

Creedal Passion Politics?

The End of Yale's Calhoun College and the Start of a Green New Deal Revolution

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INTRODUCTION

Ideas and values are essential to the practice of politics, especially in America. The United States set out its fundamental values at its founding, making “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” essentially a national mission statement. But the meaning of these values and the degree to which they have been effectively realized have been contested over time. Waves of unique and varied interpretations and reinterpretations of these values regularly circulate in American political history. This observation raises questions. What are these fundamental values? To what extent do contests over their meaning and realization impact political change over time? And how does this apply to our current political era?

These questions all pertain to American Political Development (APD), a field of research marked by a preoccupation with what causes changes to American politics, ideas, institutions, and society over time.¹ Indeed, APD scholarship suggests that groups of citizens in America will be periodically massively discontented and make political demands based on fundamental principles. This claim is not deterministic, but it is not random either; it implies that political development in America happens partly – and perhaps substantially – based on periodic conflicts over the very ideas that helped to constitute the nation. Today’s extraordinarily contentious political climate calls for an examination of how disagreements in our own political time might invoke and revolve around key American values.

Huntington’s American Creed & Creedal Passion Periods

¹ Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek, *The Search for American Political Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); George Thomas, “Political Thought and Political Development,” *American Political Thought* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 114-125.

American politics always involves political conflict. Yet, some periods in U.S. history might be distinguished by the depth of that conflict and a widespread understanding that fundamental American values are central to disputes.

This position is outlined in one of the most significant early works of APD research. Known best for his contentious claims about culture, religion, and conflict in *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel P. Huntington contributed a significant theory to American political science in *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*. Though perhaps one of his lesser-known books, this work outlined an essential argument about the role of ideas in the evolution of American politics and institutions, and it provides the scholarly basis of this research. Huntington defines national identity in the United States based upon what he labels the “American Creed.” The American Creed, he writes, comprises a set of political values and beliefs that are “Liberal, individualistic, democratic, egalitarian, and hence basically antigovernment and anti-authority and institutions.” He maintains that this set of values effectively “serves to delegitimize any hierarchical, coercive, authoritarian structures, including American ones.”² Moreover, this distinct set of principles, Huntington claims, binds the American body politic, cutting across socio-economic class, race, gender, and party lines from the founding to the present day.

These principles may be perennial, but interpretations of them and the degree of difference between these interpretations fluctuate throughout American political history. Because the American Creed appeals to ambitions of moral perfection in a way that renders the U.S. so unique compared to other developed nations, the gap between political ideas and political institutions episodically widens. Huntington describes the years during which the gap becomes

² Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 4

pronounced as periods of “creedal passion.” He identifies four such periods in American history: the Revolutionary Era of the 1760s and 1770s; the Jacksonian age of 1820s and 1830s, the Populist–Progressive years of the 1890s and 1900s; and the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Huntington calls the Revolutionary Era the “prototypical” creedal passion period, and discerns that its themes were rearticulated during subsequent periods.³ Put another way by Bernard Bailyn in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, America’s national values were at once realized during the Revolution, and everything that followed were “assumed and built upon its results.”⁴ Creedal passion periods see the divergence and then realignment of ideas and institutions steered by conceptions of creedal principles. Recognizing such periods of intense creedal politics – and understanding what contributes to them – is a central empirical task for APD, and one that the case studies address. The conclusion will address the future of American national and political identity and the normative implications of moderating demands based on the creed while striving to preserve our institutions and faith in it.

A Fifth Creedal Passion Period?

This research examines the current political climate in the United States as a potential fifth creedal passion period. It is an exploration requiring analyses at various levels of society, from the national to the very local. Examining the Green New Deal and the renaming of one of Yale University’s residential colleges in 2017, Calhoun College, this research uses a case study approach to observe if separate cases reflect the larger societal dynamic in American politics. The two cases each appear potentially unlikely to meet some of the key criteria of creedal passion politics at first glance. A harsh stance against climate change is conventionally

³ Ibid, p. 87

⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 21

associated with the political left, so connotations with national principles and founding values seem improbable at least on the surface. But because of the imminence of the climate crisis, potential solutions like the Green New Deal will involve national governments throughout the world and the self-conduct of individuals. The renaming of Calhoun College provides a distinct level of political behavior on college campuses. The case brings the U.S.'s troubled history of slavery, remaining racial discrimination, and the responsibility of universities all to bear, and thus captures notions of the American creed. These cases fitting the criteria of a creedal passion period would strongly indicate, then, that most political battles in the current era are fought on creedal terms.

Conducting this research requires examining the discourse on both sides of the debate in each case. I use the published Green New Deal resolution and university reports containing the basis for renaming Calhoun College as primary sources to analyze the incentives of the architects and supporters. In addition to relevant secondary sources, I also examine a variety of other primary sources, including journalistic accounts, petitions of demands, and social media posts, to grasp the nature of reactions to both the GND and events during the renaming timeline. Relevant discourse references founding values and alludes to the nature by which conflicting interpretations of creedal principles manifest in the misalignment of ideas and institutions.

This paper contends that the contemporary political era fits much of the criteria that would constitute the fifth period of Huntington's creedal passion politics. The Green New Deal provides a more straightforward analysis of the current political climate, as the examination of contests over the American creed often focuses on such national issues. The renaming of Calhoun College poses a unique case for another reason, which is its college campus setting. Despite this case also largely meeting the criteria for a creedal passion period, it raises questions

over the place of creedal passion politics on a college campus. This research will allude to the worrisome path on which modern universities tread. That is to ask whether and to what extent college campuses should reflect the growing egalitarian tendency of American Political Development? Or, instead, to what extent must we preserve and shelter the dwindling number of “islands of aristocratic spirit” from the trend toward uniformity that Alexis de Tocqueville warned against when he travelled to America in the early 19th century?⁵

The American Creed and American Political Development

This research is heavily premised on the assumption that there is indeed a set of principles and values that run deeper than socio-economic class, race, gender, and party identities within the American people.⁶ Indeed, this is part of the more general idea of American exceptionalism, which posits that there are inherent differences between the U.S. and other nations.⁷ Even amidst 2019’s extremely polarized political community, in which 65% of Republicans and just 13% of Democrats believe the United States is headed in the right direction according to a YouGov poll, an American creed exists.⁸ Huntington argues that clashes come with its understandings and interpretations, when subsequent ideas become further from the institutional reality. Over time, the creed does not so much evolve as it is deployed to new purposes, according to Huntington’s conception.

⁵ Anthony Kronman, *The Assault on American Excellence*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), p. 8

⁶ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1995).

⁷ James W. Ceaser, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism,” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 3-28; Patrick J. Deneen, “Cities of Man on a Hill,” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 29-52; Peter S. Onuf, “American Exceptionalism and National Identity,” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 77-100; Rogers M. Smith, “‘Our Republican Example’: The Significance of the American Experiments in Government in the Twenty-First Century,” *American Political Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 101-128.

⁸ Kathy Frankovic, “America’s Political Parties Remain Polarized,” *Today.yougov.com*, May 2019, Accessed September 24 2019, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2019/05/28/americas-political-parties-remain-polarized>

But his conception is only one interpretation of the ideational nature of American politics. Ever since de Tocqueville visited and analyzed *Democracy in America*, studies of APD have attempted to unpick its uniqueness and shed light on the potential parallels binding the American people. Naturally, studies conjure up some variations of the creed. In his article “Political Culture,” which considers a wide body of APD literature on identity, Brown University’s James Morone surmises that American political identity is defined by four major aspects: Liberalism; Communal Culture; an Ascriptive Tradition, and Morality.⁹ Per Morone’s understanding of the American creed, society continuously evolves in relation to changing notions of liberalism and communitarianism. Democrats and Republicans alike, he claims, “act precisely like the Lockean liberals,” yet are similarly “communitarians more than individualists.”¹⁰ For Morone, it is this communitarianism that creates conflict over the course of American political history, rather than the divergence of the ideals of the American Creed and the political reality as Huntington argues.

