For this paper I ask the question ‘where is the behavioral revolution?’ In what follows I do an in depth analysis of the writing of behavioralists authors in the 1950s and early 1960s, and then I take a brief foray into political theory before I turn to a discussion of the historians of the discipline. My aim is to understand the nature and origin of the concept of the behavioral revolution in American political science. While the nature of the concept of the behavioral revolution is revealed in the often repeated call to make American political science more scientific, the origin of the unproblematic use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” is traced to the late 1960s.2

Searching for the Behavioral Revolution

‘Where is the Behavioral Revolution?’ What is the nature of the concept and when did its unproblematic use originate in the writing of American political scientists? A good place to begin is with an encyclopedia entry. A recent distillation of cutting edge knowledge about a subject can reveal the historical antecedents of the phenomenon in question. In this case the phenomenon in question is the use of the phrase the “behavioral revolution” in academic writing. Writing in the 2008 edition of the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Clyde Barrow’s entry on “political science” succinctly summarizes the history of the discipline. In my reading

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1 Paper presented on the Panel “Public Knowledge: Historical Perspectives on the Discipline and Its Publics” at the Western Political Science Association’s annual meeting in Portland, OR.

2 See Appendix I “Political History and Political Myth” for the beginnings of a theoretical framework that might help me to frame the concept of the behavioral revolution in terms of myth as opposed to history.
there are two noteworthy phenomena presented in the text. First, there is the easy and uncontroversial use of the Kuhnian language of “scientific revolution” and “paradigm shift” (2008, 312). As we will see the reliance on particular interpretation of Kuhn’s thesis is to be found throughout the literature bearing on the nature and origin of the behavioral revolution. Second, there is the unproblematic use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution.” On this later usage, Barrow states that “during the 1920s, political science began a paradigm shift that culminated in the behavioral revolution of the 1950s” (2008, 312). Here there is not even a hint or semblance that this statement is in any way controversial. The discipline’s acceptance of the phrase the “behavioral revolution” is captured nicely by Barrow’s unproblematic usage.

So what is the content of the myth of the behavioral revolution? Barrow summarizes the content of the myth by pointing out how the single defining contribution of the positivist movement in political science was the attempt to model the methods of the discipline on those imported from the physical sciences. The version of the “scientific method” championed by positivist social scientists and philosophers is characterized by a procedure “which starts with the formulation of a hypothesis, followed by empirical verification or experimentation, which leads to falsification or verification of the initial hypotheses” (2008, 312). For Barrow the positivist movement of the 1920s was spearheaded by efforts at the University of Chicago and especially the foundation of the Social Science Research Council and the work of Charles Merriam. By the 1950s, the positivist movement had culminated in the “behavioral revolution.”

This revolution is considered by Barrow a Kuhnian “scientific revolution” because the

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3 Already by 1965 the Kuhnian language of scientific revolution and paradigm shift had decisively entered the behavioral mainstream of American political science as Kuhn’s 1962 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was prominently featured in David Truman’s presidential address to the APSA titled “Disillusion and Regeneration: The Quest for a Discipline.”

organizing paradigm of the discipline shifted from a focus on the state in the German tradition of *Staatswissenschaft* to the “political system” and by reorienting the methodological focus to behavioral methods borrowed from the physical sciences. According to Barrow,

“behavioralism’s main methodological claim was that uniformities in political behavior could be discovered and expressed as generalizations, but such generalizations must be testable by reference to observable political behaviors, such as voting, public opinion, or decision making” (2008, 313). Here in a nutshell we have what might be termed the political myth of the behavioral revolution.⁵ American political science changed rapidly and fundamentally in the 1950s, and this transformation remade the discipline in the image of the physical science and the so-called “scientific method.”

While this short exercise has been helpful in identifying the nature of the myth of the behavioral revolution it has unfortunately not brought us any closer to finding the origin of the unproblematic use of the phrase the “behavioral revolution” in the academic writing of political science. To continue this inquiry into the origin of the phrase the “behavioral revolution,” I now turn to the literature of the behavioralists themselves. What better place to look for the behavioral revolution than in the written works of the actors during this period? As we shall see this approach is only useful in a limited way. Ultimately this literature brings us closer to the plausible conclusion that the concept of the behavioral revolution is a political myth and so, by definition, it makes sense that there would be no historical origin to identify (see Appendix I).

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⁵ By characterizing the “behavioral revolution” as a political myth I am not arguing that the nature of the discipline remained unaltered during the 1950s and early 1960s. I recognize that there was a renewed focus on applying the scientific method, a shift in the unit of analysis, a newer understanding of “theory,” and the influence of public and private grant-making agencies. The point is that all these features, less perhaps for the influence of the grant-making agencies, where already apparent in the writing of American political scientists going back to the 19th century (see e.g. Crick 1959, Somit and Tanenhaus 1967, Lepawsky 1964). On the influence of the grant-making agencies on the rise of behavioralism see Emily Hauptmann 2006, 2012.
The Behavioralists

In his 1991 “Study of Electoral Behavior,” Jack Dennis discusses the “behavioral revolution” in terms of a movement which “began to emerge and to change the intellectual concerns of political scientists by the late 1940s and early 1950” (1991, 54). Following this sentence Dennis cites three prominent behavioralist works: Robert Dahl’s 1961 APSR article “The Behavioral Approach in Political Science,” Heinz Eulau’s 1963 *The Behavioral Persuasion in Politics*, and David Easton’s 1965 *A Framework for Political Analysis*. Dennis goes on to discuss the behavioral revolution in particularly Dahlian terms as a “new mood, style and focus of political inquiry” where the study of voting behavior became the subfield par excellence for “scientific applications to the study of human behavior” (1991, 54; cf. Easton 1965, 165). Dennis also remarks how this movement was interdisciplinary, a “mainstream movement to become more ‘socially scientific’ along with the other social disciplines of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics” (1991, 54). Dennis goes on to describe the traditional alternative models of voting in American political science (the sociological, the social-psychological, and the economic).

