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Construction of the Racist Republican

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CONSTRUCTION OF THE RACIST REPUBLICAN

by

BARBARA LANE

Under the Direction of John McMillian

Abstract

Minorities have gained more civil rights with the cooperation of both major political parties in the United States, yet the actions of the Republican Party are often conflated with racism. This is partially the result of clashes in ideological visions, which explain the different political positions of partisans. However, during his 1980 run for the White House, a concerted effort was made to tie Ronald Reagan to racism, as he was accused of pandering to white Southerners. Therefore, this thesis also focuses on “Southern strategies” used by both the Republican and Democratic parties to exploit race, which have spilled into the new millennium.

INDEX WORDS: Racist Republican, Southern Strategy, Lee Atwater, Barrack Obama, Ronald Reagan, Southern exceptionalism, Jimmy Carter, 1980 Campaign, Neshoba Fair

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE RACIST REPUBLICAN

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BARBARA LANE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Cheryl and Michael Donnelly who taught me the value of getting a good education. Thank you the most for raising me to always think for myself.

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Thanks goes to my committee and the faculty of Georgia State University for entertaining my ideas and helping me explore my own ideological foundations. I have appreciated the opportunity to learn, which was the core purpose of my going back to graduate school and engaging with this project.

“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” -- T. S. Eliot

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: REPUBLICANS AND RACE	1
I. <u>Statement Of Purpose</u>	1
II. <u>Historiography and Context</u>	7
III. <u>Sources Used</u>	10
CHAPTER ONE: REAGAN'S FOUNDATION	11
CHAPTER TWO: STARTING A REVOLUTION	35
CHAPTER THREE: SOUTHERN STRATEGIES	58
CONCLUSION:	89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	98

INTRODUCTION: RACE AND POLITICS

I. Statement of Purpose

In 2008, Senator Barack Obama became the first African American to win the office of President of the United States. If one is to believe polling data, despite a hard fought election, the majority of people in the country, including many conservatives, felt optimistic about the new leader's centrist vision.¹ This does not mean that President Obama would not encounter strident—or even immediate—opposition to his political agenda from the Republican Party or that the *National Review* would start publishing columns singing his praises. It does mean that long after he famously rejected crass factionalism in the 2004 convention speech that launched him onto the national stage, many Americans who had not supported Barack Obama at the ballot box expressed a sense of good will for the charismatic commander-in-chief and a sense of real hope that his vision of unity would prove to be about something more than party rhetoric.²

¹Jeffery M. Jones, "Obama's Initial Approval Ratings in Historical Context," *Gallup*, January 26, 2009, accessed February 21, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113968/obama-initial-approval-ratings-historical-context.aspx> "At the outset of his presidency, Obama has majority approval from all ideological groups, including 83% of self-identified liberals, 75% of moderates, and 52% of conservatives." Registering much lower opposition from the opposing party than either George W. Bush or Bill Clinton had enjoyed at the exact same point, "Republicans are more likely to approve than disapprove of Obama's performance thus far, according to an average of the first four days of Gallup tracking on Obama job approval."

Frank Newport, "Obama Wins 83% Approval Rating for Transition," *Gallup*, January 19, 2009, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113824/obama-wins-83-approval-rating-transition.aspx> Obama had an "extraordinarily high 78% favorable rating" in January 2008, which suggests a great deal of good will from the general electorate at the start of his presidency. (George W. Bush's favorable rating running up to his first inauguration was only 62% in January 2001.) Obama enjoyed an 83% approval rating after he named his new team. Paul Steinhauser, "Poll: America's Honeymoon with Obama Continues," *CNN.com*, last modified December 24, 2008, accessed January 19, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/12/24/obama.approval/> CNN polling director Keating Holland noted Obama "having a better honeymoon with the American public than any incoming president in the past three decades" including Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan. Obama "can give away 20 or 30 points and still have a majority of the country on his side."

The Economist, "Getting back on Track: Barack Obama is poised to become president, bolstered by enormous public good will," January 19, 2009. With "stratospheric" poll numbers, "Mr. Obama has repositioned himself as a centrist by appointing a team that even a majority of John McCain voters appear quite comfortable with."

² Barrack Obama, "Transcript: Illinois Senate Candidate Barack Obama," *The Washington Post*, July 27, 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A19751-2004Jul27.html> "There's not a black America and white America and Latino America and Asian America: there's the United States of America."

Ultimately—and probably inevitably—the hyper enthusiasm associated with a historic inauguration cooled as the president got on with the business of governing and pushed through sweeping legislation with little to no bipartisan consensus.³ The emergence of a fiscally conservative Tea Party in 2009—and certainly the special election of Tea Party endorsed candidate Scott Brown to replace Senator Ted Kennedy—portended good fortune for Republicans in the 2010 midterms.⁴ Sweeping turnover in the House demonstrated serious pushback against the president’s policies. Despite the existence of principled disagreement over items of political contention such as government spending on an expansive healthcare program, many Democrats and their surrogates linked this pushback to racism.⁵

Indeed, by the end of his first term, President Obama seemed to be in a precarious political position with white voters. Per low approval numbers, he had shed millions of former supporters. He would win reelection in 2012 with fewer electoral and popular votes than he had secured in 2008.⁶ The key to his success was retaining every minority group in the Obama

Deborah Atwater, “Senator Barack Obama: The Rhetoric of Hope and the American Dream,” *Journal of Black Studies*, 38, no. 2 (Nov. 2007): 123. The substance of Obama’s words had the power to reach across all demographics to get Americans to “believe that we are more alike than we are different with a common destiny and a core set of values....”

³ James E. Campbell, “The Seats in Trouble Forecast of the 2010 Elections to the U.S. House,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 43, no. 4 (Oct 2010): 627. Opposition was “relegated to the sidelines” by a “very liberal president and congress.”

⁴ Bart Stupak, “What Democrats Should Do Now: How Should the White House Respond to Republican Scott Brown’s Victory in the Bay State?” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2010. “People across the country are frustrated and feel as though their voices are being ignored in the legislative process. That’s the lesson all elected officials must derive from the Senate race in Massachusetts.”

⁵ Jennifer Epstein, “Jim Moran: Racism fueled Democrats’ midterm losses,” *Politico*, January 27, 2011. Accessed January 21, 2014. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0111/48315.html> Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA) said Democrats lost midterm seats because many voters “don’t want to be governed by an African American.”

Joan Walsh, “Too Much Tea Party Racism,” *Salon*, March 20, 2010, accessed January 11, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2010/03/20/tea_party_racism/. The Tea Party movement, closely linked to the Republican Party, is “disturbingly racist and reactionary.”

Kate Zernike, “N.A.A.C.P. Examines Race in the Tea Party Movement,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2010, accessed January 11, 2014, http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/20/naacp-releases-report-on-tea-party/?_r=0 On behalf of the N.A.A.C.P., weeks before the 2010 midterms, Leonard Ziskind links Tea Party groups supporting Republican candidates to white supremacists.

⁶ Politico, <http://www.politico.com/2012-election/map/#/President/2012/>

coalition—in attracting new Hispanic voters to the polls—by decisively large margins.⁷ In fifty-nine predominantly black voting districts in Philadelphia, not a single vote was cast for the president’s Republican opponent Mitt Romney. Nationally, ninety three percent of African American voters pulled the lever for the incumbent.⁸

Such massive consolidation of minority votes behind President Obama and the Democratic Party invites the question “why.” There has been no shortage of opinion offered by pundits. Many feel the Party of Lincoln projects an image of racial exclusivity with limited appeal to non-white voters.⁹ Additionally, the individual liberty ethos that drives Republican free market ideology has at times clashed with the special interests of liberally minded, minority out-groups.¹⁰ For those who have felt crushed under the weight of racial bias, a “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” mentality to improve one’s material conditions has seemed a woefully inadequate prescription for change.¹¹ Those politics that aren’t bent on correcting long-standing

⁷ Julia Preston and John H. Cushman, Jr., “Obama to Permit Young Migrants to Remain in U.S.” *The New York Times*, June 15, 2010, accessed January 21, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/16/us/us-to-stop-deporting-some-illegal-immigrants.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 The president made a “clear play for a crucial voting bloc” via a summer executive order that changed immigration policy.

Kimberley A. Strassel, “The GOP Turnout Myth,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 22, 2012, accessed February 21, 2013. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324352004578133120431803606.html> The president generated more minority votes in some key states such as in Florida where more Hispanics turned out for the Democrats in 2012 than in 2008.

New York Times, President Election Polls, <http://elections.nytimes.com/2012/results/president/exit-polls>

⁸ Miriam Hill, Andrew Seldman, John Duchneski, “In 59 Philadelphia voting divisions, Mitt Romney got zero votes,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 12, 2012, accessed February 21, 2013, http://www.philly.com/philly/news/year-in-review/20121112_In_59_Philadelphia_voting_wards_Mitt_Romney_got_zero_votes.html?c=r

⁹ Will Dunham and Jackie Frank, “Republicans say Party Needs Revamp After Romney Drubbing,” *Reuters*, November 18, 2012, accessed February 21, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/18/us-usa-politics-republicans-idUSBRE8AH0GA20121118>

Zerlina Maxwell, “How long will the right’s recent love affair with minorities last,” *The Grio*, November 20, 2012, accessed April 28, 2013. “The Republican party has to think on its feet before the next cycle to remake their tarnished image as the party of old white people.”

¹⁰ Jonathan Haidt. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 204. “Liberals sometimes go beyond equality of rights to pursue equality of outcomes, which cannot be obtained in a capitalist system.”

¹¹ West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. New York: Beacon Press, 2001, 14. “They tell black people to see themselves as agents, not victims... [but] to call on black people to be agents makes sense only if we also examine the dynamics of this victimization against which their agency will, in part, be exercised.”

inequities can thus be viewed as tolerating—or even fostering—racial discrimination.¹² In fact, pundits and politicians on the Left have so regularly implied—or explicitly tied— notions of preserving white privilege to Republicans that the negative conflation of racism and the GOP has become quite common.¹³ This discourse feeds into a vision of Republicans sheltering racists, which leads to the “racist Republican” stereotype.¹⁴

Challenging the accuracy of this perception, Alex Tabarrok, a George Mason University economist, culled the General Social Survey to try to determine if bigotry can be empirically connected to party affiliation. His research showed “some Americans are racists but racists split about evenly across the parties.”¹⁵ In a follow up study using similar methodology, George Washington University political scientist John Sides confirmed “neither party has a monopoly on racists.”¹⁶ By measuring the number of people who hold beliefs about personality traits having racial determiners, both Tabarrok and Sides debunked the idea of the more prevalent “racist

¹² Tim Wise, *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2009). Racism should always be viewed as “both an idea and a structure of institutions in which policies, practices and procedures produce inequitable outcomes.”

Jonathan Haidt. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 161. “On the left, fairness often implies equality, but on the right it means proportionality.... even if that guarantees unequal outcomes.”

¹³ Jimmy Carter, interview by Brian Williams, *Nightly News with Brian Williams*, NBC, September 12, 2009. “I think an overwhelming portion of the intensely demonstrated animosity toward President Barack Obama is based on the fact that he is a black man.”

Marv Dumon, “Video: MSNBC’s Chris Matthews accuses Romney campaign of racism,” *Examiner*, November 5, 2012, <http://www.examiner.com/article/video-msnbc-s-chris-matthews-accuses-romney-campaign-of-racism>
Terry McMillan, “Author Terry McMillan on Why Mitt Romney is the Wrong Man for America,” *The Daily Beast*, November 2, 2012, Accessed February 21, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/02/author-terry-mcmillan-on-why-mitt-romney-is-the-wrong-man-for-america.html> McMillian writes “about just how racist the entire [2012] campaign season has been and how so many people either don’t see, or refuse to see, the real truth behind the Republicans and Mitt Romney.”

Morgan Freeman, interview by Piers Morgan, *Piers Morgan Show*, CNN, September 23, 2011, www.cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/bestoftv/2011/09/23/piers-morgan-freeman-obama.cnn.html Even the voice of God—iconic Hollywood actor Morgan Freeman—has expressed a belief that the majority of opposition to President Barack Obama’s political agenda is racially motivated.

¹⁴ W.W. Houston, “Grand Racist Party,” *The Economist*, August 22, 2012. On August 18, 2012, progressive political television host Chris Hayes articulated what is a broadly ingrained opinion on the Left: “It is undeniably the case that racist Americans are almost entirely in one political coalition and not the other.”

¹⁵ Alex Tabarrok, “Racism by Political Party,” *Marginal Revolution*, August 19, 2012, Accessed January 27, 2013, <http://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2012/08/racism-by-political-party.html>

¹⁶ John Sides, “Are Racists Only in One Political Party?” *Washington Monthly*, August 20, 2012, Accessed March 9, 2013, http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2012/08/are_racists_only_in_one_politi039322.php

Republican” as anything more than an emotional assumption that is not supported by hard data. However, for the purposes of this thesis, which is intent on understanding the “racist Republican” as a political construct, it is essential to recognize that some intellectuals who use an equality-is-outcome lens have created much more robust ways to identify racial bias emanating from different political groups. For instance, Cornel West’s understanding of racism relies on an entrenched cultural legacy in the United States that depends on oppressive economic hierarchies closely related to the running of a capitalist society. Per West’s vision, racism can be perceived within policy positions that do not increase economic equality but undermine the special interests of minorities. For example, West purports the dismantling of welfare programs is racially intolerant because such actions have “genocidal effects on the black poor.”¹⁷ Therefore, when looking through West’s prism, one finds a different source of materials than those Tabarrok and Sides measured, with which the “racist Republican” is made.

This is true even though using positions on policy initiatives to evidence racism is a dicey prospect. Opinions on policy vary amongst individual members of any political party in the United States as well as between the parties themselves. For example, a 2011 Pew study relying on cluster analysis demonstrated Democrats do not share monolithic political values about how to confront issues containing elements of race, just as Republicans are not in complete concordance about the role of government in addressing the needs of the poor.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is rational to say members of political parties share some sense of ideological orientation that influences their political thought. How one interprets racism can thereby impact how one

¹⁷ Cornel West, *Race Matters*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 58

¹⁸ *Pew Research Center*, “Beyond Red vs. Blue: Political Typology,” May 4, 2011, Accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/Beyond-Red-vs-Blue-The-Political-Typology.pdf>, 30, “Solid Liberals and Post-Moderns – both mostly white and relatively upscale – have very different attitudes about the factors limiting black progress and whether further efforts are needed to achieve racial equality.”

interprets the intent behind political actions addressing issues that are viewed as having a racial component. This idea demands closer consideration.

Therefore, Chapter One of this thesis looks at the foundations of conservative reasoning deployed by Republican icons, especially Ronald Reagan, to spur action (or inaction) when addressing issues of particular importance to African Americans.¹⁹ The goal is to determine if Republican ideology itself is inherently inimical to perceived minority interests as most often framed by civil rights groups. Second, the “Reagan Revolution” resulted in a landslide victory for Ronald Reagan in 1980, yet he attracted little black support. It is important to explore why Ronald Reagan was an attractive candidate for many white voters but not many black voters. Chapter Two focuses on perceptions about Reagan’s—and thus conservatives’—image and rhetoric. Finally, Nixon political strategist Kevin Phillips has been credited with verbalizing a Republican “Southern strategy” that has relied on the exploitation of “the prevailing cleavages in American voting behavior” that fall along ethnic and cultural lines.²⁰ Chapter Three delves deeper into Reagan’s perceived “Southern strategy” of appealing to white racists in 1980—as well as various policy positions over the course of his career—while also examining a Democratic “Southern strategy” potentially used by Carter to exploit the racial fears of blacks for political advantage. The “Southern strategies” of both parties have relied to some extent on the belief that the South was, is, and remains a peculiarly racist region of the United States.

All of the issues explored in this thesis—the perceived racial component to (and general orientation of) political ideologies, the exploitation of race by Republicans, and the exploitation of race by Democrats—have contributed to the “racist Republican” construct that exists in

¹⁹ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013). Thurber’s work shows a consistent neoliberal ideological underpinning driving 20th century Republican politics that has impacted the party’s image with minorities. This underpinning existed for Ronald Reagan as well as other conservatives.

²⁰ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969), 39-40.

political discourse today. They also confirm that even after electing an African American as president, the United States is neither a united nor a post-racial country. This is why attaching a political opponent with the stigma of racism continues to be an effective campaign tactic.

II. Historiography and Context

Scholarship about conservative politics exploded after the 1980 ascendancy of the New Right. Historians like Kim Philips Fein, Lisa McGirr, David Farber, Steven A. Shull, Rick Perlstein, Kevin Kruse and others have closely studied Republican positioning in the twentieth century, which has shed light on individual players in the Republican Party, grassroots mobilizations, and the ideological framework used to create Republican policy agendas. Though all of these historians touch to some extent on campaign strategies, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights and Taxes on American Politics* by Thomas Byrnes Edsall and Mary Edsall is the seminal work exploring how conservative politicians like Ronald Reagan allegedly and covertly exploited race and class divides for political advantage. With direct appeals to racism no longer viable in “virtually” any region of the country by 1980, the Edsalls have posited Republicans learned to fly “the banner of a conservative ‘egalitarianism’” to tap into white populism.²¹ The possible payoffs of this strategy first came into focus when Barry Goldwater carried “the most anti-black electorate in the nation without facing public condemnation” by giving the South an ideological “cloak with which to protect racial segregation.”²² This was the first Republican “Southern strategy” per contemporary understanding of the term.

Building on this platform, scholars and journalists like Glenn Feldman, Thomas Schaller and Sam Tanenhaus who belong to the “Southern strategy” school of thought, have continued to

²¹ Thomas Burne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 41.

isolate the South as persistently exceptional on matters of race, which thereby determines political outcomes in the region: the “South’s partisan realignment from Democratic to Republican is about race... and a ‘politics of emotion.’”²³ The persistence of this narrative promotes a simple syllogism used today in the construction of the “racist Republican”: The South is peculiarly racist. The majority of people who live in the South are Republicans. The majority of Republicans are peculiarly racists. This straw man is particularly useful when describing the “Southernization” of the Republican Party that spills into national contests.²⁴

Indeed, James C. Cobb has described the South as persistently “characterized primarily in terms of its perceived differences from the rest of the country,” but there is a counter-narrative.²⁵ Even though it is undisputable that the South was distinctly different in the Jim Crow Period, C. Vann Woodward cautioned decades ago against oversimplifying American history by isolating the South’s racial sins when there have always been “many parallel lines of prejudice and discrimination against the Negro in the North.”²⁶ *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, a collection of essays written by leading scholars in the field of conservative studies, disputes oversimplifications and overgeneralizations in historical analysis that are born out of a persistent magnification of Southern differences.²⁷ For example, Crespino and Lassiter have flatly challenged any “distorted account of political realignment that attributes the rise of modern

²³ Glenn Feldman, introduction to *Painting Dixie Red: When, Where, Why, and How the South Became Republican*, ed. Glenn Feldman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 5. “How exactly did the South become Republican? There is much in the unsettling answer to suggest that, in fact, the South did not become Republican so much as the Republican Party became Southern.”

²⁵ James C. Cobb, *The South and America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), xvii

²⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 113.

²⁷ Lassiter, Matthew D. and Joseph Crespino, “Introduction: The End of Southern History,” in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. by Mathew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 12. “Certainly by the second half of the twentieth century, if not before as well, focusing on the South’s aberrant qualities compared to the rest of the United States obscures much more than it reveals about fundamental questions of modern American history.”

conservatism primarily to white southern backlash against the civil rights movement.”²⁸ Further, Matthew Lassiter’s book *Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South: The Silent Majority* highlights a political transformation in the South driven more by a middle-class corporate economy than a steadfast commitment to the color line.²⁹ Naming Kevin Phillips “the false prophet of reactionary populism,” Lassiter has widened his analysis of Sunbelt politics to include the essential suburbs.³⁰ This thinking is in line with Timothy N. Thurber who has written, “Claims by pundits and historians that the GOP adopted a ‘Southern strategy’ mischaracterize what happened in the mid-1960s.”³¹ After all, when Richard Nixon tried to blatantly tap into white backlash during the 1970 midterms, the “dynamics of class and race revealed that the white electorate in Dixie was more varied and complex than Phillips and others realized.”³² Therefore, this short-lived strategy failed miserably and was quickly abandoned.

Therefore, though race has certainly had a large role to play in American politics that should never be dismissed, it is not iconoclastic to suggest that by 1980, successful conservatives like Ronald Reagan emphasized Sunbelt concerns over Southern concerns to win the White House. Moreover, though the “Southern strategy” school of thought insists white Southern voters continue to listen in the New Millennium for “coded language” to insure the maintenance of a static racial culture in the United States, the Southern realignment and the Republican Party itself is much more complex than this mode of thinking. To promote a marriage between racism and conservative ideology in 2014—or a vision of racial innocence for the Democratic Party—is to

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 227. “A grassroots approach to the political transformation of the South reveals that the regional base of the Republican Party always depended more on the middle-class corporate economy than on the working class politics of racial backlash.”

³⁰ Ibid., 251.

³¹ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP’s Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 281. “Nixon dissolved notions of a distinct South.”

³² Ibid., 347. “Republicans discovered that the Nixon and Wallace constituencies did not readily mix.”

construct an often ahistorical, “racist Republican” stereotype that is more a useful tool that can be leveraged for political gain than an actual reality.

III Sources

The ideas within this thesis have been balanced on the existing historiography about conservatives and the interplay of race with politics from 1964 to the present day. There has been a special emphasis on work that offers analysis from different ideological perspectives about the reasoning and tactics used by notable Republican players, especially Ronald Reagan, when dealing with issues pertinent to minorities, which includes not just scholarly work but articles from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Nation*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *The Chicago Defender*, *Ebony* and other such secondary sources.

Additionally, Jonathan Haidt, Yuval Levin, and Thomas Sowell have brilliantly framed contrasting ideological visions that effectively explain many of the philosophical clashes between Left and Right. Their materials were especially useful when discerning how non-fixed definitions of terms like “equality” influence interpretations of political intent. Scholars like Cornel West, Melvin Oliver and George Lipsitz have provided insight into why minorities feel the way they do about conservative ideology, race and specific legislation.

Finally, oceans of ink have been devoted to Ronald Reagan. Lou Cannon, Laurence I. Barrett, Jonathan M. Schoenwald, Frank van der Linden, Sean Wilentz, and Craig Shirley have all informed this thesis with their analysis of the former president. Reagan himself left behind a robust record of his opinions in speeches, radio broadcasts, letters, diaries, and an autobiography that have also been consulted. To address Reagan’s first successful bid for the White House, material about lesser figures like Lee Atwater who influenced Republican campaign strategy—

and who continues to influence the maintenance of the “racist Republican” construct—was analyzed. Most helpful were the many primary documents from the 1980 campaign, which are housed in the Reagan Library and Museum in Simi Valley, California.

CHAPTER ONE: REAGAN’S FOUNDATION

President Ronald Reagan is a giant in twentieth century American politics.³³ Despite the serious Iran-Contra scandal that rocked his second term, a CBS/New York Times poll from January 1989 showed he passed the baton to George H. W. Bush with a 68 percent public approval rating.³⁴ When he died in 2004, tens of thousands of people showed their enduring affection by journeying to the nation’s capital and quietly shuffling past his coffin.³⁵ Millions more tuned into his televised funeral and sunset memorial.³⁶ Conversely, knots of activists spurned social decorum to stage minor protests and register discontent with the Reagan legacy.³⁷

As years continue to pass, feelings expressed in public about this man—whether for good or ill—are amplified in the crucible of collective memory. This was certainly evident on February 6, 2014 at the Reagan Library and Museum in Simi Valley. Many who had lived through what they felt were halcyon days of a conservative ascendancy gathered to mark the fortieth president’s 103rd birthday. The Marine Corps band struck up a John Philip Sousa soundtrack that lifted spirits higher than the grey weather. A Tiger Squadron swooped low in the sky, flashed

³³ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2011), 3. “No other figure loomed larger on the political stage than Reagan or impressed his convictions and personality onto the political culture more forcefully.”

³⁴ Bootie Cosgrove-Mather, “A Look Back at the Polls,” *CBS News*, June 7, 2004, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-look-back-at-the-polls/>

³⁵ William Branigin, “Thousands Bid Farewell to Reagan in Funeral Service,” *The Washington Post*, June 11, 2004, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A34105-2004Jun11.html>

³⁶ Michael Starr, “Fox Wins with Reagan,” June 15, 2004, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://nypost.com/2004/06/15/fox-wins-with-reagan/> In addition to the millions who tuned into Reagan’s afternoon funeral at the National Cathedral, Nielsen estimated 35 million people watched his primetime memorial service in the evening.

