Parties, Issue Networks, and the Potential for Political Change:

Civil Rights and the Transformations of American Politics

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ABSTRACT

Throughout its history, much of American politics has revolved around the politics of race. Indeed, issues related to race have been central at nearly all the critical junctures in American political history – the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the construction and adoption of the U.S. Constitution, westward expansion, the Civil War and Reconstruction, the organization of American forces in armed conflicts including both World Wars, and the construction of social welfare policy. Moreover, race provides one part of the solution to Sombart’s puzzle (1906), helping to explain why there has never been a successful socialist movement in American politics. That is, racial conflict stands in the way creating a coalition of working class and disadvantaged individuals who are belong to heterogeneous racial and ethnic groups.

In this context, it comes as no surprise that issues surrounding race have been central to the evolution and organization of American political parties, the ideological bases of these parties, and the class and sectional organization of American party coalitions. Writing in 1949, V.O. Key (1949: 5) observed that the “politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro.” What was once a southern issue resolved by southern institutions became a national issue when, in the first half of the twentieth century, the large scale migrations of African Americans out of the South into northern and western cities led to a set of circumstances that provided political voice to black aspirations. And this led, in turn, to a dramatic transformation of American political parties.

Racial and ethnic divisions in American society have historically served as a subtext for the organization of American political parties. Issues regarding race
have served to create political networks within and between political parties that create a second level of political organization. When the boundaries of the parties are incompatible with this second level of organization, the potential arises for a reorganization of partisan politics.

This paper focuses on landmark civil rights legislation adopted in 1957, 1964, and 1965. These legislative victories for proponents of civil rights constitute a turning point in American politics. They involved dramatic bipartisan cooperation in passing civil rights bills, and they also led to the end of the New Deal coalition, and the transformation of both the Democratic and Republican parties and the bases of their political support.

The paper locates this political process within its political and historical context before addressing two interrelated processes. First, we consider a series of crucial votes on civil rights within the U.S. Senate. The Senate provided a particularly formidable obstacle to the passage of civil rights legislation because of the need to obtain a cloture vote to end debate – a vote which required supermajority (two-thirds) support that was difficult to obtain due to the efforts of southern and border state Democrats and their allies. Second, we consider the implications of these votes, and the process they represent, for the creation of new party coalitions among both Democrats and Republicans.

**Race in Post-World War II American Politics**

Pervasive racial discrimination in American politics and society produced a system of racial apartheid in the American south, and widespread racial discrimination in the rest of the nation. Moreover, the problems did not stop with
respect to the treatment of African Americans, but extended to other racial and ethnic minorities as well. Dramatic action in post-World War II politics created rapid progress in the struggle for racial equality – the adoption of Civil Rights Acts in 1957, culminating in the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This progress also came with an enduring political price. In particular it led to the demise of the New Deal coalition; the fracturing of a class-based coalition; a conservative backlash that transformed southern politics; and the end of the Republican Party as the party of Lincoln that embraced individual freedom and civil rights.

**The Political Context**

Several events occurred during the first half of the twentieth century leading to increased pressure on the political process to address issues of race. In particular, during the period prior to the Great Depression, a large migration of African Americans took place out of the rural south and into northern cities. While this migration slowed during the 1930s, it resumed during the war years as many southern blacks moved north to take jobs in war industries. This migration would fundamentally alter the strategic calculus of northern Democratic politicians who came to rely on African American support at the polls.

The New Deal Democratic Party increasingly came to represent the interests and aspirations of working class Americans. Local party organizations successfully mobilized many of the new arrivals into northern cities, including African Americans who had left behind not only the one-party South, but also their allegiance to the Party of Lincoln. For example, the Democratic party organization
in Chicago successfully mobilized new African American arrivals as party supporters. As a consequence, not only the Cook County Democratic organization, but also the Democratic Party in Illinois, came to rely on the support of African Americans in South Chicago.

This progress pointed out the paradox of American national politics. At the end of World War II—a war fought to free the world from fascism—the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Senate in particular, remained incapable of moving forward on civil rights. This inability made presidential support for black aspirations problematic. Two Democratic presidents, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, depended on the support of southern Democratic Senators and House members for the continued progress of the New Deal and the Fair Deal. As a consequence, Roosevelt moved slowly and cautiously on matters of race, adopting symbolic actions, acting through his wife, and employing administrative devices to support African American needs and aspirations.

