

Home
Current Issue
Archive
Forum
Site Guide
Feedback
Subscribe
Search

Browse >>

- Books & Critics
- Fiction
- Food
- Foreign Affairs
- Language
- Poetry Pages
- Politics & Society
- Science & Technology
- Travel & Pursuits

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*When the official subject
is presidential politics, taxes, welfare,
crime, rights, or values . . .
the real subject is*

Race

by **Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall**

RACE is no longer a straightforward, morally unambiguous force in American politics; instead, considerations of race are now deeply imbedded in the strategy and tactics of politics, in competing concepts of the function and responsibility of government, and in each voter's conceptual structure of moral and partisan identity. Race helps define liberal and conservative ideologies, shapes the presidential coalitions of the Democratic and Republican parties, provides a harsh new dimension to concern over taxes and crime, drives a wedge through alliances of the working classes and the poor, and gives both momentum and vitality to the drive to establish a national majority inclined by income and demography to support policies benefiting the affluent and the upper-middle class. In terms of policy, race has played a critical role in the creation of a political system that has tolerated, if not supported, the growth of the disparity between rich and poor over the past fifteen years. Race-coded images and language changed the course of the 1980, 1984, and 1988 presidential elections and the 1990 elections for the governorships of California and Alabama, the U.S. Senate in North Carolina, and the post of Texas secretary of agriculture. The political role of race is subtle and complex, requiring listening to those whose views are deeply repellent to some and deeply resonant for others. The debate over racial policy has been skewed and distorted by a profound failure to listen.

"You could classify me as a working-class Democrat, a card-carrying union member," says Dan Donahue, a Chicago carpenter who became active in the campaign of a

Republican state senator in 1988. "I'm not a card-carrying Republican--yet. We have four or five generations of welfare mothers. And they [Democrats] say the answer to that is we need more programs. Come on. It's well and good we should have compassion for these people, but your compassion goes only so far. I don't mind helping, but somebody has got to help themselves, you've got to pull. When you try to pick somebody up, they have to help. Unfortunately, most of the people who need help in this situation are black and most of the people who are doing the helping are white. We [white Cook County voters] are tired of paying for the Chicago Housing Authority, and for public housing and public transportation that we don't use. They [taxpayers] hate it [the school-board tax] because they are paying for black schools that aren't even educating kids, and the money is just going into the Board of Education and the teachers' union."

Moderate-income voters like Donahue pose a central dilemma for the Democratic Party. They are essential if the party is to have an economically coherent base, and if the party is legitimately to claim to represent not only the poor but also the average working man and woman. These voters have, however, been caught up in an explosive chain reaction of race, rights, values, and taxes which has propelled significant percentages of them out of the Democratic Party in presidential elections and into the "unreliable" column in state and local contests. Racism and racial prejudice fail to explain such voter defection adequately, and Democratic liberals' reliance on charges of racism guarantees political defeat and, more important, guarantees continued ignorance of the dynamics at the core of presidential politics.

THE COSTS OF LIBERALISM

The past two decades have seen a significant enlargement of the ideological and value-based underpinnings of political conservatism and, to a large extent, of the Republican Party. Race, rights, and taxes have become key forces behind this enlargement, helping to bring about a new polarization of the electorate, a polarization that has effectively replaced the New Deal coalition structure of presidential contests.

This polarization is built on mutually reinforcing divisions of the electorate: taxpayers against tax recipients; those who emphasize responsibility against those who

emphasize rights; proponents of deregulation and an unfettered free market against supporters of the regulatory state and of policies protecting or advancing the interests of specific groups; and, finally, whites against blacks. Public policies backed by liberals have driven these new alignments. In particular, busing, affirmative action, and much of the rights revolution in behalf of criminal defendants, prisoners, homosexuals, welfare recipients, and a host of other previously marginalized groups have, for many voters, converted the government from ally to adversary. The simultaneous increase, over the past two and a half decades, in crime, welfare dependency, illegitimacy, and educational failure have established in the minds of many voters a numbing array of "costs"--perceived and real--of liberalism.

Major elements of the Republican Party have exploited and inflated the costs of liberal policies. Republican strategists and ideologues have furthermore capitalized on these costs to establish a new and evolving ideology: conservative egalitarianism, opposed to special preferences whether for blacks, unions, or any other liberal interest. Liberal Democratic support for preferential hiring on the shop floor and in the schoolroom--to make up for past discrimination--has enabled a conservative Republican Party to lay claim to the cause of equal opportunity, once the rallying cry of the civil-rights movement. In the wake of sustained group and individual conflicts over rights, preferences, and government benefits, an egalitarian populism of the right has emerged, one so strong that it was not only accessible to George C. Wallace in 1968 but remained available twenty years later to a scion of the old guard of the Northeast, George Herbert Walker Bush. Conservative populism has permitted the Republican Party to replace in the minds of many voters the idea of an "establishment" ruled by business interests with a hated new liberal establishment, adversarial to the common man: an elite--of judges, bureaucrats, newspaper editors, ACLU lawyers, academics, Democratic politicians, civil-rights and feminist leaders--determined to enact racially and socially redistributive policies demanding the largest sacrifices from the white working and lower-middle classes.

This new polarization drives a wedge right through the heart of the old Democratic presidential coalition, and threatens to undermine the genuine advances in racial equality which have occurred in the years since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Race relations in America are, in fact, moving on two tracks. On one there

has been an extraordinary integration of the races, a striking expansion of the black middle class, and a powerful contribution from blacks to the mainstream culture. American society is undergoing a transformation that may ultimately destroy many of the racial stereotypes that drive prejudice. In the years before the outbreak of the Second World War, 73 percent of all black college graduates became ministers or teachers, almost all serving exclusively black constituencies. In 1940 only 187,520 blacks held white-collar jobs, and over 100,000 of them were clergymen, teachers, or the owners of generally small, ghetto-based retail stores producing marginal incomes. By 1990, 1.91 million blacks held managerial and professional jobs. From 1950 to 1990 the black population doubled but the number of blacks holding white-collar jobs increased by 920 percent.

On the second track, racial progress has run into major roadblocks: crime, welfare dependency, illegitimacy, drug abuse, and a generation--disproportionately black--of young men and women unwilling either to stay in school or to take on menial labor, a group that has collided with a restructuring of the American economy and a dramatic loss of well-paid entry-level jobs. The worsening of the symptoms of social dysfunction over the past three decades has become a driving force in politics, for the symptoms are perceived as an unacceptable cost of liberalism not only in the neighborhoods of southwest Chicago but also, increasingly, in the more affluent sections of suburbia and in the business cores of cities.

A NEW LEASE ON PREJUDICE

Liberal elites have had major difficulty recognizing the costs both of racial conflict and of the broader rights revolution in behalf of groups as diverse as women, the mentally disabled, prison inmates, and immigrants from developing countries. Liberal elites have in addition disregarded the effects of burdensome taxes on working-class and middle-class voters, who may see themselves as being forced to finance a revolution challenging their own values and often undermining their hard-won security. Democratic liberalism has shown a consistent reluctance to confront the inherent distributional conflicts imbedded in liberal policies. After the 1984 election the Democratic National Committee commissioned a \$250,000 voter study by CRG Communications, only to quash its release because it made explicit controversial sources of dissent

from liberal orthodoxy. The study, drawn from a poll of 5,000 voters and thirty-three focus groups, found that Democratic defectors among white urban ethnics and white southern moderates believed that

the Democratic Party has not stood with them as they moved from the working to the middle class. They have a whole set of middle-class economic problems today, and their party is not helping them. Instead it is helping the blacks, Hispanics and the poor. They feel betrayed....[These voters] view gays and feminists as outside the orbit of acceptable social life. These groups represent, in their view, a social underclass....[White urban ethnics] feel threatened by an economic underclass that absorbs their taxes and even locks them out of the job, in the case of affirmative action. They also fear a social underclass that threatens to violate or corrupt their children. It is these underclasses that signify their present image of the Democratic Party....The Democrats are the giveaway party. Giveaway means too much middle-class money going to blacks and the poor.

In some communities, such as the white working-class suburbs of Detroit, positive assessments of the Democratic Party have been washed out altogether by anger and discontent that are open, unabashed, and extremely harsh. Voters from such communities have been crucial to the outcome of presidential elections for the past two decades--they are the silent majority of the 1970s and the Reagan Democrats of the 1980s. Their votes expanded the Republican coalition to produce election-year majorities, and their abandonment of the Democratic Party in presidential elections undermined the coalition of the haves-nots and affirmed the ascendancy of a coalition of the haves, as disaffected moderate-income white voters joined forces with traditional Republicans. The views of working-class defectors from the Democratic Party were examined in a 1985 study of suburban Detroit by Stanley Greenberg, the president of the Analysis Group, a Democratic polling firm. The study found that

these white Democratic defectors express a profound distaste for blacks, a sentiment that pervades almost everything they think about

government and politics. Blacks constitute the explanation for their [white defectors'] vulnerability and for almost everything that has gone wrong in their lives; not being black is what constitutes being middle class; not living with blacks is what makes a neighborhood a decent place to live....These sentiments have important implications for Democrats, as virtually all progressive symbols and themes have been redefined in racial and pejorative terms....

