

## 2 *Party Politics and the Racial Divide*

I recognize the Republican party as the sheet anchor of the colored man's political hopes and the ark of his safety.

—Frederick Douglass, August 15, 1888

George Bush doesn't care about black people.

—Kanye West, September 2, 2005

WHEN ASSESSING THE malleability of party images, it is essential to examine how crystallized the party's reputation is along particular dimensions. Further, it is equally important to recognize how the party built that reputation to assess the feasibility of counteracting it. The presumption is that political parties consciously engage in activities that contribute to the formation of the public's perceptions of the parties. Yet the parties' actions are often taken for granted.

Research on party identification indicates that although party identification remains quite stable over time (A. Campbell et al 1960; Converse 1964; Converse and Markus 1979), it does experience short-term deviations at both the individual (e.g., Allsop and Weisberg 1988) and aggregate (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989) levels. If only for a short period of time, voters may find something appealing about a party that they had not in previous elections, causing them to upset their current partisan loyalties. Although such deviations have been explained in terms of emerging candidates (Rapoport 1997), issues (Carmines and Stimson 1989), or national political and economic circumstances (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1989), this body of work has neglected to look at the activities of the parties themselves. One might ask (borrowing a phrase from Aldrich 1995), Why parties? Or more specifically, why would it be important to look at political parties in explaining short-term deviations in partisan alignments?

One of the many functions of political parties is to gain and/or maintain electoral success. In so doing, political parties seek to strengthen existing partisan loyalties while attracting new supporters. This means making themselves more attractive to groups that formerly found the parties uninviting. Therefore, it is imperative to identify what parties have done to induce changes in the way they have been perceived.

With respect to race, the two major parties' reputations have not remained constant over time. The perceived ability to handle race has shifted so much so that the party that was once racially conservative is now the more racially liberal party, and vice versa. For example, Frederick Douglass believed that the Republican Party was the political party more amenable to the African American quest for political incorporation, seeing it as the "party of freedom and progress" (Platt 1989). Judging by support for the Republican Party during the first eighty years of its existence, most blacks believed the same. How, then, did we get to the point where rapper Kanye West exclaims to the American public that Republican president George W. Bush does not care about African Americans and where fewer than 10 percent of blacks support Republican presidential candidates in any given election? In particular, what historical events contributed to the massive shift in perceptions of the Republican Party? Moreover, how did the Democratic Party become a more attractive alternative?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions. First, I discuss the historic and contemporary role of political parties in U.S. democracy. Second, I reveal how the two major parties have created a racial divide in U.S. politics. Finally, I use this historical context to provide a backdrop for understanding the potential motivation behind and the impact of the 2000 Republican National Convention.

### *The American Political Party System: A Brief Overview*

The term *party* is derived from "part" and is meant to refer to a subset of "some unified whole" (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 3). Within the context of western politics, "party" represents "division, conflict, [and] opposition within a body politic" (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 3). Eldersveld (1964) defines a party as "a structural system seeking to translate or convert (or be converted by) social and economic interests into political power directly" (6). He argues that parties consist "of a set of

socio-economic interests groping for political recognition, articulation, and control” (6). To this definition, Ware (1995) adds that power is usually sought by attempting to occupy positions in government (5).

While parties may carry with them a negative connotation, citizens and scholars alike render parties a necessary evil. In a representative democracy, in which the people do not have direct control over governmental affairs, institutions must link citizens to government and provide a means of holding rulers accountable to the governed. Ranney (1962) argues that “the popular control over government which is the essence of democracy can best be established by the popular choice between and control over alternate responsible parties; for only such parties can provide coherent, unified sets of rulers who will assume collective responsibility to the people for the manner in which government is carried on” (12). Schattschneider (1942) contends that political parties have played a major role in the development of democratic government and that “modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties” (1). In general, those holding democratic principles believe that “the political party is a specialized subsystem of group action indispensable for the working of the political system” (Eldersveld 1964, 18). As Eldersveld (1964) argues, “The public recognizes and accepts the party battle as central to government in a democratic society” (19).

For the most part, U.S. politics functions within a two-party system. While third parties periodically arise and exert power over government and politics, the election of the president has been dominated by the Democratic and Republican Parties (Key 1942, 252).<sup>1</sup> Duverger (1963) argues that “the two-party system seems to correspond to the nature of things, that is to say that political choice usually takes the form of a choice between two alternatives” (215). Stated another way, the two-party system essentially presents the electorate with an either/or choice—between the party in power and a single alternative (see Key 1942; Schattschneider 1942).

The structure and function of American parties have evolved over time. The first two parties, the Federalists and the Jeffersonian Repub-

1. While most third or fourth parties rarely receive more than 1 or 2 percent of the vote in a presidential election, examples of more successful attempts can be seen in 1912, 1924, 1948, 1968, 1980, and 1992.

licans, were “organized first and most importantly to solve social choice problems” (Aldrich 1995, 294). Elites created the parties to facilitate the development of U.S. political institutions (Aldrich 1995, 295). The Constitution was adopted under the presidential rule of the Federalist Party (Key 1942). The Republican Party dominated throughout this era until it factionalized during the 1820s (Eldersveld and Walton 2000).

Key (1942) argues that Andrew Jackson’s 1828 election marked the beginning of the contemporary party system (266). The expansion of the franchise coupled with an increase in the number of elections under Jacksonian reforms allowed parties to become an ideal vessel for contesting elections during what Ware (1995) calls the party era (the mid-1830s to mid-1890s) (315). With the rise of the present-day Republican Party in 1856, the two major parties vying for political power became the Democrats and the Republicans. From this time until about 1960, the American parties (Jacksonian Democrats, Whigs, and then Republicans) existed as mass parties whose primary function was electoral mobilization (Aldrich 1995, 294). Aldrich (1995) maintains that “the mass party was created for, and was critical to, the extension of democratic practices in nineteenth-century America” (295).

The Populist Party temporarily disturbed the Democratic-Republican dominance of the two-party system. Populist candidates won gubernatorial races in Kansas, North Dakota, and Colorado. In the 1892 presidential election, the Populist candidate won approximately one million popular votes and 22 electoral votes. But by 1896, the Populists no longer posed a viable threat to the two-party system because the Democratic Party in the South had co-opted the Populist Party (Eldersveld and Walton 2000).

The Republican Party dominated presidential politics from 1896 until 1912, “when Roosevelt’s Bull Moose Progressive movement split the party and led to two national presidential victories for the Democrats with Woodrow Wilson” (Eldersveld and Walton 2000, 54). Although Roosevelt received only eight Electoral College votes, he won 27.5 percent of the popular vote. Like the Populist movement, however, the Bull Moose Progressive movement was short-lived, and the two-party system was restored in 1920.

Since the 1920s, three viable threats to the two-party system have arisen. First, Robert M. La Follette’s Progressives won 17 percent of

the popular vote in 1924. Second, George Wallace captured 13 percent of the popular vote in 1968. Third, H. Ross Perot received 19 percent of the popular vote in 1992. However, the two-party system has remained stable since 1932.