Let us interrogate the citations that Dennis provides for his discussion of the “behavioral revolution” and see if we can find any clue as to the when that phrase was first used or perhaps more realistically when the phrase first began to enjoy a wide currency in the literature of the discipline. Of course this investigation takes us a full 60 years back in time so it is reasonable to expect that the phrase “the behavioral revolution” will not yet be in wide circulation. If this is the case then why should Dennis cite these three pieces together by way of substantiating his

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brief outline of a definition of the behavioral revolution? Where might we locate the origin of the concept of the behavioral revolution?

The first article in time is Robert Dahl’s now classic APSR article “The Behavioral Approach in Political Science: Epitaph for a Monument to a Successful Protest.” Dahl begins his article by noting that there is no consensus concerning the nature and origin of the term the “behavioral.” Accordingly it’s much easier to identify the concept in terms of what it is not. For Dahl the behavioral approach to political science is not the same as that of “the speculative philosopher, the historian, the legalist, or the moralist” (1961, 763). In beginning his investigation of the meaning and origin of the term “behavioralism” Dahl identifies the first widespread use of the phrase “political behavior” in the literature of American political science following the First World War.

Dahl goes on to identify six “stimuli” that helped establish the behavioral approach in American political science: (1) the early work of Charles Merriam at the University of Chicago and the flowering of behavioral political science at the University of Chicago in the 1920s and 1930s, (2) the influx of German émigré scholars in the 1930s, (3) the Second World War and the experience of the war generation’s “confrontation of theory and reality,” (4) the establishment of the Social Science Research Council, (5) the development of the social scientific survey at the University of Michigan and Columbia University, (6) the impact of the great philanthropic foundations in Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford (1961, 763-765).

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7 This paper was first presented at the 5th World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Paris, September 26, 1961 (Polsby et al. 1963, 15).
8 As Somit and Tanenhous point out the term “behaviorism” was commonly used prior to the 1960s when the term “behavioralism” came to be the predominate usage (1967, 183). See also Easton 1985, p. 137.
9 Curiously, Dahl cites David Easton’s 1953 The Political System as evidence that the term has been in use since WWI. I say curious since an earlier citation would seem more appropriate. Later, Dahl also gives credit to Frank Kent, an American journalist who published Political Behavior in 1928 and to Herbert Tingsten’s 1937 Political Behavior.
By the second section of his essay, Dahl is ready to define the behavioral approach as “a protest movement within political science” which is further characterized:

through usage by partisans, partly as an epithet, terms like political behavior and the behavioral approach came to be associated with a number of political scientists, mainly Americans, who shared a strong sense of dissatisfaction with the achievements of conventional political science, particularly through historical, philosophical, and the descriptive-institutional approaches, and a belief that additional methods and approaches either existed or could be developed that would help to provide political science with empirical propositions and theories of a systematic sort, tested by closer, more direct and more rigorously controlled observation of political events (1961, 766).

By the third section Dahl has equates the “behavioral mood” with the “scientific outlook” and then rather unproblematically transitions to using the later term in place of the behavioral approach. By the time he concludes his essay, the behavioral approach has disappeared altogether. Dahl closes his study with a reminiscence of how “from time to time in the past the study of politics has been altered, permanently, by a fresh infusion of the spirit of empirical inquiry – by, that is to say, the scientific outlook” (1961, 772). In effect Dahl concludes that the behavioral approach to the study of American politics is a “mood” which is characterized by the effort to be more “empirical” in the “scientific” sense imported from the physical sciences (i.e. the positivist inspired “scientific method”).

Where is the “behavioral revolution” in Dahl’s essay and by extension why does Dennis cite this article in his discussion of it? Even though Dahl does not use the term “behavioral revolution” the idea is already there in his writing on the subject of behavioralism in political
In section five Dahl refers to the behavioral approach variously in terms of a “revolt” and a “protest” against the traditionalists in the discipline. He comes closest to the meaning conveyed by this concept at the end of section one and the beginning of section five. In closing section one Dahl refers to the “radicals” and the “revolutionary sectarians” who first initiated the behavioral approach in the 1920s and 1930s at the University of Chicago. The justification for the use of this language is not offered by Dahl. Presumably the “sectarians” of the behavioral approach were “radical” and “revolutionary” because they represented a new mood or outlook in the discipline which was different than what had come before.

Here we see Dahl participating in political myth-making since he is eulogizing a set of heroic founders of a movement and the institutions which supported them. In particular Dahl spends a good deal of time discussing a David Truman’s 1951 “The Implications of Political Behavior Research,” but he also mentions such founders of behavioralism as Charles Merriam, Harold Lasswell, David Easton, V.O. Key, Jr., Herbert Simon, Pendleton Herring, Gabriel Almond. Dahl also mentions the institutional support of Universities like Chicago and Columbia, the Social Science Research Council and its Committee on Political Behavior, the Survey Research Center and the Bureau of Applied Research at the University of Michigan, the support of the philanthropic foundations like the Ford Foundation’s Behavioral Science Program, and stemming from this last effort the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University.

The next reference cited by Dennis is David Easton’s 1965 book *A Framework for Political Analysis*. For my purposes the relevant portions of Easton’s text come primarily from Chapter One which was previously published in 1962 as “The Current Meaning of”

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10 Easton acknowledges Jack Dennis in his preface as one of many graduate students who helped in some way contribute to the book (1965, xiii).
‘Behavioralism’ in Political Science.” Easton begins his preface by mentioning that *Framework* is a follow-up to his now more well-known *The Political System* (1953). By and large the book is an elaboration of what Easton calls “systems theory” and the way that the entire political system can be mapped in a logico-functional manner. This somewhat antiquated approach to political analysis is interesting for its importance in the historiography of the discipline but my emphasis is on finding the behavioral revolution in Easton’s work. Why does Dennis cite this work in reference to the “behavioral revolution?”

