

# **‘Governor Rockefeller for Governor’: The 1966 New York Gubernatorial Campaign**

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On November 8, 1966, the Republican Party won impressive electoral gains across the nation—forty-seven new seats in the House, three in the Senate, and eight gubernatorial wins. The G.O.P. continued its advances in the no-longer-solid South and maintained its presence in northern industrial centers, while continuing its traditional dominance in the Midwest. These victories were a great relief after Goldwater’s staggering loss to Johnson two years before. Candidates who represented the party’s right and left wings had impressive wins: Ronald Reagan defeated an incumbent to become the governor of California, Edward Brooke won a U.S. Senate seat from Massachusetts, and Senator Clifford Case of New Jersey won reelection. RNC Chairman Ray Bliss downplayed the divisions between the party’s moderates and conservatives by encouraging tolerance within the party. He also sought to rebuild the party on the foundation of sound financing, organization, and Republican rhetoric on fiscal responsibility, which, for him, meant blaming the Democratic Party for the nation’s rising rate of inflation.<sup>1</sup> Immediately after Goldwater’s loss, Bliss told the public that the party was big enough to comprise men as different as Goldwater and Jacob Javits—if the Democrats could “settle their differences,” so too

could the Republicans “develop a strong united front.”<sup>2</sup> While Democrats were able to win major gains in 1964, Republican victories in 1966 suggested that the era of Democrats settling their internal differences was nearing its conclusion.

Republicans became the new champions of party unification and while Bliss looked to economic policy to lead the party to victory the tense status of race relations in 1966 helped the party more. The month before the election, Newsweek reported that for the first time since 1962, the majority of Americans polled by Gallup (fifty-two percent) said the Johnson Administration was pushing civil rights too fast. Louis Harris, however, found that closer to seventy-five percent of Americans thought the Johnson Administration was moving too fast, which he attributed to backlash politics. Harris predicted that backlash politics—understood as a resistance to the civil rights movement, new federal civil rights laws, and unrest in the streets related to public protests and urban riots—could be the decisive factor in nearly half of the districts where freshmen Democratic congressmen sought re-election.<sup>3</sup> A Harris survey from the same month found that sixty-nine percent of respondents thought that the Republican Party “would do a better job of slowing down the pace of civil rights.”<sup>4</sup> It was an important distinction.

By 1966, urban unrest had become a pivotal issue in American society, most notably during the August 1965 riot in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. Much of the nation was shocked when just days after the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 a traffic stop incited a confrontation between black residents and white police officers that resulted in six days of rioting and left thirty-four people dead, over one thousand injured, and upwards of forty million dollars in property damage. “After three summers of ghetto rioting and one charged with

talk of 'black power,' few northern politicians," wrote Newsweek, "were willing to write off backlash" as a "purely Southern phenomenon."<sup>5</sup>

The 1966 campaign season enabled Republicans to consolidate and build upon the themes prominently discussed during Goldwater's candidacy, including opposition to civil rights legislation, veneration of states' rights, and fear of urban crime. Urban riots played a major role in exacerbating feelings of uncertainty and resistance to the expansion of African American rights. Even Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR), who sought a third-term in office, deployed new strategies in race relations to respond to the growing controversy caused by the civil rights movement. New York's governor remained an advocate of civil rights, but he tempered his message to suit the tenor of the times. The nation fractured as civil rights activists continued to fight social and economic inequality that persisted despite legislative victories, leaving moderate Republicans in a precarious position.

With the aid of slogans such as "Governor Rockefeller for Governor" to emphasize his leadership experience and inventive advertising techniques, NAR attempted to reestablish his brand as an innovative and responsive leader. After two terms in office in which NAR called for tax increases and two unsuccessful presidential bids, many accused the governor of being too wealthy and personally ambitious to be concerned with the average New Yorker. NAR appointed civil rights leaders like Jackie Robinson and Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker to help him reconnect to African Americans who were no longer as receptive to liberal politicians, particularly those within the Republican Party, which they now associated with racial conservatism. While offering support for the black freedom struggle, NAR found ways to connect with white New Yorkers who were becoming more resistant to the demands of African Americans in a period of increasing urban crime and unrest. In the days before the election, he

refused to offer unqualified support for the newly appointed Civilian Complaint Review Board, which was instituted by John Lindsay, as a means for racial minorities to voice grievances related to police misconduct and brutality. Instead, NAR accused his Democratic opponent, Frank O'Connor, who supported the civilian review board, of being "soft on crime" to take advantage of the fear of urban crime and unrest in black communities to beat his Democratic opponent.

This chapter examines the range of strategies NAR employed during the 1966 gubernatorial campaign to extend the life of moderate Republicanism in New York. He designed a sophisticated and nuanced campaign that appealed to African Americans and increasingly racially conservative whites, by catering to concerns within both communities that were becoming at odds with one another. In a period when urban uprisings and crime became more commonplace in cities and Republicans blamed liberal Democrats, NAR used similar tactics to attack his Democratic opponent. He was careful, however, to maintain his relationship with the black community by avoiding the race-baiting of more conservative Republicans. The 1966 gubernatorial campaign reintroduced NAR to the people of New York and with the support of deep coffers and his record of progressive and expensive programs, he held together the increasingly fragile voter base that had secured his victories in the past. While NAR won an impressive third-term reelection, he began to undermine his steadfast record of racial liberalism that had set him apart from other mainstream politicians.

