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nia Virginia, the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Philadelphia in 1793, Abraham Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. More directly, it represents the culmination of 75 years of political history during which rising levels of African American support for the Democratic Party and the accompanying shift of defenders of the racial status quo from the Democratic to the Republican Party remade the American political landscape.

Race, Politics, and the New Deal

It was during the Depression of the 1930s that black voters first began to migrate from the "party of Lincoln" to the Democratic Party. From the Civil War through the 1920s, region, race, and ethnicity had marked the divide between the two major political parties. The Republicans were the party of white native-stock Northerners and those African Americans, primarily in the North, who were able to exercise their right to vote, while the Democrats were the party of the white South and of "white ethnics" (Catholic and Jewish immigrants of European descent and their descendants) in the industrial North.

The growing influence of urban political machines within the national Democratic Party, and the increasing influence of "white ethnic" voters and politicians within those machines, was the one countervailing trend to racialism in post-World War I politics. By 1930, 56.2 percent of the U.S. population lived in urban areas. This trend culminated in the Democrats' nomination of Alfred E. Smith, the Irish Catholic governor of New York, as the party's standard-bearer in the 1928 presidential election, an achievement as momentous in its time as Obama's nomination was in 2008. But while Smith's nomination portended the increasing integration of European immigrant communities into the mainstream of American politics, his defeat in the face of widespread anti-Catholic prejudice demonstrated the continuing power of nativism in the country's politics.

Four years later, another Democratic governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, swept to victory over the incumbent Republican president, Herbert Hoover. Coming three years into the most severe economic depression in U.S. history and after 12 years of Republican rule in Washington, Roosevelt's victory was in one sense unremarkable. The Democratic Party remained, as it had been under Al Smith, an alliance of northern urban political machines and southern segregationists. What made

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Barack Obama's 2008 election as president of the United States was a singular moment in African American history, comparable to the arrival of the first African slaves in colo-

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Roosevelt's victory possible was the growing disaffection from the Republicans of native-stock middle-class and working-class voters in the Northeast, the Midwest, and California. One group of traditional Republican voters not drawn to Roosevelt's call for a "New Deal" for American families were African American voters. Black voters in most major cities voted for Hoover in 1932 by margins of more than two to one.

However, the New Deal quickly reorganized the racial and ethnic divisions within American politics in three significant ways. First, the Roosevelt administration's policies built for the Democrats an unassailable base among lower- and middle-income voters outside the South. Galvanized by Roosevelt's promise of government assistance to those most affected by the collapse of American industrial economy, working-class voters who had previously divided their votes between the two major parties along ethnic and religious lines flocked to the Democratic Party. In 1936 Roosevelt swept to reelection with nearly 61 percent of the vote.

As significant to shifts in working-class views on race, nation, and identity was the rapid growth in union membership in the 1930s, particularly following the founding of the Committee on Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1935 as an industrial alternative to the craft unions in the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The impact of the CIO's organizing drive on race relations within the working class was contradictory. On the one hand, the effort to organize every worker in a factory irrespective of differences of job, skill, race, ethnicity, or religion cast class unity—rather than hierarchies of race, religion, or ethnicity—as the key to advancing workers' interests in a capitalist economy. And, in fact, the CIO organized many minority and women workers whom the AFL had ignored. Yet, central to the CIO's appeal was also the labor organization's representation of the ideal American worker as white and male. The result was a working-class nationalism that for the first time fully included white Catholic and Jewish workers, while implicitly suggesting that minority and women workers were marginal to the cause of labor.

Second, the New Deal solidified the alliance between the southern and northern wings of the Democratic Party. To win the support of southern Democrats, however, Roosevelt had to assure white Southerners that New Deal programs would be administered in ways that would not disrupt race relations in the region. Most important, the Roosevelt administration allowed state and local officials to control the implementation of most New Deal programs. For example, the Civilian Conservation Corps

and the Works Progress Administration both operated segregated employment projects in the South. Most devastating to the interests of African American workers was the Roosevelt administration's decision in 1935 to accede to the demands of key southern congressional leaders to exclude farm and domestic workers from the provisions of the Social Security Act. As a result, 65 percent of black workers were excluded from Social Security's unemployment and retirement provisions.