Like Dahl, Easton has trouble providing an unequivocal definition since it is too soon to clearly see the borders of the emerging approach to political analysis (1965, 4). For Easton what is afoot is a “conceptual revolution” in the discipline which is a remaking of the meaning of “theory” in modern political science (1965, 2). In this chapter Easton comes very close to describing the period in terms of a “behavioral revolution.” The first section of the chapter is called “The Revolution in Political Theory.” The revolution Easton refers to is in the manner of thinking about political theory that he hopes will come to predominate in the discipline. Easton had already rejected “traditional” political theory (historical, institutional, moral, etc.) in his 1951 article “The Decline of Modern Political Theory” and in his 1953 *The Political System*. Moving beyond these criticisms, Easton is now ready to describe the theoretical framework which he hopes will serve as a basis for modern empirical political theory.12

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12 Judging from Easton’s remarks in 1985 his efforts were an overwhelming success. In his “Political Science in the United States: Past and Present,” Easton remarks about the behavioral period that “if there was any single comprehensive description of the subject matter of political science it was to be found in the notion that it studied the authoritative allocation of values for society. This was the conception that I had put forward in my book, *The Political System*, in 1953, and it had found widespread acceptance” (1985, 144). For more on the success of empirical theory see *Contemporary Empirical Political Theory*, Kristen R. Monroe, Ed. (1997).
A key difference between the way that Dahl and Easton approach the problem of identifying the nature and origin of behavioralism in American political science is that for Easton behavioralism is not characterized by a “mood” or “orientation,” but rather by a particular framework of thinking or modern “political theory,” as he would have it. Easton emphasizes that this “intellectual revolution” and “upheaval” is in large part due to the interdisciplinary nature of the behavioral approach to political analysis (1965, 3). Easton goes on to do his best to give a comprehensive account of the “assumptions and objectives” which loosely characterize the “behavioral credo” of behavioral researchers in the discipline (1965, 7). These assumptions and objectives are: (1) the search for regularities or patterns in political behavior, (2) the use of a verification principle such as hypothesis testing, (3) an emphasis on methodological technique, (4) quantification, (5) the separation of values from facts in an analytic fashion, (6) the systematization of both theory and practice, (7) pure science in the sense that theory precedes application, and (8) integration in the sense that political behavior research is interdisciplinary (1965, 7).

Next Easton sets out to better delimit the meaning of the “behavioral approach” which, echoing other period authors, “has come to mean about as many things as are commentators” (1965, 8). Even so the diversity of definitions has at least a common goal – “a science of politics modeled after the methodological assumptions of the natural sciences” (1965, 8). Here in a nutshell is the heart of what the behavioral movement came to mean to later political scientists (recall Barrow’s 2008 definition above). Even so, the goal of making the study of politics more scientific has been discussed for much longer than the behavioral period in the US (see Lepawsky 1964; Dryzek 2007). What was new was the addition of a disdain for “tradition” and the dismissal of classical political theory.
Traditional or classical political theory is dismissed by Easton in favor of “empirical political theory.” The “behavioral approach” is “largely the offspring of this revolution” which can be understood as “the new kind of theory in political science that has been struggling through a decade of parturition and that is just now beginning to take on a life of its own” (1965, 3). In addition, reports Easton, the “new name” of “behavioralism” signals that the science of politics aims to ally itself with trends in other social science disciplines (1965, 9). The point that Easton labors to make clear is that the behavioral approach is more than a new emphasis on the application of the “scientific method.” Although there has long been a focus on modeling political science on the physical sciences it was “only since the 1950’s” that the name “behavioral science” came into use (1965, 9).

For Easton the behavioral approach signifies far more than a new methodological orientation in American political science. Historically there have been a number of name changes as science slowly evolved into specialized branches. Whereas once there was philosophy; slowly there appeared “moral” and “natural” science, followed later by the full modern repertoire of “biology,” “physics,” and “astronomy”

More recently the emergence of behavioral as opposed to “social” science may be attributed to the creation of the National Science Foundation in 1950 and social scientists’ efforts to disassociate themselves from any sort of “socialist” science (1965, 12; see Easton 1985, 139-140). Thus, Easton argues, “the adaption of this name by the various foundations, institutes, and departmental programs at universities, the idea of behavioral science is applied to any social research concerned with a

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13 Easton also mentions the influence of the Ford Foundation (established in 1936) as a factor in the name change from social to behavioral science. On foundation influence and the rise of behavioralism see Hauptmann 2006 and Hauptmann 2012.
scientific understanding of man in society, regardless of the disciplinary umbrella under which it may find shelter” (1965, 12-13; see also Hauptmann 2012, 22).

Even where the behavioralists have been in agreement in what they are not (not confined to one discipline, not restricted to the study of institutions, not adverse to the application of the scientific method to social and political problems, etc.) they have to date failed to consider the newness of the emergent behavioral or “empirical” theory. As I mentioned earlier, Easton believes that the behavioral movement represents more than a new focus on method (1965, 17, 21). Instead the principal feature that distinguishes the old traditional from the new behavioral political science is the new empirical theory that Easton champions throughout his career. “New theory,” for Easton, “tends to be analytic, not substantive, explanatory rather than ethical, more general and less particular” (1965, 22). When aligned with advanced technical means of research the new empirical theory promises to reveal the “full meaning and significance of the behavioral approach in political science” (1965, 22).

Where is the behavioral revolution Easton’s 1965 book? The behavioral sciences represent a “new turning in the road” and “the beginning of a new direction.” This language is making use of the imagery of revolution even if the metaphor is far from explicit (1965, 13). In part the behavioral approach is “an ideological weapon lending color and vigor to the movement of a diffuse and informal group of academic rebels against traditions” (1965, 10). More specifically Easton wishes to analytically separate out two “revolutions” that are occurring simultaneously in American political science: (1) the technical revolution, and (2) the theoretical revolution. First, the technical revolution which began in the 1920s and flourished after WWII political analysis developed the following scientific techniques: “interviews, survey research, technical methods for measurement, [t]he formalization of analysis in logical and mathematical
symbols … the widespread introduction of the scope and method of political science and training in the use of mechanized procedures for recording and analyzing data” (1965, 18).

Next, Easton turns to the second “theoretical revolution” which he feels needs to be acknowledged in order to understand the nature of behavioralism for American political science. Although Easton does not use the phrase “the behavioral revolution” he does remark that “the behavioral movement” is marked by a “second revolution” which has “transformed other social sciences into behavioral disciplines” (1965, 18-19). “This revolution,” Easton continues, has involved the sharp consciousness that without far more concentrated effort on empirical theory our technical resources would be squandered” (1965, 19).