### **Racial Politics and Moderate Republicanism**

Although the civil rights movement was still largely popular, NAR became increasingly careful to avoid associations with its more controversial elements because of his liberal civil rights record. Polling data showed that a significant cross-section of Americans thought that the

Johnson Administration and civil rights activists were pushing for change too quickly and in a reelection year NAR sought to distance himself from such opinions. Speculation about the significance of a “white backlash” to the civil rights movement was high for the duration of the Goldwater campaign. In the days prior to the election, pollsters still thought the backlash might be the major factor that could garner Goldwater a significant amount of votes despite polling numbers to the contrary. While opposition to the activism of the civil rights movement did not decide the 1964 presidential election, resentment toward the black community grew as more white people believed blacks were demanding rights they did not deserve or were expecting change too quickly. For northerners, the efforts of civil rights activists were easier to support when they appeared on newscasts covering the South, rather than when they threatened their way of life at home. Even as efforts to desegregate the South drew sympathy from many white Americans in the North, local struggles to desegregate northern schools and neighborhoods often incited intense protest and violence.

The survey data NAR collected in preparation for his first gubernatorial run suggested this contradiction. He found that respondents were most concerned—and were often angry—about neighborhood change and the increasing migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City. Sam Lubell, who created the report for NAR in 1958, noted that this could be a very fruitful campaign issue if a politician chose to exploit the increased racial tensions in cities. Although aware of the growing discord related to race on the neighborhood level in New York and the political problems it posed, NAR chose to reach out to Puerto Ricans and African Americans. In turn, they rewarded him with an uncommon connection to his politics and campaigning style. As the 1960s progressed, however, it became common for politicians to use racial tension to their

benefit once urban uprisings became more common and the civil rights movement shifted focus to de facto school and housing segregation in the North.

Two days after the conclusion of the 1964 Republican National Convention a riot first broke out in Harlem followed by others in Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, and Rochester, New York. The frustration and anger that drove some African Americans to walk out of their homes and burn and loot the neighborhoods they inhabited, but typically did not own, was long felt. However, the unrest in Harlem was first triggered by a rally held to protest the murder of a black teenager by a police officer. James Powell, a fifteen-year-old, was fatally shot by New York City police officer, Lieutenant Thomas Gilligan, after James and his friends got into a confrontation with a building superintendent who tried to chase them off with the spray of a water hose. Tensions were already high in the community. The rally to protest Powell's murder was originally planned by a chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)—a civil rights organization founded in Chicago in 1961—to draw attention to the disappearance and suspected murder of three civil rights workers in Neshoba County, Mississippi. At the last minute it was reorganized to protest Powell's murder.

The peaceful rally eventually drew a large crowd who gathered at the West 123<sup>rd</sup> police station to demand the suspension of Gilligan who was on paid sick leave because of an injury he was reported to have obtained in the altercation with Powell. The crowd began to clash with police in front of the station and chaos ensued. After the first night of rioting, the Chicago Defender reported the death of a single Negro man at the hands of the police, while the New York Times emphasized the property damage at the hands of what were described as wild roving mobs of blacks, who attacked the police with anything they could throw, while the police fired

warning shots into the air. When the uprisings came to a close, five people died, eight hundred sixty-seven were injured, and sixteen hundred and fifty were arrested in the three communities.<sup>6</sup>

In 1964, NAR spoke before the convention on July 14, unrest broke out in Harlem the night of July 18, and spread to Bedford-Stuyvesant on July 20, but not until rioting broke out in Rochester on July 24, was the governor compelled to release a public statement. On July 25, 1964, NAR released a statement from the Executive Chamber in Albany denouncing the riots in New York City and Rochester that alluded to his speech condemning extremism at the Republican National Convention.

Such lawlessness, hoodlumism, and extremism from whatever source or for whatever reason, will be met by the full force of the law. There are disturbing indications that there may be organized efforts to incite or abet such disturbances. The overwhelming majority of the people in the areas where these incidents have occurred are decent, law-abiding citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Before this statement NAR was absent. Two days after the violence erupted, James Farmer requested that NAR send state troopers to Harlem to protect the residents from city police, but received no response—NAR was vacationing in Wyoming and had yet to return to New York.<sup>8</sup> Mayor Wagner was also on vacation when the riot broke out in Harlem, but he managed to return to the city and President Johnson ordered the FBI to Harlem to investigate days before NAR released his own statement.<sup>9</sup> When NAR finally broke his silence, he said rioting and looting would not be condoned, while praising the police who he called “our principal bulwark against mob violence and chaos.” NAR assured the public that although he had been out of state—and noticeably silent—he was in “continuous communication with the appropriate officials.”

Just days after NAR railed against the extremism of Goldwater and his supporters, he cited extremism for the rioting. He told the minorities of New York that they had the most to gain from “law and order” and warned that “mob rule and looting” only endangered “their

cause” and the foundations of an orderly democratic society.<sup>10</sup> The following day he activated the New York National Guard and sent units to Rochester along with state troopers, to prevent more violence. Ultimately, the governor flew to Rochester unannounced to survey the damage on July 28. He reiterated his previous statements denouncing the unjustifiable extremism in Rochester and warned that violence could not achieve progress in a democratic society. Furthermore, NAR did not acknowledge the specific complaints of black residents who cited police brutality and a lack of police review for inciting the violence nor did he meet with African American leaders, such as those in the NAACP who met with the mayors of New York City and Rochester.

While Rockefeller said little about the possible long-standing issues in the minority communities that made them fertile ground for violent clashes between residents and law enforcement, Robinson, who served as an aide to the governor, chose to speak out in his newspaper column. The forty-six year-old Major League Baseball Hall of Fame member and current Chairman of the Board of Harlem’s Freedom National Bank, expressed concern, because newspapers in the Midwest and West reported that droves of criminals incited the uprising and a “reign of terror” after the justifiable murder of a black teen. While Robinson refuted the claims that Harlem was overrun by criminals, he regretted the violence in Harlem because he believed it gave Goldwater, and people like him, ammunition to use against the black community. Robinson assured his readers that the uprising was the result of frustration over police brutality in Harlem and unprosecuted violence against African Americans across the nation. The Negro community would not “turn the other cheek forever,” he warned. He feared future violent outbreaks, but said he understood the frustration that inspired it. “I do not have to be in Harlem,” Robinson wrote, “to be familiar with the kind of frenzied and sadistic brutality that many of the



New York City police force feel they can get away with in dealing with Negro and Puerto Rican citizens.”<sup>11</sup> Robinson’s sympathetic view stood out in opposition to the Rockefeller Administration.

