Chapter 1. The American Party Systems and the South

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CHAPTER 1

THE AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEMS AND THE SOUTH

This first chapter is designed to serve an introductory function, both substantively and methodologically, by locating the study of southern politics within the context of a party-systems mode of analysis. This approach has been developed comparatively recently, less by historians than by political scientists with a keen sensitivity to the importance of the historical dimension in political life. In the pages immediately following, we attempt briefly to describe the construction of the party-systems approach and the empirical discoveries and theoretical assumptions behind it and then to survey the evolution of the five successive American party systems, with special attention to the role of the South within each. This brings us to our point of immediate departure, the structure and functioning of southern politics on the eve of what has been called the Second Reconstruction of the South. It is at this point that we make our major assumptions explicit—or at least own up to them—and briefly describe our research design and methodology, which is explained in greater detail in the Note on Methodology and Data Sources.

Among the central revelations of American political analysis in the post-World War II period has been the discovery, primarily through the relatively new instrument of survey research, of remarkably stable patterns of partisan loyalty. These tenacious party affiliations apparently stemmed far less from specific voter responses to issues and candidates than from basic underlying preferences largely inherited from parents and culture through normal childhood socialization. Upon this stability was predicated the concept of the "normal" vote, the customary partisan distribution of the vote in the absence of unusual external forces. And from this stable distribution there followed the concept of the normal majority, which in the post-New Deal era involved a national partisan distribution fluctuating around just under one-half Democratic, slightly more than...
one-quarter Republican, and about one-quarter independent or apolitical.  

This pattern in turn suggested the construction of a threefold typology of partisan elections: maintaining, deviating, and realigning. In maintaining elections, such as the election of 1948, the preceding pattern of partisan loyalties constitutes the primary influence governing the vote. In a deviating election this basic pattern is not seriously disturbed, but short-term forces, such as the popularity of Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956, bring about the defeat of the majority party (in response to which is a subcategory of the maintaining election, the reinstating election, such as that of 1960, in which the basic partisan loyalties of the “normal” majority are reasserted). The third type of election, relatively rare but of major impact, is the realigning election, in which popular excitement associated with politics is sufficiently intense and durable to basically transform the electorate’s loyalties and thereby create a new “normal” partisan majority. Both political scientists and historians have recently employed the model of critical realignment to reconstruct our understanding of the entire evolution of American political life, focusing less on ephemeral candidates and issues and even on individual parties than on party systems, of which, by rough consensus, there have been five.  


Campbell et al., The American Voter, chap. 16. Gerald Pomper has convincingly argued that a fourth category, the converting election, should be added to this trilogy, on the grounds that the realigning category as explicated in The American Voter does not distinguish between critical elections which produce a new majority party and those that produce a fundamental rearrangement of the partisan base of a majority party that maintains its hegemony. Hence the following four-cell table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Majority Party</th>
<th>Victory</th>
<th>Defeat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Cleavage</td>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining</td>
<td>Deviating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Converting</td>
<td>Realigning</td>
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</tbody>
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The first of these was the Experimental System, lasting from 1789 to roughly 1824. Despite the Founders' theoretical opposition to “divisive faction,” and to some extent precisely because of this initial denial of legitimacy to the concept of party, the Federalists and the Republicans clashed bitterly, especially over foreign policy and its domestic implications, and thereby foreshadowed the bimodal partisanship that was to take its modern form after 1824. Following the suicidal demise of the rigidly elitist Federalists after 1800 and the deceptively nonpartisan Era of Good Feelings associated with the administrations of James Monroe, the stage was set for the surprisingly rapid evolution of the first truly modern democratic party system in the world.

The Democratizing System, during the period 1828 to 1854, centered on a democratized presidency and attendant patronage, and both Jacksonian Democrats and Whigs demonstrated extraordinarily creative organizational innovations to mobilize mass participation. This effusive broadening of the franchise focused first on the symbolic figure of Andrew Jackson. Then, as the system matured, the new Whig opposition came to accept the policy and organizational implications of white manhood suffrage, especially after the Jacksonians attempted to dismantle the neomercantilist federal structure they had inherited from the Founders. During this latter period Jackson's previously “Solid South” melted away, and spirited two-party politics became a national tradition, driving voter turnout from an estimated 26.9 percent of the eligible electorate in 1824 to an average of 77.3 percent in the three heated presidential elections of the 1840s. Voters in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Tennessee turned out at an average rate of 82.1 percent—a performance worth bearing in mind in light of subsequent developments. Indeed, the South has not since been so fully integrated into national politics. Moreover, the division of the two-party vote in presidential elections was consistently close, with the winners' margin during the 1840s averaging a modest 4.1 percent, in contrast to the 15.6 percent average margin for the two elections of the 1830s.