I now turn to the third reference cited by Dennis, Heinz Eulau’s 1963 The Behavioral Persuasion in Politics. Like Dahl and Easton, Eulau begins his book with the question “what is political behavior” (1963, 4). Eulau characterizes the behavioral approach in American political science as the “behavioral persuasion.” Whether a mood (Dahl), an orientation (Easton), or a persuasion (Eulau) all the authors covered would agree with Eulau when he says – “the behavioral persuasion in politics is concerned with what man does politically and the meanings he attaches to his behavior” (1963, 5). For Eulau the behavioral persuasion in politics is a “return” to a tradition of research began with ancient authors in Greece and neglected by modern researchers. In turn, the behavioral researcher neglects institutions and normative theory and instead focuses on what people do and what beliefs they understand to be motivating their actions (1962, 7). “In returning to man as the root of politics,” states Eulau, “the behavioral persuasion reveals itself as a ‘radical’ orientation in the study of politics” (1963, 10). By “radical” one suspects that Eulau is referring to the etymological meaning of ‘going to the root of something’ (the title of the chapter is “The Root is Man” after all), but more specifically Eulau
means to highlight the Popperian criterion of validity or ‘falsificationism’ – the behavioral persuasion’s “radicalism stems from the conviction that a proposition may be worn out when, on being tested, it can be disproved” (1963, 10-11).

Although there are many individual differences among practicing behavioralists in the American science of politics, Eulau identifies four areas where a broad consensus exists. First, there is widespread agreement on the appropriate units of analysis. Echoing other behavioralists like Easton, Eulau emphasizes that the core of the approach is the focus on “the individual person as the empirical unit of analysis” (1963, 13). Second, the common agreement that research must engage all levels of analysis relevant to political behavior whether social, economic, or cultural. This acknowledgment of the necessity of approaching a phenomenon from multiple levels of analysis necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. Third, the interdependence of theory and research where by “theory” Eulau means the “theoretical activity” which postulates and ultimately presupposes a framework or model for analysis and by “research,” the activity of formulating testable hypotheses and then testing them using empirical data (e.g. voting or other decision making phenomena).

The fourth area of general consensus is the general agreement on the utility of behavioral methods for the analysis of political phenomenon. Here Eulau makes near explicit use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution.” Echoing Easton, Eulau is discussing the methods or techniques of behavioral political science and he states that “the revolution in the behavioral sciences has been predominantly a technological revolution” (1963, 31). Unlike Easton, Eulau is adamant that the “revolution” is not a revolt against classical or traditional theory.¹⁴ In his

¹⁴ Which is not to say that Eulau withholds from criticizing traditional political theory along the same lines pursued by Easton and Dahl. According to Eulau, “much traditional political inquiry has been purely formal in the sense that is was limited to the observation of patterns and took the meaning content of behavioral for granted. Political institutions or constitutions were described and their formal similarities and differences were noted, but what
telling the behavioral persuasion represents what one might call the “coming of age of social science” through the application of techniques of research that “the classical writers would have used had it been available to them” (Eulau 1963, 32). Among the techniques that Eulau singles out are the “probability survey sample,” “the use of panels of informants,” “the invention of metric techniques such as scalogram and factor analysis,” and “the analysis of political group behavior” (1963, 33-34).

In his 1991 oral history, Eulau registers his opinion that there really was never a behavioral revolution – at least in the sense that Kuhn meant in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1991, 194).16 Eulau remarks that the origin of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” probably came from a 1955 article by David Truman titled, “The Impact on Political Science of the Revolution in the Behavioral Sciences.” This book chapter appears in *Research Frontiers in Politics and Government* which was produced for the Brookings Institution. Other notable behavioralists who have chapters in the book are Herbert Simon, Robert Dahl, and Alfred de Grazia. Truman opens his article by asking “what is the nature of the alleged revolution” marked out by himself in his title (1955, 202). For Truman the “behavioral sciences” may be defined in the special sense of “academic departments” in social science which “provide or aspire to provide ‘verified principles’ of human behavior through the use of methods of inquiry similar to those of the natural sciences” (1955, 203). This summary of the behavioral

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15 In chapter five, Eulau discusses some “behavioral dilemmas.” Eulau begins by noting that “the behavioral persuasion in politics is difficult to live by. Behavioral practitioners make exacting scientific demands on themselves” (1963, 110). This persuasion is difficult to live by since it “aspires to the status of science” and since Eulau “takes it for granted that a science of politics is both possible and desirable, and I shall start from there” (1963, 111).

16 There seems to be somewhat of a consensus on this point – see for example Eulau’s 1991 oral history, Farr 1995, Gunnell 2004, and Dryzek 2006).
approach represents the essence of what I’ve termed the political myth of “the behavioral revolution” (see Appendix I). In 1955 these departments are overwhelmingly to be found in psychology, sociology, and anthropology (1955, 203).

Despite Eulau’s reference to the article there is no mention of any “behavioral revolution” in Truman’s article. Truman goes on to rather unproblematically relate all the advances in technique or method which would in just a few short years become the focus of tremendous controversy (e.g. see Barber 2006). There is no sense in Truman’s remarks that anything he is saying is controversial in the least. From the perspective of the present, his naivety (or perhaps his political astuteness?) is a consequence of the fact that the impact of Kuhn’s 1962 *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* had yet to be felt in the sociology of knowledge. Truman is decidedly not a partisan of any “revolution” and after the first couple of pages he preaches caution and admonishes the Young Turks to not lose sight of the political aspect of their vocation and not fail to recognize the limited applicability of behavioral theories to the larger and more complex arena of politics and human governance. He identifies the core of what political scientists do as the description of institutions, how they operate and the consequences their activity has on the life of the citizen. In the end, although he is sympathetic to the call for more systematic theory and empirically testable hypotheses in political science research, he is still skeptical that a revolution in theory and method along behavioral lines will improve the discipline as a whole.¹⁷

¹⁷ As I noted above, it may be the case that Truman is being “politically astute.” He is writing from a position of power in the discipline, as for example, a member of the SSRC’s Committee on Political Behavior and may be writing in such a manner as to preempt his potential critics. I am grateful to Emily Hauptmann for pointing out these important considerations.
In all these period pieces (1955-1965), the authors allude to the concept of the “behavioral revolution,” but in no case do they actually make use of the phrase. Why did Dennis choose to cite Dahl, Easton, and Eulau to back up his condensed definition of the so-called “behavioral revolution?” How do these pieces help us understand the nature and origin of the concept? The empirical question remains – when did the phrase the “behavioral revolution” enter into the literature of American political science and perhaps more importantly when did its use become completely unproblematic and non-controversial?