³⁷ Agencies, “Reagan’s Grand Funeral Marked with Protests,” *China Daily*, June 12, 2004, accessed February 11, 2014, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-06/12/content_338910.htm

the underbelly of a tight formation, and roared off again like jungle cats stalking game on the horizon.³⁸ Raucous applause turned into a warm welcome for the first speaker: a brigadier general with ribbons lining half his chest. He regaled the audience with well-heeled anecdotes about the Gipper's courage. After being shot, the President had famously quipped to his wife, "Honey, I forgot to duck."³⁹

Then William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education and drug czar, stepped behind the lectern. Thanking the general for his opening, he pondered what Reagan might have said if in the hospital about to be wheeled into surgery in 2014: "Gee, Nancy, I sure hope our application for healthcare.gov got through?"⁴⁰ The crowd exploded with laughter, but most of Bennett's keynote did not reference politics in the New Millennium. Instead, he recalled the decent man for whom he had worked—for whom many of the people present had voted—as an able commander-in-chief who hadn't shied away from the task of leading. Heads bobbed up and down in the audience. These people innately understood Reagan's vision of strength, honor and duty, which was underscored by the presence of Secretary Bennett's Princeton educated son: a young man listening to the speech in a polished marine's uniform. There were visible reactions to revolving themes of patriotism, which revealed deeply held convictions worthy of action for many conservatives—articles of faith extending well beyond politics—that help Republicans win elections. If this is true—and if one is to assume political ideologies are about something more than base material interests—it is essential to understand how values influenced the voters who put men like Reagan into public office. Did his election have anything to do with racism?

³⁸ Fred Ryan, "President Reagan's Birthday Celebration," presentation *The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation*, Simi Valley, CA, February 6, 2011. The chairman of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library stood behind the podium's microphone and pointed up. "As the president would say, that is the sound of freedom."

³⁹ John W. Bullard, Jr., "President Reagan's Birthday Celebration," presentation at *The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation*, Simi Valley, CA, February 6, 2011

⁴⁰ William Bennett, "President Reagan's Birthday Celebration," presentation at *The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation*, Simi Valley, CA, February 6, 2011

Though some decry polarization trends within the American electorate, it is also important to note that party affiliations have long been important in countries with representative governments.⁴¹ As far back as 1770 when the United States was but a collection of dissatisfied colonies with various interests pushing against prevailing powers, British MP Edmund Burke was arguing political factionalism is necessary to affect societal change. This is because “whilst men are linked together, they easily and speedily communicate the alarm of an evil design. They are enabled to fathom it with common counsel, and to oppose it with united strength.”⁴² When such men are unacquainted with collective principles, talents, and dispositions, “it is evidently impossible that they can act a public part with uniformity, perseverance, or efficacy.”⁴³ In the same spirit, economist Paul Krugman has argued, “to be a progressive, then, means being a partisan.”⁴⁴ But why choose which party? Why vote which way?

As neuroscience continues to develop, there is a growing body of evidence that confirms what Edmund Burke intuitively believed more than two hundred years ago: people are creatures of passion as much as they are masters of logic, so the heart and the head “think” in tandem.⁴⁵ Rose McDermott thus posited in *Perspectives on Politics* that political scientists need to adjust their analyses to take into account the fact that emotion and reason are closely interdependent: “one

⁴¹ Peter Coy, “Political Polarization: It’s Worse than you Think,” *Bloomberg Business Week*, October 18, 2013, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2013-10-18/political-polarization-its-worse-than-you-think> “Political polarization has increased since the 1980s....”

⁴² Edmund Burke, *Thoughts on the Causes of the Present Discontents and the Two Speeches on America*. Ed. E. J. Payne, Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc. 1990, 1.1.142, accessed February 12, 2014, <http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Burke/brkSWv1c1a.html#Vol. 1, Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents, continued>

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.1.142

⁴⁴ Paul Krugman, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 268. “The only way a progressive agenda can be enacted is if Democrats have both the presidency and a large enough majority in Congress to overcome Republican opposition.”

⁴⁵ Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Left and Right* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 57- 60. “As Burke’s contemporary William Hazlitt put it: ‘[Burke] knew that man had affections and passions and powers of imagination, as well as hunger and thirst and the sense of heat and cold.... He knew that the rules that form the basis of private morality are not founded in reason, that is, in the abstract properties of those things which are the subjects of them, but in the nature of man, and his capacity of being affected by certain things from habit, from imagination, and sentiment, as well as from reason.’”

cannot exist without the other.”⁴⁶ Rationalized feelings assign value to the political mechanisms that people think will most enrich their lives, and political movements are born from a root desire to live within a society that embodies the standards that various members deem worthy. As a consequence, when progressive polemicist Thomas Frank once observed “because some artist decides to shock the hicks by dunking Jesus in urine, the entire planet must remake itself along the lines preferred by Republican Party, USA,” he wasn’t completely wrong.⁴⁷ Values matter, and individuals have a deep sense of what is sacred that governs their reactions to every topic, from art to religion to party politics. This does not mean that voters are tricked or manipulated by emotion into voting against their best interests. On the contrary—whether they cast their lot with the GOP or the Democratic Party—people reason from different premises, often implicit, that inform their understanding of what their best interests might be.⁴⁸ This is because “people bind themselves into political teams that share moral narratives. Once they accept a particular narrative, they become blind to alternative moral worlds.”⁴⁹

Additionally, according to an extensive study conducted by left-leaning academics Jonathan Haidt, Jesse Graham, and Brian Nosek, many on the Left misconstrue the motives and reactions of those on the Right because they honestly cannot relate to the interplay of emotion and logic expressed in things like the Reagan narrative.⁵⁰ Instead of seeming heroic, President Reagan often sounded to liberals as “completely unconcerned about the welfare of drug addicts, poor

⁴⁶ Rose McDermott, “The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 4 (Dec. 2004): 692.

⁴⁷ Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 5.

⁴⁸ Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles, Revised Edition* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 3.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), XXIII.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 334. Many liberals “actively reject [conservative] concerns as immoral.” Self-described liberals often incorrectly predicted conservative responses to moral questions and could not correctly process conservative intent. (Conservatives were much more likely to correctly predict liberal responses.)

people, and gay people. He [was] more interested in fighting wars and telling people how to run their sex lives” than he was in creating a just country of equal citizens.⁵¹ Thereby, how people process morality can in part explain how movements like the Reagan Revolution are so often characterized in wildly divergent ways by different groups of American voters.

To further delve into the impact of Moral Foundations Theory, consider a core belief of the Left is that fairness is achieved by creating equality, but those on the Right tend to feel “proportional outcomes” are more fair.⁵² These are ideological beliefs that are sincerely rationalized, but there are hazards when making even noble abstracts with no fixed definitions into the concrete policy goals of partisans because dissonance is associated with the different foundational forms of reasoning used to reach certain conclusions about morality. In simpler terms, visions of what equality itself actually *is* conflict, so voters interpret the intent and ultimate consequences of “equality”—and thus “equality politics”—in vastly different ways. Ultimately, this, too, contributes to the construction of—and belief in—the “racist Republican.”

To think about the hazards of different ideological visions in American politics, take into account a favorite, canonical short story “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut. Here a fascist dystopia is created when all are made “equal” through artificial means.⁵³ Greatly lauded in William Buckley’s *National Review*, the piece’s overriding theme seems obvious to conservatives: government imposed equality is ridiculously oppressive.⁵⁴ However, a more liberal reading of the well-known plot, which was written by a socialist satirist, can undercut this

⁵¹ Ibid., 335

⁵² Ibid., 161

⁵³ Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron,” *Welcome to the Monkey House* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), 7-14. Innate talents are neutralized for all characters via different government imposed handicaps such as bags on the faces of the pretty or weights that hold down the strong.

⁵⁴ John J Miller, “Vonnegut, RIP,” *National Review*, April 12, 2007, accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/140655/vonnegut-rip/john-j-miller> “At any rate, Vonnegut was also the author of ‘Harrison Bergeron,’ a wonderful short story that makes the utterly conservative point that forced equality is the enemy of freedom.”

interpretation. Despite the hyper-egalitarian environment in which he was raised, the story's protagonist appears intent on using his considerable talents to lord over others.⁵⁵ Therefore, neutralizing Harrison Bergeron's advantages is *necessary* in an ethical society concerned with closing unjust performance gaps and leveling the classes.

These contrasting readings, which depend wholly on how one approaches the text, resonate powerfully and differently for Americans with dissimilar foundational feelings about egalitarianism. There is more than one way to see equality, and it is difficult to reach true consensus on the meaning of even a short piece of fiction because it is hard to broaden one's underlying emotional understanding of certain concepts once they become fixed by emotional attachment. Yet people—both unconsciously and deliberately—persist in using narrow interpretive lenses in politics that do not allow for alternate moral matrices. This practice often distorts political analysis in a realm of emotional half-truths born from conflicting values visions.

For example, having been reduced by LBJ's campaign machine into a crazed zealot, Senator Barry Goldwater—the man widely credited with shifting the Republican Party to the conservative wing from which Reagan would lead it—observed years after losing his bid for the presidency, “If I didn't know Goldwater in 1964, and I had to depend on the press, I'd have voted against the son of a bitch myself.”⁵⁶ Though it's important to understand part of the Democrats' strategy had been to turn Goldwater into a caricature, many journalists really believed—honestly *felt*—that the Arizonan running for the highest office in the land was “a fascist, a racist, a trigger-happy warmonger, a nuclear madman,” when they helped brand him as

⁵⁵ When Harrison Bergeron throws off the shackles that reduce his abilities and make him “equal” to everyone else, he cries, “I am the Emperor! Everybody must do what I say at once!” This possible tyranny is halted by Diana Moon Clampers, the Handicapper General, who murders Bergeron and his consort. All are “equal” again, and life is returned to “normal.”

⁵⁶ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 320.

such.⁵⁷ This was true despite Goldwater's long history as a compassionate capitalist whose main issue as an Arizona politician had been to turn back New Deal encroachments on private enterprise and individual freedom, not to blow up the free world or to stop the progression of civil rights.⁵⁸ To further complicate matters, some intellectuals have explored how internalized attitudes about contradictory currents in modern political life can form the basis for political coalitions that capitalize on singular issues. For example, Thomas and Mary Edsall have portrayed race as the main driver of Republican—or, more accurately, *conservative*—appeals to voters, which they have contended broadened an anti-government coalition in 1968 that would be exploited by Republicans running for office later. That year George Wallace, a Southern segregationist, conducted a racialized campaign against liberal initiatives like busing and other Great Society programs that benefitted poor blacks. The Edsalls said Wallace's success with some voters cracked the electoral door for some Republicans who did not mind using Wallace's populist tactics to eventually take over the executive branch of government.⁵⁹

To some extent, there is merit in this argument because race mattered to the exclusion of other issues for some voters in the 1960s, but it is much too narrow a view for analyzing broader political trends. It does not allow for the myriad of “social issues” or “values” that prompt the vast American middle to support one candidate over another outside of any social extreme.⁶⁰ In

⁵⁷ Bart Barnes, “Barry Goldwater, GOP Hero, Dies,” *Washington Post*, May 30, 1998, A01, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwater30.htm>

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, “Origins of the Conservative Ascendancy: Barry Goldwater's Early Senate Career and the De-Legitimization of Organized Labor,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (Dec. 2008), 696. “The image of Goldwater as a trigger-happy cold warrior is more a product of Lyndon B. Johnson's 1964 presidential campaign against Goldwater than his actual politics.... Goldwater targeted Keynesian fiscal policy, intrusive government planning, and a politically active labor movement as the main threats to the American body politic.”

⁵⁹ Thomas Burne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 78. “Wallace helped to put in place the foundation of what ten years later would become a groundswell of discontent... essential to the strengthening of Republican presidential prospects.”

⁶⁰ Ben J. Wattenberg, *Values Matter Most* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 12-13. In *The Real Majority*, which Wattenberg and R. Scammon published in 1970, they argued, “unless the Democrats paid serious attention to that

other words, though racial discord was certainly important in 1968—and Richard Nixon and George Wallace used some of the same conservative language when campaigning—there were multiple issues being processed in multiple ways by voters with multiple visions throughout the sixties and into other decades. After all, in 1952, Republican Dwight Eisenhower had been able to chip away four states from the “solid South” block though neither candidate had emphasized race in that early election.⁶¹ Additionally, members of the States’ Rights Party of 1948, which had been formed purely to protest the important civil rights initiatives put forth by President Truman, had returned to voting for Democrats, which means the “racist vote” had not gone into the GOP column.⁶² Yet even in the Deep South, Eisenhower won many districts.⁶³ This showed as V. O. Key had observed in 1949: “[the South’s] rate of evolution may [have seemed] glacial but fundamental shifts in the conditions [were] taking place.”⁶⁴

That said, four years after Dwight Eisenhower retired, and four years before the American Independent Party nominated the “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever” candidate to carry their third party banner, Barry Goldwater’s libertarian vision, which projected a ‘state’s rights’ federalism, was reduced to an unfortunate “Southern strategy” that served to alienate blacks and provide early materials for the “racist Republican” construct. Ironically, Goldwater’s popularity—and the “Draft Goldwater” effort that had first begun after his resounding 1958 reelection to the Senate—was born out of the Arizonan’s ability to champion Americans who had growing fears about the tyrannical nature of concentrated power that they

socially turbulent center, they would likely keep on losing in the national arena.” Nixon won in 1968 because he played to the center.

⁶¹ “1952 Presidential Election,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed February 26, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1952>

⁶² Seth C. McKee, “The Past, Present, and Future of Southern Politics,” *Southern Cultures* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 100. “The Dixiecrat Party was plain and simple a protest movement that arose to vehemently defend Jim Crow...”

⁶³ Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 229-230. “Eisenhower received about three-fourths of the vote in upper-middle-class and wealthy metropolitan precincts across the [Southern] region, including the affluent corners of the Deep South.”

⁶⁴ Seth C. McKee, “The Past, Present, and Future of Southern Politics,” *Southern Cultures* 18, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 95.

saw as restricting their freedoms, the very sort of thing that was subjecting Southern blacks to second class citizenship.⁶⁵ However, Goldwater's beliefs in local control and individual liberty attracted both strict Constitutionals and Jim Crow segregationists to form a strange fruit coalition that coincided with the observations of such within *Chain Reaction*. This coalition naturally pushed minority voters further away from the Right and gave succor to whites who wished to maintain the status quo of racial oppression.⁶⁶ As Lovelyn Evans lamented to the National Federation of Republican Women, "It is not easy for a Negro to be a Republican."⁶⁷

Clearly Goldwater's candidacy would eventually cause a shift in national voter perceptions about the different political parties' involvement in the Civil Rights Movement though there is little evidence that Goldwater had ever desired a conflation of his views with the antipathies of racists.⁶⁸ Overwhelmingly Democratic, "blacks fundamentally disagreed with several core values routinely touted by Republicans" such as faith in private enterprise.⁶⁹ Therefore, with limited resources, it seemed a rational—not racial—decision to abandon minority voters when abandoning the Industrial East to Kennedy. In fact, when Goldwater first said he was going to "go hunting where the ducks [were]," he was speaking about campaigning in regions like the Deep South—and the Midwest and West—to find conservatively minded people whom he understood shared a sense of deep scorn for the pomposity of the "effete elite," not to target

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, "Origins of the Conservative Ascendancy: Barry Goldwater's Early Senate Career and the De-Legitimization of Organized Labor," *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (Dec. 2008), 707.

⁶⁶ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 192. Goldwater "wanted his opposition to the Civil Rights Act to be understood in legal terms.... [but representatives from the NAACP believed] the senator's affirmation of states' rights was 'clear enough language for any Negro American.'" Additionally, many Southern whites felt Goldwater's position, whatever its intent, perpetuated the status quo of racial hierarchies, which many of them supported.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 264. Ms. Evans also recalled "ugly Republicans" who attended the 1964 convention.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 203 "The public now overwhelmingly saw the Democrats as pro-civil rights, whereas Republicans were seen as hostile or at best neutral."

⁶⁹ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 180

voters who had similar attitudes about Jim Crow.⁷⁰ Goldwater's anti-establishment approach had also seemed to be working in 1963. The more patrician Kennedy made what would be an ill-fated journey to Texas in part because his approval rating had fallen to a dangerously low 38 percent in that state; pollster Samuel Lubell had given him only a "small edge" over his potential challenger.⁷¹ He had needed to shore up Southern support, but then a sniper's bullet completely changed the electoral equation.⁷²

As LBJ capitalized on Kennedy's death to push forward civil rights, Barry Goldwater's personal feelings about segregation were trumped by his intransigence about the proper role of federal government. Blacks like Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, viewed Goldwater's indifference—if not hostility—to fixing the plight of blacks as dangerous: "Voting for Barry Goldwater as president would be placing the fate of Negroes into the hands of Ross Barnett of Mississippi and George Wallace of Alabama."⁷³ Whitney M. Young purported, "the issues go beyond Goldwater as an individual."⁷⁴ Indeed, Harry Golden made his attacks a bit more personal. Writing in the *Chicago Defender*, he scorned not just Barry Goldwater but Republicans in general for sharing a flawed—and hypocritical—political philosophy in which government aid should be rejected unless that government aid was serving Republican purposes. Recalling President Eisenhower's admonition that "law can't change the hearts of men," Golden admonished that law changed the *actions* of men, and that was the only thing that mattered to

⁷⁰ Stewart Alsop, "Can Goldwater Win in 64?" *The Saturday Evening Post*, August 23, 1963, 23-24. As the anti-eastern candidate, Goldwater "once remarked—perhaps only half jokingly—that the East Coast ought to be 'sliced off and set adrift.'"

⁷¹ Jeffrey J. Matthews, "To Defeat a Maverick: The Goldwater Candidacy Revisited, 1963-1964," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Fall 1997), 664. This is not to downplay the fact that Goldwater's states' rights stance was very appealing in the South in great part because of Jim Crow.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 665. "Unfortunately for [Goldwater], a Democratic victory was all but assured by Kennedy's assassination."

⁷³ "Negroes Won't Back Goldwater, Wilkins Avows," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 15, 1963, Section Two, 1.

⁷⁴ "Goldwater Victory Would Imperil Negroes; Young," UPI, *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 7, 1964. "It's like putting the lamb in the custody of the lion."

blacks in that moment.⁷⁵ Additionally, though he had long been a Republican, Jackie Robinson's rebukes of Goldwater were scathing. He refused in an open letter to accept an invitation of the senator's to even talk over dinner: "Relating to your proposal that we discuss civil rights, what could you possibly have to say?"⁷⁶

Many others in the minority community understood that Goldwater's position could prove detrimental to blacks living in the South, even as many segregationists understood Goldwater's ideology could be twisted to their purposes. However, the Goldwater and Wallace positions were always different. When an offer was extended by George Wallace's camp to switch to the Republican Party and join Goldwater on his 1964 ticket—a move that truly would have consolidated federalism with segregationism—Goldwater's response was a quick, "Go to hell!"⁷⁷ These two men did not share the same ethos about race. Consider when a bomb went off outside of a black student's University of Alabama housing, Wallace pondered how long it would take "to get the nigger bitch out of the dormitory."⁷⁸ But Goldwater had sanctioned the goals of the "freedom riders" engaged in constitutionally protected interstate commerce.⁷⁹ Wallace said in 1959, "How in the name of common sense can you be too strong about segregation? You're either for it or against it."⁸⁰ Goldwater's department store in Arizona was voluntarily integrated with blacks in supervisory roles well before the Civil Rights Movement ever gained legislative

⁷⁵ Harry Golden, "Candidate Barry Goldwater," *Chicago Daily Defender* July 23, 1964.

⁷⁶ "Jackie Robinson Hits a Homer 'Up Side' Goldwater's Bigotry," *Chicago Daily Defender*, August 10, 1964.

⁷⁷ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 241-242.

⁷⁸ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2001), 240.

⁷⁹ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 230-231. Goldwater also helped end legal segregation in Phoenix's schools and the National Guard. Codified inequality was as big an assault on the liberty foundation on which he built his thoughts, as codified "equality" had the potential to be. For this reason, he was not opposed to every section of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but he could not—or would not—overcome his intellectual opposition to Title VII.

⁸⁰ *George Wallace: Settin' the Woods on Fire*, produced by Daniel McCabe and Paul Stekler (2000; Arlington, VA: PBS, 2006), DVD, transcript accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wallace/filmmore/transcript/>

momentum.⁸¹ George Wallace was a political opportunist who had transformed like a resurrected Tom Watson from purporting a progressive agenda in his home state to engaging in racial demagoguery to gain power.⁸² Barry Goldwater's entire political career was built on a consistent worldview that promoted minimal federal intervention in the lives of Americans.⁸³

Furthermore, when Wallace withdrew from the race for president on July 19, 1964 with the claim that the Republicans had offered a segregationist platform that made his candidacy moot, Goldwater found this description of the vision that the Republicans under his leadership had endorsed to be baffling.⁸⁴ Certainly the 1964 platform passed at the July convention stressed the conservative commitment "to help assure equal opportunity and a good education for all, while opposing federally-sponsored 'inverse discrimination,' whether by the shifting of jobs, or the abandonment of neighborhood schools, for reasons of race," but the platform also pledged "full implementation and faithful execution of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and all other civil rights statutes, to assure equal rights and opportunities guaranteed by the Constitution to every citizen."⁸⁵ Though it is understandable that many blacks thought his personal stance on race was

⁸¹ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP's Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 7.

Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 236.

⁸² *George Wallace: Settin' the Woods on Fire*, produced by Daniel McCabe and Paul Stekler (2000; Arlington, VA: PBS, 2006), DVD, transcript accessed February 20, 2014,

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wallace/filmmore/transcript/>

Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2001), 318. George Wallace "except for civil rights, had never met a government program he didn't like." He had always used government to forward a populist-minded agenda that took into consideration poor blacks as well as white, but he learned how to exploit race when he was "out-niggered" in an election.

⁸³ Bart Barnes, "Barry Goldwater, GOP Hero, Dies," *Washington Post*, May 30, 1998, A01, accessed February 22, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/may98/goldwater30.htm> This was true even when some of his positions (such as those he would take on abortion and gay rights) would eventually prove uncomfortable for some within the conservative movement he has been credited with founding.

⁸⁴ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2001), 396.

⁸⁵ "Republican Party Platform of 1964," *The American Presidency Project*, July 13, 1964, accessed February 20, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25840>

Tom Wicker, "Goldwater Backers Vote Down Scranton's Anti-Bircher Plank and His Rights and A-Bomb Plans," *New York Times*, July 16, 1964, accessed February 20, 2014,

irrelevant in light of their own oppression, Goldwater's objections to the passage of certain civil rights legislation had never been about maintaining segregation, which he found morally reprehensible. When some of his political operatives wanted to capitalize more directly on white backlash a la the Governor of Alabama—and some operatives engaged in direct pandering to racists—Goldwater indicated he felt such actions were not only wrong but dangerous. After telling reporters he would quit the campaign “if anyone sowed racial violence on his behalf... even if it was the day before the election,” he met with LBJ and vowed to not fan racial tensions for political gain.⁸⁶

This is important to understand because Goldwater—not Wallace—was the foundation upon which conservative Republicans would build their future thinking, and the country would not always be mired in the same sort of civil rights debate that existed in 1964. For example, John Sears, a future campaign manager for Ronald Reagan, offered an explanation for the evolution of the Republican Party into the New Right when he identified Goldwater as the first serious presidential contender to challenge the principles of the New Deal and to thus open the emotional and intellectual doors required for ending the era of big government.⁸⁷ There was also an element of populist nationalism used to create “value wedges” for the Goldwater campaign from the very beginning that Reagan echoed. No one talked more down-to-earth and apple pie than the anti-elite Barry with his ham radios and appreciation for American Indians and solid

<http://partners.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/640716convention-gop-ra.html> The more liberal wing of the party led by Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Governor George Romney had pushed for stronger language to be inserted into the platform, Senator Everett Dirksen and Congressman William McCulloch—two essential legislators in the shaping and passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—endorsed the Goldwater civil rights plank without the addition of amendments. However, the platform fight created a greater divide between Goldwater and black Republicans as seen when “Negro delegates and alternates to the convention issued a joint statement challenging Senator Goldwater’s ‘fitness’ to be President.”

⁸⁶ Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Nation Books, 2001), 396-397.

⁸⁷ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 360.

record as a World War II pilot doing his duty in Asia. He used patriotism and liberty to whip up the decidedly conservative Young Americans for Freedom as early as March 1961.⁸⁸

Therefore, when scholars purport the normative narrative that Richard Nixon “retooled” and Ronald Reagan “perfected” the terms first drafted by segregationist George Wallace, there seems to be a narrowing of focus that misses a broader rhetorical picture that would include the man who was speaking loud and clear about American values apart from the governor of Alabama.⁸⁹ In other words, even when Wallace coined clever phrases like “limousine liberal” that would become part of the broader political lexicon for politicians of both parties, he wasn’t the original source of conservative populism.⁹⁰ Blasting the “power elite” and “big government” had been the heart of the Goldwater message. Therefore, though he failed in his goals to win higher office, Goldwater was the one who left a legacy blueprint others would modify—maybe even George Wallace followed—to forward conservatively oriented agendas, and Goldwater’s motives were not tied to keeping the color line in tact.

Additionally, it is important to note Goldwater’s candidacy imploded outside any repudiation of a ‘state’s rights’ mantra. The attacks used against him—the negative and distorting commercials put forth by the Johnson campaign such as the Daisy ad, which suggested voting for Goldwater was equivalent to voting for nuclear apocalypse—also left an indelible mark on American elections and impacted 1964 voters.⁹¹ This had more to do with how mass attack ads

⁸⁸ Ibid., 158-159. Many young Americans caught “Goldwater fever” and became “zealots” (per a Rockefeller supporter).

⁸⁹ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 364.

⁹⁰ Sanders, Randy, “The Sad Duty of Politics: Jimmy Carter and the Issue of Race in His 1970 Gubernatorial Campaign,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 619. Politicians of all stripes used some of Wallace’s phraseology. Jimmy Carter turned Carl Sanders into a “limousine liberal” in the 1970 campaign for governor.

