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A Choice, Not an Echo:
Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System

A dissertation presented

by

Sam Hoffmann Rosenfeld

to

The Department of History

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
History

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Cambridge, Massachusetts

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A Choice, Not an Echo: Polarization and the Transformation of the American Party System

Abstract

This dissertation offers an intellectual and institutional history of party polarization and ideological realignment in the postwar United States. It treats the construction of an ideologically sorted party system as a political project carried out by conscious actors within and around the Democratic and Republican parties. The work of these activists, interest groups, and political elites helped to produce, by the last decades of the twentieth century, an unpredicted and still-continuing era of strong, polarized partisanship in American politics. In tracking their work, the dissertation also account for changing ideas about the party system over time, starting with an influential postwar scholarly doctrine that cast bipartisanship as a problem for which polarization would provide the solution.

National politics at mid-century involved high levels of bipartisanship in government given the presence of significant liberal and conservative factions within both parties; weak and federated party structures; and mass partisan attachments defined more by affective ties of tradition and communal affiliation than by issues and ideology. National politics at century's end involved levels of partisan discipline in Congress unseen since the Gilded Age; robust national party organizations; and an electorate that had followed political elites in sorting itself ideologically among the two parties. The movement from the first era to the second is the subject of this project, which argues that, during these decades, America's two-party system gained a programmatic cast and logic long considered alien to the country's political traditions. Long-term technological and demographic developments undergirded the rise to predominance of issue-driven party activism, while southern realignment provided a key electoral engine

driving ideological sorting. But these processes took specific form through the work of activists and party elites, and they drive the dissertation's narrative.

The project contributes a historical narrative and context to the popular and scholarly discussion of contemporary party polarization, by identifying the origins of modern polarization in developments dating to the early postwar period and by historicizing Americans' longstanding debates over partisanship. By restoring parties as institutions to the forefront of an analysis of postwar political history, moreover, the project helps to recast key historiographic themes relating to the rise of the right and the decline of the New Deal order.

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For
Erica

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Coming from a family of academics, I certainly win no marks for blazing my own trail. Just about the boldest gesture of familial rebellion I have been able to muster is becoming a historian rather than a quantitative social scientist. I am grateful to my family for forgiving me my innumeracy, and for much more besides that. My brother, Jake Rosenfeld, has been a constant source of inspiration, support, and grizzled wisdom from the trenches of contemporary academia. I have treasured his friendship and camaraderie, along with the influence of his own intellectual interests and political passions, which have deeply informed this project. I am lucky to count my sister-in-law, Erin McGaughey, as a great friend and a font of good cheer and encouragement. My father, Richard Rosenfeld, has long demonstrated a level of scholarly productivity as impressive as it is downright intimidating. But his approach to a well-rounded life of intellectual inquiry balanced by non-scholarly engagement has always been an inspiration – one that I may more plausibly stand a chance of emulating. I thank him as well as Janet Lauritsen for their unfailing support, encouragement, and advice during my work on this project. My mother, Frances Hoffmann, has served as a constant source of keen academic wisdom, unconditional encouragement, and infectious optimism about my work, career, and life. I am

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"Let us concede that the American people will never create a powerful party system unless they want one."

-- E. E. Schattschneider, 1948[1]

[1] E.E. Schattschneider, *The Struggle for Party Government* (College Park: University of Maryland Press, 1948), 12.

Introduction

Nationally successful politicians, as opposed to academics, tend to be a practical sort. Necessity demands a pragmatic approach to working within the political constraints of the moment. But on occasion, such politicians have been prompted to take the long view about how the American political system functions, and how they think the two major parties should fit into it. During the middle of the twentieth century, a particular set of questions about the party system recurred among national leaders, and they disagreed with each other about the answers.

In 1944, Franklin Roosevelt turned to an aide and declared, "We ought to have two real parties – one liberal, and the other conservative." He made that remark in the course of pursuing secret inquiries into the prospect of orchestrating a party realignment from the top down, by forging an alliance with his moderate, internationalist Republican opponent of 1940, Wendell Willkie, on behalf of a new party combining the liberal wings of the existing Democratic and Republican parties. Such a configuration would have left conservative Republicans and the large minority of (disproportionately southern) conservative Democrats to ally in a single new party as well. Willkie responded favorably to the idea, lamenting the current state of affairs in which "both parties are hybrids."[1]

Fifteen years later, in 1959, Vice President Richard Nixon took the opposite tack of Roosevelt and Willkie. "It would be a great tragedy," he told a California audience in 1959, "if we had our two major political parties divide on what we would call a conservative-liberal line." It would be a tragedy because "one of the attributes of our political system has been that we have avoided generally violent swings in Administrations from one extreme to the other. And the reason we have avoided that is that in both parties there has been room for a broad spectrum of

[1] Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 231-232.

opinion." Bringing about an ideological sorting the parties, Nixon predicted, would lead not only to extreme swings in policy, but also to "very violent contests in elections."[2]

Four years after that, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy – then embroiled in a conflict pitting his brother's administration against fellow Democratic leaders of massive resistance to desegregation in the South – expressed a sentiment similar to Nixon's in a discussion with the journalist Godfrey Hodgson. "With some vehemence," Hodgson later recalled, Kennedy insisted that, since "the country was already split vertically, between sections, races, and ethnic groups," it would be "dangerous to split it horizontally, too, between liberals and conservatives." Down that path "lay the rift between haves and have-nots, and the ideological politics of Europe."[3] The jumble of cross-cutting partisan and ideological alliances helped to ensure national stability and political inclusion, he argued.

South Dakota Senator George McGovern disagreed with Nixon and Kennedy, and agreed with Roosevelt and Willkie. In 1969, a journalist had asked him what he thought about "a realignment of American parties to something a little closer to the British system, with conservatives in one party and liberals in another." He responded that, "on balance, it would serve the national interest and serve the interests of our party … if we did move more in the direction of a unified party where we can expect the overwhelming majority at least of our membership to follow the party's platform and program."[4] A few years later, a fellow senator with radically different ideological views, Jesse Helms of North Carolina, concurred with

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[2] Radio broadcast of the Commonwealth Club of California, June 11, 1959; audio accessed at http://www.commonwealthclub.org/node/82025.

[3] Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 2.

[4] Transcript of *Meet The Press*, July 6, 1969, Box 10, Folder "Commission Chronological File, August 1969," Democratic National Committee Records, National Archives, Washington, DC.

McGovern by calling for "a general realignment into Conservative and Liberal parties, by whatever names."[5]

Politicians were not the only ones with views on this subject. Ordinary voters sometimes chimed in as well. "[I]t is now time," an Arkansas man wrote to California Senator William F. Knowland in 1956, "to get all the right-wingers on one side, and all the left-wingers on the other."[6] Many Americans agreed with the letter-writer in the middle decades of the twentieth century – but many more apparently did not. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, George Gallup's polling firm periodically surveyed Americans on the question of ideologically sorting the parties, using various iterations of this question: "It has been suggested that we give up the present Republican and Democratic Parties and have two new parties, one for the Liberals and one for the Conservatives. Would you favor this idea?"[7] Across four decades, those answering in the affirmative to this question never even reached one third of the total polled.

Gallup has long since stopped asking Americans whether or not they would prefer that the parties sort themselves according to ideology, just as politicians in the contemporary period have rarely opined in public about the desirability of such a development. That is because what had been a matter of speculation has now become a reality. By the end of the twentieth century, Franklin Roosevelt and George McGovern and Jesse Helms had gotten their wish, while Richard Nixon and Robert F. Kennedy and, it seems, consistent majorities of Americans did not. The two major American political parties are now sorted quite clearly along ideological lines, with,

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[5] Jesse Helms, "The New American Majority: Time for a Political Realignment?," May 15, 1974, American Conservative Union Papers, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

[6] Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Taft, Dewey, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 193.

[7] This specific wording can be seen in Gallup Poll no. 394, April 9, 1947, accessed at Gallup Brain, http://brain.gallup.com.

for example, the most liberal Republican member of Congress amassing a voting record that is to the right of the most conservative Democrat.[8] When politicians and the public alike now opine about the two-party system and its role in American politics, they are much more likely to lament the incivility, gridlock, and dysfunction that they attribute to the phenomenon that is commonly called "polarization."[9]

A slew of institutional changes has accompanied the ideological sorting of the parties. Contemporary parties are not only more ideologically cohesive and distinct than at midcentury. They are also more disciplined when in power, and more centralized in their internal authority at the national level. The parties' later twentieth-century development along those three dimensions – the degree to which they are defined and driven by programmatic (policy-based or ideological) goals, their capacity for discipline when in power and opposition, and their orientation around national issues and national party leadership – is what has given contemporary politics its distinct, oft-lamented quality of mobilized partisan warfare.[10]

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[8] By Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal's measurements, the very last lawmaker to represent an "overlap" position in the House -- a Republican with a voting record slightly to the left of the right-most Democrat – left office in 2003. The last senator representing such an overlap – a Democrat positioned to the right of the most liberal Republican -- left office two years later. See *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 30-32; and their updated data at http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp.

[9] "Polarization" is protean in meaning, and in the popular discourse it typically connotes divergence (among voters, or political elites, or both) toward opposing extremes on a left-right ideological spectrum. Matthew Levendusky makes a distinction between that kind of polarization – a spread toward ideological extremes – and "sorting," which he defines as the increased correlation between one's ideology and party affiliation, and which can occur even as most voters and/or elites remain close to the ideological center. He argues that, among the mass electorate, sorting has occurred to a much greater extent than ideological polarization. Matthew Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For a similar terminological distinction, see Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson and Longman, 2005). Given my focus on the parties as institutions and governing organizations, I consider "partisan polarization" to be an accurate and reasonably straightforward term for the phenomenon I am interested in explaining historically, and use it interchangeably with "sorting" throughout the dissertation. For a useful exploration of competing understandings of polarization, see Hans Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 165-170.

[10] Popular laments include Juliet Eilperin, *Fight Club Politics: How Partisanship is Poisoning the House of Representatives* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006); Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornnstein, *The Broken Branch: How Congress is Failing America and How to Get it Back on Track* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ronald Brownstein, *The Second Civil War: How Extreme Partisanship Has*

Put simply, the story this dissertation tells is the momentous shift in American politics from a mid-twentieth century era of decentralized and ideologically non-cohesive parties to a late-century era of ideologically sorted and highly disciplined parties. National politics at mid-century involved historically high levels of bipartisanship in government given the presence of significant liberal and conservative factions within both parties, weak and highly federated party structures, and mass partisan attachments that were defined more by affective ties of tradition and communal affiliation than by policy issues and ideology.[11] National politics at century's end involved levels of partisan discipline in congressional voting unseen since the Gilded Age, robust national party organizations, and an electorate that had followed political elites in sorting itself ideologically among the two parties. The movement from the first era to the second through the construction of a new, ideologically defined two-party system is the subject of this dissertation, which argues that, during these decades, American party politics gained a programmatic cast and logic long considered alien to the country's political traditions.

The term "construction" is used advisedly, as the narrative highlights the work of purposive historical actors, on both the left and right, who waged interconnected struggles to restructure the parties ideologically from the early postwar years into the Reagan era. That,

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Paralyzed Washington and Polarized America (New York: Penguin Press, 2007); and Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Likeminded America is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Haughton Mifflin, 2008).

[11] The political science scholarship on the bases of mass partisan affiliation remains contentious regarding the question of how "affective" versus substantive are the sources of voters' partisanship. The classic statement on "affective" party voting is Angus Campbell et al, *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1960). On increasing voter awareness over the course of the postwar period of policy-related and ideological distinctions between the parties and its influence on voting, see Gerald M. Pomper, *Voters' Choice: Varieties of American Electoral Behavior* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975); Pomper and Marc D. Weiner, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party Voter: The Evolving Bases of Partisanship," in *Responsible Partisanship? The Evolution of American Political Parties Since 1950*, eds. John C. Green and Paul S. Hernnson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 181-200; and Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).. For an argument reemphasizing the importance of affective ties to parties, see Donald Green, Bradley Palmquist, and Eric Schickler, *Partisan Hearts and Minds: Political Parties and the Social Identity of Voters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

indeed, is the dissertation's core claim: The party system we have today is not simply the byproduct of structural developments, but was a political project carried out by conscious actors – men and women who had reasons to think that forging disciplined, programmatically distinct parties would provide answers to certain endemic problems they saw in the American political and constitutional system. Arguing for the significance of conscious historical actors in reconstructing the party system also means emphasizing the intellectual lineage of polarization. Thus, in addition to offering an institutional history of party transformation, this dissertation offers an intellectual history of postwar scholarly and journalistic ideas about parties and their role in American politics – starting with a midcentury theory, "responsible party doctrine," that cast bipartisanship as a problem for which polarization could provide the solution.

In 1950, the American Political Science Association (APSA) published *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, an influential and highly controversial report that called for the development of more programmatically distinct and disciplined parties along European parliamentary lines, which would be "able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and … possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs."[12] The report articulated a view of party politics that reflected most directly the frustrations of liberal Democrats grappling with the legislative power of the southern conservative wing of their party at midcentury. But that vision also engendered heavy criticism from scholars, journalists, and political actors who celebrated the loose, non-ideological nature of traditional American parties and questioned the desirability or feasibility of developing more "responsible" ones given the federalized and fragmented U.S. constitutional structure.

[12] Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee On Political Parties of the American Political Science Association* (New York: Rinehart, 1950), 17.

When both parties entered a period of tumult and institutional experimentation from the late 1960s on, responsible-party prescriptions remained influential among important factions and leaders. Aspects of the theory informed the work of actors pursuing both intra-party political struggles as well as major institutional reforms of Congress and the parties' presidential nominating procedures in the 1970s. And though such efforts helped to lay the basis for a revival of partisanship that shows no current signs of abating, they occurred during an era in which the dominant scholarly and journalistic view emphasized American parties' declining strength and relevance. Indeed, the contemporary era of party polarization represents a fulfillment of key responsible-party tenets that was as unheralded in its development as it is widely decried today.

Parties, Ideology, and Ideological Partisanship

The very fact that this partisan resurgence, which was underway by the late 1970s, came about as such an analytical surprise to scholars preoccupied with party decline and dealignment helps to underscore a central theme of this work: namely, that the functional relationship between ideological politics and partisanship is itself subject to historical change. The roots of modern party polarization lie in a change in that relationship during the later twentieth century that contemporary observers had difficulty recognizing as it happened. A party – "an organized effort to get control of the government," to use one classic formulation – and an ideology – "a configuration of ideas … in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint," to use another – are, of course, distinct phenomena, and thus so are partisanship and ideological affinity.[13] But midcentury arrangements had conditioned several generations of observers to

[13] E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1942), ix; Phillip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964), 207.

conceive of the two phenomena as existing in inherent conflict. The key historical development at the heart of this dissertation, however, was the revival of partisanship as a *result* of, rather than in spite of, ideological politics.

Parties, whether conceived of as teams of office-seekers or as coalitions of interests, need not be driven by coherent and comprehensive policy programs with ideological foundations, and a relative absence of ideology was long considered to be one of the key distinguishing features of American parties in comparative terms.[14] The last period of intensely disciplined partisanship in American political history, for example – the "party period" of the later nineteenth century, with its torchlight parades, patronage armies, and sky-high voting participation among white males – featured what might be characterized as a non-ideological system of strong party polarization. The post-Civil War Republican and Democratic Parties were federated and locally embedded institutions that stitched far-flung communities together into two national coalitions. Positions on certain issues, such as tariff and currency policy, divided the parties, but many other potential issues were sidelined from partisan contestation in a federal policymaking regime dominated by the distributive politics of expansion and development rather than redistributive and regulatory

[14] The most sustained recent argument against the traditional view that American parties have been historically less ideological than their European counterparts is John Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America, 1828-1996* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Using systematic content analyses of national party platforms and presidential campaign rhetoric, Gerring argues that both parties have demonstrated coherent and distinct ideological views since the advent of the "Second Party System" in 1828, with the Democrats' ideology changing three times since that year and the Whig-Republicans' ideology changing once. Gerring's methodology, however, excludes from analysis the relative intensity or weakness of internal party factionalism over time, and thus has little to say about what might be significant about the ideological sorting of the parties in the later twentieth century. Hans Noel, meanwhile, marshals quantitative evidence for the proposition that a "unidimensional" left-right ideological divide has emerged – gradually, but consistently in one direction – over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See his *Political Ideologies and Parties in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially 82-92. He argues that, independent of partisan politics, issues positions articulated by writers, intellectuals, and advocates in civil society came increasingly over time to cohere into two overarching ideological clusters, possibly for the first time in two centuries. Noel's evidence for a *longue duree* rise in ideological thinking is partial and suggestive, but it warrants further engagement by historians.

interventions. Mass party affiliation and rank-and-file party activism alike stemmed from communal ties and material inducement more typically than coherent ideological positions.[15]

The aberrant era of bipartisanship and depolarization in the middle of the twentieth century, meanwhile, stemmed from a new interaction between ideological coalition-making and partisan politics. A broad and enduring liberal-conservative ideological division had developed at the hands of intellectuals and movement leaders in the wake of industrialization, the New Deal, and World War II. But this ideological division cross-cut, rather than reinforced, the partisan alignment. Such a mismatch – and the ideological bifurcation of the two major parties that it produced – set the context for a historically unique period of bipartisan policymaking and of entrenched norms fostering pragmatic bargaining and fluid political alliances. It also reinforced the popular and scholarly conception of the U.S. two-party tradition as exceptional in its very aversion to ideological politics and in its pragmatically inclusive big-tent parties.

At the same time, the midcentury mismatch between ideological and partisan alignments also provoked discontent among those who saw the existing party alignment and its institutional effects within the parties as hindering the accomplishment of policy goals. The protagonists of this dissertation translated that discontent into a critique of the existing party system, and many pursued practical work in the service of changing the country's partisan dynamics. As will be shown, those actors' struggles met potent resistance for many decades, thanks to the "stickiness" of existing party allegiances among voters as well as key politicians' and interests' investment in existing arrangements within the parties and in the broader political arena. What enabled their

[15] Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation: 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); and Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). A relevant debate over the functions and significance of the two parties in nineteenth-century politics can be found in Robert P. Formisano, "The 'Party Period' Revisited," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 93-120; and Michael F. Holt, "The Primacy of Party Reasserted," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 151-157. On partisan developments during the Gilded Age that presaged twentieth-century patterns, see Daniel Klinghard, *The Nationalization of American Political Parties, 1880-1896* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

eventual success was the confluence of effective political activism with long-term institutional and demographic developments in American politics that opened new opportunities for major partisan transformations.

Two distinct but related long-term developments provide particularly important background settings for this dissertation's account. The first is the long decline of the patronage basis of mass partisanship that began in the Progressive Era. The second is the long-term rise in the education level of the mass electorate during the same period. What both of these trends helped to foster was the rise of issue-driven and ideological activism as a predominant basis for engaged party work, as well as a growing capacity among American voters to connect candidate and parties to ideological positions.[16] It was the work of ideologically driven activists, factional fighters, and strategic party elites to bring about the ideological sorting that would make such durable linkages between parties and issues possible. And it was the further work of many of these same actors to struggle to reform the parties *as institutions* to render them more permeable by, and accountable to, issue- and ideologically-driven activists like themselves.

Ideological activism began to disrupt dominant partisan arrangements in the 1950s and 1960s before achieving major institutional breakthroughs during the 1970s. Then, contrary to widespread predictions, it helped to catalyze a process of partisan resurgence during the last decades of the century. Ideological activism, in other words, lay at the root of a chain of political

[16] For useful overviews of the decline of patronage politics in twentieth-century American parties, see Alan Ware, *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); A. James Reichley, *The Life of the Parties: A History of American Political Parties* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 304-315; and Katherine Krimmel, "Special Interest Partisanship: The Transformation of American Political Parties," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013). The distinct characteristics of issue-driven party activism – including the predominance of educated and middle-class participants – is emphasized in a line of empirical research starting with James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). The connection between education and ideological partisanship in the broader electorate was emphasized in 1964 by Herbert McClosky in "Consensus and Ideology in American Politics," *American Political Science Review* 58 (June 1964): 361-382; and is discussed more recently by Pomper and Weiner, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party Voter;" and Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*.

and institutional developments – issue sorting, procedural and organizational reform, and the steady and still-continuing rise of partisan discipline and nationalized strength – that have made the contemporary era a new great age of partisanship.[17] The fact that this kind of partisanship derived its strength precisely from ideological sorting was what rendered the process itself invisible to so many scholars and observers educated to consider ideology and partisanship as mutually exclusive and conflicting approaches to politics.

A focus on the changing relationship between ideology and partisanship helps us to transcend single-issue explanations for political change. Because the fulcrum of partisan change in the postwar United States occurred in the formerly one-party South, and because political changes in that region revolved around the explosive issue of civil rights for African Americans, race has long dominated explanations for party realignment in the later twentieth century.[18] As will be seen, the politics of civil rights unquestionably provided a key catalyst for factional developments and organizational changes within both parties during the second half of the twentieth century. But those who struggled to remake the parties along ideological lines were themselves *ideological* actors, motivated by dueling systems of belief (some more tightly constrained than others) that encompassed positions on multiple issues. A growing body of political science scholarship identifies the beginning of ideological sorting around racial issues –

[17] As Noel formulates the progression from midcentury politics to the contemporary period, "The ideological divide between liberals was not reflected in the partisan divide between Republicans and Democrats. The ideologies prescribed different coalitions than the parties did. As such, liberal and conservative activists pressured both parties to be more reflective of their ideological coalitions … [A]fter much conflict, the ideological coalition[s] won out." *Political Ideologies and Political Parties*, 2.

[18] Important political science works on modern southern realignment and regional party-building include Alexander Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Tod A. Baker et al, eds., *Political Parties in the Southern States: Party Activists in Partisan Coalitions* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Charles D. Hadley and Lewis Bowman, eds., *Southern State Party Organizations and Activists* (New York: Praeger, 1995); Earl Black and Merle Black, *Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

with economic liberals tending to advocate pro-black positions and economic conservatives tending to oppose them – as early as the late New Deal era.[19] This finding complements the historical scholarship on the Long Civil Rights Movement, with its emphasis on labor-oriented racial advocacy over a decade prior to the emergence of the "classical phase" of the movement.[20] This sorting of racial positions into the conservative and liberal ideological agendas long before the flashpoints of civil rights policymaking and political conflict in the 1960s and beyond should make it unsurprising that the parties have sorted themselves in the last several decades around a slew of issues beyond those pertaining to race.[21] They have also ideologically sorted themselves in every region of the country, not just the South.[22]

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[19] Brian D. Feinstein and Eric Schickler, "Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered," *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (Spring 2008): 1-31; Anthony S. Chen, Robert W. Mickey, and Robert P. Van Houweling, "Explaining the Contemporary Alignment of Race and Party: Evidence from California's 1946 Ballot Initiative on Fair Employment," *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (Fall 2008): 204-228; Eric Schickler, Kathryn Pearson, and Brian D. Feinstein, "Congressional Parties and Civil Rights Politics from 1933 to 1972," *Journal of Politics* 72 (July 2010): 672-689; Hans Noel, "The Coalition Merchants: The Ideological Roots of the Civil Rights Realignment," *Journal of Politics* Vol. 74 (2012): 156-173; Kevin Baylor, "First to the Party: The Group Origins of the Partisan Transformation on Civil Rights, 1940-1960," *Studies in American Political Development* 27 (Fall 2013): 111-141.

[20] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263; Nelson Lichtenstein and Robert Korstad, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75 (Dec. 1988): 786-811; Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[21] This claim, which finds empirical support in much quantitative work in political science, also complements arguments advanced recently by historians and APD scholars about the southern contribution to national conservative ideology in the postwar decades. See Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, eds., *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Shamira Gelbman and Jesse Rhodes, "Party Organization and the Origins of the Republicans' Belated 'Southern Strategy'," presented at the Policy History Conference, Columbus, OH, June 5, 2010; and Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

[22] Howard L. Reiter and Jeffrey M. Stonecash, *Counter Realignment: Political Change in the Northeastern United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort*, 53-63.

A focus on ideological partisanship also challenges an influential account of partisan developments since the 1960s positing that the party system has simply replaced the set of issues defining the division rather than reorganized the parties into newly coherent ideological vehicles. In this account, the "realignment" of the later twentieth century saw the parties depolarize around one set of issues – the economic issues of the New Deal era – while polarizing around social and cultural issues pertaining to ethnic and racial identity, gender, morality, and other "postmaterialist" controversies.[23] The post-1960s period did indeed see the rise to political salience of new issues in the socio-cultural realm that came to divide the parties. But much new empirical work by political scientists confirms that measurable partisan polarization has occurred across both the older economic issues and the newer cultural ones simultaneously, in a development categorized by some of those scholars as "conflict extension."[24] The narrative account that follows in this dissertation, grounded in archival sources and focused on the actors who worked to put this sorting into action, complements such findings. Activists on both the left and right after the 1960s worked consciously and in the face of great obstacles to forge and

[23] E.E. Schattschneider articulated a theory of "conflict displacement" and its relationship to party realignment in *The Semi-Sovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1960). At the height of both the cultural tumult of the 1960s as well as the scholarly influence of critical realignment theory, conservative strategist Kevin Phillips helped to popularize the idea that a new "Social Issue" dimension was replacing the economic one and realigning the party system in *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New York: Arlington House, 1969). Later scholarly works emphasizing the reorientation of party politics around postmaterialist issues include Jeffrey Berry, *The New Liberalism: The Rising Power of Citizen Groups* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999) and Jeffrey Smith, *Trading Places: The Two Parties in the Electorate from 1975-2004* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2013). Thomas Frank has popularized a conception of cultural politics as an electoral ruse deployed by economically conservative elites in *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004). Historian Robert Self has reframed the story of a post-1960s conservative ascendancy by identifying the centrality of issues of gender and family to even ostensibly "economic" controversies from the Great Society onward in *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

[24] Geoffrey C. Layman et al, "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* 104 (May 2010): 324-346. See also Larry Bartels, "What's the Matter with *What's the Matter With Kansas*?," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1 (Summer 2006): 201-226; Jeffrey M. Stonecash and Mark D. Brewer, *Split: Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics* (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2007); and Noel. *Political Ideologies and Political Parties*, 144-164.

sustain coalitions between, respectively, labor liberals and the cultural left and antistatist economic interests and social conservatives.

Prophets of Polarization

Who were these actors? Who transformed the American party system? The quotes on party realignment discussed at the outset offer something of a clue about where *not* to look. While Roosevelt and Willkie and McGovern argued in favor of ideological parties, none of them proved capable of bringing that system into being in the short term – not even Roosevelt, arguably the century's most transformative president and a man who worked actively to orchestrate a party realignment from the top down. And while Nixon (in his 1959 incarnation, at least) and Robert Kennedy defended the ideological heterogeneity of American parties, they and the many other politicians who agreed with them ultimately proved incapable of stopping the parties' ideological sorting in the long run. Presidents, presidential aspirants, and other national political leaders cannot themselves compel the broad reshuffling of interest coalitions, organizational priorities, and voting allegiances required for party transformation merely through force of will and political skill. Something similar might be said for ordinary voters, whether letter-writers like the Arkansan in 1956 or poll responders like those surveyed by Gallup. Much evidence in social science highlights the degree to which the mass public takes their cues on issue positions and ideological belief from elites in the party with which they are already aligned.[25] If the parties have become more ideologically distinct and internally cohesive, that process is unlikely to have been driven centrally by the activities of ordinary voters.

[25] Discussions of elite-centered explanations for party positions can be found in Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 115-158; John Zaller, *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Gerring, *Party Ideologies in America*, 29-31; and Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort*, 1-37. Even among scholars who have challenged such work's strict focus on politicians and officeholders and have broadened the

Instead, the actors at the heart of this narrative occupy a broad middle range of influence and formal power between the mass voting public and the occupants of high offices – a middle range that might be said to be a shared analytical subject of much of the most promising recent scholarship in both American political history and historically-engaged political science. Politically-minded historians of postwar urban and suburban history have highlighted the work of issue activists, grassroots partisan workers, and movement builders whose locally-rooted mobilizations had national ramifications.[26] Others, influenced by the organizational and policymaking orientation of historical-institutionalist and American Political Development scholarship, have chronicled the interaction between organized activist coalitions and the formal political arena to help explain institutional reform and changes in policy.[27] And a small but

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universe of actors influencing party position-taking to include activists, interest groups, and social movements, the mass electorate plays a reactive rather than proactive role. See, e.g., Taeku Lee, *Mobilizing Public Opinion: Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); David Karol, *Party Position Change in American Politics: Coalition Management* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*. Research on voter ignorance and myopia, as well as the enduring impact of partisanship in determining the issue positions of ordinary voters, bolsters a focus on engaged political elites (broadly construed) as the prime movers in party position change. Larry Bartels, "Beyond the Running Tally: Partisan Bias in Political Perceptions," *Political Behavior* 24 (June 2002): 117-150; and "The Irrational Electorate," *Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn 2008.

[26] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Kruse, *White Flight*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Lily D. Geismer, "Don't Blame Us: Grassroots Liberalism in Massachusetts, 1960-1990" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010); Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[27] Julian Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Eduardo Canedo, "The Rise of the Deregulation Movement in Modern America, 1957-1980" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008); Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009); Benjamin C. Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

growing number of scholars have begun to apply such a focus to activism within the political parties themselves that helped shaped partisan and broader political developments over time.[28]

Political scientists' study of American parties, meanwhile, has undergone important changes during the contemporary era of polarized hyperpartisanship in real-world politics. Eschewing models that put either the strategic decisions of national politicians or mass political behavior at the center of explanations for party development, a diverse and growing scholarship has renewed attention to issue activists, organized interests, and ideological advocates as the prime drivers in American politics. At the broadest level they include all "engaged citizens" – the most politically informed and active subset of American voters, who are also the most ideologically polarized.[29] A somewhat more elite component includes the ideological activists and partisans both informally and formally at work within the "meso-level" of party activity, running party organizations as well as satellite advocacy groups, drafting state and national platforms, mobilizing voters, and organizing collective pressure on office holders.[30] And,

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[28] Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage to the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Leah Wright, "The Loneliness of the Black Conservative: Black Republicans and the Grand Old Party, 1964-1980" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2009); Tim Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010); Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[29] The term is Alan Abramowitz's. See Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center.*

[30] The term is Feinstein and Schickler's. See Feinstein and Schickler, "Platforms and Partners," 6. See also Barbara Sinclair, *Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 22-28, 36-66. Conceived broadly enough, this middle range also includes members of Congress and leaders of national advocacy organizations and pressure groups who are able to hold party leaders accountable to sufficiently well-organized and articulated demands. This conception of the relationship between the rank-and-file majorities of the parties' congressional caucuses and party leaders in Congress is central to the theory of Conditional Party Government, which emphasizes members' growing ideological cohesion to explain the revival of congressional partisanship since the late 1970s. See David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); John H. Aldrich and Rohde, "The Logic of Conditional Party Government: Revisiting the Electoral Connection," in *Congress Reconsidered*, 7th Ed., eds. Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), 26-92; and Sinclair, *Party Wars*, 67-184. In the world of interest-group and social-movement activism, the key actors are those bridge-builders between activists in civil

outside the day-to-day work of partisan politics and interest-group and advocate strategy, there are also the intellectuals constructing and legitimating overarching ideologies out of disparate issue positions over time.[31] This change in focus has helped give rise to an influential new conception of parties not as organized teams of politicians but rather as long coalitions of "intense policy demanders" – activists, interests, and ideologues using vote-seeking politicians as agents rather than principals in the quest to achieve policy-related goals.[32]

A wide variety of actors, from small-town citizens to presidents, play roles in the narrative that follows. This dissertation frequently highlights the activities of national lawmakers and leaders of the national party committees who were responsive to political currents, as they offer useful case studies and entry points into changing ideological and partisan dynamics over time. But at the heart of this account of the emergence of a polarized party system are precisely the ideologically driven thinkers, activists, and politicians in the middle range of influence and formal power. They are the men and women, sometimes pursuing short-range goals, sometimes explicitly seeking long-range systemic change, who worked over the course of decades to remake the parties in their image, and ultimately succeeded. Such actors appeared on both the left and the right. Precisely because the ideological division at midcentury cross-cut rather than defined the partisan division, ideological opponents might share kindred goals – and prove to be partners in a shared project – when it came to challenging the structure of the party system itself.

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society and the parties who turn particular movements into long-term and transformational "anchoring groups" for one or the other party coalitions. See Daniel Schlozman, "The Making of Partisan Majorities: Parties, Anchoring Groups, and Electoral Change," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011).

[31] Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties*.

[32] Marty Cohen et al, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Bawn et al, "A Theory of Parties: Groups, Policy Demanders, and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (September 2012): 571-597.

Political History through a Partisan Lens

As an exercise in disciplinary bridge-building, this work pursues a twofold analytical agenda. It places purposive historical actors at the center of the story of polarization – a subject that has remained largely the purview of quantitative political science. At the same time, it seeks to restore parties as institutions to the forefront of an analysis of postwar U.S. political history – a subfield that has experienced exciting revival in the past two decades but that has remained more focused on spatial politics and grassroots mobilizations than changes in formal political institutions.[33] As the central collective actors in American democratic politics, parties have helped to shape the historical evolution of political participation and policymaking. But political participants themselves can, and have, worked to alter the structure and function of those very parties. This dialectic between political actors and parties requires careful attention if historians hope to contribute to the collective understanding of the origins of contemporary polarization. Parties began to matter in new ways in the later twentieth century, and thus parties should matter in the period's historiography.

Putting the changing relationship between ideology and partisanship at the center of the story of postwar American politics informs how historians characterize and periodize the latter half of the twentieth century. First, this work offers a new angle of revision on the early postwar decades, an era still commonly characterized as a period of liberal "consensus" despite sustained assaults on this term by historians of labor, business, and politics alike.[34] On the one hand, this

[33] On the revival of political history, see Zelizer, Jacobs, and William Novak, eds., *The Democratic Experiment: New Directions in American Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Zelizer, *Governing America: The Revival of Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[34] Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism*, 1945-1960 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Jennifer Klein, *For All these Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

dissertation complements such revisionist scholarship's emphasis on midcentury conflict by identifying in the initial postwar decades the origins of many of the developments driving later partisan transformations. What appeared to be consensual policymaking is more accurately seen as partisan depolarization, and this depolarization was itself a byproduct of cross-cutting – rather than non-existent – ideological divisions in society. On the other hand, the dissertation also argues that the bipartisanship stemming from such ideological cross-cutting was, in fact, a historically significant phenomenon that influenced political culture and policymaking and delineates the midcentury decades as a distinct era in American politics. If the political order forged in the wake of the New Deal can usefully be considered a "long exception" in American history, dependent on a contingent and very fragile confluence of institutional and social arrangements, the exceptional bipartisanship that characterized the years of that order's dominance undoubtedly played an important role in those arrangements.[35]

This work also speaks to scholars' continuing efforts to characterize the last third of the twentieth century historically. The existing political historiography of the post-1960s period takes as its central narrative the breakdown of the New Deal coalition and the attendant rise of the right to national power. An ever-growing list of historical studies tracks the stresses and

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2003); Kruse, *White Flight*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Kathleen G. Donohue, ed., *Liberty and Justice for All? Rethinking Politics in Cold War America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012). Wendy L. Wall recounts the active construction of the idea of a centrist American political consensus in *Inventing the "American Way:" The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). For a forceful reassertion of the existence and efficacy of a postwar liberal consensus, see Jennifer Delton, *Rethinking the 1950s: How Anticommunism and the Cold War Made America Liberal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[35] Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (Fall 2008): 3-32. To argue that the depolarized midcentury party system served as an important component of this exceptional New Deal political order would be to argue that party depolarization aided the national cause of liberalism. As will be shown in Part I of this dissertation, postwar conservative advocates of an ideological realignment believed this precisely, arguing that a consolidation of conservative forces into a single party would hasten a rightward shift in national policy. Liberal advocates of that same realignment, however, believed the opposite, lamenting the ways in which bipartisan arrangements stymied and dissipated what they perceived to be a majority-backed liberal cause.

travails of the New Deal Democratic coalition beginning in the 1960s and the contemporaneous development of intellectual, cultural, organizational, and eventually electoral movements on the political right that coalesced as a mainstream national force in Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in 1980.[36] Historical accounts of liberalism during this period are unsurprisingly less numerous, but the prevailing narrative of those accounts that do exist stress the political crack-ups of the 1960s and subsequent intellectual and institutional disarray and decline.[37] The two major parties obviously feature in this literature, but their development as organizations and changing roles in American politics generally do not play a significant role.[38] Explicit treatment of ideological polarization and partisan resurgence is largely lacking in political histories of the period, even those that extend into the last two decades of the twentieth century.

This lack of engagement with partisan developments has interpretive consequences. Ironically, it causes even the rich historical literature on the rise of the right to understate the far-reaching impact of the conservative movement. That movement was a partisan project. As such, it proved to be a significant force not only in shaping policy debates but also in hastening

[36] For overviews of the vast recent literature on the rise of the right, see Julian E. Zelizer, "Rethinking the History of American Conservatism," *Reviews in American History* 38 (June 2010): 367-392; and Kimberly Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 98 (Dec. 2011):723-743.

[37] See Allan Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, Harper & Row, 1983); Dominic Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar American Liberalism* (New York: Anchor, 2005); Otis L. Graham, Jr., "Liberalism after the Sixties: A Reconnaissance," in William H. Chafe, ed., *The Achievement of American Liberalism: The New Deal and Its Legacies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 293-325; Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the American Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the 1970s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[38] Partial exceptions among histories of conservatism include Donald Critchlow's synthetic account of the postwar Republican right, which does situate the story within the context of resurgent partisanship and ideological polarization. "As a result of the right's success in the last decades of the century," Critchlow writes, "partisanship intensified and ideological division between parties and within the electorate widened." Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007)*, 5. See also Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010); and Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer's analysis of the Reagan presidency in *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981-1989 – A Brief History With Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010).

changes in the party system itself, helping to render both parties organizationally stronger, increasingly programmatic, and more influential in shaping political and policy outcomes during the last decades of the twentieth century. The prevailing historical literature also gives analytical short shrift to post-1960s liberalism, by obscuring processes of ideological consolidation and organizational development within the Democratic Party and among its allied interest groups that paralleled – though hardly matched – developments on the right. By putting parties at the analytic forefront of its account, this dissertation illuminates such themes. And by tracking the parties together in a single narrative rather than in isolation, it identifies shared characteristics, asymmetries, and mutual interactions in their development.

The question of symmetry is an important one. Historians' emphasis on the rise of the right in the last third of the twentieth century is not misplaced. Conservative political power is a signal theme of the period, and reframing an interpretation of the era around party polarization does not imply that liberals and conservatives contributed equally to the process or that the contemporary Democratic and Republican parties are equivalently ideological vehicles. Political scientists have supported historians' emphasis on conservative ascendancy with a slew of quantitative evidence for a process of "asymmetric polarization," in which Republicans have moved much farther to the right since the 1970s than Democrats have moved left.[39]

This dissertation confirms the asymmetry of modern polarization. It also, however, offers a correction to the prevailing historiography's singular focus on liberal disarray and fragmentation, by emphasizing the significance of decreasing ideological distance among Democratic-aligned officials, activists, and ordinary voters and increasing organizational

[39] The political science literature approaches empirical consensus on the asymmetric polarization of this period, a theme recently articulated for a general readership by Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein in *It's Even Worse than it Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

capacity and mechanisms of partisan discipline from the 1970s onward. In doing so, this dissertation argues that the two parties underwent *parallel but asymmetric* developments in the 1970s. In the Democrats' case, electoral and interest-group sorting – including the atrophying of the party's conservative southern wing – combined with the conscious organizational efforts of leading liberal activists to result in a rough rapprochement between left-of-center elements that had battled each other since the 1960s. The party's contested absorption of social movement energies and the transformed politics of organized labor were central to this development.[40] Factional fighting would of course continue during the subsequent decades, but the ideological space separating the battlers was much diminished from the prior era. This greater cohesion had substantive consequences. In the short term, the growth in Democratic party discipline served to curb the policy impact of the "Reagan Revolution" significantly, as consolidated opposition helped to stall Reagan's legislative agenda after 1982. In the longer term, the coalitional work of liberal activists contributed to the simultaneous partisan polarization on both economic and cultural issues though the end of the twentieth century.

Liberals' contribution to party transformation in the later twentieth century extended beyond the work of coalition-building and sorting. They were also the chief instigators of institutional reforms to both party procedures and Congress that proved central to the emergence of a new, more programmatic party system. Contemporary scholarly assessments cast these

[40] On labor politics in the post-1960s period, see Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008). A small but growing body of scholarship reassesses post-1960s developments in liberal and left politics and, to varying degrees, challenges the narrative of decline. See Sara Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," in *The World the 60s Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, eds. Van Gosse and Richard Moser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 52-66; Stephen Tuck, "'We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left Off': The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest in the 1970s," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 43 (2008): 637-654; J. Zeitz, "Rejecting the Center: Radical Grassroots Politics in the 1970s – Second-Wave Feminism as a Case Study," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 43 (2008): 673-688; Geismer, "Don't Blame Us;" Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter*; Bell, *California Crucible*; and Bell and Stanley, eds., *Making Sense of American Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

reforms as misguided interventions that fragmented the parties and hastened the rise of candidate-centered politics.[41] Subsequent historical scholarship, to the limited extent that it has addressed institutional changes in the parties and Congress, has largely echoed those initial, critical analyses.[42] Historians have rightly come to view the 1970s as a "pivotal decade" producing lasting transformations in U.S. politics, but have mostly ignored the role that the institutional reconstruction of the parties played in those transformations.[43] This dissertation reassesses the reforms and their historical significance. It shows that the two reform initiatives, of nomination procedures and congressional organization, were connected in personnel and outlook, and that the responsible-party themes of issue politics and party nationalization were central to the efforts of key activists involved. These reforms, so often cast as contributors to party decline, in fact helped to create a newly receptive institutional setting for programmatic activism in the parties, with direct consequences for the parties' subsequent ideological sorting.

If this work brings the processes of polarization and partisan resurgence to bear on existing historical understanding of postwar politics, it also contributes an actor-centered narrative and historical context to the political science literature on U.S. parties and

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[41] Early statements on the reform of the parties' nominating procedures include Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); and Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). Early assessments of congressional reform include Roger H. Davidson and Walter Oleszek, *Congress Against Itself* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, eds., *The New Congress* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), and Burton D. Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform: The Reform Roots of the Special Interest Congress* (Cambridge: Schenkman Books, 1985).

[42] Examples include James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76-85; and Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 35, 39, 145.

[43] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo, 2001); Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Kalman, *Right Star Rising*; Stein, *Pivotal Decade*, Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*; and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). A major exception to this lack of engagement with the 1970s reforms is Zelizer's *On Capitol Hill*, though his focus is limited to Congress.

polarization.[44] The common empirical story in that literature posits a sequence in which party elites first sorted ideologically, then prompted sorting within the mass electorate through partisan cues. The process of the initial elite polarization, however, largely remains a historical black box. By treating the construction of an ideologically sorted party system as a political project carried out by conscious historical actors, this dissertation serves to open that box.

Doing so yields insights into several ongoing pursuits in research on parties and polarization. The narrative details both the institutional changes necessary for, and the active coalitional work directed towards, the sorting of the two parties on both economic and cultural issues -- the "conflict extension" that scholars have identified as a notable and unanticipated characteristic of modern polarization.[45] It also reveals the work of partisan transformation to be unavoidably dialectical. Even as ideological activists worked to transform the parties in their own image, the existing partisan setting helped to shape and structure their strategic choices and outlook on the political system.[46] Finally, a focus on the interplay between ideology and party

[44] Useful overviews of the political science literature on polarization include Geoffrey C. Layman, Thomas M. Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, and Consequences," *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 83-110; and Matthew Levendusky, "Partisan Polarization in the U.S. Electorate," in *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Political Science*, ed. Rick Valelly (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[45] Layman et al, "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics."

[46] In this sense, Noel's account, in which ideological coalitions first rivalled the partisan coalitions and then won out and replaced them, is powerful but incomplete. Existing partisan arrangements influenced the work of ideological movement-building even in the process of those movements' altering the partisan arrangements. Noel, *Political Ideologies and Political Parties*. Similarly, Katherine Krimmel's argument that party nationalization rather than ideological activism drove the two parties' programmatic differentiation usefully revives E.E. Schattschneider's argument for the significance of scope in affecting political conflict. But, as this dissertation documents, ideological activists were themselves the primary instigators of institutional reforms that would serve to nationalize the parties. In tracking the real-world work of partisan transformation, in other words, ideological and partisan influences cannot be so cleanly conceptually segregated. See Krimmel, "Special Interest Partisanship."

structure helps to reveal the mechanisms by which polarization contributed to the emergence of organizationally strong and well-resourced national party apparatuses in recent decades.[47]

This work also historicizes postwar political science itself, tracing scholars' internal debates about parties, their changing conceptions of power, and the influence of both on real-world politics.[48] Two key threads of this intellectual history are the postwar political career of responsible party doctrine and the declensionist turn in public and scholarly understandings of parties from the 1960s onward.[49] Investigating the sources of such ideas as well as their impact on political developments sheds light on the role that normative ideas about the political system play in that system's very development. It also helps to account for the sheer unexpectedness of late-century polarization and partisan revival from the point of view of contemporary observers.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation proceeds in two parts, each consisting of three chapters. Part I, "The Bipartisan Era, 1948-1968," recounts political developments in the exceptionally depolarized

[47] On national party organizations, see John Bibby, "Party Renewal in the National Republican Party," in *Party Renewal in America: Theory and Practice*, ed, Gerald M. Pomper (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1980), 102-114; A. James Reichley, "The Rise of National Parties," in *The New Direction in American Politics*, eds. John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 175-200; Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1955-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); John C. Green, ed., *Politics, Professionalism, and Power: Modern Party Organization and the Legacy of Ray C. Bliss* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994); Brian Matthew Conley, "Party People: Bliss, Brock, and the Rise of the Modern Republican Party" (PhD diss., New School for Social Research, 2008); Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party-Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Krimmel, "Special Interest Partisanship."

[48] The intellectual history of postwar American political science is a relatively undercovered area of scholarship, as compared to historical work done on other fields such as economics. A recent example, covering a related set of literatures and debates to those engaged by this project, is Theodore Rosenof, *Realignment: The Theory that Changed the Way We Think About American Politics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005).

[49] For two useful essays giving a historical overview of the debate over responsible parties, see John Kenneth White, "Intellectual Challenges to Party Government," in *Challenges to Party Government*, eds. White and Jerome M. Mileur (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 1-21; and White and Mileur, "In the Spirit of their Times: 'Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System' and Party Politics," in *Responsible Partisanship?*, eds. Green and Hernnson, 13-36. On party decline scholarship, see Jeffrey E. Cohen, Richard Fleisher, and Paul Kantor, eds., *American Political Parties: Decline or Resurgence?* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001).

partisan era of the mid-twentieth century, a period characterized by high levels of legislative bipartisanship and two federated and non-programmatic national parties. The intellectual revival of an alternative vision of party politics, the rise of issue-driven activism on both the left and the right, and the transformational politics of civil rights all served to strain existing partisan arrangements to the breaking point by the tumultuous 1960s.

The first chapter, "The Idea of Responsible Partisanship," recounts the origins of the APSA Committee on Political Parties, its publication of *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* in 1950, and the debate the report engendered. Shaped by the politics of the New Deal state, postwar responsible party doctrine offered a potent critique of the fragmented and undisciplined American party system and prescribed an alternative model involving disciplined, programmatic, and mutually distinct parties. The publication of the APSA report in turn motivated critics of that doctrine to mount a vigorous defense of traditional American parties as forces for stabilization and inclusion.

The vision of parties articulated by the APSA report would influence most directly the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in the 1950s and 1960s, as "amateur"-style reform activism and the politics of civil rights increased liberals' receptivity to arguments made in behalf of ideological realignment. Chapter Two, "Democrats and the Politics of Principle," documents Paul Butler's stormy chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee from 1954 to 1960 as a case study in the political and institutional tensions besetting the postwar Democratic coalition. Butler's tenure featured responsible-party innovations as well as incessant clashes with southern Democrats, party professionals, and the powerful congressional leaders Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, two men who embodied a starkly different outlook on the value and function of parties in America. It then explores the ways in which the explosive social movement

mobilizations of the 1960s interacted with partisan politics. It identifies continuities, in both style and outlook, linking the era's new left-liberal mobilizations to the issue-driven middle-class reform activism of the 1950s.

Political divisions within the Republican Party in the early postwar decades similarly reflected competing visions for the party and clashing theoretical claims about partisanship itself. Chapter Three, "A Choice Not an Echo," explores these conflicts, elucidating the dynamics they shared with the Democratic story. Factional disputes over political strategy in the early postwar years took on ideological coloring, as ubiquitous conservative charges of "me, too" posturing among GOP politicians prompted deeper questions about the very existence of an American consensus. Against the backdrop of declining transactional party organizations and a resurgent conservative intellectual movement, GOP politics in the later 1950s witnessed intensifying clashes between supporters of a moderate, Eisenhower-centered partisan vision and issue-driven, amateur-style activists on the right. In a mirror-image reflection of the Democratic dynamic, conflicting ideological visions for the Republican future aligned with conflicting strategic postures toward the Solid South, particularly with respect to civil rights. I trace the evolution of conservative advocacy for an ideological party realignment via GOP alliance with southern whites, from Senator Karl Mundt's organization of a Dixie-focused Committee to Explore Political Realignment in 1951, to debates carried out within internal party councils during the Eisenhower years, and finally to the right's capture of the party's presidential nomination in 1964.

Part II, "Redrawing the Lines, 1968-1980," analyzes the 1970s as a decade of underappreciated dynamism, flux, and experimentation in American party politics that produced the key characteristics of our modern polarized era. After years during which efforts to

restructure the parties around ideological agendas had met decisive obstacles, what explains activists' success in transforming the parties in the 1970s? As a brief introductory section to Part II discusses, the long-term rise of issue-based party activism and long-term decay of the parties' existing organizational structures rendered the parties vulnerable to the potent challenges to major social institutions that were such a signature of the tumultuous late 1960s and early 1970s. This allowed reformers and issue activists on both the left and right to achieve decisive breakthroughs in reorienting the parties ideologically. Ultimately, the arc of change from Nixon's presidency to Ronald Reagan's inauguration involved a tightening alignment between the policy positions and partisan affiliation of political activists and elites. Though this dynamic would drive the revival of partisanship in subsequent decades, most analysts in the 1970s emphasized party decline as the key theme of their political era, in part because they retained an older conception of the parties that automatically counterposed ideology and partisanship.

Chapter Four, "The Age of Party Reform," reassesses the sweeping institutional changes pursued by Democrats in the late 1960s and 1970s relating to their presidential nominating system and their organization in Congress. It offers a new account of the transformations initiated by the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection (commonly known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission) and continued by successor commissions, emphasizing the intellectual premises that animated participants. It connects this story of party reform, moreover, to the congressional reforms enacted during the same years relating to the seniority system and committee structure. Responsible party doctrine informed the outlook of key figures in both reform projects. Often cast at the time as contributors to party fragmentation and decline, both reform initiatives in fact ultimately helped to create a newly receptive institutional setting for

issue-based activism within the parties, with consequences for future ideological sorting and polarization.

The following two chapters shift focus from the formal reconstruction of partisan institutions to the political work done within this new institutional context by party-oriented activists on the left and right. Chapter Five, "The Making of a Vanguard Party," recasts the familiar narrative of conservative ascendance in the 1970s as a project of ideological party-building. Strategists in the Nixon years articulated a vision of a new political majority waiting to be won through partisan realignment. Some activists would pursue an experiment in third-party building before backing Ronald Reagan's potent intraparty challenge to Gerald Ford in 1976, the immediate result of which was a rightward shift in the party's platform. Carter-era struggles would further drive conservatives' takeover of the Republican Party machinery amidst ongoing southern realignment, new business mobilizations, and a dramatic influx of ideologically-driven grassroots activism in the form of the Christian Right.

Chapter Six, "Liberal Alliance-Building for Lean Times," challenges the prevailing historiographic narrative of post-1960s liberal decline, arguing that liberal coalition-building and activism in the inhospitable 1970s contributed to the making of a more ideologically sorted party system. The Ford and Carter years would see fracture and disarray among liberals at the policymaking level but a gradual process of coalitional reformation at the activist and interest-group level, seen most importantly in the reemergence of a labor-liberal alliance uniting progressive unions with "new social movement" groups. Reform-mandated midterm Democratic conventions in 1974 and 1978 served as forums for tightening such coalitional ties, an important factor in the decade's second major intraparty challenge to a sitting president, Ted Kennedy's 1980 bid for the Democratic nomination.

A brief concluding chapter, "Polarization Without Responsibility," surveys the unfolding dynamics of an ideologically sorted party system during the Reagan years and beyond. Partisan resurgence and divided rule defined politics in the Reagan era. Issue activists came increasingly and consciously to be drawn into the logic of two-party electoral competition, enlisting as soldiers for one or the other major party. Congress proved to be the leading edge in manifesting the resurgent polarization and partisanship that were soon found in other realms of government. The consequences of partisan sorting have underlay every major flashpoint in national politics since, from the Republican congressional takeover in 1994 to the Clinton impeachment of 1998 to the interbranch warfare of the Bush and Obama presidencies in the new century. Decades of work carried out by the activists, intellectuals, and political elites at the center of this dissertation had finally helped to produce the nationalized and ideologically distinct American parties prescribed by responsible party doctrine. In a political system still defined by separated powers and myriad veto points, however, party majorities find themselves with no sustained capacity to implement their program. Hence the modern American predicament of responsible partisanship *without* responsible party government – a volatile ill-fit between disciplined ideological partisanship and fragmented political institutions that turns routine conflict into chronic crisis.

Part I: The Bipartisan Era, 1948-1968

Chapter 1: The Idea of Responsible Partisanship

On November 4, 1952, Adlai Stevenson lost handily to Dwight Eisenhower in his bid for president, bringing an end to twenty years of Democratic control of the office. Over eighty thousand people wrote Stevenson in the immediate aftermath of the election.[1] One of them was the political scientist E.E. Schattschneider.

The Wesleyan professor had read newspaper reports that Stevenson was assuming the mantle of leader of the Democratic opposition, and he wrote to express his hope that this leadership would embody "a more active effective sense than that implied in the expression 'titular head' of the party. As a lifelong student of the American party system I have come to feel that the opportunity for leadership in the opposition party is second in importance only to the presidency itself." Since American politics "generates remarkably few genuinely national leaders at any time," he noted, "it would be tragic if the Democratic party and the liberal forces in the country were forced to begin all over again four years hence to try to discover and develop new leadership." What was needed instead was for Stevenson – who along with Harry Truman had already "done very much to interpret for the nation the idea of party government and party responsibility" – to build upon the popular following and policy agenda he had established in the campaign and sustain them in opposition.[2]

What end would this leadership serve? "The function of the Democratic party as an opposition party," Schattschneider wrote, "is to remain, first, a liberal party, and second … to help the public understand the meaning of the liberal alternatives" to the coming Republican rule. Interpreting the election less as a party mandate for the GOP than a personal one for

[1] John Bartlow Martin, *Adlai Stevenson and the World* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 4.

[2] E.E. Schattschneider to Adlai E. Stevenson, November 9, 1952, Box 1, Folder 36, E.E. Schattschneider Papers, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT.

Eisenhower, Schattschneider was confident that Democrats would be returning to power soon. Moreover, ongoing structural developments, particularly the "the breakup of the Solid South, which seems now to be near at hand," might allow for a newly *effective* party governance when they returned. Thus the party should prepare now for that power and responsibility, by mounting a cohesive opposition. "For this job we can expect some leadership from the Democrats in Congress but not very much." The primary burden, and opportunity, was Stevenson's.

Adlai Stevenson responded to this letter, as he responded to the many others articulating similar arguments in the winter of 1952, with a courteous and noncommittal note of thanks, after which the politician and the professor never appear to have communicated again.[3] In itself, the exchange meant little. But Schattschneider and Stevenson were both, in different ways, significant actors in a shared story of postwar intellectual and political history, and the scholar's letter hinted at some of what that story entailed.

Schattschneider had indeed been a lifelong student of American parties, and by 1952 was associated more closely than any other scholar with a specific outlook on how they should function, summed up by two terms he used in the letter: "party government and party responsibility." Proponents of responsible party government viewed the federated character of the two national parties as anachronistic in an industrial age of large-scale institutions and national issues, and they sought to *nationalize* the parties' structures and orientation while facilitating the majority party's ability to govern effectively. They also sought *programmatic* parties, which would organize both their electoral appeals and behavior in power around policy positions rather than tradition, patronage, or personality. And finally, to secure democratic accountability in a system that only provided voters with a choice of two alternatives, they

[3] Stevenson letter to Schattschneider, December 19, 1952, Box 1, Folder 36, Schattschneider Papers.

sought mechanisms of *discipline* that could ensure that the two parties' respective programs were at once coherent and mutually distinct. The goal, as a Schattschneider-led committee of the American Political Science Association (APSA) wrote in 1950, was a system in which the parties "bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and … possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs."[4]

This was a theory of party reform with intellectual roots in the turn of the century, but one for which the more specific political experiences of the 1930s and 1940s had helped to mobilize a new set of advocates. The modern national state created by the New Deal and World War II brought with it a new politics centered on issues of federal policy. Franklin Roosevelt's presidency reshaped American liberalism as a public philosophy of activist state administration. But, crucially, that liberalism only partially defined the program and personnel of the party that Roosevelt led – a party that contained factions ideologically or instrumentally opposed to various aspects of New Deal liberalism. Liberal Democrats, frustrated with the obstacles to effective policymaking posed by dissident elements of their own party, would thus prove the eagerest proponents of responsible party notions in the ensuing decades.

Seeking to ensure, as Schattschneider did, that the Democratic Party would "remain, first, a liberal party," such liberals targeted those Democrats whose partisan identity did not relate to the programmatic agenda of the New Deal. These included the declining ranks of non-ideological patronage-based organizations as well as the conservative party leaders of the Solid South. The southern bloc compromised the coherence and effectiveness of the Democratic Party in Congress – hence Schattschneider's pessimism about congressional leaders' capacity to lead the opposition – and made mischief in conventions and national committee deliberations. Thus,

[4] Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, supplement to the *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 40 (Sep. 1950): 17-18.

liberals valorized partisan discipline in Congress and majority rule within national party affairs. Schattschneider's heralding of two-party competition in the South, meanwhile, hinted at a logical end product of these intraparty struggles: a realigned party system structured by coherent policy agendas, consisting of one broadly liberal and one broadly conservative party.

The doctrine of responsible party government was most clearly articulated in the report of APSA's Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, which met intense controversy upon its publication in 1950. It motivated critics of responsible party theory to respond not merely with critiques of the document's contents, but with a vigorous defense of traditional American parties themselves as valuable forces for stabilization and inclusion. This scholarly dispute helped to set the terms of debate for conflicts that would soon erupt in the rough and tumble world of party politics. And indeed, the questions it touched on – about the proper function of parties, their connection to policy and ideology, and their role in the American system – would recur in American politics for another half century.

The New Deal's Incomplete Revolution

"We ought to have two real parties – one liberal and the other conservative."[5] When Franklin Roosevelt said this in 1944 and Republican Wendell Willkie concurred, a top-down party realignment appeared as a tantalizing possibility. Some mistimed press leaks, a spate of cold feet, and – most importantly – Willkie's sudden death that October all compelled the president to abandon this pursuit. But the mere fact of his overture signified how the New Deal era had provided a new impetus for the ideological realignment of the parties.

[5] Susan Dunn, *Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 231.

The New Deal transformed American politics and *partially* transformed American parties. The disjunction between the former and the latter set the context for the revival of responsible party doctrine as both an idea and a plan of action. Government activism during the Roosevelt years ushered in a politics centered on conflicts over federal public policy and a new governing philosophy of state intervention on behalf of economic regulation and social provision. Though Roosevelt's massive electoral victories occurred under the Democratic label, the New Deal was not a party program. The congeries of interest groups, social movements, experts, and public officials that mobilized to implement and secure New Deal policies was not primarily integrated with the party.[6] To be sure, the New Deal's effect on the Democratic Party was dramatic, shifting its electoral center of gravity to the North, associating its national agenda with the president's liberalism, and compelling a limited but real degree of centralization in its internal affairs.[7] Countervailing developments, however, compromised Roosevelt's ability to mobilize his party for programmatic ends, most importantly the emergence by 1938 of an effective obstructionist coalition of Republicans and conservative Democrats – mainly southern, disproportionately senior, and empowered by the congressional committee system.[8] In his famous "purge" campaign that year, Roosevelt intervened in the primary contests of leading conservative Democrats in Congress in a largely failed effort to replace them with pro-New Deal alternatives. Roosevelt explained this effort to radio audiences in explicitly ideological terms,

[6] Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52-97; David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Political Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 128-161.

[7] A notable example of this last trend was the 1936 abolition of the century-old requirement for a two-thirds vote of convention delegates to secure the presidential nomination; the rule had afforded the southern bloc a veto power.

[8] On the dynamics of the conservative coalition in Congress during the Roosevelt and Truman years, and southern Democrats' particular cohesion on race and labor-related policies, see Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950," *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (Summer 1993): 283-306.

saying that, as "head of the Democratic Party," charged with carrying out "the definitely liberal declaration of principles" in the 1936 platform, he was obligated to intervene in primary contests pitting a liberal against a conservative.[9]

Four years after the fact, Schattschneider would hail the purge campaign as "one of the greatest experimental tests of the nature of the American party system ever made," and that test's failure did not put an end to liberals' interest in party realignment after World War II.[10] The dramatic political year of 1948, for example, saw upheaval within the Democratic coalition followed by an ideologically polarized general election. In a stunning demonstration of the growing internal party clout of northern liberals, insurgent activists at the 1948 Democratic convention succeeded in adding a forceful civil rights plank to the party platform, prompting four delegations from the segregationist South to bolt and mount a third-party presidential bid. For a general election featuring major efforts by a Republican, a Dixiecrat, and the left-wing Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace, Harry Truman's political strategists devised an aggressively liberal campaign for the president, mobilizing core New Deal constituencies like organized labor in the name of securing and expanding Franklin Roosevelt's programmatic legacy. Truman's upset victory, accomplished without the Deep South's support, accompanied the election of a slew of energetic liberal newcomers to Congress. It seemed to herald an era in which Democrats could compete nationally free from a dependence on southern conservatives.[11]

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[9] Franklin D. Roosevelt radio address, June 28, 1938, John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* (Santa Barbara, CA), http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15662.

[10] E.E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1942), 163. Milkis emphasizes the impact of the purge's failure in hastening a redirection of liberal efforts away from party politics, while Sean J. Savage attributes more significance to the purge as a moment of explicit partisan rupture that helped set in motion the long-term marginalization of the South within the party. Milkis, *The Presidents and the Parties*, 75-99; and Sean J. Savage, *Roosevelt: The Party Leader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 153-173.

[11] Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 241-265. On the congressional races, see Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and its Consequences, 1945-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 36-42.

Related developments in the early postwar years helped to bolster the two-party system and channel left-liberal energies into the Democratic Party, enlarging the potential constituency within that party in favor of stronger discipline and ideological cohesion. The national orientation of New Deal politics combined with the pressures of domestic anti-communism to hasten the decline of regional third-party movements, like Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Party.[12] In national politics, the Progressive Party disintegrated, while the anti-communist Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) consolidated its position as an elite satellite group, nominally non-partisan but functionally dedicated to liberalizing the Democratic Party.[13] A similar dynamic obtained in the political strategy of the labor movement. After flirting with third-partyism, industrial labor leaders like Walter Reuther abandoned the effort by 1947 in favor of integration into the Democratic coalition.[14] Their long-range strategy was to partner with liberal and civil rights activists within Democratic ranks, compel the exit of illiberal blocs (chiefly southern conservatives), and achieve an ideological realignment through which the party might be transformed further.[15]

Meanwhile, the experience of failure during Truman's second term – the grinding frustrations of congressional obstruction and partisan disarray that crippled the Fair Deal domestic agenda – prompted liberal Democrats to diagnose more intensively the institutional and

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[12] Jennifer A. Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal: Civil Rights and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 1-39.

[13] Steven M. Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 35-56.

[14] Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 50-51.

[15] Stephen Amberg, "The CIO Political Strategy in Historical Perspective: Creating a High-Road Economy in the Postwar Era," in *Organized Labor and American Politics, 1894-1994: The Labor-Liberal Alliance*, ed. Kevin Boyle (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 169-173. On the mid-century emergence and functioning of a labor-liberal Democratic faction, see Daniel DiSalvo, "The Politics of a Party Faction: The Labor-Liberal Alliance in the Democratic Party, 1948-1972," *Journal of Policy History* 22 (Fall 2010): 269-299.

political roadblocks to effective party governance.[16] This was the setting into which stepped a phalanx of sympathetic political scientists, eager to help.

The Prescription of Party Responsibility

The doctrine of responsible party government originated in the scholarly writings of Progressives like Woodrow Wilson and Henry Jones Ford, and one strong current within the New Deal and World War II-era intellectual revival of the doctrine reflected classic Progressive concerns with modernizing administration and rationalizing the politics of national policy.[17] Making the parties more cohesive and programmatic was bound up in a broader reform project of adapting America's cumbersome and fragmented "horse-and-buggy" constitutional structure to the needs of a modern industrial and military state. Thomas Finletter, a New York lawyer and diplomat who served as Truman's Air Force Secretary, typified this reformist impulse in his 1945 book *Can Representative Government Do the Job?*, which warned that the political drift and division fostered by American federalism and the separation of powers imperiled the national interest in an era of global crisis. He advocated fostering closer legislative-executive branch coordination and ridding the legislature of such "anachronisms" as the Senate filibuster, the autonomy of committees, and the seniority system, all of which impeded action and fragmented authority. Giving presidents the power to dissolve Congress and coordinating the elections of the House, Senate, and presidency, meanwhile, would help to produce that "party

[16] Hanby, *Beyond the New Deal,* 311-327.

[17] On the originators of responsible party doctrine, see Austin Ranney, *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government: Its Origins and Present State* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1954), 25-110; and John Kenneth White and Jerome M. Milieur, "In the Spirit of their Times: 'Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System' and Party Politics," in *Responsible Partisanship? The Evolution of American Political Parties Since 1950*, eds. John C. Green and Paul S. Hernnson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 16-20.

discipline which alone in representative government can constitute an effective bridge between the Executive and Congress and alone can bring them to work together harmoniously."[18]

As Finletter's prescriptions hinted, the British parliamentary system loomed large as a model in postwar reformist thinking, due to both its technocratic appeal as well as, for liberals, a substantive affinity for the postwar Labor Party's rule under Clement Atlee. That government's implementation of a sweeping program of social provision and nationalization offered American liberals a stark contrast to the deadlock and disappointments of Truman's stalled Fair Deal.[19] British intellectuals like Harold Laski contributed directly to this comparative analysis of the two party systems, while young American scholars like Samuel Beer studied the dynamics of British politics with an eye toward gleaning applicable lessons.[20] "I was much influenced by the British example of strong party government getting things through the legislature," Beer later recalled. "I thought, well, that's what we need: A political party which has a program that's been explained to voters who then choose this program rather than another."[21]

To these respective Progressive and Anglophile strands of responsible party thinking, Elmer Eric Schattschneider would add both a sweeping overarching framework as well as a potent rhetorical posture of hardnosed realism – a highly un-Progressive celebration of the raw

[18] Thomas K. Finletter, *Can Representative Government Do the Job?* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1945), 92, 108, 110.

[19] Leon D. Epstein, "A Persistent Quest," in *Responsible Partisanship?,* eds. Green and Herrnson, 203.

[20] Harold Laski, *The American Presidency: An Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940); James MacGregor Burns mentions Laski's influence on his own thought in Thomas E. Cronin, "On the American Presidency: A Conversation with James MacGregor Burns," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 16 (Summer 1986): 530.

[21] Samuel Beer, Oral History Interview with Vicki Daitch, November, 2002, p. 14, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (JFKL), Boston, MA.

and messy potentialities of power in real-life democratic politics.[22] Writing in a distinctively terse, aphoristic style in the 1940s, Schattschneider celebrated the restless power-seeking energies of the two major American political parties (the first chapter of his major work, *Party Government*, was called "In Defense of Political Parties") even as he sought their reconstruction into forces for cohesive policy agendas. He shared the Progressive goal of issue-based politics while shunning the Progressive impulse toward antipartyism, noting how the latter served to impede the former in the wake of the New Deal's ongoing revolution of national politics. Progressive antipartyism was "formulated in language which seems to condemn all partisanship for all time but [was], in fact, directed at a special form of partisan alignment which frustrated a generation of Americans," he pointed out.[23] Its legacy was a "folklore of politics" that venerates independence and thus vitiates effective governance. "Independence per se is a virtue, and party loyalty per se is an evil. We cling to this notion" even in the face of evidence that "independence is a synonym of ineffectiveness in a game in which teamwork produces results."[24]

Schattschneider similarly eschewed the Progressive tendency toward formalism and institutional reform. Though well aware of the constitutional structures fostering localism and fragmentation in the parties, his confidence in the potentialities of political power led him to believe that a new commitment among partisans to unity behind a shared program could itself trigger far-reaching changes in the entire system. The priority was thus political: to will discipline and organization into existence on behalf of programmatic national parties. In turn,

[22] Jennifer Delton aptly argues that Schattchneider's "self-conscious pragmatism" and "tough-guy pretense of understanding parties as they actually operate, not as we would like them to be" presaged a dominant rhetorical style among postwar liberal intellectuals; Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 27.

[23] E.E. Schattschneider, "The Functional Approach to Party Government" in *Modern Political Parties: Approaches to Comparative Politics*, ed. Sigmund Neumann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 215.

[24] E.E. Schattschneider, *The Struggle for Party Government* (College Park: University of Maryland Press, 1948), 6.

the ceaseless electoral competition of those parties campaigning on their programs would have the happy byproduct of smashing the boss rule of urban machines and the Southern gentry.[25]

The intellectual force of Schattschneider's arguments and his infectious enthusiasm as a teacher and scholar gave him a devoted following in the 1940s.[26] "You're the prophet," his protégé Austin Ranney wrote in 1948. "I never expect to cease being a disciple."[27] Other devotees of Schattschneider's vision with important connections to real-world politics included Steven K. Bailey, who alternated between stints in government and academia throughout the 1950s; James MacGregor Burns of Williams College; and Hubert Humphrey's circle of publically active political scientists at the University of Minnesota.[28] Altogether, Schattschneider's influence outstripped his public name recognition. It was not a surprise when APSA named him to chair a Committee on Political Parties in 1947.

The APSA Committee on Political Parties was one example of a broader disciplinary commitment to providing prescriptive expertise in the service of planning and reform in the early postwar years (a commitment that would soon after recede). As the association put it in a 1945 manifesto, "Ceaseless change in the social and economic world presents government with ever-

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[25] Schattschneider, *Party Government*, 65-98, 129-169; *The Struggle for Party Government*, 3-5, 27-38.

[26] Theodore Rosenof, *Realignment: The Theory That Changed the Way We Think about Politics (*Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 80.

[27] Austin Ranney letter to Schattschneider, January 15, 1948, Box 1, Folder 32, Schattschneider Papers.

[28] Two such political scientists in Humphrey's orbit were Art Naftalin and Max Kampleman; see Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 26-39. Humphrey delivered an address called "Party Responsibility" at APSA's annual meeting in 1949, and reiterated the following year his belief that "political parties should clearly stand on issues" and "develop policies and programs" to which its members commit. Paul C. Light, "Hubert Humphrey and Political Science," *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 21 (Winter 1992): 10-15. For his part, Burns solicited Schattschneider's editorial input for the book version of his dissertation, *Congress on Trial*, remarking, "I hardly need say how much my thinking on the general problem of Congress has been influenced by your 'Party Government';" James Macgregor Burns letter to Schattschneider, April 16, 1949, Box 1, Folder 6, Schattschneider Papers. Burns would popularize a responsible party critique of the Truman and later Eisenhower years under the rubric of "four-party politics," arguing that both major parties were internally divided, institutionally and ideologically, between presidential and congressional wings. See, e.g., "Truman's Way Out," *The Reporter*, July 19, 1949, and "America's 'Four-Party' System," *New York Times Magazine*, August 5, 1956.

new problems," and part of political scientists' task was to "spread as widely as possible a knowledge of what good government is and what its benefits are to all citizens."[29] An immediate model for the parties committee was APSA's Committee on Congress, whose 1945 report had exerted modest influence on the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946. Schattschneider indirectly inspired the new committee's formation by publishing an article in 1946 concerning partisan dynamics in the new Joint Economic Committee in Congress.[30] His analysis intrigued three scholars working in federal agencies at the time, Fritz Morstein Marx, Bertram Gross, and Paul T. David, who subscribed to responsible party doctrine and thought a comprehensive case might be made for reforms under the imprimatur of a national commission. They circulated a proposal for a Committee on Political Parties, and in December 1946, APSA's Executive Council authorized its formation, with a mission to "study the organization and operation of national political parties and elections, with a view to suggesting changes that might enable the parties and voters to fulfill their responsibilities more effectively."[31] APSA's president named the members of the committee in April.[32] The committee circulated and commented on a series of position memos by mail in 1947, then held meetings over the course of 1948 and 1949.[33]

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[29] "Political Science and the World of Tomorrow: The Post-War Program of the American Political Science Association," draft text for pamphlet submitted to APSA Executive Council, March 31, 1945, Box 104, Folder "Committees and Organizations – APSA – Executive Council Fall 1945," V.O. Key Papers, JFKL.

[30] E.E. Schattschneider, "Party Government and Employment Policy," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 39 (December 1945): 147-57.

[31] Paul T. David, "The APSA Committee on Political Parties: Some Reconsiderations of Its Work and Significance," *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 21 (Spring 1992): 71.

[32] The full membership list was: Thomas Barclay, Clarence Berdahl, Hugh A. Bone, Franklin Burdette, David, Merle Fainsod, Gross, E. Allen Helms, V.O. Key, Evron M. Kirkpatrick, John W. Lederle, Marx, Louise Overacker, Howard Penniman, Kirk Porter, Schattschneider, and J.B. Shannon. Key, preoccupied with researching and writing *Southern Politics in State and Nation* at the time of the committee's activities, withdrew in 1949; V.O. Key letter to Schattschneider, January 4, 1949, Box 1, Folder 23, Schattschneider Papers.

[33] "Interim Report of the Committee on National Parties and Elections," undated, Box 8, Folder 10, Schattschneider Papers; David, "The APSA Committee on Political Parties," 71-72.

Though Schattschneider did not personally dominate the activities of the committee in all its particulars, responsible party doctrine certainly dominated the body's assumptions and approach. All of the most active participants, among them Schattschneider, Gross, Marx, Louise Overacker, and Clarence Berdahl, were committed to fostering better disciplined, more programmatic, and more nationally-oriented parties, and the few dissident members did little to challenge the consensus. (No one produced a minority report.) Committee members most strongly differed from Schattschneider's views on the subject of internal party procedures. Schattschneider had long viewed efforts to foster mechanisms of democratic participation *inside* the parties as irrelevant at best and pernicious at their frequent worst, while most other members believed that intra-party democracy bolstered rather than jeopardized programmatic cohesion. The latter position survived in the Committee's eventual report, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, a document whose primary author was not Schattschneider but Fritz Marx.[34] The spirit of the committee's chairman was well reflected, however, by the confident declaration in the report's Foreword that "the weakness of the American two-party system can be overcome as soon as a substantial part of the electorate wants it overcome."[35]

Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System, a cleanly written 100-page document released to considerable fanfare in the fall of 1950, framed the problem of irresponsibility in this manner: "Historical and other factors have caused the American two-party system to operate as two loose associations of state and local organizations, with very little national machinery and very little national cohesion." This meant that either party, when in power, "is ill-equipped to organize its members in the legislative and executive branches into a government held together

[34] David, "The APSA Committee on Political Parties," 72.

[35] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, v.

and guided by the party program." Lest Americans resign themselves to muddling through, the report warned that modern conditions in foreign and domestic affairs rendered the situation truly "grave" – for "it is no longer safe for the nation to deal piecemeal with issues that can be disposed of only on the basis of coherent programs." The authors of the report were emphatic that parties should be organized in terms of issues – "the choices provided by the two-party system are valuable to the American people in proportion to their definition in terms of public policy" – and attributed the new policy-oriented basis of partisanship to the creation of the New Deal state: "The reasons for the growing emphasis on public policy in party politics are to be found, above all, in the very operations of modern government."[36]

The suggested reforms offered by the Committee concerned changes along three dimensions of party operations – developing policy positions, ensuring discipline and cohesion, and centralizing power at the national level. It advocated a 50-member party council that would meet regularly to manage the party's continuing affairs and to steer the formulation of the party platform while devising party positions on new policy issues as they arose. Notably, the council would also act as a disciplinary board authorized to "make recommendations to the National Convention, the National Committee or other appropriate party organs with respect to conspicuous departures from general party decisions by state or local party organizations." As a further means to foster integration, cohesion, and deliberation over policy programs, the committee recommended that national party conventions take place biennially. Concerning Congress, the committee recited what by that time had become a standard litany of reform proposals to rationalize, if not quite parliamentarize, both chambers: curbing the autonomy of

[36] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, v, 15.

committees and the sanctity of seniority; centralizing authority in the party leadership; and abolishing that iconic countermajoritarian institution, the Senate filibuster.[37]

In Defense of Indiscipline

The APSA report stirred strong feelings among American political scientists. Intensely controversial from the outset, it helped set the terms of debate about American political parties for much of the next decade.[38] Indeed, a testament to its impact was its success in motivating the Committee's opponents – scholars who had never endorsed the analyses and ethos of the responsible party school – to mount a vigorous defense of American parties as they traditionally functioned.

To do this, critics largely rearticulated the main lines of argument laid out a decade earlier by Pendleton Herring in his major statement on the American party system, *The Politics of Democracy*. Herring agreed that American parties were not suited to generating coherent and distinct programs, but he did not see that as a problem. "Our present system does not mean the negation of policies because the parties seem so similar in viewpoint," he wrote. "There is ample room for positive programs, but our parties are not the channels best suited to their initiation." Instead, interest groups and activists in society better served that role. The parties functioned less as channels of policy generation than as arenas in which "differences of viewpoint upon public questions may in large measure be either disregarded or compromised," and in so doing

[37] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 43, 56-65.

[38] On the debate within the discipline, see Evron M. Kirkpatrick, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: Political Science, Policy Science, or Pseudo-Science?" *American Political Science Review* Vol. 65 (1971): 965-990; John Kenneth White, "Intellectual Challenges to Party Government," in *Challenges to Party Government*, eds. John Kenneth White and Jerome M. Mileur (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 1-7; and John C. Green and Paul S. Hernnson, "The Search for Responsibility," in *Responsible Partisanship?*, 5-7.

the parties served as forces for stability, integration, and incremental, pragmatic policy change.[39] Reflecting the pluralism that would dominate political science in the coming decades, Herring argued that loose, non-programmatic parties not only fit institutionally with America's fragmented constitutional order, but also served as useful forces for inclusion and compromise in a notably diverse population composed of a jumble of cross-cutting group interests. Any strongly majoritarian vision of comprehensive mandates and responsible parties was at best unrealistic in such a setting. Indeed, the acute *danger* posed by party alignments based on deep ideological or group cleavages was the central historical theme in another influential contemporary defense of American parties, Herbert Agar's *The Price of Union*.[40]

Scholarly critics of the APSA committee report sounded anew these cautionary notes. "How Much Party Centralization Do We Want?," T. William Goodman asked. Expressing doubt that most voters ever consciously associated their vote with support for a given party's platform, and invoking Madisonian reservations about the potential for majority tyranny, his answer was clear: not nearly as much as the Committee on Political Parties wanted.[41] The most notable voice in this chorus was Schattschneider's erstwhile "disciple" Austin Ranney, who in the course of writing his dissertation had become, as he later recalled, "more and more skeptical about the applicability, the reality, of the Schattschneider prescription." Herring and Agar's work helped resensitize him to the political necessity of concepts like "consensus and majority forbearance

[39] Pendleton Herring, *The Politics of Democracy: American Parties in Action* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1940), 106.

[40] Herbert Agar, *The Price of Union* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950).

[41] T. William Goodman, "How Much Party Centralization Do We Want?" *Journal of Politics* Vol. 13 (Nov. 1951): 536-561.

and minority acquiescence" that responsible party proponents often sidelined.[42] He published a critique of the Committee's report challenging its presumption that Americans' fundamental democratic commitment was to effective majority rule. In fact, he countered, a sensitivity to minority rights and to the prevention of unchecked control of the full government by any given majority was deeply ingrained in American political culture, and "the same popular beliefs about government which sustain our present anti-majoritarian constitutional system will continue to sustain … our anti-majoritarian party system."[43]

What little direct evidence existed of Americans' normative views about the party system, moreover, showed general hostility to the prospect of a programmatic party realignment, contrary to the Committee report's claim that the scrambled ideological lines of the congressional parties was "a serious source of public discontent."[44] Gallup polled Americans in 1947: "It has been suggested that we give up the present Republican and Democratic Parties and have two new parties, one for the Liberals and one for the Conservatives. Would you favor this idea?" Thirteen percent said yes. In 1950, Gallup asked, "Would you like to have the Republican party officially join with the Southern conservative Democrats in a new political party?," to which neither a majority of Republicans, nor a majority of northern Democrats, nor a majority of Southern Democrats answered in the affirmative.[45]

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[42] Ranney interview with Nelson Polsby in Michael A. Baer, Michael E. Jewell, and Lee Sigelman, eds., *Political Science in America: Oral Histories of a Discipline* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), 219- 220.

[43] Ranney, *The Doctrine of Responsible Party Government*, 162. A similar contemporary critique of the APSA report came from J. Roland Pennock in "Responsiveness, Responsibility, and Majority Rule," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 46 (Sep. 1952): 790-807.

[44] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 19.

[45] The Gallup Polls no. 394, April 9, 1947, and no.451, January 6, 1950, can be accessed at Gallup Brain, http://brain.gallup.com. See also George Horsley Smith and Richard P. Davis, "Do the Voters Want the Parties Changed?," *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 11 (Summer 1947): 236-243; and Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, *Democracy and the American Party System* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1956), 499-504.

In the face of such polling data, committee members likely would have responded that their central aim was to *educate* citizens about the virtues of strong, responsible parties. In fact, however, the committee's report was notably coy on the related subjects of ideology and realignment. Though the implication may have been obvious in, say, their claim that **"**the sort of opposition presented by a coalition that cuts across party lines, as a regular thing, tends to deprive the public of a meaningful alternative," the report's drafters deliberately avoided an explicit discussion of party realignment.[46] They even claimed that "needed clarification of party policy *in itself* will not cause the parties to differ more fundamentally or more sharply than they have in the past." Since that clarification would produce a more realistic, results-based public discussion, "the contrary is much more likely to be the case."[47] In his critique of the report, T. William Goodman expressed incredulity at this obvious fudge. "If parties are not 'to differ more fundamentally or more sharply' in the future than in the past," he asked, "what is all the hullaballoo about? How will the voters have any clearer choices than they have had?"[48] The report deepened its own ambiguity with an artful formulation on ideology. "Increasing concern with their programs" will not "cause the parties to erect between themselves an ideological wall," the Committee wrote. "There is no real ideological division in the American electorate, and hence programs of action presented by responsible parties for the voter's support could

[46] As committee member Paul David recalled, "It was obvious when the report was being written that most of the proposed reforms would be impossible or unlikely unless some realignment occurred, especially in the South. Hence I suggested to the drafting committee that the report should deal much more directly than it did with the whole problem of party realignment. Morstein Marx responded that this issue had been carefully considered and that the omission of any discussion of realignment had been deliberate. It was the thinking of the drafting committee, he said, that if the Democratic party went ahead firmly with the development of the programmatic views that were held by a majority of the party, then the southern dissidents would eventually find themselves so out of place that they would leave the party." David, "The APSA Committee on Political Parties," 73.

[47] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 20.

[48] Goodman, "How Much Party Centralization Do We Want?," 554.

hardly be expected to reflect or strive toward such division."[49] This statement was obviously pregnant with the assumptions and vocabulary of midcentury liberal thinking about a national consensus, but more practically it raised the question of what would motivate and shape the construction of two alternative party programs, if not some differing set of principles or "ideology."

Far from being clear on this point in his own writing, Schattschneider actually betrayed just such a thin conception of political disagreement in *Party Government*, notwithstanding his exuberant celebration of conflict as the energy of democracy. What mattered to him was simply the existence of a choice between programs and the ability of the party in government to carry its program out. The formulation of the programs and their mutual distinctiveness would come as byproducts of the parties' competition for votes. He could even write approvingly of the often muddled programmatic results of this process.[50] Ideology and principle played little role in his self-consciously pragmatic conception of politics. Partisan competition was, for him, the all-powerful mechanism for achieving responsible party government. [51] But his and the APSA committee's unexamined assumptions about the sources of political belief had implications for that very party competition. As one critic of the report noted prophetically, disciplined national parties might produce *more* rather than less one-party dominance in localities given the uneven distribution of political beliefs across the country.[52] Moreover, as we shall see, the most zealous

[49] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 20-21.

[50] Schattschneider, *Party Government*, 85-93.

[51] His supreme confidence in the beneficial effects of thoroughgoing party competition also accounted for his famous dismissal of the need for intra-party democracy. Schattschneider, *Party Government*, 53-61.

[52] Julius Turner, "Responsible Parties: A Dissent from the Floor," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 45 (March 1951): 143-152. A recent restatement of this point – as description rather than prediction – is made by Nicole Mellow in *The State of Disunion: Regional Sources of Modern American Partisanship* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), especially 176-179.

advocates of programmatic politics in the 1950s – the amateur foot soldiers of party responsibility – would be precisely those most drawn to a political language of principle and ideological conviction.

The controversy over *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* was largely confined to academics in the early 1950s, though the report did circulate elsewhere. Its publication garnered front-page coverage in the *New York Times* and a supportive editorial in the *Washington Post*.[53] Schattschneider traveled to Washington at Hubert Humphrey's invitation to discuss the report with labor activists and party leaders.[54] Truman administration officials showed the report to the president, who agreed with certain specific recommendations (like enhancing the party's research capacities) but thought the party council idea impractical.[55] Some of the report's language also circulated among activist organizations. A 1951 ADA pamphlet suggested possible topics for discussion at chapter meetings, one of which was: "Should we have responsible political parties?"[56] Still, the report's early political impact was modest.

