

## INTRODUCTION

---

# The Paradox of the Black Republican

THERE IS A FASCINATING *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* SKETCH FROM 1980, A piece almost entirely forgotten by most viewers of the NBC comedy show. The sketch survives in the pop culture arena only because it features the *SNL* debut of comedian Eddie Murphy. Airing about a month after the country elected an ex-actor to the presidency (ousting a former Georgia peanut farmer in the process), the skit is a spoof of *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*, that unconventional animal wildlife series sponsored by an insurance company. In the *SNL* piece, a Jim Fowler-type zoologist braves the “savage” landscape of a tony Manhattan cocktail party in search of an elusive subject: the Negro Republican. Tracking the “migratory patterns” of African Americans “fleeing the liberal lake wastelands” for the “fertile promised land of the GOP,” the scientist stumbles badly—a hilarious case of mistaken identity—when he assumes that a black funeral parlor director *must* be a member of the GOP. Undeterred, he spots another black man nearby—a thorough examination of speech patterns, clothing, musical tastes, and economic interests confirms that the subject is indeed the evasive Negro Republican. With great care, the zoologist sedates the “exotic creature,” attaching a blinking transmitter disguised as an American flag pin to the man’s lapel. As the disoriented man awakens, the scientist quickly hides, emerging to take notes on his subject from afar once the Negro Republican has wandered back into the “wild.”<sup>1</sup>

“In Search of the Negro Republican” is a riveting political satire, interesting not for the writing or the cast’s performance but for the ideas conveyed by the sketch—ideas about popular perceptions of African American members of the GOP. A black Republican, it would seem, was a rare fellow in 1980—a political opportunist and an economic conservative who, seduced by the promise of a Reagan Revolution, had disavowed his longtime home in the Democratic Party. By that same token, a black Republican was a racial turncoat—a Benedict Arnold in blackface who had appropriated clichéd notions of middle-class whiteness: a stuffy voice, a preference for the Carpenters over the Isley Brothers, the choice of a drab, unsophisticated suit, and a degree of comfort with the quintessential symbol of American patriotism, Old Glory. A black Republican was a curiosity—a creature to be observed, sedated, and studied.

The *SNL* sketch, as with any satire, is a primer in exaggeration, entertaining precisely because it taps into stereotypes of black Republicans—caricatures that we know logically are absurd, yet nevertheless still make some kind of intuitive sense. The uneasy racialized undertones of the sketch are rendered practically invisible because something about the parody *resonates*. Stripped of nuance, the stereotype works because it exposes the fundamental question that so many of us ask: Why would an African American join the Republican Party? The question is an old one, an ubiquitous inquiry that many people, Democrats and Republicans alike, have posed consistently since the 1930s—the decade when black voters first began to flee the Republican Party, then known as the “Party of Lincoln,” an ideological home so very different from what “Republican” means today. Since then, the link between blacks and Democrats has become a knee-jerk one, a relationship that is taken for granted by all sides. Over the decades, the concept of a “black Republican” has come to seem a contradiction in terms, invested with an odd kind of alienness. “Since President Franklin and the New Deal,” wrote the editors at the *Chicago Defender* in 1976, “being black and Republican was about as compatible as being black and aspiring to leadership in the Ku Klux Klan.”<sup>2</sup>

Beneath the stereotypes and the made-for-TV satire, our notions of black Republicans rest on two basic truths. First, without question, blacks are the most partisan of any racial group in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Since 1948, a substantial majority of African Americans has identified as Democrat; since 1964, that lopsided figure has only increased, as more than 80 percent of black voters have cast their ballots for the Democratic Party nominee in every presidential election. By 1980, more than 90 percent of the nation’s five thousand black elected officials were Democrats, including all of the members of the Congressional Black Caucus. And in 2012, African Americans played a vital role in helping reelect Barack Obama to the White House, offering the president 94 percent of their votes. This partisanship, as Michael Dawson, Nancy Weiss, and others have suggested, “was never blind or random but was based on a realistic assessment of which party would best further black political and economic interests.” And as the extensive histories of civil rights and black politics make clear, African Americans made critical and significant advances for racial equality and social justice by way of the New Deal and the Great Society programs, thereby “anchoring” African Americans in Democratic liberalism.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the GOP of today bears little resemblance to the “Party of Lincoln” to which black voters had been fiercely loyal since the era of Reconstruction. Instead, the modern Republican Party is indelibly associated with Herbert Hoover’s “lily-white” movement, “Operation Dixie” of

