First Watergate, Then You: Spiro Agnew and the Making of an Emotional Community

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When it was all over and Spiro Agnew, Richard Nixon's embattled Vice President, had resigned in October 1973, letters of support continued to pour into his office. One admirer was sure that Agnew could not "realize how very much you will be missed by millions of every-day Americans like myself."[1] Another spoke of the "millions of Americans, nobodys [sic] like me, who know you have been the only person who spoke for us & said what needed to be said to counter what those who would destroy our country have been saying."[2] An Olympia, Washington, man explained how "(m)any of us – the conservative, hardworking, middle class, reasonably normal people in this land . . . . know what you have been trying to do is right. And we are all so sad tonight."[3] Daniel and Rosemary Kosifas of Chicago Ridge, Illinois, wrote, "If only there were a button we could press, some way we could share that suffering with you and your family – make it easier for all of you." But, sadly, "Life isn't like that. Life just isn't that way." Signing off, they confessed that "we have never written to anyone in public life before and we feel kind of funny."[4] These remarkable letters attest to an emotional commitment to a political figure most have long forgotten, if they remembered him at all. But Spiro Agnew's role in creating an emotions-based political community bears a much closer look.

Political scientists have for years been studying the role of emotions in politics, a line of inquiry that has brought together research from neurobiology, cultural anthropology, and literary criticism on the source of emotions themselves. These disciplines ask: how are emotions or personality traits connected to human physiology? To what extent are emotions the product of – shaped by – one's cultural context? For instance, under what social circumstances are expressions of anger or sorrow seen as acceptable or threatening? Or, how are emotions embedded within articulations of power within particular discourses? For example, is there anger implied in "Thou shalt not…" or is it straightforward proscription? Not surprisingly, more recent research suggests that the lines between these methodological approaches are blurry and getting blurrier.[5]

The implications for understanding how, why, in what direction emotions impact politics are considerable, to say the least, especially in today's political climate. Studies of ingroup and outgroup trust dynamics can, for example, shed light on views of immigrants, nativism, and civic

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[1] Lois Hingorani to Spiro Agnew, October 18, 1973.
[2] Mrs. C.H. Rutledge to Spiro Agnew, n.d.
[3] Robert W. Funke to Spiro Agnew, October 10, 1973.
[4] Daniel and Rosemary Kosifas to Spiro Agnew, n.d.
[5] See for example, John R. Alford and John R. Hibbing, "Personal, Interpersonal, and Political Temperaments," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (November 2007): 196-212; Nicholas A. Valentino, Ted Brader, Eric W. Groenendyk, Krysha Gregorowicz, and Vincent L. Hutchings, "Election Night's Alright for Fighting: The Role of Emotions in Political Participation," *The Journal of Politics,* vol. 73, no. 1 (January 14, 2011): 156-170.

engagement.[6] Scholars like Lilliana Mason are among those whose recent work also grapples with group psychology within an increasingly polarized polity. The emotional attachment to one's group, she argues, is fast reaching a point of superseding the traditionally assumed, policy-based identification to one party versus another. Support for one's group or party, she notes "is driven not only by policy concerns, but also, powerfully, by the need to *feel* [emphasis added] victorious."[7]

Intellectual historians have also explored the "inner life" of people. Perry Miller's 1939 classic *The Puritan Mind* is an early example of such efforts. But these historians were more concerned with how the ideas drawn from text-based value systems shaped their lived experiences; for example, community life in 1630s New England. Inspired by these different disciplinary approaches, historians like William P. Reddy in the 1990s and early 2000s began to search for the historical role played by emotions.[8] Reddy introduced the concept of an "emotional regime," defined as the "set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and 'emotives' that express and inculcate them."[9] Emotives, in turn, Reddy explains, are "an emotional expression [that] is an attempt to call up the emotion that is expressed; it is an attempt to feel what one says one feels."[10] While at one level this is history of the inner self, it has larger implications since, "there is ample evidence in ethnographic and historical research on emotions that every community deploys emotional ideals and norms, and inculcates norms through emotional rituals, formulas, prayers, oaths, and so on."[11]

Of particular use to the research for this project, however, is the work of Barbara Rosenwein who offers the idea of an "emotional community." Rosenwein's work itself follows in the wake of Benedict Anderson's 1983 classic *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism.* Anderson argued that members' sense of belonging to a nation was "imagined" since they would "never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them." Yet, he continues, "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[12] From Rosenwein, historians can look to discover "what these communities (and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they made about others' emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore." Rosenwein then "pares this idea down to its essentials" of the emotional community as "social groups that adhere to the same valuations of emotions and how they should be expressed" and as

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[6] Mark M.L. Crepaz, Jonathan T. Polk, Ryan S. Bakker, Shane P. Singh, "Trust Matters: The Impact of Ingroup and Outgroup Trust on Nativism and Civicness," *Social Science Quarterly* vol. 95, no. 4 (December 2014: 938-959.
[7] Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 21.
[8] William P. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[9] Jan Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," *History and Theory* 49 (May 2010): 238.
[10] Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," 238.
[11] *Ibid*.
[12] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 6

"groups of people animated by common or similar interests, values, and emotional styles and valuations."[13]

Political historians, according to Michael E. Woods, "have embraced the study of emotions more slowly than their colleagues in social and cultural history, perhaps because of assumptions about which spheres of human experience are particularly 'emotional.'"[14] This is changing at last toward a greater appreciation that "the 'political is emotional,' and emotions are 'a significant component of political mobilization,'" as political scientists well know. Since, as Joanne B. Freeman in her work on politics in the Early Republic argues, "emotional patterns . . . reveal larger cultural truths" and that since "masses of people in a given place and time were amused, disgusted, or frightened in similar ways on similar occasions, this suggests larger, shared assumptions that require explanation."[15] Biographies of George Wallace demonstrate his ability to stir the emotions of his followers.[16] Both Ronald Reagan and Barack Obama also struck powerful emotional chords among their supporters. But there is still a relatively wide open field in modern American political history for further investigations along these lines.

That the effort to try and identify and understand the formation of an emotional community by and around Spiro Agnew has particular relevance currently seems all too clear. As Mason observes, "anger and resentment are the primary emotional drivers of political action" but "not drivers of thoughtful processing of information."[17] As today's political analysts try to comprehend the staying power of Donald Trump's support among his MAGA base, they would do well to think of them as members of an emotional community rather than focusing on immigration, anti-abortion judges, China, or their opposition to the teaching of critical race theory. The idea of emotional community may also add a useful dimension to Schlozman and Rosenfeld's "Long New Right" argument regarding the half century-rivalry between populist and Establishment Republicans. Leaders of the Long New Right were keen on fighting "social issues" more than pushing for tax cuts or protecting corporate interests. The tacticians of the Long New Right focused intently "on a take-no-prisoners mobilization of resentment." Their "pugilistic style" connects Joseph McCarthy's defenders and Barry Goldwater supporters of the 1950s and 1960s, to Pat Buchanan and Newt Gingrich voters and Rush Limbaugh listeners of the 1990s, to Trump's followers today.[18] Spiro Agnew's speeches, and the letters his fans wrote in response, fit perfectly the tenor of the "pugilistic style" of the Long New Right.

