THE GRAND OLD PARTY IN TRIUMPH:
Politics and Race 1968-1974

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INTRODUCTION

"I think we just delivered the South to the Republican party for a long time to come."[1] Lyndon Johnson whispered these words to Bill Moyers, his press secretary, hours after he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Johnson was predicting the dismantling of the Democratic coalition that was built in 1932 by Franklin D. Roosevelt. His predictions seemed to be justified in the 1968 presidential elections as fissures within the Democratic party's coalition assisted Richard Nixon in victory. Although the margin of the 1968 election was narrow, Nixon would create a dominant GOP in 1972 by expanding on the campaign themes of Barry Goldwater in 1964 and George Wallace in 1968. This new Republican majority in 1972 would continue through the 1980s.

The Republican party's seizure of presidential power at the height of the civil rights era was no accident. As Lyndon Johnson well knew, key to the balance of power between the two political parties lay in the white South. The South had increasingly voiced anger at the Democratic party's use of.

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[1]Michael Oreskes, "Civil Rights Act Leaves Deep Mark On American Political Landscape," New York Times, 2 July 1989, A16.

federal power to enforce desegregation laws in the South. Before the Civil Rights Act was signed, Lyndon Johnson's good friend Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia, the patriarch of the Senate, said that if Johnson didn't make a compromise on the Act, it was "going to cost him the South and the election."[2] Senator Russell was wrong about the election, but as the civil rights effort began to take effect, his warning about the South proved justified.

Why was the South so important to the Democratic party? The South, a voting bloc of eleven states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia), had been Democratic since Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865. From that time on, the Democratic party could automatically assume that its presidential candidate would receive the majority of southern votes. It was this southern core that allowed the Democratic party to build a voting coalition in 1932, a coalition that would empower Democratic presidential candidates for the next thirty-two years.

The Republican party, for the most part, had accepted the South's loyalty to the Democratic party and had given up campaigning for the southern vote throughout the Roosevelt years. Franklin Roosevelt, in the 1932-44 elections, received 81, 81, 78, and 72 percent of the southern vote. Because of Roosevelt's

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[2]Oreskes, "Civil Rights," A16.

dominance in the South, the Republican party's creeping progress there was not always obvious. From the 1948 to the 1964 elections, the South began to show interest in the Republican party. As the South became increasingly critical of liberal Democratic presidents, the Republicans began to build a new presidential political base. The conservative ideology in the South would soon resemble the conservative ideology in the Republican party.

The terms "conservative" and "liberal" have never been universally defined, hence they pose certain problems. The terms are meant to provide loose definitions regarding one's political, economic, and social preferences. For this paper, liberals are those who favor a relatively strong federal government and social changes that would move the South toward racial reform. Conservatives are more resistant to a strong federal government, and favor each state's individual right. They also are considered traditionalists in matters of family and matters relating to public morals.

The 1964 presidential election carried harsh signs of defeat for the Republican party. It had lost the election by a landslide, but its leaders had seen significant success in the South. Barry Goldwater was able to carry five southern states because the GOP had been committed to a more conservative ideology. Goldwater criticized the Democratic-run federal government for causing problems in the South. He adopted a racial strategy that spoke out against the Civil Rights Act and

perpetuated the idea of states' rights. It was this strategy that the Republican party used to regain the presidency.

Racial tensions began to dominate the political and social arenas during the middle and late 1960s. In their book The Real Majority, Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg demonstrated the importance of the race issue as it related to the "Social Issue." The Social Issue, comprised of primarily crime and race, was a potent issue motivating voters. Scammon and Wattenberg point out that for the voter, the Social Issue was deeply intertwined with the whole racial problem in America. They explained that because Republicans were perceived as somewhat tougher than Democrats and more in tune with the attitudes of the electorate, it did not mean the Republicans subscribed to a racial strategy. Scammon and Wattenberg fail to relate Goldwater and Nixon's references to the racially sensitive topics of ghetto riots (1965-68) and rising crime rates in the black cities as the beginning of a racial strategy. It was the merging of the Social Issue with racially related issues that enabled Goldwater and Nixon to receive support from the South and West, and eventually push the Republican party back into the White House.

Racial issues were not obviously the sole reason for the Republican resurgence (or the Democratic demise). Other factors included the Democratic administration's entanglement in Vietnam; a political and social revolution among white youths who protested the draft, and introduced a new liberalization in sexual morality and in drug use, threatening some of the most

traditional values of the middle class; and the Supreme Court's actions to broaden the rights of criminal defendants. It is the contention of this paper, however, that racial problems across the United States were the most powerful factor affecting political behavior.

Recently, Thomas B. Edsall and E.J. Dionne have written accounts of the political realignment that began in the 1960s and lasted through the 1980s. Expanding on political scientist James L. Sundquist's theory that "the social issue, bound up with and reinforced by the political schism over race, was a powerful realigning issue,"[3] both Edsall and Dionne have remarked that the Republicans gained a great deal both in the South and in the white areas of northern big cities. This was due to the reaction against the Democratic party's stand in favor of civil rights. Edsall and Dionne have suggested that the racial alignment of the Democratic party with African-Americans, which began in the 1930s with Franklin Roosevelt, was by the late 1960s an opening for Republican resurgence. Although they list other factors involved with the Republican party's rise, they both stress that racial issues were decisive in the Republican presidential victories of 1968, 1972, 1980, 1984, and 1988.

The white backlash vote was crucial for the Republican party. In the 1968 presidential elections, Richard Nixon was able to win with the white vote from the South, West, and Central

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[3]James L. Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 384.

states. Nixon's successful appeal to lesson the intervention of the federal government in States's affairs, to slow school desegregation, and create more law and order, was widely applauded. He employed a southern strategy that capitalized on anti-black feelings in 1968, striving to capture the Wallace vote to build "an emerging Republican majority in 1972," Nixon's racial strategy was successful as the Republican party received the majority of votes in 1972.

What remains to be answered, however, is to what extent did the Republican party consciously use race as a strategy to get back into the White House? Did the Republican party prudently institute a racial strategy in the late 1960s, to expand on it in the 1980s, to lead them to presidential victories, or did they accidentally stumble across the white "back-lash" vote?

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THE NEW DEAL COALITION

The elections of the 1930s and the emergence of the "Roosevelt coalition" ended a period of over three decades during which the Republican party claimed the allegiance of the majority of the active electorate. The "Roosevelt," or the "New Deal coalition" as it would later be called, appeared awkward to most, as it gained the support from groups of different races, economic backgrounds, and religions. This unlikely amalgamation of voters would enable the Democratic party to dominate the majority of presidential elections between 1932 and 1964. Although the Depression destroyed the Republican hopes of a Hoover reelection in 1932, it was Franklin D. Roosevelt's appeal as a strong leader and his ability to unite voters through themes of economic prosperity and recovery that allowed the Democratic party to dominate the presidency from the years 1932 to 1964.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's primary objective when he entered the White House was relief. Roosevelt wanted a revived economy, which would shrink or eliminate the need for relief and restore health to the entire society.[1] Programs such as the Farm Security Administration, the Public Works Administration, and the United States Housing Administration improved the lives

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[1]Otis L. Graham, ed., Franklin D. Roosevelt: His Life and Times: An Encyclopedic View (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), 286.

of millions. As Roosevelt continued to concentrate on economic recovery, his popularity grew steadily among the masses. Columnist O.J. Villard explained, "I do not believe that any public man in our history has ever had such power as Franklin D. Roosevelt wields today by the consent of his fellow citizens."[2]

The Democratic coalition was not assembled overnight. The one group that could always be counted on was the South. The South had voted unanimously Democratic since Reconstruction when the Democratic party had become the party of white supremacy. It continued to cast votes for Democratic candidates, supporting Roosevelt in all his elections. FDR polled slightly higher percentages of the popular vote in the southern states in each of his four elections than did any other Democratic nominee since the beginning of the twentieth century.[3]

In the summer of 1937, however, a group of conservative Democratic Senators broke with President Roosevelt to form a bipartisan bloc with Republicans to obstruct the New Dealers. Led by southern Democrats like North Carolina's Josiah Bailey, who was "convinced he was making a battle for Constitutional Representative Government as opposed to mass Democracy," the conservative alliance united fellow southerners like Virginia's Harry Bryd, border-state Democrats like Maryland's Millard

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[2]O.J. Villard, "The President's Popularity," The Nation, 14 March 1934, 293.

[3]Samuel Lubell, The Future of American Politics, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 72.

Tydings, and northerners like New York's Royal Copeland.[4] These men aimed to frustrate reform legislation as well as take control of the Democratic party. In retrospect, we can see that this group was a predecessor to groups like the Dixiecrats and men like George Wallace, all believing that the party had been subverted by New Deal administrators whose ideas were alien to Democratic traditions.

Despite the "Democratic junto's" attack against Roosevelt, southern voters remained loyal to the Democratic party during the Roosevelt years. They did, however, express some concern over the "black issue." African-Americans were benefiting from the New Deal and in 1934 they abandoned the party of Lincoln and joined the New Deal coalition. As the African-American vote became more important, the South became more attentive. John Temple Graves II claimed in 1939:

> The fact that the Negro vote in the North and East has been won for the Democratic party in the last two elections and that it may have become more valuable and concession-worthy than the vote of the whiteman in the South could eventually destroy the South's loyalty to the Democratic party, but that eventually is not yet.[5]

If the Republican party strategically designed a racial policy in the 1960s to use against the Democratic party's linkage with African-Americans, the strategy's viability was born during this

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[4]Leuchtenburg, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 252.

[5]John Temple Graves II, "The South Still Loves Roosevelt," The Nation, 1 July 1939, 13.

time. It was evident to both parties that the white South did not automatically vote Democratic.

