

★ Chapter 9 ★

Presidential Elections and the South

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THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SOUTH and presidential electoral politics since World War II has been the central focus of most scholarly work on the South and the presidency over the past half century or so. Although some literature has addressed presidential decision making during the civil rights era of the 1950s and, especially, the 1960s, this has been primarily a recounting of the effort to extend full citizenship rights to black southerners and is, therefore, more properly categorized as a part of the literature that focuses on presidential decision making regardless of region. Even that literature, however, tends to underscore electoral politics as the major connection between the presidency and the South. For example, there are frequent extended discussions of how presidents approached the development of civil rights policy positions with a sharp eye on how those positions might affect their ability to attract votes in the South—see, for example, the later discussion in this chapter of Lyndon Johnson's recognition of the consequences of his signing the 1964 Civil Rights Act for his—and other Democrats'—electoral chances in the region (Black and Black 1992).

The electoral focus is understandable. Inasmuch as the presidency is a national office, there is relatively little about its contemporary institutional structure and operation that is uniquely regional. Thus, the electoral context frames most of the research on the connections between the presidency and southern politics qua southern politics, and it is mainly that research that concerns us in this chapter.

One useful way of grouping this research is to divide it into two broad, frequently overlapping categories. First, there is a body of litera-

ture that examines presidential elections in the South from the perspective of specific elections. Early examples include Donald Strong's *The 1952 Presidential Election in the South* (1955) and Bernard Cosman's *Five States for Goldwater* (1966). More recent examples include the series of studies of the 1984–2000 presidential elections in the South edited by Robert Steed, Laurence Moreland, and Tod Baker (Steed, Moreland, and Baker 1986, 1994; Moreland, Steed, and Baker 1991; Moreland and Steed 1997; Steed and Moreland 2002). Although he included more than one election in the 1990s, Alexander Lamis's *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (1999) can also be placed in this category in light of its extended but relatively focused discussion of presidential electoral politics during that decade.

All these studies presented data and analyses aimed at clarifying voting patterns in the South in specific elections. What is perhaps more significant is that they also set those elections in a broader historical context that attempted, generally successfully, to identify how those elections fit into the larger patterns of regional political change. Thus, for example, Strong and Cosman both discussed an emerging Republican presidential vote in the South in the early 1950s and mid-1960s, respectively, that pointed to more generalized party transformation. Although (as I will discuss later in this chapter) the bases of Republican support in those elections differed in important ways, both elections demonstrated a growing willingness on the part of white southerners to desert the Democratic Party, at least in presidential elections. The development of presidential Republicanism in the South and its contribution to broader partisan change continued to be a major focus of the later studies of specific elections as well.

The second broad category of literature includes those studies that take a longer view of how presidential politics in the South evolved historically. In some instances presidential elections are contributing but secondary elements of a broader discussion of southern political change. For example, Earl Black and Merle Black in their landmark 1987 study, *Politics and Society in the South*, included one chapter devoted to presidential politics as a key indicator of the wide-ranging social, economic, demographic, and political changes in the region. Again in their 2002 book, which focused mainly on southern congressional politics (*The Rise of Southern Republicans*), the Blacks included related material on presidential elections to advance the general theme of partisan transformation. From a slightly different angle, Nicol Rae paid significant attention

to presidential electoral politics in the South as an integral part of his examination of southern factionalism within the national Democratic Party in *Southern Democrats* (1994).

In fact, it is difficult to find any broad examination of southern partisan change during the period since World War II that did not in some way consider presidential elections as a significant element of that change. The prime examples include the usual suspects: *The Changing Politics of the South* edited by William Hovard (1972), *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* by Numan Bartley and Hugh Graham (1975), *The Transformation of Southern Politics* by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries (1976), *Southern Republicanism* by Louis Seagull (1975), and *The Two-Party South* by Alexander Lamis (1988). A more recent addition to the list is David Lublin's *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change* (2004). A number of these books highlight the importance of Republican success in capturing presidential votes in the South as a means of gaining an electoral foothold in the region, but special mention should be made of Kevin Phillips's *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969) and Joseph Aistrup's *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South* (1994) for their emphasis on the Republicans' strategic calculations in the 1960s. It was a conscious design to peel off southern white votes as a base of long-term Republican growth in the South. Aistrup in particular noted how success in presidential elections paved the way for a slower climb to competitiveness for Republicans in subnational elections over the last quarter of the century.