Nor were the New Deal's racial inequities limited to the South. The New Deal policies with perhaps the longest-lasting disparate racial impact came in the area of housing. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was established in 1934 to rescue the private housing industry by providing mortgage guarantees to lenders willing to provide long-term mortgages to home buyers. As criteria for these mortgages, the FHA adopted standards from the real estate industry that favored white neighborhoods over integrated and predominately minority areas, suburban communities over urban neighborhoods, and owner-occupied single-family homes over multifamily structures and rental properties. The full import of this policy would not be evident until after World War II. New Deal housing programs would, in effect, subsidize the postwar boom in all-white suburbs while steering private housing investment away from the middle- and working-class urban neighborhoods that became the only housing option for ever-increasing numbers of southern black migrants.

Despite the racial inequities built into the New Deal, the third and final component of the New Deal coalition was in place by the end of the 1930s. In 1936 Roosevelt won more than 60 percent of the black vote in every major city except Chicago. Roosevelt's popularity with black voters was the product of two distinct aspects of his first two terms in office. First, large numbers of African Americans became, for the first time, recipients of government assistance. To be included among the beneficiaries of Roosevelt's New Deal was both a matter of survival in those hungry years and thrilling to a people so long treated as undeserving of the rights and privileges of American citizenship.

Second, and as important to black voters as these substantive benefits of the New Deal, was the symbolic value of Roosevelt's appointment of an unprecedented number of African Americans to high positions in his administration. While it would be another 30 years before an African American would be elevated to a position in the cabinet, Roosevelt's so-called "Negro Cabinet"—

made up of well-educated professionals appointed to the position of “Adviser for Negro Affairs” in the various agencies of the federal government—was a source of tremendous pride to black voters. These voters were also deeply impressed by Eleanor Roosevelt’s determined and very visible commitment to racial equality. The most dramatic emblem of the first lady’s commitment came in 1939 when she publicly resigned her membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution after the nativist and elitist women’s patriotic organization refused to allow Marian Anderson, the African American opera singer, to perform in the organization’s Constitution Hall in Washington. Mrs. Roosevelt instead arranged for Anderson to perform at the Lincoln Memorial for a national radio audience, a concert that became the high-water mark of African American inclusion in the New Deal.

World War II and the Double-V

Even as a majority of African American voters switched allegiance to the Democratic Party during the 1930s, it would be another decade before the party would formally commit itself to a civil rights agenda. During the 1940s, African American activists and their allies codified the “civil rights” strategy of achieving racial equality through legislation and judicial rulings that guaranteed government protection of individual rights. Three factors enabled civil rights activists to make much more significant demands on the administrations of Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman during the 1940s. First was the rapid growth in the African American population in the North as wartime labor shortages and growth in defense industry employment reinvigorated black migration from the South following the lull of the Depression years. In this decade, the black population living outside the South grew by 65 percent, to a total of 12.8 million people. Second, the rise of Nazism in Europe discredited theories of racial supremacy within the United States, particularly among liberal elites within the Democratic Party. Third, and most important, were the efforts of civil rights advocates to take advantage of the wartime social and political context to pressure the federal government and the Democratic Party to more directly address structures of racial discrimination within American society.

What one black newspaper would call the “Double-V” campaign (victory over fascism abroad and victory over racism at home) began when A. Philip Randolph, president of the all-black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, called for a black-only march on Washington, D.C.,

in June 1941 to demand the desegregation of the armed forces and equal treatment for black workers in the nation’s defense industries. Concerned that such a march would undercut popular support for his efforts to aid the European allies, Roosevelt convinced Randolph to call off the march in return for an executive order banning racial discrimination in defense employment. The resulting President’s Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) became the focus of the activists’ wartime efforts to improve employment opportunities for African American workers. In 1944, for example, the FEPC ordered the Philadelphia Transit Company to promote eight black maintenance workers to the position of trolley conductor. When the company’s white workers responded with a wildcat strike that shut down the transit system, the secretary of the Navy had to order troops into Philadelphia to run the trolleys.

It was during the 1940s that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) transformed itself from a primarily middle-class and northern organization into a truly national and mass-based one. Membership in the NAACP during the war grew from 54,000 to more than 500,000. Particularly significant was the growth of the organization’s membership in the South during these years. The NAACP’s southern chapters served as a training ground for a generation of local leaders who went on to play crucial roles in the civil rights mobilizations of the 1950s and 1960s, including Modjeska Simmons and Septima Clark in South Carolina, E. D. Nixon and Rosa Parks in Alabama, and Medgar Evers and Amzie Moore in Mississippi.