But Morone shares with Huntington a focus on how morality and moral claims are important to American political culture. His 2003 book *Hellfire Nation* outlines an ecclesiastical conception of American political identity, contending with what he describes as the “moral urge at the heart of American politics and society.”¹¹ He expands on his previous liberal and communitarian account, and presents the “American Symbiosis” where liberalism, community, and morality meet. Inserting morality into the picture explains both the existence of American society’s unique political identity, as well as its development over time. “In the United States,”

⁹ James A. Morone, “Political Culture: Consensus, Conflict, and Culture War,” in *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*, ed. Richard Valelly, Suzanne Mettler, and Robert C. Lieberman, (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, August 2016), p. 11

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 5-6

¹¹ James Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 4

Morone writes, “the lines get drawn and justified, ripped and razed by moral judgments.”¹² In these terms, Morone describes something akin to the politics of a creed passion period.

Another seminal account of the source of tensions in the U.S.’s liberal democracy is the “multiple traditions” thesis, articulated by the expert in American political identity and political thought, Rogers Smith. The central claim of this thesis is that there are three predominant— and often competing or contradictory— traditions in APD: Liberal, Republican, and Ascriptive. The Liberal Tradition refers to a belief in limited government and the protection of individual rights, and the Republican Tradition encompasses representative government institutions, rather than the direct democracy of ancient Athens. Smith argues these two traditions work in tandem, while the third tradition is entirely distinct. The Ascriptive Tradition refers to culture, religious, ethnic, racial, and gendered hierarchies in APD. It is the tensions among these traditions that explain the shortcomings and development of American political society, such as those that surround inequality according to race, gender, and sexual orientation. Notably, Smith observes that American history has not been a simple straightforward march towards the Liberal and Republican traditions, but rather it is often a story about resurgence within the Ascriptive Tradition, pointing to the rise of Jim Crow after the end of slavery, for example.¹³ Smith’s thesis would also explain the tightened immigration policy under the Trump Administration. Thus, while Smith’s thesis may more substantially allow for both progress and reversals of progress than Huntington’s conception, they share the notion that creedal values are an important driver of political development.

¹² Ibid, p. 11

¹³ Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (September 1993): 549-566; Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

Finally, former Dean of Yale Law School Anthony Kronman provides an important offshoot of conventional analyses of the American creed. Like Morone, he reinserts ideas of morality into narratives of APD and the nation's conscious society. Kronman, though, is concerned with how these may distinctly apply to the university, as opposed to society as a whole. He argues that universities should uphold the Aristotelian preoccupation with virtue and the humanistic pursuit of excellence, rather than reflect the growing egalitarianism of the broader political society. His overall argument amounts to a case for why events on college campuses, like the renaming of Yale's Calhoun College, should not be an environment for creedal passion politics.

Regardless of the exact meaning or categorization, these works and the APD literature on ideas more broadly all support a few key claims that are important to this research. First, creedal principles exist in American political society. Second, these principles can evolve or apply themselves to different events throughout history, facilitating political change over time.

Defining Creedal Criteria

Creedal passion periods do not simply pertain to years in American political history that saw marked change. Huntington distinguishes between periods of notable progress and creedal passion periods. The focus of change during the former, like the 1860s when the Civil War eliminated southern agrarian slave-holding supremacy and in the 1930s when the working class gained political influence, "concerns the role and power of social forces."¹⁴ Meanwhile the latter are, in his words, "distinguished by institutional realignment and reform," since the focus of change in these instances "concerns the structure and character of political institutions and

¹⁴ Huntington, p. 86

practices.”¹⁵ Huntington has extensive criteria for discerning whether a period fits the creedal passion category. He formulates 14 definitive characteristics that creedal passion periods each fulfill:

1. Discontent was widespread; authority, hierarchy, specialization, and expertise were widely questioned or rejected.
2. Political ideas were taken seriously and played an important role in the controversies of the time.
3. American values of liberty, individualism, equality, popular control of government, and the openness of government were stressed in public discussion.
4. Moral indignation over the IvI gap was widespread.
5. Politics was characterized by agitation, excitement, commotion, even upheaval— far beyond the usual routine of interest-group conflict.
6. Hostility towards power (the antipower ethic) was intense, with the central issue of politics often being defined as “liberty versus power.”
7. The exposure of muckraking of the IvI gap was a central feature of politics.
8. Movements flourished devoted to specific reforms or “causes” (women, minorities, criminal justice, temperance, peace).
9. New media forms appeared, significantly increasing the influence of the media in politics.
10. Political participation expanded, often assuming new forms and often expressed through hitherto unusual channels.
11. The principle of political cleavages of the period tended to cut across economic class lines, with some combination of middle- and working-class groups promoting change.
12. Major reforms were attempted in political institutions in order to limit power and reshape institutions in terms of American ideals (some of which were successful and some of which were lasting).
13. A basic realignment occurred in the relations between social forces and political institutions, often including but not limited to the political party system.
14. The prevailing ethos promoting reform in the name of traditional ideals was, in a sense, forward-looking and backward-looking, progressive and conservative.¹⁶

For the parameters of this research, I have grouped Huntington’s 14 criteria into four broader categories: (1) *Public appeals to values associated with the Declaration of Independence, the Founders, or the Constitution*; (2) *Widespread discontent at the current regime*; (3) *Revolutionary demands in conjunction with new forms of media*; and (4) *Explicit misalignment of ideas and institutions*. These groups broadly address the creedal underpinnings

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 86-87

of issue debates, the inevitable diverging interpretations of creedal principles, and recurrent calls for “more responsive, more liberal, more democratic” institutions.¹⁷ I will use them to investigate whether the current moment constitutes a fifth creedal passion period, examining the political discourse in each case and the means and venues through which these ideas were contested.

Whether or not it does, creedal principles are clearly as pertinent today as ever. As Smith alludes to with the Jim Crow laws in the first part of the 20th century, almost all salient issues in American political history surface conceptions of creedal principles. Distributive policy, Supreme Court decisions like *Reno vs. American Civil Liberties Union* (1997), and gun control debates involve manifestations of principles like egalitarianism, liberalism, and individualism to a degree seemingly unmatched by the rest of the Western world.

The next section tests the Green New Deal and the renaming of Yale’s Calhoun College against the four broad categories derived from Huntington’s 14 characteristics. Meeting much of the criteria will suggest that the current political era may constitute a fifth creedal passion period. The conclusion will consider a slightly different question: whether the cases *should* indicate a creedal passion period.

CASE I: THE GREEN NEW DEAL

At first glance, the Green New Deal appears an unlikely case for examining the current era in the context of a potential creedal passion period. The resolution originates on the left and garners much socialist support because of its calls for radical changes, which tend not to closely associate with creedal principles like liberty and freedom. However, climate change is the most imminent threat in the 21st century, forcing politicians and citizens to realize their responsibility in mitigating it. Because it will involve significant federal power, debates inevitably touch on the

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 88

role of government and individual responsibility in society. Thus, one might indeed expect debates to conjure up merging and diverging principles of the American creed.

In this case, I first introduce the resolution and the terms it lays out. I then evaluate it against the broad characteristics I have outlined from Huntington's criteria, using them to deduce the likelihood that the case indicates a creedal passion period.

Background

In 1970, then-President Richard Nixon proposed the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), an organization whose creation marked the moment at which the United States federal government had to contend with the issue of climate change. Since that time, environmental concerns about the rising global temperature, rising seawaters, deteriorating air quality, and continued deforestation have unfortunately taken on more of a political cast than an objective one. As global temperatures get hotter, in a corresponding way so do political debates. Legislative approaches range from the most conservative lack of acknowledgment of climate change, like bolstering domestic coal and oil production, to the most radical, like overthrowing the capitalist structure in favor of a carbon-neutral centralized economic plan. Among the most radical is the Green New Deal (GND). The idea began to circulate after the three-time Pulitzer Prize winning political journalist, Thomas Friedman wrote in 2007, "like the New Deal, if we undertake the green version, it has the potential to create a whole new clean power industry to spur our economy into the 21st century."¹⁸ His emphasis veered away from individualized attempts at cutting carbon footprint towards a comprehensive program that reorganizes the economy and American society.

