Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction

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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press


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When V. O. Key published his monumental *Southern Politics* in 1949, he painted a rather gloomy portrait of a poor and politically stagnant region, Democratic in its affiliations and New Dealish in its inclinations, but one wherein the legitimate grievances of its abundant have-nots were largely thwarted by the iron grip of four major institutions which Key portrayed as underpinning the southern polity. These were (1) disfranchisement, (2) the one-party system, (3) malapportionment, and (4) the edifice of Jim Crow. At best these symbiotic arrangements effectively minimized public participation, party discipline, and party responsibility and diffused the focus of issues by deflecting campaigns toward a parochial and too often irrelevant friends-and-neighbors stump politics, and, at their too familiar worst, they encouraged the time-honored racebaiting which historically had proven effective in setting the region's black and white have-nots against each other.

But Key also saw room for hope. In his last chapter, entitled "Is There a Way Out?" he asserted that "southern liberalism is not to be underestimated," that "fundamentally within southern politics there is a powerful strain of agrarian liberalism," and that "an underlying liberal drive permeates southern politics."1 Since in his view "southern political regionalism derives basically from the influence of the Negro," Key concluded hopefully that "if the Negro is gradually assimilated into political life, the underlying southern liberalism will undoubtedly be mightily strengthened."2 Key's concluding note of optimism soon received strong reinforcement with the publication of *A Two-Party South?* written by his research associate, Alexander Heard. While sharing Key's consciousness of the irrational and unpredictable elements of political life, Heard called attention to increasing sources of two-party competition and accordingly to the improving prospects for a "liberal Democratic politics in the South."3

2Ibid., pp. 665, 670.
During the decade following World War II, the cautious optimism of Key and Heard seemed well-founded. The postwar tendencies toward a neopopulist politics in the South encouraged liberal hopes and sent to southern statehouses and to Congress such relatively loyal New Dealers as Governors James Folsom, Kerr Scott, Sidney McMath, and Earl Long and Senators John Sparkman, Estes Kefauver, and Albert Gore. For the most part, such candidates relied upon rural votes, especially from the predominately white hill country; votes from the lower-status white precincts in the cities; and the votes of the gradually growing number of black voters who until quite recently have been mainly urban dwellers. Neopopulists like James Folsom and Earl Long ran best in rural areas, but the returns suggest the fundamental class orientation of their followings. Despite significant state-to-state variations and exceptions, this coalition of farmers and mill workers of the countryside and working-class whites and the blacks of the cities, united behind populist economic programs and common-man campaign styles rather than racebaiting, generated much of the thrust in southern state politics during the decade following World War II.

These voting patterns were clearly etched in the presidential election of 1952, in which General Dwight D. Eisenhower carried four southern states, all of them in the peripheral South, and made an impressive showing throughout the region. Like other Republicans before him, Eisenhower won the votes of Appalachian and Ozark mountaineers. He was also the choice of a substantial number of citizens who had voted Dixiecrat four years before and who, having made their break with the national Democrats, continued their anti-civil-rights rebellion by supporting the Republican ticket. But even more important to Eisenhower’s success in the South were the ballots cast by prospering urban-suburban voters, who found the Republican candidate’s personal appeal and economic conservatism too attractive to resist. Eisenhower’s campaign established the G.O.P. as the party of affluent voters in the cities and suburbs, and the election returns of 1952 conformed with considerable precision to Alexander Heard’s speculations in *A Two-Party South*? The merchants, businessmen, and landowners of the black belt and the business-professional-white-collar residents of the cities and suburbs, all of whom were economically conservative and for the most part reasonably prosperous, were seemingly being driven out of the Democratic party, while the less affluent whites of the cities and the countryside and the newly emerging Negro voters, all economic liberals, in varying degrees remained loyal to the Democrats.

In the 1952 presidential election, the southern electorate divided along relatively rational lines of economic self-interest in an election that marked the beginning of a genuinely competitive two-party presidential politics in the South and also witnessed a significant increase in voter turnout. Voter participation in the South still remained far behind the national average,
but by the early 1950s two of the South’s distinctive political institutions—disfranchisement, which had been under attack since the *Smith v. Allwright* decision of 1944, and the one-party system—showed signs of slippage, and the behavior of southern voting groups suggested a movement toward a more participatory and class-based politics.

