is a syndicated columnist, had once used in a private conversation with me about some political things. And he turned to his marketing director and said, 'That's it.'

If we form an organization, that's what we call it,' and he said, 'That's fantastic.' So, that is actually how the organization got its name. The formation of the organization came several months later and actually didn't begin functioning for about five months after that meeting.

CAPPS: Had you been using the name before? You talked about Jeffrey St. John, but were those words moral majority words you had on your lips frequently?

WEYRICH: No, Jeffrey and I had this private conversation in which he - Jeffrey is very able at coming up with alliterations, and he had come up with that and just went onto something else. And he does particularly well, that it stuck in the back of my mind. And that was six months prior to my meeting in Lynchburg, which I recall was in February of 1979, and I don't believe that I had ever used the term prior to that time.

CAPPS: And it wasn't even deliberate on your part in that conversation - it just happened to come up?

WEYRICH: No, if Howard Phillips hadn't been late, the name probably would have never come up.

CAPPS: Another question in that regard is whether there's any relation between the Moral Majority and the Silent Majority. Was there ever a discussion of what had happened to the Silent Majority, and that the Silent Majority has perhaps become the Moral Majority. Has there been speculation about that?

WEYRICH: No, the silent majority was so silent that I think it probably didn't exist. The silent majority was a term that was invoked in the Goldwater era, when many people believed that if you simply nominated the right candidate for President of the United States, this majority that had supposedly been there, but had been turned off by the choices that they had, would have stepped forward and get out and vote. Mr. Goldwater's significant defeat put an end to that discussion. So I don't think there was an intent to draw an analogy to it.

CAPPS: Were you happy with the name? Was the Moral Majority, you think, an acronym for what it was you were presenting at that particular meeting?

WEYRICH: I think, what I've long had in mind was some kind of political operation which would seek to unite people of different faiths who had the same values in political terms. To the extent that the Moral Majority was put in to do that, I think that is the Moral Majority. I think that its clear idea is that no one organization can do this for the entire country because of a significant difference in approach by various religious leaders but I think collectively, the different operations that are going on and taken in totality, come much closer to that concept than anything that's happen thus far.

CAPPS: I've been reading about politics in the sixties and the seventies, and there's a reaction among the writers and thinkers in my own discipline, religious studies, the Moral Majority, the rise of the new religious right is something that registers religiously in this country, obviously, but there weren't very many experts who were able to anticipate, it took most of the experts by surprise. Mary Douglas, who writes about religion and anthropology said that the scholars didn't anticipate that this would happen, (but) that there would be a strong conservative religious movement in the United States in the 1970's. She thinks one of the reasons is that most of the scholars would not be very sympathetic to it, and they usually write about things that they tend to favor, and they didn't favor this one and probably didn't see it coming. But, you apparently saw it coming way back then in 1973 or 1974 ... I read in something "Mr. Weyrich said that when he first came to Washington he was 'surprised to discover that conservatives showed almost no sign of being organized and their attitude was essentially negative and reactive.'" And you were able to turn that around, you were able to organize that, you were able to work with conservatives, organize conservatives and change the attitude from being negative and reactive to positive and, I guess, proactive. I'm just curious about how you knew that would work, what did you sense in the political climate of that time that gave you reason to be optimistic that a strong conservative, religious affiliated group would really catch on in this country?

WEYRICH: Well, I will have to give you a complex answer to that. First of all, the actual mechanics of how to do it I give credit to the liberals. I was fortunate enough to be at a meeting run by the liberals in Washington in 1969, which actually gave me the vision of how to put this together and what ingredients you have to put into it. I saw the effect of it ... but I didn't know the mechanics and I was very fortunate to get into this meeting to see how they did it, I have at various times been called the Japanese political mechanic of the right, in the sense that most of what I have done is to copy what has been done successfully on the left, and I think that's an accurate description because the vision for achieving that objective was more constructed by my political opponents than something that I originated. I guess the origins really of what I had in mind came from my own family, because I come from a family which is divided between Protestants and Catholics. They were the typical Protestant and Catholic families of that era in that they were very very tied up in doctrine and the differences between Protestants and Catholics and failed to see the similarities in points of view. So there would always be these enormous discussions and arguments with the two different camps which sort of evolved around the constant of current. What I found was that, more than they understood, they shared the same values. They tended to vote for different candidates, but yet, they really stood for the same things on basic questions. They saw the world in more or less the same way, that struck me as being odd, but they didn't see it that way. The more I got into it, the more