¹⁸ Thomas L. Friedman, "A Warning From the Garden," *The New York Times*, January 19 2007, Accessed October 22 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/19/opinion/19friedman.html>

On February 7, 2019, Senator Edward Markey (D-MA) and House member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) published their version of what Friedman envisioned—the Green New Deal. Its promise: a resolution, in the sense of a determination to mitigate the climate crisis and also in the sense of articulating the corresponding goals in an official document. After outlining findings by 2018 United Nations climate assessment reports, Markey and AOC proposed, in essence, a federal mission statement. “It is the duty of the Federal Government,” they write, “(A) to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions,” “(D) to secure for all people of the United States for generations to come— (i) clean air and water; (ii) climate and community resiliency,” and “... (v) a sustainable environment.”¹⁹ Demands are not confined to the parameters of environmental policy. The healthcare system, income inequality and aging national infrastructure require not amending but transforming. The GND sponsors pledge that the federal government must also grant all citizens “high-quality healthcare,” “high-quality union jobs that pay the prevailing wage,” and “a new sustainable food system.”²⁰ Thus, these broad and far-reaching proposals mean the bill extends itself beyond one that simply mitigates the impacts of the one-dimensional issue of climate change. The resolution constitutes a whole-scale re-ordering of federal responsibility in American society, from healthcare to food to living wages.

As with all ideas that intend to alter or, at least, challenge the existing order, the GND brings to bear larger questions within American Political Development, the most elemental of which pertain to national political identity and notions of the American creed. However, given the conventional—albeit false—understanding of the Constitution as designed to limit the power

¹⁹ Valérie Masson-Delmotte, Hans-Otto Pörtner, Panmao Zhai, et al., *IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C 2018; Fourth National Climate Assessment November 2018*, November 2018, Accessed November 30 2019, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/download/#full>; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Climate Crisis, *Reorganizing the Duty of the Federal Government to Create a Green New Deal*, 116th Cong., 1st sess., 2019, 1-14

²⁰ Ibid

of the federal government, advocates for resolute policies on climate change might be expected to avoid appealing to either the nation's fundamental values or its founding. Proponents of the GND, though, often preface their arguments with references to the founding documents and their provisions for an energetic central government. Meanwhile, critics spurn the resolution as an interrogation of consumer freedom and a frontal assault on the free-market.

Regardless of whether the GND is simply pandering to alarmist youth or whether the climate crisis indeed requires this far-reaching revolutionary approach, its substance opens up competing claims to the principles that constitute Huntington's American Creed. The Green New Deal, hence, affords an ideal national test case for determining if the contemporary era represents the fifth creedal passion period.

A Climate (Plan) of Creedal Passion

First, both those who support and those who oppose the GND make *public appeals to values associated with the Declaration of Independence, the Founders, or the Constitution*—the first of Huntington's broader criteria for creedal passion periods. While we may anticipate such appeals from opponents on the right who champion free market liberalism and limited government, appeals by the GND's proponents are somewhat striking and distinguish the movement from other rather more subdued climate change initiatives.

Though devised by players furthest to the left on the political field, the GND resolution professes fealty to American political and constitutional ideals. Markey and AOC employ exact phrases from the Declaration of Independence in the resolution. Just as the original document proclaims that governments are instituted, "to secure these rights [Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness]" to "all men," the GND begins "it is the duty of the federal government to create a

Green New Deal— ... to secure for all people of the United States...”²¹ Its supporters, such as Xiuhtezcatl Martinez, followed suit. A leading figure of the GND, Martinez, along with other members of Earth Guardians— a self-acclaimed “tribe” of young climate activists— filed a lawsuit against the federal government defending their rights to life and liberty.²² The plaintiffs accused the government of negating climate change and “foreclosing on a republican heritage.” The “final loss,” they added, would result in subsequent generations being “estranged from the deepest and richest source of which it means to be an American.”²³ The impassioned associations with the nation’s founding continue throughout the appeal. America’s forefathers, such as Jefferson, Madison, Franklin and Lincoln, they assert, held a “widely-shared principle that society must behave responsibly so that children present and future will inherit a rich and enduring legacy,” since after all, “there is no greater monument to the tradition of ordered liberty than the nation’s responsible commitment to society and environment: past, present, and future.”²⁴

The remarks are arguably even more surprising because some environmentalists believe they are detrimental to an effort to bolster the GND’s legitimacy. According to *The Trouble*— a magazine whose aim it is to “catalyze meaningful leftist climate action”— GND leaders should abstain from referencing the Constitution or the Founding altogether.²⁵ An article from January 2019 entitled “Constitutional Brinkmanship and the Green New Deal” warns that it is “frankly suicidal” especially in the wake of the “increasing weaponization of the First Amendment to

²¹ Thomas Jefferson, “The Declaration of Independence,” July 4 1776, Retrieved from <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/1419123>; U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Climate Crisis, *Reorganizing the Duty of the Federal Government to Create a Green New Deal*, 5

²² Earth Guardians, “Our Mission: Inspire,” *Earthguardians.org*, Accessed October 25 2019, <https://www.earthguardians.org/>

²³ Juliana et al. vs. United States of America et al., 18-36082 U.S. 9, January 2019, Retrieved from http://blogs2.law.columbia.edu/climate-change-litigation/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/case-documents/2019/20190301_docket-18-36082_amicus-brief-4.pdf

²⁴ Ibid, 10

²⁵ The Trouble, “Manifesto,” *The-trouble.com*, Accessed October 24 2019, <https://www.the-trouble.com/manifesto>

block economic regulations,” in recent Supreme Court decisions (*Matal vs. Tam* (2017); *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission* (2010)). By engaging in debates about America’s founding values, those behind the GND find themselves on dangerous footing, footing that the opposition is overwhelmingly better accustomed to utilizing. In other words, the right has co-opted the founding documents and knows how to use them in pursuing its ideological interest. Still, even though her ostensible allies warn against ceding ground to the right that curtail the possibility of the GND, AOC continues to make founding arguments and pledges that the resolution is actually a return to the constitutional principles of the United States.

Critics on the right indeed hastily repudiate the GND for its “potent un-American” nature.²⁶ For instance, the *Objective Standard* has published a multitude of articles attacking the GND for its unconstitutionality and violations of freedom. In a March 2019 piece, the journal’s reporter Tim White contends that certain provisions of the GND, like the right to healthcare, assume that if “some people have the *right* to the goods and services others produce” then “those producers have *no* right to their own lives and property.” This, he maintains, is incompatible with the Declaration’s promise that “all men have unalienable rights.” Also, the resolution lays out proposals designed to “protect” various groups and resources, but as White concludes, “Not one instance refers, even obliquely, to protecting the individual rights of all Americans.”²⁷ A further wave of criticism among conservatives emanates from the defense of laissez-faire economics—a concept for which the United States is the archetype. As political correspondents for the *Washington Post* Jeff Stein and David Weigel put it, the resolution promises economic security

²⁶ Joseph Ellis, “The Green New Deal isn’t Socialism. It’s what the Founding Fathers Wanted,” *Cnn.com*, April 2018, Accessed October 12 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/18/opinions/green-new-deal-not-socialism-ellis/index.html>

²⁷ Tim White, “The Green New Deal: The Plan to Sink America,” *Theobjectivestandard.com*, June 11 2019, Accessed October 2 2019, <https://www.theobjectivestandard.com/2019/06/the-green-new-deal-a-plan-to-sink-america/>

to those “unwilling to work,” undermining a principle the nation was largely founded upon.²⁸

These explicit references to founding principles and national values on both sides suggest that through the lens of the GND, 2019 survives the first of Huntington’s criteria as a creedal passion period.