the 1950s, and Richard Nixon's "southern strategy." It is a party whose 1964 presidential candidate voted against the landmark Civil Rights Act passed in that year, and whose 1980 nominee launched his official presidential campaign with a now-infamous "states' rights" speech in Philadelphia, Mississippi—the town in which three civil rights workers were murdered sixteen years earlier.<sup>5</sup> As politicians shaped the GOP from the "top down," ordinary white city dwellers and suburbanites from all backgrounds and income levels along with an "army" of conservative activists, influenced the direction of the GOP from the grass roots, *reacting* to changing social and cultural norms, the liberalism of the civil rights movement and the radicalism of Black Power. In short, the GOP is a party whose conservatism, to quote Robert Smith and Hanes Walton, seems to make it "virtually impossible for blacks, given their history and condition," to accept.<sup>6</sup>

These two strands of thought are mutually reinforcing, confirmed through our everyday experiences: individual encounters, media reports, fictional depictions in television and film, and scholarly studies all work in concert to produce a pervasive vision of the past century that leaves little room for the coexistence of African Americans, conservatism, and the Republican Party. All of our instincts, scholarly and otherwise, tell us that *African Americans should not be Republicans, nor should they be conservatives*. Yet black Republicans do exist—and their inevitable existence, of course, complicates our assumptions. Some black families never left the Republican fold, while other individuals have found their way back to the GOP. The past three decades alone have witnessed the rise of a number of prominent African American members of the Republican Party: Samuel Pierce, Clarence Thomas, Colin Powell, J. C. Watts, Condoleezza Rice, Michael Steele, Constance Berry Newman, Alan Keyes, Robert A. George, Herman Cain, Michael Powell, Lynn Swann, Allen West, and Tim Scott, to name a few. But rather than erasing public curiosity, the appearance of black Republicans merely intensifies it, often infusing a new urgency into the original underlying question of *why*.

That curiosity is often suffused with a measure of frustration: the question of *why* quickly becomes a more loaded inquiry: *How could they?* For some, anger with black Republicans is an implicit rejection of a larger accommodationist tradition. To their critics, black Republicans are Booker T. Washington's successors, racial apologists whose affiliations and beliefs mark them as traitorous individuals, complicit in an age-old crusade to "delegitimize the black quest for racial and social justice."<sup>7</sup> A black Republican, the *Pittsburgh Courier* spat in 1992, "is a kind of bogeyman dressed in a Black tailored suit or immaculate silk dress, to cajole Blacks into believing the Republican Party and its brand of conservatism is a

trumpet-tongued angel playing the jazz of economic salvation and racial harmony.” Such music, the black newspaper criticized, “is nothing more than bubbles of gas emanating from the butt of reptiles.” However, as we shall see, the “songs” of black Republicans are far more complicated and multivocal.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, white Republicans often heap gratuitous public praise on African American members of the GOP, applauding them for having the gumption to leave the “plantation politics of the Democratic Party,” as Pat Buchanan did on CNN in 2011, while defending Herman Cain. This line of thinking stems from the flawed and simplistic belief that African Americans have been brainwashed into voting for the Democratic Party and, as a result, ignore the benefits of belonging to the GOP. The trope of the Democratic Party as a slave plantation has been a recurring feature of GOP rhetoric since at least 1968, when Richard Nixon mentioned it in an interview with *Jet* magazine; predating even this, black Republicans have used the phrase regularly since 1964. Such thinking is problematic—often condescending and occasionally even bigoted, insinuating that Democrats have “bought” the black vote with “government handouts,” and that African Americans are therefore unable to make their own rational political choices, thereby sidestepping the GOP’s role in repelling black voters.<sup>9</sup>

More broadly, however, both of these perspectives, like much of our understanding of black Republicans, are deeply unsatisfying. They tell us little about who black Republicans are, why they join the GOP, and what they really believe and why. Our assumptions about blacks in the Republican Party are teleological and ahistorical, informed by the Republican Party as it exists in the present; thus our views are often flat, lacking historical depth. Surely this understanding denies us the messiness that is at the heart of our beliefs and at the core of our personal politics: the ongoing debate that each one of us has with ourselves and with others about which politicians and policies we should support and about what ideologies we should embrace.