Yet for all its apparent vitality, the volatile second party system rested on localistic, piecemeal coalitions of hostile ethnocultural groups, and the Jacksonian legacy of a weakened federal structure left the national government poorly prepared for the difficult maneuvering necessary in the face of a sectional crisis. Voting alignments outside the South seem to have reflected differences between old-stock Protestants and more recent immigrants and between newly-arrived British and non-British immigrants, as well as settlement patterns and local antagonisms. In the relatively homogeneous white South, partisan voting patterns lacked much of the ethnocultural orientation of northern political divisions but also seemed to reflect differing local perspectives. Some evidence suggests that the more prosperous and growing communities showed a Whig bias while the more
isolated and self-contained areas inclined toward the Democrats, although settlement patterns and Protestant denominational concerns may also have influenced partisan preferences. In neither North nor South did Democratic-Whig divisions at the mass level demonstrate significant class-economic conflict.

During the 1850s both local and national events conspired to disrupt these partisan patterns. The growing influx of Catholic immigrants into the northern states, especially in the years following the great potato famine of 1846, sharpened ethnocultural conflict and apparently led evangelical pietist Protestants toward a heightened concern for the morality of American life. In state and local politics, prohibition, Sunday blue laws, and favoritism for public education over parochial schools were issues that attracted support from pietist Protestants, while the emergence of the American, or Know-Nothing, party elevated these provincial concerns into national politics. Ultimately this crusading moralism centered around the slavery question, an issue of sufficient intensity to split the major pietist Protestant denominations into northern and southern wings. The formation of the Liberty and Free Soil parties during the 1840s combined with sharp regional differences in Congress over the expansion of slavery into the West to fuel the slavery controversy in national politics. At the same time, these events forged an alliance between those groups that presumably wanted to escape the moralistic zeal of their countrymen. Catholics, many liturgical Protestants, and white southerners all found refuge in a Democratic party devoted broadly to limited government. As northern Whigs flirted with Free-Soilers, Whiggery became highly suspect in the South, and when the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 overturned the old modalities of compromise that had permitted the antislavery and free-soil controversies to be papered over, the Whigs disintegrated.

The deterioration of party structure during the 1850s foreshadowed the emergence of the Civil War System of 1860–92. The increasingly turbulent national politics drove a traditionalist and entrenched but obsessively fearful southern elite to take desperate measures in response to both real and imaginary threats to the political, economic, and racial status quo. During the Civil War, the new Republican government, suddenly enjoying enormous artificial majorities in Congress, not only delivered the coup de grace to slavery but also launched a neo-Whiggish, positive federal program in banking, currency, transportation, tariff, and land-grant policy. This radical transformation had been largely consolidated by the early 1870s. Following the “redemption” of the South by conservative Bourbon state regimes, there ensued, despite the Republican dominance of the White House (textbooks depicting a Republican era are misleading), a

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quarter-century of intense partisan deadlock, in which voting alignments broadly pitting pietist Protestants against a Catholic-liturgical-Protestant-southern white coalition remained generally intact.

In the South during these turbulent years, Redeemer hegemony did not stand unchallenged. The Readjuster insurgency of the 1870s associated with Virginia’s William Mahone and the Populist uprising of the 1890s were linked to a Southwide pattern of sporadic effusions of agrarian discontent. Furthermore, voter turnout in presidential elections remained quite high throughout the South, averaging 66 percent in the elections of 1868 through 1892. Indeed, in 1876 the voters of South Carolina, voting early and often in that troubled year, dutifully trooped to the polls in a splendid performance that marshaled 101 percent of the voting-age population. Even the Republicans maintained a modest showing throughout the South during the period of the third party system, generally hovering about the fortieth percentile and periodically threatening to fuse with the agrarian insurgents—a tactic that was particularly successful in North Carolina in 1894, thereby shortly inviting upon the Republicans the same electoral destruction that was to befall their erstwhile agrarian allies.

Hence the third party system grew increasingly unstable as two disadvantaged strata, the cash-crop farmers of the economically colonialized South and West and the ethnically fragmented urban proletariat, grew increasingly restive under the two conservative-dominated major parties. Festering discontents had been heralded prior to previous realignments by the rise of significant third parties—the Anti-Masons in the 1820s and the Free-Soilers and Know-Nothings in the period prior to the Civil War—which had telegraphed the basic clusters of issues that would dominate politics in the next electoral era. Similarly, the Populist party of the 1890s mushroomed in the wake of the “Democratic” Depression of 1893 to attempt the truly formidable task of forging a biracial and multi-ethnic alliance of the rural and urban dispossessed.

The abortive Populist revolt combined with the depression of the 1890s as an important contributing factor to the evolution of the fourth party system, the Industrial System of 1894–1932. Historians continue to debate, with sharp ideologically overtones, whether the Populists were rational radicals well in advance of their time or backward-looking provincials with pronounced tendencies toward paranoia and bigotry. Two decades ago, in 1951, in an analysis that was essentially Beardian in its implicit assumptions, the distinguished southern historian C. Vann Woodward penned a

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masterful and sympathetic portrait of the Populists’ tragic crusade. A grudging admirer of the political acumen if not of the moral compunctions of the outnumbered, neo-Whiggish Redeemers, who ultimately crushed the hapless Populists in the 1890s, Woodward chronicled a tragic epic of chicanery and unrequited hope. The Populists’ ill-starred inflationary crusade was probably foredoomed by ancient racial tensions on the farm and by the understandable nervousness of an ethnically variegated urban proletariat too immature and internally fragmented to link arms effectively with Protestant agrarian rebels under the banner of William Jennings Bryan. In any case, the dramatic shift of the Democratic party from the limited government position of Grover Cleveland to the governmental activism and economic reform of Bryan joined with the economic and political turmoil of the 1890s to disrupt the voting coalition that had relied on the Democratic party for protection from moralistic reformers.