Next, the GND represents *widespread discontent with the current administration*— the second broad category of Huntington’s criteria. The resolution begins by highlighting the far-reaching impacts of the federal government’s failure to properly address environmental concerns. Basic needs, Markey and AOC note, like “Clean air, clean water, healthy food, and adequate health care, housing, transportation, and education, are largely inaccessible to a significant portion of the United States population.” What is more, they add, the “anti-labor policies” favored in the current economic system has led to “(B) the third-worst level of socio-economic mobility in the developed world before the Great Recession... (D) Inadequate resources for public sector workers... [and] (3) The greatest income inequality since the 1920s.”²⁹ The Trump Administration and the Republican Party are not the only ones under fire for inadequate environmental management, either. In June of 2019, 800 members of the Sunrise Movement, a group who ardently supports the GND, congregated and slept the night on the stairs of the Democrat National Committee Office in Washington DC. The young activists protested against the lack of attention they felt Democratic candidates had given to the climate crisis in primary debates. Discontent extends further still to the prevailing economic, political, and social system: capitalism. Fred Iutzi of the Land Institute and Robert Jensen of the University of Texas at

²⁸ Jeff Stein and David Weigel, “Ocasio-Cortez Retracts Erroneous information about Green New Deal Backed by 2020 Democratic Candidates,” *The Washington Post*, February 11 2019, Accessed September 20 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/02/11/ocasio-cortez-retracts-erroneous-information-about-green-new-deal-backed-by-democratic-candidates/?noredirect=on>

²⁹ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Climate Crisis, *Reorganizing the Duty of the Federal Government to Create a Green New Deal*, 3-5

Austin note that American capitalism is based on a “domination / subordination dynamic” which, they argue, “draws down the ecological capital of the planet at a rate well beyond replacement levels.”³⁰ They maintain that for some supporters the GND constitutes “a first-step toward transcending capitalism and moving toward a partnership model that puts human caring above material acquisition as the primary goal.”³¹ Clearly, within the parameters of GND discourse, there is discontent across the ideological spectrum with aspects of the current regime’s approach to the climate crisis, including even discontent with the societal structure at large.

Further, even though proponents believe the GND is consistent with America’s founding documents, *the resolution simultaneously makes revolutionary demands*. The final pages of the resolution stipulate the federal government’s responsibilities for achieving the GND’s goals. All people of the United States, the authors insist, must be provided with “high-quality health care; affordable housing; economic security,” as well as, “training and high quality education, including higher education,” and finally, a “job with a family-sustaining wage, adequate family and medical leave, paid vacations, and retirement security.”³² At present, just under 10 per cent of the American public are without health insurance of any kind; 65 per cent are without a college degree and 57 percent are without retirement assets in an individual or employer pension plan.³³ In other words, the current system does not provide for a large proportion of the population, let alone just the most impoverished. Supplying healthcare, a college education, and

³⁰ Fred Iutzi and Robert Jenson, “Growing a Green New Deal: Agriculture’s Role in Economic Justice and Ecological Sustainability,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Partnership Studies*, 6 (1), 2019, Article 4, <https://doi.org/10.24926/ijps.v6i1.1749>, pp. 2-4

³¹ Ibid

³² U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Climate Crisis, *Reorganizing the Duty of the Federal Government to Create a Green New Deal*, 10-12

³³ Edward Berchick, Jessica Barnett, and Rachel Upton, *Health Insurance in the United States: 2018*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2019), P. 60-267; U.S. Census Bureau, “Percentage of the U.S. Population who have Completed Four Years of College or More from 1940 to 2018, By Gender,” Chart. February 19 2019, *Statista.com*, Accessed October 26 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/184272/educational-attainment-of-college-diploma-or-higher-by-gender/>; Jennifer Erin Brown, Joelle Saad-Lessler, and Diane Oakley, *Retirement in America | Out of Reach for Most Americans?* (Washington, DC: National Institute on Retirement Security, 2018), p.

a job that pays the prevailing wage to all Americans will entail what a press release last year by the Sunrise Movement called “a 10-year... justice-oriented economic mobilization plan,”—which is simply a convoluted plea for replacing capitalism with socialism. Conservative critics are quick to argue that, as well being ideologically and fiscally unfeasible, the prospect threatens the First Amendment. For instance, White warns that these proposals “have in common their attempt to replace freedom with “security,”” and so accepting the GND would “entrench unchecked government power even further into American politics.”³⁴

Huntington also argues that revolutionary demands occur *in conjunction with new forms of media*. AOC indeed avails the newest media outlets to reach supporters and reiterate her demands. On the evening of April 3, 2019, AOC completed an Instagram Live broadcast during which she likened her and her supporter’s activism to an established creedal passion period, the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement. But, she warns that because “the internet documents everything,” those who resist bold action and revolutionary demands of the GND—in her eyes, climate change deniers—will be unable to hide from history like those who opposed Black Suffrage.³⁵ In essence, AOC is utilizing the constant exposure to ideas that social media allows and that is pronounced particularly among younger generations. The use of Instagram here represents, in Huntington’s words, the “jump in scope and intensity of political communication.”³⁶

Finally, the GND also illustrates the last of Huntington’s criteria: *the explicit misalignment of ideas and institutions*. The GND resolution states that keeping global temperatures 1.5 degrees Celsius below pre-industrialized levels requires the reduction of

³⁴ White, “The Green New Deal: The Plan to Sink America.”

³⁵ TheDC Shorts, “AOC On Instagram Live.” YouTube Video, 3:40, April 4 2019, Accessed October 26 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TznpTrzqp8>

³⁶ Huntington, p. 100

greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 60 per cent from 2010 levels by 2030 and to net-zero by 2050.³⁷ Yet, withdrawing from the 2016 Paris Accord—“a hail to American leadership,” according to former President Barack Obama—leaves the United States unanswerable to reducing emissions in line with the 20/20/20 targets set forth in the agreement. The Trump Administration’s statement of withdrawal on June 1 2017 incited anger and fear throughout the world, as it signified the United States’ intention to renege on its commitment to cutting global emissions – a far cry from the ideas and goals of the GND and its supporters. Also, the GND uncovers misaligned views of ideas and institutions on the role of fossil fuel producers in the United States. During a protest in front of the California Bay Area district offices, Sunrise Movement members urged congressional representatives Nancy Pelosi and Barbara Lee to endorse the select committee of the GND. One protestor, Cheyenne Rupert from Wisconsin asserted, “We need cleaner energy, we need to stop the fossil fuel companies from taking over.”³⁸ Meanwhile, the Trump Administration’s Energy Independence Plan reflects a somewhat different view. “Rather than continuing the current path to undermine and block America’s fossil fuel producers, the Trump Administration will encourage the production of these resources,” the manifesto reads. “Energy,” the President believes, “is the lifeblood of modern society. It is the industry that fuels all other industries.”³⁹

But the GND embodies more than just a misalignment or lack of consensus. The debates bring to bear the outright hostility of ideas and institutions on climate change. President Trump has steadfastly dismissed the severity of the issue from his early advances within the Republican

³⁷ U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Climate Crisis, *Reorganizing the Duty of the Federal Government to Create a Green New Deal*, 3

³⁸ Cheyenne Rupert, as cited in Christopher Cook, “Protestors demand a Green New Deal,” *48hills.org*, November 20 2019, Accessed October 27 2019, <https://48hills.org/2018/11/green-new-deal/>

³⁹ “Energy Independence,” *GreatAgain.gov*. Archived November 17 2016, Accessed October 15 2019, <https://www.greatagain.gov/policy/energy-independence.html>

Party, throughout his 2016 election campaign, and during his presidency. 2012 saw the first of his infamous denouncements, which possibly foretold his current hostility towards China, too, when he tweeted, “The concept of climate change was created by and for the Chinese.”⁴⁰ Then, three years later at a rally in South Carolina, he spurned then-President Obama’s preoccupation with global warming, calling it “a hoax.”⁴¹ And, in January this year when a polar vortex struck much of the Midwest and East Coast of the U.S., the president took to Twitter once more. “Wouldn’t be bad to have a little of that good old-fashioned Global Warming right now!” he joked.⁴² The critique is not just limited to notorious climate change deniers, either. Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi derisively referred to the resolution as “The green dream, or whatever they call it,” and followed up by stating “nobody knows what it is, but they’re for it, right?”⁴³ Ideas as radical as the GND, as well as those more moderate who acknowledge the need for a more comprehensive approach to the climate crisis, are not only misaligned but are in fact currently at odds with the world’s most powerful unilateral institution— the United States federal government. Notably, there is also a misalignment between the proponents of the GND and realists from the Democratic Party who advocate for an earnest approach to the climate crisis like Pelosi.