⁹¹ Steven Seidman, “The ‘Daisy Spot’—The Most Famous Political TV Ad,” *Ithaca College*, March 23, 2011, accessed February 23, 2014,

http://www.ithaca.edu/rhp/programs/cmd/blogs/posters_and_election_propaganda/the_daisy_spotthe_most_famous

were deployed on television than with the introduction of dirty campaign tactics about race, which are as old as politics. LBJ himself once described the ruthless methods he had first deployed in a low-stakes campus election when he was but a student who wanted to be a part of his small college's student council: "It was a pretty vicious operation for a while. They lost everything I could have them lose. It was my first real big dicta[tor]—Hitlerized—operation, and I broke their back good. And it stayed broke for a good long time."⁹²

The bellicose Texan whom Barry Goldwater had once described as "the biggest faker in the United States" broke Goldwater's back good—the Arizonan was defeated by the largest margin in the history of American presidential politics—but the federalist ideas that Goldwater put forth would prove transcendent.⁹³ This was in part because of a Hollywood actor turned General Electric spokesman who had co-chaired Goldwater's campaign in California, who believed deeply in conservative causes, and who was asked to deliver a speech on television in Los Angeles shortly before the 1964 election.⁹⁴ This speech was dubbed "A Time for Choosing," and it raised millions of dollars for a flailing Goldwater campaign. Even former president Dwight Eisenhower had taken notice.⁹⁵

Ronald Reagan had walked onto the stage and commanded the audience like an understudy who should have been cast the star in the first place. Goldwater faltered on Election Day, but heavy Republican hitters in the Golden State helped Reagan pick up the conservative banner and

[political_tv_ad/#.Uwns5kJdVJk](#) "DDB's propaganda campaign (which included the Daisy Spot) did two significant things: (1) it created a convincing image of Goldwater as an extremist product and (2) it softened the image of Johnson as a crass wheeler-dealer, making him seem almost avuncular—virtually a peace and love advocate of the 1960s—in comparison to his bellicose opponent."

⁹² Robert A. Caro, *The Path to Power: Volume 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 190.

⁹³ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 264, 338.

⁹⁴ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 170.

⁹⁵ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 336. After hearing the speech, Ike immediately called the RNC from a hospital where he was undergoing medical tests and asked for a copy to be sent to him.

run with it straight to the governor's mansion in 1967.⁹⁶ It seemed though he had long been a concerned citizen openly engaged in politics—his celebrity and a contract as the host of the downhome *General Electric Theatre* had provided him with the perfect public platform to express and crystalize his opinions—Reagan's political career as a candidate himself was quite literally launched by the Goldwater campaign.⁹⁷ Yet the charismatic actor gave off a much different vibe than the man from Phoenix and connected with a much broader audience.

Additionally, it is interesting to note, despite the cowboy images Reagan and Goldwater projected—their embodiments of rugged individualism expressed through a mutual love for the great outdoors—these men were not close friends. This might partially be because of different backgrounds that made a closer connection between the two harder to maintain. They had enjoyed very different sorts of childhoods. Goldwater had grown up in big sky deserts. Reagan had sprung from the silo-dotted Midwest. One had been a privileged son whose Jewish father had owned department stores. The other had been the youngest child in a family headed by a shoe salesman whose alcoholism meant he regularly provided little more than “oatmeal meat” for his wife and kids to eat.⁹⁸ These icons had taken different routes to conservatism, and they had very different styles on the campaign trail.⁹⁹ Yet many of their foundational visions of how the world should work were interchangeable, and thus one might say they were imperfect reflections of each other.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 337

⁹⁷ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 169. For eight years, to fulfill his duties to GE, Reagan traveled the country and spoke with working people about life in America. These “conversations” gradually became more political as he discussed topics like taxes and perfected the delivery of what would become his stump speeches.

⁹⁸ Frank van der Linden, *The Real Reagan: What he believes, What he has accomplished, What we can expect from him* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 29. Reagan's mother would mix hamburger with oatmeal and pan fry it to make the meat go a long way since this was a luxury in the family diet.

⁹⁹ Lee Edwards, *Goldwater: The Man Who Made a Revolution* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1995), 333.

Whether or not they went on family vacations together, Ronald Reagan revered Barry Goldwater. Along with William Buckley, founder of *National Review* and host of the PBS show *Firing Line*, Reagan felt Goldwater was responsible for creating the New Right.¹⁰⁰ The conservative ideas Goldwater espoused had pushed Reagan to test the parity of his conscious reasoning with the raw essence of his core values, and this had resulted in a different way of processing politics. Once a fervent New Dealer—a man whose favorite president was the optimistic FDR for whom he’d first voted when he was just in his twenties—Reagan had slowly discovered the Democratic Party and his ideology were irreconcilable.¹⁰¹ He had divorced the party of his youth and publically joined the GOP in 1962.¹⁰²

Furthermore, though delivered on Goldwater’s behalf, “A Time for Choosing” laid bare how Reagan felt about the issues four years before George Wallace fashioned his 1968 appeal to the working class. The themes within that speech would be forever after played throughout the Reagan Narrative. How one received those themes would continue to depend upon the moral foundations of politics Jonathan Haidt has said people use when constructing meaning about the intent of someone else’s ideas. Perhaps anticipating future misinterpretations of his views, Reagan delivered during the address the well-known laugh line: “The trouble with my liberal friends is not that they’re ignorant; it’s just that they know so much that isn’t so.”¹⁰³

Sure enough, it did not take long before there were several examples of how Reagan rubbed the Left in the wrong way. When running for governor, he was a relentless advocate for security as a necessary component of civil society. He was especially intent on combatting what

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 354

¹⁰¹ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 7.

¹⁰² David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 164-170.

¹⁰³ Ronald Reagan, “A Time for Choosing,” *The Reagan Foundation*, October 27, 1964, transcript accessed February 25, 2014, <http://www.reaganfoundation.org/pdf/ATimeForChoosing.pdf>

conservatives saw as the flouting of authority by student activists out of line on college campuses.¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Schoenwald has noted this “emphasis on law and order echoed much of Goldwater’s race-coded language, especially after the Watts riots of 1965.”¹⁰⁵ But one should note, though there were racial dimensions to some of the unrest in 1960s-era California, Schoenwald’s interpretation of Reagan’s “law and order” rhetoric at that time as “race-coded” contains an implicit denial that there were reasons outside of what were rising racial tensions to call for more security in the state. For example, though the face of student radicalism was predominantly white, Reagan showed little tolerance for disruptions that threatened violence on college campuses. He had great disdain for the “anti-almost anything demonstrations” that were so often run by radical dissidents.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, reducing rhetoric about containing the California chaos into an appeal to racial antipathies is distortive.

Many years later, on her road to becoming Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice spent a good deal of her academic career in California as provost of Stanford University where she would also have to get tough and tamp down unrest within her own student body. Such trials recalled the reaction her father once had to some of the more significant turbulence Americans experienced in the sixties in which Reagan was first campaigning. Even though he was a life-long Republican, Dr. Rice was also a black Southerner who had fervently supported LBJ’s part in pushing Congress to pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, both of which Reagan had opposed. Rice saw those laws as essential corrections to an unequal society, sorely needed corrections for blacks to gain access to their birthrights as equal American

¹⁰⁴ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 174

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 209.

¹⁰⁶ Ronald Reagan, “Missing Person,” April 3, 1978, *Reagan in his Own Hand: The Writings of Ronald Reagan that Reveal his Revolutionary Vision for America*, edited by Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (New York: The Free Press, 2010), 411. Recalling for a radio address a visit to a California University in the sixties, Reagan mentioned “the riots, the pickets, and the vandalism” with which he had been fed up.

citizens. He even threw his support behind Bobby Kennedy for president in 1968. But after RFK's assassination, Rice evaluated the political situation in a country that seemed to him to have gone mad. He told his daughter he had decided to cast his vote for Richard Nixon because Nixon "would bring order" back.¹⁰⁷ One did not need to be white to want stability.

Another topic that got Reagan into hot water in 1976—the very year in which Condoleeza Rice would cast her first vote in a presidential election (for Jimmy Carter)—was his "unrestrained" rhetoric against busing, which Reagan felt incited racial animosity without improving the quality of education for children.¹⁰⁸ Having relocated to Denver in the late 1960s when busing was ramping up, the first black woman secretary of state's parents had expressed some of the same concerns that Reagan expressed about this approach to integration. Dr. and Mrs. Rice scrimped to send their daughter to a private Catholic school where such government schemes could not adversely impact her education because they were not convinced that "black kids would learn better just by sitting in a classroom with white ones."¹⁰⁹ Though the irony was not lost on them, surely the Rices' feelings were not born from racism, and some studies suggest their skepticism was mainstream. For example, data extracted from a large national sample and published in 1974 indicated the "subjective motivations for opposing busing [were] not racism even though opposition [had] the objective consequence of perpetuating segregation and educational inequality."¹¹⁰ Moreover, there were objections within the broader African American community to busing that are sometimes overlooked by historians.

¹⁰⁷ Condoleeza Rice, *A Memoir of Family: Extraordinary, Ordinary People* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2010), 187, 124.

¹⁰⁸ Jeremy D. Mayer, *Running on Race: Racial Politics in Presidential Campaigns, 1960-2000* (New York: Random House, 2002), 135.

¹⁰⁹ Condoleeza Rice, *A Memoir of Family: Extraordinary, Ordinary People* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2010), 126.

¹¹⁰ Jonathan Kelley, "The Politics of School Busing," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1974): 24-25. Though 84% of survey respondents thought Negro and white students should attend the same schools, 83% opposed busing to achieve this end.

For instance, D. F. Glover, a former principal who was on the staff of Clark College in Atlanta in 1971, penned a forceful letter to the *Atlanta Daily World* in which he pointed out “a handful of persons must not be permitted to continue making decisions for the majority of the black population” specifically on issues regarding “total integration, busing, and the unitary school system” because this small assembly “treated the black mass like a group of paralyzed and unconscious victims of an inferior environment whose lot cannot be worsened by any experimental arrangement, regardless of how stupid.”¹¹¹ He pointed out many of the educational accomplishments of blacks before even *Brown v. Board* in much the same way that Stanford University’s Thomas Sowell would do in *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality*.¹¹² Showing sympathy with this position, Atlanta’s oldest continuously running black newspaper announced in 1970 the formation of a national committee with representatives from thirty-two states to express that “the majority of blacks refuse to ‘buy’ what white radicals are selling” and would rather discuss issues facing “the black silent majority” such as their own “opposition to forced school busing to effect school integration.”¹¹³

This does not mean that some African Americans did not see a real connection between racism and busing that surely existed in school districts around the country.¹¹⁴ But it also means

¹¹¹ D. F. Glover, “Glover Wants Parents to Express Themselves on Busing Question,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 22, 1971, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/hnpatlantadailyworld/docview/491366073/fulltextPDF/E740A22F3A064584PQ/8?accountid=11226>

¹¹² Thomas Sowell, *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality?*, (New York, William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 83. “When the U.S. Supreme Court declared in 1954 that separate schools were inherently inferior, within walking distance of the Court was an all-black public school whose performance had equaled or surpassed that of white schools in the District of Columbia for more than 80 years.”

¹¹³ “The Black Majority,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 9, 1970, 4, accessed March 6, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/hnpatlantadailyworld/docview/491336119/E740A22F3A064584PQ/43?accountid=11226>

¹¹⁴ “Busing False Presidential Issue, NAACP Official Says,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 16, 1972, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/hnpatlantadailyworld/docview/491377704/abstract/E740A22F3A064584PQ/65?accountid=11226> Alfred Baker Lewis, national treasurer for the NAACP, made the case that objections to busing were rooted in racism: “The real objection to busing is that too many white parents do not want their children

that there is little doubt that not all opposition to busing was rooted in racism; there were problems associated with the practice that were real and needed to be addressed. It is also difficult to determine where the tipping point was for when other rational objections outweighed parents' concerns about race when considering the merits of busing. Many parents—white and black—were not persuaded that the only path to integration was through balancing student populations in this manner. Many parents felt such practices were detrimental. Therefore, it was legitimate for politicians to try to address parents' concerns.

However, even when Ronald Reagan's policy goals tracked with some of the feelings of black Americans such as those of the Rice family and the "silent black majority" alluded to in the *Atlanta Daily World*, he was horrible at establishing a good rapport with black voters—into tapping into their moral matrices—even when earnestly attempting to do so. For example, though polls registered zero support from—and zero need *for* support from—the black community in his first bid for governor—and other elections—Reagan insisted “there be total Negro involvement in every phase of his campaign.”¹¹⁵ Yet he often damaged himself by offending African Americans out of what may have been sheer cultural ignorance. For example, during the 1976 Republican primary against Gerald Ford, he called an able-bodied state aid recipient a “young buck.” He was told that this phrase could be viewed as an offensive reference to black males, and Reagan never used it on the campaign trail again.¹¹⁶ The intentional dropping of lingo of this sort is nonsensical if the phrase was intended to be some sort

to go to school with black students.... They never objected to busing when your Negro children were bussed past a nearby white school to a good Negro school sometimes a good many miles away.”

¹¹⁵ Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 209. Quote taken from a memo written between Reagan campaign operatives in 1965.

¹¹⁶ Jeremy D. Mayer, *Running on Race: Racial Politics in Presidential Campaigns, 1960-2000* (New York: Random House, 2002), 154. He defended “young buck” as a nonracial term commonly used in the Illinois in which he grew up.

of coded wink at racist whites. Rather, it was an example of cultural insensitivity that hurt Reagan's case with minorities. Such insensitivity would happen again.

Decades after his presidency ended, the depth of the offense taken by some of Reagan's rhetoric can still be felt in the African American community. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* has recorded Ronald Reagan "produced a fictitious 'welfare queen' from Chicago who was living off the public trough while hard-working people were grappling with hyper-inflation" to make a subtle appeal to racial prejudice.¹¹⁷ The idea is clear: Reagan created a (black) villain to bilk (white) workers. However, many conservatives "hear" the story of the "welfare queen" in a much different way than, apparently, some black academics. Per Jonathan Haidt's research on moral foundations, the reason such talk resonates often has little to do with race but a lot to do with ideas about what is socially fair. This is why the "welfare queen" anecdote was effective outside any racial "code."

Moreover, whatever his underlying motive for referring to her, the con artist on whom Reagan built his government-cheating archetype was not fictitious. He also never ascribed a name or race to this symbol for welfare fraud when he talked about her in public.¹¹⁸ He also did not coin the term "welfare queen." Rather this moniker's origin can be found in the *Chicago Tribune*, which "lavished attention on Taylor's jewelry, furs and Cadillac—all of which were real."¹¹⁹ George Bliss, a multiple Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, had used Taylor as a tool to

¹¹⁷ "Looking Back: Ronald Reagan, a Master of Racial Polarization," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 58 (Winter 2007/2008): 35.

¹¹⁸ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 1991), 457. The model for Reagan's "welfare queen" was Linda Taylor who was put on trial in 1977, but she had become "the symbolic embodiment of welfare fraud for legislative conservatives who were trying to reduce welfare costs" earlier.

¹¹⁹ Josh Levin, "The Welfare Queen," *Slate*, Dec. 19, 2013, accessed February 24, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/history/2013/12/linda_taylor_welfare_queen_ronald_reagan_made_her_a_notorious_american_villain.html

capture the public's imagination and garner attention for the widespread fraud dovetailing with government waste that he was investigating in Illinois.¹²⁰

Bliss's articles obviously hit an emotional chord with one reader: the once governor of California. After working hard with Democratic legislators to compromise in Sacramento on welfare reform—an issue that he felt was connected to the very solvency of his state—Reagan seemed to be personally affronted by any such examples of blatant malfeasance in the public sphere.¹²¹ Though he also understood the need for safety nets in the system—his family had benefitted from some provided by the New Deal during the Great Depression—his rhetoric suggested welfare fraud, which bilked the taxpayer in the name of the needy, was the very definition of immoral. Even so, Reagan's emotional approach could at times be demagogic: red meat for conservatives who viewed redistribution as unfair. For this reason, from the Left's perspective, even if Reagan's outrage was colorblind, his reference to the Chicago case still put a black face on welfare recipients that undermined needed assistance from the state for many poor citizens who were nothing like Linda Taylor. For liberals, Reagan's story about the “welfare queen” *felt* racist. Therefore, it fed racism.

Of course, there is a broader political and social cost associated with making these sorts of equivalencies. Thomas and Mary Edsall have observed persistent conflation of racism with conservative values stunts the ability of politicians from either party to address legitimate social problems impacting voters.¹²² For example, when the Moynihan Report was released in 1965, it

¹²⁰ Ibid. “For Bliss and the *Tribune*, the scandal wasn't just that Taylor had her hand in the till.... The newspaper also directed its ire at the sclerotic bureaucracy that allowed her schemes to flourish. Bliss had been reporting on waste, fraud and mismanagement in the Illinois Department of Public Aid for a long time prior to Taylor's emergence.”

¹²¹ Frank van der Linden, *The Real Reagan: What he believes, What he has accomplished, What we can expect from him* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1981), 104-105.

¹²² Thomas Burne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 259. “This stigmatization as ‘racist’ or as ‘in bad faith’ of open discussion of value-charged matters—ranging from crime to sexual responsibility to welfare dependency to drug

provoked such a hostile outcry from the Left that “liberal scholars were frightened away from [further] examination of the interrelationships between race, class, family structures and poverty.”¹²³ Yet the Edsalls have accused Reagan of connecting rising taxes to special interest groups to forward what was specifically an anti-black (and anti-woman and anti-gay) policy agenda.¹²⁴ This is similar to the views of George Lipstz who has written about the “racialized nature of social policy” with its “possessive investment in whiteness,” which has been tied to “overtly race-conscious neoconservative reactions against liberalism since the Nixon years.”¹²⁵ Further working with a definition of “equality” that runs counter to conservative thinking, Linda Faye Williams has also proposed the only way to confront “white skin privilege” is to have “a significant redistribution of income and wealth, more consumption, and less capitalization.”¹²⁶ Therefore, when refracted through a liberal moral narrative, almost any race-neutral reasoning to preserve the free market—or to discuss social conditions that might cause different wealth classes—can be “shown” to have negatively racial undertones.

Regardless, by the time Ronald Reagan was gearing up to change his residence from a ranch in California to the White House, the world looked much different than it had looked when he had first entered the political realm as a candidate. A full generation had passed since *Brown v. Board of Education*. Jim Crow had been killed and buried, even if the specter of his ghost would not die. Yet time and again, “Republicans and African Americans approached racial

abuse to non-participation in the labor force to standards of social obligation—has for more than two decades created a *values barrier* between Democratic liberals and much of the electorate at large.”

¹²³ Ibid., 54-55.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 206. “For disaffected white voters, Reagan drew the connection between taxes and ‘groups’ and ‘special interests’—adding to Republican rhetorical phrases and words that now bore a new meaning—signifying for many working and middle-class voters the reliable opposition of Reagan and the Republican party to benefits targeted at blacks, feminists, homosexuals, and others seeking new rights, protections, or preferences from government.”

¹²⁵ George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,” in *White Privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism*, 3rd edition, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2008), 69-70. This creates “contemporary racism.”

¹²⁶ Linda Faye Williams, “The Constraint of Race: American Social Policy at the Dawn of a New Century,” in *White Privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism*, 3rd edition, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2008), 94.

questions with sharply contrasting histories, beliefs, and interests.”¹²⁷ Working at cross-purposes, the different policy positions supported by these two groups underscored seemingly irreconcilable conflicts in visions. Reductionist narratives further distorted the original intents of Republican politicians and made minority voters wary of them.

No matter. In 1980 Ronald Reagan would still have his rendezvous with destiny.

CHAPTER TWO: STARTING A REVOLUTION

On November 2, 1980, Ronald Reagan trounced Jimmy Carter with 489 electoral votes as well as a majority of the popular vote.¹²⁸ Regionally speaking, the defeated incumbent performed the best in the Deep South, which Barry Goldwater had once “flipped” for the Republicans in part due to his stance on the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In Reagan’s case, when looking closely at the final returns, the margins of victory in these Deep South states were hardly decisive and could have easily gone the other way. The margin in Alabama, for instance, was nothing to brag about: a tiny sliver of 1.3%. In Mississippi he claimed a mere 1.32% more votes than Carter who had carried the Magnolia State in 1976. In South Carolina where Lee Atwater—a young campaign coordinator and protégé of political powerhouse Strom Thurmond—had worked to pull out all the stops, the margin was but 1.53%. Only in Louisiana did the California governor show what might be described as a comfortable 5.45% margin. He soundly lost Carter’s home state of Georgia by 14.81%, and other “Old Confederacy” states such

¹²⁷ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP’s Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 375.

¹²⁸ Leip, David. “1980 Presidential Election Results.” *US Elections Atlas*, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1980> Reagan received 43,903,230 votes to Carter’s 35,480,115 votes. This was 50.75% of the popular vote.

as Tennessee, which had been going off and on for Republican presidential candidates since 1920, were barely secured with as few as five thousand votes separating the candidates.¹²⁹

These numbers are important because the closeness of the final Southern vote does not suggest a preference for one candidate over the other per any persistent white “backlash” such as that which had obviously existed in 1964. Republican Barry Goldwater was crushed nationally, but he pulled 87% of the predominantly Democratic white vote in Mississippi.¹³⁰ Then George Wallace easily claimed the Magnolia State back from Republicans in 1968 when running on a distinctly segregationist platform.¹³¹ Therefore, it seems fair to say Barry Goldwater’s resounding success in the Deep South can be explained by the region’s concern about segregation at the time he ran, but 1964 was not the beginning of a wholesale realignment in the region to the Republican Party.¹³² Additionally, though many in the South would shift by 1972 from being Democratically affiliated voters into a column of non-partisans, Republican identification remained very low, and there was hardly “any notable burgeoning of Republican sympathies under the guise of Independence.”¹³³

This is true even though Douglas Gatlin had observed in 1975 that race issues impacted short-term voting trends in Dixie, and the Democratic alignment with African Americans meant,

¹²⁹ David Leip, “1980 Presidential General Election Data – National,” *US Elections Atlas*, accessed February 27, 2014, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/data.php?year=1980&datatype=national&def=1&f=0&off=0&elect=0>.

¹³⁰ Jeremy D. Mayer, *Running on Race: Racial Politics in Presidential Campaigns, 1960-2000* (New York: Random House, 2002), 5.

¹³¹ David Leip, “1968 Presidential General Election Results – Mississippi,” *US Elections Data*, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/index.html> George Wallace swept the Deep South in 1968. Republican Richard Nixon finished dead last in Mississippi.

¹³² Douglas S. Gatlin, “Party Identification, Status, and Race in the South: 1952-1972,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1975), 42-43. Short-term voting issues were more important in voting trends than party affiliations in the South in the 1960s. Additionally, when looking at Southern Research Center surveys, there is “no evidence of a southern realignment from Democratic to Republican... in presidential elections through 1968.” Kenneth J. Meier, “Party Identification and Vote Choice: The Causal Relationship,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (Sep. 1975), 505. “Normal vote analysis will overemphasize the impact of the long-term component of vote choice (party identification) and, thus, underestimate the impact of short-term forces (issues, candidates, etc.)”

¹³³ Douglas S. Gatlin, “Party Identification, Status, and Race in the South: 1952-1972,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1975), 43

“ironically” that “Republicans [had] replaced the Democrats as the party in the better position to play upon the racial fears that [lingered] among many southern whites.”¹³⁴ Yet the South would not remain hyper-focused on segregation. When Reagan projected the exact same federalist ethos in 1980 as Goldwater had in 1964, his returns in Dixie were nowhere near as strong as Goldwater’s had been. In fact, a majority of the southern congressional districts carried by George Wallace in 1968 voted for Jimmy Carter in 1976 and 1980.¹³⁵ Reagan’s returns looked much closer to Eisenhower’s in 1952 than Goldwater’s in 1964. Like Ike he had returns showed he had performed the best in Southern districts with more wealth.¹³⁶ Therefore, voter defection to the Republican Party in 1980 seemed to be more economically than racially driven.

Moreover, though he would moderate his position on the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Reagan had long moved from being a private citizen actor giving a stirring speech on behalf of someone else, into a state office holder with a record that demonstrated he was loath for any higher government power to intervene in local affairs unless absolutely necessary.¹³⁷ If Southerners were still focused on the same issues that had invigorated them during Goldwater’s run—if ‘state’s rights’ in a racialized context was the main criterion by which Southerners determined which man they wanted to put in office—the Republican candidate would have swept the Deep South decisively despite the incumbent candidacy of a Southern son. The state-by-state returns simply don’t suggest this as having been the reality.