During those same years, however, a groundswell of grassroots political activism evincing a distinctly programmatic ethos attended Adlai Stevenson's rise to Democratic leadership. His presidential campaign in 1952 drew an influx of reformist liberals into the ranks of state and national Democratic organizations, thereby enlarging the potential constituency for an ideological reconstruction of the parties. One such Stevenson booster, an energetic national committeeman from Indiana named Paul Butler, would come across *Toward a More Responsible*

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[53] John D. Morris, "Reform is Urged in 2 Major Parties," *New York Times*, October 14, 1950; "Our Limping Parties," *Washington Post*, November 8, 1950.
[54] Delton, *Making Minnesota Liberal*, 156.

[55] Ralph M. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 432.

[56] "Proposed Subjects for ADA Discussion Outlines," August 24, 1951, Box 16, Folder "Americans for Democratic Action Files – July-Sept. 1951," Joseph L. Rauh Jr. Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Two-Party System in 1952, on the eve of his rise to power within the Democratic National Committee. Butler took the report to heart, and as DNC chairman would pursue something of an experiment in responsible party leadership in the later 1950s.

Chapter 2: Democrats and the Politics of Principle

The scholarly apostles of responsible party doctrine in the postwar years tended to be liberal Democrats who shared their ilk's frustration with the party's internal divisions and contradictions. When E.E. Schattschneider wrote to Adlai Stevenson after the 1952 election, he laid out a vision of a disciplined and coherent Democratic opposition that increasing numbers of liberal activists and voters found attractive.[1] As his noncommittal reply suggested, Stevenson's role in realizing this vision would be partial, somewhat unlikely, and at times even unwitting. An introspective patrician rather than a party warrior – and an ideological moderate to boot – Stevenson nonetheless served as a vessel for programmatic liberal energies in the 1950s. His two campaigns for president facilitated, on the one hand, the coalescence of a powerful cadre of policy intellectuals that helped to shape a liberal agenda during the Eisenhower era, and, on the other hand, a major grassroots influx of new Democratic activists committed to party reform as well as substantive, issue-based politics. Both developments created constituencies that were open to making American party politics more national in scope, programmatic in orientation, and coherent in structure.

The Democratic struggle for party responsibility was less visible in Stevenson's actual campaigns than in nascent efforts to reform Congress, skirmishes in the national conventions, and, most vividly, the controversial tenure of Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman Paul Butler. During his chairmanship from late 1954 to 1960, Butler institutionalized a key responsible party reform proposal – an official party council – and articulated an increasingly explicit vision of vigorous party opposition. His actions drew him into ceaseless public conflicts with southern Democrats, urban bosses, and the congressional leaders Sam Rayburn and Lyndon

[1] E.E. Schattschneider to Adlai E. Stevenson, November 9, 1952, Box 1, Folder 36, E.E. Schattschneider Papers, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT.

Johnson, two men who embodied a starkly different outlook on the value and function of parties in America.

These struggles proved inconclusive in the Eisenhower era. They raised crucial questions about the nature of political conflict in the United States and the relationship between parties and principles without answering them. Because the struggle for party responsibility pitted liberals against conservative southern Democrats, it was inextricably bound up in the politics of civil rights. The substantive fight for civil rights would prove to be a great dynamic force for nationalizing power within the Democratic Party, bolstering its capacity for internal discipline, and, eventually, ushering an ideological realignment of both parties. But that process would involve more conflict and take more time than Schattschneider and others anticipated. With the inauguration of a new Democratic president in 1961, the forces of programmatic liberalism were once again ascendant, while still entwined in an unreconstructed party system. In the ensuing years, issue-driven and ideological activism rocked the party with explosive force. But the origins of that activism, and that approach to party politics, could be found in the previous, allegedly staid decade of the 1950s.

Paul Butler, Adlai Stevenson, and the Amateur Spirit

That national party chairmen rarely acted as historically significant players in American politics is testament to the very institutional features that subordinated the national committees to the authority of local and state organizations and muddied national party leadership. The title of a leading scholarly assessment of the party committees summarized their peculiar position: *Politics Without Power*.[2] Paul Butler, whose tenure as DNC Chairman from 1954 to 1960 was lengthy by the standards of these thinly institutionalized entities, cannot be said to have

[2] Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy, *Politics without Power: The National Party Committees* (New York: Atherton Press, 1964).

successfully transcended the limits of his post or transformed it in an enduring manner. But his unusually energetic effort to do just that, driven by both substantive commitments and responsible party theory, served to highlight dynamic tensions within the Democratic coalition and the American party system.

Butler was a lawyer from South Bend, Indiana, who had risen through the Democratic ranks in a state with a competitive two-party system. In his native setting he was not a good-government reformer. Committed to the party, comfortable with patronage, and scornful of anti-party reforms, he wrote in a 1950 letter that he made "no pretense of being anything but an organization Democrat."[3] He was, however, a devoted New Deal liberal, and despite his modest reform bona fides, he owed his ascension within the DNC to a new breed of Democrats who saw in him a kindred spirit.[4] "Paul had observed the discontent brewing in the Party in many states over the ineffectiveness of the old politics," recalled Michigan party chairman Neil Staebler, "and was determined to bring the new approach into the National Committee."[5]

What was "the old politics?" What was "the new approach?" Staebler's language hinted at an important current of intraparty dynamism that ran through Democratic politics across a slew of states and cities in the 1950s. At the vanguard of this change was a postwar generation of predominantly middle-class liberal party activists – the "club Democrats." In state after state

[3] George C. Roberts, *Paul M. Butler: Hoosier Politician and National Political Leader* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 13.

[4] A factional split within the state party in the 1950s pit Butler against state treasurer Frank McKinney, a self-described conservative who chaired the DNC during Truman's second term; Butler letter to George C. Roberts, 7/5/61, and Frank McKinney letter to George C. Roberts, 6/28/61, Box 29, Paul M. Butler Papers, Hesburgh Library, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, IN. As a newly elected DNC committeeman in 1952, Butler urged Stevenson to replace McKinney with "a new chairman entirely disassociated from the political bosses of big city organizations around the country;" Butler letter to Adlai Stevenson, June 29, 1952, Box 15, Folder 16, Adlai E. Stevenson Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

[5] Neil Staebler letter to George C. Roberts, July 6, 1982, Box 292, Folder "Roberts, Robert," Neil Staebler Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

beginning in the late 1940s, the club Democrats came into conflict with existing party machinery and leadership, unless, as was sometimes the case, they took over with little resistance at all.

The context for these power struggles was the postwar acceleration of a trend that had begun during the Progressive Era: the long-term decay of transactional, non-programmatic local and state party organizations. Observers recognized this decline as it happened. Journalist John Fischer, who had worked on the Stevenson campaign in 1952, described in a *Harper's* essay the following year the "almost total collapse of the party organization" across the country that had hindered that campaign's efforts: "The city machines turned out to be a toothless and rheumatic team of dragons," he wrote, "far gone in senility and fatty degeneration. The old-time bosses … found they could no longer deliver the votes."[6] The senility may have been partly willful in 1952 – many party regulars were unimpressed by Stevenson and disinclined to work hard for his election – but the underlying process was real enough.

Myriad forces drove the unraveling of the parties' classic patronage model in most localities over the course of half a century.[7] Economic growth and the creation and expansion of a national welfare state reduced the demand for the material inducements offered by the old machines. Civil service reforms in states and cities, meanwhile, drastically depleted those machines' supply of such inducements in the form of public sector employment. ("Grandma no longer needed to see her precinct captain about that pension," Fischer wrote in explaining the pincer dynamic hastening the machines' decline. "Instead she talked to a brisk civil servant with a Vassar degree in the neighborhood Social Security office.")[8] Finally, increases in mass

[6] John Fischer, "What Do the Democrats Do Now?", *Harper's*, March 1953.

[7] On the decline of mass party organizations in the twentieth century, see A. James Reichley, *The Life of the Parties: A History of American Political Parties* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 304-315; and Alan Ware, *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[8] Fischer, "What Do the Democrats Do Now?"

educational attainment combined with the advent of new communications media – most importantly, television – to reduce the need for party organizations to mediate and prescribe political information and voting choices. To be sure, as catalogued by the studies of Angus Campbell and his University of Michigan colleagues, well into the 1950s the voting behavior of the mass electorate continued largely to be structured by stable partisan affiliations formed early in life, with issues and ideology playing very limited roles.[9] But the long-range trends were working to destabilize those patterns in the electorate, while they set the context for more visible, immediate changes among the parties' activist ranks.

The pattern recurred in multiple states in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Young, educated New Deal liberals, motivated largely by convictions related to national issues, forged alliances with organized labor and racial minorities to square off against sclerotic, generally non-ideological existing Democratic organizations. There was the California Democratic Council, launching pad for future liberal congressional stalwarts like George Miller, Phil Burton, and Henry Waxman, which produced in the 1950s a zealous and energetic DNC committeeman in Beverly Hills attorney Paul Ziffren.[10] The Democratic Organizing Committee of Wisconsin, a para-party band of liberals, swamped and supplanted the existing state party leadership through primary fights in the late 1940s. (James E. Doyle, Sr., became the state party chairman in 1953.)[11] The Michigan Democratic Club formed in the wake of liberals' failed efforts to oust the state party leadership in 1946. Through painstaking statewide organizational work by Neil

[9] Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Co., 1954); and Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960).

[10] Jonathan Bell, "Social Democracy and the Rise of the Democratic Party in California, 1950-1964," *The Historical Journal* Vol. 49 (2006): 497-524; and James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 96-125.

[11] Frank J. Sauroff, "Extra-Legal Political Parties in Wisconsin," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 48 (Sept. 1954): 692-704.

Staebler in alliance with Walter Reuther's United Auto Workers (UAW), the Club launched G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams to a record six terms as governor starting in 1948.[12] In some states, like New York and Illinois, with more robust existing machines capable of defending themselves, new reformers and clubs still managed to establish organized beachheads from which they became meaningful players in intraparty activities. Even in one-party Texas, a vigorous liberal cadre, inspired initially by the Stevenson campaigns, established the Democrats of Texas in 1957 as an organizational base for Senator Ralph Yarborough, providing a left flank for what was now a tripartite factional division within the state party.[13]

Contemporaries described such activists as "New Look" Democrats.[14] What distinguished them from their fellow partisans? The leading scholarly observer of the "amateur Democrats," James Q. Wilson, contrasted such activists with the professionals in terms of their outlooks on the ends of politics and the functions of the party system. "The amateur takes the outcome of politics – the determination of policies and the choice of officials – seriously, in the sense that he feels a direct concern for what he thinks are the ends these policies serve and the qualities these officials possess." By contrast, public policy to the non-ideological professionals was merely "the by-product of efforts that are aimed, not at producing the good society, but at gaining power and place for one's self and one's party." Parties served as "neutral agents which mobilize majorities for whatever candidates and programs seem best suited to capturing public

[12] Harry Lunn, "Politics Keeps Neil Staebler Moving," *Michigan Daily*, August 2, 1952; Staebler letter to Dora Beale Polk, April 8, 1953, and Staebler letter to Samuel Lubell, July 18, 1956, both in Box 314, Folder "Neil Staebler - Summations & Forecasts; Analyses & Plans; Statements of Principles - 1952-1956," Staebler Papers.

[13] Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 35.

[14] Stevenson described his early impression of Butler as "definitely a 'new look' type," in a letter to Arthur Schlesinger, August 16, 1954, Box 73, Folder 9, Stevenson Papers; Staebler employed the "new look" term in Jim Elsman, "Staebler Attacks Republican Practices," *Michigan Daily*, January 15, 1956.

fancy."[15] A key implication of this distinction was that the amateur's attention to issues of public policy made him at least a potential advocate for a party system organized around coherent agendas – that is, responsible party government. The authors of *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* had heralded the emergence of just a type of activist helping to "break down the patronage-nomination-election concept of party" and to build programmatic parties in its wake.[16] As the 1950s progressed, advocates like Schattschneider and Burns similarly welcomed signs of ascendant issue-based voting and party activism.[17]

No development proved more galvanizing to the grassroots emergence of that activism in the 1950s than Adlai Stevenson's first campaign for president. Stevenson was in many ways an unlikely vessel for such liberal energies. He was frequently at pains to point out that his own beliefs on issues ranging from civil rights to economics were a good deal more conservative than those of the activists manning the Draft Stevenson movement and populating Stevenson Clubs in 1952, as well as those of policy advisors and speechwriters like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and John Kenneth Galbraith. What endeared him to the new breed of issues-based party activists was clearly his political style and posture toward the party machinery. His intelligence and evident aversion to the grubby business of old-fashioned party politicking struck a chord with amateurs whose interest in politics was, to use Wilson's later term, "purposive" and ends-focused rather than transactional.[18] In this sense the Stevenson followers' proud adoption of the pejorative

[15] Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat*, 3-4, 18-19.

[16] Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, supplement to the *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 40 (Sep. 1950): 67.

[17] David Adamany, "The Political Science of E.E. Schattschneider," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 66 (Dec. 1972): 1328-1330; James MacGregor Burns, "Forces for Unity and Disunity in the Democratic Party, 1954-1956," paper presented at the APSA annual meeting, September 11, 1954, Box 1, Folder 32, Schattschneider Papers.

[18] James Q. Wilson, *Political Organizations* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 45-51, 95-118.

"egghead" label reflected not merely their dominant social characteristics, but a particular disposition toward politics that was of growing prevalence and significance for both parties.[19]

Butler, an early Stevenson supporter who was first elected national committeeman in 1952, built a reputation among his fellow DNC members as an energetic and innovative proponent of issue-based, program-oriented party politics, traveling endlessly to foster intra-party communication while proposing organizational reforms that stemmed directly from the work of the American Political Science Association (APSA) Committee on Political Parties.[20] Butler's introduction to the committee had come by way of Paul Willis, a University of Indiana political scientist with whom he collaborated on a proposal for a 1954 midterm national party convention.[21] The first page of Butler's proposal, "A Democratic National Convention in 1954?", explicitly cited the APSA report and its proposal for biennial party conventions.[22] He argued that a midterm convention would generate publicity for the party while helping to keep it engaged on national issues and a coherent program. The response to the proposal at the DNC Executive Committee offered an early illustration of the intraparty fault lines that would later define Butler's chairmanship. Chairman Stephen Mitchell and several reformist committeemen expressed interest. But Pittsburgh mayor David Lawrence, a powerful machine boss, articulated a skepticism shared by many party professionals when he pointed out that to "have a convention and have the linen washed out over television" might exacerbate rather than resolve intraparty

[19] Stevenson's appointments to the DNC reflected this disposition. His handpicked chairman, the reformist Stephen Mitchell, took an approach to party management that anticipated in many ways Paul Butler's succeeding tenure. See James Reston, "Stevenson Selects Political Amateur as Party Chairman," *New York Times*, August 9, 1952.

[20] Butler's interest in the Draft Stevenson movement can be seen in Stevenson letter to Butler, April 18, 1952, Box 46, Folder 56, Butler Papers.

[21] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 35-37.

[22] Paul M. Butler, "A Democratic National Convention in 1954?", p. 1, Box 176, Folder "Nat'l Committee, 1/1/54 to 11/2/54," Staebler Papers.

tensions.[23] Unity-minded professionals, conservative southerners, and congressional leaders jealously guarding their dominance over policy all voiced opposition.[24] One congressman called the idea "asinine."[25] Mitchell appointed a committee to consider the idea, which dismissed it on ostensibly logistical grounds.[26]

Similar factional lines recurred in Butler's 1954 bid to succeed Mitchell as DNC chairman, with one important difference. Unlike his two main rivals for the job – Harry Truman's favored candidate, Mike DiSalle of Ohio, and the leading urban bosses' pick, James Finnegan of Pennsylvania – Butler lacked a powerful political patron backing his effort. He was the only candidate to actively campaign for the job, personally calling 93 of the 105 DNC members to solicit their vote.[27] At the December meeting where the vote took place, Butler secured the support of reformist committee members from states like California, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota, while Finnegan and DiSalle split the machine-dominated East Coast.[28] Surprisingly, however, Butler also swept the votes of southern committee members, the region least committed to responsible-party reforms, nationalized parties, or issues-based politics. In an uncharacteristically cynical gambit, Butler secured the support of key southern committeemen thanks to a secret pledge he signed at a closed-door meeting with Georgia Democratic Chairman John Sammons Bell. "I do not consider the question of segregation a political issue," read the

[23] Minutes of DNC Executive Committee meeting, April 1, 1953, Box 114, Folder "Executive Committee Meeting – March 31-April 1, 1953 – Transcripts," Democratic National Committee (DNC) Records, John F. Kennedy Presidential Libray (JFKL), Boston, MA.

[24] Peter Edson, "Democrats Plan 1954 'Convention'," *Nashville Tennessean,* April 14, 1953.

[25] W.H. Lawrence, "Congress' Democrats Shun '54 Convention," *Louisville Courier-Journal,* April 30, 1953.

[26] Ralph M. Goldman, *The National Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 445-446.

[27] Sidney Hyman, "The Collective Leadership of Paul Butler," *The Reporter*, December 24, 1959.

[28] Democratic National Committee Meeting minutes, December 4, 1954, Box 116, Folder "DNC & Subordinate Committee Meetings – DNC Meeting, December 4, 1954," DNC Records.

note that bore Butler's signature. "I see no reason for any chairman of our party at any level to project segregation into our political discussions."[29] Expediency appears to explain Butler's signature, since his personal views as of December 1954 were progressive on civil rights and critical of the South's role in the party. As we will see, a mid-fifties intra-party détente on racial issues soon broke down as the issue grew in political salience, and Butler would become an outspoken advocate on behalf of this process.

Butler's early years as party chairman saw little movement on civil rights but a number of initiatives reflecting the issues-based, programmatic orientation of his core allies. He appointed Neil Staebler as chairman of a new Advisory Committee on Political Organization (ACPO), which offered suggestions on party structure, worker training, and communication. Among ACPO's recommendations were several reflecting a responsible party belief in issue-based partisanship. District and regional issues conferences, for example, would foster the intraparty circulation of "a common body of information and argument for party members," in the words of a 1957 report, while televised town hall meetings could publicize those positions.[30] ACPO also recommended measures promoting disciplined commitment to party programs, such as a Platform Review Committee operating between conventions that would report to the DNC concerning "the manner in which the Democratic Party Platform is being implemented."[31]

Butler's own conception of the relationship between program and party reflected responsible party theory. In a 1959 speech, he would explain why a modern party must be "first and foremost an 'issue-oriented' organization – one held together primarily by belief in and

[29] A copy of the pledge is enclosed with David Lawrence's letter to Harry Truman, August 14, 1959, Box 92, Folder "Lawrence, David L.," Truman Post-Presidential Files, Harry S. Truman Library (HSTL), Independence, MO.
[30] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 140.

[31] Recommendation No. 16-A, Report to the Democratic National Committee on Recommendations of Advisory Committee on Political Organization, April 20, 1956, Box 2, Drexel Sprecher Papers, JFKL.

devotion to some commonly held, clearly enunciated principles that provide motivation for political action."

> The extent and nature of the modern means of mass communication, the increased educational level of the population, the increasing importance of nationalizing trends as regards both section and nationality, the expanding participation of citizens in the processes of political parties and the growing importance of governmental programs in the Nation's economy and the everyday life of the citizen are all increasing the emphasis on the power of issues, principles, and ideas as the forces which are most responsible for the attraction and lasting attachment of new people to the banners of political parties. Party leaders are fast discovering, some the hard way, that political organizations based solely on patronage, personal favors, and the power and prestige of public office no longer enjoy the tremendous effectiveness they once possessed.

Using a term that would gain currency a decade later, Butler explained that "the 'new politics' places a premium on principles and demands greater attention be given to issues." Wherever the party takes "a hard-hitting approach based on issues designed to clarify the differences between our party and the opposition, we are making steady and often phenomenal progress."[32]

Proposals like the midterm convention and platform review committee reflected simultaneously the attention to national issues that Butler's allies stressed as a political strategy and the drive toward a cohesive program that responsible party reformers advocated. Neither came to pass during Butler's tenure. But a related reform – also with origins in the APSA report – did. The Democratic Advisory Council (DAC), a party council with a broad policy purview, was Butler's crowning innovation, an experiment that achieved an outsized impact precisely by sharpening rather than papering over the party's institutional and ideological tensions.

[32] Butler speech, Lansing Michigan, January 1, 1959, Box 3, Folder "Butler, Paul – Speeches, 1959," Butler Papers.

From Brain Trust to Party Council

The core driver behind the DAC was not Butler, but rather an unofficial network of intellectuals, politicians, and ex-New Dealers associated with Stevenson and known amongst one another as "the Finletter group," named after its social center and patron, ex-Air Force Secretary and Stevenson ally Thomas Finletter. [33] The Finletter group owed its existence to the liberal impetus to publicize a positive, distinct Democratic program in the Eisenhower years. A chorus of such voices urged Stevenson to maintain a national presence after his loss in 1952, starting with his adviser, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.[34] Resolutions passed after the election by Stevenson clubs and state and local parties pledged continued activity on behalf of his national agenda.[35] Staebler's Democratic State Central Committee in Michigan, for instance, unanimously resolved that "the continuing active leadership of Governor Adlai E. Stevenson is essential in building a party of principle and vitality" and urged that the DNC in conjunction with volunteer groups finance a radio and television presence for Stevenson and other party spokesmen."[36] *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins suggested that Stevenson help establish a High Council for the Democratic Party to develop issue positions, while Hubert Humphrey urged him to sustain a vigorous, public advocacy of liberal principles and to combat the party's right wing.[37] Stevenson

[33] On the Finletter group's activities between 1953 and 1956, see John Bartlow Martin, *Adlai Stevenson and the World* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977), 82-89.

[34] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., letter to Adlai Stevenson, November 7, 1952, Box 73, Folder 8, Stevenson Papers.

[35] For an example of the former, see "Volunteers in Politics: Dedicated to Adlai Stevenson's Principles of Government" pamphlet, Box 73, Folder 8, Stevenson Papers.

[36] Minutes of State Central Committee Meeting, November 23, 1952, Box 138, Folder "Democratic State Chairman, Minutes," Staebler Papers.

[37] Walter Johnson, ed., *The Papers of Adlai E. Stevenson, Vol. IV* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1974), 221; Martin, *Adlai Stevenson and the World*, 8.

heeded the call in 1953 and 1954 by authorizing an informal stable of experts, writers, and politicians to produce detailed memos and speech material for party officials.

It was fitting that Tom Finletter would lead such an effort, holding the first meeting at his apartment in October 1953. A hardliner on military matters but a staunch liberal domestically, he generally encouraged boldness in the party's policy pronouncements. More significant was his abiding intellectual interest in strengthening the lines of accountability and partisan cohesion in the political system. Finletter had advocated a partial parliamentarization of government in his book *Can Representative Government Do the Job?*, and the Democrats' ouster in 1952 sharpened his focus on the problem of opposition.[38] "The idea of a 'cabinet,' an organization in opposition, a shadow organization, was in my mind for a long time," he later recalled.[39]

The collective research and communication capacities of this brain trust provided not only Stevenson but also other leading Democrats with a steady supply of ammunition for attacking the policies of the Eisenhower administration and articulating alternatives. Arthur Schlesinger and John Kenneth Galbraith were leaders and informal coordinators of the ad-hoc, ever-changing roster of participants.[40] The group's output between 1953 and 1956 was often reactive, responding to issues and agendas set by congressional Republicans or the Eisenhower administration. But collectively the papers circulated by the group amounted to a coherent articulation of Cold War liberal orthodoxy – hawkish and internationalist, aggressively Keynesian, and committed to enhancing New Deal-vintage activism in labor relations, healthcare, social insurance, and agriculture. Importantly, this was primarily *northern*

[38] Thomas K. Finletter, *Can Representative Government Do the Job?* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1945).

[39] Martin, *Adlai Stevenson and the World*, 83-84.

[40] A useful overview of the group's structure is in Finletter letter to Schlesinger, September 28, 1954, Box P-13, Folder "Incoming Correspondence File 1945-1960 -- Thomas Finletter," Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Papers, JFKL.

Democratic doctrine, advocated without the threat of veto from southern or other conservative party professionals.[41] By 1955 the "Finletter group" was a phrase and a phenomenon readily discussed in the press. The *Christian Science Monitor* described the group that year as the "secretariat of a shadow-government … one of the most interesting innovations in the evolution of the United States political system.[42] Soon enough, the DNC under Paul Butler's stewardship would absorb the group's approach, and much of its key personnel, into a formal party apparatus.

The Democrats' recapture of Congress in the 1954 midterms intensified efforts among some to publicize a party program in competition with Eisenhower. Stevenson sought to formalize the Finletter group's activities with a salaried director, and discussed his intensions with Butler.[43] From a different source within the DNC came renewed attention to policy promulgation – and to the sticky subject of coordinating with the congressional leadership. After the midterms, Truman aide and DNC special counsel Charles Murphy suggested that the committee liaison with congressional leaders to develop a distinct policy agenda for the party, arguing that "it is not enough to wait for Eisenhower's recommendations and vote them up or down "[44] He sent Butler a dossier of collected material for drawing up a Democratic legislative program and strategized about how they might share it with the congressional leadership "without undue ruffling of feelings" or provoking suspicions of "mischievous interference."[45]

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[41] Herbert S. Parmet, *The Democrats: The Years After FDR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 126-127.

[42] Joseph C. Harsch, "How Tough is the Elephant's Hide?," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 29, 1955.

[43] Stevenson letter to Finletter, December 12, 1954, Box 32, Folder 10, and Stevenson letter to Butler, December 30, 1954, Box 15, Folder 16, both in Stevenson Papers.

[44] Charles Murphy letter to Stephen Mitchell, November 5, 1954, Box 7, Folder "Democratic National Committee – 1954," Charles S. Murphy Papers, HSTL.

[45] Murphy letter to Butler, December 20, 1954, Box 7, Folder "Democratic National Committee," Murphy Papers.

Murphy's fears on this latter score were prescient. The conflict that flared up in the later 1950s between Paul Butler and the congressional Democratic leaders Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson was overdetermined, combining clashes over strategy, ideology, political theory, and personality. Underlying all of it, however, were the institutional barriers to cohesive party agendas inherent in the American system. Policymaking authority for the minority party belonged to congressional officials, each of whom were directly responsible to local constituents rather than a collective party organ. The party committees' own organizational weakness, meanwhile, rendered any claim to a policy role dubious. The drafters of the 1950 APSA report had been well aware of this predicament when they cast their proposal for a Party Council not as an incursion on congressional prerogative but rather an instrument of integration, one incorporating a large congressional contingent.[46] But the very divisions the council was meant to heal made the prospect of establishing such a body difficult. Frustration would compel liberals to begin addressing this dilemma, and electoral defeat would embolden them to action.

The frustration stemmed from the performance of congressional Democrats during the Eisenhower years, first in the minority and especially in the majority during the 83rd Congress (1955-1956). The political strategy toward Eisenhower adopted by Rayburn and Johnson was well-publicized, and its watchword was *cooperation*. They surmised that the president's immense personal popularity, combined with policy divisions between his administration and the Old Guard majority of congressional Republicans, necessitated a constructive rather than oppositional Democratic posture. Democrats should seek opportunities to find common ground with the president, which would exacerbate fractures within the GOP. This implied that Congressional leaders should work to blur programmatic differences between the parties while

[46] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System,* 43.

avoiding issues that divided Democrats.[47] Rayburn and Johnson took their recapture of congressional control in 1954 as vindication of this strategy. "We are going to look upon the president's recommendation with kindliness," Rayburn said upon reclaiming the Speaker's gavel, "because he is the leader of our country. We are not going to be against [his program] just because a Republican President has recommended it."[48] Throughout 1955 and 1956, newspapers depicted the "bipartisan love match" and "Capitol Hill armistice" governing executive-legislative relations."[49] Assessing congressional politics prior to the 1956 party conventions – typically a time ripe with campaign-eve partisanship – William S. White marveled how "Little that is stark and unarguably clear stands to differentiate the parties as they enter the final weeks of this session."[50]

For liberals, that was just the problem. To their minds, it was both politically and substantively perverse for Democratic leaders to insulate Eisenhower from the taint of congressional Republicans' conservatism while melding the Democratic agenda with his own. What the opposition party needed was a program that contrasted with Eisenhower's while illustrating the degree to which his moderate image was window-dressing. In a widely circulated 1955 memo, Schlesinger described how Eisenhower's "bear hug" of congressional Democrats – a strategy "designed to obscure and minimize the issues between the parties" – might "result in squeezing a good deal of the vitality out of the Democratic appeal." Democrats needed instead to "clarify the differences between the parties," in part by passing an array of bills *intended* to

[47] Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 598-604.

[48] William S. White, "Democrats Reject a Harsh Approach as Congress Opens," *New York Times*, January 6, 1955.

[49] Robert C. Albright, "84th Congress a Bipartisan Love Match for Ike," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1955; William S. White, "Capitol Hill Armistice Holds Despite Election," *New York Times*, May 27, 1956.

[50] White, "Capitol Hill Armistice Holds Despite Election."

draw presidential vetoes.[51] This veto strategy was significant, for it spoke directly to the tricky question of applying responsible party principles to a system where power could be – and for much of the 1950s, was – divided between the parties. Liberals advocated approaching lawmaking like the opposition party in a parliamentary system: passing bills doomed to veto would help amass a record to run on in the next election, while the very process of committing to a bold agenda could resolve the chronic problem of intraparty ideological division through victory on the part of the liberal majority. Both goals were anathema to Johnson and Rayburn.[52]

When Stevenson lost the 1956 election by even bigger margins than in 1952, a wave of intra-Democratic recrimination ensued. "The election of 1956 was over before the campaign began," ex-senator Herbert Lehman argued. "The Democrats in Congress failed to make the issues during the 18 months we were in control. On the contrary, almost everything the leadership did during that time was designed to prevent any controversial issue from being seriously joined or vigorously debated."[53] The fact that Eisenhower made gains among key Democratic constituencies, particularly African Americans and union members, illustrated to liberals the costs of letting two congressional southerners dictate party strategy.[54] The domination of committees by southerners far more reactionary than Johnson or Rayburn, moreover, posed even more of an electoral burden. One party boss summarized the predicament faced by northerners when trying to get out the labor and black votes for Stevenson that year: to counter the Democrats' appeal, the Republicans "just say 'Eastland'; they say 'Barden'; and that

[51] Schlesinger, "Congressional Strategy and the 1956 Elections," undated, Box 73, Folder 10, Stevenson Papers.

[52] Johnson described his approach to Harry Truman in late 1956, explaining that he would construct his legislative agenda in reaction to the president's declared priorities rather than independently, and would pursue only what was passable. Lyndon Johnson letter to Harry Truman, December 7, 1956, Box 22, Folder "Johnson, Lyndon B. -- corres. 1955-58," Truman Post-Presidential Files, HSTL.

[53] D.B. Hardeman and Donald C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 407.

[54] Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 842.

answered all kinds of arguments."[55] These were not new complaints, but Stevenson's second loss at last prompted action to institutionalize a party voice outside of Congress.

Surprisingly, the Democratic Advisory Council was born of mixed amateur and professional parentage inside the DNC. The central mover on its behalf was California's Paul Ziffren, who epitomized those "new look" liberal committeemen devoted to issues-based politics and loyal to Paul Butler. But two powerful big-city professionals, former Illinois Cook County boss Jacob Arvey and Pittsburgh mayor David Lawrence, joined Ziffren in proposing the council at a DNC Executive Committee meeting in late November.[56] They suggested a two-part resolution: first, a reaffirmation of the contents of the 1956 Democratic platform and a call for the Democratic congressional majorities to enact it; and second, authorization for the Chairman to establish an advisory committee made up of the full DNC Executive Committee as well as party leaders from Congress, state and local government, and elsewhere that would meet from time to time to "coordinate and advance efforts in behalf of Democratic programs and principles."[57] The three pitched their proposal in tactical terms, as a way to thwart Eisenhower's increasingly aggressive efforts to co-opt Democratic issues. "We have to beat [the Republicans] to the punch," argued Lawrence, "and I think this is the only medium we have of doing it."

Predictably, the Executive Committee members most skeptical of this proposal were southern. Camille F. Gravel, Jr., a committeeman from Louisiana who was racially moderate

[55] Mississippi Senator James Eastland was the white-supremacist chairman of the Judiciary Committee; North Carolina Congressman Graham Barden, the anti-union chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee. The quote is from David Lawrence, DNC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, November 27, 1956, p. 188, Box 119, Folder "Executive Committee Meeting - November 26-27, 1956," DNC Records.

[56] Arvey and Lawrence were no fans of Butler, but in the aftermath of the election they shared other northerners' alarm at the atrophying of key Democratic electoral constituencies. Moreover, both were Stevenson allies, and perceived the DAC as a platform for him. Sean J. Savage offers an analysis of Lawrence and Arvey as adaptable party bosses who, beginning in the Roosevelt years, consciously aligned themselves with the forces of New Deal liberalism; *Truman and the Democratic Party* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 31-36, 41-48.

[57] This language and the ensuing discussion come from the DNC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, November 27, 1956, p. 185-239, Box 119, Folder "Executive Committee Meeting - November 26-27, 1956," DNC Records.

and loyal to the national party, worried that "we might be playing with political dynamite if we try to take the position in this committee that we should advise the members of Congress and the Senators as to what sort of legislative program they should adopt." Assuring the committee that "we are going to have trouble with our states in the South," Gravel questioned whether "the Executive Committee of the Democratic National Committee should adopt a resolution in the face of major conflicts we apparently have within the Democratic Party." Even the proposed symbolic reaffirmation of the platform gave him pause. He reminded his colleagues of how much unhappy intersectional compromise had been required just to secure grudging agreement to that platform in the first place. This prompted Arvey to interject that he saw nothing wrong "in asserting our belief in the principles which we adopted in our last Democratic Convention. We either meant those things at that time, or we did not." Gravel was dubious:

Gravel: 110 members of the Democratic House are from the South.
Arvey: Just a minute, they were elected on the Democratic platform, were they not?
Gravel: Parts of it.
Arvey: Well, parts of it.
(Laughter)
Gravel: I mean seriously, now that –
Arvey: My friend, let me finish. We either have a National Party or we do not have.

Gravel's fellow southerner on the Executive Committee echoed his skepticism, but both agreed to join the others in passing the resolution, which authorized Butler to extend invitations to twenty Democrats for membership. During the meeting Butler expressed hope that he could secure cooperation from congressional leaders, though he allowed that he had a better shot with Rayburn than Johnson. When Ziffren acknowledged the likelihood that "Mr. Johnson will view this with less than enthusiasm," DNC Treasurer Mike McCloskey chimed in: "That's an understatement." "That's the understatement of the year," Gravel added, to laughter.

The congressional leaders' response to the Democratic Advisory Council was, indeed, immediate and negative. Johnson wrote Rayburn in December that the council idea "opened up a real hornet's nest" and "is capable of deepening divisions within the Democratic Party."[58] He suggested that all members of the congressional leadership convey appreciation for the spirit of the resolution but refuse to join the council on the grounds that membership would conflict with their obligations to colleagues.[59] Rayburn expressed this to Butler, whose follow-up pleading fell on deaf ears.[60] The leaders' refusal to join the council had the effect of dissuading most other invited congressmen from joining, along with two southern governors. Reporters covering these demurrals conveyed a sense that the council was stillborn.

But Butler, characteristically persistent, did not take the congressional opposition as a reason to scrap the initiative. He pressed on without them, asking Charles Murphy to draw up an organizational plan and bylaws.[61] The DNC Executive Committee made Butler chairman of the DAC, authorizing him to appoint an organizing committee and hire an executive director.[62] Over the course of two DAC meetings in early 1957, members hashed out the basic contours of the organization, with key internal leadership eventually concentrated within an administrative committee that met several times a month, consisting of Butler, Murphy, Finletter, Maryland committeeman Phil Perlman, and prominent New Dealer Henry Fowler.[63] Significantly, on two

[58] Phillip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 23.

[59] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 106-107.

[60] Rayburn letter to Butler, December 8, 1956, Box 14, Folder "Comments re. Advisory Council," Butler Papers.

[61] Charles S. Murphy, Oral History Interview with Jerry N. Hess, May 19, 1970, p. 496-497, HSTL.

[62] Minutes of Combined Meeting of the Executive Committee and Advisory Committee of the Democratic National Committee, January 4, 1956, Box 357, Folder 11, Stevenson Papers.

[63] See Proceedings of the Advisory Council of the Democratic Committee, February 15-16, 1957, Box 120, and Proceedings of the Advisory Council of the Democratic Committee, May 5, 1957, Box 121, both in DNC Records.

early occasions the full DNC endorsed the initiative. In February, it ratified the establishment of the council over the objections of several southern members.[64] In May, southerners pushed a resolution requiring full committee approval for any DAC policy declaration; it was defeated 67 to 26.[65] The DAC rested on a strong foundation of DNC support.

Those committeemen and women who backed the DAC largely shared its view that the national committee had a legitimate claim to contribute to party policy. The congressional party, they argued, could not exercise a monopoly on policy during non-convention years, not only because institutional constraints compromised its effectiveness, but because doing so shut out millions of Democrats not represented by their party in Congress. "The Democratic Party is not just a Congressional party, it is a National party," Stevenson declared in justifying the DAC. "To be an effective opposition, the Democratic Party must have a broader base than the Democrats in Congress."[66] Phil Perlman argued that, given the regional biases of the congressional party, "on many policy matters, if not all of them, the Democratic National Committee is more truly representative of the entire Party."[67] The council's executive director, Charles Tyroler, put it more bluntly decades later: the DAC's founders were "goddamned tired of the presidential wing of the party – the liberal, national-oriented wing of the party, stalwarts of it, who controlled 60 percent of the electoral votes – not being listened to in the off-years.

[64] Hugh A. Bone, *Party Committees and National Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956), 223.

[65] Mildred Jeffrey letter to Margaret Price, May 22, 1957, Box 18, Folder 2, Mildred Jeffrey Papers, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

[66] Statement to the press, January 3, 1957, Box 358, Folder 3, Stevenson Papers.

[67] Philip Perlman letter to William S. White, December 3, 1959, Box 35, Folder "Demo Nat Comm Advis Council, working papers July-Dec 1959," Murphy Papers.

Everybody was listening to Sam and Lyndon. Who were they but a couple of Texas politicians?"[68]

Rayburn and Johnson may have just been a couple of Texans, but their opposition to the DAC – and its ripple effects on others' agreement to participate – served to render the council's membership much more monolithically liberal than originally intended. Indeed, the two congressional members who bucked their leaders to accept Butler's invitation at the outset, Senators Estes Kefauver and Hubert Humphrey, epitomized the council's ideological and operational cast. Humphrey had long served as a leader of the Senate Democrats' liberal bloc, and just as the DAC took shape in 1957 he sponsored a comprehensive Democratic legislative program in the Senate, in conjunction with Eugene McCarthy's introduction of a similar manifesto in the House.[69] In addition to Kefauver, Humphrey, and the 14 ex-officio members from the DNC's Executive Council, the DAC's membership included figures such as Truman, Stevenson, and Soapy Williams, joined in later years by the likes of Herbert Lehman, Governors Pat Brown and Orville Freeman, labor chief George Harrison, and, eventually, 1960 presidential hopefuls Stuart Symington and John F. Kennedy. This was a body with real stature. But it was also, more by circumstance than design, the mouthpiece of a specific party faction.

What did the DAC council actually do? Its core function, like that of the Finletter group before it, lay in issuing substantive policy statements. It interpreted its mandate in the same broad manner as had the APSA report in suggesting a Party Council that could "make more specific or reformulate the party principles in their application to current situations."[70] Between

[68] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 21.

[69] Kenneth Kofmehl, "The Institutionalization of a Voting Bloc," *Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 17 No. 2 (1964): 256-272; Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and its Consequences, 1945-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49.

[70] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 51.

January 1956 and June 1960, the DAC produced a total of 61 statements.[71] Ranging from lengthy essays to short reactions to current events, they emerged from the work of issue-specific advisory committees comprised of academics and activists, including groups on foreign affairs, economic policy, labor, natural resources, and civil rights. Intramural conflicts emerged within some advisory committees, but they were differences of degree. The DAC's published output reflected members' shared support for military buildup, criticism of Eisenhower's approach to foreign and domestic policy, and advocacy of Keynesian management and more equitable social provision. The most significant subset of DAC statements, by dint of its sheer distance in tone and content from the congressional party's output, was undoubtedly civil rights, discussed below.

As a vehicle for transmitting a distinct and relatively coherent party policy agenda to a national political audience, the DAC was a success. It commanded widespread and prominent press attention.[72] National and local newspapers alike routinely covered DAC pronouncements between 1957 and 1960, often reprinting their full text and frequently portraying them as official party positions. On occasion journalists even assessed the council's institutional significance. "The U.S. political system has been often criticized for its failure to produce a coherent and challenging opposition between national elections," the *Dayton Daily News* editorialized in 1957, pointing by contrast to "Britain's annual party meetings" that helped to elevate and organize political debate in that country. "For that reason, the Democratic hierarchy rates an 'A' for effort for taking up the chore of periodic policy review."[73] Two years later the *Christian*

[71] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 113.

[72] See the clippings collected by Charles Tyroler in Box 3, Folder 6, and Box 358, Folder 4, Stevenson Papers; and Box 34, Folder "Demo Nat Advis Council – working papers, Dec. 1958 - June 1959," Murphy Papers.

[73] Editors, "From Small Oaks," *Dayton Daily News*, November 11, 1957.

Science Monitor declared the DAC "a significant development in the political evolutionary process."[74]

Press reports like these spoke directly to Butler's own vision for the council and his overall leadership of the DNC. Butler developed an increasingly articulate theoretical commitment to party responsibility over the course of his tenure. Years of pitched conflict within his party and frustration with the fragmented machinery of national lawmaking sharpened his diagnosis of the American party system's ailments. In an extraordinary address in the summer of 1958, Butler offered an analysis that would have sounded familiar in a political science seminar but hardly constituted the typical rhetoric of party chairmen.[75] During the speech, Butler ticked off some of the main components of American party irresponsibility, including "loose party organization in the relationship of the state group to the national level … loosely organized national conventions and national committees, and the lack of mechanics to provide statements of official policy." The system's crowning failure, however, was the "total lack of disciplinary authority in implementing the provisions of the party platform." Butler declared this "political party responsibility at its worst: the lack of capacity within our political parties to so discipline party members as to require such reasonable conformity to party policies as to best serve the public interest." He knew that the DAC could not eradicate the structures fostering indiscipline. But he saw the body as one mechanism by which to compensate for it.

Crucially, however, the impediments to party responsibility did not end with the institutional elements Butler identified. Major ideological conflicts rent the party as well – substantive divisions that aligned with and thus compounded the institutional divisions and

[74] Richard L. Strout, "A Voice for the 'Out' Party," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 19, 1959.

[75] "Party Responsibility in the 20th Century," July 2, 1958, Box 29, Folder "Speeches - July, 1958," Butler Papers.

ensured that a party council like the DAC could never fully transcend its lot as an embattled factional mouthpiece.[76] That Butler invariably viewed such complications as goads to further action is what made his tenure a source of inspiration for some and exasperation for others.

What did account for this heedless persistence of Butler's, a widely noted trait that at times struck many as downright eccentric? Critics frequently alleged that Butler's seeming eagerness to ignite intra-party conflagrations stemmed from an interest in building a liberal base for a career of his own in electoral office, but little evidence bears that out. (He considered running for Senate in 1958, but decided to stay on as DNC chair instead.) Firsthand accounts of Butler's personality emphasized both earnestness and guilelessness, a tendency to commit fully to abstractly reasoned plans without sensing the likely controversy they would engender. Murphy wrote to Harry Truman in 1957 that Butler was a bad executive but had both integrity and a "good, clear, orderly mind."[77] The man with that orderly mind appeared to lack a certain knack for the human touch. Katie Loucheim, the savvy head of the DNC Women's Division and a powerful player in the party, never warmed to his leadership, recalling him as a moody micromanager. He never seemed to anticipate making enemies but was, Loucheim wrote, "afraid of no one."[78] Sidney Hyman portrayed Butler as the personal embodiment of the amateur spirit in modern American politics – the egghead as party boss: "Tall, thin, an abstainer from both smoking and drinking, he impresses most of those who meet him as an intense and innocent man, scholarly and stubborn … He seems lacking in all the back-slapping, yarn-swapping minor arts of politics. All this makes the 'old pros' uncomfortable in his presence.[79]

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[76] Klinker, *The Losing Parties*, 14.

[77] Murphy letter to Truman, August 7, 1957, Box 19, Folder "Advisory to Pres HST, 1953-1966," Murphy Papers.

[78] Katie Loucheim, *By the Political Sea* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970), 171.

[79] Sidney Hyman, "The Collective Leadership of Paul Butler," *The Reporter*, December 24, 1959.

Those pros, Truman among them, never ceased in their efforts to oust Butler from the DNC, while the base of his support lay among reformist committeemen who shared his outlook and commitment to issue-based politics. It was this commitment that won him the support of liberals nationally. The symbolic stakes that came to be attached to Butler's clashes with Rayburn and Johnson explain why Johnson's aide George Reedy once advised his boss to take a public attitude toward Butler's pronouncements akin to that of "a tolerant father toward a wayward son who drinks too much, necks too much, and gets himself hauled off into police court too many times for speeding. Any comments should be amused and tolerant and delivered with a smile – and should be held to a minimum."[80] That advice would be sorely tested in the late 1950s.

Parties, Principles, and the Dilemmas of Opposition

A Broadway hit came to Washington in June 1959. "Sunrise at Campobello" depicted a young Franklin Roosevelt's heroic struggle with polio, offering a showcase for actor Ralph Bellamy. The capital's Democratic Central Committee sponsored a gala opening at the National Theater and invited Democratic luminaries and party activists to the show.[81] At one point in the play, Bellamy read aloud a letter Roosevelt wrote in 1922, warning that "this country will be enduring Republican presidents for a long time unless we rip the barnacles off the Democratic organization and make it a progressive and modern political party." At the reading of that line, the audience exploded into unexpected applause.[82]

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[80] Arlene Lazarowitz, *Years in Exile: The Liberal Democrats, 1950-1959* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1988), 129-130.

[81] "'Sunrise' Dawning for the Democrats," *Washington Post*, May 24, 1959.

[82] The applause is reported in the *NCEC Congressional Report*, June 30, 1959, Box 8, Folder 3, Maurice Rosenblatt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

The now familiar pattern of congressional electoral gains followed by liberal frustration at the Democrats' legislative performance recurred after the 1958 midterms, with one difference. The party's gains that election were *massive*, marking a watershed in the ideological makeup of Congress and thus compounding liberals' ensuing impatience with its actual policy output.[83] Capitalizing on a recession and the electoral mobilization of organized labor facing a slew of state-level right-to-work proposals, Democrats picked up 48 House and 13 Senate seats in November 1958 – and virtually all of the new members were liberals from outside the South. Liberals now constituted not only a majority of the Democratic congressional ranks but something close to a majority of the full House and Senate. A sense of ascendency helped set the tone for the DAC's post-election statement, a 17-page agenda titled "The Democratic Task in the Next Two Years."[84] It called on Democrats to pass a gamut of bills covering, among others, foreign aid, defense spending, public housing, federal aid to education, rural electrification, the enforcement of desegregation and voting rights statutes in the South, Social Security expansion, the repeal of Taft-Hartley's right-to-work provisions, and a minimum wage hike.

Rayburn and Johnson, as usual, responded dismissively to the proposal, a reflection not merely of pique and differing strategy but also of the stark fact that the filibuster, the seniority system, and Congress's committee structure all ensured the conservative coalition's continued power even in the face of swelled liberal ranks.[85] By the end of the first session of Congress, Democrats had passed less than a third of the council's suggestions, and indeed the most important bill produced by the 86th Congress turned out to be the anti-labor Landrum-Griffin

[83] Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), xi-xiii, 59-88.

[84] "The Democratic Task in the Next Two Years," December 7, 1958, in Box 358, Folder 6, Stevenson Papers.

[85] "Rayburn Says Thanks, But House Will Set Own Course," *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 9, 1958.

Act.[86] Liberals reached new peaks of outrage toward Democratic Congressional leaders, expressed not merely in spontaneous applause from theater audiences but in jeremiads from the likes of ADA and the National Committee for an Effective Congress.[87] The DAC issued a harsh analysis of "The Current Legislative Situation" at the end of the first session. Careful to focus the blame not on Democrats but rather on Eisenhower for the "retarding and corrosive effects of 'veto government,'" the council nonetheless urged Congress to stop attempting "to water-down proposals to the limits of what the president might accept…The Congress should not be intimidated by threats of Presidential veto. The American people are entitled to have the lines definitely drawn."[88]

But it was precisely Rayburn and Johnson's strategy not to draw definite lines on legislative matters. These leaders defended their approach with both pragmatic and normative arguments. The practical case was simple. Beyond the institutional obstacles to coordinated party activity in the American system, the scrambled ideological contours of *both* parties as they actually existed in the 1950s virtually guaranteed that legislative strategies would have to be bipartisan. The Republicans' main factional cleavage was not symmetrical to that of the Democrats, but the divisions between the Old Guard based in Congress and the "Modern Republicans" led by Eisenhower were real enough. Ad hoc alliances of liberal Democrats and Eisenhower Republicans on certain issues alternated with conservative coalition action on others. All of this made for a fluid legislative terrain in which party labels did little to structure conflicts. In that terrain, Johnson and Rayburn sought to avoid explicitly partisan efforts whenever

[86] "How Democrats Fared in 1959 Session," *Congressional Quarterly* Fact Sheet, September 29, 1959, p. 1305, in Box 358, Folder 7, Stevenson Papers. Liberal frustration with the 86th Congress is discussed in Nelson Polsby, *How Congress Evolves: The Social Bases of Institutional Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 20-30.

[87] "2 Liberal Groups Score Johnson in Assessing Record of Congress," *New York Times*, June 22, 1959.

[88] "The Current Legislative Situation" text, June 15, 1959, Box 358, Folder 7, Stevenson Papers.

possible. Johnson had laid out this logic to Rayburn in arguing against the DAC in 1956: "Republicans who will vote for certain types of Democratic legislation … are highly unlikely to vote for that legislation when they are told that it was advanced by a committee whose sole objective is to sponsor a Democratic ticket that will elect a Democratic Congress in 1958 and Democratic President in 1960."[89] He retained this aversion to partisanship even after his party's margins expanded in 1958.

Johnson and Rayburn's objections to the responsible party model as advocated by the DAC and other liberals also had a cultural context, specific to the institution they led – the set of norms and mores that defined virtuous behavior in the midcentury Congress. Those mores tended to emphasize attitudes antithetical to the vigorous discipline and programmatic commitment that responsible party theory required. A slew of ethnographic studies portraying the social world and professional values of midcentury congressmen and senators revealed a focus on collegiality, compromise, deference , and bipartisanship. "Integrity crosses party lines," a Republican told one such scholar. "You rely on some of your Democratic colleagues equally."[90] The intensely self-conscious internal culture of the Senate in particular venerated civility, reciprocity, and a peculiar combination of individualism and conformity.[91] It instilled a primary commitment to the Senate as a body. As William S. White put it in his paean to the upper chamber, *Citadel*, the Senate type is "a man for whom the Institution is a career in itself, a life in itself, and an end in itself."[92] That meant, in turn, that lawmaking should always take priority over partisan efforts.

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[89] Klinkner, *The Losing Party*, 23.

[90] Charles L. Clapp, *The Congressman: His Work as He Sees It* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1963), 25.

[91] Donald Matthews, *U.S. Senators and Their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 92-117.

[92] William S. White, *Citadel: The Story of the U.S. Senate* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 84.

As a young Senator Robert Byrd told Butler in 1959, "We are here to legislate – not to make a political record."[93]

Such a congressional culture not only challenged responsible partisanship in the Schattschneider mode, but also helped buttress an alternative vision of American parties' proper function, as big tents that mitigated rather than clarified conflict. According to one early scholarly critique of Butler's tenure, his commitment to implementing responsible party principles betrayed a disastrous misunderstanding of the American system, where federalism and the separation of powers demanded that parties serve not as programmatic bodies at all, but as "arenas of compromise" – decentralized "multi-group associations with liberal and conservative wings."[94] To scholars skeptical of the responsible party vision, the very "irresponsibility" of American parties was a feature rather than a bug, for many of the reasons articulated by the APSA committee report's critics. During the Eisenhower era, scholars further elaborated a Madisonian argument for loose, inclusive parties. Each party incorporated a portion of all the various groupings in the population, according to this view, thus tempering any particular conflicts between them while protecting minority rights. Schattschneider's disciple-*cum*-heretic, Austin Ranney, laid out this argument at length in his 1956 collaboration with conservative theorist Willmoore Kendall.[95] "The parties have been the peacemakers of the American community," Clinton Rossiter wrote in his bestselling *Parties and Politics in America*, "the

[93] Robert C. Byrd letter to Butler, July 10, 1959, Box 449, Folder "Chairman Butler's File - Anti-Butler Correspondence, 7/8-7/11/59," DNC Records. Byrd assured Butler that "our party is big enough for the liberals, the conservatives, and the middle-of-the-roaders…[T]hat our Party possesses these varied elements makes it all the more representative of this Nation's heterogeneous people and all the more responsive to the public heartbeat."

[94] Charles Ogden, Jr., "Paul Butler, Party Theory, and the Democratic Party," in *Comparative Political Problems: Britain, United States, and Canada*, eds. John E. Kersell and Marshall W. Conley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 117-125.

[95] Ranney and Kendall, *Democracy and the American Party System*, 459-487, 500-533.

unwitting but forceful suppressors of the 'civil-war potential' we carry always in the bowels of our diverse nation. Blessed are the peacemakers, I am tempted to conclude."[96]

The normative defense of traditional American parties meshed well with the postwar flourishing of pluralist models in political science that portrayed politics writ large as the ad hoc, incremental, and non-ideological negotiation of group interests. In his study of reform Democrats, James Q. Wilson cast a critical eye on such activists' commitment to a politics of principle, issues, and outcomes, their belief that "the ends of government and the incentives for political action ought to be identical." Wilson, greatly influenced by his collaborations with Edward C. Banfield studying the rough and tumble of American urban politics, preferred a system consisting of unprincipled professionals and non-ideological voters, in which "public policies are the by-product of political self-seeking just as the distribution of goods and services is the by-product of economic self-seeking."[97]

Ideology – the politics of principle – occupied an ambiguous place in this discourse, just as it had in the contrasting arguments of Schattschneider and the APSA committee. Celebrators of the American party system at times implicitly sidelined ideology in their own arguments, while at other times explicitly celebrated *the system's* sidelining of ideology. They alternated between, on the one hand, arguing that the parties' non-ideological orientation reflected a real American consensus and, on the other hand, celebrating the parties for their role in mitigating a real American potential for ideological strife. When Lyndon Johnson argued that "what the man on the street wants is not a big debate on fundamental issues; he wants a little medical care, a rug

[96] Clinton Rossiter, *Parties and Politics in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960), 59. Rossiter took the term "civil-war potential" directly from Ranney and Kendall's book.

[97] Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat*, 20. Edward C. Banfield's most direct statement on American parties is "In Defense of the American Party System," in *Political Parties, U.S.A.*, ed. Robert Goodwin (Chicago: McGraw Hill, 1964), 21-39.

on the floor, a picture on the wall," he implied that Americans shared core premises and sought from politics only the incremental improvements of means and materials. But when, in nearly the same breath, he intoned that "the biggest threat to American stability is the politics of principle," he conveyed a fear that ideological conflict was in fact all too possible.[98]

Likewise, Connecticut Senator Thomas Dodd combined optimism with alarm in a 1960 speech that condemned Democratic reformers' recklessness "when they try to whittle away at the deliberative process, when they attack the committee system of the Congress … when they propose binding party platforms and binding party caucuses."[99] Dodd associated the DAC with those lines of reform and warned against paving the road to the British system, which he cast as a heinous party dictatorship that crushed independent judgment and divided the country. Such ominous warnings, though, jibed awkwardly with his complacent belief in an American consensus. "The extreme liberals in the Democratic Party and their conservative counterparts in the Republican Party," Dodd mused, "are fond of issuing manifestos calling for a repudiation of the moderate elements in each party and thus presenting the voters with a clear choice." The reason they always fell on deaf ears was simple:

> We live in a country which has an essentially sound system of government, a basically just social system, a growing and prosperous economy, a happy relationship between church and state, a satisfactory arrangement between workers and employers, and the absence of bitter conflict between the so-called classes. Why then should there be a doctrinaire division, a fundamental conflict between the two parties? Why should people resent the fact that our parties offer similar solutions

[98] Quotes from Doris Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 152, 154. Kearns offers a rich discussion of Johnson's pluralist assumptions and normative democratic commitments, 152-159. One irony of Johnson's leadership was that he valorized a political vision of consensus forged through relentless bargaining – a process yielding incremental improvements while ensuring stability – while at the same time innovating unprecedented tools of discipline and centralized command as majority leader. Johnson's mastery of the Senate's legislative machinery bolstered a personal rather than party-oriented rule, utilized in the service of blurring rather than sharpening partisan disagreements. See Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 488-515, 572-578.

[99] Dodd delivered his speech, "The Case Against Reforming our Political System," on November 21, 1960 in New York City. The text was reprinted in the *Congressional Record - Senate*, 87th Cong., 1st sess., Vol. 107: 205-208.

> to most problems? Why should there be a call for disagreement, merely for the sake of disagreement?

Dodd's rhetorical questions conjured an image of social peace and consensus. Hindsight affords us the knowledge of just how soon afterwards the explosion of the long civil rights struggle into a mass movement of direct action and moral reckoning would belie that picture.

This knowledge is not only relevant for critically engaging postwar American assumptions about consensus and ideology, however. It is also central to an understanding of how the American party system eventually did transform. As we have seen, responsible party innovations like the DAC were doomed to a life of factional controversy and illegitimacy so long as deep ideological divisions remained in the parties, while the existence of those divisions helped in turn to entrench an array of cultural and intellectual bulwarks against party responsibility. The gradual emergence of issue-based activism and voting behavior at least created the possibility of ideological realignment in American parties and produced a set of constituencies potentially committed to it. But a key catalyst for that eventual realignment – and a major fulcrum of party transformation as it actually took place – turned out to be civil rights.

Civil Rights, Institutional Reform, and the Specter of Realignment

Within the DNC, Butler's initial posture toward civil rights was compromised. His victory in the 1954 chairmanship election depended on a coalition of northern reformers on the one hand and highly un-reformist southerners on the other. Butler's early behavior in office relating to sectional issues was conciliatory toward the South, partly in reflection of Stevenson's intraparty posture at the time.[100] But Butler's personal views on civil rights were liberal, and dynamics during the later 1950s increasingly compelled him and other Democrats like him to

[100] See, for example, Thomas L. Stokes, "Loyal Democrats in the South: Regulars Irked by Butler's Inclination to Forgive those Who Deserted Fold," *Washington Star*, May 18, 1955. Also, Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 91-93.

marry their substantive commitment to civil rights with institutional reform commitments related to partisan nationalization and discipline.

Leading Democrats' substantive position on civil rights evolved as a result of pressure from African American advocates and politicians, other Democratic activists, and the logic of national events. Black officials like Michigan congressman Charles Diggs and NAACP executive secretary Roy Wilkins lobbied Butler relentlessly regarding DNC policies and voting conditions in southern primaries.[101] "We don't think that Chairman Butler can blandly ask for the support of Negro voters over the country," Wilkins wrote Hubert Humphrey in 1955, "when one branch of his party is so brazenly and brutally denying Negroes the right to vote in certain states."[102] Other reformist Democrats began articulating this same political logic. As a state chairman wrote to Stevenson in 1956, increasing numbers of northern Democrats were "persuaded that the southern Democratic base no longer is a reality and that efforts to restore it are fatal to success in the north and the west," an assessment with implications for the party's positioning on civil rights.[103]

But the substantive commitment among many Democrats was not merely strategic. Those middle-ranking activists most inclined toward programmatic partisanship – issue-based amateurs, laborites, urban constituencies – held disproportionately liberal views on civil rights. They served as a pressuring force on party officials that had little counterpart among Republicans, despite the moderate civil rights posture of many Modern Republican

[101] See, e.g., Charles Diggs letters to Butler, August 4 and September 13, 1955, and Butler's letter to Diggs, November 15, 1955, in Box 457, Folder "NAACP – Integration," DNC Records.

[102] Wilkins letter to Humphrey, August 9, 1955, Box 457, Folder "NAACP – Integration," DNC Records.

[103] James Doyle memo to Adlai Stevenson, February 1956, Box 358, Folder 3, Stevenson Papers.

officeholders.[104] More and more Democrats concluded that a commitment to liberalism required a commitment to civil rights.[105] Stevenson's routing in 1956 and later southern resistance to the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision helped bring Butler around to that position. During the Little Rock desegregation controversy in 1957, he declared that "the Democratic Party will not be deterred in its stand for civil rights by any threat of a third party in the South."[106] The DAC condemned Arkansas's governor and later established an Advisory Committee on Civil Rights, headed by Eleanor Roosevelt, which called for the 1960 Democratic Party platform to explicitly endorse picketing and sit-down demonstrations.[107]

Substantive conflict over civil rights had important institutional consequences. Within the national committee, it prompted a little-noticed but important process of nationalization through the resolution of the so-called "loyalty oath" controversy.[108] The Dixiecrat revolt of 1948 had created a situation in which the ballots of four southern states listed, under the Democratic name and label, electors pledged to the States' Rights Party nominee. To prevent this from recurring, Michigan Senator Blair Moody authored a resolution requiring that the duly nominated presidential and vice-presidential ticket appear on all states' ballots under the Democratic label. Three southern states refused to comply in 1952 and others expressed

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[104] Brian D. Feinstein and Eric Schickler, "Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered," *Studies in American Political Development 22* (Spring 2008): 1-31; and Schickler, Kathryn Pearson, and Feinstein, "Congressional Parties and Civil Rights Politics from 1933 to 1972," *Journal of Politics* 72 (July 2010): 672-689.

[105] As Joseph Rauh put it in 1956, Democrats would be "the Party of unsegregated federal aid or it will no longer be the Party of federal aid … Civil rights is no longer a single or a separate issue." John Frederick Martin, *Civil Rights and the Crisis of Liberalism: The Democratic Party, 1945-1976* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), 148.

[106] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 92.

[107] Press release, September 15, 1957, Box 449, Folder "Chairman Butler's Files – Advisory Council Press Releases," DNC Records. "Possible Policy Positions," April 22, 1960, Box 100, Folder "Democratic Advisory Council – Advisory Committee on Civil Rights – Meeting, April 22, 1960 [1 of 2]," Philleo Nash Papers, HSTL.

[108] For a useful account of the controversy, see Abraham Holtzman, "Party Responsibility and Loyalty: New Rules in the Democratic Party," *Journal of Politics* Vol.22 (1960): 485-501.

opposition on federalist grounds.[109] In 1953, a DNC panel revisited the rule. Its proposal, adopted and aggressively enforced by Butler, made state party chairmen responsible for ensuring that the national ticket appear properly on all ballots and added a stringent loyalty requirement for DNC members. Though a compromise measure, the new rule set a precedent for the nationalization of party authority. It created a citable record of officials from both southern and northern states agreeing in principle with the DNC's counsel that, with respect to national conventions and elections, "the state party is not acting by and for itself, but as a part of a national party and, linked with all other states parties, in a national effort."[110] As a novel demonstration of the national party's power to set rules for conventions, it proved an entering wedge for transformative national reforms in later decades.[111]

The most important way in which civil rights politics contributed to party nationalization and reform was in motivating a more intensive effort to restructure Congress. The litany of suggested congressional reforms, including curbing seniority, subordinating the authority of committee chairmen to party leaders and caucuses, and abolishing the Senate filibuster, remained largely the same as those in the 1950 APSA report. But civil rights threw into relief the connection between southern conservative power and the structure of Congress, since southern Democrats controlled key legislative chokepoints. The conservative coalition's obstructive capacity was never better demonstrated than during these fights, and this bipartisan alliance diminished the luster of bipartisanship itself to increasing numbers of liberals, inclining them

[109] Allan P. Sindler, "The Unsolid South: A Challenge to the Democratic Party," in *The Uses of Power: Seven Cases in American Politics*, ed. Alan F. Westin (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962), 229-282.

[110] Quoted in "The Democratic Party's Approach to its Convention Rules," *American Political Science Review* 50 (June 1956): 567.

[111] Holtzman, "Party Responsibility and Loyalty," 492; Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 183.

toward reforms to foster greater coherence in the legislative parties.[112] The NAACP began lobbying for filibuster reform in 1949 and joined with labor and other activists in such efforts during every Congress in the 1950s. Liberals inserted a call for 'improved Congressional procedures so that majority rule prevails" into the party platform.[113] The DAC's very first policy statement endorsed filibuster reform, meanwhile, and conflict over the committee system provided subtext to its clashes with congressional leaders. The council advocated not only policies that conservative chairmen opposed but also the kind of overarching party *program* that a fragmented system of autonomous committees could not sustain.

A related development, similarly catalyzed by the civil rights issue, was the organization of a liberal Democratic bloc in Congress.[114] By 1957, the press was already familiar with "McCarthy's Mavericks," the informal caucus of liberal House Democrats who supported Minnesota Representative Eugene McCarthy's proposed party manifesto that year. Confidential proposals to formalize this faction and bolster its capacity in areas such as whip operations, coordinated floor speeches, and committee testimony circulated in ensuing years, resulting in the 1959 formation of the 120-member Democratic Study Group (DSG). [115] At the outset, the DSG gave voice to liberal representatives' growing criticism of their congressional leaders for being "more content … to keep peace between the North and South than to push the Democratic

[112] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 42-51.

[113] *The Democratic Platform 1952*, in Box 43, Folder "Subject File, U.S. Senate – Rule 22," Joseph L. Rauh Jr. Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[114] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 53-56.

[115] "Suggestions for More Effective Coordination by the Liberal Democratic Group in the House," unsigned memo, November 1957, Box 60, Folder 13, Rosenblatt Papers. See also Kofmehl, "The Institutionalization of a Voting Bloc," 258-262.

Party's aims."[116] An early DSG report analyzed the conservative coalition's makeup and operations, while the staff distributed talking points and speech material to combat it.[117]

Unsurprisingly, both Butler's staff and the DAC sought to liaison with the DSG.[118] As scholar James Sundquist later observed, the combined efforts of the DAC, the DSG, key Senators, and allied advocates amounted to a phalanx of liberal policy activism that directly influenced the party's unprecedentedly aggressive 1960 platform.[119] It was a feat of policy generation that, to Sundquist, actually warranted comparison to Schattschneider's vision of responsible partisanship, despite the fact that it took place without the support of congressional leaders and in the context of deep intraparty division. Civil rights exacerbated that division like nothing else, and so it is little surprise that the issue would motivate renewed interest not only in institutional reform but also in a further political endgame: realignment of the parties themselves.

In October 1958, after reiterating his repudiation of Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus's stance on school desegregation, Paul Butler received what by then had become a standard outpouring of angry correspondence from ordinary conservative Democrats.[120] "What are you trying to do, make Arkansas go Republican?" one elderly Iowan asked, while a Texan wrote to declare he was "beginning to think that maybe it would be a good idea if the South did quit the

[116] "Notes, Remarks, and Impressions of Democratic Study Group Meetings of September 5, 7, 8, and 9," unsigned memo, September 1959, Box 60, Folder 14, Rosenblatt Papers.

[117] "Notes, Remarks, and Impressions of Democratic Study Group Meetings of September 5, 7, 8, and 9," unsigned memo, September 1959, Box 60, Folder 14; and "The Republican-Southern Democratic Coalition – 1937-1959," DSG report, December 1959, Box 60, Folder 7, both in Rosenblatt Papers.

[118] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 109. See also Charles Tyroler memo, "Tentative Liaison Designations," May 5, 1959, Box 14, Folder "Advisory Committee," Butler Papers.

[119] James L. Sundquist, *Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1968), 389-415.

[120] "Butler Repudiates Faubus on Schools," *New York Times*, October 9, 1958.

Democratic Party."[121] These warnings were meant as a rhetorical argument, of course – the threat of party-bolting long made by southerners in the face of northern criticism. But that threat was beginning to lose its sting among many liberals who, for the first time since FDR's purge campaign, were willing to contemplate favorably a southern switch to the GOP that could produce a more coherent right-left ideological alignment of the parties

Advocacy of ideological party realignment spread from responsible-party scholars to major liberal interest groups and activists in the later 1950s, thanks in part to civil rights' intensification of sectional discord among Democrats. As late as 1955, speculation about realignment retained an airily abstract quality given the absence of intense, immediate political conflict over civil rights. James Macgregor Burns, making a case for ideological realignment that year in the *New York Times*, argued that long-range economic development in the South could have the effect of diminishing the region's exceptional qualities, thus facilitating two-party competition along liberal-conservative lines.[122] He did not depict this process as either a "bolt" or a "purge" precipitated by national political clashes over race. But by 1958, Democratic politicians could earn praise from liberal activists and journalist specifically for taking positions that might run the white South out of the party. *The New Republic* deemed the DAC's post-election policy manifesto that year "electrifying. They told the South if it wanted to bolt, to go bolt. Just like that." The magazine went further, connecting the prospect of a southern bolt to the possibility of a more effective American party system: "Ever since the Advisory Council began it has been helping to create a new, liberal national image of the party. One can't help hoping that

[121] L.G. Gambs letter to Butler, October 9, 1959, and Don C. Bates letter to Butler, October 9, 1958, in Box 453, Folder "Chairman Butler's File - Statement of Faubus Re Integration and South's Reaction to," DNC Records, JFKL.

[122] James MacGregor Burns, "Republicans, Democrats: Who's Who?," *New York Times Magazine*, January 2, 1955.

if it goes on long enough the United States will ultimately have coherent political parties like other nations, instead of foggy coalitions."[123]

Key elements of the labor movement, meanwhile, echoed this vision. At its constitutional convention in 1959, the UAW passed a resolution calling for "a real realignment" of the party system and "a clear demarcation" between a liberal party and a conservative one. Americans could then "vote for a clear-cut program as represented by one of the major political parties with the full assurance that when elected that party will carry out its liberal program without qualification, compromise or delay."[124] This amounted to a tempered version of the political strategy developing at the farther ideological reaches of the labor movement, among activists associated with the socialist Max Shachtman. Since the late 1940s, Shachtman had shared Walter Reuther's commitment to working within the Democratic Party. But, compelled by the civil rights conflicts of the later 1950s and under the influence of James MacGregor Burns's writings, Shachtman now articulated a more elaborate, aggressive political project for labor radicals.[125] The strategy involved uniting with civil rights and liberal forces and aggravating tensions within the Democratic coalition sufficiently to compel the exodus of reactionary southerners and urban bosses.[126] By 1959 Shachtman had compelled the Socialist Party to endorse the strategy, called simply "realignment."[127] As we will see, the Shachtmanite doctrine of realignment would inform an important current of activism in the 1960s thanks to its

[123] TRB, "Two-Headed Donkey," *The New Republic*, December 15, 1958.

[124] Partial Report of the Resolutions Committee, 17th Constitutional Convention of the United Auto Workers, October 1959, Box 446, Folder "Chairman's Files, 1960 – Chapin, Arthur," DNC Records.

[125] Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey through the '"American Century"* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), 192-208, 242-244. On Burns's influence, see 268, 283.

[126] An early exposition is in R.M. and B.S., "Oust the South from Democratic Party," *Labor Action*, July 16, 1956.

[127] Resolution on Political Action, adopted by the National Committee SP-SDF, October 24-25, 1959, Series I, Reel 28, Max Shachtman Papers, microfilm, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

author's influence among elements of the era's civil rights, labor, and nascent radical movements.

Closer to the political mainstream, meanwhile, Butler experienced firsthand the dynamic by which intraparty tensions over civil rights could prompt discussions of realignment. Appearing on television in 1958, Butler voiced concern about southern dominance of the congressional committee system, then described civil rights as an issue that "requires moral leadership," promising it would be addressed "without compromise" in the 1960 Democratic platform. As for southern Democrats who disagreed? "Those people in the South who are not deeply dedicated to the policies and beliefs, in fact the philosophy, of the Democratic Party will have to go their own way," taking "political asylum wherever they can find it, either in the Republican Party or a third party."[128] The outcry was swift. House campaign chairman George Smathers of Florida told Butler to "pipe down," while Mississippi's Jamie Whitten warned that the South truly would bolt if he and others kept up such talk.[129]

Criticism of Butler's outbursts came not merely from southern conservatives, but also from northern machine elements within the party and those officials, like Harry Truman, sensitive to their views. To be sure, some urban bosses were solidly committed to civil rights. But Butler's moralistic rhetoric and zeal for making the party more programmatic clashed with these leaders' longstanding commitment to pragmatic, non-ideological coalition-building. At several points during Butler's tenure, an alliance of southerners and northern machine leaders attempted to orchestrate a replacement at the top of the DNC, for which the latest controversies over Butler's public statements usually provided the pretext. Truman supported the first such

[128] Quoted in Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 94.

[129] Smathers is quoted in Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 94, Whitten in his letter to Butler, December 19, 1958, Box 446, Folder "Chairman Butler's Files – Whitten, Jamie," DNC Records.

effort, in the summer of 1957, which included among the plotters Jacob Arvey, David Lawrence, and New York's Tammany boss Carmine De Sapio.[130] Most of the same participants mounted another "dump-Butler" effort two years later, following an infamous television appearance on the news show Celebrity Parade in which Butler explained his intention "to try to influence the Democratic leadership of the Congress to come along with the national program, rather than the more conservative and moderate program which they are trying to follow."[131]

The cycle of Butler-inspired exasperation and reproach was a familiar one by July 1959, but the furor sparked by these comments was outsized even by his standards – the sharply polarized response made headlines across the country. Southern Democrats rushed en masse to denounce the chairman, while Sam Rayburn curtly retorted that "Mr. Butler can do the talking and we'll do the acting and make the record."[132] Rayburn's response in private correspondence was more aggressive. He advised one donor to the DNC to hold off on a contribution so as to avoid demonstrating "endorsement of [Butler's] criticism of Congress," while telling other correspondents that Butler was "running wild," having "allowed himself to be passed into the hands of the most radical element of the Democratic Party – that element being led by Paul Ziffren, DNC from California, and others of the Lehman type in New York."[133]

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[130] Truman letter to Matthew McCloskey, August 1, 1957, in Box 28, Folder "McCloskey, Matthew H.," and Truman letter to Jacob Arvey, September 1, 1957, in Box 47, Folder "Arvey, Jacob," Truman Post-Presidential Papers; and Philip Perlman letter to Truman, June 19, 1957, Box 33, Folder "General Correspondence, 1953-1967 - Democratic National Comm, 1956-1959," Murphy Papers. See also Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 159-160.

[131] Celebrity Parade television show transcript, July 5, 1959, Box 19, Folder "Butler," Staebler Papers. The second dump-Butler effort is described in Frank McHale's letters to David Lawrence, August 21, 1959, and to Harry Truman, August 21, 1959, both in Box 98, Folder "McHale, Frank M.," Truman Post-Presidential Papers.

[132] Rayburn is quoted in Allen Drury, "Congress Chiefs Reprove Butler," *New York Times*, July 7, 1959. Examples of critical letters sent to Butler can be found in Box 46, Folders 53 and "Originals Not Returned," Butler Papers.

[133] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 83.

Butler owed his survival to continued support among a majority of DNC members as well as liberals across the country. The second ouster attempt collapsed when a planned DNC vote was called off in the face of a clear pro-Butler majority. As one committeeman explained to a reporter, "we admire his integrity and courage. He is a symbol of the liberal feeling which is dominant in the party."[134] Many activists and officials specifically endorsed his Celebrity Parade comments.[135] In a floor speech, Michigan Senator Pat McNamara defended Butler and castigated congressional timidity. "Leadership of the 86th appears to be more like leadership of the minority of the majority," he said. "Or perhaps it is leadership of the majority of the minority. In any event, it is looking less like leadership of the majority party in Congress."[136]

It was, of course, the need for Johnson and Rayburn to accommodate disparate factions that prevented them from carrying out a legislative agenda supported by "the majority of the majority" as in a parliamentary system. And as mainstays of the heterogeneous Democratic coalition, urban machines and southern elites shared an aversion to such programmatic partisanship even as they differed on countless other matters. Lines of partisanship and ideology were shifting and intersecting in new ways by the eve of the 1960s, such that an iconic partisan brawler like Harry "Give Em Hell" Truman could appear as a spokesman for Democratic conciliation while the most zealous advocates of partisanship were those channeling the amateur spirit of the clubs. That partisan zeal might stem from substantive commitments rather than non-ideological team affinity was key to the eventual transformation of the system. But the

[134] Earl Mazo, "Butler Foes Seen Losing in Ouster Bid," *New York Herald Tribune*, September 15, 1959.

[135] Supportive letters from northern congressmen can be found in Box 46, Folder 52, Butler Papers.

[136] Patrick McNamara, "Criticism by Paul M. Butler of the slow pace of the 86th Congress," July 8, 1959, in *Congressional Record - Senate*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., Vol. 105: 12940.

transformation was not yet imminent as the decade came to a close with a spirited and close presidential contest between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy.

Party and Principle in the 1960s

The midcentury responsible party theorists had outlined a prescriptive model of partisan change in the United States along three lines of development. They sought the nationalization of party operations and political contests. They wanted policy issues and mutually distinctive party programs to be the central elements structuring national politics. And they advocated the development of sufficient discipline within the parties to enable their carrying out of coherent programs when in power.

Along all three of those dimensions, the 1950s saw the emergence of a number of phenomena providing necessary thought not sufficient conditions for the transformation of the party system. Middle-class amateurs increasingly supplanted the diminishing ranks of old-style party workers as the parties' key activist corps, and in doing so helped inject a programmatic, issue-oriented ethos into party politics. Long-term regional economic development as well as the seismic rumblings of the civil rights revolution both promised to end the Solid South's exceptional position in the political system by unleashing partisan competition. Shorter-term internal Democratic disputes over civil rights and other issues fuelled the institutional development of formal national supremacy in party affairs, a break from American parties' traditional decentralization and patchwork localism. At the national level, meanwhile, liberal party factions devised new institutional innovations to foster both programmatic capacity and means of discipline within the Democratic National Committee and the congressional party. Ultimately, a potential byproduct of all three of these lines of development – the scale of politics,

its policy orientation, and the parties' degree of internal cohesion – would be the realignment of the political system into two ideologically sorted parties.

Such developments were latent or incomplete by decade's end, however. The Democratic Party's standard-bearer in 1960, John F. Kennedy, occasionally connected a theory of party politics to his overarching critique of Eisenhower-era drift. "Legislative leadership is not possible without party leadership," Kennedy declared in one speech.[137] But the personalized nature of his campaign signaled a relative lack of interest in thoroughgoing party leadership. He made it clear that the DAC would cease operation upon his election, and, after considering the reformist Neil Staebler to replace Butler, opted instead for Connecticut machine boss John Bailey.[138] Meanwhile, his campaign strategy unfolded along the familiar lines of Democratic coalitional logic, in which securing a North-South sectional accord was seen as paramount, thus prompting the selection of Johnson as running mate. The campaign against Nixon, then adopting the moderate positioning of Eisenhower's "Modern Republican" brand, featured notably little in the way of clear-cut divisions on ideology or even basic policy stances. The resulting electoral map showed little evidence of a fraying of the Democrat's North-South coalition, excepting Mississippi's plurality vote for Strom Thurmond's third-party candidacy. The forces underway that would bring transformative changes to the party system, in other words, were not yet in evidence at the level of national party politics.

Signs abounded, however, to those who knew where to look. They could be found in the burgeoning civil rights movement, whose rhetoric of moral transformation promised an

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[137] "The Presidency in 1960," Washington, DC, January 14, 1960, text in John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* [online], Santa Barbara, CA. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25795. If a president "blurs the issues and differences between the parties," he went on to argue, "if he neglects the party machinery and avoids his party's leadership, then he has not only weakened the political party as an instrument of the democratic process – he has dealt a blow to the democratic process itself."

[138] Loucheim, *By the Political Sea*, 140-141.

equivalent transformation of American political institutions. They could be found in the increasingly impassioned language of middle-class reform clubs, captured in the inaugural declaration of Tom Finletter, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Herbert Lehman's New York Committee for Democratic Voters. "The day of boss rule and boss power … is nearing its end," it proclaimed in 1959, employing a participatory language ahead of its time to advocate "the principles of democracy within all the reaches of the Democratic Party organization of New York."[139] And they could be found in the words of the party chairman that Kennedy replaced. Five years before a more famous speech insisted that moderation in pursuit of justice was no virtue, Paul Butler sounded a similar note. "The Democratic Party is not a party of accommodation or attainability or compromise," he declared in 1959. "People who are willing to accommodate themselves and the objectives of the Democratic Party to existing obstacles and obstructions to achievement do not typify the real spirit, the true courage or the genuine zeal of our Party." Most dangerous of all: "The Democratic Party is a party of principle."[140]

Paul Butler died of a heart attack in 1961. His untimely death prevented him from observing what he would have likely thought of as a paradoxical political combination during the "liberal hour" of the early and mid-1960s.[141] A new, historic high tide of liberal policymaking transformed American government and political culture during those years. But this wave of legislative activism took place amidst a pervasive public rhetoric of non-ideological pragmatism, and followed coalitional dynamics that made it in many ways the very apogee of the midcentury bipartisan system.

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[139] Press release, January 22, 1959, Box 15, Folder "Personal Memoranda," Thomas K. Finletter Papers, HSTL.
[140] Roberts, *Paul M. Butler*, 79.

[141] G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

Before falling to his own untimely death in 1963, John F. Kennedy typified the liberal era's cool disavowal of ideological politics. "The central domestic issues of our time," he told Yale's graduating class in 1962, "relate not to basic clashes of philosophy or ideology but to ways and means of reaching common goals."[142] Kennedy's technocratic and dispassionate approach to governance did little, however, to break the immense constraints on legislative action posed by the postwar conservative coalition. His policy agenda was largely frustrated. In the process of pursuing that agenda, however, he and congressional allies succeeded in achieving a crucial early breakthrough in congressional reform – an expansion of the Rules Committee membership that diminished the conservative coalition's ability to bottle up legislation.

If Kennedy's abbreviated presidency epitomized the paralysis that the bipartisan era could induce, his successor's tenure revealed that system's capacity for major and broad-based policy advances, under the right circumstances. The popular trauma of Kennedy's assassination, the exuberant boomtime economy, and an eventual landslide reelection victory all played a role in making the Great Society Congresses of Lyndon Johnson's presidency historic high-water marks of bipartisan legislative productivity. Johnson's own extraordinary political skills, of course, were also key. As he had done as Senate majority leader, President Johnson exercised a personalist and avowedly bipartisan kind of leadership, even as political conditions and personal conviction now compelled him toward a far more ambitious and activist approach to policymaking. Johnson marginalized and starved national party organs like no president before him, disavowed rhetorical appeals to ideological and partisan conflict, and sought to incorporate and implicate leadership from all major institutions in American society into his Great Society

[142] John F. Kennedy commencement address, Yale University, June 11, 1962, accessed online at: http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3370.

agenda, in a tableau of establishment consensus on behalf of an activist liberal state.[143] "President Johnson," Rowland Evan and Bob Novak reported in 1964, "is attempting, with surprising success, to turn his party into a non-ideological, broad-based 'consensus' party cleansed of over-partisanship … the party is being moved outside the arena of political contention to become a rallying point for all controllers of power in America today."[144]

As Johnson would soon find out, however, the politics of principle – ideological conflict, moralized engagement with power, a new array of issue alignments – helped to make a hash of his consensus political project. His difficulties had myriad sources. Johnson's embrace of the decades-spanning crusade for racial equality under the law, which culminated in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights and 1965 Voting Rights Acts, only accelerated political stirrings in the South that would upend the cross-cutting arrangements mitigating partisan conflict. But in the shorter term, a broad upsurge of movement-driven, issue-oriented political challenges upended the establishment order Johnson had sought to sustain.

Key elements of this upsurge bore continuities with the issue-oriented amateur activism of the previous decade. A liberal critique of partisan depolarization, a prescription of responsible party government, and an explicit call for realignment all found their way into the founding document of the New Left organization Students for a Democratic Society, 1962's Port Huron Statement. "The American political system is not the democratic model of which its glorifiers speak," the statement intoned. "In actuality it frustrates democracy by confusing the individual citizen, paralyzing policy discussion … Instead of two parties presenting distinctive and significant differences of approach, what dominates the system is a natural interlocking of

[143] Daniel Galvin, *Presidential Party-Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 182-203

[144] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "LBJ's Consensus Party," *Washington Post*, July 24, 1964.

Democrats from Southern states with the more conservative elements of the Republican party." Such a "party overlap" served as a "structural obstacle of democracy in politics."[145] Betraying the influence of Shachtman and other laborite proponents of realignment, the Port Huron statement even championed the nascent Goldwater movement for its potential to help drive conservatives into one party.[146]

As it had in the previous decade, meanwhile, the politics of civil rights served as a catalyst both for ideological sorting within the parties and for the centralization of Democratic Party authority at the national level. This was put most vividly on display at the 1964 Democratic convention, where the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's (MFDP) alternative slate of party delegates challenged the credentials of the state's segregationist, Goldwater-supporting regulars. Captivating and emotionally charged testimony by Fannie Lou Hamer and other civil rights activists conveyed to television audiences the brutality and visceral terror that black Mississippians faced in the pursuit of political participation. But the MFDP's procedural case before the credentials committee rested on the same questions of loyalty and party nationalization that had attended controversies over southern delegations for a decade and a half.

Activists emphasized the responsibility of the national party to address local infractions of party policy just as they demanded federal intervention in local civil rights disputes. "Federal support within the state and the seating of the Freedom Democratic Party at the National Convention are inseparable needs," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee chairman John Lewis wrote to Lyndon Johnson in the run-up to the convention, demanding protection for black civil rights in "all areas of American life where Mississippi Negroes seek full participation –

[145] Students for a Democratic Society, Port Huron Statement, accessed at http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/huron.html.

[146] On Shachtman and other realignment proponents' influence on early SDS thinkers, see James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 103-119.

including the processes of the Democratic party, and the means by which they choose their candidates and leaders."[147] The MFDP – "the only Mississippi party chosen democratically," as Martin Luther King put it – staked its procedural claim not only on the principle of intra-party democracy but on its substantive and political loyalty to a national party that the Mississippi regulars openly spurned.[148] As the MFDP's counsel Joe Rauh argued, contrasting the party's slate with that of the Mississippi regulars, "We are here because we love the Democratic Party. We will work for its candidates … We pledged loyalty – what they won't pledge … Are you going to throw out of here the people who want to work for Lyndon Johnson, who are willing to be beaten in jails, to die for the privilege of working for Lyndon Johnson?"[149] In the short term, the MFDP's struggle resulted only in a tepid compromise offer that the organization's rank and file fatefully interpreted as a betrayal. But, as discussed in Chapter Four, the real legacy of the fight was institutional. It launched a process of structural reform of the party and its nominating processes that would ultimately prove transformative for the party system as a whole.