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[13] Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," 252-253. See also, Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Passions in Context: Journal of the History and Philosophy of Emotions* 1,1 (2010) https://alioshabielenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Rosenwein-2010-Problems-and-Methods-in-the-History-of-Emotions.pdf. Accessed July 12, 2022.

[14] Michael E. Woods, "The Caning of Charles Sumner and Emotion in Antebellum Politics," *The Journal of Social History*, spring 2011, Vol. 44, No. 3 (spring 2011): 689.

[15] As quoted in Michael E. Woods, "The Caning of Charles Sumner and Emotion in Antebellum Politics," 689.

[16] See for example, Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origin of New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

[17] Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 86.

[18] Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld, "The Long New Right and the World It Made," presented at the American Political Science Association meeting, Boston, MA, August 31, 2018, 3-4. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/540f1546e4b0ca60699c8f73/t/5c3e694321c67c3d28e992ba/1547594053027/Long+New+Right+Jan+2019.pdf. Accessed July 25, 2022. See also Sidney Tarrow, *Movements and Parties: Critical Connections in American Political Development* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 135-147.

The growing number of stories about "white backlash" in the early to mid-1960s indicates that there was an emotional community there to be gathered by the time Richard Nixon ran for president in 1968. These were people who resisted the civil rights movement in varying ways. This opposition had been long obvious in the south, but it becoming more evident among white urban and suburban northerners jealous of their access to jobs, neighborhoods, and schools. They also resented the growing antiwar movement after LBJ sent in combat troops in 1965. They grew increasingly defensive of their work-a-day jobs and material comforts in the face of the counterculture's alternative lifestyles. And they were taken aback by the outspokenness of their own college-aged kids who seemed to delight in questioning and rejecting everything their parents stood for.

A 1966 *New York Times* article by Tom Wicker, for example, focused on the political implications of such a backlash. But one can also find in Wicker's piece signs of an emotional community forming among an identifiable group – "not just poor whites, but among moderate-income whites." Even though Vietnam was becoming the political debate of the day, "they worry more about Negroes moving into the block, taking over their jobs, and making their streets a battleground." The pronoun "their" takes on added significance in the context of identifying an emotional community and who gets included or denied entrance. Wicker describes "widespread and growing resentment" and "disgust at a concern [by the government] that seems exclusively for Negroes." In the midst of growing anger over busing, Mayor John Collins, of the Kennedys' own home base of Boston, was campaigning on the line "Nobody is going to push me around."[19] Disgust, resentment, defensiveness: from Boston to California, angry people were beginning to search for an emotional community to call home.

Richard Nixon, like all political figures of the day, and his staff took it as a given that people's emotions could be channeled toward certain behaviors, including political ones. The key questions were how to manipulate and to what end those manipulations? In late 1969, the Nixon White House stumbled onto the realization that by thrusting their everyman Vice President, Spiro Agnew, into what we would call the "culture wars" of the day, they could build a new kind of political base. Indeed, it was Agnew himself who did much of the heavy lifting in creating what became – and remains -- a right-wing, populist "emotional community" borne out of the particular anxieties, frustrations, resentments of their working- and middle-class white base of supporters.

In their efforts to shape public emotions, the Nixon White House focused intently on the connections between mass media, popular culture, and consumer culture. The massive rise of American consumerism after World War II brought an acute awareness of consumer psychology. Business schools by the 1960s increasingly had shifted their curricula to embrace the behavioral sciences.[20] The potential to shape behavior through emotional appeals seemed almost unlimited to advertisers. As Charles Revson, the Revlon cosmetics mogul said famously, "In the factory we make cosmetics; in the store we sell hope."[21] An economist explained in 1963 in ways that would have clear implications for politics, "Product differentiation can only be assumed to have

[19] Tom Wicker, "Is the Backlash Here at Last?" *New York Times,* September 7, 1966.
[20] John B. Miner, "Psychologists in Marketing Education," *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 30, January 1966, 7.
[21] Quoted in Theodore Levitt, "The morality (?) of advertising," *Harvard Business Review,* July 1, 1970, 85.

been achieved when the consumer *believes* [emphasis added] the product is different. No amount of physical alteration of a product really changes it unless the buyer actually is convinced that it is a new product."[22] The Eisenhower staff kept an advertising agency on retainer during the 1950s as the Republican party's national chairman explained that "You sell your candidates and your programs the way a business sells its products."[23] Regarding the relationship between image-maker and image-consumer, a Harvard business professor in 1970 put it more bluntly: "The consumer is an amateur, after all; the producer is an expert. In the commercial arena, the consumer is an impotent midget. He is certainly not king. The producer is a powerful giant."[24]

It was therefore no accident that Nixon had a number of men from the advertising and mass media industries working on his campaigns and then on his White House staff. H. R. "Bob" Haldeman had spent several years at the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency before joining Nixon's campaign in 1960. Nixon also brought on board Frank Shakespeare, the former president of CBS, for the 1968 campaign. Harry Treleaven, a former long-time advertising executive, also from the J. Walter Thompson agency, was also hired.

In 1968 the campaign focused its efforts on television as the key, but not first without some heavy lifting on behalf of the candidate's staff. As Joe McGinniss has famously described: "Into this milieu came Richard Nixon: grumpy, cold, and aloof."[25] A young Roger Ailes, at the start of his long, controversial career shaping conservative politics that ended with multiple, credible sexual harassment allegations, was at the time working for the popular daytime talk show "The Mike Douglas Show." He had been instrumental in convincing Nixon in 1967 that television was not a "gimmick" and then continued on as a media consultant.[26] Nixon, McGinniss writes, "was afraid of television." He "half suspected it was an eastern liberal trick: one more way to make him look silly."[27] Still, his publicity staff succeeded in shaping Nixon into a fairly effective television communicator.

The Nixon campaign's use of "controlled television (controlled, that is, by the candidate rather than by the network news department)" was instrumental in his election. They staged town hall meetings populated by Republican voters with planted questions, for example, showing Nixon beloved and armed with clearly thought-out answers for every question. This reflected Nixon speechwriter Ray Price's conclusion that, "It's not what's *there* that counts, it's what's projected – and carrying it one step further, it's not what *he* projects but rather what the voter receives. It's not the man we have to change, but rather the *received impression.* [emphasis in original] And this impression often depends more on the medium and its use than it does on the candidate himself."[28] Price's view of the consumer – or voter, that is – was less than flattering, if fairly typical of that era of mass media, advertising, and consumerism. The voters, he wrote, "are basically lazy, basically uninterested in making an effort to understand what we're talking about. . . . The emotions are more easily aroused, closer to the surface, more malleable . . . ." So, Price

[22] John W. Lowe, "An Economist Defends Adverting," *Journal of Marketing,* July 1963, 17.
[23] Quoted in Joe McGinniss, *The Selling of the President* (Penguin edition, 1988), 27.
[24] Theodore Levitt, "The morality (?) of advertising," *Harvard Business Review,* July 1, 1970, 85.
[25] McGinniss, *The Selling of the President*, 31.
[26] *Ibid*., 63-63.
[27] *Ibid.,* 33.
[28] *Ibid.*, 37.

concluded, "let's not be afraid of television gimmicks…get the voters to like the guy and the battle's two-thirds won."[29]

How fitting then that Spiro Agnew first got on to Richard Nixon's radar when his loyal aide Pat Buchanan saw him on television as the governor of Maryland, calmly but savagely skewering the leadership of Baltimore's black community in the midst of the civic unrest following Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. While pundits at the time and historians later would explain Agnew's selection as Nixon's running mate as fitting a kind of geographical and ideological sweet spot between the Northeast and the South, between the conservative and the more "establishment" moderate wings, in April 1968, Buchanan liked what he saw and what he heard on television.