Also crucial to the increase in southern civil rights activism was the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), which outlawed the Democratic Party’s use of all-white primary elections across the South. As Charles Payne has argued, the decision spurred black southern voter registration, particularly in urban areas. The percentage of southern blacks registered to vote grew from less than 5 percent in 1940 to 12 percent in 1947 and 20 percent in 1952. Black voters in Atlanta and other cities were able to use their increased voting power to play a moderating influence in certain local elections.

The Civil Rights Movement in Cold War America

It was, however, developments in the North during the 1940s that provided the NAACP with new opportunities to pursue its civil rights agenda in the political arena. In 1948 Henry Moon, the NAACP’s public relations director, published *Balance of Power: The Negro Vote*, in which

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he argued that black voters in the urban North now held the balance of power between the two political parties in national elections and that for the first time since Reconstruction African American voters had the ability to demand significant civil rights reforms in return for their votes. Clark Clifford, President Truman's chief political advisor, reached a similar conclusion as he looked forward to the 1948 presidential election. Clifford concluded that unlike Roosevelt's four campaigns, southern support for the Democratic candidate would not be sufficient in 1948, but that an effective appeal to northern African American voters could return Truman to the presidency even if he lost some southern votes in the process.

To win northern black votes, however, Truman would have to fend off a challenge from Henry Wallace, his predecessor as Roosevelt's vice president and the candidate of the left-wing Progressive Party. Truman thus appointed a blue-ribbon commission in 1946 to study civil rights issues. The President's Committee on Civil Rights issued its report, titled *To Secure These Rights*, in 1947. The report laid out an agenda of actions that all three branches of the federal government should take to protect the rights of the nation's racial minorities. While the report's recommendations had little chance of being adopted by Congress, they did form the basis for Truman's groundbreaking appeal for the votes of northern blacks. Most dramatically, and in response to threats from A. Phillip Randolph to organize a civil disobedience campaign against the Selective Service system, Truman issued Executive Order 9981 on February 2, 1948, mandating the desegregation of the armed forces. The results of the 1948 election proved both Moon and Clifford to have been right. South Carolina Democratic governor Strom Thurmond won four Deep South states as the candidate of the States' Rights Democratic Party. But in the North, African American voters largely rejected Henry Wallace's candidacy and provided the margin of victory for Truman's upset defeat of the Republican nominee, Thomas E. Dewey.

With southern Democrats effectively blocking federal civil rights legislation, northern civil rights activists turned their focus to passing civil rights legislation at the state and local level. Between 1945 and 1964, 28 states passed Fair Employment Practices (FEP) laws. But as important as these legislative victories were, they could not mask the fact that racial discrimination remained pervasive in the North. Thus, the northern FEP laws did little to change the informal hiring policies and exclusionary union practices that kept African American workers

locked out of many white- and blue-collar occupations. And while the Supreme Court declared in 1948 that racial covenants were unenforceable in court, the suburban housing boom remained closed to African Americans as federal mortgage guarantors, housing developers, and white home buyers continued to favor white-only communities. Civil rights activists also faced increasing political opposition from other elements of the New Deal coalition to their efforts to address persistent racial inequities in northern communities. In the 1949 mayoral election in Detroit, for example, Albert Cobo, a conservative Republican, defeated the United Auto Workers-endorsed candidate on a platform of opposition to the building of public housing projects in white neighborhoods. As historians Arnold Hirsch and Thomas Sugrue have shown, black families seeking to move into all-white neighborhoods in cities like Chicago and Detroit were often greeted with racial violence.

Historians continue to debate the impact of the cold war on the civil rights movement. Manning Marable and Martha Biondi have argued that the stigmatization of left-wing politics during the period of McCarthyism greatly hampered civil rights efforts in part because of the prominence of left-wing figures like Paul Robeson among advocates of civil rights, in part because defenders of racial segregation were able to use the charge of communism to discredit all advocates of racial equality, and in part because organizations like the NAACP became extremely cautious politically in order to distance themselves from radicalism. In contrast, Mary Dudziak has argued that the cold war helped civil rights activists to advance their cause because of the pressure it placed on the nation's political leaders to demonstrate to the emerging nations of the third world that capitalist democracies were better able to deliver on the promise of racial equality than was the Soviet bloc.

