

Philipp Adorf

How the South was won and the nation lost

The roots and repercussions of the Republican
Party's Southernization and Evangelicalization

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Acknowledgments

The path to this book has not always been the most direct one. Rooted in an interest of why the American South had been a bastion of the Democratic Party – an odd state of political affairs to anyone only familiar with 21st century US parties – it quickly branched out into a variety of other areas, not all of them limited to the political science realm. Gathering information on past developments virtually always led to the discovery of links to the present, allowing the research for this book to provide new and fascinating avenues to explore each day.

I am supremely grateful to a number of people. First of all, I would like to thank my doctoral advisor Frank Decker for the invaluable support during this process. Of particular importance was the free rein he provided me with during the writing process, allowing me to pursue my own scholarly path.

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Introduction

The Republican 2012 primary campaign had entered its crucial phase and the party's supporters could be forgiven for thinking one of their candidates was about to move into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The economy still had not recovered from the greatest recession since the Great Depression. Unemployment stood at more than eight percent, job growth had slowed to a crawl and despite pumping billions of dollars into the economy, the outlook for that year remained gloomy. Hope and "change we can believe in" had turned into indifference, despair, and sometimes outright anger. A perfect environment then, it appeared, for anyone willing to take on an incumbent. The most recent election most certainly provided the party with additional hope. A mere year before Republican candidates were gearing up for the first primary contests, the GOP had been swept back into power in the mid-term elections, taking over control of the House of Representatives in the biggest swing in a Congressional Election since 1948¹ and reducing Barack Obama's Democratic majority in the Senate. The time seemed ripe to drive home the point that Democrats had no clue about how to run the country in general and the economy in particular. The Republican front runner Mitt Romney seemed poised to woo his primary audience with a résumé that included years of business experience and the successful organizing effort of the Olympic Games in his home state of Utah. The fundamentals behind determining electoral outcomes seemed to be on the Republican side – after all as Bill Clinton's campaign manager James Carville once put it, "it's the economy, stupid." In the midst of a de-accelerating recovery, the defining issue of any and all presidential debates surely had to be the economic well-being of the United States, the primary issue that appeared to make President Obama the most susceptible to defeat. Discussions within the Republican Party and its challengers for the presidency would take a different turn though. Instead of keeping their eyes fixed on the economy, the Republican core audience frequently ap-

1 Cf. Q. Bowman 2012: "Congress Loses Hundreds of Years of Experience – But Majority of Incumbents Stick Around." *PBS*, November 5.

peared more interested in candidates' views on socio-cultural issues such as contraception and abortion.² Jobs were cast aside by condoms and diaphragms while the frontrunner and "Massachusetts Moderate" Mitt Romney had to go to great lengths to portray himself as "severely conservative," a process that did not exactly enhance his reputation as a man with strong convictions. In the past, the track record of having been elected as a Republican to the gubernatorial post in the most liberal state of the union might have been seen as an advantage, a sign that one was able to work with opponents from across the aisle, uniting different points of view under a single banner with the sole purpose of advancing legislation in the best interest of the people. Not so in 2012 though.

The reason for this increase in the salience of social issues at the expense of the economy and the visceral loathing of anything resembling compromise can be found in the changes the Republican Party has undergone over the past half a century, a remarkable transformation that has not only changed the GOP itself but caused huge upheaval within the wider American political and party system. It is a story of the simultaneous *Southernization* and *Evangelicalization* of the Republican Party that has provided it with a group of devoted and easily galvanized supporters while, at the same time, fashioning a partisan core that appears to drag the GOP ever further away from the political center and the views and values of the average American voter. For a significant period, the dual processes of *Southernization* and *Evangelicalization* appeared to primarily bear advantages. The 1994 Republican Revolution brought about the first Republican U.S. House majority in 40 years as the party also managed to win a majority of Southern House districts for the first time since the 1870s. For the remainder of the decade, the GOP would control both houses of Congress, providing it with the perfect springboard from which to launch attacks against the despised inhabitant of the White House. As Bill Clinton left the White House, a Southern born-again Christian moved in – in no small part thanks to the candidate's sweep across the eleven states of the South, including the crucial state of Florida. Four years later, George W. Bush was re-elected, once again carrying the entirety of the South, while his congressional Republican compatriots expanded their majority in both houses. The country appeared to be on the cusp of a permanent Republican majority across all levels of federal politics, seemingly disproving the thesis drawn up by Ruy Teixeira and John Judis two years earlier that the United States was heading towards an "emerging Democratic majority." Republican strategists were confident that they had found the holy grail of electioneering:

2 During the last Republican primary debate of 2012 in Mesa, Arizona the terms "contraception" and "contraceptives" were for example mentioned a combined seven times, compared to ten mentions for "job(s)" – a rather minute difference considering the overall weight that is usually placed on economic matters by the general public. Cf. CNN 2012g: *Full Transcript of CNN Arizona Republican Presidential Debate*, February 22.

Craft a devoted base (primarily found in the South of the nation), get them to the polls with red meat issues such as gay marriage which affect the core of their worldview and win just enough of the remaining electorate to squeak past the line in first place. The following years demonstrated though that replicating this feat was no easy assignment. After the 2004 election, scholars already predicted that “[t]he GOP may have a difficult task in choosing policy positions that will alienate neither their religious conservative base nor the moderate voters who will hold the balance of power in future elections.”³ As the former continued to increase its weight within the party in subsequent years, the latter slowly but surely began to abandon the GOP in favor of their Democratic counterparts. As a result of this exodus, today’s Republican is more *southernized* and *evangelized* than ever before. This book will depict how the foundations for these processes were laid, just how heavily dependent on the South the GOP is today, and what sort of problems these developments inherently entail in a country that is increasingly moving away from the South and its evangelical and deeply conservative values.

This book has right to the very end been a work in progress. Starting off with the intention of explaining why the South had remained Democratic in congressional elections right up until the early 1990s, it evolved into a story of how yesterday’s decisions and choices shape today’s politics – developments that have in a sense culminated in the rise and success of Donald Trump in the 2016 Republican presidential primary on the back of white Southern voters who were drawn to the northeastern billionaire by his brand of anti-federal government populism and nativism. The changes we have witnessed in white Southern partisan behavior have been nothing short of awe-inspiring particularly when the light is shone on the last two decades during which the Republican Party has not just become the majority party of white Southerners but developed into an almost mirror image of the (Southern) Democratic Party of yesteryear in terms of its dominance within this voting bloc. The developments described in the first part of this book started off as the dominant element in this work but over time changed into forming the backdrop of this tale of Southern dominance at the cost of national popularity. While numerous works⁴ have explained in great

3 Abramson, Aldrich, Rohde 2005: “The 2004 Presidential Election: The Emergence of a Permanent Majority?” *Political Science Quarterly* 120(1), pp. 33–57, here p. 56.

4 For the development of the first cracks in the Democratic *Solid South* and subsequent events leading up to and including the struggle over civil rights in the 1960s cf. Frederickson 2001: *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932–1968*. The seminal work on the former Confederacy’s increasing Republican allegiance undoubtedly is the Black brothers’ *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (2002). It tells the complete story of how and why the South became Republican, first at the presidential, then at the congressional and local levels. Shifting the focus to the U.S. House level, Seth McKee assesses a variety of factors that delayed Republican gains below the presidential level for a number of decades – factors like the

detail how and why the South became Republican – and why it took such a considerable amount of time for the congressional realignment to occur – and others have described the manner in which the Christian Right has been able to obtain an ever more prominent role within the Republican Party,⁵ attempts to assess the negative impact of the GOP's *Southernization* and simultaneous *Evangelicalization*, particularly in light of the demographic changes America has undergone and will undergo in future decades, in closer detail are rare with such forecasts usually relegated to a final few words in the final chapter. In light of the significant role played by Hispanics and African Americans in Barack Obama's electoral victories, attention in both the media and academic world has also turned towards future electoral majorities and the corner the Republican Party has backed itself into because of its poor performance among those mi-

