

Republican Party Politics and the American South, 1865-1968

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Book Proposal

We propose a book that examines the history of Republican Party politics and the American South between the end of Reconstruction and the implementation of the “Southern strategy” under Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan in the second half of the 20th century. Political scientists (as well as historians) have largely ignored the Republican Party’s activities in the South during this period.¹ To some extent, this lack of attention is understandable: while the GOP dominated the South in the years immediately following the Civil War, it receded dramatically post-Reconstruction as the Democrats reasserted their control and the region became a de-facto single-party state. The disenfranchisement of African American voters – the traditional backbone of the Republican Party in the former Confederate states – and the successful labeling of the GOP as the “black” party (which alienated white voters) produced an electoral advantage for the Democrats that kept the Republicans from competing effectively in the South for nearly a century.

While the Republicans lacked the ability to actively challenge Democrats for elective office in the post-Reconstruction South, local GOP organizations remained active in each state. This was due largely to Southern Republicans maintaining their influence within the national party organization. That is, despite the South’s declining electoral strength for the GOP after

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¹ For notable exceptions, see Vincent De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question: The New Departure Years, 1877-1897* (Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959); Stanley Hirshson, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt: Northern Republicans and the Southern Negro, 1877-1893* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962); and Charles W. Calhoun, *Conceiving a New Republic: The Republican Party and the Southern Question, 1869-1900* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

Reconstruction, each Southern state was consistently allotted seats at the Republican National Convention. And this representation was often considerable: throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Southern delegates represented at least 15 percent, and frequently 25 percent, of all delegates at Republican national conventions. In addition, competing groups (divided largely along racial lines) often battled for control of these local Southern GOP organizations.² The ongoing presence of a substantial number of Southern Republicans at national conventions, and the intense conflict over local party organizations in the South, presents a puzzle: why were Southern Republicans given considerable weight in deciding crucial party matters (including presidential and vice-presidential nominations, platforms, and the location of national conventions), even as the GOP was increasingly unlikely to win elections in the South? And why did local political actors compete so vigorously for control of a party that did not produce electoral success?

We will answer these questions by connecting the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ sides in the relationship between national and local Southern Republican party leaders during this period. In previous work we have argued that, on the demand side, national Republican leaders (and, in particular, presidents and presidential hopefuls) relied on Southern party leaders for a secure base of support at national conventions.³ To ensure that Southern delegates voted the ‘right’ way, these national leaders made substantial investments in the South – both by supplying federal patronage to members of the local party organizations, as well as by paying bribes to local party leaders. In this book we expand on this argument by incorporating the supply side and analyzing local GOP organizations in the post-Reconstruction South. We will identify the types of

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² Hanes Walton, Jr., *Black Republicans: The Politics of the Black and Tans* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1975).

³ Boris Heersink and Jeffery A. Jenkins, “Southern Delegates and Republican National Convention Politics, 1880-1928,” *Studies in American Political Development* vol. 29, no. 1 (April 2015) 68-88.

activities these organizations engaged in, and their economic relations with the national party and federal government through patronage and direct side payments. We we will explore in detail the racial conflict between Black-and-Tans (the heirs of the Reconstruction-era, mixed-race GOP) and Lily-Whites (those who believed that the GOP should be a white-only party), who competed for control of these local organizations.

This focus on local Southern Republican party organizations will help fill a considerable void in the literature. While a handful of studies have focused on specific states or individual Southern Republican political actors, little has been written about the more general contours of state GOP organizations in the post-Reconstruction South. The best existing study is by Hanes Walton, published four decades ago, which focuses mostly on the state-level conflicts for organizational control between the Black-and-Tans and the Lily-Whites.⁴ While Walton’s study is illuminating, it is mostly descriptive in nature, with little in the way of modern theory or systematic data and analysis. Additionally, while Walton provides information on the racial demographics of Southern convention delegates, the data are woefully incomplete. For example, we have conducted a pilot study on delegations from five Southern states from 1880 through 1928 and identified a substantially higher number of black delegates than appears in Walton’s dataset.⁵ Thus, it is clear that there is still much to learn about what these state organizations looked like, how they changed over time, and what economic and political ties connected them to national party leaders.

We believe our book will contribute to the political science literature in a variety of ways. First and foremost, it will update the existing understanding of the Republican Party’s

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⁴ Walton, *Black Republicans: The Politics of Black and Tans*.

⁵ The five states are: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. This pilot study was incorporated in our paper “Black-and-Tans versus Lily-Whites: Republican Party Organization in the South After Reconstruction,” presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association.

relationship with the South during this period. By charting the influence Southern delegates had on decisions within the party, as well as by showing how national GOP leaders affected the Southern organizations, we reject the existing consensus that the Republican Party played no role in Southern politics between the end of Reconstruction and the post-Voting Rights Act era. In doing so, we explore an important chapter of American political history that has gone almost entirely ignored, and show the very real influence Southern Republicans had on important intra-party decisions after Reconstruction.