A separate tributary of political activism also fed into the same nascent reform project within the party. The new social movement activism of the later 1960s extended and amplified the "amateur spirit" that a previous generation of reformist activists had helped bring to postwar politics – namely, a focus on substantive issues and ideology and a willingness to apply moralizing rhetoric and appeals to partisan conflict. It was, of course, conflict over issues – paramount among them the Vietnam War – that provoked the insurgent presidential campaigns

[147] John L. Lewis letter to Lyndon Johnson, August 19, 1964, Box 27, Folder "Hu 2 / ST 24 – 7/17/64-11/30/64," White House Central Files (WHCF) - Human Rights, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (LBJL), Austin, TX.

[148] Martin Luther King, Jr., telegram to Lyndon Johnson, August 24, 1964, Box 52, Folder "PL/ST 24," WHCF-Political Affairs, LBJL.

[149] Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., address before the Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Convention, August 22, 1964, Box 86, Folder "Legal File -- MFDP: General Jul-Aug 1964," Rauh Papers.

of Gene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in 1968 and the battles at the Democratic convention that year. And the perception by insurgent activists that existing party structures failed to be responsive and accountable to their issue demands helped motivate the movement for institutional reform.

In all of these ways, the 1960s marked less a break with the past than an acceleration of the postwar process by which "principle" might be made the basis of partisanship.

Chapter 3: A Choice, Not an Echo

Democrats struggling with internal ideological disagreement in the early postwar decades did not have a monopoly on arguments over principle in partisanship. Indeed, Republican National Committee (RNC) leaders did their counterparts one better during the unusual inaugural gathering in 1959 of their own party council, called the Republican Committee on Program and Progress. They put the very question of whether or not parties should stand for anything up for debate.

To stimulate discussion among members of the newly formed committee, the group's chairman brought in a young political scientist to offer a provocative challenge to its very *raison d'etre*. "This Committee is charged with the task of formulating principles and objectives to guide the Republican Party," Robert Goldwin began his presentation. "The task assigned to me was to prepare a brief paper making the strongest possible case to show that it is neither possible nor desirable for a major political party to be guided by principles."[1] Goldwin proceeded to lay out the basic scholarly case for the undisciplined catch-all American party tradition – a case which he assured the assembled Republicans was "a commonplace feature of books on the American political system" and which, as we have seen, had recently gained renewed salience as an intellectual counterstrike against the APSA Committee on Political Parties' advocacy of responsible party government.

The reasons that so many analysts "say it is a good thing for the nation as a whole that neither of our two major parties stands for anything in particular" were myriad, Goldwin explained. Structural conditions necessitated nonprogrammatic parties, for one. A two-party

[1] The discussion below is found in the transcript to the meeting of the Republican Committee on Program and Progress, March 14, 1959, Series 1A, Reel 17, *Papers of the Republican Party*, Paul L. Kesaris, ed., microfilm (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1987).

system in a large, heterogeneous nation forced both parties to seek majorities through appeals mostly to the same constituencies. Federalism in both state and party vitiated the prospect of disciplined support behind a national party agenda determined from on high. Separation of powers gave co-partisans in the executive and legislative branches different political bases and electoral strategies, further undermining national-level party cohesion. And, "with both parties including liberals and conservatives within their ranks," Goldwin said, "those differences which would otherwise be the main campaign issues are settled by compromise within each party." According to the common account, all this was to the good. American elections "have the effect of unifying the nation rather than dividing it on ideological or class lines… Our national unity would be weakened if the theoretical differences were sharpened." Given these arguments, Goldwin challenged the members to answer: "Are there good reasons even so why this Committee ought to try to formulate principles and objectives for the guidance of the Republican Party?"

The ensuing discussion was tortured, at times almost comically confused.[2] Committee members blanched reflexively at the idea that parties should not have principles but struggled to explain why. Some interpreted "principle" simply as integrity, with one surmising that "it was not where you stood on a particular issue that was a matter of principle, but *that* you stood." Others defended the heterogeneity of a broad-based, majority-seeking party while still insisting that an underlying philosophy defined the GOP. But, pushed by Goldwin to identify the principles that distinguished the party from Democrats, members faltered. A tentative consensus eventually formed around the idea that both Democrats and Republicans shared core premises

[2] That the two-hour discussion proved vexed is not only the judgment of a historian viewing the transcript a half century later. Just after the session, Chairman Charles Percy surveyed committee members about how helpful and constructive they had found the exercise. One member conveyed the judgment of a majority of respondents when he replied, "We lost time." Meeting transcript, Republican Committee on Program and Progress, March 14, 1959, Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Party Papers.

and ultimate goals, while differing on the methods to achieve them. Democratic means tilted toward the federal government, GOP ones toward individuals and the market. "The objectives of both parties in many ways are the same, to provide the greatest fruits of the American system for all the people," a member summarized. "The key to this whole thing is how we get where we are going. What this Committee … has to do is define the differences in the means to the good end."

Such a formulation implied a committee-wide consensus on the existence of a basic American consensus. One member rejected that assumption outright. The premise that "we all have the same objectives" was a false one, insisted Stephen Shadegg of Arizona. "We have men who have no desire to be self-sufficient, who have been conditioned by twenty years of our philosophy to depend on someone else." What Shadegg meant by "our philosophy" was not his own but rather the prevailing "collectivist" attitude of the New Deal era – "that man is significant materially, to be fed, housed, cared for, doctored, buried, have his worries removed." This conflicted directly with Shadegg's concept of "the dignity of the individual, which is such that man has a spiritual need to do these things for himself and to deny them. This is a basic conflict, I believe, between the collectivists who are in control of the Democrat Party and the philosophy of the Republican Party which we have somehow neglected …" Shadegg cast this conflict in stark terms. "What we are talking about," he said, "is the nature of man, really."

Political conflict in the contemporary United States did involve a clash of core premises, Shadegg was arguing. It limned a divide over deeper questions than those of mere governance. What is more, the philosophical divide was also a partisan divide – or it could be, if Republicans would reaffirm their commitment to principles that too many had "neglected" out of misguided political expediency. Shadegg's words were pointedly dissonant. The Committee on Program and Progress was a project instigated by Dwight Eisenhower and administered by RNC chair

Meade Alcorn and the liberal GOP businessman Charles Percy, and its staff and membership largely reflected the moderate ideology and political posture to which the president had attached the moniker "Modern Republicanism."[3] Shadegg was in a minority among members as a representative of the party's conservative wing – specifically, the deputy of that wing's leader, Arizona senator Barry Goldwater. In his professional life Shadegg was Goldwater's campaign manager and advisor, and something of an intellectual alter ego. In five years he would help him articulate a national political message that doubled as a commentary on the place of ideology in a two-party system. "This will not be an engagement of personalities," Goldwater would say in announcing his presidential bid in 1964, but "an engagement of principles." Shadegg's insistence that political divides in postwar America transcended the instrumental and demanded partisan articulation found voice in Goldwater's promise: "I will offer a choice, not an echo."[4]

As among Democrats, so too did political divisions among Republicans in the early postwar decades reflect competing visions for the party and clashing theoretical claims about partisanship itself. Dynamics were not identical. Ideological cleavages within the comparatively homogenous GOP were shallower than those wracking Democrats. Intellectually, an anti-statist program ill-matched the Progressive, action-oriented ethos of responsible party doctrine, and so, with a few notable exceptions, that scholarship exercised less direct influence on the rhetoric and approach of conservative Republicans than it did liberal Democrats. And, strategically, the post-New Deal Republican Party's chronic minority status informed an internal party debate that differed from a Democratic conflict borne of the dilemmas of a baggy majority coalition. Liberal Democrats mainly sought clarity and cohesion through the excision of a dissident sectional

[3] Eisenhower's authorship of the original idea for the committee is confirmed in Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 60.

[4] "Text of Goldwater's Announcement of Candidacy for GOP Nomination," *Washington Post*, January 4, 1964.

faction – a politics of subtraction -- whereas moderate and conservative Republicans alike had to frame their ideological conflict around the question of majority-making – a politics of addition.[5]

Nevertheless, both parties' internal debates over program and principle shared key dynamics, and were structured by many of the same forces in midcentury society and politics. Factional disputes over political strategy in the early postwar years took on ideological coloring, as ubiquitous conservative charges of "me, too" posturing by GOP politicians prompted deeper questions about the very existence of an American consensus. Against the backdrop of declining transactional party organizations and a resurgent conservative intellectual movement, GOP politics in the later 1950s witnessed intensifying clashes between supporters of a moderate, Eisenhower-centered partisan vision and issue-driven amateur activists on the right.

The role of the Solid South – solidly non-Republican, that is – was central to the party's factional debate over program and principle. Conflicting ideological visions for the party's future aligned with conflicting strategic postures toward the South, especially regarding civil rights. The alignment was a mirror image of the one defining Democratic factionalism. Republican advocates of a coherent ideological posture for the party were disproportionately conservatives seeking formal alliance with southern whites, in part through opposition to civil rights. Conversely, those most committed to retaining their party's traditional advocacy of civil rights through cooperative legislative action with northern Democrats were disproportionately moderates opposed to both parties' ideological sorting. Advocacy of an ideological realignment via GOP alliance with the South had a history dating as far back as the Long Civil Rights

[5] Robert Mason uses the "minority debate," the intra-GOP argument over the sources of the party's minority status and the best strategy to escape it, as the organizing concept for his account of a half century of GOP politics in *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Movement did, to the late New Deal.[6] By tracing its postwar evolution, from Senator Karl Mundt's organization of a Dixie-focused Committee to Explore Political Realignment to debates within internal Eisenhower-era party councils to Goldwater's Deep South incursions in 1964, this chapter shows that the question of southern realignment was inextricably bound up with the growth of a broad conservative movement advocating an ideological conception of partisanship.

As the long history of that southern debate helps illustrate, the eventual conservative capture of the GOP, long cast by many scholars as a story that begins with the movement for Goldwater's 1964 campaign, actually originated in intellectual conflicts, party developments, and strategic choices made during the previous two postwar decades.[7] Years of intra-party conflict amidst a changing postwar landscape helped to produce, by the early 1960s, a party constituency receptive to an argument rejecting American consensus and affirming ideology as central to principled partisanship. That this constituency proved incapable of forging an electoral majority in 1964 only delayed rather than prevented the system's eventual transformation.

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[6] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* Vol. 91 (March 2005): 1233-1263.

[7] The emergence of a "fusionist" conservative intellectual movement in the early postwar decades has received extensive scholarly attention in the years since the publication of George Nash's landmark *The Conservative Intellectual Movement In America, Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). But only recently have scholars begun to attend to elite intra-Republican developments in the early postwar decades and their long-run significance. See Lara Jane Gifford, *The Center Cannot Hold: The 1960 Presidential Election and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009); Shamira Gelbman and Jesse Rhodes, "Party Organization and the Origins of the Republicans' Belated 'Southern Strategy'," presented at the Policy History Conference, Columbus, OH, June 5, 2010; Michael Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism: Dewey, Taft, and the Battle for the Soul of the Republican Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 112-182. Another important strand of recent scholarship seeks to connect southern political developments to the national story of the postwar right in the decades prior to the presidential bids of Goldwater and George Wallace. See Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 1-204; Joseph E. Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-76; and Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

"Me, Too": Party Theories in the Dewey-Taft Wars

The political revolution wrought by the New Deal affected the Grand Old Party along with the Democracy. Older party fissures dating to the Gilded Age and Progressive era diminished in the 1930s and 1940s. Populist western progressives disappeared as a Republican faction as some (such as Robert LaFollette, Jr. and Henry Wallace) abandoned their party label in support of the New Deal while others followed their foreign policy isolationism into the adoption of a more orthodox conservatism. Stalwart midwestern Republicans, disproportionately rural, overwhelmingly Protestant, and hostile to the New Deal, secured dominance over the party's reduced congressional ranks. Simultaneously, the long dormant eastern progressive Republican tendency – urban, paternalistic, internationalist – saw a revival. A perceived need among many Republicans to compete with the Democrats' electoral juggernaut through their own promises of activist government policy drove this revival, encouraged at an interest-group level by the new extent of government-business cooperation during both the New Deal and especially war years.[8] The sectional and institutional lines delineating the two tendencies – stalwart and progressive, the latter more typically called "moderate" in its revived form – were hardly strict, but they were visible. Stalwarts' strongholds were Congress and the professional ranks of most state parties and RNC representatives. Moderate leaders tended to be found among big-state governors and senators building statewide coalitions that included urban and labor constituencies.

The three presidential contests of the 1940s – all considered at the time to be winnable by the Republicans – helped instantiate the factional division within the party that would take on

[8] Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans: From 1952 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 25-30; Kimberly Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 33.

increasing ideological coloring in the postwar decades. Wall Street attorney Wendell Willkie secured the 1940 nomination in an upset thanks to the support of eastern financiers and party leaders seeking an internationalist standard bearer amidst the worsening conflict in Europe. His campaign failed to unseat Franklin Roosevelt but succeeded in consolidating moderate elements within the GOP as a factional force. It also fueled stalwarts' sense that tweedle-dum campaigns downplaying policy differences with the Democrats were electoral losers.[9]

New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey emerged as the moderate faction's leader in the early 1940s and, aided by the energy and tenacity of his media-savvy political operation based in Albany, secured the presidential nomination in 1944. Dewey's general election campaign style deemphasized issues outright, though his control of the platform guaranteed that on issues such as Social Security, health care, and labor law, interparty differences were minimal. That election's "outstanding characteristic," a *New York Times* editorial summarized in retrospect, was "the promise by both parties of all good things to come from a benign and endless generous Government."[10] Dewey's defeat to an ailing FDR left his party demoralized over its endemic minority status and divided about the course forward. An effort among party eminences to craft a unified statement of principles in December fell apart when conservatives, led by Ohio Senator Robert Taft, blanched at retaining a Deweyite RNC chair.[11] Congressional leaders would go on to issue their own separate statement of GOP principles the following year, one that connected policy positions to party strategy by urging both parties to give Americans a "cleancut choice."[12]

[9] Malcolm Moos, *The Republicans: A History of Their Party* (New York: Random House, 1956), 420, 422.

[10] Editorial, "Fashions in Politics," *New York Times*, March 17, 1945.

[11] Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 26.

[12] "Republican Congress Aims," *New York Times*, December 6, 1945.

Taft and Dewey were the men around whom the GOP's factional division deepened and accrued increasing strategic and ideological valence in the later 1940s. When the party captured control of Congress in 1946 during Harry Truman's first term, its congressional leadership, including Taft, exercised impressive discipline over the rank and file, sustaining a conservative if hardly counterrevolutionary policy stance.[13] The legislative centerpiece of the 80th Congress was the Taft-Hartley Act, which amended to existing labor law provisions that outlawed the closed shop, allowed states to pass right-to-work laws, legalized federal injunctions against some strikes, and tilted the playing field in management's favor during organizing drives through various speech regulations. Congressional Republicans' near unanimity in voting for the bill belied deep misgivings among moderates about the actual policy.[14] Backed by the conservative coalition, Taft-Hartley was a classic cross-cutting issue of the bipartisan era, and a key flashpoint around which the GOP factions staked their claim in the run-up to 1948. Outside of Congress, Taft- and Dewey-aligned forces battled for control of state party operations and the RNC. Dewey, flush with cash from financial and industrial interests, eventually secured the 1948 nomination over Taft. His victory came less from convincing a stable majority of party elites and their delegations about the merits of programmatic moderation than from outgunning Taft in the grittily transactional game of delegate hunting via patronage and local lobbying.[15]

The factional warfare was not merely a matter of issueless power struggles and candidate allegiances, however. Policy substance and strategic emphasis did matter. With a presidential ticket consisting of two moderate big-state governors – Dewey and California's Earl Warren –

[13] Anthony Badger, "Republican Rule in the 80th Congress," in *The Republican Takeover of Congress*, eds. Dean McSweeney and John E. Owens (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 165-184.

[14] The unanimity stemmed in part from Taft's adept negotiations over the bill with co-partisans to his left. James T. Patterson, *Mr. Republican: A Biography of Robert A. Taft* (Boston: Haughton Mifflin, 1972), 354-361.

[15] Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 58-66.

and another big-state moderate, Hugh Scott, installed as RNC chair, 1948 would see the apogee of the Dewey wing's institutional power within the party, and this had policy consequences. The party platform that year was brief, general, and focused on the middle ground rather than line-drawing. It offered a maxim that was considered in its Goldilocks-like, "just so" formulation: "Maximum voluntary cooperation between citizens and minimum dependence on law; never, however, declining courageous recourse to the law if necessary." It briefly and namelessly touted the 80th Congress's "sensible reform of the labor law" while pledging "continuing study to improve labor-management legislation;" advocated the expansion of Social Security benefits; and touted federal action on civil rights, voting rights, and the desegregation of the military.[16] On issues like these, the Taft wing generally advocated meaningfully different positions than Dewey's supporters, explicitly defending Taft-Hartley, holding the line on expansion of New Deal programs like Social Security, and, as will be shown, resisting active civil rights policies.[17] On foreign affairs, by contrast, the formerly stark factional divide pitting isolationists against internationalists had diminished somewhat by 1948, as the postwar context left little space for avowed isolationism while the Cold War provided new terrain on which the party could seek common nationalist and anti-communist ground.[18]

Dewey's shocking 1948 defeat to an incumbent president facing extraparty challenges from important elements of the New Deal coalition unleashed a new, more intense round of Republican recrimination and soul-searching. H.L. Mencken's cutting post-election

[16] "Republican Party Platform of 1948," June 21, 1948, accessed online at Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25836.#axzz2fYSK7VDZ.

[17] To be sure, Taft the legislator hewed to a more nuanced sense of the government's potential role than Taft the factional standard-bearer did, notably regarding housing and public education. Patterson, *Mr. Republican*, 315-334.

[18] Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 123-124. To be sure, as shown below, McCarthyism soon proved to be a divisive political phenomenon pitting conservative advocates against moderate critics. Still, such tactical and ethical objections over the politics of anticommunism did not cut as deeply as the core intraparty divisions between isolationists and internationalists had prior to World War II.

characterization of Dewey's campaign strategy – "to chase what appeared to be the other fellow's ambulance" – found amplification among Taftites ready to publicize their frustration.[19] House Republicans, who lost 75 seats and thus the majority in 1948, established a policy committee soon after the election with the pointedly worded mandate to "guide the minority to a firmer national policy.[20] Taft wrote a confidant that Dewey could have won "if he had put on a real fight on the issues" rather than offer pallid bromides and paeans to character.[21] The Republican Senate Policy Committee under Taft's control articulated this argument publically in an election postmortem targeting forces that had "entrapped the party into a 'Me, too' position and otherwise confused the distinctions between Republicans and Democrats" in the last several elections.[22]

The "Me, too" charge was everywhere. Hugh Scott solicited the views of GOP precinct workers across the country in the run-up to the RNC's first postelection meeting in January 1949. "Why don't you me-too guys who are running the party try dropping dead?" wrote one typical correspondent.[23] Scott himself reported that 60 percent of the letters he received in response to his request for feedback from grassroots workers on the election and the state of the party echoed this criticism of me-tooism. Senate Majority Leader and Taft ally Kenneth Wherry spoke out at the same meeting about "those who say we should revitalize the party by turning to the radical left and by out-promising New Dealers. A 'me-too' policy is the road to ruin for our party and

[19] H.L. Mencken, "Truman's Election: Mencken Says Country Jolly Well Deserves It," *Baltimore Sun*, November 7, 1948.

[20] Charles O. Jones, *Party and Policy-Making: The House Republican Policy Committee* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964), 25.

[21] Clarence E. Wunderland, Jr., ed., *The Papers of Robert A. Taft: Volume 3, 1945-1948* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), 471.

[22] Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 79.

[23] Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 126.

for our nation." Utah's governor echoed Wherry by touting a "strong two-party system, with a definite cleavage on policy and theory of government" – a system Republicans had undermined by "hiding our light under a bushel."[24] Later that year, another RNC solicitation for the views of 125,000 party workers regarding a proposal to generate a new statement of party policy revealed "overwhelming support" for the idea, the *New York Times* reported, with a majority of respondents calling for a "substantial rewriting" of the 1948 platform and expressing the "desire to be rid of 'me-tooism.'"[25] "Even the 'me, too' boys shrink from the 'me, too' label," the *Chicago Tribune* editorialized. "But 'me, tooism' is more than a label. It is a policy that has brought the United States close to ruin. It isn't enough to slough off the label, or attempt to evade it. It is the policy that must be repudiated."[26]

The "me-too" charge served as a rallying cry for an organized factional drive to oust Scott from the RNC chairmanship and to install Taftites in party leadership, beginning at the same January 1949 meeting of the RNC. Six months of wrangling would finally result in Scott's resignation and replacement by a Taft ally.[27] A party strategy committee that had been set up by Scott similarly became riven by factional warfare before conservative national committeemen took it over. One leader of these conservatives urged in December 1949 that, "from this moment forward, the Republican Party as a matter of strategy – and patriotism, if you will – divest itself

[24] Comments from Scott, Wherry, and J. Bracken Lee are all found in the transcript of RNC meeting, Omaha, NE, January 26-27, 1949, Series 1A, Reel 9, Republican Party Papers.

[25] Clayton Knowles, "Republicans Back Restating Policy, *New York Times*, December 16, 1949.

[26] Editorial, "What 'Me, Too' Means," *Chicago Tribune*, December 16, 1949.

[27] Ralph M. Goldman, *The Party Chairmen and Committees: Factionalism at the Top* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1990), 495-498.

of 'me-tooism' and go to the people with a program clearly and unmistakably in opposition to that now offered by our opponents."[28]

An RNC Policy Committee worked to make good on that request by devising a "Statement of Principles and Objectives" that would serve as the national party's manifesto in the upcoming midterm congressional elections. The committee met with its counterpart panels in the House and Senate in early 1950 to formulate the statement. As was the case with Democrats several years later under Paul Butler's tenure, the GOP's effort at out-party agenda-setting was complicated by institutional tensions between the national committee and the congressional parties and factional tensions between rival ideological camps. But the manifesto that eventually emerged out of the now-Taftite controlled RNC, while a compromise document, was notably more conservative than either the 1944 or 1948 party platforms.[29] Its framing of the coming elections rendered the partisan contrast in maximally ideological terms: "The major domestic issue today," the statement declared, "is liberty against socialism … Basic American principles are threatened by the Administration's program for a planned economy modelled on the Socialist governments of Europe…"[30] In contrast to the party platforms under Dewey, the new document explicitly endorsed Taft-Hartley and advocated an array of conservative planks, including both tax and spending cuts as well as devolution to states and localities in the administration of welfare policies. While some conservatives complained that the statement did not go far enough, GOP moderates condemned it outright. At the committee meeting that passed the resolution, a northeastern-dominated group that included Senators Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.,

[28] Speech by Arthur Summerfield, minutes of the meeting of the Republican Strategy Committee, December 13, 1949, Series 1, Reel 9, Republican Party Papers.

[29] Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 90.

[30] "Statement of Republican Principles and Objectives," February 6, 1950, in Box 34, Folder 2405a, Everett M. Dirksen Papers, Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

and Margaret Chase Smith and Representatives Jacob Javits and James Fulton refused to vote for it, citing its anemic and heavily truncated plank on civil rights as particularly objectionable.[31]

Another central plank of the party's Statement of Principles and Objectives, a militant posture toward domestic anticommunism, reflected an emerging new locus of factional Republican conflict in the late 1940s and 1950s. A section of the statement titled "Loyalty" denounced "the soft attitude of this Administration toward Government employees and officials who hold or support Communist attitudes" and pledged a robust new internal security program and the purging of Communists and their sympathizers from federal employment. The release of the statement preceded by mere days Senator Joseph McCarthy's instantly infamous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, where he brandished a list of Communist "enemies from within" occupying positions in the State Department. As the Red Scare intensified as a political issue at the start of the new decade, drawing Taft-aligned conservative Republicans into (sometimes tacit or arms-length) support of McCarthy and his tactics, it became a fulcrum for further factional division.[32] Margaret Chase Smith rallied six fellow moderate Republican senators behind a Declaration of Conscience, which she read on the Senate floor in June 1950.[33] Aiming at her fellow Republicans, Smith called out the "hate and character assassination" that was serving to "psychologically divide" the country. She demanded that the minority party carry out its obligation to offer "constructive criticism" and to "allay fears by acting as responsible citizens" rather than as demagogues and opportunists. If moderate Republican opponents of McCarthyism emphasized the importance of sober leadership and a politics of unity in national affairs, the

[31] W.H. Lawrence, "GOP Poses Issue for '50 as Liberty Versus Socialism," *New York Times*, February 7, 1950.

[32] The Republican Strategy Committee, under the control of conservatives, maintained close collaboration with McCarthy's operation before being disbanded within the RNC. Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 92-94.

[33] Alfred Friendly, "7 Senate Republicans Assail 'Smearing,' Exploiting 'Fear'," *Washington Post*, June 2, 1950.

conservatives who rallied to the anticommunist cause – including an extraordinary new cadre of young conservative intellectuals and activists galvanized by this very debate – saw in it a vehicle for infusing partisan politics with crusading moral conviction and meaningful line-drawing.[34]

Thus, like postwar Democrats, the GOP at the dawn of the 1950s faced a factional divide that was also an ideological one – increasingly so as the decade wore on.[35] As with the Democrats, these Republican ideological factions, occupying broadly differing institutional positions within the party, developed contrasting views of the roles that partisanship, issues, and ideology should play in the political system. After repeated presidential electoral defeats and ubiquitous charges of "me, too" temporizing, moderate Republicans in many ways had the tougher affirmative case to make. Political pragmatism remained central to their argument even after the 1948 loss. In the first post-election RNC meeting, moderate committeeman Victor Anderson said that while he agreed with the Taft supporters that expediency should not require Republicans to cease being Republicans, "on the other hand, we are not required by consistency to commit political harikari by an over-zealous and ceremonious insistence upon the doctrines of laissez faire." The consequence of such arguments, however, was an unavoidable vagueness in

[34] The importance of anticommunism and the early 1950s fight over McCarthyism in drawing future leaders of the postwar conservative movement into political and intellectual affairs has long been emphasized by those leaders themselves as well as their scholarly chroniclers. On McCarthy's specific impact on the trajectory of William F. Buckley's career, see L. Brent Bozell, Jr., and William F. Buckley, Jr., *McCarthy and His Enemies: The Record and Its Meaning* (New York: Regnery, 1954); Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*, 84-130; Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 50-81. Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 222-256.

[35] Bowen argues that the Dewey-Taft rift was initially fairly devoid of ideological content and had more to do with personal allegiances and transactional divisions over patronage and personnel. The intensity and endurance of the conflict, he argues, provoked both sides to attach increasingly expansive ideological stakes to the division and to deliberately seek out for emphasis those issues over which the two wings differed. I emphasize a number of real policy divisions informing the conflict from the early postwar years, particularly on civil rights and labor, as well as the changing social and economic context for issue-driven party politics in the postwar decades. But Bowen's analysis, like Mason's regarding the "minority question," usefully highlights the capacity for meta-debates within parties to affect individuals' actual policy positions and political strategies. As my account shows, theoretical debates over the party system and its connection to issue politics similarly served as both a cause and a reciprocal effect of intraparty conflicts. Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 45-55, 84-85, 182, 201-206.

moderates' typical prescription for their party's ideological identity, as illustrated by Anderson's own suggestion. "America," he declared, "needs a soundly liberal, or if you prefer – and I prefer it with you – a progressively conservative party." Scott endorsed the branding, calling the GOP "the indispensable catalytic agent to bring this conservatism and this liberalism together for the common good." And whereas Anderson and Scott sought to achieve party unity by *combining* liberalism and conservatism, another Deweyite advocated achieving the same goal by *jettisoning* both liberalism and conservatism in favor of a purely partisan affinity. "We must stop identifying each other as 'liberals' or 'conservatives' or 'reactionaries,'" Indiana congressman Cecil Harden insisted, urging all to claim "but one label … the label of the Republican Party."[36]

But some moderates offered a more affirmative argument, grounding their big-tent advocacy in a theory of the proper role of parties in American politics. As the minority faction among both rank and file party activists and officials within the major party organs, these GOP moderates most often echoed conservative Democrats in celebrating the flexible and non-programmatic aspects of the American party tradition. The moderates' postwar standard-bearer himself mounted the most thorough elaboration of the connection between a positive, if vague, ideological program of moderate Republicanism and a broader normative defense of the ideological heterogeneity of the party system. Delivering a lecture series at Princeton in February 1950, Governor Thomas Dewey laid out his thoughts on the American two-party tradition and his own vision for the Grand Old Party.[37] Dewey traced his brand of Republican governance back to the Whig tradition that dominated the GOP program in the initial decades of

[36] Anderson, Scott, and Harden's quotes all found in the transcript of RNC meeting, Omaha, NE, January 26-27, 1949, Series 1A, Reel 9, Republican Party Papers.

[37] Dewey's lectures were published in book form sixteen years later – with the internecine GOP battles after Goldwater's landslide election defeat in 1964 providing the backdrop and impetus for their release. John A. Wells, ed., *Thomas E. Dewey on the Two-Party System* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

its existence as well as to the regulatory initiatives instituted under Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. Dewey emphasized that Republican governance historically encompassed active government intervention, through investment in the infrastructure required for economic growth as well as regulatory measures to restrain monopoly power and protect the health of citizens.[38]

He devoted much more time, however, to a general defense of American parties' traditional lack of uniform adherence to any particular programmatic approach, including his own preferred one. Dewey celebrated rather than lamented the fact that, "in the sense of a unified organization with a national viewpoint on major issues," neither the Democratic nor Republican parties could be described as "real" parties. "There are wide divergencies of opinion in each of the two great parties … because each party represents a composite spectrum of roughly similar interests." Dewey countered the "me, too" charge by explaining how two-party competition in a heterogeneous nation ensured that "no single religion or color or race or economic interest is confined to one or the other of our parties … The result is that since the Civil War the parties have not been too far apart on most fundamentals of our system."

Dewey knew all too well that "this similarity is highly objectionable to a vociferous few. They rail at both parties, saying they represent nothing but a choice between Tweedledee and Tweedledum." Such critics' "passion for neatness" endeared them to abstract notions about how the parties should be realigned. They sought to purge moderates and liberals from the GOP and "have the remainder join forces with the conservative groups of the South."

> Then they would have everything very neatly arranged, indeed. The Democratic party would be the liberal-to-radical party. The Republican party would be the conservative-to-reactionary party. The results would be neatly arranged, too. The Republicans would lose every election and the Democrats would win every election.

[38] *Thomas E. Dewey on the Two-Party System*, 21-26.

For reasons he hardly intended, those last words would prove to be among Dewey's most lastingly famous, a prime example of those unprescient gems of midcentury political prognostication offered by occupants of a complacent consensus center. But Dewey's electoral prediction was a sidenote to the main argument he offered in engaging the advocates of ideological realignment in America: his conviction that "the resemblance between the parties and the similarities which their party platforms show are the very heart of the strength of the American political system."[39]

Dewey's support for ideologically heterogeneous parties bolstered his support for the pragmatic, transactional politics of the traditional nominating conventions – and his opposition to idealistic reforms prescribed in the name of transparency and democratic principles.[40] In contrast to multiparty European parliamentary systems, he explained, "we make our coalitions within the parties and instead of achieving them after elections, we make them before election," and thus it was not surprising that the conventions often provided an arena for both noisy factional squabbling and frantic dealmaking.[41] But such dealmaking forged the compromises and coalitional agreements that undergirded the stability and good sense of the system itself.

If Republican moderates echoed conservative Democrats in their normative arguments about the workings of the party system, conservative Republicans could often sound more like liberal Democrats. In the project of realigning the parties ideologically, after all, ideological opponents could be strategic partners. Similarly occupying a majority position within their party's activist ranks, conservative Republicans advocated party adherence to the views of that

[39] *Thomas E. Dewey on the Two-Party System*, 7-9, 13.

[40] *Thomes E. Dewey on the Two-Party System*, 31-39.

[41] *Thomas E. Dewey on the Two-Party System*, 7.

majority in the service of drawing stark lines of division on issues and ideology between the GOP and the Democratic Party.

The intellectual foundations for conservatives' advocacy of ideologically sorted parties differed somewhat from that of liberal Democrats, however. The responsible party vision resonated with the latter group precisely because it connected the party coherence that they desired to a streamlined system of majoritarian and activist governance that they *also* desired. By reducing the number of veto points in the legislative process while rendering party politics both issue-based and national in orientation, responsible party government would enable the federal government to do more on behalf of the winning party's program. As the faction most dedicated to governmental activism, liberal Democrats proved most naturally receptive to such an outlook. The theoretical ties were bolstered by sociological ones. Most of the leading scholarly advocates of responsible party government were themselves liberal Democrats, some of whom maintained social and professional connections to liberal Democratic politicians.

A few notable conservatives of the period, either ignoring or disputing the statist subtext of much responsible party doctrine, embraced the theory's prescription for party government. Henry Hazlitt, the economics writer most responsible for introducing the work of Ludwig von Mises and F.A Hayek to a popular American audience, dedicated an entire book in 1942 to an argument for replacing the Constitution with a new system of British-style parliamentary government.[42] *A New Constitution Now*, like Arthur Finletter's contemporaneous work and the treatises by Woodrow Wilson and Walter Bagehot that Hazlitt cited as his central inspirations, advocated party discipline under cabinet governance, in which a single authority would be accountable to the people for carrying out federal policy. Hazlitt, a libertarian and vociferous

[42] Henry Hazlitt, *A New Constitution Now* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1942).

critic of Roosevelt, argued that such reforms, far from enabling perpetual governmental activism, were more likely to hinder presidents' ability to aggrandize power in times of crisis. Another Roosevelt foe, former president Herbert Hoover, also sounded responsible-party notes, taking the argument further by explicitly urging the ideological sorting of the parties. "If there cannot be a reasonably cohesive body of opinion in each major party," he declared in 1950, "you are on a blind road where there is no authority in the ballot or in government."[43] The APSA Committee on Political Parties quoted this passage approvingly in its report the same year.[44]

Such voices were exceptional, however. Responsible party government advocates were generally hard to find on the Republican right, whose adherents more typically couched their critiques of New Deal liberalism in language venerating the time-honored wisdom of the American constitutional tradition and condemning the aggrandizement of centralized governmental power. Members of the party that had toiled in the congressional minority for most of the past several decades were also more reflexively disposed toward an emphasis on minority rights rather than majority rule in lawmaking. Rather than advocate congressional reform and endorse party government under an activist presidency, postwar conservatives typically endorsed Congress's institutional norms and the overall political system's countermajoritarian features, using arguments that would soon find full articulation in works by James Burnham and Willmoore Kendall.[45] And rather than cite Great Britain's parliamentary

[43] "Text of Hoover's Address to Publishers Here Proposing a Reorganization of U.N.," *New York Times,* April 28, 1950.

[44] Committee on Political Parties, *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, supplement to the *American Political Science Review,* Vol. 40 (Sep. 1950): 69. When that same committee circulated its report among officials in Washington, it encountered notably greater receptivity from the Republican congressional leaders, Taft and Joseph Martin, than from their Democratic counterparts. Paul T. David, "The APSA Committee on Political Parties: Some Reconsiderations of Its Work and Significance," *Perspectives on Political Science* 21 (Spring 1992): 78.

[45] James Burnham, *Congress and the American Political Tradition* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1959); Willmoore Kendall and Austin Ranney, *Democracy and the American Party System* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1956); Kendall, *The Conservative Affirmation* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1963), 1-49.

system as an institutional model to emulate, as Hazlitt and liberal responsible party advocates alike did, conservative Republicans were more likely to invoke Atlee-era Britain merely to raise the specter of a slippery slope from the Fair Deal to, in Taft's words, to "a controlled economy and a handout state."[46] "Unless we could turn the tide toward national socialism in the next Congressional and Presidential election," conservative South Dakota senator Karl Mundt wrote in a typical formulation, "we are going to find America suffering from the same collapse of freedom now being tragically manifested before our eyes in the experiences of Great Britain."[47]

But if the postwar factional warfare between Taft and Dewey had not turned conservative Republicans into advocates for parliamentary-style governance under disciplined parties, it had prompted them to sharpen an argument in favor of issue-based politics and party cohesion behind a distinct program. The corollary to such an argument for substantive partisanship was a critique of non-substantive partisan affiliations. "A political party," Taft declared, "is not just an organization in which men of completely different points of view join because their parents or their friends belonged to that party, or because they became members through youthful and forgotten prejudices."[48] A belief in programmatic politics also implied opposition to a political strategy based on individual candidates' personal electoral appeal. Sharpening the ideological contrast between Republicans and Democrats would help to enable Americans to "vot[e] for ideas rather than built-up personalities," as conservative writer Felix Morley put it.[49]

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[46] Minutes of the RNC Policy Committee meeting, January 19, 1950, Series 1, Reel 9, Republican Party Papers.

[47] Karl Mundt letter to G. Wartham Ages, January 31, 1950, Reel 180, Karl E. Mundt Archives, microfilm, Dakota State University, Madison, SD.

[48] Clarence E. Wunderland, Jr., ed., *The Papers of Robert A. Taft: Volume 4, 1949-1953* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 25.

[49] Felix Morley, "A New Political Element," *Barron's*, September 24, 1951.

These factional debates over GOP strategy and the politics of personality only intensified in the wake of Dewey's decision to take himself out of presidential contention in 1952 – for his successor as the moderates' favored candidate turned out to be a figure of truly extraordinary personal appeal across the country. After heavy courting from both parties, General Dwight D. Eisenhower entered the race against Taft for the Republican presidential nomination backed by much of Dewey's campaign machinery as well as his key areas of organizational support in the Republican Governor's Association and among Eastern party donors. Eisenhower's strategic vagueness on policy issues came in for the same criticism from Taft supporters that Dewey's had before him. "The Republican voters of this country," Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee chairman Everett Dirksen wrote in 1952, "are entitled to know whether the candidate, who only a few months ago wouldn't say whether he was a Democrat or Republican, is now an advocate of Democratic or Republican national policies."[50] But the allure of a personally popular candidate proved hard to resist after such a prolonged political drought for the party. "I am now past thirty years of age and I cannot remember an election when a Republican was elected president," wrote one Republican in explaining his openness to supporting Eisenhower despite sharing Taft's political views. "It has just about gotten to the place with me that I don't care who the candidate is as long as we can elect him."[51]

Eisenhower's campaign operatives fanned out during the spring of 1952 to line up delegate support among state party leaders through promises of patronage and support in local factional matters, with virtually no discussion of policy issues or ideology.[52] Nowhere did the hardnosed battle between the Eisenhower and Taft campaigns for delegate pledges prove more

[50] Everett Dirksen telegram to Henry Cabot Lodge, April 8, 1952, Folder "000433 EMD Politics," Dirksen Papers.

[51] M.B. Tuttle letter to Everett Dirksen, April 23, 1952, Folder "000434 EMD Politics," Dirksen Papers.

[52] Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 116.

intense and decisive than in the South, which sent one sixth of the total delegates at the national convention. Eisenhower's campaign managers had deliberately sought to cultivate opposing delegates to the Taft-leaning "old guard" in states like Texas, Louisiana, and Georgia, in the process involving themselves in internecine local factional squabbles within those state's thinly institutionalized and virtually unpopulated Republican organizations. The large majority of the 98 delegate seats in dispute before the Credentials Committee of the Republican National Convention that summer belonged to southern states, and the bruising battle for them is what ultimately tipped the nomination in Eisenhower's favor.[53]

There was, in fact, good reason that the battle for southern delegates proved particularly rife with opaque and personalized deal-making among small numbers of interested parties. The virtual eradication of a popularly-backed Republican organizational presence in most parts of the South starting at the end of Reconstruction had rendered state Republican parties essentially empty shells, a collective regional "holdover organization functioning only for the power it could wield in national conventions," as political scientist Malcolm Moos put it in 1956. The legacy of that 19th century expulsion for 20th century GOP politics was a quadrennial display of regional engagement at its most ruthlessly pragmatic and insular – "the 'demoralizing influence' that went with the shameful scramble for the votes of southern delegates."[54] Eisenhower's campaign manager recalled that the leaders of southern state Republican parties "represented almost no one at home," surviving off of federal patronage directed their way in exchange only for nominating support at conventions, since they had no votes to deliver in the ballot box or the U.S.

[53] Moos, *The Republicans*, 468-479, and Bowen, *The Origins of Modern Conservatism*, 123-129, 140-144.

[54] Moos, *The Republicans*, 158.

Congress.[55] The scramble to accumulate that support, devoid of either democratic stakes or much ideological content, reached new heights in 1952.

If the intensity of the factional scrambling in southern states during the 1952 nominating fight highlighted the GOP's organizational weakness in the region, however, the national political context was changing in ways that signaled the potential for momentous transformations in southern political alignments. The great post-New Deal flourishing of the conservative coalition in Congress highlighted the power inherent in national agglomerations of conservative influence. Simultaneously, southern electoral support at the presidential level for the Democratic Party was slowly eroding, as illustrated in the States' Rights Party's capture of four Deep South states in the 1948 election and Eisenhower's eventual 49 percent showing in the southern popular vote in the general election of 1952. The potential for a southern Republican Party that was not a shell but rather a viable organization and political contender was becoming increasingly apparent. And thus, just like postwar Democratic debates over ideology and partisanship, intra-Republican debates touched unavoidably on the subject of party realignment in Dixie – and the explosive issues of race and civil rights.

The Southern Crossing

"I am a Southerner by birth and tradition," G. Wartham Ages of Memphis wrote to RNC chairman Guy Gabrielson in December 1949, "but nearly all my life I have been an independent in politics, and especially so since Roosevelt destroyed the Democratic Party." Like conservatives throughout the country, Ages attributed Thomas Dewey's defeat the previous year to "his promise to do everything that the New Dealers were doing but to do it better." He also attributed "all that has been accomplished in the 80th and 81st Congresses to defeat Truman's

[55] Herbert Brownlee, quoted in Bowen, *The Origins of Modern Conservatism*, 123.

program" to "a combination of the conservative members of Congress from the North and South." This observation compelled a question – one that increasing numbers of conservatives began to ask in the postwar decades. "Why not make that combination a real and permanent factor rather than a temporary one for expediency only?"[56]

Giving partisan shape to the conservative coalition had been a goal among some conservatives in both the North and the South since the very inception of the coalition during the late New Deal. Southern congressional resistance to Franklin Roosevelt's legislative agenda had spread and solidified gradually through the late 1930s and early 1940s. That same resistance first broke out in presidential politics in 1944, when all of the delegates from three southern states and portions of the delegations from four others lodged protest votes against Roosevelt's re-nomination, supporting Virginia Senator Harry Byrd instead.[57] Some conservative Republicans, meanwhile, made tentative inquiries into building partisan inroads into the region through an anti-New Deal ideological appeal during this same period, with ideas ranging from changing the party's name to the Constitution Party to boost southern appeal to nominating a joint Republican-Southern Democratic presidential ticket.[58] Short of such dramatic moves, Republicans could only urge southerners to take it upon themselves to convert their partisanship into better alignment with their beliefs. "I realize it is hard for those who have been active leaders in one party to change their allegiance," Bob Taft told a Nashville audience in 1948, "but I suggest to the people of the Southern States that you lead your leaders into the Republican

[56] G. Wartham Ages to Guy Gabrielson, December 31, 1949, Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

[57] Keri Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 37-39.

[58] Mason, *The Republican Party in American Politics*, 57, 68-70, 87-88.

Party."[59] But the strength of existing partisan ties in the electorate and the absence of enduring, interlocking relationships among activists and partisan elites in the northern Republican and southern Democratic parties rendered such ideas purely theoretical through the 1940s.

Indeed, the southern revolt against the national Democratic Party that did eventually emerge during that decade – the Dixiecrat campaign of 1948 – illustrated the region's continued aversion to the Republican label, even as it revealed the extent of political change underway there. The long-run factors that drove the revolt would make the region increasingly ripe for political realignment after the revolt's failure. The impact of the New Deal and World War II in sparking regional development, agricultural mechanization, and industrialization in the South posed unavoidable challenges to the region's one-party politics. The stirrings of political activism among both working-class whites and African Americans exiting agricultural labor and emboldened by wartime service helped to provoke, in reaction, a closer political alliance between Bourbon agricultural elites and industrial and commercial businessmen in the South.[60] Looking at the national scene, those elites viewed with alarm the growing electoral strength of African American Democrats in the North and the rapid rise of racial liberalism to the forefront of the New Deal-Fair Deal ideological agenda. This looming specter was best epitomized by the war-time Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) and President Truman's postwar support for its permanent operation.

The civil rights threat prompted a reevaluation of the party system and the South's place in it. Charles Wallace Collins, an Alabama lawyer, political activist, and propagandist for white supremacy, portrayed the fight over the FEPC and other Truman-endorsed civil rights measures

[59] *The Papers of Robert A. Taft: Volume 3, 1945-1948*, 465.

[60] Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 11-66.

as a harbinger of a broader partisan breakdown in his hugely influential 1947 treatise, *Whither Solid South?* "The South finds itself in the anomalous position of being the chief support of a political party which intends to put her through a second Reconstruction," he wrote.[61] Given the fact that there was now "a 'liberal' and a 'conservative' wing to each major party," Collins's preferred solution to the southern predicament was the forging of a "new two-party alignment" in which the respective wings would sort into a Liberal Party and a Conservative Party and the latter would serve to protect the southern racial order.[62] But if political leaders proved incapable of bringing about such a transformation of the two-party system, Collins laid out a second-best alternative, one that became the blueprint for the States' Rights Democratic Party campaign the following year: a regional third-party bid intended to deny any candidate a majority of electoral votes, thereby throwing the decision to the House of Representatives where Southerners could influence the outcome. Precisely because existing partisan ties remained too strong to make an ideological realignment realistic, this second-best plan was the option pursued by the southern elites who launched the Dixiecrat revolt in 1948 behind the candidacy of Strom Thurmond.

The legacy of the Dixiecrat campaign, both for southern political strategy and for the shaping of postwar American conservatism, was decidedly mixed.[63] The party's disappointing electoral performance provided further testimony to the continuing strength of traditional partisanship. (It only won in the four southern states whose ballots listed Thurmond as the

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[61] Charles Wallace Collins, *Whither Solid South? A Study in Politics and Race Relations (*New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1947), 19.

[62] Collins, *Whither Solid South?*, 255-256.

[63] Contemporary chroniclers, following V.O. Key's description of the movement as "the dying gasp of the Old South," typically portrayed it as a backward-looking venture, whose failure revealed the looming decline of white supremacy as a viable political appeal in a rapidly modernizing region. V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 671. Recent scholarship has emphasized elements in the movement's ideological appeal and alignment of support that presaged the rise of a national conservative movement and eventual party realignment in the South. See Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 11-44, and Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America*, 61-84.

regular Democratic nominee.) And the scope of the Dixiecrats' ambition had been modest to begin with. Rather than an attempt to ideologically realign the American party system, the revolt amounted to a regionally-defined venture to restore one faction's unique balance-of-power position within that system. But precisely because it failed to achieve that goal, increasing numbers of political actors in the coming years began to envision national rather sectional partisan strategies for combatting racial and economic liberalism. In this way, the Dixiecrats' failure proved influential. Moreover, while the Dixiecrat campaign proved both regionally circumscribed and explicitly racial in its appeal and policy program, certain participants in the campaign did pioneer ideological arguments that subsumed white supremacy into a deracialized and nationally-directed conservative anti-statism. Such an ideological strategy would soon become central to the conservative project of partisan realignment.

While southern conservatives struggled over political strategy in the wake of the 1948 election, northern conservatives in the GOP pursued new efforts at forging an electoral alliance with the South as part of their factional struggle with moderates. At the center of the most significant of such efforts was South Dakota Senator Karl Mundt, whose national profile in the early postwar years was largely defined by his close alliance with Joe McCarthy.[64] Mundt's crusading anticommunism lent a sense of urgency to his interest in reconstructing partisan alliances in the United States. The global spread of collectivism made America's position as a redoubt for liberty all the more precious, he thought, but the diffusion of conservative forces into factions of both major American parties had enabled the creeping socialistic bent of New Deal-Fair Deal liberalism to drive policy unchecked. "Present political groupings," he declared, "appear to be based much more upon geographical, traditional, or historical factors than upon a

[64] On Mundt's militant anticommunism, see Scott N. Heidepriem, *A Fair Chance for a Free People: The Biography of Karl E. Mundt, United States Senator* (Madison, SD: Leader Printing Company, 1988), 150-157, 166-194.

grouping around basic economic, social, and political concepts."[65] Such foggy alignments muffled the voice of American conservatism at just the moment it was most needed. A north-South coalition of conservative voting strength was essential, he wrote, not only "for our two-party system, but also for the most effective fight possible against Communism in America."[66]

Starting in 1949, Mundt began corresponding with a circle of fellow senators and GOP aides on the subject of political realignment, including the fellow anticommunist militant Owen Brewster of Maine and the recently retired Albert Hawkes of New Jersey. Two New York-based political aides and Republican activists named J. Harvie Williams and John Underhill spent the summer of 1949 soliciting support from northeastern businessmen and Republican donors to fund a "Citizens Political Committee" to explore the idea of party realignment through a North-South conservative alliance.[67] Williams's prescribed strategy for such a union began in Congress rather than the Electoral College. His head count estimated a slight majority in the Senate and a larger one in the House that, with the proper inducements and leadership, would support a reorganization of partisan congressional control "better reflect[ing] that substantial majority of public opinion which holds to traditional American concepts and values." The realigned congressional officials would then serve to help lead their electoral constituents into the new partisan alignment over the course of subsequent electoral cycles. Republicans' present hopeless

[65] Karl Mundt, "Is There Need for a Southern Democrat - Northern Republican Political Alliance?," October 3, 1951, in *Congressional Record*, 82nd Cong. 1st sess., A6241.

[66] Karl Mundt and Clifford Case, "Should the GOP Merge with the Dixiecrats?," *Collier's*, July 28, 1951.

[67] J. Harvie Williams letters to Albert Hawkes, Robert Dresser, and Karl Mundt, all dated July 7, 1949, Reel 180, Mundt Papers. Williams's interest in institutional reforms intended to bolster conservative political success extended beyond party realignment. Beginning in the late 1940s he also worked with Republican Congressman Frederic Caudert on a proposed constitutional amendment that would replace state-level winner-take-all elections for the Electoral College with district-level ones, with the intention of diminishing the power of liberal big-city majorities in industrial states. See Williams, "Electoral Reform – The Caudert Amendment," *Human Events*, December 10, 1952.

situation, Williams wrote, was matched by that of Southern Democrats. "Our proposals are designed to help both to help each other."[68]

Mundt shared Williams's confidence in the existence of a basic conservative majority among both American voters *and* public officials in Washington, requiring only altered institutional contexts to empower.[69] He disagreed, however, with Williams' focus on Congress as the site for initial action, arguing that existing arrangements in both chambers, and particularly the complications that seniority privileges posed, would make individual members exceedingly cautious about attempting a collective leap into the uncharted waters of partisan realignment.[70] Instead, with the Dixiecrat revolt fresh in his mind, Mundt argued that realignment should be pursued through a presidential electoral strategy. Republicans should plan to delay holding their 1952 convention until after the Democrats, who would likely choose a platform and nominee (either Truman or a liberal alternative) odious to southern delegates. If the Republicans then responded by nominating a ticket composed of a Republican and a Southern Democrat – Mundt suggested Georgia's Richard Russel or Virginia's Harry Byrd – and directly wooing alienated southerners in their platform and campaign appeals, a conservative electoral victory would be possible. Very quickly thereafter, such a victory would compel a formal reorganization within both Congress and the national parties. Mundt speculated that the ideologically cohesive parties

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[68] J. Harvie Williams, "Plan and Program for Political Realignment," undated, enclosed in letter to Karl Mundt, October 8, 1949, Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

[69] Mundt even anticipated the analysis of liberal scholar James MacGregor Burns in declaring in 1951 that "we are operating with a two-party system in name but a four-party system in function." But unlike Burns, he saw this system as favorable to the left rather than the right, since it fragmented the power of what he believed to be a conservative American majority. Mundt, "Is There Need for a Southern Democrat - Northern Republican Political Alliance?," October 3, 1951, in *Congressional Record*, 82nd cong. 1st sess., A6241.

[70] Mundt letters to Williams, April 15, 1950, and December 27, 1951, Reel 180, Mundt Papers. Williams argued through his numerical analysis that honoring seniority norms among an organizational alliance of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans would result in both groups gaining chairmanships at the expense of northern Democrats rather than each other.

of this near future could be labeled "Laborites" and "Freedomites" if they failed to retain the existing names. Beginning with a swing through the Northwest in the winter of 1949 and 1950 and continuing with multiple speaking tours across every southern state, Mundt devoted much of the next two years to a campaign of direct appeal to southerners to help "bring about a permanent realignment of party forces in this country … so that henceforth in each of our 48 states the people would have a clear cut choice in all elections."[71]

Mundt's speaking tours helped provide the impetus for the formal launch of a Committee to Explore Political Realignment in September 1951.[72] The organization grew out of a three-day conference of conservative activists in Washington DC, at which Mundt gave the keynote address. The Committee commissioned Williams and Underhill to draft a full report on the rationale and prospects for an ideological sorting of the parties, which eventually resulted in an 80-page treatise, "Liberty and the Republic: The Case for Party Realignment."[73] The Committee listed among its leaders the ex-senators Albert Hawkes and Ed Burke and ex-governors Horace Hildreth and Charles Edison. The leading southerner involved in the group was the former New Deal official turned conservative legal scholar and activist, Donald Richberg. As indicated by the northern tilt of the membership, most conservative political elites in the South still proved reluctant to pursue openly the idea of a formal proto-partisan alliance with Republicans.[74]

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[71] Karl Mundt speech in Jackson, MS, April 8, 1952, Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

[72] The genesis and personnel of the group are described by Mundt, "Is There Need for a Southern Democrat - Northern Republican Political Alliance?," October 3, 1951, in *Congressional Record*, 82nd cong. 1st sess., A6241.

[73] J. Harvie Williams and John Underhill, "Liberty and the Republic: The Case for Party Realignment," December 1951, Reel 181, Mundt Papers.

[74] Even the major existing southern organization pursuing the question of realignment, the Mississippi-based National Coalition Committee, had been organized by a Taftite Republican from Illinois. Spencer McCulloch, "A New Party A-Comin'?," *The Progressive*, May 1951.

Despite such leaders' reluctance, southern audiences were welcoming of the Yankee senator's message during his tours. Standing ovations were typical. The audience at one 1951 address in Jackson, Mississippi, gave Mundt "not mere applause … but ear-splitting level yells," according to the *Jackson Daily News*."[75] Charles Wallace Collins wrote to Mundt to express his support for the project.[76] National conservative voices like radio personality Fulton Lewis, Jr., writer Felix Morley, and newspaper editor William Loeb all echoed this support and joined in the campaign.[77] Speaking at the annual Mississippi Economic Council in 1951, Raymond Moley, another conservative ex-New Dealer, heralded the coming dissolution of the South's one-party system, cribbing from V.O. Key's mammoth recent study of southern politics to describe the southern state Democratic organizations as "merely a holding company of transient squabbling factions, most of which fail by far to meet the standards of permanence, cohesiveness, and responsibility."[78] An ideological realignment of the two parties, Moley argued, would finally render southern politics meaningfully coherent and issues-based and connect southern goals to the national political system.

All of this discussion was, of course, merely an abstraction if it did not face squarely the most potent source of the rift between southern Democrats and their national party: civil rights for African Americans. Mundt made the policy implications of realignment clear when he repeatedly declared that a conservative alliance could only be possible if the Republicans gave "some thought to southern concepts in the writing of the platform" and avoided including "any

[75] Heidepriem, *A Fair Chance for a Free People*, 159.

[76] Charles Wallace Collins letter to Karl Mundt, June 13, 1951, Reel 181, Mundt Papers.

[77] Heidepriem, *A Fair Chance for a Free People*, 159; Morley, "A New Political Element;" Editorial, "GOP-Southern Alliance," *Manchester Union Leader*, August 8, 1951.

[78] Charles M. Hills, "Moley Would Erase Mason-Dixon Line," *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, April 25, 1951.

of the planks which are understandably repugnant to the people of the South."[79] The planks he meant, which had appeared in the 1948 platform drafted by the Dewey forces, were the endorsements of federal legislation challenging Jim Crow practices in the workplace and polling place. As Raymond Moley bluntly put it, realignment depended on getting "Republicans to forego their past practice of baiting the South by support of a Federal civil rights program."[80]

Crucially, postwar Republican positions on federal civil rights measures had a factional valence. Opposition was disproportionately found among Taft-aligned conservatives opposed to all manner of federal activism in social policy – and answering to few African American constituents or supporters. Taft had long expressed private skepticism about courting black votes, writing in 1945 that it was hopeless to try since a measure like the FEPC bill "violates any possible party philosophy we could adopt."[81] Three years later he warned a Tennessee crowd that Truman "would center in Washington the entire field of control over questions involving civil rights, without even considering the proper functions of the Federal Government, the states, and local communities in dealing with different features of the problem."[82] Taftites opposed a permanent FEPC throughout the 1940s and stripped the 1950 statement on party principles of draft language endorsing aggressive civil rights measures.[83] Mundt's advocacy of jettisoning altogether the civil rights tradition that had been the GOP's birthright as a party was not mere

[79] "Some thought" passage from "New Political Alliance: An Interview with Karl E. Mundt," *U.S. News and world Report*, August 3, 1951; "any of the planks" passage from the radio transcript of *The Eleanor Roosevelt Show*, March 16, 1951, accessed at http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/documents/displaydoc.cfm?_t=radio&_docid=rad020.

[80] Raymond Moley, "A '52 Coalition Budding in South," *Omaha World*, March 25, 1951.

[81] *The Papers of Robert A. Taft: Volume 3, 1945-1948*, 46-47.

[82] Quoted in Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 139.

[83] Charles Wallace Collins made a point of noting conservative Republican opposition to civil rights measures in *Whither Solid South?*, 154-155.

opportunism in pursuit of party realignment, but a stance that was ideologically and politically congenial to many Republican conservatives.

Importantly, however, that congeniality needed to be expressed explicitly in terms of state's rights and opposition to federal power rather than race and white supremacy. As the Birmingham newspaperman John Temple Graves put it in heralding an ideological party realignment, "an obstacle in the path of this national political line-up is the impression given a great many Americans that the States' Rights movement in the South is nothing but race hate in political action, and is a sort of political first cousin to the Klan."[84] Deracializing the language of southern conservatism – and of opposition to civil rights legislation in general -- was a prerequisite for realignment. "The South must be led by men less identified with the Negro question and more identified with the national revolt against federalism in general," he wrote.[85] Taftite Republicans were partners in this rhetorical project. RNC Chairman Guy Gabrielson startled many political observers in the early 1950s by making direct appeals to the Dixiecrats, but he did so on race-neutral ideological grounds. "Our friends call themselves States' Righters and we call ourselves Republicans," he declared in Alabama in 1952. "But they oppose corruption and so do we … The Dixiecrat Party believes in states' rights. That's what the Republican Party believes in."[86] Mundt even endorsed white southerners' own framing of their opposition to federal action on civil rights, denying racist intent altogether. "Southerners have no desire to hold the Negro down," he insisted. "They want to promote programs in an area where by evolution and education they must work out a harmonious adjustment."[87]

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[84] John Temple Graves, "The Birth of a Party," *Human Events*, May 11, 1949.

[85] Quoted in Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 37.

[86] Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 36.

[87] "New Political Alliance: An Interview with Karl E. Mundt," *U.S. News and world Report*, August 3, 1951.

To pro-civil rights Republicans, such positions were as morally objectionable as they were strategically dubious. In 1951, Mundt debated liberal Republican Congressman Clifford Case in the pages of *Collier's* magazine on the question, "Should the GOP Merge With the Dixiecrats?"[88] Case's practical arguments against the idea emphasized Southern Democrats' institutional clout in Congress, which would disincline them from seeking to upset existing arrangements, as well as the electoral punishment a merger would face north of the Mason and Dixon line. But substantive policy lay at the heart of his objections. "I do not want victory at the price of party character," he wrote, echoing Margaret Chase Smith's recent dissent against her party's embrace of McCarthyism. Case predicted that two-party politics would indeed soon come to the South, but that history and morality alike required that it come about through "a progressive Republican party which will align itself with, and provide a rallying point for, the progressive forces in Southern labor, industry, and agriculture – not with the Dixiecrats." Antiracism was a central pillar of Case's vision for southern Republcanism. "In the South of the future there is a permanent place for a political party which really believes that the Negro is not an inferior person to be dealt with kindly but kept in his place, and which refuses to accept 'separate but equal treatment' as the last word in handling racial problems."

Case proceeded, however, to make a broader normative point about the American party system – one that underscored the degree to which one's position within a party's factional division at midcentury informed one's perspective on how parties best functioned in American politics. Like Thomas Dewey the year before, Case offered a note of caution to "those who, whether on doctrinaire grounds or because they are dazzled by the prospect of temporary political or economic advantage, would re-form our two great parties along separate interest

[88] Karl Mundt and Clifford Case, "Should the GOP Merge with the Dixiecrats, *Collier's*, July 28, 1951.

groupings and ideological lines." Achieving such a reformation, he argued, would strike at the very defining quality of the American two-party system, namely the fact "that our two great political parties do not divide the people into separate interest or ideological groups." Such inclusion and overlapping of constituents and interests fostered the stability, basic civic unity, and incremental adaptability in policy that were the hallmarks of the American political system. Case's essay revealed the logic by which, under the existing alignment of political and ideological forces in the midcentury America, a moderate Republican's forceful, entirely principled argument for civil rights and other progressive issue positions could also amount to a system-level celebration of the *absence* of principle in the division of the two parties.

The same logic explained why Mundt's ideological enemies in the opposing party frequently endorsed his proposal for realignment. Mundt engaged in a radio debate with leading liberal Democrat – and noted responsible party advocate – Hubert Humphrey in July 1951. On the central question of ideological realignment, their "debate" turned out to be anything but. Both had plenty of harsh words to say regarding the substance of their opponent's views, but Humphrey stated up front that he agreed with Mundt's "propos[al] that we get the political parties cleaned up or cleared up on the basis of issues … I welcome it, because I would like to have the American people truly know what the political parties stand for."[89] Mundt appeared on *The Eleanor Roosevelt Show* the same year, where the former First Lady – and eminent liberal activist within the postwar Democratic Party – told her guest, "I agree with you when you say

[89] The senators appeared on *American Forum of the Air*. Heidepreim, *A Fair Chance for a Free People*, 161-162. Humphrey was not the only explicit proponent of responsible party doctrine to come across Mundt's radar. Mundt enlisted the help of a Congressional Research Service staffer to collate relevant scholarship on parties and realignment for him; she responded with a trove of material that included the APSA Committee on Political Parties report and various responses to it. Dorothy Shaffter letter to Karl Mundt, April 17, 1951, Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

that our present parties confuse people … You and I are not often in agreement, but I made a suggestion somewhat similar to that [for party realignment] also some time ago."[90]

She had also, of course, been privy to her husband's landmark experiment in engineering a realignment in 1938 and his abortive consideration of it in 1944. At a more fundamental level, Mundt credited Franklin Roosevelt with ushering in the political revolution – the mobilization of a new national program of liberal government activism – that made partisan transformation imperative. "Some great changes have come about in the political thinking of America," Mundt told Eleanor Roosevelt, "a great many of which, incidentally, are attributable to your husband … because he gave us the New Deal, which gradually took on the shape and the formation in large part of a somewhat different political concept, almost a new political party." The conservative Mundt and liberal Roosevelt agreed about the desirability of bringing those "great changes" to fulfillment within the party system itself.

In the short term, however, conservatives would prove no more capable than liberals of reconstructing the party system along ideological lines. The shuttering of the Committee to Explore Political Realignment less than a year after its creation was illustrative.[91] "I am not willing to raise a substantial amount of money from people all over the country," Hawkes wrote to Mundt in explaining the decision, "until I feel we have some kind of a plan that justifies their contributing the money and justifies us in expecting to spend it wisely and effectively."[92] Such a plan was missing. A surfeit of political caution disinclined large numbers of political leaders – North and South – from enlisting in the cause. At this early stage in southern conservatives'

[90] Radio transcript of *The Eleanor Roosevelt Show*, March 16, 1951, accessed at http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/documents/displaydoc.cfm?_t=radio&_docid=rad020.

[91] Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Committee to Explore Political Realignment, November 30, 1951, Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

[92] Albert Hawkes letter to Karl Mundt, November 15, 1951, Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

break from the national Democratic leadership, too many retained investment in existing arrangements, and too few northern and southern activists, political funders, and politicians had developed close ties with each other, to make a short-term political breakthrough realistic.[93] Virginia's powerful Democratic senator Harry Byrd, for example, launched his own campaign in the South against Truman's civil rights policies in 1951 and called for the reinstatement of the old two-thirds requirement for Democratic presidential nominating conventions that had given Dixie veto power before 1936.[94] But despite repeated meetings with Hawkes and other leaders involved in the Committee, Byrd resisted joining an explicit campaign for party realignment.[95]

Explaining the "standoffish" attitude of many southern conservatives to party realignment, one journalist cited not only the pull of tradition and lingering suspicions of Republicans, but also the continued uniqueness of the South's place in the political system. "Southerners exert a vital balance-of-power role in national affairs, particularly in the Congress," he wrote, "and do all right on patronage, public works, and other items of Federal aid, too."[96] That unique role depended on sectional solidarity among southern political elites, just as, from those elites' perspective, the maintenance of Jim Crow depended on preventing party competition in the South, which could lead to efforts to mobilize African Americans as voters. National party realignment along ideologically defined lines threatened to disrupt that political solidarity. To most southerners in the 1950s, the risk of such a disruption outweighed the

[93] Murray Snyder, "Cold Shoulder for Mundt," *New York Herald Tribune*, July 8, 1951; Drew Pearson, "Coalition Move Shunned," *Washington Post*, October 7, 1951.

[94] P.B. Young, "The 'Solid South' is Now a Political Myth," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, July 28, 1951.

[95] The failure to court Byrd is discussed in Albert Hawkes letter to Karl Mundt, November 2, 1951, and J. Harvie Williams letter to Mundt, December 1951, both in Reel 180, Mundt Papers.

[96] Clayton Knowles, "Southern Democrats Wary of the North-South Alliance," *New York Times*, September 23, 1951.

potential benefits that could come from a national consolidation of conservative forces hostile (or at least indifferent) to federal civil rights initiatives.[97]

Nevertheless, stirrings from the South in 1952 indicated that increasing numbers in the region were beginning to change their calculations. Eisenhower's southern support was strongest in the urbanized and comparatively moderate peripheral states.[98] But disenchantment with the national Democratic Party had grown sufficiently to compel increasing numbers of strong conservatives to jump ship as well. From the Virginian Donald Richberg to the Texas oil baron Jack Porter, conservative southern activists and political donors mobilized on behalf of a Republican presidential candidate in numbers never seen before.[99] And from the ranks of elected Democratic officials, South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes led the push to campaign for Eisenhower against Stevenson in the general election.[100]

Two developments would help to compel more southerners to join such apostates in the years to come. First, as the region continued to grow economically and to incorporate ever increasing numbers of northern transplants, traditional partisan electoral attachments began to loosen and to more closely resemble national patterns. Second, American conservatism itself attained a new coherence and self-conscious movement spirit, and as a result helped to empower the right in its factional battles within the GOP. That national Republican right would advocate a political posture toward the South much more in keeping with Karl Mundt's Dixie courting than

[97] For southern "conservatives to join the Republican party," one contemporary scholarly observer noted, "would increase rather than decrease the political potentialities of the Negro." O. Douglas Weeks, "Republicanism and Conservatism in the South," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* Vol. 36 (December 1955): 254.

[98] Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 61-64.

[99] Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 37-38; Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 124-126.

[100] Raymond Moley, "A Political Revolution," *Newsweek*, December 15, 1952.

Clifford Case's progressivism.[101] Ironically enough, both of these developments would occur during the tenure of an exceptionally popular -- and deceptively ambitious – moderate Republican President.

"Principle is Basic:" The Conservative Movement in the Age of Consensus

Conservative Republicans had reason to feel embattled during Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency. Scholars have sharply revised the contemporary portrayal of Eisenhower as a grandfatherly executive amiably carrying out his tenure in both an apolitical and nonideological manner – documenting instead the sharp political and partisan instincts and personally strong Midwestern conservative convictions that drove Eisenhower's "hidden-hand" leadership.[102] But despite Eisenhower's personal small-government convictions, his outlook on the GOP's future emphasized substantive accommodation to the New Deal state and a political image makeover. Increasingly over the course of his two terms, Eisenhower pursued both high-profile and *sub rosa* political activities on behalf of a vision for the Republican Party and the alignment of factional forces within it that was sharply at odds with the interests of the party's conservatives.

Eisenhower's substantive views shaped his brand of Republicanism. Ideologically, he combined a fervent internationalism with a view of domestic policy that venerated what he termed "the Middle Way." "[T]he critical problem of our time," he wrote to a friend in 1954, "is to find and stay on the path that marks the way of logic between conflicting arguments advanced by extremists on both sides on almost every economic, political, and international problem that arises." In the realm of social policy, this meant "establishing some kind of security for

[101] Gelbman and Rhodes, "Party Organization and the Origins of the Republicans' Belated Southern Strategy."

[102] Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader (*New York: Basic Books, 1982). See also Gary W. Reichard, *The Reaffirmation of Republicanism: Eisenhower and the Eighty-Third Congress* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975); Cornelius P. Cotter, "Eisenhower as Party Leader," *Political Science Quarterly* 98 (Summer 1983): 255-283; and Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 41-69.

individuals in a highly specialized and industrialized age" without "push[ing] further and further into the socialistic experiment."[103] His substantive disagreements with Republican conservatives took early political form in the well-publicized fight with the remaining congressional isolationists over Senator John Bricker's proposed constitutional amendment to restrict the scope and process of treaty ratification, as well as in conservative grumbling over his appointment of Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.[104] In the electoral arena, Eisenhower actively promoted several moderates to run for House and Senate races, beginning with his encouragement of Clifford Case's bid in New Jersey in 1954 and continuing through the year of his reelection in 1956.[105] The famously protracted battle waged within the administration over whether or not to jettison Richard Nixon as the vice presidential nominee in 1956 was similarly colored by ideological factionalism, since the Californian Cold Warrior's original ascension to the ticket had stemmed from his closeness to the party's right wing. Though Nixon stayed on, Eisenhower was by then newly committed, in his words, to "build[ing] up a strong, progressive Republican Party in this country … If the right wing wants a fight, they're going to get it."[106]

In an unhappy irony for his cause, Eisenhower's efforts to wage that fight ultimately did a great deal to shape, cohere, and motivate the postwar conservative movement that eventually captured the Republican Party. At the level of ideological construction, William F. Buckley and other intellectual architects of the postwar conservative movement forged their political analysis

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[103] Dwight Eisenhower letter to Bradford Chynoweth, July 13, 1954, in Lewis Galambos and Daun van Ee, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: Vol. 15* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1220. On Eisenhower's outlook on domestic policy, see Steven Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism: Pursuing the Middle Way* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 7-87.

[104] The Bricker amendment would prove to be the last gasp of postwar isolationist political activity among Republican conservatives. Reichard, *Reaffirmation of Republicanism*, 51-98.

[105] Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 152-153.

[106] Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*, 114.

and movement project partly through combat with the philosophical exponents of Eisenhower-style moderation, chief among them the administration official and law professor Arthur Larson. At the grassroots level, demographic and social developments similar to those driving the rise to predominance of a new kind of amateur liberal activist inside the Democratic Party also fostered the flourishing of amateur activism on the Republican right. Those activists derived motivation and missionary zeal from the very fusionist conservative ideology that Buckley and others were disseminating. The first stirrings of this newly powerful confluence of intellectual leadership and grassroots energy were felt in internal party initiatives that Eisenhower encouraged in the hopes of bolstering moderate Republicanism. Those stirrings would turn into a storm of conservative activity in the 1960s that powered Barry Goldwater's ascension to the presidential nomination.

"Boy oh *boy* oh boy, does that Arthur Larson bear keeping one's eye on!," editorialized *National Review* in September 1956.[107] That magazine's writers and editors kept close eyes indeed on the man whom the *New York Times* called Eisenhower's "chief theoretician" and *Meet the Press*'s moderator called the White House's "ideologist-in-chief." Their engagement with Larson's vision for the GOP and the two-party system itself helped to structure the conservative agenda they developed as an alternative course.

Larson, like Eisenhower a Midwestern-raised Republican, was a legal scholar of the welfare state before serving the administration as Undersecretary of Labor, Director of the United States Information Agency, and eventually, chief presidential speechwriter. His experience while in the Labor Department working with a centrist-liberal coalition of moderate Republicans and northern Democrats in Congress against the conservative coalition on behalf of

[107] "The Week," *National Review,* September 8, 1956.

expansions in Social Security, unemployment insurance, and workmen's compensation and disability insurance helped to inform his outlook on the alignment of forces in the contemporary political system.[108] In 1956, as his work in the administration shifted to speechwriting and political consultation, he wrote a bestselling treatise connecting his policy views to a philosophy of the American political system, which received official endorsement from Eisenhower's chief of staff, Sherman Adams, and, later, the president himself. (Larson's book, William F. Buckley quipped, "had the singular distinction of being read by President Eisenhower.")[109]

A Republican Looks at his Party promised to establish "two key political facts of mid-century America," the first being that "we have greater agreement than ever before in our history on fundamental issues," the second that the Eisenhower Administration's philosophy and policies reflected that agreement.[110] The approach around which Americans had reached consensus offered a third way between what Larson termed the "1896 ideology" of laissez faire and the "1936 ideology" of proto-socialism. Eisenhower's "New Republicanism" acknowledged the changed reality of an urbanized industrial society requiring concerted federal action in many realms of life that had traditionally been left to states, localities, and the private sector. It also, however, limited federal action only to those realms in which localized or private initiative could not meet the need. The formula prescribed "as much government as necessary, but not enough to

[108] David L. Stebenne, *Modern Republican: Arthur Larson and the Eisenhower Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 130-135.

[109] William F. Buckley, Jr., *Up from Liberalism* (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1959), 189.

[110] Arthur Larson, *A Republican Looks at his Party* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), vii. The title came about as a result of the same publisher's recent release of another treatise on a major party's philosophy, Dean Acheson's *A Democrat Looks at his Party* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955).

stifle the normal motivations of private enterprise" or to hinder "the maximum restoration of responsibility to individuals and private groups."[111]

The way that the party system interacted with this ideological formulation was instructive. Larson disavowed European-style party politics, "with its left-right arrangement of political status… In this country, we have alignments formed according to a complex system of sectional, local, traditional and interest groupings." The cumulative product of such fragmented alignments was the very "American Consensus" approach to policy that Larson endorsed. But though "there is no American Center Party as such, and there probably never will be," Larson explicitly predicted that New Republicanism in the Eisenhower mold could forge an enduring partisan majority for years to come. This was because the opposition Democrats actually contained within their own coalition the most extreme exponents of both the 1896 and the 1936 ideologies. New Republicanism "captured the political center" by falling in between the extremes represented by a Democratic party that included "the most conservative elements in the country – the Southern Democrats – and the most radical – the ultra-Fair-Dealers."[112] The notion of an intrinsically bifurcated and ideologically schizophrenic Democratic Party – "a preposterous coalition of opposites," as Larson put it to Eisenhower – was a recurring theme among Republicans in the 1950s.[113] In a typical statement, the Republican National Conference of 1957 passed a resolution highlighting the "bitter divisions rending the Democratic Party, which – not being a truly national party –would not dare to solicit the views of its party leaders … lest its

[111] Larson, *A Republican Looks at his Party*, 10.

[112] Larson, *A Republican Looks at his Party*, 12, 16, 18.

[113] Stebenne, *Modern Republican*, 156.

gatherings deteriorate into sectional bickering."[114] But Larson emphasized Democratic division not merely to convey the practical utility of the GOP's comparative cohesion, as most partisan GOP statements did. Rather, he cast the Democratic divide as intrinsic in order to bolster his case for an ideologically middle-of-the-road political project that could garner bipartisan majorities in the electorate and in Congress.

Larson used the term "New Republicanism" to describe this project in his book. By the time Eisenhower hit the campaign trail for reelection in 1956, after delivering a nomination acceptance speech at the GOP convention that Larson had written, "Modern Republicanism" had become the more popular phrase. On the night of his second victory over Adlai Stevenson, Eisenhower declared that "modern Republicanism has now proved itself. And America has approved of modern Republicanism."[115]

*Dis*approval of modern Republicanism helped to shape the politics and vision of the postwar conservative movement. William F. Buckley, Brent Bozell, James Burnham, Frank Meyer, William Rusher, and the rest of the mid-1950s intellectual circle around *National Review* saw the ideological scrambling of the two-party system as the means by which a collectivist liberal elite could sustain itself in power. "The most alarming single danger to the American system," declared the *National Review*'s inaugural issue, "lies in the fact that an identifiable team of Fabian operators is bent on controlling both our major political parties – under the sanction of such fatuous and unreasoned slogans as 'national unity,' 'middle-of-the-road,' 'progressivism,' and 'bipartisanship.'" In the face of that threat, the new journal would stand "without

[114] Transcript of the Resolutions Committee Meeting of the Republican National Conference, June 7, 1957, Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Party Papers.

[115] Wagner, *Eisenhower Republicanism*, 121.

reservation" on the side of a "two-party system that fights its feuds in public and honestly."[116] In that vein, the magazine declined to endorse Eisenhower in 1956, and in the ensuing years made good on the promise to track the exploits of the president's court philosopher, Larson, as he rose in prominence. "[M]odern Republicans," wrote the magazine, "are – *as a matter of principle* – *against* principle."[117] For that reason, they were to blame both for the GOP's failure to recapture Congress while Eisenhower won reelection in 1956 and, most grievously, for the party's mammoth losses in the 1958 congressional midterms. "An organization needs people and money, but before that it needs a purpose," Brent Bozell explained in 1958, augmenting conservatives' substantive critique of Modern Republican governance with their longstanding strategic argument against me-tooism. "With the Republican Party deprived of a distinctive policy, the party organization was deprived of a reason for existing and working."[118]

Buckley offered his most thorough formulation of the connection between building a conservative ideological movement and engaging the party system in his 1959 book *Up From Liberalism*. He attacked the postwar era's atmosphere of ideological dissolution, issuing a call to reject consensus politics and revive ideology in America that in certain ways ironically anticipated arguments of the New Left. Though "America, fashionable observers say, is a non-ideological nation," Buckley warned of the danger that looms "when a distrust of doctrinaire social systems eases over into a dissolute disregard for principle" and when Americans demonstrate a "failure to nourish any orthodoxy at all." Larson's Modern Republicanism claimed to identify a coherent line of thought driving the seeming mishmash of centrist policymaking, but "in permitting so many accretions, modifications, emendations, maculations,

[116] "The Magazine's Credenda," *National Review*, November 19, 1955.

[117] "…When Half-Gods Go," *National Review*, September 27, 1958.

[118] L. Brent Bozell, "The 1958 Elections: Coroner's Report," *National Review*, November 22, 1958.

and qualifications" to its alleged philosophical priors, it had proven "simply not useful as a philosophy of government distinctive to a single faction in American life."[119] The context of a two-party system made the need for such a coherent and distinctive philosophy – and for the rejection of a centrist middle path that failed to engage the battle with liberalism – all the more urgent. Our "challenge," Buckley wrote, was "to restore principles to public affairs." Doing so required factional battle inside the GOP – and this required the cohesion that stemmed from intellectual coherence: "The conservative movement in America has got to put its theoretical house in order."[120]

The way by which Buckley and other midcentury conservative intellectuals had set about doing just that constituted one of the more thoroughgoing and self-conscious projects of ideological construction in American history. The "fusionism" of the postwar conservative project, to use Frank Meyer's term, merged the economic libertarianism of Hayek with cultural traditionalism and a militant and morally charged anticommunism.[121] At a theoretical level, intellectuals worked to make an affirmative case for how those outlooks fit together into a coherent conception of the proper relationship of individuals to the state and society. But Buckley the activist was always explicit in asserting the practical necessity of fusion as a matter of coalition politics – of forging a "conservative framework" in the face of "modern realities." In *Up From Liberalism*, he endorsed the centrality of a "negative response to liberalism" as the

[119] Buckley, *Up From Liberalism*, xxi, 189, 191.

[120] Buckley, *Up From Liberalism*, 221, 189.

[121] Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*. Subsequent scholarship in intellectual and political history, noting in particular the importance of business support in funding postwar conservative political ventures (including the *National Review*) and the prominence of libertarian voices outside of Buckley's circle, have tended to tilt the balance of the postwar conservative fusion further in the direction of the economic side than Nash did. See, e.g., Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets Since the Great Depression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

organizing rationale of conservative unity, and used a navigational metaphor to describe an approach to disparate political issues that put them all "in range" of a single conservative outlook. "There is a point from which opposition to the social security laws and a devout belief in social stability are in range," he wrote; "as also a determined resistance to the spread of world Communism – and a belief in political non-interventionism … That is the position, generally speaking, where conservatives now find themselves on the political chart."[122] What was needed was to cohere and mobilize such conservatives into an ideological movement capable of achieving real political impact.

The grassroots and organizational manpower for that movement had several sources. One was the conservative core of Republican party activists and professionals referred to as the "Taft wing" prior to the Ohio senator's death in 1953. When, four years later, Eisenhower acknowledged in his private notes that his candidacy had been "forced down the throats of a lot of people in '52," these rank and file conservatives at the base of the party were who he was describing. "Some will never forget it … There is so much resentment, and these people will never give up."[123] In the years between Taft's death and Goldwater's national ascendency, such rank-and-file conservatives lacked an agreed-upon standard-bearer, though Taft's successor as Republican Senate Leader, William Knowland, came close. But even while politically leaderless, Republican conservatives articulated increasingly hard-edged critiques of Eisenhower Republicanism and support for polarization in the mid-1950s. One 1957 RNC survey of Midwestern party officials found sentiments that were typified by one respondents' suggestion to "Register all 'Modern Republicans' as Democrats."[124]

[122] Buckley, *Up From Liberalism*, 218-220.

[123] Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 161.

[124] Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 161.

Beyond the enduring core of Taftites among the party's rank and file was the emergence, over the first two postwar decades, of a right-wing corollary to the "amateur Democrats" of James Q. Wilson's analysis: a great flourishing of organization-building and political activism by largely middle-class and highly ideological, issue-driven conservatives.[125] A generation of historical scholarship has helped to uncover the outlook and experiences of the "suburban warriors" who populated the sprawling new developments of the booming postwar Sunbelt, and whose activism gave grassroots force to the fusionist ideology that Buckley and his fellow intellectuals helped construct.[126] Locally rooted anticommunist groups, linked through national networks of organizations and syndicated media and radio programs like the Dan Smoot Report and the *Manion Forum on Opinion*, compelled millions of Americans to connect the global Cold War struggle to domestic political issues and ideological conflicts.[127] Christian conservative groups like Spiritual Mobilization, the Freedom Clubs, and Fred Schwarz's Christian Anti-Communism Crusade gave powerful organizational form to the ideological melding of religious conservatism, Cold War hawkishness, and domestic free-market orthodoxy.[128] At the day-to-day heart of much of this activism was a cohort of conservative women – educated wives and

[125] Activism on the right was typically ignored or otherwise pathologized by scholarly observers during its growth period starting in the mid-1950s, but by the time of Goldwater's 1964 campaign, several scholars (Wilson included) had begun to identify the shared characteristics of amateur conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats. See Aaron Wildavsky, "The Goldwater Phenomenon: Partisans, Purists, and the Two-Party System," *Review of Politics* 27 (July 1965): 398; and James Q. Wilson's 1966 discussion of the Goldwater movement in his preface to the second printing of *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), viii-x.

[126] Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[127] Nicole Hemmer, "Messengers of the Right: Media and the Modern Conservative Movement" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2010); Heather Hendershot, *What's Fair on the Air? Cold War Right-Wing Broadcasting and the Public Interest* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[128] Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 68-86;Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011).

mothers of the postwar boom – who organized the book clubs, arranged the speakers' series, and galvanized community activism on behalf of local and national issues alike.[129]

The manner in which this amateur spirit began to penetrate the party system likewise had some parallels to the club Democrats. Some existing paraparty organizations at the state level, like the California Republican Assembly, found themselves taken over by conservative insurgencies starting in the late 1950s, while conservatives in other states built new independent Republican groups from scratch.[130] And movement funders such as Roger Milliken, Lemuel Boulware, and J. Howard Pew took tentative initial steps to form and bankroll national mass-membership organizations dedicated to conservative advocacy.

One core locus for the emergence of issue-driven and ideological party activism on the Right, however, had no equivalent parallel among liberal Democrats. Intense ideological warfare – and eventual conservative triumph -- in the Young Republican and College Republican organizations at both the state and national level revealed Republican youths to be the canaries in the coalmine of future party transformations.[131] Key conservative movement activists and party operators had cut their teeth in Young Republican National Federation politics in the early postwar years, notably William Rusher and the campaign operative F. Clifton White – though the fact that they had belonged to a Dewey-aligned faction underscored the degree to which youth

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[129] McGirr, S*uburban Warriors*; Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage to the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[130] Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 165-166. More broadly, see Kurt Schuppara, *Triumph of the Right: The Rise of the California Conservative Movement, 1945-1966* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

[131] The relative significance and intensity of activism within Republican youth auxiliaries when compared with that of counterpart organizations in the Democratic Party throughout the second half of the twentieth century – and continuing into the twenty-first – is an asymmetry that warrants much more scholarly attention.

GOP activism took on increasing ideological coloring as the 1950s progressed.[132] By the time of the 1957 Young Republicans convention, committed conservatives representing a Midwestern-Sunbelt regional coalition had secured control of the national organization. Two years later, the federation passed a platform plank that explicitly denounced Eisenhower Republicanism.[133]

By the late 1950s, then, grassroots elements within the Republican Party, in auxiliary organizations, and in civil society increasingly espoused a consciously ideological movement spirit.[134] The translation of that spirit into a political mobilization behind a powerful new factional leader began occurring, ironically, within the very party-building initiatives that Eisenhower pursued during his second term in an effort to remake the national GOP along Modern Republican lines. Eisenhower's ambition as a presidential party leader far exceeded his capacity to change the ideological coloring of the party's most engaged activists, and thus his efforts to secure Modern Republicanism had the profoundly unintended consequence of empowering the Republican right.