Perhaps more detrimental to the cause of civil rights during the 1950s than cold war anxieties about the threat of internal subversion was the widespread belief among political leaders that the nation had entered a period of political consensus. The notion of consensus politics was rooted in two beliefs—first, that the country had solved most of its domestic problems, and second, that internal political unity was required to defeat the Communist threat. In this view, whatever social inequities remained in American society (among which most advocates of consensus politics would have included racial issues) would gradually disappear as the capitalist economy continued to grow, while efforts to speed the process of

social change (through, for example, aggressive efforts to implement civil rights reforms) would only divide the country and weaken its resolve in the struggle against communism. As a result, the 1950s were characterized both by historic civil rights achievements rooted in an idealistic view of the United States as the world's foremost defender of individual liberty and equal rights under law and by the failure of government officials to fulfill the promise of those achievements for fear of the reaction of the white majority. Thus, the Supreme Court ruled in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case that school segregation is unconstitutional. But with southern Democrats promising "massive resistance" to the *Brown* decision, President Dwight Eisenhower refused to vigorously enforce the decision. Moreover, the Supreme Court ruled just one year later that school desegregation should take place with "all deliberate speed," thus opening the door to two decades of southern efforts to sustain dual school systems. In a similar fashion, the U.S. Congress passed its first major piece of civil rights legislation since Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Act of 1957, just days before Eisenhower was forced to send federal troops to enforce a federal court order requiring the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. By the time of its passage, however, the enforcement provisions of the act, which sought to increase the number of African American voters in the South, had been so watered down that leading southern Democratic senators declared its passage a victory for their side.

The 1960s

Thirty-two years after Al Smith lost his bid to become the first Catholic president of the United States, John F. Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. Twice during the campaign, Kennedy felt it necessary to give speeches declaring his commitment to the separation of church and state. What was not in question, however, was Kennedy's status as a white American. In contrast to previous generations of European Catholic immigrants and their descendants who were seen as racially distinct from native-stock white Americans, Kennedy, like his contemporaries Frank Sinatra and Joe DiMaggio, became a symbol of the quintessential American experience in a nation of immigrants.

African American voters again played a crucial role in the 1960 presidential election. Nine months earlier, the student sit-in movement to protest segregated lunch counters had spread rapidly across the South. That fall,

civil rights protest became an issue in the presidential campaign when Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested for leading a sit-in in Atlanta and was subsequently sentenced to four months in a south Georgia prison camp. Nixon refused to intervene, hoping to gain the votes of white Southerners upset by the civil rights plank in Democratic Party platform. Kennedy, in contrast, placed a call to King's wife, Coretta Scott King, to express his concern. Within days, Kennedy campaign officials had successfully petitioned Georgia officials for King's release. On the Sunday before the election, the Kennedy campaign distributed a flyer to black churches across the nation announcing the endorsement of King's father, Martin Luther King Sr. In one of the closest presidential campaigns in American history, black votes provided the margin of victory for Kennedy in a number of northern states.

Civil rights issues were not a priority for Kennedy when he entered the White House in 1961. Rather, his central focus was on foreign policy. Within months, however, the efforts of civil rights protesters—particularly the interracial teams of "freedom riders" who sought to ride interstate buses across the South—would force Kennedy to address the question of southern race relations. In an effort to defuse the sense of crisis generated by nonviolent protest, the Kennedy administration initially sought to encourage civil rights activists to shift their focus to voter registration on the theory that a growing black electorate in the South would lead the region's politicians to moderate their positions on racial issues.

In June 1963, however, as nonviolent protest campaigns continued to roil southern cities and as voter registration drives in the rural South were met with racist violence, Kennedy submitted to Congress civil rights legislation banning segregated public accommodations and employment discrimination. Support for the Kennedy civil rights bill was a central feature of the August 1963 March on Washington, even as activists affiliated with the student wing of the movement pressed unsuccessfully for the march to explicitly criticize the president for failing to do enough to protect civil rights workers in the South from racist violence.

Still, little progress had been made on the civil rights bill by the time of Kennedy's tragic assassination in November 1963. It would take a Southerner, Kennedy's successor Lyndon Johnson, to overcome southern opposition and steer the civil rights bill through Congress. During his 23 years in Congress, including six as Senate majority leader, Johnson had been an ardent New Dealer and, for a Southerner, a moderate on civil rights

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issues. Now he pledged “to take the dead man’s program and turn it into a martyr’s cause.” On June 11, 1964, the Senate voted for the first time to end a southern Senate filibuster against a civil rights bill and, on July 1, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law.