Whatever the cause of the Populist insurgents’ demise, the movement had a profound impact on southern politics. The agrarian radicals not only challenged the Bourbon strategy of uniting white southerners behind a program of limited government and opposition to outside intervention but, even more crucially, sought to create a mass following based on economic and class divisions, a voting alignment only hinted at by previous agrarian insurgency. This internal conflict between, on the one hand, a white southern quasi-ethnic group defending the region from intrusions into social relations on a program of white supremacy and negative government and, on the other, the masses of exploited blacks and whites of an economically disadvantaged region combining behind the strategy of active governmental reform has in a simplistic but fundamental sense been the underlying division in southern politics during the modern era.

If the recent new-leftist trend in American historiography has been friendly toward the Populists, it concomitantly has invited a concerted assault upon the liberal-reformist credentials of the Progressives, picturing them essentially as nostalgic middle-class conservatives whose crusading rhetoric masked an elitist paternalism.7 Paralleling and reinforcing this historical critique, political scientist Walter Dean Burnham has severely indicted the politically devastating effects of the Industrial System and the Thermidorian legacy of the Progressive reformers, who, Burnham argues, in the process of reforming the system actually consolidated it as an engine of industrial-elitist domination.8 The Progressives’ electoral reforms bore

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a host of illiberal consequences. The adoption of the secret ballot deprived political parties of their function of printing and distributing ballots; personal voter registration procedure favored the more politically involved middle-class citizens over those of lower socioeconomic status; the direct primary not only undermined the party leadership's control over the nomination of candidates but also denied the out party its position as the only available alternative; and nonpartisan municipal elections further weakened the party structure. These changes no doubt contributed to greater honesty in the casting and counting of ballots, but at the same time they debased the political parties and decimated voter turnout, especially among lower-status voting groups. By the 1920s on the average only some 52 percent of adult Americans voted in presidential election years, and hardly more than a third made their way to the polls for the off-year congressional contests.

The net result of the fourth party system, Burnham argues, was the virtual destruction of party competition throughout much of the United States. The massive Democratic defections during the 1890s in the greater Northeast created a reliably Republican bastion that effectively controlled a system which served to insulate the dominant industrial elites from the victims of the industrializing process, despite the protesting political movements repeatedly launched from the quasi-colonial West. In the now solidly Democratic South, a shrunken electorate excluded many of the erstwhile agrarians who had sought alliance with the western insurgents, while the consolidation of a legally institutionalized caste system inclined southern politics toward a defense of regional racial and social practices. Nationally the major components of the system included the progressive fragmentation of Congress, corporate domination of the executive branch, and the large but negative role played by the Supreme Court. More broadly, Burnham concludes, the Industrial System of 1896 thrived upon the substantial disappearance of party competition and even the discrediting of party itself as an instrument of government.

Clearly, such a severe interpretation ill comports with our traditional view of the Progressive era as a period in which a broad political reform

*can Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), in which he elaborates his argument that the world's most dynamic socioeconomic system has been harnessed since the evolution of the second party system to a moribund political system, one so archaic and shackling that the American government, unlike the polities of modern Europe, lacks the fundamental "sovereignty" necessary to respond effectively to the needs of its exploited people. Jerold G. Rusk has challenged Burnham's use of split-ticket voting as evidence of voter alienation by explaining the phenomenon as primarily a consequence of the adoption of the Australian ballot. See Rusk, "The Effect of the Australian Ballot Reform on Split Ticket Voting," *American Political Science Review* 64 (December 1970): 1220-38. Recent analyses similar to Burnham's are E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).
movement spread from the cities to the state and federal arenas to cope with the manifest inequities and dislocations of urban-industrial America. Yet in recent years several American historians have contributed to a fundamental reinterpretation of the Progressive era that is more congenial to the political analysis advanced by Burnham, E. E. Schattschneider, and Samuel P. Huntington. This new historical interpretation emphasizes a duality in the ranks of the Progressive reformers which parallels and reflects what Ferdinand Tonnies called the transition of modern society from Gemeinschaft ("community") to Gesellschaft ("society"). This was "a transition in which local, personal relations were replaced, through technological change, by a national system of bureaucratic, routinized, relatively impersonal relations in a society where power flowed increasingly from local elites to be centralized in the hands of a new elite whose claim to power rested upon expertise rather than reputation." This dualism goes far toward explaining how men who became reformers in order to rationalize a chaotic and inefficient society—the "new middle class" of rising bureaucrats, professionals, and businessmen who endowed Progressivism with its pronounced regulatory character—found themselves rubbing shoulders with fellow reformers whose goals were quite the opposite: to defend the threatened, traditional values of the small towns and of the island communities of the rural hinterland. And it was primarily the latter who endowed Progressivism with its nostalgic and even reactionary qualities by espousing such reforms as prohibition, immigration restriction, blue laws, and eugenics. Yet both types of middle-class Progressives feared the alien values and alleged radical proclivities of the lower social orders, especially those composed of nonwhite and non-Protestant Americans, and appear to have hedged their faith in democracy by "purifying" the franchise of its unworthy elements. While the decline in voter turnout, perhaps especially in the South, seems to have been clearly linked to the demise of agrarian radicalism and a consequent waning of psychological involvement in the political process, the Progressive "reforms" served to consolidate and extend the decimation of voter turnout.