Shortly after the unrest in Harlem, NAR received letters from across the country criticizing his response. Amid letters that attributed the situation to a wide range of causes from deplorable living conditions to the savagery of Negroes, a couple from Port Chester, New York, blamed the “rioting of lawless Negro[es]” on Rockefeller and city officials’ “past and present appeasement of Minority Groups.” Lucile Jansen of Miami, Florida, said the riots were a “forewarning of what the Negroes intend to do” and complained that leaders like Rockefeller supported the use of the national guard in the South, but did nothing when wild mobs roamed the streets of New York. She continued, “If this is the way you would handle the Negro rioting in the country should you have been elected President we are fortunate indeed that Mr. Goldwater carried the nomination.”<sup>12</sup> NAR would continue to face these criticisms as urban uprisings became a more common and increasingly dreaded occurrence.

Urban unrest like that in New York in July 1964, infuriated many whites who blamed blacks and leaders like NAR, who they believed condoned it. The anger and frustration caused by urban unrest would grow and become increasingly controversial throughout the 1960s. Critics who had long opposed the civil rights movement and the efforts of the black community to achieve social and economic parity, needed little to convince them that African Americans deserved no more favors. The fallout would be tremendous for the African American community and the politicians associated with their demands for equality. The political careers of leaders like Johnson and NAR were soon jeopardized.

In the spring of 1968, for example, NAR and his aides sought strategies to fend off an attack from Phyllis Schlafly in her book, *Safe Not Sorry*, where she accused NAR of approving of the race riots. NAR's aides told him that he should avoid conversations related to her accusations if possible, but if necessary, he should insist that he did not condone violence. NAR's staff believed that his words had been distorted because of his "known record in favor of civil rights."<sup>13</sup> He was not alone. NAR faced the criticism that the Republicans would usually direct toward liberal Democrats. In July 1966, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey appeared before the NAACP's 55<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Los Angeles, California and told the audience that if he lived in a ghetto he would "lead a mighty good revolt." Republicans took advantage of Humphrey's statement saying, "high officials of this Administration had condoned and encouraged disrespect for law and order." Ultimately, such attacks left the Johnson Administration, and the Rockefeller's, on the defensive.<sup>14</sup>

By the mid-1960s, NAR had to navigate an increasingly hazardous middle ground between Republicans who expected him to adopt more racially conservative positions and his black allies who looked to him to preserve racially progressive Republicanism. Shortly after conservative whites accused NAR of endangering New Yorkers by not condemning the African Americans that rioted, Robinson told the governor that he was not doing enough to prevent the "violence and bloodshed" that would arise if Goldwater was elected president. NAR gave minimal support to the Goldwater campaign. At first his staff said he would not campaign for the national Republican ticket, but eventually he did offer an endorsement from "top to bottom." After a couple of campaign appearances in upstate New York where NAR praised Goldwater for his "courage and integrity" and chastised New York Republicans for what he called the "childish horseplay of being divided," Robinson expressed his disappointment.<sup>15</sup>

Dear Governor Rockefeller:

I see that Barry Goldwater is now, in your opinion, a man of courage and integrity. You know and I know that a Goldwater victory would result in violence and bloodshed. His candidacy reeks with prejudice and bigotry. His remark that this has become a nation ruled by minorities while the majority suffers is not only stupid, but undeserving of support from a man with real courage and integrity.

Perhaps it makes no difference, but I have to let you know that I am truly sorry you have taken this stand, for you know what Barry Goldwater means—not only to the Negro people—but to so many other Americans of good-will. It seems to me that to support him is to reject the ideals and principles for which the Rockefeller name has always stood. Your doing so is one of the most disappointing things which has ever happened to me ...

Your Friend,

Jackie Robinson<sup>16</sup>

NAR was the moderate Republican who had jeopardized his political career the most to oppose Goldwater, but by extending a minimum amount of support to Goldwater to meet the basic expectations of party unity during the campaign season, he received criticism from his most liberal supporters, both black and white.

### **Reintroducing Nelson Rockefeller**

Rockefeller began hiring new staff in preparation for his 1966 reelection campaign in late 1964. He also commissioned private studies of New Yorkers to monitor his political standing throughout 1965. The governor had Lloyd Free prepare reports analyzing his prospects against potential Democratic and Republican opponents. The news was not good. Free's analysis from December 1965, for example, read: "In brief, the overall picture that emerges from the December study is only mildly encouraging as compared with our survey last May, when you really hit bottom. There has been some improvement—particularly in certain aspects of your 'image'—but, from the point of view of your standing vis-à-vis potential competitors, the situation remains

decidedly unfavorable.” The major problem, according to Free, was the persistent stereotype that NAR was not “for the people” and too much of a big spender. Almost half of the people surveyed associated NAR with two groups of descriptors: “Poor fiscal policy, high tax man, unbalanced budget” and “Not helpful for the people—seems above the common man; not helpful to the poor little man.”<sup>17</sup>

Among possible Republican contenders, both Javits and Lindsay were more than twice as popular as NAR. In response to NAR’s decline in popularity, some New York Republican legislators encouraged Javits to oppose NAR for the nomination. The senator canvassed the state to see if he could potentially beat NAR, but the nominating system in New York favored the incumbent. New York was one of the few states at the time that did not choose candidates in open primaries. Javits would need to take the nomination at the state convention—an unlikely scenario that NAR was able to prevent.

