

Jess McIntosh [00:00:00] This limited series podcast is based on the book, "The Lie that Binds" by NARAL Pro-Choice America president Ilyse Hoague with Ellie Langford. Each episode builds on the history terminology and figureheads established in the last. So we strongly recommend that you start from episode one before jumping ahead.

[00:00:20] Here's a story you already know. A bombastic showman runs for president and turns American politics on its head. He has a background in entertainment and a history of flirting with the far right. What he lacks in a carefully crafted policy agenda. He makes up for with unapologetic bravado. Who am I talking about? It's a trick question. It sounds like the rise of Donald Trump, right? But it's also the story of Ronald Reagan.

Archive [00:00:49] Good evening. Nearly 1000 people showed up at the state house in Trenton today for a foot stomping rally staged by the Moral Majority Mary.

Jess McIntosh [00:00:57] The year is 1980 and Jerry Falwell is taking a victory lap.

Archive [00:01:01] It was show business, slick and church supper sincere. The 30 second state capitals stop of the Moral Majority touring show. This is a well packaged salute to God and Americana, with some controversial messages tucked inside its spiritual leader and chief showman Jerry Falwell delivers them smoothly. He says prayer should be allowed in schools. Abortion is murder and should be banned under the Constitution. Homosexuality is a perversion. He says it's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve welfarist bad. And we need a strong defense. He sees the election just passed as indication of a moral American groundswell.

Jess McIntosh [00:01:43] In episodes one and two, we covered the first decade of the anti-choice movement and how its leaders started the so-called Moral Majority only a few years prior to Reagan's victory. How did this fledgling coalition gain so much power so quickly? Here's Ilyse Hogue, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America.

Ilyse Hogue [00:02:01] You have to remember what was happening in the 70s. The culture was in total transformation. It was the rise of feminism, sexual liberation. The pill had become legal for unmarried women in 1970 to the hippies were everywhere. It was the black power movement. It felt like a total threats to the control that had been really narrowly held by white men, white Christian men, for a really long time. It felt great to some and tumult to others.

Archive [00:02:34] Well, the 70s were desperately bad for their right. And Paul, he came to Washington and put up a fight.

[00:02:41] He started a committee down here in the city. I'm glad it did, because now I'm here to sing. Did he in front of you all?

[00:02:50] Because Paul is really quite a hero.

[00:02:53] The song you're hearing is from The Roast of Paul Weyrich, hosted by Rush Limbaugh.

[00:02:58] Pardon me, Paul, is the majority still moral?

[00:03:03] That's quite a task. We'd better not.

Jess McIntosh [00:03:10] The 70s were bad for the right. Between Watergate and Nixon's resignation, the conservative movement was deeply fractured, even as the likes of Paul, Eric and Jerry Falwell were working to bring it together. Conservative voters were still conservative, but they weren't sure about being Republican. So when Democrat Jimmy Carter entered the 1976 presidential race, he was a breath of fresh air, a kind hearted, born again Christian. Many were comforted by his authentic Southern roots, modesty and religious identity. But Carter's administration and the 70s in general were plagued by high unemployment, an oil crisis and an ongoing culture war. Many Americans remained deeply anxious.

Ilyse Hogue [00:03:50] And so they thought, well, how do we effectively play on the fears of people in this country about losing control of their families, of the political system, of the culture? And they thought abortion would be a good way to do it.

Archive [00:04:05] And Paul is still in there a fight. What a good man. Let's give him a hand.

Ellie Langford [00:04:20] They tapped Reagan to be that face of the movement.

Ilyse Hogue [00:04:26] Reagan was really sort of test case of proof concept for a religious right that had chosen to focus on abortion. And they were still working out their messaging and they were still trying to figure out how much they had to hide their honest agenda.

Linda Greenhouse [00:04:40] It didn't happen overnight. It took about eight or 10 years. And what really marked his success was the rise of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Jess McIntosh [00:04:54] Welcome to The Lie That Binds. I'm your host, Jess McIntosh. This week, we're looking at the parallel stories of Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. As easy as it is to draw connections between them, Trump and Reagan are not exactly the same. In fact, the most important similarity is not about the men, but the machine that brought them to power. In 1980, this coalition was in its infancy. Reagan was the result of baby steps. Four decades later, they were fully up and running.

Ilyse Hogue [00:05:30] I think the radical right in which I include the evangelicals have always seen a utility in organizing around fear.

Archive [00:05:39] I doubt that anyone watching this program is unaware of the Moral Majority who feel that a deep seated malaise has gripped this nation. But liberal humanism has led to a breakdown of our family structure, to a diminished national morality, to a rise in crime, even to a growing inability to protect ourselves from our enemies abroad.

Ilyse Hogue [00:05:59] Fear sort of supports their natural inclination towards authoritarian power structures, whether that's an authoritarian power structure in the family where you have one dad and one mom and lots of kids and dads in charge and or authoritarian power structures in the country where you don't really question that much. And I think that the rise of the Cold War with two superpowers and a clear enemy helped reinforce sort of their natural inclinations towards a more rigid authoritarian mindset.