Finally, the most extensively developed overview of presidential electoral politics in the South over the past half century is Earl Black and Merle Black's *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* (1992). Not only did the Blacks provide a thorough discussion of the details of presidential elections in the post-World War II South, but they placed this discussion in the context of national politics over the same period and also in a broader historical framework that ranged back well into the 1800s. In the process they presented a strong case for viewing the changes in southern presidential voting as important for understanding southern politics but also as important for understanding national politics. Their concluding sentence captured the central theme: "Above all, this is a portrait of a *vital* South, a region once again at the center of struggles to define winners and losers in American politics" (*ibid.*, 366).

This is not an exhaustive listing of the work on presidential elections and the South; other materials will be cited in the following discussion. The rich body of work on presidential elections and southern politics often varies in emphasis, detail, time frame, and interpretative analysis, but collectively it tells an important story critical to understanding political patterns in the region. The remainder of this chapter offers an overview of that story.

Before Goldwater

In the years after World War II the southern states, once solidly Democratic, began undergoing a lengthy political shift. In 1952 four southern states backed the Republican presidential candidate. Rather than proving aberrational—as was the case in 1928 when five southern states defected rather than back the Democratic nominee, Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York—political forces inside and outside the South transformed the South, establishing competitive two-party politics, initially at the presidential level.

In *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, Earl Black and Merle Black emphasized the transforming roles of two Republican presidential candidates, Barry Goldwater in 1964 and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Goldwater's presidential bid marked the first time more southern whites voted Republican than Democratic. The Reagan years marked the first time more southern whites identified themselves as Republicans than as Democrats, which laid the foundation for Republican advances below the presidential level in the 1990s (Black and Black 2002, 205).

The Goldwater breakthrough followed a major federal intervention in race relations, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an act that scrambled the political calculus of the South. President Lyndon Johnson, a Democrat, had made passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 a memorial to the assassinated President John Kennedy. No longer could solid southern attachment to the Democratic Party seem the best means of preventing federal interference with race relations in the South. The solidly Democratic South had rested on just such a notion, contrasting the Democrats as the party of and for the South with the Republican Party as the party of President Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal had set in motion the potential for conflict within the New Deal support coalition, because that coalition included both blacks and southern whites. Yet the notion that

the Democratic Party would best protect white supremacy in the South had begun seriously unraveling in 1948 with President Harry Truman's endorsement of a civil rights program as he sought reelection. If the Democratic Party would not preserve southern race relations, a fundamental justification for one-party politics would be lost, and the way to two-party competition would be opened. In 1948 the Independent candidacy of Strom Thurmond of South Carolina gave voice to white southerners opposed to civil rights who wished to defect from the Democratic ticket. Thurmond carried four deep South states—Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina—and gained 39 electoral votes. Truman defeated Governor Thomas Dewey of New York 303 to 189. Such third-party candidacies can be viewed as halfway houses that facilitate the move of voters from identification with and support of one party to another.

In 1952 and 1956 the Democratic presidential nominee, Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois, did not repeat Truman's endorsement of a strong civil rights plank, but many southern voters did not return to their Democratic loyalties. Instead, they found reason to like General Dwight David Eisenhower, the Republican candidate and World War II commander. "Ike' was the personification of a genial, non-threatening Republican . . . [who] could attract conservative Democrats and independents and carry several southern states" (Black and Black 2002, 207–9). Unlike Dewey in 1948 and previous Republicans, Eisenhower actively campaigned for southern votes and secured four of the largest southern states (Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) in 1952. In 1956 he won these four states again and even added Louisiana.

Nor did the 1960 contest between Republican Vice President Richard Nixon and Democratic Senator John Kennedy draw sharp contrasts between the two in terms of civil rights. Nevertheless, the Solid South's Democratic ties were fraying. In 1960 Nixon carried Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia. The addition of Senator Lyndon Johnson to the Democratic ticket as ice president helped Democrats retake Texas, without which Kennedy would not have had an Electoral College majority.

Race, while central to southern politics, was not the only issue in southern presidential politics propelling some white voters toward the Republicans. Some southern voter disenchantment in 1952–60 with the Democratic Party and its presidential candidates could be traced back to President Roosevelt's New Deal. Conservative Democrats, and they were numerous among southern Democrats, could find much to dis-

like in the more progressive politics of the New Deal. A developing and broad-ranging ideological misfit between conservative southern Democrats and the national Democratic Party would help produce a reconfiguration of party support in the South (Lamis 1999, 5, 7).