It was at this point that another peculiar southern institution came under direct challenge with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of May 1954. Although in its implementation decision of 1955 the Court permitted a pattern of gradual compliance, which for a decade produced the barest tokenism, the magnitude of a decision declaring the foundation of the southern social system to be illegal was readily apparent. But in the hope that after the initial shock of social change the freeing of blacks from the caste system would also free whites from the requirement of defending it and thus would hasten the emergence of a two-party, New Dealish politics in the South, liberally oriented political analysts underrated the intensity of white opposition to the *Brown* decision and to the civil-rights movement generally. Southern state executive officials and their malapportioned legislatures launched a program of massive resistance to school desegregation during the 1950s, and during the 1960s the white backlash against the pace and extent of civil-rights progress was frequently reflected in seismic political jolts. In the face of white hostility to social change, blacks became increasingly organized and more unified in their balloting.

The racial hysteria on the part of a considerable number of southern politicians and the racial fears on the part of many white voters drove a wedge between blacks and less affluent whites, much as in the 1890s. With prosperity increasing and memories of the Great Depression fading, many rural and lower-income whites saw themselves threatened more by social change than by economic exploitation. In state and local politics, the Folsoms and Earl Longs gave way to the Wallaces and McKeithens. Orval Faubus, George Wallace, Ross Barnett, Jimmie Davis, and John McKeithen were among those who combined racism, a white common-man campaign style, and, often, little in the way of constructive programs to rally support in rural areas and in lower-income white urban districts.

But massive resistance did encourage a political dialectic of its own. The two groups in southern society most disturbed by the excesses of the movement were blacks and the affluent whites of the cities and suburbs. This coalition provided important support for some of the South’s better-known moderates of the period, men like LeRoy Collins, Carl Sanders, and deLesseps Morrison. In the racial crisis in Little Rock, the alliance of blacks and affluent whites ultimately provided the political stability that led to the reopening of the public high schools. In Atlanta the same coalition kept progressive Mayor Ivan Allen in office and made Charles Weltner the Democratic nominee for congressman in Atlanta’s Fifth District. In
Birmingham, it ultimately retired Eugene "Bull" Connor from city office, although this event was delayed, since the county board of registrars placed every obstacle in the path of prospective black voters and since a large proportion of the more prestigious white residential neighborhoods lay outside the city limits. The extent of the changes in voting patterns generated by the politics of massive resistance could be exaggerated, of course, but the heating up of the race question did fundamentally transform the evolution of the New Dealish patterns that had marked the late 1940s and the early 1950s.

Similarly, the civil-rights question influenced the emerging patterns of two-party politics. The first impact was temporarily to make the G.O.P. the party attracting a coalition of blacks and higher status-whites; Eisenhower carried both the affluent white precincts and the black districts in most southern cities in 1956. But this alignment soon dissolved as Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson consolidated the Democratic position among minorities by vigorously championing minority rights. The civil-rights movement and federal legislation accomplished during the 1960s what federal court decisions alone had not been able to do in the 1950s, namely, the destruction of the de jure Jim Crow system, an event that sent political shock tremors throughout the region. The civil-rights movement also spread northward, and what had once been quaintly regarded as a problem unique to the wicked South now threatened to split the New Deal coalition outside the South. In this situation, the national Republicans shifted to their famed Southern Strategy.

The logic and the results of the Southern Strategy are well known. The rural and lower-income whites who fairly consistently supported the national Democratic ticket also tended to vote for the Faubuses and Wallaces. Ironically, the urbane and racially liberal Adlai E. Stevenson and the equally urbane and racially liberal—and also Catholic—John F. Kennedy generally ran best among the same white voter groups who evidenced the strongest concern for white supremacy and, more often than not, the greatest support for those gubernatorial candidates who most uninhibitedly vowed to thwart the liberal policies of the national Democratic party. In the presidential election of 1960 and in several senatorial contests in 1962, Republican candidates made some significant gains in areas that were normally citadels of Democratic solidarity. By abandoning civil rights in the name of states' rights, the Goldwater Republicans presumably sought to broaden these beachheads into a general polarization of southern voters along racial lines. This design was successful in the Deep South, where Goldwater won a large majority of the votes cast by whites. In the cities of the southern heartland he projected an essentially classless appeal, winning equally impressive margins in white working-class districts and affluent neighborhoods. In the peripheral South, however, Goldwater largely failed to break the Democratic voting habits of lower-income
whites, while there as elsewhere driving blacks into virtually solid opposition. Nationally, of course, the Goldwater campaign was a disaster. Only in the Deep South were racial fears of sufficient salience to solidify the bulk of the white vote. Goldwater’s Southern strategy failed to live up to the expectations of its sponsors, but it further warped the emerging two-party system by attracting lower-income whites, especially in the Deep South, whose partisan identification had normally been Democratic and by repelling normally Republican mountain whites and highly educated suburbanites, particularly in the Rim South.