Archive [00:06:30] I really willing to say that the word majority has no relationship to the concerns that have been expressed by Falwell and others. Well, the Moral Majority is neither necessarily be moral point of view nor a majority.

Jess McIntosh [00:06:44] That's television icon Norman Lear. He produced All in the Family The Jeffersons and basically defined the sitcom genre.

Archive [00:06:52] We are, I think, as a people more frustrated, more anxious, more deeply concerned with less hope than at any time in my fifty nine years on this planet. So I think in that vacuum comes a divisive, I feel a very narrow group. So insists here we are, we have all these answers. And there are simple answers to your most complex problems. People would normally embrace. I mean, it's natural that they would wish to embrace that and be embraced by that in the absence of anything else.

Jess McIntosh [00:07:28] His description of American anxiety in the early 80s is how many have portrayed Trump's base today. The solutions offered to them by the radical right then and now are compelling because in addition to being simple, they offer someone to blame. Reagan understood this tactic very well.

Ellie Langford [00:07:44] Reagan is similar to Trump in ways that I think we haven't fully grappled with.

Jess McIntosh [00:07:49] Ellie Langford, director of research at NARAL Pro-Choice America.

Ellie Langford [00:07:53] He was a Hollywood figure with a long history of making problematic sexist comments.

Jess McIntosh [00:08:04] For him, women fell into two categories good little ladies on one side, aggressive women's libbers on the other. The anti-feminist rhetoric was perfectly timed to attract an enormously receptive audience of white men who were competing with women and people of color in the job market for the first time. In the late 70s and early 80s, the economy faltered and went into recession. Men's wages shrank dramatically and male breadwinners, a status that research repeatedly found to be central to the American male identity, fell to new lows. As one researcher noted to some of the men falling back, it certainly looked as if women had done the pushing. Reagan was open about his strong personal belief that a woman's place was in the home and that the government shouldn't encourage women to consider options beyond the domestic sphere. We believe when a man marries a woman, she is his obligation.

Jess McIntosh [00:08:55] Weyrich and Falwell were especially taken in charismatic Ronald Reagan. They found the perfect front man for the next phase of their new strategy.

Ilyse Hogue [00:09:04] What they saw in Ronald Reagan was a like minded creature who really did embody that sort of sense of masculinity.

Jess McIntosh [00:09:18] Reagan combined a flair for political theater with a significant public profile. His style resonated with a lot of Americans very quickly. A 1982 Rolling Stone profile retroactively pinpointed the crux of Reagan's appeal. They noted Ronald Reagan looks like a real man. He stands up to the commies. He loves rockets. He even dresses up like a cowboy. In every dimension, his political personality embodies the

nostalgic idea of masculinity in an era where men are struggling with their own definition of masculinity. Ronald Reagan seems totally content with his. He's a real man who makes no apologies for it.

Ilyse Hogue [00:09:57] One of the things that we point to a lot is if you're already sort of have a idea of what we would call misogyny, but what they would say is of a woman's rightful place in the home. And certainly Nancy Reagan totally embodied that, right, gazing up adoringly at her big, strong husband all the time and then trading away our reproductive rights is kind of a no brainer. And if you are a good girl in their minds, you're never going to need abortion anyway because you're not sleeping around and you're going to have the babies of your husband. So it was like a very transactional moment for the anti choice movement. And Reagan, they found enough like mindedness and a willingness to sort of use racist dog whistles to ascend in this very theatrical way. And he was really effective at it.

Jess McIntosh [00:10:55] In fact, one of his most lasting legacy is was showing the Radical Right how to avoid backlash to sexism by leaning into coded racism.

Ellie Langford [00:11:03] That time was when the conservative movement was really coming to the end of its rope in organizing people around overt racist appeals. They were moving into the dog whistle portion of their Southern strategy.

Jess McIntosh [00:11:19] In 1976, Reagan upped the ante after a Chicago newspaper coined the phrase welfare queen to describe a local con-woman. Reagan co-opted the story on the campaign trail for his first presidential run.

Archive [00:11:31] She used 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans benefits for nonexistent deceased veterans, husbands, as well as welfare. Her tax-free cash income alone has been running \$150,000 a year.

Jess McIntosh [00:11:53] Again and again, he told mortified crowds about the Chicago woman who had grafted the government, twisting the story into an indictment of an entire group of people.

Ilyse Hogue [00:12:03] Certainly, you know, he made central to his governing platform the idea that undeserving people, people of color, we're taking your money.

Archive [00:12:15] He is on to something that touches the hopes and the hearts of many frustrated Americans who seen the Carter administration expanding the bureaucracies it swore to contract, increasing the dependance of the poor, the blacks, the dispossessed on the government by way of welfare subsidies and the rest.

Ilyse Hogue [00:12:38] And he centered that very powerful combination of racism and misogyny that sort of like these undeserving women who are having children irresponsibly and want you to support them, right? And this all went part and parcel with the idea of restricting reproductive freedom.