I felt that if one could get people who shared the same values together in some cohesive political body, that you could do a lot of interesting things. I postulated this idea to the Republican Party in the state of Wisconsin, where I am from in 1962, when the school prayer decision was rendered by the Supreme Court. You'd have thought that I had advocated compulsory leporacy. They almost went screaming from the room. The Republican Party was totally unreceptive to that point of view. So, I just kept chugging along, and I guess coming from the neighborhoods as I do, my family is a blue-collar family, and they shovel coal for a living, so I'm not from the right side of the tracks. It gives you a certain better gut political sense of when things are ready to go then perhaps if you approach things from another standpoint. And I sensed that in the later part of the 1970's, that the reaction to the ecumenical movement in the mainline churches and the reaction to political liberalism as translated to, what you might call values questions, was beginning to take hold, and therefore, concluded that the time was right to begin that operation, which began in 1977 when I persuaded Robert Billings to come to Washington following his unsuccessful congressional campaign in Indiana and to open what was the first full-time operation of its kind in the nation's capital; what is now called the National Christian Action Coalition, at that time it was called Christian School Action Coalition. It was really a lobby on the national Christian schools, and I began to introduce those kinds of issues to the conservative movement, which they had not really paid a lot of attention to. It was very interesting watching that transition from the early part of 1977 to about the later part of 1979, the sway was so heavily in the direction of these kinds of issues that indeed we had a coalition of conservative groups that had been meeting on a regular basis since 1972. We had to form another coalition just to deal with those values related questions because there were so many groups coming (alive) and so many people becoming interested in them that we couldn't handle them at the regular meeting of conservatives. So ... it was a hunch, really, that some of us had that - Howard Phillips is equally responsible for what happened, and he also is out of that lower/middle class, blue collar arena - (he's from Boston and went to Harvard, and his father was a Russian immigrant) and you have a certain outlook on life, on what is possible and what isn't possible, that I think you don't have in upper class roots, which the conservatives and Republicans had been descending from up until that point.

CAPPS: Tell me specifically, what did you perceive about the ecumenical movement of the late 70s?

WEYRICH: The ecumenical movement was really a movement for all the different religions to create a sort of church of the ??? bible, where people who believed in the lowest common denominator could get together .... In all seriousness, I know how deeply held certain religious beliefs are, both on the Protestant side and the Catholic side. The kinds of

considerations that these people came forth with did not match those beliefs. Plus, this same ecumenical movement was tolerant of abortion, for example, if not outright promoting it, scoffed at the issue of prayer in the schools, which means a great deal to a lot of fundamentalists. They did not look in favor upon the Christian school movement the way (you) would think they would. And, they generally aligned themselves with political liberalism, which was not comfortable for the majority of the kind of people which I was acquainted with. The kind of people that I'm talking about were not Republicans, they're sort of cultural conservatives (who) mostly voted Democratic. So, I knew, just from comments that I would make at gatherings with these kinds of people, that sparked an enormous, spontaneous response, that there was an undercurrent there which, if one could tap it, would translate politically, and move certain things in the country. I think those people didn't see it coming because the assumption of the leaders of the ecumenical movement was that the traditionalists, Catholics, and fundamentalists & people of that sort could not get together - that the differences, historical differences which divided them, were so great and they held their views so strongly that they would forever be apart. While, in the meantime, those people who shared the kind of vision on the liberal end of things were close enough together in their general view, that they could unite and reassemble an agenda. I perceived it differently because most of the traditionalists and conservatives in the different churches had been backed into a corner, and when people get on the defensive, they're willing to look at other allies, than when they are on the march and on the offense. So, I began to sow the seeds for that kind of coalition. The night before last, I was at a dinner for a small Catholic college and the speaker was Professor Charles Rice of a university law school, who got up and told the conservative Catholics that their best friends were the fundamentalists, and that they really should understand that the Christian School Movement in America was the best thing that could happen to them, and this was revolutionary in terms of 20 years ago. What they didn't understand was that Dr. Charles Stanley, who is a fundamentalist television preacher based in Atlanta, who is now in all different states through his television ministry, had a gathering of ministers in Atlanta at the First Baptist Church, and the entire program, was to instruct these ministers on how to be active in the political process, consisted of General Al Mite, who is an Episcopal priest, Charley Rice of Notre Dame, and yours truly. So you had two Catholics and an Episcopalian telling fundamentalist Baptists and ministers how to participate in the political process. I mentioned that at this gathering, and how revolutionary that idea was, and the fellows in the back of the room, as they want to do, they shout out, you know, during these meetings, one of the fellows said, 'If you'd of shown up two years ago, we'd have thrown you out,' which I think is absolutely right. The times have changed and people are now beginning to look at what unites them, rather than what divides them. So, that a sort of fundamental decision has been made on the part of a lot of people, not all, but on

the part of a lot of people to say, well, let's unite on the things that we agree on - to preserve certain institutions that will enable us to fight later, which I think is an entirely different way of putting it. ....