If, as some media analysts of the time believed, the "television celebrity is a vessel. An inoffensive container in which someone else's knowledge, insight, compassion, wit can be presented," then tall, slender, handsome Spiro Agnew fit the bill for the Nixon team in 1968.[30] Not that the Nixon media team was impressed at first. Getting ready to preview a campaign film on Agnew, Harry Treleaven was asked, "What have you done about Agnew so far? "Done?" Trevleaven said. "Nothing. He's just there." At first, Nixon's team described Agnew's television presence as having all the spiciness of tapioca pudding.[31]

In July 1968, Nixon surprised the Republican national convention by naming Agnew as his running mate. In his acceptance speech, Agnew sheepishly acknowledged that he wasn't exactly a household name. As a product of the Baltimore County (MD) suburbs, Agnew grew into the walking, talking personification of the Richard Nixon's "silent majority." He was "the common man made exceptional" through his surprising rise through the political system.[32] A World War II veteran who moved out to the suburbs after the war, Agnew earned his law degree by attending night class. A ping-pong playing Dad, he was proud of his stay-at-home wife and their four children. He grilled burgers on the weekend, served on the local PTA, and loved watching the Baltimore Colts. Elected Baltimore County executive in 1962 and Maryland's governor in 1966, his name as well as lack of national recognition made him an instant target for columnists and jokesters. Erma Bombeck, for instance, included in her column a conversation with her husband who reported hearing of a woman who thought "Spiro Agnew was a fern."[33]

Then starting in the fall of 1969, through his speeches – many of them televised, workmanlike at best in their delivery, but often shocking in their content -- Agnew became a shooting star in American politics. Peter Jenkins had a point when he wrote of Agnew in 1972, "the phenomenon is more interesting than the man." [34] Following Rosenwein's lead on emotional communities, what we might normally see as garden variety stump speeches can also be seen as Agnew creating rituals for members of the emotional community he was building. They attended his events not simply out of political support for the Republicans, but out of high emotional

[29] *Ibid.,* 38-39.
[30] *Ibid.,* 29.
[31] *Ibid.,* 55-56.
[32] "Agnew is the common man made exceptional," *New York Times,* October 29, 1972.
[33] "Trivia: pro and con," *The Pocono Record,* December 4, 1968.
[34] "Agnew is the common man made exceptional," *New York Times,* October 29, 1972.

anticipation of his oh-so-satisfying attacks. His description of their enemies scratched that itch: the list included anti-war protestors and the counterculture, college professors, the "big-city liberal media" against whom he launched a "holy war," liberal Democrats, and weak moderate Republicans. Agnew's choice of enemies turned him into an icon of the embattled white middle and working class. "I may be a 'nobody' American," wrote one admirer, but Spiro Agnew was their champion.[35] These were not policy speeches meant to persuade: they were pep rallies and grievance gatherings for middle America. Thousands of supporters wrote to him and described how good it *felt* to have Agnew on the attack. Or, as another fan expressed her appreciation of Agnew, "We love you in America."[36]

After his inauguration in January 1969, the early newspaper profiles showed the new Vice President as an earnest, "normal" fellow. One of his tasks was to "smooth out" federal-state-local relations in terms of executing new federal policies and directives.[37] At his first turn as President of the Senate, Agnew displayed "an essential quality of the Senate newcomer: humility. He said he approached his new role with 'tremors of uncertainty, not personal uncertainty but an awe of presiding over this august body.'"[38] Perhaps the biggest news was that he was assigned his own plane, an "eight-passenger Jetstar aircraft for use at will." This was a Vice Presidential first and the plane was designated Air Force 2.[39] Other than that, Agnew spent the first few months in office performing the traditional vice presidential duties, capturing such riveting headlines as "Agnew Is Busy Welcoming Delegations at 3 Airports" and "Sponge Fishers Hail Agnew."[40] He conceded that the job was, as the *New York Times* put it, "limited."[41]

Gradually a "new" Agnew started to emerge, but not without a few hiccups. In March, as official Washington gathered at Andrews Air Force Base to welcome President Nixon home from a European trip, Agnew slipped on the ice, took a header, and smashed his nose. "Poor Agnew," Nixon aide Bob Haldeman wrote in his diary.[42] In mid-July, however, *New York Times* writer Warren Weaver, Jr. reported that "the intervals between Vice President jokes seem to be growing significantly longer." Now Agnew "seems to be more of a figure in his own right." In a bit of foreshadowing, Weaver noted that Agnew was "shaping up as a widely visible, free-speaking, unabashed spokesman for the Administration."[43]

Agnew gave a glimpse of what lay ahead in a commencement day speech in June 1969 at Ohio State University. Against the backdrop of the growing antiwar and student movements, he warned that a "society which comes to fear its children is effete. A sniveling hand-wringing power structure deserves the violent rebellion it encourages. If my generation doesn't stop cringing, yours will inherit a lawless society where emotion and muscle displace reason." The

[35] David J. Jenkins to Spiro Agnew, September 29, 1973.
[36] Phyllis N. Williams to Spiro Agnew, October 19, 1973.
[37] "A Task For Agnew Detailed By Nixon," *New York Times,* January 18, 1969.
[38] "Agnew Has Debut In Presiding Post As Senate Meets," *New York Times,* January 22, 1969.
[39] "Agnew Gets His Own Plane, Jetstar Called Air Force 2," *New York Times,* February 4, 1969.
[40] "Agnew Is Busy Welcoming Delegations at 3 Airports," *New York Times,* April 1, 1969; "Sponge Fishers Hail Agnew," *New York Times,* June 18, 1969.
[41] "Agnew Finds He's Limited," *New York Times,* April 9, 1969.
[42] H. R. Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House*, 69.
[43] "Agnew: He's Beginning to Emerge as a Figure in His Own Right," *New York Times,* July 13, 1969.

constitution, he added, "does not guarantee happiness."[44] One finds several emotional touchpoints just in this passage: effeteness led to fear; sniveling led to violence and rebellion; cringing produced lawlessness; there were no guarantees for happiness. This was not just a harangue of American youth: these negative emotional characterizations warned of antisocial consequences – indeed, rebellion – since they had "muscle" enough to "displace reason" itself.