Figure 1.1 diagrams the strikingly positive correlations between the demise of Populism and the drop in voter participation and the inverse correlation between the rise of Progressivism and the decline in turnout. Although this marked decline was nationwide, as was the Progressive im-

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10Graham, From Roosevelt to Roosevelt, p. 114.
Fig. 1.1. Estimated voter turnout in presidential elections, 1860–1968
pulse itself, nowhere was it more dramatic and devastating than in the South, where by 1924 turnout in presidential elections reached a nadir average of 17.4 percent; in the five Deep South states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, turnout bottomed at an appalling average of 11.1 percent, with South Carolina once again, as in 1876, claiming supreme honors for descending from the sublime summit of 101.0 percent to a resounding 6.4. In the hands of such a purified electorate, Progressive democracy posed little threat to the established order. Raymond H. Pulley, in a recent study of the Progressive movement in Virginia, concluded that “the reforms undertaken in the Old Dominion during the progressive era returned the state to a political and social system as stable and resistant to innovation as any that had existed prior to the Civil War.”

This is not to deny that the Progressive movement was a viable impulse throughout the South, nor that in its range and complexity and even humanitarian concern it mirrored the national movement; indeed, it did so to a remarkable degree for such a distinctive region. But this regional distinctiveness seemed to both magnify and distort as well as to mirror, channeling the regulatory thrust into a more narrow and less controversial business progressivism of more roads, better schools, and cleaner (and minimal) government and accelerating its defense of the South’s traditional cultural values down the dark byways of Negrophobia and xenophobia that were to be so thoroughly plumbed by her Tom Watsons and Theodore Bilbos. And in this long and agonizing descent the alleged New South’s legacy of massive disfranchisement was enduring, not only for her black native sons, as has been abundantly documented, but for even greater numbers of her less affluent whites as well. The leaders of the South’s disfranchising conventions, which clustered about the turn of the century, were often quite candid on this point. Governor William C. Oates of Alabama, a Bourbon whose call for a purified franchise was both typical and hardly distinguishable from the Progressives’ stance, openly insisted upon the elimination of “all those who are unfit and unqualified, and if the rule strikes a white man as well as a negro, let him go. There are some white men who have no more right and no more business to vote than a negro and not as much as some of them.” The results of this purge of both the

15Quoted in Woodward. *Origins of the New South*, p. 330. Woodward and Key place great emphasis upon the conflict between hill and black-belt whites.
blacks and "the depraved and incompetent men of our own race," in whose alleged interest "the intelligence and wealth of the South" would govern, were both effective and tenacious.  Francis Pickens Miller, the frustrated Virginia reformer who twice challenged and twice was crushed by Harry Byrd's formidable machine, recalled with despair the response in 1947 of his white house-painter to his query whether the gentleman was qualified to vote. "Colonel," the man replied, "you know I don't belong to the folks who vote." 

As the fourth party system evolved into its mature form in the 1920s, the few folks who voted in the South voted increasingly Democratic. The identification of the Democratic party with the lost cause and white supremacy had been a sacred legacy of the Bourbon redemption that was reinforced by the decimation of the Populist and Republican opposition. The symbolic power of the Democratic party label as representing the Bourbon redemption from black Reconstruction was typified in 1900 by former Governor Murphy J. Foster of Louisiana, who defended his Democratic administration by invoking a higher loyalty: "Because I have sinned don't destroy the Democratic party; strike down the sinner. If I have been recreant in my duty, strike me down, but for God's sake don't destroy

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Fig. 1.2. Democratic percentage of the major party presidential vote in the South, 1868-1936

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16 See especially Woodward's discussion of black and white disfranchisement in Louisiana in Origins of the New South, pp. 342-49.

the Democratic party." In 1924, when South Carolina’s Senator Coleman L. Blease noted that Calvin Coolidge had received 1,123 of South Carolina’s 50,131 presidential votes, he exclaimed: “I do not know where he got them. I was astonished to know that they were cast and shocked to know that they were counted.” Figure 1.2 reflects the incremental ascent of the South’s Democratic vote in presidential elections from 1868 to 1936, a pattern of evolving Democratic solidarity marred only by the aberrant revolt against Alfred E. Smith in 1928. That this bolt was largely a defection of the six states of the Rim South—Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—is reflected in figure 1.3, which also con-

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20The dichotomy between the five Deep South and the six Rim South states is a useful convention that recognizes the centrality of race in southern political life, but this distinction should be employed with some caution, as it invites an erroneous equation of the relative strengths of the two blocs of states. While the racially sensitive and frequently bizarre political behavior of the Deep South more readily captures our attention and has indubitably endowed
trasts the performance of the Democratic South to that of the normal Republican majority nationally, a majority that abruptly disintegrated following the crash of 1929.