To go further, when finally a serious contender for president, Reagan was asked by William Buckley to talk about a series of issues as if he had already gained the highest office in the land

¹³⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁵ Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP’s Frayed Relationship with African Americans, 1945-1974* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 359. Nixon won the Wallace districts in 1972. Carter won the Wallace districts in 1976. Carter retained 68% of the Wallace districts in 1980.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 359. Carter lost middle and upper class whites to Reagan,

¹³⁷ Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution 1980-1989* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009), 96.

on the popular public affairs show *Firing Line*. Addressing what he would do in the face of race riots in Detroit, Reagan said:

Well, I would be inclined to say that that was a problem for the local authorities in Detroit, unless those local authorities were unable to control the situation and had called on the federal government for martial help. And maybe one of the things [that has] been happening too much is the federal government has been interfering where they *haven't* been invited in.¹³⁸

When pressed on this matter, Reagan referred back to his time as California's governor when there was a great deal of unrest on college campuses as crystalizing his perspective. He had chosen to defer to local authorities to handle rioting without interference from Sacramento until this was no longer possible.¹³⁹

This clear—not coded—declaration that Reagan still believed firmly in federalism might have telegraphed to the white South that the candidate intended to allow local people to deal with local problems including those related to forced integration. Yet such matters were not on the minds of most Southerners in 1980. Their public schools had already become much more integrated throughout the 1970s, even as public schools in the Northeast had become more segregated.¹⁴⁰ Open racism was also no longer socially acceptable in polite society as it had once been, and race politics had gotten downright moderate, even in Deep South states like Georgia. Consider when Jimmy Carter was inaugurated governor in Atlanta in 1970, he proclaimed, “I say to you quite frankly that the time for racial discrimination is over. Our people have already made this major

¹³⁸ William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Reagan I Knew* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 117. The episode of *Firing Line* was aired in January 1980.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 117. Reagan said, “The state was not involved until the local authorities—as they did one day, calling from the university president’s office—told me, as governor, that they could no longer assure the safety of the people of Berkeley, and they asked for the National Guard, and I immediately sent the National Guard in.”

¹⁴⁰ Steven G. Rivkin, “Residential Segregation and School Integration,” *Sociology of Education* 67, no. 4 (Oct. 1994): 284. Between 1968 and 1980 the percentage of blacks in the Northeast who had no white schoolmates “actually rose.... In contrast to the Northeast, segregation in the South, West, and Midwest decreased in all parts of the distribution, with most of the change occurring before 1980.”

and difficult decision.”¹⁴¹ Surely racism still existed, but widespread voter suppression through intimidation, a codified color line, and systemic electoral malapportionment that privileged rural white supremacists over metropolitan moderates had been relegated to the past.¹⁴² An increasingly dynamic economy and growing middle class had also decreased any real sense of “Southern exceptionalism” as the culture had steadily evolved within Sunbelt circumstances. Yes, the South retained conservative cultural values, but these were in line with other American states in which Jim Crow had never had the same presence.

Additionally, in a 1980 pre-election poll conducted by CBS News/New York Times, the biggest concern across ideological groups was not race but inflation.¹⁴³ There was a “low ebb” of American confidence, a debilitating “mood of pessimism” after military defeats abroad and rising unemployment at home, a “bleakness” in the daily lives of a demoralized people who felt their system had failed.¹⁴⁴ People of all political persuasions had grown weary of the “misery index” coming out of Washington, which had lost credibility when it came to solving the country’s problems. Conservatives were not alone in disdaining a leader who “[felt] their pain.”¹⁴⁵ The world was a complicated, dangerous place that called for more than American resignation on the global stage, and as Ted Kennedy pollster Peter Hart identified, “people [wanted] a president who [could] get things done.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Randy Sanders, “The Sad Duty of Politics: Jimmy Carter and the Issue of Race in His 1970 Gubernatorial Campaign,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (Fall 1992), 612.

¹⁴² Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 26.

¹⁴³ “Presidential Election 1980,” *Roper Center Public Opinion Archives*, University of Connecticut, accessed April 6, 2014, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/elections/presidential/presidential_election_1980.html

¹⁴⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1979), xiii-xv.

¹⁴⁵ Jimmy Carter, “Crisis of Confidence,” *PBS*, July 15, 1979, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/carter-crisis/> “I promised you a president who is not isolated from the people, who feels your pain....”

¹⁴⁶ Ward, James M., Editor, “Our Views: Tightrope Walking,” *Jackson Daily News* (Jackson, MS), Feb. 13, 1980, 10A. [Reference Copy from Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Box 121, Ronald Reagan Library]

Perhaps for all of these reasons, William Buckley believed the most important factor in Reagan's first successful bid for the White House had nothing at all to do with a "Southern strategy" exploiting race, but was predicated on his early opposition to the Panama Canal Treaties. Taking Carter's part in this case, Buckley himself had felt Central America needed to be stabilized, but he had understood many Americans were in no mood to concede ground to a tin-pot dictator in their own hemisphere. Therefore, the Panama Canal issue had galvanized the conservative base that was so essential in launching a conservative candidate.¹⁴⁷ In fact, any position other than opposition to the treaties was regarded as apostasy on the Right—as was the case when Senate Minority Leader Howard Baker—and could derail a GOP nomination.¹⁴⁸ Though he had vigorously debated the canal issue with his old friend Reagan on *Firing Line*, Buckley was most charmed when Reagan still invited him to his house for dinner. As the founder of the *National Review* made his way up the drive, he had read three cardboard signs displayed at intervals purely for his benefit and Reagan's amusement. They read in order, "WE BUILT IT," "WE PAID FOR IT," "IT'S OURS!"¹⁴⁹

Of course, whatever preoccupied white voters in 1980, black voters were definitely not Reaganites. The Gipper would receive "the lowest percentage of the black vote of any Republican presidential candidate in history."¹⁵⁰ One reason for this abysmal result was the steady wear on an already tattered relationship that held the black community and the Party of Lincoln together by only a few fraying threads. A letter from Clarence M. Pendleton, Jr. of the San Diego Urban League written on June 2, 1980 to Gordon Luce, former Reagan California

¹⁴⁷ William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Reagan I Knew* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 99.

¹⁴⁸ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 32.

¹⁴⁹ William F. Buckley, Jr., *The Reagan I Knew* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 111.

¹⁵⁰ Steven A. Shull, *A Kinder, Gentler Racism? The Reagan-Bush Civil Rights Legacy* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 40.

cabinet member and state campaign coordinator, expressed frustration after he attended an event in which only he and his wife weren't white: "I cannot help but feel alone in my support of the Republican Party."¹⁵¹

Steadily losing minority support for decades, Republican candidates had long stopped trying very hard to court black voters, and the ideological divides between the two groups just kept growing wider.¹⁵² This happened in part because many African Americans put a great deal more trust in federal authority than the private sector to address their specific concerns. Others felt like academics Melvin Oliver and Thomas Shapiro: "Equal opportunity, even in the best of circumstances, does not lead to equality."¹⁵³ They purported, "without redistributing America's wealth, [America] will not succeed in creating a more just society."¹⁵⁴ But this sort of positioning was anathema to Republican thinking. Conservatives distrusted federal government to solve problems as much as blacks distrusted private enterprise, so it was very difficult to craft a message that would be appealing to both of them.

When debating Carter, Reagan still tried: "Yes, the President talks of government programs, and they have their place. But as governor, when I was at that end of the line and receiving some of these grants for Government programs, I saw that so many of them were dead end."¹⁵⁵ Reagan wanted minorities to consider alternatives that led to greater opportunities for them to improve

¹⁵¹ Clarence Pendleton, letter to Gordon Luce, June 2, 1980, folder "Clarence Pendleton," Box 121, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹⁵² Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 253. After Goldwater's national trouncing, during an RNC strategy session, "a state senator from Georgia would observe, 'Suppose you register three whites and are reasonably sure two of them will vote for you; then you register three Negroes believing that only one of them will vote for you, where should you spend your time and money?'"

¹⁵³ Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality - Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 181.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 182. Working off the premise that a good economy is not enough to close the wealth gap between blacks and whites (because blacks and whites both gain during periods of prosperity, the groups maintain an equal number of rungs separating them on the socioeconomic ladder), Oliver and Shapiro argue a general progressive perspective: what is really needed to end racial discrimination in the United States is a government imposed economic correction.

¹⁵⁵ Ronald Reagan, "October 28, 1980 Debate Transcript," *Commission on Presidential Debates*, October 28, 1980, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-28-1980-debate-transcript>

their own economic positions. However, when the moderator asked him in the same debate what he thought about the future of a multiracial society, Reagan seemed to have a tin ear:

I believe in it. I am eternally optimistic, and I happen to believe that we've made great progress from the days when I was young and when this country didn't even know it had a racial problem. I know those things can grow out of despair in an inner city, when there's hopelessness at home, lack of work, and so forth. But I... believe the Presidency is what Teddy Roosevelt said it was. It's a bully pulpit. And I think that something can be done from there, because a goal for all of us should be that one day, things will be done neither because of nor in spite of any of the differences between us—ethnic differences or racial differences, whatever they may be—that we will have total opportunity for all people. And I would do everything I could in my power to bring that about.¹⁵⁶

President Carter pounced on what he had heard as an insensitive gaff. He observed, “I noticed that Governor Reagan said that when he was a young man that there was no knowledge of a racial problem in this country. Those who suffered from discrimination... certainly knew we had a racial problem.”¹⁵⁷

Here Carter had pointed out the obvious. Life for minorities in the United States could be very difficult in the early twentieth century. How could anyone be ignorant of this fact? Not long after becoming president, Reagan addressed this statement head-on when he told biographer Frank Van der Linden, “Some people in the campaign didn't understand what I meant when I said I remember an era when we didn't know we have a race problem. We were accustomed to hearing everywhere, ‘Well, they're fine, in their place.’ They could be talking about Catholics or Jews or blacks.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, it was easy to move through life with little awareness of how racism impacted others in much the same way it might have been easy to move through life in Victorian Britain without acknowledging the stifling rigidity of class hierarchies. Intolerance

¹⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, “October 28, 1980 Debate Transcript,” *Commission on Presidential Debates*, October 28, 1980, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-28-1980-debate-transcript>

¹⁵⁷ Jimmy Carter, “October 28, 1980 Debate Transcript,” *Commission on Presidential Debates*, October 28, 1980, accessed March 1, 2014, <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-28-1980-debate-transcript>

¹⁵⁸ Frank van der Linden, *The Real Reagan: What he believes, What he has accomplished, What we can expect from him* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 40.

was a pervasive social condition few whites thought much about. One was born into a certain position, and this was simply the way it was. To think otherwise was ahistorical.

Even so, Reagan also recalled for Van der Linden the values on which he had been raised. His father, an Irish Catholic, despised the hate espoused by groups like the Ku Klux Klan to such an extent that Reagan—a Hollywood actor with an obvious interest in the evolution of film—purposefully avoided ever seeing the iconic movie *The Birth of a Nation*.¹⁵⁹ Jack and Nelle Reagan had taught their boys that perpetuation of negative myths or racial intolerance was nothing but ignorant and wrong.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, when he was a student at Eureka College, Reagan volunteered to let two black football players including his close friend, William Franklin Burghardt, spend the night at his parents' home where he knew they would be welcomed after they had been refused hotel rooms. Burghardt confirmed this incident to Lou Cannon of the *Washington Post*. Burghardt added, "I just don't think [Reagan] was conscious of race at all... [In the Carter debate] Reagan said that when he was growing up they didn't know they had a race problem. It was the dumbest thing a grown person could say, but he'd never seen it."¹⁶¹

Clearly, Reagan *had* seen how society could put people into boxes that were labeled in discriminatory ways, but he did not participate in such labeling. Like Barry Goldwater, he personally opposed segregation—he publically spoke out against it as early as the nineteen-thirties when he was a sportscaster in the Midwest—but even with his Irish Catholic surname, he had not had to think very often about how discrimination impacted others.¹⁶² As a white man who had been born in 1911, he had lived in a society that segregated experiences as well as

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 40. Jack Reagan would not let Ronald or his brother see the movie when he was younger, and he later concluded his father's instincts about the film had been right.

¹⁶⁰ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 1991), 457. "The many people [Lou Cannon] interviewed who knew [Reagan] as a young man were unanimous in believing that he absorbed these lessons."

¹⁶¹ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 1991), 457.

¹⁶² Lou Cannon, "Reagan's Southern Stumble," *The New York Times*, November 18, 2007. "As a sports announcer in Iowa in the 1930s, Mr. Reagan opposed the segregation of Major League Baseball."

people, which inevitably led to a form of tunnel vision.¹⁶³ Indeed, Reagan committed an early kerfuffle over American stereotyping in his 1980 bid for the Republican nomination.

Despite entering the race as the frontrunner, the Gipper's campaign was beset from the start with debilitating internal divisions. These would eventually lead to a change in campaign management team.¹⁶⁴ Before that happened, George H. W. Bush would unexpectedly come out on top in the Iowa caucus, and the outcome of the New Hampshire primary would be unnervingly uncertain. With his prospects looking momentarily dim—his political career close to being completely derailed by a poor campaign strategy—Reagan tried to lighten the mood with his staffers by telling a joke in front of several reporters: “How do you tell the Polish one at a cockfight? He’s the one with the duck. How do you tell the Italian? He’s the one who bets on the duck. How do you tell when the Mafia is there? The duck wins.”¹⁶⁵ For this lapse in taste, Reagan was widely condemned in the media. With offense that either bordered on the absurd or showed an especially dry sense of humor, the President of Yale—whose surname was Giamatti—released a statement published in the *Boston Globe*: “There seems to be a lot of idle time in the Reagan campaign – idle time that apparently allows the candidate to tell ethnic jokes that mock our fellow citizens... I think he owes everybody an apology, including the ducks.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Walter C. Reckless and Harold L. Bringen, *The Journal of Negro Education* 2, No. 2 (Apr. 1933): 128. An early study at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee revealed the high level of ignorance white students had of blacks—and thus the challenges blacks faced—due to superficial interactions. Tennessee had a much higher black population than Reagan's native Illinois.

Russell Middleton, “The Civil Rights Issue and Presidential Voting among Southern Negroes and Whites,” *Social Forces* 40, No. 3 (Mar, 1962): 210 Another study conducted later in a small, Southern town in 1960 when Nixon was running against JFK confirmed that issues surrounding civil rights were of major importance to people of color but not even on the radar for most white voters. Many seemed unaware there was dissatisfaction with the status quo despite the civil rights movement.

¹⁶⁴ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 169. John Sears, Charlie Black and Jim Lake were replaced with William J. Casey, Ed Meese and Dick Wirthlin.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁶⁶ “CAMPAIGN '80; YALE HEAD HITS REAGAN.” *Boston Globe (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, Feb 21, 1980. <http://ezproxy.gsu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/293936010?accountid=11226>.

Yet the same level of offense expressed by this representative of the elite intelligentsia did not flower within the general public no matter how many seeds of outrage the media planted. In a March 1, 1980 internal staff memo, Governor Reagan was informed that the campaign had received a total of twelve letters and mailgrams from voters taking a position on the matter. Not all of these were negative either. One note read: “Dear Ron: I want you to know that even though I’m ½ Italian, only ½ of me is mad at you. The other half says you’re still No. 1 in my book.”¹⁶⁷ Another said, “I thought your joke was funny as hell, and I’m Italian. My wife thought it was funny also, but what does she know? She’s Polish. Shows you have a good sense of humor.”¹⁶⁸

Reagan would also receive at this time an interesting letter from Ted Kessler, Director of Management Services at St. Charles Hospital in Ohio. It began: “Being aware of some continuing distortions regarding the ethnic joke incident, [I was reminded] of an instance early in your career, long before any civil rights movement, that demonstrated your attitude and principles toward racial fairness.” Kessler recalled how he had created a raffle at the General Electric Jet Engine Plant in Cincinnati, Ohio to reward employees by allowing someone in his department to win a “night-on-the-town” with the actor Ronald Reagan after an employee dance. Since some “Supper Clubs” in Ohio were segregated in the mid-nineteen-fifties, the committee had proposed to move the event to a venue at which all the employees, regardless of race, would have an equal chance to participate. Reagan was contacted to make certain he did not have any personal objections. “To say the least, I was extremely pleased with your unequivocal response that either setting was perfectly acceptable to you. Our black employees were delighted.... This

¹⁶⁷ Fredrick W. Guardabassi, memo to Governor Reagan from “Dodi,” March 1, 1980, folder “Mail,” Box 121, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹⁶⁸ Mr. and Mrs. Domenic Caristo, mailgram to Governor Reagan, February 19, 1980, folder “Mail,” Box 121, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

little known incident twenty-five years ago I am certain is matched by other acts of understanding long before it became popular to do so.”¹⁶⁹

Kessler had reminded Reagan of what really amounted to only a small gesture, but this was a revealing incident all the same. Per the social customs of the period, few white people would have remembered Reagan objecting to having to spend time socializing with blacks. If Reagan had felt blacks were beneath him, he could have said so then when it would have cost him nothing. It is reasonable to assume—as Ted Kessler did—that’s not the way Ronald Reagan ever felt. That was also not the message he wished to project to voters. He took the time to personally draft a thank you note to tell Mr. Kessler he appreciated the words of encouragement: “I must admit, they touch a nerve when they attack me on something like that story because I was brought up to detest prejudice or bigotry....”¹⁷⁰

Regardless, Reagan was able to regain his position as frontrunner in the Granite State, and his team swaggered down South with high hopes for winning Dixie.¹⁷¹ Yet in South Carolina, the most important Southern Republican senator did not endorse the Gipper in the primary. “Big Strom” aligned instead with Governor “Big John” Connally, another once Southern Democrat who had switched parties during the Nixon administration.¹⁷² A young political strategist named Lee Atwater, who had cut his teeth in politics working for Senator Thurmond, decided to throw his weight behind Reagan. When Haley Barbour, head of the Mississippi Republican Party and a Reagan supporter in 1976 followed Strom’s lead, he tried to influence Atwater to jump to the

¹⁶⁹ Ted Kessler, letter to Ronald Reagan, February 22, 1980, folder “Mail,” Box 121, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹⁷⁰ Ronald Reagan, letter to Ted Kessler, March 19, 1980, folder “Mail,” Box 121, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

¹⁷¹ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 161-162. Reagan won the New Hampshire Primary with its record turnout by a stunning haul of 50% of the votes as compared to number two winner George H. W. Bush’s 23% take. He won handily in every category—blue collar workers, white-collar conservatives, voters making less than \$10,000 a year, etc.—except the affluent elite, which would bode well for the general election.

¹⁷² Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 286.

Connally ship. Even under pressure, Lee declined because he felt Reagan would prove the better candidate in the long run.¹⁷³ This early judgment showed good instincts.

To get onto the Reagan campaign, Atwater leaned on his relationship with Carroll Campbell—a rising politician from the Palmetto State—who then agreed to be the chair for Reagan’s South Carolina effort if Atwater could serve as his manager.¹⁷⁴ At that time, the future head of the RNC was still in his twenties, still making his name in the ranks of hard-nosed professional consultants who often acted like Southern football coaches in front of the press: fiercely loyal to a team when wearing that team’s jersey, worshipped alongside players when delivering wins, completely disposable when racking up losses, and always open to new contracts that contained the potential for professional gains. In the 2008 biopic *Boogiemán: The Life of Lee Atwater*, journalist and professor Eric Alterman observed, “Isn’t it a shame that [Atwater] didn’t decide to become a Democrat because it would have been just as easy for him. He didn’t really believe in any of those things.... He liked politics because he could kick the other guy’s ass.”¹⁷⁵

Though he once told a journalist he was intent on winning “to show the Harvard crowd that a redneck from South Carolina could come out on top,” Atwater was probably more committed to his party’s principles than Alterman has allowed.¹⁷⁶ He is buried beneath a truncated version of the South Carolina Republican Party’s creed.¹⁷⁷ But Alterman’s implication that Atwater was but a hired hand means he should never be confused with any of the long line of candidates he

¹⁷³ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997), 74.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 75

¹⁷⁵ Eric Alterman, *Boogiemán: The Lee Atwater Story*, produced by Stefan Forbes (2008, New York: NY: InterPositive Media), DVD.

¹⁷⁶ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997), 77.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 323. Inscribed on Atwater’s grave: “I do not choose to be a common man. It is my right to be uncommon. I prefer the challenges of life to guaranteed security, the thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of utopia. I will never cower before any master, save my God.”

promoted. The observation that Atwater played his game hard—which was the way political consultants are expected to play when the stakes are the nation’s corridors of power—is entirely accurate and led to Atwater’s deserved reputation as “the Babe Ruth of negative politics.”¹⁷⁸

An early experience that shaped Atwater’s strategic thinking was had when driving the man who was his mentor to the 1972 Republican National Convention. Their car got stalled within the midst of “a demonstration of peaceniks” that blocked the road. Unfazed by the angry crowd, Senator Strom Thurmond decided to get out of the car and was immediately confronted by a young woman who denounced him as a “fascist pig” and a “cocksucker.” As she continued to curse him—and the television crews continued filming—Thurmond smiled at her and said things like, “Little girl, do your parents know you’re out here? Honey, you sure are a pretty little thing.” When the senator got back in the car some time later, Atwater asked him what in the world he had been thinking or doing. Thurmond calmly explained, “Young man, that’ll be twenty-five thousand votes when we get home.”¹⁷⁹

Another thing that Atwater learned in South Carolina’s political swamp was how to sometimes walk through the minefield that was race and blow up an opponent. During the 1980 primary, South Carolina was widely recognized as John Connally’s last chance to show he could inspire support apart from his oil field-owning friends back in the Lone Star state where he had been the governor when JFK was assassinated.¹⁸⁰ But NBC correspondent Ken Bode reported on Jane Pauley’s March 7 NBC newscast that there was a charge from the Bush campaign that “John Connally offered 70,000 dollars in walking around money to black ministers: election day

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 313.

¹⁷⁹ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997), 37. Atwater told Remnick, “Boy, did I learn from that man.”

¹⁸⁰ Richard J. Cattani, “South Carolina’s Primary: John Connally’s Waterloo?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 1980, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0208/020842.html>

cash for black votes.”¹⁸¹ As had been the case for multiple decades, African Americans voted overwhelmingly for Democrats in general elections, but there was the possibility that they could influence the open primary if they cast their support to either of the Texans. Harry Dent—a Nixon operative who had orchestrated the 1970 debacle in which the Republican “Southern strategy” proved bankrupt—served as Bush’s South Carolina campaign chairman.¹⁸² Dent claimed he had a black witness who swore she had seen black ministers counting Connally’s money in the back of a church.

Whether it was made out of whole cloth or not, it is not hard to surmise this sensational story was circulated for the benefit of those rural Democrats the Bush team wanted to rile with racial hostility to go to the polls and neutralize Strom Thurmond’s endorsement of Connally.

Whatever his role in the dissemination of this rumor—and he did play a role according to Lee Bandy, a political writer for the most important newspaper in South Carolina at that time—Lee Atwater would have certainly understood the racial maneuverings of Bush’s strategist Harry Dent whom *Time* magazine had once called a “Southern fried Rasputin in the Nixon Administration.”¹⁸³ Any outrage at such “dirty tricks”—as Atwater had publically expressed—

¹⁸¹ "Charges of Vote Buying Cloud 1980 South Carolina Primary," *NBC Today Show*. New York, NY: NBC Universal, March 7, 1980, accessed March 2, 2014 from NBC Learn: <https://archives.nbclearn.com/portal/site/k-12/browse/?cuecard=5819>

¹⁸² Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 264-265. The “Southern strategy” here is the one that people mean whenever they deploy this term. Harry S. Dent was one of Nixon’s strategists—and close Thurmond ally—who worked for Nixon in 1968 and then contributed his expertise to the midterm campaigns in 1970. Here he purposefully supported segregationist Democrat-turned-Republicans running for office in the South via a Kevin Phillips type “Southern strategy” with the purpose of flipping the political alignment of the region. This strategy was a debacle and failed miserably.

¹⁸³ Lee Bandy, *Boogieman: The Lee Atwater Story*, produced by Stefan Forbes (2008, New York: NY: InterPositive Media), DVD. Atwater was Bandy’s source for a story he wrote about Connally and the alleged bribes. “Up at Harry’s Place,” *Time* Vol. 94, issue 2 (July 11, 1969), 25.

was also surely feigned.¹⁸⁴ But Atwater's "boogiemán" persona, which is often credited with single-handedly elevating negative campaigning to the national stage, is unwarranted.¹⁸⁵

Consider James Carville, political guru of the Left, has written with admiration about campaigns in Rome in which a candidate for consul's brother advised, "go negative early, even bringing up the character issue: it must be easier to do when your appointment is a murderer [or] child molester."¹⁸⁶ Historian Charles O. Lerche, Jr. has observed, "appeals to naked prejudice and crass selfishness" have been rampant in every American political contest since 1796.

Thomas Jefferson himself was accused of defrauding a widow out of her land, sleeping with a slave, liking the French, and being a Godless heathen.¹⁸⁷ As Armstrong Williams—a black legislative analyst for whom Atwater opened doors to the Reagan White House—explained: "Politics is brutal. It's ruthless. It leaves a lot of debris along the way."¹⁸⁸ And like every other campaign consultant working at his level for either party for centuries, Lee Atwater could be

¹⁸⁴ Ken Rudin, "South Carolina's Role as Kingmaker," *NPR*, January 16, 2008, accessed March 2, 2014 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=18147641> "[Atwater]... was aghast at Bush's campaign tactics."

¹⁸⁵ Paul Harris, "US Election: Documentary Explores the Man Behind Negative Campaigning," *The Guardian*, August 28, 2008.