continued ability of Democrats to draw their own districts or the simple fact that for many potential Republican candidates there was little appeal in contesting races against seasoned Democratic veterans who could thus frequently count on their incumbency advantage alone to keep them safe and secure. Cf. McKee 2010: *Republican Ascendancy in Southern U.S. House Elections*. Other important and central works that warrant a mention in this area include Aistrup 1996: *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South* and Lublin 2004: *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change*. While Aistrup sees Republican success at the presidential level as a precursor for subsequent state level growth, Lublin makes the case that the Republican takeover of the Southern U.S. House caucus could not have been achieved if it had not been for Republican candidates with some previous political experience at the local level running for House and Senate seats – in other words Republican competitiveness at the substate level was a vital prerequisite for success in higher elections although Lublin acknowledges that Republican growth in the former Confederacy indeed followed a path down from the presidential level, taking the longest time to reach offices the furthest removed from the presidency. James Glaser's *Race, Campaign Politics, & the Realignment in the South* (1996) also represents a vital source of information for anyone trying to understand the Southern realignment. As the title illustrates, Glaser places race front and center in this story although he also touches upon a variety of other factors such as the experience of Democratic officeholders and the extent to which this provided them with an advantage over their Republican counterparts.

- 5 The most extensive assessment can probably be found in David Williams's work which explains the increasing role of the religious right and its alliance with the Republican Party since the emergence of the New Christian Right in the 1950s in great detail. Cf. Williams 2010a: *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. David Domke and Kevin Coe on their part chart the rise in religious appeals by American politicians from 1932 to the George W. Bush presidency, placing a special emphasis on how the GOP has in recent decades used God and social issues to bring Christian conservatives to the polls. Cf. Domke, Coe 2010: *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America*. A broader approach to the connection between religion and politics in the U.S. is provided by Kenneth D. Wald's and Allison Calhoun Brown's *Religion and Politics in the United States* (6th edition, 2011). Their work also extensively assesses the role evangelical Protestants in particular have played within the Republican coalition in recent years (pp. 201–238). By now in its fourth edition, *Onward Christian Soldiers?* by Clyde Wilcox and Carin Robinson also provides one of the best illustrations of the immense growth in political power by the Christian Right that has been obtained through its alliance with the Republican Party. Cf. Wilcox, Robinson 2011: *Onward Christian Soldiers?: The Religious Right in American Politics*. 4th ed.

nority voters – often though without explaining in greater detail the historic reasons behind why Republicans have such a difficult time appealing to minorities. This is where this book will fill the void by combining the different strands of past Republican campaigns, electioneering, and policy to first of all show how the South was won, what sort of continuing impact the decisions of Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan in particular have on today's Grand Old Party and its quest to win majorities and how the large-scale influx of Southerners and Evangelicals into the party – a steady trickle after the mid-1960s that turned into a veritable tide washing away virtually all moderate remnants in the early 1990s – has transformed the Republican Party into a political organization that is incredibly internally cohesive and ideologically pure. Even more importantly in the context of this book, it is a party that stands in the tradition of the South's unique identity: Deeply religious and deeply opposed to an activist federal government that is frequently deemed to only act on behalf of minorities. While Reagan's decision to forge an alliance with the Christian Right most certainly paid off handsomely in the South, the subsequent *Southernization* and *Evangelicalization* of his party has come at the cost of electoral support in the rest of the nation. This process has accelerated over the past two decades, ever since the Republican Party won its first congressional majority in the South since 1874⁶ in the 1994 House elections. In a country that is rapidly becoming less white and in many parts more secular – with today's younger voters and minorities often far more open to the notion of an activist government lending a helping hand to those in need – increasingly relying and focusing on a white, anti-statist, devoutly religious part of the electorate seriously hampers the Republican Party's chances of forging majorities in nationwide elections today and will only increasingly do so in future decades.