Once again, I tentatively propose there is no origin to be pointed to because the concept of the behavioral revolution has no origin because it is not political history it is political myth. Before giving up the search for the origin of the concept of the behavioral revolution, however, I now turn to two more areas in the literature of American political science: political theory and disciplinary history.

Political Theory

By 1969 the phrase “the behavioral revolution” is evidently in wide enough circulation that the political theorist Sheldon Wolin can frame his article around a critique of the so-called technological or methodological advances represented by behvioralism in American political science. In sharp contrast to the three behavioralists discussed above, Wolin insists that theory is not method and in fact these two activities represent very different ways of life (i.e. the bios theoretikos and the vita methodica). In this APSR article, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” Wolin juxtaposes the vocation of what he calls “the epic political theorist” and the “scientific

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18 Although Easton also distinguishes between technique or method and theory his use of “empirical theory” is very different than “traditional” or “classical” political theory. Wolin characterizes the crisis in the “tradition of political theory” in the following terms: “there is widely shared belief that that tradition was largely unscientific where it was not antiscientific and that the defining characteristic of a scientific revolution is to break with the past” (1969, 1068). On “traditional” political theory see also Hauptmann’s 2005 “Defining ‘Theory’ in Postwar Political Science.”
theorist” (1969, 1080). Like other political theorists of the time (e.g. Hannah Arendt or Leo Strauss), Wolin aims to restore the dignity and legitimacy of traditional or classical political theory in the face of the criticisms of the behavioralists. Behavioral empirical political theory as Dahl, Easton, and Eulau understood it has impoverished the long tradition of political thought and in Arendt’s immortal words – left many of us thinking “what we are doing?” (Arendt 1958)

The reduction of the rich tradition of western political theory into the narrow confines of the scientific method is lamentable. Like Arendt and Strauss (although with different emphases), Wolin is concerned with the big picture and with understanding how it is that traditional or classical political theory could come to be so maligned – even to the point of being declared dead or dying by its defenders? His answer is revealed on the last two pages of his essay: the western world as it existed in 1969 is productive of a methodological and scientific mentality. The technical and ideological imperatives of late capitalism in the west have created methodological technicians and it is no wonder that social and political scientists have found behavioral methods congenial. This is very much like a scenario Max Weber might have had in mind when he wrote of the “polar night of icy darkness and harness” referring then to the dystopian possibility of a fully rationalized society. Since citizens are trained from early childhood to think in methodological and scientific terms it is no wonder that they behave in rational and predictable ways.

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19 The vocation of the traditional or epic political theorist is characterized by Wolin in the following terms: “Here lies the vocation of those who preserve our understanding of past theories, who sharpen our sense of the subtle, complex interplay between political experience and thought, and who preserve our memory of the agonizing efforts of intellect to restate the possibilities and threats posed by political dilemmas of the past” (1969, 1077).

20 There is not space here to dive deeply into these epic issues and I’ve dealt with them in more detail elsewhere (Berkenpas 2009 “The Ongoing Revolution in American Political Science;” Berkenpas 2010 “European Exile and American Escape: The Dispute between Science and Philosophy”).
Wolin begins his article by noting that “whatever one’s assessment of the ‘behavioral revolution,’ it clearly has succeeded in transforming political science. What is less clear is the “precise nature of that revolution” (1969, 1062). In my reading, it is still not clear how the discipline has been transformed, much less what the “precise nature” of this transformation has been. Yet most practitioners today would probably accept the surface validity of the common story of the behavioral revolution as the period between 1950 and 1970 in which American political science became a real science modeled after the methodological assumptions and technical innovations of the modern physical and biological sciences. At this point we are no closer to identifying the origin much less the nature of the “behavioral revolution” in American political science.

One factor that all these authors have in common is their direct or citational reliance on the work of Thomas Kuhn. Following the publication of Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962 it quickly became de rigueur in American political science to speak of the history of the discipline in the Kuhnian terms of normal science, paradigm shift, and scientific revolution. By 1965 the language introduced by Kuhn to explain changes in dominant scientific paradigms has entered the mainstream as David Truman reflected on Kuhn’s thesis for the discipline (1965, 865). While Wolin moves fairly quickly in his rejection of the proposition that the behavioral revolution was a scientific revolution on the order that Kuhn described in the history of the physical sciences, he does find that “there has been a certain revolution in political science” which has been characterized by the behavioral movement’s presupposition that “the fundamental purposes and arrangements served by its techniques have been settled” (1969, 1063). Thus a dominant “paradigm” has emerged but not because of any anomalies in
“traditional” political theory. Rather this shift has been made possible by external changes in the world of human affairs following the world wars (cf. Brown 2002).

So where is the “behavioral revolution” in Wolin’s article? The phrase “the behavioral revolution” is clearly and unproblematically used by Wolin to refer to the behavioral period in the discipline’s past. By this time the nature of the so-called revolution is well established. Wolin notes how for the proponents of behavioralism in American political science, the “idea of method is the central fact of the behavioral revolution” (1969, 1063). It seems fair to say that the nature of the behavioral revolution can be summarized in terms of Wolin’s vita methodica or the dogmatic adherence to “the ethic of science: objectivity, detachment, fidelity to fact, and deference to intersubjective verification by a community of practitioners” (1969, 1064). Wolin remarks that this change in the mentality of the average political scientist “may mark the significance of the behavioral revolution” (1969, 1064). This seems to be a prediction that has been born out with time but unfortunately brings us no closer to identifying the origin of the phrase “the behavioral revolution.”