The special status of blacks is perceived by almost all of these individuals as a serious obstacle to their personal advancement. Indeed, discrimination against whites has become a well-assimilated and ready explanation for their status, vulnerability and failures.

The bitterness and anger of the white Detroit voters is one consequence of a central tragedy of the past twenty-five years: the drive to achieve racial equality and the striking advances of the black middle class have coincided with a significant worsening of social dysfunction in the bottom third of the black community. Social dysfunction--crime, welfare dependency, joblessness, and illegitimacy--wreaks havoc, crushing recognition of the achievements of liberalism. When it is disproportionately associated with one group or race, social dysfunction assaults efforts to eliminate prejudice. Gordon W. Allport wrote in *The Nature of Prejudice*,

Prejudice...may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports...and provided it is of the sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups.

The contact between whites and the black underclass has routinely violated every standard necessary for the breakdown of racial stereotypes. Most white contact with the underclass is through personal experience of crime and urban squalor, through such experience related by friends and family, or through the daily reports about crime, drugs,

and violence which appear on television and in newspapers. The news includes, as well, periodic reports on out-of-wedlock births, welfare fraud, drug-related AIDS, crack babies, and inner-city joblessness.

"The stereotype is not a stereotype anymore," says Kenneth S. Tollett, a black professor of education at Howard University. "The behavior pattern in the underclass is not stereotypical in the pejorative sense, but it is a statement of fact. A stereotype is an overgeneralization, 'This is the way people are,' and then we say all are like that. The behavior of black males in the underclass is now beginning to look like the black stereotype. The statements we have called stereotypes in the past have become true."

Social dysfunction, and crime in particular, have tragically served over the past two and a half decades to reinforce racial prejudice. Statistics suggest the widespread problems among the black underclass.

In a nation that is 12 percent black and 84 percent white, there were in 1986, according to the Department of Justice, more black prison inmates than white or Hispanic. There were in 1988, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, more black welfare recipients than white. By the late 1980s, according to the Bureau of the Census, a majority of black families were headed by single or separated women. At the same time, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 60 percent of all black children were born out of wedlock. Among black male high school dropouts aged twenty to twenty-four, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the proportion who had not worked at all during the previous year rose from 15.1 percent in 1974 to a staggering 39.7 percent in 1986. The comparable figures for young white dropouts were 9.1 percent in 1974 and 11.8 percent in 1986, and for young Hispanic dropouts 8.8 percent and 9.6 percent. According to figures compiled by the Department of Justice in criminal-victimization surveys from 1979 to 1986--the surveys considered by law-enforcement professionals to contain the most reliable data on race--an annual average of 44.3 out of every 1,000 blacks were victims of a violent crime, with much higher rates in very poor areas, as compared with 34.5 out of every 1,000 whites. At the same time, however, a far higher percentage of the crimes committed by blacks than of the crimes committed by whites were interracial. In 1986 and 1987 whites committing crimes of violence--robbery, rape, and assault--chose white victims 97.5 percent of the time and

black victims 2.5 percent of the time in those incidents in which the victim could identify the race of the offender. Blacks committing violent crimes chose white victims 51.2 percent of the time and black victims 48.8 percent of the time. For the specific crime of robbery the figures are similarly striking. In 1986-1987, of those robberies in which the race of the offender was identified by the victim, 95.1 percent of robberies committed by whites had white victims and 4.9 percent had black victims; 57.4 percent of robberies committed by blacks had white victims and 42.6 percent had black victims.

THE RACES POLARIZE OVER WHAT'S GONE WRONG

Violence, joblessness, drug abuse, and family disintegration have not only functioned to reinforce racial prejudice; they have also led to widely differing interpretations of what has gone wrong. Significant numbers of blacks, both middle-class and poor, see malevolent white power behind the disruption and dislocation in black neighborhoods. Take drug abuse. "It's almost an accepted fact," says Andrew Cooper, the publisher of the City Sun, a black weekly Brooklyn newspaper, echoing ideas often heard on black radio talk shows and in other all-black forums. "It's a deep-seated suspicion. I believe it. I can't open my desk drawer and say, 'Here it [the evidence] is.' But there is just too much money in narcotics. People really believe they are being victimized by The Man. If the government wanted to stop it, it could stop it." Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the Nation of Islam, brought an entire auditorium of black politicians, intellectuals, and organizers--men and women on the left of the political spectrum, but by no means on the outer fringes--to their feet during a 1989 speech in New Orleans which clearly captured elements of a black world view. He said,

"The black man and woman in America is of no further use to the children of our former slavemasters and when a thing loses its use or utility, it loses its value. If your shoes wear out, you don't keep them around; if an old dress becomes old, you don't keep it around. Once it loses utility, you move to get rid of it....We cannot accept the fact that they think black people have become a permanent

underclass...If we have become useless in a racist society, then you must know that not public policy but a covert policy is being already formulated to get rid of that which is useless, since the economy is going down and the world is going down. Follow me, brothers and sisters. According to demographers, if the plummeting birth rate of white people in America continues, in a few years it will reach zero population growth. As for blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans, if their present birth rate continues, by the year 2080, demographers say, blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans will conceivably be 50 percent or more of the United States population...If things continue just birthwise, we could control the Congress, we could control the Supreme Court, we could control state legislatures, and then 'Run, Jesse, run,' or 'Run, Jesse Junior, run,' or 'Run, Jesse the Third, run.'"

The emergence of predominantly black underclass neighborhoods rife with the worst symptoms of social pathology has proved to be one of the most disturbing developments in the United States, both for city residents and for residents of surrounding areas. In his book *Canarsie*, the Yale sociologist Jonathan Rieder described the climate of opinion he found in the late seventies in one of Brooklyn's white urban ethnic enclaves:

Canarsie's image of ghetto culture crystalized out of all the visual gleanings, fleeting encounters, and racist presumptions. Lower-class blacks lacked industry, lived for momentary erotic pleasure, and, in their mystique of soul, glorified the fashions of a high-stepping street life. The hundreds of thousands of female-headed minority households in New York City, and the spiraling rate of illegitimate births, reinforced the impression that ghetto women were immoral...When provincial Jews and Italians recoiled from the riven families of the ghetto, they were prisoners of ancient notions of right as well as vituperative passion. "The blacks have ten kids to a family," the Italian wife of a city worker observed...."Bring up a few, give them love and education."...It is hard to

exaggerate the bewilderment Canarsians felt when they considered the family patterns of the ghetto. To be without a family in southern Italy "was to be truly a non-being, un sacco vacante (an empty sack) as Sicilians say, un nuddu miscatu cu nenti (a nobody mixed with nothing)."

THE VALUES BARRIER

The intensity of public reaction to the world of the underclass has coincided with a larger conflict in America over values. This conflict has evolved, in complex ways, from one of the major struggles of the twentieth century: the struggle between so-called traditional values and a competing set of insurgent values. Traditional values generally have been seen to revolve around commitments to the larger community--to the family, to parental responsibility, to country, to the work ethic, to sexual restraint, to self-control, to rules, duty, authority, and a stable social order. The competing set of insurgent values, the focus of rights-oriented political ideologies, of the rights revolution, and of the civil-rights movement, has been largely concerned with the rights of the individual--with freedom from oppression, from confinement, from hierarchy, from authority, from stricture, from repression, from rigid rule-making, and from the status quo.

On a level essentially ignored by liberal elites--but a level, nonetheless, of stark reality to key voters--the values debate has become conflated with racial politics. Among Democrats and liberals the stigmatization of racism in the 1960s had the unintended and paradoxical consequence of stigmatizing the allegiance of many voters to a whole range of fundamental moral values. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the raising of the "traditional values" banner over such issues as law and order, the family, sexual conduct, joblessness, welfare fraud, and patriotism was seen by liberals and blacks--with some accuracy--as an appeal to racist, narrow-minded, repressive, or xenophobic instincts, designed to marshal support for reactionary social policies. The conflation by the political right of values with attempts to resist racial integration, to exclude women from public life, and to discredit the extension of constitutional rights to minorities fueled an often bitter resistance by the left and by blacks to the whole values package.

The result was that liberal Democrats often barred from

consideration what are in fact legitimate issues for political discourse, issues of fundamental social and moral concern which must be forthrightly addressed by any national candidate or party. This stigmatization as "racist" or as "in bad faith" of open discussion of values-charged-matters--ranging from crime to sexual responsibility to welfare dependency to drug abuse to standards of social obligation--has for more than two decades created a VALUES BARRIER between Democratic liberals and much of the electorate. Insofar as many voters feel that their cherished policies and practices have been routed, the values barrier has been a major factor in fracturing a once deeply felt loyalty to a liberal economic agenda.

