

Michael McKenna, "Heads We Win, Tails You Lose: Television and the Rise of the New Right, 1964-1976"

Beginning in the early 1960s, American politics and culture underwent a dramatic realignment. At the heart of this transition was the rise of a rejuvenated conservative movement in national politics. The broad appeal of this "New Right" was not primarily built on ideology or legislative imperatives. Rather, it was fueled by identity politics; millions of Americans began to proudly self-identify as conservative Republicans. Powering the growth of the New Right was a well-crafted Republican populism designed to appeal to the emotions and desires of millions of Americans. This populism was nourished in varying degrees by a diverse set of characteristics and tactics, including: fear, hyper-patriotism, religion, selective morality, racialized politics, nostalgia, personality politics, anti-intellectualism, and the vilification of coastal elitism. During these formative years of the New Right, American television acted as both an incubator and battleground for Republican neo-conservatism and its ideological and cultural opponents. The elements of what will later come to be called the "Reagan Revolution" can already be seen in every corner of the television industry more than a decade before the Reagan ascension. This paper will examine television's role in several of the seminal events and developments in the emergence of the New Right.