Jess McIntosh [00:13:00] Reagan's welfare queen played on many of the same racist stereotypes used in anti choice propaganda. Here's Pamela Merritt, co-founder of Repro Action.

Pamela Merritt [00:13:10] Whenever the anti-abortion movement talks about black mothers and they always are talking about it in a sense of perpetuating stigma that black women already face, like we know the lie that we are, you know, sexually promiscuous, that we're reckless, that the welfare myth. They've done a really good job, unfortunately, of associating black women and women of color with poverty, a lack of success and that poverty and a lack of success with the fact that they are hypersexualized and are having, you know, a lot of abortions.

Imani Gandy [00:13:51] They sort of hold the black fetus up as this sort of like emblem of what the anti-choice movement should be about.

Jess McIntosh [00:13:58] Imani Gandy, senior legal analyst for Rewire.News.

Imani Gandy [00:14:02] It should be about making sure that every black child has a chance to be born. But once that black child is born, there's no help. There's no assistance. There's no there's not even any sort of goodwill towards black mothers because black mothers are routinely demonized, routinely castigated as people who are simply having children in order to get more welfare, in order to get more help from the state. How can you demonize black motherhood on the one hand, but on the other hand be forcing black motherhood? It's just it's just it's just racism is what it is, right?

Jess McIntosh [00:14:37] The kind of weaponized stigmatization that she and Pamela are talking about was described by GOP consultant Lee Atwater as an evolved Southern strategy. In a 1981 interview, he outlined how the introduction of loaded terms like welfare queens, state's rights and forced bussing triggered some of the same responses that had previously only been incited by openly racist epithets. Ronald Reagan spoke this language fluently.

Archive [00:15:02] The only thing that's gone up more than spending is crime. Our city streets are jungle paths after dark.

Jess McIntosh [00:15:10] The rally you heard up top was a triumphant continuation of a tour Falwell began around the time of the bicentennial. Falwell embarked on a series of live events, most notably in 1976. He kicked off his quote unquote. I Love America tour.

Ilyse Hogue [00:15:25] Falwell, as he was thinking about forming the Moral Majority, actually hit the road with a tour. That was the I Love America tour. Right? And it really was this idea that the sort of fundamental values of his vision of America were under attack. This was almost a war. And if you loved America, it was your patriotic duty to get involved and carry your vision of what America should look like into politics.

Archive [00:15:56] And that is what is happening across this country. A sleeping giant is standing up the church of the living God is standing up.

Ilyse Hogue [00:16:04] And, of course, then, as we saw, ragging sort of come to power on the national stage. He adapted from I Love America to Make America Great Again.

Archive [00:16:15] For those who've abandoned hope we'll restore hope. And we'll welcome them into a great national crusade to make America great again.

Ilyse Hogue [00:16:27] You know, I think the that sort of this idea of I Love America, Make America Great Again is grounded in an almost unconscious call to people who have almost a romantic view of what America was and has been. This idea of the nuclear family with, you know, one man who goes to work and one woman who stays home very Leave it to Beaver style. And, you know, it almost goes without saying white people and power. Right? You know, for people who were never actually afforded equal opportunity Make America Great AGAIN has a very different tone to it. It has a like know your place, stay in your place, because since you have actually started striving for equality, that has jeopardized America.

Ellie Langford [00:17:24] We see a lot of it today. There's been so much coverage and so much conversation, at least since 2016, of how fear and how this nostalgia for better times that may or may not actually have been better is such a motivating fantasy for a lot of people and a lot of ways that whole Make America Great Again ideology was there at the time. That mythology is powerful. It tapped into identities that were very baked in to how white people saw themselves related to their power. And it just hit people on a gut level in a way that frankly worked.

Jess McIntosh [00:18:10] Just as Reagan started developing his welfare queen talking points years before his 1980 victory, trump started signaling his far-right tendencies early on with a very specific message.

Archive [00:18:21] You know, this guy either has a birth certificate or he does it.

Archive [00:18:25] Why would you decide to do this if, in fact, you decide to run for president?

Archive [00:18:28] Because if you're not born in the United States, you could not be president. Why can't he produce a birth certificate? And by the way, there's one story that his family doesn't even know what hospital he was born in.

Archive [00:18:41] Yeah, I've heard that as well. Do you think he was born in this country?

Archive [00:18:44] I am really concerned. And I'll tell you what, I brought it up just routinely. And all of a sudden a lot of facts are emerging. And I'm starting to wonder myself whether or not he was born in this.

Archive [00:18:56] So it's not going away. And you're like Donald Trump, who we all know was born in this country. I have to do is read the side of this building.

Ilyse Hogue [00:19:03] Well, I think to talk about 2016, we have to talk about 2012, when Donald Trump was flirting with the idea of running against President Obama. And grounding that in the birther conspiracy theory, which really played to racists around the country.