I was up in South Dakota speaking to a group of fundamentalist pastors, and I told them that their best allies were the urban Catholics in South Dakota, who are rather conservative, and are very pro-life, for example, and I told them how they should approach those people in forming some sort of a coalition and after I was finished ... the head of the Moral Majority in South Dakota came up to me, and he said, 'Son, you have changed my life,' you don't hear that too often so I was quite taken, and I said, 'Really?' And he said, 'Yes sir, after hearing you, things would never be the same.' And I said, 'Well, how so?' And he said, 'Well, I got to thinking over you saying how the Catholics are our best friends,' and he said, 'Well, I think you're right, but things will never be the same.' And I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said, 'Well, you can't preach against them on Sunday and meet with them on Monday.' I really think that that's illustrative of what's happened, that a number of the people, although they have very substantial theological differences from each other have decided to look at people of other denominations and say, 'Well, yes, we disagree on this, this and this, but in terms of issues with which the country is faced, we have more in common than differences.'

CAPPS: What's amazing to me is that, from your perspective is a stronger ecumenical movement than the movement that's called the ecumenical movement, because the purpose of the ecumenical movement was to bring Catholics, Protestants and everybody together. You penetrated through that.

WEYRICH: Well, but they don't have the strong beliefs in many cases that the people on this side have, and because of that, they looked at it more in terms of ... social unity and unity of a non-religious agenda, in some cases. Or unity of churches by washing over certain historical differences.

CAPPS: But, from your perspective, all pretty much on the surface, not dealing with the root issues.

WEYRICH: Yeah, that's right I don't think they dealt with the root issues. I have a priest on my staff from Washington and he just had a meeting with a group of fundamentalist pastors in Montgomery County, Maryland, where a gay rights ordinance just passed the county council there which the ministers want to get a referendum going to appeal it. And he's Hispanic, after he got finished they said, 'Hey, you're like one of us.' And we just had a Jewish Rabbi from New York (who) had a historic meeting with the new Archbishop of New York, and they found that on the family issues, they really shared values that worked together. We're looking for opportunities of people who share values to get people to go beyond what they have been told by their church or by their parents, and say, 'Look, do we agree on this, this and this, and if we do, let's figure out how we can work together and

put aside our differences.' *crossed.*

CAPPS: Were you surprised at the Jewish support for what you're doing? There's anti-semitism in this country, for sure, and (it's been said) some of that is fed by Christian attitudes toward Jews. I can see how you can link Catholics and Protestants, but then at the same time, to bring representatives from the Jewish community, was that at all a surprise to you when that happened?

WEYRICH: No, ... I meet all the time with rabbis and members of the orthodox Jewish community. I had a meeting in New York with a group of rabbis and an organization called '????' and they made the statement to me, 'We have more in common with you than we have with our authority, co-religious.' And I said the same to them, I said you are closer, in terms of values questions, rather than looking at it in terms of religious doctrine. In terms of values questions, you are my brother, whereas my fellow liberal Catholics who reject the same premissis upon which we operate, I have nothing in common with. So, that is the key question. These people have been concentrating on doctrinal differences and if you look at doctrinal differences, we have tremendous gaps between us. Yet, in terms of values questions or what kind of society you want America to be, then we find all sorts of shared values. We have been stressing, look at it in this context rather than in that context.

CAPPS: Is what links all these people their common concern about values questions, or is there really something deeper than that, or more fundamental, like a conservative instinct? The reason I asked you that is I was trained under a sociologist who said ... that he thought that I would probably miss the force of conservatism wherever I found it, because I would approach it as if it were a system of ideas, and I would go out there and be philosophical, and battle with it, because liberalism is what is thought common sense in universities and you think that everybody who is not that way, there's a predisposition to think that if you're not thinking that way, you're not thinking as correctly or as sophisticated as one could. He said I would miss the force of it, because he said you have to go through the instinct, you have to go beneath what the person said ... and find out is there an impulse there that links all of this together and why are things the way they are ...

WEYRICH: It's a world view. It's a world view as to where man stands with respect to his creator, and what is man's purpose on earth. On that one, I'm very close to the Orthodox Jews and I'm very close to the fundamentalists, and yet I'm a Catholic, and so - I'm not a sociologist, and I've never probed for impulses, but what seems to me to unite these people, more than just the political issues at hand is a world view, a sort of idea of who are we and where do we belong, and what is our proper role here on earth, and what is the ultimate outcome. That is a common theme which you will find in the discussions, sort of underneath the surface of

whatever issue is being discussed.

