

The Sharon Statement

September 11, 1960

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1960, some 90 young conservatives met at the Sharon, Connecticut, home of *National Review* editor William F. Buckley, Jr., where they founded Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) to serve as an organization for young conservative activists. As their statement of principle, the group adopted the Sharon Statement, which was drafted by 26-year-old newspaper editor M. Stanton Evans. Written “at this time of moral and political crisis,” the statement is a succinct summary of the central ideas of modern American conservatism.

Among those principles are the following: Free will and moral authority come from God; political and economic liberty are essential for a free people and free institutions; government must be strictly and constitutionally limited; the market economy is the economic system most compatible with freedom; and Communism must be defeated, not merely contained.

This statement of principles denies the basic premises of Progressivism and liberalism. It also recalls earlier New England declarations about fundamental liberties—for example, the Essex Resolves and Massachusetts Constitution of 1780. While the language differs, the concerns for liberty remain the same over the centuries.

YAF became one of the most influential groups in the history of modern conservatism. In the early 1960s, it would provide the National Draft Goldwater Committee with critical manpower to draft and promote conservative Senator Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election. YAF would also challenge the liberal agenda of groups like the National Student Association and Students for a Democratic Society, support American servicemen in Vietnam, and call for a firm stance against Communism around the world.

“The Sharon Statement”

Adopted in conference at Sharon, Connecticut, September 11, 1960

In this time of moral and political crises, it is the responsibility of the youth of America to affirm certain eternal truths.

We, as young conservatives, believe:

That foremost among the transcendent values is the individual's use of his God-given free will, whence derives his right to be free from the restrictions of arbitrary force;

That liberty is indivisible, and that political freedom cannot long exist without economic freedom;

That the purpose of government is to protect those freedoms through the preservation of internal order, the provision of national defense, and the administration of justice;

That when government ventures beyond these rightful functions, it accumulates power, which tends to diminish order and liberty;

That the Constitution of the United States is the best arrangement yet devised for empowering government to fulfill its proper role, while restraining it from the concentration and abuse of power;

That the genius of the Constitution—the division of powers—is summed up in the clause that reserves primacy to the several states, or to the people, in those spheres not specifically delegated to the Federal government;

That the market economy, allocating resources by the free play of supply and demand, is the single economic system compatible with the requirements of personal freedom and constitutional government, and that it is at the same time the most productive supplier of human needs;

That when government interferes with the work of the market economy, it tends to reduce the moral and physical strength of the nation; that when it takes from one man to bestow on another, it diminishes the incentive of the first, the integrity of the second, and the moral autonomy of both;

That we will be free only so long as the national sovereignty of the United States is secure; that history shows periods of freedom are rare, and can exist only when free citizens concertedly defend their rights against all enemies;

That the forces of international Communism are, at present, the greatest single threat to these liberties;

That the United States should stress victory over, rather than coexistence with, this menace; and

That American foreign policy must be judged by this criterion: does it serve the just interests of the United States?