Ellie Langford [00:19:20] He basically served up this racist birther conspiracy theory to these far right activists who were enraged at the election of a progressive black president and really hungry for affirmation of their resentment, which Trump brought. And the interesting thing is that Trump was able to channel that racist backlash, that rage against President Obama into a ton of political power for himself. Way back then, even though he

eventually decided not to run for president, he got so many invitations to speak on Fox News. He even eventually got a regular weekly segment on Fox and Friends.

Archive [00:20:09] Brash and never bashful, The Donald now makes his voice loud and clear every Monday on Fox.

Archive [00:20:14] My message is a better message and anybody else.

Archive [00:20:16] Monday mornings with Trump on Fox and Friends.

Ellie Langford [00:20:19] On an emotional level, he fits so many of the things that they're looking for in a candidate, and his personal history tracks so well with their movement history. This idea of building a movement out of openly racist appeals and eventually channeling enough anger in order to build this type of fervor and this partisan base that's based on identity rather than issues or policy. And that is just angry and looking to lash out. That's the story of the anti-choice movement. It's also the story of Trump's personal political rise.

Jess McIntosh [00:21:10] Four years prior to each of their presidential victories, the idea of a Trump or Reagan presidency seemed pretty unlikely. In 1976, Reagan challenged incumbent Republican President Gerald Ford. Reagan positioned himself as the conservative candidate in contrast to the more moderate Ford. By this point, he was no stranger to the far right. Reagan spoke at the first CPAC in 1974 with the likes of Paul Weyrich and other future Radical Right leaders in attendance. Reagan's primary bid, while unsuccessful, did earn him the support of key conservative organizations. But the establishment GOP was not quite ready to embrace their far-right ideology. Here's Pulitzer Prize winning historian and author Linda Greenhouse.

Linda Greenhouse [00:21:52] The first Republicans platform after Roe against Wade in 1973 was the 1976 platform, which still maintained a big tent on the abortion issue because there were still many Republicans who favored reform of abortion law.

Jess McIntosh [00:22:12] The party had not yet shifted to the right, but the tide was steadily changing. And it was around this time that Ed McAteer, Paul Weyrich and Jerry Falwell officially joined forces in 1979. They established the Moral Majority as a formal organization, and within a year they had chapters in 18 states. They were ready to transform their ideas into political power right as Reagan began his ascension. Together, they shaped the next GOP party platform.

Linda Greenhouse [00:22:43] It wasn't until 1980 that the Republican Party, now increasingly dominated by the religious right, inserted into the platform, pledge that whoever became president would name judges and justices who would who would overturn Roe against Wade.

Jess McIntosh [00:23:01] The 1980 platform rang with gloom and doom. It talked about America's international humiliation and claimed that the 80s were going to be our most dangerous years since World War II. It was within this framework of our alleged impending doom that the platform shifted its stance on key issues impacting women.

Archive [00:23:20] No one thought they would really do it. But after 40 years of support, the Republican Party has dropped the Equal Rights Amendment from its platform.

Following frontrunner Ronald Reagan's lead, the platform committee acts the measure and endorsed a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion.

Jess McIntosh [00:23:36] Well, considering Reagan's potential to carry their issues to the presidency, the new right had to face the fact that as governor Reagan signed a bill liberalizing abortion in the state of California.

Linda Greenhouse [00:23:46] As governor of California, he actually supported abortion reform.

Jess McIntosh [00:23:50] But they were calculated power brokers. They decided that a possible lack of personal conviction was not a deal breaker if they could sell Reagan's ardent conversion to the public. If he was open to adopting the underlying ideology they reason to the tactics could be taught.

Linda Greenhouse [00:24:04] As we know from more recent political figures. That was then. In 1980 was now. And so Ronald Reagan ran on that platform.

Jess McIntosh [00:24:15] Cut to the summer of 1980, a seminal moment for Reagan's relationship with the evangelicals. Reagan had just won the GOP nomination a month prior. So Ed McAteer organized a massive religious conference in Dallas called the National Affairs Briefing. 16,000 attended and the goal was clear. Introduce the new nominee to religious roundtable members and convince pastors to take the unprecedented steps to politicize their pulpits.

Archive [00:24:39] If the righteous, the pro-family, the moral biblical, the godly and be hardworking and decent individuals in this country stay out of politics. This does not lead to make policies under which you and I live and struggle to survive.

Jess McIntosh [00:25:04] That's James Robeson, a young and charismatic preacher mentored by Billy Graham, speaking at the conference to an audience of thousands.

Ilyse Hogue [00:25:12] You know, one of the things that the Radical Right had to get around was really deeply held belief by people of all faiths and all denominations that America was really founded on this idea that church and governments should be separate. So they recognized, in fact, that they had to start to shift people's comfort level with religiosity, governing our policies and our politics.

Archive [00:25:37] If you think our solution is political, you two have been to see. Don't you commit yourself to some political party or politician, you commit yourself to the principles of God and demand both parties and politicians align themselves with the eternal values in this book. The book will be forever. The greatest nation on this earth.