Both voter registration and voter turnout shot upward during the 1960s, but the long-awaited and largely simultaneous enfranchisement of lower-income whites and blacks was a mixed blessing. During the decade well over six million new names were estimated to have been added to southern registration rolls, of which roughly 30 percent belonged to blacks and 70 percent to whites; there clearly appears to be a causal relationship between the addition of some four and a half million new white voters to the registration rolls and the election successes of Wallace, Lester Maddox, James Johnson, and other common-man, “good ole boy” segregationists.

The 1968 presidential election sharply etched the developing voting tendencies in the region. George Wallace appealed to the traditionally Democratic white voters in rural-small town counties and in the working-class districts in the cities. Richard Nixon was the candidate of the urban bourgeoisie, and he was Wallace’s chief competitor among white voters generally. Black voters formed the base of Hubert Humphrey’s following. In the broadest sense, both survey research data and voting patterns demonstrate that Wallace’s blend of populist economics and social reaction appealed to lower-income whites; Nixon’s economic conservatism and defense of social stability paralleled the attitudes of the better educated and more secure urban-suburban affluents; and Humphrey’s welfare economics and racial liberalism reflected the views of blacks, liberal whites, and other minorities.

Recent state elections have suggested a shift away from the politics of Goldwater, Wallace, and racial turmoil. Moderate Republicans—Winthrop Rockefeller in Arkansas, A. Linwood Holton in Virginia, Howard Baker and Winfield Dunn in Tennessee, James Holshouser in North Carolina—have enjoyed at least temporary successes in the upper South, while a wave of progressive Democrats—Reubin Askew and Lawton Chiles of Florida, Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, William Waller of Mississippi, Jimmy Carter of Georgia, John West of South Carolina, Edwin Edwards and Bennett Johnston of Louisiana, for example—have been swept into office. The difficulties involved in evaluating this apparent orgy of progressive moderation exemplify the problems of dealing with contemporary history. It would appear, however, that the new southern moderation was more antiestablishment than issue-oriented, a proposition that is at least in-
directly supported by voting returns, in that these New South Democrats in their primary-election victories did not appeal with any consistency to specific voter groups, and liberals Ralph Yarborough and Albert Gore succumbed as readily as did more conservative contenders.

George Wallace's victories in the Democratic presidential primaries and the continuing storm over busing during 1972 evidenced the powerful strain of social conservatism that underlay the surge of New South moderation. As the vote in the Florida referenda elections suggested, white southerners had accepted desegregation but not much more than that. Attractive new faces similar to those that had fared so well in 1970 were largely unsuccessful in 1972, as Nick Galifianakis and David Pryor, among others, fell before conservative opponents. In the 1972 presidential election, Nixon combined Republican and Wallace votes to sweep the Solid South with a 70.5 percent majority, leaving McGovern, like Humphrey before him, with little voter base beyond blacks and other minority groups. The New Deal coalition of have-nots, which had collapsed in successive presidential elections, seemed in various stages of disintegration in state politics. A notable exception was Henry Howell, who demonstrated strong appeal to urban lower-status voters regardless of race in his two strong but unsuccessful bids for the Virginia governorship. In Texas Frances "Sissy" Farenthold attracted a similar following in her 1972 effort for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, although her campaign foundered when she tried again for the same office in 1974. Nevertheless, when an avowed liberal who is both female and Catholic not only wins a runoff spot in a Texas gubernatorial primary but also makes a creditable contest against a well-financed, conservative opponent, surely things are changing in southern politics.

Indeed, during the quarter-century since Southern Politics was written, all four institutional supports for the politics of the old Solid South have crumbled under the combined assault of the Bulldozer Revolution and the Second Reconstruction. In virtually all aspects of public life and commerce, de jure Jim Crow has been destroyed. In fact, in the matter of school desegregation, minority children were more likely to attend schools with substantial numbers of nonminority children in the South than elsewhere in the nation. Similarly, the reapportionment revolution that began with Baker v. Carr and Reynolds v. Sims has so equalized, at least arithmetically, the apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and the state legislatures that Georgia's county-unit system and Florida's pork-choppers seemed as quaintly outmoded as the convict-lease system. As for suffrage, the South's massive disfranchisement has been dramati-