In spite of these obstacles, startling progress occurred in the period leading up to the 1948 presidential election. First, Harry Truman used an executive order to desegregate the U.S. armed forces. Second, the Democratic convention, urged on by two northern liberals running for the Senate in 1948 – Hubert Humphrey (MN) and Paul Douglas (IL) – added a civil rights plank to its platform. This was a crowning blow to the white separatists within the Party, leading to a southern walkout from the convention and the presidential candidacy of South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond as a Dixiecrat candidate. Thurmond’s candidacy won four Deep South states, and Truman barely won the election as a consequence. The political lesson
taken by many Democrats was that Truman would have won handily if not for the divisive effects of race on his campaign.

This is illustrated in the 1948 Texas Senate campaign being simultaneously waged by Lyndon Johnson in Texas. As a House member, Johnson had been a committed New Dealer and a favorite of Franklin Roosevelt. In his first run for the Senate, however, he distanced himself from the national party and repudiated Truman's civil rights efforts (Evans and Novak (1966: 4).

My feelings are well known in my district and in Washington. And Harry Truman knows I am against him on this program. I just don't think Congress should try to cram his program down the throats of Southern states....

Truman’s whisker-thin victory in 1948, the defection of Southern Democrats, and the loss of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina to Strom Thurmond’s State Rights candidacy sent a message that was not lost on the rest of the party and its candidates. In his two subsequent presidential campaigns, Adlai Stevenson tread softly on issues of race in an effort to maintain the support of the white South. In a speech during the campaign at Richmond, Virginia, Stevenson spoke to the suffering of southerners in the post Civil War period under Republican control when he suggested that: "Among the most valuable heritages of the Old South is its political genius, which in many respects was far ahead of its time. Even today some of the finest products of Southern governmental thought are only beginning to win the general acceptance which they have so long deserved. . . . A classic example, it seems to me, is the Constitution of the Confederacy. . . ." (1953: 153).
In short, it would appear that many Democrats had learned their lesson during the near debacle of 1948. If they wanted to control the presidency, they needed to make the necessary compromises to maintain their white southern supporters, and this made progress on civil rights difficult to achieve.

At the same time, the strategy failed to maintain the party’s control of the presidency. More blacks were now able to vote due to their movement north and west, and significant minorities supported Eisenhower’s candidacy in both 1952 and 1956, as well as Nixon’s candidacy in 1960. This was particularly problematic as many Democratic organizations in northern cities had become increasingly reliant on strong levels of support in African American neighborhoods. Democratic support for black aspirations was not simply a humanitarian response to injustice. It was also anchored in the political reality that the non-southern elements of the party confronted.

This is not to say that the national party lacked champions of African American rights. Senators Paul Douglas (IL) and Hubert Humphrey (MN), both newly elected to the Senate in 1948, became vocal in their support of black aspirations. Indeed, Humphrey would be the Democratic floor leader in the successful effort to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Moreover, outrageous events in the South continued to stir indignation: southern lynchings, hostility toward returning black army veterans, and high profile killings such as that of Chicagoan Emmet Till, a 14 year old who was murdered on a trip to Mississippi after being accused of flirting with a white woman.
At the same time, the social, political, and institutional constraints were compelling, and addressing them proved to unleash a reorganization of American politics. In the analysis that follows, we consider the patterns of support for landmark civil rights and voting rights legislation. Quite simply, the Democrats could never have hoped to pass the initial landmark legislation on their own. Indeed, the most stalwart opposition to the legislation came from the southern Democrats, many of whom were also stalwart supporters of the New Deal. Hence, the passage of the legislation must be understood within the context of competing political networks that reached across partisan boundaries. These networks reflected the fact that the two political parties were highly heterogeneous, not only in terms of race and civil rights, but also in terms of ideology more generally, thereby making it possible to engage in bipartisan collaboration across party lines.

This bipartisan cooperation served to undermine and ultimately put an end to the New Deal coalition that that both sustained racial apartheid in the south, while also making it possible to pass landmark social and labor legislation – the Social Security Act and the Wagner Fair Labor Standards Act, as well as legislation aimed at ameliorating the effects of the Great Depression. The New Deal coalition was built on a dedication to the interests of working class Americans, but working class Americans come in a variety of colors. And thus the underlying compromise on race created a fundamental contradiction that inevitably led to its demise.

The bipartisan cooperation that passed this landmark civil rights legislation would not last. As Poole and Rosenthal demonstrate (20xx), politics and political parties abhor multidimensional political competition. The cooperative effort in
passing initial civil rights legislation exposed other contradictions that ultimately led to a transformed political landscape. This new landscape produced a redefinition of both the Democratic and Republican parties – parties that would be much more homogeneous internally on issues related to race and ideology, and more highly polarized across a variety of issues.