Jess McIntosh [00:26:04] While his advisers sat backstage cringing Reagan publicly and enthusiastically applauded. Then it was his time to speak.

Archive [00:26:13] I know this is a nonpartisan gathering. And so I know that you can't endorse me. But I only brought that up because I want you to know that I endorse you and what you are doing.

Jess McIntosh [00:26:28] Reagan's ringing endorsement of evangelical doctrine rippled through churches and religious organizations across the country. His speech ended with a plea to take action at the polls. And in this moment, Falwell's labor bore political fruit.

Ilyse Hogue [00:26:43] Reagan not only became the first presidential nominee to run explicitly on an anti-abortion platform, which was kind of unheard of at the time, but he was willing to do it in a way that linked his presidency to a really traditional picture of what power in America looked like. And their experiment actually worked better than they ever could have imagined.

Archive [00:27:17] Well, the time has come. You've seen the map. We've looked at the figures and NBC News now makes its projection for the presidency. Reagan is our projected winner, Ronald Wilson Reagan of California, a sports announcer, a film actor, governor of California is our projected winner at 8:15 Eastern.

Ilyse Hogue [00:27:41] Why work in the Radical Right really hit their stride? I think that they you know, they gambled on Reagan when he was kind of an unknown quantity and people wrote him off as, you know, just an actor who couldn't win. And they won. They won big.

Jess McIntosh [00:27:56] Jerry Falwell was interviewed by New Jersey Nightly News days after Reagan's 1980 victory.

Archive [00:28:02] You called last Tuesday's election results. If you are quoted correctly here, "the greatest day for the cause of conservatism and American morality in my adult life," What do you hope for from the Reagan administration?

Archive [00:28:15] Well, I don't think that Mr. Reagan owes us or anybody anything. But I think he has publicly stated position, for example, in favor of a human life amendment in favor of a return to volunteer a voluntary prayer to public schools. His commitment along issues of the traditional family are totally compatible to what we have been promoting for the last two years since we came into existence.

Jess McIntosh [00:28:43] Falwell and his Radical Right peers understood that they had to walk a thin line between claiming credit for Reagan's success and revealing the full extent of their political influence, which grew exponentially once they had a solid ally in the Oval Office.

Ilyse Hogue [00:28:56] There was an enormous amount of infrastructure built up around Ronald Reagan, but there was no substitute for having a mouthpiece, you know, who owns the largest platform in land and that is the president. And so there was this mutually reinforcing, dynamic, anti choice infrastructure being built that allowed the president at the time to say things that, you know, he he wouldn't have otherwise said and building a whole generation who actually did believe that abortion was the thing, even though it wasn't for the movement founders.

Ellie Langford [00:29:34] As soon as they got the bully pulpit with Ronald Reagan, as soon as they started to build things like Fox News, which came on a little bit later in the 90s, they really had all of the tools they needed to start changing the conversation and rolling back reproductive freedoms and broader freedoms in America.

Ilyse Hogue [00:29:52] They exerted a lot of influence with him, some to the consternation of his closest advisers, who were very worried that they were taking him and far to write a direction. And he won the second time. And that sort of second victory that proved that what they had constructed around Reagan was not an anomaly but could be repeated was where they really cemented their power at the heart of the Republican Party.

Archive [00:30:22] And I am optimistic about America. May I begin by saying that I feel that America. He is in these 1980s particularly, and this decade. Experiencing a moral and spiritual rebirth. I do indeed agree with Mr. Reagan's motto, a new beginning. I think that's happening in our country.

Jess McIntosh [00:30:46] The Moral Majority maintained their influence with Reagan throughout both his terms in office. This period mainstreamed the radical right and legitimized the political infrastructure Paul Weyrich and his cronies built in the 70s. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the Reagan years also led to the downfall of the Moral Majority. They continued to successfully advance their political agenda. But the organization itself ran out of steam and eventually dissolved in 1989. The white conservative evangelical base they had mobilized, however, did not disappear. Instead, they only became more devoted to the cause and more ideologically aligned behind their candidates of choice. Four decades later, the radical right power structures that supported Reagan are no longer fringy, far right groups. They are the establishment GOP and they are the exact people Trump courted in order to win the support of their devout base. But like Reagan before him, he had to figure out how to message around his past.

Archive [00:31:42] Was justice tougher sell with evangelicals to get them to vote for somebody like Ronald Reagan, who had been married twice as it was for me to get people to vote, support Trump? It was the same dynamic. It's like history repeating itself.

Jess McIntosh [00:31:59] He should know about history repeating itself. That's Jerry Falwell, junior son of the late evangelical preacher and current president of Liberty University. Starting around Reagan's rise in 1980, Liberty University has had a unique sway in American politics, offering candidates of all political persuasions an opportunity to credential themselves with the evangelical base.

Archive [00:32:19] What a place. This is an amazing school. It's an amazing university. And I'll tell you something all over the world they're talking about at Liberty University what they've done and in such a short time. So you can be very, very proud of yourself and your leaders. Amazing job.