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4}}\text{Race Relations Reporter, April 23, 1973; Today's Education, May 1973.}\]
cally reversed, with southern voter turnout in presidential elections soaring by 183.8 percent between 1948 and 1968, compared to a national increase of 34 percent. A regional differential still remained: the mean southern turnout in 1968 was 51.9 percent, as compared with 67.6 percent in the non-South. But this still represented a quantum leap from the old days of the "purified" southern electorate. Whereas in 1948 an estimated 12 percent of black southerners, or 595,000, were registered to vote, 3,324,000, or 66.3 percent, were registered by 1970, and white registration had climbed to 83.3 percent of the white voting-age population. Approximately 16.5 percent of southern registrants in 1970 were blacks.\(^6\)

Finally, there was the dramatic demise of the one-party system, from the once reliably solid Democracy to the solidly Republican South in the presidential election of 1972. As spectacular as that transformation was, a more reliable indicator of sustained Republican growth was the percentage of Republican seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the state legislatures, as indicated in figures 8.1 and 8.2. The G.O.P. held 34, or 31.5 percent, of the South's 108 House seats in 1974, which declined to 27, or 25 percent, as a result of that year's elections. In 1972 Republicans occupied 253, or 14 percent, of the region's 1,807 state legislative seats, and by 1974 the Republicans had elected seven U.S. senators and six governors.\(^7\)


\(^7\)The senators were Tower (Texas, 1961), Thurmond (South Carolina, 1966), Baker (Tennessee, 1966), Gurney (Florida, 1968), Brock (Tennessee, 1970), Helms (North Carolina.
Eleven logic would suggest that the demise of the institutional pillars of the old politics would unleash new and unpredictable currents. Key argued that "the predominant consideration in the architecture of southern political institutions has been to assure locally a subordination of the Negro population, and, externally, to block threatened interferences from the outside with these local arrangements." Assuming that Key was correct, and in large measure we believe that he was, the collapse of the caste system would of necessity force basic changes in political arrangements. The South had absorbed—sometimes with grace, more often with turmoil—a profound social revolution, and once again race relations were in a state of flux. While in racial matters opinion polls consistently showed growing toleration on the part of southern whites, the racial issue remained deeply embedded in southern and indeed American politics. Voting returns presented in this volume and elsewhere testify to the political vitality of the racial issue, and, despite hopeful trends in opinion polls, that issue is apt to remain politically salient in the foreseeable future. The deeply rooted contradictions entrenched in the social fabric of the South by her tragic history have demonstrated a perverse persistency.

Legislative reapportionment surely was a significant advance, but the rough consensus of political scientists who have studied the effects of *Baker v. Carr* on the decision-making process in state legislatures may be

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Footnotes:

1972), and Scott (Virginia, 1972). The governors were Rockefeller (Arkansas, 1966), Kirk (Florida, 1966), Holton (Virginia, 1969), Dunn (Tennessee, 1970), Holshouser (North Carolina, 1972), and Edwards (South Carolina, 1974).

*Key, Southern Politics,* p. 665.

summarized with the observation that “the policy choices of malapportioned legislatures are not noticeably different from the policy choices of well-apportioned legislatures,” and consequently “reapportionment is not likely to bring about any significant policy changes.” The one man-one vote formula is in no way inconsistent with the most brutal partisan gerrymandering, and the debate over the relative merits of multi- and single-member legislative districts reflected one of the paradoxes of reapportionment. In many southern states and municipalities the multi-member district was preferred by dominant white Democrats because it minimized the election of blacks and Republicans. On the other hand, it did force the gerrymandered urban delegation to respect the political clout of all constituent groups. But when the federal courts began to frown on such arrangements, and the blacks began to demand single-member districts for blacks to be elected in, the consequent urban delegations, their membership bolstered by reapportionment, also lost much of whatever unity they had possessed, and the rear guard of rural conservatives found new allies in the burgeoning suburban delegations. Both the multi- and the single-member district formulae, it seems, contained pitfalls for urban citizens whose hopes had soared on the heels of Baker v. Carr. The situation was analogous to the dilemma of the man who took a mouthful of scalding hot coffee: the next thing he did was going to be wrong.

Similarly, higher voter participation and the blossoming of the two-party system, while laudable in terms of democratic theory, have sharpened political conflict and raised basic questions about voter alignments and the ultimate voter base of the southern Democratic and Republican parties. In the 1968 presidential election, Wallace, Humphrey, and Nixon each received approximately one-third of the votes cast in the southern states. In the cities, as has been indicated, each appealed to relatively identifiable voter groups, and, generally, this was also true on the county level of analysis. How these three voting groups will fit into a two-party system is, in a simplified sort of way, the basic question of contemporary southern politics. In state and local politics the Wallace and the Humphrey voters have remained in the Democratic party, though with declining regularity, leaving the Republicans with numerically inadequate bases in the suburbs and the mountains, although exceptions to this pattern are numerous.