This ideological reconfiguration was not rapid. Between 1952 and 1980 many southern whites, considering themselves staunch Democrats, would defect in their presidential voting either to Governor George Wallace of Alabama, an Independent candidate in 1968, or to the Republican candidate. These were the latter-day equivalents to V. O. Key's "strange political schizophrenic, the presidential Republican," who made up the Republican base in the 1940s, along with "mountain Republicans" and "Negro Republicans." But Key noted that these three parts added up to very little. For decades the Republican Party had not been seriously seeking southern Electoral College votes. Key, writing in 1949, said the Republican Party in southern states "scarcely deserves the name of party. It wavers somewhat between an esoteric cult on the order of a lodge and a conspiracy for plunder in accord with the accepted customs of our politics." Rather than seeking to win elections in the South, Republican officials would raise funds for contests in more doubtful states in the non-South (Key 1949, 278, 277, 296).

The Republican Party in the late-1940s South was not a robust political organization, but political trends in the region augured brighter days ahead for the party. In 1952 Alexander Heard, a principal research assistant to Key in *Southern Politics*, published *A Two-Party South?* Heard's analysis set out the long-term trends at work in the South. According to Heard, prospects for an invigorated Republicanism rested with changes brought on by economic and social developments. The shift from a rural, agricultural orientation to an urban and industrial society should alter the bases of political controversy in the South. Liberal factions within the state Democratic parties should eventually become stronger partly because of the increasing political organization of blacks and workers. Conservative Democrats would be driven to seek refuge in the Republican Party as third-party efforts and continued loyalty to the Democratic Party lost favor. The growth of a sizable urban middle class, subject to Republican as well as Democratic appeals, should nourish a two-party politics. The increasing competitiveness should realign the parties along liberal and conservative dimensions in line with the national parties (Heard 1952, 128-29, 245-49).

It is fitting that Key's other research assistant, Donald Strong, ex-

tended Heard's analysis with his exploration of the 1952 election in *The 1952 Presidential Election in the South* (1955). In this publication, and again in his *Urban Republicanism in the South* (1960), Strong found evidence supporting the expectation that Republican support in the 1950s was emerging in many of the sectors Heard had identified (for example, the white urban middle class).

Goldwater: A Choice, Not an Echo

Unlike the 1952, 1956, and 1960 campaigns, the 1964 presidential contest offered voters stark differences on civil rights. Senator Goldwater had voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, arguably for reasons of principle rather than racism or political opportunity. For southern whites opposed to change from white supremacy and segregation, Goldwater's opposition to the Civil Rights Act gave them a choice.

Shortly after signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Johnson reportedly told an aide: "I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come" (Black and Black 1992, 6). Subsequent presidential politics proved Johnson more prophetic than wrong.

The issue of race provided Republicans with an opportunity to expand their support among white southerners. Before Goldwater, Republicans had earned a considerable share of the black vote, particularly in 1956 after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In 1960 this support ebbed a bit. The black vote, where it did not split evenly, went predominantly Democratic. Democrats had regained black support without significantly estranging white supporters. The Republican loss in 1960 was particularly vexing for Republicans; they had not gained white votes and had lost black votes. "Nixon had received only 33.4 percent of the vote in the black-belt counties in 1960, yet he was clearly more conservative, especially on racial matters, than was Kennedy" (Bartley and Graham 1975, 95). A Republican Party postmortem on 1960 statewide losses in Virginia and North Carolina, in which Republicans had run progressive campaigns with no race-baiting, pinpointed a paradox ripe with implications for future Republican strategy: Democratic victories rested on "the support of an unnatural coalition—Negroes demanding change in the pattern of race relations and those most strongly opposed to departure from the pattern" (ibid.). Since the black vote was small, writing off black voters to pick up white segregationist votes was not, at the time, particularly costly. In 1961 Goldwater had put it expressively: "We're not

going to get the Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 and 1968, so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are" (Tindall 1972, 60). Hunt they did.

Survey research indicates "Goldwater was perceived by southern whites as a defender of segregation, even to a point well beyond any which the Senator actually took" (Converse 1966, 241). Goldwater carried the deep South states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. He won the deep South but lost every other state except Arizona, his home state. As Bernard Cosman discussed in some depth in *Five States for Goldwater* (1966), Goldwater swept the southern areas of high black population in the Black Belt counties, the areas of the South most resistant to black advancement, in which few blacks voted before the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black Belt counties gave Goldwater greater support than did traditional Republican counties or urban areas.