Disciplinary History

I now turn to the work of the disciplinary historians. Among the first works devoted exclusively to discussing the history of the discipline of political science were Bernard Crick (1959) and Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus (1967). I have not found the unproblematic use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” in either of these foundational texts in the history of American political science. Disciplinary history proper, where the object of the analysis is some fundamental theme or foundational event in the history of a social scientific discipline, has been around since the 1970s and is now sub-genre in its own right. By the late 1980s “it would not be
an exaggeration to suggest that the history of political science is on the threshold of becoming a distinct research specialty” (Gunnell 1985, 16; see also Farr 1988).

The earliest use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” in its entirety I’ve found to date is in David Easton’s 1968 *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* entry on “Political Science.” Easton is writing as a disciplinary historian and he opens his encyclopedia entry by noting that “political science in mid-twentieth century is a discipline in search of its identity” (1968, 282). This “identity crisis” has been precipitated by a “profound revolution” in the discipline since WWII (1968, 282). Easton goes on to catalogue the past means of organizing political phenomenon such as institutions, the state, power, and of course he gives special attention to his concept of the “political system.” Next Easton catalogues the various content areas that he sees as being at the core of political sciences over the millennia: universalism (ancient Greek thought through the 19th century), legalism (late into the 19th century), realism (through WWII), and behavioralism (after WWII).

The rest of the article is devoted to the behavioral period. According to Easton, “the behavioral movement in political science came into full bloom after WWII (1968, 291). As with his 1965 *A Framework for Political Analysis*, Easton identifies two distinct “revolutions” simultaneously at work in contemporary political science in the US: the technical or methodological and the theoretical. Unlike in the earlier work the phrase “the behavioral revolution” occurs four times. Discussing the advance of the theoretical revolution in American

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21 It seems that 1968 was somewhat of a threshold year for the unproblematic use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” in the writing of American political scientists. In Marian Irish’s 1968 edited volume, *Political Science: The Advance of the Discipline*, there are two uses of the phrase “the behavioral revolution.” The first is found in William Keech and James W. Prothero’s article “American Government” the authors speak of the “behavioral revolution” in quotation marks. In Neil McDonald and James Rosenau’s contribution, “Political Theory as Academic Field and Intellectual Activity,” the phrase “the behavioral revolution” appears without quotation marks once (1968, 47). In my reading the alternating usage of the quotation marks indicates that political scientists are not yet convinced that the phrase is wholly unproblematic and ready for use without the qualification.
political science Easton says “the behavioral revolution has stimulated the formulation of empirically oriented theory” (1968, 294). Later in a section titled “Method and Theory,” Easton discusses how the discipline has been reshaped by the revolution in techniques or methods of analysis. The newer political science has turned toward method and technique in the wake of a “major revolution” and “by the 1960s the methods of modern science had made deep inroads into political research, under the rubric of the study of political behavior. This behavioral revolution has permanently changed the methodological and technical face of political science” (1968, 295).

Easton goes on to discuss how modern political science went through an arduous learning process as it worked to “throw off the heavy yoke of the Greek classical tradition” (1968, 296). Shortly thereafter the third appearance of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” appears. Curiously, this usage is bracketed by quotation marks – The “‘behavioral revolution’ in political science after World War II stands as a summary label for the consequences of the full reception of scientific method” (1968, 296). The use of quotation marks in this instance ought to signal that the author is uncomfortable with the usage or that he or she is quoting another author. Neither of these traditional interpretations makes sense in this case. Easton is not quoting any author in this use and clearly he is comfortable with the phrase “the behavioral revolution” since he’s already used it unproblematically twice and in the very next paragraph he uses the phrase without quotation marks. “If we disregard particulars for the moment, what stands out with brilliant clarity in the behavioral revolution in political science is the final and complete acceptance of the idea that methods of investigation, in all their aspects, are problematic and, accordingly, merit special, concentrated attention” (1968, 296). Throughout this article there is

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22 For Easton “empirical” theory is tantamount to “behavioral” theory. The ancient desire to understand the nature and origin of “political systems” or regime types “expanded after World War II to become empirically oriented, or behavioral, theory” (1968, 293).
no sense that the use of the phrase is in anyway problematic (despite the one strange occurrence of the phrase in quotation marks). Easton stands as one of the earliest example of the unproblematic use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution.”

By the 1980s and early 1990s the use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” to refer to the development of American political science at midcentury has become common place. John Gunnell’s 1983 “Political Theory: The Evolution of a Sub-Field” in found in the first APSA State of the Discipline volume. The section title on page 12 is “The Behavioral Revolution: 1950-1959.” In 1985 Easton again uses the phrase in his discussion of the history of the discipline in his article “Political Science in the United States” (1985, 137, 139). By the early 1990s the phrase is in widespread use in volumes dedicated to the history of the discipline (e.g. Farr and Seidelman 1993; Farr, Dryzek and Leonard 1995). By this time the concept of the behavioral revolution is so taken for granted that James Farr and Raymond Seidelman can unproblematically differentiate two “behavioral revolutions” the first coinciding with what has also been called the “pre-behavioral” or positivist period of 1903-1945. The second period corresponding to the more typical era of behavioral dominance from 1945-1970.24

James Farr’s 1995 essay “Remembering the Revolution: Behavioralism in American Political Science” is written in the critical mode typical of disciplinary history. It’s important to note that Farr sees himself as criticizing the myth through the reporting of what the historical actors themselves thought they were doing. This approach to historical narrative, however, often blurs the line between what the author believes and what his or her historical subjects were up to. For Farr a certain “revolution had indeed made over the discipline of American political science”

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23 This unproblematic use is particularly remarkable given that just a year later Easton would declare the end of the “behavioral revolution” and the beginning of the “post-behavioral revolution.” See his 1969 APSR presidential address “The New Revolution in Political Science.”

The behavioral revolution ushered in a rapid and “fundamental transformation in the identity of the discipline as a whole” (1995, 198). In Farr’s reading the behavioral revolution is analogous to a political revolution in so far as it “effected the behavioral transformation of the discipline” (1995, 199). Or more to the point, Farr states that the “success of the behavioral revolution” is evident in the professional positions and offices held by behavioral political scientists (1995, 206).