"I still have a job of re-forming and re-vamping the Republican Party," Eisenhower wrote upon his reelection in 1956. Building Republican organizational capacity from the precinct level up would serve to provide "a strong basis for the Modern Republicanism that will best represent the interests of all the people."[135] To pursue both the manpower and ideological components of

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[132] Clif White noted the parallels in factional and ideological developments between the Young Republicans and the national party itself in 1957, saying that the Federation's factional problems "are as much symptomatic of the problems of the Republican Party as a whole as they are unique federation problems." F. Clifton White letter to Sullivan Barnes, October 15, 1957, Box 14, Folder "Republican Party (1957)," F. Clifton White Papers, Ashland University, Ashland, OH.

[133] John A. Andrew III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans For Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 25.

[134] This is the context for Bowen's finding that, compared to the early postwar years, "[b]y 1960, party insiders, who had initially backed candidates out of self-interest and patronage, factored ideology much more prominently into their decisions." Bowen, *The Roots of Modern Conservatism*, 173.

[135] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 57.

his party-building agenda simultaneously, the president and his appointed RNC chairman Meade Alcorn called for six regional conferences of party workers and officials in 1957 to discuss party organization and program, culminating in a Republican National Conference in Washington that summer. All seven meetings proved to be riven by ideological division, with conservative Republicans mobilizing to voice their criticism of the Modern Republican agenda. At the National Conference, the president only managed to deepen rather than mollify the division when he gave an address denying that intra-Republican disagreements "concerned our basic principles. I believe that they do not … Some of us Republicans have a talent for magnifying and advertising our differences. Our opponents then seize on these statements to throw up a smoke screen to conceal their own deep division. Why should we help them play that game?"[136]

Eisenhower and Alcorn's next party-building initiative, launched in the aftermath of the GOP's devastating electoral losses in the 1958 midterms, provided further occasion for those magnifiers of difference to exercise their talent. In early 1959 Alcorn appointed a Republican Committee on Program and Progress and tasked it with "providing the Republican Party with a concise understandable statement of our Party's long-range objectives in all areas of political responsibility."[137] The impetus for this new entity – commonly called the Percy Committee after its moderate chairman, Charles Percy – shared some similarities with the rationale for the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC) under Paul Butler. Both were responses to electoral losses that had seemed to reveal the need for a clearer and more identifiable national policy program that voters could associate with the party. But if the DAC became a vehicle for the Democrat's dominant liberal faction to amplify that liberalism under an official party imprimatur, the Percy

[136] Eisenhower speech, June 7, 1957, transcript of the Republican National Conference, in Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Papers.

[137] Quoted in the Republican Committee on Program and Progress, *Decisions for a Better America* (Garden City: Double Day and Co., 1960), 17.

Committee served as an effort by elite Modern Republican proponents to secure a moderate programmatic branding for their party. The president believed that the GOP's electoral misfortunes derived not only from a moribund national organization and poor candidate recruitment, but, relatedly, a conservative programmatic outlook that failed to project youth, vigor, or optimism. The Percy Committee, intentionally stacked with party outsiders and tasked with devising consensual policy positions on such themes as "The Impact of Science and Technology" and "Economic Opportunity and Progress," was intended to remedy this by institutionalizing Modern Republicanism.[138]

Though Percy and the RNC staffers who organized the committee's research and meetings worked to strike both a scholarly and non-ideological tone for the proceedings, participants from both the Modern Republican and conservative factions made the deepening fissures within the party unmistakably clear.[139] Thomas Kuchel typified the moderates' arguments regarding both political strategy and policy substance in his address at a March 1959 session. The moderate California senator, whom then-governor Earl Warren had originally appointed to fill Richard Nixon's seat, made a point of celebrating Warren's tenure as Chief Justice, including the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision, as part of a venerable party tradition of progressivism. Though Kuchel "regret[ted] to say" that Warren was "a controversial figure in this country," he insisted that the Chief Justice was both "a very great man and a very great Republican." Kuchel argued on both political and substantive grounds that the

[138] Alcorn described the decision to appoint a number of party outsiders among the 44 members of the Committee – including a Farmer of the Year, a Teacher of the Year, a recent head of the American Nurses' Association, and the vice president of the boilermakers union – at an RNC Executive Committee meeting, April 9, 1959, Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Party Papers.

[139] In addition to holding the seminar-style forum on principles and partisanship discussed at the outset of this chapter, Percy also commissioned scholarly discussion papers on policy and political history from an array of political scientists, including Robert Osgood, Joseph Cropsey, and Herbert Storing. See the session transcript of the Republican Committee for Program and Progress, March 13, 1959, Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Party Papers.

congressional GOP needed to abandon its alliance with southern Democrats in opposition to pro-labor and pro-civil rights legislation. But he insisted even to "those of you who disagree with some of the philosophy that I espouse" that the Republican Party "is big enough to have and … strong enough to have men of a conservative point of view, and I think it is big enough and strong enough to have men and women in it of a moderate to liberal point of view." Kuchel concluded by echoing Arthur Larson's formulization of a centrist Republican program that would be deliberately positioned between the left and right poles contained within the Democratic Party. "I do not believe we should be a party of extremists," he said. "I believe the extremists are located in the Democratic ranks far more than the Republican ranks."[140]

A forceful, if oblique, counterargument came later in the same session, during a presentation by the new chairman of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee who also happened to be the rapidly rising star of American conservatism. By 1959, Arizona's Barry Goldwater had already achieved conservative renown for the consistency – so unusual in a professional politician – with which he framed his positions on disparate issues within an overarching ideological vision. An across-the-board anti-statist conservative, Goldwater was particularly notable in the Senate for his hostility to organized labor and the populist, pro-worker rhetoric he employed in the service of denouncing union leadership. His smashing reelection victory in 1958 in the face of a concerted labor-backed effort to unseat him bucked the Republican trend that year and won him newfound national attention.[141]

Goldwater's presentation before the Percy Committee was designed in part to make the strategic case that a party comeback did not, in fact, require a reversal of position on labor policy

[140] Session transcript of the Republican Committee for Program and Progress, March 13, 1959, Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Party Papers.

[141] Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, "Origins of the Conservative Ascendancy: Barry Goldwater's Early Senate Career and the De-Legitimization of Organized Labor," *Journal of American History* 95 (December 2008): 678-709.

or any other core issue. In his description of the 1958 Republican successes in Arizona, he emphasized the primacy of a clear party program over the individual attributes of any of the candidates. He cited analyst Samuel Lubell's post-election work surveying Arizona voters to find out why the state "went against the trend. Voter after voter interviewed said they voted for us because they knew what we stood for. … Our position in Arizona was unambiguous and uncompromising, and it was clearly conservative, afraid neither of the word, nor its connotations." Goldwater combined his analysis of the Arizona campaign in 1958 with an historical argument about the strategic daftness of "me, too" party policies dating back to 1948. The conclusion he reached directly contrasted with Kuchel and other's defense of party heterodoxy. "Principle is basic. That is the first consideration," Goldwater insisted. "It is axiomatic that a party must finally deteriorate into nothing if it becomes obsessed with technique and forgets its basic meaning and purpose … The trouble is not that we are Republican. The trouble may be that we are not Republican enough."[142]

A day later, during the forum on principles and partisanship discussed at the outset of this chapter, Goldwater's aide Stephen Shadegg insisted that a fundamental ideological divide over the very "nature of man" defined contemporary America's politics, if not yet its parties. For a committee dominated by Modern Republicans seeking to broaden and brighten the GOP's programmatic image, Goldwater and Shadegg served as skunks at the garden party. But their argument for marshalling the Republican Party in the service of ideological battle galvanized more party activists than did the bromides issued forth by the Percy Committee. That committee's final report, published in book form as *Decisions for a Better America* in 1960, covered a laundry list of policy issues but did little to improve Modern Republicanism's

[142] Session transcript of the Republican Committee for Program and Progress, March 13, 1959, Series 1A, Reel 17, Republican Party Papers.

reputation for vague philosophical straddling. Its lack of ideological coherence and distinctiveness strongly contrasted with the parallel output of the DAC on the Democrats' side. Conservative Republicans saw in it only capitulation and crypto-liberalism – "the ultimate, it may be hoped," Goldwater speechwriter Karl Hess later wrote, "in the lemming-like Republican urge to accept Democratic programs, tacitly approve Democratic principles, but to propose implementing them in a more businesslike manner."[143] *Decisions for a Better America* barely made a ripple among American political readers and commentators. Another volume released in 1960 – a compendium of Goldwater's speeches and writings polished into book form by William F. Buckley's brother-in-law and released under the senator's name as *The Conscience of a Conservative* – took aim at the statist New Deal philosophy that reflected "the view of a majority of leaders of one of our parties, and of a strong minority among the leaders of the other."[144] The book became a best-seller. Over half a million copies were in print by November.[145]

"Everything Should Be an Issue"

As participant memoirs and historical scholarship alike have detailed, the tributaries of conservative activism flowing through the later 1950s first converged behind the political leadership of Barry Goldwater in 1960, well before his successful capture of the GOP nomination four years later.[146] Conservative intellectuals alarmed at the chameleonism and opportunistic leftward drift of Richard Nixon, the party's likely presidential nominee, looked to Goldwater as the potential channel through which ideological energy could be put to practical

[143] Karl Hess, *In a Cause that Will Triumph: The Goldwater Campaign and the Future of Conservatism* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 59-60.

[144] Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (New York: Victor Publishing Company, 1960), 7-8.

[145] Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 63.

[146] F. Clifton White, *Suite 3505: The Story of the Draft Goldwater Movement* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1967), 19-29; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 3-157; Gifford, *The Center Cannot Hold*.

use. "The situation of conservatism in the United States," Frank Meyer wrote to his fellow *National Review* editors in May of 1960, "presents a sharp contrast between the steady growth of conservative influence on the intellectual level and the cumulative debacle on the political level." Only the "the emergence of Barry Goldwater as a principled conservative" on the national scene "gives us a public political symbol through which our position is expressed in the political arena."[147] The emerging conservative stronghold of young Republican organizations, meanwhile, mobilized early and dramatically on behalf of a draft-Goldwater movement for vice president, starting in the Midwestern Federation of College Young Republican Clubs. Within half a year, the student campaign behind Goldwater took on a new organizational form, Young Americans for Freedom, at a meeting in William F. Buckley's Connecticut estate.[148] And finally, within formal GOP ranks, a delegate drive to nominate Goldwater for the presidency materialized – and it did so in the heart of Dixie, at the South Carolina Republican convention.

That South Carolina would provide the triggering action – "the catalytic agent," in F. Clifton White's words – that launched Goldwater toward an active candidacy in the 1960 convention helps to underscore the centrality of civil rights politics to the conservative ascendency within the GOP.[149] The alignment of the party's left-right ideological division with competing positions on civil rights, already close in the early postwar years, had tightened further in the wake of *Brown vs. Board*, massive resistance, and the beginnings of the civil rights movement's "classical" phase of direct action against Jim Crow. Racial conservatism was as much a component of movement leaders' fusionist intellectual project as economic orthodoxy

[147] Frank Meyer memo to William F. Buckley, Jr., L. Brent Bozell, Priscila Buckley Bozell, William Rusher, James Burnham, May 10, 1960, in Series I, Box 10, Folder "Inter-Office Memos (1960)," William F. Buckley, Jr., Papers, Archives and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.

[148] Gifford, *The Center Cannot Hold*, 143.

[149] White, *Suite 3505*, 19.

and moral traditionalism. In the later 1950s, *National Review* and other conservative organs helped to refine and legitimize "color-blind" states-rights and constitutional arguments against federal intervention on civil rights.[150] The *Conscience of a Conservative* typified this emerging line in the two chapters it devoted to "States' Rights" and "Civil Rights," respectively.[151]

That ideological work dovetailed with a nascent effort at Republican party-building in the state of South Carolina, on hard-edged conservative terms. The Palmetto State proved a first mover in this regard. Republican organizations in most states remained non-ideological shells, while Eisenhower and Meade Alcorn did pursue a significant RNC initiative at building southern GOP organizational capacity, but one that eschewed a strongly conservative, and segregationist, posture. Instead, the RNC's "Operation Dixie" in the Eisenhower era focused on building Modern Republican organizations and deepening party inroads among young urban professionals in the peripheral South, where the president had made the most gains in 1952 and 1956.[152]

[150] As illustrated by William F. Buckley's notorious 1957 editorial explicitly defending southern racial voting restrictions on the grounds that "the white community in the South" was "the advanced race," the task of deracializing the rhetoric and justification for civil rights opposition was a difficult one, achieved haltingly but concertedly by conservative ideologists, both at *National Review* and elsewhere, in the years that followed. William F. Buckley, Jr., "Why the South Must Prevail," *National Review*, August 24, 1957. For close analyses of this process as pursued by elite intellectuals, popular media commentators, and grassroots activists, respectively, see Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right*, 45-76; William P. Hustwit, *James J. Kilpatrick: Salesman for Segregation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 41-142; and Stephanie R. Rolph, "Courting Conservatism: White Resistance and the Ideology of Race in the 1960s," in *The Right Side of the Sixties: Reexamining Conservatism's Decade of Transformation*, eds. Laura Jane Gifford and Daniel K. Williams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21-40.

[151] The book condemned "the abandonment of States' Rights by the Democratic Party" and "the unmistakable tendency of the Republican Party to adopt the same course," though it separated that argument from a discussion of racial segregation in the South. It then upheld individuals' constitutionally protected right to vote but denied a constitutional requirement for "States to maintain racially mixed schools." Goldwater, *Conscience of a Conservative*, 17, 27. Goldwater would employ similar logic – that no Constitutional right existed implying a prohibition on racially discriminatory practices by private parties, and thus the federal government could not compel states to enforce such prohibitions – to explain his opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

[152] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 63-66.

What happened in South Carolina was different, and a harbinger of how conservative Republican advances would be made in other southern states in later years.[153] As would be the case elsewhere, in an illustration of the profound stickiness of lifetime partisan allegiance even among some of the most staunchly right-wing Democrats, northern transplants proved central to the emergence of conservative Republicanism in South Carolina. Even the 1948 Dixiecrat candidate himself, Strom Thurmond, remained a Democrat for another four years and was peripheral to the state GOP activity on behalf of Goldwater in 1960. At the center of that activity instead was Gregory D. Shorey, Jr., a Massachusetts native, owner of a sports equipment company, and rock-ribbed conservative who had risen through the South Carolina GOP ranks in the 1950s as one of several younger activists battling a patronage-oriented Old Guard. As party chairman in 1960, he worked with a fellow northern transplant, the textile magnate and Republican financier Roger Milliken, to assure a surprise vote at the state convention pledging all fourteen delegates to a Goldwater presidential candidacy. As Milliken told a local journalist, the vote was "designed to call attention of GOP bigwigs and Nixon personally of conservative sentiment in these parts."[154] Unsurprisingly for Yankee businessmen like Shorey and Milliken, Goldwater's anti-labor stances and economic conservatism were as significant components of his ideological appeal as his constitutional opposition to civil rights legislation. Conservative ideology was broadening in the South – coming increasingly to resemble the national brand – at the same time that national conservatism became more "southernized" through a deepening and increasingly populist approach to racial issues.

[153] The South Carolina effort is discussed in Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 46-49, 76; Gifford, *The Center Cannot Hold*, 146-167, and Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America*, 128-130.

[154] Gifford, *The Center Cannot Hold*, 151.

Though conservative Republicans' pursuit of this kind of southern strategy met with loud opposition from GOP moderates, a basic imbalance in the factional politics of civil rights was already apparent within the party by 1960. To be sure, key Republican officials crusaded aggressively on behalf of civil rights. Most notably in 1960, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller withheld his endorsement of Richard Nixon until he could secure an aggressive civil rights plank in the party platform in the infamous (to conservatives) "Treaty of Fifth Avenue."[155] Moreover, as typified by President Eisenhower's dispatching of federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957 to enforce the *Brown* decision, Republican governance in the executive branch in the later 1950s, while insufficient in the eyes of civil rights activists, was hardly calculated to win the political allegiance of segregationist southerners.[156]

Nevertheless, support for civil rights was more prevalent at the elite level of Republican office-holders working to sustain electoral coalitions than it was in the middle range of engaged party activists and officials. At least as early as the immediate postwar years, and likely earlier still, northern Democratic activists showed at once more pervasive and more intense support for civil rights than their Republican counterparts.[157] "Basically and sociologically," Theodore White wrote in *Collier's* in 1956, "Republican state organizations are unlikely to go out for the

[155] Robert T. Hartmann, "Nixon, Rockefeller OK Platform in Secret Talk," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1960.

[156] For accounts emphasizing the strength of pro-civil rights politics within the Eisenhower administration and the GOP, and the continued existence of a plausible alternative path for the party on race well into the 1960s, see David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007); Timothy Thurber, "Forgotten Architects of the Second Reconstruction: Republicans and Civil Rights, 1945-1972," in *Making Sense of American Liberalism*, eds. Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 181-201; and Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[157] Brian D. Feinstein and Eric Schickler, "Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered," *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (Spring 2008): 1-31; Anthony S. Chen, Robert W. Mickey, and Robert P. Van Houweling, "Explaining the Contemporary Alignment of Race and Party: Evidence from California's 1946 Ballot Initiative on Fair Employment," *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (Fall 2008): 204-228; Brian Schickler, Kathryn Pearson, and Feinstein, "Congressional Parties and Civil Rights Politics from 1933 to 1972," *Journal of Politics* 72 (July 2010): 672-689.

predominantly working class Negro unless flogged into it by the White House." As one RNC official told his chairman two years later, "How many Republicans would sit down in their own home and break bread with a Negro? I've done it, but even I don't say much about it for fear other Republicans would look down their nose at me."[158] The lack of a sizeable activist bloc for whom civil rights advocacy was a salient and central concern led the Nixon campaign in 1960 to err much further on the side of caution against alienating southern whites than against African Americans. The campaign neglected black mobilization, and Nixon went to great lengths to avoid public interaction with civil rights activists, much to the vocal dismay of the RNC's head of minority outreach.[159] Already in 1960, as a consequence both of the balance of pressure within the party base and the developing political landscape for pursuing new voters, the GOP's racial strategy was beginning to tilt in the direction that Barry Goldwater, one year later, would articulate to a Republican audience in Atlanta. "We're not going to get the Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 and 1968," the senator declared, "so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are."[160]

The Nixon-Kennedy race of 1960 was determinedly non-ideological. As they had done in 1956, *National Review*'s staff debated whether or not to publish an endorsement. William Rusher, always the most caustic when it came to considering the prospect of turning the GOP into a conservative vessel, argued strongly against offering any endorsements. Even to pursue the hope of building and sustaining a viable conservative presence within that party seemed foolish to him. "I think that both major parties, as presently constituted, are simply highly efficient vote-gathering machines," he wrote. "It is pointless to upbraid such a machine for

[158] Both White and the RNC official are quoted in Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics*, 175.

[159] Gifford, *The Center Cannot Hold*, 83.

[160] Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 26.

failing to concern itself with principles." Rusher held out hope for the independent emergence in the coming years of a "new and more highly ideologized political party."[161] As it would happen, just such an ideologized party seemed to appear, with deceptive speed, by 1964. And contrary to Rusher's prediction, the party in question turned out to be that very "machine" itself, the GOP. It would, however, prove significantly less efficient than usual at the task of vote-gathering that year.

The story of the 1964 Goldwater insurgency is a tale that movement conservatives and their scholarly chroniclers have long reveled in detailing. From the organizational spadework of F. Clifton White's "Syndicate" of Young Republican allies, to the parliamentary maneuvering by which Goldwaterites swept the party offices in charge of delegate selection in one state after another, to the serially faltering efforts by established Republican moderates to beat Goldwater to the nomination, the tale makes for an irresistible origin story for the modern right. The Goldwater insurgency was all the more remarkable for having been carried out through party nomination channels that had yet to be rendered more easily permeable via reform. Its success provided a potent demonstration of the practical power of ideological zeal when effectively mobilized in pursuit of intraparty goals. Goldwaterites' Republican opponents underscored this point by frequently casting conservatives' factional efforts as illegitimate and unfair play. "These groups are attempting to take over Republican committees and clubs in an effort to move the party to the rights by internal force," one complained, "rather than create a climate of opinion

[161] William Rusher memo to William F. Buckley, Jr., October 10, 1960, Series I, Box 10, Folder "Inter-Office Memos (1960)." Buckley Papers.

which would make such a move profitable in terms of votes."[162] Nelson Rockefeller similarly warned of "subversion from the radical right," which was currently "boring from within."[163]

As we have seen, however, the activists working on Goldwater's behalf were hardly foreign entities or interlopers in GOP affairs, and the 1964 campaign itself was not actually the origin story of legend. Rather, it represented a culmination of organizational and ideological work that had been shaped by two decades of factional debate within the Republican Party. In this sense it was appropriate that *A Choice Not an Echo*, the surprise bestselling campaign book by the extraordinary grassroots organizer Phyllis Schlafly, framed its case for Goldwater conservatism in an account of a quarter century of intraparty betrayal, extending back even farther than the Dewey-Taft wars. Schlafly's book offered a conspiratorial vision of party irresponsibility, depicting the marginalization of the Republican Party's conservative majority as the work of a cabal of "secret kingmakers."[164]

The long factional struggle to which Schlafly alluded had, over time, taken on more fully elaborated ideological content. By 1964, Goldwater delegates were startling longtime students of American party politics by espousing a conception of partisan strength that seemed downright foreign. "Even if the party loses," one told a political scientist, "at least we have presented a clear alternative to the people. At least we'll have a strong party." What did he mean by strong? "Cohesive, united on principles." Another delegate reveled in the way that ideologically driven partisanship drew more and more issues into the orbit of philosophical contestation. "I think

[162] "Right Wing Upsurge," *Civic Affairs Monthly*, Nov./Dec., 1961, in Box 15, Folder "1961," White Papers.

[163] Andrew, *The Other Side of the Sixties*, 178.

[164] Phyllis Schlafly, *A Choice Not an Echo: The Inside Story of How American Presidents are Chosen* (Alton: Pere Marquette Press, 1964).

everything should be an issue," she said. "Cuba should be an issue. Civil Rights should be an issue. This is the first time a race will be on issues. I think it's wonderful."[165]

Most American voters that year found it less wonderful. Goldwater's loss was historically massive – though so were his victories in the South, six months after his Senate vote against the Civil Rights Act. He won five southern states outright and notched major Republican gains over the party's showing four years earlier in virtually every other one. The totals outside of Dixie, however, seemed to provide ample evidence for one commentator's post-election insistence that Republicans "cannot win in this era of American history" except as a "me, too" party.[166]

Factional strife predictably resumed in the aftermath of the debacle. The avowedly non-ideological "organization man" Ray Bliss was installed at the RNC to refocus party efforts on ground games, candidate recruitment, and party professionalization rather than divisive ideological battles. Liberal Republican organizations like the Ripon Society, intellectually and politically savvy if thinly supported at the grassroots, moved to repudiate the Goldwaterites. In turn, predictably, Goldwaterites blamed the defeat on moderate Republicans' abandonment of their candidate, and organized a new satellite organization, the American Conservative Union, to sustain a coordinated conservative presence within the GOP. The Republican right was not going anywhere. But it would take another decade of continued factional efforts and political experimentation, amidst a shifting and expanding issue terrain, before conservatives could consolidate power within the Republican Party again.

[165] Wildavsky, "The Goldwater Phenomenon," 397-398.

[166] Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 513.

Part II: Redrawing the Lines, 1968-1970

Part II: Introduction

In the 1970s, diagnoses of American political parties tended to sound more like eulogies. David Broder told book readers in 1971 that *The Party's Over*.[1] Political scientists' debates over realignment segued into a new discussion of partisan *de*alignment.[2] The chief electoral advisors to the decade's hapless presidents echoed the sentiment. "Realignment is less likely than the disintegration of both parties," wunderkind pollster Patrick Caddell told a journalist in 1975, predicting "the death of the two-party system" shortly prior to joining Jimmy Carter's longshot presidential campaign.[3] "Elections have become virtually totally candidate-oriented," observed Gerald Ford's pollster Robert Teeter a year later, at a Republican National Committee meeting following the president's reelection loss to Carter. He called that election "a non-partisan media event" carried out before an electorate inexorably shedding its party ties.[4]

Later, in the aftermath of a midterm congressional election in 1978 that had produced, on the surface, unremarkable results, here was how veteran reporter Lance Morrow described the national scene. "Today," Morrow declared in *Time* magazine, "the parties have virtually collapsed as a force in American politics. This fall's campaigns were emphatic confirmation of a trend that has been at work for a decade or more: the draining of energy and resources away from the parties and into a sort of fragmented political free-for-all." The disintegration of the parties and "chaotic individualism of American politics" were as evident in the behavior of elected

[1] David S. Broder, *The Party's Over: The Failure of Politics in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

[2] Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1970), 91-134; Everett Carll Ladd, Jr. and Charles D. Hadley, *Transformations of the American Party System: Political Coalitions from the New Deal to the 1970s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975).

[3] Michael J. Malbin, "Party System Approaching Crossroads in 1976 Election," *National Journal*, May 23, 1975.

[4] Robert Teeter, "The Present National Political Attitude as Determined by Pre-Election Polls," November 1976, Box 62, Folder "Post-Election Analysis - Speeches and Reports (2)," Robert Teeter Papers, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (GRFL), Ann Arbor, MI.

officials – like those populating a Congress that "now has all the discipline of a five-year-old's birthday party" – as in the rising rates of self-declared independence, split ticket voting, and disengagement among the mass electorate. Institutions connecting voters with politicians, Murrow reported, no longer served to aggregate interests into stable party alignments, producing a disorderly political world populated by entrepreneurial politicians, candidate-centered campaigns, and ad hoc legislative coalitions. Procedural reforms crippled parties' ability to control nominations, television provided a direct link between office-seeking individuals and the public, and proliferating special interest groups mobilized to push policymaking in multiple directions simultaneously. Underlying these changes in the organization of politics, he claimed, was a popular disenchantment with parties that reflected the broader "atomizing process of American culture" – a turning away from traditional institutions of all kinds. Morrow feared a day when the two parties would be "reduced to performing merely decorative and ceremonial duties," with candidates using the party label as "a flag of convenience, and no more."[5]

Something of the declensionist cast of the 1970s discourse on parties has survived to color the decade's political historiography. To the limited extent that historians of the 1970s have addressed the party system at all, it has been to note the deepening incoherence and irrelevance of party politics and the unintended fragmenting effects of misguided reforms.[6] They fit the disaggregating trajectory of the parties into a broader cultural and institutional context

[5] Lance Morrow, "The Decline of the Parties," *Time*, November 20, 1978.

[6] Examples include James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76-85; and Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W.. Norton & Co., 2010) 35, 39, 145.

dominated by processes of fragmentation, flux, dissolution, atomization – that great 1970s historical wringer yielding an Age of Fracture that would last for decades to come.[7]

The trouble with this enduring image of party decline in the 1970s is that it obscures contrasting developments whose significance has only become evident in hindsight. Along various measurable dimensions of strength, coherence, and influence, American parties did indeed reach a nadir in the 1970s following years of decline. But the *reversal* of those trend lines, and the beginning of a gradual but uninterrupted thirty-year progression toward ever-greater partisanship – that too is a story of the 1970s.

Take measurements of mass partisanship among those atomizing ordinary Americans. The proportion of voters answering "Independent" to surveyors' question of party affiliation hit a plateau in 1974 and began to decline around 1978.[8] The prevalence of "split-ticket" voting similarly peaked in the mid-1970s then began to decline, while one estimate of the influence of party labels on vote choice showed a gradual, long-term rebound of such "party effects" after 1972 for presidential voting and 1978 for congressional voting.[9] As for the behavior of elected officials in Morrow's undisciplined kindergarten Congress, it too had already begun slowly to reorient along party lines by the time of his quip – a process encouraged rather than hampered by the decade's congressional reforms, as will be seen. Both the frequency of votes cast in which a majority of one party voted against a majority of the other and the margins of those vote

[7] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 85-90. See also Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001) and Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[8] James L. Sundquist pointed this out as early as 1983 in "'Whither the American Party System?' Revisited," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 98 (Winter 1983/4): 576. It is reconfirmed in Larry Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior," *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 44 (2000): 35-37.

[9] Barry C. Burden and David C. Kimball, *Why Americans Split Their Tickets: Campaigns, Competition, and Divided Government* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 5, 66; Bartels, "Partisanship and Voting Behavior," 42.

differences began to rise starting in the early 1970s.[10] And rather than reflecting mere reversions to some midcentury norm after temporary drops, these turnarounds would be revealed in time to be the beginning of a new, decades-spanning march of ever-rising partisanship.

What accounts for the dissonance between observers' impression of party politics in the 1970s and the partisan resurgence that appears to have originated in those years? A second, related set of incipient trends offers a clue. Trough-and-rebound arcs similar to those traced by measurements of party strength during the 1970s can also be seen in measures of ideological sorting among the two parties. The parties' ideological muddle at midcentury, a central theme in previous chapters, can be captured by a prevailing measurement of ideological distance between average members of the two congressional parties. That figure remained at historic lows for the middle decades of the century – only to begin an unbroken upwards climb towards greater polarization starting in 1977.[11] Within the mass electorate, meanwhile, trends in the measured association of partisan affiliation with self-described ideology and issue positions also showed long-term increases following early-1970s lows.[12] Unsurprisingly, the percentage of Americans polled during presidential election years who affirmed the existence of meaningful differences between the two parties hit a nadir in 1972 and slowly, steadily increased after that.[13]

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[10] Barbara Sinclair, *Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2004), 6-7. Such majority-against-a-majority roll calls are known as "party votes" and the standard measurement of their degree of lopsidedness is called the "party distance score."

[11] The measurement is known by the acronym DW-NOMINATE. Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 6.

[12] Richard Fleisher and Jon R. Bond, "Evidence of Increasing Polarization Among Ordinary Citizens," in *American Political Parties: Decline or Resurgence?*, eds. Jeffrey E. Cohen, Richard Fleisher, and Paul Kantor (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), 55-79; Matthew Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 38-77; Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 45.

[13] See Table 2B.4 in the American National Election Studies, *Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior*, http://www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab2b_4.htm.

The following chapters argue that this very ideological sorting helped to drive the partisan resurgence. One explanation for the declinism permeating the discussion of party politics at the time is that few contemporary observers drew such a relationship between partisanship and ideology, because their conception of the party system emphasized precisely its non-ideological nature. American parties, according to this view, were broad-based, pragmatic coalitions incorporating diverse interests and outlooks, and partisan strength was measured in part by professionals' ability to *withstand* the pressures of "purist" and issue-driven activists. But to counterpose parties and ideology in this way was to misapprehend some of the changes to the political system emerging in the 1970s.

Previous chapters have recounted the postwar circulation of ideas concerning partisanship and ideology and the frequently vexed efforts of activists on both the left and right during the 1950s and 1960s to forge a national two-party politics of starker programmatic contrast – a choice, rather than an echo. During the 1970s, the interplay of long-term developments with the concerted action of engaged activists, reformers, and political elites helped at last to render the two major parties more conducive to ideological sorting and differentiation, providing a new basis for the structure and orientation of party politics that lasted for decades to come. By this account, the 1970s are better seen as an age of dynamic flux and experimentation for the parties than as the end state of parties' terminal decline. Indeed, the party system that 1970s activists helped to initiate would ultimately consist of less, rather than more, fragmentation – as parties, along the three dimensions traced in previous chapters, became increasingly centralized in their national organizations, increasingly defined and differentiated by issues, and increasingly capable of disciplined action. Chapter Four reassesses the decade's liberal-led reforms of both presidential nominating procedures and congressional rules and structure, revealing the

important currents of responsible-party thought motivating key reform architects and showing how those reforms helped to create a newly receptive institutional setting for programmatic party-building by activists. Chapters Five and Six shift focus from the institutional setting to the activist mobilizations themselves, taking a look at who it was who engaged in these programmatic efforts during the 1970s, and with what consequences for the parties.

Crucial to this story in the 1970s was the gradual fulfillment of a key goal of those activists: the emergence of two-party competition in the South. Southern realignment enticed conservatives with the promise of new sources of conservative Republican electoral support as much as it enticed liberals with the promise of finally marginalizing the Democrats' pesky internal conservative faction. The forward march of this regional electoral process is a key factor both in the direction of change during the 1970s as well as its unheralded quality, since the realignment was slow and halting enough to be obscured by cross-cutting factors seeming to indicate partisan decline rather than transformation. But the partisan changes were not only regional, and stemmed more from the efforts of engaged activists and political elites than from mass electoral behavior in any region.[14] Ultimately, the arc of change traced in these chapters from Nixon's presidency to Ronald Reagan's inauguration involves a gradually tightening alignment between the policy positions and partisan affiliation of those comprising the "base" of each party. It was a change wrought, in parallel if asymmetrical ways, by actors in both parties.

[14] In this sense the chapters share the emphasis on "massive mobilization by activists, organizations, and political elites" made by Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer in accounting for political change during the decade, though not their singular focus on the right. Schulman and Zelizer, "Introduction," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Schulman and Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3.

Chapter 4: The Age of Party Reform

The first half of the 1970s saw two historic waves of party reforms initiated by Democratic activists – one aimed at the party's presidential nominating procedures and national structure, the other aimed at its organization in Congress. These were dramatic, highly contested efforts yielding far-reaching institutional changes that affected both parties. But if it is a cliché of reforms to invoke the law of unintended consequences, those of the 1970s were notable for the speed with which popular and scholarly discussion came to lament their ill effects. Changes that proponents had initiated in the name of saving an endangered party system came soon enough to be blamed for that system's very endangerment. In 1970, the key party reform commission had declared that the alternative to opening up the Democratic Party's nominating procedures would be either fragmentation or "the anti-politics of the street."[1] But by 1977, the prevailing tendency to blame the would-be treatment for the disease was typified by political scientist Everett Carll Ladd, Jr.,'s declaration in *Fortune* that "'Reform' is Wrecking the U.S. Party System."[2]

What did these reforms entail? The nominating changes emerged out of the debacle of the 1968 Democratic convention. The Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection – commonly referred to as the McGovern-Fraser Commission after its two succeeding chairmen, South Dakota Senator George McGovern and Minnesota Congressman Donald Fraser – established uniform standards for state nominating systems emphasizing transparency, grassroots participation, and "out-group" representation in convention delegations. One byproduct of states' implementation of the reforms, largely unintended by the reformers, was a rapid proliferation of primary systems. The reform impetus continued for a decade after the guidelines' enactment, as

[1] Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, *Mandate for Reform* (Washington, DC: DNC, 1970), 49.

[2] Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., "'Reform' Is Wrecking the U.S. Party System," *Fortune* (November 1977).

three successor commissions and a party charter-writing process tinkered continuously with the rules while consolidating McGovern-Fraser's core transformations. As for Congress, among the reforms made between 1970 and 1975 were requirements that the Democratic caucus vote to approve committee chairs, a diffusion of authority to subcommittees, the enhancement of party leaders' institutional power, and, in the Senate, a reduction of the number of votes needed to break a filibuster. This thumbnail sketch hardly does justice to the scope of activities during the Age of Party Reform. But it can help to frame our understanding of the reputation that the period's reformers have enjoyed – or, more accurately, suffered from – since their heyday.

If the 1970s was a decade of party reform, it was also a decade dominated by agonized discussion of party decline. That discussion provided the context in which early observers first lodged their critiques of reform efforts. An initial, highly influential cycle of scholarly assessments cast the reforms as misguided interventions that weakened the parties, fragmented political authority, and hastened the rise of candidate-centered politics.[3] More oddly, party decline has *remained* the context in which many historians have depicted the reforms, despite the fact that the allegedly terminal decline of parties reversed itself in the decades after their implementation. To the limited extent that political historians of the 1970s have addressed these institutional changes, it has typically been either to note their unintended fragmenting effects or to implicate the reformers in a narrative centered on the decline of New Deal liberalism and its

[3] The major early statements on the reform of the parties' nominating procedures include Austin Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction: Party Reform in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dismantling the Parties: Reflections on Party Reform and Party Decomposition* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet Revolution: The Struggle for the Democratic Party and the Shaping of Post-Reform Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983); and Nelson Polsby, *Consequences of Party Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). A more positive assessment is found in William J. Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats: Reforming the Party Structure* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). Early assessments of congressional reforms emphasizing their decentralizing and fragmenting effects include Roger H. Davidson and Walter Oleszek, *Congress Against Itself* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, eds., *The New Congress* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981); and Burton D. Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform: The Reform Roots of the Special Interest Congress* (Cambridge: Schenkman Books, 1985).

Democratic vessel.[4] They have rightly come to view the 1970s as a "pivotal decade" producing lasting transformations in U.S. politics, but have mostly ignored the role that the institutional reconstruction of the parties played in those transformations.[5]

This chapter reassesses the reforms, their historical significance, and their connection to the subsequent emergence of a more programmatic, ideologically sorted party system. It argues that the two reform initiatives, of nomination procedures and congressional organization, were connected in both personnel and outlook to a greater extent than scholars have noted. It also argues that responsible party themes, especially the importance of *issue politics* and *party nationalization*, informed the outlook of key activists involved and helped shape some of the key outcomes of their efforts. Ultimately, reforms so often cast as contributors to party decline in fact helped to create a newly receptive institutional setting for programmatic, issue-based activism within the parties, with consequences for future ideological sorting and polarization.

The crucible of the 1960s shaped the rhetoric and dynamics of efforts during the Age of Party Reform, underlying the paradoxical combination of centralizing and decentralizing, process-oriented and ideologically-driven elements that long muddied reforms' reputation. New social movement mobilizations fuelled a political insurgency within the Democratic Party in

[4] Examples of the former include James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 76-85, and Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W.. Norton & Co., 2010) 35, 39, 145. Examples of the latter include Otis L. Graham, Jr., "Liberalism After the Sixties: A Reconnaissance, " in *The Achievement of Liberalism: The New Deal and its Legacies*, ed. William Chafe (Columbia University Press, 2003), 293-325; and Dominic Sandbrook, *Eugene McCarthy: The Rise and Fall of Postwar American Liberalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

[5] See Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo, 2001); Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Kalman, *Right Star Rising*; Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the 1970s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); and Daniel T. Rodgers, Age *of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011). A major exception to this lack of engagement with the 1970s reforms is Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and its Consequences, 1948-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). But Zelizer analyzes congressional reform in isolation from the Democratic Party's changes to its nomination procedures and national structure.

1968 that was issue-oriented and ideological. The insurgents attributed their political failure that year to a set of outdated party procedures and structures that empowered entrenched officials at the expense of activists motivated by substantive goals. The reform movement they launched utilized the participatory rhetoric of 1960s social movements rather than older responsible party emphases on discipline and majority rule, leading many scholars to cast them as latter-day, anti-party Progressives.[6] But the reformers' core goal resonated powerfully with classic responsible-party themes: an issue-oriented party, accountable to an activist base representing its ideological majority. This goal also underlay a shared set of antagonists, namely conservative southern state parties and northern urban machines. Participatory reforms would empower issue activists at the expense of professionals in state and local parties motivated more typically by patronage and organizational incentives. Because the reforms' implementation required new assertions of national party power over states while benefitting activists concerned with national issues, the effort also shared the responsible party goal of nationalization. Party nationalization in this sense did not mean the geographic expansion of the party – indeed, central to the reform project was the disempowerment of the party's conservative southerners – but rather the centralization of institutional and power in national organs dominated by the party's liberal majority.

The movement for congressional reform that mobilized in parallel with party reform and with the support of an overlapping activist network pursued the same core goals. Congressional reformers targeted the seniority norm because it entrenched conservative southern members in

[6] Assessments emphasizing a contrast between responsible party and McGovern-Fraser tenets include Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction*, 42-48; Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite: Men and Women in National Politics* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1976), 354-355; James W. Ceaser, "Political Change and Party Reform," in *Political Parties in the Eighties*, ed. Robert Goldwin (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), 97-115; William J. Crotty, "The Philosophies of Party Reform," in *Party Renewal in America: Theory and Practice*, ed. Gerald M. Pomper (New York: Praeger, 1980), 31-50; Morris Fiorina, "The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics," *Daedalus* Vol. 109 (1980): 25-45; and Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 98-100. On the reformers as latter-day, anti-party Progressives, see James Ceaser, "Direct Participation in Politics," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* Vol. 34 (1981): 121-137; and Kirkpatrick, *The New Presidential Elite*, 355.

positions of great power as committee chairmen. Placing committee appointments instead in the hands of the caucus empowered the party's ideological majority while providing incentives for discipline. Ensuring majority rule in the party, and in the Senate as a whole via filibuster reform, fostered party nationalization by reducing the clout of a dissident sectional minority.

Within the context of a two-party system, the long-term consequence of "ideologizing" and nationalizing the Democratic Party both in presidential politics and lawmaking would be an ideological sorting-out of both major parties. Reformers were neither unaware nor leery of this consequence. But the fragmentary confusions accompanying this sorting process once it got underway would look to critics more like the chaotic fruits of destructive reform rather than the gradual fulfillment of an ideological realignment that reform helped to birth.

From Revolt to Reform

If the origins of the 1970s party reforms lay in the political conflicts of the 1960s, then the translation of insurgent social movement energies into an institutional reform project that would last a decade arguably began on June 23, 1968. That evening, 200 delegates to the Connecticut Democratic Party convention in Hartford staged a walk-out.

The meeting was meant to select the 44 state delegates to the national party convention in Chicago that August. Connecticut's Democratic Party was a traditional, tightly organized machine, and the way that the state convention had worked in years past was straightforward. The organization, under the control of longtime party boss John Bailey, would select the delegates, all officially unpledged to any presidential candidate. (This year, unofficially, the regulars were all Hubert Humphrey backers, as was Bailey.) At the national convention, the delegation would vote as a single bloc, since Connecticut, like a dozen other states, employed the "unit rule," which bound delegation minorities to majority decisions.

What made that year's state convention different were the insurgent antiwar campaigns of Eugene McCarthy and the late Robert Kennedy, which had managed to secure almost a fourth of the delegates.[7] That show of strength came as a shock to Bailey, who had predicted to the White House as recently as January that, at most, "10 or 15 state delegates out of 1,000 … might be noisy" at the state convention, and thus "there will be no problem at all."[8] In the face of insurgent delegates numbering instead in the hundreds, Bailey felt compelled at the outset of the convention to scrap the unit rule for the first time and to offer a handful of national delegation seats to McCarthy backers. The McCarthy forces, led by Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) activist Joe Duffy and local organizer Anne Wexler, demanded twelve of the 44 seats, in proportion to their claimed strength at the state convention. Nine was as high as regulars would let Bailey go. Invective rained down from the stage: officials condemned the antics of the McCarthy supporters, while Kennedy confidante Richard Goodwin denounced Bailey as "the last nonelected boss in America." Finally, Duffy announced his delegates' rejection of the party's offer, rounded up the troops, and marched out of the hall to loud boos from the regulars.[9]

What the exiles did next was consequential. A steering committee of McCarthy delegates and state campaign organizers met that night in West Hartford. All of them agreed immediately that a credentials challenge to the Connecticut delegation in Chicago would be necessary, but McCarthy's state coordinator persuaded them to pursue something further. The same obstacles that McCarthy supporters encountered in Connecticut in the run-up to the state convention – not

[7] They garnered these delegates through victories in town caucuses, committees, and "challenge primaries" mounted via petition drive. William Borders, "Connecticut Vote Buoys McCarthy," *New York Times*, April 11, 1968.

[8] John Bailey memo to W. Marvin Watson and The White House, January 5, 1968, Box 1, Folder "New England," W. Marvin Watson Office Files, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, TX.

[9] Christopher Lydon, "McCarthy People Quit Ct. Convention, Frustrated over Delegates to Chicago," *Boston Globe*, June 23, 1968.

only the procedural irregularities and arbitrary actions of local officials, but the closed nature of the system itself – were experienced by activists in other states. He argued that the credentials challenges planned for Chicago should have the backing of a report that would catalogue state nominating procedures across the country and make the case for systemic reform. They gave a moniker to the yet-to-be-assembled panel intended as the face of this report: the Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential Nominees. Over the next month, activists recruited six men and one woman to the body, to be chaired by Iowa's pro-McCarthy governor, Harold Hughes. This was a staff-driven operation, however. The full commission only met once.[10]

To deflect suspicions that the reform agenda was a mere stalking horse for McCarthy's candidacy, the organizers of what would come to be known as the Hughes Commission took pains to include a Humphrey supporter in its ranks. Donald Fraser fit the bill. The Minneapolis Congressman was a longtime Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party activist who remained loyal to his political mentor, Humphrey, while breaking with Lyndon Johnson's administration over its policies in Vietnam. His substantive sympathy for the insurgent campaigns' policy agenda was matched by a longstanding interest in party reform that attracted him to these activists' embryonic effort. Fraser had long had an affinity for parliamentary forms of governance featuring disciplined but permeable parties with clear policy agendas.[11] By 1968, he had assumed the chairmanship of the Democratic Study Group, the caucus of liberal House Democrats that was leading the charge in Congress to empower the party caucus and its

[10] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 14-17.

[11] Nicholas Lemann, "Can a DFL Statesman Defeat Senator Anderson?," *Metropolis*, 1977.

leadership. His acceptance of the vice chairmanship of this new Commission signified, in his mind, an application of the same reform impulse to a different party arena.[12]

The staff worked that summer on research for a report cataloguing inequities and inadequacies in state and territorial nominating systems as well as the national convention. The resulting report was published as *The Democratic Choice*. The Commission ensured the report's practical impact at the Chicago Convention in August through coordination among allied members of both the Rules Committee and Credentials Committee. This convention strategy had been shaped by the resolution of the Connecticut delegation dispute. The McCarthy delegates' walk-out there proved short-lived, as they eventually decided to accept the nine seats offered by John Bailey along with an added sweetener: two out of the delegation's committee slots.[13] Anne Wexler thus became a member of the Rules Committee, organizing a whip system to keep pro-reform members of the panel coordinated. She also ensured that a copy of *The Democratic Choice* was waiting for every member of the committee when it convened.[14]

In both the substance of its recommendations as well as the basis for its critique of the nominating system, the report would prove highly influential. "Events in 1968 have called into question the integrity of the convention system for nominating presidential candidates," *The Democratic Choice* declared. "Recent developments have put the future of the two-party system itself into serious jeopardy." Such developments included upheavals on campuses and in the ghettoes, which reflected growing popular alienation from the political system. The irregularities and non-responsiveness encountered by the insurgent campaigns threatened to compound this

[12] He also hoped his presence might be a moderating force on the group. See Ken Olson memo to Jim Wright, John Hoving, and J.D. Williams, August 12, 1968, Box 44, Folder "Political 1968 – Democratic National Convention Credentials Committee," James O'Hara Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

[13] William Borders, "Connecticut McCarthy Backers Take Bailey's Offer of 9 Votes," *New York Times*, Jul 3, 1968.

[14] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 26.

alienation, unless the the party made an effort to meet "the demand for more direct democracy and the call for an end to 'boss control' of the nominating machinery."[15]

The Commission recommended that certain actions be taken immediately in Chicago, most notably a prohibition on any delegation's enforcement of the unit rule and an aggressive implementation of the provisions in the Democratic National Committee (DNC)'s Call to the 1968 Convention relating to racial non-discrimination. The panel also prescribed an array of state-level procedural changes for the future, starting with the outright abolition of all methods of delegate selection lacking direct popular participaiton.[16] Further recommendations were organized around basic principles. "Meaningful access" required an end to proxy voting, secret caucuses, and informal or unpublicized rules for delegate selection. "Clarity of purpose" implied that voters would choose delegates for that role alone, without thereby selecting the same people as state party officers. The principle of timeliness meant that no delegates could be chosen more than six months prior to the national Convention, before the issues and candidates relavent to the election had emerged. (Over 600 delegates to the 1968 convention were chosen in *1966*.) Finally, the report advocated proportional representation of candidate preferences at all levels of the delegate selection process except winner-take-all primaries. As will be seen, all of these procedural critiques and prescriptions lived on in the reform efforts to come.

Just as important was the Hughes Commission's theory of the party system and political change. *The Democratic Choice* put new calls for reform in the context of nearly two centuries of evolution toward more direct democracy in presidential politics. More recent developments in communications technology, especially radio and television, "contributed to the continuing

[15] Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential Nominees, *Democratic Choice* (New York, 1968), 1, 13.

[16] Thirteen states and territories in 1968 chose their delegates entirely on the basis of appointments by state party executives or officials, and ten chose part of their delegations through such methods. *Mandate for Reform*, 17-20.

expansion of the democratic dimension of the selection of presidents." But most important were ongoing changes in the mass electorate. African Americans were increasingly dissatisfied with a role as "junior partners" in the New Deal Democratic coalition, putting them in conflict with northern party organizations at the state and city levels. "Meanwhile," the report claimed, "Negro demands for civil rights and the support of those demands by the Northern liberal wing of the Party have alienated the once Solid South and dropped the black belt from the list of states that could be counted on, or even hoped for, on the Democratic side in presidential elections."[17]

If the catylitic effects of the civil rights revolution created one stream of intra-party tensions and demands for institional reform, another stream grew out of a more gradual electoral development the Commission labeled "the emergence of the issue-oriented independent." "The electorate is generally more affluent and more widely educated," it argued. Stable partisan attachments have eroded, while "issue-oriented individuals who rank relatively abstract ideological questions high among the criteria by which they approve or disapprove of candidates have become a substantial portion of the electorate, as the Vietnam War has shown." How did this relate to the nominating system? The proliferation of issue-oriented voters "has taken a significant portion of the electorate outside the tightly-knit groups represented by Democratic party operatives."[18] The thrust of the commission's prescriptions was to empower issue-driven party activism relative to the exercise of control by those existing professionals.

In offering this analysis, the report's drafters had in mind most immediately those voters and activists influenced by the mobilizations of the 1960s, but their description of the increasing issue orientation in U.S. politics could also have described the "amateurs" analyzed by James Q.

[17] *The Democratic Choice*, 12, 13.

[18] *The Democratic Choice*, 14.

Wilson in 1962 and the "purists" of Nelson Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky's 1968 textbook.[19] By using the designation "issue-oriented," drafters implied that the key distinction between such voters and the party professionals was less a matter of differing issue positions than of differing relationships toward national issues *per se*. At the outset of McCarthy's candidacy in early 1968, journalist Andrew Hacker had identified this distinction as a key obstacle to the campaign's efforts. "The typical delegate is not only not chosen or pledged by a primary," he wrote, "but he is a local party loyalist. Most are year-round county committeemen, quite senior in service, and accustomed to going along with the leadership. Very few, especially among the Democrats, have opinions that are in any way ideological and quite a few have no opinions at all on national issues."[20] Hacker concluded that, while "in the best of political worlds it might be possible for the parties to reflect and incorporate the most pressing issues of the day in their candidates and platforms," such responsiveness was usually lacking. "We do not, then, have a really 'open' political system. It is smug and stolid and well-guarded by those who got into it first."

That system proved less well-guarded than Hacker had anticipated, given the surprising capacity of McCarthy and Kennedy (much of whose campaign, after his assassination, would hastily reassemble for the convention behind George McGovern) to amass delegates during the spring and summer of 1968. But the insurgent forces still entered the Chicago convention on August 26th facing an essentially insurmountable delegate deficit, which shaped their dual-track strategy. First, they would wage an all-out fight over the Vietnam plank of the platform, lodging substantive arguments for an unconditional halt to bombing as well as a political argument about the need for the two-party system to produce a viable choice for voters on such an important

[19] James Q. Wilson, *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron B. Wildavsky, *Presidential Politics: Strategies of American Electoral Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1968).

[20] Andrew Hacker, "The McCarthy Candidacy," *Commentary*, February 1968.

issue. Second, they would pursue procedural and credentials challenges that, short of shaking up the delegate counts sufficiently to give an alternative candidate to Humphrey a chance at the nomination, would at least lay the groundwork for fundamental reforms in later years. Famously, the platform fight made it to the convention floor, where the antiwar plank went down to defeat while still garnering 40 percent of the vote. Even more famously, violence outside the International Amphitheater escalated through the week as demonstrators clashed with police under the aggressive direction of Mayor Richard Daley, filling jail cells and hospitals by the hundreds and rendering Chicago a notorious watchword in convention history. This spectacle of discord provided the backdrop for fateful decisions on party reform garnering no such attention.

Battles within the Credentials Committee illustrated connections between a longstanding reform agenda related to the civil rights movement and the newer reform efforts. The number of credentials challenges in 1968 was unprecedented: seventeen in total, covering fifteen states.[21] Most Deep South states faced challenges on the basis of alleged violations of the Call's strong provisions regarding racial discrimination. Those provisions had made it into the Call thanks to the work of the Special Equal Rights Committee, a DNC panel established in the wake of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) challenge at the 1964 convention. The drama of that prior fight and the subsequent work of the committee helped ensure that both McCarthy *and* Humphrey endorsed the challenge made in 1968 against the Mississippi regulars, which called for the seating of the alternative slate led by civil rights activist Aaron Henry.[22] The Special Equal Rights Committee thus became a model for wresting institutional reforms from dramatic on-the-ground delegation fights, one that the new reformers took to heart. The McCarthy forces,

[21] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions, 1968* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1968), 88, 96-131.

[22] Aaron Henry letter to John Bailey, July 17, 1968, Box 29, Folder "Democratic Party: Democratic Convention, 1968: Credentials Contest: Mississippi," Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

whose credentials effort was headed by former MFDP counsel Joseph Rauh, took pains to build ties to alternative slates filing challenges in Alabama, Georgia, and Texas, thereby bootstrapping civil rights advocacy to the broader reform agenda they were developing at the convention.

The Credentials Committee upheld the Mississippi challenge and meted out partial victories to two other southern challengers. Both the Georgia regulars and Julian Bond's alternative slate were seated, while the Alabama regulars were seated only on condition of signing an oath pledging not to support any presidential ticket "other than the nominees of the Democratic National Convention." Though the specter of George Wallace set the context for this requirement, the issue of loyalty to the national party had been a lightning rod in Democratic conventions for decades and a principle highlighted by civil rights activists to achieve reforms. The decisions to force a pledge on one delegation and to fully or partially replace two others with self-described "national" Democrats marked steps in the nationalization of southern parties. This dynamic was also seen in the Special Equal Rights Committee's final report, which called for a Commission on Party Structure "to study the relationship between the National Democratic Party and its constituent State Democratic Parties, in order that full participation of all Democrats without regard to race, color, creed or national origin may be facilitated by uniform standards."[23]

Meanwhile, the reformers' broader effort was evident in the array of credentials challenges filed against northern delegations that were *unrelated* to racial discrimination, justified instead on the basis of principles more sweeping than those typically seen in party conventions. Challengers based their case against delegations in several states on the undemocratic character of the unit rule, the use of ex officio delegates, and delegate selection by unelected committees – all perfectly lawful devices. Challenges against Connecticut and

[23] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions*, 196, 198.

Minnesota touted novel principles relating to proportional representation of candidate preference and adherence to the Supreme Court's "one-man, one-vote" ruling in the allocation of state convention delegates.[24] The McCarthy forces' strategy in lodging such systemic challenges – mainly based on analyses in *The Democratic Choice* – was pragmatic, a short-term bid to sway delegates.[25] But they set in motion future reform efforts, offered as fig leafs by Humphrey backers to secure the nomination. The Credentials Committee rejected all of the northern challenges but included a resolution calling for the DNC to establish a new "Special Committee" to study delegate selection practices and recommend improvements following the principles of timeliness and participation.[26] This resolution, following the Special Equal Rights Committee's final report, became the second convention text calling for a reform commission.

The third and most important document giving an official mandate to party reforms emerged from the Rules Committee. There, Anne Wexler's whip system kept sympathetic members behind a series of resolutions drawn from the findings of the Hughes Commission. The Humphrey forces dismissed the commission as "an unofficial, largely self-appointed group," and successfully voted down all of the Wexler faction's resolutions.[27] Importantly, though, their strategy focused on limiting the reformers' short-term impact on the nomination rather than rebutting the substance of their arguments as laid out in *The Democratic Choice*. Indeed, the

[24] To be sure, challengers also frequently cited procedural irregularities and abuses, including rampant use of proxy voting, unpublished meeting times, and arbitrary enforcement of quorum requirements. The informality of many state parties served to foster such irregularities; in at least twenty states, written rules covering the delegate selection process were either non-existent or inaccessible to those wishing to participate. *Mandate for Reform,* 21.

[25] Lawyers for McCarthy memo to Eugene McCarthy, July 17, 1968, Box 29, Folder "Democratic Party: Democratic Convention, 1968: Credentials Contest," Rauh Papers.

[26] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions*, 199-200.

[27] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution,* 27.

Humphrey forces conceded the validity of many of those arguments.[28] In the process, they contributed to a growing consensus around the legitimacy of pursuing reforms after the election.

Whereas the Humphrey strategists and party regulars were satisfied to leave questions of reform to a purely advisory future commission issuing non-binding recommendations, however, the reformers seized the opportunity to put the power of party law behind the mandate of any prospective reform body. Wexler helped draft a Rules Committee minority report resolving that the Call to the 1972 Democratic Convention would include language *requiring* state parties to make "all feasible efforts" to adopt delegate selection procedures that allow for full and timely public participation and prohibiting the use of the unit rule at all levels of the process.[29] When the convention adopted that report on Tuesday, August 27, in a surprise 1,350-1,206 vote – the only victory for any minority report in 1968 – few except the reform activists themselves realized its potential significance. On top of the resolutions calling for a formal commission to study major party reforms, the convention had now committed the party to implementing such reforms for 1972 and provided guiding language for what kind of reforms they would be.

The post-convention survival of the commission idea owed to the same dynamics that had fostered its emergence. Democratic officials and Humphrey's campaign operation endorsed the commission largely as a means of reconciling with McCarthy and Kennedy supporters, while the Hughes Commission activist network remained fully engaged on the issue both during the desultory months of the fall campaign and after Humphrey's loss to Richard Nixon. A new national party chair elected in January 1969, Fred Harris, explicitly championed thoroughgoing reform. Humphrey, reeling from defeat and still mindful to repair relations with the party's

[28] Jim O'Hara memo to Lawrence O'Brien, Walter Mondale, Jim Wright, and Fred Harris, August 25, 1968, Box 44, Folder "1968 Democratic National Convention Credentials Committee," O'Hara Papers.

[29] *The Presidential Nominating Conventions*, 198.

insurgent wing, insisted at the January DNC meeting that "the winds of change are strong" and "will not be denied."[30] He endorsed resolutions authorizing Harris to appoint two reform commissions: a Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, to focus on nominating procedures and national-state party relations, and a Commission on Rules, focusing on the procedures of the party conventions themselves. Both resolutions passed by voice vote.

Harris and his aides selected members and staff for the two commissions with dual goals of achieving a degree of geographical and constituency-based representativeness while also ensuring solid majorities in favor of ambitious reform. To avoid exacerbating tensions with party regulars by placing Harold Hughes in charge of the delegate selection commission, Harris opted for what was, as of 1969, a more congenial compromise choice for chairman: South Dakota Senator George McGovern. Hughes would serve as vice-chairman, while two other members of his unofficial commission from the preceding year, Congressman Donald Fraser and former Kennedy campaign aide Fred Dutton, also received appointments. Organized labor had two representatives on the new commission; Aaron Henry held one of two "civil rights" seats; and two moderate southern party leaders, Will Davis of Texas and LeRoy Collins of Florida, also accepted membership. The 28-member panel also featured two political scientists steeped in the scholarship on reform and comparative party systems: the advocate-turned-critic of responsible party doctrine, Austin Ranney, and a leading U.S. scholar of British politics, Samuel Beer.

If the official membership of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection tilted towards reformers, the composition of the staff that McGovern and Harris recruited did so to a greater extent. McGovern's longtime aide Robert Nelson headed it, while his 1968 convention coordinator Ken Bode served as research director and McCarthy campaigner Eli

[30] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 29.

Segal served as staff counsel. Wexler, too much of a lightning rod to be appointed directly to the commission, used her position on a panel of outside consultants to maximum effect. Like the Hughes Commission, the new panel would fatefully prove a staff-driven and dominated outfit.

"By the People Rather than By the Bosses"

The preceding origin story of what became known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission is worth examination precisely because it embodied themes, actors, and patterns that would recur during the ensuing reform process. The constellation of forces on each side proved an important constant. From 1968 on, the most visible proponents of reform were those youthful, educated participants in McCarthy and Kennedy's presidential campaigns and, more broadly, the era's progressive social mobilizations related to civil rights, the Vietnam War, feminism, and the counterculture. Their political outlook, emphasizing both procedural openness and substantive commitments on issues of peace, racial and economic justice, and identity, came collectively to be deemed the "New Politics." In contrast to New Left activists, New Politics reformers sought to work within the Democratic Party and envisioned a potentially majoritarian coalition. This would combine the progressive elements of existing New Deal constituencies, unaffiliated middle-class voters motivated by interests like consumerism, feminism, and environmentalism, and such "out-groups" as youth, minorities, and the poor.[31] The impetus was not circumscribed generationally, however. Longstanding advocacy outfits like the ADA also supported reform, while collaboration between New Politics activists and the older Democratic club movement

[31] Three works by activists sympathetic to the New Politics would describe this vision: Frederick Dutton, *Changing Sources of Power: American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971); Lanny J. Davis, *The Emerging Democratic Majority: Lessons and Legacies From the New Politics* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974); and Stephen C. Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces For Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

found expression in the 1968 founding of the pro-reform New Democratic Coalition (NDC), which enjoyed a rocky organizational life but showed vitality in certain state chapters.[32]

While fights over issues and candidates set the context for reform, its deeper stakes concerned programmatic politics and party nationalization. Unsurprisingly then, the opposition to reform coalesced in 1968 as an alliance of the elements that had long undergirded the party's reputation for pragmatic and decentralized bargaining. The conservative South and the remaining urban machines constituted two of those blocs, but they lacked persuasive rationales for the legitimacy of the procedures – localized, often informal – on which they depended.[33] It would instead be left to the other major anti-reform constituency, the majority faction of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) under president George Meany, to articulate the case against reform in the years after Chicago.

The opposition of that wing of the labor movement had multiple sources.[34] During the nomination battles of 1968, Meany and the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE) had made an aggressive push for Humphrey, in part by pressuring member unions sympathetic to McCarthy or Kennedy to refrain from endorsement.[35] Those efforts stemmed in part from a substantive commitment to hardline anticommunism in general and to continued U.S. military engagement in Vietnam in particular. Ideology also overlapped with cultural and generational tensions. The tenor of New Left and New Politics appeals antagonized many labor leaders and members, none more so than those in Meany's base among the building and skilled

[32] On the NDC, see Schlesinger, *The New Reformers*, 109-136, and R. Bruce Allison, *Democrats in Exile, 1968-1972: The Political Confessions of a New England Liberal* (Hinsdale: Sol Press, 1974).

[33] David Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal in the United States, 1968-1972," *Studies in American Political Development* Vol. 10 (Fall 1996): esp. 237-248.

[34] Taylor Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Cornell University Press, 1999), 77-92.

[35] Harry Bernstein, "Meany Wins 1st Round in Fight for Humphrey," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1968.

trades.[36] Finally, the existing constellation of authority in the party privileged Meany and his allies. Meany had successfully positioned himself as the primary interlocutor on behalf of labor in negotiations with the Johnson White House, while the AFL-CIO exercised significant influence in party conventions via relationships with the state party workers and officials who typically led delegations. These arrangements relied on informal, face-to-face bargaining among small numbers of players. A reform project intending to regularize delegate selection and convention procedures and to greatly expand the number of participants would render moot the informal power that Meany and COPE had garnered through painstaking work over the years. Thus ideology, culture, and institutional dynamics all combined to make them hostile to reform.

But, contrary to most accounts of intra-Democratic conflict over reform, labor's position was not monolithic. Meany's best-known rival had long been Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers (UAW), who not only signified a leadership threat on the AFL-CIO Executive Council but also embodied a contrasting outlook on the labor movement and its political role. Reuther espoused a social democratic vision putting labor at the organizational core of a broader, cross-class array of progressive reform and social justice movements. By the mid-1960s, that outlook translated into independent UAW support for a wide network of causes and organizations, from teacher and farmworker unionism to antipoverty efforts to campus activism.[37] The UAW's openness to coalitions with the New Left, new identity groups, and middle-class liberal activists put it at basic strategic odds with the Meany wing. Foreign policy issues, moreover, exacerbated the conflict. Reuther had dovish instincts on Cold War policy and, by the mid-1960s, faced intense pressure from other UAW leaders and rank-and-file activists to break with the AFL-

[36] Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 52-53.

[37] Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 396-415.

CIO's line on Vietnam. In 1966 he issued a wide-ranging open letter to UAW locals decrying the AFL-CIO's lack of "social vision." He pointed to the confederation's "narrow and negative" foreign policy and its failure "to develop stronger ties with labor's historic and essential allies in the liberal and intellectual academic community and among America's young people."[38] He resigned from the AFL-CIO Executive Council in 1967. The following year, the 1.4 million-member UAW formally disaffiliated from the confederation.

The split within the labor movement manifested itself in leaders' approach to party reform. Early in 1969, COPE director Alexander Barkan met with Fred Harris to object to the preliminary list of members of what would become the McGovern-Fraser Commission, claiming it was overly stacked with insurgents. Shortly thereafter, Meany, Barkan, and AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Lane Kirkland made the fateful decision to institute a blanket confederation boycott of the commission.[39] As one labor source told a journalist, the panel would only serve to "give attention to those 'New Politics' nuts who helped lose the election for us."[40] UAW leaders' outlook on party reform, by contrast, reflected their interest in allying institutionally with new social movement forces in the Democratic orbit. Reuther worked directly with Harris to organize the McGovern-Fraser Commission at the beginning of 1969 with the goal, in Reuther's words, of recruiting "people committed to bring about fundamental change in the structure and opportunity for participation in the Democratic Party."[41] The UAW's representative on the commission, Bill Dodds, was an active member. The union even helped to underwrite the commission's activities on several occasions, providing facilities for regional

[38] "Excerpts from a U.A.W. Letter on Union Dispute," *New York Times*, December 30, 1966.

[39] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 55.

[40] "Labor Boycotting McGovern Reforms," *Washington Post*, September 21, 1969.

[41] Walter Reuther letter to Kenneth O'Donnell, January 31, 1969, Box 437, Folder 9, Reuther Papers.

hearings in 1969 and funding the publication of the commission's report, *Mandate for Reform*, the following year.[42] Throughout this time, Paul Schrade, the UAW's California director and its chief liaison to the New Politics, lobbied for reform from the outside as NDC co-chairman.

Following an inaugural meeting of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection in March, 1969, the panel held a series of 17 regional public hearings through the spring and summer while its staff catalogued state-by-state party bylaws and procedures. The regional hearings generated publicity for the cause while activating reformist networks. Witness lists were dominated by those activists most interested in participatory reforms, while the fairly paltry turnout of representatives from the regular party organizations reflected the same combination of strategic wariness and political weakness that the AFL-CIO was demonstrating.[43]

The New Politics vision of political coalition that underlay party reformers' agenda for institutional change recurred as a subject of discussion at the hearings. "New coalitions of big-city Blacks, Youth, and suburban young to middle-aged must be brought into the party, if for no other reason than numbers," said the civil rights activist and DC national committeeman Channing Emery Phillips during one hearing.[44] "Younger voters, black citizens, and college educated suburbanites" were "three constituencies on which the Democratic Party must build as the lower middle class, blue collar vote erodes," concurred commission member Fred Dutton, outlining the argument he would make in his 1971 book *Changing Sources of Power*.[45] The

[42] The UAW, the Communications Workers of America, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, and the International Association of Machinists also lobbied for states to comply with the McGovern-Fraser guidelines in 1971 and 1972. Schlesinger, *The New Reformers*, 84.

[43] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 129-131, and Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal," 257-259.

[44] Channing Emery Phillips testimony at Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection hearing, Washington, DC, April 25, 1969, in Box 21, Folder "Hearings: Special Testimony," Democratic National Committee (DNC) Records, National Archives, Washington, DC.

[45] Dutton to Leroy Collins, April 22, 1969, Box 149.C.12.3(B), Folder "Democratic Party Reform -- Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection – 1969," Donald Fraser Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN..

NDC echoed this sense of the emerging forces in politics in its call "to coalesce a massive constituency of the oppressed with a massive constituency of conscience" – a coalition that, it acknowledged, did "not presently compose a voting majority of politically active Americans, nor even of the Democratic Party. But it is a large and growing proportion of the voting public."[46]

Hearing witnesses drew a connection between the dynamics of that emerging political coalition and the growing importance of issue politics in American partisan behavior. Edmund Muskie, Humphrey's 1968 running mate and a widely recognized contender for the 1972 presidential nomination, observed that "the electorate is becoming more educated. The grassroots Democrats are becoming more educated." What this meant was that "ideas alone" – issues and policies rather than partisan spirit or patronage – were coming to determine the political behavior of increasing numbers of Americans.[47] Muskie's argument recurred throughout the hearings, and a commission staff memo tasked with summarizing the testimony of witnesses put the matter succinctly. "Vast numbers of intelligent and energetic Americans today … do not respond to the traditional inducements of party loyalty or patronage. They are issue-oriented citizens…"[48] "The real heart and soul of a political party is its policy, its philosophy, its stand on the great issues of the day," McGovern declared at one hearing. "Really the only purpose of party reform is to provide a vehicle through which those policies can be determined by the people rather than by the bosses."[49]

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[46] New Democratic Coalition, "Statement of Purpose," February 1970, Box 2, Folder 25, New Democratic Coalition (NDC) Records, Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, MO.

[47] Transcript of the proceedings, Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection hearing, Washington DC, April 25, 1969, Box 21, Folder "VII 14A Washington DC," DNC Records.

[48] Staff memo to commission members re. "Task Force Hearing Themes," May 27, 1969, Box 12, Folder "Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection," DNC Records.

[49] Transcript of the proceedings, Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection hearing, New York, NY, May 3, 1969, Box 22, Folder "3A New York Hearing," DNC Records.

A short-term political conflict catalyzed reformers' efforts in this regard. The perception that existing procedures had failed to bring about party nominations representative of the rank and file's views on the key policy issue of Vietnam had provided the impetus for the movement. But systemic reform had implications that extended beyond transient issues and policy conflicts, and was relevant to a category of political actor a good deal more specific than "the people." Ensuring through nationally mandated guidelines that party elites in the patchwork of state organizations could no longer exercise arbitrary control over delegate selection would have a permanent, structural effect: the relative empowerment of issue-driven activists, who had the inclination and resources to mobilize voluntarily. As primary systems proliferated in the years following reform, engaged activists' systematically higher participation rates and organizational capacity did indeed provide them a new structural position in the party.[50]

Party nationalization loomed as another core theme in the panel's work. Commission staff summarizing the regional hearings reported that, "in the area of party structure, many witnesses have expressed the view that the national party should play a more significant role in the ongoing affairs of the party."[51] "The U.S. has become more national in economic, communication, and, increasingly, social terms," Dutton pointed out, "yet the party essentially reflects a commonwealth base not true of most of the rest of American life." He advocated measures to integrate state and local parties with "presidential politics and the more inter-related

[50] As Geoffrey Layman, Thomas Carsey, and Juliana Menasce Horowitz put it, "the presidential nominating process has become more open and participatory … [T]his openness has greatly increased the influence of issue-oriented activists over the selection of party candidates and the parties' policy agendas." "Party Polarization in American Politics: Characteristics, Causes, Consequences," *Annual Review of Political Science* 2006: 96. See also: John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 178-192; Marty Cohen et al, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 14, 159, 171-172; and Layman et al, "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 104 (May 2010): 326.

[51] Staff memo to commission members re. "Task Force Hearing Themes," May 27, 1969, Box 12, Folder "Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection," DNC Records.

policy which we really have now."[52] The most vivid demonstration of McGovern-Fraser's nationalizing thrust would be its very success in prodding state and local parties to open up their nominating procedures. But since the activists that reformers sought to empower tended to be motivated by national issues, making the party more issue-oriented was itself a way to encourage nationalization. Activists like the McCarthyites, Beer wrote, "see themselves not so much as a faction within a state party as part of a nation-wide combination, and therefore want a system which will register their strength in the nation as a whole … Our politics, in short, is becoming more 'nationalized' and the nomination system should reflect this fact."[53]

Over the course of public hearings and several meetings of the commission's Executive Council, members and staff articulated and fixed into place the key elements of the reform agenda they would mandate to states in early 1970. These elements, formalized as eighteen guidelines in the report *Mandate for Reform*, were notably consistent with the prescriptions first laid out by the Hughes commission in the summer of 1968. Most practical were requirements to make delegate selection procedures transparent, codified, timely (within the calendar year of the national convention), and accessible to all Democrats. The participatory focus also underlay prohibitions on devices that privileged party officials and office holders, including the automatic designation of delegate status to such officials (so-called ex-officio delegates) and proxy voting and lax quorum requirements at party meetings. Closely related to such participatory measures were efforts to ensure that minority views on policy and candidate preferences could not be snuffed out by majorities. Thus, the McGovern-Fraser Commission formalized the abolition of

[52] Dutton to Collins, April 22, 1969, Box 149.C.12.3(B), Folder "Democratic Party Reform -- Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection – 1969," Fraser Papers.

[53] Beer letter to McGovern, November 4, 1969, Box 18, Folder "Responses to the Guidelines II," DNC Records.

the unit rule in state-level procedures as well as at national conventions.[54] Another guideline required that candidates for delegate seats declare their presidential preference.

Though these participatory reforms would prove to be by far the most consequential and transformative of the McGovern-Fraser Commission's actions, a second category of provisions, concerning demographic representation, came unexpectedly to occupy the center of thorny controversy beginning in the fall of 1969. At the behest of members Fred Dutton and David Mixner, a guideline that had reaffirmed the old Special Equal Rights Committee's provisions on racial discrimination was turned into two, the first addressing discrimination based on race, the second doing so for "age or sex." Those agreeing to this were quick to aver that methods for enforcing the guidelines would not constitute anything resembling numerical quotas for specific groups. But at the last commission meeting prior to codifying the guidelines, Austin Ranney noted that "our fellow black Democrats feel that something more is needed than a no-discrimination rule," and suggested adding language urging state parties to include fair representation of racial minorities in their delegations. Indiana Senator Birch Bayh augmented Ranney's proposal with language referring to "some reasonable relationship between the representation of delegates and representation of the minority group to the population of the state in question."[55] After the Commission narrowly voted to adopt Bayh's additions, Dutton and others pushed to apply the same language to the guideline covering women and youth. Many members blanched, including Ranney, now lamenting having "opened Pandora's box."[56] But they were unable or unwilling to mount a pushback against the extension.

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[54] A majority of the staff and membership also sought repeatedly to extend this principle to a ban on winner-take-all primary systems. But the relentless internal lobbying of the Californian Fred Dutton prevented such a prohibition from being included in the commission's guidelines. See Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 142-144, 173-175.
[55] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 166-167.

[56] Ranney, *Curing the Mischiefs of Faction*, 190.

The results were two reform guidelines, A-1 and A-2, whose quota-like demographic requirements covering racial minorities, women, and youth would prove to be a lightning rod of intraparty controversy for the next several years. Ironically, demographic affirmative action was never a guiding priority for the hard core of reform activists in and around the commission staff. After the haphazard introduction of such measures internally in November 1969, the impetus to strengthen rather than water them down came from outside social movements. In 1971, the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), a new feminist organization led by Bella Abzug and Patsy Mink, managed to secure a key policy from the chairmen of both the DNC and the McGovern-Fraser Commission. They agreed to add language to A-1 and A-2 stating that failure to achieve demographic representation in proportion to the three targeted groups' presence in the population would constitute prima facie evidence of discrimination in any credentials challenges.

This confirmation in all but name that state parties now needed to meet numerical quotas for African Americans, women, and youth sparked an intractable debate. The history of failed promises to enforce intraparty antidiscrimination provisions against African Americans rendered hollow claims that quotas were unnecessary to achieve representation.[57] The new aggressiveness of feminist activists, moreover, disinclined many officials from rolling back A-2. At the same time, reform activists whose core goals were open participation and proportional representation of views were in an awkward position to argue effectively for measures privileging demographic representation above other kinds. They faced an intellectual conflict between reforms meant to empower the grassroots in choosing the composition of delegations and those directing state parties to compose them in specific ways. That conflict also explained why, compared to the transformative effects of the participatory reforms, the significance of the demographic quotas

[57] Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal," 275.

would prove largely symbolic. In the short term, they provided the basis for a slew of credentials challenges at the 1972 convention, and thus were of some practical importance that year. But in the long term, precisely because the main thrust of the McGovern-Fraser reforms circumscribed the autonomy of convention delegates and bound them to the wishes of primary and caucus participants, debate over provisions regulating the composition of delegations would dwindle.

The real significance of the A-1 and A-2 guidelines in the early 1970s lay in how they symbolized the Democratic Party's institutional posture toward the new social movements that had emerged over the previous decade. The provisions for minorities, women, and youth reflected the incipient party coalition that New Politics advocates envisioned, and the very visibility of the changes in the makeup of conventions was part of the appeal. The campaign to implement the reforms itself helped to channel movement efforts into the party. "I thought I was retired from politics, partly by choice but mainly by having no playing field," longtime activist Martha Ragland of Tennessee reported in 1971. "But the 1968 convention and the McGovern Commission guidelines gave a new leverage."[58] Ragland and other's involvement in the effort to bring Tennessee into compliance with McGovern-Fraser provided a new locus for state-level feminist organizing. Similar mobilizations occurred across the country. The composition of the 1972 convention testified to the reforms' effect: blacks' share of delegates rose from 5.5 percent in 1968 to 15.5 percent; women's rose from 13 to 40 percent; youth's, from 4 to 21 percent.[59] These changes embodied the party's interest in absorbing 1960s movement currents – in augmenting the progressive core of the New Deal coalition with newly mobilized constituencies.

[58] Martha Ragland letter to Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., August 19, 1971, Box 9, Folder 119, Martha Ragland Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

[59] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 72-79.

This was a political posture that would be revealed, in the catastrophe of McGovern's defeat that November, inadequate to the task of building a national electoral majority in early-1970s America. Indeed, it was hardly a posture that could address the disaffection of those millions of *other* Democratic voters who had moved in a radically different ideological direction in 1968, toward George Wallace's campaign.[60] And it was a posture that major Democratic elements bitterly opposed. But, in the sharp contrast it struck with the coalitional strategy then being pursued by the GOP, and in the way it helped keep the era's left-liberal energies channeled into a major party, it proved lastingly significant for party alignments going forward.[61]

Pushing Through an Open Door

The McGovern-Fraser reforms that exerted the greatest long-term effect on the party system were those that did away with methods by which party professionals could determine the makeup of delegations and their convention activity free from the input of activists and voters. The very act of implementing those reforms, of course, would require the cooperation of fifty-five states and territories, each of which would need to meet the requirements either through private changes or a combination of internal party reform and state legislation. This would be a tall order. "You can define 'all feasible efforts' … anyway you like," Will Davis of Texas had pointed out at the very first McGovern-Fraser meeting. "There are plenty of conservative Democrats, who control the legislatures in several southern states, for example, and they are not

[60] Philip Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 102-103.

[61] Indeed, the New Politics coalition of progressive labor, minorities, and culturally liberal professionals would eventually become the basis for viable Democratic political majorities in the early twenty-first century. John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira referred to this development as "McGovern's revenge" in a 2002 book whose title echoed not only Kevin Phillips' famous conservative work of prognostication, but also Lanny Davis's early-'70s New Politics tome. See Judis and Teixeira, *The Emerging Democratic Majority* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 37-68.

going to line up like sheep to pass reform legislation."[62] Davis's logic was unassailable, and applied similarly to resistant states outside the South.

Between McGovern-Fraser's promulgation of its guidelines in the fall of 1969 and the convention in July 1972, opponents had several opportunities to mount an effective resistance. In October 1969, the commission distributed draft versions of the guidelines to thousands of officials throughout the country, soliciting their feedback. Among the responses were notably few critiques from party regulars or their allies. Such lonely dissents were outnumbered by endorsements of the guidelines or arguments that they did not go far enough. Few regulars bothered to respond at all. Their next opportunity to voice opposition came when the panel distributed its compliance letters to all state party chairmen and DNC members in February 1970. Most states replied with pro forma thanks and then took no action, while some set about immediately to pursue compliance in conjunction with state-level reform commissions. Reform critics at the DNC might have been expected to translate resistance into meaningful action in 1971 during the meeting to adopt the Preliminary Call to the convention. Instead, the DNC voted to incorporate the entirety of the McGovern-Fraser guidelines into the Call. Even then, states might *still* have opted for foot-dragging as a strategy to undermine reform. But by the eve of the convention, 45 states and territories were deemed by the commission to have achieved full compliance with its guidelines, with the remaining ten in substantial compliance.[63]

What accounted for the curious failure of the very forces targeted by the McGovern-Fraser Commission to resist its reforms? Practically, the local and state-based political actors who would be disempowered by the reforms lacked organizations at the national level in which

[62] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 89-90.

[63] "The Party Reformed," Box 1061, Folder "McGovern-Fraser," DNC Records.

to coordinate a collective response. And precisely because existing nominating procedures varied so widely across states, and had so often been informally or casually performed by insiders, party regulars lacked coherent and identifiable standards, arguments, or alternative proposals around which they could rally.[64] Political developments also undermined the regulars' strategic decision to refrain from vocal opposition for as long as possible. Fred Harris resigned as DNC chair in early 1970 and Lawrence O'Brien replaced him, returning to the chairmanship he had vacated a year earlier. Contrary to reformers' fears, this ex-Kennedy and Johnson aide proved to be just as committed as Harris to implementing the McGovern-Fraser guidelines and more *effective* in doing so given his credibility among party leaders.[65] O'Brien secured a crucial ruling from the DNC's counsel confirming that failure to comply with the guidelines would be grounds for delegate credentials challenges in 1972.[66] The 1970 midterms, which saw the election of many pro-reform Democratic governors, bolstered the momentum of state-level implementation. Once O'Brien neutralized DNC opposition to the guidelines' incorporation into the Preliminary Call in 1971, the regulars had run out of opportunities to turn the tide.

The sources of the regulars' defeat were not merely practical and political, but also intellectual. Opponents of the guidelines' participatory emphasis never transcended the role of defenders of the status quo – and as defenders of existing procedures, they lacked a compelling case.[67] Practices in numerous states were evidently irregular, arbitrary, and closed to new entrants. The long legacy of intraparty struggles over southern organizations' racially

[64] Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal," 257.

[65] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 98.

[66] Joseph Califano memo to Lawrence O'Brien, May 18, 1970, Box 29, Folder "Democratic Party: Delegate Selection and Party Organizations, 1969-1971," Rauh Papers.

[67] Plotke emphasizes the regulars' intellectual bind in "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal," 260-269.

discriminatory and undemocratic procedures delegitimized classic federalist arguments against national party incursions into state affairs. From the very outset of the reform campaign in 1968, virtually no regulars vocally questioned the idea that establishing some basic set of uniform national standards for state nominating procedures would be desirable. Nor did many regulars seriously question an emphasis on democratic participation in such standards. When Richard Daley himself appeared at a McGovern-Fraser public hearing in Chicago in 1969, he gave no full-throated defense of the famously disciplined and closed Cook County party organization he led. Tellingly, he instead proposed his own set of party reforms: a series of minor changes to convention practices along with the establishment of a presidential primary in every state.[68]

Opponents of reform could not articulate a plausible argument for existing arrangements' effectiveness in translating voter sentiment on policy issues into coherent and distinct party positions. Reform advocates emphasized the failure of the 1968 nominating process to provide general election voters with a meaningful choice regarding Vietnam. They attributed that result to institutional failure: a party nominating system that was unresponsive to engaged grassroots sentiment and vulnerable to the arbitrary decisions of entrenched actors. Reform critics like the centrist Democratic strategists Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg could mount a persuasive counterargument that, in fact, the 1968 Democratic convention did produce both a nominee and a platform position on Vietnam that reflected the wishes of a rank-and-file party majority. But what even these two able analysts could not do was explain how the unreformed nominating process worked systemically to ensure such outcomes. The system's "institutionalized helter-skelterism," they wrote in 1970, "is so complicated, it is hard to say exactly *why* and *how* it ends up as responsive as it is … What can be said about the delegate selection system is this:

[68] Arthur Siddon, "Plea for 'Soft Stand' by McGovern is Refused by Daley," *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 1969.

Somehow it works." Delegates were either elected, selected by people who were elected, or "selected by people who were selected by people who were elected popularly at one time or another. There is then, a democratic process, if far removed, behind each delegate."[69] This was as close to a full-throated defense of the existing system as any the era produced. It left little reason to expect that the system could dependably adjudicate among and reconcile party factions divided over major issues.

What party regulars' practical inefficacy and intellectual difficulties ultimately reflected was weakness – the wages of decades of organizational decline amidst long-range changes in American politics.[70] The current beneficiaries of organizational arrangements dating back to a previous century's era of non-ideological mass partisanship and transactional party activism were the occupants of often-sleepy state and local party organizations. They lacked the inclination, credibility, or resources to fight back effectively against the forces calling for long-overdue reform. To a real extent, and notwithstanding the suspicions of the most militant activists, McGovern-Fraser-era reformers found themselves pushing through an open door.[71]

In contrast to the party regulars, the reformers benefited from the support of an outside coalition of organizations featuring an interlocking network of actors. Anne Wexler consulted on the NDC's Party Reform Task Force and headed the delegate selection reform effort at Common Cause, a new good-government organization founded by ex-HEW secretary John

[69] Richard M. Scanlon and Ben Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 142-143.

[70] Plotke, "Party Reform as Failed Democratic Renewal," 254-261.

[71] A similar analysis can be found in Samuel Beer's notes for a commission presentation he delivered on May 10, 1969, Box 11, Folder "Response: Intellectuals," DNC Records.

Gardner.[72] The ADA formed a Convention Task Force to monitor states' implementation of the reforms, overseen by Wexler's fellow Connecticut activist and now-husband, Joe Duffy, and co-chaired by ex-McGovern-Fraser staffer Ken Bode, who had left the commission in 1970. The leading staffer on the NWPCs's Task Force on Delegate Selection was Phyllis Segal, whose husband Eli had served as McGovern-Fraser's counsel, while the NWPC's policy council included Arvonne Fraser, whose husband Don ascended to the chairmanship of the commission in January 1971. Bode established his own independent organization, the Center for Political Reform (CPR), which coordinated pressure campaigns for state-level implementation and devised strategy for credentials challenges at the 1972 convention.[73]

The pattern of state adoption of the guidelines, moreover, reflected not only the effectiveness of these new efforts but also the enduring legacy of a longer reform movement among issue-oriented Democratic activists. Those states with traditions of volunteer party activism and robust "amateur" club activity – Minnesota, Wisconsin, Oregon – were disproportionately the earliest and easiest states to reform, while the longest holdouts were those states – Texas, New York, Connecticut – with surviving patronage-oriented party organizations.[74] Even the latter states could only hold out for so long. George McGovern's unlikely presidential campaign gathered strength in the spring of 1972, amassing hundreds of pledged delegates amidst a crowded field as one opponent after another either stumbled on the trail or failed to adjust their strategy to the new procedural landscape of proportional delegate

[72] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 54; Minutes, NDC National Steering Committee meeting, March 14, 1970, Box 1, Folder, 2, NDC Records.

