

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-02452-6 — American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region
Sean P. Cunningham
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region

This book analyzes the political culture of the American Sunbelt since the end of World War II. It highlights and explains the Sunbelt's emergence during the second half of the twentieth century as the undisputed geographic epicenter for conservative Republican power in the United States. However, the book also investigates the ongoing nature of political contestation within the postwar Sunbelt, often highlighting the underappreciated persistence of liberal and progressive influences across the region. Sean P. Cunningham argues that the conservative Republican ascendancy that many have identified as almost synonymous with the rise of the postwar American Sunbelt was hardly an easy, unobstructed victory march. Rather, it was consistently challenged and never foreordained. The history of American politics in the postwar Sunbelt resembles a rollercoaster of partisan and ideological adaptation and transformation.

Sean P. Cunningham is Associate Professor of History at Texas Tech University. A decorated teacher, he holds a Ph.D. in Modern American History from the University of Florida and teaches broadly in twentieth-century U.S. history, while specializing in the history of post-1945 American political culture. His first book, *Cowboy Conservatism: Texas and the Rise of the Modern Right*, was published in 2010.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-02452-6 — American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region
Sean P. Cunningham
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Cambridge Essential Histories

Series Editor

Donald Critchlow, *Arizona State University*

Cambridge Essential Histories is devoted to introducing critical events, periods, or individuals in history to students. Volumes in this series emphasize narrative as a means of familiarizing students with historical analysis. In this series leading scholars focus on topics in European, American, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern, African, and world history through thesis-driven, concise volumes designed for survey and upper-division undergraduate history courses. The books contain an introduction that acquaints readers with the historical event and reveals the book's thesis; narrative chapters that cover the chronology of the event or problem; and a concluding summary that provides the historical interpretation and analysis.

Titles in the Series

Edward D. Berkowitz, *Mass Appeal: The Formative Age of the Movies, Radio, and TV*

Sean P. Cunningham, *American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt: Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region*

Ian Dowbiggin, *The Quest for Mental Health: A Tale of Science, Medicine, Scandal, Sorrow, and Mass Society*

John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Early Cold War Spies: The Espionage Trials that Shaped American Politics*

James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries*

Maury Klein, *The Genesis of Industrial America, 1870–1920*

John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good*

Wilson D. Miscamble, *The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs, and the Defeat of Japan*

Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400–1800*

Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War*

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-02452-6 — American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region
Sean P. Cunningham
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt

Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region

SEAN P. CUNNINGHAM

Texas Tech University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-1-107-02452-6 — American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
 Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region
 Sean P. Cunningham
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107024526

© Sean P. Cunningham 2014

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Cunningham, Sean P.

American politics in the postwar sunbelt : conservative growth in a battleground region / Sean P. Cunningham.

pages cm – (Cambridge essential histories)

ISBN 978-1-107-02452-6 (hardback)

1. Sunbelt States – Politics and government. 2. United States – Politics and government. 3. Conservatism – Sunbelt States. 4. Republican Party (U.S. : 1854-) I. Title.

JS437.C86 2014

320.97309'045-dc23 2013044947

ISBN 978-1-107-02452-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-67234-5 Paperback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-02452-6 — American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region
Sean P. Cunningham
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

For Caitlin and Samantha

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-02452-6 — American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt
Conservative Growth in a Battleground Region
Sean P. Cunningham
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page xi</i>
Introduction: What Is the Sunbelt – and Why Is It Important?	i
1 Convergence, Metropolitanization, and Anticommunism	17
2 Race, Rights, and the Liberal Consensus	56
3 Wars against Liberalism	91
4 Southern, Suburban, and Sunbelt Strategies	126
5 Mobilizing the Religious Right in the Politicized “Bible Belt”	160
6 Reagan’s Sunbelt, Reagan’s America	191
7 Shades of Red, Shades of Blue	226
Epilogue: Sunbelt Politics in the Twenty-First Century	257
<i>Index</i>	<i>267</i>

Acknowledgments

This book would not exist without the guidance and support of numerous friends and colleagues. Don Critchlow is at the top of that list. In February 2011, Don asked me to consider writing a study about Sunbelt politics for Cambridge's Essential Histories series. It goes without saying that I jumped at the invitation and have never once regretted doing so. Don's expertise in the field of post-1945 American politics and the history of modern conservatism was especially invaluable, as was his guidance during the initial stages of the proposal and publication process. I also want to thank Lew Bateman, who stepped in to shepherd this project after Eric Crahan – whose support was also invaluable – left for a new position at Oxford University Press in June 2012. Thanks also go to Shaun Vigil, whose patience with me during the production process was greatly appreciated, as well as Abigail Zorbaugh, Linda Benson, Sumitha Nithyanandan, and everyone else associated with Cambridge University Press – in my experience, a truly first-class organization.

I also want to thank Texas Tech University for supporting me and this project through a Faculty Development Leave, which I was awarded during the spring 2013 semester. That award allowed me to temporarily step away from teaching responsibilities to focus on the final stages of research and writing. I also want to thank my colleagues in the Department of History at Texas Tech for their

support, wisdom, and input throughout the various stages of this project. I am thankful to work in a department whose members celebrate with and consistently support one another – a rarity, I think, in the world of modern academia.

I also want to thank Bill Link, Brian Ward, Kevin Kruse, Matthew Lassiter, Darren Dochuk, Kyle Longley, Dan Williams, Walter Buenger, Alwyn Barr, Donald Walker, and Randy McBee for constructively critiquing my earlier scholarship on the Texas Right, thereby influencing my approach to this study. Their work is among the very best in the field, and I relied heavily on both their scholarship and previous advice as I wrote *American Politics in the Postwar Sunbelt*.

I am also thankful for the love and support of my wonderful family, including notably my parents, Kirk and Kay Cunningham. I also want to thank my brother, Eric Cunningham, for the always enjoyable and often challenging political discussions we've had in recent years, usually while drinking some very good beer. Those conversations have helped me clarify several of the arguments I make in this book. A particular word of thanks also goes to my uncle and aunt, Al and Cindy Cunningham, for allowing me to occupy their mountain home in Angel Fire, New Mexico, for an extended stay during the final stages of the writing process. The uninterrupted solitude and crisp mountain air were particularly motivating.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Laura, and my two daughters, Caitlin and Samantha. Without their patience, love, and encouragement, this book would not exist, nor would my career. I dedicated my first book, *Cowboy Conservatism*, to Laura, and I dedicate this one to Caitlin and Samantha, and do so with much love.