Case Conclusion

⁴⁰ Donald Trump, Twitter Post, November 6 2012, 2:15PM, <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/265895292191248385?lang=en>

⁴¹ “Donald Trump Campaign Rally in Hilton Head, South Carolina,” C-SPAN Video, 35:38, December 30 2016, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?402610-1/donald-trump-campaign-rally-hilton-head-south-carolina>

⁴² Donald Trump, Twitter Post, January 20 2019, 4:59AM, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1086971499725160448>

⁴³ Nancy Pelosi, as cited in Bret Stephens, “Is Nancy Pelosi a Climate Skeptic?” *The New York Times*, February 15 2019, Accessed December 2 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/15/opinion/green-new-deal-climate-change-pelosi.html>

The Green New Deal demonstrates the inclusion of creedal principles in debates about serious national issues, like climate change. Those on each side, young and old, Republicans and Democrats, appeal to the same aspects of the founding documents in making their distinct arguments; express discontent with some aspect of the U.S.'s climate policy; make or resist a revolutionary approach; and create a misalignment of ideas and institutions. Its essence and far-reaching scope, however, may undermine its prospects to pass. Whether the resolution becomes an even more significant factor in political debates – such as the 2020 presidential election – will further determine the extent to which it indicates a creedal passion period.

CASE II: THE RENAMING OF CALHOUN COLLEGE

The renaming of Calhoun College in February 2017 appears an equally unlikely lens through which to examine the current era as a potential creedal passion period. It may be expected that broad and underlying creedal principles might not be so relevant in a campus setting, and also the decision's focus on problematic parts of American history may make the case appear unlikely to invoke American founding ideals in a manner indicative of a creedal passion period. The campus level variation does provide a distinct level of political behavior, yet one that still markedly employs principles of the American creed. Therefore, the case constitutes some of strongest suggestive evidence that political battles on a wide variety of issues and in a wide variety of contexts are likely being fought on creedal terms.

To unpack the case, I will first review the context, including the events elsewhere and those more immediate on the Yale campus that preceded the decision. Then, I will evaluate the case against the four broad categories born from Huntington's fourteen to determine if the renaming of Calhoun College serves to indicate a fifth creedal passion period. I will leave the

question of whether it *should* to the conclusion. Lastly, it is worth recognizing the backdrop of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement broadly involves making demands for change and greater justice, while implicating various values in American history.⁴⁴ Its national prominence very probably inspired the relatively fast mobilization of members of the Yale community, and thus could underpin the potential creedal passion environment at the campus level.

Background

“Our unanimous conclusion is that **the name should change,**” reads the last line of the opening paragraph from the Report of Presidential Advisory Group on Renaming Calhoun College.⁴⁵ A month after receiving the January 2017 report, Yale University President Peter Salovey announced the decision to rename one of Yale’s then-12 residential colleges. Since 1931, Calhoun College had honored John C. Calhoun – Yale Class of 1804 and a former U.S. senator and vice president – and had served as a place where students lived, ate, studied, and socialized. The building memorialized Calhoun, the Yale graduate, statesman, and political thinker. But, his “*principle legacy*”— a term that proved integral to the final decision to rename— was that of a white supremacist, slaveholder, ardent states’ rights advocate and early secessionist. The name selection may have received a relatively muted reaction back in 1931, but its controversy dominated events and conversations on campus (and elsewhere) in the semesters leading up to President Salovey’s announcement in the winter of 2017.

⁴⁴ Debra Thompson and Chloe Thurston, “American Political Development in the Era of Black Lives Matter,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 6, no. 1 (2018): 116-119; Kirstine Taylor, “American political development and Black Lives Matter in the age of incarceration,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6, no. 1 (2018): 153-161.

⁴⁵ John Lewis Gaddis et al., *Report of the Presidential Advisory Group on Renaming Calhoun College*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2017), Accessed November 7 2019, https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Presidential%20Advisory%20Group%20-%20Calhoun%2001_13_17.pdf, p. 2

Although the decision affected me personally as a student living in what is now Grace Hopper College and formerly Calhoun College, the renaming decision represents just one example of a broader series of controversies currently afflicting American college campuses. In 2017, the University of Southern California's students challenged the name of the school's mascot for having the same name as Robert E. Lee's horse— Traveler.⁴⁶ The administration of Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania sought to appease protesting students when it placed a plaque by Lynch Memorial Hall to affirm that the namesake reflected a former college president rather than the practice of lynching.⁴⁷ Perhaps the closest parallel example to the Calhoun case at Yale was the push by protesting students to rename the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton. In this instance, the university's administration chose to keep the name despite students offended by Princeton's allegiance to a former president with problematic racial views.⁴⁸ The context may be different, but the fundamental issue is the same.

Some observers celebrate these events as representing society's acknowledgement of and efforts to repudiate the horrors of slavery, and thus celebrate and encourage the growing inclusion and equality of African Americans in the United States. For one Yale law professor, John Witt, the renaming marked the point at which Yale rightly and finally stopped according honor to a man he describes as "the most fervent architect of white supremacy."⁴⁹ For another Yale law professor, and former Dean, Anthony Kronman, the events reflect another problem in

⁴⁶ Nathan Fenno, "Traveler, USC's mascot, comes under scrutiny for having a name similar to Robert E. Lee's horse," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2017, Accessed September 30 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/sports/la-sp-usc-traveler-20170818-story.html>

⁴⁷ Colin Deppen, "Naming of Lebanon Valley College's Lynch building questioned amid equality push," *Pennlive.com*, December 8 2015, Accessed September 30 2019, https://www.pennlive.com/news/2015/12/naming_of_lebanon_valley_colle.html

⁴⁸ Merrit Kennedy, "Princeton Will Keep Woodrow Wilson's Name on School Buildings," *Npr.org*, April 4 2016, Accessed September 30 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/04/04/472985937/princeton-will-keep-woodrow-wilsons-name-on-school-buildings>

⁴⁹ John Witt, "Witt: Slouching back to Calhoun," *The Yale Daily News*, September 3 2019, Accessed November 21 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2019/09/03/witt-slouching-back-to-calhoun/>

American society. He argues they are symptoms of what he describes as the “feverish egalitarianism” of college campuses, which to him constitutes “a threat to our democracy.”⁵⁰ Kronman distinguishes between political and social egalitarianism— which concerns the 5th 14th, 19th amendments— and the dangerous gravitation towards human egalitarianism. The latter, he claims, undermines the grace of human excellence, ignores the importance and lessons of certain events in U.S. history, and threatens the precious aristocratic spirit of universities.

The two professors defined themselves in opposition to each other on the issue, but regardless of the stance, the events on college campuses lay claim to an intersection of fundamental political, historical and societal issues ranging from the most abstract to the very objective. Among the most abstract involves examining the role of history, education and commemoration not only in isolation, but how they are intertwined. At the other extreme lies the objective immorality of slavery and systematic racism. While I am hopeful that no one disputes the evils of slavery, students, faculty, and onlookers did debate the implications of continuing to memorialize John C. Calhoun. Why would Yale University hesitate to distance itself from Calhoun, a man chiefly remembered as one of the 19th century’s leading defendants of the subjugation of African Americans? Or, would renaming a building signify denial and an effort to brush Yale’s and the country’s fraught history under a carpet? Put another way by then-Dean of Yale and former master of Calhoun College Jonathan Holloway, would renaming the college “forget ugliness for the convenience of the modern moment?”⁵¹ What arose as the key question — and the ultimate proxy for determining the eventual outcome — was whether the namesake was conducive to the University’s goal of educating future leaders in an “ethical, interdependent,

⁵⁰ Kronman, *The Assault on American Excellence*, inside cover

⁵¹ Jonathan Holloway, as cited in Ray Hardman, “Yale’s Calhoun College: History Lesson or Institutional Racism,” *Wnpr.org*, June 2015, Accessed November 12 2019, <https://www.wnpr.org/post/yales-calhoun-college-history-lesson-or-institutional-racism>

and diverse community.”⁵² “This is the hard question,” the Committee to Establish Renaming admitted in their letter to President Salovey.⁵³