Historical changes and technological advances made the mass party form obsolete in the twentieth-century. This gave rise to a third party form, described by Aldrich (1995) as the party in service, which organizes and facilitates the electoral and the governing process for party members (294). This contemporary party form is the “candidate-centered party designed by and meant to serve its office seekers and its new brand of benefit seekers, and it was intended to transform the conditions of party government into a reasonable approximation of that party government in practice” (296). Eldersveld and Walton (2000) contend that this era has been marked by the rise of the use of mass media in campaigns, an increased importance on the role of interest groups, and ideological conflict within party competition. Key (1942) notes, however, that while the names of the parties have changed over the years, the parties’ coalitions have remained fairly stable (263).

While parties by necessity adapt to changing political environments, they continuously perform three major functions in American politics. First, parties help to organize the way people think about issues and candidates. Party labels serve as heuristics and allow people to make political decisions with minimal information. Second, parties organize elections. Party primaries, caucuses, and conventions select which candidates will run for which offices. The Democratic and Republican National Committees prioritize campaigns based on viability and then help fund candidates accordingly. Finally, parties help to organize government. Party leadership within government determines committee assignments, procedures, and schedules.

Consequently, political parties’ actions can have profound effects on the electorate. For example, Eldersveld (1964) found that “party effort is associated with increased voting turnout, strengthening party identifications and loyalties, and developing attitudes favorable to working for the party operation” (541). He also found that contact with parties led to greater interest in national, domestic, and local affairs (542). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), who also found that party mobilization efforts significantly affect voter turnout, explained the phenomenon:

Political participation arises from the interaction of citizens and political mobilizers. Few people participate spontaneously in politics. Participation, instead, results when groups, political parties, and activists persuade citizens to take part. . . . In mobilizing citizens for political action, political leaders intend only their own advantage. Seeking only to win elections, pass bills, amend rulings, or influence policies, they target appeals selectively and time them strategically. Nevertheless, in doing so, they extend public involvement in political decision-making. They bring people into politics at crucial times in the process. Their strategic choices impart a distinctive political logic to political participation. (37)

Thus, parties are vehicles for both interest articulation and aggregation (Kitschelt 1989, 47).

In summary, political parties, by definition and conception, provide the vehicle through which societal groups have their policy preferences actualized. In a representative democracy, parties connect voters to elected officials. Although the structure of the U.S. party system has evolved, the parties' goals have remained the same. Parties organize government, organize the way citizens think about government and their elected officials, and facilitate the electoral process both for candidates and for voters. In so doing, political parties maintain electoral coalitions that have remained stable for more than 100 years. At the same time, the parties further exploit divisions already present in American society. In the next section, I discuss one of the more enduring cleavages sustained by political parties in their quest to wield political power.

*The Southern Strategy: The Creation of the  
Racial Divide in Party Politics*

Whether explicit or hidden behind code words and symbols, race has played and continues to play a central role in the U.S. party system. Since early in the country's history, foreign observers from Alexis de Tocqueville (1835) to Gunnar Myrdal (1944) have recognized the racial tension that has existed in the American populace. Race remains one of this country's political hot buttons. Because of this enduring racial tension, party elites have included race when determining which strategies to employ, which policies to adopt, and which constituencies to pursue. As a result, race has helped shape the existing party coalitions and has affected how the public perceives political parties.

In attempting to assemble winning electoral coalitions, parties must

mobilize their supporters and simultaneously demobilize the supporters of their opponents. This task becomes easier when those constituencies can be placed in opposition to one another. One of the most effective and widely used tactics involves exploiting racial divisions in the American polity by racializing campaign rhetoric.<sup>2</sup> Injecting race into campaign communication has typically been manipulated for two purposes: (1) to attract blacks into a party's coalition or (2) to attract racially conservative whites in the South. Both of the major parties have used each of these tactics at different times (Walton 1975; Frymer 1999).

Early in American history, political parties learned that they could repeatedly exploit the competing interests of blacks and southern whites when seeking public office. First, the politics of the South is marred by racial conflict. As Key (1950) wrote,

In its grand outlines the politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro. It is at times interpreted as a politics of cotton, as a politics of free trade, as a politics of agrarian poverty, or as a politics of planter and plutocrat. Although such interpretations have a superficial validity, in the last analysis the major peculiarities of southern politics go back to the Negro. Whatever phase of the southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro. (5)

Second, with respect to their political behavior, blacks and southerners behave as distinct electoral blocs. In other words, African Americans and the South constitute two groups that have fairly cohesive voting patterns.<sup>3</sup> These two factors led to the development of the "southern strategy."<sup>4</sup>

2. While scholars have noted the need to define race and racial politics beyond the black-white paradigm (Marable 1995), race here denotes the divide between African Americans and whites. Race is confined to this narrow definition primarily because the black-white cleavage has remained distinct and persistent throughout the history of U.S. party politics. Its origins and maintenance are well documented, providing a good beginning point from which this type of analysis can be expanded in the future.

3. The origins of the cohesiveness between these two groups can be explained by the identification of a shared history within each group. For example, Key argues that the Civil War and Reconstruction brought unity among the Confederate states. Prior to the war, southern states exercised much more independence. Similarly, scholars such as Dawson (1994), Tate (1993), and McClerking (2001) argue that the political unity among African Americans is derived from exposure to institutions that reinforce the existence of a common history among African Americans.

4. O'Reilly (1995) defines the term *southern strategy* as "regionless code for 'white over black'" (8). This strategy is rooted in the assumption that electoral success depends largely on political elites' ability to frame elections in terms of black and white, pinning African

Yet leading scholars in the field of political science rarely acknowledge race's contribution to the formation and perpetuation of the American party system. For example, Schattschneider (1956) recounts the political histories of the early Democratic and Republican Parties but omits a discussion of race's role in the formation of the modern-day two-party system. He recognizes the importance of the business elite within the ranks of the Republican Party and even acknowledges the tension between the business community and the Solid South. He discusses the Republican Party's difficulties in establishing itself in the South and attributes those problems to the party's business faction. In actuality, the bigger contention was between the existence of African Americans in the Republican Party and the unwillingness of southern whites to coexist in a party with blacks.

Sundquist (1983) discusses the role of race in the realignment of the American party system during the slavery and civil rights movement periods. Sundquist's treatment of race falls short in that he ignores the role of race between these two eras and from the aftermath of the civil rights movement to the present. Similarly, Milkis (1999) "probe[s] the philosophical and historical roots of America's struggle to create democracy on a grand scale" (8) but almost completely ignores African Americans' political struggle. He discusses race only briefly and superficially in a section on slavery and the civil rights movement.

