8 *Working in Reverse*

Reshaping the Democratic Party

> Two hundred summers ago, this Democratic Party was
> founded by the man whose burning pen fired the spirit
> of the American Revolution—who once argued we
> should overthrow our own government every 20 years
> to renew our freedom and keep pace with a changing
> world. In 1992, the party Thomas Jefferson founded
> invokes his spirit of revolution anew.
>
> —1992 Democratic Party Platform

HOW APPLICABLE IS THE THEORY of party image change beyond
the activities of the Republican Party? What happens when the Democratic Party tries to appear more racially conservative? Answering these
questions is the goal of chapter 8. While the preceding chapters have
focused primarily on the circumstances under which the Republican
Party can reshape its image with respect to race, there is no reason why
the same theoretical approach could not apply to the Democratic Party
as well.

Many of the same phenomena that impede the Republican Party's
ability to alter the way citizens view the party work the same way for
the Democratic Party. For some people, cosmetic changes will be
enough; for others, the bar for proving that the party has changed is set
much higher. Historically, when it comes to modifying their images
with respect to race, the two parties have appealed to a continuum of
voters, with blacks on one end and racially conservative whites in the
South at the other end. Given the current party images, the Republican Party has found it difficult to prove to African Americans that it is
now more racially inclusive. As chapter 5 demonstrated, the Republican Party had the most success with those voters located somewhere in
the middle of the continuum. I anticipate that the Democratic Party
will encounter the same difficulty when it tries to portray itself as more
racially conservative. Southern whites should be the most resistant to

Democratic attempts to reframe the party's racial symbolism. Southern whites left the Democratic Party because of its stance on racial issues. Not only is race a salient construct in the partisan alignments of southern whites relative to nonsouthern whites, but quite a bit of distance currently exists between southern whites and the Democratic Party on racial issues. Thus, the Democratic Party will find it difficult to meet the burden of proof when trying to appear more racially conservative among southern whites relative to other groups in society.

Bill Clinton: A "New" Democrat?

The idea that the Democratic Party would reshape its racial symbolism is not without precedent. The 1992 election cycle and the emergence of Bill Clinton as the Democratic presidential candidate marked the beginning of a new Democratic Party. In the weeks leading up to the 1992 Democratic National Convention in New York City, Clinton trailed both George H. W. Bush and H. Ross Perot. Thus, it was imperative to create an image of the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate that would appeal to voters in ways that past Democratic candidates had not.

Democratic strategists sought to paint Clinton as the "candidate of fundamental change" (Goldman et al. 1994, 679). Clinton was a Democrat who was anti–big government, pro–personal responsibility, and generally against "politics as usual," positions traditionally reserved for Republican candidates. He focused on bread-and-butter issues such as reinvigorating the economy and promised to put the needs of middle-class Americans first (Goldman et al. 1994).

The 1992 Democratic National Convention was part of the transformation of the Democratic Party. Ron Brown, the Democratic National Chairman in 1992, "was determined that this was going to be a different kind of convention" (Germond and Witcover 1993, 336). According to Germond and Witcover (1993), Brown carefully orchestrated a convention that would maximize the momentum needed to continue through Election Day:

> [T]he convention offered a program designed to send the clear message that the Democratic Party of 1992 was a different party from what it had been, and its nominee truly "a different kind of Democrat," independent of the constituency groups—the "special interests," according to the Republicans—and committed to middle-class Americans worried about their jobs and health care. There

were all the usual Democratic touches of political correctness; one night the benediction was offered in English and then in Navajo. But the first priority clearly was projecting an image that would not repel independents and Reagan Democrats watching in their homes across the nation. (342)

Table 12 illustrates African Americans' presence in the 1992 Democratic National Convention program. At least since 1988, African Americans have had a greater presence at Democratic conventions than at Republican conventions. In any given year, the number of black delegates attending Democratic conventions has been at least six times the number attending Republican conventions. Blacks constituted between 18 and 23 percent of delegates at Democratic National Conventions from 1988 to 2004, while the percentage of African American delegates ranged between 3 and 7 percent at Republican National Conventions over that period.