The New Deal System, forged during the critical realignment period of 1928-36, rested upon a dominant coalition formed from such an unlikely amalgam of constituent voting blocs as the Solid South, blacks, organized labor, urban ethnic groups, disgruntled farmers, and liberal intellectuals. That Franklin Roosevelt successfully fused such disparate elements was tribute to his political acumen, as well as to Republican blundering and the purblind opposition of a truculent business community that failed to recognize the vast cooptive possibilities that have always been inherent in the American reform impulse. The critical realignment of 1928-36 produced, through a massive shifting of voting blocs, a new national Democratic majority, but the southern contribution to this realignment flowed less from new electoral pressures than from an acceleration and exaggeration of older electoral forces already inherent in the Industrial System of 1896. Figure 1.4 reflects the degree to which the already Solid South's pronounced Democratic proclivities were further strengthened. This basic pattern of continuity between the fourth and fifth party systems in the South was also reflected in the size of the franchise, which experienced some modest growth during the New Deal years but which nonetheless remained, in striking contrast to the nonsouthern pattern, largely restricted to the region's more affluent white citizens. Never more than a quarter of the South's voting-age population cast ballots. The massive critical realignment that created the New Deal System, of which the Solid Democratic South was a crucial part, ironically witnessed no fundamental modification in southern voting patterns, which were overwhelmingly Democratic and disproportionately low before the realignment and subsequently.

This crucially revealing quality of the southern electorate—its considerable degree of disaggregation relative to the high levels of participation that had characterized so much of the nineteenth-century electorate, North and South—is, again, most readily revealed in the index of turnout, the percentage that major-party voting is of the estimated voting-age population.21 At the presidential level, the mean turnout of the eleven southern...
states in 1920 was 20.5 percent, in contrast to a national rate of 56.9; by 1948, the South's participation had increased only to 23.5, and the national figure stood at 53.0, which reflected not only the southern drag but also the decidedly modest popular enthusiasm generated by the 1948 contest. The South's average turnout in the presidential elections between 1868 and 1892 had been 66.0.

This uninspiring portrait of one-party dominance and electoral disaggregation in the South is equally poignant at the gubernatorial level. Illustrative of the steady erosion of southern Republican strength is the
G.O.P.'s decline in Tennessee. In 1920 its loyal bloc of Confederate- and Democrat-hating voters in the mountains of east Tennessee, aided by the national Harding sweep, proved sufficient to capture the governor's mansion in Nashville. As figure 1.5 indicates, however, Republican strength slid gradually into impotence thereafter. By 1948 Tennessee Republicans were reduced to nominating hillbilly singer Roy Acuff, star of the Grand Ole Opry, who campaigned against his good friend and the Democratic nominee, Gordon Browning, with entertaining music, warm words of affection, and, ultimately, only a third of the voters. Once again confronted by Browning in the following gubernatorial election, Tennessee's Republicans quietly threw in the towel and nominated no one. Yet during the first half of the twentieth century, the G.O.P. had a better record in Tennessee than in any of the other southern states, where no Republican was elected governor or U.S. senator. During the three decades of decline following 1920, southern Republicans did not bother seriously to contest the Democratic gubernatorial nominees in Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, or South Carolina.

Southern voters, then, made their decisions in Democratic primaries, and while the basic continuity of the legacy of 1896—one-party politics and

Fig. 1.5. Republican vote in Tennessee gubernatorial elections, 1920–50
electoral disaggregation—remained dominant, the South’s minimal transition from the fourth to the fifth party system did produce a small overall improvement in gubernatorial turnout, much as it had in presidential turnout.22 During the 1920s the South’s mean turnout in Democratic gubernatorial primaries was 17.9 percent of her voting-age population; the equivalent figure for the New Deal years 1930–49 was 24.5.23 This represents a growth in voter participation, but in contrast to the gubernatorial turnout in general elections outside the South, the improvement was minor, and the overall rate of voter participation remained almost pathologically low.