The principal source of increased Democratic strength in the 1930s came from the cities. "The revolt of the cities" took place as the majority of American people between 1910 and 1920 came to live in the cities, especially the industrial cities of the Northeast and the Great Lakes.[6] These new Democrats were working-class, low-income voters -- many of them first-or-second-generation immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who had crowded into America's industrial cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[7] Many of these immigrants, who had existed on the edges of American political life, were recruited by new unions, especially those organized by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The solidifying of the vote of industrial labor behind Roosevelt was probably the crucial factor in producing the large 1936 majority.[8] Thus, labor, being attracted to the economic policy of the New Deal, became a strong member of the coalition.

President Roosevelt could neither ignore the growing force for African-American rights nor disregard the strength of those arrayed against any change in the racial status quo. He nevertheless took steps to ensure blacks a fairer share of the New Deal benefits. Although almost no New Deal legislation was

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[6]Lubell, The Future of American Politics, 45.

[7]Graham, Franklin D. Roosevelt:His Life and Times, 121.

[8]"What the Election Means," New Republic, 23 November 1938, 9.

written specifically to aid blacks, and no attack on the Jim Crow system in the South came from Roosevelt's administration, urban blacks did share in the New Deal programs intended to aid the poor and the unemployed.[9] Blacks saw the beginnings of change take root in the Democratic party and were hopeful that a better world could soon be achieved. In promising black support for the Roosevelt administration in 1936, Representative Mitchell of Illinois, the first black to sit in the House as a Democrat, declared:

> We expect to wage a campaign to show the Republican party that it has abused the Negroes more than it has abused this country; that we stand politically emancipated, and that we are going to give the Democratic party and the great President that I love so dearly the largest vote that any Negro group has given a President of the United States.[10]

Examining the overpowering election victories of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic party testifies to the enduring nature of public support for him and his party. After the 1932 election, the Democrats controlled both Houses of Congress with substantial majorities. The Democrats won 310 seat in the House, the Republicans 117; in the Senate the distribution was 60 Democrats and thirty-five Republicans.[11] It was also the first

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[9]Nancy J. Weiss, Farewell To The Party Of Lincoln (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 32.

[10]"Cheers For Negro Ring In The House," New York Times, 23 April 1936.

[11]Graham, Franklin D. Roosevelt: His Life and Times, 119.

continued to be president of the United States beyond the grave.[14] In order for Truman to successfully attempt a presidential bid in 1948, he would have to summon the Roosevelt coalition.

Truman faced formidable problems within the Democratic party during his first term. Movements inside the Democratic party such as the secession of the Dixiecrats and the "dump Truman" drive appeared to seriously injure Truman politically. The Dixiecrats, led by Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, were a third party movement developed when the Democratic national convention of 1948 adopted a relatively liberal civil rights platform incorporating the proposals Truman had made to Congress. This effort was unsuccessful. Thurmond carried only four states -- South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Truman had defied the South on the racial issue and won.

Truman's success continued as he based his campaign on an appeal to memories of Franklin Roosevelt. Liberals then began to gravitate toward him. One commentary of 1948 went so far to say, "Despite all of Truman's bungling and reactionary mistakes from 1945 to 1947, once he rededicated himself to the Roosevelt program, the political coalition Roosevelt had formed proved inherently strong enough to stagger in again. This alone pulled

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[14]William E. Leuchtenburg, In the Shadow of FDR (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 3.

Truman through."[15] Truman also elicited the same degree of support from black voters by moving well beyond what Roosevelt had done. On election day, he beat Thomas Dewey, receiving 49.5 percent of the vote, while Dewey received only 45 percent.

Truman added a commitment of civil rights to the New Deal's promise of economic and social justice that made it plausible for black Americans to see themselves as Democrats. He supported legislation to abolish the poll tax, appropriations for the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), which was created under Roosevelt to insure that blacks got jobs in defense industries, passage of antilynching legislation, and an end to the filibuster on an anti-poll tax bill.[16] Truman was also the first president to address the NAACP, the first president to create a national commission to study racial injustice, and the first president to denounce racial discrimination as intolerable.

The only Republican interlude came in 1952 when the ex-General Dwight D. Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson. In many respects Eisenhower reminded liberals of FDR in that he had the same contagious charm. Though liberals were guilty of overreaching in claiming that Eisenhower shared their outlook, pollsters found that he did inherit some of FDR's following.[17]

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[15]Leuchtenburg, In The Shadow, 34.

[16]William Berman, The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1970), 129-35.

[17]John M. Fenton, In Your Opinion . . .: The Managing Editor of the Gallup Poll Looks at Polls, Politics, and the People from 1945 to 1960 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), 103.

Although some Democrats voted for Eisenhower in 1952 and in 1956, the coalition was still intact. Historian William Leuchtenburg states, "During all of Eisenhower's presidency the Democrats held a 2-to-1 edge in registered voters, and for six of the eight years they controlled Congress." He continues, "That served fair warning that the Roosevelt coalition was still strong enough to recapture the White House, thereby leaving the Eisenhower reign merely an interlude in an era of Democratic dominance, rather than the beginning of a Republican epoch."[18]

In 1960 the Kennedy-Johnson ticket narrowly edged out the Republicans by 112,803 votes, demonstrating the viability of the New Deal coalition. White southerners, to the dismay of many Republicans, did not abandon the Democratic party. As the 1960s progressed into the fight for civil rights, so too did the Kennedy-Johnson administration. The national Democratic party under the administrations of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, joining forces with the civil rights revolution, snapped the bond between the presidential wing of the Democratic party and the segregationist Democratic electorate. The growing commitment of the Democratic party to civil rights under Kennedy and Johnson produced white defections to the GOP throughout the South, defections that were critical to the conservative take-over of presidential politics for the Republican party.

Barry Goldwater assisted the Republican party to future success by changing the structure of the Republican party to

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[18]Leuchtenburg, In The Shadow, 60.

adopt a more conservative stance. His campaign demonstrated that conservatism could provide an ideological mechanism for the Republican party to appeal to whites opposed to racial integration, without the liability of being labeled racist.[19] Goldwater, with a states' rights slogan, would attract those whites in the deep South who were tired of the Democratic federal government intervening in their affairs. In 1964, however, evidence of the importance of Goldwater's campaign, outside of winning the deep South, were misjudged as the results to the election gave Lyndon Johnson a tremendous victory.

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[19]Thomas B. Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 40.

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THE DEMOCRATIC DEMISE

The presidential election of 1964 between Lyndon Johnson, an outspoken proponent of the civil rights movement, and Barry Goldwater, an aggressively conservative opponent, marked the inception of the racial realignment of the two parties. The ideological confrontation was highlighted by the differing views concerning the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The result of this contest polarized the two parties on the issue of race for the next twenty-five years.

In 1965 Barry Goldwater was one of only eight Republican Senators to cast his vote against the Civil Rights Act, becoming a "representative of the new strand of racial conservatism within the GOP."[1] Although he was crushed by Johnson in the 1964 election, he developed tactics that became part of Richard Nixon's strategy in 1968. Columnist Robert Novak (who later became an advocate of conservatism) examined the Goldwater tactics devised in 1964 and truthfully concluded:

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[1]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 36.

> Policy A: Soft-pedal civil rights. While stopping short of actually endorsing racial segregation, forget all the sentimental tradition of the party of Lincoln. Because the Negro and the Jewish votes are irrevocably tied to the Democrats anyway, this agnostic racial policy won't lose votes among the groups most sensitive to Negro rights. But it might work wonders in attracting white southerners into the Republican party, joining white Protestants in other sections of the country as hard-core Republicans.[2]

This policy had little success in 1964 but it laid the groundwork for Richard Nixon's campaign in 1968.

Goldwater's political strategy in 1964 induced a rethinking in public opinion concerning the two parties. Polls conducted for the National Election Studies reveal that the public before 1964 saw virtually no difference between the parties on issues of race. In 1962 when respondents were asked which party "is more likely to see to it that Negroes get fair treatment in jobs and housing?" 22.7 percent said Democrats, 21.3 percent said Republicans, and 55.9 percent said there was no difference between the parties.[3]

By late 1964, however, the public saw clear differences between the two parties. When asked which party was more likely to support fair treatment in jobs for blacks, 60 percent said the Democratic party, 33 percent said there was no difference between

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[2]Robert Novak, The Agony of the GOP 1964 (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 63.

[3]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 36.

the parties, and only 7 percent said the Republican party.[4] By 1964, the Democratic party, as political reporter Thomas B. Edsall noted, was on its way to becoming the home of racial liberalism, and the Republican party was on its way to becoming the home of racial conservatism.

An important change within the Republican party came with the new brand of conservatism that Goldwater espoused. The "Draft Goldwater Committee," a group of conservative Republicans, took control away from the moderate conservatives of the party, led by Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York. The Goldwater Committee was now able to bring a conservative ideology to the Republican party. This conservative ideology, however, received much critism concerning its nuclear weapons position. A large percentage of Americans thought Lyndon Johnson would do a better job in handling nuclear weapons than Goldwater. One influential member of the Goldwater Committee, though, said "the hell with this election. At least we [conservatives] have gotten control of the party."[5]

The Goldwater campaign served as the transformation of ideologies within the Republican party. This "intra-party" revolution ended the domination of the pro-civil rights,

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[4]Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 165-166.