Partisan identification has been the best single predictor of the way an individual will cast his vote, of course, but here, again, the evidence is suggestive but by no means conclusive. Certainly the Democrats suffered mas-

sive defections during the latter 1960s. According to our survey data, approximately 64 percent of white southerners in 1964 called themselves Democrats; the remaining 36 percent divided about evenly between Republicans and independents. By 1970, according to our analysis of Institute of Social Research survey data, the relative number of white Republican partisans continued to hover around 18 percent, but the percentage of white Democrats had dropped from just over 64 percent to approximately 44 percent, and the number of white independents had vaulted from approximately 18 percent to 38 percent. This substantial shift from Democrat to independent was true of both upper- and lower-income whites. In the higher-income half of the southern white population in 1970, roughly 41 percent were Democrats, 38 percent independents, and 21 percent Republicans; in the lower-income half of the white sample, about 46 percent were Democrats, 38 percent independents, and 16 percent Republicans. An overwhelming 80 percent of black southerners identified themselves as Democrats. The shortage of self-confessed Republicans has meant that the G.O.P. could win state elections only when short-term factors were heavily in its favor.

The fact that the bulk of the blacks and a substantial minority of whites were Democratic partisans has helped to account for the general-election victories of attractive, nonvulnerable Democrats like Reubin Askew and Dale Bumpers in the early 1970s. It has also reinforced the degree to which the Republican party at the state and local level in the South has so long confronted, and may continue to face, formidable obstacles, despite the impressive presidential sweep of 1972. Republican growth outside the mountains, where it has lasted, has been built downward from presidential politics, not upward from the grass roots. Lacking the Democrats' broad base of party identifiers (the G.O.P.'s reliable mountain and suburban base in the recent past has provided Republicans with roughly a third of the vote in a typical southern state), Republicans have had to gear for elections one at a time, taking advantage of an attractive candidate, a vulnerable opponent, a favorable issue, a windfall split in the opposing state Democratic party. Hence, attractive Republican candidates have done well where they could find vulnerable Democrats with a divided party behind them who were open on a given issue, such as liberalism in the case of Robert King High and LeRoy Collins in Florida, the Kennedy image and an apparent inability to sell fried chicken on the part of John J. Hooker in Tennessee, and the stubborn courage of conviction plus languished home ties in the case of Albert Gore. Republican challengers have enjoyed the advantages of the underdog, and the upset victories by Jesse Helms and James Holshouser in North Carolina and William Scott in Virginia are particularly significant in that their opponents—Nick Galifianakis, Hargrove Bowles, and William Spong, respectively—were generally attractive and not generally regarded as vulnerable.
But the price of all this was high, and the future is unsure. Such strenuous campaigns to convince non-Republican identifiers are expensive, and they invite the kind of highly personalized, emotional, and frequently mud-slinging campaigns that have long marred Democratic primaries. Further, the resulting accretion of Republican officeholders, being based on no united design, produces no consistent pattern. Generally, G.O.P. candidates in the Deep South have campaigned as states' rights conservatives, attempting to link their opponents to the liberal policies of the national Democratic party. In the Rim South moderate Republican candidates in the Eisenhower tradition have been more frequent.

A good argument can be made that logically the South should be Republican. In the rest of the nation, the Democratic party is broadly the home of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities and of organized labor. The Republican party is the party of white Protestants, especially those residing in affluent suburbs and in rural-small town areas. Yet in the South, most whites are enthusiastically Protestant; rural-small town Protestants are particularly numerous; ethnic enclaves and labor unionists are few; and the position of the nouveau affluent has been strengthened by the out-migration of poor blacks and whites and the in-migration of upper-status whites lured by growing prosperity. Indeed, the major barriers between the South and the Republican party are the Civil War, Reconstruction, and one hundred years of history.