In an examination of the formation of political party systems in the United States, Burnham (1967) highlights the presence of three enduring cleavages. First, he discusses the clash between the South and the Northeast, arguing that "the more Americans of the New England and Southern subcultures came to learn about each others' social values and political goals, the more pronounced their hostility toward each other grew" (283). Second, he discusses the tension between "community" and "society" (283). A cleavage that fell along regional lines, the battle between community and society essentially constituted a conflict between the working class and the business elites. Finally, Burnham acknowledges an ethnic-cultural conflict, but he restricts his discussion to European immigrants. Like others, Burnham does not

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American interests and the interests of whites in opposition to one another (10). This definition is consistent with that of Aistrup and others who define the southern strategy in terms of a Republican strategy utilized in the past four decades "to transform the Republicans' reputation as the party of Lincoln, Yankees, and carpetbaggers into the party that protects white interests" (1996, 8).

discuss the conflict between blacks and white liberals and racial conservatives primarily in the South.

In sum, with the exception of Key, most seminal works on political parties in the U.S. context ignore or minimize the role of race in the formation of the political system. Scholars who do acknowledge the role of race center their discussions on key historical moments such as slavery, Reconstruction, and the civil rights movement, arguing (incorrectly) that race was not an issue in the eras before, after, and/or between these time periods.

In actuality, the history of what contemporary scholars call the “southern strategy” of electoral politics can be traced back to the founding of the Republican Party in 1854. Walton (1975) describes political parties as

electoral devices which must appeal to the general electorate for the right to administer the government of the state. Before a political party can gain control of the government, it must, through numerous appeals, form a coalition of voters from as many sectors of the population as possible. (1)

In 1854, the Republican Party had begun seeking new groups to incorporate into its electoral coalition. Because many of the new Republicans were antislavery advocates who had already received black support as part of the Liberty and Free Soldiers Party, “an appeal to the Free Blacks who could vote, was a natural way to enlarge the ranks of the party” (Walton 1975, 4).

During Reconstruction (from about 1868 to 1876), blacks achieved many political successes within the ranks of the Republican Party. For example, during its 1884 convention, the party appointed John R. Lynch, a black state legislator from Mississippi, as the convention’s temporary chair (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 21). Moreover, 13 percent of the 1892 Republican National Convention’s delegates were black (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 21). As Republicans, African Americans “went to the Senate and the House of Representatives, to governors’ mansions, courts, state departments of education, and ambassadorial posts, to aldermen, judgeships, and to numerous positions of power throughout the South and the North” (Walton 1972, 87). During this period, Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson (1989) argue, black political incorporation into the Republican Party reached levels unmatched by either party until the 1960s (21).

The relationship between blacks and the Republican Party began to deteriorate as a result of the Compromise of 1877, which enabled Republican Rutherford B. Hayes to assume the presidency after a dispute between southern Democrats and northern Republicans over contested votes from Louisiana, South Carolina, Florida, and Oregon. In exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, the Democratic Party conceded the election (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 21–22).

Walton (1972) argues that the election of 1876 signaled to Republican leaders that the party needed to integrate southern whites into the GOP's ranks (89). Prior to the end of Reconstruction, the South was overwhelmingly Democratic. Without the presence of federal troops overseeing southern political institutions, including elections, the southern states adopted instruments to disenfranchise blacks, thereby depriving the Republican Party of its black constituents and leaving it politically impotent in the region (Key 1950). Consequently, Walton (1972) notes, the Republican Party made a concerted effort in subsequent presidential elections to pursue policies that would attract southern white voters. Many of these policies, however, came at the expense of black Republicans (88). For example, several black Republicans in leadership positions were forced to vacate their posts and were replaced by whites (Walton 1972, 90).

Yet the South remained very resistant to the Republican Party. First, southern whites still regarded it as the party of blacks. Second, Key adds, two-party competition would have diluted the South's electoral strength and thus its dominance of national politics. Key (1950) argues that the South's solidarity was necessary so that "the largest possible bloc could be mobilized to resist any national move toward interference with southern authority to deal with the race question as was desired locally" (8–9). To maintain the status quo, many southern states adopted suffrage restrictions. Although the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibited the denial of franchise on the basis of color, Democrats in the South found ways around the amendment by complicating voting procedures so that people with little to no education found it difficult to cast ballots. Instruments such as the Australian ballot, literacy tests, and multiple box laws disenfranchised between 8 and 18 percent of whites and between 39 and 61 percent of blacks in the South (Kousser 1974, 55). Other tools of disenfranchisement included the poll tax and the white primary. By restricting suf-

frage, southern Democrats not only controlled opposition from the Populist and Republican Parties but also prohibited blacks from gaining political power.<sup>5</sup>

While the South was resisting building a relationship with the Republican Party, African Americans sustained their relationship with the GOP for a number of reasons. First, many blacks still felt a loyalty toward the party of Lincoln. Second, a small but influential number of black politicians were still drawn to party positions and federal jobs. Most importantly, however, was the fact that blacks really had no place else to go (Sherman 1973, 2). Political independence was ruled out as an option because “not many were willing to follow a course that seemed so uncertain in leadership and unpromising in results” (Sherman 1973, 3). Because of its “white supremacy principles and policies as well as the violent actions and terrorism,” the Democratic Party remained an unattractive alternative (Walton 1975, 39). Thus, blacks had no option but to remain loyal to a “political organization that was increasingly uninterested in their welfare and that took their support largely for granted” (Sherman 1973, 3).

But blacks’ steadfast allegiance to the Republican Party collided with the pursuit of southern white Republicans and the purging of the Republican Party of blacks. This led to a polarization within the Republican Party ranks between lily-white Republicans and black-and-tan Republican factions (Walton 1975; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989). Lily-white Republicanism was an attempt to make the Republican Party more appealing to the South (Key 1950). The term *lily-white* referred not only to the faction’s racial composition but also to its philosophy of white supremacy and racial segregation (Walton 1975, 45). Black-and-tans have been described as “satellite black political organizations [attempting] to operate as Republican organs at the local level [to] gain recognition and acceptance by the national Republican party” (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 24). These organizations fought for African American political equality and unlike lily-white Republicans did not endorse segregation (Walton 1975, 45–46).

For years, these factions competed with each other for Republican Party recognition and patronage, but the black-and-tan factions eventually could no longer survive. “Lack of motivation and a variety of set-

5. For a more in-depth discussion of voting restrictions and their effects, see Kousser 1974; Key 1950.

backs” caused some groups to dissolve (Walton 1975, 139). Black-and-tan Republicans also faced aggressive opposition from lily-white factions. In North Carolina and Alabama, for example, black Republicans were prohibited from attending Republican conventions (Woodward 1951). According to Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson, a few black-and-tan factions existed in Texas and Louisiana until the 1920s, but most disappeared after Reconstruction, when most blacks were disenfranchised (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 24). After disenfranchisement, black-and-tans relied on presidential elections and national conventions for state patronage (Walton 1975, 140). President Herbert Hoover and others’ sustained support for lily-white Republicanism killed the black-and-tan Republican factions (Walton 1972, 93).