President Salovey tasked the Committee with providing principles by which to settle this question. Law and history professor John Witt ’94 LAW ’99 GRD ’00 chaired the committee of 12 members who ranged from Pulitzer prize-winning Sterling history professor David Blight, to then-undergraduate Dasia Moore ’18, to then-Dean Holloway. After the committee published the four principles for renaming in a letter to President Salovey, responsibility fell to another group named the Presidential Advisory Group on the Renaming of Calhoun College. Its members, professors G. Leonard Baker, Jr., Jacqueline Goldsby and John Lewis Gaddis had to apply the committee’s findings to the Calhoun case specifically. The group concluded: “Calhoun himself defined a principle legacy – his defense of racial inequality as integral to national development – fundamentally at odds with Yale’s mission of educating future leaders within ‘an ethical, interdependent, and diverse community.’”⁵⁴ The landmark decision incited both widespread celebration and criticism. Holloway wrote of being “thrilled” about Yale’s “public stance” against honoring a man “whose principle legacy is so deeply in conflict with our core mission and values.”⁵⁵ On the other hand, Kronman shamed the outcome as “an educational failure,” and describes the process by which the question was put to rest as a deterministic “blur of administrative legerdemain” that lacked “intellectual or moral leadership... from the start.”⁵⁶

⁵² Yale University, “Mission Statement,” *Yale.edu*, Accessed November 11 2019, <https://www.yale.edu/about-yale/mission-statement>

⁵³ John Fabian Witt et al., *Report of the Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2016), Accessed November 7 2019, https://president.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CEPR_FINAL_12-2-16.pdf, p. 18

⁵⁴ Gaddis et al., p. 4

⁵⁵ Jonathan Holloway, “Holloway: Looking Back at Calhoun,” *The Yale Daily News*, February 13 2017, Accessed November 21 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2017/02/13/holloway-looking-back-on-calhoun/>

⁵⁶ Anthony Kronman, “Kronman: Politics by Another Name,” *The Yale Daily News*, September 4 2019, Accessed September 10 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2019/09/04/kronman-politics-by-another-name/>; Ibid, *The Assault on American Excellence*, p. 4

Three years later, implications of the decision still crop up in the classroom, around campus, in university publications, and in public discourse.

Creedal Passion on Campus

Finding an appropriate equilibrium between freedom and equality is often a liberal democracy's Achilles' heel, but in the case of slavery and its historical memory in the United States these two creedal principles seem to merge and diverge together. The case takes on conceptions of morality and historical memory in ways that Green New Deal need not. Also, the Calhoun case differs in that the actors on each side of the debate appealed to distinct constitutional traditions rather than contesting precisely the same ones as actors in the Green New Deal case do. Both cases, though, incorporate notions of the American creed.

First, actors in creedal passion periods make *public appeals to values associated with the Declaration of Independence, the Founders, or the Constitution*. Those who advocated for the name change implicitly evoked the prolonged racial discrimination in America and the corresponding breach of the 14th amendment rather than explicitly appealing to the documents. By contrast, those who spurned the decision called on what they perceived as the University's violation of the spirit of first amendment. But, as with many social movements, both the endorsers and critics of the egalitarian crusade within political society and on the Yale campus implicitly reference, by default, the equal opportunity promise of the Declaration.

Advocates criticized Yale's commitment to honoring a man who called slavery "a positive good" 150 years after it was outlawed by the 13th amendment. The namesake, which professor of American studies professor Charles Musser calls "a shrine to white supremacy," represents and is symptomatic of the lasting racial inequality that the civil war amendments were

designed to conquer.⁵⁷ African Americans in particular felt the prominence of the racial degradation that the Calhoun name reinforced. A black dining hall worker in Trumbull College, Vanesa Suarez, for example, told *The New Haven Register* that because of the name, “As a Yale employee I am constantly reminded of my status.”⁵⁸ In response to the University’s preliminary decision to keep the name in the spring of 2016, an undergraduate in the Class of 2019 tweeted “This corporation is selfish, insensitive, and antagonistic towards POC [people of color].”⁵⁹ The college name served as a harrowing reminder and a symbol of the enduring institutional racism that did not disappear after the abolition of slavery. Therefore, advocates viewed it as a contemporary and lasting obstruction to both the equality supposedly established by passage of the 14th amendment. Also, the contention that Calhoun College “will always preclude minority students from feeling truly at home at Yale” signaled that keeping the name would stand fundamentally at odds with the idea of equal opportunity outlined in the Declaration of Independence.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, those critical of the decision appeal to a different constitutional amendment — the freedom of expression — and its requisite on college campuses particularly. Renaming Calhoun College encourages, such critics believe, intolerance towards opposing viewpoints and contentious memories. It silences the voices and deliberation so vital to the university’s responsibility of pursuing truth and human progress. In his 2018 book *Speak Freely*, Princeton’s Keith Whittington writes of the American university as a community that “grows rich through

⁵⁷ Charles Musser to Charles B. Johnson, September 23 2016, <http://www.charlesmusser.com/?p=2693>

⁵⁸ Ed Stannard, “New Haven rally draws hundreds to support call to change name of Yale’s Calhoun College,” *New Haven Register*, October 26 2018, Accessed November 13 2019, <https://www.nhregister.com/colleges/article/New-Haven-rally-draws-hundreds-to-support-call-to-11320993.php>

⁵⁹ @YoungAdultRebel, Twitter Post, April 28 2016, 4:03 PM, <https://twitter.com/YoungAdultRebel/status/725822854768513025>

⁶⁰ Heaven Berhane, Nathan Empsall, and Nicole Tinson, “Calhoun College Petition,” Petition, 2015, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfE8qhKII3C3bXKEDmEUM_K43UyipRPJubfWNW6bwu9i-54Sw/viewform

the free exchange of ideas,” and whose core mission is “free inquiry, not indoctrination.”⁶¹ He contests Yale’s decision to seemingly whitewash history with renaming the building. After all, he continues, “scholarship is a conversation... that extends across generations” that should not, “hide the light under a bushel, but rather to let it shine forth.”⁶² Whittington has company. Three days after news broke of the renaming decision, *The National Review* published a scathing headline, “Yale Removes Calhoun Name: Foolish Erasure of History.”⁶³ The position is not one only belonging to academics, it is one visibly held by others out there more generally. Because of the campus-level setting, perhaps the lack of explicit public appeals and rather the tactic allusions to the founding documents is unsurprising. Still, founding principles like equality, freedom, and liberty underpinned cries on both sides of the renaming debate.

Widespread discontent with the current administration characterized the renaming fiasco from start to end. With the backdrop of the tragic Charleston shooting in June 2015 when nine African Americans were shot dead at the hands of a self-professed white supremacist, three Yale students launched an online public petition entitled “Rename Yale’s Racist Calhoun College!”⁶⁴ The petition, which represented the mature thought of a wide cross section of people, details the believed injustice and odious implications of the namesake. Calhoun College, in name, “conveys disrespect toward black perspectives, and serves a barrier toward racial inclusiveness,” it reads.⁶⁵ With 9000 signatories including students, faculty, employees, and the wider general public, its message was as far-reaching as well as antagonistic towards the university and its administration. Importantly, the petition was central to the convention of the two presidential renaming

⁶¹ Keith E. Whittington, *Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 16, 20

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 15

⁶³ Ben Shapiro, “We Can’t Erase History — Or Simplify It,” *The National Review*, February 15 2017, Accessed November 22 2019, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2017/02/yale-removes-calhoun-name-foolish-erasure-history/>

⁶⁴ Berhane, Empsall, and Tinson, “Calhoun College Petition.”

⁶⁵ *Ibid*

committees later in the year.