A slight decrease occurred in African Americans' presence at the 1992 Democratic convention, from 962 four years earlier to 771; the number of black speakers also decreased, from 36 in 1988 to 27 in 1992 and 19 in 1996. Although he was among the few blacks allowed to give a speech during the 1992 convention, Jesse Jackson complained that Clinton was trying to distance himself from African Americans (Germond and Witcover 1993, 339). Although the number of blacks who addressed the convention decreased in 1996, the number of black delegates returned to approximately 20 percent, a figure that remained constant in 2000.[1] By 2004, the number of African Ameri-

TABLE 12. African American Presence at Democratic National Conventions

	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Delegates	962	771	908	872	871
	(23.1%)	(17.9%)	(21.0%)	(20.1%)	(20.1%)
Speakers	36	27	19	4	57
	(16.2%)	(16.3%)	(9.0%)	(16.7%)	(20.5%)
Musical entertainers	0	1	2		9
	(0.0%)	(50.0%)	(66.7%)		(47.4%)

Source: Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1988, 1992, 1996; Democratic National Committee; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; C-SPAN Archives.

1. The number of black speakers in 2000 is a low estimate. At the time these figures were compiled, the Democratic National Committee had not yet assembled a complete list of convention attendees.

can speakers had reached 57, exceeding the pre-Clinton level, while the convention included 871 black delegates and 9 black musical entertainers.

Racial issues were not very prominent in the Democratic Party platform during this sixteen-year period. The number of paragraphs devoted to race and racial issues in the Democratic platform was comparable to that in the Republican platform. In recent presidential election years, however, race has figured more notably. In 1988 only one paragraph was devoted to racism, a number that increased to 9 in 2000 before falling again to 6 in 2004. The discussion of diversity also expanded in 2000 but returned to its 1996 level in 2004.

Other issues that rose in salience during this period included education, crime, and welfare. In 1988, only seven paragraphs discussed education. In 1996, 2000, and 2004, however, no fewer than 25 paragraphs were devoted to education. Welfare also ascended in prominence in the 1990s before all but disappearing by 2004, a development that is consistent with the scope of the welfare reform debate that occurred during the same period. Crime as an issue also experienced the same rise and fall in importance from 1988 to 2004. Prior to 1992, fewer than 10 paragraphs were devoted to crime in any Democratic platform. In 1996 and 2000, this number jumped to 23 and 22, respectively. By 2004, however, crime was no longer a prime issue.

Regardless of importance, however, the Democratic Party's positions on racial issues have remained the same. Table 13 summarizes the Democratic Party's platform on racial issues. From 1988 to 2004, the Democratic Party has supported affirmative action: its 2004 platform language on the subject reads, "We support affirmative action to redress discrimination and to achieve the diversity from which all Americans benefit," capturing the Democratic Party's sentiment on affirmative action in all five years that I examine. Likewise, the Democratic Party consistently condemned racism and any discrimination based on race, gender, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. Like the Republican Party, the Democrats celebrated U.S. diversity, but the Democratic Party platform included more detailed statements about how the party would protect the rights of minority groups. For example, the Democratic Party took stands against environment racism, against the rash of African American church bombings in the 1990s, against racial profiling, and in favor of the adoption of an Equal Rights Amendment.

The notable change to the 1992 Democratic Party platform was not to the party's issue positions per se but to some of the more rhetorical statements about personal responsibility and unresponsive government. For example, the Democratic Party posited that

> government must once again make responsibility an instrument of national purpose. Our future as a nation depends upon the daily assumption of personal responsibility by millions of Americans from all walks of life—for the religious faiths they follow, the ethics they practice, the values they instill, and the pride they take in their work. (Democratic National Convention 1992)

The 1992 Democratic Party Platform also promised to empower the poor by moving them "away from subsistence and dependence and toward work, family and personal initiative and responsibility."

Much of this rhetoric was featured during Clinton's acceptance speech, in which he vowed to "end welfare as we know it." Furthermore, Clinton criticized President George H. W. Bush's record on crime, claiming that he "talked a lot about drugs, but [had not] helped people on the front line to wage that war on drugs and crime" (Clinton 1992). Clinton promised to pick up where Bush fell short. Observers of the 1992 convention contended that "there was nothing subtle about [Clinton's] appeal to the political center" (Germond and Witcover 1993, 346). Clinton's policy initiatives would prove to be less conservative than the ones that would emerge out of a majority Republican Congress in the mid-1990s (Bane and Ellwood 1994; Danziger and Gottschalk 1995). On their face, however, excerpts of Clinton's speech could have easily been mistaken for a speech delivered at the Republican National Convention.