This close textual analysis is at the heart of discerning the values of an emotional community. As Barbara Rosenwein notes, "It is important . . . to know what words signified emotions for the particular emotional community you are dealing with." Then "it is necessary to see how frequently and in what context" an "emotion word" is invoked and "how it is expressed. . . ." If repeated, "patterns should emerge – the outlines of an emotional community."[45] Rosenwein also makes another important point when she urges historians to "keep in mind that emotions are sometimes used not to express or to describe feelings but to label others. . . . Emotional epithets and characterizations may be used by one group (self-defined by race, class, estate, and so on) for or against another."[46]

By mid-September the *New York Times* announced that Agnew was "alive and coming out of hiding."[47] In ways that often irritated his boss, he had made news, disagreeing publicly with Nixon on a plan to limit the tax exemption of municipal bonds, for example. As the titular head of the American space program, Agnew publicly urged that the U.S. go to Mars, a goal he had not bothered to run by Nixon, Congress, or space program officials. Both the President's and Vice President's offices agreed that Agnew was of more use back on the stump. "Speechmaking and traveling," Ehrlichman noted, "were less taxing and more interesting" to the restless Vice President.[48] It was time to fire up Air Force 2.

In what *Time* magazine came to call the "Weekly Agnew Special," the now-energized Vice President launched into his new assignment.[49] These months of 1969 were indeed a tumultuous time. The My Lai massacre story broke that fall. The antiwar movement and the counterculture were reaching new heights gathering hundreds of thousands at their giant war Moratorium events in October and November. Hundreds of thousands had already gathered at Woodstock that summer. Charles Manson and his followers went on a murderous rampage in California. The post-King civil rights movement had fractured badly. The war in Vietnam raged on and the June 27 edition of *Life* magazine ran the pictures of the 242 Americans killed in one week of the war.[50]

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[44] "What Vice President Agnew told Ohio State graduates in his 1969 commencement address," https://www.cleveland.com/metro/2013/05/what_vice_president_agnew_told.html. Accessed June 30, 2022.
[45] Jan Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," *History and Theory* 49 (May 2010): 253.
[46] Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions," *Passions in Context: Journal of the History and Philosophy of Emotions* 1,1 (2010): 13. https://alioshabielenberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Rosenwein-2010-Problems-and-Methods-in-the-History-of-Emotions.pdf. Accessed July 12, 2022.
[47] "Agnew: Finding a New Way To Be a Household Word," *New York Times,* September 14, 1969.
[48] John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years,* 146.
[49] "The Press: The Weekly Agnew Special," *Time,* November 28, 1969.
[50] "One Week's Dead," *Life*, June 27, 1969.

Speaking at a Republican fund-raising dinner in New Orleans on October 20, Agnew tied the leaders of the Moratorium in with forces of change working their way through the nation's universities and popular culture. Enabled and encouraged by a new generation of academics and administrators, the college generation felt justified to merely "proclaim rather than to learn." And what together the students and their professors seemed to proclaim – over and over and over – was how awful the United States was. As a result, "A spirit of national masochism prevails, encouraged by an effete corps of impudent snobs who characterize themselves as intellectual." Compounding their bad judgement was the fact that despite, as young people, they were "at the zenith of physical power and sensitivity," they instead "overwhelm themselves with drugs and artificial stimulants."[51] Here Agnew again characterized the opposition in emotionally charged terms against which the Silent Majority could come together: the professors were masochists, effete, impudent, while their over-indulged students loomed, threatening in their physical power and drug-taking. In short, he tied the antiwar movement, campus radicalism, and the counterculture all together into a generation of dangerous drug-gobbling, unpatriotic kids, egged on by their permissive, weak professors.

The New Orleans speech generated the support from precisely the kind of people Nixon and Agnew wanted to reach – the middle Americans. Letters to the *Washington Post*, for example, relished this new sharp-edged message and his followers caught on immediately that Agnew was also aiming his criticism at the press and not just the students and their professors. While established newspapers like the *Post* and the *New York Times* tended to treat Agnew as a "national giggle," his supporters now asked, in essence, "how do you like him now?" One letter to the *Post* described attending an Agnew event: "I have seen Mr. Agnew in action, and his poise, sincerity, appearance and personality inspire an old-fashioned response – I am proud to be an American." As for the *Post,* this writer concluded, "You and others have underestimated the majority, and with Mr. Agnew speaking for us, we are no longer silent. Is this what worries you?" Another wrote that the *Post's* editorials "always seem to uphold the vociferous, regardless of their strength and their causes." But, "[i]f you were as close to the pulse of the great majority as one would expect of the *Post,* you would, for instance, realize that most Americans feel the same way about the so-called mangy peace-at-any-priceniks as Mr. Agnew." Agnew "has spoken for those of us who don't march and demonstrate, who patronize barbers, bathe frequently, and take it for granted that living in this country costs more than just the taxes we pay."[52] Here again one sees the characteristics invoked to help identify and unify members of the emotional community. The connection between Agnew's words and those found in letters of support appear to be a good example of what again William Reddy describes in his examination of "emotives," as "an attempt to call up the emotion that is expressed . . . to feel what one says one feels."[53] Agnew's poise and proper look created pride among his admirers and stood in stark contrast with mangy appeasers – and the writers knew how "most Americans" felt about *them*.

Agnew's address ten days later in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was even more provocative. "I triggered a holy war," he gloated. "I have no regrets. I do not intend to repudiate my beliefs, recant my words, or run and hide." "We have," he continued, "among us a glib, activist element

[51] "Agnew Says 'Effete Snobs' Incited War Moratorium," *New York Times*, October 20, 1969.
[52] "Letters to the Editor: More on the Vice President's Remarks," *Washington Post*, October 26, 1969.
[53] Quoted in Plamper, "The History of Emotions: An Interview with William Reddy, Barbara Rosenwein, and Peter Stearns," 238.

who would tell us our values are lies and I call them impudent. . . . I call them snobs for most of them disdain to mingle with the masses who work for a living." The "mature and sensitive people of this country must realize that their freedom of protest is being exploited by avowed anarchists and Communists who detest everything about this country and want to destroy it." Better therefore not to engage with them at all, Agnew proclaimed. Instead, he continued ominously, "We can . . . afford to separate them from our society – with no more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel."[54] Since his work was "holy," one could not possibly consider regrets. Again one finds the particular mixing of emotions with politics: his opponents were glib, impudent, snobs, avowed anarchists and communists. *They* were the ones consumed with hate, not Agnew. There was no point in engaging with them.