¹⁸⁶ James Carville, "Why Cicero Should be Every Campaign Strategist's Mentor," *The Guardian*, May 10, 2012, accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/may/10/why-cicero-campaign-strategists-mentor>

¹⁸⁷ Charles O. Lerche, Jr. "Jefferson and the Election of 1800: A Case Study in the Political Smear," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 1948), 471. In Jefferson's case, all four of these stories were to some degree or another true—sleeping with Sally Hemings was completely true!--but they were told to maximum distortive benefit. The charge Jefferson was an atheist stung the most.

¹⁸⁸ Armstrong Williams, *Boogiemán: The Lee Atwater Story*, produced by Stefan Forbes (2008, New York: NY: InterPositive Media), DVD.

dispassionately ruthless.¹⁸⁹ To think otherwise is naïve. He viewed himself as a general for his party, perhaps like Sherman on a perpetual march to the sea, engaged in total warfare.¹⁹⁰

Yet Ronald Reagan won the South Carolina primary in which Atwater was involved by simply and effectively positioning John Connally—who came from a New Deal tradition of big government spending—as a candidate who was too economically liberal to represent the interests of South Carolinians.¹⁹¹ Reagan had performed well at the University of South Carolina debate moderated by NPR’s Jim Lehrer, just as Lee Atwater had predicted he would.¹⁹² When asked about the participation of African Americans in the GOP, Reagan had also not given a demagogic answer aimed at resurrecting Jim Crow. Rather, he had reiterated what he had said in other states across the country: “We’re Americans... with the same hopes and dreams.... We want [blacks] to have [opportunity], and we believe the Republicans offer that more than the Democrats do.”¹⁹³ Ronald Reagan’s campaign was not Barry Goldwater’s campaign or Richard Nixon’s 1970 midterms. Rather than trying to leverage regions to win electoral votes, it was built on a consistently national strategy.

¹⁸⁹ Robin Toner, “Washington at Work: The New Spokesman for the Republicans: A Tough Player in a Rough Arena,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1990. Roger Ailes described the personalities that translated into the professional styles of two of the most well known political consultants who eventually led the RNC. The first, Charlie Black, was fired from Reagan’s team in 1980 and then rehired again in 1984. The second is Lee Atwater: “Charlie’s the kind of guy who if he came home and found somebody making out with his wife on a rainy day, he’d break the guy’s umbrella and ask him to leave, then have him killed a year later. Lee would blow the house up.”

¹⁹⁰ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997), 316. “Like a good general, I had treated everyone who wasn’t with me as against me.” The quote is from the controversial interview Atwater gave to *Life* magazine while wracked with cancer. Perhaps his opponents viewed him this way as well. On his death day, Ron Brown had the flag flown at half-mast at the Democratic National Committee.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

¹⁹² Richard J. Cattani, “South Carolina’s Primary: John Connally’s Waterloo?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 1980, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0208/020842.html> Lee Atwater said, “Sure, the debate will help us. Some say Reagan's afraid to debate after he didn't in the Iowa campaign, or he's too old to do well against younger men. This will dispel all that.”

¹⁹³ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 182.

Additionally, Lee Atwater's role in shaping Reagan's bid for the presidency should not be aggrandized. Stuart Spencer who had worked as a political consultant both for and against the Gipper in multiple campaigns was part of Reagan's inner circle.¹⁹⁴ He once commented, "I don't remember what Lee did for the Reagan campaign. Something in the South."¹⁹⁵ Though he would become a deputy for Ed Rollins who managed Reagan's 1984 campaign, Atwater remained only a minor player in the Office for Political Affairs during Reagan's first term. Strom Thurmond had called Reagan's new chief-of-staff James Baker to help get Lee that job after the election was over, and Lyn Nofziger extended an offer only when Atwater assured him he could keep "liar politics out of the White House."¹⁹⁶ As Robert Novak has said, "In the Reagan administration, they didn't take [Atwater] seriously. He was a guy on the make."¹⁹⁷

In these circumstances, Atwater was probably quite happy to take some time to talk politics "off the record" with Alexander Lamis from Case Western Reserve University in 1981. Atwater was as ambitious as a politician, but he also nursed a secret desire to one day teach practical politics on a college campus.¹⁹⁸ The resulting interview would become infamous, and some doubted it even existed until Lamis's widow released the actual audio to James Carter IV in 2012. An Obama donor, she said her driving motivation was that she wanted the world to know that her husband's reasons for quoting Atwater were always "scholarly, not political."¹⁹⁹ If she was sincere, it is most ironic that only a few incendiary sentences from less than two minutes of

¹⁹⁴ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 1991), 49.

¹⁹⁵ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997), 82.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85-86

¹⁹⁷ Robert Novak, *Boogiemans: The Lee Atwater Story*, produced by Stefan Forbes (2008, New York: NY: InterPositive Media), DVD.

¹⁹⁸ John Brady, *Bad Boy: The Life and Politics of Lee Atwater* (Reading: Addison Wesley Publishing Company, 1997), 32.

¹⁹⁹ Rick Perlstein, "Exclusive: Lee Atwater's Infamous 1981 Interview on the Southern Strategy," *The Nation*, November 13, 2012, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/170841/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy#>

verbiage from a forty-two minute long recording are most often repeated with no context ever added for the general public. One must wonder if anyone but scholars bother to listen to—or actually analyze—the entirety of what Lee Atwater said. It is difficult to surmise that his words have been anything but politicized.

Regardless, the main thrust of the 1981 interview was to examine voting trends in the South after the New Deal. Atwater asserted race became a primary political issue in the region for obvious reasons in 1954. Race would continue to be a primary focus for a generation and would prompt the exploitive Harry Dent style “Southern strategy” tried in 1970 on the heels of Kevin Phillips’ *Emerging Republican Majority*. However, by then, aligning with segregationists was not a winning proposition. The country itself had moderated its stance on race, and this moderation had extended into the South.²⁰⁰ By 1980, the dominant issues that moved voters to the polls had been completely transformed again into a new (old) focus on the economy and national defense: a Goldwater platform that was uncorrupted this time around by the taint of Southern racism. To illustrate the point, Reagan ran on the foundational issues, which had first launched him into politics in 1964 minus “...obviously the Voting Rights Act, the TVA, and all that bullshit... The South went from being behind the times to being mainstream.”²⁰¹ Atwater further posited all vestiges of a Southern strategy with coded racial appeals had been phased out as the race issue had been resolved legislatively and was no longer on the minds of most whites. The fact that the Connally “buying black votes” scandal existed is an instance that refutes this Atwater assertion. Republicans sometimes still deployed the “race card” when convenient. But

²⁰⁰ Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 271. Atwater does not mention Phillips but makes the same case as outlined by Mathew Lassiter that racially moderate Republicans and racially moderate Democrats won the majority of the 1970 races, which thereby meant the “Southern strategy” was not viable.

²⁰¹ Lee Atwater, interview by Alexander Lamis, “The Southern Strategy,” 1981, *The Nation*, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/170841/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy#>

Atwater's analysis that the South had been forced to structurally change, and thus Southerners themselves had adjusted to a new social reality, was supported by the focus on larger conservative issues in the 1980 campaign that resonated more than race with white Southerners.

When Lamis pushed Atwater on the existence of "residual" racist sentiment to which politicians still appealed when using "code words" via issues like busing, law and order, welfare reform, etc., Atwater talked about polling that showed that these matters had deflated considerably in importance and were no longer animated at the root by racism. He asserted resentments between groups had become more class-based than race-based and were thus colorblind. As he had explained, "You could sit in a cocktail party anywhere... and you'd hear, 'I'm tired of these fuckers getting welfare,' and if [any of those fuckers] were a white, it wouldn't make any difference.... My generation... your and my generation... will be the first generation of Southerners that won't be prejudiced."²⁰²

Even so, Atwater also recognized there were blue-collar and lower class whites who had once been easily swayed by racism—and who were still swayed by racism—because they felt the most economically threatened by blacks. They were the Wallace voters, and by 1976 they belonged to Jimmy Carter. But even these voters also cared about issues that genuinely stood apart from—and could trump—racial antipathies by the 1980 contest. These issues included a desire for a strong defense, an evangelical religious ethos, regional pride, and a strong sense of self-reliance. In other words, multiple core values remained viable issues for Republicans to use to campaign to this demographic when racism was thrown out the electoral pot.

Lamis pushed again for Atwater to make race more prominent in the discussion of how Reagan might have won the South, so restating in much cruder terms *what he'd already essentially communicated*, Atwater said:

²⁰² Ibid.

You start out in 1954 by saying nigger, nigger, nigger. By 1968 you can't say nigger. That hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like, well, forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff, and you're getting so abstract now, you're talking about cutting taxes, and all of these things you're talking about are totally economic things, and a byproduct of this is blacks get hurt worse than whites, and subconsciously maybe that *is* part of it. I'm not saying it, but I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract and that coded, uh, that *we're doing away with the racial problem one way or the other*, uh, you follow me? Cause obviously sitting around saying we want to cut taxes, we want to cut this, is much more abstract than even the bussing thing, uh, and a hell of a lot more abstract than nigger, nigger, you know, so any way you look at it, race is coming on the back burner.²⁰³

In other words, in 1954 the most important issue in the South was race, which was predicated on blatant appeals to pervasive racism. Many politicians—and most campaign consultants—took this into account when running campaigns. However, the society was forced to change, so the political culture slowly changed, too, until blatant appeals to racists no longer worked for politicians. “Coded language” was then used via a George Wallace/Harry Dent style Southern strategy in 1968/1970 to mean racist things until those “codes” eventually became so watered down with “abstracts” that the “racism” was diluted right out of the concepts. People started to have different concerns about politics in any case, and these concerns were no longer tied to maintaining the color divide, which was done and gone. Cutting taxes was what percolated most in 1980. Race—which had once been the main ingredient used to get passions boiling—was pushed onto the back burner.

Additionally, Atwater talked specifically about the impact of economic change in the South. Unfortunately, some “abstracts” like the fairness of reducing tax rates hurt minority communities disproportionately because poor blacks depended to a higher degree on government assistance than anyone else. Though there were some whites that may have been “subconsciously” happy with this reality, the essential difference to note—a distinction Atwater made in the greater interview—is that in political days past the black community was *targeted* for harm. But more

²⁰³ Lee Atwater, interview by Alexander Lamis, “The Southern Strategy,” 1981, *The Nation*, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/170841/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy#>

than a quarter of a century beyond *Brown v. Board*, resentment over redistribution was determined by whether or not a person paid his taxes, not the color of his skin. This was cultural evolution. Atwater felt even middle-class blacks would eventually fit into the Republican coalition. In any case, the old Wallace voter who was most influenced by race and who still ruled local government as Democrats in the South in 1981 could (and would) be phased out incrementally.²⁰⁴

Of course, when Andrew Rosenthal quoted in an editorial for *The New York Times* only the “nigger, nigger, nigger” paragraph of the Atwater interview the day after *The Nation* first published the audio on-line—which, incidentally, had the “nigger, nigger, nigger” segment of the audio conveniently extracted and highlighted at the top of *The Nation* page—there was no mention of any of these broader points, no scholastic discussion of political science or the realities of campaign strategizing, which was the type of thing in which Atwater was forthrightly—albeit crassly—engaging. Instead, Rosenthal asserted when the Right bristled in the Obama years at accusations that conservatives used “dog whistle” politics that only people in Dixie could hear, they had been proven to be equivocating because in 1981 a still minor player outside of South Carolina named Lee Atwater had shown “manipulating the racial fears, ethnic resentments and xenophobia of some American voters is the warp and woof of the modern Republican party.”²⁰⁵

Rick Perlstein has also asserted that Lee Atwater had been acting in bad faith—had been trying to establish Republican racial innocence—when purporting to Lamis that “people in the

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Atwater discussed in some detail why the South remained controlled by Democrats on the local level despite Reagan’s national victory. The Republican Party was still in nascent ascendency in 1981. Mathew C. Hulbert, “Governors of Georgia,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Feb. 6, 2004. To underscore Atwater’s point here, the first Republican governor of Georgia since 1868 was not elected until 2003.

²⁰⁵ Andrew Rosenthal, “Lee Atwater’s ‘Southern Strategy’ Interview,” *The New York Times*, November 14, 2012, accessed March 2, 2014, http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/14/lee-atwaters-southern-strategy-interview/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

South are just like any people in the history of the world” adapting to changed circumstances.²⁰⁶ Preferring a Southern exceptionalist narrative, Perlstein purported race is more of an issue in establishing voting habits in the twenty-first century South than it had been—apparently—during the Civil Rights Era. To come to this conclusion, Perlstein leaned on scholars Valentino and Sears who have advanced the “Southerners-are-racists” trope by embracing the idea that “a new form of racism” currently determines twenty-first century Southerners’ party allegiances.²⁰⁷ (Southerners are racists. Southerners are Republicans. Republicans are racists.)

Perlstein has embraced this belief despite the fact that respected “principled ideology” theorists and “group conflict” theorists take different positions than the “symbolic racism theorists” like Valentino and Sears when attempting to understand the role of anti-black affect within a complex, modern political context.²⁰⁸ Reducing political motives to race is always tricky, but a study conducted by Paul M. Sniderman and Edward H. Stiglitz in conjunction with the 2008 presidential election showed that negative attitudes about race profoundly influenced the voting choices of Democrats while any measurably “negative attitudes toward blacks had no significant influence among [the voting choices of] Republicans.”²⁰⁹

If that is true, it is easier to understand why Lee Atwater is highlighted to the degree that he is in 2014. He is part of the “racist Republican” construct. He has remained an effective “boogie man” for Democrats. It is also easier to understand why Andrew Young, a former Carter UN

²⁰⁶ Rick Perlstein, “Exclusive: Lee Atwater’s Infamous Interview on the Southern Strategy,” *The Nation*, November 13, 2012, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.thenation.com/article/170841/exclusive-lee-atwaters-infamous-1981-interview-southern-strategy#>

²⁰⁷ Nicholas A. Valentino and David O. Sears, “Old Times Are Not Forgotten: Race and Partisan Realignment in the Contemporary South,” *American Journal of Political Science* 49, No. 3, (July 2005), 674.

²⁰⁸ Michael A. Neblo, “Meaning and Measurement: reorienting the Race Politics Debate,” *Political Research Quarterly* 62, No. 3 (Sep. 2009), 474. Michael A. Neblo, “Three Fifths a Racist: A Typology for Analyzing Public Opinion About Race,” *Political Behavior* 31, No. 1 (March, 2009), 32.

²⁰⁹ Paul M. Sniderman and Edward H. Stiglitz, “Race and the Moral Character of the Modern American Experience,” *The Forum* 6, No. 4 (2008), 8, accessed March 22, 2014, http://www.uky.edu/AS/PoliSci/Peffley/pdf/Sniderman/Sniderman%20and%20Stiglitz_Race%20and%20Moral%20Character.pdf

Ambassador and surrogate, attempted to manipulate racial fears, ethnic resentments and the xenophobia of voters as part of a Democratic Southern strategy designed to profit from the racial resentment and fear of blacks. In the heat of the 1980 election, Mr. Young said Ronald Reagan had telegraphed to the country “it’s going to be all right to kill niggers when he’s president.”²¹⁰

This message was not abstract or coded in any way.

CHAPTER THREE: SOUTHERN STRATEGIES

There are wounds within the American body politic that Kevin Phillips described in his book *The Emerging Republican Majority*. Phillips posited ethnic, cultural and racial divisions are deeply felt in the United States, and politicians who understand how to manipulate these divisions win elections.²¹¹ For suggesting such, Phillips was called “an insensitive Neanderthal with almost sadistic social concepts,” but his rationale reveals what many have always believed to be the realities of practical politics.²¹² Yet some say Ronald Reagan took his campaigning cues from Phillips and sacrificed black voters on the altar of Southern whites for political gain. To determine if this is true, it is necessary to do two things: look at Reagan’s record on issues that mattered to minorities leading up to the 1980 campaign (and beyond) in more depth as well as examine specific charges that he exploited race to win votes. One should also question how Democratic reactions to Reagan, which have shown elements of Phillips’ “divide and conquer” strategy, might have shaped the president’s legacy outside of his base of supporters. (If Ronald Reagan pandered to whites in his first successful bid for the White House, Jimmy Carter pressed hard on the deeply felt scars of blacks in a desperate attempt to retain political advantage.)

²¹⁰ Jeremy D. Mayer, *Running on Race: Racial Politics in Presidential Campaigns, 1960-2000* (New York: Random House, 2002), 170. Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 502.

²¹¹ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969), 470.

²¹² Boyd, James, “Nixon’s Southern Strategy: It’s All in the Charts,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1970.

First, it is undeniable many in the African American community viewed Reagan as he was running for president in 1980 with deep suspicion. As a private citizen, he had opposed very important civil rights legislation in the 1960s. He had objected to any federal laws—including civil rights laws—that he viewed as disruptive to free enterprise.²¹³ Though these objections were predicated on “the Lockean notion that any gain of government came at the expense of freedom” rather than a desire to maintain segregation, the Republican Party’s inevitable alliance via the Goldwater faction with Southerners who clearly were interested in maintaining the color line “opened a gulf between conservatives and blacks that has never healed.”²¹⁴ Additionally, Reagan told journalist Laurence I. Barrett “that the 1965 Voting Rights Act had been ‘humiliating to the South,’” and he “was opposed to [it] from the beginning” as he found the selective application of law enforcement particularly “vindictive.”²¹⁵ This may have been true, but this attitude did not win Reagan any fans amongst black voters who had long been humiliated by selective voting laws that had discriminated against them.

Fast-forward fifty years to 2014 and one can easily say Reagan’s positions on civil rights in the 1960s were flawed. Codified discrimination had clearly crippled the ability of minorities to enjoy the civil liberties to which they were entitled, and action needed to be taken by the government to correct the untenably tilted playing field it had, in part, created. However, reducing Reagan’s position in any debate about complicated legislation—even *necessary* legislation—to short sentence critiques that carry implications of racial antipathies is both ahistorical and unfair. Though racism was, indeed, at the root of much of the uproar in the South, the undermining of some freedoms and the potential for unintended consequences—

²¹³ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 1991), 458. Cannon has written that he felt political pandering drove some of Reagan’s maneuvering on civil rights issues in the 1960s though Cannon has also argued forcefully that Reagan had no racial antipathies and was essentially colorblind.

²¹⁴ Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2003), 122.

²¹⁵ Laurence I. Barrett, *Gambling with History* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 426.

especially in regard to vague language in Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—were the things to which Republicans like Reagan objected.²¹⁶ To be sure, by the end of Ronald Reagan’s first term as president, approximately “70 percent of the American population [was] entitled to preferential treatment under ‘affirmative action’” initiatives that sprang out of early civil rights legislation.²¹⁷ Statistics like these undergirded Reagan’s case when he spoke in 1985 about those in American society who, “in the name of equality, would have [the government] practice discrimination.”²¹⁸ They continue to resonate today as some race-defined groups still push against other race-defined groups over issues like equal treatment in college admissions.²¹⁹ Therefore, it seems the honest observer might concede it was possible in 1964—as it is possible today—to have a very principled argument about which were the best ways to maintain appropriate balances between citizens’ “civil liberties,” which are inalienable and “civil rights,” which are not, without being accused of engaging with racism or pandering to racists.²²⁰ This is true even though one must *also* concede Goldwater made an alliance with Southerners who were interested in the power of states’ rights purely to preserve segregation.

²¹⁶ Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order: 1964-1980* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 26. Hubert Humphrey responded to such objections by promising to “start eating the pages [of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act] one after another...” if quota hiring was part of the bill.

²¹⁷ Thomas Sowell, *Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality?* (New York: William Morrow), 14.

Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama’s America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 111. “Once policies are set to achieve racial purposes or at least justified as likely to reduce racial disparities, it is hard for officials to avoid some form of counting to see if those purposes are being achieved. And once officials start counting, it is hard for those they regulate to resist adopting policies with quantitative targets. Peter Schuck has summarized this tendency well: even to engage in ‘soft’ efforts to expand employment pools, ‘one must expend additional resources, targeting them on some groups and not on others and... increasing the probability that the members of the target group will win the prize... we are now on a slippery slope that could move us toward preferences of a more robust sort.’”

²¹⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Civil Rights,” *The American Presidency Project*, June 15, 1985, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38782> “Some bluntly assert that our civil rights laws only apply to special groups and were never intended to protect every American.”

²¹⁹ Jason L. Riley, “Asians vs. Racial Preferences,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 2014. “The Democratic-controlled state Legislature in California is trying to restore racial preferences in college admissions, which have been banned since... 1996. But Asian-American lawmakers are pushing back and could defeat the effort.”

²²⁰ Steven A. Shull, *A Kinder, Gentler Racism? The Reagan-Bush Civil Rights Legacy* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 5.

Even so, attitudes about how to properly rectify the wrongs of institutionalized racism are constantly evolving in the United States and should be evaluated in context. Consider LBJ himself built his early political career on opposing civil rights legislation. Not only did he water down President Dwight Eisenhower's 1957 Civil Rights Bill in the Senate, in 1948 the Texas Congressman called President Harry Truman's civil rights initiatives "a farce and a sham—an effort to set up a police state in the guise of liberty."²²¹ Often crass, President Johnson also frequently bantered with words that do not seem to have ever been a part of Reagan's vocabulary and that might suggest a feeling of strong personal animosity towards blacks.²²² As with most large initiatives that come from Washington, there was a self-serving element of political calculation involved in LBJ's decision to capitalize upon Kennedy's death to push forward a civil rights agenda that tracked closely with the changing mood of the public outside Johnson's native South.²²³ None of this changes the fact that the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act did a great deal of good for African Americans living in the United States, but it calls into question the wisdom of judging any politician with a long career in the public eye on early positions rather than on his or her defining actions.

²²¹ Bruce Bartlett, *Wrong On Race: The Democratic Party's Buried Past* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 141. Bartlett's source is a speech LBJ gave in Austin, Texas on May 22, 1948, which has been quoted by LBJ biographers Gardner and Caro.

Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order: 1964-1980* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 23. LBJ wrote to constituents in 1957 and 1960 that he was "firmly opposed to forced integration."

²²² Michael E. Ross, "Should African Americans Celebrate LBJ's legacy?" *The Grio*, February 21, 2011, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://thegrio.com/2011/02/21/should-blacks-celebrate-lbjs-legacy-on-presidents-day/> Johnson regularly used the word "nigger" when discussing blacks.

²²³ Harry McPherson and Jack Valenti, "Achilles in the White House," *The Wilson Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 92. "As a southerner, [Johnson] had to show the nation that he was an American, not just a southerner and a Texan. One way to do that was to get the civil rights legislation through."

Bruce Bartlett, *Wrong On Race: The Democratic Party's Buried Past* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 168. "Johnson's strategy of abandoning the South—as well as his own past—by embracing civil rights was the right thing to do, both for his own political fortunes as well as for the country. As political scientist Pearl T. Robinson explains, the effect of Johnson's effort 'was to add to the newly enfranchised Southern voters the potential for more solid Democratic support from poor blacks in the North as well as the middle class.'"

If concerned more by what Ronald Reagan *did* when in power rather than what Ronald Reagan *said* as a private citizen, he signed the 1982 Voting Rights Act Amendment. Of course, like related laws, this legislation was very complex with substantial controversies swirling around its passage. Though there were still abuses within some state electoral systems that ultimately made the amendment necessary for minorities to better join the political mainstream, elected legislators—and the administration—had another vigorous debate about the wisdom of signaling “a major departure in the Nation’s understanding of ‘equality,’ [that might transform] the focus of analysis for the first time from the individual citizen to the collective racial or ethnic group.”²²⁴ By affixing his signature to the legislation, Reagan effectively conceded there are times in which it is appropriate to look at the bigger, societal picture. Never an ideologue, he said, “There are differences over how to attain the equality we seek for all our people.... But actions speak louder than words. This legislation proves our unbending commitment to voting rights.”²²⁵

Additionally, when asked directly by Robert Scheer, who interviewed Reagan in 1980, if he would still oppose the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Reagan indicated he had changed his initial position “because [he recognized] now that [racism] is institutionalized and [the Civil Rights Act] has, let’s say, hastened the solution of a lot of problems.”²²⁶ Apparently unimpressed, Scheer wrote the former governor “was still against the [forced] desegregation of neighborhoods and affirmative action; and surely having one black friend from college football days [would] not solve the [civil rights] problems.... [Additionally, Reagan had created] fewer than 2,000 jobs in

²²⁴ Thomas M. Boyd and Stephan J. Marman, “The 1982 Amendments to the Voting Rights Act: A Legislative History,” *Washington and Lee Law Review* 40, no. 4, (Sept. 1, 1983): 1428.

²²⁵ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1982,” June 29, 1982, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed March 25, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42688>

²²⁶ Robert Scheer, “The Reagan Question,” *Playboy*, August 1980, 235, Box 110, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

a state that [had] 40 percent black-youth unemployment... [and] 20,000,000 people.”²²⁷ Many shared Scheer’s skepticism, and the issues he raised should be examined in brief.