Clinton's advisers were well aware of the pitfalls of moving too far to the right. At around the time of the 1992 Georgia primary, senior campaign adviser Stan Greenberg warned the Clinton camp against enacting the southern strategy:

> The campaign will have to make a strategic judgment about the anti-liberal message. Clinton's support rises from 45–51 in the white community when he is anti-liberal, but that is balanced in part by slippage in the black community, from 25 down to 19 percent. . . . On balance, the anti-liberal theme only marginally enhances Clinton's candidacy; other additions will make more of a

TABLE 13. Democratic Platform on Racial Issues

	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
Racism	• Believes equal access to government services should not be denied on the basis of race.	• Condemns anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia, bigotry, and negative stereotyping of all kinds.	• Vows to continue to lead the fight to end discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. • Deplores the recent wave of burnings that has targeted African American churches in the South. • Vows to renew efforts to stamp out hatred of every kind.	• Believes that there is a chasm created by income disparity, discrimination by race and gender, and the abandonment of our inner cities. • Vows to continue to lead the fight to end discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. • Believes growing racial segregation of our schools and neighborhoods must be combated. • Supports a vision of an America healed of hatreds and misunderstanding. • Supports creation of a commission of distinguished scholars and civic	• Vows to fight racial and ethnic health care disparities. • Believes all patriotic Americans should be able to serve in the armed forces without discrimination. • Believes racial and religious profiling is wrong.

Diversity				
• Honors the nation's multicultural heritage.	• Takes special pride in our country's emergence as the world's largest and most successful multiethnic, multiracial republic. • Pledges to help all Americans understand	leaders to examine the history of slavery, discrimination, and exclusion. • Supports increased funding for civil rights enforcement. • Recognizes new forms of discrimination, such as environmental injustices and predatory lending practices. • Vows to fight for full funding and full staffing of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other civil rights enforcement agencies. • Opposes language-based discrimination in all its forms.	• Believes that America is uniquely suited to lead the world into the twenty-first century because of its great diversity. • Believes it is possible to draw strength	• Embraces diversity. • Believes diversity of views is a source of strength, not a sign of weakness. • Recognizes that tolerance is a virtue. • Believes America's	• Rejoices in diversity. • Believes all Americans benefit from diversity. • Supports measures to ensure diversity, competition, and localism in media ownership.

TABLE 13.—*Continued*

	1988	1992	1996	2000	2004
		the diversity of the culture. • Affirms that immigrants have contributed to the American tapestry.	from both diversity and constant values. • Believes the Democratic Party is a party of inclusion and respects the conscience of all Americans on the capital punishment issue.	diversity is expanding yet there is still wide-spread evidence of persistent discrimination. • Believes in celebrating diversity and in focusing on strengthening common American values. • Believes American schools must be funded to handle the diverse student body. • Believes pursuing excellence means including a diverse administration.	• Views diversity of views as a source of strength.
Affirmative action	• Believes the lingering effects of past discrimination should be eliminated by affirmative action, including goals, timetables, and procurement set-asides.	• Supports affirmative action.	• Believes in mending it, not ending it. • Supports affirmative action that is improved and promotes opportunity but does not accidentally hold others back in the process.	• Strongly opposed to rolling back affirmative action programs. • Believes in continuing to expand opportunities for everyone who wants to achieve.	• Supports affirmative action to redress discrimination and to achieve the diversity from which all Americans benefit.