Southern whites were not the only ones paying attention to the candidates' stances on civil rights. For blacks the 1964 choice between Johnson the Democrat and Goldwater the Republican, along with the clear identification of the national Democratic Party as the stronger advocate of civil rights in 1964 and later, established strong ties to the Democratic Party that have endured. Before 1964 the positions of the Democratic and Republican parties had not been clearly differentiated on civil rights. In 1964 and afterward they were (Carmines and Stimson 1989). In the five southern states Goldwater carried, between 62 and 93 percent of the voting age blacks had been unregistered in 1964 (Bass and DeVries 1976, 29). In the years that followed, blacks in even these most racially resistant areas of the South gained an effective right to vote with passage and enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And their votes were cast with a strong attachment to the Democrats.

Wallace, Nixon, Reagan, and a Southern Strategy

Federal interventions in civil rights and the Democratic Party's more progressive positions led many southern whites to reconsider their political preferences. Regarding the rise in the 1960s in Republican voting, one South Carolinian discounted the apparent partisan shift in voting: "There ain't that many Republicans in South Carolina, just a lot of mad Democrats" (Tindall 1972, 71). Many of these "mad Democrats" defected from their partisan ties, some backing Governor George Wallace of Alabama, some backing Republican candidates.

Wallace, a highly skilled and ambitious politician, called for federal defiance as exemplified by his "stand in the schoolhouse door"—an unsuccessful attempt to prevent desegregation of the University of Alabama in June 1963. His defiant rhetoric struck a chord. And he sought to expand his support base beyond Alabama. Wallace entered three Democratic presidential primaries in 1964 to challenge President Johnson politically and to show support for his views outside the South. Wallace lost each primary but secured almost 43 percent of the vote in the last one, in Maryland. In July 1964, three days after Republicans nominated Goldwater and less than three weeks after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Wallace withdrew, bowing to the reality that Goldwater's running as the Republican nominee had eclipsed the justification for his candidacy (Carter 1995).

Wallace returned to run for president in 1968, not as a Democrat in the primaries but as an Independent in the general election, giving voice again to southern whites who had found a temporary home with Goldwater in 1964. The Wallace candidacy threatened to deny either the Republican Nixon or the Democratic Vice President Hubert Humphrey a majority in the Electoral College, which would throw the election into the House of Representatives. Wallace fell short, securing 46 electoral votes from five southern states (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi). Nixon won 301 electoral votes, Humphrey only 191; 270 votes constituted a majority of the Electoral College. Opinion polling revealed that two-thirds of the 1968 Wallace voters would have backed Nixon had Wallace not run (Bartley 1970, 108). Humphrey won only one southern state (Texas), and Nixon won five.

In 1968 Republicans backed away from the blunt, toxic approach to racial issues that had characterized Goldwater's campaign. The outer South, less scarred by racial anxieties, would make a more feasible target; GOP gains in the outer South spilled over as the deep South evolved (Phillips 1969, 205). Nixon himself had proclaimed in 1966: "Republicans must not go prospecting for the fool's gold of racist votes" (Bass and DeVries 1976, 29). And again: "Southern Republicans must not climb aboard the sinking ship of racial injustice. They should let the Southern Democrats sink with it, as they have sailed with it" (Tindall 1972, 69). Noble sentiments these, but when made in 1966 the Republican choice was not so much one of climbing aboard as one of jumping off.

For his 1968 presidential campaign Nixon fashioned a "southern strategy" that sought to strike a responsive chord in the South, at least

those southern states outside the deep South. In early spring 1968 Nixon and southern Republican strategists came to an understanding of a southern strategy that two journalists characterized like this: "If I'm president of the United States, I'll find a way to ease up on the federal pressures forcing school desegregation—or any other kind of desegregation" (Murphy and Gulliver 1971, 2).

Nixon's comeback win of the presidency in 1968 was predicated in part on this southern strategy, personified by Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina. The southern strategy sought to profit politically from racial resentment without driving away more moderate support. The political logic behind the Republican strategy was set forth in Kevin Phillips's *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969). Phillips, Nixon's main electoral analyst and strategist, optimistically lumped together Nixon and Wallace support to divine trends in the political tides. As his book developed in some detail, Phillips saw the southern strategy as a key ingredient in a national electoral strategy that would have long-term payoffs for the party. Phillips's analysis has since been recognized as one of the most prescient writings on American partisan politics in the post-World War II era. Indeed, these long-term implications would later be examined by Joseph Aistrup in *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South* (1994), in which he would connect Republican growth in the South to the strategic seeds sowed in the late 1960s.