Agnew's "rotten apples" comments were then overshadowed by President Nixon's highly anticipated televised address on Vietnam on November 3. Nixon invested heavily in the "Vietnamization" speech in which he effectively gave the South Vietnamese notice that they would need to stiffen their efforts against the North and the National Liberation Front as the Americans began a gradual troop withdrawal. In this speech, Nixon also helped popularize the idea of the Silent Majority who now needed to be heard, he urged. But since he, as President, wanted to try and stay above the political fray, at least publicly, it was Agnew who poured the feelings into that identity. When Nixon became infuriated by some of the post-speech television analysis, aide Pat Buchanan sensed an opportunity for Agnew to take on an old enemy, the press, on behalf of his boss.

Buchanan, ever alert to the fighting side of Nixon, recommended that the White House hit back at the television commentators themselves – and by doing so raise doubts about the objectivity of the media itself. In a memo to the President, Buchanan suggested a "three-week offensive on this one subject" of media objectivity. If memos can include a hint of glee, this one did: "the result will be to terrify the networks; and to discredit their reporting in the minds of millions of people." To launch the offensive, Agnew would deliver a major address challenging the still-new practice of post-event political television commentary. Nixon loved it. His assistant Bob Haldeman relayed the good news back to Buchanan, using the White House shorthand for the President: "Pat, let's go! P is all for it." Not only was Nixon "all for it", he played a major role in drafting the speech with Buchanan, at one point chuckling, "This really flicks the scab off, doesn't it?" Agnew put his own touches on the speech as well, describing his work with Buchanan as "a labor of love."[55]

The resulting "Des Moines" speech of November 13, 1969, made Agnew a household name – especially among his base in the Silent Majority. Speaking before a nationalized television audience – free publicity offered by the media industry he was about to attack – Agnew pinned his remarks to the television commentary that followed President Nixon's November 3 speech. The President's painstakingly prepared remarks were "inherited by a small band of network commentators and self-appointed analysts, the majority of whom expressed in one way or another their hostility to what he had to say." Even though, as Haldeman's diary indicated, the analyses were "mixed," Agnew complained that it was "obvious that their minds had been made

[54] "Agnew Castigates 'Hate Merchants,'" *Washington Post*, October 31, 1969.
[55] Holden, Messitte, Podair, *Republican Populist: Spiro Agnew and the Origins of Donald Trump's America*, 109-111.

up in advance." It wasn't just what these commentators said either. It was "the expressions on their faces, the tone of their questions, and the sarcasm of their responses" that "made clear their sharp disapproval."[56]

And who were "they" exactly? Here Agnew broadened his attack on the television news industry itself. He noted how "no medium has a more profound influence over public opinion." And yet "Nowhere in our system are there fewer checks on such vast power." As a result, a "little group of men" wielded an outsized influence over the news itself. They constituted a "tiny and closed fraternity of privileged men, elected by no one." What's more, said this champion of middle America speaking from the Heartland itself, they were urbane Easterners: "to a man, these commentators and producers live and work in the . . . intellectual confines of Washington, D. C. or New York City." By virtue of their class and geography, Agnew could barely count them as Americans at all: the "views of this fraternity do not represent the views of America."[57]

The speech hit the bullseye. Nixon, Buchanan, and Agnew were delighted with the howls from those wounded by the Vice President's remarks. Network executives decried the address, claiming that Agnew wanted censorship. Buchanan recalled later how the next day, a grinning Agnew approached him aboard Air Force Two, stuck out his hand, and exclaimed, "Gangbusters!"[58]

While on the surface Agnew's Des Moines speech seemed to fit a long tradition of political leaders complaining about the press, there were some in the news business who understood instantly that their entire industry had just been attacked – and for a reason beyond venting frustration. Richard Wilson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for the *Des Moines Register,* who was well-sourced within the Nixon White House, astutely described Agnew's comments as "bold and calculated."[59] In 197l, the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights held hearings on the freedom of the press which included current and former industry leaders. The ripple effects of Agnew's attack on the media were still evident. David Brinkley testified and in his characteristically laconic tone noted how, "In the mail, people who are angry at us still say precisely the same things they were saying before, but now they almost invariably add one more line at the bottom of the letters: 'Agnew was right.'"[60] Richard Harris of the *New Yorker* later observed how "[b]y the start of the 1972 Presidential campaign, a very large part of the press had been silenced by covert and overt threats from the Administration – chiefly by Agnew's attacks…."[61]

Judging by the emotions expressed in letters to the editor, members of Agnew's growing emotional community knew exactly how to respond by now. A writer to the *Washington Post* clucked with satisfaction: "The response of the major networks to Agnew's speech sound like the

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[56] https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/spiroagnewtvnewscoverage.htm. Accessed May 25, 2022
[57] https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/spiroagnewtvnewscoverage.htm. Accessed May 25, 2022.
[58] Pat Buchanan, *Nixon's White House*, 74.
[59] *Get the Wilson footnote info.*
[60] *Freedom of the Press: Hearing Before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, 92nd Congress, First and Second Sessions* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1972), 320.
[61] Harris, "The Presidency and the Press, *New Yorker,* October 1, 1973.

whimperings of a spoiled child after a long overdue spanking."[62] One writer to the *Bluefield (WV) Daily Telegraph* celebrated the speech and man himself: "Without political fear, with the guts that made us a great nation, and with professionalism unsurpassed, one man, namely Spiro Agnew, stood unafraid" and delivered. "Let us all, that are free thinking, freedom loving people, pray that Spiro continues to strike again, again, and again."[63] An Iowan wrote how, "A great sense of relief was felt among the overwhelming majority of the people of our nation as we realized our own feelings about national television news coverage were being conveyed to the world."[64] Largely missing from these letters are references to issues or policies. Rather, it was all guts, courage, fearlessness, enemies that needed to be spanked or struck again, again, and again – and what a relief it was to finally have someone – the Vice President, no less -- give voice to these feelings.

One week later in Montgomery, Alabama, Agnew added accusations of liberal media bias in print journalism as well and identifying the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* specifically. He now had a self-generating line of attack: accuse the press of being biased, wait for the commentators to criticize him, and then complain about the criticism, convincing his audience that an unfair press hated him especially. It was a cleverly-built, self-propelling grievance machine. In the meantime, Agnew practically crowed: "The day when the network commentators and even the gentlemen of the New York Times enjoyed a form of diplomatic immunity from comment and criticism of what they said is over. Yes, gentlemen, that day is passed."[65]

In the context of building an emotional community, what is significant here is not simply that his admirers agreed with him about the media. What leaps off the pages of their letters to Agnew's office and to their local newspapers was the delight they felt over him making the attack as well as the deep resentment and loathing they had of all the enemies Agnew had identified for them. Meanwhile, Agnew's popularity soared: a Gallup poll slotted him as the third most respected man in the country in 1969 (behind President Nixon and Billy Graham) and an AP story looking back at 1970 concluded that "Few commanded as much page-one attention as Vice President Spiro Agnew."[66] *Life* magazine put him on the cover twice in 1970, once under the headline, "Stern Voice of the Silent Majority: Spiro Agnew Knows Best."[67] Hugh Sidey, a widely read commenter of that era, offered a sharp observation that Agnew was "a political phenomenon unknown in our history" because he had "built a constituency that goes beyond that of the President. In some instances, it is far more dedicated." A dedicated constituency – a community, in other words. Sidey added insightfully that his popularity was "a creation of his own unusual personality and the very electronics he periodically denounces."[68]