[5]Rodger Kahn, "Goldwater's Desperate Battle," Saturday Evening Post, 24 Oct. 1964, 25.

northeastern wing over the presidential selection process.[6] In contrast to the 1960 Republican convention, which approved a strong civil rights plank, the 1964 GOP convention rejected an attempt to include in the party platform a strong stand in favor of civil rights. This rejection of a pro-civil rights platform was crucial, for without the underlying issue of race, the Goldwater movement would have been unable to alter the composition of the Republican party. Goldwater had given the conservative cause its "political baptism of fire."[7]

Goldwater represented a geographical and ideological shift in the Republican party. His conservative, right-wing strategy in the liberal, pro-civil rights milieu of 1964, was a short term disaster. During the next four years, however, the conservative movement, behind Goldwater's seizure of the presidential wing of the Republican party, capitalized on the changing public opinion that overtook the nation. William Rusher, a key member of the Goldwater Committee, concluded that "there was real political significance for American conservatism in 1964 in that it laid the foundations for everything that followed."[8]

Barry Goldwater carried only six states, including his home state of Arizona, in the 1964 presidential election. One notable aspect in this defeat was his breakthroughs in the South.

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[6]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 39.

[7]William A. Rusher, The Rise Of The Right (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 172.

[8]Rusher, The Rise, 161.

Goldwater carried Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. With the exception of Louisiana, none of these states had voted Republican since Reconstruction.[9] The one issue that allowed Goldwater to carry six states was civil rights. The Goldwater belt corresponded to that of Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond in 1948, which reflected the continuity of the anti-civil rights vote.[10] Goldwater declared himself opposed to segregation, but even more deeply opposed on the principle to federal intervention to end segregation. In a speech made to the Senate on June 18, 1964, Senator Goldwater said:

> I wish to make myself perfectly clear. The two portions of this bill to which I have constantly voiced objections are those which would embark the Federal Government on a regulatory course of action with regard to private enterprise in the area of so-called "public accommodations" and in the area of employment . . . I find no constitutional basis for the exercise of federal regulatory authority in either of these areas; and I believe the attempted usurpation of such power to be a grave threat to the very essence of our basic system of government.[11]

Goldwater, being a strong constitutionalist, felt that constitution did not require the States to maintain racially

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[9]E.J. Dionne, Why Americans Hate Politics (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 185.

[10]James L. Sundquist, Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 358.

[11]"Why Goldwater Said 'No' To Civil Rights," U.S News & World Report, Speech made in the Senate on June 18, 1964, vol. 56, 67-68.

mixed schools.

Goldwater provided a new opening into the South, a course that permitted the GOP to carry the most anti-black electorate in the nation without facing public condemnation. The southern reaction to the civil rights movement was a fortuitous and unplanned development for architects of the new conservative ideology.[12] These architects were careful, however, to appeal to the South on the grounds of states' rights and not racism. In his book Conscience of a Conservative, Goldwater stated:

> The Congress and the States, equally with the Supreme Court, are obliged to interpret and comply with the Constitution according to their own lights. I therefore support all efforts by the states, excluding violence of course, to preserve their rightful powers over education.[13]

Goldwater's "southern strategy" was clearly vindicated in that future GOP candidates were able to gain the electoral votes of the deep South and much of the border states with an appropriate states' rights campaign.[14]

Although Goldwater suffered one of the worst defeats in the nation's history, not all of his backers were downcast in the aftermath of the election. Harry S. Dent, Senator Strom Thurmond's political advisor, and the man who would later become

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[12]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 42.

[13]Barry Goldwater, The Concience Of A Conservative (Shepherdsville, Kentucky: Victor Publishing, 1960), 30.

[14]Sundquist, Dynamics, 358.

a principle strategist of Richard Nixon for the South wrote, "The tree was bearing fruit. We South Carolina Republicans were now getting ready for the big coup -- the White House -- with this new southern strategy."[15] For southern Republicans, the prospect of a staunch conservative like Goldwater at the top of the Republican ticket in 1964 offered the opportunity of a lifetime.

There was, however, an unusual character to Goldwater's southern vote. His gains came in rural, segregationist counties that had never before voted Republican.[16] In many of the South's metropolitan areas, as the Ripon Society, a liberal Republican group, pointed out, Goldwater actually lost ground on Eisenhower and Nixon. "In Florida, for example, which Nixon carried in 1960 and Goldwater lost in 1964, the Republican vote in small, rural Calhoun County jumped from 28 percent for Nixon to 65 percent for Goldwater. But in populous Pinellas County, Nixon had won 64 percent; Goldwater got just 45 percent.[17] "The Goldwater strategy succeeded in trading off the progressive, industrialized, urban areas of the New South," the Ripon Society concluded, "for the segregationist rural regions of the deep South."[18] Within a few years, however, much of the urban vote

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[15]Harry S. Dent, The Prodigal South Returns to Power (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1978), 67.

[16]Dionne, Why Americans, 184.

[17]Dionne, Why Americans, 185.

[18]Dionne, Why Americans, 185.

would come back to the Republicans.

As the 1960s progressed, the different ideologies concerning civil rights in the two parties also grew. Johnson and a Democratic Congress incited a confrontation between the Democratic party and southern whites as the federal government strongly supported the principle of racial equality. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, aiming at equal constitutional rights for American blacks, set the stage for the involvement of the federal judiciary and of a powerful centralized government bureaucracy.[19] What was not expected were the riots that would ensue in the latter half of the 1960s. Inevitably, the riots in Watts, Detroit, and Newark reinforced the negative images white Americans held toward blacks.

The 1964 landslide victory for Lyndon Johnson, the driving force behind the Civil Rights Act, was read as an approval by voters to the Democratic party's commitment to racial liberalism. But this voter approval would not withstand the events that took place after 1964. Thomas Edsall explains:

> In 1964, neither Johnson nor the Democratic Congress anticipated that the church-led, nonviolent southern civil rights movement of the fifties and early sixties would soon be superseded in the public eye by a violent contagion of race riots in northern slums; nor that leadership of the civil rights movement would be seized by a highly visible new generation of activists committed to the rise of "black power."[20]

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[19]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 69.

[20]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 38.

The summer of 1966 began a period of deep discontent within the civil rights movement, and the resulting riots assisted racial conservatives back into power.

The Voting Rights Act, signed by Lyndon Johnson on August 5, 1965, which provided for federal registration of black voters to ensure their protection was followed six days later by rioting in the Watts section of Los Angeles. The violence in Watts was the first in a series of events that would push a substantial segment of the electorate to the right. There was rioting in the streets. Blacks shouted "Burn, Baby, Burn!" for four days, as television viewers across the nation watched men and women loot and firebomb stores. Watts provided evidence that the drive to achieve equality would have costs as well as rewards. It forced the acknowledgement of a new reality: "that passage of civil rights legislation was not adequate to either assuage black anger, nor to produce the relatively trouble-free integration of the races that had been anticipated by many liberals."[21] The Republican party, verging on extinction after the 1964 election, was positioned to capitalize on the newly divided Democratic party.

In June 1966, Stokely Carmichael, newly elected president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), captured attention when, during a demonstration in Greenwood, Mississippi, he led the chant "We want Black power." Thus began a revolution within the civil rights revolution. The venerable slogan of

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[21]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 48.

"Freedom now!" (associated with Martin Luther King, Jr.) was being shoved aside by the new call for "Black Power!."[22] In rapid succession, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in October 1966, formed the Black Panthers in Oakland, California, organizing "black self-defense groups." armed with rifles and shotguns, "dedicated to defending the black community from racist police oppression and brutality," to patrol ghetto streets.[23]

Although riot violence in Watts was the most threatening, more violence broke out in cities such as Detroit and Newark over the next three years. The Kerner Commission was appointed in 1968 by President Johnson to investigate the riots from surveys of rioters in Detroit and Newark. The Kerner Report noted that the "typical riot" did not take place. The disorders of 1967 were "unusual, complex, and unpredictable" social processes. "It involved Negroes acting against local symbols of white American society, authority, and property in Negro neighborhoods -- rather than against white persons."[24] The Democratic tendency to blame black disorder not on the blacks but on society gave the Republicans the basis for charging their opponents with "condoning" and "encouraging" violence.[25]

The riots allowed the Republican party to launch a vigorous

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[22]Dionne, Why Americans, 83.

[23]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 59.

[24]The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 63-65.

[25]Sundquist, Dynamics, 389.

attack on liberal social policies. "The image of the Negro in 1966 was no longer that of the praying, long-suffering nonviolent victim of southern sheriffs; it was a defiant young hoodlum shouting 'black power' and hurling 'Molotov cocktails' in an urban slum," wrote James L. Sundquist, a liberal political scientist.[26]

As rioting broke out in desolate all-black ghettos in 1965, 1966, and 1967, and as the black power movement gained prominence, northern white support for the civil rights movement began to erode. From 1962 through April 1965, decisive majorities of northern whites had endorsed the efforts of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to press the cause of racial integration. In April 1965, 71 percent of those surveyed said the Johnson administration was "pushing racial integration" either "not fast enough" or "about right;" Only 28 percent said "too fast."[27] In August 1965, the month of the Watts riot, the "about right" and "not fast enough" responses fell to 64 percent, and those saying "too fast" rose to 36 percent. By September 1966, after riots and race-related disorders in Chicago and forty-one other communities, the percentage of favorable responses had fallen to 48 percent, while those who said the administration was pushing too hard on civil rights had jumped to

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[26]James L. Sundquist, Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1968), 281.

[27]Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1972 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1973) 72H.