**The Heterogeneity of the Parties Prior to the Civil Rights Revolution**

The Senate votes on civil rights legislation, examined below, reveal the internal heterogeneity of American political parties during the post-World War II era. Much of this heterogeneity was rooted in the historical peculiarities of local, regional, and temporal circumstance. Most importantly, southerners were Democrats in the early 20th century as a direct legacy of the Civil War. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, the southern voters’ only viable choice was to vote for Democrats. They became Democrats because they could not become Republicans—the legacy of Lincoln and the “War of Northern Aggression” meant that they rejected the Republican Party just as they rejected Union dominance. More importantly, if whites were to maintain control over the African-American population, party competition needed to be eliminated and one-party control embraced (Key 1949; Kousser 1974; Woodward 1938).

Indeed, the primary issue giving rise to southern political unity was the place of African-Americans within southern society. The unfolding events of the Civil Rights Movement during the early 1950s demonstrated its importance in the form of the “Southern Manifesto.” In response to the Supreme Court ruling in Brown v. the Board of Education, the “Southern Manifesto” accused the Supreme Court of an
abuse of power and laid out its case for states’ rights. All but 3 of the 22 southern senators signed the document, and it received unanimous support from members of the U.S. House delegations in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia. As we will see, however, the political solidarity of the south did not extend far beyond issues of race.

Heterogeneity within partisan camps was also an important factor among northern Democrats and Republicans. This heterogeneity persisted not only within states, but at more particularized local levels as well. New ethnic immigrants to New York encountered machine politics and a Democratic political machine run by Tammany Hall. New ethnic immigrants to Philadelphia encountered machine politics and a Republican machine run by the Vare brothers. In Chicago during the 1920s, competing Republican and Democratic machines courted votes with very similar appeals. Some of this northern heterogeneity was eliminated by the political successes of the New Deal, but a great deal remained particularly with regards to civil rights, as can be seen in the passage of both the 1957 and 1964 Civil Rights Acts. Neither bill would have passed without the collaboration of Northern Democrats and Republicans, and both bills encountered overwhelming resistance among southern Democrats.

This heterogeneity had persisted within larger political movements that previously cut across party lines. Both the Populist and Progressive reform movements had been inspired by leaders from both parties: Republicans Robert LaFollette, George Norris, and Hiram Johnson, as well as Democrats William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson and Al Smith. Moreover, both movements had
supporters in the North as well as in the South. Indeed, by revealing the heterogeneity among Southern Democrats, the populist movement in the South created a bitter fight within state Democratic Parties (Woodward 1938) – battles in which the Populists were eventually eliminated (Kousser 1974). In short, there had been liberal and progressive as well as conservative elements within both parties and both regions.

In short, at the beginning of the Civil Rights era, both parties were internally heterogeneous, and each contained its own internal contradictions. Patterns of support for civil rights legislation in the 1950s and 1960s revealed the depth of the divisions within the parties, and it created an environment for the reconsideration of party boundaries.

**Policy Networks Among and Within Parties**

For some purposes, one might consider the pre-civil rights era of the twentieth century to constitute a three party system in American national politics – Republicans, Democrats, and southern Democrats. While the Democrats and southern Democrats voted together on determining party leadership in the House and the Senate, the heterogeneity of policy positions among the southern Democrats meant that stable political coalitions developed over time regarding economic issues between conservative southern Democrats and Republicans. Indeed, the resulting “conservative coalition” often stymied liberal legislation, particularly when Republicans controlled the presidency.

At the same time, other southern Democrats took liberal issues on economics and social welfare, and provided the core support for Roosevelt’s New Deal and
Truman’s Fair Deal. The problem was that this cooperation was severely limited by the issues touching on the civil rights of African Americans. As a consequence, the Democratic Party could not govern as a united party when race came into play. And Republicans, in turn, could undermine the liberal Democrats by cooperating with the economically conservative southerners just as they could undermine the southern Democrats by cooperating with non-southern Democrats on race. In short, the construction of the relevant policy networks threatened the unity of the Democratic Part in several different ways.

The New Deal-Fair Deal coalition began to come unraveled in the late 1940s as a consequence of Truman’s actions in desegregating the armed forces, moving against employment discrimination in federal employment, and establishing a President’s Committee on Civil Rights, as well as the Democratic Party’s adoption of a civil rights plank to its platform at the 1948 convention. The culmination of this process occurred with the adoption of the 1957 and 1964 Civil Rights Acts, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

We gauge the strength of support for the three civil rights proposals by considering two votes for each measure – the vote on final passage as well as a key intermediate vote taken on the Senate floor to weaken each of the measures. In 1957 and 1964, the intermediate vote was on an amendment to grant jury trials when suits were brought against local election officials accused of violating voting rights. The amendment was seen as weakening the Act inasmuch as civil rights advocates believed that white southern juries would not convict local officials accused of abridging the voting rights of black citizens. In 1965 the intermediate
vote was on an amendment to eliminate the legislation’s prohibition on poll tax in state as well as federal elections. For all three years, we define civil rights supporters as Senators who voted against the jury amendment (or against the elimination of the poll tax) as well as voting for final passage. We define mixed support as supporting final passage but in favor of the amendment that weakened the bill. And we define non-supporters as individuals who voted to weaken the bill as well as voting to defeat it on final consideration.