Minorities			
• Seeks to recruit minority teachers. • Supports bilingual education and historically black and Hispanic institutions. • Believes the voting rights of all minorities should be protected. • Resists English-only pressure groups. • Supports the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment. • Believes reproductive rights should be ensured regardless of ability to pay. • Believes treaty obligations with Native Americans should be enforced. • Pledges that women and minorities should have full and equal access to elective office and party endorsement. • Believes in the return of federally held foreclosed lands to minorities.	• Believes the voting rights of all minorities should be protected. • Resists English-only pressure groups. • Supports the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment. • Vows aggressively to prosecute hate crimes. • Pledges to deal with other nations in such a way that Americans of any origin do not become scapegoats or victims of foreign policy disputes. • Believes treaty obligations with Native Americans should be enforced. • Believes reproductive rights should be ensured regardless of ability to pay.	• Deplores those who use the need to stop illegal immigration as a pretext for discrimination. • Strongly opposes divisive efforts like English-only legislation. • Committed to strengthening the government-to-government relationship between the federal government and Indian and Alaskan native tribal governments. • Supports an Equal Rights Amendment.	• Vows to end Republican Senate delays in the Senate that have kept qualified nominees, especially women and minorities, waiting for a Senate vote. • Committed to equal treatment of all service members and believes all patriotic Americans should be allowed to serve their country without discrimination, persecution, or violence.	• Supports more minority students entering the sciences. • Vows to bring environmental justice to low-income, rural, and minority communities using federal resources to improve public health and spur economic development by cleaning up polluted sites.

Source: Democratic Party Platforms, 1988–2004.

difference without costing Clinton in the black community. (Gold-man et al. 1994, 625)

In the end, the Democratic Party's move to the middle paid off. Clinton continued to focus primarily on the middle-class and on those moderate voters who had defected to the Republican Party during the Reagan-Bush administration. He also gained the support of nearly 85 percent of black voters. As a result, Clinton gained a 20 percentage point lead over Bush in the postconvention period (Goldman et al. 1994, 286) and won the presidency in 1992 and reelection in 1996.

Reclaiming the Democratic Party's Conservative Roots

Ideally, I would examine what impact the Democratic Party's attempt to co-opt Republican-owned issues in 1992 had on perceptions of the Democratic Party's image with respect to race. Adequate data from this period, however, were not available. In the absence of such data, I re-created a contrived instance where the Democratic Party tried to alter its racial symbolism in 2004. To explore the conditions that facil-itated the Democratic Party's ability to reshape citizens' perceptions of its image, I employed the 2005 Party Image Study, which exposed subjects to a question-wording experiment in which they read about the Democratic Party reaching out to Republican-leaning voters. As with the experiment described in chapter 7, participants in the study were required to answer the following question: "How much do you think the Democratic Party has changed over the last few years?" Before answering this question, some subjects read a brief paragraph that gave a fictitious account of the 2004 Democratic National Con-vention. One paragraph described a race-neutral version of the con-vention that described the Democratic Party as attempting to reach out to conservative voters. Others read a racialized version of the con-vention that described the Democratic Party as reaching out to con-servative voters by distancing itself from African Americans. In the control condition, participants read no paragraph about the conven-tion. (See the appendix for exact question wording.) After answering the experimental question, subjects were asked how well they thought the Democratic Party reached out to blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities. Responses were coded 1 if subjects believed the Demo-cratic Party did a good job, 0 if the party did a bad job, and .5 if the Democratic Party did neither a good nor a bad job.

Figure 19 presents the mean placement of the Democratic Party on the racial symbolism dimension by experimental treatment group. Overall, when subjects read about the Democratic Party reaching out to Republican-leaning voters, perceptions of the Democratic Party's racial symbolism became more negative. In the control condition, the mean placement of the Democratic Party was .7. As might be expected, absent any information that suggests otherwise, people associated the Democratic Party with positive racial symbolism. This is consistent with the findings presented in chapter 2 that in contemporary American politics, the Democratic Party is the party considered racially liberal. Nevertheless, when exposed to a description of the 2004 Democratic National Convention that described the party as reaching out to Republican-leaning voters, the mean placement of the Democratic Party on the racial symbolism scale decreased in both the race-neutral and the racialized conditions. The average racial symbolism score was .53 in the race-neutral condition and .52 in the racialized condition. A difference-of-means test indicated that both of these scores differed significantly from the control condition.