Second, the book will help more fully identify the important role that local party organizations played in national intra-party politics during this period. Scholars typically argue that local parties in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often played a “machine-style” role, by mobilizing voters on election day. In this sense, local parties were valuable to national leaders due to their influence over the party’s electoral performance. In exchange for getting voters to the polls, local party leaders were given a say in the selection of presidential nominees and the content of the party’s platform. However, in studying Southern GOP politics during this era, we show that local party organizations were important to national party leaders *independent of any votes being mobilized in general elections*. That is, Southern Republican organizations had no particular hope of winning elections post-Reconstruction, but nonetheless were the recipients of considerable investments (in the form of patronage and side payments). We thus highlight how national leaders connected themselves to specific local party organizations for the express purpose of producing majority coalitions at national conventions. Stated differently, by focusing on Republican organizations in the South after Reconstruction, we reveal that machine-style politics in this era was not a static concept, but that partisan machines varied in both means and ends, depending on institutional context.

Finally, in a more indirect way, the book contributes to understanding the developmental role that presidents played as leaders of their party. One of the key reasons why incumbent Republican presidents invested so heavily in the South is that they could not be certain of being re-nominated by their party. Chester Arthur is the best such example in 1884, but others like Benjamin Harrison also faced staunch opposition to their re-nomination. In creating a system of local organizations dependent upon patronage, Republican presidents during this period attempted to bind the party to their own personal goal of remaining in power. Importantly, they did so long before the personalization of the presidency under the New Deal.⁶

In detailing the history of Republican Party activities in the South during this period, we will rely on a variety of data and evidentiary sources. Most importantly, we will compile a new data set with demographic information on all Southern delegates to Republican National Conventions between 1868 and 1968. By connecting the information provided in the convention proceedings on each delegate (name, hometown) to census forms, we will be able to provide data showing the racial division of Southern state delegations for each election year, and its development over time. We will also be able to identify which of the competing coalitions in each Southern state succeeded in getting seated at the conventions, and how these power struggles played out over time. We will match this demographic data to existing data sets on federal appointments,⁷ thus allowing us to identify when and how these appointments were used to connect the national Republican Party with local Southern party organizations. Additionally, we will connect the votes of state delegations and local party leaders at national conventions to

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⁶ See Sidney M. Milkis, *The Presidents and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁷ See Scott C. James, "Patronage Regimes and American Party Development from 'The Age of Jackson' to the Progressive Era," *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2006); Nolan McCarty and Rose Rzaghan, "Advice and Consent: Senate Responses to Executive Branch Nominations," *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 43, no. 4 (1999).

the source of received patronage. Combined, these different sources of data will provide us with a new level of insight into what Southern GOP organizations looked like on a state-by-state basis, how they changed over time, and how national party leaders used their access to federal patronage to ensure the loyalty of the South.

A chronological outline of the book appears below. The intention is to write seven chapters – an Introduction, Conclusion, and five chapters that will each cover a distinct phase in the post-Reconstruction history of Republican Party activities in the South. Portions of the proposed chapters have already been written as (1) a stand-alone article and (2) a conference paper. The article “Southern Delegates and Republican National Convention Politics,” published in *Studies in American Political Development*, covers the ‘demand’ side for the 1880-1928 period and will be incorporated in chapters 3 and 4. The paper “Black-and-Tans versus Lily-Whites: Republican Party Organization in the South After Reconstruction,” which we presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association in April 2015, represents a pilot study of the ‘supply’ side which will also make up part of chapters 3 and 4. Additionally, the main argument put forward in chapter 2 regarding the Republican Party’s relation to the South during Reconstruction has been articulated in a more condensed version in both the article and paper.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter, we will lay out the central puzzle noted above and explain the distinction between a demand and supply side in Republican Party politics in the South in this period.

Chapter 2: From Reconstruction to Redemption, 1865-1880

In this chapter, we discuss how Republican fortunes in the South emerged after the Civil War, thanks to GOP-led efforts in Congress to enfranchise the former slaves (the “Freedmen”) and establish a system (“Southern Reconstruction” and “Enforcement”) to protect the sanctity of the ballot box and ensure fair elections. For a decade, a Republican Party comprised of carpetbaggers (whites from the North), scalawags (Southern whites), and Freedmen was electorally successful in many parts of the South. But over time, white Southern Democrats reasserted their control, often through fraud and violence, and by 1877 all states of the former Confederacy had been “redeemed.” The years of Rutherford Hayes’ presidency underscored that the Republicanism in the South was clearly on the wane, and that new strategies had to be developed if the GOP was to remain viable in the states of the former Confederacy.