The relevance of this work extends beyond the world of politics. Over the past few years, the U.S. has teetered on the brink of economic chaos and default on a number of occasions, threatening to drive the world economy off the cliff along with it. The reasons for this development are primarily found in the changes the Republican Party has undergone over the past few decades, morphing from a party that used to have sizeable socially moderate or even liberal factions – such as the Rockefeller Republicans – into a political organization that has found a new home in the vehemently anti-statist South while losing significant support in many of its former bastions. Understanding the underlying reasons behind this shift also aids us in comprehending the deep appreciation many Republicans, both within the electorate and among elected officials, hold for the tenets of principled political beliefs. The decades-long process of a simultaneous *Southernization* and *Evangelicalization* has driven the GOP ever further to the

6 Cf. Black, Black 2002, p. 329.

right, culminating – as we will see in the second part of this book – in the Tea Party as an anti-statist, uncompromising, racially resentful, and populist movement in the mold of George Wallace. The Tea Party itself therefore is far from a new phenomenon – it did not burst onto the political scene in 2009. Instead it has been in the making for the last 50 years, a process that began to get off the ground with Goldwater’s attempt to “go hunting where the ducks are,”⁷ continued by Nixon’s refined Southern Strategy and provided with a large jolt by the presidency of Ronald Reagan – developments that all ultimately set the foundations for the establishment of what we commonly refer to as the Tea Party, a religiously as well as racially conservative movement that far from representing the party’s lunatic fringe instead serves as its ideological core and guardian of the values that many white Southerners subscribe to as well. If we wish to understand contemporary American politics and venture an estimate as to where it is headed, we need to understand why the Tea Party has not just emerged but been able to drive the GOP into such an uncompromising direction that it facilitated a government shutdown in October of 2013. Portrayals of the Tea Party as a movement that can disappear as quickly as it burst onto the political stage if only the supposedly moderate core of the Republican Party were to push back against anti-statist populism completely misunderstand the underlying foundations and deep roots within the GOP this movement possesses, leading to conclusions about the future path of the Republican Party that are not infrequently widely off the mark.

As this book will show, it would be a gross misunderstanding of the Tea Party to assume that the negative press the GOP has received in the wake of a variety of budgetary showdowns will somehow help moderate Republicans in their efforts to separate themselves from the Tea Party, a pointless endeavor since the Tea Party is not some alien movement that has taken over the GOP but has instead come into existence thanks to the decisions taken by Republican leaders over the course of the last few decades which we will see time and again throughout this book. The Tea Party is therefore here to stay, as are its policies and approach to politics that may not just harm the American economy⁸ but have to a certain extent laid the groundwork for the remarkable success of Donald Trump and his own brand of anti-government politics nourished and sustained by a strong dose of racial animus. That is why it is of utmost importance to address the ideological buttressing of the Tea Party and its supporters in closer detail (as will be done in chapter II.3). Their conservative stance on race, economics, and socio-

7 Quoted in: Hillygus, Shields 2008b: *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns*, p. 117.

8 According to S&P, the 2013 government shutdown decreased quarterly growth for the fourth quarter in the United States by 0.6 percentage points. Cf. The Economist 2013d: *Where Next?* October 26.

cultural matters, their vehemently anti-statist agenda as well as their inability to compromise all highlight the movement's Southern lineage and traits while those positions and the Tea Party supporters' high levels of activism also present the Republican Party with a momentous challenge in an electoral environment that is becoming more open to the ideas and concepts of a more activist government.