A closer examination of the response to the experimental treatments showed that race played a moderating role. Blacks in the control condition gave the Democratic Party an average racial symbolism score of .76. This placement decreased by 26 percentage points in the race-neutral condition and 23 percentage points in the racialized condition. Further, a *t*-test revealed that both of these differences were statistically significant. These results suggest that blacks resented the Democratic Party attempts to reach out to Republican-leaning voters, regardless of whether the Democratic Party distanced itself from African Americans. Blacks' perceptions of the Democratic Party's image with respect to race went from positive to neutral.

Whites' perceptions of the Democratic Party, in contrast, differed from the control condition only when they read the racialized version of the 2004 Democratic National Convention. In the control condition, whites' placement of the Democratic Party on the racial symbolism dimension was .68, a positive score. Although whites in the race-neutral condition gave the Democratic Party a mean racial symbolism score of .59, this difference was not statistically significant. When exposed to the racialized version of the experimental wording question, however, the Democratic Party's average placement on the racial symbolism item among whites was .56, a statistically significant differ-
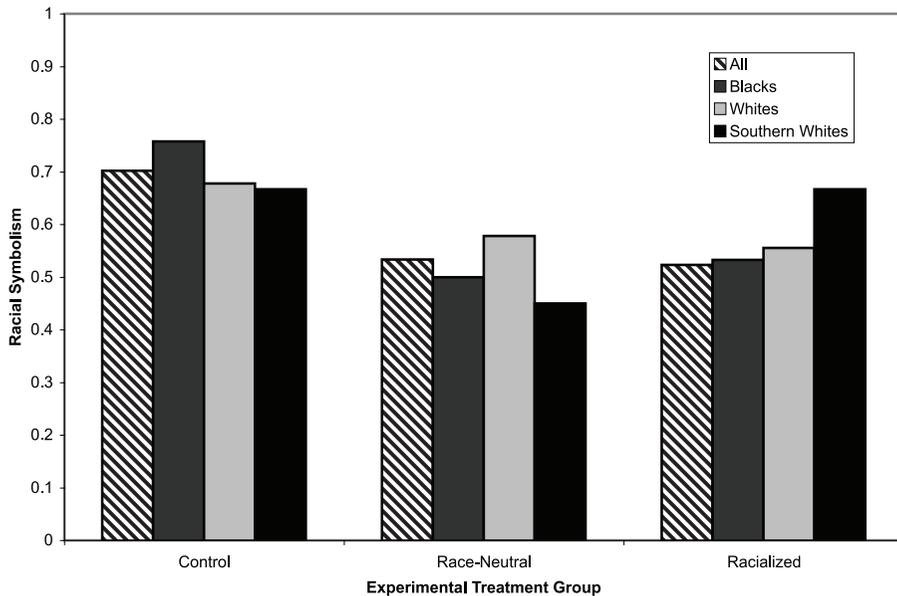
Fig. 19.   Perceptions of the Democratic Party's racial symbolism. (Data from 2005 Party Image Study.)

ence of 12 percentage points. Like their black counterparts, whites in this condition indicated that, on average, the Democratic Party did neither a good job nor a bad job of reaching out to minorities.

Throughout this book, I have discussed the tension political parties have experienced when trying to recruit both black and southern white voters. These two groups have had conflicting interests and thus have found it difficult to coexist in sustainable political coalitions. Consequently, the Democratic Party, which was once the party of the Solid South, is now the party perceived as more racially inclusive. Moreover, the Democratic presidential candidates in both 2000 and 2004 failed to win any of the southern states despite winning more than 90 percent of the black vote. Thus, when the Democratic Party proves to the electorate that it is more racially conservative, southern whites are expected to be most resistant to this appeal.

Table 14 shows why such might be the case. With respect to racial issues, particularly affirmative action, southern whites were more likely than nonsouthern whites to believe that affirmative action was extremely important. While affirmative action never reached the same

level of importance as it did among African Americans, southern whites were 5 percentage points more likely than nonsouthern whites to indicate that this issue was extremely important. At the same time, southern whites were more likely than both blacks and nonsouthern whites to see a difference between themselves and the Democratic Party on this issue. Ninety percent of African Americans and 59 percent of nonsouthern whites saw no difference between themselves and the Democratic Party on the issue of affirmative action; in contrast, only 46 percent of southern whites saw no difference. Whereas fewer than 10 percent of blacks and 37 percent of nonsouthern whites were more conservative than the Democratic Party, 50 percent of southern whites were more conservative than the Democratic Party on affirmative action.[2] Given the relative importance of racial issues coupled with the distance between southern whites and the Democratic Party on these issues, I expected members of that group to be the most resistant to a Democratic attempt to appear more racially conservative by distancing itself from blacks.