The act was only part of Johnson’s agenda of social and political reform, however. In his first State of the Union address in January 1964, Johnson called for the most prosperous nation in the world to wage “a war on poverty.” Then, in May, he pledged to use the nation’s material wealth to build a “Great Society” based on “an abundance and liberty for all . . . an end to poverty and racial injustice . . . [and] the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.” Johnson’s vision of the Great Society was rooted in two seemingly contradictory views of American society—the first of a great country ready to use its wealth to help those with the least, the second of a nation flawed by racism but willing to confront its failings in pursuit of justice for all. Johnson promoted the war on poverty and the Great Society both as efforts to provide assistance to the poor of all races and as essential to fulfilling the call of the civil rights movement to end racial injustice.

In the short run, Johnson would parlay these twin imperatives into a remarkable streak of legislative and political victories. In the summer of 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act—the centerpiece of Johnson’s antipoverty initiative—which would provide nearly \$3 billion in government funds for local antipoverty programs over the next three years. That fall, not only did Johnson win a landslide victory over his Republican opponent, Barry Goldwater, but the Democrats swept to the party’s largest majorities in both the House and the Senate in the post–World War II period. This majority enabled Johnson to push a legislative agenda through Congress over the next two years that rivaled the reforms of the New Deal. Most significant was the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which established for the first time, federal oversight over the voter rolls in the ten southern states that had historically denied the vote to African Americans. Educational programs were enacted for low-income children, including the preschool program Head Start; Medicare and Medicaid, health insurance programs for the elderly and the poor; immigration reform; mass transit programs; and consumer safety and environmental safety legislation.

By the fall of 1966, there were signs of declining support for Johnson’s reform agenda. Civil rights protests, urban race riots, and rising urban crime rates combined

to weaken white support for the president’s agenda of racial reform and poverty reduction, while the growing cost of the Vietnam War and rising inflation strengthened the voices of conservative critics of taxes and government spending. Republicans picked up 50 seats in the 1966 congressional elections, effectively bringing a halt to Johnson’s Great Society agenda and setting the stage for the resurgence of Republicans in national elections.

Historians have tended to see the 1960s as the moment when the national Democratic Party committed itself fully to the cause of civil rights, the Republican Party began to capture the allegiance of white southern voters, and the New Deal coalition of white southern, black, and northern white working-class voters began to collapse. This analysis must be qualified in three ways. First, racial issues in the urban North had begun to lead middle- and low-income white voters to abandon the Democrats in local elections as early as the late 1940s. Second, Republicans had begun in the 1950s to pursue a strategy of capturing the votes of white southern Democrats rather than seeking to compete with the Democrats for the votes of African Americans and other supporters of civil rights.

Third, the most important factor in the shift of white voters toward the Republican Party, in the South and in the industrial states of the Northeast and the Midwest, was only tangentially related to the civil rights reforms of the 1960s. Rather, Republican candidates in presidential and congressional elections benefited from the growing importance of white suburban voters, relative to both northern urban and southern rural voters, within the American electorate. By the late 1960s, suburban voters—many of them the children of New Dealers—were increasingly hostile to the perceived cost (in taxes) of government programs designed to address racial and economic equality as well as to any efforts by the federal government and courts to force local communities to adopt policies (in areas like zoning and public schooling) designed to lessen racial segregation in the North. Suburban voters were also attracted to Republican calls for lower taxes and for a vigilantly anti-Communist foreign policy.

The splintering of the New Deal coalition was most evident in the 1968 presidential election. While Richard Nixon received only about 500,000 more votes than his Democratic opponent, Hubert Humphrey, he won the Electoral College by more than 100 votes. Humphrey’s defeat was in part the result of the loss of support for Democrats among white southern voters. Nixon swept the Upper South, South Carolina, and Florida for a total

of 65 electoral votes, while Alabama's Democratic governor George Wallace, running as a third-party candidate, won five Deep South states and a total of 45 electoral votes. However, the Democratic standard-bearer might still have won the election had Wallace not cut severely into his support among white northern working-class voters who felt abandoned by the Democratic Party's civil rights policies. The Alabama governor campaigned extensively in the North, drawing large crowds to campaign rallies during which he received appreciative applause for his attacks on elitist liberals for insisting that poor whites integrate their schools even as those liberals sent their own children to exclusive private schools. In six northern states, the Wallace vote more than doubled Nixon's margin of victory over Humphrey.

Racial Codes and the Rise of the New Right

These fissures within the New Deal coalition did not immediately add up to Republican dominance of American politics. Nixon won the 1968 election with only 43.4 percent of the vote. Moreover, Democrats remained in firm control of both houses of Congress despite Nixon's landslide reelection in 1972. Not until 1994 would Republicans win majorities in both houses of Congress. Throughout this period, Democrats remained competitive in southern congressional elections, particularly when they campaigned on New Deal-style populist economics that appealed to middle- and lower-income white as well as black voters.