Jess McIntosh [00:32:42] Trump's first Liberty University appearance was in 2012. Falwell Jr. introduced him as one of the greatest visionaries of our time and closed his remarks by praising Trump.

Archive [00:32:53] Trump has also become one of the most influential political leaders in the United States. In 2011, after failed attempts by Senator John McCain and Hillary Clinton, Mr. Trump singlehandedly forced President Obama to release his birth certificate.

Jess McIntosh [00:33:13] Jerry Falwell Junior represents a key group of radical right leaders who are willing to whether initial criticism from segments of their base while aligning themselves with Trump.

Ilyse Hogue [00:33:22] Quite certainly for some of them, the coarseness of Donald Trump's language was difficult to digest. But that's an issue of style, not substance. It was not actually as unlikely as people thought it was because of the underlying ideology that Donald Trump embraced around racism and misogyny and also that he was willing to just negotiate.

Ellie Langford [00:33:48] Trump has always been a highly transactional politician. Trump and the anti-choice movement both have really well tuned understandings of power and how to gain it. And their alliance makes so much sense. All Trump had to do was prove that he was worth the risk to their reputation. And he also got noticed by a couple of political figures on the far right who seem to be scouting for somebody who could shake up the political dynamic and maybe even replicate some of the more emotional appeals that the conservative movement had been built on as far back as the 70s, as far back as Reagan.

[00:34:37] Ralph Reed of Faith and Freedom Coalition was one of those first political figures who seemed to see potential in Donald Trump.

Archive [00:34:48] Ralph Reed is a veteran activist in the Christian right and as of yesterday, playing an advisory role to Donald Trump.

Ellie Langford [00:34:55] Reid later tried to rewrite history and claim that he just respected Trump for his heartfelt anti choice sentiments.

Archive [00:35:05] We became friends because I saw him on TV talking about the abortion issue in a way that I thought was compelling and transparent and and based on his deep moral conviction.

Ellie Langford [00:35:19] So this idea that Trump was just a heartfelt anti choice extremist who was the perfect ideological fit for the conservative movement was fairly pretty ridiculous.

Archive [00:35:30] Partial birth abortion. The eliminating of abortion in the third trimester. Big issue in Washington, would President Trump ban partial birth abortion?

Archive [00:35:39] Look, I'm I'm very pro-choice.

Jess McIntosh [00:35:43] That interview was recorded with the late Tim Russert back in nineteen ninety nine.

Archive [00:35:47] I hate the concept of abortion. I hate it. I hate everything it stands for. I cringe when I listen to people debating the subject, but I am strong for choice. And yet I hate the concept of abortion. But you would not ban it now or ban partial birth. No, I would. I would. I am. I am pro-choice in every respect.

Jess McIntosh [00:36:08] Trump shared variations of this conflicted message over the years and well into his 2016 presidential campaign. Trump's repeated attempts to clarify his shaky position is a good illustration of how the radical right builds power by exploiting people who identify as pro-choice but express conflicted feelings on abortion. Trump was an unlikely anti-choice hardliner, but his discomfort around abortion access made his

conversion an easier sell for the movement. With that said, there were many evangelicals who weren't convinced.

Ilyse Hogue [00:36:41] The anti-choice movement is not monolithic and there were, in fact, real factions of the anti-choice movement that was much more reticent to get behind Donald Trump. They wanted somebody who had sprung from their own ranks like Ted Cruz. That makes sense, or at least it's ideologically consistent.

Jess McIntosh [00:36:59] How can a group that prides itself on being the pro moral party throw its weight behind such an ethically questionable candidate? Here's evangelical activist Bob Vander Plaats calling out that very hypocrisy in the 2016 campaign.

Archive [00:37:13] God's design for marriage and family is not up for the art of the deal. Religious liberty is not up for the art of the deal. Our relationship with the nation of Israel is not up for the art of the deal. Now, yesterday, he took me on because I didn't endorse him, so he took me on the Twitter world. You need to know I'm the youngest of eight children. I grew up with older brothers, so I know how to fight back when they want to push in Russia. We fought back and we won that Twitter war because the truth was on our side.

Jess McIntosh [00:37:40] Trump and Vander Plaats sparred publicly on Twitter, both accusing the other of underhanded dealings. But fighting Trump was an uphill battle.

Ilyse Hogue [00:37:49] Donald Trump excited their base and was willing to actually make deals with them and in fact, deals that previously they thought were impossible by more cautious candidates, including candidates of their choice.

Dahlia Lithwick [00:38:04] I think that it's just a perfectly transactional relationship and that both sides of the transaction understand that.

Jess McIntosh [00:38:11] That's Dahlia Lithwick, senior editor and legal correspondent for Slate.

Dahlia Lithwick [00:38:15] Donald Trump is well aware that he doesn't go to church. He golfs on Sunday. He is well aware that he has had multiple marriages, multiple affairs. He is accused of multiple acts of sexual violence against women. And it doesn't matter because he's going to give very, very religious people what they want. And again, he ran on that. Right. He during the 2016 campaign was absolutely explicit and overt in saying to religious audiences, you need me and you're going to hold your nose and vote for me regardless of how I've lived my life.