A success story like no other

A little over 50 years ago, the existence of a Republican Party rooted in the South and run by a conservative base upholding the values of the former Confederacy through its staunch conservatism on both economic and social matters was unthinkable. It is difficult to overstate just how dominant the Democratic Party was in the South of the first half of the twentieth century. Control over the political process of the region rested solely in the hands of the party while their Republican counterparts did not even deserve to be considered the opposition party. Even as the national Democratic Party was making its first tacit steps towards racial equality, the party's stranglehold in the region continued. After Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat insurgency in 1948 for example, Republicans still accounted for none of the region's eleven governors, none of its 22 Senators and just two of the 105 members of the U.S. House of Representatives from the region. Republicans also controlled just 2.8 percent of all state legislators across the South.⁹ Expanding the analytical timeframe elucidates the GOP's pitiful state even more vividly. During the three-decade period preceding the civil rights revolution¹⁰ Republicans won just 1.5 percent of all Senate and 7.2 percent of all House races in the region.¹¹ Things could hardly be more different today, as table 1 illustrates. Over the sixteen-year period between 2001 and 2017, only Arkansas failed to send a Republican majority to the U.S. House as the GOP won 63.5 percent of all congressional races in the eleven states of the former Confederacy during the entire timeframe.¹² Even President Clinton's home state has made the switch to the Republican side though as the party has won eleven of the twelve U.S. House races in Arkansas over the past three congressional elections (2010 through 2014).

9 Cf. Egerton 2004: "The Southernization of American Politics." In: Dunbar (ed.): *Where We Stand: Voices Of Southern Dissent*, pp. 197–223, here p. 207.

10 1932–1965.

11 Cf. Stanley, Niemi 2013: *Vital Statistics on American Politics 2013–2014*, p. 12.

12 This includes eight congressional elections in total. If one only assesses the four most recent elections, the share actually increases to 67.8 percent. In the 2014 U.S. House elections, Republicans managed to win 73.2 percent of all Southern districts.

Table 1: Party victories in Southern U.S. House elections, 1932–1965 and 2001–2017:¹³

State	Total 1932–1965			Total 2001–2017		
	Dem.	Rep.	Other	Dem.	Rep.	Other
Alabama	146	5	0	14	42	0
Arkansas	109	0	0	16	16	0
Florida	111	8	0	67	135	0
Georgia	170	1	0	40	64	0
Louisiana	139	0	0	13	41	0
Mississippi	110	1	0	15	18	0
N. Carolina	189	9	0	46	57	0
S. Carolina	97	2	0	13	37	0
Tennessee	121	37	1	30	42	0
Texas	365	8	0	102	160	0
Virginia	147	15	0	28	59	1

For political scientists of the period between the 1930s and '60s, the Republican Party thus offered little reason for scholarly analysis. In his seminal 675-page work on the South and its political environment – *Southern Politics in State and Nation* – V.O. Key, Jr. devoted a mere 21 pages to the Republican Party in a chapter to receive the rather disparaging title “A Note on the Republican Party.” The organization itself “scarcely deserve[d] the name of a party,”¹⁴ according to Key, adding that it stood somewhere “between an esoteric cult on the order of a lodge and a conspiracy for plunder in accord with the accepted customs of our politics.”¹⁵ In such an environment voting Republican, particularly in the Deep South, required “fortitude.”¹⁶ Breaking this dominance was going to require hard work and patience. At the time of Key’s assessment of the GOP there was no Republican infrastructure in the South to speak of; as a matter of fact, there were virtually no Republicans to speak of as Trent Lott noted when he commented that growing up in the Mississippi of the 1940s and '50s, he had “never met a live Republican.”¹⁷ This

13 Entries indicate the total number of U.S. House seats won by a party in the state during the period in question. For 1932–1965 data cf. Stanley, Niemi 2013, pp. 32–33. Contrary to Stanley and Niemi’s other dataset which shows Republicans winning 7.2 percent of all House elections during the period in question, the table gives Republicans a share of just 4.8 percent of all elections won. This may be due to also incorporating special elections. 2001–2017 data are own work based on Election Day results. Data obtained from United States House of Representatives 2013: *Party Divisions of the House of Representatives* and New York Times 2014c: *House Election Results*. December 12.