A random sample of nonsouthern and nonborder states produced gubernatorial election turnouts (expressed as percentages) as follows: in the presidential year of 1940, Connecticut, 65.9; Illinois, 76.6; Minnesota, 69.6; Montana, 65.8; Nebraska, 71.6. In the off year of 1938, lower turnouts still reached levels vastly beyond the South’s performance: New York, 44.0; Oregon, 51.0; Pennsylvania, 60.0.24

Expressed in terms of Deep South and Rim South, turnout in gubernatorial primaries was as follows:

22The raw data have been compiled by Alexander Heard and Donald Strong in Southern Primaries and Elections, 1920–1949 (University: University of Alabama Press, 1950).
23Gubernatorial turnout was computed for both the Democratic primaries and, where there was significant Republican opposition, the general elections. (When runoff elections were held, they, rather than first primaries, were employed in the calculations.) But the emphasis is upon the primaries because, with the lone exception of Tennessee in 1920, no Republican ever won and because turnout was generally higher in the primaries. The major exceptions to this rule are the three states with significant blocs of mountain Republicans (Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina). Mean turnout in Virginia for the 1920–49 period was about the same in Democratic primaries (12.1 percent) and elections (12.8 percent), and both were dismally low. Virginia elected governors to four-year terms in odd years, presumably to insulate her politics from the possible contamination of national presidential elections. (One result of this practice, which has not been unusual in the South, is that elections are constantly being held.) Until 1954 Tennessee elected governors to two-year terms in even years, which practice produced a characteristic pattern, similar to that observed in congressional elections, of a marked drop-off in non-presidential-election years. Consequently, mean turnout for Tennessee’s 1920–49 primaries was 16.6 percent, slightly superior to her “drop-off” mean of 15.3 percent for off-year general elections but considerably inferior to her mean turnout of 26.7 percent for general elections in presidential-election years, which raised her election mean turnout to 20.7 percent. A similar pattern of gubernatorial drop-off is found in Arkansas and Texas, which also elected governors to two-year terms in even years, but the Arkansas and Texas Republicans were such a small minority that general election turnout rarely approached that of the crucial primaries. Uniquely among southern states, North Carolina elected governors to four-year terms paralleling presidential terms, which produced a high mean turnout of 41.7 percent for her elections, compared with 19.6 percent for her primaries. Gubernatorial elections elsewhere in the South were largely inconsequential as opposed to the Democratic primaries.
Surprisingly, participation in the Deep South was actually superior. But more revealing is the rank order of mean turnout in gubernatorial primaries in all eleven southern states from 1920 through 1949:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Mean turnout, in percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.7 (tie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18.7 (tie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

South: 22.6

Here the conventional Deep South-Rim South dichotomy makes little sense, and the hoary "Thank God for Mississippi" (for being consistently last) even less, as at least the white voters in the much maligned Magnolia State could legitimately lay claim to a greater measure of participatory democracy than that which obtained in all but one of the Rim South states and in all of Mississippi’s fellow Deep South states except Louisiana, where the dynasty founded by Huey P. Long produced unusually intense bifactional competition. In light of this performance, Francis Pickens Miller’s white house-painter in Virginia might well have felt more sovereign had he resided anywhere else in the South. But not much.

In 1920, H. L. Mencken pondered the culturally barbarian and politically bankrupt abyss into which the once aristocratic South had allegedly fallen, in a vintage essay entitled "The Sahara of the Bozart."25 Therein he contemplated this vast regional "vacuity" in characteristic Menckenese ("One thinks of Asia Minor, resigned to Armenians, Greeks and wild swine, of Poland abandoned to the Poles") and concluded that the South’s fall from lofty grace, as symbolized by the decay of Virginia, still the South’s "best" state but by 1920 in tragic disrepair, came because "the old

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aristocracy went down the red gullet of war; the poor white trash are now in the saddle.”

Mencken’s genetic theories aside, one may legitimately question whether “the liberated lower orders of whites” were fundamentally responsible for molding and transforming the political structure of a Virginia which sent only 19.4 percent of its voters to the polls in 1920, never attracted to the polls as many as one-quarter of her voting-age population during the following three decades, averaged a mere 12 percent turnout in her gubernatorial primaries and elections during those years, and dispatched Carter Glass and Harry Flood Byrd to the Senate.

In 1949 V. O. Key, Jr., and his research associates published the magisterial *Southern Politics in State and Nation*. With careful attention to parties, candidates, and issues, Key described a political South whose political and social sectionalism was characterized and dominated by four essential and crippling institutions: disfranchisement, malapportionment, the one-party system, and the elaborate structure and pervasive ethos of Jim Crow. Yet, just as Key was writing, the mercurial genie of the race question, that keystone of southern political and cultural life supposedly settled a half-century earlier, was fatefuly let out of the bottle by a curious combination of forces. These included the traditional fecundity and massive northern migration of southern blacks; the voting, protests, and demonstrations of blacks and liberal whites; both the liberalism and the expediency of the Democratic party; the demonstrable hypocrisy of the “separate but equal” South, in combination with the hypocrisy of much of the white non-South; the logic of sociological jurisprudence; the decolonization of Africa; the crusading rhetoric of World War II; and the ideological sensitivities of the Cold War.

Key could not know that a veritable Second Reconstruction of the South was in the offing, but, a Texan of liberal persuasions, he was optimistic that a dismantling of the institutional legacy of disfranchisement, malapportionment, the one-party system, and racial segregation would tend to release the South from the constraints of its conservative political establishment. This process, he reasoned, would invite the belated surge of a kind of New Dealish politics which one might plausibly expect from a region of such widespread poverty. “If the blue-collar vote in the South should double, southern conservatives in Congress would probably become less numerous.” Key speculated, and he was aware that public opinion polls in the late 1930s had elicited from southerners a higher percentage of self-identifications as “liberals” than from any other region in the United States.