52 percent.[28]

The rise of "Black Power" created a furious debate over the future of black America and a sharp reaction within the white community. "Conservatives seized on 'Black Power's' idea of black separatism as a rationale for halting progress toward integration," noted political reporter E.J. Dionne. "If blacks did not want integration, the arguments went, why should whites 'impose' it on them? If blacks wanted to have nothing to do with whites, the more extreme opponents of integration asked, why should whites feel obliged to have anything to do with them?"[29] The issues that were arising to dominate the sixties helped disintegrate the old Democratic coalition. Thomas Edsall, in a clear analysis of the situation, states, "It was the fusion of race with an expanding rights revolution and with the new liberal agenda, and the fusion, in turn, of race and rights with the public perception of the Democratic party that created the central force splintering the presidential coalition behind the Democratic party throughout the next two decades."[30]

With the advent of the riots and "Black Power," Republicans were able to attact the resulting issue of "crime in the streets" by stressing for "law and order." The riots were the most terrifying example of the breakdown of law and order during the 1960s, and Republicans were there to let the fearing white public

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[28]Congressional Quarterly, 73H.

[29]Dionne, Why Americans, 86.

[30]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 72.

know that the liberal courts and Democratic party were to blame. The law and order theme, which would be used by the next four Republican presidents, carried strong racial or anti-black tones, as it linked the crime issue to the race issue.

In September of 1968, the Harris pollsters showed that there was a clear attitudinal spillover and linkage from the crime issue to the race issue. One poll found that 59 percent of American voters indicated that "Negroes who start riots" are "one of the major causes" in the "breakdown of law and order in this country." Harris also showed that 42 percent of whites felt that blacks are "more violent than whites" and that 33 percent of whites believed blacks "bred crime."[31] But also on the Harris scale of stereotypes was the statement, "they [blacks] are asking for more than [they are] ready for." Two-thirds or 67 percent of the whites fully agreed with this statement. And that statement, noted political analysists Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, clearly had a direct and immediate contest point -- i.e., if they're asking, we're denying.[32] This point was seen more programmatically in October when Harris asked if "the progress in civil rights should be speeded up." 72 percent of the blacks said yes compared to only 28 percent of the whites.

The call for law and order gave a new explosiveness to the race issue. Another Harris poll showed that while 66 percent of whites felt that blacks "had gone too far in their demands,"

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[31]Scammon and Wattenberg, Real Majority, 97.

[32]Scammon and Wattenberg, Real Majority, 97.

there was also 58 percent that agreed that "America has discriminated against Negroes for too long." The poll also found that 63 percent of Americans agreed with the statement, "Until there is justice for minorities, there will not be law and order."[33] Americans were not clear about their racial feelings. There was, however, much to gain from adopting a campaign that stressed law and order, even if it did carry anti-black messages.

The Republican party, seemingly on the verge of extinction after its defeat in 1964, had much to celebrate in the latter half of the 1960s. The Republicans had now found success in the South, and their new conservative ideology was gaining acceptance with the populace, especially when it concerned law and order. Their southern breakthrough, however, would be most important in the presidential elections of 1968 and 1972. Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and Governor George Wallace of Arkansas would provide a new populist message that would enable the Republican party to attract a larger following. Thurmond and Wallace would provide the Republican party with the southern strategy.

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[33]Scammon and Wattenberg, Real Majority, 59.

3
STROM THURMOND AND GEORGE WALLACE SOUTHERN CONSERVATISM

The 1964 Goldwater movement appealed to many southerners with its conservative views on race and its belief in states' rights. Because of this Barry Goldwater was able to win five states from the deep South. The South, although still regarded as a Democratic coalition member, had been slowly shifting away from liberal Democratic presidential candidates since 1948. Strom Thurmond, in the 1948 presidential election, won the same states as Barry Goldwater in 1964. This was no coincidence. The South was ready to completely shift away from the Democratic party, and the Republican party would look to Strom Thurmond and George Wallace for leadership. The southern vote would be there for the Republican party because of these two men.

The 1948 Dixiecrat movement, headed by Strom Thurmond, opened a division within the Democratic party that would later assist the Republican party to presidential victory. As mentioned before, Strom Thurmond's leading role in the Dixiecrat movement defined the intensity of the race issue. The Dixiecrats

adopted a platform that stated "we stand for the segregation of the races and the racial integrity of each race."[1] The governor charged that Truman's proposed civil rights laws "would be unconstitutional invasions of the field of governmental belonging to the states."[2] Thurmond realized that advocating states' rights would permit southern states to administer their own laws without the force of the federal government.

Thurmond, pursuing the demand for states' rights, continued to use racial rhetoric as a means to gather support. The South had not made any progress in the area of racial equality since the end of the Civil War. Thurmond tried to keep it this way by fighting to preserve the status quo. In the 1948 presidential race, Thurmond's speeches declared proposals of the Fair Employment Practices Committee to be "communistic" and the racial integration of the Armed Forces to be "un-American." He announced that "the intermingling of the races in our schools and in our theaters is impractical and impossible."[3] Thurmond also stressed that the Democratic party remain in favor of states' rights. During an address in 1948, he said:

> Those who follow the banners of the States' Rights Democrats are determined that the evil forces which

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[1]"War Between The Democrats" Newsweek, 26 July 1948, 21.

[2]Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., History of American Presidential Elections 1789-1968 vol. IV (New York: Chelsea House, 1971), 3102.

[3]Don Oberdorfer, "Ex-Democrat, Ex-Dixiecrat, Todays 'Nixiecrat'," New York Times Magazine, 6 Oct. 1968, 68.

> have seized control of the national party shall be cast out. The tides of that great party will flow like muddy water over the sands and rocks and be purified. The impurities of that party - Harry Truman and all his followers - will be deposited like sediment on the banks.[4]

Thurmond's fight for states' rights remained an issue for both Democrats and Republicans to grapple with over the next four decades.

On September 16, 1964, Strom Thurmond switched political parties and declared himself a "Goldwater Republican." In strong language, Thurmond denounced the Democratic party, and shouted:

> The party of our fathers is dead . . . The Democratic party has forsaken the people to become the party of minority groups . . . The Democratic party has encouraged lawlessness, civil unrest and mob actions . . . The Democratic party has encouraged, supported and protected the Supreme Court in a reign of judicial tyranny, and in the Court's effort to wipe out local self-government, effective law enforcement, internal security, the rights of people and the States, and even the structure of the State governments.[5]

People across the United States were concerned about the judicial leniency of the Supreme Court, and southerners, in particular, were concerned about the federal government intervening to control desegregation. Strom Thurmond shared these same worries and switched to the Republican party to stop federal intervention

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[4]"Southern Revolt," Time, 11 Oct. 1948, 24.

[5]"Why A Democratic Senator Turned Republican," U.S. News & World Report, 28 Sept. 1964, 83-4.

in its tracks.

"I personally know him to be able and responsible. He is an honest man of courage and conviction, who trusts the American people to hold the reins of government and rule themselves."[6] Strom Thurmond said this about Barry Goldwater the same night he publicly denounced the Democratic party on September 16, 1964. The result of Thurmond's support for Goldwater was a breakthrough for the Republican party. They now had a very well known, very popular southern conservative leader who shared the same views of states' rights as the Goldwater movement. Although Goldwater was defeated in 1964, the Republican party had made developments into the South through Thurmond's support. Strom Thurmond's prevalence within the conservative Republican party would help convert many more southerners to the Republican party in future elections.

Converting southern Democrats to vote for Republican presidential nominees could not have been possible without George Wallace. Wallace came into the political scene in the 1958 gubernatorial contest against segregationist candidate John Patterson. Important to the election was that Patterson was endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan, and Wallace found himself in the doubtfully favorable position of being endorsed by both the Jewish population of Alabama and the NAACP.[7] When Wallace was

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[6]"Why a Democratic Senator," 84.

[7]Jody Carlson, George C. Wallace and The Politics of Powerlessness (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1981), 22.

defeated he exclaimed, "John Patterson out-nigguhed me. And boys, I'm not going to be out-nugguhed again."[8]

Wallace continued his pursuit of the governorship and in 1963 he was successful. In his inaugural speech in January 1963, Wallace spoke out against federal intervention to desegregate schools, a slogan that Goldwater used and Nixon will use to attract southern voters. Wallace dared the federal government to try him: "I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny . . . and I say . . . segregation now . . . segregation tomorrow . . . segregation forever."[9] Wallace was true to his words as he resisted the ruling of a federal judge to admit two black students into the University of Alabama. He physically blocked the entrance into the school and read a statement that proclaimed the constitutional right of the people of Alabama to operate their public schools as they wished. In the aftermath, Wallace portrayed himself as successfully defying a court order for the purpose of testing constitutional questions. Although the two students were eventually enrolled, Wallace had shown, to those who felt the burdens of an interfering federal government, that he was the champion of their cause.[10]

George Wallace ran for president of the United States four

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[8]Marshall Frady, Wallace (New York: Meridian Books, World Publishing Company, 1968), 142.

[9]Frady, Wallace, 135.

[10]Carlson, George C. Wallace, 26.

times -- in 1964, 1968, 1972, and 1976. The election of 1968 is of most concern here since this is the only year in which Wallace actually ran on the presidential ticket (in the other years, Wallace ran in the Democratic primaries). The 1972 election will also be discussed due to the effect the "Wallace vote" had for Richard Nixon.