After the state nominating conventions, the gubernatorial race became a four-man contest between NAR, the Republican Party candidate, Frank D. O’Connor, the Democratic Party candidate, Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., the Liberal Party candidate, and Paul L. Adams, the Conservative Party candidate. The ballot was a bit more crowded than usual. In the past, the Liberal Party had always endorsed the Democratic Party nominee, but liberal Democrats in 1966 decided not to endorse O’Connor, the former Queens District Attorney and the current New York City Council President because of his association with party bosses. The split among Democrats resulted in a weakened position for O’Connor, who would lose some traditional Democratic supporters to Roosevelt.

While New York Republicans were also split between those who supported NAR and more conservative party members who backed Adams, a political science professor and dean at

Roberts Wesleyan College outside of Rochester, New York, the Liberal Party nominee posed a more significant threat to O'Connor. A private poll taken shortly after the state's nominating conventions found that thirty percent of New Yorkers said they would vote for NAR. While that number reflected an improvement from previous polls, NAR still trailed O'Connor by seven percent.<sup>18</sup> O'Connor was in the lead, but running against an incumbent with the resources and determination of NAR would be a daunting task.

The previous January, long before NAR's opponents began their campaigns in September, the governor and his staff launched an exhaustive ten-month campaign. To combat his low approval ratings the governor made appearances in all of New York's sixty-two counties, delivered three hundred and eighty speeches, and hired agencies that produced cutting-edge advertisements for television and radio that were particularly uncommon for non-presidential races. By Election Day, NAR outspent his Democratic opponent ten-to-one.<sup>19</sup> He conducted a systematic and dogged campaign to reach as many people as possible and address the concerns of diverse segments of the electorate. The good news for NAR was that voters rarely mentioned his personal life, but they often complained about his record on increasing taxes and fees, and on the state's high taxes overall.

After taxes, pollsters found that "crime and juvenile delinquency," education, "narcotics and dope addiction," aging/deteriorating neighborhoods, and "civil rights and integration" were most likely to concern respondents. It was difficult to strike a balance between limiting taxation and meeting the public's expectations for services in New York. While the New Yorkers polled opposed NAR's record on taxing and spending, they said they wanted a governor who favored more spending for education, tuition assistance, aid for the mentally disabled, and the reduction

of water pollution.<sup>20</sup> As the incumbent, he needed to practice great care in meeting these conflicting demands.

NAR and his staff relied upon new advertising techniques to present the governor's case. James M. Perry, a senior editor of the *National Observer*, described the campaign as “probably the most expensive nonpresidential campaign ever put together in America. Not only the most expensive, but one of the most professional, one of the most astute, one of the most imaginative, and one of the most ruthless.”<sup>21</sup> In his book, *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation*, Perry analyzed the effect of professional political managers, scientific polling, data processing, and the use of mass media to make direct appeals to the voter in the 1960s.

Many of these trends were not unique to the 1960s, as he noted, but Perry argued that they were used more effectively in this period to tailor campaigns more closely to the interests of a diverse and increasingly demanding electorate. NAR's 1966 gubernatorial campaign stood out for more than its unprecedented cost. His bid for reelection was designed by an innovative advertising agency that helped the governor use television commercials to set the tone of his campaign in stages from the weeks before the state convention that nominated NAR—considered the pre-campaign—until the final days against O'Connor. The NAR team settled on Jack Tinker & Partners, a New York advertising agency started in 1960. NAR became the first politician to join the agency's cadre of clients including Alka-Seltzer and Braniff Airways, Inc.<sup>22</sup>

The agency's first task was to reintroduce New Yorkers to NAR's accomplishments, not NAR himself. They decided that neither NAR nor his voice would be used in the early commercials—a first for a political candidate in this period.<sup>23</sup> The first Tinker advertisement featured hand puppets discussing Rockefeller's Pure Waters Program. It was eye catching and

drew the viewer in over the sixty second duration with information about a single program rather than focus on a list of the governor's accomplishments.<sup>24</sup> The early commercials reflected the campaign's first phase or "soft-sell." Perry found NAR's use of advertising notable because of its targeted approach that made it possible to create a campaign that was customizable to suit trends in public viewership and opinion down to the county level as Election Day drew near. The first phase of commercials never mentioned opponents or even the upcoming election; rather, they sold NAR's achievements on issues such as increasing state-aid for college tuition and improving the state's network of roads.

The second phase of advertisements commenced after the convention. They relied less on humor—and puppets—and were narrated by NAR, but they still refrained from mentioning his Democratic opponent. The commercials continued to focus on single programs advanced by the governor, but they featured a more staid tone when discussing the state's new minimum wage law or the Medicaid program—"Rockefeller's Medicaid, we hope you never need it."<sup>25</sup> The advertisements would end with NAR speaking directly into the camera making a case for high-cost programs that could and would incur the wrath of conservative Republicans. These commercials, offered a stark defense for programs that the private polls said the voters wanted, although they balked at the cost.

The third phase of advertisements attacked O'Connor directly. In these advertisements, the Rockefeller campaign portrayed the Democrat as a product of New York City's corruption and mismanagement. NAR exploited the classic upstate-downstate divide in New York. One version of the commercials in this series used a simple black background with a bi-line at the bottom of the screen stating that the viewer was watching an advertisement. A narrator, not NAR, stated, "Frank O'Connor, the man who led the fight against the New York State Thruway

is running for governor. Get in your car, get down to the polls, and vote.”<sup>26</sup> Other advertisements in this phase featured NAR at a podium, as if at a dramatically lit press conference, where he portrayed himself as tough and hard-hitting opposed to O’Connor. The negative advertisements at this stage in the campaign, in particular, reflected what Perry called a, “sharp turn for the worse,” because they were no longer “ethically acceptable.”<sup>27</sup>