Matthews and Prothro, in their *Negroes and the New Southern Politics*, offered at least guarded support for the speculations of Key and Heard that the substantial entry of blacks into southern political life might lead to a biracial coalition of the poor. In the concluding chapter of their study, Matthews and Prothro observed: "It is the upper-middle-class, economically conservative, racially moderate whites who need to be driven from the Democratic party into the Republican, not the region's segregationists. Then, and only then, will a politics of class prevail over a politics of race in the South as in the rest of the nation." Matthew and Prothro pointed out that blacks had much to gain from what they called "highly volatile, 'populist' coalitions with heavily segregationist white workers." In the backwash of the Great Depression and the New Deal, that is, when Key and Heard wrote, this populist alliance seemed fairly self-evident. By 1972, the balancing of economic issues with what Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg have called the Social Issue was a much more perilous matter.

Important strains of the southern historical legacy militated against the development of a politics based on a realistic assessment of economic self-interest, and this tendency was compounded by the lack of an ade-

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12 Ibid., p. 479.
quate institutional foundation for a meaningful southern liberalism. The South has little in the way of ethnic-religious minorities with liberal Democratic voting traditions, and the weakness of southern labor unions deprived the region of another foundation upon which the northern New Deal coalition has rested. Political machines have existed in the South, but, with the exception of some Chicano and urban black communities, they have not performed the function of educating lower-status citizens to the relationship between politics and bread-and-butter issues that northern machines have traditionally done. The South's distinctive historical evolution and the absence of basic aspects of the New Deal coalition have contributed to a politics which might be described as less structured and more individual and personal than was customary on the national level. That is, lacking the structure provided by a disciplined party organization, a union, the block club of a political machine, or the social pressure of an ethnic group, southern whites, in comparison with northerners, have been not only less inclined to vote but more inclined to use their ballots in state and local politics to express personal beliefs or prejudices rather than socioeconomic self-interest.

Most Americans, North or South, appear to possess little in the way of a coherent political philosophy, and therefore the group orientation of a voter has been extremely significant to political behavior. But the basically tripartite group orientation of southern voters as it has emerged during the era of the Second Reconstruction so ill comported with the two-party model and has so set the South against itself politically that the wan, populist dream of a biracial coalition of the poor seemed to stand essentially little chance. Both voting and survey research data reinforce the portrait of a southern electorate that, unshackled at last from the most severe institutional constraints of disfranchisement, malapportionment, the one-party system, and Jim Crow, found itself still confounded by its peculiar historical legacy.

One of the most striking trend lines in the survey data was the growing divergence in opinion between blacks and whites in which southern blacks consistently anchored the liberal position, nonsoutherners hovered in the middle, and southern whites grew increasingly conservative. There has been a sharp decline in the number of whites (but not of blacks) who identified themselves as Democrats. Similarly, our own survey data analysis supports the findings of Alfred Hero and others that there has been a substantial decline in support for economic welfare measures on the part of whites, especially the lower-income half of the white population, but relatively little decline in support on the part of blacks. The chasm between blacks and lower-income whites widened on such fundamental matters as partisan identification, economic welfare measures, civil liberties, and governmental intervention in support of black economic advancement. Long-term voting patterns strongly suggested that holding the bulk
of blacks and lower-status whites in the same party is going to be extremely difficult.

How all of this translated into long-term partisan voter divisions is by no means clear as yet. The party-systems mode of analysis assumes normally stable voting patterns, anchored by partisan identification, which tend to remain quite consistent until upheavals sufficiently traumatic to effect the masses of voters catalyze a critical period of realignment. The Eisenhower campaign of 1952 marked a significant break with past patterns of presidential voting, but not until the emergence of the civil-rights issue did a matter directly affecting huge numbers of voters become politically salient. The Republican Southern Strategy and the civil-rights laws of the mid-1960s, combined with the third-party effort of George Wallace, seemed to provide the basic ingredients for realignment. V. O. Key presented the classic definition for this phenomenon when he described “a category of elections in which voters are, at least from impressionistic evidence, unusually deeply concerned, in which the extent of electoral involvement is relatively quite high, and in which the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate.”13 Southern political competition in the mid and late 1960s met all of these criteria. Voters evidenced great concern with politics, and electoral involvement shot upward, with turnout reaching its peak in the 1968 presidential election and then leveling off, in some states receding, during the early 1970s in both state and presidential elections. The disentegration of the New Deal coalition and of the national Democratic party’s position in the South in the presidential elections of 1968 and 1972 clearly indicated sharp alterations in electoral cleavage. All of these facts strongly suggested that the South had just passed through a critical period of realignment and entered the era of the sixth party system, with the G.O.P. enjoying a solidly Republican (white) southern base in presidential politics and perhaps with time in state politics as well.14 However, Key added to his definition of critical elections the crucial admonition: “Moreover, and perhaps this is the truly differentiating characteristic of this sort of election, the realignment made manifest in the voting in such elections seems to persist for several succeeding elections.”15 Thus, despite persuasive evidence, the central question remained unanswered.