On May 4, 1970, Agnew spoke at the American Retail Federation meeting in Washington, D.C., a small-business-oriented, Silent Majority organization if ever there were one. Agnew again

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[62] "Letters to the Editor: On Vice President Agnew and Television Networks, Press," *Washington Post,* November 24, 1969.
[63] "Spiro Agnew is Urged to Strike Again," *Bluefield (WV) Daily Telegraph,* November 16, 1969.
[64] "Majority for Agnew," *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, November 20, 1969.
[65] "Transcript of Address by Agnew Extending Criticism of News Coverage to Press," *New York Times,* November 21, 1969.
[66] "Spiro Agnew Probably Top Personality of '70," *Great Bend (KS) Daily Tribune,* January 1, 1971.
[67] *Life,* May 8, 1970.
[68] Hugh Sidey, "Here comes the 'Aggernaut,'" *Life*, August 28, 1970.

defined and attacked "the elite" as those "found in every segment of society that helps to form…opinions…in the universities, the media, in government, in the professions." They were, he added, often those "born on the social ladder" and "formally educated." They were the ones who permitted the "paranoids" on campus. They were the ones who were "willing to believe that the criminal who throws a bomb at a bank is a hero and the policeman who gets killed trying to stop him is a pig." As a result, Agnew concluded, it was no wonder that "we have traitors and thieves and perverts and irrational and illogical people in our midst."[69] This lineup of emotionally charged characterizations was by now vintage Agnew. Weak, entitled members of the elite had unleashed a life-threatening pestilence upon the rest of the nation. His community had to band together to protect itself.

May 4 of course was also the day of the horrendous shooting of the students in response to antiwar unrest at Kent State. An alarmed President Nixon quickly sought feedback on just how implicated his Vice President's pot-stirring had been in the violence against student activists. Members of his own administration, as well as a gathering of university presidents, all pointed to Agnew's speeches as a having played a central role. Nixon then attempted to rein in his Vice President. Bob Haldeman's diary recorded that, "Nixon wants VP to stop saying anything about students… Vice President disagrees. . . . The whole university community is now politicized, and there's no way to turn it off. All blame Agnew primarily."[70]

By then, however, Agnew knew full well what Richard Nixon, of all people, should have been able to appreciate: the Silent Majority loved it when Agnew's speeches approached the line separating accusation from incitement. Both critics and admirers saw clearly how Agnew's speeches fed a growing "national mood" and a "public attitude" among people who did not lose any sleep over the attacks on the press or even the cold-blooded killing of four students on a college campus.[71] For his supporters, now was not the time to go "wobbly" as Margaret Thatcher might say since, as one writer to the *Baltimore Sun* wrote dismissively, "The bleeding hearts are having a field day over the recent tragedy at Kent State."[72] The resentment, anger, and loathing of their enemies, was now seemingly being channeled wherever Agnew aimed his attacks.

The novelist James Michener, hardly a countercultural leader in his day, travelled to Ohio to gauge for himself the local reaction to the shootings. What he found stunned him. Michener described the letters to the editor in the area as "frightening" in their lack of empathy. The firing on students, one writer hoped, was "the first slap" and "a mighty sting," adding, "Live ammunition! Well, really, what did they expect, spitballs?" A "Mother of a Guardsman" wished for more campus shootings: "Congratulations to the Guardsmen for their performance of duty on the Kent University Campus. I hope their actions serve as an example for the entire nation."[73]

Some concluded that they could not be the legitimate, nation-saving Silent Majority if they *weren't* willing to use violence against those they deemed radicals. "If the National Guard is

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[69] "Agnew Excoriates 'Elitists' Who Undermine 'Optimism,'" *Washington Post*, May 5, 1970; "Nixon Says Violence Incites Tragedy," *New York Times,* May 5, 1970.
[70] Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries,* 161-162.
[71] "Letters to the Editor, *Scarsdale Inquirer*, May 7, 1970.
[72] "Bleeding Hearts," *Baltimore Sun,* May 12, 1970.
[73] James Michener, *Kent State: What Happened and Why* (New York: Random House, 1971), 436, 438.

forced to face these situations without loaded guns, the silent majority has lost everything," one wrote. "The National Guard made only one mistake – they should have fired sooner and longer." An interview in an Akron paper revealed an even higher level of murderous fantasy: "Frankly, if I'd been faced with the same situation and a submachine gun, there would not have been fourteen shot, there would have been 140 of them dead, and that's what they need." Michener also reported that some people had "adopted the device of flashing their right hands in the air, thumb folded down and four fingers extended. When a student asked what the sign meant, he was told, 'This time we got four of you bastards. Next time we'll get more.'" One Kent State professor, identified as a "soft-spoken conservative" no less, was told the "only mistake they made was not to shoot all the students and then start in on the faculty."[74]

Indeed, shortly after the Kent State shootings, Agnew prepared to go back on the attack. Less than two weeks later, Agnew wrote a memo to his chief of staff Art Sohmer outlining his midterm campaign strategy. Significantly, the opposition research Agnew wanted his staff to conduct was not of the Democrats, it was of the media. "We should go right to the jugular, which is an exposé of how frequently the media have been wrong in the past and how frequently true national leadership in the face of initial unpopularity has proven to be the right course." Agnew wanted "two full-time people immediately assigned to research. . . . They need to go back through the files of the New York Times, the Washington Post, Time Magazine, Newsweek and other liberal newspapers and media" and find "anything that can be gleaned from the wealth of material that proves that these rags are more often wrong than right in the long run."[75] Writing with the self-awareness that he was now a media figure who could use the media to attack the media, he continued: "What I say can make a substantial difference because it will be widely publicized. The people of the United States need to be made aware of the fallibility, the weakness and the utter futility of the masochistic frenzy that seems to be sweeping certain parts of the Establishment." "This assignment," he concluded, "is A-1 priority, and all hands should turn to [it] immediately . . . ."[76]

Just as the memo to Sohmer indicates, Agnew had no intention of backing down. This became evident to those reporters who covered the Vice President. On May 17, John Carroll of the *Baltimore Sun* reported that "it was clear that whatever stresses and self-doubts may have accompanied [Nixon's] Cambodia-Kent State ordeal had passed." Carroll added, "…no one will be surprised when he comes back with another of his 'stem-winders,' as he likes to call his tough speeches. In political terms, Mr. Agnew is pure gold . . ."[77]

The outlines of this emotional community were clear by mid-1970. It was a right-wing, populist community bound together by an emotional commitment to toughness, strength and reason, as they defined them. Community members were both alarmed and angered that the survival of the nation appeared to be threatened by those whose effeteness, snobbery, impudence, and weakness generally, had led to irrationalism and violence and political subversion. The twinning of the