Our implicit views of black Republicans—either as strange alien creatures or as noble exceptions among their duped Democratic brethren—reject the notion of political choice; too often we assume that blacks in America are Democrats by default; though not intentional, that assumption denies agency to an entire group of citizens. In this scenario, black Republicans are simultaneously invisible and hypervisible: isolated political misfits who provoke extreme reactions. These views, whether voiced by liberals or conservatives, of any race, are troublesome, muting reality and history and ignoring the complex ways that race and politics intersect in the United States. Simply put: our views obscure the fascinating diversity that exists within this “strange” group known as black Repub-

licans, obscuring their historical significance over the past three-quarters of a century; this, in turn, conceals a richer understanding not only of black politics but of American politics more generally.

My aim in this project is to offer a new understanding of the interaction between African Americans and the Republican Party and provide insights into the seemingly incongruous intersection of civil rights and American conservatism. Exploring black politics over nearly half a century, as we will see, disrupts many of our perceptions about African Americans who support the GOP; at times we find not a peculiar group of blacks, desperate for white acceptance or out of touch with American realities but rather a movement of African Americans working for an alternative economic and civil rights movement. At other moments, we see a cadre of figures who make cynical concessions in order to maintain a modicum of power. I argue that the complex nature of this story reveals the links between the black freedom struggle and the American conservative movement, uncovering the forgotten efforts by African Americans, some of whom attempted to forge new pathways to equality, even as many within the GOP appeared hostile to that very idea. This study illustrates that black Republicans occupied an ostensibly irreconcilable position in that they were simultaneously shunned by African American communities and subordinated by the Republican Party. In response, black Republicans vocally, and at times viciously, critiqued members of their race and their party, attempting to regulate and influence the attitudes, behaviors, and public images of both black citizens and the GOP.

Over the past two decades, there has been an explosion of first-rate scholarship that explores the intersections of race, ideology, and American politics through local histories and studies of the lives of “ordinary” American citizens.<sup>10</sup> My study, by contrast, is by necessity national in emphasis, with a focus not on a particular local community but on African American involvement with the Republican Party on every level—local, state, and national. The most crucial figures in this narrative were a relatively small group of black men and women—activists, leaders, officials, politicians, and occasionally intellectuals—who helped steer the machinations of the GOP on a national level; still, from time to time, I also take into account the efforts of a much larger group of African Americans who were solely active in local and state-level politics. This is an expansive endeavor, covering forty-four years of American social and political history, tracing black involvement in the Republican Party from the political realignment of the New Deal to the beginning of the so-called Reagan Revolution. And though the importance of local studies on social and political history cannot be overstated, adopting a wide yet targeted framework is crucial to this book, allowing me to examine the ways in which members

of a group who have long been both a political minority in their racial community *and* a racial minority in their political party interacted with each other, with the Republican Party, and with other African Americans. Moreover, employing a national focus also allowed me to tell a subtle but important story about the evolution in the opinions and behaviors of rank-and-file blacks who voted for Republicans in local, state, and national elections between 1936 and 1980.

By no means have scholars ignored the political ideologies of African Americans; the sheer amount of work on black political thought and action is tremendous, offering critical and nuanced readings of African Americans' embrace and rejection of philosophies, including liberalism, radicalism, feminism, and nationalism, and nearly any combination and variation thereof. Because so much of the "action" has taken place on the left, most of the scholarship has concentrated on this political history. More recently, however, a rapidly growing body of literature has started to address the dearth of scholarship on African American "conservatives," focusing exclusively on black conservatism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, offering interpretive readings of the black tradition, and highlighting the existence of an "everyday" form of conservatism among almost a third of African Americans (which rarely translates into votes for the Republican Party). In addition, many of these texts illustrate the development of a form of "black neoconservatism" in the 1980s and 1990s, wherein some black men and women became vigorous spokesmen for contemporary right-wing Republican policies and programs, placing the "onus of responsibility" on African Americans for their social and economic woes and urging black voters to join the GOP.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, a small group of historians has turned its attention to expanding the scholarship on race and the Republican Party, revealing the existence of a moderate and liberal tradition within the GOP, one that consistently clashed with the party's more reactionary elements over the course of the twentieth century and pushed Republicans to address equality in a way that spoke to the needs of all American citizens.<sup>12</sup>