Reagan’s beliefs in private property rights were at the root of his opposition to forced neighborhood integration and the Rumford Act in 1963, which was aimed at stopping property owners from engaging in blatant discrimination.²²⁸ In the early sixties, open housing laws were routinely crushed across the country—“even in supposedly liberal Berkeley”—whenever they were proposed by local governments.²²⁹ When riots broke out in Watts and other urban centers outside the South, opposition to such laws became further entrenched, and voters who felt legitimately threatened by a social upheaval they had neither foreseen nor understood in the wake of civil rights legislation revolted politically. This was the “white backlash” to which many historians like Rick Perlstein and Kevin Krus have devoted much attention. Like most mass phenomena, this backlash was not driven by a single factor, but segregation and racism that existed outside the South nursed its growth.²³⁰

Still, Ronald Reagan maintained, “[Opposition to fair housing laws] has nothing to do with discrimination. It has to do with our freedom, our basic freedom.”²³¹ When Reagan was actually elected governor in 1967, he would take a conservative’s approach to combatting racism in real estate by trying to change California culture outside the cudgel of top-down mandate. For example, he recognized that the California Real Estate Association had no black members, so he directed Bob Karpe, his Real Estate Commissioner, to gradually desegregate the real estate

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2003), 143.

²²⁹ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 76.

²³⁰ Ibid., 119. After being attacked during a march, Martin Luther King said, “I think the people of Mississippi ought to come to Chicago to learn how to hate.”

²³¹ Ibid., 91. Running for governor, Reagan was speaking directly about Proposition 14, which overturned the Rumford Fair Housing Act, had been deemed unconstitutional by California’s Supreme Court.

industry by folding minority realtors into a new CREA that pushed a “color-blind” ethos.²³² He also chartered three minority-owned banks in cities with minority populations to generate minority loans to grant greater access to better housing.²³³ Additionally, he tried to empower individuals by increasing their ability to earn more money.

On this, his civil services reforms had minority workers specifically in mind. Instead of retaining written tests for licensing, which often required a certain kind of education to complete well, Reagan pushed for actual skills testing, which allowed trade workers to demonstrate what they could *do* rather than what they could write about doing. This was because Reagan had discovered “virtually the only blacks employed by the state were janitors or those working in other menial positions, largely because state civil service tests were slanted against them.”²³⁴ Showing ideological flexibility when attempting to rectify racial disparities, Reagan also introduced affirmative action into state hiring practices in 1971 when he signed Executive Order No. R-34-71.²³⁵ “As a result... the number of minorities who were a part of the state system... workforce increased over the Reagan years.”²³⁶ Perhaps all of these efforts were innately inadequate to redress black living conditions or increase black employment—especially in a state as large as California—but President Reagan would sign a bill in 1988 that levied punitive fines

²³² Melvin Bradley, interview by Gabrielle Morris, “Governor’s office, access and outreach, 1967-1974: oral history transcript/1987,” Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, May 4, 1983, accessed March 2, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/governorsoffout00bradrich>, 27.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 30.

²³⁴ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Pocket Books, 1990), 163.

²³⁵ Michael Lynch, “Affirmative Action in California’s State Civil Service: Who is Really Underrepresented and Why,” *Pacific Research Institute*, October 1996, accessed March 29, 2014, http://special.pacificresearch.org/pub/sab/social/civil_briefing/civil_brief.html Whilst attempting to redress disparities with affirmative action in this case, Reagan remained completely opposed to quotas.

²³⁶ Melvin Bradley, interview by Gabrielle Morris, “Governor’s office, access and outreach, 1967-1974: oral history transcript/1987,” Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, May 4, 1983, accessed March 2, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/governorsoffout00bradrich>, 21. Like Eisenhower, Reagan viewed state jobs and private enterprise differently. He also maintained a steadfast opposition to the quotas to which affirmative action would later seem to lead, but he has said in his memoirs that disparities in state employment were so blatant to require immediate redress.

on anyone still engaging in flagrant discrimination in the real estate sector, which strengthened the essentially toothless Civil Rights Act of 1968.²³⁷

Back to 1980, Robert Scheer also noted as many other Republican critics would that he had not seen any appreciable minority following for Reagan at any of the events he had covered on the campaign trail.²³⁸ Per this point, black loyalties had been consolidated within the Democratic Party for decades, and some of Reagan's ideas about states' rights and the positions he had taken on civil rights felt incompatible with—if not downright antithetical to—black interests. At one point on the road, Reagan spotted a sign in the crowd that read “Blacks for Reagan.” This prompted him to pause and say, “God bless those who brought that sign, and, by golly, it shows that you can't fool all the people all of the time.”²³⁹ The fact that this sign was so notable to the candidate—was so rare at a rally as to catch his eye—suggests just how unpopular Reagan must have truly been with African Americans. This was true even though the 1980 Republican National Convention was held in Detroit, Michigan specifically to combat a WASPish Republican brand that seemed to scream racial exclusivity. On a symbolic level, Reagan had been meant to stand in the Motor City as a clear alternative to the status quo of liberal rule that had not served blacks well.²⁴⁰ Yet when he prepared to finally claim his party's nomination, the Gipper may have missed a chance to drive this point home as he was more focused on who would be his running mate than he was focused on minority outreach.

²³⁷ Julie Johnson, “Reagan Signs Bill to Fight Housing Discrimination,” *New York Times*, September 14, 1988, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/14/us/reagan-signs-bill-to-fight-housing-discrimination.html>

²³⁸ Robert Scheer, “The Reagan Question,” *Playboy*, August 1980, 235, Box 110, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²³⁹ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 488.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 325. “Unemployment in 1980 hovered just under a heartrending 20 percent, a level not seen since the Great Depression. When Hollywood film directors needed a convincing backdrop for science fiction movies about ‘dystopias,’ they would often choose the grim city streets of Detroit without changing a thing.”

On this point, one might recall in February 1975 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., conservative activists had tried to convince Reagan to run on a third party “dream ticket” with George Wallace.²⁴¹ Refusing to make such an alliance—despite the urging of Kevin Phillips—Reagan had maintained he had “certain philosophical differences” with the former governor of Alabama that were insurmountable.²⁴² Dewey Burton, the *New York Time*’s face for blue-collar men who jumped primaries, said Reagan won his support then because the ex-actor was the image of “freshness, independence, backbone, and scrappy spirit that Wallace had shown in 1972 but ‘without the shadow of racism behind him.’”²⁴³ When speculation turned to a new “dream ticket” in 1980, no one even mentioned George, the Democrat. There was talk instead of an unconventional union with President Gerald Ford that collapsed at the last minute. Despite a contentious relationship with Reagan during the primary season, a moderate from Texas ended up accepting the position of VP candidate.²⁴⁴ Then Reagan and George H. W. Bush flew to Houston to take their wives to “a rally that marked the first public campaign appearance of the Republican ticket.”²⁴⁵ This is important to note because many scholars and journalists persist in

²⁴¹ Frank van der Linden, *The Real Reagan: What he believes, What he has accomplished, What we can expect from him* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 111.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 112, 114. Phillips who pushed hard for a Wallace alignment accused Reagan of engaging in “the politics of Chevy Chase and Wilshire Boulevard,” and proposed a choice between the “conservatism of Big Business and the conservatism of average citizens.” Reagan, a former Democrat who had been elected in California (twice) partially because so many Democrats supported him, rejected Phillips’ ideas. He found the strategist rude.

R. W. Apple, “Reagan on the Road: Easy Smile and Hard Rhetoric,” *New York Times*, February 20, 1975. Reagan had long felt his “core constituency” and Wallace’s “core constituency” were not a natural enough fit to create a viable partnership. Additionally, Reagan was not talking about *only* different racial attitudes here. Wallace was a liberal who liked government intervention *unless* that intervention dealt with civil rights. Reagan was a small government conservative in all matters outside the military.

²⁴³ Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010), 13-14.

²⁴⁴ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 364. George H. W. Bush had been Reagan’s toughest primary opponent.

²⁴⁵ Clay I. Richards, “Campaign Begins Immediately,” *Atlanta Daily World* 52, no. 199, July 20, 1980. “After appearing before the final session of the 32nd Republican National Convention to formally accept their nominations, Reagan, 69, and Bush, 56, planned to fly to Houston....”

Douglas E. Kneeland, “Reagan Escorts Bush Home for a Campaign Appearance,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1980.

saying Reagan opened his general campaign in Mississippi.²⁴⁶ This is simply not true. The official launch would not happen until Labor Day.²⁴⁷ But the first campaign event revolved around Reagan's need to unite different factions within his own party. He did this by tipping his cowboy hat to Bush's home state: "If Texas and California can't [beat Carter], it can't be done."²⁴⁸

Reagan had also not forgotten about his desire to pull minorities into his campaign. Though internal polling data showed that Reagan had literally no chance of winning a meaningful segment of blacks to his cause, the *Atlanta Daily World* advised its predominantly black readers to not be duped by "the efforts of some writers in the white press to give the impression that former Gov. Reagan has written off the Negro vote."²⁴⁹ Reagan was making efforts to reach out, but these efforts were often clumsy. For example, NAACP President Benjamin Hooks was invited to address the Republican Convention in Detroit in part because Reagan was criticized for missing the NAACP convention in Miami.²⁵⁰ Hooks then "argued that 'laissez-faire' and 'trickle down' solutions would not resolve the economic crisis" for poor blacks.²⁵¹ Though he was warmly received, this presentation gave another glimpse at a serious ideological divide

²⁴⁶ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 190. "Reagan chose to open his general campaign in Neshoba County, Mississippi."

Ian Haney-Lopez, "The Racism at the Heart of the Reagan Presidency," *Salon*, January 11, 2014. "After securing the Republican nomination in 1980, Reagan launched his official campaign at a county fair just outside Philadelphia, Mississippi...."

²⁴⁷ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 446. "The Reagan Team announced that the official kickoff of its fall campaign would be at Liberty State Park in New Jersey on Labor Day."

²⁴⁸ Douglas E. Kneeland, "Reagan Escorts Bush Home for a Campaign Appearance," *New York Times*, July 19, 1980.

²⁴⁹ "Don't be Fooled," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 10, 1980. Chief spokesman Lyn Nofziger telegrammed an apology to Ben Hooks of the NAACP for a mix-up that resulted in Reagan's missing the opportunity to speak at the NAACP convention. The article counseled the newspaper's readers to "constantly bear in mind" concerted "efforts are also made today to turn Blacks against the Republicans."

²⁵⁰ "Reagan, Bush: GOP Strong Ticket," *Atlanta Daily World* 52, no. 198, July 18, 1980. Hooks was given a prominent speaking slot though his invitation seems to have been in part an apology for Reagan's not going to the NAACP convention.

²⁵¹ Pearl T. Robinson, "Whither the Future of Blacks in the Republican Party?" *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 220.

between conservatives and minorities. If “the GOP’s biggest potential black constituency was the product of governmental actions designed to counter the traditional discriminatory practices of the free market and to redistribute income and opportunity”—a view Hooks seemed to advocate in his speech—Reagan’s smaller government, lower taxes candidacy was doomed from the start to be seen as untenable.²⁵²

Furthermore, conservative ideology born from opposition to the New Deal simply rejected or disparaged much of the redistributive liberal vision that had been most appealing to African Americans: guaranteed annual income, a national health service, public sector jobs, food stamps, and a minimum wage.²⁵³ Under Reagan’s leadership, the Republicans’ position to address class disparities was always full employment, not redistribution.²⁵⁴ He insisted any approach that made any group dependent on a federal program was both short sighted and unproductive. Addressing the N.A.A.C.P. in 1981, he said, “Government is no longer the draft horse of minority progress.... It is time we looked to new answers and new ways of thinking that will accomplish the very ends the New Deal and the Great Society anticipated.”²⁵⁵ This coldly received speech was an attempt to explain why his administration had pushed the House for massive cuts to various welfare programs that impacted minorities disproportionately in

²⁵² Ibid., 219. The poor aside, middle class blacks tended to be employed by the public sector at higher percentages than middle class whites, so “their vested interests appear to [have been] at odds with the Republican’s philosophy of limited government and preference for giving free rein to the private sector and market forces.”

²⁵³ Ibid., 222-223. When FDR moved blacks from the Republican to Democrat column, he used “substantive material incentives, particularly in the face of the Democratic Party’s limited sensitivity to racial problems, to induces blacks to move toward a new partisan attachment.... If the Republicans are to be successful at attracting more black support in the 1980s, they too must complement the politics of economic promise with substantive benefits and rewards.” Such a position is antithetical to every economic principle on which the New Right was founded.

²⁵⁴ David Wood, “Reagan Opens Drive to Take Black Votes Away from President,” *Washington Star*, August 4, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “Vote for Your Future: Jobs, Jobs, Jobs,” Reagan Campaign Ad as published in *The Record*, October 13, 1980, Box 318, Max Hugel, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁵⁵ Steven R. Weisman, “Reagan Urges N.A.A.C.P. to Help End ‘Bondage’ Of Federal Programs,” June 30, 1981, *Special to the New York Times*, accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/06/30/us/reagan-urges-naacp-to-help-end-bondage-of-federal-programs.html>

Reagan's first term.²⁵⁶ The reason for these cuts had been two-fold: to decrease dependence on government programs and to slash inflation.²⁵⁷ Reagan also supported a tightened monetary policy, which slayed the inflation beast but caused painful, short-term consequences.²⁵⁸

Some anti-capitalism scholars who have advocated socialism as the only way to achieve a just society viewed these practices within Reaganomics as racist attempts to conserve the position of a power elite "at the expense of blacks, Latinos, the working class and the poor."²⁵⁹ Indeed, the national black unemployment rate spiked to 20.4% in 1982, but this number would drop to 11.4% by the time Reagan left office, a substantive improvement for black families when compared to an almost 15% unemployment rate when Reagan first took control from Carter.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, after the 1981-82 recession ended, "per capita real GNP or per capita real disposable income or per capita real consumption rose at rates of increase above those

²⁵⁶ Lou Cannon, *President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime* (New York: Public Affairs, 1991), 456. "Federal benefit programs for households with income less than \$10,000 a year declined nearly 8% during Reagan's first term."

²⁵⁷ Evan Glass, "Pelosi Fires Back at Gingrich Over Food Stamps," *CNN Political Ticker*, October 6, 2010, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2010/10/06/pelosi-fires-back-at-gingrich-over-food-stamps/> As Pelosi would argue decades later that food stamps have the power to stimulate the economy, Reagan suggested such forms of artificial stimulation through government endowed entitlements drove up inflation.

²⁵⁸ David Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 197. Thomas Burne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 24. Ironically, many of the "factory closings, farm bankruptcies, and [high] unemployment rates" that accompanied the 1981-1982 recession were the result of Paul Volcker's policies. Volcker was Carter's chairman of the Federal Reserve, though it seems fair to say from his "anti-inflation" rhetoric that Reagan supported Volcker's approach despite the negative political consequences.

²⁵⁹ Manning Marble, "Reaganism, Racism, and Reaction: Black Political Realignment in the 1980s," *The Black Scholar* 13, no. 6 (Fall 1982): 5. "Reagonomics should be understood, fundamentally, as a conservative political response to the organic crisis of capital accumulation," 4. "In this crisis period of capital accumulation, only two long-term outcomes are possible: (1) the acceleration of the corporations' exploitation of blacks, the working class, and the poor, or (2) the nationalization of heavy industries, the means of transportation and financial establishments by the public, and a general socialist reconstruction in America," 5-6.

²⁶⁰ Larry Elder, "Ronald Reagan: The 100 Year-Old Racist?" *Real Clear Politics*, February 10, 2011, accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2011/02/10/ronald_reagan_the_100-year-old_racist_108835.html In addition to the shift in employment, the number of black owned businesses increased by 38% during Reagan's terms compared to the general 14% increase in businesses experienced by Americans in general. Black owned business receipts "went from less than 10 billion to nearly 20 billion – a 100% increase." Bureau of Labor and Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics: Black or African American 1982-1988," Data Extracted March 23, 2014, <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet> U.S. Census Bureau, "Unemployment Rate by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 1998," *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1999, accessed March 25, 2014 <http://www.census.gov/prod/99pubs/99statab/sec13.pdf> Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 383.

experienced in the 1970s,” which coincided with “more than 65 percent of the potential labor force [being] employed for the first time....”²⁶¹ Though not specifically targeting minorities, these were the rising tides that Reagan had always said would lift all boats, and if using such economic measures as guideposts, blacks were consequently better off at the end of Reagan’s tenure than they had been at the end of Carter’s.

Moreover, despite the very real dissonance that existed between the prevailing vision of blacks and the prevailing vision of conservatives, there were black conservatives who supported Reagan with points of view that should not be dismissed just because they were on his team.²⁶² James C. Cummings, Jr., Chairman of the National Black Republican Council, felt in 1980 that “the image of Governor Reagan, which [was] promoted among blacks by the Democrats, [was] not an accurate image....”²⁶³ He predicated this notion on Reagan’s actions in office. For example, Governor Reagan had appointed an unprecedented number of blacks to important positions including James Johnson, his Director of Veterans’ Affairs, who was the first black to head a California state department.²⁶⁴ Melvin Bradley who served as Assistant to the Governor from 1970-1974 said, “The fact of the matter is that prior to Governor Reagan, there had never been more than a handful of blacks who participated in state government at almost any level.... Almost every appointment that Governor Reagan made, as far as blacks are concerned, was a first.”²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Allan H. Meltzer, “Economic Policies and Actions in the Reagan Administration,” *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 10, no 4 (Summer 1988), 530.

²⁶² Manning Marble, “Reaganism, Racism, and Reaction: Black Political Realignment in the 1980s,” *The Black Scholar* 13, no. 6 (Fall 1982), 8. “Black conservatives do not represent a monolithic political/social force, but rather have evolved from radically different sectors of black society.”

²⁶³ “Black GOPers Back Reagan in Run for the White House,” *The Indianapolis Recorder*, April 26, 1980.

²⁶⁴ Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2003), 177. When first taking his position in Sacramento, Reagan appointed 19 minority applicants to fill 100 jobs in his administration that needed immediate attention.

²⁶⁵ Melvin Bradley, interview by Gabrielle Morris, “Governor’s office, access and outreach, 1967-1974: oral history transcript/1987,” Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley, May 4, 1983,

Even though Reagan never got a lot of credit from the majority of black voters for these endeavors, he had still planned to make his first major address after the 1980 Detroit Convention to the black community. On an internal calendar dated June 13 from Ed Meese's files stored in the Reagan Library—before Reagan had even become the official Republican nominee—there was a handwritten “OK” in bold blue ink next to “National Urban League” in the August 5th block. Unfortunately, “Neshoba County Fair” appeared on the same calendar in the August 7th block.²⁶⁶ Reagan would not travel to Mississippi per the date on this early schedule, but the nefarious symbolism that clouded Neshoba County meant it would have probably been better for Reagan's image if the event had been canceled all together. Certainly Reagan's appearance there would undercut the work of Wright-McNeill, a black political consulting firm based in Columbus, Georgia, that had been hired by the RNC to analyze and conduct black outreach. Wright-McNeill had concluded the GOP could reach more black voters, but Reagan would need to pay special attention to articulation to persuade minorities to consider Republican principles that caused psychic discomfort.²⁶⁷ In light of this purpose, Reagan giving a speech near a city in which civil rights workers had been murdered was surely incoherent and counterproductive.

This was also the conclusion of an African American economist named Thomas Sowell who was asked to offer his opinions on Republican outreach efforts. Sowell was not a Republican—or even very political in 1980—but he agreed to go to Reagan's Los Angeles office. He met with two black staffers, one of whom Sowell has called “Mr. Skeptic” in his memoir. Though on the same ideological page as Reagan, Mr. Skeptic “wondered how much [Reagan and his aides]

accessed March 2, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/governorsoffout00bradrich>, 26. Bradley also says (transcript page 30), “When you say that the governor appointed a black to the state appeals court... which is a big appointment, or the governor appointed a black to be the director of a department, that doesn't sound like very much in 1983. I have to continue to put this in its proper perspective... in 1967, it was pretty important.”

²⁶⁶ August Calendar, June 13, 1980, Box 121, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁶⁷ Pearl T. Robinson, “Whither the Future of Blacks in the Republican Party?” *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (Summer 1982), 217-220.

understood black voters or were comfortable with them.”²⁶⁸ When Sowell learned that Reagan planned to go to Philadelphia, Mississippi to speak at the Neshoba Fair, he was confounded and withdrew any official affiliation with the campaign—an affiliation that had lasted all of two days—because such a trip seemed breathtakingly wrongheaded. Though he already felt Reagan was “a man of much more substance than he was usually credited with in the media—then or later,” Sowell viewed Mr. Skeptic’s instincts as having been validated.²⁶⁹

Regardless, on August 3, 1980, the Republican nominee started what was billed as a three-day campaign swing to woo black voters after a quick pit stop down South.²⁷⁰ On ABC’s *World News Tonight*, Joe Benton set the scene: “An estimated 30,000 people did their best to make Ronald and Nancy Reagan feel at home at the Neshoba County fair.... Republicans here say it is the most important event in the entire state between now and Election Day.”²⁷¹ Much more would be made later of what the press described as a “10-minute speech” near a small town on a summer evening than would ever be made of what was the “major address” Reagan gave to the Urban League only a couple of days later.²⁷² Blowback would come almost immediately from the Carter campaign, but some historians and liberal pundits continue to use Neshoba to tarnish Reagan’s reputation by suggesting he openly appealed to racists when running for office.

²⁶⁸ Thomas Sowell, *A Personal Odyssey* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 275.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 265.

²⁷⁰ “Reagan, ‘Itching to Get Started,’ Scratches for Votes on the Road,” *UPI*, August 4, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “Reagan embarked yesterday on an early campaign swing that will take him from the rural South to an inner city ghetto... [He] planned a quick stop at the fairgrounds in Philadelphia, Miss., before flying to New York City.... Tomorrow he will deliver what aides have billed as a major address to the National Urban League.”

²⁷¹ Joe Benton, “World News Tonight - ABC,” ABC News Transcripts, American Broadcasting Companies, Inc., August 3, 1980, accessed March 9, 2014, <https://archive.org/stream/ABCNews19781979/ABC%20News-1980-1981-B-b.txt> The “30,000” people said on ABC to be in attendance at the fair is an interesting detail. Reagan’s advance men estimated “6,000” would listen to the speech. The Jackson Daily News reported a record “20,000” people went to hear the nominee speak. The Chicago Ledger said “15,000” people gathered. Joseph Crespino used this “15,000” estimate in his book *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution*. The New York Times had “10,000” people at the speech. The crowd’s size is uncertain.

²⁷² David Wood, “Reagan Opens Drive to Take Black Votes Away From President,” *Washington Star*, August 3, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library

For example, Thomas F. Schaller wrote in *Whistling Past Dixie* Reagan's "race-themed event" in Mississippi capitalized on white backlash. Reagan's campaign strategists purposefully chose the rural platform for the candidate's "first major speech after accepting the 1980 Republican presidential nomination" to send a "clear signal that the GOP presidential ticket... would defend southern autonomy on racial issues."²⁷³ For liberals like Schaller, Neshoba was such a powerful symbol that Reagan's visit was meant to spark a fire brighter than a burning cross because "press coverage and word-of-mouth among white southerners [would quickly] spread Reagan's coded racial messages across the region."²⁷⁴

This is similar to the story Jimmy Carter's surrogates would tell about Neshoba, but that was a matter of politics. History is a different animal. Schaller's version of events is inaccurate on multiple points. First, Reagan's 1980 visit to Neshoba County Fair was not "race-themed." Though most of the attendees were white, the fair itself could be called race-neutral. Surely there were Confederate flags fluttering in the Mississippi breeze, but the attractions at the fair were politicians, family reunions, a hog calling championship, and the selection of Miss Neshoba County.²⁷⁵ Nor did Reagan mention race once in his speech. Secondly, once the negative implications of the Neshoba appearance were clear, Reagan's campaign strategists advised strongly against going. Thirdly, the Gipper did not give a "major" speech. Rather this was a short, humorous address that touched upon little of substance. Fourth, there were, of course, racists in Mississippi including those KKK members who had shamefully murdered the civil rights activists in nearby Philadelphia in 1964, which had forever tainted the geography with negative symbolism. However, in general, no one was much concerned about Southern

²⁷³ Thomas F. Schaller, *Whistling Past Dixie* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 22.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁷⁵ Hoy, Anne Q. "Reagan Speaks Part on Unique Rural 'Set'" *Chicago-Ledger*, Box 264, folder "Neshoba County Fair," Charles Tyson (Advance and Scheduling), 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. "Politics has always taken top billing at the Neshoba County Fair."

autonomy on racial issues in 1980, and any “pride of place” as a “first” campaign event was wholly unintentional on Reagan’s part and not an accurate description of his schedule.

Per notes on a July 29th campaign calendar in Ed Meese’s papers, the Urban League Speech happening on August 5 was still slated before Reagan was supposed to speak in Neshoba County.²⁷⁶ However, Reagan’s disorganized campaign managers changed the date of Reagan’s appearance at the last minute to avoid sending the wrong signal to voters. As one staffer explained, “It would have been like we were coming to Mississippi and winking at the folks here, saying we didn’t mean to be talking to them Urban League folk.”²⁷⁷ The desire was to not “wink” at anyone. To be sure, an internal campaign memo to Reagan’s advance schedulers handwritten by Ken Klinge outlined chief pollster and strategist Dick Wirthlin’s four options for dealing with the potentially horrible optics of the fair. These options were: cancel Neshoba all together and return to the South in mid-October; substitute George and Barbara Bush to make the appearance; change the date, or abandon the “urban affairs theme” of Reagan’s broader trip, which was the main purpose for this segment of his travel.²⁷⁸ Wirthlin also had a direct conversation with the candidate about how Neshoba might be negatively spun with racial overtones, which had made Reagan so angry he had thrown the papers in his hands across the room. Having long viewed any charges of racism—or charges of appealing to racists—directed against him as nothing more than blatant attempts at character assassination, he had said, “Dick, I’ve already given a commitment on it. I’m not going to disappoint those people.”²⁷⁹

²⁷⁶ August Calendar, July 29, 1980, folder “July 1980,” Box 143, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁷⁷ Lou Canon, “Reagan Campaigning from County Fair to Urban League,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁷⁸ Ken Klinge, memo to Bill Timmons and Chuck Tyson, 1980, folder “Neshoba County Fair,” Box 264, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁷⁹ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 394.