Jess McIntosh [00:38:49] And they do this pretty much sums it all up. The radical right and Donald Trump share a core trait. They both love making deals. But unlike Reagan, Trump is willing to go all in.

Ellie Langford [00:39:01] Trump was willing to give them whatever they wanted in exchange for political power and recognized that he would see returns on that investment. But I think what was really the tipping point was his willingness to go further than any other candidate in history in terms of the firm promises he offered. The anti-choice movement for decades had pursued this ultimate goal of molding a far right, ideologically conservative Supreme Court. That was the ultimate prize for them. The fact that Trump had the ability to

dangle a Supreme Court seat out in front of the conservative movement far right voters was incredibly powerful for his electoral prospects.

Dahlia Lithwick [00:39:50] If you look at how Republican candidates for the Senate were messaging this and they were going out. And so was Donald Trump. And in every single speech, this was their number one thing. You may hate everything else. But the courts are the key. The courts are the key to reversing Roe. Donald Trump puts out a list of nominees. It's never been done before, he says. All of my nominees are going to reverse Roe.

Ilyse Hogue [00:40:14] That willingness to negotiate really pulled the anti-choice movement into unity behind Donald Trump and with it a tremendous amount of infrastructure and footsoldiers.

Jess McIntosh [00:40:26] And here's how the anti-choice infrastructure exercises its power. Some of those foot soldiers were the very people who rallied against Trump in the primary. Remember Bob Vander Plaats?

Archive [00:40:36] All right. Yeah. Wonder what it must be like for those who've been critical of Donald Trump throughout the campaign or at least zinged him a few times to then have a one on one meeting with him and sort of reassess. Bob Vander Plaats had a chance for a one on one meeting over the Trump Tower. He joins us right now. Bob, how did that go?

Archive [00:40:53] Well, first of all, I really well, I think the good signal for conservatives is Donald Trump is reaching out. He and I go back for about five, six years with the relationship of being friends.

Archive [00:41:04] Well until that Iowa endorsement, until an endorsement tells you a lot of nasty stuff.

Archive [00:41:07] I mean, yeah, there's no doubt people remember the Twitter war. But I think what it is, is that to the future of this country is at stake. It's about, you know, who are you going to surround yourself with? What kind of people you will you surround yourself with? He asked my advice in regards to, you know, maybe some people that I'd like to have him put around.

Archive [00:41:24] Did he apologize for the remarks and the tweets, the nasty stuff that was them.

Archive [00:41:28] No, I didn't need that. And I don't think he needed that.

Archive [00:41:32] Did he offer it? Did he feel bad about what happened?

Archive [00:41:34] No.

Jess McIntosh [00:41:37] Bob Vander Plaats wasn't the only prominent figure to flip flop spectacularly in support of Trump. Kellyanne Conway also shifted course in the name of political expediency.

Ilyse Hogue [00:41:47] Kellyanne, was Ted Cruz all the way. I think when Cruz was out and Trump was the guy, she showed her massive adaptability to just jump ship and, like, fully embrace this guy who was actually honestly undoing years and years of work for her. Right. She had been the one to say we can't be so misogynist. She had been the one to say we have to actually put women on a pedestal. And yet she went in there and fully embraced him and now has become one of his biggest apologists or promoters.

[00:42:28] I think in that we can see two things through the lens of Kellyanne. You can see that there was never an issue of substance. Right? The misogyny, the sort of playing on racial fears that was not antithetical to Kellyanne Conway or the the anti-choice movement. It was just a question of style. And when Trump style proved to be a winning one, they just adapted. But the other piece is that at every moment that the sort of anti-choice movement could have stood up and said 'what you said on the Access Hollywood tapes is abhorrent. You can't do that. Forget about that. Separating children from their parents at the border. That's abhorrent. That is antithetical to everything we believe.' They did not do that. And in fact, Kellyanne Conway carrying through a theme from the origins of the anti-choice movement in defending that overt racism and misogyny, coined the term alternative facts, which was just a different way of saying ideology is an ends that justifies the means, even if it's pursued through disinformation.

Jess McIntosh [00:43:55] Conway's tactics fit perfectly into the playbook established by her anti-feminist form other Phyllis Schlafly.

Ellie Langford [00:44:01] She, very similarly to Schlafly, was a woman looking to make her mark in politics. And she found power in selling out the women around her.

Jess McIntosh [00:44:17] Phyllis Schlafly strategy that was so successful in defeating the ERA was rebooted in support of Ronald Reagan.

Archive [00:44:24] In the primaries this year, he has demonstrated that he can and will articulate the issues that concern the survival of America as a free and independent nation. And that's why I'm asking you to join with me in voting for Ronald Reagan.

Jess McIntosh [00:44:42] The message was simple. Pro-woman, not pro-feminism.

Ilyse Hogue [00:44:46] Look, I think you always had, you know, a portion of women like the members of the Eagle Forum who actually believed in the idea that their role was to be homemakers and support their husbands going out to work.