While the perspectives on black conservatism and liberal and moderate Republican politics are unequivocally important to this project, readers will notice that my project differs from this scholarship, as my focus is on the *intersection* of race, civil rights, conservatism, and party politics and addresses both the "nuts and bolts" of black Republican activism and the ideas that motivated these actions. My choice of historical period is also distinct, for most studies of black conservatism focus on either the late nineteenth or late twentieth century, while most works on the Republican Party view African Americans as only *adjacent* to Republican politics, focusing instead on the actions of white members of the GOP.

This “middle period” between 1936 and 1980 is devoid of scholarship, in part, for two reasons: we focus on the most evident and productive centers of action—the liberal coalitions between blacks and the Democratic Party; and we assume that no African American would want to be associated with the Republican Party after the rise of Barry Goldwater in 1964.

I revise this broader narrative by pointing to a long history of black Republican activists, a cadre of figures who were middle-class professionals—lawyers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and businessmen and women—who hailed primarily from California, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. They were mostly men—at least until the 1960s, when black women, despite being the least likely of any racial demographic to vote for the Republican Party, increasingly played an important public role in party affairs. Many were members of local chapters of civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Urban League (NUL), and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)—and some were even leaders and officials in local and state chapters of these groups. At the same time, many black Republicans actively distanced themselves from the direct action and civil disobedience protests that characterized the classical civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and publicly repudiated the Black Power cries that exploded in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Most of these black party members joined the Republican Party (or never left it) out of a belief in what they called “traditional” conservatism: anticommunism, free market enterprise and capitalism, self-help and personal responsibility, limited government intervention, and a respect for authority, history, and precedent, along with Western institutions and traditions. In this sense, their beliefs were aligned with those of their white counterparts; and like their white counterparts, black Republicans’ traditional conservatism also reflected their dissatisfaction with the Democratic liberalism of the New Deal and the Great Society. Reflecting the political diversity of the Republican Party more generally, there were three broad wings of black Republican thought, a great ideological gamut that encompassed liberal, moderate, and conservative factions. Equally important—and especially baffling to critics—most black Republicans, regardless of their ideological differences, believed that racial egalitarianism was in keeping with the Republican Party’s principles. Indeed, the majority believed that in times of crisis, the government had a right to intervene on behalf of the nation’s citizens; consequently, African American party members’ traditional conservatism often included a belief in federal intervention in specific matters of civil rights and racial equality.

Black Republicans’ faith in traditional conservatism was not their sole motivator for working with and within the Republican Party; they also

did so for pragmatic purposes, viewing two-party competition as the most efficient and practical way to achieve sociopolitical power. Sharing their Democratic Party counterparts' mistrust of third-party political systems, black Republicans were committed to working within a two-party system. Still, they differed from their Democrat peers in seeking to push an agenda of equality through conservative networks and institutions of power. This allegiance to two-party competition was, and still is, central to black Republican thought and action. Since 1936, when more than 70 percent of African Americans first cast votes for Franklin Roosevelt, African American Republicans have consistently argued that large black constituencies could mean substantial black influence if applied to both political parties, insisting that the black vote should be "flexible enough to swing between the two parties according to the momentary interests of Blacks."<sup>13</sup> In theory, this strategy would allow African Americans to institute major social and economic changes from within *both* political parties. Neither were black Republicans alone in advancing this thesis: prominent black Democrats made similar arguments throughout the twentieth century with the hopes of forcing concessions and instituting reform within their own political party.<sup>14</sup> As we shall see, however, the notion of two-party competition was, and still is, deeply flawed, causing black Republicans endless frustration.

A central problem that this study bumps up against, again and again, is exactly what—or better yet *who*—a conservative is. What did it mean to be "conservative" and black during the twentieth century, and what did it mean to affiliate with the Republican Party? Some may argue that the black Republicans at the heart of this story were not "authentic" conservatives. Such a notion of authenticity assumes that conservatism is a rigid ideology, fixed over time and space, when in fact the reality is far more complicated and interesting.<sup>15</sup> I have identified various black individuals and groups as "conservative" because they identified as such or were so labeled by political observers of the period.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the more we look across the decades in question, the more we see how intellectual and political *ideas* of conservatism changed for black Republicans between 1936 and 1980. Their definition of "conservative" and "conservatism" was not constant; they used the terms in a myriad of contradictory and confounding ways, as we shall soon see.