By the early 2000s there seems to be a shift in the way that disciplinary historians understand the nature and origin of the concept of the behavioral revolution. The concept of the behavioral revolution is being subjected to critical analysis after decades of unproblematic use. As John Gunnell pointed out in 2004, “telling the story of political science has always been a crucial element in both the discipline’s internal rhetoric of inquiry and its search for identity” (2004, 47). By 2004 Gunnell finds the phrase “the behavioral revolution” to be an inappropriate usage given that its use since the 1960s was based in part on the theory of scientific revolution forwarded in Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In somewhat sharp contrast to what he has said in the past, Gunnell argues that there has only been one scientific revolution in the sense of a discipline wide paradigm shift and this occurred in the 1920s. This earlier positivist revolution was characterized by a shift from state-based political science to a focus on the integration of positivism into mainstream political science through the aegis of pluralist theory – a movement that was “complete” by the mid-1930s (Gunnell 2004, 48; see Barrow 2011, 82). This implies that the story of the behavioral “revolution” is inaccurate – at least in so far as it purports to be a Kuhnian scientific revolution (again there seems to be somewhat of a consensus on this point – see for example Wolin 1969, Eulau’s 1991 oral history, Farr 1995, and Dryzek 2006).
In Gunnell’s estimation the behavioral revolution was “far from a revolution in the Kuhnian sense” (2004, 48-49). Instead the movement is understood in terms of a “reformation” of the positivist revolution of the 1920s and 1930s, buttressed by the influx of émigré scholars who became the epistemological ‘other’ of the mainstream in American political science (2004, 49; see also Gunnell 1993, Gunnell 2007). From this perspective, the behavioral “revolution” becomes a “conservative movement” which sought to bolster and defend the mainstream from the assaults of their critics in political theory and elsewhere (2004, 49). Gunnell characterizes the behavioral movement as a “reaffirmation” of the pluralist revolution of the 1920s and 1930s which was “in part a defense against the new and unprecedented attack on the idea of a science of politics, but it was also a response to a context that valorized pure science and funded quantitative research” (2004, 49). For Gunnell, then, the discourse about the behavioral revolution is clearly mythological. Gunnell’s article works to debunk the myth of the behavioral revolution by arguing that the movement was not in fact revolutionary at all. He does this by applying a specific (Kuhnian) sense of the term “revolution” to the discourse about the behavioral revolution.

According to John Dryzek there have been at least five “revolutionary moments” in the history of American political science (2006, 487). In succession these were: the statist founders in the late 19th century, the pluralist moment in the early 20th century, the behavioralist period of the mid-20th century, the Caucus for a New Political Science in the late 1960s, and finally the Perestroika movement in the early 21st century. Its notable that Dryzek finds only two of these moments to be truly revolutionary – the statist and the behavioralist ones – in the sense that they were able to “rese[t] the discipline’s agenda” from what came before (2006, 487).
As the title of his article makes clear, Dryzek’s thesis is that the reason these moments were able to be truly revolutionary and change the agenda of the discipline was because they did not encounter any resistance from practitioners in the field. Thus for Dryzek the thesis of Gunnell that there was only one revolutionary moment in the history of the discipline is incorrect since the rise of pluralist theory did not displace the older statist forms of analysis without resistance (2006, 488). In fact, the recognition of a pluralist moment in American political science does not even count as a revolution in Dryzek’s analysis. Statism and behavioralism, on the other hand, counted as revolutionary because there was no opposition to their incorporation and they successfully shifted the agenda for the entire discipline.

It seems that the “behavioral revolution” reset the agenda for a large number of scholars in the field. It represented a “selective radicalization of exiting disciplinary tendencies” which led to “more survey research being funded and published, an increase in the relative frequency of quantitative studies in the discipline’s top journals, and a relative decline in work addressed to public policy” (2006, 490). Again, the point is that these were not new conditions arising out of a revolutionary shift in the discipline, but were rather readjustments and changes in focus within the already existing mainstream.

In disciplinary history, then, there appears to be a movement toward a more critical awareness about the behavioral period and whether or not it counts as a “revolution” or not. Whether understood as a political, intellectual, or Kuhnian “scientific” revolution, historians of the discipline have at least began to question the easy use of the phrase “the behavioral revolution” to refer to the 1950s and early 1960s. This brings to mind a mythological usage in

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25 Of course, not all political scientists started doing behavioral research. According to James Farr, “numerically, nonbehavioralists represented the majority of practicing political scientists and theorists” at the time (2003, 322).
the discipline’s history that finally realized the promise of science for political science but this usage is problematic since the nature of “science” in political science is still widely contested.

In closing his 1985 essay “Political Science in the United States,” David Easton points to the solution to the problem of the behavioral revolution in American political science. Easton is speaking of the so-called “postbehavioral” period, but I am going to substitute the term “postbehavioral” with “behavioral” and invite the reader to imagine a behavioralist of the period making a statement like this:

These many, often conflicting tendencies in *behavioral* political science in the West make it difficult to draw general conclusions about the state of the discipline. For the very reason that political science is still in the process of change, we cannot speak of a single, dominant tendency or direction (Easton 1985, 148).

I draw attention to this passage because it seems to me that the recognition of an ongoing revolution in political science is the best way to understand the historical evolution of the discipline over time. There has never been a single coherent and dominant paradigm that took hold of the discipline. More importantly there was not an abrupt change from a before to an after state where tradition was suddenly supplanted by behavioralism as the term “the behavioral revolution” implies. To speak of the 1950s and 1960s in American political science in terms of “revolution” is to contribute to a mythical understanding of our discipline’s history.
Both the discipline and the profession of political science are in a constant state of change. Ideas and institutions evolve over time and it simply doesn’t make sense to speak of intellectual and structural change in terms of political, social, or scientific revolutions. Instead both our intellectual and institutional configuration changes slowly over time reflecting the development of institutions as well as the endless input of generation after generation of new political scientists. New political scientists are trained in institutions and come to confront a political system that is fundamentally different than that of previous generations. It is no wonder then that there is going to be a division of labor where one group continues with basic research on more traditional problems, while another group commits itself to criticizing these authors for their failure to consider the normative implications of their basic assumptions, and finally another which would seek to make political science something other than what it has been in the past. In every era in the development of American political science, one can find examples of all three tendencies. In retrospect every era has its dominant trends in research and ideological commitments but I propose that in reality these three research groups are engaged in a great conversation which ultimately produces the present ideological and institutional configuration of the field. There has been no “revolution” in American political science but rather the historical record reveals an ongoing process of disciplinary and professional change over time.