Ellie Langford [00:45:02] There was a whole series of women who built their power in relationship to men. Even if they were never top of the pyramid, they would always be close, that they would get power by proxy, get power through their husbands.

Ilyse Hogue [00:45:23] And largely, you know, that the overt strategy was to play to that subsection of women. And a lot of men who were feeling very threatened.

Jess McIntosh [00:45:33] It's important to note that Reagan's 1980 election was the birth of the partisan gender gap in American politics. That year marked the end of any attempts from the GOP to appeal toward genuine feminist ideals by lifting up specific women and specific kinds of women as proof of their commitment to female empowerment. They could avoid making any concrete policy advancements.

Ilyse Hogue [00:45:55] The gender gap was real when you looked at the election rate. So you have to separate what they were doing from a policy perspective to how they were maintaining power to be able to move their policy. And what you saw as not only did Reagan lose by the largest gender gap ever, but that he continued to actually alienate and hemorrhage women who were coming into their own despite the gender gap.

Jess McIntosh [00:46:20] The GOP was able to maintain just enough women, which is to say white women to win and save face.

Ilyse Hogue [00:46:26] I think there were two different things that he did that allowed him to maintain enough white women who had privilege within his coalition to win reelection in 1984. And one was play on racist fears, everything from welfare queens to, you know, sort of the the rise of drug use in the inner cities. There was just a you know, it's a very cynical way that you sort of make sure that those women are thinking more about their race than their gender. And it's it worked then. It works now.

Jess McIntosh [00:47:01] The impact of white women's decision to vote against gender equity in order to maintain an economic and social order that benefited them would live on in the minds of democratic women of color and consequently bisect the female vote by race. This dynamic has continued through every subsequent presidential election from 1980 through 2016.

Ellie Langford [00:47:24] Internalized sexism is something that we're all taught and that is hard to completely cut out from your ideology coming at it from a high level view. It seems surprising that women would vote against their interest, but we know that so many people vote against their interests for so many different reasons. Women are no different.

Ilyse Hogue [00:47:46] And during the Obama years, Kellyanne was really trying hard to recenter Republicans to actually talk to women. And so they decided they were going to launch Women for Trump.

Archive [00:48:05] White House adviser Kellyanne Conway and former Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi joined hundreds at the Tampa Convention Center for Thursday's Women for Trump event.

Archive [00:48:14] Women don't ask, do you share my gender? They say, Do you share my vision to share my values? You share my position on issues.

Archive [00:48:20] It's difficult for me to call myself a feminist in the classic sense because it seems to be very A.I.M. and it certainly is very pro-abortion in this context. And I'm neither anti-male or pro-abortion.

Jess McIntosh [00:48:33] In 2020, Trump became the first sitting president to speak in person at the March for Life. One of the Radical Right's premiere events held annually since 1970.

Archive [00:48:44] Well, thank you very much and thank you, Jeanne. It is my profound honor to be the first president in history to attend the March for Life.

Jess McIntosh [00:48:57] Trump spoke before thousands in the midst of his impeachment trial. Flanked by pro-life women, including Susan B. Anthony List president and Kellyanne Conway ally Marjorie Dannenfelser.

Archive [00:49:09] We have seen historic gains under this president. You heard what his heart is and what his track record has been along with his Senate. But now is the time to go for the win and let your pro-life voices be heard in November.

Jess McIntosh [00:49:29] In January, Susan B. Anthony List launched a 52 million dollar effort to support Donald Trump's 2020 reelection bid, marking its largest election spending effort to date. Why invest so much? Because Trump has proven he's a valuable commodity to the radical right and his willingness to bargain with the Supreme Court as his currency means the stakes could not be higher. Reagan and Trump both showed unprecedented deference to the anti choice movement in their rise to power. But at the end of the day, Reagan had his limitations. Reagan started out as the Moral Majority's darling, but he didn't follow through on many of the promises he made on the campaign trail. Not true for Donald Trump. The greatest fault line in this presidential comparison comes down to the courts.

Ilyse Hogue [00:50:15] And for Reagan, that meant nominating Sandra Day O'Connor as the first female justice to the Supreme Court.

Jess McIntosh [00:50:22] Trump, on the other hand, has doubled down in his efforts to completely transform the courts for a generation.

Dahlia Lithwick [00:50:28] This is actually a transaction in which both parties got exactly what they wanted. This is the one area in which he has been an unmitigated success.

Jess McIntosh [00:50:41] Next week, we'll take a closer look at the judiciary and the impact both of these decisions ultimately had on the current state of reproductive freedom in America. The Lie that Binds is a production of NARAL Pro-Choice America and produced by Jackie Danziger, our associate producer is James Tyson. Our music is by Hannis Brown, mixing in engineering by Kegan Zema. This series is adapted from the book "The Lie That Binds" by Ilyse Hope with Ellie Langford, published by Strong Arm Press, currently available at TheLieThatBinds.com.