[73] Kenneth Bode and LaVerne Newton, "Center - Original Proposal," Box 2807, Ken Bode Papers, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

[74] Shafer, *Quiet Revolution*, 281-286, 328-329.

counts and participatory contests. McGovern's frontrunner status by the convention in Miami meant that there was little chance recalcitrant state parties would get a sympathetic hearing there.

The saga of that most iconic of all machine organizations – Cook County of Illinois – dramatized perfectly the shifting constellation of intra-Democratic power in 1972. As early as 1970, activists in the state laid groundwork for a challenge to the delegates who would emerge from Chicago two years later. The state's NDC chapter launched Challenge '72 to monitor Richard Daley's organization for reform violations and to mount a credentials challenge in Miami if need be. "YOU just may occupy the seat next to Daley," it announced cheekily in a report to members.[75] By primary season of 1972, Cook County Democrats had given no indication of interest in complying with the guidelines. "We'll elect our delegates as we always have," Daley told party workers in February. "Why the hell should we let those people in Washington tell us how we should elect them?"[76] In Illinois's state primary that May, Daley's organization got its 59 delegates elected as usual. Immediately, a group of ten reform Democrats led by Alderman William Singer and civil rights activist Jesse Jackson filed a challenge to "the Daley 59," done on behalf of "Democrats in general, and, in particular, all Blacks, Latin Americans, Women, and Young People."[77] Reform networks at the state and national level supported the challenge, which cited violations of six McGovern-Fraser guidelines by the Chicago regulars.[78] The challengers held district caucuses to elect an alternative slate of delegates. Regulars disrupted several of them, but an alternative delegation did come into being.

[75] "Report of the IDC Executive Committee Meeting," April 21, 1970, Box 1, Folder 2, NDC Records.

[76] William J. Crotty, "Anatomy of a Challenge: The Chicago Delegation to the Democratic National Convention," in *Cases in American Politics* ed. Robert L. Peabody (New York: Praeger, 1976), 113. Except where noted, the following narrative of the Chicago challenge comes from this account. Crotty, "Anatomy of a Challenge," 111-158.

[77] Crotty, "Anatomy of a Challenge," 120.

[78] For CPR's activities related to the Illinois challenge, see Box 2831, Folder "Chicago," Bode Papers.

The next step in the process testified to the degree of nationalization the party was undergoing. Though the Commission on Rules, McGovern-Fraser's less controversial counterpart panel, concerned itself chiefly with convention logistics, one reform it implemented bore directly on the Illinois challenge. This was the new institution of "hearing officers" – impartial observers appointed by the DNC to hold open hearings in states where credentials challenges were occurring. The officers would prepare finding-of-fact reports for the Credentials Committee to help guide its decisions. Such a device was intended to bolster a rule-of-law ethos in the credentialing process and to reduce the degree of pure candidate-driven horse-trading that afflicted the panel. The officer for the Chicago challenge withstood unrelenting hostility from Daley's forces to hold a hearing and file a report. He sided with the challengers, citing "abundant and probative" evidence that the regulars carried out "deliberate, covert, and calculated" violations of McGovern-Fraser guidelines.[79] The report helped the challengers' case in the Credentials Committee, which voted 71-61 in the challengers' favor.

The regulars' last chance to keep their seats came on the first night of the convention itself. The mammoth array of credentials disputes pushed the floor debate on the pro-regular Illinois minority report to 2:00am. Speaking for the regulars, attorney Raymond F. Simon charged that the alternative delegates "were chosen by a handful of non-elected, self-appointed usurpers."[80] Supporters of the challengers recited the litany of alleged violations by Cook County Democrats and invoked themes of reform and New Politics coalition-building. Jesse Jackson connected the challenges against Cook County to those made against racially discriminatory southern states in 1964 and 1968. "Mississippi was not an exception," he

[79] Philip Warden, "Challenge to Daley's Slate Upheld," *Chicago Tribune*, June 28, 1972.

[80] *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1972*, Shelia Hixson and Ruth Rose, eds. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1972), microfilm, 206. The mayor himself chose to avoid the convention.

declared. "Georgia was not an exception. Chicago can't be an exception. We must nationalize the McGovern rules."[81] The final vote approached like a slow-motion wreck. McGovern was fully aware of the disastrous symbolism that would accompany the ouster of 58 Chicago Democrats and their nationally iconic leader, but he was hamstrung from openly opposing the Singer-Jackson delegates by his New Politics supporters and a basic commitment to his own reforms. A final compromise proposal to seat both delegations failed. The convention voted narrowly against the pro-Daley minority report, thus confirming the Credentials Committee decision to seat the reformers. The visceral nature of the hostilities in this drama could hardly be overstated, and was captured in the gendered language of a party official who told reporters, "They urinated right in the face of all those people. They insulted Daley's political manhood."[82]

The intramural warfare that such language reflected continued throughout the general election and in the aftermath of McGovern's landslide loss – and institutional reform was never far from the center of the factional strife. In the summer of 1972, meetings among operators in Meany's orbit lay the groundwork for a planned counterrevolution in the aftermath of the anticipated Democratic loss in November.[83] Central to the plan would be a campaign to replace the McGovern-backed DNC chair, Jean Westwood, with the party's former treasurer, Texas attorney Robert Strauss. The plan commenced after the election, and Strauss was duly elected in December. His first staffing decision was to hire an AFL-CIO staffer as the party's executive director. Strauss, a close friend of ex-governor and Nixon cabinet member John Connally, had a reputation as a southern conservative. Meany's patronage of Strauss's leadership captured well the alliances that had emerged out of shared opposition to New Politics reform.

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[81] *Democratic National Convention, 1972*, 207-208.

[82] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "The Dethroning of Daley," *Washington Post*, July 12, 1972.

[83] David E. Broder, "Labor exerting new muscle in Democratic Party, *Washington Post*, September 2, 1973.

A related outside organization similarly originated in preelection meetings. Ben Wattenberg began consulting in September with a dozen other New Politics opponents about the need to form an anti-New Politics outfit. In the weeks after McGovern's loss, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM) launched with inaugural meetings and a newspaper ad campaign featuring the headline, "Come Home, Democrats."[84] The major indictments CDM laid out against the New Politics were substantive rather than procedural, including its adherents' alleged belief "that the United State must withdraw from its international responsibilities and effect a serious diminution of its own power."[85] A strain of incipient neoconservatism – centrally concerned with foreign policy but paired with hostility to New Politics activists' affirmative action agenda – was at the ideological core of the group. Despite this outlook and CDM leaders' penchant for effective rhetorical attacks, its procedural agenda concerning McGovern-Fraser was fairly modest. The coalition recommended repealing the demographic targets in A-1 and A-2 and curbing regulations of slate-making and ex officio delegates.[86] Overall, it combined aggressive attacks on New Politics ideology and strategy with quite tempered procedural recommendations, which modified but did not challenge fundamentally the core of the McGovern-Fraser reforms.

That same dynamic could be seen in the deliberations of McGovern-Fraser's successor panel, the Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure, tasked by the 1972 convention

[84] Jules Witcover, "Democratic Coalition Formed to Curb 'New Politics' Wing," *International Herald Tribune*, December 8, 1972.

[85] Text of ad in Series RG9-003, Box 42, Folder 8, George Meany Memorial Archive, Silver Spring, MD. The roster of neoconservatives sponsoring CDM included Jeane and Evron Kirkpatrick, Max Kampleman, Richard Pipes, Midge Decter, Norman Podhoretz, and Seymour Martin Lipset.

[86] CDM Task Force on Democratic Party Rules and Structure, *Toward Fairness and Unity for '76*, pp. 1 and 26, April 1973, Series RG9-003, Box 42, Folder 9, Meany Archives.

with reviewing and reassessing the guidelines in light of the experience of that year's election.[87] Chaired by Baltimore councilwoman Barbara Mikulski in symbolic reflection of the need for the party to repair relations with white ethnic constituencies, the new commission served during the year of its operations as an arena for chronic factional squabbling but little in the way of major rollbacks of reform. Daley and the AFL-CIO's Al Barkan maintained their antireform alliance to pressure Strauss regarding staffing decisions at both the DNC and the Mikulski Commission. At commission meetings that year, reform critics made their case for nixing the demographic targets and restoring ex officio delegates. Despite the pressure, Strauss the pragmatic dealmaker generally worked to ameliorate divisions. The commission ultimately issued a report making several technical adjustments along with a compromise reform to guidelines A-1 and A-2. The latter change rendered the demographic targets more stringent by making delegate distributions proportional to groups' Democratic strength rather than their presence in the population, but also rescinded McGovern-Fraser's provision placing the burden of proof on challenged delegations. A final measure furthered party institutionalization through a new Compliance Review Commission expanding on the role of hearing officers.[88] Ultimately, the Mikulski Commission entrenched McGovern-Fraser's participatory and nationalizing elements. Despite McGovern's election loss, the reforms' intellectual and political underpinnings proved durable.

Reform's Forgotten Structural Turn

By the time the Mikulski Commission issued its report, the focus of debate over institutional change within the party, and the attention of wary party leaders like Robert Strauss, had largely shifted away from nominating procedures. The new focus concerned the party's

[87] Crotty, *Decision for the Democrats*, 231-239.

[88] See Commission on Delegate Selection and Party Structure, *Democrats All*, December 1973, Box 1061, Folder "Mikulski Commission Report," DNC Records.

organization and mechanisms for enhancing issue-based deliberation and ideological cohesion within it. The "Party Structure" component of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection's mandate, in other words, was more than mere verbiage. A Charter Commission would serve as a locus for carrying this element of the reform project out in 1973 and 1974.

If, as we have seen, the issue focus and nationalizing thrust of McGovern-Fraser's delegate-selection reforms drew from responsible party doctrine, the panel's forgotten structural agenda bore even clearer connections to that outlook. Though the structural efforts proved less enduring and easily entrenched than the nominating reforms, they still undermine portrayals of the reformers as anti-party zealots. And in the shorter term, such reforms – particularly the institution of midterm conventions – exerted a real political impact, contributing directly to the processes of party differentiation and ideological sorting that commenced in the 1970s.

From the beginning, McGovern-Fraser's reformers considered structural issues in the national party to be a component of their mandate, and an answer to the Special Equal Rights Committee's call in 1968 for a panel "to study the relationship between the National Democratic Party and its constituent State Democratic Parties." The commission temporarily narrowed its focus to delegate selection, as that topic faced the most pressing timetable. But Fraser in particular remained committed to structural reform, and made suggestions in 1969 and 1970 to his own panel and to James O'Hara's Commission on Rules on reforming the DNC, establishing a Democratic Advisory Council-style research arm, and drafting a party constitution.[89]

The latter proposal, to draft the first-ever charter for a major U.S. party with codified rules and procedures governing the national organization and its relationship to local and state

[89] Donald Fraser letter to George McGovern, March 19, 1969, Folder "Comm. On Party Structure Correspondence, 1969," and Fraser statement, O'Hara Commission hearing, January 15, 1970, Folder "Democratic Party Reform – Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 1969," both in Box 149.C.12.3(B), Fraser Papers.

counterparts, saw a revival among interested actors in 1971. Fraser and O'Hara identified overlapping jurisdictions between their respective panels regarding structural issues and DNC reform, and agreed early in the year to work jointly on those topics. They built an informal network of correspondents on structural reform that included Sam Beer, James MacGregor Burns, and Michigan's Neil Staebler, the advocate of programmatic party-building who had worked with Paul Butler at the DNC.[90] The group considered longstanding responsible party proposals, from biennial party conferences to political education arms to national policy councils. Other proposals connected organizational reform to the participatory ethos of the delegate selection reforms then underway, including a national dues-paying party membership system that could enhance grassroots participation while building a mass base for the party.

The discussions culminated in a joint meeting of the McGovern-Fraser and O'Hara commissions in the fall of 1971, where party nationalization and issue activism recurred as central themes.[91] Anne Wexler praised "the assertion of the 1964 and 1968 conventions of their authority to adopt binding standards on constituent state Democratic parties" for finally enabling "the national convention to become the party's national policy maker." Emphasizing programmatic party-building, Sam Beer situated his proposal for party issue conferences in an analysis of broad changes among voters. "The electorate as a whole is showing a great and growing interest in issues and public policy," he asserted, attributing the development to "the rising level of education among voters." He insisted that "There are votes in issues. This is a heretical remark among some political scientists even today," given the influence of works like

[90] For samples of this 1971 correspondence, see the letters in Box 79, Folder "Charter," DNC Records.

[91] All of the papers, as well as minutes to the November 19 meeting itself, can be found in Box 46, Folder "Dem. Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Meetings, Nov. 19, 1971," O'Hara Papers.

The American Voter that emphasized affective affiliations over ideology or issue positions.[92] But Beer drew on new findings from scholars grappling with the tumult of the 1960s to claim "it's finally getting around to political scientists that people in the millions choose the candidate they vote for and the party they identify with …on issues. That's the thing we haven't allowed for in the structure of our party." James MacGregor Burns went further by connecting programmatic reform to an eventual ideological sorting of the party system itself. A reformed party "would welcome and recruit members on the basis of one test and one test alone – belief in the principles and goals of the party as defined in the national platform," and so, soon enough, "those who do not share its goals would see no point in joining it, or staying in it."

The presence of another participant at the 1971 meeting, David Anderson of Canada's Liberal Party, hinted at a notable theme of the era's structural reform efforts: a transnational engagement with party systems in other democracies. Fraser, whose congressional work focused on international affairs, frequently took advantage of his travels and interactions with foreign officials to discuss parties. In 1971 he organized a meeting on party organization and reform with a British Conservative Party member, alongside O'Hara and Bob Nelson.[93] And when considering proposals for a dues-paying Democratic membership, Fraser drew on Beer's expertise to gather data on British Labor Party finances and dues' role in it.[94] Such engagement with other countries' systems was hardly surprising. The aspects of U.S. parties most widely considered exceptional were precisely those targeted by reformers, from their decentralization to their programmatic fuzziness. The difficulty of attempting to gain through top-down reform

[92] Angus Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960).

[93] Notes to ad hoc meeting with Barney Hayhoe at the 7th Anglo-American Conference on Africa, Baltimore, MD, June 18, 1971, Box 12, Folder "National Committee Reform," DNC Records.

[94] Sam Beer letter to Donald Fraser, May 22, 1972, Box 44, Folder "Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 2," O'Hara Papers.

those elements of foreign systems that U.S. parties lacked for historical and constitutional reasons was not lost on the reformers. "The British example has been very much in my mind," Neil Staebler told Fraser, "but I do not find it possible to jump very far to their organizational forms because of our geographical diversity and federated character."[95] If history and structure limited the degree of centralization and coherence possible in the U.S., however, measures meant to institute national party supremacy and to foster issue activism might still fruitfully be pursued.

Biennial national conferences of party delegates stood at the center of structural reformers' proposals. Such meetings' international ubiquity was an argument in the idea's favor. "Such a conference would take on the character less of the quadrennial national convention," Burns argued, "than of the kinds of annual national policy-making conferences that are held by scores of political parties … throughout the world."[96] As Fraser later framed his case for a midterm conference, Democrats rarely made an "effort to think about the party and its role in society," while "Western European political parties concern themselves with political education on an ongoing basis. We could learn much from their example."[97] The late 1960s had seen renewed interest in this longstanding responsible party proposal as a channel for the seemingly explosive issue activism of the period, one less severe than nomination challenges. Candidate McCarthy had proposed biennial conventions during the campaign, as did officials ranging from

[95] Neil Staebler letter to Donald Fraser, July 1, 1971, Box 12, Folder "National Committee Reform," DNC Records.

[96] James MacGregor Burns presentation, joint commission meeting, November 19, 1971, Box 46, Folder "Dem. Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Meetings, Nov. 19, 1971," O'Hara Papers.

[97] Donald M. Fraser memo, "The Case for a 1974 Democratic National Party Conference," March 3, 1974, Box 152.K.10.5(B), Folder "Democratic National Policy Conference," Fraser Papers. Fraser's piece was soon published in op-ed form as "The Democratic Party Still Needs Reform," *Washington Post,* April 5, 1973.

Al Lowenstein to Jesse Unruh to Ed Muskie at the McGovern-Fraser field hearings the following year.[98] The idea would soon prove one of the most consequential party innovations of the era.

Fraser, O'Hara, and several of their staffers produced a draft charter in the spring of 1972 that was striking in its sweep and ambition.[99] The proposal called for a new national party membership system requiring annual enrollment, with a nominal fee "strongly urged." The state-based structure of the existing DNC would be replaced by a new system of seven regional organizations and a National Executive Committee composed of the national and regional chairmen, congressional leaders, and various at-large members. Finally, the draft charter called for regional party conferences to be held on odd years and a National Policy Conference of 3,000 delegates to take place on even years between the conventions.

Support for the proposal came not only from avowed responsible party advocates but also New Politics activists better known for their focus on grassroots participation and demographic representativeness. "Party responsibility, a stillborn concept in many sections of this country, now stands a chance of becoming the foundation of party organization and policy," wrote one political scientist in a typical note of praise to Fraser and O'Hara.[100] Support for the charter among New Politics activists could be seen in the sentiments expressed at a CPR meeting featuring representatives from the NWPC, the Youth Caucus, and other groups. Though some voiced reservations about the proposal's provision for ex-officio membership in party affairs, a meeting note-taker reported, "all agreed that the Fraser-O'Hara charter was much better than the

[98] E.W. Kenworthy, "McCarthy Bids Party Hold Convention Every 2 Years to Map Policy on Key Issue," *New York Times*, August 12, 1968. Lowenstein's testimony is in the transcript for the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection's hearing in New York, NY, May 3, 1969, in Box 22, Folder "3B New York Hearing," DNC Records. Muskie's testimony at the April 25, 1969, hearing in Washington, DC, and Unruh's testimony at the June 21, 1969, hearing in Los Angeles, CA, are both in Box 21, Folder "Hearings: Special Testimony," DNC Records.
[99] "A New Charter for the Democratic Party of the United States: A Draft Proposal," March 24, 1972, Box 44, Folder "Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 2," O'Hara Papers.

[100] Ken Kerle letter to Fraser and O'Hara, March 27, 1972, Box 12, Folder "National Committee Reform," DNC Records. See also Jonathan Cottin, "Reform Units Propose New DNC Structure," *National Journal*, April 1, 1972.

current structure."[101] Such support reflected the degree to which a participatory reform vision could be compatible with responsible-party prescriptions.

The political implications were just as apparent in the array of forces opposed to the proposal. Democratic State Chairmen reacted with outrage to the regional party organizations that would supplant much of their power. (Fraser and O'Hara eventually jettisoned them.)[102] A mass membership system, meanwhile, struck many officials as a radical and foreign concept – "reprehensible and dangerous," according to South Carolina' Donald Fowler, privileging "those who are highly motivated because of special interests or extreme ideological commitments."[103] A dues fee's resemblance to a poll tax gave even some pro-reform liberals pause. The drafters thus watered down the provision to a vague call for "periodic, personal enrollment in a manner specified by the Democratic National Committee," with dues explicitly prohibited.[104] Even in modified form, the proposal provoked intense opposition from elements who had long resisted responsible party reforms, from southern conservatives to machine pols to congressional elites.

When Fraser appeared before a Democratic House caucus meeting to present the draft charter, Chicago Representative Frank Annunzio, a loyal member of Daley's machine, was outraged. He began rounding up the required signatures to call another meeting of the House caucus to discuss the charter exclusively. Annunzio's co-signers were disproportionately "southern and old-line congressmen," according to the *Washington Post*, and eager to express

[101] "Notes on the meeting arranged by Ken Bode," June 6, 1972, Box 44, Folder "Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 3," O'Hara Papers.

[102] Transcript, Box 149.G.11.10(F), Folder "Draft of Interview of Fraser by Jim and Iric Nathanson," Fraser Papers.

[103] Donald Fowler memo to Democratic State Chairmen, May 4, 1972, Box 44, Folder "Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 2," O'Hara Papers.

[104] The final version of the proposed charter was included as an appendix in the O'Hara Commission's *Call to Order: A Narrative Report by the Commission on Rules of the Democratic National Committee* (Washington, DC: Democratic National Committee, 1972), 133-143; the quoted passage is on p. 139.

their alarm. Wayne Hays of Ohio pointed to the activists who would dominate delegations at the proposed midterm conferences. "These people shouldn't run the party, elected officials should," he said. "I was elected by the people of my district. Not by some packed caucus."[105] Florida's Robert Sikes connected the charter's "efforts to mold the Democratic Party into a liberal party in the hands of a narrow ideological elite" to a longer-range and dangerous agenda to transform the party system itself, defined by "a new division of the American party structure into liberal and conservative camps."[106] The emergency meeting of the caucus, held two weeks before the national party convention, turned into a raucous shouting match between representatives angry about the whole sweep of institutional reforms and defenders of the charter. The former outnumbered the latter among those attending, resulting in a 105-to-50 vote for a resolution that formally opposed a convention vote on the charter and called instead for further study.[107]

Fraser lobbied to win over skeptics in the weeks leading up the convention, supported by Common Cause and Democratic Study Group campaigns.[108] But he could not ignore the many voices arguing that a charter was too complicated a project to tackle at an already overscheduled convention. These voices included the McGovern campaign, wary of raising novel reform issues just when it needed to secure victory.[109] Fraser and O'Hara eventually agreed to refrain from advocating a floor vote on the charter, instead pushing a resolution that called for a commission to pursue the charter-writing process and a midterm conference in 1974 to amend and ratify that

[105] Mary Russell, "Special Caucus Called in Anger by Democrats," *Washington Post*, June 23, 1972.

[106] Robert Sikes remarks, *Congressional Record – House*, 92nd Cong., 2nd sess., Vol. 118: 23023.

[107] Mary Russell, "Democrats Vote to Delay Some Reforms," *Washington Post*, June 29, 1972.

[108] "Democratic Charter: Action Delayed for Two Years," *Congressional Quarterly*, July 15, 1972.

[109] Marjorie Hunter, "Established Democrats Opposed Reforms," *New York Times*, July 11, 1972.

commission's product.[110] The resolution passed late on Thursday night, in one of the many chaotic roll calls that helped push the start of McGovern's acceptance speech past 2:00am.[111]

The proposed charter of 1972 marked a peak for centralizing, programmatic party reform during this period. The eventual product of the commission mandated by the Miami convention would be a much more modest set of bylaws and structures, though the limited changes they embodied all still ran in the direction of greater nationalization and issue focus. The Charter Commission boasted a huge membership, the better to ensure the inclusion of all interested factions in the party. From the outset, Robert Strauss worked to retain tight control over its work, with the overriding goal of patching up factional disputes over institutional issues.[112] Strauss, an ostentatiously pragmatic back-slapper, was averse to any forums that might occasion public party squabbling. He thus vehemently opposed the very concept of party-wide issue conferences. The Miami convention had mandated that a Democratic Conference on Party Organization and Policy take place in 1974 to ratify the charter, but Strauss did all he could to control that meeting in the planning stages – and to keep discussion of public policy issues out of its purview altogether. He was never less than candid about his view of the meeting. "I am not the father" of the midterm conference, he told a reporter. "And I would admit to you that I'm not Catholic and I would have practiced a little more birth control if I were father to this child."[113]

Strauss's outlook put him in direct conflict with reform advocates like Fraser, who worked throughout 1973 to build support within the DNC for including issue seminars and

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[110] Resolution text, July 13, 1972, Box 44, Folder "Democratic Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Charter Proposal 3," O'Hara Papers. As a first step in reform, the resolution also expanded the size of the DNC more than twofold.

[111] *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention*, Hixson and Rose, eds., 405-423.

[112] "Democrats Plan Warily for 1974 National Conference," *Congressional Quarterly*, June 16, 1973.

[113] Kathryn J. McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 153.

platform discussion in the midterm conference and continuously sounded the alarm about Strauss's efforts to marginalize and muzzle the meeting at the planning stages. The terms of a debate that broke out between Strauss and Fraser that year did much to illustrate the intellectual and political stakes driving structural reform. In response to one critical missive from Fraser, Strauss wrote a letter in March emphasizing his intention to "heal the wounds of the past, to bring Democrats together," a goal he said would be jeopardized by introducing "ideological debate" into the mini-convention.[114] "Your faith," he wrote to Fraser, "that opening up the 1974 conference to questions of public policy will serve to unite the party is not shared by all other Democrats across the nation." He then took a detour into academic disquisition:

> You cite the American Political Science Association Committee on Political Parties' 1951 work, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System," as a guide to political reform in the Democratic party. You should be aware that the APSA report has been criticized by some over the last several years as being ill-conceived and contradictory … Political scientists have concluded that many of the suggestions employed in this document are inappropriate and dysfunctional to the American political system.[115]

That this twenty-two year old political science report found its way into a debate among working politicians concerning party reform and conference logistics is notable.[116] More notable still is the fact that Strauss aligned Fraser with that doctrine's tenets while he sided with those critics who judged responsible partisanship "dysfunctional to the American political system."

Over the course of public hearings and commission meetings in 1973 and 1974, the charter debate pit those seeking cohesion and programmatic commitment against those touting

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[114] Robert Strauss letter to Fraser, March 14, 1973, Box 152.K.10.5(B), Folder "Democratic National Policy Conference," Fraser Papers.

[115] He referenced two: Evron Kirkpatrick, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: Political Science, Policy Science, or Pseudo-Science?" *American Political Science Review* Vol. 65 (1971): 965-990; and Gerald Pomper, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System? What, Again?," *Journal of Politics* Vol. 33 (1971): 916-940.

[116] It was actually published in 1950. *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System: A Report of the Committee On Political Parties of the American Political Science Association* (New York: Rinehart, 1950).

the pragmatic functions of traditional American parties. As notes from one of the meetings summarized, "the broadest division in the Party is between those who feel the purpose of the Party is to elect Democrats, and those who feel the Party must represent some point of view."[117] Fraser and Staebler led the reform coalition in the second camp, supported by most of the major New Politics and liberal advocacy groups. Disputes between these reformers and Strauss in the first half of 1973 focused on the chairman's efforts to limit the scope of the midterm conference and the ambition of the charter drafters. The anti-reform coalition on the Charter Commission was led by the same elements that had fought McGovern-Fraser: southerners, machine pols, and the Meany wing of labor. At a meeting in July 1973, the coalition demonstrated its strength by passing resolutions to schedule the midterm party conference for after the 1974 elections and to restrict conference discussion to the charter. As a member put it, Democrats had recently "gotten into trouble by talking about the environment and Vietnam and things like that… The way to win elections is to get people to vote for Democrats because they're Democrats."[118]

Such arguments received their most articulate expression in a 1973 position paper prepared by the Coalition for a Democratic Majority called "Unity out of Diversity." The paper criticized the 1972 draft charter as well as newer proposals by Fraser and Staebler for seeking "to centralize, ideologize, and 'Europeanize' the Party in ways which run against the grain of American political tradition and the unique coalitional character of the Democratic Party." [119] CDM described the responsible party doctrine underlying the proposals as "an approach to the

[117] Charter Commission meeting, Fort Collins, CO, July 21-23, 1973, Box 185, Folder "DNC Charter Commission Oct. 1973 - 12/31/73," Neil Staebler Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

[118] Quoted in the Democratic Planning Group Newsletter, August 6, 1973, in Box 149.G.8.6(F), Folder "Dem Planning Group," Fraser Papers.

[119] Coalition for a Democratic Majority, "Unity out of Diversity: A Draft Position Paper on a New Charter for the Democratic Party of the United States," July 1973, Series RG9-003, Box 42, Folder 9, Meany Archives.

role and structure of political parties which is suited to parliamentary systems of government – not out own." The paper acknowledged that the national parties had a stronger role to play, but called proposals to inject issue-based activism into party institutions dangerous and ill-timed. New issue cleavages, from Vietnam to law and order to the counterculture, divided Democrats among themselves. "It is unrealistic to talk of the desirability – or even the possibility – of a united, liberal 'national' party driving out the impure and arousing new converts" while such divides remained. Here the CDM's political agenda merged with its procedural outlook, as the organization clearly saw the need for further intraparty struggle – and New Politics factions' defeat – before reforms like issue conferences and policy councils might be safe to implement.

The CDM advanced a coherent, tempered argument against the tide of reform efforts. But such intellectual engagement did not quite match the intensity and vitriol with which the anti-reform coalition, led as always by the flamboyantly aggressive Al Barkan of COPE, moved politically to strike out against factional enemies in 1973 and 1974. Barkan led the push to replace Jean Westwood with Strauss after the 1972 election, and sustained the ultimately fruitless campaigns within the Mikulski Commission to roll back the McGovern-Fraser reforms. Simultaneously, he mobilized opposition to holding off-year party conferences, in 1974 or any other year. His combativeness ran counter to the themes of comity and pragmatic compromise that other reform critics, Strauss chief among them, sought to emphasize. A DNC staffer later recalled how Barkan and Meany "wanted not only to defeat the McGovern wing of the party but to castrate them and throw them to the sharks."[120] In a disastrous overreach, Barkan's forces attempted to use a Charter Commission meeting in August 1974 to muscle through major roll-backs of McGovern-Fraser reforms, prompting a walk-out by the commission's black members

[120] McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 160.

and most of their allies.[121] The meeting dissolved for lack of a quorum, the anti-reformers drew condemnation, and Strauss subsequently kept his distance from the counterrevolutionaries.

No similar fireworks accompanied the actual midterm conference, formally titled the Democratic Conference on Party Organization and Policy. 2,035 delegates convened in Kansas City a month after the party's massive, Watergate-fuelled congressional victories had produced a net gain of 3 seats in the Senate and 49 in the House. The afterglow of those victories, combined with party-wide wariness over the infighting of the August commission meeting, bolstered the position of those seeking a conflict-free conference. Strauss, chastened by criticism over his alleged role in the August debacle, pursued unity at all costs by micromanaging the conference planning and proceedings. Orchestrated to within an inch of its life, this first ever midterm party conference fell far short of the grassroots-empowering and programmatic functions that proponents desired. Those participants not engaged by the technical aspects of reform found it downright pointless. "Never in the history of human boredom," Texas Representative Jim Wright declared, "have so many traveled so far to be stirred by such matters of immeasurable triviality."[122] But the meeting set an important precedent while producing a constitution that, however dull, marked a new phase in the institutionalization of the party.

The party charter that emerged from the conference was a modest document.[123] It included a carefully worded requirement for state-level affirmative action programs to "provide for representation as nearly as practicable" of minorities, youth, and women in proportion to their Democratic presence – but it forbade both mandatory quotas and credentials challenges based

[121] Loye Miller, Jr., "Reformers Walk out of Dem Parley," *Detroit Free-Press*, August 19, 1974.

[122] David S. Broder, "Discipline Among the Democrats," *Washington Post*, December 11, 1974.

[123] The full text can be found in "The Charter and By-Laws of the Democratic Party of the United States," Box 1073, Folder "Hunt Commission," DNC Records.

solely on the numeric results of elections. It created a Judicial Council "to adjudicate disputes arising from the interpretation and application of national Party law" – but it stipulated that the national convention and the DNC retain control over their own credentialing disputes. It created a National Education and Training Council that gestured toward the kind of political education functions prized by Staebler and Fraser – but it remained vague about the nature and scope of the new entity's responsibilities. As for midterm issue conferences, a narrow floor vote at the Kansas City conference ensured that future meetings would not be a requirement enshrined in the party's constitution. "The Democratic Party may hold a National Party Conference between National Conventions," the charter ultimately read, and its "nature, agenda, composition, time and place … shall be determined by the Democratic National Committee." Modest though it was, the charter signified a new step in party nationalization while inscribing the core elements of the era's procedural reforms into stable party law. It institutionalized a party model that was highly permeable and driven increasingly by volunteers and issue activists.

No actor was more central to the structural reform process than Fraser, designated by Neil Staebler as "the Thomas Jefferson of the New Democratic Party."[124] After the charter's passage, Fraser established a new organization, The Democratic Conference, underwritten by unions, feminist groups, and reform lobbies, which worked in the coming years to defend the reforms and monitor the party's institutional health.[125] As the Age of Party Reform dwindled, Fraser remained engaged in the service of both participatory and responsible party principles. Simultaneously, he served as a leader in another reform project with direct bearing on the party system: the transformation of committee organization and partisan institutions in Congress.

[124] Staebler letter to Fraser, Box 284, Folder "Donald M. Fraser (misc)," Staebler Papers.

[125] "The Democratic Conference: A Report on the Past Year's Activities," July 30, 1976, and "Briefing Paper - Democratic Party Organizational Issues, 1977," Box152.L.10.5(B), Folder "Democratic Conference," Fraser Papers.

Congressional Reform and Party Government

During the joint meeting of the McGovern-Fraser and O'Hara Commissions in 1971, a question had been raised about whether or not the party charter should mention congressional organization. Sam Beer cautioned against it on the grounds that the DNC lacked any formal ability to compel changes in the internal workings of the congressional party. Henry Aaron, the Mississippi civil rights activist and party organizer, responded to Beer in frustration. "Unless, Sam, we take a position somewhere that there is going to be a modicum of conduct that we demand by people who call themselves Democrats, or be willing to exclude them, you give me a great fear," he said. "The racist element that permeates the Democratic Party, it permeates it in terms of committee assignments." James MacGregor Burns chimed in to support Henry, calling the congressional party "a separate power base" whose southern contingent amounted to an "opposition party" that reformers would need to "confront and overcome." Fraser responded that this could only happen "by getting a congressional party that will refuse these people chairmanships." As another member put it, "Congress is going to have to reform itself."[126]

The exchange highlighted both the inextricability of congressional organization from any broader party reform agenda and the practical *separation* of the two arenas given America's divided political institutions. That institutional division has itself helped to structure scholarly assessments of organizational change, which tend to focus on distinct realms – the national committees, the conventions, Congress – in isolation. But it is not coincidental that a transformative period of reform in Congress took place simultaneously to the nominating and structural reforms of McGovern-Fraser. The two movements shared key personnel, resource support, political motivations, and theoretical premises about the function of parties.

[126] Minutes, joint commission meeting, November 19, 1971, Box 46, Folder "Dem. Party, O'Hara Rules Commission, Meetings, Nov. 19, 1971," O'Hara Papers.

The role of responsible party doctrine in the movement for congressional reform was constitutive. Key items eventually achieved in the 1970s, from eliminating the sanctity of seniority to empowering the caucus and party leadership to reforming the filibuster, had all appeared in the APSA Committee on Political Parties' 1950 report.[127] From its founding in 1958, the leading force for institutional reform inside the House, the Democratic Study Group (DSG), peppered its reports and memos with explicit references to *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*.[128] Moreover, the key responsible party themes informing the McGovern-Fraser reforms – nationalization and programmatic partisanship – also underlay the major elements of congressional reform. "The strength of the Democratic Party is in its national characteristics and broad-based responsibilities," the DSG wrote in 1964, "not narrow regional interests." The party must "provide the necessary legislative machinery and internal party unity to guarantee action on the Democratic programs pledged in our platform."[129]

Early, piecemeal efforts in the 1960s to challenge seniority and to discipline recalcitrant congressional Democrats connected directly to reform developments in the *non*-congressional party. Civil rights-related controversies over convention delegations and party loyalty tests provided leverage for institutional activism within Congress. An early demonstration of the House Democratic caucus's capacity to punish dissident members came in 1965, when the DSG organized a successful campaign to strip the seniority of congressmen John Bell Williams of Mississippi and Albert Watson of South Carolina for their support of Goldwater. The DSG,

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[127] *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System*, 56-65.

[128] See. e.g., DSG background paper, "The House Rules Committee - Its History and a Creative Proposal for the Future," 1966, Box 48, Folder "Democratic Study Group - Congressional Reform, 1964-1968," O'Hara Papers; and the DSG report, "The Seniority System in the U.S. House of Representatives," February 20, 1970, Box 149.G.12.1(B), Folder "Seniority," Fraser Papers.

[129] DSG background paper, "The Case for House Democratic Caucus Action against Rep. John Bell Williams and Rep. Albert W. Watson," December 1964, Box 48, Folder "Democratic Study Group - Congressional Reform, 1964-1968," O'Hara Papers.

referencing the MFDP delegate challenge the previous year, argued that stripping Williams and Watson's privileges would reaffirm "the sound and historic role of the caucus in the achievement of party responsibility."[130] Four years later, the DSG persuaded the caucus to strip the seniority of Louisiana's John Rarick, a founding supporter of George Wallace's 1968 campaign.[131]

But such actions were sporadic and individually targeted rather than systemic. At the mid-1960s high tide of Great Society legislative productivity, the concern for procedural reform had been tempered by the evident capacity of Lyndon Johnson and liberal congressional majorities to break through institutional logjams. This capacity proved fleeting, however, largely stalling after Democrats' 1966 midterm elections. It was in the late 1960s, just as reformers began sweeping efforts at presidential nominating reforms, that the executive leadership within the DSG generated a new strategy to reform the core elements of congressional organization itself, focusing on internal party procedures as well as the structure and functioning of the committee system. The person who first managed to cut through the uncoordinated proposals of his DSG colleagues and suggest a goal around which to coalesce action was Don Fraser. In December 1968, he suggested that the DSG should lobby to achieve, as a matter of party policy, an up-or-down secret ballot vote in the Democratic caucus for all committee chairmanships at the start of each new Congress.[132] His approach won unanimous support from his colleagues.

The DSG's campaign began with a successful effort in 1969 to pass a new rule requiring caucus ratification of the Committee on Committees' nominations before they proceeded to a full House floor vote. (The Committee on Committees consisted solely of the Democratic members

[130] DSG, "The Case for House Democratic Caucus Action against Rep. John Bell Williams and Rep. Albert W. Watson," Box 48, O'Hara Papers.

[131] Donald Fraser memo to DSG, January 28, 1969, Box 151.I.11.8 (F), Folder "Rarick Ouster," Fraser Papers.

[132] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 40.

of the Ways and Means Committee, and controlled committee appointments for the caucus.) The same year, the caucus also reinstated the practice of holding regular monthly meetings. Under Fraser's chairmanship, the DSG ramped up its communications and lobbying capacities and released two major reports. The first compiled data on key votes in 1967 and 1968. Over a third of all committee and subcommittee chairmen were found to have voted against the majority of their party more often than with it. 34 exceeded the Republicans' overall record.[133] The second report laid out the stakes of the fight over seniority, articulating critics' charges that it "fragmented and diffused power in the House, thereby crippling effective leadership and making it impossible to present and pursue a coherent national program."[134] Congressional liberals grew increasingly open in attacking "the dead hand of seniority," as one member put it.[135] "Even societies that worship their ancestors," Al Lowenstein quipped on *Meet the Press*, "don't automatically put their ancestors in charge of the Armed Services Committee."[136]

A political dynamic familiar to veterans of the Eisenhower years, meanwhile, helped to set the context for the reform push. The ascension of a Republican president eliminated the coordinating effect for congressional Democrats of a co-partisan in the executive, and soon led to liberal criticisms that the congressional party leadership and committee chairs were failing to offer an effective and coherent opposition to the Nixon administration. A DSG-endorsed caucus resolution proposed in late 1969 noted that "although we Democrats are in control of both Houses of Congress as a result of last year's elections, we have no overall legislative program, and seemingly no prospect of developing one." The resolution called on all House committee

[133] DSG report, "Voting in the House," March 10, 1969, Box 151.I.11.8(F), Folder "DSG – 1969," Fraser Papers.

[134] DSG, "The Seniority System in the U.S. House of Representatives," Fraser Papers.

[135] Michael J. Harrington, "The Dead Hand of Seniority," *The Nation*, September 21, 1970.

[136] *Meet the Press* transcript, February 15, 1970, Box 149.G.11.10 (F), Folder "Gen'l Reform," Fraser Papers.

chairmen to review the 1968 party platform and develop a plan to bring its provisions to the floor in legislative form.[137] Though the resolution failed by caucus vote, increasing numbers began to share the strategic critique implicit in its language. Speaker John McCormack, 78 at the start of Nixon's presidency and noted for his passive leadership style and deference to committee barons, came in for particular criticism for enabling the conservative coalition and resisting reform.[138]

Just as party leaders during and after the 1968 Democratic convention had sought to appease insurgents by appointing a commission to study future nominating reforms, so did Speaker McCormack and Majority Leader Carl Albert agree in 1970, at the DSG's suggestion, to appoint a Democratic Organization, Study, and Review Committee as a means of accommodating and tempering their critics.[139] This committee's output proved modest but consequential. It recommended a procedure by which the caucus could vote up or down on specific chairmanship nominations made by the Committee on Committees: a request by ten members could force a caucus vote at the beginning of each Congress. The committee also included explicit language noting that seniority need not be the only criterion used in selecting chairmen. The Democratic Caucus's adoption of these recommendations at the beginning of the 92nd Congress in 1971 marked a fundamental break with internal party practices that had helped to structure House lawmaking for the previous several decades. At least as a matter of formal party procedure, committee assignments now rested on the sanction of the Democratic caucus.

The mere existence of formal powers hardly guaranteed the ability to exercise them in ways antagonistic to congressional elites, however. To do that, reformers depended on a major mobilization of outside advocacy and pressure in the early 1970s, carried out by many of the

[137] Dear Colleague letter from Sam Gibbons, John Culver, John Bingham, and Claude Pepper, September 11, 1969, Box 141.H.2.6(F), Folder "Demo. Caucus 1970," Fraser Papers.

[138] Norman C. Miller, "John McCormick: Speaker Under Fire," *Wall Street Journal*, February 17, 1970.
[139] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 70-71.

same organizations and activist networks pushing McGovern-Fraser. These included ADA, which began in 1970 to give congressional reform "the highest possible priority," in the words of its chairman.[140] The same year, Common Cause initiated intensive lobbying efforts related to congressional reform. It organized letter-writing campaigns challenging the seniority privileges of specific House members as well as advocating system-wide reforms.[141] In January of 1971, it advocated that the Democratic caucus strip the chairmanships of three southerners known for both conservatism and autocratic leadership styles: William Colmer of the Rules Committee, W.R. Poage of the Agriculture Committee, and John McMillan of the District of Columbia Committee.[142] "I strongly urge you to vote for the defeat of three men who will probably be nominated for committee chairmanships," wrote one typical constituent to a Democratic congressman (in this case Tip O'Neill) prior to the organizational meeting of the caucus.[143] Thousands of other letters likewise specified the three targeted chairmen. All three survived challenges in the caucus, but the precedent of open votes on senior chairmen had been set.

A broader network of groups coalesced in 1972 as the Committee on Congressional Reform, representing over 40 member organizations ranging from ADA and the National Committee for an Effective Congress to the League of Women Voters and the United Methodist Church Board of Christian Concerns.[144] The liberal philanthropist Stewart Mott financed the

[140] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill,* 104; Leon Shull memo to ADA officers, board, and chapters, November 27, 1972, Box 34, Folder 1240, Allard K. Lowenstein Papers, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC.

[141] "New Lobby Fights 'Special Interests'," *New York Times*, February 3, 1971.

[142] "Common Cause Urges Defeat of Three Hill Chairmen," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1971.

[143] Dianne D. Wheatley letter to Tip O'Neill, January 16, 1971, Box 21, Folder 5, Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., Papers, John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Boston, MA.

[144] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 80-83; Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*. 132-133.

Committee at the same time he was underwriting activism related to party nomination reforms.[145] In coordination with the umbrella committee, Common Cause launched a new campaign of electoral pressure called Operation Open Up the System, which compelled members to submit to congressional candidates a questionnaire covering key reform issues.[146] Such efforts not only helped make reform a salient issue in the 1972 congressional elections, but also popularized a specific *kind* of reform agenda, focused centrally on curbing the power and autonomy of committee chairs – "the feudal barons of Congress," in John Gardner's term.[147]

The vision articulated by the reform network – a network consisting mainly of avowedly nonpartisan organizations – tended not to emphasize explicit responsible-party themes concerning discipline, party centralization, or ideological cohesion. Instead, like that of the McGovern-Fraser activists, the discourse surrounding congressional reform was steeped in the New Politics-tinged language of participation and transparency. Generational turnover in Congress and among the lobbyists and advocacy groups in Washington played a role in this participatory rhetoric, as a 1970 *Nation* article tracking "The Greening of Congress" observed.[148] But it was also true that several of the reformers' agenda items did seek to diffuse power and enhance procedural regularity and transparency. In 1970, for example, the DSG and Common Cause alike lobbied to include amendments to the Legislative Reorganization Bill that would require published records of roll call votes within committees as well as so-called "teller votes"

[145] "Congressional Reform: The Tortoise Lumbers Forward," *ADA Legislative Newsletter* Vol. 2.2, February 1, 1973, Box 149.G.8.3(B), Folder "Congressional Reform," Fraser Papers.

[146] "A Common Cause Manual for the 1972 Congressional Elections," Box 114, Common Cause Records, 1968-1991, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

[147] John W. Gardner, testimony before the Mathias-Stevenson Ad Hoc Hearings on Congressional Reorganization, December 5, 1972, Box 146, Common Cause Records.

[148] Wes Barthelmes, "The Greening of Congress," *The Nation*, November 30, 1970. The headline refers to Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random House, 1970).

on legislative amendments within the Committee of the Whole.[149] They also successfully lobbied the caucus's passage of a ban on any member chairing more than one subcommittee, which had the effect of spreading chairmanships among lower ranking members. Anti-secrecy and subcommittee empowerment remained themes of the reform movement over the next few years, and New Politics-influenced procedural concerns rather than responsible party doctrine underlay them. The fact that both agendas were also supported by a cohort of junior Republicans further underscored their seeming distance from a conscious party-building effort.[150]

Such decentralizing and nonpartisan aspects of the congressional reform movement would serve to color its subsequent scholarly reputation in accounts that emphasized its fragmenting effects.[151] Those components of the reform movement, however, can easily be overemphasized. Most of the decentralizing and anti-secrecy reforms justified on grounds of participation and transparency also instrumentally served the substantive and partisan goals of Democratic reformers. Unrecorded teller votes on legislative amendments, for example, advantaged senior members with disproportionate control over the vote-gathering process, so reformers conceived of recorded teller votes as a reform that would advance the substantive goals of the party's liberal majority. Limiting members' ability to chair multiple subcommittees, meanwhile, eliminated a widely used tool that committee chairmen had employed to agglomerate power. Expansions of subcommittees' numbers and resources similarly served both to boost rank-and-file participation and to provide the party's middle tier with end-runs around conservative chairmen. Virtually all key actors in the outside reform groups were themselves

[149] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 47-57.

[150] Eric Schickler, Eric McGhee, and John Sides, "Remaking the House and Senate: Personal Power, Ideology, and the 1970s Reforms," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* Vol. 28 (August 2003): 297-331.

[151] Sheppard emphasizes reform's contradictory impulses in *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 21-22, 95-102.

liberals acutely aware of the connection between institutional reform, partisan behavior, and policymaking. Even the most avowedly nonpartisan groups endorsed a normative commitment to intraparty majority rule. When Common Cause distributed rankings of committee chairmen in 1975, one of its criteria was conveyed by the question, "Does he use [power] to further the programs and policies favored by the Democratic majority or does he use power to undercut such programs?"[152] Similarly, consumer activist Ralph Nader celebrated that chairs who "consistently violate caucus rules and vote more often with the Republican majority than with the Democratic" were now "on notice that they will be accountable to the Democratic majority."[153]

This push for party cohesion and internal majority rule found notable if comparably limited expression in the other chamber of Congress in the early 1970s. The Senate, with its extraordinarily open legislative procedures and limited capacity for centralized control, provided a set of incentives to its members that inevitably encouraged greater individualism than would be seen in the House, pre- or post-reform.[154] Neither committee chairmen *nor* party leaders could aspire to exercise the kind of power over members' behavior that they could within the House. Nevertheless, the outside reform coalition worked with Democratic liberals in the Senate to moderately strengthen the party caucus (known as the Conference in this chamber) and its leadership and to diminish the autonomy of conservative committee chairmen. Majority Leader Mike Mansfield agreed in 1970 to let the Democratic Policy Committee make policy

[152] Common Cause, "Report on House Committee Chairmen," 13 January 1975, Box 126, Common Cause Records.

[153] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 170.

[154] For discussions of the sources of those incentives and how they work, see Christopher J. Deering and Steven S. Smith, *Committees in Congress*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1997), 131-132.

recommendations to the Conference. A year later, he agreed to hold Conference meetings automatically at the request of members and to appoint a committee to study seniority reform.[155]

The incremental movement for party-enhancing reforms proceeded in the wake of the 1972 elections, which produced a landslide victory for Richard Nixon that was largely devoid of coattails helping congressional Republicans. Retirements, redistricting, and the electoral efforts of the reform coalition all helped to produce a younger and more pro-reform incoming Democratic caucus in both chambers. The caucus soon passed a new requirement for automatic votes on all committee chairmanships at the beginning of each new Congress. The year 1973 also saw the establishment of the Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, which would serve as a kind of executive committee for the Democratic caucus, pursuing legislative coordination and making appointment recommendations to the Committee on Committees. In another leadership-enhancing reform, the caucus voted to make the Speaker, majority leader, and whip all *ex officio* members of the Committee on Committees. "We have made committee chairmen more accountable to the Democratic Caucus," Fraser reported to his constituents in March. "We have also moved to strengthen the House leadership and centralize its decision-making capability."[156]

Procedural strikes against the committee barons' power still did not translate into the direct removal of individual chairmen by the caucus, however. In this, the first organizing caucus that would include automatic votes on every chairmanship, the highest number of votes cast in favor of removing a sitting chairman was 49 against Richard Ichord of the Internal Security (formerly Un-American Activities) Committee, followed by 48 against W.R. Poage of

[155] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 131.

[156] Fraser, "Special Report," March 26, 1973, Box 149 G.8.3 (B), Folder "Congressional Reform," Fraser Papers.

the Agriculture Committee.[157] One factor contributing to the caucus's continual reluctance to exercise its newfound powers was the forward movement of the very electoral realignment in the South and elsewhere that reformers sought to hasten through institutional changes. The top target for reformers seeking to oust a chairman in previous Congresses had been South Carolina Representative John McMillan of the District of Columbia Committee, but a liberal primary challenge in 1972 removed McMillan from the race. In the general election, a conservative Republican candidate defeated that liberal Democrat, in a preview of the basic partisan and ideological dynamic that would come to define congressional races in the South in later decades.

The breakthrough for reformers came in 1974, when the first congressional elections since the Watergate crisis and Nixon's resignation ushered in an enormous crop of freshman Democrats. Many of these new members, soon termed the "Watergate Babies," had run on congressional reform platforms in coordination with the reform coalition and, in the case of House candidates, with financial support from the DSG. Common Cause had expanded its Open Up the System electoral campaign that year, while the umbrella Committee on Congressional Reform promoted a comprehensive reform package covering issues related to seniority, party leadership, and committee structure.[158] An extraordinary alignment of developments, ranging from the public atmosphere created by Watergate to massive generational replacement underway among members of Congress to the concerted mobilization of outside advocacy, finally appeared after the 1974 midterms to give reformers an opening for truly sweeping change.

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[157] Transcript, "Democratic Caucus for the Organization of the 93th Congress," January 22, 1973, Box 4, Folder 1, Records of the House Democratic Caucus, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[158] *In Common* Vol. 3 No. 1, February 1974, and Vol. 3 No. 9, June 1974, Box 127, Common Cause Records; DSG Special Report, "94th Congress Reform Proposals," December 1, 1974, Box 149 G.8.3 (B), Folder "Congressional Reform," Fraser Papers.

At its organizational meeting in December of that year, the numerically expanded and demographically younger House Democratic caucus enacted the gamut of proposals included in the reform coalition's package. Two of the boldest provisions directly enhanced the power of the party leadership while indirectly empowering the caucus's liberal majority. First, the caucus voted to give the Speaker the power to appoint all Democratic members of the Rules Committee. Secondly – thanks to intense lobbying by not only the core reform coalition members but also, notably, the AFL-CIO – the caucus did away entirely with the Committee on Committees, removing the authority over committee appointments from its longstanding home at Ways and Means and placing it in the Steering and Policy Committee.

The following month occasioned even more dramatic developments, as reformers seized the moment to make precedent-setting examples out of key committee barons targeted for ouster. The DSG, Ralph Nader's Congress Watch, and Common Cause had all collaborated on a formal report assessing the record of fourteen House chairmen. The report singled out F. Edward Hebert for "flagrant" conduct, while cataloging a range of abuses by six other chairmen relating to rule compliance, fairness, and fealty to caucus wishes.[159] Common Cause distributed the report to congressional Democrats just days before the meeting of the Steering and Policy Committee. Simultaneously, the 75-member freshman caucus flexed its institutional muscle by inviting every committee chairman to meet with it for what many perceived to be implicit auditions to retain their jobs. Hebert got off on the wrong foot by referring to the freshmen as "boys and girls," while Poage reported encountering hostility from the disproportionately liberal

[159] Common Cause, "Report on House Committee Chairmen," 13 January 1975, Box 126, Common Cause Records.

and non-rural interlocutors at his meeting.[160] Such chairmen found themselves in the unfamiliar position of needing to defend their records and actively campaign to retain their power.[161]

Following the meetings with the freshmen, reformers carried their momentum through two crucial rounds of Democratic voting. First, the Steering and Policy Committee voted to oust two chairmen for the first time: Wright Patman of Banking and Wayne Hays of House Administration. Then, at the full caucus meeting the following day, House Democrats voted to uphold the Steering Committee's ouster of Patman, narrowly rejected its decision on Hays, and, most stunning of all, also rejected its recommendations to retain Poage and Hebert as heads of their respective committees.[162] The caucus had exercised its power to oust three sitting chairman, an unprecedented overturning of longstanding norms and practices.

The response from the reformers' targets mirrored the alarm that party professionals had conveyed in their reactions to McGovern-Fraser, castigating the barbarians at the gate. "Common Cause is running Congress," Hebert declared on *The Today Show* in February. "Who elected them?"[163] Others made explicit comparisons between the reformers in Congress and McGovernites. As the embattled chairman Richard Ichord declared at a caucus meeting, "what we are doing here is conducting another Miami Convention."[164] One twelve-term incumbent's reaction to the developments constituted his own small contribution to the process of ideological sorting that would soon transform the party system itself. "In the last few days," Oklahoma

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[160] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 200; W.R. Poage, *My First 85 Years* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 1985), 147.

[161] For examples, see the "Dear Colleague" letters from Edward Hebert, January 14, 1975, and Jamie Whitten, January 21, 1975, both in Box 151.H.2.6(F), Folder "Democratic Caucus – 1975," Fraser Papers.

[162] "Hearings Before the Committee On Early Democratic Caucus for the Organization of the 94th Congress," p. 529, Box 5, Records of the Democratic Caucus.

[163] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 171.

[164] "Hearings Before the Committee On Early Democratic Caucus," 535, Box 5, Records of the Democratic Caucus.

congressman John Jarman announced in January, "I have seen the caucus taken over by some of the same elements which took the party over in 1972." To Jarman, the intent of those leading the takeover was clear: "to do everything possible to force their liberal views on this Congress and on this country by nullifying the seniority system and punishing those who do not adhere to the liberal party line." Refusing "to serve under this kind of party control," Jarman announced his intention to switch affiliation to the GOP. House Minority Leader John Rhodes applauded Jarman's move, and reflected on reform's implications for realignment. "For many years it has been speculated that moderate and conservative Democrats might find sufficient justification to cross party lines," he said. Seniority perks had long posed a "roadblock in this scenario," but the reforms now removed the "incentive for many Democrats to maintain their affiliation with a party whose general philosophy is not reflective of their views."[165]

The same reformist surge rocking the House after the 1974 elections did not fail to affect the Senate. That chamber's Democratic Steering Committee appointed several new liberals to key committees while blocking the return of segregationist James Allen to Judiciary. The Democratic Conference also passed a rule requiring automatic secret-ballot votes on all committee chairmen at the beginning of each Congress.[166] Senate liberals also launched a new campaign against a longstanding target of responsible-party reformers: the filibuster. For nearly three decades, activists had sought to change the requirements for cloture, arguing that the threshold of two-thirds of the chamber needed to break a filibuster mocked majority rule and empowered conservatives. The newer congressional reform advocates in the early 1970s, led by

[165] Mary Russell, "Rep. Jarman Switches to Republican Party," *Washington Post*, January 25, 1975.

[166] Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 172.

Common Cause, endorsed the cause.[167] The 1974 election results combined with the ascension of liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller to the Vice Presidency (the presiding officer of the Senate) to provide a window of opportunity. Walter Mondale's January 1975 proposal shied away from outright majority rule, calling merely for a reduction of the threshold from two-thirds to three-fifths to break a filibuster. The rule change that eventually passed was compromised further. A three-fifths vote of the entire Senate, rather than merely of those present and voting, would be required for cloture, and two thirds would still be required for votes related to Senate rule changes, a hindrance to future reform.[168] Still, the move from a 67 to a 60 vote threshold for cloture constituted a significant change to a procedure that had only experienced comparable reform two other times in the twentieth century.

When the dust settled in early 1975 after those tumultuous organizational meetings among House Democrats and the hard-fought achievement of a modest reform of the Senate filibuster, only the startling extent of the reformers' victories was evident. A vision of just how policymaking might change for the long term in the wake of those victories was still far from clear. The special alignment of forces that had enabled such a breakthrough would prove difficult to replicate in the coming years, and thus the beginning of the 94th Congress served as the high-water mark for deliberate institutional transformation within Congress. Occurring just after Democrats' ratification of a party charter, it might also be said to have marked the beginning of the end of the Age of Party Reform that had, starting in 1968, seen transformation across so many elements of America's majority party and overall party system.

[167] See, e.g., Common Cause, "Editorial Memorandum: Senate Considers Adjustment of Filibuster Rule," February 1975, Box 137, Common Cause Papers.

[168] David E. Rosenbaum, "Filibuster Foes Win the Key Test and Limit Debate," *New York Times*, March 6, 1975.

From Disarray to Centralization

It was not merely the impetus toward further institutional reform that dissipated quickly in the mid-1970s. Optimism over the consequences of the reforms that had been implemented seemed to vanish just as fast. Invocations of reform's unintended consequences soon became a rote accompaniment to ceaseless commentary on political fracture and party decline in America. This focus on political disarray had multiple causes. On one hand, as explored in more detail in the next two chapters, the later 1970s saw developments that exacerbated points of fragmentation and paralysis in the political system. Stagflation presented novel, seemingly intractable policy dilemmas. Successive presidents working in rocky terrain weakened their position by setting priorities at odds with key allies. More subtly, tectonic shifts of party allegiance among demographic and constituent groups intensified the impression of disarray. On the other hand, party reforms themselves did produce changes with some initially decentralizing effects. The number of primary systems proliferated, for example, as states found them to be cheaper and logistically easier to establish in conformity with the new guidelines than conventions or caucuses.[169] Since primaries were the most direct, unmediated system of delegate selection, their rise to predominance meant a relative marginalization of formal party organizations in favor of campaign armies amassed by individual political entrepreneurs. This occasioned an explosion of commentary on the rise of "candidate-centered" politics. The commentary also encompassed members of Congress, for whom reforms had created new opportunities for individualistic legislative behavior thanks to transparency rules and the proliferation of subcommittees.[170]

[169] Their number more than doubled between 1968 and 1980, reaching 35. Elaine Kamarck, *Primary Politics: How Presidential Candidates Have Shaped the Nominating System* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2009), 18.

[170] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform,* 219-254; David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 34-39, 82-93. In a separate but related scholarly development, David Mayhew's highly influential 1974 work, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, though not itself focused on institutional reform or party decline, at once embodied and helped to catalyze a disciplinary movement away from

On both fronts, a critical scholarly literature of reform emerged quickly. The first influential work on presidential nominating reform came from political scientists within the orbit of the CDM, most notably Jeane Kirkpatrick and that regretful McGovern-Fraser veteran, Austin Ranney. They were soon joined by a panoply of centrist and neoconservative scholars, including Everett Carl Ladd, James Caesar, Nelson Polsby, and Polsby's doctoral student Byron Shafer.[171] To these critics, reform was not merely an anti-party, neo-Progressive venture. It was also a mechanism for transferring power from professionals and traditional constituency leaders – cast now as implicitly responsible and representative stewards of group interests rather than out-of-touch bosses and hacks – to a new group. In 1977 DNC testimony, Kirkpatrick termed reform's benefactors "a verbalist elite" holding "a much greater interest in what might be called style and symbol issues, ideological issues … environmentalism and foreign policy and so forth, and much less interest in the bread and butter questions." Alarm over this ideological coloring compelled critics to make arguments similar to those lodged against responsible party doctrine. Noting that delegates in 1972 were distinguished "by their zeal," O'Hara argued that reform produced "a system that was open to capture by an aroused minority." Lost were "the views of the non-participating Democrats, the casual Democrats … whose support we need in November."[172]

Concern over the reforms was not limited to centrist and neoconservative critics, however. Some of the most devoted proponents of responsible party doctrine worked throughout the later 1970s to organize a collective scholarly response to developments in party politics.

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party-centered research with its declaration that "no theoretical treatment of the United States Congress that posits parties as analytical units will go very far." Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 27.

[171] Lawrence B. Joseph, "Neoconservatism in Contemporary Political Science: Democratic Theory and the Party System," *Journal of Politics* Vol. 44 (Nov., 1982): 955-982; Robert T. Nokamura and Denis G. Sullivan, "Neo-Conservatism and the Presidential Nomination Reforms: A Critique," *Congress & the Presidency* 9 (1982): 79-97.

[172] Proceedings of the League of Industrial Democracy conference, May 2-3, 1975, in the pamphlet "The Challenge of Change and Conflict in American Society," p. 2, Box 149.C.13.4(F), Folder "Fraser Articles," Fraser Papers.

Starting with informal correspondence led by James MacGregor Burns in 1975, these scholars eventually organized themselves as the Committee on Party Renewal. In roundtables at APSA meetings and testimony before party commissions, members generally endorsed the participatory thrust of the McGovern-Fraser reforms and directed their concerns instead at fragmenting developments like the proliferation of primaries.[173] They advocated measures to strengthen the central party apparatuses and bolster issue-based party activism while protecting intraparty democracy. But they were hardly confident about the prospects of achieving such goals.

At the same time that fragmentation seemed to dominate party politics, however, moves to shore up and strengthen the parties commenced. Some of these developments stemmed directly from changes made by party organizations. The next two DNC reform panels to form after McGovern-Fraser, Mikulski, and the Charter commission took as their institutional goals a modest curbing of their predecessors' participatory reforms and a restoration of the role of elected officials. In 1978, the Commission on Presidential Nomination and Party Structure called for "add-on" ex-officio delegates numbering 10 percent of each state's delegation.[174] Four years later, a new Commission on Presidential Nomination expanded that concept with the introduction of "bonus delegates" to Democratic conventions – several hundred unpledged delegate slots reserved for public and party officials.[175] The easing of factional tensions reduced opposition to such proposals. In a self-reinforcing process, increasing party cohesion enabled the adoption of reforms to empower majorities and curb dissidents.

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[173] See the letters in Box 149.C.12.7(B), Folder "Committee for Party Renewal," Fraser Papers.

[174] Commission on Presidential Nomination and Party Structure, *Openness, Participation, and Party-Building: Reforms for a Stronger Democratic Party*, p. 99-105, Box 1074, Folder unlabeled, DNC Records.

[175] Commission on Presidential Nomination, *The Report of the Commission on Presidential Nomination*, Box 1073, Folder unlabeled, DNC Records.

That dynamic would be far more forcefully, if less visibly, manifested in the *informal* ways that engaged activists, politicians, and interests came to coordinate nomination races after the 1970s. In 1975, Fraser had lamented the proliferation of primaries and speculated on what the most feasible way might be to produce some degree of stability without jettisoning voter participation. What might work, he said, would be to treat the primaries as "the one place down the track for the public to intervene in the process. Then we could try to move one step earlier to get some kind of ad hoc or informal coalitions across the country which can try to reach an agreement on one or two or three candidates."[176] Something resembling that very system emerged by decade's end. Party actors would now seek through meetings, endorsements, and informal agreements to coalesce behind acceptable candidates prior to the race's public phase – a process labeled by scholars the "invisible primary."[177] Increasing ideological cohesion within the parties only enhanced the ease and effectiveness of this coordination.

The same gradual move from fragmentation to centralization commenced in the postreform Congress by the later 1970s. As with the nominating process, the first wave of scholarly and journalistic commentary on the transformed Congress emphasized the unintended consequences of reforms that dispersed power.[178] "On many days," a reporter wrote, "Congress has all the earmarks of a Southern state legislature where, in the absence of party influence, a new coalition has to be put together for every roll-call."[179] The southern comparison was ironic,

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[176] "Challenge of Change and Conflict in American Society," Box 149.C.13.4(F), "Fraser Articles," Fraser Papers.

[177] Barbara Norrander, "Presidential Nomination Politics in the Post-Reform Era," *Political Research Quarterly* 49 (Dec. 1996): 875-915; Wayne P. Steger, "Do Primary Voters Draw from a Stacked Deck? Presidential Nominations in an Era of Candidate-Centered Campaigns," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30 (Dec. 2000): 727-753; Cohen et al, *The Party Decides*, 159-234.

[178] Sheppard, *Rethinking Congressional Reform*, 302-362; Anthony King, ed., *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1978); and Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, eds., *The New Congress* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981).

[179] John Herbers, "The Party's Over for the Political Parties," *New York Times*, December 8, 1979.

since the transformation of that region proved so central to the revival of congressional party discipline. Conservative southern Democrats were increasingly replaced by conservative Republicans, moderate Democrats representing biracial coalitions, or liberal Democrats in largely African American districts. Remaining conservative Democrats began to liberalize their own voting, a result of electoral trends and new incentives for party loyalty brought by reform.[180]

Growing ideological cohesion was not only an effect of reform. It was also an impetus for the increasing utilization by party leaders of reform's centralizing tools. Here as in presidential nominations, cohesion made partisans more inclined to allow leaders to exercise coordinating and agenda-setting power.[181] Beginning with Tip O'Neill's Speakership in 1977, Democratic leaders flexed the institutional muscles afforded by reform. They expanded the whip system and used the Steering and Policy and Rules committees to set the legislative agenda, along with Party Task Forces handling initiatives across multiple committee jurisdictions.[182] The combination of ideological sorting and tighter control by party leaders caused voting cohesion to begin a rebound in the late 1970s that continued for decades.

Leaders in the Age of Party Reform shared two responsible party goals: programmatic politics and party nationalization. They were well aware that achieving them would catalyze the

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[180] Charles S. Bullock III, "Congressional Voting and the Mobilization of a Black Electorate in the South," *Journal of Politics* Vol. 43 (August 1981): 662-682.; Sara Brandes Crook and John Hibbing, "Congressional Reform and Party Discipline: The Effects of Changes in the Seniority System on Party Loyalty in the U.S. House of Representatives," *British Journal of Political Science* 15 (1985): 207-226.

[181] This is the central argument of Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House*, and the key dynamic of the "Conditional Party Government" theory developed by Rohde and John H. Aldrich.

[182] Barbara Sinclair, *Majority Leadership in the U.S. House* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 55-56. 67-85, and 138-146; and Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill*, 234-238. Amid the general disorder of Carter-era policymaking, two examples of legislative achievements made possible by the congressional reforms were O'Neill's tightly controlled shepherding of the White House's energy bill to House passage in 1977 (the bill met a much different fate in the Senate) and the surprising reform and expansion of the food stamp program the same year. See John C. Barrow, "An Age of Limits: Jimmy Carter and the Quest for a National Energy Policy," in *The Carter Presidency*, eds. Fink and Graham, 166; and Sam Rosenfeld, "Fed By Reform: Congressional Politics, Partisan Change, and the Food Stamp Program, 1961-1981," *Journal of Policy History* Vol. 22 (Winter 2010): 491-498.

ideological realignment of the two parties. In 1969, a journalist had asked George McGovern what he thought about "a realignment of American parties to something a little closer to the British system, with conservatives in one party and liberals in another." He responded that, "on balance, it would serve the national interest … if we did move more in the direction of a unified party." Harold Hughes went further in the same interview, arguing that such a "leveling process of philosophical lines will take place if we open up the political processes at the precinct and ground level," and "the sooner it happens the better off probably we would be in this country."[183]

Less than a decade later, many political observers had become more pessimistic. They feared that the institutional disruptions caused by reform might not be alleviated. "What would take the place of parties?" the Committee on Party Renewal asked in 1977. "A politics of celebrities, of excessive media influence, of political fad-of-the-month clubs … of heightened interest in 'personalities' and lowered interest in policy."[184] The logic of ideologically driven partisanship is what kept this vision from coming to pass. Far from being either issueless or partyless, politics in the postreform era became increasingly partisan as a result of being increasingly ideological. Democrat-authored reforms were hardly the only driver of this process. But institutional changes did matter, and not only in ways *un*intended by their architects.

[183] *Meet The Press*, July 6, 1969, Box 10, Folder "Commission Chronological File, August 1969," DNC Records.

[184] "Professional Notes," *PS* 10 (Autumn 1977): 494.

Chapter 5: The Making of a Vanguard Party

To understand what happened to the Republican Party in the 1970s, ponder for a moment a realignment that might have been. Past figures as disparate as Franklin Roosevelt, Karl Mundt, and Paul Butler had each discovered in turn that the work of remapping American parties along ideological lines was frustratingly slow and seemingly impervious to top-down orchestration. But that did not stop several aides of Richard Nixon as well as House leaders from pursuing one more bid for an instantaneous realignment of the congressional parties, in 1972 and early 1973.

Gerald Ford, the House minority leader, called the gambit "Operation Switch Over." Early in the summer of 1972, he sensed that George McGovern's impending presidential nomination provided the best opportunity yet to make an argument to the remaining southern Democratic congressional barons – conservatives like Joe Waggonner, George Smathers, and Jamie Whitten – that their party was truly lost to them.[1] He sought to convince a sufficient number to switch parties *en masse* for control of the House to shift to the GOP. Nixon, however, discouraged Ford's pursuit of this plan until after the November elections, calculating that his personal electoral majority would be maximized by the symbolism of *bi*partisan support.

A new effort proceeded in the winter following Nixon's landslide victory. Vice President Spiro Agnew publicly exhorted southern audiences to switch their party allegiance from Democratic to Republican, describing the former as a crew of "exotics, elitists, and philosophical abstractionists" whose new chairman had just "read George Wallace and John Connally out of the party."[2] Simultaneously, backdoor talks took place between southern Democrats and Ford and Nixon aides, with Waggoner serving as a liaison. Nixon's lack of down-ticket coattails in

[1] Robert Mason, "'I Was Going to Build a New Republican Party and a New Majority': Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969-73," *Journal of American Studies* Vol. 39 (December 2005): 476-477.

[2] Nick Thimmesch, "Spiro has not really gone underground," *Chicago Tribune*, January 7, 1973; "Agnew Opens Drive," *The Washington Post*, December 13, 1972.

the 1972 election, however – a partial byproduct of his bipartisan campaign strategy – meant that the Democrats' majority did not shrink sufficiently to enable willing switchers to give the GOP a House majority.[3] Scattered reports claim that, during the wintertime negotiations, upwards of 35 Democrats contemplated switching, though other sources indicate that the realistic number was half that.[4] Whatever the count, discussion of a mass conversion ground to a halt in March, as the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities began its Watergate investigation.

The fact that, at such a late date as 1972 – a moment of maximal Republican electoral dominance at the presidential level – senior southern Democrats still either could or would not coordinate a mass conversion owed largely to a mix of personal and institutional factors mitigating against such bold ideological gambits. The inertia borne of career-long affiliation to the party of Dixie was one factor, affecting not only officeholders but many of their constituents, who would continue to vote Democratic in down-ballot races for years to come. The institutional perquisites of seniority also mattered, and Ford encountered stiff resistance from GOP colleagues to the notion of transferring the converts' seniority in the event of a switch. Nevertheless, the evident effort put into orchestrating this instant congressional realignment lends it at least a modicum of plausibility in spite of its failure. So it poses a tantalizing counterfactual, one that helps set into relief the nature of important changes that the GOP underwent in subsequent years.

[3] Nixon's legislative aide William E. Timmons estimated that 17 Democrats stood ready to make the switch if it gave the GOP control, but the election left a need for 26 Democratic defections to bring that about; Congressman Bud Shuster endorsed these numbers. See A. James Reichley interviews, November 29, 1977, Box 1, Folder "Nixon White House – Timmons, William," and October 6, 1977, Box 2, Folder "Congress – Shuster, Bud," both in A. James Reichley Interview Transcripts, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library (GRFL), Ann Arbor, MI.

[4] The high-end estimate is provided by Godfrey Hodgson in *The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 123–27; and is backed up by William Rusher, *The Rise of the Right* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984).

"Operation Switch Over" was of a piece with the vision of partisan realignment that animated Nixon's presidency and shaped his most ambitious political efforts.[5] Such efforts – some implemented, others merely discussed – included the administration's attempts to nationalize the 1970 midterm elections around a backlash against social unrest; its intensive courting of Dixiecrats like Virginia's Harry Byrd; and Nixon's grooming of the ex-Democrat John Connally of Texas as his heir apparent, who would head a Republican Party reconstructed, and perhaps even renamed, as a result of Nixon's transformative leadership.[6] All of these efforts revolved around a particular conception of the changing demographic landscape of electoral politics and its connection to a changing issue terrain for the party system.

Though "the silent majority" served as a rhetorically effective evocation in speeches, Nixon aides typically used the shorthand "New American Majority" to describe their vision. Demographically, the majority combined the traditional bastions of Midwestern Republicanism with middle-class suburban voters in the Sunbelt states, George Wallace supporters in the South, and disaffected white ethnics in cities across the country. Ideologically, the basis of the New American Majority, the new line of cleavage in a realigned party system, would concern cultural more than economic issues. Nixonian conservatism rejected the libertarian anti-statism of Goldwater. It was defined by opposition to the ferment of the 1960s – "the Social Issue," as Ben Wattenberg and Richard Scanlon put it in the 1970 tome *The Real Majority* – rather than the core

[5] The most comprehensive assessment of Nixon's various approaches to reshaping partisan politics is Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[6] On the 1970 midterm strategy, see Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 251-275. On Nixon and Harry Byrd, see James R. Sweeney, "Southern Strategies: The 1970 Election for the United States Senate in Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 106 (1998): 165-200. Nixon's post-reelection discussions with his aides about John Connally's future leadership is documented by H.R. Haldeman in diary entries dated December 1 and December 5, 1972; see *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 546, 548-549.

architecture of the welfare state and postwar economic policy.[7] It was a conservatism that could accommodate wage and price controls and turbo-charged Keynesianism (administered by the consummate statist conservative, Treasury Secretary John Connally), Social Security expansion and a guaranteed income. Kevin Phillips called it "consolidationist Republicanism" in his best-selling blueprint for an emerging partisan majority.[8] Realignment theory itself bolstered the idea among Nixon strategists that a socio-cultural issue dimension would displace rather than augment the economic one as the basis for partisan conflict – for such "issue displacement" was allegedly the hallmark of realignments.[9] The wooing of Southern Bourbon officeholders through Operation Switch Over and of Wallace populists in the electorate fit a plan to construct a party alignment largely around racialized social issues, cultural "permissiveness," and foreign policy.

To imagine Operation Switch Over succeeding in 1973 is to imagine a trajectory for American conservatism and party politics different from that which eventually occurred. The aging Democrats targeted for conversion certainly held conservative positions on issues ranging from labor to civil rights to foreign affairs. But they were not inculcated in an intellectual and institutional milieu that was only beginning to be constructed as of 1973, one that included congressional caucuses, think tanks, and advocacy organizations and was defined by ideologically-driven partisanship and a movement orientation. These Democrats were in fact the last master practitioners of committed *bi*partisanship in American politics, and of an instrumental

[7] Richard M. Scanlon and Ben Wattenberg, *The Real Majority: An Extraordinary Examination of the American Electorate* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), 35-44.

[8] Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969), 36.

[9] James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1983), 13.

kind of partisan maneuvering to maintain the South's clout within the system.[10] The question of whether Nixon's New American Majority would have, in fact, taken political root had not Watergate destroyed his presidency is similarly speculative. What matters is that the actual post-Watergate trajectory of both GOP and conservative politics differed from his vision in key ways.

The years following Watergate saw experimentation in conservatives' approach to partisan politics, featuring arguments about the potential viability of a new party and the proper relationship between issues and partisanship. Ronald Reagan's nomination challenge to Ford in 1976 signaled a new strategic convergence on pursuing ideological activism singularly through the GOP. Conservatives built new organizations within and around the party and took advantage of changing institutional contexts to maximize their leverage. Their efforts gained momentum during the Carter years, thanks partly to ideological business mobilization and an influx of "amateur" activism from the Christian Right. The result by decade's end was a reconfiguration of the GOP agenda, in which moderate elements on both social and economic issues were marginalized and the "fusionism" of the modern right became the programmatic core of the party.[11] In this reconfiguration, contrary to realignment theorists' predictions, party cleavages on cultural issues *supplemented* rather than supplanted those on economic and welfare state issues.

In the explosion of historical literature on postwar American conservatism and, in particular, the right's mobilizations during the 1970s, the partisan context of that movement-

[10] Indeed, even Joe Waggoner himself later said, as paraphrased by interviewer A. James Reichley, that he was "opposed to having all the conservatives in one party, and all the liberals in the other party," because while parties rotate in and out of power, once liberals enact a new program, "you never really turn it back all the way." Reichley interview, February 8, 1978, Box 2, Folder "Congress – Waggoner, Joe," Reichley Interview Transcripts, GRFL.

[11] The classic analysis of the fusionism of the postwar right is George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America Since1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

building has often been underemphasized.[12] This is in keeping with contemporary commentary during that decade that cast ideological politics as symptomatic of system-wide party decline. But analyzing the conservative movement as a kind of partisan project helps to bring the right into a broader story of party development, one it shared with liberal activists and reformers who also sought to forge a more ideologically sorted, issue-based system. Conservative actors and political elites not only made some of the same responsible-party arguments as liberal reformers – against transactional partisan organizations, in favor of issue politics and programmatically distinct parties – they also took advantage of new institutional reforms that were rendering the party system more permeable to activist influence. That new institutional context and the coalitional efforts made by conservative activists in turn help explain why the party polarization that began at the elite level in the 1970s occurred along multiple issue dimensions at once.[13]

From the 1970s onward, conservatives within the GOP would occupy the vanguard of efforts to inscribe a firmer line of ideological division into the party system, to marry partisan team spirit to substantive and philosophical zeal in pursuit of a politics of permanent combat. The congressional realignment of the white South that Operation Switch Over had symbolized would eventually take place, though its unfolding spanned decades rather than months. But the southern Republicans who eventually came to power would operate differently from their Dixiecrat predecessors – conservative across more dimensions of policy, more steeped in the

[12] For historiographical reviews of the subfield, see Julian E. Zelizer, "Rethinking the History of American Conservatism," *Reviews in American History* Vol. 38 (June 2010): 367-392; and Kim Phillips-Fein, "Conservatism: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* Vol. 98 (Dec. 2011): 723-743. Two works that do focus on the partisan dimensions of post-1960s conservatism are Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).

[13] Geoffrey C. Layman and his colleagues use the term "conflict extension" to describe the impact on the party system of such additive issue activism, contrasting it with the older realignment theory concept of "conflict displacement." They argue that conflict extension is a distinguishing feature of modern party polarization, and point to the 1970s party reforms as one factor enabling multidimensional issue polarization. Layman et al, "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 104 (May 2010): 324-346.

ethos of a well-defined national conservative movement, and far more partisan in orientation. The conservative story of the Ford and Carter years is the story of how that combination of characteristics came to predominate within the GOP and, in so doing, changed American politics.

Conservative Revolt and the New-Party Path

Gerald Ford had been president of the United States for all of two weeks when he began receiving warnings of the collapse of conservative Republican support. "There is a mini-revolt among congressional conservatives over some of the week's activities," legislative aide William Timmons wrote the president on August 22, 1974. Those activities ranged from weighty policy decisions to symbolic gestures, but they acquired an air of significance from their seeming confluence as the new president's first, standard-setting batch of directives.[14] They included a new policy regarding clemency for Vietnam War draft evaders; Ford's reaffirmation of support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA); and Nelson Rockefeller's nomination as vice president.[15] "The House funny-farm rumors are that you will come out soon for busing, gun control, and abortion," Timmons reported. To calm right-wing nerves, he recommended holding meetings with both chambers' conservative-dominated Republican Steering Committees: "If you approve, we'll prepare some conservative issues to discuss at these meetings." Ford did not approve, checking off the "Do Not Schedule" option at the bottom of the memo.

That checkmark well captured both the new administration's instinctive disposition toward movement conservatives and the latter's marginal position in national politics as of 1974. Ford's presidency, borne of crisis and forced into a harried midstream transition, lacked the

[14] William E. Timmons memo to Gerald R. Ford, August 22, 1974, in Box 5, Folder "Memoranda – Timmons to the President August 1974 (2)," William E. Timmons Files, GRFL.

[15] Lou Cannon, "Amnesty and Health Plan Stir Disenchantment: Ford's Early Moves Ire Conservatives," *Washington Post*, August 26, 1974.

benefit of the kind of overarching agenda that typically emerges out of a campaign and lengthy preparation for office. In a climate of crisis management, with national reconciliation and reassurance the basic orienting goal, Ford's team opted for a default posture in the direction of prevailing policy currents. In 1974, that direction, not only in Congress but among establishment Republicans, ran towards the center and away from the right. Most decisions made during the early months of the administration reflected an inclination to shore up Ford's left flank.

This inclination also reflected the degree to which conservatives lacked intraparty leverage after years serving as fitful junior partners to Nixon.[16] That weakness was evident, for example, in the administration deliberations regarding Ford's vice-presidential pick. It was not surprising that aide Bob Hartmann thought it wise to choose Rockefeller as a genuflection to the party's moderate wing.[17] More striking was the fact that Pat Buchanan, the old Nixon staff's token hard-right voice, echoed the recommendation. "If I were speaking of the President's interest alone," he wrote Ford, "regrettably, Rockefeller is the one." Picking Reagan or Barry Goldwater would "cause a mighty rupture in the liberal establishment and tear up the pea patch with the national press corps." Buchanan deemed Rockefeller "a strong and safe choice," partly because of a soon-to-be-disproven sense that the he had "lost the old devil patina with the Right," but also because Buchanan considered the liberal establishment a force still to be reckoned with.[18] Similarly, Ford's new policy for Vietnam draft evaders was conceived as a

[16] On Nixon's arms-length relationship with movement conservatives, see Sarah Katherine Mergel, *Conservative Intellectuals and Richard Nixon: Rethinking the Rise of the Right* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[17] A. James Reichley interview with Robert Hartmann, December 3, 1977, Box 1, Folder "Ford White House – Hartmann, Robert," Reichley Interview Transcripts, GRFL.

[18] Buchanan memo to Ford, August 12, 1974, Box 21, Folder "Vice Presidential White House Staff Suggestions," Robert T. Hartmann Files, GRFL.

conciliatory gesture, a break from Nixon-era divisions, with little thought given to a conservative backlash.[19]

But the dam of conservative frustration, which had strained against Nixon's ideological transgressions, burst in the wake of his fall, and the newcomer to the presidency immediately became the target of factional dissent that had roots stretching years in the past. The swiftness of the "mini-revolt" that Timmons noted was striking. His warning to Ford had partly been prompted by another staffer's report of Senate cloakroom scuttlebutt. Tennessee Senator Bill Brock remarked that his constituent calls and wires were "running 50-1 against [Rockefeller] already," while Goldwater told the staffer, "You can kiss the Republican Party goodbye." Idaho's reliably blunt Jim McClure asked, "How many times do you have to kick a guy in the groin before you let up?"[20] Backroom conservative grumbling soon turned into public criticism and streams of mail from GOP voters and officials. Looking to the midterm elections, Georgia Congressman Ben Blackburn warned Ford that he threatened to "force many of our Republican candidates into a 'me too' posture when in confrontation with a liberal Democratic opposition."[21]

Grousing about me too-ism is the perennial recourse of ideologically committed partisans. What made this disaffection significant was the action it inspired. The Ford years would mark a productive and experimental period for conservative activists who sought a new, closer alignment of party and principle and who perceived, in the tangled thicket of public opinion, demographics, and changing institutions, an increasingly hospitable environment for

[19] John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 37-52.

[20] Tom Korogolos memo to William Timmons, August 21, 1974, Box 5, Folder "Memoranda-Timmons to the President, August 1974 (2)," Timmons Files, GRFL.

[21] Blackburn letter to Ford, August 23, 1974, Box 5, Folder "Memoranda to the President," Timmons Files, GRFL.

such a project. That experimentation entailed a quixotic inquiry into third-party politics and, eventually, a direct intraparty challenge to the president.

Prior to Ford's ascension to the White House, during the stormy endgame of Nixon's presidency, some conservatives were already envisioning the eventual transformation, if not outright replacement, of the Republican Party. For most of them, such a possibility stemmed less from the short-term Watergate crisis than from long-term political changes to which the GOP had proven institutionally incapable of responding. Watergate appeared merely a proximate cause to conservative political consultant Clif White, for example, when he speculated over lunch in January 1974 with *National Review*'s publisher William Rusher and editor William F. Buckley about the coming breakup of the GOP and "the development of a new political grouping after 1976."[22] That new grouping would likely still be the coalition of Wallace Democrats and Republicans aligned around the Social Issue. But with Watergate having cut short Nixon's fitful efforts to forge a new majority, and with public identification with the Republican Party at an all-time low, it was increasingly possible to imagine the coalition taking a different form and name.