As Table 3 shows, southern Democrats in the Senate were strongly opposed to all three measures, while Democrats cooperated with Republicans in passing the three landmark measures. Indeed, in 1957, the Republicans were more united in their support for civil rights than the non-southern Democrats. In contrast, by 1964 the Democrats had displaced the Republicans as the party of civil rights. More than 75 percent of non-southern Democrats gave full support in 1964 and 1965, while only 39 percent of Republicans gave full support in 1964 and only 19 percent gave full support in 1965. In contrast, more than 75 percent of southern Democrats provided no support in all three years, with 95 percent providing no support in 1964.

Figure 1 provides a network graph that demonstrates the politically unstable nature of the Senate coalitions in 1957. Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson was only able to secure southern agreement to forego a filibuster if a group of northwest Democrats would agree to support amendments that weakened the bill – one of which was the jury amendment (Caro, 2002). In return, a group of southern
Democrats agreed to support authorization for the Hells Canyon Dam – a project near and dear to the northwestern Democrats who participated in a log roll.

This group of primarily liberal western Democrats had been vocal supporters of public power and the construction of a large Hells Canyon Dam on the Snake River as it runs along the Idaho-Oregon border. One of these northwest Democrats, Senator Frank Church of Idaho, had made the dam a primary issue in his successful campaign for the Senate. The dam met with stiff resistance among the opponents of public power, and the northwest Democrats had been stymied in their efforts to win authorization for the project. Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson engineered the log roll in which a group of Southern Democrats agreed to support the Senate vote on authorization for the dam contingent on the support of the northwest Democrats for amendments that weakened the 1957 Civil Rights Act. These participating southern Democrats included the leader of the southern caucus, Senator Richard Russell of George, and most importantly they agreed that they would not support a filibuster of the Civil Rights Bill.

If the southerners had the votes to sustain a filibuster, why would they agree to the log roll? Lyndon Johnson was at the height of his significant powers as majority leader, and he had national aspirations that his southern colleagues wanted to support. Moreover, while the southern delegation had employed the filibuster effectively on many occasions, it was an extreme device that had the effect of isolating them not only within the Senate, but more broadly within the larger policy making process. In short, members of the southern delegation were looking for alternative ways to realize their shared goals.
Figure 1 thus portrays a very fragile ad hoc political coalition that depended on a one-time deal among southern and non-southern Democrats. The Senators within the nodes at the northwest corner of the plot (41, 42, 43, 32, and 33) provided strong support for the Act; the nodes in the middle (12, 13, 21 and 22) provided mixed support; and the nodes at the southwest corner (51, 52, 53, 61, and 62) provided no support. The figure illustrates the ideologically diverse nature of the southern Democrats, as well as their virtual non-existent support for even the weak 1957 CRA. All the senators providing no support were southerners, and only five southern Democrats from Texas, Tennesse, and Florida voted for the bill on final passage. Moreover, the southern Democrats voting against the Act on final passage included conservatives, moderates, and liberals. And both strong supporters and those providing mixed support included conservatives, moderates, and liberals as well.

The figure also shows the strong Republican support for the Act. The sizes of the nodes are proportional to the number of senators represented by each node. Hence node 41 (conservative Republicans) accounts for the largest group in support of the measure. Moreover, node 33 (liberal Democrats) provides strong support for the measure, but other liberal Democrats, represented within node 13, provided weak support. Finally, some of these liberal Democrats who failed to provide strong support were from the Northeast, including Senator John Kennedy from Massachusetts.

In short, the 1957 Act revealed the political and ideological disarray and weakness of the Democratic Party in addressing issues with respect to Civil Rights.
The coalition lined up in support of the Act proved to be very fragile—it would have not been able to defeat the southern filibuster that was avoided due to the Hells Canyon log roll. Moreover, heterogeneous interests and ideological positions within the coalition of support undermined its long term prospects. Larger coalitions of support would need to be assembled to pass future civil rights and voting rights legislation, and a new political order would need to be constructed in terms of both party and ideology.

In the next section, we consider the full array of ideological positions held by senators before, during, and after the civil and voting rights revolution. Putting major ideological shifts among southern senators together with changing support among non-southern senators on civil rights and voting rights provides a key to understanding the contemporary ideological ordering of America’s political parties.