When rank-and-file white voters characterize the value structure of the underclass as aberrant, white liberals are not alone in their angry response. In segments of the black community the response is often a wounded outrage so extreme that it precludes all debate.

Bernard Boxill, a black scholar at the University of North Carolina, has, for example, argued that the growing problems of the underclass may be used by the white community as "an excuse to undo the legal, social and economic advances made by the black middle class, plunge the country into a race war, and worst of all, be a pretext for genocide."

Dr. Frances Welsing, a black psychiatrist, was loudly applauded at a predominantly black "town meeting" organized and televised in 1989 by ABC-TV and Ted Koppel when she argued that whites bear responsibility for whatever disorders there may be in black ghettos:

"Racism is a behavior system that is organized because white people are a minority on the planet....If we understand the white fear of genetic annihilation, which is why Willie Horton [the Massachusetts prisoner who committed rape and assault while on furlough] could be used as a very profound symbol by the Republican Party to win this election, then we will understand what is happening to the black male in this society. The black male is a threat to white genetic annihilation. And so he is profoundly attacked in this society."

THE ROOTS OF OUR RACE-CHARGED POLITICS

In the gulf between Frances Welsing and Dan Donahue one can see evidence of a political struggle that goes back to the 1960s. When one looks at recent political history through the prism of our current race-charged politics, familiar events take on a new significance. From the perspective of 1991, for example, the presidential election of 1964 stands out as a turning point in the politics of race in the United States. That election forced race, already a volatile national issue, into the partisan competition between the Democratic and Republican parties. The 1964 contest pitted the Democrat Lyndon Johnson, the leading supporter of the recently passed Civil Rights Act (which granted full U.S. citizenship rights to blacks for the first time in history), against the Republican Barry Goldwater, an ideological conservative and a strong opponent of the bill. By Election Day, 1964, an exceptional 75 percent of the electorate knew that Congress had that year passed the bill, with a striking 96 percent of those voters aware that Johnson had backed the measure and 84 percent aware that Goldwater had opposed it.

The Democratic and Republican nominees' polarized positions on civil rights immediately transformed public perceptions of the two parties. Two years before the 1964 election, polls conducted by National Election Studies showed virtually no difference in the public assessment of whether the Democratic or the Republican Party would be "more likely to see to it that Negroes get fair treatment in jobs and housing." Of those polled in the 1962 survey, 22.7 percent identified the Democrats as more likely to protect black interests, 21.3 percent identified the Republicans, and the remaining 56 percent said either that there was no difference between the parties or that they had no opinion. By 1964, however, fully 60 percent identified the Democratic Party as more likely to help blacks get fair treatment in seeking jobs, and only seven percent identified the Republican Party--the party of Abraham Lincoln.

By 1964 the Democrats had become the party of racial liberalism and the Republicans had become the party of racial conservatism. It was the first and last presidential election in which racial liberalism was politically advantageous.

The event most strikingly associated with the decline in political support for Democratic liberalism was the riot that broke out on August 11, 1965, in the Watts section of Los Angeles. Blacks throwing rocks and bottles at

policemen shouted, "Burn, baby, burn!" as television cameras rolled. By August 16, after the National Guard had been called in and order slowly restored, there were thirty-four dead, more than 1,000 injured, over 800 buildings damaged or destroyed, and nearly 4,000 arrests. Even Martin Luther King, Jr., the leader of black protests since the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955, was unprepared for Watts. Stunned by the scope of anger among rioters, and by their perception that the civil-rights movement had been largely irrelevant to improving conditions in the ghetto, King "was absolutely undone" after visiting Watts, his close associate Bayard Rustin recalled.

A succession of other violent eruptions followed over the next three years. According to the Kerner Commission, appointed to investigate the causes of rioting, in 1967 there were 164 "disorders," eight of them ranked as "major" on the grounds that they involved "many fires, intensive looting, and reports of sniping; violence lasting more than two days; sizeable crowds; and use of National Guard or federal forces as well as other control forces." More than eighty people were killed, nearly 90 percent of them black civilians and 10 percent policemen, firemen, and other public officials. More than three quarters of the deaths were in two cities, Detroit (forty-three) and Newark (twenty-three). During the five-year period 1964-1968, according to one estimate, 329 significant outbreaks of violence took place in 257 cities. Seventy-two percent of rioters in Newark surveyed by the Kerner Commission said they agreed with the statement "Sometimes I hate white people"--a finding painful to white liberals.

The sea change in American presidential politics--the replacement of a liberal majority with a conservative majority--involved the conversion of a relatively small proportion of voters: the roughly five to ten percent of the electorate, made up primarily of white working-class voters, empowered to give majority status to either political party. Alabama Governor George C. Wallace was the politician who showed the Republicans how to seize lower-income white voters. Running as a third-party candidate in 1968, Wallace capitalized on the huge defection of white Democrats, particularly in the South, as the Democratic Party formally repudiated segregation. He won just under 14 percent of the vote. Wallace and Nixon together that year won 57 percent of the vote, however, establishing what would become the conservative presidential majority. This majority carried every presidential election but one over the next twenty years--

the exception being Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter's victory in the wake of Watergate, the worst Republican scandal in history.

The strength of Wallace's appeal in 1968 went beyond white backlash. Wallace defined a new right-wing populism, capitalizing on voter reaction to the emergence of racial, cultural, and moral liberalism. Wallace demonized an elite Democratic establishment, providing a desperately sought-after moral justification to those whites who saw themselves as victimized and displaced by the black struggle for civil rights and by broader social change. For these voters, Wallace portrayed the civil-rights movement not as the struggle of blacks to achieve equality--a goal impossible to challenge on moral grounds--but as the imposition of intrusive "social engineering" on working men and women by a coercive federal government in the hands of a liberal cabal: lawyers, judges, editorial writers, government bureaucrats, and intellectuals. "They have looked down their noses at the average man on the street too long," Wallace told disaffected voters. "They've looked down at the bus driver, the truck driver, the beautician, the fireman, the policeman, and the steelworker, the plumber, and the communications worker, and the oil worker, and the little businessman, and they say, 'We've gotta write a guideline. We've gotta tell you when to get up in the morning. We've gotta tell you when to go to bed at night.'" Wallace laid the groundwork for the Republican assault on "reverse discrimination." "You know who the biggest bigots in the world are--they're the ones who call others bigots," he declared at a Milwaukee rally, as he struggled to be heard over the shouts of protesters. In another campaign speech he said, "It's a sad day in the country when you can't talk about law and order unless they want to call you a racist. I tell you that's not true."

Perhaps most important for long-range Republican strategy, Wallace brought into mainstream presidential politics a new political symbol, a vilified Democratic establishment that replaced as an enemy of lower-income voters the Republican establishment of corporate America and the rich. Wallace effectively portrayed this Democratic establishment as bent on imposing a liberal, authoritarian, statist agenda on an unwilling electorate.

To voters resentful of the heavy hand of the new liberal establishment, Wallace said, "You are one man and one woman, and your thoughts are just as good as theirs."

Richard Nixon set out to win the Wallace vote. Nixon was among the first Republicans to understand how the changing civil-rights agenda could be manipulated to construct a new conservative majority. His strategy effectively straddled the conflict between increasing public support for the abstract principle of racial equality and intensified public opposition to government-driven enforcement mechanisms. Nixon found a message that encompassed the position of the growing majority of white Americans who had come to believe that the denial of basic citizenship rights to blacks was wrong, but who were at the same time opposed to the prospect of forced residential and educational integration, directed by the courts and the federal regulatory bureaucracy

When, in October of 1969, the Supreme Court rejected an Administration attempt to postpone the desegregation of Mississippi's schools, Nixon declared, "We will carry out the law," but he stressed that he did "not feel obligated to do any more than the minimum the law required." The Court ruling, Nixon warned, should not be viewed by "the many young liberal lawyers [in the Justice Department]...as a carte blanche for them to run wild through the South enforcing compliance with extreme or punitive requirements they had formulated in Washington." On the campaign trail in 1972 Nixon declared,

There is no reason to feel guilty about wanting to enjoy what you get and get what you earn, about wanting your children in good schools close to home, or about wanting to be judged fairly on your ability. Those are not values to be ashamed of; those are values to be proud of. Those are values that I shall always stand up for when they come under attack.

THE REPUBLICAN RACIAL STRATEGY

A central irony of the Nixon administration was that the development of a Republican alternative--"black capitalism"--to the traditional civil-rights agenda created a critical vulnerability for Democrats in the 1980s. Under black capitalism the federal government began actively to promote three racial-preference programs that would soon become controversial: a minority contracting program known as "8-a," which set aside fixed percentages of

federal contracts for minority-owned businesses; the Office of Minority Business Enterprise, established within the Department of Commerce to assist minority business in securing government contracts; and, most important, the so-called Philadelphia Plan, designed to increase black access to high-paying union jobs.