A first step in moving away from this mythical understanding of our shared past is to recognize the conventional nature of the concept of the behavioral revolution. In this paper I attempted to locate the origin of the phrase the “behavioral revolution” in the writing of political scientists over time. I traced its unproblematic use to somewhere around the year 1968. I also

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26 According to Easton our "discipline refers to our intellectual enterprise; our profession to the trained and expert scholars who participate in the discipline" (1969, 1059). Cf. John Gunnell 2006.
27 For an analogous skeptical treatment of the behavioral movement in political science see Adcock 2007 “Interpreting Behavioralism.”
found that it is most commonly used in narratives about the discipline’s past and often in connection with discussions of Thomas Khun’s theory of scientific revolution.

The next obvious step in the analysis of political myth is to uncover the reasons why the myth operates and so to discover what deep seated needs are being served through the repetition and retelling. This is a story for another occasion but I can briefly sketch a map of where I am heading (or think I am heading). Future research will endeavor to understand why our identities as social and political scientists depend on myths like the behavioral revolution.\(^{28}\) By way of a provisional hypothesis, I suggest that the behavioral revolution is an important foundational myth in the current intellectual and ideological configuration of the discipline because that story is important to the way we think about our past, where we’ve been, and ultimately where we see ourselves going.

These images of the past, including the one involving the birth of a new science of politics sometime after WWI, provide contemporary political scientists with a way to relate to the past, and these considerations weigh heavily on our professional identities. Should the “behavioral revolution” become a story that no longer spoke to us in the present, political scientists would stop talking about it, and henceforth they would stop writing about it, and the myth would disappear. To be sure, the myth of the behavioral revolution would be replaced by another political myth that did a better job speaking to the present in a way that fulfilled the political or social scientists need for professional and ideological grounding in the past in order to carry out their work moving into the future.

\(^{28}\) On the relationship between disciplinary history and professional identity see Dryzek and Leonard’s 1990 “History and Discipline in Political Science.”
Appendix I: Political History and Political Myth –

In future research I plan on making a formal or analytic distinction between “political history” and “political myth.” Tentatively I offer the following draft summary of where my thoughts are heading on these matters and especially how “the behavioral revolution” might better be understood as political myth rather than political history. I would like to juxtapose political history and political myth – not, to be sure, as a means of establishing a hard and fast binary – but as a preliminary way of understanding the two terms meaning and significance for political science.

The distinction I would like to make is between what I’ve termed “political history” and what I’ve termed “political myth.” Political history is based in the facts as they are evident in the historical record. Political myth is based in cultural forces which have no necessary basis in historical reality. In my usage “political history” is essentially what John Gunnell has labeled “internal” or “historicist” history. Unlike political myth which is primarily concerned with providing meaning where the historical record is not clear, political history aspires to create meaning based on the facts of the historical record as they are available.

In his 1991 “The Historiography of American Political Science,” John Gunnell discusses these two approaches to historical analysis. The first is what he characterizes as an “externalist” account which focuses on the impact of the social and political context or environment on the ideas and events of the period in question. This approach to history is often “presentist” in the sense that it views the past through the lens of the present and learn lessons from the past in order to address some controversy or promote some reform in the present or near future (1991, 28; see also Gunnell 2007, 137).²⁹ The second approach is what Gunnell characterizes as an

²⁹ “Presentism” may be defined as “a bias that comes from the conscious or unconscious selection of historical facts in terms of present objectives” (Easton and Gunnell 1991, 3). In his 1993 book *The Decent of Political Theory*
“internalist” approach to disciplinary history. Here the focus in the “evolution of a discursive practice and conceiving such an investigation as something on the order of a genealogy or archeology of its internal conceptual development” (1991, 29). This historical mode of analysis is decidedly “historicist” in the sense that the discourse does not go beyond the text and those “conventional, propositional, and conceptual artifacts” which are revealed through a careful and detailed internal history of the discipline.

Political myth works to fill an imaginary space in a narrative important for political meaning and identity. When one searches for the beginning of a political myth one searches in vain. Unlike with political history there is no actual origin which one can identify, grasp and uphold as foundational and as such important for meaning and identity. Tentatively, I propose that the difficulty of identifying a specific origin of a concept points to its mythological character. This is true because it is part of the nature of myth to conceal the fact that its origin is imaginary and culturally propagated through myth.30

If this concept of political myth is accurate then it ought not be possible to identify a clear cut origin of the behavioral revolution. Instead, the concept will seemingly appear out of nowhere while simultaneously constituting itself as truth in the discourses of the discipline. This dynamic is possible because the discipline – professional political scientists working over the past 60 years – has needed the myth of the behavioral revolution to make sense of disciplinary history and to reconcile their desired image of themselves as social and behavioral scientists in

Gunnell describes two kinds of external history. The first is “presentist” in that the narratives are “designed as vehicles of disciplinary legitimation and critique in which rhetorical purpose governs method and interpretation” (1993, 9). The second is “contextual” in that “understanding books, authors, or conceptual change by locating them in their historical contexts” (1993, 9-10).

30 This process of myth-making is similar to the dynamic discussed by Gunnell in relation to externalist accounts of the history of the discipline. I view the concept of the behavioral revolution in American political science in much the same way that Gunnell views the concept of “professionalism” which for some disciplinary historians, “has become an explanatory context which, in substance and method, has largely escaped critical scrutiny” (1991, 29).
the turbulent postwar era. While this later point about disciplinary identity is crucial for my larger project, in this paper I only take the first step in identifying the concept of the behavioral revolution as a problem that requires further research by disciplinary historians. This history can be better understood through more detailed historical analysis of the period as well as a continuing calling into question of the concept of the behavioral revolution.
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