In 1968 George Wallace contributed to the formation of a Republican presidential majority by winning 9.9 million voters, 13.5 percent of the total cast as a candidate of the American Independent part. The Republicans knew if they could tap into this voting bloc, they could regain the presidential majority. Wallace won only five states -- Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and Louisiana -- almost replicating the victories in the deep South of Strom Thurmond running on a segregationist ticket in 1948, and Goldwater's southern victories in 1964. More than Thurmond or Goldwater, Wallace made it possible for the Republican party to capture the Democratic working-class voters in the South. "Wallace's conservative populism, his conceptualization of a privileged, coercive liberal Democratic establishment, and his redefinition of racial conflict -- painting the opponents of integration as victims of an over-bearing and dictating central government -- proved essential to the building of a new, conservative Republican presidential majority."[11]

Wallace's campaign in 1968 was centered around working and

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[11]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 79.

lower-middle-class whites who felt threatened by liberal Democratic establishment and the civil rights revolution. As Wallace understood the situation, it was the working and lower-middle-class who competed with blacks for jobs, who lived adjacent to black neighborhoods, and whose children would be attending school with blacks if the federal government had its way. "The class-tilt of the costs of integration and of racial equality -- a disproportionate share of which was borne by low and lower-middle income whites -- turned the resentment of those white working-class voters into a powerful mobilizing force."[12]

As more working class whites felt victimized and displaced by the black struggle for civil rights, Wallace provided justification. These poor southern whites, who had been deeply loyal to the economic commitments of the New Deal Democrats, voted for Wallace in 1968, just as they had voted for Goldwater in 1964. Political reporter E.J. Dionne noted that detailed studies of whites who moved right because of the race issue suggested that such questions played at least as much of a role in their political conversion as racism:

> In a study of white voters in Gary, Indiana, who had voted for George Wallace at twice the national rate in 1968, political sociologists Thomas F. Petligrew and Robert T. Riley found that Wallace supporters were far more likely than Nixon or Humphrey voters to identify themselves as "working class" rather than "middle class." In other words, the sort of class identification that had pushed voters "left" during the New Deal began pushing them "right" in the 1960s.

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[12]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 12.

> Wallace understood this and focused his campaign toward "the average, working-class man on the streets."[13]

Wallace, by broadening the conservative anti-government coalition to include moderate and low-income whites, undermined the allegiance of many working-class whites to the federal government and to the Democratic party.[14] Although Wallace was not able to send the election into the House of Representatives in 1968, he was able to supply the conservative Republican party with a new support group in 1972.

The election returns of the 1968 presidential contest showed Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, winning with 43.4 percent of the votes to Humphrey's 42.7 percent, and Wallace's 13.5 percent. George Wallace attracted voters who almost certainly would have voted for Nixon if Wallace had not been on the ballot. In a survey conducted by Angus Campbell, the director of the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan, questions concerning welfare legislation, Medicare, Vietnam, and racial integration and civil rights were asked, and those intending to vote for Wallace stood much closer to Nixon supporters than to those favoring Humphrey. More than a third of them reported that they had voted for Goldwater in 1964.[15] In both the Gallup and Harris polls, Wallace appeared to draw substantially more from

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[13]Dionne, Why Americans, 91.

[14]Edsall and Edsall, Chain Reaction, 78.

[15]Angus Campbell, "How We Voted - And Why," Nation, 25 Nov. 1968, 552.

people who would otherwise vote Republican.[16] In order to gain the majority of the votes in 1972, Nixon would have to tap into the Wallace vote.

The Wallace and Nixon campaigns were similar in that they both expressed concerns about an interfering federal government. It is vital to understand that where Wallace differed most was in his racial myopia and his vehement criticism of the growing power of the federal government in its moves toward integration. The answers to the questions below demonstrate the distinctively different racial politics of Wallace voters. The question was asked, "Which of these statements do you agree with: (a) White people have the right to keep Negroes out of their neighborhoods if they want to, and (b) Negroes have the right to live wherever they can afford to, just like anybody else," the responses were: 46.1 percent of Wallace voters said "keep out," compared to 22.5 percent of Nixon voters and 13.3 percent of Humphrey voters.[17]

By 1970 the South's historic mold of white racial demagoguery had disappeared. Segregationist politicians like Thurmond and Wallace, successfully adjusted to the new political demography by courting black voters.[18] Thurmond and Wallace both realized that they were perceived as extremists and as racists, and this, in part, led to their decline. For racism in

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[16]Richard Scammon, "How Wallace Will Run His Third-Party Campaign," Reporter, 19 Oct. 1967, 35.

[17]Carlson, George C. Wallace, 98-9.

[18]Hugh Graham, The Civil Rights Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 453.

American politics equals extremism, and extremism loses votes.[19]

The conservative ideology created by the Goldwater movement in 1964, along with George Wallace's populist movement in 1968, were both scene as extremism. Wallace, however, attracted a wider range of voters throughout the South and other parts of the nation. In another poll conducted by Angus Campbell, survey findings provided evidence that the Wallace votes came much more commonly from Democrats and "self-styled" Independents than they did from Republicans.[20] Republican party was rebuilding political power by gathering the streams of southern Democratic voters quitting their party. In the South as a whole, 85 to 90 percent of the white electorate cast Nixon or Wallace votes against the re-aligning national Democratic party in 1968, "an unprecedented magnitude of disaffection which indicates the availability of the Wallace vote to the future GOP."[21] The task was for Richard Nixon to develop a way to reach those who voted for George Wallace.

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[19]Scammon and Wattenberg, Real Majority, 189-91.

[20]Campbell, "How We Voted," 551.

[21]Kevin P. Phillips, The Emerging Republican Majority (New York,: Arlington House, 1969), 462.

4
THEY'RE BACK: REPUBLICANS BEGIN NEW DOMINANCE - 1968

The resurgence of both the Republican party and Richard Nixon in 1968 had both been considered highly improbable in the months following the 1964 presidential election. The country had overwhelmingly voted for Lyndon Johnson, a testament perceived as an acceptance with how the liberal federal government was operating. Yet this liberal momentum, a cycle that started with Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932, stalled as social unrest was released throughout the country. As the late 1960s began to be dominated by racially related social unrest, Richard Nixon was there to position the Republican party accordingly. He was able to build from the mishaps of Barry Goldwater, and alter the practices of George Wallace and Strom Thurmond to reach out to the many Americans who felt threatened by the Democratic party. In short, Richard Nixon was able to couch his views on race in such a way that a citizen could avoid admitting to himself that

he was attracted by a racist appeal.[1]

During the 1950s, Richard Nixon spent eight years as Vice president under Dwight Eisenhower. In 1956 he committed the GOP to a strong stand on civil rights, and at the 1960 Gop convention, he matched the Democratic party's commitments to equal rights by following a civil rights plank that supported the sit-ins of blacks at southern lunch counters. The South, an area that might be turned away from Nixon because of his support of the Civil Rights Act, accepted his stand because he always softened his pro-civil rights stance by adding that he was for states' rights.[2]

"It seems to me that there are two extreme groups. There are those who want instant integration and those who want segregation forever. I believe that we need to have a middle course between those two extremes."[3] With this statement at a press conference on September 26, 1969, Richard Nixon publicly committed himself to a centrist position. In the first term of his presidency, Nixon would establish a safe position by affirming his belief in equality and civil rights while voicing opposition to the use of federal intervention to achieve those goals.

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[1]John Ehrlichman, Witness to Power: The Nixon Years (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 223.

[2]Stephen Ambrose, Nixon: The Triumph of a Politician 1962-1974, vol. 2 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 89.

[3]Rowland Evans, Jr., and Robert D. Novak, Nixon In The White House: The Frustration Of Power (New York: Random House, 1971), 133.

The centrist strategy devised by the Nixon staff would not have been effective unless it received support from the conservatives from within the party. Because of this conservative emphasis, Nixon's centrist position was actually drawn to the right. This fact will become more apparent as the facts are distributed.

During the 1968 campaign, Nixon understood the importance of the conservative group within the party and sought for their endorsements. The conservatives would give Nixon a far-reaching acceptability. Nixon first had to show the populace that Goldwater backed him. On January 22, 1965, Goldwater told interviewers publicly that he would support Nixon for the Republican presidential nomination in 1968.[4] By early 1968 there was a rush of conservatives to Nixon. Men like Peter O'Donnell, who had chaired the Draft Goldwater Committee, Bill Timmons of Tennessee, who had been one of the staunchest Young Republicans, and Jeremiah Milbank, Jr., the long time Republican fundraiser, had all endorsed Nixon.[5] Nixon needed all the conservative support he could get, and "Goldwater's blessing was tantamount to the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval as far as conservatives were concerned.[6]

In the middle months of 1968, Strom Thurmond convinced a

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[4]William Rusher, The Rise Of The Right (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 195.

[5]Rusher, The Rise, 209.

[6]Rusher, The Making Of The New Majority Party (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1975), 54.

large southern crowd that, "we are going to elect a president who will stand up for the constitution, who will love the flag, and that man's name is Richard Nixon."[7] Thurmond had stuck out his neck for Nixon in 1968 that helped Nixon pick up seventy-five electoral votes in the peripheral South despite George Wallace.[8] Nixon's strategy of gaining conservative support would not have been completed without the endorsement from Strom Thurmond. In fact, without Thurmond, Nixon might not have turned up the winner at all.

Nixon's carefully crafted campaign ran into difficulties in the South when Ronald Reagan's late-starting campaign started to receive massive southern support. Thurmond, however, made sure the Reagan ship ran aground. "The essential problem was Strom Thurmond," said on top aide to Ronald Reagan. "I don't think anyone knew the extent to which Thurmond had a hold on the South."[9] Harry Dent, South Carolina's Republican Chairman and soon to be Nixon's top aide to the South, summed it up: "I can tell you I saw some votes change right back from Reagan to Nixon. I heard delegates tell Strom, 'if you're satisfied, we are.'"[10]

Richard Nixon and George Wallace collected 57 percent of the vote in 1968. The Democrats, who had received 72 percent of the

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[7]Oberdorfer, "Ex-Democrat," 36.

[8]"Politics - A Northern-Southern Strategy," Time, 3 Aug. 1970, 6.

[9]"Eyeball to Eyeball with Strom Thurmond," Newsweek, 19 Aug. 1968, 26.