Discontent became most pronounced after April 27, 2016 when the administration initially announced that the name would remain. The statement represented not just a disinterest or ambivalence towards the prospect of reform, but an active defense of the status quo. At a town hall meeting called in the days following the announcement, students threw fake money at President Salovey, criticizing the influence of money on the university.⁶⁶ Yonas Takele, a junior in Calhoun College, told the *Yale Daily News* of his choice words that he had put to the president at the town hall: “We spent the entire year discussing this with you, and you turned around and did nothing.... You had the opportunity to stand and do the right thing. It’s on you, and I want you to know that. I have no respect for you.”⁶⁷ Coupled with the #WrongMoveYale hash tag on Twitter, news and videos of the inflamed reaction disseminated across campus and on the wider Internet. Then, on April 29 2016, 600 students attended a renaming ceremony on Yale’s Cross Campus, outside of the college gates, for what they described as “A college formerly known as Calhoun.”⁶⁸ Faculty and journalists shared in the students’ anger at the university’s initial decision not to rename Calhoun College. In a *New York Times* article, Yale professor of history, American studies, and African-American studies Glenda Gilmore wrote of the “grievous mistake” Yale had made in keeping a college named after “one of the country’s most egregious racists.”⁶⁹ The United Kingdom’s *Independent Magazine* even published an article titled, “Yale

⁶⁶ The Blue Grass Professors, “Yale President’s Remarks Met with a Shower of Fake Money,” YouTube Video, 0:20, May 19 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lk6BaYyZhDg>

⁶⁷ Yonas Takele, as cited in Victor Wang and David Yaffe-Bellany, “Students Confront Salovey at Town Hall,” *The Yale Daily News*, April 29 2016, Accessed November 17 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2016/04/29/students-confront-salovey-at-town-hall/>

⁶⁸ David Shimer and Victor Wang, “Students Hold Calhoun Renaming Ceremony,” *The Yale Daily News*, April 29 2016, Accessed November 14 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2016/04/29/students-hold-calhoun-renaming-ceremony/>

⁶⁹ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, “At Yale, a Right That Doesn’t Outweigh a Wrong,” *The New York Times*, April 29 2016, Accessed November 14 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/30/opinion/at-yale-a-right-that-doesnt-outweigh-a-wrong.html>

University keeps college named after white supremacist despite protests.”⁷⁰ Evidently, sentiment infiltrated all aspects of campus, and even extended across the Atlantic.

However, despite the loudest voices belonging to those advocating for the name change, not everyone shared in their views. For instance, as the Letter of the Committee to Establish Renaming points out, those who resisted changing the name were pleased at the April 27 announcement to keep the name. “Many applauded a courageous refusal to give in to the fashion of ‘political correctness,’” the committee wrote, in reference to a group comprising mostly of generations of older alumni for whom the namesake represented fond college memories, and highlighted human and societal progress since the days of John C. Calhoun.⁷¹ But, as events progressed through late spring and summer of 2016, it became harder to support the status quo than to scorn at Yale’s apparent contribution to racial oppression.

Moreover, citizens made *revolutionary demands*— relative to the university campus scale— and did so in conjunction with *new forms of media*. While these demands were not quite so revolutionary as to call for the overthrowing a capitalist society as in the Green New Deal case, they were still drastic for a university, particularly one so enriched by and deferent to tradition as Yale. For nearly 100 years, one of the first seven residential colleges at Yale was named Calhoun College, until the winter of 2017 when the university announced its new name, Grace Hopper College, in response, largely, to the protests of aggrieved students.

Members of the Yale community took advantage of its growing interconnection provided by social media outlets Twitter and Facebook to harvest support and momentum for the renaming movement. #WrongMoveYale began trending on Twitter following the initial decision

⁷⁰ Andrew Buncombe, “Yale University keeps college named after white supremacist despite protests,” *The Independent*, April 28 2016, November 10 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/yale-university-keeps-college-named-after-slavery-proponent-a7005301.html>

⁷¹ Witt et al., p. 4

to keep the name. User @MatthewRyanWare tweeted, “John Calhoun was a defender of American slavery, and one of history’s greatest voices for oppression. Keeping his name is the #WrongMoveYale”⁷² Similarly, alumnae @KatieChocklet deployed the hash tag in her articulation of support of student protestors, tweeting “Continually in awe of activists at Yale. Keep fighting for + creating the university you deserve #WrongMoveYale #FormerlyKnownAsCalhoun.”⁷³ Facebook too became a hub for the unrelenting torrent of disdain at the namesake. On “Overheard At Yale,” a page designed to poke fun at conversations heard on an Ivy League campus, a student, once more using the #WrongMoveYale hash tag, posted the proceedings of the student-led renaming ceremony:

Overheard and overseen again and again and again: “I stand with Yale students who refuse to tolerate the continued disrespect of people of color in a place that calls itself their home. Their intergenerational pain is an injustice—it should not be continued for the sake of your history lesson. Together, we rid of this campus of what John C. Calhoun represents. In the face of administrative failure, Calhoun College will now be #FormerlyKnownAsCalhoun”⁷⁴

The student’s post symbolized the movement’s effervescence as it exposed even non-participants to the latest events in the effort to revoke Yale’s nearly 100 year-old decision to name a college after John C. Calhoun.

Finally, the case encapsulates a specific *explicit misalignment of ideas and institutions* surrounding the teaching of history. Prior to the announcement in February 2017, a dichotomy existed between the ideas belonging to protesting students and Yale’s approach to teaching slavery. Per the Yale History website, the department acknowledges the deep roots of “injustice and prejudicial behavior... that continue to affect people’s everyday lives” and that by “engaging

⁷² Matthew Ware, Twitter Post, April 28 2016, 10:58 PM, <https://twitter.com/MatthewRyanWare/status/725927251590565894>

⁷³ Katie Chockley, Twitter Post, April 29 2016, 1:36 PM, <https://twitter.com/KatieChocklet/status/726148280938291203>

⁷⁴ Israel Tovar, “Overheard and overseen again and again and again,” Facebook Post, April 29 2016, https://www.facebook.com/groups/OVERHEARDATYALE/search/?query=administrative%20failure&epa=SEARCH_BOX

with these issues,” it seeks to “cultivate... a robust awareness of the problems created by stereotyping, bias, discrimination, exploitation, and injustice.”⁷⁵ Until 2017, Calhoun College represented a part of the university’s means to achieving this goal, keeping slavery at the front and center of campus life. For example, the official announcement on Twitter to keep the name a year before it was changed read: “Yale will keep the name of Calhoun College to teach & confront the history of slavery in the U.S.”⁷⁶ Dean Holloway, an expert in American and black intellectual history, endorsed this view in a follow up statement. Before acknowledging the ongoing pertinence of racial discrimination towards African Americans, he nonetheless affirmed that “Yes, the historian in me still sees alarm our national propensity to forget ugliness.”⁷⁷

Advocates of changing the name, however, held different ideas about teaching the history of slavery. The student authors of the online petition claimed that eliminating racism “must include all monuments and symbols dedicated to people and institutions that fought to preserve slavery and white supremacy.” The namesake, they continued, “Represents an indifference to centuries of pain and suffering” that “will always preclude minority students from feeling truly at home at Yale.” Their conclusion captures the very essence of the misalignment, observing, “Respect for history in the eyes of some [Yale] is the tolerance of white supremacy in the eyes of others [them and others campaigning for the name change].”⁷⁸ Furthermore, Twitter once more revealed students’ alternative ideas towards teaching slavery. Directly responding to the university’s tweet about keeping the name to confront and teach about slavery, user @jasnikki insisted, rather, that “The best way to confront the history of slavery is by refusing to continue to

⁷⁵ Yale University History Department, “Diversity and Yale History,” *History.yale.edu*, Accessed November 13 2019, <https://history.yale.edu/about-us/diversity-and-yale-history>

⁷⁶ Yale University, Twitter Post, April 27 2016, 2:50 PM, <https://twitter.com/Yale/status/725441938007040000>

⁷⁷ Holloway, as cited in Hardman

⁷⁸ Berhane et al., petition, 2015

honor a slave owner #WrongMoveYale.”⁷⁹

The Committee to Establish Principles of Renaming, the agent that ultimately realigned ideas and the institution, favored the students’ view. The committee largely premised the findings of the Letter to the president on one of Robin Winks’ conceptions of history, in which “a change in the way a community memorializes its past offers a way to recognize important alternations in the community’s values.” For instance, the inclusion of women and people of color at Yale offer support to the authors’ point that, “to change, however, is not always to erase.”⁸⁰ In under a year, the university shifted one of its means of teaching about slavery and its staunch defendant, John C. Calhoun. And once it did so and renamed the college, the case was closed, so to speak. Ideas and institutions aligned again.