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26Ibid., p. 139.
27Key was assisted by Alexander Heard and Donald Strong.
29For a thoughtful assessment of public opinion in the South, see Alfred O. Hero, Jr., *The Southerner and World Affairs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), especially, on this point, pp. 369–73.
Key introduced *Southern Politics* with the following assertion: "Of books about the South there is no end. Nor will there be so long as the South remains the region with the most distinctive character and tradition." In the more than two decades since the publication of Key's modern classic, two broad developments have occurred that in many ways have been contradictory in their impact. First, the accelerating pace of economic growth and technological change—what C. Vann Woodward has called the Bulldozer Revolution—has tended greatly to reduce the socioeconomic lag which historically had contributed heavily to settling the South apart. A recent comparative study of the South and the non-South, based upon an analysis of urbanization, industrialization, occupational redistribution, income, and education as reflected in census data since 1930, concludes that "in these sectors the South has been changing more rapidly than the rest of the nation for the past forty years and moreover is becoming increasingly indistinguishable from the rest of American society." Secondly, paralleling this Bulldozer Revolution, especially since World War II, has been an attempt to dismantle those political and sociocultural institutions that were the hallmark of the South's uniqueness. In their alarmed and defensive response to this Second Reconstruction, southern whites reaffirmed, sometimes violently, their allegiance to the old order and their determination once again to defend it against Yankee assault.

Against the background of this paradoxical relationship, in which nationalizing forces exacerbated old regional fears and intensified regional loyalties, a body of literature has been produced by social scientists who have tended to be liberal in persuasion and who hence have seemed at times to function as cheerleaders for the nationalization of the South. These social analysts, and especially the southerners among them, frequently have been somewhat ambivalent, in that their disapproval of the South’s elitist caste society has been counterbalanced by an attraction toward a rural folk society and a revulsion against the urban squalor of the industrial North. Nevertheless, an implicit assumption widely shared among social scientists has been that the processes of urbanization and industrialization are fundamentally conducive to the liberalization of political life. In the concluding chapter of his *Political Tendencies in Louisiana*, political sociologist Perry H. Howard observes that the spate of "recent symposiums on change in the South have consisted of papers in which authors wait impatiently for the liberalization of the South and the increasing competitiveness of a two-party politics," and he adds the sobering admonition that "there is nothing inherent in the processes of industrialization and urbanization which foster liberal tendencies."

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30Key, *Southern Politics*, p. ix.
Perhaps some day the homogenizing forces of the Bulldozer Revolution will erase the distinctive patterns of regional diversity in the United States, but at least insofar as the South is concerned, that day has not yet arrived. Samuel Lubell affirmed in 1970 that "the South remains the section of the country where business enjoys the widest permissiveness, where labor unions are weakest, where the economic dependence upon military installations is unusually high, where Negroes still struggle for political visibility, where welfare payments are lowest." In a more rigorously empirical study published the same year, political scientist Ira Sharkansky concluded:

Because the low turnout and single-party character of Southern politics is not explained by the poverty of the region, we must look to centuries of slavery and segregation, together with the corollaries of elitism, the alien reputation of the Republican Party and the reluctance of white politicians to carry their competition outside of the Democratic Party.

The policy impact of this historically inherited, narrow political base, Sharkansky concluded, is reflected throughout the South in the low levels of public service, the regressive nature of state tax systems, and consequently poor public performance generally:

The region scores below economic expectations on the measures of school completion, exam success, urban and rural road mileage, and benefit payments in all of the major public-assistance programs. Its performance in the program to aid families of dependent children is particularly poor, and reflects AFDC's reputation of being a "Negroes' program." Similarly, the low regional scores on exam success reflect the cultural distance between Southern Negroes and the dominant American society, and the failure of Southern school systems to close the gap since Emancipation.

In short, sociological analysis alone cannot fully explain the observed distinctive phenomena in the absence of historical analysis. C. Vann Wood-
ward has posed the rhetorical question: “Is there nothing about the South that is immune from the disintegrating effect of nationalism and the pressure for conformity? Is there not something that has not changed?” To which he replied: “There is only one thing that I can think of, and that is its history... the collective experience of the Southern people”—the South’s uniquely un-American experience with poverty, failure and defeat, guilt, and the pervasive fear of abstraction.

But if the South persists as a self-conscious entity, the writing of contemporary regional history is doubly perilous. The contemporary historian is largely robbed of the depth of perspective that has been the historian’s chief asset. And, to the degree that the essence of social science is comparison, the regional historian risks falling between the two stools of national and state history. Political trends identified as uniquely southern may in fact only mirror national trends. Moreover, there is much truth in the assertion of Donald R. Matthews and James W. Prothro, despite their commitment to regional analysis, that “the most important political and legal fact about the South is its division into 11 states.” There is certainly no pretension here that a regional analysis, however comprehensive, can obviate the need for state monographs which reflect the distinctive patterns of state politics within the regional framework.