**Regional Variation in Senators’ Ideology**

U.S. Senators are the highest visibility national political leaders within the individual states. While an electorate’s choice of governor may be based on issues and concerns that are relatively idiosyncratic to the state, the choice of a senator is likely to be a more straightforward ideological choice. Hence the voting record of a senator is not only an indication of the individual office holder’s ideological predisposition, but the predisposition of the state electorate as well.

Within this context, we address regional variation in the scores senators receive on their voting records from the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) from 1948 through 2008. These ADA scores are based on the percentage of liberal votes cast by each senator on a set of votes chosen by the ADA, and hence they vary
from 0 to 100 percent. These scores have been analyzed in various ways. Some scholars have used the original scores as they are provided by the ADA, and we will return to the original scores later in this analysis. Poole and Rosenthal (1985; 1997) employ a scaling methodology to identify underlying ideological dimensions in time. And Groseclose, Levitt and Snyder (1999) adjust scores to reflect changing means and variances in the definition of ideology.

Our own purposes are somewhat different. We are not interested in a definition of ideology that is adjusted for changing perceptions and definitions in time. That is, we are not interested in a time invariant measure of ideology. Rather we use the ADA scores as time specific measures based on the issues confronted in a particular session of the Senate, as these issues are seen in the eyes of the participants at the time. Within this context, our main purpose is to observe the ideological positions of individual senators (and groups of senators) relative to their colleagues. In Figure 4 we translate the senators’ individual scores into quintiles for each Senate. This ideological measure thus provides a senator’s position relative to the median position within the chamber, defined relative to the primary issues addressed by the chamber in that session.

Figure 4 shows the ADA quintiles for each region organized by time, from 1948 until 2008. The period in question captures the period before, during, and after legislative activity on civil rights. While the civil rights issue was already important in 1948, it had yet to occupy significant space on the congressional agenda. In particular, non-southern senators had not been required to take positions on civil rights for African Americans, and it had not become a defining
ingredient of liberalism. For example, Senator John Kennedy was seen as a liberal even though his views and positions on civil rights were ambiguous at best. At this point in time, following the New Deal and in the midst of the Fair Deal, being a liberal had more to do with economic issues and social welfare.

[Figure 4 here]

In contrast, by 2008, civil rights had been incorporated as a central issue within the definition of parties and ideology. At the same time, many of the defining events in the civil rights movement had receded in importance. This is not to say that liberals and conservatives were of one mind with respect to underlying issues, but rather that the civil rights issues were more likely to play out in legal cases and administrative actions. Senate action was still important but it was also less visible and more likely to deal with issues such as whether preclearance requirements in Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act should apply to the whole country or only to areas of the country (almost entirely in the South) with histories of violating citizens’ right to vote. These issues were less visible to the public at large and even to the press.

The figure shows very different levels and patterns of change in ideology across the states, and the results are perhaps surprising. In particular, the two highest levels of liberalism at the beginning of the period were in the Border states and the South, and the most conservative levels were in the Midwest. This reflects the afterglow of the strong support that Roosevelt received from southern and border state senators. It also demonstrates the political dilemma that Roosevelt

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1 The Nunn Amendment, which called for nationwide pre-clearance, was defeated by a narrow vote on the Senate floor. Authored by the moderate Democratic senator from Georgia, it was widely seen as a measure to reduce VRA restrictions on southern states and localities.
faced – he could not move forward on civil rights without offending the southern base of his support. Indeed, the backbone of support for the New Deal came from the South (Katznelson 2013), and many (but certainly not all) southern senators were New Deal stalwarts, reflecting the very real problems of poverty faced by whites as well as blacks in the South. At the same time, Roosevelt’s vision of the American role in international affairs had meant increased military spending, and a disproportionate amount of that spending occurred in the South.

The figure also shows precipitous increases and declines in the levels of liberalism within regions. Liberalism declined in an especially dramatic way in the South across this sixty year period, and the most dramatic declines occurred between 1948 and the mid-1970s, with a short-term resurgence centered on 1990 that quickly disappeared. During this same period, substantial declines appeared in the levels of liberalism among border state senators. In contrast, the most dramatic increase in liberalism occurred in the Midwest. It showed the lowest level of liberalism in the early part of the period, but by the end of the period it demonstrates the second highest level. Increases in liberalism among northern senators were sufficient to make the Northeast the most liberal region in the country. Indeed, we see something that approaches an inversion of the earlier distribution of liberal strength within the country.