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[74] James Michener, *Kent State: What Happened and Why* (New York: Random House, 1971), 441-447.
[75] Spiro Agnew to Arthur J. Sohmer, May 16, 1970. Agnew Papers. Series 3. SubS 5 – Box 82 Folder – Political Affairs, 1969-1971.
[76] Spiro Agnew to Arthur J. Sohmer, May 16, 1970. Agnew Papers. Series 3. SubS 5 – Box 82 Folder – Political Affairs, 1969-1971.
[77] "`It'll Play in Peoria,' Thinks a cigar-smoking President," *Baltimore Sun,* May 17, 1970.

emotions of anger and alarm appears to be an early example of what Mason sees today: "As identities grow stronger, anger only increases if the group is perceived to be under some kind of threat from the outgroup."[78] As Buchanan wrote in a memo to Nixon at this time, "we are an army under fire now." He added, "I see us as under very real attack from our enemies within the society, who have many powerful and influential weapons." The solution for Buchanan (and Agnew) was, of course, to double down on the emotions. Their enemies needed to be engaged in "heated political warfare" by "stirring the fires and passions often." They were "in a contest over the soul of the country now . . . it will be their kind of society or ours; we will prevail or they shall prevail."[79]

With their eyes on the 1972 campaign, a bunker mentality had begun to set in within the Nixon-Agnew team. Buchanan's framing of the stakes at hand reflected the victory-at-all-costs paranoia that led to the dirty tricks campaigns of 1971 and then to the Watergate break-in in 1972. The Nixon-Agnew team, meanwhile, breezed to reelection over George McGovern and Sargent Shriver. An April 1973 Gallup poll had Agnew as the leading GOP candidate for 1976 with a solid fifteen-point lead over Ronald Reagan.[80] *Life* magazine ran an article entitled "Agnew Sitting Pretty" – and so it seemed.[81]

But in mid-1973, while the country gradually learned about the growing Watergate scandal, a separate federal investigation into bribery and tax evasion began to encircle Agnew. His followers rallied around the conviction that the enemies he had warned them about had launched a "Get Agnew" movement against their hero. Speaking in Los Angeles before the National Federation of Republican Women, Agnew on September 29, 1973, gave a full-throated defense of his innocence before an adoring, raucous crowd of supporters. Rumors swirled that Agnew would be indicted, impeached, or forced to resign. But in this packed auditorium, the women "yelled their approval of Agnew" and "stood on tables to cheer." They waved their scarves and held up signs proclaiming "Spiro My Hero" and "Agnew For President." His remarks at times were "drowned out by applause and cries of 'Right on.'" He concluded "above the din" that he had never "used my office nor abused my public trust as county executive, as governor or as Vice President." Over the roar Agnew proclaimed defiantly, "I will not resign if indicted."[82]

Accusing the press of liberal bias was now reflex among Agnew's base. The letters of support repeat with utter emotional conviction that the media was out to "get" Agnew. "Keep giving those damn reporters hell," wrote a Gary, Indiana, woman.[83] "Apparently," wrote a married couple from Indiana reaching back to show the importance of the Des Moines speech, "you committed the unpardonable political sin when you took on the TV and finally the news media generally by exposing and criticizing their strong leftist bias several years ago."[84] Ed Boyd of Merritt Island, Florida, begged Agnew: "DON'T RESIGN." There are "millions of Americans, I am sure, that stand behind you and resent this concerted and well organized attempt by the entire communications media to force you out." "Millions of Americans hav'nt [sic] forgotten," he

[78] Mason, *Uncivil Agreement*, 84.
[79] Pat Buchanan, "Media Memorandum For The President," May 21, 1970.
[80] "Gallup Poll Reports Kennedy Leading Agnew in Popularity," *New York Times,* April 30, 1973.
[81] David Maxey, "Agnew Sitting Pretty," *Life*, October 27, 1972.
[82] "Agnew Declares He Won't Resign Even If Indicted," *Washington Post*, September 30, 1973.
[83] Dorothy DeVault to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.
[84] Richard and Blanch to Spiro Agnew, Agnew Papers, September 29, 1973.

continued, "that you are the first prominent politician to come along and tell us the facts about our lying and well-orchestrated propagandizing media."[85]An Army chaplain wrote of his admiration "for you in your battle against the communist-controlled news-media."[86] From Glenshaw, Pennsylvania, a woman assured Agnew, "I hope you shut up the Washington Post for good. Turn the tables on them."[87]

In a foretaste of the Trump era, Agnew's base believed that since the media was out to "get" him, they now had permission to reject the facts presented by that same media. One of the many letters typical of this view acknowledged the bad news swirling around Agnew, but insisted nonetheless that "I can honestly say, that I have not believed a word. The news media and critics have pounced on every inference that was breathed by any individual [and] have tried to make these allegations appear as facts. . . . The news media gobbles it all up like a bunch of hungry vultures and then spits it back on vulnerable Americans. I for one won't swallow it."[88] Edith M. LaPree from White Cloud, Michigan, said, "Now I don't know it to be a fact, that you did or did not do what is said. You want to know something? Personally, I don't give a DAMN. You go by what you feel sometimes and it is my feeling deep in my heart, that you are a [sic] honest man."[89]

But emotional convictions couldn't trump the fact of Agnew's illegal activities over the years. He appeared suddenly in a Baltimore federal court room, having just resigned the Vice Presidency, and pled nolo contendere to one count of tax evasion on October 10, 1973. The prosecution then published the 40-page case against Agnew that went into lengthy detail on how the bribery scheme had worked over the years from his position as the Baltimore County Executive, to his term as Maryland's governor, and then finally as contractors drove down the Baltimore-Washington Parkway to pay off the Vice President of the United States with envelopes stuff with cash. It was a tawdry, clownish scheme with code words used to communicate about the next round of payments. Agnew was fined $10000 and given three years' probation, but served no jail time.

Yet his supporters stood firmly by him, as they aimed their anger and resentments at their enemies, and shared their love, loyalty, and affection for Agnew. In doing so, the emotional response to his downfall again perhaps gives an earlier example of what scholars like Lilliana Mason and others are seeing in their examination of polarization and group identity today, where "political enthusiasm" and "anger [are] . . . based not on policy goals but on knee-jerk identity-defense responses."[90] Sally J. Bohs of St. Clair, Michigan, spoke for many others when she wrote, "I wish I could put into words how angry and frustrated I feel every time I pick up a paper or turn on the television and read or hear what is happening to you."[91]

Even after pled and resigned, Agnew's emotional community continued to blame the press. Mrs. Richard Damaske concluded angrily that the "`Get Agnew' Conspiracy" had "won again!" The

[85] Ed Boyd to Spiro Agnew, September 24, 1973.
[86] Clifford C. Cartee to Spiro Agnew, September 29, 1973.
[87] Mrs. McNulty to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.
[88] Carol C. Hinson to Spiro Agnew, *track down date*
[89] Edith M. LaPress to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.
[90] Mason, *Uncivil Agreement,* 86.
[91] Sally J. Bohs to Spiro Agnew, September 26, 1973.