The Philadelphia Plan established the authority of the federal government to require companies doing business with the government to set up "goals and timetables" for the hiring and promotion of minority members. The plan set specific percentage "ranges" for blacks and other minority groups for craft-union jobs. For example, plumbers and pipefitters, of whom only twelve out of 2,335 in Philadelphia were black (0.5 percent), were given a hiring goal of five to eight percent in 1970, a range that would rise to 22 to 26 percent by 1973. The goals-and-timetables mechanism was incorporated in 1970 into the regulations governing all federal procurement and contracting--affecting a universe of corporations that employed more than a third of the nation's work force.

Nixon in 1969 did not anticipate that the affirmative-action provisions of his Philadelphia Plan would become, in the course of the next twenty years, essential to a Republican strategy of polarizing the electorate along lines of race--and thus be vital to constructing a presidential partisan realignment. It did not take him long to learn, however: by the 1972 election Nixon was campaigning against the quota policies that his own Administration had largely engendered.

It was Nixon's re-election campaign that developed a relatively comprehensive Republican racial strategy stressing whenever possible the costs of remedies for discrimination, especially in the cases of busing and affirmative action. On March 17, 1972, Nixon escalated his assault on busing. The school bus, "once a symbol of hope," had become a "symbol of social engineering on the basis of abstractions," he said. Seeking to reap political rewards from the growing stockpile of blue-collar resentment, Nixon turned against his own Philadelphia Plan: "When young people apply for jobs...and find the door closed because they don't fit into some numerical quota, despite their ability, and they object, I do not think it is right to condemn those young people as insensitive or even racist."

THE DEMOCRATS BECOME A WHITE-COLLAR PARTY

In devising a political strategy for capturing white working-class and southern voters, the Nixon Administration in 1972 would have had difficulty designing a scenario more advantageous to the Republicans, and more damaging to the Democratic-Party, than the one the Democrats devised for themselves. This scenario grew out of a seemingly minor development at the 1968 Democratic convention. As a token gesture of appeasement to the forces of Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, Democratic Party regulars allowed the creation of a special Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, to ensure that "all feasible efforts have been made to assure that delegates are selected through party primary, convention, or committee procedures open to public participation within the calendar year of the National Convention."

No one, neither Democratic Party regulars nor the press, had any notion of the scope of what had been set in motion. "There was not much attention to the Rules Committee reports," Max Kampelman, one of Hubert Humphrey's major strategists, recalled later. "Our objective was to get a nominee....We said to ourselves, if you are going to STUDY it, you can control it. If you get the nomination, you'll have control of the DNC [Democratic National Committee]. If you have the DNC, then you'll control any study. A study commission could be a way of harmonizing the issue." Few political judgments have proved more incorrect.

The liberal-reform wing of the Democratic Party--in part made up of veterans of the civil-rights and student anti-war movements--dominated the party-structure commission and achieved a radical alteration of the presidential-delegate selection process. The new rules shifted the power to nominate presidential candidates from the loose alliance of state and local party structures, which had in the past been empowered to use their control of the party to pick delegates, to the universe of activists, often rights-oriented liberal reformers, who were now granted direct access to the machinery of delegate selection. "Before reform," Byron Shafer wrote in his book describing the party rules changes, *Quiet Revolution*,

there was an American party system in which one party, the Republicans, was primarily

responsive to white-collar constituencies and in which another, the Democrats, was primarily responsive to blue-collar constituencies. After reform, there were two parties each responsive to quite different white-collar coalitions, while the old blue-collar majority within the Democratic Party was forced to try to squeeze back into the party once identified predominantly with its needs.

In other words, those who unquestionably lost power in the Democratic presidential-nomination process were the white working- and lower-middle-class voters who were already leaving the party in droves because they felt the heaviest burdens of the civil-rights revolution had been placed on their shoulders.

Party reforms produced a substantive ideological upheaval. Before 1972, Democratic presidential delegates were only slightly more liberal than the public at large, according to delegate surveys, while Republican delegates were considerably more conservative than the electorate. Delegates to the 1972 Democratic convention, however, were significantly further to the political left of the electorate at large than the Republican delegates that year were to the right.

No development better summarizes the shift in intra-party power than the decision by the McGovern forces at the 1972 convention to oust the fifty-nine-member Cook County delegation under the control of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. Since 1932 the Chicago organization had been more important to the success or failure of Democratic presidential candidates than any other city machine. Without Daley in 1960, for example, John F. Kennedy would not have carried Illinois by an 8,858-vote margin.

The Cook County delegation, elected in a March 21 Illinois primary, was vulnerable to challenge because Daley's machine had slated candidates in closed meetings, and because the composition of the Chicago delegation did not include the required proportions of women and blacks.

Pro-McGovern reformers successfully voted out the Daley delegates and replaced them with a slate "chosen no one knew quite how," according to Theodore H. White. White wrote,

In the 1st Congressional District of Chicago, for example, a group of people had met at the home of one James Clement and decided that only ten of those present might vote for an alternate to Mayor Daley's slate; those ten had chosen 7 delegates, including the Reverend Jesse Jackson. This rival hand-picked alternate slate offered the exact proportion of women, blacks and youth required by the McGovern reform rules. Yet the elected slate in the 1st Congressional had been voted in by the people of Chicago, and these had not.

In an open letter to Alderman William Singer, the leader of the Chicago reformers, the Chicago Sun-Times columnist Mike Royko wrote,

I just don't see where your delegation is representative of Chicago's Democrats....About half of your delegates are women. About a third of your delegates are black. Many of them are young people. You even have a few Latin Americans. But as I looked over the names of your delegates, I saw something peculiar...There's only one Italian there. Are you saying that only one out of every 59 Democratic votes cast in a Chicago election is cast by an Italian? And only three of your 59 have Polish names....Your reforms have disenfranchised Chicago's white ethnic Democrats, which is a strange reform....Anybody who would reform Chicago's Democratic Party by dropping the white ethnic would probably begin a diet by shooting himself in the stomach.

After the credentials committee voted seventy-one to sixty-one to oust the Daley delegation, Frank Mankiewicz, a spokesman for the McGovern campaign, dryly noted, "I think we may have lost Illinois tonight."

In the 1972 general election, George McGovern lost not only Illinois but forty-eight other states, being defeated by 61 percent to 38 percent, or 18 million votes. For the long-run future of the capacity of the Democratic Party to nominate and elect Presidents, the central issue was not just the magnitude of McGovern's defeat. It was the inability of the Democratic Party to absorb competing

factions and to mediate the differences among them. The new rules removed from the presidential-nomination process those white elected and party officials who were closer to the racial and cultural conflicts plaguing the party than the liberal reformers who dominated the proceedings. Among those who did not attend the 1972 convention were 225 of 255 Democratic congressmen, the Democratic mayors of Los Angeles, Detroit, Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, Mayor Daley and his Chicago loyalists, and uncounted city councilmen, state legislators, and leaders of Democratic ward organizations.

These leaders represented white voters who were on the front lines of urban housing integration; who were the subjects of busing orders; who were competitors for jobs as policemen and firemen and union craftsmen which were governed by affirmative-action consent decrees; who regarded as incomprehensible many liberal Supreme Court decisions on criminals' rights, abortion, sexual privacy, school prayer, busing, and obscenity. These voters and their political representatives were, and still are, largely relegated to peripheral status in the Democratic presidential-primary process. With the withdrawal of socially conservative white voters from the nomination process, Democratic presidential candidates have negotiated that process in the context of an artificially liberal primary electorate that puts the candidates outside the ideological mainstream and provides them with virtually no training in the kinds of accommodation and bargaining essential to general-election victory.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS AGENDA BECOMES REDISTRIBUTIVE

As the white working-class voters who had formed the core of the New Deal coalition began to lose clout within the Democratic Party, the economy began to falter. Steady economic growth, which had made redistributive government policies tolerable to the majority electorate, came to a halt in the mid-1970s. With stagnation the threat to Democratic liberalism intensified. Just as the civil-rights movement reached its height, high-paying union jobs and big-city patronage--which had served to foster upward mobility for each succeeding immigrant generation--began to dry up. Many blacks lost even a toehold on the ladder, while whites slipped down, sometimes just a rung, sometimes all the way to the bottom.

The end of vigorous post-Second World War economic growth came in 1973. Hourly earnings, which had grown every year since 1951 in real, inflation-adjusted dollars, fell by 0.1 percent in 1973, by 2.8 percent in 1974, and by 0.7 percent in 1975. Weekly earnings fell more sharply, by 4.1 percent in 1974 and by 3.1 percent in 1975. Median family income, which had grown from \$20,415 (in 1985 inflation-adjusted dollars) in 1960 to \$29,172 in 1973, began to decline; family income fell to \$28,145 in 1974 and then to \$27,421 in 1975.