When Wallace returned in 1972 to run again for president, he ran as a Democrat, something the Nixon administration was keen to encourage. (Nixon had surreptitiously aided Wallace in his comeback bid for governor in Alabama in 1970, a fact that came out with the Watergate investigations.) Nixon realized a politically potent Wallace offered real prospects for dividing Democrats nationally. The shooting of Wallace in May 1972 effectively ended his potency in national politics, although he did run for president again in 1976 in the Democratic primaries, only to be eclipsed by a fellow southerner, Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia.

In 1952 Eisenhower had broken through the solidly Democratic South: "The watershed election for presidential Republicanism was the contest of 1952, which clearly established the G.O.P. as the respectable party of the urban and suburban affluent whites in the South's large and small cities and a visible threat in presidential elections in the South" (Bartley and Graham 1975, 86; cf. Strong 1955). One estimate is that Eisenhower secured 50 percent of the southern white vote in 1952 and

close to that in 1956. Eisenhower's candidacy attracted to the GOP southern members enthusiastic about electoral victory. Republican organizations increasingly resembled true party organizations with electoral ambitions for state and national office rather than a closed group focused on federal patronage.

Eisenhower ran well in the South's metropolitan regions, drawing from the growing urban and suburban middle class (Black and Black 2002, 209). Aggregate analysis reveals that presidential Republicanism made the greatest gains in metropolitan areas during the Eisenhower years. Nixon's 1960 campaign continued the trend; he was most successful in metropolitan areas (and traditional mountain Republican areas, as Ike had been). Goldwater upset the trend, gaining greater percentages of support in Black Belt counties than in traditional Republican counties or metropolitan areas. The trend returned with Nixon's 1968 campaign, although the conclusion must be hedged a bit since urban areas then contained a large number of blacks who had begun to vote and who backed the Democrats (Strong 1971, 239, 256).

In 1972, against the Democratic presidential nominee Senator George McGovern, Nixon swept the South, something that had not occurred since 1944, except in 1944 a Solid South was Democratic. Only five of the eleven southern states had cast electoral votes for the Republican presidential candidate since 1880 (Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia in 1928 and Tennessee in both 1920 and 1928).

Republican prospects for party building down South (as well as across the nation) were set back by the Watergate scandal. Gerald Ford took over as president, declaring "the long national nightmare" was over. Governor Jimmy Carter of Georgia, the Democratic presidential nominee in 1976, symbolized a political nightmare for Republicans and a dream candidate for Democrats: a moderate southerner who could mobilize black voter turnout and support as well as secure substantial white voter support in the South and across the nation. Such biracial coalitions had proven effective at the state level, enabling southern Democrats to win office and turn back the rising Republican challenge (Lamis 1999, 8–9). Prospects were strong for Democratic presidential wins, too.

Carter's regional roots appealed to white southern voters in ways that President Johnson's Texas ties had not in 1964. Carter carried every southern state except Virginia and narrowly won the presidency. Carter's 1976 campaign proved alluring, but his presidency proved off-putting, marked as it was by poor economic performance combined with foreign

policy crises (Black and Black, 1992, 307–12). Chief among the crises was what one nightly network news program regularly called “America Held Hostage,” as U.S. embassy employees were held captive in Iran during the final year of Carter’s presidency.

Governor Ronald Reagan, favored by the Republican right, had challenged incumbent President Gerald Ford for the Republican nomination in 1976, coming close to toppling the sitting president. In 1980 Reagan gained the Republican presidential nomination and defeated Carter’s reelection bid. This time Carter lost every southern state except his home state of Georgia (Black and Black 2002, 212–14).

Reagan’s presidency strengthened the Republican Party in the South in ways that won converts to the party among many former Democratic supporters. This bolstered the Republican presence in the South and promised larger gains later below the presidential level, a promise realized during the 1990s. As Black and Black wrote of Reagan: “Ronald Reagan’s presidency legitimized the Republican party for many white southerners. His southern legacy was immense. . . . His optimistic conservatism and successful performance in office made the Republican party respectable and useful for millions of southern whites. Many of them, for the first time in their lives, began to think of themselves as Republicans. . . . By realigning white conservatives and dealigning white moderates, Reagan produced a partial realignment of the southern white electorate” (ibid., 206, 370). In 1984 Reagan won reelection in a landslide. Carter’s vice president, Walter Mondale of Minnesota, captured the Democratic presidential nomination in 1984, and Reagan—as Nixon had in 1972—swept every southern state (Stanley 1986).