In summary, at the beginning of this period, the core strength of liberalism within the Senate was located in the South and Border States, and the core strength of conservatism was located in the Midwest. By the end of this period, the Northeast and Midwest delegations provided the core strength of liberalism, with the core
strength of conservatism located within the South. Indeed, at one point, the Speaker of the House (Newt Gingrich), the Senate majority leader (Trent Lott), and the Chair of the National Republican Party (Haley Barbour) were all southern Republicans. In short, the New Deal coalition ended with the advent of the civil rights agenda, and this transformation led to a regional realignment among the parties that is reflected in the ideological composition of the Senate.

At the same time, aggregation at the regional level masks a great deal of what is happening within the individual states. Indeed, understanding the whole requires a more complete understanding of the parts. A detailed analysis of each region lies beyond the boundaries of this paper, but the South is key, and we focus on political transformation within the southern states before concluding.

**The Political Transformation of the South**

For those accustomed to politics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, it may be difficult to conceive of the South as the hotbed of American liberalism. By the mid 1960s and early 1970s, southern senators such as John Sparkman and Lister Hill – both from Alabama – were understood as right wing conservatives opposed to the liberal agenda. They signed the Southern Manifesto. They supported white supremacy and opposed any extension of civil rights. Sparkman in particular was a military hawk who supported American involvement in Vietnam. Indeed, contemporary definitions of liberalism would exclude the two Alabama senators, or at least treat them as curious contradictions.

During the majority of their careers, however, they were both leading liberals by the definition of the time. Sparkman was a supporter of unions, public housing,
education, and public health – certainly issues that continue to resonate among contemporary liberals. Hill was an important backer of the New Deal, supporting government programs on public works, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and public employment, as well as being a central figure in supporting medical research and public health programs. One of the centers at the National Institutes of Health is named in his honor, recognizing his lasting contributions. In short, both men were central to the success of the New Deal and the Roosevelt revolution.

How can we understand the liberalism of Sparkman and Hill? Both were members of Big Jim Folsom’s populist wing of the Alabama Democratic Party (Key 1949). Among his many leadership roles in both the House and the Senate, Sparkman chaired the Senate’s Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, and he was the vice presidential nominee of the Democratic Party in 1952. Lister Hill was the son of a prominent surgeon, named in honor of Dr. Joseph Lister who made major advances in antiseptic surgery. Trained as an attorney, Lister served in both the House and the Senate, and he was a coauthor of the Hill-Burton Act, officially known as the Hospital and Health Center Construction Act of 1946.

During the early part of their careers, both Hill and Sparkman were consistent supporters of the New Deal and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and both developed liberal voting records.² Their political paths diverge in the 1950s when both sign the Southern Manifesto in 1954, and both vote against the Civil Rights Act of 1957. As a central part of the new Democratic Party agenda, there

² Perhaps the most committed liberal in the Senate during this period, Paul Douglas of Illinois, provides generous retrospective evaluations of Hill and Sprakman, as well as other southern Democratic supporters of the New Deal in his memoirs (Douglas 1971).
was no longer any room in the Party, or within liberalism, for individuals who opposed the extension of 14th Amendment guarantees to African Americans. Their own voting records shifted toward being more conservative, and their seats are ultimately occupied by individuals who are consistently conservative across a broad range of issues.\(^3\) The decade of the 1950s is a pivot point both in the histories of party politics and in the definition of liberalism. When southern politicians realize that they cannot be liberals and white supremacists, they increasingly adopt positions that are conservative across the board. Moreover, this is not simply a process of replacement, where conservative candidates for office are more likely to be elected. Sitting members of the Senate move their own votes in a decidedly conservative direction. They become even more at odds with the dominant ideological position of the Democratic Party, and thus the Republican Party has a chance to move into the southern political vacuum. This means, however, that the Republican Party will have a more difficult time maintaining its traditional role as the party of Lincoln and civil rights.

In summary, not only liberalism and conservatism, but also the political parties, were redefined by the civil rights movement in American politics. At the beginning of that movement, the parties were relatively homogeneous on issues of the federal activity in the areas of social welfare legislation and the economy, but they were badly divided on issues related to civil rights. Sixty years later, the parties are homogeneous both on issues of civil rights and on issues related to social welfare and the economy. In particular, southern populism that led to

\(^3\) Senator Howell Heflin was Sparkman’s immediate successor. He was a Democrat with a populist orientation who combined support for a mix of liberal and conservative causes
support for social welfare issues in the 1930s and 40s has taken on a conservative point of orientation. As a consequence, the ascendant southern Republicans in the Congress are largely opposed to any increased federal government activity in the areas of economic regulation and social welfare, such as the Affordable Care Act. This leads to several outcomes: a Congress and a population that are more politically polarized, and a unified conservative movement that has been empowered by increased levels of support, particularly from the South.