Perry, who admired NAR, calling him a strong campaigner, an “exceptionally able governor,” and a “genuine product to market,” said the governor crossed the line into murky territory as Election Day neared.<sup>28</sup> For example, the criticism of O’Connor’s stance on the Thruway artfully misrepresented the former state legislator’s position on the highway. O’Connor, like the majority of Democrats in the state legislature, did not oppose the construction of the thruway, he opposed the tolls that Republican legislators wanted to institute. Due to a general lack of organization on the part of the Democrats, they had little success trying to correct such statements, while asserting O’Connor’s message. NAR’s flush coffers also meant that he could easily inundate voters with television advertisements, which began airing in late July. The Rockefeller campaign, for example, paid for two hundred and eight commercials on WNBC in New York City at a cost of \$237,000, compared to the O’Connor organization’s twenty-three commercials on the same station for \$41,000.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Changing Politics of Civil Rights**

The Rockefeller campaign made impressive and innovative use of television when many politicians were only beginning to realize the potential of the medium, but NAR did not rely on technology alone. To reach voters, a great deal of effort was expended to help the governor connect with specific demographic groups through traditional campaigning. The African American community received a disproportionate amount of NAR’s resources. He sought to



reach out to African Americans by hiring advisers who had been active in the civil rights movement and were attuned to the social and political challenges faced by the black community. On February 7, 1966, NAR named Jackie Robinson his Special Assistant to the Governor for Community Affairs. Robinson, who served on NAR's personal staff, had worked for his campaigns in a smaller capacity in 1964 as a Deputy Campaign Director and as a head of a committee to re-elect him in 1962. As an assistant for community affairs, Robinson said he hoped "to bring the remarkable Rockefeller record to the attention of minority groups throughout the state."<sup>30</sup>

Robinson often spoke of NAR's longtime commitment to civil rights and his willingness to remain abreast of the current concerns of the black community without relying on his family's philanthropy or his previous record. For Robinson, who remained a devoted Republican, NAR represented hope that blacks would continue to have a place within the party. "In our opinion," said Robinson, "it is important for the Governor to 'win big' because, if he does, this will once again serve notice on the National Republican organization that the Goldwater, Bill Buckley route is the sure road to disaster."<sup>31</sup> Robinson did not always agree with NAR, as evidenced by his response to NAR's decision to praise Goldwater, but he remained committed to the strand of racial liberalism the governor reflected within the party.

In addition to his duties in-state, Robinson also called for greater unity among black Republicans nationally, intensified voter registration, and an effort to reverse the Goldwater influence that remained in the party. Robinson told Glenn Douglas of the Chicago Defender that John Lindsay's upset victory the year before to become mayor of New York City in 1965 was the result of a "Negro revolt in voting patterns," and as a result both parties should have "more respect for the needs and ambitions of the Negro citizen." Robinson believed that a decisive

victory for NAR in 1966 would be significant for the nation. He explained, “A whopping Rockefeller victory in this state, indicating that Negroes respect Mr. Rockefeller as a ‘stand-up’ Republican who will not sell out his principles, should really do wonders for our people nationally.”<sup>32</sup>

In Robinson’s newspaper column of January 15, where he praised NAR’s commitment to civil rights and the political health of the nation, he lauded the governor’s openness to criticism and willingness to make changes. Robinson spoke from recent experience. Just days before the column was published Robinson had a private meeting with NAR after he wrote a critical letter to him about the lack of black appointments to his staff.

Dear Governor Rockefeller:

This is one of the most difficult letters I have ever had to write. It is, however, absolutely necessary.

While I sincerely believe there is not a more dedicated politician on the scene, your record toward the Negro regarding political appointments cannot be accepted by any self-respecting Negro. In New York, it seems to me inexcusable, that on the state level, excluding a few appointments, you do not have any one of color on your staff. In states far less sophisticated, as far as race relations are concerned, the governor is completely aware of the necessity of having qualified Negroes on his personal staff.

I felt we had made it very clear at our meeting some time ago about the importance of appointments of this nature. Little, if anything, has been done and [I] have been left in a most embarrassing position. I can only come to the conclusion that nothing is going to be done, and because of what I stand for, my personal high regard for you cannot stand in the way of my desire to see the progress Negro Americans are making continued.

Your inaction can only mean a lack of interest, which compels me to do whatever I must to bring it to the attention of the public. If I am to be of any use to anyone I eventually support, whatever my value is, I can only be useful if I continue doing what I believe to be right. Unless there is immediate action, Governor, I must publicly answer the challenges which have come to me concerning favorable articles I have written about you

...<sup>33</sup>

It appeared that Robinson’s insistence was significant enough for NAR to take action. The following month, he hired Warren E. Gardner Jr. as an assistant press secretary, Wyatt Tee

Walker as Special Assistant for Urban Affairs, and Sandy F. Ray as a member of the governor's youth commission—all of them African American. Robinson had to make several overtures to get NAR to pay for the staff he promised him, but eventually he was able to hire his own staff including Alfred Duckett, founder of the public relations company Alfred Duckett Associates, who had collaborated on speeches and a book project with Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>34</sup>

NAR's new appointments helped maintain his connection to the civil rights movement and the black community by keeping him aware of the evolving concerns and expressions of the community's activism. In a period when the movement was perceived as taking on a more militant orientation, it was important for NAR to make adjustments. At one point during the campaign Robinson alerted the governor to a potential problem. Robinson explained that NAR's ever-ready greeting of "attaboy" could be misinterpreted by African Americans because calling a black man a boy, which was tantamount to using a "dirty word."<sup>35</sup> While this example serves to show the attention to detail that NAR's black staff members provided, which could be invaluable when campaigning, they also offered advice that went beyond style. Reverend Walker's role as urban affairs adviser offers insight into the extent of NAR's efforts to change with the times.