and invited the speculation of political scientists and the judgment of future political historians. Indeed, the off-year elections of 1974 further clouded the question, as economic recession and the shadow of Watergate moved American voters to punish the G.O.P. severely. While this retribution was less extreme in the South than elsewhere, previous Republican gains were seriously eroded, especially in the Rim South, by the loss of the governorship of Tennessee, of the indicted Edward Gurney’s Senate seat in Florida, and a net loss of seven House seats. In North Carolina, Republicans were reduced from 15 to 1 in the state senate and from 35 to 10 in the house, and the G.O.P. lost 14 legislative seats in Tennessee and 11 in Florida. Only a bizarre Democratic split in South Carolina produced a gubernatorial victory to bolster the dampened spirits of southern Republicans.

While the prospects for critical realignment in the South were clouded by the election of 1974, they were reinforced in the Congress, where the southern delegation stood to lose power, especially in the Senate. Whereas southern senators had chaired ten of the eighteen committees in 1970, by 1975 they chaired only six, and while these still included the “Big Four” of appropriations (McClellan), armed services (Stennis), finance (Long), and foreign relations (Sparkman), plus agriculture (Talmadge) and judiciary (Eastland), the advanced age of the chairmen promised retirements that would transfer power to more liberal northern Democrats. Russell Long was the youngest southern chairman, and Herman Talmadge was the next-to-youngest. Between Talmadge and the next ranking southern Democrat in line to chair a committee stood twenty-two northern and western Democrats. Hence the likely retirements of Stennis in 1976 and of McClellan, Sparkman, and Eastland in 1978 would turn their chairmanships over to nonsoutherners. In the House, retirement or death has in recent years sig-

16In Tennessee Ray Blanton, a conservative former Democratic congressman from West Tennessee who had been badly beaten in his 1972 attempt to oust Senator Howard Baker, defeated Lamar Alexander, the Republican nominee to succeed Governor Winfield Dunn. In Florida, Representative Bill Gunter was upset in the Democratic senatorial primary by former Secretary of State Richard Stone, who then defeated the Republican nominee, drugstore millionaire Jack Eckerd. Nine Republican House seats were lost, including two each in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee, as follows (with the defeated Republican in parentheses): Georgia Fourth to Elliott H. Levitas (Ben B. Blackburn); North Carolina Fifth to Stephen L. Neal (Wilmer Mizell) and Eighth to W. G. Hefner (Earl B. Ruth); South Carolina Sixth to John W. Jenrette (Edward L. Young); Tennessee Third to Marilyn Lloyd (LaMar Baker) and Eighth to Harold E. Ford (Dan Kuykendall); Texas Thirteenth to Jack Hightower (Robert Price); Virginia Eighth to Herbert E. Harris (Stanford E. Parris) and Tenth to Joseph L. Fisher (Joel T. Broyhill). Two Democratic seats were lost (with the defeated Democrat in parentheses): Florida Fifth to Richard Kelly (Jo Ann Saunders), and Louisiana Sixth to W. Henson Moore (Jeff LaCaze). Blackburn was Georgia's only Republican congressman, and Ford became the South's third black congressman.

17State Senator James B. Edwards, a conservative Republican, defeated retired General William C. Westmoreland in the primary and then won the general election by capitalizing on a Democratic debacle. His opponent, twenty-eight-year House veteran William Jennings Bryan Dorn, had lost to reform Democrat Charles D. “Pug” Ravenel in the primary, who subsequently was declared ineligible by the state supreme court, because he failed to meet a five-year state residency requirement.
nificantly reduced the ranks of conservative Democratic oligarchs, as have primary victories by younger Democrats, general election victories by Republicans, and, following the elections of 1974, the resignation under fire of Wilbur Mills (Ark.) as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the unhorsing by the Democratic Caucus of three other southern committee chairmen: W. R. Poage (Tex.) of Agriculture; F. Edward Herbert (La.) of Armed Services; and Wright Patman (Tex.) of Banking and Currency. At the same time, the ratio of nonsouthern to southern Democratic congressmen has dramatically changed at the expense of the latter. In 1946 there were only 85 Democrats elected to the House from the nonsouthern states; in 1974 there were 201, and meanwhile the southern Democratic House ranks have been significantly eroded by the election of southern Republicans.