**Replacement vs. Transformation**

These patterns of partisan transformation raise an important question. To what extent was the change due to the replacement of former office holders by newly elected Senators who better reflect the new realities of race and politics in the nation and in individual states? And to what extent were these changes created by contemporary office holders who have changed their political stripes.

We address these questions by considering the change in ADA scores for single southern Senate seats between 1947 and 1967 – the crucial period in the transformation of the partisan landscape. In 1947, Harry Truman had yet to desegregate the armed forces, and the Democratic Party had yet to add a civil rights plank to its party platform at the 1948 convention. In 1967, by way of contrast, the new position of civil rights within American politics had been redefined. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were in place. The Republican Party had nominated Barry Goldwater who opposed the Civil Rights Act. And in 1964 – the first time a southerner was elected president since the Civil War – the
deep south states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina voted for a Republican candidate.⁴

As we have seen, the biggest change occurred in the South, and Table 2 addresses ideological change for individual Senate seats, irrespective of the office holder. The Senate seats are sorted by the 1947 ADA score, with the most conservative seat listed first and the most liberal seats listed last. The table shows the incredible ideological heterogeneity of the southern delegation in 1947. The southern delegation was solidly Democratic in 1947, but it was neither solidly liberal nor solidly conservative (Key 1949). In contrast, by 1967 the ADA scores lie almost uniformly on the conservative end of the scale. Only Al Gore, Sr. from Tennessee and Ralph Yarborough from Texas had ADA scores above 50. And only one other southern senator, William Fulbright, had a score above 30.

In short, we can see the individual level changes in voting records that gave rise to the aggregate redefinition of the South in national politics. Only two of these senators were Republicans – John Tower had been elected as a Republican and Strom Thurmond changed his party affiliation in 1964. At the beginning of the period, the partisan affiliation of the southern delegation was uniformly Democratic and ideologically heterogeneous. At the end of the period, the southern delegation was moving toward partisan heterogeneity, even though it had become increasingly and much more homogeneously conservative.

The table includes only 21 senate seats because one seat was left vacant in 1947 by the death of Sen. Bilbo in Mississippi. Of the 21 remaining seats, 8 were

⁴The vote of the deep South was, in another sense, a glimmer of things to come. The 1964 was the last election in which a majority of white voters supported the Democratic candidate.
held by the same officeholders throughout the 21 year period. These individuals all
demonstrate more conservative voting records at the end of the period, with an
average adjustment of -55. In contrast, two of the 13 replacement senators actually
demonstrate a more liberal position at the end of the period, and the average
adjustment is -29. In short, we see a remarkable political redefinition of the
southern Democratic Senate delegation, led primarily by partisan change among
existing southern Senators. Not only do they take conservative positions on the
expansion of civil rights and voting rights, but they also adopt a more conservative
position across a range of crucial issues – the issues established by ADA as the best
test of what it means to be liberal versus conservative within a particular session of
the Congress.

Table 3 employs a series of linear models to estimate the trend in each of the
eight senators’ voting scores. For each senator except Lister Hill of Alabama, a
second order polynomial provides the best estimate of the trend. As Figure 3 shows,
the common pattern is a precipitous decline in the ADA score at the beginning of the
period, followed by a slower rate of change at the end of the period. Hill provides
the exception, with a steady rate of decline in liberal voting over the entire 21 year
period.

Summary and Conclusion

In 1947, shortly after the end of World War II, the American South was not
simply the most Democratic region of the country, it was also the most politically
liberal measured on the basis of ADA scores. Nearly 70 years later, it has become
the most conservative region of the country, and Democratic prospects in the region
are severely diminished. One might certainly protest such a statement based on the fact that racial equality had been effectively excluded from the political agenda until 1948. Indeed, New Deal liberalism had failed to advance the Second Revolution in American Politics, brought about by the Civil War and the adoption of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Due process, equal protection, and colorblind politics within the states were unrealized dreams, and the New Deal made only modest symbolic progress in moving the civil rights agenda forward.

The issue is really two-fold. First, liberalism has been redefined and expanded to focus on issues revolving around the 14th Amendment – issues of due process and equal protection. Second, while these issues often carry economic implications – nondiscriminatory hiring practices, affirmative action programs in employment, and so on – their goals are in a sense subsidiary to the early focus of liberalism that promoted a populist agenda. This earlier liberal and populist agenda was racially biased and it also ignored the aspirations of women. The newer liberal agenda has lost its widespread populist economic appeal, and has difficulty in maintaining support among disadvantaged groups within the white population. Perhaps not surprisingly, industrial trade unions are in retreat, and economic inequality has expanded within the larger population.