CAPPS: Would you call that a common theology? Is the world view a theology?

WEYRICH: Yes, it's the beginnings of a theology, sort of a primitive theology, which is probably the same kind of theology which has united the liberals that have gotten together from the various churches, who have really been united in a more humanist view of the world, and a sort of man-centeredness in their operationally pre-occupation with what can you do with the world now, and how does that translate into what sorts of issues that we want to be active in. Whereas, the common theme that runs through the minds of the kind of people we deal with is what happens in the hereafter and how do we relate to that. ... I'm not saying that the liberals, the humanists don't believe in the hereafter, some of them do, but the emphasis is different.

CAPPS: So, you're really talking about a world view that approaches the human being as being a child of God?

WEYRICH: Yes.

CAPPS: You're talking about eternity, maybe not heaven and hell; but, you're talking about the hereafter, pretty much in hope of deterrence?

WEYRICH: Yes, we're talking about the hereafter in hope of deterrence, and we are talking about a kind of society which ... stressed delayed gratification, as opposed to the kind of society which centers around a more immediate gratification. That I find to be a sort of central issue in the different approaches to things.

CAPPS: So, that would get us into a discussion of the permissive society, I don't want to pursue that at all. But, one of differences between the view you represent and the view that's represented by the other -

in terms of how you explain why there's evil and why things are going wrong ...

(liberals - environment) you're point of view, is that it's the nature of man, human nature. It's possible both those views are right ... there's such a thing as individual perversity that man is perverse, but there's also social sin, that there are inequities in society, and social injustices ... Can you reflect on that, is it a clear cut case between evil being attributed to sin and evil as sort of a factor within the environment?

WEYRICH: Well, we do not believe in any kind of collective guilt or innocence. We believe in individual guilt or innocence, and that is a common thread amongst all the groups that we work with. So that yes, you can have injustices in a society but, mainly because a group of individuals are individually guilty and happen to have



have united together to form the kind of society which, collectively perpetuates injustice, but not because there is a sort of collective wrong there, or a social sin. It is a series of individual wrongs put together, which I think is a fundamental difference. Indeed you have sick societies, but we stress the individual accountability of all people, and that no one can be excused for their behavior on the basis of having come from a society which doesn't live up to a particular standard. I don't think the analysis is correct that it's a little bit of both in the way that you articulated it. I think that you do have,, of course, unjust laws and unjust societies, and oppressive societies, but it's because of the collective action of a lot of individuals who are guilty either by over-actions or inactions. In Nazi Germany, you had all kinds of people who overtly perpetuated evil, but the real guilt came from individuals who did not fight that, and that taken collectively, one worked with the other and produced a society that was very unjust.

CAPPS: So, you wouldn't talk about the sins of America - the sins of America would be the sins of Americans?

WEYRICH: Yes.

CAPPS: In connection with the world view - about the future and individual salvation, what would you like to see for the United States in the future, given your emphasis upon delayed gratification, and thinking that the real goal in life is to be saved?

WEYRICH: Well, I think that if you have a lot of individuals who understand their proper relationship with their creator and understand their proper role in society, that you will have a lot better society. We do not believe in the perfectability of man, except through God. So we don't look for any kind of perfect society to evolve here in the United States, but we can achieve, and I think we have achieved a better model, than we have in the current time. So, we think that if there is a religious revival, where people go back to basics, that we will probably have in the United States, we will probably come out of some of the severe problems that we have been facing, that I think will sink us as a nation, if they are not turned around. I'm speaking, of course, of drug problems, I'm speaking of massive crime problems which effect everybody, I'm speaking of problems killing the unborn, -and things of that sort. We think that as people internalize a world view, that that will translate into society as a whole. In other words, we don't look to reform the environment which is then supposed to reform man; we look to reform man, who is then supposed to reform the environment, and that is a very basic difference. I don't know whether America will come out of the problems that it's been facing or not, but I will tell you that there is

more of a trend toward the kind of religious beliefs that I've been talking about now than there was even two years ago or five years ago. The various fundamentalist preachers have been growing by exponential rates, but not only those, I came across this past week a little tape operation that sells old tapes of Bishop Sheen's speeches and things of that sort and they are selling, and it's an operation which has no formal outreach - it's all word of mouth and little catalogs and dissident conservative Catholic groups - and they are selling 2,000 tapes a day. It's phenomenal. So there is a back to basics religious revival in the country, and if it takes hold, we will see a translation to society in a way that will effect the eventual politics and the operation of them.

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