The decline of the congressional Old Guard, which promised to disrupt the Republican-Dixiecrat coalition and to narrow the North-South split in the congressional Democratic party, and the Republican set-backs in the 1974 elections suggested a politics of continuity. But projections based upon such secular, short-term surge forces as Watergate and recession are risky, and the apparently vengeful mood of those who voted in 1974 reflected a deepening disillusionment with political life. Whether the recession would slow the disintegration of the New Deal coalition was unclear, but southern electoral returns and survey evidence during the postwar years pointed overwhelmingly toward the coalition's decay. It is true that electoral fragmentation, popular cynicism toward government, and the disintegration of the New Deal coalition have been national as well as southern phenomena, and we seek here neither to deny the convergence factor nor to speculate on the relative strengths of the northerization of the South or the southerization of the North. The increasing national salience of the Social Issue since the bread-and-butter politics of the New Deal has intensified the disharmonies between the major parties and their traditional supporters. Generally, the white-collar class has been more conservative than the blue-collar class on most economic issues, but the blue-collar class has been more conservative than the white-collar class on a variety of social issues relating to civil liberties and civil rights, international involvement, patriotism, law enforcement, and the like. Hence, as Norval Glenn has observed, "the Democratic Party, in seeking the support of blacks, has alienated many of its white working-class members, and the generalized conservatism of the powerful conservative wing of the Republican Party is inconsistent with many of the characteristic values and attitudes of the affluent and well-educated classes, who tend to be liberal on many non-economic issues."18

Electoral instability and ambivalence toward party have increased nationally, and George Wallace has been in a position to capitalize upon this

process of disaggregation by simultaneously appealing to economic and social fears.

But in the South, the historical legacy of cultural distinctiveness, the persistence of which John Shelton Reed has recently demonstrated in *The Enduring South*, must more than any other factor explain the alarmingly wide divergences of opinion reflected in our survey data. Once having shed their inherited Democratic label, upper-status white Republicans in the South are not likely to remain troubled by partisan ambivalence, for as Norval Glenn concluded, "at present, white-collar whites in the South represent a combination of conservative attitudes on both economic and noneconomic issues which is probably unique among the major categories of the population in the United States." Blue-collar whites in the South have never been particularly conservative on economic issues, but they, too, have shared that collective legacy that Wilbur Cash called *The Mind of the South*, a legacy that the despairing Cash, in his intensive love-hate relationship with his native region, saw as an amalgam of pride, bravery, honor, loyalty, courtesy, and generosity at its best, together with its characteristic vices of the past—"violence, intolerance, aversion and suspicion toward new ideas, an incapacity for analysis, an inclination to act from feeling rather than from thought, an exaggerated individualism and a too narrow concept of social responsibility, attachment to fictions and false values, above all too great attachment to racial values and a tendency to justify cruelty and injustice in the name of those values, sentimentality and a lack of realism."21

The "new political history" has persistently demonstrated the importance of ethnocultural factors in determining long-term voting behavior and party identification. In a summary of findings of recent research in political history, Joel H. Silbey and Samuel T. McSeveney have observed that "clashing religious and ethnic perspectives more often than anything else shape group attitudes toward politics and lead particular groups to identify with those political institutions that seem either to reflect their specific viewpoints or to serve their specific interests. . . . Economic differences within the society have occasionally influenced voting behavior but usually have been subordinate to these cultural tensions except in periods of intense economic dislocations such as the 1890s and 1930s."22 The legacy of

19*The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1972). Reed argues that southern whites constitute an ethnic group wherein family and church are far more powerful agents of socialization than are school and media and that southerners are more likely to be conventionally religious, to accept the private use of force, and to be anchored in their homeplace.


slavery, segregation, and white supremacy leaves little doubt about the basic ethnocultural division in southern society.

The South of the 1970s is not the same South that the tortured Wilbur Cash knew. Gone are the Jim Crow signs and ordinances, the yahoo legislatures with their prohibition and monkey laws, and the triumphant "nigger-baiting" demagogues, and many of the social and political dilemmas of the South are symptomatic of a national malaise. But given the region's decidedly un-American experience with defeat, poverty, and guilt,23 history seems to have placed a peculiar kind of hex upon her, not as an immutable curse but as a pernicious source of devilment that confounds our more rational and optimistic predictions and masks deeply-rooted continuity behind the symptoms of basic change. The Republican sweep of the South in 1972 may well have reflected a quite traditional southern triumph, under a new partisan label, of her more dominant social conservatism over her game but historically outweighed populism.