14 V.O. Key, Jr. 1949: *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, p. 277.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., p. 280.

17 Quoted in: Courtwright 2010: *No Right Turn – Conservative Politics in a Liberal America*, p. 168.

“reservoir of power,”¹⁸ among other reasons, allowed the Democratic Party to remain the majority party at the congressional level in the region up until the early 1990s.

Numerous works have delved into the reasons, such as the aforementioned reservoir of power, for why it took a number of decades after the civil rights about-face of the GOP for the party to finally make significant inroads into the political realm of the South below the presidential level. The task of this work is not to recount the work of others in that regard but to use a few specific issue and policy areas to help explain why today’s Republican Party is both *southernized* and *evangelized*. The first part of this book will therefore focus on three primary factors whose significance to both the Republican Party and its activist core, the Tea Party, should be obvious to any observer of American politics. They are the three R’s of race, religion, and Reagan. All three and the interplay and overlap between them played a key role in how the Republican Party managed to win the South both at the presidential as well as the congressional level. Ronald Reagan’s role in particular warrants a closer inspection as his rhetoric and policies sought to use race and religion to fashion a new Republican Party whose base of power would be firmly planted in the South. Separating the three R’s is frequently almost impossible. Reagan’s support of tax exemptions for schools that continued to implement segregationist policies during the early 1980s – such as Bob Jones University (BJU) which had refused to admit black students up until 1971 and continued to ban interracial dating until 2000¹⁹ – for example allowed him to draw support from both the racial and religiously conservative voting blocs (with once again a fair degree of overlap between them). Not only was he defending a traditional cornerstone of the white Southern way of life by backing segregationist private schools that were largely found in the former Confederacy but his battle on behalf of the Protestant Bob Jones University allowed Reagan to portray himself as a great fighter for religious freedoms seeing as the university –

18 J. Nash, Taggart 2006: *Mississippi Politics: The Struggle for Power, 1976–2006*, p. 8. Coupled with a factor like incumbency advantage – itself acting like an “anchor” that lessens the impact of “short-term tides” – we see quite quickly why it took such a considerable period of time for Republican candidates to make any headway in Southern congressional elections. At the presidential level the changing tides washed away the remaining Democratic advantage that had been decreasing for at least two decades when Goldwater and Nixon ran in the 1960s. Local Democratic candidates were able to insulate themselves quite well from national politics though, as the party and its candidates used their reservoir of power and incumbency advantage to good effect for another twenty odd years. For the description of incumbency advantage as the aforementioned anchor see Petrocik, Desposato 2004: “Incumbency and Short-Term Influences on Voters.” *Political Research Quarterly* 57(3), pp. 363–373, here p. 364.

19 For an apology for those practices cf. Bob Jones University 2014: *Statement about Race at BJU*. In 2000, then president of the university Bob Jones III apologized on television for the university’s policy of not admitting black students until 1971 while also announcing lifting the institution’s ban on interracial dating on the same program.

and many other private educational institutions with similar policies – argued its discriminatory rules were based on scripture.²⁰ This fusion of the different strains of conservatism was to become the underlying foundation for today’s Republican Party and an ingenious way of drawing support from all sorts of conservative groups who had hitherto often pursued different agendas. For Joseph Lowndes the former actor and 40th president was able to “seamlessly combine conservatism, racism, and antigovernment populism in a majoritarian discourse,”²¹ making Reagan quite possibly *the* central figure in the establishment of an electoral alliance between fiscal, social, and racial conservatives. At the same time, the three R’s all continue to exert significant influence on today’s GOP – more often than not as will be illustrated in the second part of the work in front of you, this influence tends to be detrimental in a nation that is becoming more secular, less white, and less supportive of Reaganomics and its small government, supply-side policies.