Contrary to the observations of many analysts and scholars, blacks did not move from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party en masse. The shift to the Democratic Party began at the local level, both in the North and in the South. As early as 1876, southern blacks reportedly supported Democratic candidates and independent Democratic movements. Furthermore, between 1890 and 1915, several southern black Democrats were elected to local offices (Walton 1972, 103). In the North, small black Democratic organizations existed as early as 1868 (Walton 1972, 104). Walton (1972) notes, however, that although blacks supported the Democratic Party at the local and even state levels, they generally continued to vote Republican at the national level (105).

The shift toward the Democratic Party at the national level began around 1900. Two movements, the Negro National Democratic League and the Niagara Movement, endorsed Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan (Walton 1972, 111–12). Groups of northern and southern blacks later organized Democratic clubs to support Woodrow Wilson in the 1912 presidential election (Walton 1972, 112). Nevertheless, “just as Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation cemented blacks to the Republican party, so Roosevelt and the New Deal became the forces that finally cemented blacks to the Democratic party” (Walton 1972, 116).

Scholars differ on how well blacks fared under the Roosevelt administration. Bunche (1939) argued that the New Deal fell “far short of meeting adequately the minimal needs of the Negro” (3). While the agencies created to eradicate the effects of the depression only modestly helped blacks, FDR created a “black cabinet”—a group of black

policy advisers assembled to aid in the creation of programs aimed at the black community. Roosevelt also issued Executive Order 8802, establishing the Fair Employment Practice Commission and banning government contractors from racial discrimination (Walton 1972, 116). But Weiss (1983) argues that the black cabinet had little policy impact (139). Moreover, FDR refused to commit to racial justice issues. Because of the potential political fallout that would be connected with interfering with states' rights and the "southern way of life," Roosevelt did little in the way of antilynching legislation (Weiss 1983, 119). In fact, the Roosevelt administration failed to enact any civil rights legislation even though more than 150 bills were introduced during Roosevelt's tenure as president (Tate 1993, 51). Nevertheless, Weiss (1983) contends that "meager though the Negro's share may have been, it came in the form of tangible benefits that touched the lives of millions of black Americans" (298).

In any event, the New Deal marked the beginning of the formation of a new electoral coalition for the Democratic Party. Still in the coalition was the Solid South: according to Lamis (1999), "Within the southern one-party system, pro-New Deal and anti-New Deal factions emerged, but both sides were firmly wedded to the Democratic party and what it stood for in racial terms" (399). The New Deal coalition also consisted of whites in larger cities, labor, and African Americans in the North. The incorporation of African Americans proved especially important during the 1944 presidential election, when blacks provided Roosevelt's margin of victory in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Illinois, and New Jersey (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 36).

FDR's death raised the question of whether black support for the Democratic Party was candidate-specific or would endure through other administrations. At this point, blacks' alliance with the Democratic Party was economically related rather than characterized by "any new Negro devotion to the Democratic Party" (Bunche 1939, 10). Scholars agree that Truman's commitment to civil rights in conjunction with the legacy of Roosevelt's economic policies kept blacks loyal to the Democratic Party, at least until 1956 (see Walton 1972; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989). This phenomenon, coupled with growing dissatisfaction with the Republican Party's pursuit of southern white support, resulted in the African American allegiance to the Democratic Party that typifies contemporary partisan coalitions

(Bunche 1939). Nevertheless, in 1948, African Americans again played a critical role in electing a Democrat to the presidency (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989).

For a brief period between 1956 and 1960, blacks defected, although not overwhelmingly, to the Republican Party in support of Eisenhower. The decision to support Eisenhower likely resulted from his enforcement of school desegregation. By 1964, however, blacks returned to the Democratic Party in full force “when it became clear to the nation that the Democrats would support black interests and civil rights more than the Republican party” (Dawson 1994, 106).

This transition upset the Democratic Party’s white southern constituents. For example, Aistrup (1996) describes the Dixiecrat revolt led by South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond, who ran for president in 1948. Thurmond had considerable success in four southern states, and according to Aistrup (1996),

[t]his event was significant for two reasons. First, it was the initial split between Northerners and Southerners within the Democratic party over the issue of race. Second, it was a harbinger of increasing numbers of Southern white voters supporting non-Democratic candidates for president. (6)

Throughout the 1950s, however, southerners found it difficult to disconnect the Republican Party from its image as the party of Lincoln. Republican president Dwight Eisenhower and a Republican-dominated U.S. Supreme Court supported, even if reluctantly, the fight against school segregation. Aistrup (1996) argues, however, that the Republican Party eventually reshaped its image among southern voters by welcoming “segregationist candidates under their party umbrella” (6). Arguably, however, the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back was a southern Democratic president’s ardent support for civil rights reforms. Even as he signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act, however, Lyndon Johnson said that the Democratic Party had “just lost the South for a generation” (Walton and Smith 2000, 206).

Nixon sought to exploit the strained relationship between southern whites and the Democratic Party for electoral gain in the 1960 presidential election. Specifically, Nixon “hoped to woo Southern support so ardently that there might once again develop a solid political South—but this time committed as firmly to the Republican party as it once had been to the Democratic Party” (Murphy and Gulliver 1971,

3). In his pursuit, Nixon devoted much of his resources to educating the American public about the Democratic Party's "love for and infatuation with blacks" (O'Reilly 1995, 285). Nixon essentially sought to categorize the Democratic Party as the party of blacks, much as his own party had been labeled a hundred years earlier.

Although Nixon did not win the 1960 presidential election, his strategy inspired a transformation of the Republican Party at the national level. The Republican National Committee began more openly to support segregationist candidates and to promote states' rights and racially conservative policies. By 1964, Barry Goldwater's presidential candidacy solidified the Republican Party's new image as the party of the South (Aistrup 1996). Goldwater did not win, but his candidacy marked the first time in decades that five southern states had voted for a Republican presidential candidate (Bullock and Rozell 1998).

After his defeat in the 1960 presidential election and a subsequent defeat in the 1962 California gubernatorial election, Nixon took a brief hiatus from politics. He reentered the political arena in 1968, winning the Republican Party's presidential nomination (Kalk 2001). Nixon resurrected the southern strategy: scholars agree that the "bargain of Atlanta" sealed the relationship between Nixon and the South (O'Reilly 1995; Aistrup 1996; Kalk 2001). The agreement resulted from a May 31, 1968, meeting among Nixon, Thurmond, and a number of other southern leaders. As Kalk (2001) explains,

Nixon met with southern state GOP chairmen upon his arrival. The following day, the candidate spoke with Thurmond and [Texas Senator John] Tower. In return for the group's support for the Republican nomination, the former vice president made several specific promises. For one, he pledged to stop the accelerating federal commitment to racial integration by easing pressure on southern school boards and discouraging plans to bus students in order to achieve racial balance. Second, Nixon promised to nominate conservative "strict constructionists" to the Supreme Court. A Nixon administration would regularly consult southern GOP leaders, the candidate further pledged, which gave Senator Thurmond the distinct impression that there would be a "southern veto" over White House policies that affected the section. (82)

Although the third-party candidate, Alabama governor George C. Wallace, minimized Nixon's margin of victory, the Republican won

the 1968 presidential election. Nixon received 32 percent of the southern vote and carried five southern states—Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and South Carolina (Scher 1997).