In a whipsaw action the middle-class tax burden rose with inflation while the economy and real income growth slowed. The tax system was losing its progressivity, placing a steadily increasing share of the cost of government on middle- and lower-middle-class voters, vital constituencies for the Democratic Party. In 1953 a family making the median family income was taxed at a rate of 11.8 percent, while a family making four times the median was taxed at 20.2 percent, nearly double. By 1975 the figures had become 22.7 percent for the average family and 29.5 percent for the affluent family. In other words, for the affluent family the tax burden increased by 46 percent from 1953 to 1976, while for the average family it increased by 92.4 percent.

As the job market, income patterns, and growing pressure from many groups for spending on the poor created a competition for government funds in which there were more losers than winners, the civil-rights agenda itself became increasingly redistributive. In order to remedy past and present discrimination in both employment and education, the courts and the federal regulatory structure turned to tough affirmative-action policies. Federal directives and regulations--developed in part by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and endorsed by the Supreme Court in 1971 in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* and in later decisions--sharply restricted hiring and promotion procedures that adversely affected blacks.

The most aggressive efforts to provide jobs for blacks were directed at the most besieged white Democratic constituencies: the building-trades unions and police and fire departments. White men working as carpenters, plumbers, sheet-metal workers, iron workers, steamfitters, cops, and firemen became the focus of the anti-discrimination drive waged by the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department.

The dilemma inherent in using racial preference to remedy

past discrimination is sharply reflected in Justice William Brennan's 1976 majority opinion upholding the award of retroactive seniority to blacks in *Franks v. Bowman Transportation Co., Inc.*, and in the dissenting opinion of Justice Lewis Powell.

Brennan wrote that retroactive seniority was essential for the victim of discrimination, because without it he

will never obtain his rightful place in the hierarchy of seniority according to which these various employment benefits are distributed. He will perpetually remain subordinate to persons who, but for the illegal discrimination, would have been, in respect to entitlement to these benefits, his inferiors.

Powell, on the other hand, contended that the award of retroactive seniority would penalize "the rights and expectations of perfectly innocent employees. The economic benefits awarded discrimination victims would be derived not at the expense of the employer but at the expense of other workers."

The intensity of the conflict over affirmative action can be seen in less abstract terms in Birmingham, Alabama. Not until 1968--103 years after the end of the Civil War--did the Birmingham fire department hire its first black fireman. Throughout all those years blacks were systematically denied the opportunity not only of employment but also of building seniority and learning the promotional ropes. Legal proceedings were initiated against the city in 1974, the year the second black fireman was hired. Richard Arrington, Birmingham's first black mayor, was elected in 1979, and two years later the city agreed to a consent decree providing that every white hire or promotion would be matched, one for one, by a black hire or promotion, as long as blacks were available who had fulfilled basic test requirements.

In 1983 James Hanson, a white fireman, and Carl Cook, a black fireman, both took the Birmingham Fire Department test for lieutenant. Both passed, but Hanson ranked sixth among all who took the test, with a score of 192, while Cook ranked eighty-fifth, with a score of 122. Under the consent decree Cook was promoted to lieutenant and Hanson was not.

Hanson became part of a group of whites attempting to

challenge the consent degree. He argued, "I can understand that blacks had been historically discriminated against. I can also understand why people would want to be punitive in correcting it. Somebody needs to pay for this. But they want me to pay for it, and I didn't have anything to do with it. I was a kid when all this went on."

Cook countered, "Say your father robs a bank, takes the money and buys his daughter a Mercedes, and then buys his son a Porsche and his wife a home in the high-rent district. Then they discover he has embezzled the money. He has to give the cars and house back. And the family starts to cry: 'We didn't do anything.' The same thing applies to what the whites have to say. The fact is, sometimes you have to pay up. If a wrong has been committed, you have to right that wrong."

The Birmingham case represents an extreme: pitting white and black workers against each other in a competition for government-controlled jobs and employment benefits. Over time these racial divisions reverberated in Birmingham's political system. Once, every elected official in this city was a Democrat; now racial conflict has begun to translate into a local partisan realignment. By the end of the 1980s Jefferson County, which encompasses Birmingham, had its eighteen seats in the state House of Representatives split between blacks and whites. In partisan terms there were eight black Democrats, one white Democrat, and nine white Republicans. Among the white Republican state representatives was Billy Gray, a former president of the Firefighters Union. Race had become central to establishing partisan difference.

The same zero-sum element of affirmative action in employment is applicable to higher education. "We are committed to a program of affirmative action, and we want to make the university representative of the population of the state as a whole," James A. Blackburn, the dean of admissions at the University of Virginia, said in 1988. "That means fewer spaces for the traditional mainstream white students who have come here from around the country....If you were looking at the academic credentials, you would say Virginia has it upside down. We take more in the groups with weaker credentials and make it harder for those with stronger credentials."

REAGAN AND RACE

Explosive forces--stagnant incomes, declining numbers of manufacturing jobs, inflation-driven increases in marginal tax rates, sharply accelerating welfare dependency, skyrocketing crime, soaring illegitimacy, and affirmative-action competition for jobs and college placement--began to reach the point of combustion in the mid-to-late 1970s. Democrats failed to recognize the threat these forces represented; leaders of the party were given false comfort by the belief that Watergate had done irreparable harm to the Republicans.

The importance of race in the chain of events that brought Ronald Reagan to the White House--from the Great Inflation of the 1970s to the California tax revolt--cannot be overestimated. Reagan, echoing Goldwater from sixteen years before, strengthened the image of the Republicans as the party of racial conservatism. Under Reagan in 1980 the percentage of voters who said the Republican Party was "not likely" to help minorities shot up to 66 percent (from 40 percent in 1976), while those who said that the party would help minorities collapsed to 11 percent (from 33 percent). Unlike Goldwater in 1964, however, Reagan in 1980 demonstrated that racial conservatism was no longer a liability--that in fact it was a clear asset--as his party made gains at every level of electoral competition from state legislative seats to the White House.

Under Reagan the Republican Party in 1980 was able to stake out a conservative civil-rights stand that won strong majority support. Advocacy of "equal opportunity"--the original clarion call of the civil-rights movement--became the center-right position, the core of the new conservative egalitarian populism. Republican and Democratic differences over what [Equal Opportunity](#) meant reflected, in part, differences in the opinions of whites and blacks. By the 1980 election the ideological divergence had extended beyond issues of civil rights to basic questions about the role and responsibilities of the federal government. In 1980 blacks who believed that it was the responsibility of government to provide jobs outnumbered those who contended that "government should just let every person get ahead on his own" by a margin of 70-30, according to National Election Studies poll data. Whites, however, split in the opposite direction, contending by a 62-38 margin that government should just let "everyone get ahead on his own" rather than guaranteeing work.

Responses to this question also revealed the extent to which ideology, voting patterns, and race had become commingled. In addition to polarizing blacks and whites,

the question was found to polarize Reagan and Carter voters, with Carter getting 80 percent of those who most strongly supported government intervention to provide work, and Reagan winning 79 percent of those most strongly opposed to such intervention.

In a parallel split, Carter received 93 percent of the vote from those citizens, white and black, who most strongly supported government efforts "to improve the social and economic position of blacks," while Reagan got 71 percent of those who felt most adamantly that "the government should not make any special effort to help because they should help themselves."

Race, ideology, and partisanship had become inextricably linked, a linkage that empowered the Republican Party in its new populism. Lee Atwater, who ran southern operations for the 1980 campaign and managed George Bush's 1988 campaign, has argued, "In the 1980 campaign we were able to make the establishment, insofar as it is bad, the government. In other words, big government was the enemy, not big business. If the people are thinking that the problem is that taxes are too high and government interferes too much, then we are doing our job. But if they get to the point where they say the real problem is that rich people aren't paying taxes, that Republicans are protecting the realtors and so forth, then I think the Democrats are going to be in pretty good shape. The National Enquirer readership is the exact voter I'm talking about. There are always some stories in there about some multimillionaire that has five Cadillacs and hasn't paid taxes since 1974, or so-and-so Republican congressman hasn't paid taxes since he got into Congress. And they'll have another set of stories of a guy sitting around in a big den with liquor saying so-and-so fills his den with liquor using food stamps." So what determines whether conservative or liberal egalitarianism is ascendant, Atwater says, is "which one of those establishments the public sees as a bad guy."

Reagan focused on the right-wing populist strategy described by Atwater, playing on the combustible mix of race, big government, and white working-class anger. One of Reagan's favorite anecdotes was the inflated story of a Chicago "welfare queen" with "eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards" whose "tax-free income alone is over \$150,000." The food-stamp program, in turn, was a vehicle to let "some young fellow ahead of you buy T-bone steak" while "you were standing in a checkout line with your package of hamburger."

Such implicitly race-laden images, and the values conflict associated with welfare and food stamps, furthered the Republican Party's efforts to expand beyond its traditional base and establish a sustained policy majority--which supported the first major retrenchment of the liberal government policies of the 1930s and the 1960s, ranging from assaults on labor to a broad attempt to dismantle the civil-rights regulatory structure and to overturn court rulings favoring minorities. In direct contrast to the "bottom-up" coalition of the New Deal Democratic Party, the new Republican presidential majority was--and is--a "top-down" coalition.