Case conclusion

The Calhoun case demonstrates that even local debates can encapsulate creedal principles. Because even this case substantially fulfills the criteria, it is likewise indicative of the extent to which the current era and political moment constitutes a creedal passion period. On Yale’s and other universities’ campuses, creedal principles clearly premise contentious episodes that make appeals to founding documents and values, embody widespread discontent, make revolutionary demands, and reveal a misalignment of ideas and institutions.

CONCLUSION

The United States’ current contentious political climate requires assessments of the place and standing of ideas, values, and institutions in American society. The field of American

⁷⁹ @jasnikki_, Twitter Post, April 28 2016, 4:11 PM, https://twitter.com/jasnikki_/status/725824859696173056

⁸⁰ Witt et al., p. 2

Political Development has sought to answer these types of questions. How relevant are founding values in 21st century political society? How do they manifest themselves in American politics? What are the implications for American exceptionalism? Such questions also invite a review of American political history. Jon Meacham's 2019 book *The Soul of America* represents just one of many attempts to comprehend the current political climate by revisiting and comparing it to impassioned years throughout American political history.

Though a work of the 1980s, Huntington's *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* provides a relevant and effective framework for examining the political climate today in the context of broader American history. The U.S., Huntington argues, possesses a set of national creedal principles, which he believes, are: "Liberal, individualistic, democratic, egalitarian, and hence basically antigovernment and anti-authority and institutions."⁸¹ Because they appeal to the metaphysical notions of freedom, liberty, and morality, these principles can vary in how they are interpreted over time. Perhaps even more importantly, these creedal principles and associated ideas also deviate in their relation to political institutions. The gap between the political ideal and institutional reality widens and closes episodically over time. The gap may grow over a long period of time, but once that gap is significantly pronounced, it is followed, Huntington posits, by a creedal passion period, featuring a significant and sharply contentious realignment of ideas and institutions that seeks to close that gap.

In this study, I have employed a case study approach to assess whether the current political climate potentially constitutes a fifth creedal passion period in American history. As aforementioned, the Green New Deal and the renaming of Calhoun College seem unlikely cases for this research. A socialist proposition for combating climate change and the other perceived defects of American capitalism appears the last thing that would appeal to founding national

⁸¹ Huntington, p. 4

values. However, because of the precedence afforded to the climate crisis, the resolution calling for the GND inevitably involves ideas about the role of the federal government and the principles that Americans live by. Similarly, the highly localized level of a college campus may not be thought to capture the wider political climate. But the renaming of Calhoun College brings to bear the issues of slavery and its problematic aftermath, historical memory, and the role of universities. Thus, fundamental national values were at the heart of debates during the process and even today, nearly three years after the final decision. This research reveals that even in the most unlikely settings— a drastic climate change resolution and a college campus— political debates are fought on such terms, so perhaps most salient issues in American politics in the current era can claim to be contested on creedal principles as well.

Compared to the students protesting for Calhoun College to be renamed, defendants of the Green New Deal made very explicit appeals to founding documents. The resolution itself uses exact phrasing from the Declaration of Independence, which its supporting activists hasten to mimic. The resolution's staunch conservative opponents are also quick to react, and unsurprisingly, this group utilizes constitutional traditions like small government and the free market to degrade the legitimacy of the resolution. Consequently, the loudest and most authoritative voices belong to members of this group. By contrast, the fiercest student advocates for renaming Calhoun College make more tacit appeals to the equal protection granted by the 14th amendment and the equal opportunity clause promised by the Declaration. Students utilized the growing interconnectedness of campus events via social media to engage in emotive charges of racial discrimination that they claimed Yale upheld by keeping the namesake.

Both cases revealed very widespread discontent, and from a number of sources. Notably, the GND and the Calhoun case conjured up alleged failures of the current regime— whether that

was the federal government or the Yale administration— in providing society its most basic needs: access to food, housing, and healthcare, and racial equality. Moreover, actors in each case made revolutionary demands, but the demands varied in accordance with the setting. The GND captures the essence of a typical revolution with calls to overthrow the current system in place of a fairer, more just arrangement. The demand made on Yale’s campus was for the university to rescind on a building name that had been in place for nearly 100 years.

Finally, each case’s debates embodied the misalignment of ideas and institutions. Once more, the GND evidences very clearly opposing approaches to climate change and its severity by the federal government and supporters of the resolution. Misalignment in the Calhoun case is more nuanced. The racial inequality that advocates for the name change argued Yale reinforced by continuing to honor John Calhoun is a far cry from an ideal of complete racial equality in society. But those who resisted the name change did so on other terms. Many denied any misalignment at all, claiming instead that the name formed a part of the university’s approach to teaching the troubled history of slavery, rather than an ode to white supremacy.

A normative comparison exposes another misalignment within the Calhoun case that is increasingly irreconcilable – the pursuit of knowledge and human excellence and complete egalitarianism. Creedal politics are appropriate at the broader society level, such as in debates over the GND, but this research raises questions about the dynamics of creedal politics on campus. The central the mission of a university is, according to Witt, “to discover and disseminate knowledge,” but some, like Kronman, believe that events such as the renaming of Calhoun College reflect deviations from this central mission. Kronman posits that at a place like Yale, one committed to pushing the boundaries of knowledge and “devoted not to promotion of equality but the recognition of excellence” the principle of equality, he maintains, “is not merely

misplaced but destructive.”⁸² Essentially, if the entire function of a university is to encourage and constantly push ideas to their extremity, then gaps between ideas and institutions are inherent, inevitable, and desirable.

The notion that universities have a distinct purpose is widely shared by different institutional actors and across the political spectrum. But episodes on college campuses that Whittington describes as “newsworthy and embarrassing” may suggest that universities are faltering in their very purpose.⁸³ Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos responded to the proliferation of bands of “speech bullies” at the University of Michigan and elsewhere that seek to block “hurt feelings” around campus with a speech in November 2019. “Feelings are important,” DeVos acknowledged, “but learning isn’t about feelings. It’s about thinking. And it’s a willingness to engage with any and all ideas.”⁸⁴ This perspective was not limited to a Trump administration official, who might be more likely to criticize campus excesses. During the latest episode of controversy at Yale in September 2019 involving an Instagram post, President Peter Salovey also affirmed that students and faculty should be “willing to tolerate the intolerable” to avoid heading “down a slippery slope of regulating speech [and] deciding what’s offensive and what’s not.”⁸⁵ At the elite level, then, universities are viewed as distinct from politics – not separated from the world, but engaged in a different purpose.

Pursuing truth and nurturing minds are essential for and within the university itself, but that task is also necessary for wider society. Universities must teach its students to think freely

⁸² Kronman, p. 2, p. 7

⁸³ Whittington, p. 2

⁸⁴ Betsy DeVos, Speech, as cited in Paul Bedard, “Education secretary: 200 colleges use ‘speech bullies’ to prevent ‘hurt feelings,’” *Washingtonexaminer.com*, November 14 2019, Accessed November 27 2019, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/education-secretary-200-colleges-use-speech-bullies-to-prevent-hurt-feelings>

⁸⁵ Peter Salovey, as cited in Serena Cho, “Santos email fuels free speech debate,” *The Yale Daily News*, September 19 2019, Accessed October 20 2019, <https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2019/09/19/santos-email-fuels-free-speech-debate/>

and independently so they can behave as responsible democratic citizens and insure against the tyranny of the majority opinion that, in Alexis de Tocqueville's view, is the greatest danger confronting American democracy. Kronman expands on Tocqueville's 19th century observations, arguing, "democracy is strengthened by the habit of independent-mindedness" that universities "at their very best value and promote."⁸⁶ Put more plainly by Whittington, "universities help prepare young adults to be thoughtful and responsible contributors to civic life."⁸⁷ Kronman, Whittington, DeVos, and Salovey uncover an irony within credal politics. By encouraging complete freedom of inquiry and expression, rather than simply responding to credal demands on campus, universities actually prepare their graduates to be effective advocates for this kind of politics in the broader democratic society. After all, we did not design institutions of higher education as microcosms of political ideals, but perhaps our political ideals are best realized by independent and freethinking college graduates and faculty.

⁸⁶ Kronman, p. 8

⁸⁷ Whittington, p. 18

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