When he appointed Walker, NAR said that the thirty-six year-old, former executive director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and aide to Martin Luther King, Jr., was the newest member of a team he was assembling to "tackle the multiple problems" of Negroes in urban areas.<sup>36</sup> Walker intended to address issues related to defacto segregation, medical facilities, job opportunities, and narcotics trafficking. Walker's first task was to coordinate plans for two-year technical colleges that NAR proposed for Harlem, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Buffalo, and Syracuse. During the luncheon NAR held to announce his appointment, Walker expressed his personal aspirations for his new role and his intention to use

it to address a need for a new approach to alleviating the ills of black America. Walker said that he and the governor shared “the conviction that the people of the area to which I will be giving primary attention have had enough social studies, political speeches and pious platitudes to last a lifetime.”<sup>37</sup> Instead, it was time for action. In his role as special assistant for urban affairs, Walker often talked about the need to tackle the “hopelessness and frustration” felt by inner city communities.<sup>38</sup> Walker soon joined in NAR’s effort to reduce narcotics addiction and crime related to it, which Walker saw as a uniquely damaging scourge upon the black community. Walker served as a mouthpiece for NAR; he helped the governor address concerns shared by blacks who sought new ways to address persistent inequality.

Despite NAR’s new appointments and his attempts to tailor his message to meet the new demands of an important voting bloc, he experienced difficulties when campaigning in African American communities. “Let me say, first, that I cannot tell you how much I admired your raw courage on Tuesday evening,” wrote Walker to Rockefeller. “It certainly equaled or surpassed the San Francisco incident. Under very, very trying circumstances, you did the very best that anyone could do.”<sup>39</sup> Walker sent this encouraging message to NAR after he went on a quick tour to open storefront campaign headquarters in Harlem; Flushing, Queens; Bensonhurst, Brooklyn; and the South Bronx on August 9, 1966. The New York Times wrote that the events—modeled after Lindsay’s mayoral campaign the year before—which included pretty girls in straw hats, staff armed with walkie-talkies, and bands that played jazz and rock and roll from the back of decorated trucks were successful despite some hecklers.<sup>40</sup>

In Walker’s opinion, however, that the tour was not a success. He argued that more forethought should have gone into the planning of the campaign tour stops in black communities.

Walker explained that what worked in the past to drum up goodwill and fanfare for NAR was no longer sufficient and they could not afford to repeat this mistake. Walker explained:

The black community is in a very ugly mood and have some very legitimate reasons for being so. Most of it is despair, and any candidate who comes into their midst will feel the brunt of their venom and hostility because they are in no mood for voting for anybody so much as they are in the mood to vote against somebody. Since you are the incumbent, you can't escape feeling the wrath which is the harvest of apathy."<sup>41</sup> In this political climate, Walker said NAR should have never gone to Harlem without an effort made beforehand to emphasize the "new job program" or the "signing of some bill that touches the ghetto community.

Furthermore, there was no outreach to the "Nationalists," a reference to members of Black Nationalist groups—or perhaps those who sympathized with them.<sup>42</sup> Black Nationalists gained attention in this period for their activism on behalf of the black community. While they shared many of the same objectives as more traditional civil rights leaders, they placed a greater emphasis on racial pride and sometimes separatism opposed to integration.<sup>43</sup>

The summer of 1966 was difficult for civil rights activists and the broader African American community, and as Walker told NAR, there was a new level of frustration with elected officeholders. Despite the passage of major civil rights legislation many blacks were upset that those hard-fought and undeniably important victories had not translated into tangible improvements amidst defacto segregation, a lack of jobs, and persistent inequality. The year before, CORE met in Durham, North Carolina, for a convention entitled "The Black Ghetto: An Awakening Giant," where the organization identified the need for a new phase of the freedom movement to address these disparities, particularly in the North. Feelings of despair and fatigue within the black community inspired those at the convention and in groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to give a rallying cry for "Black Power," which, for them, reflected a change in the attitude and emphasis of the African American freedom struggle. It was a significant development, not because of a major change in the aims of these

activists, but in the response they received from Americans who feared calls for Black Power would lead to more violence. It led to divisions within the civil rights movement, most significantly, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP rejecting Black Power and calling it reverse racism and “anti-white” power that would only spawn counter violence from whites.<sup>44</sup>

Floyd B. McKissick, national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), rejected these characterizations. In an article published in the Chicago Defender, he said the misinterpretation of Black Power to mean violence and racism was “further proof that there remains in this nation a malevolent Southern tradition that even now, seeks to divide black Americans into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ niggers.”<sup>45</sup> McKissick said that the Black Power movement was founded in racial pride, not racial supremacy. The ultimate goal was to mobilize black communities to create the meaningful change that eluded them.

Although the press often characterized this debate over Black Power as a split between traditional leaders like Wilkins of the NAACP and “radical” leaders such as McKissick, King also criticized Wilkins’ stance. During an interview with Gene Roberts of The New York Times, King explained, “I get the impression that the N.A.A.C.P. wouldn’t mind a split because they think they are the only civil rights organization.” He continued, “My problem with S.N.C.C. [the student committee] and CORE,” he said, “is not their militancy—I think you can be militantly nonviolent. It’s what I see as a pattern of violence emerging and their use of the cry, ‘black power,’ which, whether they mean it or not, falls on the ear as racism in reverse.”<sup>46</sup> Like King, Walter Lippmann, in his column for the Washington Post, called attention to the futility of a divide within the black community because of Black Power.

Lippmann discussed the “bleak realization” that progress had stalled and that African Americans, regardless of their opinion on Black Power or their approach to activism, would

make no more progress as the Vietnam War drained the nation of its resources. The promise of Johnson's 1964 election and the consensus it represented rested on the prospect that expansion of the economy—not tax increases—would make it possible to fulfill the promises of reform in housing, schools, jobs, and hospitals that were promised in recent federal legislation. Lippmann, in his article, "Broken Promises," concluded cogently,

The crude truth is that the great majority of us, for the most part white, who are safely beyond the poverty line, will resist higher taxes in order to help the poor, so many of them black. The Johnson consensus of 1965 was based on the economic calculation that the reforms could be financed by economic growth. The rich would not have less, they would even have more, but not quite so much more. This was the material foundation of the hope that a great society could be built by consensus.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, the 1960s were an unmatched period of economic growth for the nation, but by the end of the decade the rising costs of the Vietnam War and the War on Poverty along with the Johnson Administration's decision not to raise taxes meant the nation's economy was overburdened.