Lou Cannon has written that one of the reasons Reagan made this “stumble” was that he was very superstitious about ever breaking an engagement, but one should also note the campaign’s real “Southern strategy” had been to “recruit prominent surrogate speakers for Reagan from the South, especially Democrats from the state.”²⁸⁰ Breaking a commitment to Southern politicians over Neshoba might have sent the negative message that Reagan viewed the Southern people, her elected officials, and the region in general as the pariahs they were too often portrayed to be long after the civil rights movement had ended. For an example of perpetuated “Southern racist” stereotyping persisting, one need only remember when school integration was finally a reality in Neshoba County in 1970, “the national media flocked to Philadelphia to watch the violence erupt; there was none.”²⁸¹ Besides, Reagan’s strategists believed their candidate had a natural charm in the “New South” where the key to changing votes was economic dynamism “aided by themes stressing productivity, lower taxes, free enterprise, etc.”²⁸² Reagan did not need to appeal to racists to attract support.

Additionally, though he would keep his word to attend the fair in 1980, the date of Reagan’s visit was switched on the calendar at the last minute per Wirthlin’s advice—the number three option on the aforementioned memo—to de-emphasize any unintended messaging that might be inscribed onto the venue by political enemies. This was hoped to be enough of a defensive calculation because the fair was not Reagan’s first public outing since he had officially been named the Republican nominee in Detroit. It was not even the first public event over which he

Jeremy D. Mayer, *Running on Race: Racial Politics in Presidential Campaigns, 1960-2000*, (New York: Random House, 2002), 152. “Throughout his career, Reagan would react with visceral anger to any suggestion that he was racially insensitive or prejudiced.”

²⁸⁰ Lou Cannon, “Reagan’s Southern Stumble,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2007. “Reagan had a showman’s superstition that it was bad luck to cancel an engagement once it was booked.”

Donald J. Devine, Memo to William J. Casey and Dr. Richard B. Worthlin, “Strategy and Targeting for November Election,” June 19, 1980, Box 103, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁸¹ Bob Moser, *Blue Dixie: Awakening the South’s Democratic Majority*, (New York: Times Books, 2008), 132.

²⁸² Donald J. Devine, Memo to William J. Casey and Dr. Richard B. Worthlin, “Strategy and Targeting for November Election,” June 19, 1980, Box 103, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

had presided that weekend. Just the night before flying to Mississippi, Reagan spoke in Irvine, California for a similar length of time as he would speak at the Neshoba Fairgrounds. He had been an honored guest presiding over the United States Long Course Swimming Championship that would determine who would have made the country's Olympic Team if American athletes had been allowed to compete at the official games in Moscow.²⁸³

Once Reagan was on stage in Mississippi at what multiple publications called a “traditional political forum” where candidates jockeying for Southern voters had been appearing for almost one hundred years, the Republican candidate did not launch into a formal or race-themed address.²⁸⁴ Rather he referenced great Southern traditions like Old Miss football. He mentioned his good friend John Wayne. He joked about Nancy in the rocking chair she'd been given by their hosts along with a basket made by Choctaw Indians, early residents of Philadelphia. He kept the crowd laughing with lines like, “I know Jimmy Carter has been doing his best; that's the problem,” and “I know why [Teddy Kennedy is] so interested in poverty: he never had any when he was a kid.”²⁸⁵ Far from playing the role of race-baiter with a George Wallace flair for insinuation, Reagan introduced some of his more serious core beliefs to the crowd as casually as

²⁸³ “Detailed Schedule: Ronald Reagan,” August 2, 1980, Box 264, folder “Schedules – 8/2/1980, US Olympic Team,” Charles Tyson (Advance and Scheduling), 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. Reagan was scheduled to arrive at the sports complex at 8 PM where he watched various events. At 9:08 PM, Ronald Reagan was introduced to the crowd gathered for the 1980 Olympic Team Selection. He was to begin his remarks at 9:10 PM. He was to conclude his remarks at 9:20 PM. Therefore, this speech was planned to be 10 minutes long. His written schedule for the next day had Reagan arriving at the Neshoba fair at 5:15 PM. His speaking slot was from 5:30-5:50 PM. He actually spoke for 14 minutes and fifty-four seconds in Mississippi. He also told the Neshoba Fair attendees in his address to them about the experience he had enjoyed whilst speaking with American athletes the night previous.

²⁸⁴ David Hampton, “Reagan Addresses Enthusiastic Supporters,” *Jackson Daily News: The Second*, August 4, 1980, August 3, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. Reagan spoke at “the traditional Mississippi political forum.” Donald Lambro, “Reagan Will Address Urban League Today,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 5, 1980. Reagan previously spoke at the “traditional political gathering” in Mississippi. Anne Q. Hoy. “Reagan Speaks Part on Unique Rural ‘Set’” *Chicago-Ledger*, Box 264, folder “Neshoba County Fair,” Charles Tyson (Advance and Scheduling), 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “Politics has always taken top billing at the Neshoba County Fair.”

²⁸⁵ “Transcript of Ronald Reagan's 1980 Neshoba County Fair Speech, *The Neshoba Democrat*, November 15, 2007.

a guy talking on a front porch drinking lemonade. He said the common stereotype of lazy people on welfare was wrong because he knew after having been a governor of a major state that “the overwhelming majority [of people receiving public aid] would like nothing better than to be out with jobs for the future.”²⁸⁶ Therefore, one can assume if “welfare” was—as has often been contended by the Left—a white backlash “code word,” Reagan did not deploy it well in Neshoba County.²⁸⁷ Rather than stirring up racial resentment, he was clearly calling for compassion for fellow citizens in need while communicating that a Reagan administration would provide a way to escape government dependence.

To be sure, the predominantly white crowd with “anti-Washington views popular in such parts” responded enthusiastically when Reagan also said what he’d said many times in the past: states and local communities should handle programs funded by their own taxes.²⁸⁸ He had used virtually the exact same language when accepting the Republican nomination in Detroit.²⁸⁹ But the most famous line from his speech—“I believe in state’s rights”—received no audible reaction on the only known recording of the event.²⁹⁰ This polite attention was not like the roar of protest easily detected when Reagan observed the audience was “ninety percent Democrat.”²⁹¹ It could not touch the whoops of pride that filled the air when Reagan talked about the young athletes he’d watched on August 2: the American swimmers he saw break the winning times of athletes

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Thomas Burne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 206, 214.

²⁸⁸ Carl P. Leubsdorf, *The Sun*, August 4, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. Douglas E. Kneeland, “Reagan Campaigns at Mississippi Fair,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

²⁸⁹ Richard S. Williamson, “1980: The Reagan Campaign: Harbinger of a Revitalized Federalism,” *Publius* 11, no. ¾ (Summer 1980), 148. Reagan had said in July in Detroit, “Everything that can be run more effectively by state and local government we shall turn over to state and local government, along with the funding sources to pay for it. We are going to put an end to the money-merry-go-round where our money becomes Washington’s money, to be spent by states and cities only if they spend it exactly the way the federal bureaucrats tell them to.”

²⁹⁰ Ronald Reagan, “Neshoba County Fair Speech,” delivered August 3, 1980, transferred to CD by David Hixon August 30, 2006, accessed March 7, 2014, <http://www.onlinemadison.com/ftp/reagan/reaganneshoba.mp3>

²⁹¹ Ibid.

in Moscow even though they had been asked to stand by their country rather than stand on a podium in the Soviet Union.

This does not mean that “state’s rights” has not often been associated with racism or the struggle to maintain the color line in the South. The American Civil War was in part fought over “state’s rights” per maintaining the institution of slavery. Many Southern politicians who temporarily broke away from the Democratic Party to form the “Dixiecrat” or “State’s Rights Party” in 1948 to protest civil rights legislation used this phrase often.²⁹² Surely Southerners in the crowd were very familiar with the term and knew all of the various ways by which it had been deployed in their region. D. Jonathan White from the University of Alabama noted “states’ rights” more sordid attachments when writing “the term still appears on occasion in political speech, in some cases as code language indicating support of discriminatory practices or outright racism; as a result, its use is often met with skepticism or suspicion by the public at large.”²⁹³ However, there is still little evidence apart from speculation about “code” that Reagan was trying to tap specifically into white racism in Mississippi.

Many years later, shortly after Reagan died, African American civil rights leader, former member of LBJ’s administration, journalist and historian Roger Wilkins said:

[Reagan’s] first speech in his campaign in 1980 was in Philadelphia, Mississippi, which nobody outside of Mississippi had ever heard of except for one thing and that was that three civil rights workers were killed there in 1964. Reagan said then “I’m for states rights.” If you say “I’m for states rights in Mississippi,” everybody knows what you’re talking about. Some years later he went to Atlanta and he said “Jefferson Davis is a hero of mine.” Everybody knows what you’re talking about then, too.²⁹⁴

²⁹² Desmond S. King and Rogers M. Smith, *Still a House Divided: Race and Politics in Obama’s America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 82.

²⁹³ White, D. Jonathan, “States’ Rights,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, August 3, 2009, last updated November 15, 2012, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-2367> “After the Civil War and Reconstruction, Alabama, along with other Southern states, used states’ rights arguments to restore a system of white supremacy.”

²⁹⁴ Roger Wilkins, “The Reagan Legacy,” PBS Newshour transcripts, *Public Broadcasting System*, February 6, 2001, accessed April 4, 2014, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics-jan-june01-regan90_2-6/

Few people would dispute that Reagan's use of the words "state's rights" had been inartful and insensitive, but it is interesting that none of his critics seem to recognize that some white Southern culture exists outside the prism of racism. As Tony Horwitz discovered when researching his Pulitzer Prize winning *Confederates in the Attic*, the memory of the "War Between the States" echoes quite differently in the minds of many Americans who still feel a strong connection to a defeated past.²⁹⁵ Though he poked a great deal of fun of at misplaced Neo-Confederate sentiments in enclaves of Dixie—a quiet "railing against modernity" that at times used nostalgia as justification for "reactionary politics"—Horwitz seemed capable of at least conceding that the South presents a complicated tapestry of beliefs not so easy to unravel with just one thread.²⁹⁶ This was certainly Robert Penn Warren's position in *Jefferson Davis Gets His Citizenship Back*.²⁹⁷

First appearing as an extended essay for *The New Yorker* in 1980, Warren's piece was written on the heels of Jimmy Carter referencing the former President of the Confederacy's history of service to the United States on the occasion of restoring his citizenship.²⁹⁸ Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon had first introduced the resolution for restoration, which had passed unanimously on a voice vote, so as to give back to Davis "the rights due an outstanding American."²⁹⁹ Perhaps Reagan mentioned a Southern figure as his hero to connect with a Southern audience, but in light of the fact that a Democratic President had recently signed very

²⁹⁵ Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 26. "Roughly half of modern-day white Southerners descended from Confederates, and on in four Southern men of military age died in the War."

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 386. Nancy MacLean also discusses the Neo-Confederate phenomenon in her essay in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*.

²⁹⁷ Robert Penn Warren, "Jefferson Davis Gets his Citizenship Back," *The New Yorker*, February 25, 1980, 44. Though he had a mixed reputation amongst Southerners who blamed him in part for the loss of the war, "Davis was 'a gentleman' and... had 'the courage of a man.'"

²⁹⁸ Jimmy Carter, "Restoration of Citizenship Rights to Jefferson F. Davis: Statement on Signing S.J. Res. 16 Into Law," *American Presidency Project*, October 17, 1978. "[Jefferson Davis] had served the United States long and honorably as a soldier, Member of the U.S. House and Senate, and as Secretary of War."

²⁹⁹ Robert Penn Warren, "Jefferson Davis Gets his Citizenship Back," *The New Yorker*, February 25, 1980, 90.

bipartisan legislation honoring this man, Wilkins' feelings about how everyone "knew" what admiring Jefferson Davis "meant" seem a bit unfair.

One might also wonder if Reagan was blowing a "dog whistle" in 1980, what did white voters "hear" when he spent twice as much time in the hospital speaking with the wounded civil rights leader Vernon Jordan than he had spent at the Neshoba Fair?³⁰⁰ How were Southerners who surely watched the national news like everyone else supposed to interpret Reagan's "major assault on the allegiance of black voters to the Democratic Party" when he made a fervent pitch for blacks to join his crusade in front of the Urban League?³⁰¹ If he was telegraphing a return to the Jim Crow South, why did he say in a highly publicized, major speech that he was "committed to the protection and enforcement of civil rights of black Americans?"³⁰² Is it possible Reagan's outreach was sincere and his use of the phrase "state's rights" to express his federalism, which he made no secret was the foundation of his political worldview, was but another example of racial insensitivity like his deployment of "welfare queen" or "young buck?"

Regardless, the *Atlanta Daily World* lauded Reagan's efforts to reach out to blacks in New York with only a passing mention of Mississippi. After his speech to the Urban League was finished, some in attendance relayed the candidate was short on details about how he would help minorities in particular, but others felt positive about the fact that he was openly courting their vote. Reagan also got respect from many African Americans for choosing to visit a ghetto in the Bronx despite the hostile reception he received from local residents.³⁰³ The three-day effort to woo blacks finally ended in Chicago where Reagan met with the editors of *Jet* and *Ebony*

³⁰⁰ Lou Cannon, "Reagan Visits Jordan, Says He Is Doing Well," *Washington Post*, August 4, 1980, Box 126, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁰¹ David Wood, "Reagan Pushes GOP Economics In An Appeal to Black Voters," *Washington Star*, August 5, 1980, Box 126, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Donald Lambro, "Reagan Winning Respect of Blacks During First Tour of Wealthy, Ghetto Areas," *Atlanta Daily World* 52, no. 208, August 8, 1980. The Urban League audience "interrupted [Reagan's] address on black economic problems 12 times with applause."

magazines as well as Jesse Jackson.³⁰⁴ Much like the mixed reaction Reagan received from different attendees to his Urban League speech, the civil rights activist and head of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity) said he felt it was good that Reagan was reaching out to black Americans, but he did not feel Reagan had offered many specific solutions for black problems.³⁰⁵ Additionally, in front of television crews near where Reagan's car was waiting outside the PUSH headquarters building, Jackson asked ambush style if Reagan was willing to renounce the endorsement he had received from the Ku Klux Klan. Taken aback, the Republican candidate said he was unaware of any such endorsement but repudiated it immediately.³⁰⁶ In a follow up letter he wrote to Jackson to thank him for meeting with him, he reiterated: "I join you in abhorring the actions and rejecting the tenants of the Klan and all other organizations which preach racial, religious or ethnic hatred or encourage a climate of terrorism against any other group of people."³⁰⁷

Perhaps Jackson's inquiry on August 5 was prompted by news that Patricia Harris, a Carter surrogate, had already implied publically to several thousand black professionals in Dallas—as well as members of the AFL-CIO in Los Angeles—that Reagan was sympathetic with the KKK's hateful purposes. She had addressed both groups in the official capacity of Carter's

³⁰⁴ David Axelrod, "Reagan to See Black Publishers," *New York Times*, undated, Box 126, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. "State Representative Donald Totten, Reagan's Illinois chairman... [said] 'We are not going to write off the black community.... We are going to make an effort with meetings like these, and we will see what develops.'"

³⁰⁵ Donald Lambro, "Blacks Applaud and Boo Reagan," *UPI*, August 6, 1980. Box 126, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁰⁶ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 388. "Reagan Meets with Jackson: Repudiates Klan Endorsement," *UPI*, August 5, 1980, Box 126, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁰⁷ Ronald Reagan, letter to Jesse Jackson, undated, Box 126, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. This was an excerpt from the campaign-approved cover letter sent to Jackson—with apologies for not communicating sooner—that accompanied a point-by-point response to Jackson's concerns about Reagan's Urban League speech, an August 22 statement rejecting the Klan's endorsement, and the Republican Party platform excerpt dealing specifically with civil rights. According to a handwritten note to Meese from "Mel" in the same file, Jackson had endorsed Carter by the time this packet was sent, and thus the Reagan campaign should be criticized for its slow response to the civil rights leader.

secretary of Health and Human Services: “The KKK said on July 19, ‘The Republican platform reads as if it were written by a Klansman.’ The Klan obviously knows their platform.”³⁰⁸

Senator John Tower, the chairman of the committee that penned the platform that “Mrs. Harris [chose] to so grossly represent,” issued a press release lambasting the secretary’s words as “inflammatory racial slurs” intended to shore up the black vote for President Carter.³⁰⁹ He said, “I believe the Black community will see through this transparent ploy as a clearly desperate appeal by the Carter Administration for the Black vote.... The Klan endorsement would have stayed in the gutter where it belongs if Mrs. Harris had not dignified it by her comments.”³¹⁰

With the incumbent in a dead heat in some polls with John Anderson—the third party candidate who was eating into his more liberal base—and behind Reagan before the Democratic National Convention, Carter could not relinquish even one ballot.³¹¹ The black voting bloc had played too pivotal a role in first putting him into the White House, and he needed to shore up that support despite minority dissatisfaction with his performance.³¹² Therefore, playing on the fears of blacks nationwide by implying the Republican Party was a haven for racists to keep his base in tact became an integral part of his—and the Democratic Party’s—new “Southern strategy.”

As a result, the Reagan campaign monitored all of Harris’s “non-political” speeches. On one transcript preserved with other campaign papers, Dick Wirthlin wrote to Tony Dolan: “Take a

³⁰⁸ Ann McDaniel, “Tower Complaints Bring Review of Harris’ Trip,” August 7, 1980, *Washington Bureau*, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³⁰⁹ John Tower, Press Release, August 6, 1980, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ Louis Harris, “Harris Poll: Ron on Top, Carter Lags,” *Chicago Tribune-NY News Syndicate*, August 4, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “When the cross section of 1,458 likely voters was asked straight-out whom they preferred, Reagan received 53%, Carter 26%, and Anderson 18%. Reagan has gained 14 points since June.” “Gallup Poll Shows Edge For Republican Issues,” *New York Times*, August 4, 1980, Box 132, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. A survey on which political party with current American problems “found 30 percent naming the Republicans and 27 percent naming the Democrats.”

³¹² Kenneth Walker, “Black Leaders Finding it Difficult to Deliver on Promises by Democrats, Face Criticism from Voters,” *Black Enterprise*, July 1980, Box 104, Ed Meese, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “‘We literally elected Carter,’ [said] Columbia University political scientist Charles Hamilton.”

good look at this tripe.” Dolan wrote a memo to Meese saying that both he and Lyn Nofziger felt it was “essential” to respond to “this incredible smear” taxpayers had funded, but Harris was not the only attack dog the Carter campaign had unleashed.³¹³ Andrew Young, Carter’s former ambassador to the United Nations, picked up the fear-mongering ball on August 11, 1980 in an editorial published in the *Washington Post*. Recalling the sordid history of Philadelphia, Mississippi, he lambasted Reagan’s use of the phrase “state’s rights” as “code words” from the “southern strategy” script used by Wallace, Goldwater and Nixon. He used the rhetorical question to great effect whilst coupling the Neshoba visit to the Klan endorsement written in a Klan newspaper that Patricia Harris had already pushed into the public sphere:

Is Reagan saying that he intends to do everything he can to turn the clock back to the Mississippi of 1964? Do the powers of state and local governments include the right to end the voting rights of black citizens? Would Reagan dare to commission, directly or indirectly, the Sheriff Rainey and the vigilantes to ride once again, poisoning the political process with hatred and violence? ...All of this prompts me to pose this question to the Urban League’s John Jacobs: do you really believe the black vote is up for grabs this year?³¹⁴

If Reagan had made subliminal appeals to racism, Young used a brutal Southern history to make direct appeals to black fears rooted in the past. In radio commercials that ran on WWRL in New York, a station with a predominantly black audience, Young also said, “I would like to talk to you a moment about Jimmy Carter, a president who has been our good friend, and about the forces that are out to *get* him and us.”³¹⁵ Perhaps this is what Harris meant when she said she saw “the specter of white sheets” behind Ronald Reagan.³¹⁶ Amazingly, these overtures would

³¹³ Anthony R. Dolan, Memo to Ed Meese, “Harris Smear,” Undated, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. Tony Dolan, Memo to Jim Baker, “Possible Ford Speech,” Undated, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “The Carter surrogates are killing us, and Patricia Harris’ latest attack is the lowest.”

³¹⁴ Andrew Young, “Chilling Words in Neshoba County,” *Washington Post*, August 11, 1980.

³¹⁵ Carter Radio Commercial transcripts from WWAL in New York, Undated, 1980, Box 859, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³¹⁶ “Candidates’ Labor Day Speeches Mark Start of Presidential Race,” *Washington Post*, September 1, 1980.

get more blatant, but first Reagan would make his own stumbling reference to the Klan that would hurt, not help, his campaign.

Per the *Washington Post* the candidates' Labor Day speeches marked the start of the presidential race.³¹⁷ Reagan gave his speech at Liberty State Park with shirtsleeves rolled up and the Statue of Liberty standing tall in the background. Jimmy Carter gave his speech at a picnic in Tuscumbia, Alabama, which the *Los Angeles Times* had reported was “the national headquarters of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.”³¹⁸ Whilst Ronald Reagan had been accused of echoing George Wallace rhetoric in Mississippi, the Democratic president embraced George Wallace himself where he sat in his wheelchair on the dais from which Carter would give his speech. When the Klan showed up to hear what the president had to say—as uninvited in his campaign as they were in Reagan's—he said it angered him to see them using the Confederate battle flag. This implies he felt the Confederate battle flag might mean something to his white Southern constituents other than what it meant to the Klan. (It is unclear what he may have thought such a symbol meant to any Southern blacks in the audience.) Carter again wrapped himself in the South after returning to the White House where he served labor leaders barbecue, a regional delicacy.

Yet Reagan still managed to get bogged down in what some Alabamians felt was a slur on their very honor. At the Michigan State Fair in Detroit, he “tripped over his own tongue” when he said Carter was opening his campaign “in the city that gave birth to” the Ku Klux Klan.³¹⁹ Not only did this prompt an indignant telegram from Fob James, the governor of Alabama, the campaign was flooded with calls from outraged Southerners.³²⁰ A “man from Virginia called to

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 456.

³¹⁹ “Who's Slinging Mud,” *The Arizona Republic*, September 5, 1980, A5, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

ask that Ronald Reagan stick to bread and butter issues and not the KKK.”³²¹ Many angry voters called from Alabama. The Klan was born in Tennessee. Helen Keller was born in Tuscumbia! (Clearly, many voters in the South no longer wanted to be associated with a segregationist past.) An internal campaign memo to Ed Meese from Ed Gray said, “We could lose the whole South with [Reagan’s] statement.”³²² The Gipper apologized in Detroit saying that he “intended no inference that Mr. Carter was in any way sympathetic to the Klan and in no way did I intend to disparage the City of Tuscumbia or the State of Alabama. Nor do I believe there is any place for the Klan in the hearts of the people of the South.”³²³ He also called for President Carter to “disavow” statements made by Patricia Harris and Andrew Young that associated his campaign with the KKK.

This did not fit with the Carter’s campaign plans. On September 4, 1980, the *Atlanta Constitution* reported that Andrew Young and Coretta Scott King had joined a task force led by Maryland Representative Parren Mitchell to generate higher black turnout in the presidential election. Perhaps finding fear to be a good motivator for voters, Mitchell said, “Ronald Reagan is a clear and present danger to black America. He has been embraced and endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan.”³²⁴ At Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, President Carter bowed his head in front of a black audience in a moment of feigned piety before heavily insinuating

³²⁰ Fob James, Telegram to RR, September 2, 1980, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²¹ Answer Desk, “Calls on KKK Comment,” Undated, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²² Ed Gray, Memo to Ed Meese, “Alabama Statement Reaction,” Undated, Box 867, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²³ Ronald Reagan, Statement on Tuscumbia, September 2, 1980. Box 562, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²⁴ Campaign Watch, “Group to Spur Black Turnout,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 4, 1980.

Governor Reagan was a hatemongering racist.³²⁵ He said, “You’ve seen in this campaign the stirrings of hate and the rebirth of code words like ‘state’s rights’ in a speech in Mississippi, in a campaign reference to the Ku Klux Klan relating to the South. This is a message that creates a cloud on the political horizon. Hatred has no place in this country.”³²⁶

This prompted Senator Paul Laxalt of Nevada to issue a statement at a news conference accusing Carter of having “resorted to smears and personal attacks against almost all of his major opponents since 1966” rather than sticking with a debate on the record.³²⁷ Carter relented and stopped running an ad that had appeared in “about 100 black oriented newspapers across the country starting September 13 and [was] in [September] editions of *Ebony*” accusing Republicans of being “out to beat” Carter because of the number of black judges he had appointed.³²⁸ Richard Nixon weighed in on the state of the political season when he told Teddy White for the *Today* show that “They’re a tough bunch... these Georgia boys. They may play softball down in Plains, but they play hardball in the country.”³²⁹ Senator Laxalt called Carter’s style “hardball below the belt.”³³⁰

Reflecting on Carter in the *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, communications and culture professor Dan F. Hahn claimed the president’s rhetorical characteristics were marked by a

³²⁵ “A Squalid Exercise in Church,” *Washington Post*, September 18, 1980, Box 860, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library. “Running Mean,” *Washington Post*, September 18, 1980, Box 860, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²⁶ Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2003), 487.