[10]"Eyeball to Eyeball," 27.

southern vote in 1944, had only received 31 percent in 1968 -- less than either the Republicans (34.6 percent) or American Independents (34.3 percent).[11] Nixon was able to see that the basic issue undermining the Democratic party's dominance in the South had been racially related. Nixon, for his part, developed a racial strategy by following the "southern strategy."

The pivotal element in the grand scheme of the Republicans after 1968 was to combine the votes Nixon received with that of the votes George Wallace received for a Republican majority in 1972. Thus, Nixon and John Mitchell, Nixon's campaign manager and future U.S. Attorney General, created the "southern strategy," which held that there was an immense debt owed to the South for both the nomination and the election, and that nothing was to be done to the South that could be seen as faintly hostile.[12] Nixon also felt that the black vote was lost to the Democratic party. Although he did receive a small percentage of black votes in 1968, Nixon felt that the courting of the black vote could hurt with the white vote, particularly the southern white vote.

In addition to the "southern strategy," Nixon attracted millions who were concerned with law and order. Nixon praised the "forgotten Americans," those "good people who paid their

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[11]Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg, The Real Majority (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970), 180.

[12]Evans and Novak, Nixon, 137.

taxes and did not indulge in rioting nor take to the streets."[13] Nixon capitalized on the same key words as Goldwater, Thurmond, and Wallace, and made sure to show the "average American" that he was concerned with the social issues. Nixon was careful to stress that his administration would follow a "nonpermissive posture" of law enforcement. Thus the cry for "law and order" was never louder than in 1968.

The term "law and order" enraged millions of liberals across the country. "Law and order," insisted orthodox liberals, was a code word for racism.[14] Because many whites linked rising crime rates with blacks in the lower class, liberals were uneasy with the crime issue. Liberals uneasiness would not be calmed as Richard Nixon continued to pursue the "law and order" theme. In an article published in the Readers Digest, Nixon denounced the "growing tolerance of lawlessness" among civil rights groups, and "the increasing public acceptance of civil disobedience." He insisted that the black community had to reject lawlessness and the society as a whole had to re-establish law and order.[15] "Law and order," Nixon argued, was not "a code word for racism" because "black Americans have just as great a stake in law and

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[13]Homer Bigart, "Nominee Hailed in South Carolina," New York Times, 5 Oct. 1968, 20

[14]Theodore H. White, Making of the President, 1968 (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969), 189.

[15]Richard Nixon, "What Has Happened To America?," Readers Digest, Oct. 1967, 50-52.

order."[16]

During his campaign Nixon had to convince the Republican southern delegates that he was compatible to southern needs. Nixon conveyed to southern leaders and delegates at a meeting in Atlanta that two things were at issue: first, the Republican convention votes of southern delegates, and second, the philosophy of the Nixon administration.[17] Theodore H. White, a political reporter and author of Making the President (1960 through 1972) explains:

> On civil rights, which was the chief concern of the southern Republicans, Mr. Nixon agreed that the Supreme Court phrase "all deliberate speed" needed re-interpretation; he agreed also that a factor in his thinking about new Supreme Court Justices was that liberal interpretationists had tipped the balance too far against the strict construction interpreters of the Constitution; and he averred, also that the busing of school students from one district to another for the purpose of racial balance was wrong.[18]

John Ehrlichman, Nixon's assistant to domestic affairs, adds, "Nixon believed that America's blacks could only marginally benefit from Federal programs because blacks were genetically inferior to whites."[19]

Nixon's southern strategy drew criticism from the liberal

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[16]E.W. Kenworthy, "Nixon Strategy In South," New York Times, 5 Oct. 1968, 20.

[17]White, Making, 1968, 137.

[18]White, Making, 1968, 137-8.

[19]Ehrlichman, Witness, 223.

side of the Republican party. The Ripon society, a group dominated by young liberal Republicans, charged that Nixon was "embarked upon a racially divisive path" and that to adjust "to the fears and prejudices of a narrow class of votes [the South] in the end is bound to fail."[20] Also, Nelson Rockefeller, Republican Governor of New York, cited that Nixon's support from Senators Thurmond and John Tower of Texas showed that there were racist overtones in the Nixon campaign. Nixon's southern strategy did not fail, as he was elected to the presidency in 1968 and reelected in 1972. He made it clear to the nation that the Republican party was on a course seeking out the votes of those who didn't think racial equality sponsored by the federal government was an acceptable thing.

The emergence of race as a central issue became more apparent through Nixon's continuing actions with the South. Nixon developed a strategy of staying within the law while publicly showing reluctance to enforce it. In a speech delivered on September 12, 1968, Nixon said:

> I believe that the decision [Brown v. Topeka] was a correct one, but while that decision dealt with segregation and said that we would not have segregation, when you go beyond that and say that it is the responsibility of the Federal Government, and the Federal courts, to , in effect, act as local school districts in determining how we carry out, and then to use the power of the Federal Treasury, to withhold funds or give funds in order to carry it out, then I

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[20] "Politics - A Northern-Southern Strategy," 7.

think we are going too far.[21]

By 1968, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's guidelines were calling for "terminal desegregation" in many southern school districts. Those schools that failed to show progress in ending de jure segregation called for by the guidelines lost their federal education funds under the Primary and Secondary Education Acts of 1965.[22] Thurmond and other powerful southern leaders appealed to Nixon to slow the fund-cutoff process and lift the "terminal desegregation" deadline.[23] Thurmond counseled Nixon on ways to delay fund cutoffs until new legislation had been devised that would sanction a "voluntary" approach to integration favored not only by the South but by Nixon himself. Nixon, in his memoirs, wrote, "I felt that plans for desegregation should be made by the school boards, local communities, and the courts in each area, rather than by bureaucrats in HEW in Washington."[24]

In 1968 Nixon had also campaigned for the freedom-of-choice route to school desegregation, which left the choice of a school up to the parents and children. This plan, however, usually was envisaged for maintaining the status quo. As president, Nixon

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[21]Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Scores U.S. Method Of Enforcing Integration," New York Times, 13 Sept. 1968, 1.

[22]Evans and Novak, Nixon In The White House, 138.

[23]Evans and Novak, Nixon In The White House, 138.

[24]Richard M. Nixon, The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 440.

dramatized himself as a freedom-of-choice man inside the South in order to capture the Wallace segregationist votes and add it to the Nixon Republican vote for the 1972 election.[25] One big problem for Nixon was that during the campaign the Supreme Court on May 27, 1968 in Green v.County School Board stated that "the general experience under freedom-of-choice to date has been such as to indicate its ineffectiveness as a tool of desegregation."[26] There was little that Nixon could do concerning freedom-of-choice despite the pledges he made to the southerners during the campaign. He could not repeal the Green decision nor could he repeal the 1964 Civil Rights Act that had specific sanctions against de jure segregation and had specific mechanisms for HEW guidelines to cutoff federal school aid for segregated schools.

Confrontation between the South and President Nixon arose when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, at the request of the Justice Department, ordered thirty-three school districts in Mississippi desegregated no later that September 11, 1969. Democratic Senator John Stennis of Mississippi, one of the leaders in the Senate, threatened to create problems for Nixon. Nixon, not wanting any problems with Stennis, ordered his Justice Department attorneys to argue against desegregation in the Court of Appeals, and the circuit agreed to postpone the date of desegregation until the winter. On October 29, however, the

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[25]Evans and Novak, Nixon In The White House, 139.

[26]Hugh Graham, The Civil Rights Era, 374.

Supreme Court overturned the circuit court's decision and held that "the obligations of every school district is to terminate dual school systems at once and to operate now and hereafter only unitary schools."[27] Although the South was going to be forced to desegregate, Nixon had shown the South that he was, as President, against the Supreme Court's ruling for desegregation. The responsibility for forced desegregation was now the courts, not his.

In addition to speaking out against forced desegregation, Nixon added to the southern strategy by his attempt to appoint to the Supreme Court a white southern conservative judge under the age of sixty who was a proven strict constructionist. Nixon desperately wanted a conservative majority of the Court. Robert Novak, a political writer who analyzed both terms of Nixon, believed that Nixon was appealing to both the South and the law and order vote by promising to fill the vacancy on the Court with a judge who would make a strict or literal construction of the Constitution.

Nixon's choice of replacement was Judge Clement Haynsworth. Haynsworth, a devout Democrat since birth, switched to the Republican party in 1964 to align his personal ideology with that of the party of Goldwater. Haynsworth's career had not been with out criticism from left wing groups. During his time as Chief Judge at the Fourth Circuit, civil rights groups charged that he had dragged the courts heels over school desegregation. In

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[27]Evans and Novak, Nixon In The White House, 153-55.

question, particularly, was the long dispute over school desegregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia, when the Fourth Circuit ruled against the county and ordered desegregation, Haynsworth voted against the majority. When the Fourth Circuit ruled that hospitals receiving federal funds could not maintain segregated facilities, Haynsworth again voted against the majority.[28]

On November 21 the Senate rejected Haynsworth by a vote of 55 to 45. An outraged Richard Nixon made it clear that the opposition against Haynsworth would not stop him from naming a southern strict constructionist under sixty. Nixon remained true to his promise and named G. Harrold Carswell, a Judge with considerably less experience and reputation than Haynsworth. One White House aide concluded that "Nixon really believes in that southern strategy -- more than he believes in anything else."[29]

When Carswell's name went to the Senate, Nixon and everybody else in Washington felt certain that the Senate would confirm Carswell. Rejecting two nominees would be a serious insult and humiliating experience for the President. But Carswell was not equal to Haynsworth as a judge, nor was he even a first class judge. The final vote was 51 to 45 against him. President Nixon had now been twice defeated in his effort to put a strict constructionist southern judge on the Supreme Court. Commenting on the Senate's decision, Nixon claimed:

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[28]Evans and Novak, Nixon, 161.