Once in office, Nixon kept his campaign promises. Although he had no control over the legislation enacted under the Johnson administration or past Supreme Court rulings, he did control the implementation of civil rights legislation and future judicial rulings. Using the Justice Department, Nixon delayed the enforcement of school desegregation and even introduced a “freedom of choice” amendment to the Constitution that would have allowed students to remain in local schools and would have prevented children from being bused to schools outside of their neighborhoods (Kalk 2001, 90).

Nixon’s implementation of the southern strategy while in office proved successful; in the 1972 presidential election, Nixon won every southern state by an overwhelming majority, receiving more than 70 percent of the vote in Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina and more than 60 percent of the vote in Texas and Louisiana (Kalk 2001). Nixon had accomplished his goal, creating a solid political South aligned with the Republican Party.

But the alliance Nixon created temporarily broke apart during the 1976 presidential election, when the South returned to the Democratic Party as a consequence of the combination of the Watergate scandal and the presence of Jimmy Carter, the first presidential candidate from the Deep South in more than a century (Bullock and Rozell 1998). Carter won all of the southern states except Virginia. At the same time, however, the African American votes garnered by Carter “proved to be the margin of victory in twelve states” (O’Reilly 1995, 336). This balance between southern whites and blacks in both the North and South resulted partly from Carter’s refusal to exploit the division between these two groups to the same extent that his predecessors had (O’Reilly 1995).

Carter’s balancing act toppled during the 1980 election, when his opponent, Republican nominee Ronald Reagan, resurrected the southern strategy. In a campaign speech at the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi, Reagan announced, “I believe in states’ rights.” As O’Reilly (1995) notes, “The men who murdered Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman sixteen summers earlier believed in states’ rights, too, and there was no mistaking Reagan’s intent”

(350).<sup>6</sup> Reagan's campaign speeches also featured stories about "strapping young bucks," a term previously used to describe black males at slave auctions, "who used food stamps to purchase T-bone steaks and booze or cigarettes" (O'Reilly 1995, 351).

Like Nixon and others, Reagan successfully used the southern strategy. Scher (1997) contends that

Southerners loved the 1980 Republican nominee, conservative Ronald Reagan, former governor of California. The verities he espoused and homilies he gave were dear to the hearts of southern traditionalists: strong families, simple religious fundamentalism, . . . old fashioned patriotism, a powerful military, a hard-line anti-communist foreign policy, conservative economic policies, and maintenance of traditional social institutions and roles. To the new middle-class white southerner and the transplanted white-collar northerner or midwesterner now living in a new southern city or suburb, he promised relief, an end to inflation and budget deficits, and policies geared to help them. For southern blue-collar industrial workers and farmers, he promised an "America first" policy and better times ahead. (108-9)

Reagan's use of such racial code words as *states' rights* and *strapping young bucks* was enough to win back the South. While Carter won 95 percent of the southern black vote, he garnered only 41 percent of the overall vote in the region. In contrast, Reagan won 51 percent of the popular vote and won every state in the Deep South except for Georgia, Carter's home state (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 51).

But Reagan's southern strategy reached beyond the South. By the 1980s, the entire white working and middle classes had shifted their allegiances to the Republican Party (O'Reilly 1995, 361). Perpetuated by Reagan and later by George H. W. Bush, the modern-day southern strategy extended past the Mason-Dixon Line to appeal to northern voters burdened by having to support "welfare queens" and "street criminals" with their hard-earned tax dollars (O'Reilly 1995). In fact, the Reagan rhetoric surrounding tax issues became as racialized as the

6. Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman were civil rights workers who were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan in Philadelphia, Mississippi, during the summer of 1964.

debate over school desegregation and affirmative action (Edsall and Edsall 1991). This strategy sought to exploit racial divisions among working- and middle-class whites who had previously been loyal to the Democratic Party. Among these groups of whites, racial interests displaced economic interests. The Reagan Democrats no longer saw their economic position as a reason to politically coalesce with blacks. Rather, their position put them in direct competition with African Americans (O'Reilly 1995, 365–66). By the end of his two terms in office, Reagan was extremely popular among whites. The majority of blacks, however, believed Reagan was a racist (Carter 1996, 68).

The best illustration of the Reagan race strategy occurred during the campaign of his successor, George H. W. Bush, in his 1988 campaign against Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. During this campaign, Republican strategists devised the Willie Horton ad. William J. Horton Jr. was convicted of first-degree murder in 1974. While released as part of the Massachusetts' criminal furlough program in 1987, Horton kidnapped Clifford Barnes and his fiancée, Angela Miller, and assaulted Barnes and raped Miller. The Bush campaign convinced the American electorate that Dukakis bore the blame for Horton's crime rampage (O'Reilly 1995; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001). Bush subsequently won the election by a landslide, in part because of this strategy (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Mendelberg 2001).

Ironically, the Republican Party did not completely abandon any hope of getting at least a fraction of the black vote. In fact, after the 1988 presidential election, Lee Atwater, Republican strategist and mastermind behind the Willie Horton ad, stated that “[a]ny Republican who can capture 20 percent of the black vote, while holding the GOP base, won't even have to campaign in 1992: The election will be his” (O'Reilly 1995, 389).

Even before Atwater, Republican strategists had recognized the benefits of breaking up the black bloc vote and thereby cutting into the Democratic Party's margin of victory. In 1977, while serving as chair of the Republican National Committee, Bill Brock hired African American political consulting firm Wright-McNeill and Associates to develop an outreach plan to attract blacks to the Republican Party. The resulting strategy was “to change the party's negative image while leaving its basic philosophy intact” (Robinson 1982, 220). Brock expended substantial resources on recruiting and funding black candi-

dates, helping white candidates become more appealing to minorities and otherwise generally reshaping the party's image (Robinson 1982, 230). As a result, many blacks supported state and local Republican candidates in the 1980 elections. At the national level, however, Reagan's conservative platform discounted him among blacks as a viable alternative to Carter—95 percent of African Americans voted for Carter (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989, 51).

After the 1988 presidential election, the Republican Party again attempted to break apart the black voting bloc. Bush appointed Atwater as chair of the Republican National Committee, and in this role, Atwater sought to double the percentage of blacks voting for Bush from 10 to 20 percent by attracting black middle-class voters. Atwater believed that the growing U.S. black middle class was "good for [the Republican Party], the party of the middle class. [The GOP is] looking to attract the baby-boom blacks, the more educated, more open-minded blacks" (O'Reilly 1995, 389). As part of this strategy, Atwater got himself appointed to Howard University's board of trustees, but he was forced to resign when the school's students took over the administration building in protest (O'Reilly 1995). The Howard University example was prophetic—Bush failed to increase his support among black voters, even those who self-identified as conservatives (Bolce, DeMaio, and Muzzio 1993). Nevertheless, these two attempts to attract black voters provided the precedent for a subsequent strategy that will be discussed later.