³²⁷ Paul Laxalt, Statement at News Conference, September 19, 1980, Box 860, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²⁸ AP, “Carter Camp to Withdraw Ad Directed at Black Audiences,” *Washington Post*, September 22, 1980, Box 859, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

Ad. “Jimmy Carter Named 37 Black Judges.” *St. Louis Argus*. Box 859, Tony Dolan, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³²⁹ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 466.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, 478

reputation of “inflexibility and meanness.”³³¹ For evidence, Hahn pointed to articles written about the president’s style during the 1980 campaign. The *New York Post* called Carter’s attacks on Reagan as “‘savage,’ the ‘politics of extremism,’ going ‘for the jugular,’ ‘fighting dirty,’ with a ‘crude attempt to smear’ by a ‘compulsively nasty little campaigner’ who ‘has an attraction to... groins and eyeballs.’”³³² The *New York Times*, which had endorsed him, observed Carter did not seem to know “there is a difference between hard blows and low ones,” and the *Daily News* called Carter’s tactics a “disgrace to the Presidency and a disservice to the country.”³³³ These reactions were in part inspired by statements like those Carter gave to attendees of a fundraising cocktail party in Chicago on October 6: “You’ll determine whether or not this America will be unified or, if I lose the elections, whether Americans might be separated, black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban...”³³⁴

Some people in the minority community did not believe Carter’s message. Ralph Abernathy denounced Carter for not improving conditions for the poor.³³⁵ Further recognizing the debilitating impact of out of control inflation on black families, the civil rights leader “urged blacks to flock to the polls en masse for Reagan because ‘we need a change and we need it now.’”³³⁶ Hosea Williams followed suit.³³⁷ Revealing his conservative worldview, Walter E. Williams wrote in the *Atlanta Daily World* that attacks on Reagan made him think about how “fairness” can be twisted to an ends-justify-the-means scenario in which the rights to self-

³³¹ Dan F. Hahn, “The Rhetoric of Jimmy Carter, 1976-1980,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1984), 281.

³³² *Ibid.*, 282.

³³³ *Ibid.* “Carter probably would have been happy to have returned to the days of being perceived merely as inflexible.”

³³⁴ Frank van der Linden, *The Real Reagan: What he believes, What he has accomplished, What we can expect from him* (New York: William Morrow, 1981), 247.

³³⁵ Lou Cannon, “Abernathy Endorses Reagan: Raps Carter ‘Empty Promises,’” *Washington Post*, October 12, 1980, Box 320, Max Hugel, 1980 Campaign Files, Ronald Reagan Library.

³³⁶ Derec Gilliard, “Rev. Abernathy Calls for Support of Ronald Reagan,” *Atlanta Daily World* 53, no. 47, October 26, 1980.

³³⁷ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 506. Coretta Scott King denounced these two former lieutenants of her husband’s SCLC.

government, individual freedom, and a chance to participate in the free market are held in contempt: “Attempts by the government to eliminate ‘unfairness’ itself produce tyranny and ultimate decline.”³³⁸

This was around the time that Andrew Young made the remarks even the White House had to repudiate: “state’s rights... looks like a code word to me that it’s going to be all right to kill niggers when [Reagan’s] president.”³³⁹ But Walter Mondale was not corrected when he told voters in Texas that Reagan was “an enemy of Mexican-Americans and blacks.”³⁴⁰ (Though Young was no longer working as Carter’s appointed Ambassador to the UN, Mondale was not a low level cabinet surrogate but the Vice President of the United States.) Additionally, after Reagan received an endorsement from Charles Evers, Medgar Evers’ brother, the Los Angeles Times reported renowned civil rights leader Clarence Mitchell called Reagan a racist at a news conference held with feminist Gloria Steinem (who wasn’t very fond of Reagan either.)³⁴¹

Memory is selective and many feel today that everyone knew what would happen on Election Day in 1980. The night before the election, Reagan paid the networks for thirty minutes of time to make his last, great pitch. Jimmy Carter was but a footnote in the speech. His vision was one of a renewed America, mankind’s “last best hope.” Keeping to his federalist underpinnings, he called the country a “federation of sovereign states.” He reminded his audience that when John Wayne died, and the newspapers had called him the “last American hero,” nothing could have been further from the truth. There were men that he had entertained himself who had been prisoners of war in Vietnam. They were heroes, too: “the product of the freest society the world has ever known.” Reagan said, “It is humility before God that is ultimately the strength of a

³³⁸ Walter E. Williams, “A Minority View,” *Atlanta Daily World*, October 30, 1980.

³³⁹ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 502.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 518.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 521, 529

nation.” Americans needed to “act worthy of themselves, bind the nation’s wounds, and protect that shining city on a hill.”³⁴² The next day when Reagan emerged from the voting booth and was asked for whom he had voted, he said, “Nancy.”³⁴³

When all was said and done, the South was not exceptional in choosing for her new leader Ronald Reagan. He had broken the Democratic coalition in a landslide with a conservative vision. Andrew Young destined to become the mayor of Atlanta spoke at Brown University before Reagan had taken the oath of office and indicated his hopes that the new man in charge would not make Americans “suffer too much.”³⁴⁴ Perhaps it is fair to say that the majority of voters did not feel as if they had suffered. In 1984, the margins that put Ronald Reagan back in office would be even more resounding, one of the greatest landslide victories in American history.³⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The construction of the “racist Republican” is partially the result of a cleavage in ideology between Republicans and minorities, perception of intent, and ongoing political strategy that exists in American politics. When activists like Tim Wise propose racism should be viewed as “both an idea and a structure of institutions in which policies, practices and procedures produce inequitable outcomes,” conservatives are baffled because they feel “inequitable outcomes” are inevitable in a just society.³⁴⁶ In *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial*

³⁴² Ronald Reagan, “Vision for America,” November 2, 1980, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/11.3.80.html>

³⁴³ Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign that Changed America* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2009), 560.

³⁴⁴ “Andy Young Claims Reagan Must Learn,” *Atlanta Daily World* 53, no. 78, December 23, 1980

³⁴⁵ Howell Raines, “Reagan Wins by a Landslide, Sweeping at Least 48 States: GOP Gains Strength in House,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1984.

³⁴⁶ Tim Wise, *Between Barack and a Hard Place: Racism and White Denial in the Age of Obama*, (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2009).

Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class, Ian Haney-Lopez verbalized a common belief on the Left: “Reagan, conservatism and racial resentment were inextricably fused,” which forever attaches an element of racist taint to conservative positions.³⁴⁷ This coincides with the normative narrative of the Left, which can be quickly summarized as, “ever since Goldwater and Nixon concocted the benighted, openly racist ‘Southern Strategy’ in the ‘60s, the Republican Party has profited from overt and covert racism.”³⁴⁸ However, the relationship between the GOP and minorities is much more complex and has unfolded over many decades.

Per quick review, following the Civil War, African Americans voted predominantly for the Party of Lincoln for obvious reasons. This remained the case well into the beginning of the twentieth century. However, FDR took steps in the 1930s to ameliorate racial injustices during the Great Depression, which ultimately engendered the first significant African American support for Democrats.³⁴⁹ Harry Truman further “recognized the path to winning another term was through securing the votes of a burgeoning black electorate,” and he made a sincere effort after World War II to advance civil rights, which effectively split the Democratic Party in the South in 1948.³⁵⁰ In 1952, the Deep South returned home to the Democratic Party, but Republicans started to make inroads in middle to upper class districts as Southerners had economic reasons to rethink their party allegiances. Even so, in 1956, two-term President Eisenhower who took several important steps towards

³⁴⁷ Ian Haney-Lopez, “The Racism at the Heart of the Reagan Presidency,” *Salon*, January 11, 2014, ccessed April 8, 2014 http://www.salon.com/2014/01/11/the_racism_at_the_heart_of_the_reagan_presidency/ Describing the electoral victories of Nixon and Reagan and “that of the other conservative dog whistlers” as good examples of how Southern voters have allowed “racial entreaties to bamboozle them into voting for an anti-New Deal candidate,” Haney-Lopez has dismissed the ability of an entire region of people to discern what is in their best interest.

³⁴⁸ Ron Rosenbaum, “Is the Republican Party Racist?” *Slate*, October 8, 2012.

³⁴⁹ David Woolner, “African Americans and the New Deal: A Look Back in History,” *Roosevelt Institute*, Accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.rooseveltinstitute.org/new-roosevelt/african-americans-and-new-deal-look-back-history>

³⁵⁰ Seth C. McKee, “The Past, Present, and Future of Southern Politics,” *Southern Culture* (September 1, 2012), 95. Strom Thurmond led the Dixiecrat Party in 1948, which took Deep South states away from Truman.

ensuring the equal enjoyment of civil liberties by all citizens, pulled the highest percentage of African American votes for a Republican since before the New Deal. Some of these gains would be lost when Senator John Kennedy from Massachusetts picked up a telephone during the 1960 election and called Martin Luther King Jr.'s wife to express sympathy and offer help for her husband who had been arrested in Atlanta, Georgia for activism.³⁵¹ Despite having opposed voting on the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which Nixon had supported, JFK thereby won the crucial endorsement of Martin Luther King, Sr. and 68% of the African American vote.³⁵²

Even so, once in office, Kennedy did little to further civil rights until the problems associated with racial inequality were highlighted to such a degree by the efforts of activists—and the horrifying and televised violence against blacks that was openly displayed in Birmingham, Alabama—that they could no longer be compartmentalized in one region of the country.³⁵³ The fate of proposed legislation was uncertain, but after Kennedy's death, Lyndon Baines Johnson “seized on the [1964] civil rights bill as the perfect instrument for establishing his credentials with northern and western liberals,” and brought much needed relief to African Americans who had long been denied their equal rights.³⁵⁴ Republicans like Senator Everett Dirksen were LBJ's essential partners, but Republican Senator Barry Goldwater's vote against the bill paralleled that of the segregationist Democrats. Paying with his party's image, the Arizonan gained the votes of

³⁵¹ David A. Bostis, “Blacks and the 2000 Democratic National Convention,” *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*, (Washington D.C.: 2000), 9. He pulled 39% of the black vote.

³⁵² “Civil Rights Movement,” *John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, Accessed April 28, 2013, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Civil-Rights-Movement.aspx>

³⁵³ Daniel Stevens, “Public Opinion and Public Policy: The Case of Kennedy and Civil Rights,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32, No. 1 (Mar, 2002): 111

³⁵⁴ Robert D. Loevy, “A Brief History of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,” Accessed April 28, 2013, <http://faculty1.coloradocollege.edu/~bloevy/CivilRightsActOf1964/>

five Deep South states during his 1964 bid for president, but President Johnson retained the rest of the South's loyalty and garnered 94% of the African American vote.³⁵⁵ The relationship between blacks and Republicans would remain strained from that point forward. Some have said Reagan's terms in office all but severed it.³⁵⁶

This was in part because the Reagan administration "recast civil rights to a degree not seen since Lyndon Johnson."³⁵⁷ Harkening back to the ideological foundations of Barry Goldwater, which promoted federalism, and expressing the belief that the country's culture on race had changed since 1964, Reagan pushed to lessen the federal government's role in all American life including aspects concerned with civil rights. In fact, from his first inaugural address in which he laid out his philosophical vision, he attempted to shift the national conversation to a more universalist approach to governing with less emphasis on special interests. He contended "this administration's objective will be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunities for all Americans, with no barriers born of bigotry or discrimination."³⁵⁸ This coincided with a conservative interpretation of fairness, which demands a society in which

³⁵⁵ David A. Bostis, "Blacks and the 2000 Democratic National Convention," *Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*, (Washington D.C.: 2000), 9.

³⁵⁶ Sam Tanenhaus, "Original Sin: Why the GOP Is and Will Continue to be the Party of White People," *The New Republic*, February 10, 2013. Republicans have tied themselves to a peculiar logic of nullification pervasive in a backwards-looking South, which gave rise to conservative leaders like Ronald Reagan who "had a history of sympathy for Southern nullifiers" and who would inevitably cancel out all credibility on civil rights the Republicans may have once had with the African American community.

Robert Cohen and Pedro A. Noguera, "Remembering Reagan's Record on Civil Rights and the South African Freedom Struggle," *The Nation* (Feb. 11, 2011). Accessed March 10, 2013, <http://www.thenation.com/article/158506/remembering-reagans-record-civil-rights-and-south-african-freedom-struggle#>

³⁵⁷ Steven A. Shull, *A Kinder, Gentler Racism? The Reagan-Bush Civil Rights Legacy* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), 4.

³⁵⁸ Ronald Reagan, "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 10 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130> Recalling his strong belief in states' rights, he also said, "All of us need to be reminded that the Federal Government did not create the States; the States created the Federal Government."

there is as even a playing field as possible but no fixed results. As a consequence, Reagan's policies often ran counter to perceived minority interests.

Additionally, when speaking in 2013 about the Republican Party's tortured relationship with minorities, conservative economist Thomas Sowell observed the GOP had made many mistakes "all the way back to Ronald Reagan, whom [Sowell regarded] as the greatest president in the twentieth century, but whose approach to, uh, minorities was very, very poor."³⁵⁹ In Sowell's opinion, one problem was Reagan's style over his substance: a general lack of understanding on the Great Communicator's part when it came to getting his message across to people of color. After all, George Wallace who had clearly been a segregationist for much of his career—who had quite literally stood in the schoolhouse door to stop black advancement—was able to win over an amazing number of black voters in his twilight years in politics.³⁶⁰ On the other hand, Reagan, who had never been a segregationist and who had done a great deal of good for minority communities, has remained vilified.

Additionally, Reagan made several decisions while in office that were especially ill received by blacks. Some of these decisions, like attempting to limit or end affirmative action, dealt directly with executing the office of president per a conservative worldview that called for more limited government. But Reagan's choice to oppose legislation creating a federal holiday commemorating Martin Luther King, Jr. seemed unfathomable to blacks and whites alike. First

³⁵⁹ Thomas Sowell interview by John Bachman, "Thomas Sowell to Newsmax: GOP Outreach to Blacks Unpromising," *Newsmax TV*, March 22, 2013, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/sowell-gop-blacks-unpromising/2013/03/22/id/495990/> Sowell has posited one problem was while Wallace would go to black churches to ask for forgiveness and a second chance in his home state, Reagan went to the Urban League to make his case. This sent the message that he thought "the black establishment [could] provide entrée into the black public, as if the establishment [owned] the rest of black people." This positioning was resented in 1980 and is still resented today. It is also a nonsensical approach when looking for conservatively minded blacks. Reagan—and Republicans in general—did not—do not—understand how to position the GOP to appeal to minorities.

³⁶⁰ Colman McCarthy, "George Wallace – From the Heart," March 17, 1995, *Washington Post*, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/daily/sept98/wallace031795.htm> In Wallace's last race for governor, he won "well over 90 percent of the black vote."

voted down in Congress in 1979, many felt opposition to this special remembrance was due solely to racism.³⁶¹ Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina was especially truculent. When Reagan was asked if he felt King had been a communist sympathizer per Helms's charges on the Senate floor, Reagan snapped, "We'll know in about thirty-five years, won't we?"³⁶²

The impression Reagan must have given blacks at that time might have been softened if he had not made an inflammatory snap-statement to a reporter but instead made a better case for his position. He did not support an MLK Day as a federal holiday, but this is not because he did not want to honor the slain civil rights leader. Rather, he would have preferred to use the money he knew it would cost to give federal employees a day off for something more impactful for the black community such as funding mass scholarships.³⁶³ This is in line with a major campaign promise he made—and kept through Executive Order 12320—directly to the black community to open the door to increased federal spending for black colleges, which targeted the African Americans in a way that coincided with a conservative mindset that stressed promoting individual empowerment.³⁶⁴

³⁶¹ Frances Romero, "A Brief History of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day," *Time*, January 18, 2010.

³⁶² Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History: 1974-2008* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 183.

³⁶³ Ronald Reagan, *Reagan: In His Own Hand*, ed. Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 385. Reagan wrote and delivered a radio address on November 29, 1977 about MLK Day in conjunction with Michigan's decision to adopt a new state holiday. He admired a proposal of Jack Welborn, a Republican state senator, who had said it made little sense to give middle class government workers the day off—partially at the expense of low-income workers—when the money involved could have launched scholarships for disadvantaged students in MLK's name in addition to creating a center for studying non-violent protest movements. "One Senator Jack Welborn stood alone in opposition to the plan. It took courage because obviously he would appear as a callous individual opposed to the idea of honoring the slain Rev. King. This of course could lead to the additional charge of racism.... It seems to me that just possibly—Dr. King would approve of Jack Welborn's vote & his proposals."

³⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan, "Statement of Governor Reagan on Black College Day," September 23, 1980, Box 306, Citizens' Operations (Max Hugel): Voter Groups' Administrative Files, Ronald Reagan Library. 121. "I want to personally join with just about every social, political, church and civic organization in the Black community in support of our country's 107 historically Black colleges." Tony Brown, "Black College Struggle: Court Rulings Ignored," July 2, 1980, *The News World*, Box 306, Citizens' Operations (Max Hugel): Voter Groups' Administrative Files, Ronald Reagan Library. Black colleges were getting less money under the Carter administration due to desegregation efforts—however unintended—that actually hurt black education.

Finally, there is little doubt that politicians of every stripe have used “conquer and divide” approaches to winning elections going back to the beginning of the Republic. Republicans have also united at times with segregationists even when not embracing their causes. However, reducing Southerners’ political concerns to race issues in every national election since 1964 belies decades of economic and social progress. It is to persist the South has remained the region H. L. Mencken once described as a “bunghole of the United States, a cesspool of Baptists, a miasma of Methodism, snake charmers, phony real estate dealers, and syphilitic evangelists” focused predominantly on maintaining a rigid, racial order.³⁶⁵ It is to hold white Southerners forever in contempt for the sins of their fathers. Yet this belief is necessary to accept the thrust of Republican politics today involves “dog whistles.”

After the election of the country’s first black president, many Americans hoped politics would move beyond such beliefs and into a post-racial society. However, this has not been the result of President Obama’s tenure in office. Many on the Left have contended Republicans have attacked the commander-in-chief because of racism.³⁶⁶ Even General Colin Powell, a former secretary of state who served his country in multiple Republican cabinets including Ronald Reagan’s said in an interview on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, “There’s also a dark... vein of intolerance in some parts of the [Republican] Party.... [Republicans] still sort of look down on minorities.”³⁶⁷ A GOP insider, Powell’s opinions cannot be construed as purely

Ronald Reagan, “Executive Order 12320 – Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” September 15, 1981, *The American Presidency Project*, accessed April 10 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=43130>

³⁶⁵ Numan V. Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 176.

³⁶⁶ Joe Conason, “Conservative Racists Return,” *Real Clear Politics*, August 12, 2010. “As if suffering from a facial tic, leading figures on the right cannot seem to suppress their inner Klansman these days.”

DeWayne Wickham, “GOP’s Disrespect of Obama Goes Beyond Debt Fight,” *USA Today*, August 3, 2011. “Today you might not see the overt actions of racist southern governors like Ross Barnett or George Wallace in the 1960s. But the presence of Jim Crow, Jr.—a more subtle form of racism—is there.”

³⁶⁷ Colin Powell, *Meet the Press*, NBC, January 13, 2013.

Chris Chase, “ESPN’s Rob Parker on RGIII: ‘Is he a brother or is he a Cornball Brother?’” *USA Today*, December 13, 2012.

partisan. Yet many on the Right have contended Democrats use race predominantly to stir up their base and keep a strategic voting block in line.³⁶⁸ Speaking of political dissent from the majority of blacks, Clarence Thomas, a sitting Supreme Court justice, told an audience at Duquesne Law School in 2013, “Any black person who says something that is not the prescribed things they expect from a black person will be picked apart. You can pick anybody—don’t pick me—pick anyone who has decided not to go along with it; there’s a price to pay.”³⁶⁹ Truly, there are countless examples of there being substance to this charge as even blacks not heavily engaged in politics are publically excoriated for leaning right.³⁷⁰

In reality, the lines of what racism—or pandering to racists—even is continue to be blurred when drawn onto the political spectrum. Consider analysis of President Obama’s policies directed towards the African American community during his first term. In 2010 Tavis Smiley, a liberal political commentator, told civil rights activist Tim Wise:

“When the president is asked specifically... about black unemployment his answer, you know, famously or infamously, is a rising tide will lift all boats. The same answer, by the way, that Ronald Reagan gave: that a rising tide will lift all boats....

You ask him about anything specific no matter how far and how wide the gap is

³⁶⁸ James Taranto, “Why the Left Needs Racism—III,” *WSJ.com*, August 27, 2013. “We argued that [racism] serves a political purpose, sustaining black loyalty to the Democratic Party, and a psychological purpose, allowing white liberals to assert their moral supremacy over other whites.”

Deroy Murdock, “Enough Already with the Race Card,” *National Review Online*, November 30, 2012, accessed March 26, 2013, www.nationalreview.com/blogs/print/334453 “The Democrats’ relentless reliance on race cards is vile and repugnant. It also humiliates black Americans by presenting us as incapable of facing disapproval without lobbing the most noxious rhetorical grenades in the arsenal.”

³⁶⁹ Clarence Thomas, “Conversation with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas,” *C-Span*, April 19, 2013.

³⁷⁰ Chris Chase, “ESPN’s Rob Parker on RGIII: ‘Is he a Brother or is he a Cornball Brother?’” *USA Today* December 13, 2012. “Rob Parker, a former *Detroit News* columnist, questioned the blackness of Washington Redskins quarterback Robert Griffin III and claimed he wasn’t authentic.... ‘There was all this talk about he’s a Republican.’” Nsenga K. Burton, “Stacey Dash a Sellout? As If...” *The Root*, October 11, 2012. “Inherent in this criticism of Dash [for supporting Romney in 2012] is the idea that as a black woman, she should support only black or female candidates, which is also racist and sexist, not to mention self-policing.”

Stephen A. Smith, “Stephen A. Smith: Ostracizing Black Conservatives ‘Makes Absolutely No Sense Whatsoever,’” *Real Clear Politics Video*, December 15, 2013. “...those that I now who are black conservatives are considered pariahs and are ostracized in our communities, and it makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.”

between black and white, his answer is that a universal approach will benefit everybody.”³⁷¹

Wise responded that President Obama often pandered to white voters, which effectively reduced the first black president in the United States to using the “Southern Strategy” of Kevin Phillips. Rather than pushing race onto a metaphorical back burner where it can be forgotten, these sorts of interpretations mix all motivations for political actions into a stew that will be forever distilled into just one dish: racism. Though one might contend as *Ebony* magazine has observed that President Obama has “energetically courted Latinos and LGBT groups—with solid policy results—while rarely explicitly addressing Black-specific concerns,” this is not good evidence of a strategy that uses racial antipathies to appeal to whites.³⁷² But it does call into question why blacks remain so devoted to a Democratic Party that often takes them for granted.

The answer might be found in the fact that American politics is a shifting miasma of vision, persuasive appeals, and outright pandering. As Barack Obama has explained, the Left and the Right spin tales “not to persuade the other side but to keep their bases agitated and assured of the rightness of their respective causes—and lure just enough new adherents to beat the other side into submission.”³⁷³ Indeed, to his point, there have been times in the history in which both Republicans and Democrats have courted voters disgruntled about racial issues to forward political agendas. Half a century ago, though he was not a racist, Barry Goldwater’s “Southern strategy” certainly contributed to the rift that still exists between the GOP and black voters because it aligned his campaign with

³⁷¹ Tavis Smiley, *The Tavis Smiley Show*, PBS, June 28, 2010

³⁷² Steven Gray, “Out in the Cold,” *Ebony*, March 2013, 32. “It’s hard to forget the September 2011 night when the president told CBC [Congressional Black Caucus] annual dinner attendees to ‘stop complaining.’”

³⁷³ Obama, Barack. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream*, (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 37.

segregationists. Even after the South's racial attitudes were more comfortably integrated with the rest of the United States, sincere clashes in ideologies—and some inept positioning on the part of Ronald Reagan—did not heal that rift. Surely Jimmy Carter's "Southern strategy" poured salt into an historic wound. Yet when a sitting president and his attorney general choose to spark racially charged exchanges around the fifty-year anniversary of the bipartisan 1964 Civil Rights Act, they have best demonstrated why the construct of the "racist Republican" has remained so pervasive in what many would have hoped was a new age in American race relations.³⁷⁴ It is a useful and distracting tool from which Democrats still gain benefit.

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³⁷⁴ Editorial Board, "Eric Holder's Whine," *New York Post*, April 10, 2014. "Eric Holder dropped a race bomb in New York City this week by telling a largely black audience that Republicans are guilty of 'unprecedented, unwarranted, ugly and divisive' attacks on him.... 'What attorney general has ever had to deal with that kind of treatment?' We'll answer that: plenty."

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