WHAT "FAIRNESS"--TO WHOM?

While the Reagan administration repeatedly stressed the costs to white America of civil-rights enforcement, especially affirmative-action remedies, the Democratic Party, deliberately or inadvertently, continued to find itself identified with those costs. Throughout the 1984 campaign Walter Mondale was repeatedly enmeshed in negotiations with Jesse Jackson, with organized labor, with feminist groups, and, most damaging of all, with those seeking to raise taxes to fuel what many voters saw as an intrusive federal government. The vulnerability of the Democratic Party was reflected in the deeply hostile public reaction to Mondale's proposal to raise \$30 billion in new revenues to "promote fairness."

The Democratic "fairness" message in 1984 was viewed by a crucial sector of the white electorate through the prism of race. The Analysis Group, reporting on the views of white Democratic defectors in Macomb County, Michigan, found that

conventional Democratic themes, like opportunity and fairness, are now invested with all the cynicism and racism that has come to characterize these sessions [focus groups]. In effect, the themes and Party symbols have been robbed of any meaning for these Democratic defectors. On hearing the term 'fairness,' these voters recall, on the one hand, 'racial minorities' or 'some blacks kicking up a storm,' and on the other hand, 'only politics' or politicians who are 'lying.' It never occurred to these voters that the Democrats were referring to the middle class.

Similar views abound among white voters in such communities as Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Chicago, and rural East Texas. These views are particularly devastating to the Democratic Party because fairness has become a central Democratic theme. The 1980 Democratic platform declared, "In all of our economic programs, the one overriding principle **MUST BE FAIRNESS.**" The platform of four years later asserted, "A nation is only as strong as its commitment to justice and equality. Today, **A CORROSIVE UNFAIRNESS** eats at the underpinnings of our society." (Emphases added.)

In addition, fairness remains a strong and legitimate issue for the legions of black Democratic voters. "The issues that concern working-class minorities comprise the traditional 'fairness' agenda of jobs, housing, welfare, and education," the voter study by CRG Communications found. "They want more benefits for themselves and their children. [They] strongly assert the validity of the 'fairness' theme. They believe that they are entitled to certain governmental benefits and view the diminishment of those benefits as a betrayal of a trust."

The association in the minds of many white voters of "fairness" with "fairness to minorities" has made it very difficult for the Democratic Party to capitalize on the striking increase in the disparity of income over the past decade not only between rich and poor but also between the working and lower-middle classes and the rich. During the 1980s the top one percent saw after-tax family income grow by 87 percent, from \$213,675 in 1980 to \$399,697 in 1990 (both figures in 1990 dollars); families just above the median, in the sixth decile, saw their after-tax income grow by only three percent, from \$25,964 in 1980 to \$26,741 in 1990.

In the 1988 election no one knew better than Michael Caccitolo, the Republican committeeman of Chicago's 23rd Ward, the difficulty of the Democratic Party's struggle to revive the issue of fairness among the once-Democratic voters of southwest Chicago. "Every night I sit at home and watch the news," he said. "I see Jesse [Jackson] up there talking about 'black empowerment, our people,' and that's sending a message out there that no Democratic precinct captain can possibly overcome. When the Dan Ryan [Expressway] was being built, the old lady from Operation Push [Rev. Willie Barrow, at that time the president of Jackson's Operation Push] comes out and says, 'We are going to close the Dan Ryan down unless we

get more blacks on construction.' The people in the neighborhood remember that. Nobody threatened to close the Dan Ryan down to get Polish people on. And they [city and state officials] backed down and they gave a bunch of black guys entry-level jobs. And look who they threw off and got sent back to the neighborhood and told, 'Get on unemployment.' All it takes is two or three of them. Would you define them as Republican precinct captains? No. Is it advantageous for the Republicans to watch a guy like that sitting in a tavern drinking his beer and telling the story about how he got bumped? And then all of a sudden it's six o'clock and [on TV] it's Jesse. It's bad and it ain't going to get better."

THE SIGNAL OF "CRIME"

In 1988 the Bush campaign assembled and deployed a range of symbols and images designed to tap into voters' submerged anxieties about race, culture, rights, and values--the anxieties that had helped to fuel the conservative politics of the post-civil-rights era. The symbols of the Bush campaign--Willie Horton, the ACLU, the death penalty, the Pledge of Allegiance, the flag--and rhetoric such as "no new taxes," the "L-word," and "Harvard boutique liberal" conjured up the criminal defendants'- and prisoners'-rights movements, black crime, permissive liberal elites, a revenue-hungry state, eroding traditional values, tattered patriotism, and declining American prestige.

Willie Horton represented, for crucial sectors of the electorate, the consequences of an aggressively expansive liberalism--a liberalism running up against majority public opinion, against traditional values, and, to a certain degree, against common sense. Horton came to stand for liberalism's blurring of legitimate goals, such as helping prisoners judged suitable for rehabilitation (prisoners, for example, without long records of violence), with the illegitimate goal, in the majority view, of "coddling" violent and dangerous criminals whom much of society judges irredeemable.

Republican strategists recognized that the furloughing of Willie Horton epitomized an evolution of the far-reaching rights movement, an evolution resented and disapproved of by significant numbers of voters. These voters saw crime as one of a number of social and moral problems aggravated by liberalism. The evolving rights movement

was seen as extending First Amendment privileges to hardcore pornography, as allowing welfare recipients to avoid responsibility for supporting their children, as fostering drug use, illegitimacy, homosexual promiscuity, and an AIDS epidemic. All these led, in turn, to demands on taxpayers to foot skyrocketing social-service and health-care bills.

"Crime" became a shorthand signal, to a crucial group of white voters, for broader issues of social disorder, evoking powerful ideas about authority, status, morality, self-control, and race. "On no other issue is the dividing line so clear, and on no other issue is my opponent's philosophy so completely at odds with mine, and I would say with the common-sense attitudes of the American people, than on the issue of crime," Bush declared in an October 7, 1988, campaign speech to police officers in Xenia, Ohio, adding,

There are some--and I would list my opponent among them--who have wandered far off the clear-cut path of common sense and have become lost in the thickets of liberal sociology. Just as when it comes to foreign policy, they always 'Blame America First,' when it comes to crime and criminals, they always seem to 'Blame Society First.'... [Criminal justice under Dukakis is] a 'Twilight Zone' world where prisoners' 'right of privacy' has more weight than the citizen's right to safety.

THE RACIAL CHASM

The divisive power of race and race-infused preoccupations with values, class, and social disorder endured throughout the 1980s, reverberating across the electorate. Differences of opinion between blacks and whites intensified over the decade. A 1989 voter study conducted by KRC Research and Consulting for Democrats For the 90's, a private organization affiliated with the Democratic Party, revealed the extent to which key white Democratic voters "take issue with the Democratic rhetoric of representing the 'middle class and the poor.' These [voters] perceive themselves to be neither rich nor poor, and they do not like being referred to in the same breath as 'the poor.' They describe themselves as 'working people.'" Black urban Democratic voters,

conversely, "feel that the country and the Democratic Party are increasingly racist and that the party cares little for their needs and interests."

Divisions between the races have emerged on a host of fronts. On the basic question of whether judges and courts treat whites and blacks even-handedly, 56 percent of white New Yorkers in a 1988 WCBS-New York Times poll said they believed that the system was fair and 27 percent said the system favored one race over another, with that 27 percent evenly split between those who saw black favoritism and those who saw white favoritism. Among black New Yorkers only 30 percent saw the system as fair, and 49 percent saw it as unfair, with the overwhelming majority of those who perceived unfairness seeing a bias in favor of whites.

Such highly controversial cases as the 1987 allegations of rape by Tawana Brawley and the 1984 shooting by the "subway vigilante" Bernhard Goetz of four black teenagers provoked sharply divergent views from blacks and from whites. After a grand jury determined in 1988 that Brawley had fabricated her story, 73 percent of white New Yorkers polled by WCBS-New York Times said she lied, while only 33 percent of blacks were prepared to make that judgment (18 percent said she told the truth, 14 percent said she didn't know what happened to her, and 35 percent were unwilling to express an opinion). In the case of Goetz, the WCBS-New York Times poll found in 1985 that the proportion of whites describing themselves as supportive of the shooting, relative to those who were critical, was 50-37, as compared with 23-59 among blacks. Whites felt that Goetz was innocent of attempted murder by a margin of 47-18 (with the rest undecided), while blacks said that he was guilty by a margin of 42-19. (Hispanics sided more with whites than with blacks, favoring innocence over guilt at 41-23.)