Bill Clinton was arguably the presidential candidate most skilled at simultaneously pursuing white voters in the Deep South and maintaining the black vote. Clinton visited black churches and other black venues as well as white middle America, where he promised welfare reform and touted himself as a new type of Democrat who was tough on crime. In both the 1992 and 1996 elections, Clinton won six of the twelve southern states while benefiting from more than 80 percent of the black vote (Walton and Smith 2003, 160).

### *Enacting the Southern Strategy*

In pursuing the southern strategy—or any strategy, for that matter—many tactics may be used to attract and maintain constituencies, including proposed legislation, executive and legislative appointments, and executive orders. But parties and their candidates do not always have these tools at their disposal. Moreover, the resulting public

debate surrounding the use of these tools may confuse the electorate—multiple and sometimes competing interests are often involved. An easier and more simplistic way to convey messages to the electorate is through a more symbolic form of communication. As Popkin (1994) explains, “To communicate their opinions rapidly, candidates and their strategists search for concrete symbols that serve as information shortcuts, as cognitive placeholders and focal points, to their position on larger abstract problems” (102). Similarly, Elder and Cobb (1983) argue that symbols “represent the focal objects of political attitudes and opinions and serve to define the procedural and substantive concerns of government” (9).

In addition to being efficient, symbolic communication serves another important function. If political elites try to signal change by waffling on policy positions, they will “confuse supporters, divide the party base, and make a candidate look like an unprincipled opportunist—and politicians who flip-flop on issues are among the most popular targets of attack in American politics” (Popkin 1994, 107). The use of symbolic communication enables political actors to avoid such criticism by allowing them to maintain their traditional policy positions and ideologies. At the same time, they can use symbols that convey ideals and information that can signal change without changing their core.

Over the years, political parties, strategists, and candidates have developed creative means of symbolic communication. One of the most prominent methods of communicating is through the personal endorsement. Election after election, candidates and parties seek out recognizable figures to associate with the electoral enterprise. This type of communication takes its form in the presence of a supporting cast of speakers and entertainers at political conventions, at rallies, or on the campaign trail. Through this form of communication, voters can judge political candidates and parties by the company they keep and do not keep. In other words, the images associated with a party convey to citizens information about what the party stands for.

Though often very subtle, this form of communication resonates strongly with the electorate and can have both positive and negative consequences, sometimes unintended. For example, Presidents Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt caught political heat from white constituents for having dinner with African Americans. In response, “Cleveland denied it and Roosevelt, who invited Booker T. Washington to the White House for dinner, promised never to do it again”

(Walton and Smith 2000, 204). In spite of his apology, Roosevelt was called “the worst enemy of his race of any white man who has ever occupied so high a place in this republic” (Woodward 1951, 465).

Jimmy Carter gained support from black voters by aligning himself with several prominent black leaders, including Atlanta mayor Andrew Young and Martin Luther King Sr. These leaders helped Carter disseminate information to black voters about his commitment to civil rights. For example, Carter relied on black leaders to convey to black voters that if elected governor, he would hang a picture of Martin Luther King Jr. in the Georgia Capitol (Popkin 1994, 160). As Popkin (1994) argues, “This two-step media flow of information mediated by reliable elites provided effective cues to black communities throughout the country” (160).

Ronald Reagan’s pursuit of a southern strategy began well before he ran for president in 1980. In 1964, Reagan was a vocal supporter of Senator Barry Goldwater’s presidential candidacy (Popkin 1994, 167). As a result, Reagan built a foundation of Republican supporters seeking a more conservative leader who would oppose many of the policies adopted under the New Deal (Popkin 1994, 167). This early association with Goldwater helped legitimize Reagan as a conservative who would protect working Americans from having their tax dollars filtered into government-funded social programs.

Democratic president Bill Clinton provides the most clever and multifaceted example of this strategy. For example,

Other than appearances in black churches . . . and a spot on Arsenio Hall’s television show, where he was cool enough . . . to play sax in shades, Clinton emphasized race as a nonissue from the primaries forward. He kept black advisers in the background, made no promises, accepted the nomination at a Democratic National Convention that had two hundred fewer black delegates than in 1988, and timed his rare appearances at black events so that they would be too late for the evening news or overshadowed by other events. (O’Reilly 1995, 409–10)

To further distance himself from African Americans—at least in the eyes of non-African Americans<sup>7</sup>—Clinton posed for several pho-

7. Bill Clinton was one of the most popular presidents among African Americans. Author Toni Morrison, in an essay printed in the *New Yorker*, even referred to him as the first black American president.

tographs with Georgia senator Sam Nunn at the Stone Mountain Correctional facility. The photographs, taken during the height of the 1992 presidential primary season, featured a backdrop of several black convicts. Political analysts posited that this photo op was part of a preemptive strike against any Michael Dukakis/Willie Horton–like attacks (O’Reilly 1995).

Finally, the 2000 presidential candidacy of Al Gore illustrates the importance of striking a balance between pursuing the support of blacks and pursuing the support of southern whites. Like Clinton, Gore courted the black vote by attending African American churches and appearing at other black events. Gore did so, however, at the expense of southern voters. Not only did the George W. Bush camp outspend Gore in terms of television advertising money in the South, the Republican Party’s presidential and vice presidential candidates spent more time making personal appearances in southern states (Shaw 2006). Consequently, Gore lost every southern state, including his home state of Tennessee. Failure to court the southern states was one of the factors contributing to his defeat. Another factor—the Republican Party’s ability to strike a balance between attracting southern white voters and black voters—will be discussed later in this chapter.

*The 2000 Republican National Convention:  
Rethinking the Southern Strategy*

The southern strategy, which proved convenient and easy to employ in the past, has become increasingly difficult to sustain. With the changing times, the expression of racially conservative attitudes has become politically incorrect. As Mendelberg (2001) explains, “White Americans recognize that it is no longer acceptable to seem like a racist, not for elites or for citizens. . . . Most people want to avoid not only the public perception that they are racist, but also thinking of themselves as racist” (7). At one point, political elites modified their strategies and utilized more subtle tactics to exploit the division between blacks and racially conservative whites. By color-coding the victims and villains associated with seemingly nonracial public policies such as welfare (Gilens 1999), taxes (Edsall and Edsall 1991), and crime (Valentino 1999; Mendelberg 2001), political elites have evoked racial attitudes and polarized the electorate.

But, Mendelberg (2001) argues, political elites are constrained. Racial symbols must be disguised to give a prima facie appearance of

equality and fairness. If their intent to evoke negative racial stereotypes is made explicit, thereby violating the norm of equality, elites risk alienating voters (8). This is true for the Republican and Democratic Parties, both of which have previously played the race card.