The rise of the religious right in the 1980s, firmly tied to the Republican Party and prominent in the South, aided Republican prospects even as it added tensions within the Republican coalition (Black and Black 2002, 214–15, 227–29, 250–51).

A key Republican campaign operative, Lee Atwater, in 1981 explained the evolving role of race for Republicans:

You start out in 1954 by saying “Nigger, nigger, nigger.” By 1968 you can’t say “nigger”—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states’ rights, and all that stuff. You’re getting so abstract now you’re talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you’re talking about are totally economic things and a by-product of them is blacks get hurt worse than whites.

And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I’m not saying that. But I’m saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, “we want to cut this,” is much more abstract than even the busing thing *and* a hell of a lot more abstract than “Nigger, nigger.” (July 8, 1981, interview quoted in Lamis 1988, 26; cf. Black and Black 1992, 8, and Edsall and Edsall 1991, 3–4)

The South Reforms the Presidential Selection Process

Many southern Democratic Party and elected officials were tiring of Democratic presidential candidates with limited appeal to southern whites. Before the 1988 presidential caucuses and primaries, southern Democrats, spearheaded by the Southern Legislative Council, sought to schedule each southern state’s caucus or primary for Super Tuesday, March 8. (The first “Super Tuesday,” in 1980, had been created when Alabama and Georgia agreed to move their primary dates earlier to join Florida to provide incumbent President Carter with friendly southern settings after Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts was expected to win the early events of Iowa and New Hampshire.) With the southern states uniting to stage a mammoth one-day nominating event, it was hoped that Super Tuesday would raise the profile of southern voters in Democratic presidential nominating politics, benefit more moderate Democratic candidates, and thus help stop the movement of southern whites toward presidential Republicanism.

Those were the hopes, but the reality differed dramatically. In Republican primaries marked by substantially increased turnout, Vice President George H. W. Bush swept the southern states, cementing the Republican nomination. Among Democrats, Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts won two states (Florida and Texas), the black civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson won five (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Virginia), and Senator Al Gore of Tennessee won three (Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee). This was not the result more moderate southern Democrats had envisioned. Disappointment with the 1988 results and the ultimate nomination of Michael Dukakis led several southern states to back off the regional primary. In 1992 four states (Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Virginia) moved the primary to a later date, turning their backs on the attempt to make southern

clout felt early in the nomination process. A fifth southern state, Georgia, moved earlier in the calendar, snagging greater media and candidate attention as the curtain-raiser for the six southern states remaining in Super Tuesday. (South Carolina Republicans had shown the advantages of such timing in 1988.) By 1996 only four southern states remained on Super Tuesday (Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas). South Carolina and Georgia scheduled primaries before Super Tuesday, which served as gateway primaries to the South (Clark and Haynes 2002, 25; Stanley 1997).

Bush, Clinton, and Bush

The state-by-state analyses of the presidential elections in the South from 1984 through 2000 in the Praeger series of books edited by Robert Steed, Laurence Moreland, and Tod Baker, coupled with similar state-by-state analyses of the presidential elections of the 1990s edited by Alexander Lamis, paint a vivid picture of developments over the past two decades. Moreover, these works addressed regionwide concerns regarding the presidential nomination process we have just examined.

Vice President Bush won the election in 1988, turning back Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts. Bush, as Reagan had in 1984, swept the South. White southern voters—as they had with Humphrey in 1968, McGovern in 1972, and Mondale in 1984—again demonstrated little affinity for nonsouthern left-of-center Democratic presidential candidates. Significant numbers of southern electoral votes had previously gone for such a candidate—Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960—but those days were gone. The Bush campaign successfully targeted Dukakis as a Democratic symbol of “the various accumulated Democratic party stigmas that . . . [had produced] a national partisan reshuffling favorable to the GOP”—such as being weak on defense, opposed to the death penalty, and soft on crime. The Bush campaign may not have aired the most notorious Willie Horton ad, but they did air television ads attacking Governor Dukakis for “a Massachusetts prison furlough program in which a convicted murderer named Willie Horton, released for a weekend during Dukakis’ tenure, fled and later committed rape” (Lamis 1999, 401–2).

Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas proved a more resilient Democratic nominee, positioning himself as more of a centrist, a “new Democrat.” Clinton and his running mate, Senator Al Gore of Tennessee, drew

a sharp contrast with previous Democratic images, stating in an early television ad: “They are a new generation of Democrats, Bill Clinton and Al Gore. And they don’t think the way the old Democratic party did. They’ve called for an end to welfare as we know it, so welfare can be a second chance, not a way of life. They’ve sent a strong signal to criminals by supporting the death penalty. And they’ve rejected the old tax and spend politics” (quoted in Lamis 1999, 34). The end of the cold war in 1989 helped, blunting the stigma of Democrats as being too soft on defense (*ibid.*, 402). And Clinton hammered hard at the economic recession under President Bush and defeated the incumbent with 370 electoral votes to 168.

Yet neither for election in 1992 nor reelection in 1996 did Clinton, a moderate Democrat from the South, prove capable of repeating Carter’s near-sweep of the southern states in 1976. Clinton carried four southern states in 1992 and again in 1996: Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee in both elections, and Georgia in 1992 and Florida in 1996.

In 1996 Clinton turned back Senator Robert Dole, 379 electoral votes to 159. Democrats had an all-southern ticket in 1992 and 1996 with Clinton and Gore, but rather than battling to take back the South, the all-southern ticket put together enough Electoral College votes to win in the non-South. In neither 1992 nor 1996 did electoral votes from the southern states provide a margin crucial for the Democratic victory.

In 1996 as in 1992, the South was not a vital region in presidential politics. Bill Clinton’s victories could have weathered losing every one of the Electoral College votes he secured from the southern states—fifty-one in 1996, thirty-nine in 1992. Ironically, an all-southern Democratic ticket proved electable in 1992 and 1996, but it did not require southern electoral votes. The Democratic Party had two southerners as presidential and vice presidential nominees, but their appeal outside the South, not a strong southern base, made victory attainable (Stanley 1997, 223).

Both 1992 and 1996 featured third-party bids by billionaire Ross Perot. Despite Perot’s Texas ties, his Independent candidacy proved less appealing in the South than in the non-South. Nationwide Perot pulled in almost 19 percent of the popular vote. In the South Perot averaged just under 16 percent (Lamis 1999, 36). Third parties with impact on southern politics have tended to articulate populist themes that resonate with traditional southern culture rather than progressive themes such as those Perot advanced in 1992 and 1996 (Green 1997, 35).

President Clinton took strides to reshape politics. He signed welfare reform into law, and he declared that the era of big government was over. In many respects he was a different kind of Democrat. Clinton's presidency offered hopes for resuscitating Democratic presidential prospects in the South, but Clinton had baggage. His failed health care program in 1994 smacked of big government; its failure eroded Clinton's claims to be a "new Democrat" and helped Republicans win congressional majorities in 1994 (Lamis 1999, 42–43). Personal scandal and impeachment proceedings added bite to an increasingly polarized politics, and even his own vice president, Al Gore, used Clinton only minimally in his 2000 bid for the presidency. Kevin Phillips, commenting on the declining southern white voters' affection for Democrats, noted that "each time the Democrats have had a southern president who disappointed Dixie, the party has paid the price—LBJ in 1964–68, Carter in 1980, and most recently Clinton" (Phillips 2004). Gore, hailing from Tennessee, failed to carry even a single southern state in 2000. Winning his home state or even Clinton's Arkansas would have sufficed to put Gore in the winner's circle.

In 2000 Gore did not resonate with southern whites as Clinton had in 1992 and 1996 or even as Carter had in 1976. Governor George W. Bush of Texas proved more likable and appealing. Gore evoked strong support among black voters in the South, as in the nation, but his more liberal positions did not resonate with southern whites (Stanley 2002, 225).

In 2000 Bush campaigned as a "compassionate conservative," seeking to soften the hard-edged positions often associated with some of the more conservative Republicans. Bush thought Republicans needed to "put a compassionate face on our conservative philosophy [because] people think oftentimes that Republicans are mean-spirited folks. Which is not true, but that's what people think." Bush, pointing to his record in Texas, claimed that without abandoning conservative ideology or alienating core Republican voters, he was capable of reaching out to Hispanics, blacks, and working-class Catholics (*ibid.*).