Our primary assumptions are, first, that despite the nationalizing and homogenizing forces that eroded much of the physical base of the South’s distinctiveness during the postwar years, the region’s historical legacy perpetuated its distinctive patterns of cultural and political life; second, that regional history remains a legitimate and profitable mode of analysis, despite the real dangers of masking distinctive state and local patterns and of failing to take sufficiently into account the comparative dimension of national politics; third, that the historical narrative, if it is analytical as well as descriptive, is the organizational structure best designed to reveal the evolution of political patterns over time; and finally, we do not assume that liberalism necessarily increases with industrialization and urbanization.

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37Assessment of the contrast between regional and national political behavior depends upon the political index employed. In 1962 the Department of Political Science of Duke University sponsored a conference on political change in the postwar South. There Donald Strong focused on the surge of southern Republican voting in presidential elections in the 1950s and concluded that the Republican trend was dramatic. Philip Converse, of the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, fundamentally disagreed and pointed to the continuity of Democratic party identification in the southern survey sample in support of his contention that the Eisenhower victories were largely a result of short-term “surge” forces rather than fundamental electoral realignment. Their revealing dispute is argued in Sindler, Change in the Contemporary South, pp. 174–222.

This fourth assumption may be restated as a hypothesis, namely, that despite the virtual destruction of the South’s four inherited institutions of political sectionalism during the years of the Second Reconstruction—disfranchisement, malapportionment, the one-party system, and de jure racial segregation—the new southern politics was not primarily characterized by an unleashing of New Dealish tendencies, as Key had cautiously predicted and clearly hoped. The New Deal model of politics is basically an economic one in which common class interests link together a coalition of the have-nots; and such tendencies did characterize southern politics during the immediate postwar years when Key conducted his analysis, though the effectiveness of this coalition was hampered by low voter turnout and the one-party system. But the South’s twentieth-century political legacy was basically Bourbon in character. At the center of this tradition has been a deep racial division that has militated against class coalitions, especially across racial lines, and has permitted government by relatively insulated elites.

To test this hypothesis, we analyzed county and precinct voting returns for primary and general elections from the eleven southern states during the years 1944–72. Since the South contains well over eleven hundred counties, including Louisiana’s parishes and Virginia’s independent cities, we simplified our analysis by assigning southern counties to three demographic categories (Metropolitan, defined as a county containing a city of more than 50,000 population; Urban, describing a county containing a city of from 20,000 to 50,000; and Rural-small town, denoting any county with no town as large as 20,000) and eight geographic categories: (1) Mountain, containing those counties located in the Appalachian and Ozark mountains; (2) Piedmont, describing the crescent of hill-country counties adjacent to the Appalachians; (3) Black belt, including those counties with a nonwhite population of 40 percent or more; (4) White belt, encompassing those lowland counties with a population more than 60 percent white; and the four peripheral sections of (5) South Florida, (6) Catholic Louisiana, (7) Mexican-American Texas, and (8) West Texas. We further gathered precinct returns from twenty-seven southern cities and classified them by socioeconomic class and race (Black and Lower-class, Lower-middle-class, Upper-middle-class, and Upper-class white). The research design is described in detail in the Note on Methodology and Data Sources at the end of the book, but generally we sought a design that would permit recognition of deviant voting behavior on the part of individual counties and the formulation of generalizations about the voting behavior of rural dwellers and urbanites, of hill country and lowlands, of blacks and whites, and of higher- and lower-status whites.

The identification of trends in voting behavior required examining and discussing a massive number of elections, with the attendant risk of trying the reader’s patience with accounts of numerous prosaic campaigns, a risk
we resolved to chance in order to minimize impressionistic judgments and overly sweeping generalizations. Among other problems involved in a study of this nature was the extent to which valid inferences might be drawn from aggregate data. We have sought to guard against unwarranted conclusions by being attentive to broad trends in voting patterns and by checking our findings against survey data. There was also the problem of defining multidimensional terms of deplorable ambiguity without which political history is almost impossible to write. For the most part we have relied on the reader's good sense to interpret words within the context of history and southern politics. Although we have used the words "liberal" and "progressive" in a common sense fashion, "liberal" suggests an ideological preference for broadening economic and social opportunities with an orientation toward the have-nots in society, while "progressive" implies a middle-class-oriented business progressivism common to the South's recent past. "Moderate" refers to a relatively tolerant attitude toward race relations. "Conservative" denotes a preference for the economic and social status quo, and "reactionary" represents a general rejection of already accomplished social and economic changes. We offer these general definitions fully conscious of the fact that politicians often cannot be conveniently labeled.

In a very personal sense, Wilbur J. Cash's powerful Mind of the South represents the anguished cry of a southern white liberal whose despair over the dominant white South's irrational intransigence, together with unknown personal anxieties, drove him to take his own life on the very threshold of his rise to prominence.39 Our hypothesis posits a basic continuity of this Bourbon pattern, even in the face of the considerable changes wrought in the South by the Bulldozer Revolution and the Second Reconstruction.