For the modern-day Republican Party, the challenge has been to continue to appeal to racial conservatives without appearing overtly racist by tapping into political supporters' latent fears and resentment without appearing to do so. The GOP has done so by relying on racial code words and images to maintain and increase its white electoral base (Frymer 1999). Campaign strategies such as the 1988 Willie Horton ad appeared to have struck this balance. But while evidence suggests that using implicit racial appeals succeeded in the short run, Democratic and African American leaders uncovered the strategy, possibly costing Republicans part of their more liberal electoral base in the long run. For example, while its conservative stance on race over the past forty years solidified the South into the Republican winning electoral coalition, this conservatism "turned away many in the party's longtime traditional base of support"—that is, moderate and liberal Republicans in the northern states (Speel 1998, 205). As Speel explains, the realignment of the northern states "was caused in large part by disaffection with the increased conservatism and increased role of the South in the Republican party, and possibly less by any great attraction to Democratic policies and presidential candidates. For that reason, many voters in traditionally moderate and liberal Republican areas may be voting regularly for Democratic presidential candidates without feeling any strong attachments to the [Democratic] party" (199). Nevertheless, Speel explains that "by 1992, enough moderate and liberal Republicans were abandoning the party to hand Bush the first defeat for an incumbent Republican president since 1928" (205).

Bill Clinton's success in contrast to the relative unpopularity of his opponents—George H. W. Bush in 1992 and Bob Dole in 1996—left the Republican Party searching for a new strategy. The Republican Party had to attract enough new voters to form a winning coalition without alienating its current constituents. Doing so meant proving to voters that the Republican Party was no longer racially insensitive, even though it still maintained its conservative policy positions. The solution: add a new face to the race card. Instead of trying to evoke negative racial stereotypes, the Republican Party had to appeal to feelings of racial egalitarianism. In other words, the Republican Party had to

reframe its activities to portray the party as racially inclusive and diverse. This party was the same on the inside but now had a new face.

An ideal setting for deploying this strategy was the 2000 Republican National Convention. The presence of religious conservatives at the 1992 convention and the Religious Right's alleged influence on that year's platform alienated many moderate and liberal voters. "Coupled with uncompromising speeches by Pat Robertson . . . and by Marilyn Quayle . . . the story line that emerged from the 1992 convention was that the Republicans were angry, small-minded and exclusive" (Cannon, Dubose, and Reid 2003, 158). Although the Republican Party tried to soften its image by featuring Colin Powell and several minority politicians at the 1996 convention, many voters believed that Bob Dole and his party remained too rigid and insensitive.

In 2000, the Republican Party again attempted this strategy, but on a grander scale. Karl Rove, George W. Bush's chief political strategist, "was convinced that Bush's policy prescriptions, particularly on taxes, would do fine with the electorate, even though they were not popular with the press. But this would hold true only as long as voters didn't think of Bush and the Republican Party as harshly conservative" (Cannon, Dubose, and Reid 2003, 157–58). Thus, one of the prominent themes of the 2000 Republican National Convention was the party's inclusiveness and diversity. Although this thread ran throughout the 2000 election cycle, the message of inclusion was loudest during the convention. Republicans had

a new determination to control things tightly, and a heightened appreciation for the purely symbolic nature of modern political conventions. With the media waiting to pounce on the Republicans for any sign of small-mindedness, intolerance or generally Neanderthal attitudes, the convention speakers had to have perfect pitch. The right demographics would help, too. (159–60)

To illustrate the implementation of this strategy, table 2 presents a comparison of Republican National Conventions since 1988. In general, the presence of African Americans was greatly increased in 2000. For example, the number of black convention delegates increased from 52 in 1996 to 85 in 2000. In addition, the 2000 Republican convention in Philadelphia featured a dramatic increase in the number of black speakers, including important appearances by Condoleezza Rice and Powell (Bositis 2000, 2). Moreover, the number of blacks featured

during prime time increased greatly, from 4 in 1996 to 11 in 2000. In fact, more black speakers were featured on the first night of the 2000 convention than had appeared during all four days of the 1996 convention.

To add to the convention spectacle, the lineup featured a number of prominent entertainers, including recording artists Brian McKnight and Harold Melvin's Blue Notes, professional wrestler the Rock, and singer Chaka Kahn. In 2000, the Republican Party used images of African Americans to convey to the public that the party had become diverse and inclusive.

Almost as obvious as who was present at the convention was who was missing. Hidden from convention spectators were the more conservative actors in the Republican Party such as Pat Buchanan, who spoke during the 1996 convention, and former speaker of the house Newt Gingrich.

The Republicans made very few substantive changes to their positions on traditionally racial issues such as affirmative action or social spending but rather preserved their conservative policy platform. An examination of the prevalence of race and racial issues in the Republican platform from 1988 to 2000 shows that, overall, the Republican Party generally devoted between one and four paragraphs to issues such as diversity, racism, minority interests, and capital punishment. The number of paragraphs devoted to each of these issues remained constant over time—for example, two paragraphs on affirmative action in each of the four years. Two paragraphs were devoted to racism in 1988; from 1992 to 2000, however, the GOP devoted only one para-

**TABLE 2. African American Presence at Republican National Conventions**

	1988	1992	1996	2000
Delegates	61 (2.7%)	107 (5.0%)	52 (2.6%)	85 (4.1%)
Speakers	10 (9.7%)	11 (8.7%)	10 (7.4%)	18 (26.9%)
Musical entertainment	1 (12.5%)	1 (10.0%)		6 (50.0%)

*Source:* Official Reports of the Proceedings of the 34th, 35th, and 36th Republican National Conventions; Republican National Committee; Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; C-SPAN Archives.

graph to racism in each platform. A slight increase occurred in the number of paragraphs devoted to diversity, but this increase resulted in only four paragraphs devoted to this issue. Finally, the number of paragraphs devoted to capital punishment decreased from three in 1988 to one in 2000.

The Republican platform consistently devoted a relatively large number of paragraphs to crime, education, and welfare. Although the number of crime-related paragraphs decreased slightly after 1996, the Republican platform devoted an average of 16 paragraphs to crime. The Republican Party devoted an average of about 31 paragraphs to education, although this number declined steadily after 1998. Finally, the GOP devoted roughly 9 paragraphs to welfare. The number of paragraphs devoted to welfare peaked in 1996, after President Clinton signed the 1996 welfare reform bill. Even after the welfare system was reformed, the Republican Party devoted 9 paragraphs to welfare.