Bush's outreach contrasted vividly with previous Republican campaigns that relied on a southern strategy to secure overwhelming support from white voters to offset strong opposition among minority voters. Nixon, Reagan, and even the elder Bush had relied on such a strategy. Ralph Reed, a former political operative of the religious right, then a consultant to the Bush campaign, put it bluntly: "This is a very different party from the party that sits down on Labor Day and cedes the black

vote and cedes the Hispanic vote, and tries to drive its percentage of the white vote over 70 percent to win an election" (*ibid.*, 226).

"Compassionate conservatism" may not have won Bush very many votes from minorities, but it probably benefited him among white moderates. As one analyst noted before the election: "He doesn't come across as one of these southern, Christian Coalition, right-wing-nut Republican candidates. So white suburbanites, especially white suburban women, who are looking for someone who is reasonable can support him" (David Bositis, quoted in *ibid.*, 226–27).

In 2000 Bush's southern state victories had "depended heavily on religious constituencies, especially observant evangelical Protestants, the prime constituency of the Christian Right and the core of traditional southern Protestantism" (Green 2002, 11). In 2004 Republicans solidified their support among white evangelical, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal voters. The "churchgoing white South" was counted as critical to the 2004 Bush victory (Phillips 2004).

Conclusion

Noting that every one of the nine times between 1932 and 1988 that one party captured all or most of the South's electoral votes, that party won, Black and Black concluded that "as the united south goes, so goes the nation" (Black and Black 1992, 344).

In recent decades southern electoral votes have mostly gone overwhelmingly to the Republicans, adding to the Republican margin of victory without being critical to that victory. Only in the past two presidential elections have southern electoral votes made the difference between losing and winning. Bush swept the southern states in 2000 and again in 2004 (although critics still argue over the 2000 vote count in Florida). Republican presidential candidates had previously swept the South in 1972, 1984, and 1988. Yet none of those previous Republican wins while sweeping the South depended on southern electoral votes. Also, Reagan's near-sweep of southern states in 1980 was not required for his victory. Had every southern state remained solidly Democratic in 1972, 1980, 1984, and 1988, Nixon, Reagan (twice), and George H. W. Bush would still have won. Not so in 2000 and 2004. Southern electoral votes, solidly Republican, proved crucial for the two George W. Bush wins.

Another perspective on how Democratic presidential candidates have fared in 1968 and later with southern electoral votes is that only

two of three southerners—Carter and Clinton, but not Gore—have won southern electoral votes. In four elections Carter and Clinton carried a southern state nineteen times out of a possible total of forty-four. Of the five nonsouthern Democratic presidential candidates—Humphrey, McGovern, Mondale, Dukakis, and Kerry—only one won a southern state (Humphrey won Texas in 1968). Put differently, these nonsouthern Democratic candidates carried a southern state once out of a possible total of fifty-five times.

In the aftermath of the 2004 elections, what does a retrospective view suggest about Democratic presidential prospects? Virginia has not voted Democratic for president since 1964. Five southern states (Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas) have not voted Democratic since 1976. Georgia last voted Democratic in 1992, Florida in 1996—neither Florida nor Georgia backed Clinton in both his presidential elections. Three states last backed a Democrat in 1996 (and also backed Clinton in 1992)—Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee. Put differently, Virginia has voted Republican for president in the last ten elections; Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas have voted Republican seven straight times; Georgia three times; and Arkansas, Louisiana, and Tennessee twice.

Should Democrats write off the South in presidential campaigns or seek to win the hearts and minds of voters in southern states? One school of thought holds that Democrats are doomed without a presidential candidate capable of securing southern electoral votes. (In 2003 Howard Dean urged the wooing of southern whites, stating that he wanted the votes of southern whites with Confederate flags on their pickup trucks. This colorful but awkward wording attracted flak; lost was the larger point that Dean thought Democrats had winning economic and substantive arguments about why such voters should be siding with Democrats.) If Democrats write off the South, conceding southern states and over a quarter of the electoral votes to the Republicans, they will be forced to carry two-thirds of the electoral votes in the non-South. Yet Democrats could win without the South. If Gore had carried New Hampshire (as Kerry did in 2004), he would have won a majority of the Electoral College. Indeed, across the nation, the states Democrats carried each time in the four presidential elections between 1992 and 2004 now total 248 of the 270 electoral votes needed for a majority. The corresponding figure for Republicans is 135.

Electoral College majorities would be within reach for the Demo-

crats if their base states could be supplemented with southern electoral votes, but recent history reveals the distinct, sizable advantage Republican presidential candidates have enjoyed in courting and carrying southern states.

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