In 1966, the nation began to experience a slowed growth that would worsen until the recession of 1969. The economy began to weaken because of several factors including rising inflation, the Federal Reserve's tight fiscal policy, a decrease in production in manufacturing and construction, and increased competition in global markets. One consequence of the contracting economy and diminished public support for social change in the mid-1960s was increased infighting between civil rights organizations that competed for the limited resources, political clout, and sympathies of white Americans. The impact, however, extended far beyond debates over the strategies and rhetoric employed by activists.

The collapse of the liberal consensus Lippmann spoke of would leave many casualties in its wake. While the nation's poor would face the worst losses, politicians like NAR who relied on the liberal consensus would suffer significant losses too. It was increasingly difficult to

cobble together a diverse voting base with promises of mutual—and for the majority, sacrifice-free—prosperity. As Walker noted, NAR was not a unique target for anger within the black community. Instead, he experienced the aftereffects of African Americans' disappointment and anger once they realized that full incorporation into American society was still beyond their grasp despite the support of a sitting president. Campaign stops in Harlem with the standard reverie provided by pretty girls and lively bands were not going to be enough to earn the Negro vote, despite the efforts of NAR's black aides, who often noted that despite his record he would have difficulty among blacks who were still upset about Goldwater's nomination in 1964. They warned NAR that the black community was badly fractured and in need of a delicate touch. The Rockefeller campaign continued its targeted efforts in black communities into the fall, enlisting additional aid from black clergy. It was essential that NAR capitalize on his record on civil rights, but seemingly intractable poverty, urban uprisings, and rising rates of crime and addiction helped to decrease much of the goodwill he would acquire.<sup>48</sup>

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Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Erwin Levold, Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.



## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Concerns over inflation rose as 1966 progressed, but inflation remained a lesser concern for much of the public as the unemployment rate remained low, (less than four percent) and many Americans still enjoyed discretionary household income.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Bliss Press Conference from November 6, 1964, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR), Folder 25, Box 5, J.2 George L. Hinman, Record Group (RG) 4.

<sup>3</sup> "Politics: The White Backlash, 1966." *Newsweek* (October 10, 1966), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Harris Survey, October 1966, Retrieved June 12, 2012 from the iPOLL Databank, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut:

[http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/data\\_access/ipoll/ipoll.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html)

<sup>5</sup> "Politics: The White Backlash, 1966." *Newsweek* (October 10, 1966), p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> "Harlem Riots Over Death of 15 Yr. Old Boy: Police Kill Man in Harlem Riots." *Chicago Daily Defender* 1 (July 20, 1964); Paul L. Montgomery and Francis X. Clines, "Thousands Riot in Harlem Area: Scores are Hurt." *New York Times* 1 (July 19, 1964); Paul L. Montgomery, "Night of Riots Began with Calm Rally." *New York Times* 1 (July 20, 1964). One man died in Harlem, while four died in Rochester (three of the fatalities were caused by a helicopter crash). Property damage was well over \$1 million.

<sup>7</sup> State of New York, *Public Papers of Nelson A. Rockefeller Fifty-Third Governor of the State of New York*, 1964, p. 823.

<sup>8</sup> R.W. Apple, Jr. "Violence Flares Again in Harlem: Restraint Urged." *New York Times* 1 (July 20, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> "LBJ Orders FBI to Harlem: Johnson Sends FBI to Probe Harlem Riots." *Chicago Daily Defender* 1 (July 22, 1964); Peter Kihiss, "City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty." *New York Times* 1 (July 21, 1964).

<sup>10</sup> State of New York, *Public Papers of Nelson A. Rockefeller Fifty-Third Governor of the State of New York*, 1964, p. 824.

<sup>11</sup> Jackie Robinson, "Harlem Riot Tragedy." *The Chicago Defender* 8 (August 1, 1964); Jackie Robinson, "Negroes Tired of Turning Other Cheek." *The Chicago Defender* 6 (September 15, 1964).

<sup>12</sup> New York State Archive, Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, Second Administration, 1963-1966, Reel 17, Subject File 1963-1966, Discrimination, MFB 16/7.

<sup>13</sup> Memo from Richard P. Nathan and Graham T. T. Molitor, RAC, NAR, Folder 690, Box 66, 21.2, Hugh Morrow General, RG 15.

<sup>14</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans*. New York: Random House, 2003, p. 371.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Dales, "Rockefeller Denies That He Will Stump For National Ticket." *New York Times* 1 (August 8, 1964); Douglas Dales, "Rockefeller Urges Goldwater Vote." *New York Times* 9 (August 22, 1964); Fendall W. Yerxa, "Goldwater and Rockefeller Exchange Praise in Albany." *New York Times* 1 (September 26, 1964); "Rockefeller Calls Goldwater 'Man of Courage and Integrity.'" *New York Times* 28 (October 7, 1964).

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Rockefeller from Jackie Robinson dated October 7, 1964, RAC, NAR, Folder 2078, Box 207, Projects, RG 4.

<sup>17</sup> Memo from Lloyd Free to NAR, RAC, NAR, Folder 699, Box 64, J.1 Politics, New York City Office, RG 4.

<sup>18</sup> Roosevelt and Adams trailed the two leading candidates with seventeen and two percent of the vote respectively. New York State Candidate Standing and Campaign Issues, RAC, NAR, Folder 702, Box 64, J.1 Politics, New York City Office, RG 4.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Kramer and Sam Roberts, "*I Never Wanted to Be Vice-President of Anything!*" *An Investigative Biography of Nelson Rockefeller*. New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 309.