Table 3 summarizes the GOP's positions on explicitly racial issues from 1988 to 2000. In general, the platforms exhibited a great deal of consistency from year to year. For example, the 1996 Republican platform stated with respect to affirmative action,

The sole source of equal opportunity for all is equality before the law. Therefore, we oppose discrimination based on sex, race, age, creed, or national origin and will vigorously enforce anti-discrimination statutes. We reject the distortion of those laws to cover sexual preference, and we endorse the Defense of Marriage Act to prevent states from being forced to recognize same-sex unions. Because we believe rights inhere in individuals, not in groups, we will attain our nation's goal of equal rights without quotas or other forms of preferential treatment. We scorn Bill Clinton's notion that any person should be denied a job, promotion, contract or a chance at higher education because of their race or gender. Instead, we endorse the Dole-Canady Equal Opportunity Act to end discrimination by the federal government. We likewise endorse this year's Proposition 209, the California Civil Rights Initiative, to restore to law the original meaning of civil rights. (Republican National Convention 1996)

Four years later, the GOP's affirmative action plank read,

We believe rights inhere in individuals, not in groups. We will attain our nation's goal of equal opportunity without quotas or

other forms of preferential treatment. It is as simple as this: No one should be denied a job, promotion, contract, or chance at higher education because of their race or gender. Equal access, energetically offered, should guarantee every person a fair shot based on their potential and merit. (Republican National Convention 2000)

While not as elaborate as the 1996 statement, the 2000 platform contained the same basic premise—the Republican Party did not support quotas. Furthermore, the GOP used the language of civil rights to refer to the rights of the majority, not those of minorities, and sought to protect the majority (whites) from job or education discrimination. The same language appeared in 1988 and 1992.

With respect to diversity, the Republican Party platforms from 1988 to 2000 indicated that the party was proud of the American public's diversity and viewed it as a source of strength. The party's sole recommendation with respect to diversity, however, was to encourage institutions of higher learning to incorporate a multicultural approach through their presentations of arts and humanities. In all four years, the Republican Party denounced racism and in 1988 vowed to vigorously pursue cases of illegal discrimination.

The 1988 Republican platform boasted an increase in jobs for members of minority groups under the Reagan-Bush administration. The 1988 platform also pledged to increase minority business ownership, to devote considerable resources to increasing the number of minorities in institutions of higher learning, and to encourage and facilitate the adoption of minority children. Finally, the 1988 Republican platform invited minority participation in the party. In 1992, the only references to minorities involved opposition to including sexual preference under the heading "minority" and the continued support of minority businesses. The support for minority businesses was present in the 1996 platform but absent in the 2000 platform. In 2000, the GOP reextended its invitation to minorities to join the party and increased funding to the National Institutes of Health to further research on diseases that disproportionately affect minority populations.

Quite a bit of consistency also existed across the years in terms of the Republican platform on racialized issues.<sup>8</sup> The discussion of welfare

8. Racialized issues are those issues that were race-neutral at conception but that have become racialized through political rhetoric.

**TABLE 3. Republican Platform on Racial Issues**

	1988	1992	1996	2000
Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is proud of diverse heritage of Americans</li> <li>• Supports diversity</li> <li>• Encourages educational institutions to emphasize diversity of Americans through arts and humanities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is proud of diverse heritage of Americans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is proud of diverse heritage of Americans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believes that the diversity of the nation is reflected in 2000 platform</li> <li>• Believes that diversity is a source of strength</li> </ul>
Racism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denounces persons, organizations, publications, and movements that promote racism</li> <li>• Will vigorously pursue cases of illegal discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denounces persons, organizations, publications, and movements that promote racism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denounces persons, organizations, publications, and movements that promote racism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Denounces persons, organizations, publications, and movements that promote racism</li> </ul>
Minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has increased minority jobs under Reagan-Bush administration</li> <li>• Invites minority participation in the party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will increase, strengthen and reinvigorate minority business development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports minority small-business owners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invites minority participation in the party</li> <li>• Increased NIH budget to further research on diseases that disproportionately affect minority populations</li> </ul>

- Will increase, strengthen, and reinvigorate minority business development
- Will encourage and facilitate the adoption of minority children
- Will devote resources to increasing the number of minorities in institutions of higher learning

Affirmative action

- Opposes housing quotas
- Believes quotas are reverse discrimination
- Opposes housing quotas
- Believes quotas are reverse discrimination
- Opposes housing quotas
- Believes quotas are reverse discrimination

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*Source:* Republican Party Platforms, 1988–2000.

was quite detailed in the Republican platforms. Overall, the Republican Party supported state and local control of welfare services. The assumptions underlying the Republican Party's position on welfare remained the same from 1988 to 2000. In general, the GOP supported personal responsibility and accountability and believed that the solutions to poverty were education and work. The Republican platforms indicated that the party believed that community and faith-based organizations should play a prominent role in delivering social services. Finally, the Republican platforms advocated two-parent households.

With respect to education, the Republican Party supported school choice. Beginning no later than 1988, the GOP advocated the creation of charter schools and a school voucher system. The Republican Party also continued to believe that the education system should be decentralized, with parents wielding primary control; communities and lower levels of government should "support and stimulate the parental role" (Republican National Convention 1988).

Of the other racialized issues examined, the Republican platforms were most extensive on crime. In general, the Republican platforms called for stiffer penalties for all crimes. The party supported the establishment of a federal death penalty and the use of capital punishment in drug trafficking cases. In all four years, the Republican Party supported tougher penalties for white-collar crimes and crimes against the elderly. In 1988 and 1992, the platforms focused on drug-related crimes and violent crimes in general. In 1996 and 2000, the focus shifted to juvenile crime. In both years, the Republican Party advocated that juveniles accused of felonies be tried as adults. By 2000, the platform increasingly emphasized combating terrorism and international crime.

In summary, from 1988 to 2000, the Republican platforms experienced very little change with respect to racial and racialized issues. First, little change occurred in the number of paragraphs devoted to these issues. Relative to other issues such as defense, racial and racialized issues did not constitute major agenda items for the Republican Party. Other than broad statements about the party's position on diversity, no policy initiatives addressed the GOP's plan to protect minority rights. Second, the Republican Party did not significantly alter its positions on race-related issues. When the platform included statements about the Republican Party's policy positions on racial issues such as affirmative action, the positions were consistent across all

four convention years. Further, the additions to the GOP's platform on racial issues in 2000 represented a more detailed explanation of its extant positions. At no point did the Republican Party switch positions on these issues during the years examined. Concurrently, the number of African Americans present at the 2000 Republican National Convention increased. Convention observers questioned whether the increased visibility of African Americans represented a strategy aimed at attracting blacks and other minorities or an attempt to attract liberal/moderate white voters, and little evidence explains the precise motivation. Regardless of motivation for the change, examining the impact of the 2000 convention proves an intriguing task given the GOP's historical reputation and platform.

### *Conclusion*

In the modern-day party system, political parties function primarily to simplify the electoral process for candidates and voters. A chief task in this endeavor is mobilizing voters and building winning coalitions. In performing this function, however, political parties have helped to drive a wedge between African Americans and southern whites, the U.S. electorate's two largest voting blocs. By playing the race card, parties have signaled to voters which party is racially conservative and which is racially liberal. Parties can often send these signals by supporting legislation that conveys this information. More often, however, parties use more symbolic communication. In the past, the use of racially coded images and words has polarized the electorate.

The chapters that follow explore whether racial images can be equally successful when they are not used to tap into negative racial stereotypes and prejudice. Specifically, I examine whether the use of positive racial imagery during the 2000 Republican National Convention reshaped the Republican Party's image with respect to race. In light of their race-related histories, both parties should encounter some difficulty in altering the way people perceive them, especially when it comes to striking a balance between blacks and southern whites.