Part I of this book will therefore assess past developments that have made the Republican Party the *southernized* and *evangelized* political organization that it is today. The theoretical as well as historical basis for understanding how and why GOP came to be the party of the white Southerner through employing and exploiting the divisive matter of race in a variety of different guises will be assessed and described in chapter I.1. This course of action has had far-reaching repercussions as to this very day white Southerners continue to be the arguably most racially conservative segment of the American electorate, harboring significantly more negative views towards minorities in general and African Americans in particular than their white counterparts in the rest of the nation possess (see in particular chapter I.1.5). To further clarify and understand these traits and why the GOP has been able to use the continued *Southern exceptionalism* on racial matters to its advantage, one has to look at the theoretical basis behind modern day racial sentiments both south of the Mason-Dixon Line and beyond. This entails assessing the concepts of *racial resentment*, the *white backlash hypothesis*,²² as well as the *Southern Strategy* that sought to take advantage of both. Chapter I.1.1 will itself focus on and explain the concept of *racial resentment*, a phenomenon sometimes also referred to as modern or symbolic racism. As its latter names indicate, it differs from its old fashioned counterpart. While old fashioned racism has at its center the belief that African Americans are inherently inferior, *modern racism* or *racial resentment* is rooted in the notion that certain ethnic groups often do not share the work ethic found among white

20 For the interplay between Southern evangelical Protestantism and institutionalized racism and segregation see the introduction to chapter I.2.

21 Lowndes 2008: *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism*, p. 160.

22 Also referred to as the “racial threat” or “group threat” theory.

segments of the population. Opting for a life on welfare instead, these minorities are seen to violate basic American norms and values through their reliance on the government – a sentiment which illustrates how *racial resentment* represents a cocktail of broader conservative views, nativist positions about what constitutes “Americanness,” and racial prejudice. Understanding how racial resentment is primed in a society that has come to widely accept the *norm of racial equality*²³ is key to understanding how the Republican Party managed to slowly but surely conquer the South while also providing deeper insights into why today’s GOP has such a difficult time winning substantial shares of different minority groups. As will be illustrated in chapter I.1.4, it is a strategy that was to a certain extent perfected by the late Alabama governor George Wallace who carefully sought to ensure that his opposition to equal and civil rights was projected not through racist imagery but instead through a carefully crafted rhetoric that intended to portray civil rights legislation as un-American and on top of that as socialist – an approach copied and refined in particular by both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. As we will see time and again in this book, such an approach of carefully priming racial resentment without ever explicitly mentioning skin color has become deeply embedded in contemporary Republican rhetoric on the campaign trail and beyond. This manner of framing political issues allows candidates and elected officials to use the continued animosity some white Americans harbor towards other ethnicities and races to their own advantage while being able to brush aside any accusations of playing the race card, a key ability in a nation in which the aforementioned norm of racial equality rules supreme.

Chapters I.1.2 and I.1.3 will then delve into the question how exactly racial animus towards African Americans aided and abetted Republican growth in the former Confederacy as the local Democratic Party became increasingly reliant on black voters and how the GOP sought to take advantage of both *racial resentment* and the evolving *white backlash* against the “darkening” of the Democratic Party in the South through its *Southern Strategy*. After having been the most Democratic region in the nation for almost a century, the national Democratic shift on civil rights significantly altered Southern party dynamics. Over time, white Southerners began to feel like strangers in their own home as African Americans began to expand their role and size in the ranks of the region’s Democratic Party, leading to an electoral environment in which Democratic politicians could ill-afford to run on a racially conservative ticket. The resolutely

23 This norm represents the rejection of old fashioned racism that sees different races as inherently unequal. The norm of racial equality forces politicians to play the race card in a far subtler manner seeing as overt racial appeals are rejected by even some of the most racially conservative segments of society. Cf. Mendelberg 2001: *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality*, pp. 67 ff.