Underlying these differences in public opinion is a profound gulf between blacks and whites over the cause of contemporary differences between the races. In seeking to clarify these differences of opinion, Ron Walters, a black political scientist at Howard University, has argued that the fundamental issue in the contemporary politics of race is "Who is responsible for our condition?" He says, "Once you draw the line on that, you draw the line on a lot of other race-value issues. Whites see blacks as generally responsible for their own situation, which means that whites refuse to take responsibility. Blacks see it differently. They believe there ought to be a continuing

assumption of responsibility for their condition by the government, in addition to what they do for themselves. And therein lies a lot of the difference."

This racially loaded confrontation over the issue of responsibility, both historical and contemporary, is perhaps best illustrated by the views of the political analysts Roger Wilkins and Patrick Buchanan. Wilkins, a black professor of history at George Mason University and a well-known commentator who served as an assistant attorney general in the Johnson Administration and was an editorial writer for The New York Times and The Washington Post, has written,

The issue isn't guilt. It's responsibility. Any fair reading of history will find that since the mid-seventeenth century whites have oppressed some blacks so completely as to disfigure their humanity. Too many whites point to the debased state of black culture and institutions as proof of the inferiority of the blacks they have mangled....[The logical implication] is simple: black people simply need to pull up their socks. That idea is wrong and must be resisted....Like it or not, slavery, the damage from legalized oppression during the century that followed emancipation, and the racism that still infects the entire nation follow a direct line to ghetto life today.

On the other side, Buchanan, an Irish Catholic who was a ranking conservative strategist for the Nixon and Reagan administrations and remains a widely followed political columnist and television commentator of the hard right, has written,

Why did liberalism fail black America?
Because it was built on a myth, the myth of the Kerner Commission, that the last great impediment to equality in America was 'white racism.' That myth was rooted in one of the oldest of self-delusions: It is because you are rich that I am poor. My problems are your fault. You owe me!

There was a time when white racism did indeed block black progress in America, but by the time of the Kerner Commission ours

was a nation committed to racial justice....

The real root causes of the crisis in the underclass are twofold. First, the old character-forming, conscience-forming institutions--family, church, and school--have collapsed under relentless secular assault; second, as the internal constraints on behavior were lost among the black poor, the external barriers--police, prosecutors, and courts--were systematically undermined....

What the black poor need more than anything today is a dose of the truth. Slums are the products of the people who live there. Dignity and respect are not handed out like food stamps; they are earned and won....

The first step to progress, for any group, lies in the admission that its failures are, by and large, its own fault, that success can come only through its own efforts, that, while the well-intentioned outsider may help, he or she is no substitute for personal sacrifice.

CAN AMERICA AFFORD AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

The conflict represented by Wilkins and Buchanan is driven not only by a fundamental difference over values and responsibility but also by economic and demographic forces. These forces are helping to make the political struggle for public resources and benefits increasingly bitter and increasingly irreconcilable. In many respects these forces are working in tandem to make the process of incorporating new groups into the mainstream of American society

more difficult. They include the globalization of the economy, the growing disparity between the wages paid to the college-educated and the wages paid to those with a high school diploma or less, the drop in college entry by blacks, and the emergence of a suburban voting majority.

The globalization of the economy constitutes a fundamental attack on the mechanisms traditionally relied upon to integrate new untrained and poorly educated

groups into the mainstream of American life. Before the internationalization of manufacturing, policies and practices ranging from widespread political patronage to legislation creating the pro-union National Labor Relations Board forced the incorporation of immigrant groups into the work force.

The threat represented by overseas competition has thrust American companies into a battle for survival in which there is little or no room to accommodate the short-term costs of absorbing blacks and other previously excluded minority groups into the labor force. And while affirmative action performs for blacks and other minorities the same function that patronage performed for waves of immigrants from Ireland and southern Europe, it also imposes costs that place American companies at a disadvantage in international competition.

These costs lie at the core of the debate over the civil-rights bill of 1991. Although the issue of quotas has dominated public discussion of the civil-rights bill, the real battle is over legislating the precise cost to companies that affirmative-action programs will involve. In an attempt to overturn recent conservative rulings by the Supreme Court (now dominated by Republican appointees), the Democratic leadership of Congress has proposed legislation strictly limiting the use of ability tests and other hiring procedures with potentially discriminatory impact, even in the absence of discriminatory intent. If hiring or promotion procedures are found to have "adverse impact" on blacks--that is, if disproportionately more blacks (or other minorities) than whites are rejected--employers must demonstrate that such tests are essential for business operation and meet a stringent "business necessity" standard. The legislation would in effect overturn a 1989 Supreme Court decision, *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio*, that allowed companies to use ability tests and other hiring criteria that adversely affect blacks and Hispanics if such criteria met the far less stringent standard of "business justification." *Wards Cove* explicitly declared that "there is no requirement that the challenged practice be 'essential' or 'indispensable' to the employer's business." Such seemingly arcane and legalistic phrases as "business necessity" and "business justification" can have profound consequences. If, for example, companies were permitted to use scores on ability tests as a hiring criterion, it would at present be a major setback to the hiring of blacks and Hispanics--unless scores were adjusted for differences among whites, blacks, Hispanics, and other groups (a scoring process termed "within-group scoring," "within-

group adjustment," or "race-norming").

The importance of restricted ability testing for the employment prospects of blacks and Hispanics has been documented in two book-length studies, *Ability Testing* (1982) and *Fairness in Employment Testing* (1989), by the National Research Council. On almost all ability tests studied, the council found (without engaging the unresolved issue of causes), blacks scored substantially below whites, and Hispanics scored somewhere in between. One study found, for example, that on average, if hiring were done strictly on the basis of ability-test scores, an employer selecting from a pool of 100 whites and 100 blacks would take only three blacks in the first twenty-three applicants chosen, and only six blacks in the first thirty-six. The differences in test-score results are reduced, but remain substantial, for blacks and whites of similar income and education.

The contemporary conflict over affirmative action is rooted in the issue of test scores. Everywhere from college admissions to hiring for jobs, tests have become a primary instrument for determining personal status, income, and security. On one side of the debate it is argued that the unrestricted use of ability tests imposes an extraordinary burden on blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities; on the other that prohibiting ability testing imposes costs on the economy in terms of lost productivity and efficiency.

THE NEW SEGREGATION

While low-skill, entry-level jobs have moved overseas to low-wage countries, the domestic job market has changed in ways that work to enlarge, rather than to lessen, disparities in the incomes of whites and of blacks. The growing demand for college-educated workers and the decline in demand for low-skill manual workers have in recent years substantially changed wage patterns.

From 1975 to 1988 the average earnings of entry-level workers with college or more-advanced degrees rose from about 130 percent to about 180 percent of the earnings of workers with high school diplomas. This shift was inherently damaging to blacks: in 1988, 13.1 percent of blacks between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four had college degrees, as compared with 24.5 percent of whites.

Compounding this disparity is a second development: just

as the value of a college education has skyrocketed, the percentage of blacks between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four who go on to college and get a degree has fallen. From 1976 to 1988 the percentage of blacks aged eighteen to twenty-four enrolled in college fell from 22.6 to 21.1, while the percentage of whites rose from 27.1 to 31.3.

The effect of these two trends has been to undermine what was a powerful drive toward economic and educational equality between the races. In the ten years immediately following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the economy pushed the earnings of both blacks and whites who were in the work force steadily upward. There was a strong convergence of shared prosperity and growing racial equality. From 1963 to 1973 average weekly earnings for everyone grew from \$175.17 to \$198.35, in 1977 inflation-adjusted dollars. As wages rose for whites and blacks, income differentials were sharply reduced: from 1963 to 1977-1978 the difference between black and white wages dropped from the 45 percent range down to the 30 percent range, a drop of about one percentage point a year. For younger, well-educated workers the gap had almost disappeared by the mid-1970s.

Starting in the late 1970s and continuing into the early 1980s, however, the situation began to change radically. While the income of college graduates continued to rise, the income of high school graduates began to fall. At the same time that the so-called "college wage premium" rose, the wage levels for job categories that employ disproportionately more whites (professionals, managers, and sales personnel) grew substantially faster than wage levels for those categories employing disproportionate numbers of blacks (machine operatives and clerical, service, and household workers).

The result has been a striking shift in racial wage patterns. Starting at the end of the 1970s the convergence between the incomes of working blacks and whites--a convergence that had the potential in the long run to enlarge the economic common ground between the races--came to a halt. In the late 1970s black wages abruptly stopped catching up to white wages, with the differential stagnating at roughly 30 percent.

For a Democratic Party seeking to build a majority coalition aligning the interests of blacks and whites, this was a grave blow. The failure of the trend toward wage equality to continue has encouraged the conflict between

black and white world views, in which black gains are seen as a cost to whites, and white advantages are seen as a manifestation of racism.

RACE AND THE SUBURBS

Just as wage and education patterns are working to undermine what was a trend toward economic equality between the races, the dominant demographic trend in the nation--suburbanization--is working to intensify the geographic separation of the races, particularly of whites from poor blacks.