[29]Evans and Novak, Nixon, 163.

> With yesterday's action, the Senate has said that no southern federal appellate judge who believes in a strict interpretation of the Constitution can elevated to the Supreme Court. As long as the Senate is constituted the way it is today, I will not nominate another southerner and let him be subjected to the kind of malicious character assassination accorded both Judges Haynes and Carswell. I understand the bitter feeling millions of Americans who live in the South about the act of regional discrimination that took place in the Senate yesterday. They have my assurance that the day will come when men like Judges Carswell and Haynsworth can and will sit on the high Court.[30]

Nixon's speech explained to the nation that he was committed to representing the South. Nixon, first by being reversed by the Supreme Court on the Mississippi desegregation case and then by being rejected by the Senate on the two judgeships, had identified himself with the South. These actions moved Nixon's plan of a Republican majority in the South in 1972 much closer.

Nixon furthered his central objective of aligning himself with the white South by attempting to weaken the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In June of 1969 the Justice Department came out against an extension the Act, offering a substitute that would end the special sanctions against the South -- sanctions that had added almost one million black voters to the polls.[31] The administrations bill would have deleted the pre-clearance provision of Section 5 of the Act which would have returned to southern states their power to obstruct black voting by

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[30]Evans and Novak, Nixon, 171.

[31]Evans and Novak, Nixon, 150-1.

discriminatory laws and regulations.[32] The amendment to the Voting Rights Act would have also permitted southern states to have non-discriminatory literacy tests as a prerequisite to voting.[33] Although unsuccessful Nixon was clearly involved in racial strategy that was intended to further the southern strategy and his reelection bid in 1972.

Another matter that was of some concern to the South was Nixon's running mate. One of the most insistent demands of southern delegates to the 1968 GOP convention had been for a vice presidential running mate "acceptable" to the region, and Nixon met this demand with the Governor of Maryland, Spiro Agnew.[34] Nixon told the delegates that the wishes of the South would be considered in his selection and that Strom Thurmond would be among those he would consult before making a decision.[35] Thurmond approved and Agnew became part of the Republican ticket.

Spiro Agnew represented a symbol of conservatism for Richard Nixon. Agnew shared a similar strong posture with Nixon on crime and lawlessness, but was able to be more vocal. Agnew resembled George Wallace defining the enemy as "permissivists," "avowed anarchists and communists," "misfits," the "garbage" of society,

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[32]Evans and Novak, Nixon, 151.

[33]"Nixon Holds Most Support In The South By Promising Conservative Stand On Rights," New York Times, 8 Aug. 1968, 24.

[34]Edsall and Edsall, Chain, 84-5.

[35]"Nixon Holds," 24.

and "radical liberals," words and phrases Wallace used himself.[36] From 1969 to 1972, Spiro Agnew's style and rhetoric became a counter to Wallace as many of those attracted to Wallace's ideas left to support Nixon.

Finally, choosing Agnew as a running mate proved to the nation that Nixon was in tune with the social issues. Agnew was the one who got tough on "race" and "law and order." When rioting broke out in Baltimore, Agnew had called the black leadership of the city to a conference. Agnew blamed the black leaders for the riots, calling them "circuit-riding, riot-inciting, burn-America-down type of leader," and accused them of "breaking and running" when they should have been on the streets stopping the riots.[37] Nixon heard about the meeting and said, "that guy Agnew is really an impressive fellow. He's got guts. He's got a good attitude."[38] Agnewism was in conformity with the attitudes of the "plain folks" who were the great majority of the voters.[39] Nixon was able to keep a centrist path with Agnew speaking hard on domestic issues. Nixon and Agnew were able to appeal to those in the North and the South who were distraught over the national malaise created by the social issues.

During the four years of Nixon's first term, court-ordered busing became the most controversial and racially charged matter

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[36]Sundquist, Dynamics, 387.

[37]Ambrose, Nixon, 163.

[38]Ambrose, Nixon, 163.

[39]Scammon and Wattenberg, Real Majority, 209-10.

before the nation. Nixon believed that education was not the "great leveler" of social barriers and that he was "unequivocally" against busing for the purpose of racial balance.[40] Nixon proved adept at disassociating himself and the office of the presidency from the enforcement efforts that the executive branch was under court and legislative mandate to carry out.[41] As Harry Dent noted, "through all of the busing fervor, Nixon seemed to win the acclaim of the opponents -- much in the majority -- while the courts received the blame."[42]

Despite Nixon's attempt to retard the process of school integration, he did support the development of a government-led "black capitalism" project. Nixon promoted three racially preferential programs: 1) "Eight-A," a minority contracting program that set aside fixed percentages of federal contracts for minority-owned businesses; 2) The establishment within the Department of Commerce of an Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE) to assist minority businesses in securing government contracts; and, 3) The "Philadelphia Plan" -- designed to increase black access to high-paying union jobs.[43] As author Hugh Graham noticed, the racial preferences of the Philadelphia Plan violated Nixon's successful strategy of avoiding a policy stance on the race issue that wavered from the center-right of

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[40]Nixon, Memoirs, 443-4.

[41]Edsall and Edsall, Chain, 88.

[42]Dent, Prodigal, 197.

[43]Edsall and Edsall, Chain, 86.

the political spectrum.[44] At the end of Nixon's first term, however, his attempts to slow the pace of southern desegregation, to appoint racial conservatives to the Supreme Court, to weaken the Voting Rights Act, and to ally himself with the "law and order" theme functioned to overshadow his efforts in black economic advancement.

Nixon's style, rhetoric, and tone made him the least popular of postwar presidents with African-Americans. African-Americans saw him as being on the side of the South, the white majority, and the status quo. On May 20, 1970, the presidents of fifteen black colleges and universities met with Nixon at the White House. They read a statement to Nixon that accused him of adopting policies that had led to "anger, outrage, and frustration" among blacks, and that the "southern strategy leads to the conclusion that blacks are dispensable." It went on to cite "the neglect of urban problems;" "insufficient support of education;" "your nomination of Justices to the Supreme Court;" "your hesitancy to support strong measures to assure the voting rights of black citizens;" and, "your failure to use your great moral influence to bring the people of this great nation together."[45] Nixon had further racially divided the nation all for the costs of gaining a Republican majority in the presidential elections of 1972.

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[44]Hugh Graham, Civil Rights Era, 278.

[45]Robert Semple, Jr., "Negro Educators In Plea To Nixon," New York Times, 21 May 1970, 1.

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1972 - NIXON'S MAJORITY

The political milieu of 1972 revolved around the newly strengthened Republican party. Richard Nixon secured the presidency for the Republican party in 1968 largely because of his conservative stance on social issues. The 1972 presidential elections would call for similar measures. In the early months of the campaign, Nixon fought hard against George Wallace for the growing populace of social conservatives and eventually garnered enough votes to produce a substantial majority. Although Nixon would resign half way through his second term of presidency, he showed, through the successful campaigns of 1968 and 1972, that the Republican party could use the anti-black vote successfully. Future Republican presidential candidates Ronald Reagan and George Bush would use Nixon's model for the successful implementation of racial politics.

Abandoning the American Independent party in 1972, George Wallace aimed for respectability and legitimacy as a mainstream candidate in the Democratic party. He toned down his rhetoric, expanded his repertoire of issues, and sought for a broader constituency. Despite his new, more respectable image, Wallace

had no trouble keeping his old supporters.[1] Although Wallace's 1972 campaign appeared open and broader-based than that of 1968, an analysis of his speeches shows that little had changed. "Of the other candidates", said Richard Nixon in his Memoirs, "George Wallace was the one we had to take most seriously."[2]

On May 15, 1972, George Wallace's campaign came to a sudden stop as an assassin shot him at a shopping center rally in Maryland. Wallace was permanently paralyzed from the waist down, and because he was unable to appear personally in the remaining states yet to hold primaries, he had little chance to gain electoral votes.[3] At the time he was shot, Wallace was the leading Democratic contender in the popular vote rally. He had gotten 1.5 million more votes than any other Democrat in the first fourteen primaries, and was the leading contender for the Democratic presidential nominee.

Richard Nixon's popular majority in the 1968 election, 60. 7 percent, was exceeded in modern history only by those awarded to Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and Franklin Roosevelt in 1936. In state after state, Nixon's margin was remarkably close to the combined total won by him and Wallace (then as a third-party candidate) in 1968. The New York Times concluded that if Wallace had not been eliminated from the contest, the 1972 election would have been

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[1]Jody Carlson, George C. Wallace, 173.

[2]Richard Nixon, Memoirs, 542.

[3]Carlson, George C. Wallace, 149.

much closer.[4] The crucial factor in Nixon's landslide victory had been the fact that Wallace did not run.

George McGovern said later that Nixon's election had been assured when Wallace decided not to run as an independent candidate and refused to throw his support to his fellow Democrat George McGovern. In a New York Times interview, McGovern intimated that he could not have compromised on the kinds of issues which would have brought him Wallace's support. "What we have now," he concluded, "is a country presided over by a president who had married the Republican party to the Wallace people, and they'll [the Republicans] make a strenuous, skillful effort to preserve that coalition."[5] Political scientist James Sundquist drives home this point, explaining that because the "anti-civil rights polar bloc of voters had no leader and no candidates in 1972, it went with Richard Nixon over George McGovern, giving Nixon majorities matching or even surpassing those conferred on Goldwater and Wallace."[6] Of the voters attracted in 1968 to the man who embodied the race issue, Wallace, nearly 80 percent voted for Nixon in 1972.

Another feature of the Nixon landslide was that it was the first Republican sweep since the Reconstruction of the once solid Democratic South. He took all eleven states of the old

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[4]Max Frankel, New York Times, 8 Nov. 1972, 1.