A few months later, at a dinner honoring movement hero Clarence Manion, North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms gave a speech suggesting just such a possibility.[23] His argument deftly rendered Watergate a symptom of a different, deeper-seated malady – namely, the American party system's anachronistic ideological incoherence. Helms asked his audience, "Could it be that it is time to forge new political parties, fashioned along the lines that the people are thinking, not along the existing lines of political power-seeking? If we are going to have honesty in government today, we must have honesty in the basic philosophies of our political

[22] Quote from William Rusher's description in a letter to William F. Buckley, February 21, 1974, Box 121, Folder 7, William Rusher Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[23] Jesse Helms, "The New American Majority: Time for a Political Realignment?," May 15, 1974, American Conservative Union (ACU) Papers, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

parties." "Honesty" recurred throughout Helms's call for realignment, which implicitly rendered Watergate an apotheosis of the grubby, transactional default mode of American politics, of murky, "power-seeking" agendas breeding cynicism and disillusionment in the public. The party system "must give an honest choice, and it must furnish the mechanism for politicians to carry out honestly the principles they set before the people." For now, though, Americans remained "locked into two major political parties by geography, by tradition, by sentiment," in an outdated alignment that obscured rather than facilitated the expression of philosophical disagreement. The incoherence was evident in government – "conservative Democrats [in Congress] look across the aisle and … count the faces of men who wear the label of Republicans and practice the philosophy of liberalism" – and translated into cynicism and alienation among voters.

A formal project of ideological party-building could redress this disillusionment, and as a "starting point," Helms called for a version of that standby of responsible party reform (one recently institutionalized by Democrats), a midterm issues and platform convention gathering conservative delegates from every congressional district. Helms, a television commentator turned politician whose well-earned reputation for scabrous hardball masked a serious intellectual engagement with American political history, made sure in his speech to tip his hat to a conservative pioneer of arguments for ideological party realignment, Karl Mundt. Like Mundt, Helms was equivocal about whether this realignment should occur in the form of the existing parties or as new entities with new names. "I intend to remain a Republican," he said, "unless there is a general realignment into Conservative and Liberal parties, by whatever names."

That Helms would be the one to emphasize this distinction between party and principle was fitting, since, as a recent party-switching southerner, he embodied the core transformation on which realignment hinged. Indeed, the North Carolina scene in which Helms won election to the

Senate in 1972 was a cauldron of shifting alliances and incipient sorting – American polarization writ small. That election warrants brief attention for dynamics therein that proved prophetic.

Both of North Carolina's parties in 1972 had been riven by internal divisions, transforming rapidly. Helms had anticipated challenging the conservative elder statesman Everett Jordan that year, but in the Democratic primary Jordan fell to a moderately liberal, pro-Civil Rights challenger, Nick Galifinakis, thanks to the support of African American and younger voters. As for the Republicans, Helms's campaign, and the statewide network built for it, turned out to represent the beginning of a protracted effort by conservatives to wrest control of the state GOP machinery from a party establishment led by moderate governor Jim Holshouser. The governor's faction, based in the historical strongholds of Republicanism in the state's western mountain and Piedmont regions, was a non-ideological network of party professionals tied together by patronage and tradition rather than national issues. Helms's base of support skewed east, was overwhelmingly conservative, and included a large number of Democrats disaffected by the very forces of partisan change enabling someone like Nick Galifinakis to defeat someone like Everett Jordan.[24] Thus the general election contest in 1972 pit a staunchly conservative Republican against a liberal Democrat, an alignment that had only occasional precedent in the state but whose logic would become increasingly obvious in decades to come.

Helms's come-from-behind victory over Galifinakis that November had several sources. He employed brutally negative, race-laden campaign tactics. Numerous Democratic officials in the state crossed lines to support Helms, a dynamic exacerbated by George McGovern's unpopularity in the state. Most significant was the nature of the Helms campaign itself. Initiated by a visionary attorney named Tom Ellis, Helms's operation was manned by movement activists

[24] William Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 149-151.

recruited out of Young Americans for Freedom (YAF) and College Republicans. Helms and Ellis brought in nationally known conservative consultants like Clif White and managed to outraise Galifinakis 4-to-1. They spent the largesse on a sophisticated television and radio campaign tying the Democrat to his national party and its beleaguered presidential candidate.[25]

What Helms and Ellis did with their operation after the election proved to have lasting national implications. Ellis started the North Carolina Congressional Club as a fundraising committee to pay down Helms's campaign debt. Soon, the membership-based club expanded its operations to dinner events featuring conservative speakers as well as pathbreaking direct-mail efforts carried out by Richard Viguerie that brought in out-of-state revenue. Over the course of the decade, the North Carolina Congressional Club turned into the National Congressional Club, one of the most powerful ideological Political Action Committees (PACs) in the country. The club would recruit and fund conservative candidates for office in elections nationwide, in the process building computer files of donor lists to be utilized by other conservative organizations.[26]

What Helms sought to advance in his 1974 Manion speech was a nationalized version of the politics he was already beginning to construct in North Carolina. It was a system in which ideological activism, rather than the transactional, "power-seeking" politics epitomized by his rival Holshouser's faction, undergirded partisan campaigns.[27] It was a politics that emphasized

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[25] Link, *Righteous Warrior,* 111-129.

[26] Associated Press, "Helms Group Helps Conservative Cause," *New York Times*, November 13, 1979.

[27] A version of the North Carolina GOP's story, in which conservatives waged hostile takeovers of formerly non-ideological party organizations, recurred across the South in the 1970s and 1980s. Accounts of factional struggles in Texas, Virginia, and Florida are found in Joseph A. Aistrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 143-166. Stephen D. Shaffer and David A. Breaux confirm that younger cohorts of southern state GOP activists in recent decades have held more conservative views and have been "far more 'amateur' in their orientation toward party work" than their elders. "Clashing Generations: Useful Purists Challenge Pragmatic Professionals," in *Party Activists in Southern Politics: Mirrors and Makers of Change*, eds. Charles D. Hadley and Lewis Bowman (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 37-57.

sophisticated media appeals and direct mail over the pragmatic precinct work of older party organizations. It was an approach colored by a slash-and-burn, polarizing style of attack precisely *because* the binary lines of stark ideological conflict would align so closely with the partisan lines of campaigns. For conservative activists seething at the timidity of allegedly conservative co-partisans in office, Helms's vision resonated powerfully. A few began working with Helms early in the Ford presidency to explore options for realizing it.

One participant, *National Review*'s William Rusher, had less trouble than most writing off the GOP and contemplating an effort to hasten its decline in pursuit of a replacement. He had always doubted the viability of the Republican Party as a conservative vehicle, and was more open to the coalitional potential of the Wallace movement than other northern conservatives, including William F. Buckley. Helms's speech, coming soon after Rusher's discussion with Buckley and Clif White about the prospects for new party formations, inspired Rusher to write about the subject in his syndicated column. Helms wrote Rusher that he was "grateful for your circulating the word about a renewed proposal for realignment" and invited him to meet him in Washington."[28] In the initial months of the Ford presidency, Rusher began finding allies among newly disillusioned leaders in institutions like YAF and the American Conservative Union (ACU).[29] The awesome Republican electoral defeats in 1974 – forty-three House seats, six Senate seats, fifteen statehouses, six governorships – further emboldened conservatives to conceive of a final break with the decrepit party. At a board meeting in December, the ACU initiated plans to explore state-by-state technical considerations for building a new party. In an indication of the coalition this new formation was to embody, ACU president M. Stanton Evans

[28] Helms letter to Rusher, May 28, 1974, Box 39, Folder 1, Rusher Papers.

[29] Rusher, *Rise of the Right*, 266; ACU Board Meeting minutes, Sept. 22, 1974, Box 21, Folder 10, ACU Papers.

agreed to reach out to George Wallace "to discuss political cooperation with his constituency and organization."[30] Meanwhile, Rusher drafted a book-length manifesto for the project.

The Making of the New Majority Party, hurried into publication in the spring of 1975, hinged its case on a talismanic statistical ratio and a tantalizing historical analogy. The ratio was, approximately, 60-40. Since the 1930s, Gallup had occasionally surveyed Americans about party realignment, asking which side they would prefer if the two-party system rearranged itself into ideologically sorted conservative and liberal parties. Rusher opened his book by pointing to the Gallup result of spring 1974, which found that 26 percent of respondents chose the liberal party, 38 percent chose the conservative party, and 36 percent were undecided.[31] By either ignoring the undecided block or splitting it by the same proportions as the affirmative answers, Rusher concluded that "59 percent of the American people considered themselves 'conservative' and only 41 percent 'liberal.'" This rough 60-40 conservative-liberal split had arguably been approximated in both the 1968 and 1972 presidential results. In the former, 57 percent voted for either Nixon or Wallace versus 43 percent for Humphrey; in the latter, 61 percent voted for Nixon versus 38 percent for McGovern. This was the ideological alignment that Rusher claimed now defined American politics, awaiting conservatives' achievement of a new partisan apparatus to take advantage of it. The conservative majority combined traditional GOP economic conservatives with Wallacite populists. But the Social Issue's congeries of cultural conflicts provided the main line of cleavage, pitting, in Rusher's conception, producers of all stripes ("businessmen, manufacturers, hard-hats, blue-collar workers and farmers") against the anti-capitalist coalition of a New Class verbalist elite and welfare constituencies.[32]

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[30] ACU Board Meeting minutes, December 15, 1974, Box 21, Folder 11, ACU Papers.

[31] More precise figures were 25.57, 38.52, and 35.91, respectively. The Gallup Poll no. 899, April, 9, 1974.

[32] William Rusher, *The Making of the New Majority Party* (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1975), xiii, xxi.

The historical analogy, which would pop up constantly during the next two years in journalistic discussions of the GOP's fate, reached back to the mid-nineteenth century. The modern Republican Party, so the argument went, was experiencing the same decomposition that befell the very Whig Party it had supplanted in the 1850s. The Whigs' depleting leadership and organization, built around a cross-sectional agenda, proved incapable of surviving the onset of slavery as a primary political issue, and thus it found itself preempted and swiftly replaced by a fledgling party organized for the anti-slavery cause. The analogous elements of the Republican Party's plight circa 1974 included a new "issue," in this case the Social Issue, creating a new political impulse that cut an apparently irreconcilable cleavage across the ranks of a major party; the majority-making potential of that same political impulse; and the old party's decrepit leadership, organization, and popular approval.[33] The Whig analogy underscored Rusher's point that his would not be a minor third party, but rather a new major party, swiftly replacing the GOP up and down its ranks and representing a broad-based political coalition. Indeed, Rusher's argument was not quite a case for down-the-line conservatism in a new party vessel. He endorsed, with qualification, the classic scholarly critiques of responsible party theory, and he also stressed that a coalition with the Wallacite Democratic tendency would necessarily mean accommodating a greater degree of statism than conservative orthodoxy normally allowed.

Why could the Republican Party not be transformed from within, through the absorption of the social conservative impulse? Rusher conceded that this was the normal course of American party politics and the most desirable possibility, but he saw both immediate and longer-term obstacles to conservatives' changing and utilizing the GOP. The immediate problem was the post-Watergate trough of party strength and popularity. Gallup polls showed public

[33] Rusher, *Making of the New Majority Party*, 12-16.

identification with the GOP vacillating between a fifth and a quarter of the population.[34] Meanwhile, "the leadership and organization of the Republican party are today at an all-time low. In state after state it scarcely exists at all." But even this organizational decomposition was less a temporary result of Watergate than a byproduct of the key longer-term problem – "the party's essential meaninglessness. No one can effectively lead or even work for the Republican party today, because no one can possibly say what it stands for." The structural source of that incoherence was the inextinguishable presence of a "liberal-Republican minority whose only real function is to prevent any effective coalition with formerly Democratic social conservatives." Though conservatives outnumbered liberals two-to-one among party convention delegates and enjoyed majorities in the congressional caucuses, Rusher saw the minority bloc as "ineradicable" and permanently capable of compelling programmatic adjustment in the wrong direction. To account for the bloc's unyielding opposition to engaging social conservatives, Rusher deployed the New Class analysis that the Nixon years made *au courant* among conservatives. Liberal Republicans were themselves part of or sympathetic to that new symbolist elite. Thus, class position determined their partisan function as obstructers of conservative majority-making.[35]

Rusher lacked much argument for his claim that liberal Republican opposition would remain both permanent and permanently insurmountable. It was more a fatalist conviction borne of exasperation after years spent as an intraparty brawler. This gap in his argument hinted at the cul-de-sac that his third party project would reach once Reagan's primary challenge made such an intraparty victory for conservatives seem plausible. When fellow conservatives gave critical responses to Rusher's argument, these were the sorts of objections they raised: Reagan would likely render this movement moot, the technical obstacles to new party formation were too

[34] The Gallup Polls no. 889, April 9, 1974; no. 908, June 18, 1974; and no. 920, December 2, 1974.
[35] Rusher, *Making of the New Majority Party*, 103-104, xx, xxii.

strong, and doctrinal divisions between economic and social conservatives posed more of a problem than Rusher thought.[36] Those outside the fold could more easily point out that Rusher's interpretation of polling data exaggerated the public's support of a conservative party by ignoring the one-third who were undecided – as well as the half of respondents who opposed the very idea of ideologically aligned parties (versus 26 percent in support).[37] Rusher was also selective in his claims about the 60-40 ideological alignment he ascribed to Americans, depicting Nixon as an unprincipled ideological chameleon, for example, while simultaneously interpreting his 1972 landslide as a landslide for conservatism itself.[38]

Nevertheless, the book's main lines of argument and key data points became ubiquitous among conservatives in Rusher's orbit. The second Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), jointly sponsored by YAF and the ACU in 1975, showcased the new party project. Congressman and ACU official Bob Bauman cited the Gallup poll on conservative-party support in his speech, likening it to election outcomes in 1968 and 1972.[39] He attributed party decline and popular political disaffection to the parties' ideological incoherence. As for the GOP, Bauman joked, "it is always difficult to speak publicly of a loved one, perhaps an aging uncle, who is suspected of suffering from a terminal illness … This country does not need a third party, but by any objective analysis it badly needs a second party." Senator James Buckley advocated a "philosophy of political alternatives … Republicanism of the kind that accepts, in the name of moderation, half the Liberal Democratic program holds no appeal to those Conservative-minded

[36] James J. Kilpatrick, "This is Not the Time for a Major Third Party," *Washington Star*, June 5, 1975; Robert D. Novak, "Producers' Party," *National Review*, June 6, 1975.

[37] The Gallup Poll no. 899, April 9, 1974. Bob Teeter contested the idea of a conservative majority in Market Opinion Research report, Box 42, Folder "U.S. National Study, Feb. 1975, Overview," Robert Teeter Papers, GRFL.

[38] Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 34-36.

[39] Robert Bauman, CPAC speech, February 17, 1975, Box 3, Folder 27, ACU Papers.

independents and Democrats who were essential to the victorious Presidential election in 1972."[40] Buckley refrained from a full endorsement of the new-majority party project, using it instead as a threat to compel GOP cohesiveness and militancy.

As for the man who had introduced the idea the previous year, Jesse Helms now added an important new line of analysis in his own CPAC speech.[41] Though he still dutifully invoked the Whigs, Helms no longer made a straightforward Rusher-style case for coalition based on realignment theory and historical analogy. Instead, he saw in the contemporary scene a historically novel departure from how American parties formerly operated, and used it to herald "the realignment of political action into philosophically consistent parties." American parties had traditionally been based on sectional interests, Helms explained, which, given the "homogeneity of the social systems in the various sections," meant that "voters did not have to think about issues very deeply to get a man and a party generally representative of their interests." But when the Great Depression brought economic issues to the fore, Roosevelt used them to mobilize massive support in the North and the West, "combining it with the geographic tradition of the South" to form a powerful coalition. The latter "geographic element in the coalition" began to break down in 1964, however. In the 1960s, voters were growing "aware that their personal interests and the interests promoted by politicians were beginning to diverge. People began to get interested in issues." What was historically new, Helms implied, was that *white southerners* began to connect issues and voting.[42] In 1968, "both Nixon and Wallace attracted voters because of their stands on specific issues; the Democratic candidate was a

[40] James Buckley, CPAC Speech, February 15, 1975. Box 3, Folder 27, ACU Papers.

[41] Jesse Helms, CPAC speech, February 14, 1975, Box 3, Folder 27, ACU Papers.

[42] Polling by Bob Teeter that same month bore this out. Though he advised Republicans against using conservative ideological appeals to woo independents, he found that southern independents differed from those in other regions: they reported consistently conservative issue positions across both economic and social dimensions. Market Opinion Research report, p.120, Box 52, Folder "U.S. National Study, Feb. 1975, Analysis (3)," Robert Teeter Papers.

creature of party structure and organization, and that structure could no longer deliver." Issue-based voting in the context of ideologically scrambled parties unavoidably signified party decline. In the 1972 election, "issues emerged as more important than party," said Helms, pointing to a study showing that voters' likelihood to back Nixon increased in proportion to their conservatism. "The party which is based on geographic or social division is dead," he declared. Issue-based politics meant issue-based parties – and thus the parties' ideological sorting-out.

Though Helms marshaled this argument about issue politics in service of the claim that a specifically conservative popular majority in the United States was ripe for mobilization, the argument itself resonated powerfully with major new findings among political scientists with no such agenda. After the political tumult of the preceding decade, scholars in the 1970s began to reassess the dominant "Michigan School" view of mass political behavior laid out by Philip Campbell and his colleagues in their landmark 1960 work *The American Voter*.[43] That study had deemphasized the role of issues and ideology in guiding voters' behavior. The authors identified partisanship, determined by affective ties of affinity and loyalty, as the overwhelming factor in voting. A new view emerging in the early 1970s suggested that the Michigan School's findings reflected the political quiescence and ideologically scrambled partisan lines characterizing the 1950s more than any fundamental law of American voting behavior. The *American Political Science Review* published a symposium on the subject of issue voting in the summer of 1972, led by Gerald M. Pomper's argument that voters had moved a good deal of the way "from confusion to clarity" during the conflictive sixties.[44] Pomper used survey data on six major policy issues to show both a tightening correlation over time between respondents' party affiliation and positions

[43] Campbell et al., *The American Voter* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1960).

[44] Gerald M. Pomper, "From Confusion to Clarity: Issues and American Voters, 1956-1968," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 66 (June 1972): 415-428.

as well as respondents' increasing ability to differentiate between the two respective parties' issue positions. Conflict, in Pomper's account, educated American voters: "The events and campaigns of the 1960s … made politics more relevant and more dramatic to the mass electorate. In the process, party differences were developed and perceived."[45]

The 1972 McGovern-Nixon context only served to heighten the salience of issues and ideology in voting, just as Helms would note in his CPAC speech. David Broder reported in 1973 on the startling new findings coming out of Michigan School's own headquarters, the University of Michigan's Center for Political Studies (CPS). A new CPS report's conclusion that the 1972 contest could accurately be labeled "an ideological election" amounted to, in Broder's words, "a revolution in American politics," given the country's traditional lack of programmatic parties.[46] In 1974 two other scholars reported "major increases in the levels of attitude consistency in the mass public" since the 1950s, with New Deal-vintage issues as well as "new issues as they emerged in the 60s" becoming increasingly "incorporated by the mass public into what now appears to be a broad liberal/conservative ideology."[47]

Helms pointed to the rising salience of issues in determining voting behavior as a force in the realignment that would produce a new conservative majority party. Hardly sharing that political objective, the APSA Committee on Political Parties had articulated the same systemic

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[45] Pomper, "From Confusion to Clarity," 421. Pomper expanded his argument in *Voters' Choice: Varieties of American Electoral Behavior* (New York: Dodd & Mead, 1975).

[46] David Broder, "Ideology Comes to Politics," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1973. The findings were published as Arthur H. Miller and Warren E. Miller, "Issues, Candidates and Partisan Divisions in the 1972 Presidential Election," *British Journal of Political Science* Vol. 4 (1975): 393-434; and Arthur H. Miller, et al, "A Majority Party in Disarray: Policy Polarization in the 1972 Election," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 70 (1976): 753-778. The authors found not only that issue cleavages determined voting in 1972, but that those cleavages were deeper between Nixon- and McGovern-supporting *Democrats* than between Nixon Republicans and McGovern Democrats.

[47] Norman H. Nie and Kristi Anderson, "Mass Belief Systems Revisited: Political Change and Attitude Structure," *Journal of Politics* Vol. 36 (Aug. 1974): 544. See also Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), with its explicitly referential title.

goal – a programmatic party system – in 1950.[48] More recently, the goal motivated many of the participants in the McGovern-Fraser reforms as well as, we shall see, a network of left-liberal issue activists. Even in battle, ideologues left and right engaged in a shared partisan project.

Meanwhile, for conservatives considering the radical option of third party formation, the next task involved a dip into the kind of state-by-state exploration of ballot procedures and organizational requirements that liberals had recently engaged under the aegis of Democratic reform. CPAC participants authorized the formation of a Committee on Conservative Alternatives (COCA) to provide "a formal mechanism to review and assess the current political situation and to develop future opportunities."[49] The fifteen members included Rusher, Evans, New Hampshire governor Meldrim Thomson, Phyllis Schlafly, and George Wallace's aide Eli Howell. Jesse Helms chaired. The language Helms used in a statement following COCA's inaugural meeting sounded themes of alienation and renewal that could easily have come from the McGovern-Fraser Commission. "A time of profound change is upon our nation," Helms intoned, "and old systems of political organization are passing." Helms decried "the American people's headlong slide into alienation from the present system of parties." COCA would explore ways to remedy that alienation, including the option of forming "a major new party if the present political system fails to respond to the need for philosophical realignment."[50] Staffers in Helms's Senate office performed most of the spadework for COCA. One aide researched state election laws, producing a massive study taking up an entire bookshelf in Helms's office.[51]

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[48] Pomper emphasized this point in "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System? What, Again?" *Journal of Politics* Vol. 33 (Nov. 1971): 916-940.

[49] Text of CPAC resolution, February 16, 1975, Box 3, Folder 26, ACU Papers.

[50] Jesse Helms statement, March 7, 1975, Box 142, Folder 6, Rusher Papers.

[51] John Fialka, "Arch-Conservative's Crusade: Abolish the Republican Party," *Washington Star*, June 24, 1975.

Knowledge about ballot line procedures was important, of course, but it would ultimately amount to little without a plausible candidate. Conservatives had no doubt who that should be. Six weeks after stepping down as Governor of California, Ronald Reagan delivered a closely-watched speech at CPAC.[52] "I don't know about you," he related, "but I am impatient with those Republicans who after the last election rushed into print saying, 'We must broaden the base of our party' – when what they meant was to fuzz up and blur even more the differences between ourselves and our opponents." He attributed the record-low turnout of November's midterms to the "feeling that there was not a sufficient difference between the parties." And he coyly raised the subject of the new majority party through a rhetorical question: "Is it a third party we need, or is it a new and revitalized second party, raising a banner of no pale pastels, but bold colors which make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all of the issues troubling the people?" A new party project would sink or swim largely based on Reagan's answer to that question.

Third party advocates made their case directly and repeatedly to Reagan. Rusher dined at his Pacific Palisades home, a copy of *The Making of the New Majority Party* in hand.[53] Stan Evans followed up with a letter arguing on pragmatic grounds against Reagan's chances as a GOP challenger to Ford, pointing out that the latter's advantage was "unusually large in the heartland of organizational Republicanism – the North Central states." The primary calendar would force Reagan "to run a gauntlet of 'pragmatic' bosses and Republican loyalists of the type who tend … to be swayed by arguments about backing-our-President and not dividing the party."[54] A panoply of New Right leaders – Joseph Coors, Richard Viguerie, Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips – along with Kevin Phillips, Pat Buchanan, and two Wallace aides made one

[52] Reagan speech, February 15, 1975, at http://www.conservative.org/cpac/archives/cpac-1975-ronald-reagan/.

[53] Rusher, *The Rise of the Right*, 273.

[54] M. Stanton Evans letter to Ronald Reagan, May 1975, Box 133, Folder 3, Rusher Papers.

final effort to woo Reagan to a third party at a DC meeting in June.[55] They were all too late. In the fall of 1974, Reagan had, in fact, considered a third-party run for 1976, but his California financial backers and aides swatted the idea down.[56] Ford's missteps with Republicans bolstered Reagan's confidence that he could topple the president through a nomination challenge. His skepticism of the third party plan in turn fuelled conservative reluctance to back it.[57]

Rusher, for his part, felt committed to the project regardless of Reagan's decision. Convinced that Reagan's intraparty effort would fail, he proceeded with a state-by-state plan to ensure that, following this inevitable failure, the ex-governor would have the option of pursuing a third-party candidacy in the general election via ballot lines secured in as many states as possible. In May he sent a memo to Helms outlining a plan to set up the "Provisional Organizing Committee of a new conservative party."[58] Summer saw the formation of the Committee for the New Majority, financed by Viguerie.[59] Though one columnist described CNM as "a gun pointed at the heads of the two major parties," the organizers did not think of it primarily as a deterrent threat.[60] They sincerely hoped to hasten the GOP's demise and replacement.

The developing Reagan campaign, however, posed two obstacles to the project's growth. First, it deflected conservative attention and resources from the effort, such that CMN never had means to mobilize grassroots support.[61] The Conservative Caucus, a membership organization

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[55] Craig Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign that Started it All* (New York: Nelson Current, 2005), 37.

[56] Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), 197.

[57] See, for example, the Minutes to ACU board meeting, September 27, 1975, Box 21, Folder 14, ACU Papers.

[58] William Rusher memo to Helms, May 21, 1975, Box 39, Folder 1, Rusher Papers.

[59] Alan Crawford, "A New Option for Conservatives in 1976," *Conservative Digest*, December, 1975.

[60] The columnist was Jeffrey St. John, quoted in Crawford, "A New Option for Conservatives."

[61] See Rusher's form letter to would-be volunteers, Box 142, Folder 12, and Howard Phillips letter to Lester Logue, April 29, 1976, Box 141, Folder 9, both in Rusher Papers.

that Howard Phillips built in 1975 as a potential "half way house" for a new party, similarly proved more effective as a force for GOP conservatives than as a new-party vessel.[62] Secondly, Reagan's campaign ensured that the pool of potential CNM supporters would be dominated by a certain type of activist: insular, faction-ridden, conspiracy-minded, and extreme. Rusher realized that the route to achieving state-level ballot access lay in merging the CNM project with the network of organizers and entities left over from Wallace's third-party bid in 1968, some of which already had ballot lines in many states. But the activities of that network in the aftermath of Wallace's reentry into Democratic politics had been marked by byzantine infighting. By early 1976, three partisan entities led by ex-Wallacites operated in varying states of mutual hostility: the American Party, the American Independent Party, and the American Independ*ence* Party. The former was implacably hostile to cooperation with the CNM project, while the latter two were open to a coalition.[63] Even they, however, demanded that Rusher and other CNM organizers account for suspicious professional connections. At a January 1976 meeting, Rusher had to explain his relationship to Bill Buckley, considered beyond the pale by the Wallacites due to his membership in the Council on Foreign Relations.[64] When Rusher bemusedly recounted the inquisition to Buckley, the latter replied that the "situation sounds to me awfully close to the kooks, and I am troubled by it. In the last analysis, if you have to deal with people of that sort, a) you're not going to get anywhere and b) you are simply going to besmirch yourself."[65]

[62] Michael J. Malbin, "Party System Approaching Crossroads in 1976 Election," *National Journal*, May 23, 1975.

[63] "Atlanta Statement" report, January 1, 1976; Alex Hugins letter to William Rusher, December 10, 1975, and Ronald Docksai memo to Rusher, January 15, 1976; all in Box 141, Folder 9, Rusher Papers.

[64] Recounted in American Independence Party pamphlet, January 1976, Box 141, Folder 7, Rusher Papers.

[65] William F. Buckley letter to William Rusher, March 4, 1976, Box 121, Folder 8, Rusher Papers.

The comic-opera denouement of the CNM effort fulfilled Buckley's prediction. By June 1976 the Committee had assured that ballot lines would be secured in at least 30 states. But, as executive director Ken Rast reported to the CNM board, "the diverted attention of the Reagan types" jeopardized the prospects of securing a credible candidate for those lines.[66] Reagan's campaign had gained momentum in the spring, leading eventually to a convention that saw Ford win renomination through one of the smallest delegate margins in history. The fact that conservative forces proved so capable of near-victory within the GOP undermined the idea that structural barriers would always prevent activists from ideologizing the party. Meanwhile, the Democrats' nomination of the southern evangelical Jimmy Carter seemed to moot the possibility that 1976 would see a breakthrough for a New American Majority electoral coalition. These factors made Rusher and Viguerie's efforts to recruit a plausible CNM candidate futile. When they traveled to Chicago for the American Independent Party convention in August, the best they could propose was a ticket consisting of an ex-congressional staffer and Viguerie himself. The delegates, for their part, revolted against these northern carpetbaggers' machinations and opted instead to nominate the racist ex-governor of Georgia, Lester Maddox. The band played "Dixie," crowds waved "This is Maddox country" signs, the keynote speaker railed against "Atheistic political Zionism" – and Rusher and Viguerie walked out in disgust.[67]

The CNM was the right's last notable extrapartisan effort in the twentieth century. After the election – in which Maddox garnered 170,531 votes – Rusher decided his "inclination to attempt to cooperate any further with the people who run the American Independent Party approaches zero" and shuttered the CNM.[68] The ACU circulated a strategic working paper after

[66] Ken Rast memo to CNM board, June 16, 1976, Box 141, Folder 10, Rusher Papers.

[67] Karen Elliott House, "American Independents Select Maddox," *Wall Street Journal*, August 30, 1976.

[68] William Rusher letter to Alex Hudgins, January 31, 1977, Box 141, Folder 11, Rusher Papers.

the election that argued against further third-party adventures, emphasizing the clear potential for conservative strengthening within the GOP.[69] In its short life, the CNM revealed a bit about the potentialities of new ideological coalitions in the 1970s and much about the enduring difficulties of challenging the U.S. two-party duopoly. Ultimately, the project added to the impact of conservative political energies, and thus can be said to have served a modest ideological enforcement function. But the action for the rest of the decade would take place inside the GOP.

"No Pale Pastels:" Changing the Republican Party from Within

Congress provided one locus for this intraparty activity. During the Nixon years, Paul Weyrich had been a key organizer of congressional conservative opposition when serving as a young Senate staffer.[70] Through these efforts, he also became the Hill liaison for Colorado beer magnate Joe Coors, advising him about worthwhile conservative projects to fund and facilitating contact with relevant parties.[71] Two of the most important Nixon-era initiatives funded by Coors – the advocacy think tank Heritage Foundation and conservatives' answer to the Democratic Study Group, the Republican Study Committee – had reflected the inside-outside advocacy strategy and penchant for aping the left that would become hallmarks of the right's institution-building. The focus of Weyrich's energies for the rest of the decade originated in the summer of 1974. Facing the impending disaster of the midterm elections, Jesse Helms and three other officials formed an emergency PAC to protect conservative incumbents. Weyrich headed the outfit and secured Coors's financing. The Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC) gave contributions to 71 candidates in November, and in the ensuing years Weyrich

[69] ACU working paper, presented at November 6, 1976 meeting, reprinted in *Human Events*, November 20, 1976.

[70] Paul Weyrich memo to Joe Coors and Jack Wilson, January 2, 1973, Box 19, Folder 1, Paul Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY.

[71] Stephen Isaacs, "Coors Beer – and Politics – Move East," *Washington Post*, May 4, 1975.

expanded the operation, in emulation of the liberal National Committee for and Effective Congress (NCEC), to engage in fundraising, technical support, and candidate recruitment.[72]

Though Weyrich was, like his New Right compatriots Viguerie and Howard Phillips, a reliable font of colorful press quotes heralding the destruction and replacement of the GOP, the CSFC in practice was almost entirely focused on intraparty activism. Weyrich described in a 1975 memo the importance of distinguishing the CSFC from "just another Republican committee," suggesting that "it would help our credibility were we to back a conservative challenger to a liberal Republican."[73] CSFC's strongly Republican orientation ensured that such challengers in practice would not be Democratic or third-party, while the greater its success at promoting conservative Republicanism, the less necessary any new-party effort would be.[74] It was through just this dynamic that external, ideologically-grounded electoral and advocacy outfits, from Americans for Democratic Action and the NCEC to the Conservative Caucus and CSFC, almost invariably served as para-partisan forces for ideological sorting and polarization between the two parties rather than as agents of new partisan formations.

While the practical results of its activity made the New Right's network a largely intra-Republican force, a circle of conservative leaders worked more explicitly to keep political

[72] Jake Garn undated report to W.D. Coyne, "Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress," Box 16, Folder 3, Weyrich Papers.

[73] Paul Weyrich memo to James McClure and Dick Thompson, May 26, 1975, Box 19, Folder 4, Weyrich Papers.

[74] In the same May 1975 memo, Weyrich did recommend offering support in Democratic primaries to conservative candidates. Such cross-party conservative efforts, had they been a significant component of the CSFC's activity, would have counteracted partisan polarization by slowing the liberalization of Democratic ranks. But CSFC intervened in Democratic races only occasionally, and never endorsed a Democrat over a Republican in any general election. Moreover, its Democratic interventions usually occasioned controversy and complaint from GOP officeholders and, often, a climb-down by Weyrich. An example of that dynamic would occur in 1978, when CSFC's support for an Alabama Democrat in a congressional primary led to GOP outrage and multiple retractions made to CSFC press statements. See CSFC press release, October 18, 1978, and Paul Weyrich memo to Carl Curtis, November 6, 1978, both in Box 3, Folder 10, Weyrich Papers. See also Daniel Schlozman, "The Making of Partisan Majorities: Parties, Anchoring Groups, and Electoral Change" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2011), 74-77.

energies channeled through the GOP during the Ford years. In early 1975, Clif White and James Buckley organized the first meeting of 28 conservative luminaries known as "the St. Michael's Group," after the Maryland resort town that hosted them. Attendees included senators and congressmen, journalists like James's brother Bill, Rusher, and Tom Winter, GOP officials like Clarke Reed of Mississippi and Karl Rove of Texas, and financiers Coors and Roger Milliken.[75] The meeting's impetus was the same as that motivating the third-partiers: the sense of a post-Watergate power vacuum calling for conservative coordination. The opening sessions assessed politics with "an emphasis on the Republican Party – the position of conservatism within it and its viability as a continuing vehicle for the realization of conservative goals."[76] Though new-party advocates like Helms and Rusher made pitches, the majority of the attendees opposed them and steered the group toward intra-GOP work.[77] Hence those advocates' joking acronym for the St. Michael's Group: COLA, the Committee on Limiting Alternatives.[78] Its statements over the course of 1975 reflected a watchdog function, including calls for an open convention in 1976.[79]

Beyond presidency-focused pronouncements, the group, as described in a memo by staffer David Keene, explored "ways in which conservatives can maximize their influence within the Republican Party organizational structure."[80] Clif White suggested an audit of the existing conservative institutional infrastructure in journalism, policy development, and electoral work.[81]

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[75] Attendees listed in James Buckley letter to William Rusher, March 11, 1975, Box 141, Folder 11, Rusher Papers.

[76] Agenda described in David Keene memo to James Buckley, February 13, 1975, Box 31, Folder "St. Michael's Conference, 1975," F. Clifton White Papers, Ashland University, Ashland, OH.

[77] Fred Slight memo to Jerry Jones, June 6, 1975, Box 16, Folder "Conservative Third Party," Cheney Files, GRFL.

[78] Fialka, "Arch-Conservative's Crusade."

[79] Lou Cannon and David S. Broder, "Conservative Unit To Watch Ford, Rocky," *Washington Post*, March 3, 1975.

[80] Keene to James Buckley, March 27, 1975, Box 31, Folder "St. Michael's Conference, 1975," White Papers.

[81] White memo to James Buckley, May 26, 1975, Box 31, Folder "St. Michael's Conference, 1975," White Papers.

Keene, meanwhile, proposed specific action within the Republican National Committee (RNC). "We will have to make some gains at the National Committee level and shoot toward the selection of conservative National Committee members who are articulate enough to take the lead on various measures before the committee," Keene wrote Buckley. He suggested a funded effort to target states in which moderate and liberal RNC members were stepping down in 1976 and ensure that conservatives replace them. He made a case for the importance of nuts-and-bolts party work that invoked the danger of third-party efforts: "If we, as conservatives, are going to argue that the Republican Party is a vehicle through which we can achieve some specific political and policy goals, we will have to have some impact at the National Committee level."[82]

All of these stirrings – in Congress, party organizations, and advocacy networks – put gradual conservative pressure on the Ford administration. But in a system in which the president enjoyed enormous resources independent of the political parties, the most important point of ideological leverage over administration behavior remained the credible threat of a nomination challenge. Thus, Ronald Reagan loomed as a specter over the Ford White House to the same extant that he came to dominate the organizational energies of American conservatism in 1975 and 1976. His potential candidacy exerted a meaningful rightward pull on an administration that also faced more than a typical share of political and institutional burdens to its *left*.

Indeed, Ford's essentially untenable political balancing act during his two and a half years in office was a symptom of the flux and institutional transformations that defined the 1970s politically. "President Ford is fighting hard these days to hold the middle ground of American politics," wrote James Reston early in 1975, "but he's getting into serious trouble with the huge Democratic Congressional majorities on the left and with an increasingly critical Republican

[82] Keene memo to Buckley, March 27, 1975, White Papers.

minority on the right."[83] The economic context – recession coinciding with rising inflation – particularly narrowed his range of options at the same time it guaranteed that his preferred policy prioritization of inflation would clash directly with the congressional majority's focus on measures to end the recession. In a fateful early confrontation with the swollen Democratic ranks of the 94th Congress over a deficit-increasing tax cut, one White House aide made the case for vetoing the measure as a way to "make the President somewhat more popular with the right wing of the GOP and other conservatives as well. We have been looking for some broad action that would accomplish this."[84] But the impetus to secure compromise and legislative agreement outweighed such considerations, and Ford signed the bill. The subsequent flood of spending initiatives that emboldened congressional Democrats sent to Ford's desk belie later depictions of the "Watergate babies" as a fundamentally new Democratic breed of fiscally conservative suburbanites. They set the stage for Ford's unprecedented deployment of the presidential veto.

Given the hand it was dealt, Ford's legislative operation performed well, making deft use of the remaining conservative coalition led by Waggoner to sustain 54 of the 66 vetoes issued.[85] Still, the exigencies of policymaking in such a divided government inevitably caused frustration among conservatives, particularly when veto threats and presidential brinksmanship proved hollow. "He draws one line," a *Human Events* editor complained, "and when Congress steps across, he falls back and draws another. How can we accept that?"[86] Jim McClure led a band of

[83] James Reston, "Thunder on the Right," *New York Times*, March 5, 1975.

[84] John T. Calkins memo to Hartmann, March 28, 1975, Box 2, Folder "Policy Memos," Calkins Files, GLFR.

[85] A. James Reichley's interview with Max Freidersdorf, October 27, 1977, in Box 1, Folder "Ford White House – Freidersdorf, Max," Reichley Interview Transcripts, GRFL; see also Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 77.

[86] Nick Thimmesch, "What the Right Thinks of Mr. Ford," *New York Times*, April 13, 1975.

right-wing senators who periodically demanded meetings with Ford to remind him that their support could not be taken for granted. "This is a two-way street," he warned the president.[87]

Reagan's threat gave teeth to such conservative complaints, and over the course of 1975, the administration acted accordingly, shifting rightward.[88] That summer Ford tapped Howard "Bo" Calloway, a conservative Georgian who had bolted the Democratic Party to support Goldwater in 1964, to chair the President Ford Committee for reelection. The pick reflected the need to reach out to New American Majority constituencies and challenge Reagan in the Sunbelt. More dramatic was the unceremonious dumping of Nelson Rockefeller from the reelection ticket in October 1975, in an obvious sop to conservatives. On the legislative front, meanwhile, Ford followed months of steadily proliferating vetoes with a fall proposal for a dramatic new package of steep federal spending cuts and tax reductions. He then reversed course on a bill that his own labor secretary had drafted permitting the picketing of entire construction projects by unions in dispute with specific contractors – so-called "common situs" picketing. Conservative activists and a resurgent business lobby blindsided the administration with a lobbying effort against the bill that generated more constituent mail than any other issue in Ford's entire presidency.[89] The blitz, waged through Viguerie's direct-mail efforts, not only demonstrated that the New Right's self-styled populism reflected little real deviation from conservative economic orthodoxy.[90] It also signaled to Ford another issue that Reagan could use against him. After bluntly telling Labor Secretary John Dunlop, "if I sign the bill I won't get nominated," Ford issued a veto – and

[87] Peter Goldman, "Ready on the Right," *Newsweek*, March 24, 1975.

[88] On Reagan precipitating that rightward shift, see A. James Reichley interview with John Marsh, September 2, 1977, Box 1, Folder "Ford White House – Marsh, John," A. James Reichley Interview Transcripts, GRFL.

[89] Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 97; Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 162-163.

[90] On the New Right and economics, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 213-221.

Dunlop resigned.[91] "The Gerald Ford of November, 1975," Pat Buchanan concluded, "is a more conservative President than the Gerald Ford of November, 1974."[92] This was unmistakably true, and unmistakably the result of concerted organization and advocacy.

In an illustration of the cross-pressures besetting the presidency during a period in which the parties remained ideologically riven, Ford's efforts to shore up his right flank even provoked a threat from the GOP's beleaguered moderates and liberals. In September of 1975, a dozen Republican senators expressed written alarm to Ford about his rightward drift, while one of them, Maryland's Charles Mathias, gave a major speech decrying the right's effect on the party system.[93] Mathias laid on the rhetoric of party declinism ("being an Independent today may not so much represent apathy as a disgust with the alternatives") and echoed critics on the left and right in calling for an issue-based politics. But he turned this call into an argument for reversing the exodus of "thoughtful, serious, concerned and moderate women and men" from the GOP due to right-wing ascendance. That winter, Mathias pressed Ford for a meeting while speculating publicly about launching his own primary challenge or third-party presidential bid.[94] Mathias's behavior, which came to naught, reflected the general maladies of liberal Republicanism in the 1970s, a tendency whose factional ranks, electoral base, and organizational strength were all

[91] Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*, 98.

[92] Patrick Buchanan, "Ronald Reagan enters from Right," *Chicago Tribune*, November 20, 1975.

[93] David S. Broder, "Ford Drift to Right Alarms Center," *Washington Post*, October 30, 1975. Charles Mathias, "Can the Political Parties Survive?," *Washington Post*, November 8, 1975.

[94] Max Freidersdorf memo to Bill Nicholson, December 5, 1975, Box 2, Folder "Political Affairs 10/1/75-12/31/75," White House Central Files (WHCF) PL (Exec.), GRFL; Charles Mohr, "Senator Mathias is Exploring Possibility of 3d Political Party," *New York Times*, November 26, 1975.

diminishing, leaving behind a motley collection of individual personalities and uncoordinated gestures of independence.[95] The organization and initiative were all on the right by 1976.

Still, when Mathias warned a Ford aide that, "should the Republican Party become a purely conservative party in 1976, the GOP may well lose its very claim to existence," he was offering an idiosyncratic version of an argument echoed by others – one that cast Ronald Reagan's challenge as a symptom of broader party decline.[96] According to this argument, the post-reform proliferation of primaries rendered the system more porous to challengers and weakened party leaders' control over nominations. Reagan's decision, egged on by a cult of zealous supporters, to spurn his own famous 11th Commandment against GOP infighting and challenge a president was seen as a reflection of the incentives the new system offered during an era of continual party decomposition. But, as we will see, Reagan's failed challenge actually succeeded as a programmatic effort. The price of Ford's renomination was conservative ideological consolidation of the party itself. This could be interpreted as "weakening" the party under a theory in which ideology and partisanship are dichotomous principles by definition. But the political world that Reagan helped to build would undermine such dichotomies.

The ups and downs of Reagan's primary battles with Ford have been well told before, from his early, near-fatal stumbles in New Hampshire and Florida to his recovery and spectacular late-season surge of victories heading into the Kansas City convention.[97] What matters about the campaign for an analysis of American political realignment and polarization – as in the case of Ted Kennedy's Democratic challenge four years later – is the extent to which it

[95] Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans from 1952 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 114-116.

[96] William Kendall and Patrick O'Donnell memo to Max Freidersdorf, November 1, 1975, Box 2, Folder "Political Affairs 10/1/75-12/31/75," WHCF PL (Exec.), GRFL.

[97] The most thorough account is Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution*.

constituted an ideological and movement-oriented rather than personalized campaign. It is in that light that the recurring clashes over strategy between the campaign's resolutely non-ideological director, John Sears, who sought to emphasize Reagan's personal presidential qualities and political moderation, and its more conservative team members took on broader significance. Indeed, Sears's non-programmatic focus was in tension not only with other Reagan strategists but with much of his activist support. Surveys of the delegates who eventually came to Kansas City, for example, revealed a stark ideological dynamic to the race, with 77 percent of Ford's supporters describing themselves as moderate and 8 percent liberal, compared to the 85 percent of Reagan's backers who described themselves as conservative.[98] As a historical matter, moreover, prior to the convention, the turning point in the campaign's fortunes coincided with a change in strategy from character-based appeals to an issue-driven, ideological approach. That change took place in North Carolina, at the behest of Jesse Helms and Tom Ellis.

North Carolina's March 1976 primary was a make-or-break proposition for Reagan after having lost five state contests in a row, and Ellis insisted on complete control over the effort, independent of Sears and his staff. With Helms's factional rival Jim Holshouser chairing Ford's campaign in the state, the contest took on added stakes as a new round in the long-running battle for control of the state GOP. Helms and Ellis activated the statewide network of movement-conservative volunteers and donors they had been building since 1972, brought in veteran consultant Art Finkelstein to help with an unprecedented GOP primary voter identification effort yielding a new 80,000-name mailing list, and utilized massive direct-mail, television, and radio appeals.[99] Most importantly, they pushed Reagan's red-meat ideological material to the fore,

[98] Denis Sullivan, "Party Unity: Appearance and Reality," *Political Science Quarterly* 92 (Winter, 1977-78): 638.

[99] Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 153.

emphasizing hardline, nationalist, and caustically critical arguments, particularly concerning détente and the administration's support for ceding U.S. control over the Panama Canal. Augmenting this approach was an independent campaign effort on Reagan's behalf by the ACU, which ran issue ads and mobilized movement supporters in North Carolina as part of a $230,000 expenditure.[100] When Reagan defied pre-election polls to garner a shocking 53-47 percent victory in North Carolina, the win reenergized his campaign and set him on a winning streak across the South and West that featured more ideological than character-based appeals.[101]

The final phase of the Reagan campaign underscored the programmatic focus that had come to define it: a party convention – and, in particular, a platform-writing process – that Reaganite activists dominated and defined even as their candidate narrowly lost the nomination. Heading into the convention, Reagan trailed Ford by about 100 pledged delegates. Sears's gambit to shake up the race in early August by having his candidate announce his running mate – moderate Pennsylvania Senator Richard Schweiker – managed to alarm conservative supporters without noticeably changing the dynamic of the contest. Helms and Ellis, for their part, resolved to pursue a different, platform-based strategy for picking off Ford delegates. In late July they convened a meeting in Atlanta with 40 conservative members of the Resolutions Committee, along with Reagan aides Lyn Nofziger, to hatch their plan.[102] As Ellis explained, conservatives should back an alternative slate of platform planks to the right of Ford's proposals on key foreign and domestic issues. A platform fight would polarize the convention ideologically, and Reagan

[100] The ACU effort is described by Stan Evans in the Manion Forum weekly radio broadcast, February 27, 1977, transcript in Box 1, Folder 13, ACU Papers.

[101] One notable pattern in those primary victories was the Reagan campaign's exploitation of cross-over voting in states with open primaries to make direct appeals to Wallace Democrats. Wallace's steady losses to Carter in Democratic primary battles that spring sent many supporters into the GOP contest and Reagan's camp. See Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency, 1972-1976* (New York: The Viking Press, 1977), 419-420.

[102] Martha Weinberg, "Writing the Republican Platform," *Political Science Quarterly* 92 (Winter 1977-1978): 658.

would benefit by picking up some of Ford's conservative delegates in the ensuing scramble.[103] For Helms and Ellis, success in defining the party platform would be its own reward even if it failed to garner Reagan new delegates, an outlook that set them apart even from sympathetic members of Reagan's campaign staff.[104] As Nofziger remarked to a reporter, there were three forces at work at the convention: Ford's camp, Reagan's camp, and "those crazy SOBs from North Carolina."[105] What gave the North Carolina group its power was the degree to which Reagan's delegates shared its view of the platform. Three quarters of his delegates reported in a survey that, if forced to choose, they would rather have a "correct" platform than party unity.[106]

The Ford campaign was well aware of "the determination on the part of the conservative delegates to get a very strongly worded conservative platform," as one aide put it.[107] Reflecting the administration's rightward shift, the draft document already jettisoned certain moderate positions, like support for a Consumer Protection Agency, that had appeared in the 1972 platform. But Ford's team knew more was to come. Conservatives demonstrated their strength early in the process, when they secured passage in the platform committee of an amendment denying chairman Robert Ray the authority to personally appoint the seven subcommittee chairs. (All of Ray's suggested chairmen were Ford supporters.) The amendment's narrow victory owed to the fact that many Ford-supporting committee members had not showed up for the Sunday meeting. A Ford spokesman underlined the "amateur" zeal of Reagan's activists in

[103] Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 158-159.

[104] Jules Witcover, "Reagan Forces and Helms' 'Rebels' Get Together," *Washington Post*, August 12, 1976.

[105] Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 161.

[106] 51 percent of those supporting Ford chose party unity; Sullivan, "Party Unity: Appearance and Reality," 639.

[107] Michael Raoul-Duval memo to Dick Cheney, August 5, 1976, Box 29, Folder "Republican Party Platform – Planning and Strategy (3)," Michael Raoul-Duval Files, GRFL.

explaining how the amendment passed: "The right-wingers always come early and stay late."[108] The direct consequence of that amendment was a conservative revolt on the Subcommittee on Human Rights and Responsibilities, covering abortion and women's rights. The subcommittee voted down Ray's pick for chairman in favor of Mississippi's Charles Pickering.[109] It then proceeded to add a new plank supporting a constitutional ban on abortion and to *remove* the existing GOP platform plank endorsing the ERA. Through organized efforts by the Republican Women's Task Force and the Ford camp, the ERA plank was narrowly reinstated in the full committee. But it was an ominous development for GOP feminists, whose ranks were both thinning and concentrated at the elite rather than grassroots level. The antiabortion plank, meanwhile, survived the committee, securing a place as party doctrine for decades to come.[110]

The centerpiece of the conservative challenge to Ford's preferred platform language lay in foreign policy. Reagan owed his resurgence in the spring to a relentless focus on a string of related issues tapping into deep-seated popular discontent with détente and with other diplomatic initiatives, like the cessation of U.S. control over the Panama Canal, that seemed to encapsulate American weakness and self-imposed limits.[111] At Helms and Ellis's behest, political scientist John East drew up an alternative plank entitled "Morality in Foreign Policy." The document singled out Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn as "that great beacon of human courage and morality," an obvious swipe at the Ford Administration's high-profile snubbing of the émigré

[108] Lou Cannon and Jules Witcover, "Reagan Forces Planning Early Test of Strength," *Washington Post*, August 10, 1976.

[109] Shirley, *Reagan's Revolution*, 302, 306.

[110] Christina Wolbrecht, *The Politics of Women's Rights: Parties, Positions, and Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 41-42.

[111] Jeremi Suri, "Détente and its Discontents," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 227-245; Adam Clymer, *Drawing the Line at the Big Ditch: The Panama Canal Treaties and the Rise of the Right (*Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 10-39.

during a 1975 visit.[112] The Helsinki Accords, the administration's Taiwan policy, the Panama Canal handover, and Ford's opposition to importing Rhodesian chrome all came in for criticism in East-penned amendments.[113] In subcommittee, the "Morality in Foreign Policy" plank failed narrowly. But Helms and Ellis rallied their forces for a floor vote at the general convention. The Ford camp, fearing a roll call that would reflect majority opposition to the administration, opted instead to accept the "Morality" plank without a fight, though with some last-minute dilutions.[114]

The platform that emerged out of the convention was a distinctly conservative document filled with implicit criticisms of the administration. It was the most vivid illustration of the degree to which ideological activists dominated a convention that did, after all, eventually choose to renominate the incumbent president. The "paradox in Kansas City," journalist Tom Wicker wrote at the outset of the convention, lay precisely in the fact that Gerald Ford, entering with a two-digit delegate lead, had so little control over its unfolding. "Even after he had withdrawn as a candidate for renomination," Wicker observed, "Lyndon Johnson had greater command of the Democratic convention [in 1968] than Mr. Ford does of the Republicans today."[115] Everywhere the sense of right-wing momentum and initiative was palpable. Liberals and moderates closed ranks around Ford and, with the exception of the fights over abortion and the ERA, deliberately eschewed any policy demands or platform advocacy of their own, knowing how weak their hand had become. Speeches by liberal officials, such as Jacob Javits,

[112] The original language of "Morality in Foreign Policy" as well as proposed substitutions can be found in Box 76, Folder "Platforms 6/1/76 - 8/30/76," WHCF-PL 1-2, GRFL.

[113] Spencer Rich, "Ford Team Defuses Policy Challenges," *Washington Post*, August 13, 1976.

[114] Paul Huston, "Strongly Conservative Platform Criticizes Ford-Kissinger Policy," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1976.

[115] Tom Wicker, "The Paradox in Kansas City," *New York Times*, August 13, 1976.

were drowned out by the blown horns of Reagan supporters.[116] Even after strategically ceding major ground to conservatives regarding platform language, the Ford camp found itself forced to use valuable time shoring up the support of Helms and Ellis. Off-the-cuff remarks by Ford supporters predicting that the platform would be ignored after the convention compelled Helms to demand a meeting with Ford under threat of withholding support.[117] Ford called to assure Helms that he considered the platform "the consensus of the convention. I didn't like everything in it but I would abide by it."[118] At Helms's behest, Ford made the same assurances to Ellis.[119]

The most notable achievement of conservative activists at the 1976 convention may have been to turn the platform into a manifesto emphasizing contrasts with the opposition party rather than a thinly-veiled campaign brochure for a specific candidate. The preamble to the 1972 GOP platform had reflected the Nixon administration's complete control over the convention proceedings as well as its focus on championing its own accomplishments while occupying the broad middle ground of American politics: That platform predicted that the administration's accomplishments would cause Americans to "rally eagerly to the leadership which since January 1969 has brought them a better life in a better land in a safer world." The preamble to the 1976 platform, also drafted during an incumbent Republican's presidency, eschewed reference to any specific administration in favor of an appeal to programmatic contrasts: "You are about to read

[116] Mark R. Arnold, "Republican Liberals Shun a Battle on Issues to Back Ford Candidacy," *National Observer*, August 28, 1976.

[117] Daniel Hoover, "Helms Won't Back Ford if Platform Abandoned," *Raleigh News & Observer,* August 25, 1976.

[118] Gerald Ford's handwritten note, September 1, 1976, added to Ed Terrill memo, August 30, 1976, Box 18, Folder "President - Telephone Calls, 9/76-11/76," Cheney Files, GRFL.

[119] Jim Field memo to Dick Cheney memo, September 8, 1976, Box 18, Folder "President – Telephone Calls, 9/76-11/76," Cheney Files, GRFL.

the 1976 Republican Platform. We hope you will also find time to read the Democrats' Platform. Compare. You will see basic differences in how the two parties propose to represent you."[120]

In the convention's final day, when Reagan conceded after falling short by 108 delegates, his impromptu speech fittingly paid tribute to the platform that his candidacy helped to shape:

> There are cynics who say that a party platform is something that no one bothers to read and doesn't very often amount to much. Whether it is different this time than it has ever been before, I believe the Republican party has a platform that is a banner of bold, unmistakable colors with no pale pastel shades. We have just heard a call to arms…[121]

That call to arms had not been the sole work of Reagan's campaign. It was the product of extensive conservative experimentation during a period in which existing partisan arrangements seemed in flux. What Reagan's presidential challenge helped to reveal was that a changing GOP was, indeed, a hospitable vessel for conservative programmatic politics.

Movement and Party: A New Symbiosis

"Perhaps a little more emphasis on the ticket and a little less on the platform would have been helpful." That was how Ford's running mate Bob Dole later described Reagan's tardy and tepid campaign support during the 1976 race against Jimmy Carter.[122] Reagan's pointed decision to focus on the platform rather than Ford's candidacy that fall reflected not only sour grapes, but also broader conservative disaffection with the president's determinedly non-ideological campaign. Facing an opponent who was himself an ideological cipher, Ford shied away from conservative programmatic appeals, demobilizing movement activists as a result. Dole's

[120] "Republican Party Platform of 1972," August 21, 1972, and "Republican Party Platform of 1976," August 18, 1976 both accessed online at Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25842 and http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25843.

[121] Text of speech, August 19, 1976, accessed at http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/reference/8.19.76.html.
[122] Witcover, *Marathon*, 539.

frustration with Reagan captured the tension, inherent and to some degree ever-present, between party leaders seeking electoral majorities and ideological purists waving a banner of bold colors.

The story of the right in the ensuing Carter years, however, is the story of a time in which that tension between party-building and ideological activism diminished meaningfully – a time when revitalizing the GOP went hand in hand with efforts to consolidate conservative control over the party. This was partly the contingent result of a troubled presidential administration that responded to a difficult environment in ways that alienated its allies while mobilizing partisan opponents.[123] But it was also a product of the very process of ideological sorting that activists had managed to initiate in the American system by the 1970s, as first elite party actors and then electoral constituencies began to more firmly align their partisan allegiance with their issue positions. The Carter-era context opened up space for conservatives to make ideological appeals to a larger potential electorate, and the ongoing transformation of the party system helped to ensure that those appeals would redound to the GOP's benefit. The Carter years saw not only such ideological work on the right but also the activist tenure of an RNC chairman, Bill Brock, who would join Paul Butler and Ray Bliss in the small echelon of historically significant postwar party chiefs. In a reflection of the changing political scene, Brock managed to *combine* Butler's programmatic orientation with Bliss's commitment to nuts-and-bolts organizing. He helped make the GOP a finely-tuned and well-resourced vessel for the Reagan revolution to come.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1976 election, the second electoral setback in a row for the Republican Party, few were predicting such a fast and dynamic rebound. It was a time of soul-searching and prescriptive debate typical of parties under duress. Ford plunged into efforts to renew, if not reorient, the party institutionally after the election. He held a White House

[123] For general accounts of conservative mobilizations during the Carter presidency, see Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 73-126; and Kalman, *Right Star Rising*, 180-352.

meeting in December with three party eminences – Reagan the conservative standard-bearer, Connally the southern Democratic convert, and Rockefeller the icon of the beleaguered liberal and moderate faction – to discuss the GOP's future and the viability of the two-party system.[124] Proposals from other party quarters struck notes of experimentation and renewal. A Kansas congressman wrote to Ford about the idea of "holding a Mini-Convention, similar to the one held by the Democrats" in 1974, gathering party regulars as well as "conservative and independent groups."[125] Soon after, the RNC passed a resolution submitted to investigate the possibility of changing the party's name so as to help overcome lingering resistance to the party brand among southerners. Notably, such prescriptions were largely confined to intra-GOP rather than new-party initiatives. As Reagan himself told his followers at the start of the new year, the Republican Party remained the proper vehicle through which to "bring about the great conservative majority party we know is waiting to be created," because "the biggest single grouping of conservatives is to be found in that party."[126]

Despite the talk of party unity, however, Reagan and Ford retained quite different visions for the GOP's future and its connection to ideology. When Ford told GOP state legislatures that "a contest within our ranks to prove who is purer of ideology will not attract the American people," the target of his argument was obvious.[127] That difference in strategic outlook helped sustain the factional rivalry between the two men after the 1976 election, which now took political form in the race to succeed Mary Louise Smith as RNC party chairman.[128] Ford and

[124] Philip Shabecoff, "Ford Sees Connally, Reagan, Rockefeller," *New York Times*, December 10, 1976.

[125] Larry Winn, Jr. letter to Ford, November 15, 1976, Box 4, Folder "Political Affairs," WHCF PL (Exec.), GRFL.
[126] Lou Cannon, "Reagan Urges Conservatives to Stick with the 'New' GOP," *Washington Post*, January 16, 1977.

[127] Kenneth Reich, "Ex-President: Avoid Contest Over Ideology," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1977.

[128] Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 134-136.

Reagan were each aligned with a candidate in the run-up to the January vote, with ex-campaign manager James A. Baker backed by the former and Utah committeeman Richard Richards backed by the latter. In a sign of growing conservative strength within the party, sufficient support never materialized for either Baker or the explicit candidate of congressional moderates, Michigan governor William Milliken, and both bowed out a week before the vote. That left the race largely a two-man contest between Reagan's pick Richards and ex-Tennessee Senator Bill Brock, who was solidly conservative but had supported Ford during the previous year's primaries and generally retained independence from both men. The RNC election went to a third ballot before Brock finally captured a majority, thanks to eventual support from both anti-Reagan moderates and southern committeemen under Clarke Reed's sway.

Little in Brock's career would have indicated the dynamism with which he tackled his new job, though an engagement with the mechanics of party-building and sensitivity to changing political dynamics had long been evident. A Young Republican activist in the early 1960s, Brock had helped to organize the local GOP in Chattanooga just as the Democrats' statewide lock on power began to break.[129] He served three terms in the U.S. House before successfully defeating the Democratic incumbent Al Gore, Sr., in a 1970 Senate race that heavily emphasized the social and cultural issues Nixon's strategists sought to amplify that year. In the Senate, he amassed a more conservative voting record than his Tennessee colleague Howard Baker, while showing a talent for party work during his stint running the National Republican Senatorial Committee in 1974. Brock lost his 1976 reelection bid to a moderate Democrat who forged a

[129] "Party Building is What Bill Brock Does Best," *First Monday* (Jan-Feb 1977), 6.

biracial coalition with the help of Carter's coattails.[130] When Brock next turned to the RNC chairmanship, he campaigned on a message of party unity and nuts-and-bolts organizing.

Early in his tenure, that bid for unity met the resistance of conservatives mistrustful of his intentions and eager to purify Republican ranks during their time out of power. Reaganites like Lyn Nofziger and Oklahoma committeeman Clarence Warner wrote to complain about RNC staffing decisions alleged to be biased toward GOP moderates and against Reagan supporters.[131] Other conservatives focused on the moderate and liberal Republicans in Congress receiving party support. The New York Conservative Party organized a national mass mailing in the spring of 1977, mobilizing ordinary Republicans to respond to RNC solicitations with letters declaring their opposition to apostate officeholders. The letter writers sounded familiar notes about choices and echoes. An Ohio man singled out Charles Percy and Jacob Javits in a letter to Brock, arguing that "a party which can have them within its ranks and yet write a platform at Kansas City like you did is a party of no conviction whatsoever! ... Mr. Brock, the people want rational alternatives to national problems." "We want a clear cut choice when we go to the polls," concurred a New Jersey resident, "not a 'me too' party that promises to enlarge the welfare state fostered by the liberal Democrats." Brock's response to such writers emphasized his shared conservatism while taking issue with "those who seek to describe every dot and tittle of conservative philosophy on every issue" and who deem as heretics Republicans "with whom the voter would agree 80 or 90 percent of the time."[132]

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[130] Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 95.

[131] Lyn Nofziger letter to Bill Brock, March 21, 1977, Box 43, Folder 6, and Clarence Warner to Brock, April 1, 1977, Box 43, Folder 22, both in William E. Brock III Papers, Howard Baker Center for Public Policy, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, Knoxville, TN.

[132] Kenneth Levin letter to Bill Brock, April 22, 1977; William Zimmerman letter to Brock, April 24, 1977; and Brock form letter, April, 1977; all in Box 53, Folder 22, Brock Papers.

He gained the most notice for his aggressive efforts to rebuild the party organizationally, with a focus on grassroots and local levels of activity. "We have become too dependent on the presidency," Brock told the RNC in his acceptance speech, "oriented too much to the top of the ticket and thereby assuring our own eventual destruction as we ignore our eroding base in precinct and state legislature, in community and county government."[133] He launched a hiring spree at the RNC, recruiting fifteen Regional Political Directors and four Regional Finance Directors to work with state chairmen on their party organizations and election needs at the local and state levels. Most aggressive of all was a program to place a salaried field organizer in every single state – a plan described by David Broder as "far more ambitious, not just in cost but in its redefinition of state and national party responsibilities, than anything that has been attempted previously" by either party.[134] Noting that the GOP enjoyed unified control over the legislatures of only four out of fifty states, Brock initiated an unprecedented RNC project called the Local Elections Campaign Division, which concentrated on recruiting and training state legislative candidates. Between 1977 and 1981, its efforts helped boost the number of GOP-held legislative seats by over 20 percent and the number of GOP-controlled legislatures from four to fifteen – fateful gains given legislatures' control over congressional redistricting every new decade.[135] Such efforts also expanded the pool of trained and competent candidates for future higher office. Brock's emphasis on the RNC's Campaign Management College, candidate training seminars, and national conferences for party volunteer and professional education all similarly reflected an interest in cultivating sustained labor at the grassroots level for party activities.

[133] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 138. For an account of Brock's organizational efforts, see pp. 139-146.

[134] David Broder, "Brock Says Each State to Get a Full-Time Organizer," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1977.

[135] M. Margaret Conway, "Republican Political Party Nationalization, Campaign Activities, and Their Implications for the Party System," *Publius* Vol. 13 (Winter 1983): 4.

Harnessing grassroots energies only worked, of course, if there was energy on the ground to be harnessed – and in this as in many other areas, Brock's organizational approach came at a fortuitous time for the prospects of Republican Party growth. Most significantly, the mobilization of evangelical Protestants to political activism in the late 1970s signified a massive infusion of new personnel to fill the cadres of Republican Party volunteers, professionals, and candidates.[136] As an influx of new, predominantly middle-class actors to partisan politics embodying an issue-driven, ends-based "amateur" approach, the emergence of the Christian right invites direct comparison to the rise of club Democrats in the 1950s and the electoral efforts of 1960s social movement activists. It marked a new step in the long-running replacement by ideological activists of the old pragmatic party workers at the grassroots of American politics.

GOP leaders like Brock hardly instigated this infusion. Rather, political brokers capitalized on both tectonic demographic developments and short-term events, forging issue-based ideological attachments among politicized Christians that soon became durable partisan ties.[137] Conservative evangelicals mobilized to enhance their power within American Protestant institutions during the 1970s while shedding their aversion to political engagement.[138] Catholic activists like Phyllis Schlafly drew Protestants into anti-feminist and other conservative causes, while key Protestant theologians like Francis Schaeffer helped to mobilize evangelical support for the formally Catholic-dominated anti-abortion movement. Richard Viguerie's mailing lists brought together motivated small donors across an array of issues, and from the early 1970s he

[136] Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 105-186; Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 326-396.

[137] This account draws from Schlozman's analysis of the Christian Right's emergence in the late 1970s as an "anchoring group" for the GOP, in "The Making of Partisan Majorities," 57-114.

[138] Paul Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in *Rightward Bound,* eds. Schulman and Zelizer, 29-51.

observed the cross-cutting predominance of evangelicals on his lists, notably among George Wallace supporters. He and other New Right architects like Weyrich worked to connect nascent evangelical political interests with existing conservative organizations and support. They took fateful advantage of the controversy over the Internal Revenue Service's 1978 effort to revoke the tax exempt status of Christian schools deemed in violation of the Civil Rights Act. That conflict drew evangelicals into a fight that touched on the core post-1960s political flashpoints of race and taxes, and New Right brokers and evangelical leaders like Jerry Falwell helped derive from it a coherent anti-government ideological basis for evangelical coalition with conservatives.

The downstream effect of such elite linkages and issue mobilizations would be to channel conservative evangelical party activism almost exclusively into the GOP. Brock's training and recruitment efforts at the RNC took place at the inception of this process and did not involve explicit targeting of evangelicals. But he perpetuated rather than resisted Christian conservative inroads into the GOP. As the RNC's counsel later put it, Brock and his team viewed evangelical churches as both vehicles for mobilization and a "distribution system" for GOP appeals.[139] He invited top leaders including Falwell, Bob Jones, Pat Robertson, and Tim LaHaye to meetings to forge ties with the party and to provide input on the 1980 Republican platform.[140] This party posture toward the nascent Christian Right in the late 1970s, mirroring that of both Reaganites and the conservative GOP congressional factions, came at a pivotal developmental stage. It helped ensure the movement's lasting primacy as a source for party volunteers and candidates.[141]

[139] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 147.

[140] See Bill Brock letter to invitees, November 19, 1979, Box 44, Folder 19, Brock Papers.

[141] Evangelicals' growth in party ranks was most pronounced in the region witnessing the fastest GOP growth. Ted Baker, "The Emergence of the Religious Right and the Development of the Two-Party System in the South," in *Political Parties in the Southern States: Party Activists in Partisan Coalitions*, eds. Baker et al (Praeger, 1990).

To finance the RNC's extensive party-building efforts, meanwhile, Brock became as much of a path-breaker in party fundraising as he proved to be in organizing, and similarly capitalized on contemporary developments in ideological activism. Brock viewed direct-mail fundraising in much the same way Viguerie did, as both an advantageous adaptation to the donor limits imposed by the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) and a tool for engaging and codifying potential volunteers on given issue and electoral campaigns. Brock invested the $2.6 million surplus the RNC enjoyed as of spring 1977 into expanding the parties' direct-mail donor base. The result of this investment was an increase in that base from 250,000 to 1.2 million people in the next three years.[142] In 1980, net revenues garnered by direct mail accounted for fully 73 percent of all the money raised by the RNC.[143] To a more limited extent, Brock also sought to reap partisan gains from the political mobilization of business in the 1970s – a broad social development that, under FECA's campaign finance regime, partially took the form of an explosive proliferation of corporate PACs, from 89 in 1974 to 1,204 in 1980.[144] Brock appointed a coordinator "to lobby Corporate and Association Political Action Committees for the benefit of the Republican Party" and provided RNC consultation to businesses interested in establishing PACs and seeking advice on where to direct funds.[145] His efforts ensured that the RNC had become a financial juggernaut by 1980, dwarfing its cash-strapped Democratic counterpart.

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[142] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 139.

[143] Brian Mathew Conley, "Party People: Bliss, Brock, and the Rise of the Modern Republican Party" (PhD diss., New School for Social Research, 2008), 187.

[144] Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, "The Heritage Foundation: A Second-Generation Think Tank," *Journal of Policy History* Vol. 3 (Oct. 1991), 158. On business mobilization, see Benjamin C. Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); on PACs, see Larry Sabato, *PAC Power: Inside the World of Political Action Committees* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984).

[145] Leo Berman memo to Bill Brock, August 24, 1979, Box 44, Folder 9, Brock Papers; Bill Brock, "Learn to PAC – Effectively," *The Professional Agent* (Feb. 1978).

What Brock's organizational work amounted to was not just the strengthening of the RNC's capacities and the expansion of its campaign efforts but the relative *nationalization* of Republican activity – a centralization of technical support, candidate recruitment, and campaign-service functions in the national party. This structural shift took place, ironically, as the very result of Brock's focus on building up the party's ranks at the grassroots and lower levels of public office, since these new training and recruitment initiatives were centrally administered by the RNC. They were not without controversy. "Your program of State Organization Directors would be worthy of the most liberal Democrat alive," Oklahoma committeeman Clarence Warner wrote to Brock, calling the initiative "a concentration of power, authority, and responsibility at the national level."[146] State chairmen occasionally complained about RNC organizers failing to coordinate with the state parties.[147] Others expressed consternation with the RNC's willingness under Brock to intervene in GOP primary contests, picking contenders to support in nomination fights for open seats in both the House and the Senate.[148] With the national party serving as a newly powerful campaign-service and strategic institution, the GOP can be said to have pursued an organizationally focused process of nationalization during the 1970s. This contrasted with the Democrats' procedural, reformist path to structurally expanding their national party's authority. Both approaches, however, made the U.S. party system more national in orientation, just as responsible party tenets prescribed.[149]

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[146] Warner letters to Brock, April 1 and April 12, 1977, Box 43, Folder 22, Brock Papers.

[147] Minutes to RNC meeting, New Orleans, LA, September 30, 1977, Box 43, Folder 25, Brock Papers.

[148] Warren Weaver, Jr., "Brock, Despite Unwritten Political Code, Cautiously Taking Sides in G.O.P. Primaries," *New York Times*, May 30, 1977.

[149] William Lunch, *The Nationalization of American Politics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 241-245.

Another prescriptive tenet of responsible party doctrine was programmatic partisanship, or organizing parties around distinct and coherent policy positions. To an extent unusual for most party chairmen – though not, to be sure, as extensively as Paul Butler had during his tenure at the DNC – Brock also attended to matters of issue development and ideological branding as RNC chair. And as with grassroots mobilization and political finance, his efforts coincided with related developments among ideological movement-builders outside the formal party. Brock's interest in issue development and policy work was shared by other GOP leaders facing exile from national power after the 1976 election. Gerald Ford was the highest-profile proponent of a new programmatic initiative, calling for a 35-member Republican policy council and a dozen issue task forces, whose chairmen would comprise a British-style "shadow cabinet" to the Carter administration.[150] Partly to garner Ford's support, Brock ran on a similar policy council idea in his bid for the chairmanship in January.[151] Once elected, Brock spent months operationalizing the plan in the form of five Advisory Issue Councils, each to be governed by a small Policy Board and incorporating the work of 50-100 members. Reminiscent of the structure of Butler's Democratic Advisory Council of the late 1950s, the five RNC Issue Councils were intended, as Brock put it, "to restate with some clarity our own values, policies, and programs."[152]

Brock retained substantial cooperation and participation from congressional Republican leaders as well as major national figures in the party while pursuing this initiative. This was a contrast to Butler's experience, reflecting the relative programmatic cohesion Republicans were beginning to experience by the late 1970s. Between 1978 and 1980, the Councils produced

[150] "A 'Shadow Cabinet' Suggested By Ford," *New York Times*, January 16, 1977.

[151] Bill Brock letter to Gerald Ford, January 3, 1977, Box 4, Folder "Political Affairs 11/21/76-1/20/77," WHCF-PL (Exec.), GRFL. See also Brock letter to David Leuthold, February 17, 1977, Box 43, Folder 6, Brock Papers.

[152] Bill Brock letter to John Connally, July 28, 1977, Box 43, Folder 19, Brock Papers.

roughly two dozen position papers focusing on economic and foreign policy issues. Throughout the process, the focus was on developing positions that united the party and "distinguish[ed] the Republican philosophy and approach from that of the Democrats," as Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee chairman Bob Packwood put it at a related 1978 issues session.[153]

By far the most consequential work done by the Councils and by Brock's related programmatic initiatives at the RNC concerned tax policy. The rapid triumph of supply-side economics in American conservatism is a tale oft told.[154] The sketchy doctrine of an obscure business economist named Arthur Laffer, the supply-side argument for federal income tax rate cuts that would *raise* rather than lower federal revenue found well-placed and energetic champions in the media, most notably the *Wall Street Journal*'s Robert Bartley and Jude Wanniski. Irving Kristol, the most politically strategic of the neoconservative intellectuals, helped to bring both the idea and its chief evangelist, Wanniski, to the attention of officials in Washington, including Republican Congressman Jack Kemp. Kemp adopted supply-side economics as his cause and in June 1977 introduced a Tax Relief Act, co-sponsored by Delaware Republican William Roth in the Senate, which reduced income tax rates across the board by 30 percent. The coordinated effort inside and outside of Congress to put income tax cuts at the center of the GOP agenda benefitted immensely from the great "tax revolt" of 1978, a wave of state-level reactions against property taxes that peaked with California's Proposition 13. The front-runner for the 1980 nomination, Reagan, would come under the supply-siders' spell, putting Kemp-Roth at the center of his campaign and, eventually, shepherding it to passage in what became the cornerstone of his domestic policy legacy, 1981's Economic Recovery Tax Act.

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[153] David Broder, "Issues Session Heartens GOP," *Washington Post*, May 1, 1978.

[154] Sidney Blumenthal, *The Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 166-209; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 166-184.

Less often noted is the unusually central role played by the RNC in promulgating Kemp-Roth as a consensus GOP policy and a new key to the party's brand during Brock's tenure.[155] At an RNC meeting in September 1977, Brock first succeeded in passing a party resolution formally endorsing the bill.[156] During the same period, he and the Issue Councils' director, Roger Semerad, set about bringing key supply-side advocates and sympathizers onto the Economic Affairs advisory council, including Kemp, David Stockman, Murray Weidenbaum, and Lew Lehrman.[157] That council's tax subcommittee helped to develop an issue network in Washington conversant in and supportive of aggressive income tax cuts as a supply-side growth strategy.[158] Its work was an instrumental component of the campaign by the likes of Bartley, Wanniski, and Kristol to instantiate the doctrine as GOP policy. The advisory council unanimously endorsed Kemp-Roth in the summer of 1978. Brock held a news conference with the bill's sponsors to announce the RNC's plan to fund a series of workshops and training programs educating Republicans across the country about the proposal and the theory behind it.[159] Such work helped explain how supply-side economics became, in Rowland Evans and Robert Novak's words, "the GOP's first universally recognized economic theology since the protective tariff."[160]

Beyond the Issue Councils, Brock waged an aggressive political campaign in 1978 to make Kemp-Roth "the cornerstone of this year's Republican campaign and communications

[155] Klinkner, *The Losing Parties*, 149.

[156] Text of RNC Resolution Concerning Taxes, adopted September 30, 1977, Box 43, Folder 25, Brock Papers.

[157] Roger Semerad memo to Bill Brock, June 24, 1977,

[158] In addition to Klinkner, see Michael J. Malbin, "The Conventions, Platforms, and Issue Activists," in *The American Elections of 1980*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), 101-102.

[159] Bill Brock letter to George Murphy, July 6, 1978, Box 65, Folder 6, Brock Papers.

[160] Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, "A New Tax-Cut Theology for the GOP," *Washington Post*, June 8, 1978.

efforts" as he put it in a letter to Howard Baker.[161] At a July press conference he announced a multi-state "Tax Blitz" tour on behalf of Kemp-Roth, underscoring his intension to nationalize the midterm elections around the tax issue and touting the unanimity of Republican candidates' position on it. "This is a major, significant issue, a clear division between our parties," he said. "We want to have our party and all our candidates speaking with one voice."[162] For the three-day Tax Blitz in September, the RNC chartered a plane it christened the Republican Tax Clipper and took major Republican figures, including Ford and Reagan, to press events in eight cities.[163] After the election, during the 96th Congress, Republicans demonstrated growing cohesion in a succession of votes on Kemp-Roth, each of which lost to Democratic opposition but helped to pull the debate over tax policy notably rightward. By the time that supply-side devotee Ronald Reagan had ascended to the Republican nomination in 1980, forestalling last-ditch attempts by his moderate rival George Bush to tarnish the theory as "voodoo economics," Brock's policy apparatus at the RNC was well-placed to channel the Kemp-Roth proposal directly into the Republican platform. Roger Semerad served as the executive director of the Republican platform committee that year, while the editor of the Issue Councils' reports, Michael Baroody, worked as the platform's editor-in chief. The final document endorsed Kemp-Roth by name, devoted two lengthy sections to the tax-cut cause, and mentioned the word "tax" 145 times.[164]

[161] Bill Brock letter to Howard Baker, July 24, 1978, Box 60, Folder 14, Brock Papers.

[162] Bill Peterson, "GOP Plans 'Blitz' to Push Tax Cut Bill," *Washington Post*, July 7, 1978.

[163] Itinerary for Republican Tax Cut Blitz in Box 60, Box 60, Folder 14, Brock Papers.

[164] "Republican Party Platform of 1980," July 15, 1980, accessed online at Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25843.

That the GOP could achieve such programmatic unity around this or any other issue is notable in itself.[165] The lasting significance of the party's embrace of supply-side tax-cutting went beyond that, however, touching on key dynamics of electoral coalition-building that would allow for party polarization along multiple issue dimensions in the coming decades. Simply put, a theory that severed a direct correlation between taxes rates and revenues – and disputed the zero-sum logic of conventional budget politics – amounted to a claim that tax-cutting did not necessarily require welfare state retrenchment. That claim in turn held the potential to appeal to constituencies beyond traditional small-government conservatives.

In this way, supply-side economics offered a solution of sorts to the right's longstanding challenge of sustaining coalition between anti-statists and Wallacite social conservatives. Back in 1975, when Bob Novak had considered Bill Rusher's plan for a new majority party, he had described the tension this way: "Whereas Mr. Rusher sees give-and-take between economic and social conservatives, I see the necessity of all give and no take on economic grounds if a national party embracing the blue-collar vote is to be founded."[166] Now, three years later, Novak and his partner Rowland Evans could see the potential of supply-side theory to dissolve that tension.[167] "Whereas Republicans for the past half-century have tried pouring the castor oil of balanced budgets and reduced government services down the throats of resisting Americans," they wrote, "Laffer has a prescription that makes them feel good." As one consultant marveled to a reporter in 1978, supply side arguments meant that the GOP "suddenly could become the party of

[165] Part of this cohesion stemmed from the willingness of many experts to endorse Kemp-Roth for reasons *other* than the supply-side justifications. See, e.g. Herb Stein, "The Real Reasons for a Tax Cut," *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 1978.

[166] Robert D. Novak, "Producers' Party," *National Review*, June 6, 1975.

[167] Evans and Novak, "A New Tax Cut Theology for the GOP."

more."[168] Little wonder that one ambitious Republican, running for a House seat in a suburban Georgia district, centered his 1978 campaign on Kemp-Roth. The issue, Newt Gingrich declared that spring, "exceeds anything I have seen in 18 years of politics and 5 years campaigning in its potential to create a conservative majority in this country."[169] That potential stemmed from the fiscal promise of a free lunch. The tax cuts appealed to small-government conservatives, while their disconnection from specified spending cuts avoided alienating social conservatives.

The work done by the Issue Councils under Brock, and in particular their role in helping to make tax cuts a programmatic lodestar of the Republican agenda and brand, provided part of the basis for Brock's insistence to skeptical conservatives that he viewed the role of the opposition party in ways similar to them. To those who complained about me-tooism and Republican capitulation to Democratic initiatives, Brock pointed to the tax campaign and the growing voting cohesions of congressional Republicans.[170] In contrast to his predecessor Roy Bliss, and in line with basic responsible party tenets prizing the clarification of partisan differences over bipartisan cooperation, Brock generally espoused a parliamentary approach to party opposition. Fittingly, he traveled to Great Britain to watch the Conservative Party's historic electoral victory in the spring of 1979 under party leader Margaret Thatcher, and presented reports on that campaign's themes and strategies to the RNC and Republican congressional leaders. When he argued to skeptical conservatives that "Republicans have been ideologically consistent, coherent and committed" during the Carter years., Brock was appealing to a pervasive conservative sentiment at the time that political victory for Republicans required

[168] Norman C. Miller in "Tax Cut Plan Gives GOP a New Issue," *Wall Street Journal*, September 19, 1978.

[169] Quoted in Steven M. Gillon, *The Pact: Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and the Rivalry that Defined a Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 38.

[170] Examples include Bill Brock letters to Roy Gibson, Jr., April 12, 1978, and to O.J. Callahan, April 12, 1978, both in Box 65, Folder 5, Brock Papers; and Brock to E.C. Hallstein, March 13, 1979, Box 65, Folder 6, Brock Papers.

disciplined opposition and programmatic line-drawing.[171] Howard Phillips' Conservative Caucus, for example, pursued the formation of a "Citizens' Cabinet" – a conservative shadow government covering every executive department and framed explicitly as an effort to inject British-style partisanship into the U.S. policymaking process.[172] (Unlike the RNC's councils, which accommodated Republican moderates who wished to participate, this cabinet featured only strongly conservative voices.) Brock was not the only Republican who traveled to Great Britain to study Thatcher's victory, meanwhile. Freshman congressman Gingrich did as well.[173]

Though Brock's programmatic initiatives reflected his emulation of British opposition party practice, their ultimate fate underscored enduring differences between the American and British systems. Brock was the latest in a succession of party leaders who attempted to institutionalize an American version of the kind of in-house policy research, program development, and issue work that British and other European parties had long practiced. But despite their impact in the run-up to the 1980 convention, the Issue Councils did not survive the end of Brock's tenure that year. Similarly, Brock's venture into substantive policy journalism, a quarterly journal called *Commonsense* he intended as an RNC-funded version of *Public Interest*, survived for only a few more issues after Reagan's inauguration. What accounts for the short half-life of Brock's programmatic initiatives, particularly given that his organizational innovations survived for decades to come? Part of the answer is that, compared to parliamentary parties, the centrifugal forces in the U.S. system still had an impact on top-down efforts to establish party policy, even during a period of growing party cohesion. But timing also mattered.

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[171] Described in Bill Brock letter to Wallace M. Davis, Jr., July 13, 1979, Box 65, Folder 5, Brock Papers.

[172] William Rusher, "'Citizens' Cabinet' in the Works," *National Review*, January 19, 1977; and "Shadow Cabinet Haunts Carter," *Conservative Digest*, October 1978.

[173] Editorial, "A Tip from Britain?," *Savannah Morning News*, July 7, 1979.

Brock served as party chairman during the exact period that witnessed the great flourishing of intellectual and policy activity carried out by the conservative movement's interlocking network of corporate and foundation-backed think tanks, advocacy organizations, and lobbies.[174] Between 1970 and 1980, to take one example, the American Enterprise Institute's budget jumped from $1 million to $10.4 million and its staff increased sixfold.[175] The Heritage Foundation, launched in 1973 with a $250,000 Coors grant, saw its budget surpass $7 million by the beginning of the next decade, when it mobilized as the right-wing advance guard of the Reagan revolution.[176] Developments in the 1960s had helped to challenge the legitimacy of disinterested, ostensibly non-ideological technocratic expertise and to inject ideology into the politics of policy knowledge. Subsequently, the right's long march through the institutions in the 1970s had resulted in a great proliferation of new, politicized centers of issue expertise. These avowedly ideological organizations lacked official partisan ties, but given the ideological sorting underway among the parties, their alliance with the GOP was clear. This, rather than institutionalized research arms within the formal parties, became the model for partisan policy development. Ideological think tanks and advocacy groups would serve as para-partisan entities, shaping the agenda of their allied parties and performing the function of programmatic differentiation prescribed by responsible party doctrine.

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[174] On conservative think tanks, see Blumenthal, *Rise of the Counter-Establishment*; James Allen Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1991); Michael Patrick Allen, "Elite Social Movement Organizations and the State: The Rise of the Conservative Policy-Planning Network," *Research in Politics and Society* Vol. 4 (1992), 87-109; and Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On conservative philanthropy's role, see Alice O'Connor, "Financing the Counterrevolution," in *Rightward Bound*, eds. Schulman and Zelizer, 148-168.

[175] David M. Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 160.

[176] Blumenthal, *Rise of the Counter-Establishment*, 37.

As we have seen, in matters organizational, financial, and ideological, the formal Republican Party experienced a revitalization in tandem with conservative ascendancy during the late 1970s. In a party system that was only starting to sort ideologically, the relationship between the party and right-wing activists was hardly conflict-free in these years. But, despite tensions, partisans and ideologues were increasingly pulling in the same direction. This dynamic could also be seen electorally. 1978 and 1980 proved to be important election cycles both for the GOP and for conservatism – and, especially, for conservatism's position within the GOP.