The 1992 election will be the first in which the suburban vote, as determined from U.S. Census data, will be an absolute majority of the total electorate. From 1968 to 1988 the percentage of the presidential vote cast in suburbs grew from 35.6 percent to 48.3 percent, and there will be a gain of at least two percent by 1992 under current trends.

Suburban growth will in all likelihood profoundly change national politics, and will further deepen schisms between the public-policy interests of the two races. Although opinion polls show increasing support for government expenditures on education, health, recreation, and a range of other desired public services, a growing percentage of white voters are discovering that they can become fiscal liberals at the local SUBURBAN level while remaining conservative about federal spending. These voters can satisfy their need for government services through increased local expenditures, guaranteeing the highest possible return to themselves on their tax dollars, while continuing to demand austerity at the federal level. Suburbanization has permitted whites to satisfy liberal ideals revolving around activist government while keeping to a minimum the number of blacks and poor people who share in government largesse.

For example, the residents of Gwinnett County, Georgia, which is one of the fastest-growing suburban jurisdictions in the United States, heavily Republican (76 percent for Bush), affluent, and predominantly white (93.6 percent)--have been willing to tax and spend on their own behalf as liberally as any Democrats. County voters have in recent years approved a special recreation tax; all school, library, and road bond issues; and a one percent local sales tax.

The accelerated growth of the suburbs has made it possible

for many Americans to pursue certain civic ideals (involvement in schools, cooperation in community endeavors, a willingness to support and to pay for public services) within a smaller universe, separate and apart from the consuming failure (crime, welfarism, decay) of the older cities.

If a part of the solution to the devastating problems of the underclass involves investment in public services, particularly in the public school systems of the nation's major cities, the growing division between city and suburb lessens white self-interest in making such an investment. In 1986 fully 27.5 percent of all black schoolchildren, and 30 percent of all Hispanic schoolchildren, were enrolled in the twenty-five largest central-city school districts. Only 3.3 percent of all white students were in these same twenty-five districts. In other words, 96.7 percent of white children are educated outside these decaying school systems.

Even within major cities there is a growing divergence of interest between blacks and whites. Many of the more affluent citizens in racially mixed cities are turning to private service providers, including independent and parochial schools. Private police and security services, proliferating private recreational clubs, and private transportation companies.

THE END OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY?

In political terms race clearly remains a republican trump card, while racial fissures within the Democratic Party leave it weakened and vulnerable.

On a broad strategic scale the Republican Party over the past two years has taken steps to capture the fairness issue and to defuse charges of Republican racism, initiating an aggressive drive to win the support of affluent blacks and even running, on occasion, fully competitive black candidates. Income trends in the black community suggest a reservoir of prospective Republican support: the income of the top fifth of black families has over the past two decades been growing at a significantly faster rate than the income of the top fifth of white families. Trends among the well-to-do of both races have led to increasing racial equality of income, in sharp contrast to trends among the least affluent blacks and whites: the bottom fifth of the black community is falling steadily further behind the

bottom fifth of the white community

Insofar as the Republican drive to win support among affluent middle-class blacks is successful, and insofar as the party is able to insulate itself from charges of racism, it will further isolate the national Democratic Party as the party of poor, underclass black America. The isolation of the Democratic Party continues a process damaging to the vitality of the American political system.

Fissures resulting from racial conflict, and fissures resulting from tensions over rights, culture, and values, separate the national Democratic Party from many of its former constituents. Such fissures have forced the party to increase its dependence on special interests in order to maintain its congressional majority.

Without the resource of plurality voter loyalty, Democratic members of the House of Representatives--the seemingly unshakable bastion of Democratic power in Washington--have come to rely increasingly on an essentially corrupt system of campaign finance, on the perquisites of incumbency, on pork-barrel spending, and on the gerrymandering of districts in order to thwart continuing demographic and ideological shifts favoring their opponents.

As recently as the mid-1970s the Democratic Party was able to portray itself as the party of political reform battling a Republican Party dominated by moneyed interests. Now Democrats in the House of Representatives are more dependent on institutionalized special-interest groups than are their Republican adversaries. In 1990 the majority--52.6 percent--of the campaign contributions received by Democratic incumbent House members running for re-election came from political-action committees, while the percentage of support from individual donors represented a steady decline, from 44.8 percent in 1984 to 38.0 percent in 1990. Republican House incumbents, in contrast, received 50.9 percent of their financial support from individuals in 1988, and 41.1 percent from PACs, in a pattern virtually the mirror image of the Democrats'. In 1988 not only did labor PACs follow tradition by giving far more to Democratic House incumbents (\$16.7 million) than to Republican incumbents (\$1.9 million), but corporate PACs--the contemporary version of "moneyed interests"--gave more money to Democratic House incumbents (\$15.7 million) than to their Republican counterparts (\$13.5 million). While helpful to incumbents in the short term, this kind of contribution

pattern weakens any claim the Democratic Party may make to provide popular representation.

The Democratic reliance on special interests in fact extends beyond Congress to a second party stronghold, the nation's major cities. The public's ability to direct essential services--most important, the public school system--has been lost in varying degrees to institutionalized bureaucracies. Within urban school systems faced with declining tax bases and lessened federal support, associations and unions representing teachers, principals, administrators, clerical staff, custodians, carpenters, and security guards have become politically influential in protecting their members' tenure while carefully limiting their responsibility for meeting the larger goal--that of producing well-educated students.

Democratic vulnerability on this terrain is perhaps nowhere better reflected than in Detroit--possibly the most Democratic municipality in the nation, a city with one of the nation's worst school systems and perhaps the worst delivery of public services. In recent years Detroit voters elected a black Republican school-board president and a black Republican city councilman. Both were elected on platforms of promises to break through bureaucratic ossification and revive competitive market forces, through parental choice in school assignments, through private alternatives to public services, and through the transfer of power and responsibility from administrators downtown to principals and teachers in the trenches.

The congressional wing of the Democratic Party has become locked into an alliance with the forces of reaction--with interests and bureaucracies conducting largely futile efforts to resist, among other things, the consequences of international economic change. The Democratic Party has, in many respects, discovered that survival depends on the creation of a congressional party entrusted by the people to look after parochial interests--from water projects to rice subsidies to highways to health care for the elderly. However, to the degree that presidential elections have become referenda on the nexus of social, moral, racial, and cultural issues in the broadest sense, the Democratic Party has in five of the past six elections been at a competitive disadvantage.

The losers in this process are not only the Democratic Party and liberalism but also the constituencies and alliances they are obliged to represent. The fracturing of the Democratic coalition has permitted the moral, social,

and economic ascendance of the affluent in a nation with a strong egalitarian tradition, and has permitted a diminution of economic reward and of social regard for those who simply work for a living, black and white. Democratic liberalism--the political ideology that helped to produce a strong labor movement, that extended basic rights to all citizens, and that has nurtured free political and artistic expression--has lost the capacity to represent effectively the allied interests of a biracial, cross-class coalition. Liberalism, discredited among key segments of the electorate, is no longer a powerful agent of constructive change. Instead, liberal values, policies, and allegiances have become a source of bitter conflict among groups that were once common beneficiaries of the progressive state.

The failures of Democratic liberalism pose a larger problem. With the decline of liberal hegemony, conservatism has gained control over national elections and, to a significant degree, over the national agenda. No matter what its claims, conservatism has served for much of the twentieth century as the political and philosophical arm of the affluent. Entrusting the economic interests of the poor and the working class to such a philosophy risks serious damage to both groups.

That conservatism represents the interests of the well-to-do is to be expected--and even respected--as part of the system of representation in American democracy. A far more threatening development is that as liberalism fails to provide effective challenge, the country will lack the dynamism that only a sustained and vibrant insurgency of those on the lower rungs can provide. Such an insurgency, legitimately claiming for its supporters an equal opportunity to participate and to compete and to gain a measure of justice, is critical, not only to the politics and the economics of the nation but also to the vitality of the broader culture and to democracy itself.

Over the past twenty-five years liberalism has avoided confronting, and learning from, the experience of voter rejection, as institutional power and a sequence of extraneous events--ranging from Watergate to the 1981-1982 recession--have worked to prop up the national Democratic Party. For the current cycle to reach closure, and for there to be a breakthrough in stagnant partisan competition, the Democratic Party may have either to suffer a full-scale domestic defeat, including (to deal in the extremes of possibility) loss of control of the Senate and the House, or at the very least to go through the kind of nadir--intraparty conflict, challenge to ideological

orthodoxy, in short, a form of civil war--experienced by the Republican Party and the right in the 1960s. The original strength of Democratic liberalism was its capacity to build majorities out of minorities--a strength that comes only from a real understanding of what it means to be out of power, from direct engagement in the struggle to build a majority, and from an understanding of what is worth fighting for in this struggle. Recapturing the ability to build a winning alliance requires learning the full meaning of defeat, and developing a conscious awareness of precisely what the electorate will support politically, what it will not, and when--if ever--something more important is at stake.

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