[5]"Excerpts From McGovern Interview On Election Reaction," New York Times, 14 Nov. 1972, 36.

[6]James Sundquist, Dynamics, 369.

Confederacy, plus all the border states.[7] His southern strategy had paid off. Nixon had achieved an electoral majority by expressing conservative ideas prevalent among the populace.

Political writer James Reichley noted that "gone was the spirit of 'Bring Us Together,' the theme of Nixon's first inaugural. In its place appeared the assertive truculence of 'The New Majority,' which Nixon believed was fed up with social change."[8] Nixon highlighted this new theme in his memoirs. Referring to the Scammon and Wattenberg thesis, Nixon wrote that "the Republican strategy was clear: "We should preempt the social issue in order to get the Democrats on the defensive." Nixon went on: "We should aim our strategy at disaffected Democrats, and blue collar workers, and at working class white ethnics."[9] These groups of voters, who had found George Wallace's rhetoric appealing, were not located solely in the South. They were in the North and the West and they supported Nixon's domestically conservative ideology, an ideology that adopted Wallace's demonized "liberal Democratic establishment" to facilitate a powerful Republican-conservative populism.

As the race problem moved from the traditional South to the North and the West, the Nixon administration positioned itself accordingly. In early 1970, the President decided to use the

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[7]Congressional Quarterly, 11 Nov. 1972, 2949.

[8]A. James Reichley, Conservatives in an Age of Change: The Nixon and Ford Administrations (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1981), 232.

[9]Nixon, Memoirs, 200.

school issue for an "unprecedented public philosophical statement on the nature of America's communities."[10] Author Theodore White described the situation:

> Politics phrased the race confrontation in America in 1972 as "busing." But "busing" was only a gingerly way of talking about the largest emotional and social problem of domestic life: How would the two races of the country live together in peace? Would blacks eventually dominate the big cities of the North, whites surrounding them in the suburbs? Should the civil-rights theories of the sixties be pressed further, even those theories that required constitutional reorganization of all the cities and metropolitan areas of the country? Mr. Nixon said, quite clearly, no.[11]

By 1970, 65 percent of American blacks lived in the industrial states of the North and West and had become in the eyes of most of the country a city problem. Theodore White further explained the problem:

> The whole phenomenon was styled "tipping": One block would go black; then another; then the neighborhood. In this scenario, it was the school system that set off anxieties; if a local school tipped, the neighborhood would tip. When politicians talked of "busing," they were obliquely talking, as everybody knew, of tipping.[12]

Although Nixon did not directly discuss the "blackening" of the

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[10]Theodore H. White, Making of the President, 1972 (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1973), 226.

[11]White, Making, 1972, 141.

[12]White, Making, 1972, 142.

cities in his campaigns or domestic policy, he did set forth a strategy, catered to the fears of average white citizens, that busing was an evil created by liberal Democrats.

In 1972 the Philadelphia Plan's employment quotas had put the Nixon administration in serious discord. In a letter to the American Jewish Committee, who had earlier urged Nixon to reject the use of quotas, Nixon hedged his opposition to quotas: "With respect to affirmative action programs, I agree that numerical goals, although important and useful as tools to measure progress which remedies the effect of past discrimination, must not be allowed to be applied in such a fashion as to, in fact, result in the imposition of quotas." Nor, Nixon said, "should they be predicted upon or directed towards a concept of proportional representation."[13] Nixon later attempted to use presidential rhetoric to reap political reward from blue-collar resentments over quotas: "when young people apply for jobs . . . and find the door closed because they don't fit into some numerical quota, despite their ability, and they object, I do not think it is right to condemn those young people as insensitive or even racist."[14] When criticism became intense and voters seemed to be outraged, Nixon compromised his most important civil rights initiative by condemning what he earlier supported.

As the presidential campaign reached the party's convention in Miami, Nixon increased his references to quotas. In his

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[13]Hugh Graham, Civil Rights Era, 446.

[14]E.J. Dionne, Why Americans, 97.

acceptance speech in Miami on August 23, Nixon compared the Republican's "open convention without dividing Americans into quotas" with the elaborate system of racial and sexual quotas that George McGovern had engineered and profited from at the Democratic convention. "My fellow Americans," Nixon shouted, "the way to end discrimination against some is not to begin discrimination against others."[15] The Nixon administration's attack on quotas not only increased racial polarization, but legitimized the argument that Nixon was partaking in a racial strategy to increase voter support.

CONCLUSION

At a conference at Hofstra University, scholars from around the country met to discuss the years of Richard Nixon's presidency. Although the scholars who examined his domestic policy acknowledged such liberal achievements as the creation of revenue sharing, the indexing of social security benefits, and his proposed Family Assistance Plan, they also spoke of Nixon's disrespect for civil liberties and his use of the race issue to court the backlash vote.[16] Nixon's domestic record was extremely divided. At times he frustrated conservative Republicans with his liberal domestic initiatives like the

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[15]Graham, Civil Rights Era, 447.

[16]Dionne, "Nixon Skips Conference, But The Enigma Attends," New York Times, 23 Nov. 1987, 14.

Philadelphia Plan and the Family Assistance Plan, and at other times he played the role of social conservative. For Nixon, the primary purpose of domestic policy was its value in maintaining an electoral majority.

To conclude that Richard Nixon and the Republican party had a designed, premeditative racial strategy, would be to misinterpret the political reality of the 1960s and early 1970s. To claim that Nixon did not see success in the polarization of social issues between the races, would also be incorrect. The fact is that Richard Nixon did use racial issues as campaign and administrative policies to gain votes. He did use anti-black themes to chisel votes away from the Democratic party. Starting with the white Democratic South, Nixon moved North and then West to capture those whites who were tired of the liberal establishments of the Democratic party. Although he installed liberal programs that seemed to aid African-Americans, Nixon would later criticize the programs as partaking in reverse discrimination.

Racial politics was clearly practiced inside the Nixon administration. Nixon understood the reward of polarizing the two parties on racial issues. After the success of the southern strategy, Nixon never shied away from using anti-black themes to increase voter support. During times of white social unrest, Nixon stressed his anti-busing and anti-quota stance. When his social conservative ideology was in question, Nixon answered by criticizing past Democratic presidents for overstepping their

interpretation of the Constitution.

Along with foreign policy and managing the economy, the battle of the races has always dominated American politics. The decade of the 1960s had convinced liberal Democrats that government was the chief instrument of action and morality; that the government must move to its moral goals by affirmative action; and further, what the government did could be measured by quantifiable results -- whether in housing, or in the mathematical proportions of black and white children in classrooms.[17] As a result, many white Americans fled cities for suburbs, enrolled their children in private schools, and voiced anger at a government that seemed to be supporting one racial group over another.

Why did whites abandon the cities? Why did they voice anger at liberal administrations for interfering with the integration of society? The answers to these questions are rooted in the racial tensions that run deep through our society. For the most, fear of blacks was based on irrational phobias. Whites saw the difference in skin color alone as enough reason to fear blacks. Examples of white anxieties based on color differences are spread throughout history. Irrational phobias led whites to oppress African-Americans. This is no more prevalent than today.

The Rodney King Trial and the ensuing South Central Los Angeles riots occurred more than twenty-five years after the Watts riots. Since then, black poverty has grown, segregation in

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[17]White, Making, 1972, 33-4.

housing has worsened, and crime and violence has skyrocketed. Because the conservative administrations from Richard Nixon to George Bush have supported the conclusion that racial justice was achieved for African-Americans during the 1960s, Republican presidents have focussed their attention away from blacks. Today the conservative message to blacks is that the first step toward progress, for any group, lies in the admission that its failures are its own fault. Conservative Republicans fail to see that slavery, the damage from legal segregation during the century that followed emancipation, and the racism that still infects the entire nation has direct repercussions on African-Americans today.

The racial strategy conceived by Richard Nixon was not just developed around irrational phobias possessed by whites. It also arose out of genuine fears and anxieties over the rising crime rate, the deterioration of public schools, and the job competition between whites and blacks. Nixon, Reagan, and Bush, however, highlighted controversial issues such as the welfare dependency of single African-American mothers and the selling and using of drugs among black youths to reap political gain. Racial politics intended to dramatize those genuine fears of whites in order to increase voter support.

Nixon's racial strategy was part of the American political process. Nixon knew that inherent in the idea of politics was that majorities rule. A candidate with detailed plans and moral principles was only affective if elected. One of Nixon's real

skills was to maximize the number of votes to which his ideas would be accepted. A key factor in this strategy was that he did not appeal to overt racism. Examples set by Thurmond in 1948, Goldwater in 1964, and Wallace in 1968, demonstrated to Nixon that there was no future in a blatantly racist appeal. Thus, Nixon balanced his conservative based administration by augmenting centrist elements.

Evaluating Richard Nixon and those who worked out the racial strategy is a difficult task. Richard Nixon was not a racist. He was, however, an opportunist who focussed on the irrational and genuine fears of white Americans. He avoided the black vote, for the most, because he saw more future in the votes of whites. Nixon was willing to compromise his own initiatives that supported the economic advancement of African-Americans because he was directed by the group that had more voting bloc power. Above all, Nixon was more concerned about votes than about moral principles.

The ultimate goal for any political party is to stay in power. The Republican party used racial politics to achieve this goal. Richard Nixon watched as racial politics became manipulated under the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George Bush. During the 1980s, the chasm between black and white Americans grew wider. Conservatives added to this gap through their use of racial politics. The Reagan administrations relentless war against affirmative action and George Bush's presidential campaign advertisements focussing on Willie Horton,

were testaments to Richard Nixon. The Republican party was grateful to Nixon for his viable strategy. But even more, Republicans were thankful that the politics of race had a future.

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