As early as the fall of 1977, aides in the Carter White House were sounding warnings about the ill winds blowing for Democrats in next year's midterm congressional elections.[177] Matters only darkened for the administration and its party in the ensuing months, as a confluence of events prompted a conservative breakthrough. The policy battles of the Carter presidency, discussed in more detail in Chapter Six, comprised one key to the developments rendering 1978 a watershed year in the history of American conservatism.[178] Just as important were conservative activists' efforts to leverage the battles into effective pressure on those *Republicans* inclined, either by substantive belief or norm-driven habit, to cooperate with Democrats.

This was done through primary challenges, lobbying, and issue-based mailing campaigns. "I want a massive assault on Congress in 1978," Viguerie boasted to a journalist in the summer of 1977. "I don't want any token efforts. We now have the talent and resources to move in a bold, massive way."[179] New Right leaders personally lobbied conservative Senators to abandon

[177] See, e.g. Les Francis memo to Frank Moore, October 3, 1977, Box 37, Folder "Memoranda – Les Francis, 2/22/77-3/20/78," Office of Legislative Liaison, James Carter Library (JCL), Atlanta, GA.

[178] On 1978 as a breakthrough political year, see Paul Pierson and Jacob Hacker, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer – and Turned its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 95-160; and Schlozman, "The Making of Partisan Majorities," 74.

[179] Sasha Gregory-Lewis, "Right-Wing Finds New Organizing Tactic," *The Advocate*, June 29, 1977.

their reelection support for liberal colleagues.[180] Candidate-oriented PACs, led by Reagan's juggernaut Citizens for the Republic, distributed millions of dollars in 1978 in campaign donations, and their choices often hewed to an ideological logic in ways the official party organs could not. Reagan's PAC gave support in races at the Senate, House, gubernatorial, state legislative, and even state party chairmanship levels that systematically ignored liberal incumbents. It also intervened in GOP primary contests for open seats.[181] New Right activists went a step further than this, waging strong primary challenges against incumbent liberal Republican senators over the opposition of party officials like Brock. Edward Brooke of Massachusetts barely survived a potent nomination challenge by a right-wing talk radio host, while New Jersey's Clifford Case shockingly failed to beat back a challenge by ex-Reagan aide Jeffrey Bell, losing the GOP nomination in what Pat Buchanan described as "a political event of more significance than any other this election year."[182] Bell's case to GOP primary voters that summer was explicitly ideological, and his subsequent general election loss to Bill Bradley contributed to the sorting of the parties – by enabling a liberal Democrat to replace a liberal Republican – even as it failed to aid in the overall rightward shift in Congress.

In situations featuring intraparty conflict, Brock found himself in the position of opposing aggressive issue-base activism in the name of defending and strengthening the party. The dichotomy between party politics and ideological politics was often presumed in the late 1970s discourse about the New Right. Whether it was the letter sent to Brock in 1977 from eight Republican Senators warning of GOP "cannibalism" over the Panama Canal treaties or the

[180] See, e.g., Paul Weyrich letter to Orrin Hatch, September 18, 1978, Box 21, Folder 27, Weyrich Papers.

[181] Rhodes Cook, "GOP Presidential Hopefuls Gave Plenty to Party Candidates in 1978," *Congressional Quarterly*, February 12, 1979.

[182] Quoted in Clymer, *Drawing the Line at the Big Ditch*, 126.

comments that Brock himself made in 1978 describing single-issue activism as "hazardous to our political system," the fear that issue-driven politics was both a symptom and a cause of party decline grew in these years.[183] But in a system where two parties structured political conflict, even a consciously unpartisan strategy of political coalition through single-issue mobilizations had the practical effect of driving ideological sorting and increased partisanship.[184]

The 1978 and 1980 elections demonstrated that ideological politics could, in fact, deliver pragmatic partisan victories. Republicans gained three Senate and fifteen House seats in 1978, and Brock was quick to point out that the RNC's party-building investments at the local and state level paid off in a gain of 300 state legislators and seven governors. The chairman also emphasized the ideological victory: "The 96th Congress, by all accounts, will be decidedly more conservative than the 95th," he told one Republican.[185] Brock's occasional antagonist Paul Weyrich sounded the same theme in a post-election report to one of his major philanthropic backers, Richard Mellon Scaife. He reported the CSFC's calculations that 17 House races saw outcomes reflecting modest leftward shifts in the seat holder, compared to 32 races that produced strong rightward shifts. "Not only did we gain in districts," he wrote, "but we gained in intensity to the conservative cause."[186] In the Senate, ten new members represented a rightward shift from their predecessors, compared to four who reflected a move left.[187]

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[183] Editorial, "Republican 'cannibalism'," *Washington Star*, November 16, 1977; Warren Weaver, Jr., "G.O.P. Chairman Says Single Issue Groups Imperil Political System," *New York Times*, July 19, 1978.

[184] As Schlozman puts it, "Although the New Right hoped itself to orchestrate single-issue coalitions that would supplant partisan politics … [t]he ongoing ideological sort in American politics doomed any notions of 'coalition-ism' … The movement that sought to supersede the Republican Party has as a major legacy helping to define and strengthen it." "The Making of Partisan Majorities," 57, 75.

[185] Bill Brock letter to Andreas Moller, November 29, 1978, Box 53, Folder 1, Brock Papers.

[186] Paul Weyrich to Richard Mellon Scaife, November 16, 1978, Box 3, Folder 10, Weyrich Papers.

[187] Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 25.

The behavior of Republicans in and out of Congress in 1979 and 1980 reflected a new cohesion and aggressiveness, borne of ideological zeal and favorable political winds. "[T]here's a new passion running beneath the impassive exterior of the House Republicans," *The Wall Street Journal* reported in April 1979. "It's a new feistiness, a stick-'em-in-the-eye combativeness toward the Democratic majority."[188] Outside of Congress, the same marriage of ideological combativeness and political effectiveness was evident as the conservative standard-bearer Ronald Reagan sustained his dominant position in the race for the GOP presidential nomination against a slew of rivals. Once Reagan sewed up the nomination, the official party operation and independent conservative efforts mobilized on behalf of the same goal – a stark contrast with 1976. Though Brock, in his capacity as leader of the official party organization, still expressed reservations during the race about the "divisive" role that such independent campaigns might play, the $10.6 million that National Conservative Political Action Committee and other outfits ultimately spent on Reagan's behalf proved a help rather than a hindrance.[189] .

The election results of 1980 marked a Republican sweep that was also a conservative rout. The GOP gained 12 Senate seats and 33 House seats. As James Sundquist noted, 11 of the 16 new GOP senators "had campaigned as ultraconservatives on social, military, and foreign, as well as economic, policy." The electorate also conveyed an increasing ideological logic to their partisan alignments. Democratic Reagan supporters came from disproportionately conservative ranks, and a higher percentage of respondents in one survey reported seeing "important differences" in what the two parties stood for than in the last six presidential-year surveys.[190]

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[188] Dennis Farney, "Republicans Have What Carter Wants: The Power of Votes," *Wall Street Journal*, Apr 20, 1979.

[189] David Broder, "Brock Calls Independent Efforts for Reagan 'Divisive,'" *Washington Post*, July 1, 1980; Busch, *Reagan's Victory*, 203.

[190] James L. Sundquist, "'Whither the American Party System?' Revisited," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 88 (Winter 1983-1984): 580, 583, and 596.

Statistics help to frame what was happening to the party system – its shifting elite alignments, the changing relationship between partisanship and ideology. But these changes were also lived experiences for men and women who had spent their careers in the parties, and those stories do their own kind of work to convey the dynamics involved. To take the measure of the GOP's transformation in the 1970s, consider one last story – a coda on a bygone era.

The Saga of Mary Crisp: Factional Struggle and the Partisan Polarization of Social Issues

By June 1980, RNC Co-Chairman Mary Dent Crisp had begun to suspect that her Washington, DC, office was bugged. For weeks she had wondered why sensitive information appeared to be leaking from her office to the press, and she noticed a beeping sound on the line during calls. Eventually she called in a private investigator to conduct a counter-surveillance sweep of the office.[191] The investigator found no direct evidence of bugging but noted "two suspicious situations" – a wire running from a neighboring office through Crisp's room to an unknown destination, and an electromagnetic "energy/radio field" detectable at a window near her desk.[192] Crisp reported this to fellow RNC officials, and three days later – an excessively long time, in her opinion – they called in another firm to investigate.[193] Eventually the police themselves took over the investigation, finally concluding that no bugging had taken place.[194]

Though this case was deemed a false alarm, the idea that espionage might take place in a party committee's headquarters hardly seemed farfetched just two presidential election cycles

[191] Myra MacPherson, "The GOP's Woman Without," *Washington Post Magazine*, July 1, 1980.

[192] Richard E. Govignon letter to Mary Crisp, Box 23, Folder 8, Mary Dent Crisp Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

[193] Crisp lists her frustrations in an undated letter marked "Statement Never Made," Box 23, Folder 22, Crisp Papers.

[194] Peter A. Brown, "GOP faces the music: No 'bug' in its office," *Boston Globe*, June 23, 1980; Tom Sherwood, "The Bugging That Wasn't," *Washington Post*, February 11, 1981.

after the Watergate break-in. What was more notable about the situation was the fact that Crisp suspected the culprits to be fellow members of her own party.

The story of an RNC Co-Chairman whose gradual professional isolation brought her to the point of suspecting skullduggery by factional enemies captures in a vivid way a broader process that activists on the left and right helped to hasten during the 1970s: the partisan sorting of cultural and social issues. Positions on issues relating to gender, religion, and the environment that had come to the fore thanks to 1960s movements did not, as of the early 1970s, have clear partisan valences. That had begun to change by decade's end, and nowhere was the dynamic more evident than in the politics of women's rights.[195] The untenable position in which Mary Crisp found herself in June 1980 resulted from the parties' polarization in the preceding years.

Crisp was a career-long GOP party worker and a feminist, and during the years of her rise within party ranks, few perceived such a combination to be contradictory. Originally a precinct captain in Maricopa County, Arizona, Crisp served as a Republican national committeewoman during the Ford years and the national convention secretary in 1976.[196] Despite her support for Ford in the nomination contest that year, she encountered little opposition from Reaganites when Bill Brock chose her as party co-chairman in January 1977 as part of a Sunbelt-heavy leadership team. Within months, however, Crisp's penchant for candid press quotes drew their ire, beginning with her public criticism of Reagan's "idea of purism" and her insistence that the GOP had to be able to encompass figures as ideologically disparate as Barry Goldwater and Jacob Javits.[197] The main focus of conservatives' opposition to Crisp was her outspoken feminism. Her patron, Mary Louise Smith, had managed to serve as the party's first female chairman

[195] See Wolbrecht, *The Politics of Women's Rights*, 119-225.

[196] "RNC Co-Chairman Mary Crisp Comes from the Grass Roots," *First Monday* (March 1977), 8.

[197] Thomas W. Ottenad, "Republican Battles are Now Mostly Intramural," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

without controversy despite a reputation as, in one profiler's words, an "ardent feminist."[198] But in the years since Smith first took the reins in 1974, a powerful anti-feminist movement had grown in coalition with other elements of the New Right. When Crisp spoke out on behalf of abortion rights, federal support for childcare, redressing gender inequities in Social Security, and attacking job discrimination, those movement activists listened.

The ERA was the key symbolic issue around which feminist and anti-feminist forces mobilized for a fight in the mid to late 1970s, and Crisp's pro-ERA advocacy galvanized intense conservative opposition to a degree that Smith's had not done just a few years earlier. The National Women's Conference, set to take place in honor of International Women's Year (IWY) in Houston in November of 1977 following state-level delegate selection conferences, became a proving ground for anti-ERA and anti-abortion forces.[199] That March, Phyllis Schlafly, the shrewd leader of STOP ERA and the Eagle Forum, launched a new initiative called the IWY Citizen's Review Committee. The project mobilized social and religious conservatives to participate in the state conferences and to work to elect their own as delegates. Such action, taken relatively late in the process, resulted in conservative representation of a quarter of the Houston delegates. A startled fellow GOP feminist described the mobilization to Crisp. "The IWY at Nebraska was a disaster last weekend," she reported in July. "The 'Pro-Lifers' rallied hundreds of people to drive into Lincoln on Sunday, register, and vote for their slate. That was the end of a balanced slate. Their slate was 500 votes ahead of the next names."[200] Schlafly's Committee also led letter-writing campaigns concerning the National IWY Commission's draft

[198] James R. Dickinson, "Ford's Choice for GOP Post a Shrewd Move," *Washington Star-News*, September 5, 1974.

[199] Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 244-248; Marjorie J. Spruill, "Gender and America's Right Turn," in *Rightward Bound*, eds. Schulman and Zelizer, 71-89.

[200] Patricia Lahr Smith letter to Mary Crisp, July 2, 1977, Box 27, Folder 5, Crisp Papers.

resolutions, which featured a panoply of liberal feminist planks including not only endorsement of the ERA and abortion rights but also federal aid for childcare, universal healthcare, and an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation. In the run-up to Houston, conservatives deluged public officials and convention delegates alike with outraged letters.

Crisp, as both an Arizona delegate to the conference and an RNC official, hardly escaped the deluge. "I was appalled at the manner in which the Arizona IWY Convention was conducted," one woman wrote to her, "and I am ashamed to know that you are a delegate of the IWY (at the same time as National Co-Chairman of the National Republican Party – my party)." Others similarly emphasized Crisp's party position in denouncing her IWY activity. Crisp was undaunted, pointing out in response that support for ERA ratification was included in the 1976 Republican Platform, as it had been for decades before.[201] The following year, she wrote to every GOP member of Congress to urge support for the bill extending the ERA ratification deadline.[202] These efforts outraged conservatives anew and sent more streams of mail both to her office and to Brock's. One ex-senator articulated to Brock the partisan case against Crisp's lobbying effort: "It is quite obvious that this is a liberal Democrat sponsored effort at best, and therefore, not in the Republican area for activity."[203]

Brock would dutifully point out in response, just as Crisp did, that support for ERA ratification was a current Republican platform position.[204] But the center of gravity on gender issues was shifting so rapidly within the party by 1978 that the letter-writer's argument for what did and did not constitute a legitimate "Republican area for activity" was quite plausible. The

[201] Mary Crisp to Tressa Crosner, November 18, 1977, Box 23, Folder 22, Crisp Papers.

[202] United Press International, "Black Reagan Backer Seeks Key G.O.P. Post," *New York Times*, January 5, 1978.

[203] George Murphy letter to Bill Brock, June 28, 1978, Box 65, Folder 6, Brock Papers.

[204] Bill Brock letter to George Murphy, July 6, 1978, Box 65, Folder 6, Brock Papers.

polarization of the parties on gender was underway in Congress. Since 1972, the percentage of House Democrats co-sponsoring legislation related to women's rights had begun to exceed the figure for Republicans, with the margin expanding with each Congress. The same interparty gap began to open in the Senate by 1978. Also starting in 1978, the difference in the National Women's Political Caucus voting scores earned by the median members of the two parties began to skyrocket – with Democrats scoring ever higher and Republican scores plummeting.[205]

As Crisp ran into such crosswinds, the controversy she fostered became a source of growing irritation for Brock and his staff. In early 1979, Jimmy Carter removed Bella Abzug as head of the National Advisory Committee on Women after Abzug openly criticized the president's proposed budget cuts. The entire membership of the Committee resigned in protest of the firing. Crisp was among them, though she framed her action as a response to the Committee being treated like "a rubber stamp for the Carter administration" rather than as a "pro-Bella" gesture. Conservative Republicans were hardly assuaged. "Why oh why did you resign just because that dreadful Bella was removed?" a Virginia woman asked her. A group of ten congressmen (all men) wrote Brock asking him to "please help us explain to Republicans in our Districts why the removal of Bella Abzug from any governmental body is not cause for rejoicing rather than regret and resignation."[206] Brock began to keep her at arm's length at the RNC. During early planning stages for the convention, relations broke down between the two over her perceived exclusion. In notes for a meeting with Brock, Crisp expressed her frustration: "If my position is becoming impotent, I cannot sit back and let it happen."[207]

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[205] Wolbrecht, *The Politics of Women's Rights*, 88-89, 105-106.

[206] Mary Crisp letter to Horence Powell, May 23, 1979; Hilda Griffith letter to Crisp, undated; Joan Williams letter to Bill Brock, January 17, 1979; congressional letter to Brock, February 8, 1979; Box 28, Folder 1, Crisp Papers.

[207] Mary Crisp notes, "For Discussion with Chairman," June 1978, Box 23, Folder 16, Crisp Papers.

Any temporary resolution of tensions between Crisp and Brock stemming from the meeting would be reversed during the primary election season of 1980. As the Reagan campaign marched forcefully from state victory to state victory against his Republican competitors, Crisp grew increasingly vocal about the threat his candidacy would pose to the survival of the platform's pro-ERA plank. Engagement with issues like ERA and abortion rights – not to mention the enmity expressed by Reagan's advisors and staff toward her – helped pique Crisp's interest in John Anderson's campaign. The Illinois congressman had run as a maverick social liberal in GOP contests with little success; in March, he relaunched his bid as an Independent. On June 2, with Reagan having all but secured the GOP nomination, Crisp shared her thoughts to a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter. Supporting Anderson might pose a solution to the "big dilemma" pro-ERA women faced heading into a convention dominated by Reagan, Crisp said. She deemed Anderson's chances of winning "not so far-fetched" and referred to his GOP credentials as "impeccable – he only refuses to say he's content with Reagan's way of looking at problems."[208]

Within a day of the publication of Crisp's interview, Brock sent her a blistering memo that called her comments "wrong and totally inappropriate for a major party official." So as to ensure that she "adopt the lowest profile possible" to avoid exacerbating the damage she had caused, Brock informed Crisp that he would eliminate her from the convention program and cancel the two events she had been scheduled to host. Four days later, she informed her colleagues that she would not be seeking re-election.[209] A week after that came the intrigue surrounding the bugging scare in Crisp's office. Brock made it abundantly clear that he thought Crisp's suspicions were unwarranted. Members of Reagan's camp were happy to go farther,

[208] Quoted in MacPherson, "The GOP's Woman Without."

[209] Brock memo to Crisp, June 5, 1978; Crisp memo to RNC Staff, June 9, 1978; Box 23, Folder 19, Crisp Papers.

offering sexist mockery to reporters through a veil of anonymity. When a reporter asked one Reagan aide why Crisp might suspect that she was being surveilled, he responded, "I have no way of judging the reaction of frustrated middle-aged women."[210]

Crisp's professional crisis coincided with the crisis of feminist Republicanism now culminating in the platform meetings that preceded the national convention in Detroit. In early July, conservative delegates succeeded in routing the last-ditch efforts of the Republican Women's Task Force (RWTF) to save the ERA plank. The committee passed a draft resolution that scrapped the party's 40-year-old endorsement of the amendment and included language condemning White House-directed pressure on anti-ERA states. It also sharpened the anti-abortion plank that conservatives had managed to first get adopted in 1976. Gone were the previous platform's acknowledgment of party differences on the issue and call for "continuance of the public dialogue on abortion." What was left was an unequivocal endorsement of a constitutional ban and a call for the legislative prohibition of taxpayer-funded abortions.[211]

At the final RNC meeting that she would attend as co-chair, Mary Crisp reacted to these developments with a tearful but defiant speech that startled her colleagues.[212] She declared that the new ERA and abortion language would "bury the rights of 100 million American women under a heap of platitudes … I am sorry, but I cannot turn my back on these issues, and I feel compelled to do whatever is within my power to prevent these two tragedies from occurring." She finished her speech to silence from most committee officials – Brock included – along with a smattering of applause from the pro-ERA minority. As Crisp left the committee room during a

[210] MacPherson, "The GOP's Woman Without."

[211] Compare the texts of "Republican Party Platform of 1976," and "Republican Party Platform of 1980," at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25843 and http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25844.

[212] Arthur Siddon and Jon Margolis, "GOP ignores plea, sticks to its ERA stand," *Chicago Tribune*, July 10, 1980.

recess, one female delegate ran up to her and kissed her on the cheek.[213] But Crisp's vow to reverse the platform committee's actions proved futile. The RWTF lacked the votes for a minority report on either plank, and both made it into the final platform. [214] The denouement of Crisp's Republican career, meanwhile, was swift. Her term ended on July 18. Less than a month later, she took a new position: co-chairman of John Anderson's independent campaign.

The journey of Mary Crisp from party co-chairman to party dissident to party outcast in a few years played out as a one-woman dramatization of the ideological sorting that transformed the party system during the 1970s. Two implicit questions would recur every time a new controversy flared up over her tenure: what was the proper Republican position on a given issue, and how *should* a given issue position relate to one's bona fides as a Republican? Revealingly, when a reporter told Reagan about Crisp's blistering farewell speech in early July, he couched his combative response in the language of partisan loyalty: "Mary Crisp should look to herself and find out how loyal she's been to the Republican Party for quite some time."[215] Reagan's remark implied not only that conservative positions on social issues were the proper "Republican" positions, but that a sufficient degree of apostasy on those or other policy issues amounted to partisan disloyalty. The plausibility of that first implication stemmed from the success with which issue-driven social conservatives had gained factional power within the GOP. The plausibility of the second implication stemmed from the fact that the party system itself was transforming, becoming more institutionally permeable to issue-driven and ideological activists and, as a result, increasingly structured by a core left-right ideological alignment.

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[213] Knight Ridder Service, "GOP's cochairman quits over platform," *Boston Globe*, July10, 1980.

[214] A convention-eve CBS poll of delegates found 62 percent reporting opposition to the ERA, versus 28 percent in favor. Adam Clymer, "Emotional Issue for GOP," *New York Times*, July 10, 1980.

[215] Siddon and Margolis, "GOP ignores plea, sticks to its ERA stand."

For those, like Crisp, on the losing end of issue-based factional conflict, the newly emerging ideological cast of American partisanship seemed synonymous with the breakdown of the party system itself. "Establishing purity tests for political views is contrary to the basic assumptions underlying our two-party system," she wrote in a post-convention statement she never released.[216] Crisp was correct that such tests were contrary to basic assumptions that had underlay the American system for decades. But those assumptions were no longer tenable.

A brief look at the changing politics of women's rights within the Democratic Party in 1980 provides a different angle on why this was the case. Feminist activists were an ascendant force within that party, one whose organizational clout had been on full display during the 1978 midterm issue convention mandated by party reformers. Carter's frequent clashes with feminist leaders partly reflected that clout. At the 1980 Democratic Convention, a few weeks after conservatives reversed the GOP's ERA position, feminists demonstrated anew their mastery of issue politics within a reformed party structure. Though most members and leaders within the feminist Coalition for Women's Rights were aligned with Ted Kennedy's nomination challenge against Carter, their policy agenda survived the collapse of Kennedy's candidacy. Thanks to an effective whipping operation at the convention, the Coalition not only secured the reaffirmation of existing planks supporting ERA ratification and opposing a constitutional amendment to ban abortion, but also managed to win convention floor votes on two planks opposed by Carter.[217] The first explicitly opposed restrictions on federal funding for abortions. The second stated that the "Democratic Party shall withhold financial support and technical campaign assistance from

[216] Mary Crisp, "Statement Never Made," undated, Box 23, Folder 22, Mary Crisp Papers.

[217] Wolbrecht, *The Politics of Women's Rights*, 45-47.

candidates who do not support the ERA."[218] The latter item was, of course, just the kind of "purity test" that Crisp decried, on the very issue that had compelled her to exit her own party.

The simultaneous ascendance of feminist forces within the Democratic Party and antifeminist forces within the GOP illustrated the dynamic logic of issue sorting in a two-party system – one party's position change affected the other party's approach, along with the strategic arguments that internal factions might make. As Gloria Steinem pointed out to fellow activists in the summer of 1980, the Republicans' decision to stake out the right wing on women's issues bolstered the electoral rationale for the Democrats to speak forthrightly on them as a way of mobilizing female voters.[219] And the further such sorting proceeded on a given issue, the more obvious was the necessity of choosing a side – of joining one party's coalitional team or the other. That logic, combined with the iron laws of first-past-the-post electoral systems from which all third-party bids suffer, crippled Anderson's ability to win the support of more feminist activists. A NOW official who personally supported Anderson wrote to Crisp in the fall of 1980 to explain why the organization itself had chosen not to endorse him, opting instead only to emphasize "total opposition" to Reagan: "[T]he labor-feminist alliance is important, and there are hopes that it will thrive and expand," she wrote. "John Anderson was viewed by many to be against labor reforms and was an unacceptable choice for the labor union advocates."[220] In other words, the logic of a labor-liberal coalition inclined NOW toward continued advocacy within the Democratic Party rather than to third-party adventures or a pose of bipartisanship. The mirror of that coalition and logic was the GOP's alliance of social and economic conservatives.

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[218] "Democratic Party Platform ," August 11, 1980, at http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29607.

[219] Referenced in Michael Harrington letter to Gloria Steinem, July 25, 1980, Box 6A, Democratic Socialists of America Papers, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

[220] Pam Fridrich letter to Mary Crisp, October 9, 1980, Box 25, Folder 13, Crisp Papers.

Seen this way, the great churn of socio-cultural conflict that the 1960s produced had not, by the end of the 1970s, established a new issue axis to replace government and economics as the defining cleavage of the party system, as many realignment theorists had predicted. Instead, these new "postmaterialist" issues augmented the economic divisions. Once the conditions were in place for such additive polarization to occur – permeable party institutions, the ascendance of issue-based and ideological activism as the predominant basis for partisan activity, and a clearly dominant faction within each party – the logic of its unfolding proved irresistible. Thus, by the end of the 1970s, party divergence on issues from economics to race to gender to the environment began to become visible.[221] The trick was establishing such conditions in the first place, and that was the key work done by political activists in the 1970s. In this work, left and right both played a part, but the right was at the vanguard. By using the GOP effectively as a vessel for ideological politics; by capitalizing on a changing institutional landscape to devise new mechanisms of discipline; and by pushing the boundaries of party norms as they related to the aggravation of conflict and the politics of line-drawing; conservatives in the 1970s managed to do more than anyone else to usher in the dynamics that still define American party politics.

[221] On party divergence over environmental issues, for example, see Charles S. Shipan and William R. Lowry, "Environmental Policy and Party Divergence in Congress," *Political Research Quarterly* 54 (June 2001): 245-263.

Chapter 6: Liberal Alliance-Building for Lean Times

For good reason, the 1970s has never been seen as a time of liberal ascendance. Beyond the active and antagonistic contributions made by conservative activists themselves, an array of external developments set an increasingly difficult context for liberal progress over the course of the decade. Stagflation produced a policy environment of zero-sum material conflict between groups, diminishing the political prospects for expansionary and inclusive social, economic, and regulatory policies. Businesses, abetted by the newly porous institutional environment in Washington, engaged in new forms of both coordinated and narrowly-tailored political mobilization, resulting in an explosive proliferation of corporate lobbyists and advocacy groups.[1] The ranks of liberal issue advocacy organizations, meanwhile, also exploded in the wake of the 1960s but came swiftly to be defined by an elite, professionally staffed, DC-based organizational model that eschewed cross-class mass membership and participation.[2] A similar absence of grassroots activist energy also came increasingly to be seen in American liberalism's foremost organizational bulwark, organized labor, as union density continued its long-running decline throughout the 1970s while businesses adopted a newly hostile posture and strategy.

All these factors stood as obstacles to liberal political initiative from the 1970s onward, and unsurprisingly, they are central to a narrative that dominates American postwar political historiography nearly as much as the rise of the right: the breakdown of the New Deal political

[1] David Vogel, *Fluctuating Fortunes: The Political Power of Business in America* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989); John B. Judis, *The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of Public Trust* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), 109-155; Benjamin C. Waterhouse, *Lobbying America: The Politics of Business from Nixon to NAFTA* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

[2] Jeffrey M. Berry, *Lobbying for the People: The Political Behavior of Public Interest Groups* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 18-109; Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 127-220.

order.[3] But the partisan context for such ideological developments matters. A narrative of liberal fragmentation and decline connects ambiguously to the resurgence of partisanship and ideological polarization that occurred in the last decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, unless that polarization could be said to have been solely and entirely the byproduct of conservative ascendance within the Republican Party, a narrative of liberal decline exists in some tension with it. As we have seen, conservatives in the Republican Party were at the vanguard of the transformation of American party politics in the 1970s. But this chapter argues that, within the defensive parameters for liberalism set by the context of the era, changes occurred in both the structure and personnel of the Democratic Party and its allied activists that contributed meaningfully to the long-run transformation of the party system along more programmatic lines.

Some of the same forces for change rendering the GOP more open to conservative takeover – most importantly, the atrophying of the conservative southern Democratic wing and its gradual replacement by Republicans – helped make the ranks of the Democratic Party more generally liberal via attrition. But liberal activists, like their counterparts on the right, also worked consciously to bring about changes to the internal balance of power in their allied party. For liberals, the 1970s might be said to have featured fracture and disarray at the policymaking level but a gradual process of coalitional reformation at the activist level. By decade's end, in contrast to conservatives, activists on the left had succeeded neither in attaining national power nor in shifting the national policy discussion of major issues in a leftward direction. What they had succeeded in doing, however, was consolidating a new coalition of groups, interests, and

[3] Emphases on liberal fragmentation and decline can be found in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Otis L. Graham, Jr., "Liberalism after the Sixties: A Reconnaissance," in *The Achievement of American Liberalism: The New Deal and Its Legacies*, ed. William H. Chafe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 293-325; Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); and Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) .

movements as *the* grassroots and organizational base of the Democratic Party as well as its dominant national faction. In doing this, they helped to drive forward the ideological sorting of the two parties and the tightening of the alignment between issue position and party affiliation.

An important substantive implication of the coalitional work carried out by liberal activists in the 1970s paralleled that of activists on the right: the bases of each party grew respectively liberal and conservative on *multiple* issue dimensions simultaneously. What this meant was that, contrary to the predictions of some realignment theorists, New Right populists, and New Politics liberals, a new party alignment based on the cultural and "postmaterialist" issues that emerged during the 1960s would not, in fact, supplant the older New Deal party alignment based on economic and welfare state issues. The new alignment would instead exist alongside that economic dimension in an additive process of polarization.[4]

Liberal activists and strategists played a crucial role in this process by consciously facilitating the reconciliation of elements of the liberal coalition that had fallen into conflict during the 1960s. George McGovern's landslide election defeat in 1972 helped to snuff out the most optimistic visions of a potential New Politics partisan coalition – under a Democratic or new-party label – uniting "constituencies of conscience" in a viable electoral majority. It convinced many liberal activists drawn from or sympathetic to sixties cultural politics that they had to more effectively appeal to working-class elements of the old New Deal coalition on an economic basis. The work of such activists helped to produce an important and undernoted political development of the 1970s: the reemergence of a labor-liberal alliance uniting progressive unions with 1960s-inspired social movements and issue groups in a series of formal

[4] In addition to the discussion of "conflict extension" in the preceding chapter, see Geoffrey C. Layman et al, "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 104 (May 2010): 324-346.

organizations.[5] This was a conscious project pursued by an array of organizers and movement strategists, from the writer Michael Harrington to the United Auto Worker's president Doug Fraser to the Chicago-based activist Heather Booth. And thanks in part to the effects of the decade's institutional reforms in empowering issue-driven and ideological activists in Democratic Party affairs, this labor-liberal coalitional work had a partisan impact. Reform-mandated midterm Democratic conventions, for example, provided forums for activists to tighten coalitional ties, a key background factor in the decade's second potent intraparty challenge to a sitting president: Ted Kennedy's 1980 bid for the Democratic nomination.

Ultimately, a changing issue context, the effects of institutional reform, and the concerted activism of labor-liberal coalition partners all combined over the course of the 1970s to facilitate the absorption of "New Politics" cultural and social movement energies into a Democratic Party that was simultaneously losing its most conservative faction. These twin developments marked the party's core contribution to the making of an ideologically sorted party system, and it is this contribution that the declensionist narrative of post-1960s liberalism tends to obscure.[6] Right and left alike participated in redrawing the lines of issues, ideology, and partisanship in the 1970s. Both stories are necessary to understand the dynamics of the Reagan years that followed.

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[5] Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Andrew Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

[6] A small but growing body of scholarship reassesses post-1960s developments in liberal and left politics and, to varying degrees, challenges the narrative of decline. See Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*; Sara Evans, "Beyond Declension: Feminist Radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s," in *The World the 60s Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America*, eds. Van Gosse and Richard Moser (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 52-66; Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*; Stephen Tuck, "'We Are Taking Up Where the Movement of the 1960s Left Off': The Proliferation and Power of African American Protest in the 1970s," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 43 (2008): 637-654; J. Zeitz, "Rejecting the Center: Radical Grassroots Politics in the 1970s – Second-Wave Feminism as a Case Study," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 43 (2008): 673-688; Lily D. Geismer, "Don't Blame Us: Grassroots Liberalism in Massachusetts, 1960-1990" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2010); Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party's Soul* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010); Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); and Jonathan Bell and Timothy Stanley, eds., *Making Sense of American Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

"To Make Them Conscious of Their Common Need"

As on the right, the major efforts of liberal issue and party activists in the 1970s to foster new, lasting political formations began with intellectual work – in the search for potential new coalitions latent in the political world that the 1960s had helped to produce. Surprisingly enough, one project that would exert a meaningful impact on the mainstream Democratic Party sprung from the intense internal conflicts of a tiny political sect – the Socialist Party.

Michael Harrington, a committed Party member who had gained mainstream fame with his 1960 work *The Other America*, was an activist-intellectual haunted by regret over a missed opportunity. He had famously broken with the young activists of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at its founding meeting in 1962, in the process filling the paternal role in a generational Old Left-vs.-New Left drama. In the wake of Vietnam, however, Harrington came to appreciate both the substantive contribution he saw the antiwar and new social movements making to American politics and the coalitional potential of such middle-class activism. By 1968 he was declaring the "youthful reform surge" of the McCarthy and Kennedy movements "the most exciting, and perhaps most significant, thing to have happened in American politics since the industrial workers of the CIO became an electoral force in the thirties." Applying a loosely Marxian form of New Class analysis, he hoped that the movement might "reflect the growth of a college-educated constituency in which quantitative expansion may well have turned into something qualitatively new: a mass base for 'conscience politics.'"[7]

During the Nixon years, Harrington's increasing openness to the New Politics and new social movement activism placed him at odds with fellow acolytes of Max Shachtman in the tiny but influential circle of Socialist Party leaders. His intraparty antagonists, including the ailing

[7] Michael Harrington, untitled roundtable contribution, *Dissent* (Fall 1968), reprinted as "Straight Lesser-Evilism" in Michael Harrington, *Taking Sides: The Education of a Militant Mind* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988), 149-150.

Shachtman himself as well as younger activists like Tom Kahn and Penn Kemble, retained influence within mainstream Democratic Party politics through extensive personal and professional connections to the labor movement, civil rights organizations, congressional staffs, and journalism. Kahn and Kemble formed the nucleus of the hawkish, anti-New Politics Democratic faction that became the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM) in 1972, reflecting the outlook of George Meany and his allies in the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). (Kahn was a top Meany staffer.) Harrington battled them within the Socialist Party, breaking openly with their support for the Vietnam War in 1970 and arguing the next year that "profound changes in American class structure" – the emergence of an educated stratum inclined toward reform and potentially open to socialist appeals – made it imperative for the labor left to ally with New Politics constituencies. As he saw it, even if the growing ranks of service and professional workers were to be organized, "it is likely that these college educated unionists are going to be open to a 'New Politics,' issue-oriented approach."[8]

But as the landslide defeat of the New Politics candidate George McGovern approached in 1972, the Shachtmanites moved to consolidate their control of the Socialist Party in tandem with new preparations to battle McGovern supporters over post-election influence within the Democratic Party. Harrington tendered his resignation as Socialist Party co-chairman, and in December 1972 the Shachtmanites rechristened the organization as Social Democrats, USA. Soon after, they distributed an exhaustive 38-page report detailing Harrington's years-spanning "attempt to split the socialist movement." The report argued that on two fundamental issues –

[8] Michael Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 291-292. The quote is from Harrington's letter to the Socialist Party National Committee Members and Alternates of the Majority Tendency, May 18, 1971, Box 1, Folder 1, Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) Papers, Tamiment Library/Robert Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, New York, NY.

"1.) Labor's role and influence within the liberal coalition, and the related question of the role and influence of the affluent, educated elite making up the so-called New Politics movement, and 2.) the attitude of socialists toward Communist totalitarianism" – Harrington had broken with core social democratic positions.[9] Those positions in practice amounted to continued loyalty to the Meany wing of the AFL-CIO and continued adherence to an aggressively anticommunist foreign policy. *The Wall Street Journal* was not alone in seeing Harrington's ouster as a microcosm of conflicts in the Democratic mainstream, terming it "the successful first skirmish of a mounting attack against the New Politics, which is now underway on such traditional liberal fronts as the intellectual community, the labor movement, and the Democratic Party itself."[10]

While Meany's allies and such likeminded strategists as *The Real Majority* authors Ben Wattenberg and Richard Scammon mobilized to lead a counterinsurgency against New Politics activists in the Democratic Party, many of those activists themselves used McGovern's loss as an occasion to reevaluate. Even prior to the defeat, numerous McGovern campaigners and allies had shared a perception that the New Politics coalition of professionals and various "out-groups" could not in itself constitute a viable electoral majority. Two campaign staffers, Gerald Cassidy and Ken Schlossberg, had warned the South Dakota senator during the race to avoid "the appearance of deliberately dividing the electorate into 'us' and 'them.' The 'us' being the accepted McGovern constituency – the young, the black, the poor, the women's libbers, etc. – and the 'them' being the rest of white middle-class working America…"[11] Their warnings were

[9] "For the Record: The Report of Social Democrats: U.S.A. on the Resignation of Michael Harrington and His Attempt to Split the Socialist Movement," Series RG0-003, Box 54, Folder "Michael Harrington, 1966-1974," George Meany Memorial Archive, Silver Spring, MD.

[10] James Ring Adams, "Battle Royal Among the Socialists," *Wall Street Journal*, December 8, 1972.

[11] Quoted in Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals' Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 193.

echoed outside the campaign by former McGovern-Fraser Commission staffer Joe Gebhardt, who urged his colleague Ken Bode to eschew actions on party reform that might "divide – more than naturally occurs – the ethnic working class from the young, black, poor, academics, highly educated, and liberal suburbanites."[12] McGovern's shattering loss in November, in which he failed to win even a majority of union voters among his 37.5 percent overall share of the popular vote, painfully vindicated such concerns. It provoked new attention to repairing the breaches of the last half decade in the name of coalition politics. "We have always been a minority," Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., told a post-election meeting of liberals. "We made the mistake in 1972 of thinking we were a majority. We really are a minority in search of a coalition."[13]

Harrington's next move after his Socialist ouster signified just such a search – an effort to build ties between the labor left and 1960s-borne social movements. At a small conference in early 1973 at NYU, Harrington convened a hundred compatriots to discuss "The Future of the Democratic Left," out of which came a new organization, the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC). Its founding manifesto described a nonsectarian vision of "coalition politics" and an ambition "to link together the various movements for reform and protest and to make them conscious of their common need…"[14] Over the course of the year, a nucleus of organizers and intellectuals including older socialists like Debbie Meier, Irving Howe, and Bogdan Denitch as well as the youth activists Jack Clark and Frank Llewellyn organized a

[12] Joseph Gebhardt memo to Ken Bode, June 9, 1971, Box 2816, Ken Bode Papers, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN.

[13] Quoted in Stephen C. Schlesinger, *The New Reformers: Forces For Change in American Politics* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 209-210.

[14] Michael Harrington, "We are the socialist caucus of the democratic Left" draft statement, April 1973, Box 1, Folder 4, DSA Papers.

shoestring office and monthly periodical called *The Newsletter of the Democratic Left*.[15] By the time of DSOC's inaugural convention in October of 1973, it counted about 200 members from Social Democrats USA and another 300 from the broader liberal left in the country.[16]

That the UAW's Victor Reuther and the American Federation of Teachers president David Seldon served as founding board members, soon to be joined by International Association of Machinists (IAM) chief William Winpisinger, reflected in miniature a fateful development within the labor movement at the time. The crucible of the 1960s had helped to provoke an open split between Meany's ruling faction within the AFL-CIO and a collection of dissident unions. Meany's best-known rival had long been Walter Reuther of the UAW, whose brand of aggressive social activism and openness to coalitions with New Left, new identity groups, and middle-class liberal activists were anathema to the conservative federation president and to the AFL craft unions that made up his base of support. Reuther's marginalization on the AFL-CIO's executive council, combined with his growing skepticism about the Vietnam War and Meany's full-throated support for its escalation, eventually prompted the UAW's disaffiliation in 1968.[17] As Chapter Four indicated, contrary to common depictions of monolithic labor opposition to the efforts of New Politics reformers, the support of the UAW and other unions played an important role in the party reform efforts of the early 1970s. It took the 1972 presidential race, however, to bring fully into the open the existence of a dissident liberal union faction inside the AFL-CIO.

The federation's decision to remain neutral in the general election for the first time that year, muscled through an executive council vote by Meany, prompted an unprecedented

[15] Michael Harrington, *The Long-Distance Runner: An Autobiography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988), 21-23.

[16] Peter Kihss, "Socialist Unit is Founded Here," *New York Times*, October 13, 1973.

[17] Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, 73.

independent political effort for McGovern by liberal AFL-CIO unions.[18] Over thirty-three such unions plus two major nonaffiliated ones, the UAW and the National Education Association (NEA), representing about 8 million workers, endorsed and campaigned for McGovern that fall.[19] Some AFL-CIO unions also withheld or placed new conditions on their financial contributions to the Committee on Political Education (COPE), the federation's political arm, and developed new organizational capacities for independent political action. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) devised its own political outfit, Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality.[20] Frustration over the neutrality decision prompted Bill Lucy and other African Americans to form the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. The Communications Workers of America (CWA), meanwhile, set up regional political directorships engaged in grassroots electoral activities that expanded in scope after the election. For CWA's Glen Watts, breaking politically with the federation was revelatory. As a participant in a later labor meeting paraphrased him, Watts "didn't realize what the Communication Workers were capable of doing in community action at least until they stumbled into it during the McGovern campaign and their CAP Councils really flowered."[21]

What set these dissident unions apart from Meany's faction in the AFL-CIO? Contrasting social and institutional bases underlay the two factions' contrasting political outlooks, and conflict stemming from these differences would have important implications for party politics in the 1970s and beyond. Substantively, the liberal labor officials followed in the

[18] Bill Kovach, "A.F.L.-C.I.O. Unions Form McGovern Unit," *New York Times*, August 15, 1972.

[19] Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 51; Harry Bernstein, "Unions Supporting McGovern Kick off Blitz Voting Drive," *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1972.

[20] Paul R. Wieck, "Labor's Al Barkan," *The New Republic*, March 24, 1973.

[21] Doug Fraser memo, September 27, 1977, Box 48, Folder 3, UAW President's Office: Douglas A. Fraser Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI.

tradition of Walter Reuther (who died in 1970) in advocating an expansive social democratic political vision, an increasingly skeptical view of the Vietnam War in particular and hardline anti-Communism in general, and an interest in forging coalitional ties to reformist and New Politics constituencies. These officials were disproportionately likely to be leading either industrial unions originally affiliated with the C.I.O. or some of the growing ranks of service, professional, and public-sector unions, while Meany supporters were concentrated among building trades and A.F.L. craft unions.[22] This meant that, in addition to lingering that were a legacy of Depression-era conflicts between the A.F.L. and C.I.O., ethnic and gender disparities also informed the federation's factional split. The female and minority proportion of the rank and file grew more rapidly in the 1970s in the dissident service and public-sector unions than among Meany's allies, just as those sectors' share of the overall organized population grew.[23]

The dissident wing of the labor movement, in other words, was changing demographically and intellectually in ways similar to the activist ranks of the Democratic Party itself, a phenomenon that Harrington had noted in his losing arguments with the Shachtmanites.[24] Liberal union leaders supported party reform efforts that would empower issue-based activists in the broader political arena, as a way of forging coalitional ties with left-of-center groups whose primary policy goals were not labor-related. Three such leaders in particular would prove to be pivotal players in every major organized effort to strengthen a new left-liberal political and

[22] On the growing importance of public sector unions in the American labor movement from the 1960s onward and their significance to American labor and political historiography, see Joseph A. McCartin, "Bringing the State's Workers in: Time to Rectify an Imbalanced U.S. Labor Historiography," *Labor History* 47 (February 2006): 73-94.

[23] Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 146-162. Reflecting women's growing share of the organized population and the proliferating channels of exchange between labor and feminist activism, representatives of 58 unions formed the Coalition of Labor Union Women in 1974; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 201-205.

[24] Battista provides empirical evidence for the gradual demographic convergence between the social bases of unionism and those of Democrats and self-described liberals after 1972 in *Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 201-204.

partisan alliance in the 1970s, beginning with DSOC: Doug Fraser, the Scottish-born Secretary Treasurer and eventual president of the UAW; the IAM's William "Wimpy" Winpisinger; and Jerry Wurf of the rapidly growing public employees union AFSCME. All three men shared a broadly socialist ideological background and a basic comfort with the new social and cultural currents that 1960s activism had brought to the political surface.

Harrington had little trouble sustaining the support and engagement of these liberal labor officials over the course of DSOC's work in the next decade. But fulfilling his organizational goal of bridge-building within the polyglot mass left would require a capacity to engage with *non*-labor activists that proved easier in theory than in practice. DSOC's white male-dominated leadership experienced growing pains and occasionally strained relations with feminist and minority activists.[25] Its inaugural convention in October 1973 featured zero women speakers and no feminist planks, a failing for which Harrington was immediately pilloried by female participants.[26] DSOC eventually secured more stable coalitional relations with feminist organizations and leaders, but its efforts to develop African American and Hispanic memberships bore little fruit save for significant relationships with black congressional leaders Ron Dellums and John Conyers. Among the remnants of the New Left, meanwhile, DSOC gradually forged ties with the SDS's organizational heir, the New American Movement (NAM). Surveying the scene in a 1975 article, NAM leader Harry Boyte echoed Harrington's optimism about the potential of the largely subterranean, non-electoral currents of left-liberal activism in the country – "a large-scale resurgence and expansion of grassroots insurgencies <u>off</u> college campuses" that included the growth of "women's groups and projects of many sorts, consumer

[25] Harrington, *Long-Distance Runner*, 25-66.

[26] Isserman, *The Other American*, 320-322.

organizations, civil rights groups, environmental and health and safety campaigns, [and] public interest and advocacy projects."[27] DSOC was one elite-level effort to connect such localized, organizationally diffuse activism with sympathetic labor leadership and a national agenda.

An important ally in Harrington's outreach to feminist, public interest, and community groups was the Chicago-based Heather Booth, herself a consummate bridge-builder. Booth's activist resumé was comprehensive: a student organizer, SNCC activist, and SDSer in college, she participated in a string of labor and tenant organizing projects in Chicago in the mid and late 1960s, established the Chicago Women's Liberation Union in 1969 and the Action Committee for Decent Childcare in 1970, and attended Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute to learn new community organizing techniques in 1972.[28] In 1973 Booth founded the Midwest Academy, a training center for radical and liberal organizers of all stripes that brought her into contact with a national array of neighborhood groups, state-level citizen organizations, unions, religious activists, and issue coalitions.[29] The Academy's annual summer retreat became an institutionalized gathering for liberal activists to socialize and collaborate in the 1970s and 1980s. In the course of establishing the Academy and building a national network of activist contacts, Booth came into regular professional acquaintance with Harrington, and soon enough would embark on her own major collaborative venture with liberal labor leaders.[30]

If Harrington conceived of DSOC as a meeting ground for disparate elements of the activist left, he also intended to direct that collaboration toward a *partisan* agenda within the

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[27] Harry Boyte, proposal, October 27, 1974, Box 5a, Folder "Harrington correspondence, 9-12/74," DSA Papers.

[28] These activities are recounted in Booth's 1971 application for the Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute, Box 251, Folder "Saul Alinsky – Industrial Areas Foundation Training Institute – July-August/1971," Midwest Academy Papers, Chicago History Museum, Chicago, IL.

[29] Harry C. Boyte, Heather Booth, and Steve Max, *Citizen Action and the New American Populism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 55.

[30] She invited him to attend the first Midwest Academy retreat in a March 17, 1975, letter, Box 6a, DSA Papers.

Democratic Party. In this DSOC reflected the orientation of much of the broader liberal-left. In contrast to conservatives in the early and mid-1970s, liberal activists had only occasionally considered pursuing new-party ventures since the battles of 1968, and the party reforms, McGovern's insurgent nomination, and his subsequent defeat in 1972 had all served to push such notions further to the margins.[31] Rather than advocate third-partyism, DSOC articulated a vision of programmatic transformation within the Democratic Party. The group's founding statement made it clear that it retained the old Shachtmanite commitment to coalitional politics – to achieving ideological realignment through direct factional engagement within the Democratic Party – even as it extended this principle to support for the minority groups, feminists, environmentalists, peace activists, and public interest advocates that Shachtmanites disdained.[32] "The organizational focus for bringing together these disparate forces in the foreseeable future is, for better or worse, the Democratic Party," the statement declared. In the 1974 and 1976 elections, "the serious choice between Left and Right will counterpose liberal Democrats to Reactionary Republicans and the latter's Dixiecrat Fifth Column in the Democratic Party."[33]

But, importantly – and in contrast to the position that Shachtmanites had come to adopt – the statement went on to articulate a responsible party critique of the Democrats' lack of cohesion and ideological coherence. The fact that DSOC would pursue Democratic factional politics did "not mean that we regard the amorphousness of American party politics, or of the

[31] For post-1968 discussions about a new party, see Eugene McCarthy, "A Third Party May Be a Real Force in '72," *The New York Times Magazine*, June 7, 1970; and "A *New Democrat* Symposium: A Fourth Party in 1972?," *The New Democrat* Vol. 1 No. 4 (1970). In 1971, ex-McGovern-Fraser staffer Ken Bode investigated how to acquire a line on state ballots designated for a new party as a gambit to compel states' implementation of the nominating reforms. The supplemental ballot line was supposed to signify the threat of a bolt from the Democratic Party if the reforms were not adopted, but was never intended as a real party-building effort. In any case, Bode soon dropped the project. See Bode, "Memo On Researching the Supplemental Line," June 10, 1971, Box 2816, Bode Papers.

[32] For Harrington's own reflections on the Shachtmanite strategy of realignment and how 1960s conflicts caused him to "significantly amend" but not abandon the strategy, see *The Long-Distance Runner,* 114-115.

[33] Harrington, "We are the socialist caucus of the democratic Left," Box 1, Folder 4, DSA Papers.

Democratic Party in particular, as good." Contrary to those, "including some liberals, who celebrate the unprincipled and unprogrammatic character of the American party system as a bulwark against 'extremism,'" DSOC believed that "the problems before America today cannot be solved on an ad hoc basis." The group envisioned a future in which "trade unionists, the minorities, the poor, and the middle class liberals and radicals would not simply vote for a party which is also heavily influenced by the Dixiecrat South and Big Business," but instead "would turn it into their own party with their priorities." At the convention in October, Harrington declared that "our aim should be, not to make the Democrats a third party, but to help them become a liberal first party of the new American majority."[34] Not surprisingly, the *Boston Globe* reported that at the convention, "Walter Mondale was mentioned more often than Karl Marx."[35]

DSOC would come to focus on platform and program work within the Democratic Party for a number of reasons. Practically, it was an area that the post-reform institutional environment had rendered conducive to the efforts of committed elite activists – allowing DSOC, in Harrington's words, to play "a role quite out of proportion to our very modest numbers."[36] Normatively, DSOC leaders shared a commitment to ideological partisanship that had longstanding roots in the labor movement and among socialist intellectuals. And strategically, Harrington perceived in the 1960s growth of middle-class activism an emergent mass constituency for specifically *issue*-oriented politics. He saw in these liberals something similar to what Jesse Helms saw in southern white ticket-splitters and new conservative activists: potential agents in the transformation of the party system along ideological lines.

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[34] Michael Harrington, conference speech at the McHalpin Hotel, New York, October 13, 1973, Box 2, Folder "DSA File – DSOC – Press Releases," DSA Papers.

[35] Robert Lenzer, "Socialist Role Eyed Among Democrats," *Boston Globe*, October 17, 1973.

[36] Harrington, *Long-Distance Runner*, 14.

DSOC's first, modest effort in this vein occurred in late 1974, on the occasion of the Conference on Democratic Party Organization and Policy in Kansas City. As discussed in Chapter Four, the Kansas City "mini-conference" was intended both to ratify a formal party charter as well as to inaugurate a new institution long advocated by responsible party reformers: regular midterm party conferences. In the language of a 1972 convention resolution, such conferences were meant to "increase communication between disparate segments of the Party and to discuss and adopt Democratic statements of policy on various issues."[37] Reformers led by Congressman Donald Fraser had conceived of such meetings as both a means for enhancing the programmatic function of the party and, in James MacGregor Burns' words, "a transmission belt between movement politics and party politics."[38] But DNC chairman Robert Strauss viewed it as a costly nuisance that would publicize intra-party divisions. He scheduled it for after the November elections and restructured the meeting so as to avoid debates on policy issues.

Though Strauss neutered its programmatic function, the mini-conference still served as a gathering place for issue and party activists, and DSOC sought to take advantage. Harrington and his colleague Marjorie Phyfe ran as convention delegates in New York's 17th district, winning thanks to the support of its longstanding Democratic reform club.[39] At the conference, Harrington, Phyfe, and other DSOC-affiliated delegates had little substantive to do, but found socializing with activists and party officials encouraging. "We were amazed at how open the

[37] Quoted in Richard N. Goodwin, "A Divided Party," *The New Yorker*, December 2, 1974.

[38] Thomas E. Cronin, "On the American Presidency: A Conversation with James MacGregor Burns," *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 16 (Summer 1986): 536.

[39] Harrington, *Long-Distance Runner*, 91.

Party is to its left," Harrington reported, "we were amazed at how many unorganized socialists were there, and we were amazed by the warm reception our ideas received."[40]

Those ideas, which remained the core substantive agenda of DSOC's efforts for the rest of the decade, emphasized bedrock economic and domestic policies as a common ground for left-of-center interests divided by cultural and foreign policy issues. Top policy items included a commitment to full employment, universal health care, nationalization of energy industries, and progressive tax reform. This class-focused policy approach was shared by mainstream elements of the Democratic Party in the mid-1970s, both in Congress and among core party interest groups seeking to coalesce around a universalistic agenda. The clearest expression of this strategy was the major mobilization behind the Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill, first drafted by Congressional Black Caucus leader Gus Hawkins and Hubert Humphrey in 1974, which in its original form combined expansive federal planning measures to achieve a mandated target of 3 percent unemployment with a legally enforceable right to work for every American.[41] Humphrey-Hawkins, as well as a series of universal health insurance plans backed by Ted Kennedy, would provide core points of programmatic focus for DSOC in the next several years.

Following the 1974 mini-conference, Harrington and his colleagues decided to make a more intensive effort at factional politicking inside the Democratic Party, with a focus on the platform to be drafted and passed at the 1976 convention. Harrington, Phyfe, and Jack Clark met in late 1975 to devise such a campaign, which, according to planning notes, would involve "build[ing] a programmatic tendency of the democratic Left in the Democratic Party and related constituent organizations (women's movement, trade unions, etc.)" and "creat[ing] a presence for

[40] DSOC press release, January 14, 1975, Box 6A, DSA Papers.

[41] On the origins of the full-employment idea and its development into Humphrey-Hawkins, see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 266-271.

that tendency at the Convention."[42] Its goals would include the involvement of DSOC personnel and allied delegates in testifying during the platform drafting process, "getting some of the planks adopted," and in other instances provoking both a "platform cttee. fight" and a floor vote akin to the "'68 peace issue fight." Like conservative delegates at the GOP convention, though with no candidate motivating their strategy, Harrington, Phyfe, and Clark conceived of a platform fight as an educational gambit, one that would serve as a demonstration of intra-party factional strength for liberal forces while provoking useful substantive discussion of key issues.

The platform project, which received funding from the UAW, the IAM, and AFSCME, came to be called Democracy '76, with a declared purpose "to help redefine the political and programmatic debate in the 1976 presidential election."[43] Harrington circulated a draft economic manifesto for feedback from intellectuals and activists in his orbit, including Heather Booth and her husband Paul, then working for AFSCME.[44] The resulting Democracy '76 statement took substantive aim at neoconservative critiques of Great Society social policy and called for more aggressive action by Democrats.[45] "Far from being too radical, our liberal policy makers have not been liberal enough," it read. "We challenge our party, the Democratic Party, to live up to its rhetoric of being a party of the people against the special interests, and we insist that the liberal presidential candidates take their own rhetoric and their own stated values seriously."[46]

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[42] Isserman, *The Other American*, 328.

[43] "Democracy '76: Program Proposals for the Democratic Party," undated, Box 2, Folder "DSOC - Organizational overview," DSA Papers.

[44] Paul and Heather Booth letter to Michael Harrington, October 18, 1975, Box 22, Folder "Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee – Michael Harrington – 1973-79," Midwest Academy Papers.

[45] This engagement with the critiques of federal activism coming from disillusioned liberals like Nathan Glazer and Daniel Bell was a recurring theme of Harrington's writing in the 1970s, and helped inform his political work. For an early statement, see Michael Harrington, "The Welfare State and its Neoconservative Critics," *Dissent*, Fall 1973.

[46] Statement of purpose, undated, Box 22, Folder "Democracy '76 Conference – 6/5/76," Midwest Academy Papers.

This focus on the platform as opposed to a candidate campaign was deliberate. The 1976 Democratic nomination contest featured an unusually open field with a shifting array of plausible candidates. Though Harrington personally supported liberal congressman Morris Udall, his commitment to a coalitional effort cautioned against becoming enmeshed in the race. This outlook was shared by the nine liberal unions who formed the Labor Coalition Clearinghouse to coordinate endorsement and convention strategy apart from Meany's influence. They agreed to eschew efforts to produce a single collective endorsement and instead to focus on boosting their members' presence in the convention delegations and influencing platform policy.[47] Key actors within the Clearinghouse, however, did demonstrate an affinity for the dark horse candidate from Georgia, Jimmy Carter, both for his ability to cut into George Wallace's support from southern white Democrats and for his seeming malleability on major issue positions.[48]

Indeed, that malleability was the flip side of Carter's central campaign strategy both in the nomination contest and the ensuing general election race: to deemphasize issues and run on his own personal appeal as a Washington outsider. A relative cipher on policy, Carter drew some liberal support through his apparent willingness to accede to policy demands. In April 1976, for example, Carter delivered a speech unveiling his national health insurance plan that was drafted in close collaboration with the UAW, which had made its campaign support conditional not only on substance but even on specific word choices in the speech. This dynamic would recur on a larger scale in the platform drafting process three months later. Carter, having capitalized on early caucus and primary wins to build momentum in the media, secured the nomination long before the convention in July. But a priority for his campaign remained shoring

[47] Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, 101-102.

[48] The UAW's Leonard Woodcock was Carter's most important early labor supporter. Martin Halpern, "Jimmy Carter and the UAW: Failure of an Alliance," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26 (Summer 1996): 757.

up support on his left to avoid the kind of visible intra-party strife that had characterized the last two Democratic conventions. This appeal to liberals manifested itself both in his choice for a running mate – the stalwart labor liberal Walter Mondale – and in his approach to the platform.

While Carter forces remained in control of the process, they deliberately acceded to liberal demands on most of the platform's substance. DNC Chairman Strauss assigned an issue-oriented liberal reformer as staff director of the platform committee, while Carter deputized Stuart Eizenstat and ex-ADA Chairman Joseph Duffy to represent his interests in the process with a highly conciliatory approach.[49] The result was a strongly liberal platform whose centerpiece was a qualified version of Humphrey-Hawkins – legislation about which Carter had grave personal misgivings. When Harrington testified before the resolutions committee on behalf of Democracy '76, he laid out an agenda that, in his words, "united leaders of the major progressive constituencies of the Democratic Party" and provided "a central policy core for the Democratic Administration which the nation will inaugurate in January."[50] To a striking degree, the platform document resulting from the committee reflected the substance of that agenda. Its very first plank addressed full employment, while later ones included "a comprehensive national health insurance system with universal and mandatory coverage," "opposition to the undue concentration of wealth and power," and urban policies justified with explicit reference to the Kerner Commission on Civil Disorders.[51] Beyond the platform, Carter's campaign also fatefully agreed to support liberals' resolution calling for another midterm party conference in 1978.

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[49] Kathryn J. McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011), 187-189; Isserman, *The Other American*, 331.

[50] Michael Harrington, testimony to the Resolutions Committee of the Democratic National Convention, May 18, 1976, Box 22, Folder "Democracy '76 Conference – 6/5/76," Midwest Academy Papers.

[51] "Democratic Party Platform of 1976," July 12, 1976, accessed online at Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29606#axzz1iweH8tcW.

Of course, Carter's acquiescence to liberal platform priorities ensured, as intended, that no policy fights would occur during the convention. This ran counter to Democracy '76's goals. As Harrington had explained it, the plan for the convention was "to mount an issues campaign. In 1968, the Democratic Convention debated the issue of Vietnam before a prime time television audience. Our ideal is to stimulate such a nationwide discussion of economic and social issues at this convention."[52] Carter's preemptive concessions, however, forestalled such a discussion. His team also tightened control to keep a lid on potential conflicts. Strauss pushed a rule through the platform committee that increased the threshold requirement, from 10 percent of convention delegates to 25 percent, for petition signatures calling for a floor vote on minority reports.[53] Later, when a Wisconsin committeeman proposed twenty-minute televised debates on three policy issues of the convention's choosing, Carter's team mobilized to defeat his resolution.[54]

Ultimately, the outcome of the convention consisted of a full-throated liberal party platform and a nominee whose commitment to either the platform or the activist ranks of his own party was highly questionable. In his testimony to the platform committee, Harrington had urged the nominee to avoid the perennial American temptation to "finesse the issues" and win a personal rather than agenda-based victory. UAW President Leonard Woodcock had gone further, sounding a classic responsible-party theme in calling on the committee to "declare, explicitly, that the national platform is supreme and preemptive with respect to general principles and broad national issues."[55] Such a notion was, of course, foreign to American party traditions. But it hinted at what would become a recurring argument of Carter's liberal critics during his

[52] Michael Harrington letter to Marvin Rosenberg, March 5, 1976, Box 6a, DSA Papers.

[53] McGarr, *The Whole Damn Deal*, 189.

[54] David E. Rosenbaum, "Effort to Permit Speeches Foiled," *New York Times*, July 14, 1976.

[55] Woodcock, "America's Unfinished Agenda" statement, May 18, 1978, Box 3, Folder 15, Doug Fraser Papers.

presidency: that he betrayed a platform to which he was morally bound. This critique would eventually lead key actors to mount the decade's second major intraparty nomination challenge to a president. Fittingly, as early as May 1976, Ted Kennedy himself criticized Carter's platform testimony for "intentionally [making] his position on some issues indefinite and imprecise."[56]

Disillusion and Dissent in the Carter Years

Intentional imprecision could well describe *both* presidential candidates' approach to issues in the general election contest that fall, to the chagrin of activists left and right. "In 1976," campaign chronicler Kandy Stroud would later write, "issues were no more important than the price of hoopskirts."[57] The limited programmatic stakes emphasized in the general election race reflected the circumstances that had led to the parties' respective nominations. A southern moderate, having capitalized on a fragmented liberal opposition in the Democratic primaries and committed to a personality-based campaign approach, squared off against a GOP incumbent whose own nomination had depended on the support of moderate party regulars and whose general election campaign would depend on an exceedingly cautious Rose Garden strategy. This match-up ensured that the emerging fault lines of American politics that had been visible during Gerald Ford's presidency would be tempered rather than exacerbated in the general election.

Carter's southernness and historical independence from Democratic liberals, for example, made an appeal to southern conservatives a tougher proposition for the Ford campaign, and left open the possibility of ideologically scrambled entreaties to other constituencies. With the South foreclosed, one aide wrote in a June memo, Ford's path to victory would run through the

[56] "Kennedy criticizes Carter as being 'intentionally' imprecise,'" *Boston Globe*, May 26, 1976.

[57] Kandy Stroud, *How Jimmy Won: The Victory Campaign from Plains to the White House* (New York: Morrow, 1977), 277. Laura Kalman quotes Stroud in a discussion of the election's substantive vacuity in *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 172-173.

industrial North, a region where GOP politicians project "a generally progressive image." At the same time, given continued liberal skepticism about Carter, the memo argued that Ford "can – and must – win a proportion of the liberal vote," along with that of smaller targeted groups like environmentalists and teachers.[58] Ford did, in fact, campaign in the South to diminish Carter's advantage. Indeed, in a sign of the continuing force of the partisan realignment at work in the South, Ford would actually win a majority of the white southern vote, even as Carter won the Confederate states themselves thanks to overwhelming support from African Americans.[59] But Ford's campaign shied away from explicitly conservative programmatic appeals, while conservative movement activists generally refrained from mobilizing electorally on his behalf.

If Ford and Carter's campaign strategies ensured that 1976 would not see a repeat of the programmatic contrasts characterizing the election of 1972, this fact gibed well with a view of the electorate shared by both campaigns' pollsters. "The notion that this country is made up of people who identify themselves as conservatives or liberals is just not correct," Bob Teeter told a reporter in 1975. "To the great majority of Americans, the whole idea of conservatism and liberalism is not useful." Pat Caddell agreed: "We just don't have an ideological country now. We just have small groups on each side who take these things very seriously."[60] The swamp of mass opinion on major issues provided some support for this contention. But to draw from Americans' professed aversion to ideology a prediction that politics was moving in a non-

[58] A. James Reichley memo to Dick Cheney, June 25, 1976, Box 2, Folder "Constituency Analysis," A. James Reichley Files, GRFL. Teeter had expressed similar skepticism about being able to "rebuild 'the new majority' from 1972" in December of 1975, prior to Carter's emergence as the leading Democratic contender, in Robert Teeter memo to Stuart Spencer, December 12, 1975, Box 63, Folder "12/12/75 to Stu Spencer," Teeter Papers, GRFL. See also Teeter memo to Bo Calloway, December 8, 1975, Box 63, Folder "12/8/75 to Bo Calloway," Teeter Papers.

[59] Ford won 53 percent of the white southern vote, compared to Carter's 46 percent. Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 38.

[60] James M. Perry, "Only Zealots Can Afford an Ideology," *National Observer*, March 1, 1975. As late as 1978, Carter aides hewed to this line. "Jimmy Carter is a non-ideological President, at a time when the country is non-ideological," Hamilton Jordan told reporter Elizabeth Drew in "Constituencies," *The New Yorker*, January 15, 1979.

ideological direction was a problematic leap. For "small groups on each side" had an outsized capacity to affect the behavior of the parties and their politicians. Their influence was enhanced both by the newly participatory institutional context of the reformed parties and Congress as well as by the steady diminishment of cross-pressures that ideologically dissident factions within both parties -- conservative southern Democrats, liberal northern Republicans – had traditionally exerted. In this context, it was all the more consequential that the narrow victor of the 1976 presidential contest, a loner resting his popular appeal on a kind of outsider anti-politics, would show a knack in office for choosing political battles that simultaneously mobilized right-wing opposition while alienating liberal Democrats. In so doing, he would help accelerate the process of partisan ideological sorting while, like his predecessor, nearly losing control of his own party.

If Carter proved in office to be, like Ford, a victim of the political times, his own political profile differed from his predecessor's in ways that only compounded the difficulties. Though Ford had been ill-equipped to respond to conservative mobilization, he was a stalwart party man with longstanding relationships in the national GOP and a commitment to party-building.[61] Carter, by contrast, came of age in a largely one-party state where political competition lacked an explicitly partisan dynamic. He framed his political appeal as both a party novice and a DC outsider, and approached governance with a Progressive's conception of public "trusteeship" that eschewed pragmatic bargaining and intra-party negotiation.[62] Even leaving aside the real programmatic disagreements dividing the president from his party, such a political disposition translated into a governing approach calibrated to alienate allies and worsen political dilemmas.

[61] Daniel J. Galvin: *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 99-100.

[62] Charles O. Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

In his first two years in office, Carter continually failed to set legislative priorities, sending an array of initiatives to Congress without a strategy for building and sustaining support.[63] Modest, tepid stimulus measures and an increasingly austere approach to economic policy alienated liberals. Amnesty for draft evaders, IRS scrutiny of Christian schools' tax status, and a protracted renegotiation of the Panama Canal Treaty that Carter chose to attempt early in his tenure against the judgment of advisors – all served to unite and mobilize right-wing opposition. Simultaneously, the president stoked bipartisan outrage in Congress through repeated targeting of parochial interests embedded in the appropriations process, from water projects to B-1 bombers. Carter's presidency occasioned continued right-wing ascendance within the GOP thanks partly to the influx of new streams of conservative activism. But almost as quickly, liberal activists and their Democratic allies in Congress also mobilized to assert programmatic pressure on a titular leader of their party who seemed openly contemptuous of it.

Harrington, for his part, revamped Democracy '76 as Democratic Agenda, again with the financial backing of the UAW, AFSCME, and the IAM, and with Margaret Phyfe serving as executive director. Harrington and Phyfe initiated the project in November 1977 through a major conference in DC, which focused substantively on full-employment policies and politically on resistance to Democratic waywardness in Congress and the White House. Conference leaflets explained that "The DEMOCRATIC AGENDA is the beginning of a movement to make sure that President Carter and the Democratic Congress keep the promises contained in the 1976 Democratic platform."[64] On the second day of the conference, participants marched to the Democratic National Committee to demand accountability to that platform.[65]

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[63] Burton Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 28-49.

[64] Democratic Agenda brochure, Box 4, Folder 71, Doug Fraser Papers.

[65] Agenda for Democratic Agenda conference, November 11-13, 1976, Box 4, Folder 71, Doug Fraser Papers.

One day was dedicated to a series of panels on policy issues, some of which addressed both the tensions as well as coalitional potential among the left's diverse constituencies. A panel called "The Unnecessary Tradeoff: Energy, Environment, Employment," for instance, featured labor leaders and activist coalition groups like Environmentalists for Full Employment.

This attention to building organizational and intellectual alliances among historically leery movements typified liberal activities during the Carter years, which saw a great proliferation of acronym-happy coalitions. The Full Employment Action Council (FEAC), co-chaired by Coretta Scott King and union chief Murray Finley, followed rallies across the country in the summer of 1977 with a Capitol Hill lobbying effort on behalf of Humphrey-Hawkins.[66] A coalition of consumer and labor activists organized the Campaign on Inflation and Necessities (COIN) to advocate targeted, sectoral anti-inflation policies as a substitute for recessionary and budget-cutting measures.[67] Unions across the board, meanwhile, had reversed their opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) by the mid-1970s, and many of them would provide support for the campaign when the conservative counter-mobilization intensified. On the fault line dividing environmental activists and labor, several important initiatives emerged in the late 1970s, including Environmentalists for Full Employment as well as a major project launched by Heather Booth and William Winpisinger, the Citizen Labor Action Council (CLEC).[68] Substantively, CLEC's focus on the misdeeds of large energy corporations offered a common ground for the 60 member organizations, which included unions, state-level citizen action

[66] A.H. Raskin, "Nationwide Rallies for 'Decent' Jobs at 'Decent' Wages," *New York Times,* August 31, 1977; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive,* 273-274, 283.

[67] Bob Pender memo to Ralph Gerson, September 19, 1978, Box 16, Folder "COIN [O/A 6743]," Robert Strauss Files, Jimmy Carter Library (JCL), Atlanta, GA; Alfred Kahn and Esther Peterson memo to Jimmy Carter, September 10, 1979, Box 51, Folder "[Memos]," Council of Economic Advisors Files, JCL.

[68] On labor-environmentalist alliances, see Harvey Wasserman, "Unionizing Ecotopia," *Mother Jones,* June 1978.

groups, public interest lobbies, and progressive neighborhood groups.[69] CLEC, like Democratic Agenda, was a pragmatic coalitional effort. More importantly, it represented the first of Booth's ensuing efforts to draw grassroots citizen groups into national, electoral, and partisan politics.[70]

One legacy of the decade's party reforms was that activists disgruntled with Carter and seeking to forge new organizational ties had a focus for their efforts: the midterm party conference mandated by the 1976 convention. Carter's aides recognized that this conference posed a danger and needed to be controlled. "Politically, we must pay special attention to the 1978 Mid-Term Conference," two staffers wrote Carter in May 1977. "It can very easily be used by certain elements in this Party to embarrass the President and the Administration."[71] After vainly exploring ways that the DNC might wriggle out of its obligation to hold the conference at all, the administration instructed the national committee to again schedule it for after the congressional elections in November to diminish the gathering's impact.[72] The administration also sought to structure the conference rules so that delegates could attend issue workshops but would not be able to debate or vote on floor resolutions.[73] After liberal lobbying, the DNC Executive Council dropped this rule in the summer of 1978, but it instead required the signatures of 25 percent of conference delegates to propose a resolution – and stipulated that the signatures

[69] "A National Citizen Action/Labor Coalition on Energy Policy," November 1977, Box 208, Folder "C/LEC Planning Committee Meeting," Midwest Academy Papers; Winpisinger letter to the IAM, May 31, 1978, Box 208, Folder "C/LEC – Founding Conference – 4/19/78," Midwest Academy Papers.

[70] Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 117.

[71] Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*, 220.

[72] Drew, "Constituencies."

[73] Donald Fraser letter, June 5, 1978, Box 10A, Folder "DA – Cynthia Notes and Calls," DSA Papers.

be presented to the DNC at least three days prior to the conference.[74] The clear intent of both requirements was to make the introduction of floor resolutions logistically infeasible.

The midterm conference, taking place in Memphis in December 1978, was the Democratic Agenda's primary organizational focus, and it brought Harrington, his colleagues, and labor allies into close working partnership with Donald Fraser's reform organization, the Democratic Conference. Thanks to that consultation, the Agenda was made aware of the procedural requirements as they emerged out of DNC deliberations in the months leading up to the conference, and the group mobilized to jump the hurdles. Marjorie Phyfe worked out of the Agenda's New York office, contacting conference delegates and soliciting petition signatures on issue resolutions related to economic, social, and energy policy. Three days before the conference, Democratic Agenda was able to present 409 delegate signatures for four policy planks to a shocked staff at DNC headquarters. 409 exceeded the 25 percent threshold.[75]

The move testified to the degree to which years of networking among party and issue activists had rendered Democratic Agenda, in Harrington's words, "a communication center of the liberal-labor wing of the Democratic Party."[76] The organization's efforts were sufficiently notable for Carter's spokesman to name it as the administration's chief conference opponent in a press conference prior to the gathering.[77] Over 500 of 1625 delegates to the conference attended a liberal caucus meeting jointly held by Democratic Agenda and the Democratic Conference the

[74] Donald Fraser memo to Mid-Term Conference Delegates, October 11, 1978, Box 149.C.12.2(F), Folder "Democratic Conference," Donald M. Fraser Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

[75] Isserman, *The Other American*, 334. The planks reaffirmed the party's commitment to national health care and full employment, advocated a COIN-style sectoral inflation policy, and endorsed a new public energy corporation modeled off of the Tennessee Valley Authority. See Democratic Agenda mailing to Mid-Term Conference Delegates, Box 10A, Folder "Resolutions," DSA Papers.

[76] Harrington, *The Long-Distance Runner*, 106.

[77] Curtis Wilkie, "Democratic Parley to Get Compromise on Health Care," *Boston Globe*, December 7, 1978.

day before, some sporting "Still 4/76" buttons in phonetic honor of the 1976 platform.[78] Once the conference convened, Doug Fraser and UAW legislative director Howard Paster led the effort to whip support for the resolutions while negotiating with DNC chairman John White.

At the midterm conference itself, the pro-Carter forces repeated the strategy they had used during the nominating convention two years earlier, combining tight organizational control with a concessionary posture regarding policy planks. The official proceedings of the first two days accorded with the anodyne script devised by the administration: the screening of a hokey documentary celebrating Carter's accomplishments on Friday night followed by a tepidly received live address from the president, and, on Saturday, a marathon of issue workshops. Off the floor, meanwhile, negotiations on resolutions proceeded between White and various liberal forces – chiefly Doug Fraser regarding the Democratic Agenda-sponsored economic planks and Mildred Jeffrey and the National Women's Political Caucus over resolutions related to the ERA, abortion, and gender representation in the party. White agreed to Fraser's demand that the health care resolution include language calling on Democrats and the president to pass national insurance legislation during the 96th Congress. In exchange for feminists' backing down on a resolution forbidding the party from providing financial support for anti-ERA candidates, White also agreed to a guarantee of 50 percent female delegate representation at the 1980 convention and a pledge to work toward electing 50 women to Congress in 1980.[79] Finally, administration forces did not resist Democratic Agenda's efforts to dominate the 24 issue workshops, each of

[78] Harold Meyerson, "The D.S.O.C. - Radicals on a Tightrope," *The Nation*, April 7, 1979; Drew, "Constituencies."

[79] Alan Ehrenhalt, "The Democratic Left Faces a Dilemma," *Congressional Quarterly*, December 16, 1978.

which was to choose "platform advisors" for the 1980 platform drafting process. Thus, virtually all of those advisors as well as the planks emerging from the workshops were liberal.[80]

Despite their concessions, the Carter forces were unable to avoid a public confrontation. The point of opposition around which liberal activists coalesced was a resolution on the federal budget that had emerged out of a conference-eve meeting between labor leaders, the ADA, the Democratic Agenda, and the Democratic Conference. Carter had announced in October that, as part of his anti-inflation agenda, he was committed to keeping the 1980 deficit below $30 billion. Given a previous commitment to increase defense spending by three percent above inflation, this pledge guaranteed painful austerity for domestic social programs. The liberals in Memphis drafted a resolution explicitly condemning Carter's budget priorities and insisting that social programs not face overall reductions.[81] As one strategist explained to a reporter, the budget offered "an issue that unites the progressive community, such as it is here – labor, the black caucus, the women's caucus, the city people. There are a lot of special-interest resolutions floating around … The budget is the one that pulls the progressives together."[82] The resolution's direct criticism of administration policies was a bridge too far for Carter, and Doug Fraser refused to back down in negotiations. It became clear that the vote on this resolution, to be held on the final day of the meeting, would be the key test of strength between the contending forces.

The administration left nothing to chance, deputizing 200 loyal delegates to act as floor whips and sending out nearly every senior White House official to lobby against the resolution. Ultimately, the roll call on Saturday counted 521 in favor of the resolution, 872 against. Carter's

[80] Michael Harrington, Margaret Phyfe, Jack Clark, and Libby Moroff letter to "Key Contacts" of Democratic Agenda, December 27, 1978, Box 10A, Folder "Resolutions," DSA Papers.

[81] See Minutes to 1979 ADA board meeting, undated, Box 149.C.13.4(F). Folder "Misc.," Donald Fraser Papers.

[82] Drew, "Constituencies."

victory owed to the large number of ex officio delegates at the conference, staunch southern support, and an effective effort to woo black delegates by Detroit mayor Coleman Young, who argued pragmatically against antagonizing a president on whom urban interests depended.[83]

But the president's victory was partial. The conference had confirmed rather than obscured the reality of party disunity on core matters of program and policy. That a conference under the administration's own tight control would feature an open rebuke by 40 percent of its delegates to a president halfway through his term spoke volumes about the his perilous position as well as the clout of the party's dissident faction.[84] "There is no doubt that the left was the dominant force at the Democrats' midterm conference," the *Congressional Quarterly* concluded. "It managed to set the agenda for discussion, do nearly all the talking, and force the Administration to make serious concessions on resolution-writing and new party rules."[85] As a *Nation* editorial put it, "the midterm convention had been rigged, but poorly rigged."[86] It proved particularly significant in demonstrating a base of potential support for a nomination challenge to Carter in 1980 – which had been very much part of Harrington and Doug Fraser's intentions.[87]

Indeed, the conference provided an occasion for the most likely such contender to articulate liberals' discontent and rally them to his side. The Saturday workshop on health care featured a panel chaired by Arkansas governor Bill Clinton and comprised of White House aide Stuart Eizenstat, Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary Joseph Califano, Doug Fraser, and Senator Ted Kennedy. After the Carter officials spoke staidly about the administration's hospital

[83] Rhodes Cook, "New Party Rules: The Real Memphis Legacy," *Congressional Quarterly*, December 16, 1978.

[84] Hendrick Smith, "The Message of Memphis," *New York Times*, December 11, 1978.

[85] Ehrenhalt, "The Democratic Left Faces a Dilemma."

[86] Editors, "The Tennessee Waltz," *The Nation*, December 23, 1978.

[87] Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter*, 79.

cost containment bill, the senator rose to his feet and offered a hoarse-voiced stump speech that electrified the auditorium's crowd of 2,500. Kennedy veered away from the topic of his own national health insurance bill to offer an expansive warning about the president's policy direction and the Democratic Party's fate. "The party that tore itself apart over Vietnam in the 1960s cannot afford to tear itself apart today over basic cuts in social programs," he shouted, prompting the audience to stand and applaud.[88] To White House strategists, activists, and journalists alike, Kennedy's performance looked unmistakably like the opening salvo of a nomination challenge.[89]

Before Kennedy felt sufficiently persuaded about the existence of a plausible path to the nomination to launch a formal campaign, however, liberals pursued further efforts at institution-building in 1978 and 1979. Two major initiatives in that vein, both launched partly in imitation of New Right organizational successes, represented efforts to go beyond single-issue coalitions like COIN, CLEC, and FEAC and to establish more durable political formations on behalf of a broad-based agenda. The first, Doug Fraser's Progressive Alliance, was ballyhooed but short-lived, and proved historically significant more for the intellectual thrust of its political reform agenda than any practical political impact. The second, Heather Booth's Citizen Action, began more modestly but would grow greatly in size and significance over the next decade.

Labor Liberalism in Lean Times

The UAW president's initiative originated in the breakdown of the decade's last remaining effort to address stagflation through corporatist bargaining among business, labor, and

[88] David S. Broder and Bill Peterson, "Kennedy Warns of a Party Split by Arms Outlays," *Washington Post*, December 10, 1978.

[89] Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter*, 86.

government officials.[90] The Labor-Management Group was an informal, 16-member committee, organized by Harvard economist and former Labor Secretary George Dunlop and co-chaired by Meany and General Electric chairman Reginald Jones. It met periodically during the Nixon, Ford, and Carter years in an effort to address issues of mutual concern to unions and managers in a consultative manner – especially issues relating to wage and price inflation. But from the point of view of one of its most important labor-affiliated members, Doug Fraser, the unprecedented corporate political mobilization during Carter's first two years belied the group's assumed context of consensual relations between labor and business.[91] The struggle over a labor law reform bill in 1977 and 1978 was a case in point. After passing easily in the House in October 1977, the bill stalled in the Senate due to a filibuster. Months of fierce lobbying to break the logjam failed in the face of a massive effort by business. Emboldened by their earlier victory over common-situs picketing and organized in an array of coordinated fronts, from the Business Roundtable and Chamber of Commerce to advocacy groups like the Right-to-Work Committee, business interests teamed with conservative activists to wage a Capitol Hill "holy war," in the words of the AFL-CIO's chief lobbyist.[92] This successful effort to block a modest reform bill, coming on the heels of similar mobilizations against a minimum wage hike, Humphrey-Hawkins, and the establishment of a Consumer Protection Agency, prompted Fraser to take a public stand.

[90] Jefferson Cowie, "'A One-Sided Class War': Rethinking Doug Fraser's Resignation from the Labor-Management Group," *Labor History* 44 (2003): 307-314.

[91] Already in 1977, Fraser and his aides were discussing internally the "malaise in the labor movement," the resurgence of labor's enemies, and possible political strategies to address the problem. See Steve Schlossberg to Fraser memo, October 20, 1977, Box 48, Folder 3, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[92] Melvyn Dubofsky, "Jimmy Carter and the End of the Politics of Productivity," in *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, eds. Gary M. Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 106.

On July 18, 1978, he sent a letter to the Labor-Management Group's membership as well as the press announcing his resignation.[93] "I believe that leaders of the business community, with few exceptions, have chosen to wage a one-sided class war in this country," Fraser contended, describing an across-the-board strategic shift among business elites "toward confrontation, rather than cooperation." Rather than legitimize the new posture by continuing to participate in an enterprise predicated on good-faith negotiation, Fraser announced, in a clarion call for militant social unionism, that the UAW would seek to make "new alliances" and "new coalitions" – to "reforge the links with those who believe in struggle: the kind of people who sat-down in the factories in the 1930s and who marched in Selma in the 1960s." Fraser's resignation letter caused a stir in the press and electrified liberals. John Kenneth Galbraith told Fraser it "was the best progressive document I've read in years," while Michael Harrington called it "one of the more important documents in recent American political history."[94] What resonated was not only Fraser's identification of an ascendant, militant corporate-conservative alliance in the political arena, but also his commitment to reengaging the labor movement in coalition-building with other left-liberal activists and interests.

In the months following his resignation, Fraser worked with top UAW political staff to outline plans for a new national umbrella organization for left-liberal activists from labor, antipoverty, feminist, civil rights, consumer, and environmental backgrounds.[95] In September of 1978, Fraser formally invited leaders from over 100 such groups to attend a conference in Detroit

[93] Douglas Fraser letter, July 17, 1978, Box 1, Folder 27, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[94] John Kenneth Galbraith to Douglas Fraser, July 31, 1978, Box 15, Folder 28, Douglas Fraser Papers; Michael Harrington memo to Key Democratic Agenda Contacts, August 14, 1978, Box 5A, Folder "Michael Harrington Correspondence," DSA Papers.

[95] Doug Fraser memo to Irving Bluestone, Steve Schlossberg, Howard Paster, Don Stillman, Howard Young, and Frank James, September 5, 1978, Box 68, Folder 21, Douglas Fraser Papers.