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<sup>20</sup> New York State Candidate Standing and Campaign Issues, RAC, NAR, Folder 702, Box 64, J.1, Politics, New York City Office, RG 4.

<sup>21</sup> James M. Perry, *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1968, p. 107.

<sup>22</sup> Jack Tinker & Partners was known for its off-beat approach to ad campaigns. For Alka-Seltzer, the agency revamped its image with ads depicting people's stomachs at work and at play, and for Braniff, they repainted the planes in bright colors and dressed the flight attendants in uniforms designed by Emilio Pucci—it was known as “The End of the Plain Plane” campaign. Mary Wells, who later founded the Wells Rich Greene advertising agency, was the mastermind behind the Alka-Seltzer and Braniff campaigns. She made the presentation to the Rockefeller staffers, but left the agency immediately after to begin her firm.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Kramer and Sam Roberts, *“I Never Wanted to Be Vice-President of Anything!” An Investigative Biography of Nelson Rockefeller*. New York: Basic Books, 1976, p. 312.

<sup>24</sup> The advertisement began with a hand wearing a press hat and a microphone asking a fish puppet if he was familiar with “Governor Rockefeller’s Pure Waters Program.” When the fish said no, the reporter informed him of the program’s accomplishments. The ad concluded on a lighter note with the reporter stating: “Already, over seventy cities and industries have agreed to correct violations.” After a brief pause the fish responded, “Frankly, my problem with Rockefeller is some of his best friends are fishermen.” RAC Film Collection, Nelson A. Rockefeller Films, “1966 Campaign Commercials.”

<sup>25</sup> In another ad, Rockefeller intoned, “Arthritis may start with a little twinge in the fingers. By the time it’s finished you may be unable to walk ... I don’t have a cure for arthritis. I wish I had. But I do have a plan. I want the state to help set up centers where arthritis victims can get special treatment.” RAC Film Collection, Nelson A. Rockefeller Films, “1966 Campaign Commercials.”

<sup>26</sup> RAC Film Collection, Nelson A. Rockefeller Films, “1966 Campaign Commercials.”

<sup>27</sup> James M. Perry, *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1968, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> James M. Perry, *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1968, p. 137.

<sup>29</sup> Upstate television stations also benefited more from the Rockefeller drive rather than O’Connor’s. WBEN, in Buffalo, for example, received \$27,762 from Rockefeller and \$2,465 from O’Connor. James M. Perry, *The New Politics: The Expanding Technology of Political Manipulation*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1968, p. 135.

<sup>30</sup> “Jackie Robinson Is Appointed Aide to Rockefeller.” *New York Times* 31 (February 8, 1966).

<sup>31</sup> Jackie Robinson, “Wishes Rocky The Big Win.” *Chicago Defender* 10 (January 15, 1966).

<sup>32</sup> Glenn Douglas, “How Rockefeller and Robinson Got Together.” *Chicago Defender* 6 (February 19, 1966).

<sup>33</sup> Letter from Jackie Robinson to NAR dated January 12, 1966, RAC, NAR, Folder 392, Box 16, Ann C. Whitman, Politics, RG 4.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred A. Duckett helped Robinson write his 1972 autobiography, *I Never Had It Made*. Duckett assisted King with the writing of his “I Have a Dream” speech for the 1963 March on Washington. “Alfred A. Duckett, 67, Dead.” *New York Times* (October 8, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> Letter from Robinson to NAR dated September 19, 1966, RAC, NAR, Folder 3341, Box 102, Diane Van Wie Papers, Politics, RG 4.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Arnold, “Ex-Aide to Dr. King Appointed State’s Expert on Urban Negro.” *New York Times* 38 (March 2, 1966).

<sup>37</sup> Martin Arnold, “Ex-Aide to Dr. King Appointed State’s Expert on Urban Negro.” *New York Times* 38 (March 2, 1966).

<sup>38</sup> Martin Arnold, “Ex-Aide to Dr. King Appointed State’s Expert on Urban Negro.” *New York Times* 38 (March 2, 1966).

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<sup>39</sup> Memo from Wyatt Tee Walker to NAR dated August 11, 1966, RAC, NAR, Folder 1180, Box 43, Diane Van Wie Papers, Politics, RG 4.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas P. Ronan, "Rockefeller Off and Running in His Storefront Drive." *New York Times* 1 (August 10, 1966).

<sup>41</sup> Memo from Wyatt Tee Walker to NAR dated August 11, 1966, RAC, NAR, Folder 1180, Box 43, Diane Van Wie Papers, Politics, RG 4.

<sup>42</sup> Memo from Wyatt Tee Walker to NAR dated August 11, 1966, RAC, NAR, Folder 1180, Box 43, Diane Van Wie Papers, Politics, RG 4.

<sup>43</sup> Walker did not outline the specifics of what happened in Harlem. The *Times* article noted that Rockefeller repeatedly faced questions from citizens who wanted more state aid for education and stronger rent controls, but never mentioned a nationalist or black power presence. Thomas P. Ronan, "Rockefeller Off and Running in His Storefront Drive." *New York Times* 1 (August 10, 1966).

<sup>44</sup> "Excerpts from the Speech by Wilkins." *New York Times* 14 (July 6, 1966).

<sup>45</sup> "McKissick Defines 'Black Power.'" *Chicago Daily Defender* 5 (July 11, 1966).

<sup>46</sup> Gene Roberts, "Dr. King Declares Rights Movement Is 'Close' to a Split." *New York Times* 1 (July 9, 1966).

<sup>47</sup> Walter Lippmann, "Broken Promise." *Washington Post* A13 (July 12, 1966).

<sup>48</sup> Correspondence related to targeting the Negro vote, RAC, NAR, Folder 422, Box 30, Series 5, Campaign Files, RG 15.