"Liberal and Biased News Media" and the "Angelic Democrat & liberals" had hit their target in Agnew."[92] A New Yorker wrote, that he was "saddened and sickened by the fact that the same liberal cabal that you denounced in your Des Moines speech, was the same phalanx that conspired against you."[93] Cecile Gher assured Agnew that there was "a tremendous ground swell of feeling for you." The problem was that "the media (mainly big-mouthed-America-hating Jews) are against you." [94] The fact-denying also continued. One woman wrote that "My husband and I want you to know that we don't believe a word that has been said or printed about you. . . . Something should be done about the Press – they tried and convicted you. Of course most of them are liberals."[95]

Through September and October, members of the emotional community blamed "radicals" as well. A Maryland dentist wrote Agnew that the "Socialized, one-world internationalism is trying to crumble our Republic and you are one of their road-blocks!"[96] Robert Jackson of Seattle, Washington, similarly proclaimed to Agnew, "To hell with the leftist element in this country."[97] Another writer lamented that it "[s]eems to me blacks and Jews can do anything and Communists and traitors and not a thing is done to them. My wish is that God will take care of those dirty humans [who] have harmed you."[98] A Maryland husband and wife team wrote, "too bad this country is so full of left wingers, liberalism, [and] many communists (who followed McGovern)."[99] Norma Close of Coral Gables, Florida, lamented of the liberals, "Democrats are really not good Americans, [they are] only Democrats, and [are] destroying this America (while they claim to be changing it for the better)…"[100] Nathalie J. Thompson of Winthrop, Massachusetts, concluded that with Agnew's resignation, "The bands are playing today in Communist countries – the cells are jumping – gala celebrations are the order of the day. Life has suddenly become brighter, easier for them."[101]

Some Agnew supporters, if not blaming the media or radicals, blamed mysterious, conspiratorial forces at work. From Mae C. Fisher of Syracuse, New York: "I still believe that there are people in the highest government offices (Communist or otherwise) who are definitely set in specific plans to undermine our Government, and they are surely making progress. First Watergate, and then you."[102] Glen B. Keidel, Sr. of Maytown, Pennsylvania, a Lutheran minister, proclaimed "I honestly believe that there is a move by some in our beloved country to 'topple the government', and I have told this to different people."[103] Eleanor H. Bell of Hinsdale, Illinois, spoke on behalf of her husband as well: "We truly believe there is a conspiracy to destroy our beloved country from within, and we beg of you, Sir, not to resign!"[104] Joyce O. Tonkinson of High Point, North

[92] Mrs. Richard Damaske to Spiro Agnew, n.d.
[93] Stanley J. Feminella to Spiro Agnew, October 18, 1973.
[94] Cecile Gher to Spiro Agnew, October 18, 1973.
[95] Isabel Lease [Loase?] to Spiro Agnew, n.d. (probably October 11 – says "Thursday" on top).
[96] Charles L. Brandenburg, Jr. to Spiro Agnew, September 24, 1973.
[97] Robert A. Jackson to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.
[98] Rosalie Wiltsey to Spiro Agnew, October 10, 1973.
[99] Mr. and Mrs. Thomas P. Tower to Spiro Agnew, October 10, 1973.
[100] Norma Close to Spiro Agnew, October 10, 1973.
[101] Nathalie J. Thompson to Spiro Agnew, October 19, 1973.
[102] Mae C. Fisher to Spiro Agnew, October 18, 1973.
[103] Glen B. Keidel, Sr. to Spiro Agnew, October 18, 1973.
[104] Eleanor H. Bell to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.

Carolina worried: "I really feel that all these scandals are really just a plot to destroy our GOVERNMENT and it is working."[105]

Finally, Agnew also received thousands of letters urging him to fight. Fighting, strength, toughness, "stop cringing," "no regrets" -- these were the glue of this emotional community. Even as the Vice President's legal troubles first began to make news, there was almost a sense of panic or desperation that their hero was now in serious trouble. In addition to blaming nearly everyone besides Agnew himself, they urged him – pleaded with him – begged him – "to fight until the bitter end."[106] John Buda insisted that Agnew "stand tall & act like a man." He promised "millions of people in your corner" and concluded, "The only other thing I can say is 'Give Them Hell.'"[107] A group of Tennessee businessmen made it clear to Agnew that the "situation requires fight and you will disappoint the people of this country if you do not fight this as you have our other battles."[108] Harry Hillen of Florida sent "a brief note to say 'keep your chin' up and fight to the end against the witch hunters who are out to get you. . . ."[109] Joseph Robert Diamond wanted Agnew to, "Keep punching."[110] Earl J. Collins added, "Stay in there, Agnew. I don't believe a DAMN WORD of what they are trying to pin on you. Fight back like HELL even if you have to take on all of those in the White House."[111] Having heard Agnew's Los Angeles speech, Mr. and Mrs. Jess Working of Escalon, California, kept it short and simple: "Good! Good! Good! Vice President Agnew! Fight! Fight! Fight! We're with you! Don't Resign!"[112] Ira E. Blackwood of Harrison, Arkansas, made it clear that "Nobody, and by God, I mean nobody, has the right to tell the Vice President that he must resign . . . . I say to you that anyone who so suggests should be told to go straight to hell. And let that be the final word."[113]

"Go straight to hell" are indeed fitting final words for the core of what motivated those in Agnew's emotional community. During his years as Vice President, other than his unflinching support for the war in Vietnam, most Americans would have been hard-pressed to identify another important policy position that Agnew stood for. But, for or against him, everyone knew how they felt about Agnew and how he felt about them. The "anyone" referenced in Blackwood's letter above was, of course, those parts of American society – antiwar protesters, professors, hippies, liberal Democrats -- that Agnew longed to see "discarded." From the "emotional modes of expression" Agnew used, they were weak, effete, cringing, sniveling, irrational, impudent, self-indulged, but also dangerous. Other modes of expression enabled people to self-identify as members of the community: patriotic, strong, tough, reasonable, and fighters for what was right. Agnew's attacks on the enemies he identified functioned as the rhetorical infrastructure that held this emotional community together in self-defense, they believed, against its and the nation's enemies. Right-wing populist figures like Rush Limbaugh in the 1990s and Donald Trump in 2015 refurbished that infrastructure as they called the right-

[105] Joyce O. Tonkinson to Spiro Agnew, October 10, 1973.
[106] Virginia Bailey to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.
[107] John Buda to Spiro Agnew, September 26, 1973.
[108] Albert J. Gasser, et al., to Spiro Agnew, n.d.
[109] Harry P. Hillen to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.
[110] Joseph Robert Diamond to Spiro Agnew, September 29, 1973.
[111] E. J. Collins to Spiro Agnew, September 26, 1973.
[112] Mr. and Mrs. Jess Working to Spiro Agnew, September 29, 1973.
[113] Ira E. Blackwood to Spiro Agnew, September 23, 1973.

wing, populist community back together – if it had ever actually disbanded -- and made it stronger than ever.