While progress in civil rights legislation during the 1950s and 1960s was fundamentally dependent on the collaboration and leadership of the Republican Party (Whalen and Whalen 1985; Purdum 2014), the transformation of liberalism

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5 We appropriate the title of the “Second Revolution,” less in the sense of Beard and Beard (1927), but rather in the context of the post-Civil War revisions in the U.S. Constitution to right the wrongs of slavery, the three-fifths compromise, and its failure to create a guaranteed definition of citizenship that was common and inviolable across the States (McPherson 1991).
has also produced striking changes in the nature of conservatism. The conservative party of the 1940s and 1950s was a party of individual freedom, both in terms of economic activity and in terms of civil rights. When the Democratic Party evolved into the party of civil rights, important elements of the Republican Party evolved into the party of a conservative white populist rebellion. Indeed, the southern strategy of Richard Nixon embraced southern whites disaffected by a national government and a Democratic Party that embraced the aspirations of racial minorities, cultural minorities, and women.

In short, by embracing a southern strategy that ultimately attracted major levels of support among whites, the Republican Party compromised its appeal among African Americans in the South and elsewhere. In deep south states like Mississippi, the Democratic candidate for president typically obtains more than 90 percent of the African American vote but less than 20 percent of the white vote (Huckfeldt and Kohfeldt 1987:1). Indeed, in the country as a whole, the Democratic candidate for president has not obtained majority support among whites since 1964.

The elusive element in this contemporary political configuration is the unified representation of the economically disadvantaged population within American politics. Not only is voting in national elections structured by race, but some interests are not fully represented. A conservative Republican party wins majority support among disadvantaged whites, while a liberal Democratic Party wins supermajority support among disadvantaged African Americans and sizeable majorities among other disadvantaged minority groups. Most discussions of the
economic inequality gap in American life focus on economic change, but a close reading of American political history since the end of World War II suggests that political change plays a crucial role as well.
References


Table 1. Senate Votes on the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act: the percentage who provide full support, qualified support, and no support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>1957</th>
<th>1964</th>
<th>1965</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democrats (non-south)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full support</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed support</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no support</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=25*</td>
<td>n=46</td>
<td>n=45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Southern Democrats</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full support</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed support</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no support</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>95.2</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=22*</td>
<td>n=21</td>
<td>n=18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republicans</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full support</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed support</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no support</td>
<td>.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=45*</td>
<td>n=33</td>
<td>n=31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N-sizes are all based on senators who participated in all three votes in each year.
Table 2. Southern delegation ADA scores by Senate seat, 1947 through 1967, sorted by the 1947 score.* Entries are italicized in instances where the same individual served the entire period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1967</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>O'Daniel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Tower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>McKellar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>Stewart</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Baker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia**</td>
<td>Byrd</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Byrd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Overton</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Hoey</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Ervin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Ellender</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Ellender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Robertson</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Spong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas**</td>
<td>McClellan</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>McClellan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Talmadge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida**</td>
<td>Holland</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Holland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Connally</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Yarborough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Maybank</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Thurmond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Russell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Eastland</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Eastland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>Umstead</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Fulbright</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Fulbright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Hill</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Hill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>Sparkman</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Sparkman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Johnston</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Hollings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Smathers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mississippi’s Theodore Bilbo died during his term of office in 1947, and was not rated by the ADA. His successor, John Stennis, had ADA scores of 44 in 1948 and 0 in 1967, for a change of -44.

**Harry Byrd, Jr. succeeded his father – Harry Byrd, Sr. – in 1965.
Table 3. Estimating the trend for the decline in ADA scores among the Southern delegation for those Senators who served at least 20 years beyond 1947. (The standard errors for coefficients are in parentheses.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>time²</th>
<th>Constant</th>
<th>N=years</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>SE of est.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fulbright of Arkansas</td>
<td>-3.23</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>18.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sparkman of Alabama</td>
<td>-7.01</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>104.5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>16.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell of Georgia</td>
<td>-4.86</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>10.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClellan of Arkansas</td>
<td>-2.92</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>10.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastland of Mississippi</td>
<td>-3.85</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>11.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellender of Louisiana</td>
<td>-3.88</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>11.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill of Alabama</td>
<td>-4.21</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>15.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland of Florida</td>
<td>-4.18</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>11.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 1.** Ties based on votes regarding final passage, jury amendment, and Hells Canyon Dam.

The first digit identifies one of six unique voting blocs, and the second identifies the (1) conservative, (2) moderate, and (3) liberal subgroups within the blocs based on ADA scores. The senators in each subgroup can be found in Appendix A.
Figure 2. Senate ADA quintiles by region, 1948-2008.
Figure 2 (continued).
Figure 2 (continued).
Figure 3. Estimated ideological trends for southern Senators.