The results presented in figure 19 confirm this expectation. Southern whites in the control condition placed the Democratic Party at .67, indicating that they believed that the party did a good job of reaching out to minorities. In the race-neutral condition, this score decreased to

TABLE 14. Importance of and Placement on Affirmative Action, by Race and Region

	Importance of Affirmative Action	
	Percentage	N
African Americans	51.0	25
Non-southern whites	9.1	35
Southern whites	14.2	20

	Placement on Affirmative Action Relative to the Democratic Party			
	No Difference		More Conservative	
	Percentage	N	Percentage	N
African Americans	90.2	37	9.8	4
Nonsouthern whites	58.7	186	36.6	116
Southern whites	46.1	59	50.0	64

Source: 2002 American National Election Study.

2. The differences observed between southern whites and nonsouthern whites are statistically significant at the $p < .10$ level (one-tailed test).

.45, a statistically significant difference. Reading that the Democratic Party was reaching out to Republican-leaning voters apparently convinced southern whites that the party no longer had positive racial symbolism. The racialized condition, however, yielded no similar change in the Democratic Party's mean placement on the racial symbolism item. In this condition, the Democratic Party's average placement was .67, the same as in the control condition.

Conclusion

As is the case when the Republican Party tries to appear more racially liberal, when the Democratic Party attempts to appear racially conservative, some people will accept the changes while others will not. In general, perceptions of the Democratic Party's racial symbolism become negative when people read that the party is reaching out to Republican-leaning voters. Intuitively, whites' pictures of the Democratic Party with respect to race changed only in the racialized condition, when they read that the party was trying to distance itself from African Americans. This finding makes sense, considering that this experimental manipulation explicitly described the Democratic Party's relationship with blacks. Because the race-neutral condition omitted the information about the Democratic Party distancing itself from blacks, people would not be expected to connect the fictitious information about the 2004 Democratic National Convention to the party's racial symbolism.

The exception to whites' reactions to the Democratic Party's attempt to reshape its image occurred among southerners. Just as blacks were most resistant to the Republican Party's appeals, southern whites were least accepting of Democratic appeals when it came to race. Without any information other than the fact that the Democratic Party was trying to distance itself from blacks in 2004, southern whites were not convinced that the party was more racially conservative. When it comes to altering Democratic Party images among this group, the threshold for change is set much higher.

Blacks' party images, in contrast, were affected by both experimental manipulations. The results presented in this chapter suggest that blacks are particularly sensitive to the Democratic Party becoming too conservative. When blacks read about the Democratic Party reaching out to Republican-leaning voters, even absent information regarding the party distancing itself from African American voters, blacks no

longer believed that the Democratic Party did a good job of reaching out to minorities. This finding identifies an important potential problem associated with the Democratic Party trying to modify its image with respect to race: in so doing, the party runs the risk of alienating African American voters. Although I do not further explore this possibility here, exposure to the experimental treatments also led to a decrease in blacks' support for John Kerry, the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate. Whereas the experimental treatments had no impact on whites' evaluation of Kerry in general, exposure to the racialized treatments led to a modest boost in support for Kerry among southern whites.

Although having the Democratic Party become too conservative may not lead blacks to defect to the Republican Party, such a change could demobilize black voters. Either situation, however, could be detrimental to the Democratic Party. In 2004, African Americans constituted between 9 percent of Kerry's vote share (California) and 62 percent (South Carolina) (Bositis 2004, 5). Without the support of African American voters, Democratic presidential candidates would fail to reach the majority needed to win key electoral votes. In the short run, appealing to Republican-leaning voters would not yield the net gain in votes needed to win a presidential election, since the party would be unlikely to pick up southern white voters to replace the lost black voters. Nevertheless, the results presented in chapter 7 suggest that a long-term repeated effort may succeed in redefining the Democratic Party as the party of the South. In the interim, however, it is likely that the Democratic Party will remain the party perceived to be better at representing minority interests.