In an attempt to provide the reader with clarity, I have outlined four of the most common manifestations of conservatism among black Republicans between 1936 and 1980, keeping in mind the advice of Peter Eisenstadt, who has suggested that the dilemma for those studying black conservatism is that the ideology "will not be true of all black conservatives" and "may be true for many who are not black conservatives."<sup>17</sup>

To put it another way, the boundaries between these manifestations of black conservatism are messy at best and at times fragile. First, black Republicans' brand of conservatism was an ideology rooted in nineteenth-century middle-class mores of respectability, built upon a faith in the Protestant work ethic and the lodestones of self-help, personal responsibility, morality, and political involvement. This was a model propagated by the black elite, as many scholars have convincingly argued, and was an imperfect challenge to white supremacy in an era of second-class citizenship; it was reflected in the economic and business ethos embodied by Booker T. Washington and the class privilege inherent in W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of a talented tenth uplifting the "best" of the race.<sup>18</sup>

The second manifestation of conservatism was as a traditional set of broad principles, as we have already seen, historically connected to the Republican Party. Likewise, the third manifestation was a wing of black Republican thought; these were the conservative African Americans who held a more rigid interpretation of traditional party principles, despite their racially egalitarian beliefs. The final manifestation of conservatism among black Republicans is perhaps the most complicated to outline, since it includes those who affiliated with the reactionary wing of the mainstream Republican Party. None of the four manifestations are static categories, of course, but arguably, this is the display that changed the most dramatically throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. At first, these figures sat at the margins of black Republican thought, including those who opposed the civil rights legislation of the 1950s and 1960s; yet as the GOP's right wing adjusted the language of its conservatism—polishing it into a seemingly race-neutral ideology of individual rights, freedom of choice, and free market enterprise—more and more African American party members came to support it, despite regular opposition from their more liberal black counterparts.

Moreover, in spite of conservatism's association with the right wing of the modern GOP, black Republicans have long seen the ideology as a legitimate solution, one that should be considered seriously in the struggle for racial equality. Thus, African Americans attempted to influence the direction of conservatism—not to destroy it but rather to expand the boundaries of the ideology in order to include black needs and interests. This interpretation of conservatism has been flexible, by both definition and necessity, since issues of race, representation, and power guided black Republicans' actions. Perhaps even more remarkable, in the half century between 1936 and 1980 this pragmatic definition of conservatism was broad and elastic enough to encompass black citizens from across the political spectrum, including African American leaders *outside* of the Republican Party. As civil rights leader Jesse Jackson argued in 1978, African Americans "must

pursue a strategy that prohibits one party from taking us for granted and another party from writing us off. The only protection we have against political genocide is to remain necessary.”<sup>19</sup> And as we shall see, even President Barack Obama, the scourge of Republicans everywhere, has sounded a lot like the black Republicans of the 1960s and 1970s since taking office in 2008.

This book covers three different waves of national black Republican thought and activity, a period that begins in 1936—significant not only for the major political realignment of African American voters but also for the remarkable voting fluidity of the black electorate (see tables 1–3 in the appendix); in fact, through 1962, nearly a third of black voters pulled the lever for Republican candidates in midterm and presidential elections. The decision to nominate Barry Goldwater as the GOP presidential nominee in 1964 marks the beginning of the next wave of black party activity, as the Arizona senator’s right-wing agenda sent shockwaves through black Republicans’ ranks, motivating them to organize on a national scale in pursuit of intraparty reform. Many began to look to state and local politics, hoping to duplicate the electoral success of Massachusetts’s Edward W. Brooke; and, as we will see, the black senator reinvigorated the idea of pragmatic politics for black Republicans, or, rather, the pursuit of power through party hierarchies in a way that could reconcile conservatism with African American needs. Likewise, they also looked to the Republican-led White House in the late 1960s, where a small band of black appointees was able to introduce an economic civil rights agenda.