Chapter 3: Redemption and Republican Southern Politics, 1880-1896

Despite the GOP’s setback in the South in the late-1870s, most leaders in the party held out hope that a Southern wing could be maintained – and built back up. Thus, Republican delegations from the South were still afforded a significant role in GOP national convention politics, despite Southern Republicanism providing little in the way of electoral payoff – no Electoral College votes and few House seats – during the period known as Redemption. Republican leaders, and especially presidents (and presidential hopefuls), worked hard to line up the votes of Southern

delegates in the run-up to a convention, typically through patronage politics (i.e., federal appointments). Calls for reform, and the reduction of Southern representation at the national convention, received little support during these years, as the promise of a resurgent Southern GOP combined with leadership incentives to preserve a stable Southern voting bloc to keep the status quo arrangement in place.

Chapter 4: Black-and-Tans versus Lily-Whites: Southern Republicans in the System of 1896, 1896-1932

While the Republicans in prior decades had generally been more successful than the Democrats in winning the White House, elections had remained competitive. The presidential elections of 1896 and 1900 were a turning point, and produced a crucial partisan realignment. Specifically, the electoral coalition that formed the backbone of the ‘System of 1896’ provided Republicans with victories in seven out of nine presidential elections in the 1896-1928 period. More generally, the Republican Party dominated every region of the nation post-realignment *except* the South – which remained solidly Democratic. However, national Republican leaders recognized that controlling the White House and producing reliable majorities in Congress could now be accomplished consistently *without* the South; as a result, after 1896 they increasingly abandoned any pretense of trying to build legitimate party organizations in the South, and instead began to view Southern party organizations as a set of ‘rotten boroughs’ – which could be purchased through the provision of federal patronage and other (more direct) forms of bribery. At the same time, contestation between Black-and-Tans and Lily-Whites for control of state party organizations in the South remained fierce. We will argue that national party leaders played an important role in the development of these conflicts, by directing their investments at those

coalitions that were either deemed most reliable or were available for ‘purchase’ (that is, those coalitions which were not already under the control of other national actors).

Chapter 5: Southern Republicans in the New Deal Years, 1932-1952

The 1932 election radically changed the relationship between national Republican leaders and local Southern party organizations. In the decades between the end of Reconstruction and the beginning of the New Deal, the Republican Party had a near lock on the White House and, therefore, control over the division of patronage in the South. As we show in the preceding chapters, this control of patronage provided national leaders with an important tool to influence Southern voting behavior at conventions and to affect the outcome in the conflict between Black-and-Tans and Lily-Whites within individual states. After 1932 – with Democrats now the majority in both chambers of Congress and FDR in the White House – national party leaders lost control of federal patronage and would not regain it until 1952. In this chapter we analyze how this change in the ‘demand’ side affected the local Southern party organizations. We will specifically assess V.O. Key’s conclusion that Southern Republican state parties moved towards an all-white organization of upper middle-class political actors during the New Deal years.⁸ Additionally, we will identify whether presidential hopefuls and other national party leaders sought to build connections with Southern party organizations through other means, and how Southern delegations affected convention votes.

Chapter 6: Towards a New Southern Strategy: Project Dixie, 1952-1968

Project Dixie represented an attempt by the Republican National Committee (RNC) and the Eisenhower administration to expand on the Dixiecrat conflict within the Democratic Party and

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⁸ V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1949) 277-298.

leverage Eisenhower’s personal popularity in the South.⁹ By investing in (re-)building party organizations in the South, Project Dixie represented the starting point of the modern Republican “Southern Strategy.” In this chapter we analyze the national party’s decision-making processes that produced this project and connect the specific investments in individual Southern states to the existing organizations that were maintained throughout the first half of the 20th century. We will particularly focus on connections between the nature of party organizations in Southern states (i.e., whether they were controlled by Lily-Whites or Black-and-Tans) and the extent to which Project Dixie invested in those states. Stated differently, we will explore the relationship between the type of existing party organizations the RNC encountered after the introduction of Project Dixie and the type of investments it subsequently made in those organizations.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this chapter we summarize our historical findings (on the role of party organizations in intra-party decision-making processes during this period) and reiterate our various contributions to the political science literature. Additionally, we will connect our findings to the substantial literature that focuses on the Republican resurgence in the South in the late-20th century, initiated by the Southern Strategies of Nixon and Reagan.¹⁰

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⁹ See Philip A. Klinkner, *The Losing Parties: Out-Party National Committees, 1956-1993* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 49-60; Daniel J. Galvin, *Presidential Party Building: Dwight D. Eisenhower to George W. Bush* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 63-67.

¹⁰ See, among many others, Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Robert Mickey, *Paths Out of Dixie: The Democratization of Authoritarian Enclaves in America’s Deep South, 1944-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Galvin, *Presidential Party Building*; David Lublin, *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).