"to consider formation of a new alliance aimed at transforming the American political system."[96] He framed the meeting as a response to conservative ideological initiative -- "the tremendous power of a newly sophisticated right-wing corporate alliance." He warned that "corporate reactionaries and their ideologues for the first time in years have taken the momentum from progressives in the arena of ideas," and advocated a united front of left-leaning activist organizations to mobilize a response. About two hundred delegates attended the convention on October 17, where agreement was reached to establish an Issues Commission as well as a Political Process Commission as initial steps.[97] The organization itself was incorporated that winter as the Progressive Alliance, with the UAW's Bill Dodds installed as Executive Director. A roster of unions from the dissident progressive wing of the movement served as the Alliance's funding base outside of the UAW.[98] The group drafted a statement of principles in January acknowledging the diversity of its membership but sounding a theme of solidarity: "While we each bring our own separate concerns to this alliance, we share a common belief that our individual problems can only be solved through collective action …"[99]

Most importantly, Fraser intended the Alliance to focus on reforming the political *system* – and his conception of such reform bore the mark of responsible party doctrine. His invitation to the 1978 exploratory meeting outlined an agenda that included abolishing the filibuster and pursuing reforms "aimed at creating a stronger, more accountable, more ideological Democratic Party." The Alliance's statement of principles similarly connected substantive progress with the

[96] Douglas Fraser letter to invitees, September 19, 1978, Box 3, Folder 13, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[97] Harry Bernstein, "104 Labor, Minority Groups Organize to Battle 'Right-Wing Corporate Power,'" *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1978. The represented groups included 30 unions, Democratic Agenda, the American Civil Liberties Union, ADA, Consumer Federation of America, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the Urban League, the National Organization for Women, Friends of the Earth, and the Sierra Club.

[98] Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 86.

[99] "Toward a Progressive Alliance," January 15, 1979, Box 10A, Folder 35, DSA Papers.

transformation of party politics. "We need political parties that are accountable, issue-oriented and disciplined to abide by their platform commitments," it read. "Revitalized parties and issue-based politics are tools through which the struggle of the 1980s can be waged."[100]

Indeed, Fraser's personal outlook on party reform – vaguely Anglophilic and parliamentarian, oriented toward discipline and majority rule, rife with an older social democratic emphasis on militancy and ideological rigor – rhetorically departed from the McGovern-Fraser era's language of inclusion and participation even as it shared those reformers' commitment to issue-based politics. A working paper on the Alliance's reform program detailed a theory of partisanship that E.E. Schattschneider would have recognized. "[D]emocratic theory links the effective political participation of citizens to the effective performance of governments," it declared. "Contenders for government power must obtain office on the basis of coherent, clearly specified principles and policies" and must try to enact those policies in office. "If they fail to do so, or, if in practice, their policies fail to serve the common good, citizens must be able to: 1.) identify who failed; 2.) hold them accountable for their failures; 3.) replace them." This focus on clarifying lines of accountability underlay all of the reforms the paper advocated, from congressional changes already underway ("party caucuses must be able to require a high degree of loyalty from committee chairmen and members for the price of their committee posts") to more elusive measures for controlling officials' behavior ("candidates must be bound to party platforms"). The report's critique of the "politics of personality" and of competition aimed merely at "spoils of office" stemmed from that same responsible party ethos – the belief that "the parties must be strong, ideologically coherent, disciplined, and genuinely democratic."[101]

[100] "Toward a Progressive Alliance," January 15, 1979, Box 10A, Folder 35, DSA Papers.

[101] Interim Working Paper, September 21, 1978, Box 3, Folder 15, Douglas Fraser Papers.

Motivating Fraser's focus on political transformation was not just alarm at the gains being achieved by an ascendant alliance of business interests and conservatives, but also a perception of pervasive, systemic party decline that he shared with most journalists and scholars in the 1970s – especially as it pertained to Congress. Fraser took pains to emphasize Congress's culpability in the failures and frustrations of the Carter years. "I think you have to attach more blame to the legislative branch of government than to the executive branch," he told a reporter in 1978. "It has no cohesion. There's no discipline."[102] That same year *Time* ran a cover story on the "bold and balky" post-reform Congress that summarized the emerging consensus about the atomization and disarray of the institution and its parties. "Many political scientists fear that Congress may eventually become unmanageable by its leaders," it reported.[103] For Fraser, the indiscipline and fragmentation of Democratic legislative behavior was directly connected to the party's faltering commitment to labor-liberal policies.[104] He singled out a younger group of Democratic freshmen and sophomores from suburban districts for particular condemnation, as neoliberal apostates dissenting from key progressive tenets related to taxes, regulation, and social provision.[105] For Fraser as for many liberals during the Carter years, the fact that such heavy Democratic domination of both the executive and legislative branches could produce so little in the way of liberal policy achievements was a source of frustration and puzzlement. "We had a big victory in '76," one of his aides put it, "and wound up with a pile of shit."[106]

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[102] Fred Barnes, "Q and A: UAW Chief Explains Goals of Liberals," *Washington Star*, October 27, 1978.

[103] "A Bold and Balky Congress," *Time*, January 23, 1978.

[104] See, e.g., Doug Fraser letter to Thomas Murphy, July 17, 1978, Box 1, Folder 27, and Fraser's address to the National Conference on Social Welfare, Philadelphia, PA, May 13, 1979, Box 4, Folder 22, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[105] Barnes, "Q and A," *Washington Star*.

[106] Tom Matthews and Jon Lowell, "Liberals: Alive and Kicking," *Newsweek*, October 30, 1978.

The legislative disarray of the Carter presidency that contemporaries like Fraser so often bemoaned has lived on as a touchstone in the prevailing historical narrative of post-1960s liberal collapse. It is worth briefly qualifying the assessment. The frustration of liberal policy goals during the Carter years was very real. Moreover, some of the new Democrats arriving to Congress in this period, beginning with the massive influx of "Watergate babies" in 1974 and continuing in 1976 and 1978, did indeed embody the new issue orientation that Fraser lamented. They were liberal on social and cultural issues, while fiscally conservative and skeptical of redistributive state activism.[107] Their influence combined with an external political-economic context marked by stagflation, resurgent conservative and antigovernment energies, and a trend toward retrenchment across the industrial world in the late 1970s, all of which put new constraints on liberal policy progress. Measures of the congressional Democrats' overall voting patterns on issues relating to business regulation and fiscal policy did show a slight rightward shift in the middle and late 1970s.[108]

The conservative trend within the Democratic Party of the 1970s is, however, easily overstated. The same measurements showing a rightward shift in the congressional caucus's economic positions showed *leftward* shifts on issues ranging from civil rights to foreign and military affairs to social welfare policy – and even labor legislation.[109] Scholars and commentators have tended to give the iconic Democratic congressional class of '74 a monolithic cast as a cohort of suburbanite neoliberals paving the way for Reaganism. But the Watergate

[107] A classic statement on the Watergate Babies' neoliberal political legacy is William Schneider, "JFK's Children: The Class of '74," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1989.

[108] Barbara Sinclair, *Majority Leadership in the U.S. House* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 12.

[109] Sinclair, *Majority Leadership in the U.S. House*, 12, 15. Measurements of ideological positioning using the DW-NOMINATE method developed by political scientists Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal show very little change in the mean scores of Democratic legislators in both the House and Senate over the course of the 1970s; after the 1970s, those mean scores move in the liberal direction. See the two graphs (for the House and Senate) of "Party Means on Liberal-Conservative Dimension," accessed at http://voteview.com/political_polarization.asp.

babies counted among their ranks not only the likes of Tony Coelho, Tim Wirth, and Gary Hart, but also such liberal future legislative leaders as Henry Waxman, George Miller, and Tom Harkin. By the time a Democrat returned to the White House in 1977, he faced a congressional majority that hewed to more liberal policy priorities than his administration did. In Carter's first year in office, congressional Democrats set the pattern for intra-party relations by seeking to push him leftward on spending, the minimum wage, and public works and employment policy.[110] In a more pertinent example, the very 1978 labor law defeat that prompted Doug Fraser's formation of the Progressive Alliance did not reflect a new anti-labor bias among congressional Democrats. The House passed the bill by a vote of 257 to 163 before the measure met the fate that had befallen virtually all progressive labor law bills in the postwar era: a Senate filibuster sustained by conservative coalition votes and supported by only two northern Democrats.[111]

Despite the success of the labor law filibuster, even the southern Democratic component of that conservative coalition was undergoing changes by the end of the decade. Indeed, easily the most important electoral development among congressional Democrats in the 1970s was the gradual, halting, but forceful transformation of both the numerical strength and, especially, ideological orientation of the party's southern ranks. By removing some of Congress's most conservative lawmakers from Democratic ranks while altering the behavior of others, southern realignment was already serving to make the party more internally coherent *and* marginally more liberal overall, even as other developments introduced countervailing, fragmenting influences.

The institutional and political settings in which lawmakers operated were more significant contributors to the frustrations and disarray of Carter-era policymaking than any

[110] Bruce J. Schulman, "Slouching Toward the Supply Side: Jimmy Carter and the New American Political Economy," in *The Carter Presidency*, eds. Fink and Graham, 54-57.

[111] Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats*, 110-113.

ideological changes among congressional Democrats. As described in Chapter Four, the congressional reforms implemented in the first half of the decade contained both centralizing and decentralizing measures. In the initial years following the reforms, the decentralizing changes predominated, as party leaders hesitated to maximize their use of new powers and individual members swamped the system in the absence of management and coordination by legislative "traffic cops." The Carter White House exacerbated such centrifugal tendencies through particularly ineffective efforts at congressional coordination as well as its prioritization of the kinds of sweeping and comprehensive reform packages – on thorny issues like energy, welfare, and budget policy – that Congress has difficulty tackling even under the best circumstances.[112] Importantly, however, the legislative frustrations of those years were already serving to motivate further organizational changes that would ultimately diminish rather than perpetuate party fragmentation. Under the energetic speakership of Tip O'Neill beginning in 1977, the House leadership began pursuing the expansion of its whip system, the enhanced use of the Steering and Policy and Rules committees to manage legislation, and the deployment of Task Forces handling initiatives across multiple committee jurisdictions. Partly as a result, Democratic voting cohesion began a rebound in the late 1970s that continued for decades.

These developments were latent and largely undetectable to activists like Doug Fraser amidst the legislative confusion and conservative mobilizations of the Carter years, however. What was vividly clear was both a sense of liberal disarray as well as a Democratic president and congressional majority's obvious lack of commitment to the progressive party platform of 1976. Other liberal activist organizations were thinking in terms similar to Fraser during Carter's presidency, whether seen in Democratic Agenda's claim that the "drive for a more responsible

[112] Mark A. Peterson, *Legislating Together: The White House and Capitol Hill from Eisenhower to Reagan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 253-260.

Political Party structure never been more attractive than it is now" or ADA officials' insistence that "the 1976 platform is not obsolete, and those who are elected under it should stay with it."[113] But even most liberal allies acknowledged that party discipline and platform accountability were particularly elusive goals in the American political system. As a UAW staffer noted in an internal commentary, the Progressive Alliance's working paper on political reform seemed "to be striving for a degree of party discipline that is compatible only with a parliamentary system."[114] David Broder echoed that notion in a sympathetic profile that described Fraser's efforts as "sailing upstream against a strong current of public desire for direct, participatory democracy."[115] Moreover, the umbrella structure of the new Alliance made it a collection of disparate issue groups with differing institutional set-ups and approaches, and only some of those member organizations were receptive to a focus on party reform.[116]

Nevertheless, even while pursuing more substantive issue campaigns during the organization's three-year life, the Progressive Alliance maintained an emphasis on institutional reform through the work of its Political Process Commission. In a reflection of their shared responsible party outlook, Doug Fraser had asked that tireless reformer, Minnesota Congressman Donald Fraser (no relation), to chair the commission, but the latter declined due to his continued stewardship of the similarly oriented Democratic Conference.[117] Co-chaired instead by the political scientist Chris Arterton and the feminist and gay rights activist Gloria Johnson, the

[113] "Summary Report – Democratic Agenda 1979 Project," February 1980, Box 2, DSA Papers; Leon Shull, Minutes to 1979 ADA board meeting, undated, Box 149.C.13.4(F), Folder "Misc.," Donald Fraser Papers.

[114] Peter Eckstein memo to Howard Young, October 11, 1978, Box 68, Folder 20, Doug Fraser Papers.

[115] David Broder, "UAW's Strategy: Discipline for Democrats," *Washington Post*, October 15, 1978.

[116] As UAW staffers Steve Schlossberg, Bill Dodds, and Ed James recounted in a September 5, 1979 memo to Fraser, the Progressive Alliance "came to more substantive issues…precisely because we could not excite constituent groups, potential allies on process issue;" Box 3, Folder 12, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[117] Donald Fraser letter to Doug Fraser, May 4, 1979, Box 3, Folder 13, Douglas Fraser Papers.

Commission met several times over the course of 1979 and 1980, addressing as key themes "Political Parties and Money in Politics," "Citizen Participation," "Census and reapportionment," and "the politics of alliances and coalitions."[118] As discussed below, the Alliance would also play a pivotal role at the 1980 Democratic convention in securing both a liberal platform and a commitment from the DNC to investigate questions of party reform and responsibility.

The Alliance had long-term aims that extended beyond such study groups and convention skirmishes – and the way the group conceptualized such aims typified the approach of liberal-left activists in the late 1970s. Included in an internally distributed "Long-Range road map" in early 1979, for example, were plans for the "establishment of a more or less formal caucus within the Democratic Party," the forging of a "media network" of progressive communications efforts, the "creation of an 'AEI' on the left," and the building of a 25,000-name mailing list to be overseen by "a 'Viguerie' on our side."[119] The latter two items, in their explicit mimicry of recent conservative efforts at institution-building, reflected liberal's growing fascination with the ascendant New Right and their desire to emulate its organizational approaches.

Indeed, in analyzing the right's activities as potential models for action, liberals effectively helped their ideological antagonists construct what would become the dominant political narrative of the later twentieth century – the phoenix-like rise of the conservative movement – as that very rise took place. Mike Miller of the CWA gave presentations on the New Right's mobilizations in 1978 to liberal and Democratic audiences, including the DNC, while the NEA prepared a national conference on the new conservative threat to education.[120]

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[118] Minutes to the executive board meeting of the Progressive Alliance, June 29, 1979, Box 10A, Folder 35, DSA Papers; Progressive Alliance newsletter, March 1980, Box 3, Folder 14, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[119] Steve Schlossberg memo to Doug Fraser, January 2, 1979, Box 68, Folder 22, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[120] "Democrats Told 'New Right' Gains," *Albuquerque Journal*, July 23, 1978; Donald Fraser speech at the NEA conference, August 7, 1979, Box 152.K.12.9, Folder "The New Right," Donald Fraser Papers.

270 liberal organizations formed the network Interchange in April 1978 as a communications hub exchanging "alerts on the New Right's actions."[121] The ADA distributed 250,000 copies of its report "A Citizen's Guide to the Right Wing" that same year.[122] 1979 featured NOW workshops on "Reproductive Rights and the Right Wing" and a National Conference on Right-Wing Strategy organized by Democratic activist and Interchange co-founder Midge Miller.[123]

Richard Viguerie, the flamboyant New Right direct-mail pioneer, loomed large among liberal activists as a movement tactician to emulate. As Progressive Alliance leaders put it in 1979, "the central problem for progressives in the 1980s is to create movement and momentum. Viguerie is a master of this analysis. In his own words, he uses anti-abortion and Prop 13 sentiment as vehicles to identify and coalesce like-minded individuals."[124] Even as these organizers hoped for a "'Viguerie' on our side," the consultant and direct-mail guru Thomas R. Mathews earned that designation from reporters.[125] A former Common Cause official who built up a massive mailing list of liberal donors over the 1970s, Mathews used polarizing issue appeals to expand his base while raising funds for his clients – the epitome of Viguerie's approach.[126]

By the end of the decade, liberal strategy memos abounded calling for the explicit emulation of conservative organizational innovations from the 1960s and 1970s. This marked an ironic new turn in a long-running cycle among ideological activists, since so many of those very

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[121] Phillip Shabecoff, "Alliance Formed to Meet Challenge From Right Wing," *New York Times*, April 22, 1978.

[122] "As Liberals Dig Out from Under," *U.S. News and World Report*, October 30, 1978.

[123] Joy Horowitz, "NOW Flexes Muscle at Convention," *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1979; George McGovern, National Conference on Right-Wing Strategy speech, November 3, 1979, Box 187, Folder "Right Wing Issue File - 1980 Campaign," George S. McGovern Papers, Seeley G. Mudd Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.

[124] Steve Schlossberg, Bill Dodds, and Ed James memo to Doug Fraser, September 5, 1979, Box 3, Folder 12, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[125] Mathews "is to liberals what Richard Viguerie is to conservatives;" wrote Rudy Maxa in "When it Comes to P.R., Anti-Treaty Lobby Wins," *Washington Post Magazine*, February 12, 1978.

[126] Warren Weaver, Jr., "Liberals Open Purses to Fund-Raiser, *New York Times*, October 8, 1981.

innovations on the right had begun as answers to organizations on the left. The American Conservative Union was the right's ADA. The Republican Study Committee was the right's Democratic Study Group. The National Conservative Political Action Committee was the right's National Committee for an Effective Congress. The Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute were the right's versions of the Brookings Institution. As the cycle of combat and emulation continuously recurred, the right and the left alike helped to drive further a process of organizational and ideological polarization in American politics.

Major asymmetries would structure this dynamic from the 1970s onward, however, and the fate of the Progressive Alliance helps illuminate some of the factors underlying the left's relative disadvantage. After a flurry of activity, intellectual engagement, and ambitious planning, the Alliance buckled under its own top-heavy structure, officially disbanding in April 1981. Long prior to that official decision, the organization found itself hamstrung by the need to accommodate myriad member organizations, and its leadership struggled against key allies' accurate perception that all the effective power remained concentrated in the UAW.[127] In a 1980 letter to Michael Harrington, one departing staffer called the Alliance "about as productive as flower tending in seventh century Byzantium. Lots of nice sprouts that keep getting stepped on."[128] But more important than any such organizational dysfunctions was the manufacturing crisis, particularly in the auto industry, that was beginning take a toll on the American labor movement at the same time that employers launched a newly aggressive mobilization against unions. The long-term decline of labor would exert a crippling handicap on left-liberal mobilizations in the next few decades – not least by ensuring the Democratic Party's continued

[127] See, e.g., Melvin Glasser memo to Doug Fraser, December 9, 1980, Box 12, Folder 9, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[128] Ed James letter to Michael Harrington, May 30, 1980, Box 6A, DSA Papers.

dependence on corporate financial support – while in the short term the auto crisis had a practical and devastating effect on the Progressive Alliance. From 1979 onward, Doug Fraser's attentions were increasingly concentrated on the looming bankruptcy of Chrysler and efforts to secure federal help for the company, and between 1979 and 1981 the UAW's membership declined by 20 percent amidst a wave of plant closings.[129] The Alliance lost priority in the crisis. So central was the UAW's stewardship and support for the Alliance that Fraser's decision to step down as the group's chair in March of 1981 swiftly precipitated its disintegration.

Beyond suffering travails specific to the labor movement, meanwhile, the Progressive Alliance could be said to have shared in a deficiency common to much of the liberal-left at the time: it lacked a mobilized mass grassroots constituency comparable either to those that drove the social movements of the 1960s or to the growing ranks of engaged foot soldiers for Christian right and tax-revolt causes in the 1970s. Against the loftier hopes of its organizers, the Alliance remained largely a staff-dominated coalition of letter-head organizations. This lack of real grassroots muscle played as important a role as the conflicting legal and strategic postures among member organizations in hindering the Alliance's ability to engage in such factional party efforts as candidate sponsorships and primary challenges.[130] It was not a problem unique to the Alliance. By the late 1970s, the Democratic Agenda also began to acknowledge an inability to buttress its influential elite-level party operations with a mass base or grassroots leverage. "We have had an impact on program and structure within the Democratic Party qua party," one leader pointed out at in 1979, "but we have no electoral clout."[131] A year later, DSOC's Ruth Jordan

[129] Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 96.

[130] See Doug Fraser memo to Progressive Alliance officers, May 3, 1979, Box 68, Folder 20, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[131] Minutes to National Organizing Committee meeting, June 4, 1979, Box 10A, Folder 3, DSA Papers.

offered a similar assessment and recommended renewed efforts to build independent, locally-rooted grassroots bases for Democratic Agenda.[132] But such efforts never succeeded.

Those failures reflected the general post-1960s tendency of many advocacy groups on the left to organize as elite, staff-dominated letterhead organizations lacking mobilized mass constituencies, a popular hollowing-out of movement politics that could also be seen in the increasing emphasis on legal rather legislative strategies for pursuing political aims.[133] Indeed, the combination of continued influence and diminished grassroots muscle could characterize the position of liberal Democrats writ large at the time. *Congressional Quarterly's* assessment of the 1978 Midterm Democratic Conference in Memphis noted how the meetings dynamics "pointed up the ambiguous role of liberal activists in American politics – increasingly important within the nation's majority party, but isolated from public policy decisions and from national opinion itself."[134] That isolation stemmed not merely from the mistrust and conflicting priorities of the Carter administration, but from a mass electoral weakness that reduced liberals' leverage.

It was precisely this lack of a grassroots base that activist Heather Booth sought to address when she built upon the organizing efforts of the issue-based labor-liberal energy coalition CLEC to pursue a broader national initiative called Citizen Action. Through the Midwest Academy as well as her work alongside William Winpersinger at CLEC, Booth had begun to forge a national network of relationships and commitments among several state and local level citizens and consumer groups. In December 1979, Booth convened a three-day Citizen Action Organizing Conference in Chicago that brought together representatives from

[132] "Memo to Democratic Agenda," May 17, 1980, Box 2, Folder "DSOC – Organizational overview," DSA Papers.

[133] Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy*, 127-220; Gordon Silverstein, *Law's Allure: How Law Shapes, Constrains, Saves, and Kills Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[134] Alan Ehrenhalt, "The Democratic Left Faces a Dilemma," *Congressional Quarterly*, December 16, 1978.

liberal unions and five of the most active and influential state-level citizens groups: the Connecticut Citizen Action Group, Massachusetts Fair Share, Ohio Public Interest Campaign, Oregon Fair Share, and the Illinois Political Action Council.[135] The aim was to achieve "a national dimension" to the issue work being done by the state groups, and in particular to expand CLEC's state coalitions into multi-issue organizations and campaigns.[136] As an early blueprint laid out, the new organization would provide resources and financial support to unions, churches, and citizen organizations for "the development of national issue coalitions. Whenever requested, Citizen Action will offer assistance to unions, churches, and citizen organizations."[137]

To the extent that those efforts remained focused on practical, locally-rooted struggles over issues like toxic waste contamination, plant closings or the decontrol of natural gas prices, Citizen Action and its organizational antecedent, CLEC, were not quite innovators. Rather, they served as nodes of activity on a national level that could scale up campaigns, coordinate among member groups, and share resources and personnel. More importantly, they served as institutional connectors between, on the one hand, the community organizing, public interest, and consumer groups that were an activist legacy of 1960s social movements and, on the other hand, the progressive wing of American labor. The alliance was vividly embodied in the oddball public teamwork of Heather Booth the veteran New Left feminist and William "Wimpy" Winpersinger the gruff, fiftysomething Machinists union boss – a partnership continuously on display at CLEC and Citizen Action meetings in the late 1970s and 1980s. George Meany

[135] Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and New Hampshire groups soon joined; Boyte, Booth, and Max, *Citizen Action*, 48.

[136] Tom Corrigan, undated report, Box 149, Folder "Citizen Action Organizing Conference – 12/7-12/9/79," Midwest Academy Papers; see also Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 105.

[137] "Proposed Functions of the Citizen Action (Organizing Committee)," Box 149, Folder "Citizen Action Organizing Conference – 12/7-12/9/79," Midwest Academy Papers.

personally advised Winpersinger against working with Booth given her New Left background.[138] But Winpisinger saw an alliance with such forces as the only hope for revitalizing progressive politics in America. Booth and her partners in state-level citizen groups felt the same way.

Moreover, Citizen Action did *not* ultimately confine itself to issue campaigns that avoided electoral or partisan entanglements. As of early 1979, "Should the organization have a relation to electoral politics?" remained an open question for the nascent group's founders.[139] But CLEC 's rapidly growing lobbying efforts on oil deregulation, both at the state level as well as in Washington, helped serve both as a model for formal political engagement as well as an inducement to consider electoral activity as a component of Citizen Action's approach. By the end of the decade, Booth and fellow leaders in the organization like Michael Ansara of Massachusetts Fair Share and Robert Creamer of Illinois Public Action had begun the process of coaxing community and consumer activists who had resisted electoral and partisan politics to take the plunge.[140] The goal should be, in Ansara's formulation, to "seize control of the Democratic Party," and to do that, "winning office" was key.[141]

The model of the Republican right remained paramount. Michael Harrington told Citizen Action conference attendees in 1980 to recall Barry Goldwater's famous landslide defeat. "What did the Goldwaterites do?" he asked. "They did what we should do. They got up and they started organizing. They doubled and redoubled their efforts. They have now totally and

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[138] Battista, *The Revival of Labor Liberalism*, 104.

[139] Robert Creamer memo to Citizen Action Organizing Committee re. "Summary of O'Hare meeting of March 29, 1979," June 1, 1979, Box 149, Folder "Citizen Action Organizing Committee," Midwest Academy Papers.

[140] David Moberg, "Activists Regroup for Reagan Years," *In these Times*, December 10-16, 1980; Florence Levinsohn, "On Bingo, Bankrolls, and Ballots: Public Action goes Political," *Chicago Reader*, June 12, 1981; Renee Loth, "Fair Share comes to the electoral crossroads," *Boston Phoenix*, June 15, 1982.

[141] Heather Booth, notes, January 4, 1980, Box 150, Folder "CA Staff Meeting," Midwest Academy Papers.

completely taken over the Republican Party."[142] In a 1981 Citizen Action strategy memo, Bob Creamer called for progressive Political Action Committees modeled on the right, with an eye toward ideological recruitment and endorsements of candidates for office. He also cautioned against pursuing third-party adventures for the time being. "A progressive political apparatus should function primarily within the Democratic Party (though not always)."[143] The caveat signaled a desire to maintain a semblance of independence from Democrats, but it was not a harbinger of any significant activity on behalf of Republican candidates. From the outset, Citizen Action had a team affiliation with one of the two major parties – and stuck with it.

Precisely because a wariness of electoral and partisan politics had colored so much of the left-liberal activist approach since the 1960s, for such organizations to turn toward the formal political arena marked a historically significant development. At the Citizen Action conference held in the traumatic aftermath of Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential victory, Heather Booth announced that "we need to seriously review part of the previous advice given by myself and others: that the organizations represented here, and others like us around the country, should not be particularly electoral."[144] She outlined the reasons that community and public interest groups had eschewed elections in the past, from the relative effectiveness of Alinsky-style "accountability sessions" with public officials to the dangers of becoming overly entwined with the conflicts and compromises of individual candidates. She also recounted the saga of the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's convention fight (in which she had participated),

[142] Michael Harrington speech, November 20, 1980, Box 150, Folder "CA Leadership Conference - 11/20/80," Midwest Academy Papers.

[143] Robert Creamer, "Progressive Political Strategy for the Eighties," Box 150, Folder "Board Meeting – 3/20-3/21/81," Midwest Academy Papers.

[144] Heather Booth speech, November 20, 1980, Box 150, Folder "CA Leadership Conference - 11/20/80," Midwest Academy Papers.

portraying it as a formative experience of betrayal and demoralization at the hands of seeming allies in the formal political arena. But she then laid out the case for her generation of activists to overcome their aversion to that arena. "Electoral organizing should be considered one more tool, one more weapon, in our arsenal," she said. "If we want a majority constituency, we need alliances with people who have organized primarily in an electoral direction … We need to build a political machine." Her words signified a new intensification of Citizen Action's efforts, which soon included the provision of training, resources, and personnel for groups working on over a hundred local, state, and federal election campaigns in 1982.[145]

The "ground game" undergirding such electoral efforts was a signature contribution of the public interest and community organizations to broader progressive politics in the last decades of the twentieth century: the large-scale revival of canvassing. Though door-to-door recruitment and mobilizing campaigns had been mainstays in urban electoral politics and in the voter registration drives of the civil rights movement, the advent of television, phone-banking, and large-scale direct mail practices reduced the incentives for such canvassing efforts during the mid-20th century. But the innovations of encyclopedia salesman-turned-environmental activist Marc Anderson and an ex-Nader's Raider named Edward Zwick during the 1970s led to the rapid spread and professionalization of the canvass as a fundraising and recruitment tool for a full array of consumer, feminist, environmental, civil rights, and economic justice groups.[146] The turn toward electoral politics that organizers like Booth began to take by the end of the decade thus marked the introduction of a new stream of canvassing resources and operations to the Democratic Party. Citizen Action grew significantly over the course of the 1980s as it became

[145] Boyte, Booth, and Max, *Citizen Action*, 153.

[146] Boyte, Booth, and Max, *Citizen Action*, 71-71; Dana Fisher, *Activism, Inc.: How the Outsourcing of Grassroots Campaigns is Strangling Progressive Politics in America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 11-15.

ever more closely associated with Democratic get-out-the-vote operations and campaigns on behalf of Democratic legislative initiatives. Indeed, that partisan association grew so tight that the organization would eventually come under legal scrutiny regarding its tax status at the same time that many member groups grumbled about cooptation. Such concerns only illustrate the degree to which organizations like Citizen Action had come to establish themselves as *the* grassroots base of the party during a seeming era of liberal decline.

In doing so, they fulfilled an important, underappreciated political development that had begun with the explosion of social movement activism in the 1960s. Particularly in the wake of 1968's insurgent campaigns and George McGovern's landslide defeat in 1972, these activists had demonstrated occasional antagonism towards, and frequent wariness of, mainstream party politics. Such a disposition has underlay a scholarly view that distinguishes the 1960s-vintage movements analytically from the "amateur" reformist and issue-based activism that had galvanized Democratic politics in the 1950s. The older amateurs were a type of partisan activist doing party-related work, according to this view, while activists of the New Left generation and afterward were fundamentally apartisan, their growing political importance a symptom of party decline.[147] But if the work of leaders like Heather Booth succeeded in helping not only to midwife a reconfigured labor-liberal alliance but also to foster the gradual reentrance of a generation of issue and movement activists into Democratic politics, then that scholarly distinction collapses. Instead of helping to usher in a long-term anti-party political era, the network of activists and organizations spawned by the 1960s ultimately contributed to the ideological sorting and structuring of the two-party system, by enlisting on one side for battle.

[147] Alan Ware, *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 67, 91-103.

Such enlistment was a contested, fitful process requiring intellectual and organizational work, but it had largely occurred by the dawn of the Reagan years.

Sailing Against the Wind

Before those years commenced, liberal activists mounted one more significant partisan effort that, though a failure in the short term, embodied vital coalitional ties that endured into the Reagan era. The successful platform work done by Democratic Agenda and feminist organizations at the Democratic convention in 1976 and the midterm conference in 1978 had largely failed to affect the Carter administration's behavior. This failure helped to convince such activists that a credible nomination challenge was required for 1980. "A serious issue challenge has to also be a candidate challenge," Harrington wrote his colleagues in early 1979, just as a Progressive Alliance official emphasized to Doug Fraser "the necessity of considering the building of a left challenge (EMK) within the Democratic Party so that Carter cannot play general-election, right wing politics from now through '80."[148] Those initials specified the candidate whom activists had in mind. At least since his barn-burning speech at the party conference in Memphis, activists had been "waiting for Teddy."

Long cast as a quixotic effort by a political celebrity whose ideological appeal was a relic of bygone times, Edward M. Kennedy's 1980 nomination challenge against Jimmy Carter has recently come under renewed scholarly appreciation, as a venture stemming directly from the significant coalitional work carried out by liberals in the 1970s.[149] As with Reagan's challenge to Ford four years earlier, Kennedy's campaign appeared to many contemporaries as

[148] Michael Harrington report to the DSOC National Office Committee, January 20, 1979, Box 10A Folder 36, DSA Papers; Steve Schlossberg memo to Doug Fraser, January 2, 1979, Box 68, Folder 22, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[149] As Tim Stanley argues, the campaign capped "a renaissance of coalitional activity" on the left in the 1970s: "In 1980 Kennedy rode a momentum within the Democratic Party of increased alliance building, greater unity, and the legitimization of social and cultural liberalism that began in the mid-1970s." Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter*, 7.

symptomatic of a party system rapidly fragmenting into a candidate-centered free-for-all.[150] But the potency – and clearly programmatic cast – of both of these challenges in fact make them signposts of the polarization underway during an era better known for its surface confusions.

Certainly by the time Ted Kennedy began to seriously contemplate the run that so many Democratic officials and activists urged him to make, beleaguered Jimmy Carter was feeling the pinch of this polarization. A crippling political-economic context of stagflation, soaring energy prices, and right-wing resurgence put the president in a position that was bound to exacerbate conflict with liberals in his party. "It is damn hard to be in a Democratic administration in Republican times," one Carter administration official told David Broder at the 1978 Memphis conference.[151] In May 1979, Carter's domestic policy advisor Stuart Eizenstat sent a memo to senior White House officials signaling the danger signs on Carter's left. "I am increasingly concerned that the President is moving further and further from his Democratic Party base by a number of actions," he wrote, including "his economic policy, which is widely viewed as Republican in thrust," as well as his austerity budget and support for decontrol of oil prices. "Can we get together on this to develop ways to reach out to our *badly* estranged friends?"[152]

Eizenstat's pleas, along with those of his liberal ally in the administration, Vice President Walter Mondale, fell on deaf ears, as Carter became increasingly convinced by advisor Pat Caddell that a deeper problem than mere party politics beset the country -- a psychic crisis of confidence and faith in public institutions that had to be addressed explicitly. The result was Carter's famous Camp David summit of citizens and civic leaders in July 1979, followed by a

[150] Reporter John Herbers used Kennedy's candidacy as the opening anecdote for an essay on the decline of the two-party system: "The Party's Over for the Two Political Parties," *New York Times Magazine*, December 9, 1979.

[151] David Broder, "Kennedy Exposed a 'Gaping' Carter Weakness," *Washington Post*, December 13, 1978.

[152] Memo to Walter Mondale, Hamilton Jordan, Frank Moore, Jody Powell, Gerald Rafshoon, Phil Wise, Anne Wexler, and Jack Watson, May 22, 1979, Box PL 5-2, Folder "1/20/77-1/20/81," White House Central Files, JCL.

televised address to which posterity would lend the moniker "the malaise speech."[153] Carter's analysis of the nation's ills tapped directly into the prevailing sense among political observers of a system crumbling in the face of dissensus, mistrust, and apathy – "fragmentation and self-interest," as he put it. The speech was initially well-received by the public, but it did little to assuage committed liberals convinced that viable programmatic solutions to the nation's problems were, in fact, available, only to be rejected by an ideologically compromised president.

Kennedy certainly thought this way, and his emerging but still unofficial candidacy was closely connected, in both program and personnel, to the coalitional network of progressive unions and environmental, consumer, and feminist activists working to bolster a left Democratic faction in the late 1970s. His hiring of Carl Wagner as a political advisor in late 1978 typified such connections – Wagner was both an ex-McGovern activist and current staffer at AFSCME – as did the intensive legislative and lobbying work he did with Doug Fraser through the Coalition for National Health Insurance.[154] In July 1979, William Winpisinger lent his signature to the first major national direct-mail effort to raise funds for a draft Kennedy movement, an operation overseen by the "Viguerie of the left," Tom Matthews.[155] The ADA voted to endorse a Kennedy challenge that summer, while NOW announced opposition to Carter's reelection in December.[156]

To be sure, some of the leading lights of labor-liberal coalitional politics in this period remained loyal to Carter due to specific ties of interest and policy. Most significant was the

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[153] Kevin Mattson, '*What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?' Jimmy Carter, America's 'Malaise,' and the Speech that Should Have Changed the Country* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 125-166.

[154] Adam Clymer, "Carter's Clash with Kennedy," *New York Times*, December 12, 1978; Max Fine memo to Coalition for National Health Insurance members, September 27, 1979, Box 2, Folder 20, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[155] Martin F. Nolan, "Mail campaign is building big war chest for Kennedy," *Boston Globe*, September 6, 1979.

[156] Mattson, *'What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?*', 104-106; Susan M. Hartmann, "Feminism, Public Policy, and the Carter Administration," in *The Carter Presidency*, eds. Fink and Graham, 225. NOW did not explicitly endorse Kennedy, but much of its top leadership as well as state affiliates worked actively on his behalf.

N.E.A.'s decision to endorse the president for reelection in 1979. The teachers' union, under Terry Herndon's aggressive leadership, was at the vanguard of left-liberal activism within the Democratic Party at the time. Its endorsement, rewarding Carter's fulfillment of campaign commitments to raise federal education spending and establish a Department of Education, ultimately provided Carter with important electoral muscle to complement the inherent advantages of incumbency in his fight against Kennedy.[157] Such conflicting positions among allied organizations, meanwhile, persuaded the leaders of coalitions like Democratic Agenda and Progressive Alliance to eschew official organizational involvement in the race in favor of continued work on platform and issue advocacy.[158] Countless individual leaders in these groups, however, from Harrington and Doug Fraser on down, became active Kennedy supporters.

The details of Kennedy's vexed primary campaign, formally launched in November 1979, have been well chronicled by journalists and historians.[159] Less noted is the striking parallel in trajectory and form between his campaign and the Reagan insurgency of 1976. In both cases, an initial campaign strategy deemphasizing ideology and issues in favor of gauzier, candidate-centered appeals appeared to contribute to losses in early caucuses and primaries. Mid-campaign changes of course then turned the respective efforts into programmatic crusades on behalf of ideological party activists – crusades that failed to make up for early delegate losses but that carried the fights to the conventions and to alterations in the party platforms. In both cases, the campaigns reflected the labor of a broader array of activists and interests than just the

[157] David Broder, "Democrats," in *The Pursuit of the Presidency 1980*, ed. Richard Harwood (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 192-194. The CWA was another major progressive union to endorse Carter in 1980.

[158] Harry Boyte memo to DSOC National Office Committee, June 22, 1979, Box 10A, Folder 3, and Deborah Meier, "Draft on Election Policy," prepared for the National Executive Committee meeting, September 15-16, 1979, Box 10A, Folder "National Executive Committee minutes," both in DSA Papers.

[159] In addition to Stanley's account, see T.R. Reid, "Kennedy," in *Pursuit of the Presidency*, ed. Harlow, 65-82; and Adam Clymer, *Edward Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1999), 276-320.

personal followers of the candidate, and thus, even in defeat, they exerted an impact their respective parties by demonstrating the vitality of the majority factions within them.

The Kennedy men who devised an initial campaign strategy eschewing ideological appeals – the role performed by John Sears in the 1976 Reagan campaign – included campaign manager Steven Smith, pollster Peter Hart, and political advisor Paul Kirk.[160] There was a clear logic to their thinking. As of fall 1979, Kennedy's lead over both Carter (whose approval rating frequently fell below 30 percent) and various prospective Republican presidential candidates in public opinion polls was consistently large. Moreover, in a reflection of Carter's collapse in standing and public confidence, an array of Democratic activists and major politicians running the gamut from George McGovern to Scoop Jackson to Robert Byrd had beseeched Kennedy for over a year to launch a campaign against the president. Given the evident wishes of the public and of broad swathes of the party, Kennedy's advisors deemed it sensible to pursue a general election-style campaign from the outset, heavy on platitudes about "leadership" and light on the substance of his already well-known liberalism.[161] But the cautious strategy confused and demobilized Kennedy's supporters while helping to render him an uncomfortable, inarticulate campaigner. The first months of the campaign, meanwhile, coincided with an upsurge in Carter's support as a result of two crises that initially drew Americans to their commander in chief's side: Iranian militants' raid of the U.S. embassy on November 4 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan a month later. In the shadow of these crises, Kennedy suffered a 2-to-1 defeat in the Iowa caucus, followed by losses in New Hampshire and a string of southern primaries.

[160] Stanley, *Carter Vs. Kennedy*, 116-117; and Reid, "Kennedy," in *Pursuit of the Presidency*, ed. Harlow, 70.

[161] Adam Clymer, "Kennedy Says that Leadership, Not Economic Policy, Is at Issue," *New York Times*, September 14, 1979.

The campaign soon agreed on a course correction toward more explicit programmatic and ideological appeals, which Kennedy debuted in a major address at Georgetown University in late January. Repeating a phrase he had used in his triumphant speech at the 1978 midterm party conference – "sometimes a party must sail against the wind" – Kennedy articulated a classic case for hewing to the core programmatic traditions of Democratic liberalism so as to offer a stark contrast with the opposition.[162] "We cannot permit the Democratic Party to remain captive to those who have been so confused about its ideals," he declared, making the same case to Democratic primary voters that Reagan had made to Republicans four years earlier when calling for a party banner of "bold colors" rather than "pale pastels." The program Kennedy laid out was liberal across the board, endorsing national health insurance, wage and price controls to tackle inflation, increased environmental protections, new arms control efforts, curbs on wasteful military spending, and even cautionary notes about the danger of an overly belligerent Cold War posture. ("Let us not foreclose every opening to the Soviet Union.") The speech electrified his supporters and helped refuel his campaign's fundraising. Reenergized on the stump now that he felt freer to launch issue critiques of Carter from the left, Kennedy began to make headway in primary contests, particularly in the industrial north. Compared to Reagan's late-primary surge in 1976, Kennedy's comeback was fitful and uneven, and he ultimately entered the 1980 party convention trailing Carter's delegate count 1,239 to 1,964, in contrast to the mere double-digit deficit Reagan had held against Ford at the eve of the GOP convention in 1976. But his support was substantial enough to give him leverage in major convention decisions in August.

The characteristics of the supporters that Kennedy drew over the course of his campaign reflected just the coalition that left-liberal activists like Michael Harrington, Doug Fraser, and

[162] "Transcript of Kennedy's Speech at Georgetown on Campaign Issues," *New York Times*, January 29, 1980.

Heather Booth had sought to construct in the 1970s. As the agenda laid out in his Georgetown speech indicated, Kennedy's issue appeal mirrored those activists' *additive* approach to coalition-building, in which cultural and foreign policy liberalism augmented rather than supplanted New Deal economic appeals. Kennedy's campaign rested on mobilized support from a large portion of the labor movement, feminists, environmentalists, consumer groups, African American organizations (including the Congressional Black Caucus), Hispanic activists, and the nascent gay rights movement. The class base of this support did not skew upwards in the manner of McGovern in 1972, and the programmatic core of the campaign – the common ground for all of these groups – was a liberal agenda on economics and the welfare state.[163] By pursuing this additive approach, liberal Democrats paralleled their conservative counterparts in the GOP, who worked in the late 1970s to sustain New Right and Christian conservative mobilizations on social issues without trimming conservative positions on the economy.

The campaign's final echo of Reagan's 1976 insurgency occurred at the Democratic convention in August. By the end of the primary season, Kennedy's delegate deficit was essentially prohibitive. But after Carter rebuffed an offer to hold a televised policy debate with Kennedy in exchange for his withdrawal and endorsement, the challenger decided to pursue a long-shot rules strategy aimed at destabilizing the alignment of delegate support. The campaign mobilized at the DNC's Rules Committee hearings in June to seek an "open convention," in which delegates pledged to Carter would be allowed to reassess their allegiances.[164] Kennedy's

[163] Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter*, 99-111, 141-157.

[164] This effort resulted in the odd spectacle of many leading lights of the McGovern-Fraser-era party reforms, now backing Kennedy, suddenly extolling the virtues of delegates retaining their autonomy from the wishes of primary voters. See, e.g., Joseph L. Rauh, Jr., "A Lot Has Changed Since the Primaries," *Washington Post*, July 6, 1980, and Barbara Mikulski's unpublished letter to the *Washington Post*'s editors, July 7, 1980, Box 1385, Folder "Kennedy '80 Rules Committee Material," Democratic National Committee Records, National Archives, Washington, DC. For their part, meanwhile, longstanding *opponents* of reform movement in the Carter camp now championed a new party rule that formally bound delegates' first-ballot vote to their pledged candidate.

forces, lacking a committee majority, lost the fight. But they vowed to take a rules challenge to the convention floor in August – along with a series of minority reports on the party platform.

Liberal forces' success in dominating the platform process was the major surprise of the 1980 convention. The process could first be seen in the same Rules Committee sessions that quashed the open convention effort. The Progressive Alliance, the Democratic Conference, and Democratic Agenda worked in tandem to secure passage of two resolutions related to party reform. The first tasked the DNC with creating a new Commission on Party Accountability, which would explore measures that could "yield an effective and disciplined effort to implement the Platform of the National Democratic Party."[165] The second, mandating another midterm party conference in 1982, won in a narrow committee floor fight over the explicit opposition of Carter forces.[166] Kennedy even made noise about pursuing a requirement that presidential candidates put in writing their position on each platform plank as a condition of appearing on the ballot.[167] Though he soon dropped the proposal, it reflected his candidacy's connection to responsible party views of platform accountability and party discipline.

In addition to such efforts at institutional reform, the summer saw a successful push by liberals to influence the platform's substance. At the Resolutions Committee hearings in late June, Kennedy forces advocated an alternative platform called "A Rededication to Democratic Principles," which contrasted starkly with the cautious document written by Carter loyalists on the drafting subcommittee. The Kennedy alternative explicitly ruled out the pursuit of anti-inflationary measures that would increase unemployment, authorized wage and price controls, and called for a new $12 billion jobs program. The committee rejected these planks, but at the

[165] Bill Dodds memo to Doug Fraser, July 9, 1980, Box 3, Folder 14, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[166] Bill Dodds and Bob Corolla memo to Doug Fraser, July 15, 1980, Box 3, Folder 14, Douglas Fraser Papers.

[167] Lyle Denniston, "Kennedy to Court Delegates with 'We Trust You' Theme," *Washington Star*, June 29, 1980.

same meeting, environmentalists and feminists allied with Kennedy delegates to successfully pass sharpened anti-nuclear and pro-choice resolutions.[168] These surprise votes against the administration were indications of a growing restiveness among delegates. In the month leading up to the convention in New York, the Kennedy campaign built political momentum on behalf of the minority planks, benefitting from the help of platform-focused groups like Democratic Agenda and the Progressive Alliance. On Tuesday, August 12, the day of the convention's platform session, the Agenda held a Town Hall rally featuring speeches from Fraser, Winpisinger, Cesar Chavez, Ruth Messinger, Eleanor Smeal, and Gloria Steinem, all advocating a bolder party platform.[169] And that evening, before a primetime television audience, Kennedy spoke on behalf of his economic planks in what became the most acclaimed speech of his career.

"I have come here tonight not to argue as a candidate but to affirm a cause," Kennedy intoned. "I am asking you to renew the commitment of the Democratic Party to economic justice." Kennedy laid out the substantive vision represented by his minority planks, that vision's connection to Democratic history, and its contrast with the Republican approach. At the concluding lines declaring that "the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die," the convention hall erupted into a near-riot of applause and chanting that lasted thirty minutes. The speech provided the final bit of persuasion to Carter strategists engaged in behind-the-scenes negotiation with Kennedy forces over the platform. Now convinced that a floor vote on Kennedy's planks would embarrass the president, they sent word to convention chair Tip O'Neill that they would accept all of them, with the exception of wage and price controls. O'Neill swiftly gaveled his way by voice vote to the passage of all of

[168] Robert G. Kaiser, "Carter Loyalists Reject Kennedy's Economic Plank, *New York Times*, June 23, 1980.

[169] Brochure, "A Progressive Platform for the 1980s," Box 10A, Folder "Resolutions," DSA Papers.

Kennedy's other proposals, including the disavowal of recessionary anti-inflation measures and the $12 billion jobs program.[170] The 1980 Democratic nomination was Carter's. But much of its platform belonged to Kennedy – and to the robust liberal coalition mobilized behind him.

Issues, "Single Issues," and the Democratic Coalition

Back in November 1979, Ruth Jordan of Democratic Agenda surveyed the new left-liberal coalitions that had sprouted up in the preceding years:

> There's the Full Employment Action Council, the Citizen/Labor Energy Coalition, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the Democratic Agenda, Democratic Conference, COIN, CAPE and Progressive Alliance. There's Interchange, the Consumer Coalition for Health and even the Consumers' Committee for No-Fault Insurance. Too many coalitions? For the trade union leaders called upon to provide the bulk of the financial support for many of these organizations, it must certainly seem so.[171]

A reader encountering Jordan's list in the pages of DSOC's newsletter might draw several conclusions. On the one hand, the array of organizations conveyed a sense of energetic and experimental alliance-building, evident even amidst the disillusion and frustrations of Carter-era policymaking. And indeed, as we have seen the 1970s was a time in which many on the broad liberal left worked effectively to forge a rapprochement between the forces of 1960s-borne cultural and social activism and older elements of the New Deal coalition. Central to this work were leaders within an American labor movement that was itself undergoing important compositional and ideological change. By the end of the decade, not only had progressive

[170] Broder, "Democrats," in *The Pursuit of the Presidency*, ed. Harlow, 199-200.

[171] Ruth Jordan, "Coalitions: Too Many or Not Enough?," *Newsletter of the Democratic Left*, November 1979.

unions managed to establish important and enduring ties with many left-liberal groups, but divisions within the labor movement itself were beginning to diminish.[172]

But Jordan's list also hinted at key limitations in left-liberal political activism, underlying an enduring asymmetry with conservative forces. The organizations mentioned almost all lacked mass memberships and bases, and tended to be staff-driven coalitions of coalitions. As Jordan emphasized, moreover, organized labor provided the bulk of the funding for these groups. This fact imposed a limitation on liberals' organizational prospects that would only become more acute as union density in the United States declined with increasing speed through the 1980s and 1990s. Organized labor's decline, taking place within the context of resurgent political activism by business interests, conservatives' ascendance within the Republican Party, and steady increases in the cost of political campaigns, had important implications for an enduring *partisan* asymmetry as well. The GOP's ideological agenda and its funding base reinforced one another. Both the party and its supporters shared an increasingly cohesive anti-regulatory and anti-tax conservatism. In contrast, Democratic office holders and activists faced cross pressures between donors from labor and other liberal ranks and the business support upon which many still depended. This undergirded an imbalance in the relative coherence and aggressiveness of the two major parties' respective policy agendas and programmatic appeals.

The laundry-list quality of Jordan's catalogue hinted at another source of the imbalance between conservative and liberal forces, and between the two parties into which the forces were sorting at the dawn of the Reagan era. The very process of attempting to stitch together the

[172] George Meany's retirement as AFL-CIO president in 1979, followed soon after by Al Barkan's retirement from COPE, signified the departure of two of labor's most inveterate and determined opponents of "New Politics" liberalism. The departures helped to smooth the process by which the leading dissident union, the UAW, rejoined the AFL-CIO in 1982. The broader significance for liberal coalitional politics of Meany and Barkan's retirements and the UAW's return to the AFL-CIO was discussed in a 1980 Citizen Action staff meeting; see Heather Booth's handwritten notes, January 4, 1980, Folder "CA Staff Meeting – 1/4/80," Box 150, Midwest Academy Papers.

electoral, legislative, and partisan activity of newer movements and issue groups with older labor and civil rights interests helped to lay bare the fragmented quality of post-1960s liberalism. More enduringly than its conservative counterpart, liberal coalition work came to bear that critical moniker: "single-issue politics." Activists were cognizant of the problem. At the 1978 meeting called by Doug Fraser, a sympathetic attendee told *Newsweek* that "all the one-issue people wound up in arguments about which issues were the most important," while a reporter at the Democratic midterm conference two months later compared listening to the delegates speak to "opening the morning 'mailing list' envelopes. There were dozens of different 'very special pleas.'"[173] The Progressive Alliance had pitched itself in its founding statement as a solution to the problem of balkanization: "Individual interest groups and causes have evolved in unprecedented numbers … Many of us have been activists in such single-issue struggles of necessity, yet we join together recognizing the compelling need for a common program and the political vehicles to achieve it."[174] But the outfit never really managed to transcend the problem.

Left-liberal fragmentation had implications for the mainstream party with which such activism was aligned. Increasingly the Democratic Party would be described as a mere vessel for the disparate agendas of implacable single-issue groups – a visionless and incoherent organizational broker for particularist interests and identity groups. By contrast, though conservative movement-builders in the 1970s and 1980s had their own coalitional challenges and their own set of single-issue allies, they benefited from a comparatively overarching movement consciousness and esprit de corps among activists. And this contributed to the relative sense of

[173] Tom Matthews and Jon Lowell, "Liberals: Alive and Kicking," *Newsweek*, October 30, 1978; Peter Kovler, "Democrats, Dismay, and Disarray," *Commonweal*, January 19, 1979.
[174] "Toward a Progressive Alliance," January 15, 1979, Box 10A, Folder 35, DSA.

programmatic cohesion and confidence among Republicans as they achieved sweeping electoral victories in 1980 and went about the task of governing in the Reagan years.

That such contrasts and asymmetries existed, however, does not mean that liberal activists and Democratic reformers did not contribute to the ideological sorting of the party system in the 1970s. For decades, a key goal of liberal activists interested in changing partisan dynamics in the United States had been to compel the ouster of the Democratic Party's conservative faction based in the South. By the end of the 1970s that process was well underway. A related longstanding goal of party reformers, one emphasized anew by those who drove the McGovern-Fraser and congressional reforms in early 1970s, was to increase the access and influence of issue-driven activists in party affairs and to make substantive issues the basis for partisan activity. The criticism that began to attach to the party by the end of the decade – that it was a prisoner of its own single-issue and ideological client groups – was itself an indication that, for better or for worse, reformers had also achieved this goal. Finally, the coalitional work done by labor-liberal activists, like the efforts of supply-siders and cultural conservatives on the right, contributed to the *additive* quality of the issue dimensions around which the parties sorted.

By the end of the 1970s, certain political observers were beginning to perceive the rise to prominence of issue politics and the attendant ideological sorting of the party system, though hardly any predicted that such developments would also fuel a revival of partisanship itself. Nearly two decades after producing his path-breaking analysis of issue-oriented "amateur" activism, James Q. Wilson emphasized in 1979 "the enhanced importance of ideas and ideology" in shaping and driving political conflict in contemporary politics. [175] A New Class of educated professionals had grown enormously as a portion of the electorate in the years since he wrote

[175] James Q. Wilson, "American Politics, Then & Now," *Commentary*, February 1979. His classic work on amateur activism is *The Amateur Democrat: Club Politics in Three Cities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

about reformist Club Democrats, and Wilson now noted that members of such a class tended to practice a more issue-oriented and ideological brand of politics on both the left and the right. "[T]he rise of an educated, idea-oriented public," he argued, combined with the greater permeability of political institutions achieved by reformers, has produced both the "'one-issue' politics so characteristic of the present era" and growing polarization of the two major political parties at the national level. Within Congress, "the Republican party seems to have become more consistently conservative and the Democratic party more consistently liberal." Among legislators, "the principle of affiliation" had grown to be "more clearly based on shared ideas, and to a degree those shared ideas conform to party labels … The notion of party in Congress has been infused with more ideological meaning by its members."

If Wilson and others observers sensed at the end of the 1970s that the notion of party was being infused with more ideological meaning in American politics, few of them predicted that such an infusion might bring with it a growing degree of discipline in partisan behavior. Wilson described the confluence of ideological politics and weakened, fragmented political institutions as underlying "the schizophrenia of contemporary politics." But ideological sorting was making both parties' ranks less, rather than more, internally schizophrenic, and that fact would have profound effects on party politics in the last decades of the twentieth century. Liberals' contributions to this process were substantial – notwithstanding the fact that the decade ended with their most profound political defeat in the postwar era.

Conclusion: Polarization Without Responsibility

The triumphs of Ronald Reagan and his party in the 1980 election were sweeping and decisive. The president-elect's claims of having earned an electoral mandate for conservatism were difficult to counter. But when political journalist James Reston assessed the meaning of the race that had just transpired, it filled him with foreboding. "The sad thing about this election," he wrote soon after the polls closed, "is that it has not clarified the nation's problems but deepened them; not unified the people but divided them." Reagan's refusal to dull the ideological edge of his message during the general election meant that, unless he and his supporters chose "cooperation instead of confrontation" with the forces they defeated once faced with the task of actually governing, the country would continue to be wracked by division. In penning this post-mortem, Reston the centrist veteran wrote like a man without a country. The very notion that the outcome of a presidential race in a two-party system could or should leave Americans *more united* would prove to be the intellectual remnant of a closing political era.[1]

Once in office, and particularly during his first term, Reagan's programmatically coherent and ambitious governing approach served to strengthen rather than fragment partisan politics. In an intellectual climate still dominated by discussion of party decline and disarray, a few contemporary observers managed to detect how Reagan's ideological presidency might undergird partisan revival. "On a whole range of domestic economic and role-of-government questions," noted the realignment theorist James Sundquist soon after his election, "any perception that political parties do not take clear stands must have been shattered by the forceful, categorical positions taken by Ronald Reagan and his party during the campaign." Because

[1] James Reston, "Reagan's Startling Victory," *Washington Post*, November 5, 1980. Reston's prescience in noting the historical significance of Reagan's ideological approach to presidential campaigning was not matched by more practical predictions he made in the same column: "We will have a one-term president," he wrote, "without fear that Reagan, at his age, will try for a second term."

Reagan's agenda "drew clean lines between the parties," it could be expected to "create, or reinforce, the attachment of voters to the parties."[2] A few years later, Sidney Milkis would reaffirm Reagan's historic accomplishment in helping to rejuvenate the party system via ideological governance. "Reagan's firm adherence to conservative principles," he wrote, "contributed significantly to the emergence of a new kind of Republican party, one more national and programmatic in its orientation than the traditional GOP." In this and other ways, his administration "marked both a restoration of the modern presidency and a revitalization of partisan politics."[3]

As this dissertation has shown, however, the Reagan presidency was less the cause than the result of a process of ideologically driven partisan revival already underway at its inception. The construction of an ideologically sorted and defined party system is what made Reagan's approach to presidential campaigning and governing viable. And this project was not the achievement of any individual leader, let alone a president. It was rather the product of conscious work carried out by myriad activists, reformers, and politicians on both the left and right – Ronald Reagan very much among them – over the course of several decades.

To end this account with Reagan's ascendance is not to imply that the new system of ideologically defined parties had emerged fully by the 1980s. In fact, the partisan sort of conservatives and liberals among both public officials and American voters would continue for years to come, and as long as the process remained incomplete, the late-century political scene retained elements of fluidity and flexibility. Nevertheless, Reagan's presidency does mark a culmination and an endpoint in an important sense. By the advent of that presidency, the

[2] James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1983), 445.

[3] Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 262.

system's advocates and architects had managed to put in place conditions that would make the dynamic logic of continuous ideological sorting between the two parties all but irreversible in the coming years. And indeed, the patterns that we have seen in party politics since the 1980s might be described as "More of the same – only more so," with each passing year.

A New "Party Period" in American Politics

Congress proved to be the leading edge in manifesting resurgent polarization and partisan discipline in the 1980s – though, in the blinding light of the Reagan Revolution's initial legislative breakthroughs, such polarization was harder to detect. Indeed, Reagan owed his central achievements in tax and fiscal policy to a bipartisan congressional majority, with the disproportionately southern and conservative Democratic "boll weevils" led by the likes of Phil Gramm and Richard Shelby supplying him with the margin of victory in the House. That coalition functioned only for the first two years of his presidency, however. The 1982 midterm elections, occurring amidst a recession, saw the loss of Republicans' Senate majority as well as Reagan's working bipartisan majority in the House. Divided government and resurgent partisanship would prove to be the twin themes of the remainder of the Reagan era and beyond.

Scholars late in the 1980s first began to quantify the steadily increasing rates of party-line voting in both the House and Senate, and to connect this development to public officials' changing institutional environment.[4] Indeed, though the long-term processes of ideological and coalitional sorting were at the heart of the resurgence in party strength and cohesion in the 1980s, the institutional reforms implemented during the previous decade proved crucial in facilitating

[4] Sara Brandes Crook and John R. Hibbing, "Congressional Reform and Party Discipline: The Effects of Changes in the Seniority System on Party Loyalty in the U.S. House of Representatives," *British Journal of Political Science* 15 (1985), 207-226; David W. Rohde, *Parties and Leaders in the Postreform House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

this development. By curbing the independent power centers formally found in the major committees and empowering central party organs to control the legislative agenda – conditional on majority support from the party rank and file – the 1970s reforms secured a functional link between ideological cohesion and party discipline. During the Reagan and George H.W. Bush presidencies, the Democratic House Speakerships of Tip O'Neill and Jim Wright revealed a growth in the capacity of congressional party leaders to coordinate legislative behavior and articulate coherent programmatic positions that set them starkly apart from their predecessors.[5] More bills were passed under "suspension of the rules," and floor activity was reined in. Wright in particular accelerated the use of such practices, famously provoking the ire and indignation of the Republican minority, for example, when he kept the clock running for an extra 15 minutes on a vote in 1987.

Those Republicans' outrage would prove ironic, as the congressional GOP, first in the minority and then eventually in the majority, developed a highly disciplined and confrontational legislative and political strategy that would take partisan combat in both chambers to new heights of intensity. Newt Gingrich, an ambitious House member from the Atlanta suburbs, led the way. In 1983 he organized the Conservative Opportunity Society (COS) among younger and more conservative representatives and helped lead this faction to eventual dominance within the House GOP conference on the basis of an explicit critique of bipartisan engagement with the majority.[6] The COS's confrontational strategic posture toward the Democrats also entailed an agenda for

[5] John M. Barry, *The Ambition and the Power: The Fall of Jim Wright – A True Story of Washington* (New York: Viking Press, 1989); John A. Farrell, *Tip O'Neill and the Democratic Century* (New York: Little, Brown, 2001); Barbara Sinclair, *Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policymaking* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 67-109, 256-265.
[6] Douglas L. Koopman, *Hostile Takeover: The House Republican Party, 1980-1995* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996); Sinclair, *Party Wars*, 110-142; Julian E. Zelizer, "Seizing Power: Conservatives and Congress Since the 1970s," in *The Transformation of American Politics: Activist Government and the Rise of Conservatism*, eds. Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 105-134.

internal party reform that echoed liberal Democrats' achievements during the 1970s reform era. This included proposals to revamp and amplify Republican Research and Policy committee activities, regularize conference meetings, and expand whip operations.[7] Such an agenda also included new scrutiny by the conservative GOP majority toward wayward committee chairmen.[8]

Gingrich's ascension to the House minority whip post in 1989 sharpened the factional conflict with what he characterized as an accommodationist Old Guard within the GOP leadership. That Old Guard's outlook, epitomized by minority leader Bob Michel's insistence that the congressional minority had "an obligation to the American people to be … responsible participants in the process," grew increasingly out of step with a Republican rank and file that, with each new election cycle, became steadily more movement-conservative in orientation.[9] Newer members took a dim view of participation in Democratically-backed legislative initiatives and agreed with Gingrich that the surest route to winning a majority would be to combine high-profile public relations confrontations with Democrats with the articulation of a distinct alternative programmatic agenda, akin to the opposition party in a parliamentary system.

The Republican congressional takeover in 1994 following a nationalized midterm election centered around an explicit party manifesto, Gingrich's Contract with America, marked a culmination of the developments that had led to a particular kind of "responsible" two-party system in the United States Congress. From 1995 to 2006, Republicans in control of Congress took the centralizing and discipline-bolstering tactics pioneered by Democrats and dramatically

[7] See, e.g., Newt Gingrich's letter to Republican colleagues laying out a six-point plan for reforming conference procedures, June 8, 1983, in Box 4, Folder "W.H. Staff Memoranda – Legislative Affairs 1/83-6/83 [2 of 4]," James A. Baker III Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA; and unsigned, undated memo to Robert Michel on Republican Task Force on Conference Rules, Box 11, Folder "Leadership, 100th. Task Force on Conference Rules: Procedures Committee Task Force (Lagamarsino)," Robert Michel Papers, Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

[8] Lawrence J. Haas, "House GOP's Complicated Bottom Line," *National Journal*, February 13, 1988.

[9] Sinclair, *Party Wars*, 120.

expanded their use. As Speaker, Newt Gingrich worked to curb seniority procedures for determining committee ranks among GOP members and placed term limits on committee chairmanships. Tactics intended to bring committees under the party leadership's thumb only grew more routine and effective in the hands of Gingrich's successors in the leadership. "The job of Speaker is not to expedite legislation that runs counter to the wishes of the majority of his majority," then-Speaker Dennis Hastert declared in 2003. "On each piece of legislation, I actively seek to bring our party together. I do not feel comfortable scheduling any controversial legislation unless I know we have the votes on our side first."[10] This so-called "Hastert rule," capturing in practical language the main thrust of a dynamic theorized by political scientists as "party cartel" control, epitomized the arrival of a new era of party dominance in Congress.[11] Significantly, in the same speech Hastert made passing reference to the fact that occasionally, "we have a hard time convincing the majority of the House to vote like a majority of the House, so sometimes you will see votes stay open longer than usual." And indeed, many of the same Republicans who had cried foul at Speaker Wright's clock-extending gambit in 1987 would pursue much more extreme versions of such tactics as a matter of course while in the majority, from keeping votes open several hours past the limit to scheduling votes at midnight to shutting minority members out of conference committees altogether.[12]

The Senate, boasting (or suffering under) the most permissive rules of any legislative body on Earth, saw similar developments in partisan polarization during the last decades of the

[10] Dennis Hastert, address at the Library of Congress, November 12, 2003. Accessed at http://www.congresslink.org/print_basics_histmats_hastert.htm.

[11] Gary W. Cox and Matthew D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1993).

[12] Barbara Sinclair, *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New Legislative Processes in the U.S. Congress*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007).

twentieth century, but with quite different consequences than those observed in the increasingly parliamentarized House. As in the House, growing partisan discipline coincided with a much-lamented decline of civility and comity in the upper chamber – and, significantly, the pioneers of confrontational and hyperpartisan tactics in the Senate were found generally to be Republicans who had first served in the House during the years of Newt Gingrich's rise to party leadership.[13] But the individualistic and countermajoritarian procedural environment in the Senate meant that partisan discipline more easily helped to produce obstruction and paralysis than it did party-line passage of major legislation. The post-reform story of the Senate filibuster offers the most illustrative case in point. The employment of filibusters became ever more partisan as ideological sorting gradually transformed the Senate. And as the filibuster came to be seen as one more partisan tool at hand for Senate minorities, its use came to be more frequent and routine. Between the 1960s and the 1970s – very early in the progression of ideological sorting among the parties – the average frequency of filibusters doubled. That frequency would triple again in future decades.[14]

It is in this light that the failure of reformers after 1975 to further reduce or eliminate the supermajority threshold for cloture takes on such significance. Ideological polarization in the House helped to drive, and was in turn further driven by, institutional changes that made that chamber increasingly capable of disciplined party-line legislating along the parliamentary lines that responsible party advocates had always envisioned. By contrast, the persistence, even in modified fashion, of countermajoritarian procedures in the Senate like the filibuster ensured that ideological sorting would have the effect of intensifying rather than mitigating minority

[13] Sean M. Theriault, *The Gingrich Senators: The Roots of Partisan Warfare in Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[14] Barbara Sinclair, *Party Wars: Polarization and the Politics of National Policy Making* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2006), 191.

obstruction there, by strengthening the minority party's cohesive will to utilize all tactics at hand.[15] Defenders of the filibuster had often warned that reform would pave the way to the Senate becoming as partisan and non-deliberative as the House. "If this body ever goes to majority cloture," John Stennis warned typically during the 1975 debate over reducing the threshold required for cloture, "the Senate will never be the same again."[16] The historical consequence of the filibuster surviving the Age of Party Reform as a tool for the steadily polarizing parties, however, was that the Senate would more than ever become a redoubt for systematic minority obstruction – the graveyard of responsible party governance even during periods of unified party control in the executive and legislature.

It was not until well into the twenty-first century that the very partisan polarization that had driven the proliferation of filibusters (by increasing the minority's determination to block unwanted legislation whenever possible) began at last to threaten the filibuster's very survival as an institution (by bolstering the majority's determination to overcome minority obstruction). This new development could first be seen in the George W. Bush-era Republican threat to use the "nuclear option" to ban filibusters on judicial nominees, and culminated in the Barack Obama-era Democrats' decision to deploy that very option in 2013. The power of party polarization might very well lead to the forced disappearance of filibusters altogether in short order.

Party revival took hold initially and most dramatically in Congress, but it was hardly limited to that institution in the last decades of the twentieth century. A new wave of political science scholarship on the "polarized" or "partisan presidency" has challenged older notions

[15] On contrasting consequences of polarization in the House and Senate, see Barbara Sinclair, *The Transformation of the U.S. Senate* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 71-140; and *Party Wars*, 185-233.

[16] Quoted in David E. Rosenbaum, "Filibuster Foes Win the Key Test," *New York Times*, March 6, 1975.

about an inherent zero-sum conflict between strong parties and a strong presidency. As this recent scholarship has documented, presidents from Reagan onward have faced a changing institutional environment and strategic incentives that align their interests – and explicit rhetorical affiliation – with that of their own parties to a greater extent than was seen in the midcentury era.[17] The constraint posed by unified opposition from the out-party has, at the same time, only strengthened during this period, as has the tendency of a president's merely taking a position on a given issue to have the effect of polarizing both public and elite opinion along partisan lines.[18]

Party organizations themselves manifested the effects of ideologically-driven partisan revival. In the wake of Bill Brock's pioneering tenure, both the Republican and Democratic National Committees saw major strides in professionalization and fundraising prowess from the 1980s onward. Programmatic functions such as those pursued experimentally by Paul Butler and Brock were sidelined, and neither the national committees nor the parties' congressional campaign organizations enjoyed direct control over candidate nominations. But the national organizations evolved into important "parties-in-service" – centralized and bureaucratized entities oriented toward providing campaign resources and political intelligence to state and local candidates.[19] The institutional development of national party organizations in the last three

[17] Charles M. Cameron, "Studying the Polarized Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32: 647-63; Richard M. Skinner, "George W. Bush and the Partisan Presidency," *Political Science Quarterly* 123 (2009): 605-622; Daniel J. Galvin, "Presidential Partisanship Reconsidered: Eisenhower, Nixon, and Ford and the Rise of Polarized Politics," *Political Research Quarterly* 66 (2013): 46-60; Frances E. Lee, "Presidents and Party Teams: The Politics of Debt Limits and Executive Oversight," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43 (2013): 775-791; Julia R. Azari, *Delivering the People's Message: The Changing Politics of the Presidential Mandate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[18] Frances E. Lee, "Dividers, Not Uniters: Presidential Leadership and Senate Partisanship, 1980-2004," *Journal of Politics* 70 (October 2008): 914-928.

[19] Cornelius B. Cotter and John S. Bibby, "Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline," *Political Science Quarterly* 95 (Spring 1980): 1-27; M. Margaret Conway, "Republican Political Party Nationalization, Campaign Activities, and Their Implications for the Party System," *Publius* 13 (Winter 1983): 1-17;

decades is as much a story of party nationalization as it is a byproduct of "candidate-centered politics" emerging from reform.

The world of interest group politics, fluidly bipartisan in the ideal-type of midcentury pluralist theory, also polarized in tandem with the parties from the 1980s onward. Issue activists and interest groups came increasingly and consciously to be drawn into the zero-sum logic of two-party competition, enlisting as soldiers for one or the other major party. They did this precisely as a result of the increasing degree to which the parties took distinct and differentiated policy positions on an expanding number of issues.[20]

The relationship between the formal parties and their core group allies came to be institutionalized and routinized. Major labor unions began sharing mass mailing lists with the DNC early in the 1980s; increasingly coordinated their participation in the Democratic presidential nominating process; and regularized their cooperation with congressional Democratic leaders.[21] Joint labor-liberal "ground game" organizations, starting with Citizen Action, became evermore closely enmeshed in day-to-day Democratic electoral operations. Citizen Action endured years of allegations that such coordination crossed legal lines before

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A. James Reichley, "The Rise of National Parties," in John E. Chubb and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *The New Direction in American Politics* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 175-200; Paul Hernnson, *Party Campaigning in the 1980s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1955-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 71-196; Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George. W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2010), 120-159, 225-262.

[20] Sinclair, *Party Wars*, 308-343; Katherine Krimmel, "Special Interest Partisanship: The Transformation of American Political Parties" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), 22-72.

[21] James B. Booe letter to Douglas Fraser, February 23, 1983, Box 70, Folder 16, UAW President's Office: Douglas A. Fraser Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Rick Scott memo to Gerald McEntee and William Lucy, October 29, 1991, Box 15, Folder 6, AFSCME President's Office: Gerald McEntee Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI; Taylor E. Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 125-190.

having to disband in the mid-1990s in the wake of a union fundraising scandal.[22] Heather Booth helped to found a new national body composed of many of the same affiliates in 1999 called US Action. More broadly, the Citizen Action model of a national umbrella coalition uniting labor with post-'60s social movement organizations – usually co-chaired by both a union leader and a consumer, citizen group, or feminist activist – came to typify Democratic electoral and issue campaigns in the new century, from the "527" electioneering group Americans Coming Together in 2004 to the Obama-era issue coalitions Health Care for America Now and Americans for Financial Reform. Lobbyists and advocates for issues like the environment, meanwhile, whose formative organizing experiences revolved around successful bipartisan legislative strategies in the pre-polarized era, came gradually and painfully to adjust their approach to new partisan realities.[23]

In keeping with the broader patterns of post-1970s partisan developments, the GOP proved to be at the vanguard of interest group mobilization and coordination. The panoply of New Right "single issue" groups along with the Christian Right proved to be quick and eager adapters to a partisan political strategy, with the GOP operative-led Christian Coalition (formed in 1989) epitomizing the near complete convergence of ideological advocacy with partisan politics. Republicans proved even more aggressive in seeking to transform the political strategy of business interests and corporate lobbyists from one of bipartisan pluralism to a stable resource- and personnel-sharing partnership with the GOP. Though the political mobilization of

[22] Richard E. Cohen, "Citizen Action: Noah's Ark or a Sham?," *National Journal*, June 11, 1988; "GOP Says Citizen Action Funneled Money Illegally," *Wall Street Journal*, June 17, 1988; Steven Greenhouse, "Link to Teamsters Forces a Liberal Group to Close its National Office," *New York Times*, October 30, 1997.

[23] Theda Skocpol, "Naming the Problem: What it Will Take to Counter Extremism and Engage Americans in the Fight Against Global Warming," prepared for the Symposium on the Politics of America's Fight against Global Warming, February 14, 2013, Harvard University; Steven Teles, Heather Hurlburt, and Mark Schmitt, "Philanthropy in a Time of Polarization," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Summer 2014.

business in the 1970s had independent impetuses outside of Republican influence, the party's increasingly conservative cast and cohesion in the 1980s and 1990s made it an ever more natural political partner. At the same time, Republican leaders beginning with Gingrich began actively pressuring business interests to limit their support for and employment of Democrats. Gingrich famously warned the major business-backed Political Action Committees on the eve of the 1994 midterm elections that, "for anybody who's not on board now, it's going to be the two coldest years in Washington."[24] The so-called K Street Project that he and Tom DeLay went on to develop in the House, along with Trent Lott and Rick Santorum in the Senate, focused on pressuring Washington-based lobbying firms to hire GOP staffers and compelling organized business interests to limit their campaign donations to Republicans. "If you want to play in our Revolution," DeLay boasted, "you have to live by our rules."[25]

As they did with party cohesion and interest-group mobilization, conservative Republicans also led the way in stimulating – and benefitting from – a polarized policy research and media landscape. Thanks in part to the efforts of an interlocking network of conservative foundations, the right enjoyed a dramatic numerical advantage among the ideologically driven think tanks that began to proliferate in the 1970s.[26] The same funders also helped to ensure the growth of a powerful conservative media infrastructure in print, radio and television airwaves,

[24] Krimmel, "Special Interest Partisanship," 62.

[25] Nicholas Confessore, "Welcome to the Machine," *Washington Monthly*, July/August, 2003.

[26] Sidney Blumenthal, *Rise of the Counter-Establishment: From Conservative Ideology to Political Power* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986); James Allen Smith, *The Idea Brokers: Think Tanks and the Rise of the New Policy Elite* (New York: The Free Press, 1991); Michael Patrick Allen, "Elite Social Movement Organizations and the State: The Rise of the Conservative Policy-Planning Network," *Research in Politics and Society* Vol. 4 (1992), 87-109; David M. Ricci, *The Transformation of American Politics: The New Washington and the Rise of Think Tanks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Alice O'Connor, "Financing the Counterrevolution," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, eds. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 148-168.

and, eventually, the internet.[27] In the case of both policy research and political media, Democrats and liberals pursued important parallel initiatives, but they generally occurred later, as reactive and imitative efforts.

Such persistent asymmetry in partisan developments between Republicans and Democrats since the 1970s raises anew a basic analytical question. Is polarization even the right frame in which to view recent political history, or is it merely the byproduct of a rightward movement of both major parties that the GOP has pursued to a far greater extent? The continued breakdown of the New Deal political order and the conservative drift of the Democratic Party remain dominant themes of post-1960s political historiography, and for the last two decades of the twentieth century, those themes are identified in the emergence of the "New Democrat" movement that brought Bill Clinton to power. That movement, with its institutional origins in the Committee on Party Effectiveness established in 1981 by House Democratic Caucus Chairman Gillis Long and, starting in 1985, in the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) outside of Congress, was indeed a historically significant factional project.[28] New Democrats argued in the wake of the GOP's victories in the 1980s that Democratic electoral survival demanded a policy course-correction on various issues. They advocated centrist positioning on cultural and law-and-order issues and neoliberal approaches to economic and fiscal policy compared to the liberal agenda of the party's congressional base. No such moderating force within the GOP exercised anything like New Democrats' intraparty influence during the 1980s and 1990s.

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[27] Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj, *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[28] Paul S. Herrnson and Kelly D. Patterson, "Toward a More Programmatic Democratic Party? Agenda-Setting and Coalition-Building in the House of Representatives," *Polity* 27 (Summer 1995): 607-628; Kenneth S. Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

Nevertheless, this dissertation has argued that the endurance of left-liberal strength and the marginalization of conservatives within the post-1960s Democratic Party have been overlooked in historical scholarship. For now it will have to be merely asserted that, likewise, the significance of the New Democrats has been at once overstated and misperceived by scholars and observers. Ideologically, New Democrats embodied the centrism of post-Civil Rights-era southern Democrats and suburban economic moderates rather than the conservatism of the old Solid South bloc and its modern, fleeting efflorescence among the boll weevils. The ideological space separating factions within the contemporary Democratic Party has not come close to matching that distance during the peak of the party's midcentury dominance. Politically, moreover, New Democrats consistently advocated a strong, programmatically defined partisanship rather than the bipartisan legislative practices celebrated by defenders of the pre-polarized system. New Democrats pitched moderate programmatic initiatives in explicitly partisan terms, and made a point of advocating issue positions that, while more conservative than those of the liberal Democratic base, fell to the left of Republican policy. In this sense they were as shaped by the context and pressures of an ideologically sorted party system as other political interests of the period.

Dominant historical accounts have also exaggerated the New Democrats' alleged intraparty triumph and ideological "takeover" within the Democratic Party. That party has, in reality, faced the continuous task of accommodating an electoral and interest group coalition that encompasses both liberals and moderates. Indeed, the absence of any final victories in intraparty struggles between moderate and liberal Democrats helps to shed light on the real nature of partisan asymmetry in the modern age of polarization. If scholars such as Geoffrey Kabaservice are correct in identifying a coherent and distinct ideological tradition in the moderate

Republicanism of previous eras – one that eschewed populist politics while emphasizing public-private partnerships and state activism in pursuit of market-oriented policy solutions – it may be plausibly argued that this tradition has migrated parties in the contemporary era, to define a distinct faction among Democrats.[29] Such a development can have contrasting implications for the behavior of the two major parties without contradicting the dynamics of a party system that is itself defined by a clear ideological division.

Responsible Partisanship, Governmental Dysfunction

By the 1990s, the interaction between an increasingly disciplined party system and the fragmented, veto-laden American constitutional structure began to reveal a growing potential for crisis. Within a year of the Republican takeover of Congress, a budget stand-off between Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton precipitated a government shutdown. The impeachment battle two years later embroiled the country in a conflict that, for all of the salacious atmospherics of the sex scandal that provided its pretext, was at heart a deadly serious ideological struggle. Surveying the deepening partisan divide in Washington in 1998, scholar Nelson Polsby remarked acerbically to *The New Yorker* that "the trouble began when we political scientists finally got our wish – 'responsible' political parties instead of broad, non-ideological coalitions. The idea was, of course, completely nuts from the start."[30]

From a protracted presidential election requiring judicial intervention to resolve to the charged politics of war, economic crisis, and the fate of government in ensuing years, the

[29] Geoffrey Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, From Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[30] Joe Klein, "The Town that Ate Itself," *The New Yorker*, November 23, 1998. The ironic invocation of the midcentury scholarly prescription of responsible parties eventually became a staple of political science scholarship on polarization. As Nicol C. Rae put it, "Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (June 2007): 169-191.

American political scene during the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century seemed fated by the old curse: "May you live in interesting times." The volatility of political events – the "wave" elections producing swings in partisan control and public policy followed soon after by apparent electoral backlash, the politically induced crises within and between the legislative and executive branches – disguised the stable unidirectional trajectory of systemic political change, toward ever stronger and more perfectly ideologically sorted partisanship. Developments seeming at first to herald the introduction of potentially destabilizing or realigning forces within the system soon proved to be symptoms and further catalyzers of partisan polarization. When the Tea Party insurgency developed in the first two years of Barack Obama's presidency, for example, many commenters saw it as a libertarian movement that cross-cut existing partisan divides. But in reality it epitomized the additive, multi-dimensional quality of contemporary party polarization, as Tea Party activists were revealed to be, straightforwardly, a mobilization of the existing GOP base, with conservative positions across the board on economic and cultural issues and a uniform opposition to compromise with Democrats.[31] The congressional leadership that the Tea Party helped bring to power subsequently demonstrated its responsiveness to the wishes of these citizens by instigating not only another government shutdown but also two separate default-threatening showdowns over the statutory debt ceiling.

By the new century, scholarly and journalistic observers had begun finally to discern the dynamics of the new system and to tease out troubling implications. Discussion of party decline and fragmentation diminished. Political scholarship on partisanship and polarization flourished – including new models of party behavior positing that "intense policy demanders" rather than

[31] Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). In this sense the Tea Party typifies the "conflict extension" at work in modern party polarization. Geoffrey C. Layman et al, "Activists and Conflict Extension in American Party Politics," *American Political Science Review* Vol. 104 (May 2010): 324-346. See also Joseph Bafumi and Robert Y. Shapiro, "A New Partisan Voter," *Journal of Politics* 71 (January 2009): 1-24.

pragmatic politicians were the key drivers in American politics.[32] Commentators began to revisit political scientists Juan Linz's old observation that states with presidential systems tend toward crisis and breakdown compared to those with parliamentary systems.[33] Linz had long cast the United States as an exception to this tendency thanks to the country's famously undisciplined political parties, but both he and others now began to reconsider that exceptionalism.[34] Fifty-four years after the American Political Science Association released *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System in the United States*, meanwhile, the same body published a new prescriptive report on national party politics. Rather than advocate the sharpening of party lines as APSA had in 1950, the new report focused its attention on devising mechanisms to facilitate deliberation, negotiation, and compromise.[35]

All told, decades of work carried out by the activists, intellectuals, and political elites at the center of this dissertation had finally helped to produce the nationalized and ideologically distinct parties prescribed by responsible party doctrine. But, in a Madisonian system still defined by separated powers, myriad veto points, and staggered elections that all but ensure the recurrence of divided government, party majorities now find themselves with little sustained capacity to implement their program. Hence the modern American predicament of responsible

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[32] Marty Cohen et al, *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Bawn et al, "A Theory of Parties: Groups, Policy Demanders, and Nominations in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 10 (September 2012): 571-597.

[33] Juan Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy* (Winter 1990): 51-69.

[34] Dylan Matthews interview with Juan Linz, "Monday we celebrated our presidential democracy. Juan Linz thinks that's mistaken," *Washington Post* online, January 22, 2013. Accessed at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/01/22/monday-we-celebrated-our-presidential-democracy-juan-linz-thinks-thats-mistaken/. See also Matthew Yglesias, "Founding Falter," *The American Prospect Online*, July 7, 2011; Harold Meyerson, "Did the Founding Fathers Screw Up?," *The American Prospect*, September 26, 2011; and Jeffrey Toobin, "Our Broken Constitution," *The New Yorker*, December 9, 2013.

[35] Jane Mansbridge and Catherine Jo Martin, eds., *Negotiating Agreement in Politics: Report of the Task Force on Negotiating Agreement in Politics* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2013).

parties *without* responsible party government – a volatile ill-fit between disciplined ideological partisanship and fragmented political institutions that turns routine conflict into chronic crisis.

What might this dissertation's account of the origins of this predicament tell us about the prospects for getting out of it? If ideologically disciplined parties are ill-suited for a system of fragmented political institutions, potential solutions could involve reforming the parties, or they could involve reforming the institutions. Much public commentary decrying the decline of civility in politics and waxing nostalgic about the midcentury era of bipartisanship focuses attention on the parties themselves as the entities in need of reform. But despite this dissertation's emphasis on the agency of historical actors in helping to bring about the ideological sorting of the parties in the first place, the plausibility of new actors being able to effectively reverse that process seems hard to credit. Nor does there seem to be an obvious route by which advocates might devise and legitimate a new basis for partisan affiliation in the United States different from ideology and issue orientation.

As for reforming the political system itself, the story of postwar congressional reform shows us that institutional change can be brought about when sustained effort and fortuitous circumstances allow, and that changes far less sweeping and radical than some wholesale upending of the Constitution can still prove consequential. In the contemporary era, further reforms of certain anti-majoritarian elements not found in the Constitution itself, such as to the Senate's supermajority requirement for cloture, might constitute a compelling new program for institutional reform. But, crucially, reforms that are intended to allow partisan majorities to more easily implement their agenda when in power represent *accommodations* to polarized partisanship – ways to make the new partisanship "work" better in the American context – rather than efforts to mitigate it. And little evidence indicates that significant numbers of Americans

support reforms that are intended to make peace with our polarized parties. American voters may be, like the Founders before them, partisans in spite of themselves.[36] To turn many of them into conscious advocates of strong party government may require particularly profound and long-term changes in American political culture.

This is another way of saying that Americans' ambivalence about parties, which is as old as American parties themselves, reflects a basic ambivalence about what values should be emphasized in the political system. Trade-offs among competing democratic goals abound. Pragmatic bargaining might come at the expense of coherent policymaking. Principled representation of constituents might come at the expense of compromise. Achieving a more clubby elite spirit of comity might come at the expense of democratic participation and accountability. If it has succeeded at all, the preceding account of the work carried out by engaged citizens to reshape American partisanship in the pursuit of national policy and ideological goals has leant their efforts a degree of historical recognition and respect. The lesson that their thought and experience hold for contemporary citizens may merely be that the pursuit of effective collective decision-making in a democracy is as difficult and unending a task as it is a vital one.

[36] Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

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