The third and final wave reflects the confusion and chaos of the 1970s, a period in which black Republicans, ousted from the White House, turned to the Republican National Committee (RNC) to push party reform, still invested in a pragmatic approach to achieving power. Though their solidarity movement found moments of success, black Republicans also experienced colossal failures. Just as significant, the second and third wave of activity coincided with the passage of the major federal civil rights laws of the 1960s and a society-wide shift from explicit forms of racism to implicit and institutional forms of discrimination.<sup>20</sup> The enactment and the enforcement of this legislation gave black Republicans a kind of freedom, or the leeway, to become more conservative, and adhere to mainstream party ideas about racial equality, *if they so chose*. This distinct outlook enabled black party members to concurrently embrace new types of nonpartisan strategies for wooing black voters *and* partisan techniques for nullifying the black vote. Our story ends in 1980, with black Republicans placing their hopes in the ascent of Ronald Reagan—a man many of them had once rejected.

The year 1936 is an obvious point at which to begin this book; less clear are my reasons for ending in 1980. No one, least of all black Republicans, could have predicted the fundamental way that Ronald Reagan's victory would alter the American political landscape; nor could they have anticipated the way in which some of their ideas—a nuanced and often conflicting set of beliefs articulated over forty-four years—would suddenly gain widespread traction in both the mainstream GOP and broader American political culture. This brings us to one of the many paradoxes posed by the disjuncture between historical and contemporary black Republican politics: it is difficult, if not impossible, to categorize African American members of the GOP, because they do not square neatly with any existing narrative nor do they fit within our modern understanding of the state of American politics. In other words, *we do not have an adequate name for the black Republicans described in this book*, nor do we differentiate between the types of black Republicanism. Thus, I end the narrative in 1980 to demonstrate just how *different* the pre-1980 period was for our reality, in order to bring a better sense of understanding to contemporary American politics; indeed, the preceding period represented intense variety, possibility, and flexibility, whereas the following period witnessed the hardening of the ideological boundaries that divided liberal, moderate, and conservative black Republicans.

• • •

Having spent much of this introduction defining the scope and nature of this study, I think it is reasonable for me to provide the reader with some boundaries by devoting a few words to what this project is not. This book is not a comprehensive study of all black ideologies or politics, nor is it focused on Democratic Party politics or liberalism. It is not an expansive guide to the black freedom struggle; and it is not a primer on the twentieth-century American conservative movement. I do not offer a study of *white* Republicans, whether conservative or moderate or liberal. Neither is this book an investigation of famous black Republicans or conservatives, although some do make appearances in the narrative. I intentionally chose not to focus on figures like George Schuyler and Clarence Thomas because there is a strong body of scholarship on both of these men; furthermore, one of the reasons that we have such a limited impression of black Republicans is that our understanding of this slice of the political sphere is dominated by the individual stories of a few notorious yet significant individuals. By looking past these few men (and, to date, nearly all have been men), it is my aim to reveal a much larger national community of black Republicans.

Throughout this book, I employ polls, statistics, and studies from the period, analyzing them as primary source documents. While such figures are important, they are also flawed. In fact, public opinion data and voting statistics on African Americans are terribly inconsistent, offering contradictory information through the 1980s—a problem often bemoaned by political scientists and historians alike. I have attempted to cobble these facts and figures together in a way that makes sense, pointing out patently obvious issues whenever necessary. But more important than these data, I believe, is the content of black Republican activity; at the center of this story stand the discussions and arguments that black members of the GOP had with themselves and with others, in their perpetual attempts to make conservatism a beneficial option for African Americans.<sup>21</sup>

• • •

This study introduces readers to key figures across a spectrum of black Republican politics and examines their ongoing struggles to effect meaningful change both for African Americans and within the Republican Party over the course of nearly half a century. This project illustrates the ways in which black Republicans were conservative *and* not conservative, and how their ideas overlapped and clashed with even the most reactionary wing of the Republican Party. Most important, this project demonstrates how they tried to reshape and expand the boundaries of conservatism to incorporate a racially egalitarian perspective. In no uncertain terms, black Republicans offer a dilemma of sorts; they were far more conservative than their Democratic counterparts but far less conservative than white reactionary Republicans. They identified with a traditional conservative ideology, to be sure, but they also identified with the various wings of the Republican Party. Above all else, most held fast to a pragmatic ideology that was informed by their day-to-day racial experience rather than by an abstract, dogmatic interpretation of American politics.