Nixon's victory in the 1968 presidential campaign began a streak in which Republicans won seven of the next ten presidential elections. While largely conceding the more formal aspects of the civil rights revolution—a “color-blind” legal system, school desegregation, equal access to public accommodations—Republicans proved adept at using racial codes to promote key aspects of their conservative policy agenda to white voters across the economic spectrum. Racial coding was most pronounced in Republican efforts to stigmatize liberal policies in the areas of school desegregation, welfare, affirmative action, and immigration.

Nixon most effectively used racial codes to express sympathy for white anxieties about court-ordered school desegregation plans. In his 1968 campaign, Nixon won broad support in upper-income suburban districts across the South by affirming his support both for the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision and for local control over public schooling. He thus managed to distance himself simultaneously from southern segregationists like Wallace and

from civil rights activists and federal judges who were advocates of what he called “forced integration.” Over the next decade, the Supreme Court would uphold a series of federal court rulings that required the use of mandatory busing schemes to achieve school integration in both southern and northern urban school districts. In all of these cases, the courts found that a constellation of government policies—from the gerrymandering of school boundaries to housing and zoning policies designed to maintain residential segregation—had served to perpetuate school segregation despite the Court's ruling in the *Brown* case. And yet, each case gave conservative politicians from Charlotte, North Carolina, to Boston the opportunity to position themselves as defenders of legitimate white working-class interests—explicitly, of the right to keep their children in neighborhood schools and implicitly, of the right to keep those schools exclusively white.

Racial coding was equally effective for Republicans on the issue of welfare. Central to the conservative attack on excesses of the Great Society programs of the 1960s was the argument that the growth in government assistance to the poor constituted little more than a transfer of income from “hardworking” taxpayers to African American and Latino beneficiaries deemed too lazy to work. The majority of welfare recipients were, of course, white. Moreover, antipoverty programs contributed to a 50 percent decline in the poverty rate in the United States between 1960 and 1980. While books like conservative sociologist Charles Murray's *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950–1980* (1984) argued that income assistance programs promoted dependency on government by providing a disincentive to work, conservative opposition to welfare focused less on policy debates than on stories of welfare recipients as “cheats” and “frauds.” Anecdotal narratives of Cadillac-driving “welfare queens” who used multiple aliases to collect excessive benefits were central to Ronald Reagan's emergence as a leader of the conservative movement during the 1970s. While he rarely referred to specific individuals, Reagan's references to neighborhoods like Chicago's South Side invariably marked welfare cheaters as African American.

Opposition to welfare remained a central feature of Republican appeals to white lower- and middle-income voters into the 1990s. In an effort to inoculate his candidacy against charges of liberal elitism, Democrat Bill Clinton built his 1992 presidential campaign around a pledge “to end welfare as we know it.” Still, opposition

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to welfare remained at the top of the Republicans' 1994 "Contract with America," the manifesto on which Republican congressional leaders based their successful campaign to wrest control from the Democrats of both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years. In 1996 the Republican Congress passed and President Clinton signed a reform bill that transformed welfare from an entitlement meant to serve everyone who qualified for aid into a time-limited program with stringent requirements and a five-year cap on benefits.

Also central to the Republican critique of the racial excesses of liberalism was affirmative action. The origins of affirmative action lay in the response of civil rights activists and liberal government officials to the failure of antidiscrimination laws to substantively desegregate local labor markets. Private-sector employers found that a minimal adjustment in their hiring procedures—and, in some cases the employment of a token few minority employees—quickly brought them into compliance with fair employment laws. Debate over whether employers could and should be required to take action to increase their employment of minority workers bore fruit in March 1961, when President Kennedy issued an executive order requiring federal agencies and contractors to take "affirmative action" to remove racially discriminatory barriers to employment.

Over the next decade, federal officials responded to increasingly militant civil rights protests against continued discrimination in private-sector hiring, particularly in the construction trades, with a series of policy experiments designed to establish affirmative action's parameters and procedures. In 1969 a federal court upheld the constitutionality of the Philadelphia Plan in the building trades, and the Nixon administration extended its requirements to all federal contracts worth more than \$50,000. Women were added to the affirmative action requirements in 1971, and many state and local governments adopted similar plans.

President Nixon seems to have decided to support affirmative action both in hopes of winning support from the black business and professional classes and as part of a strategy to promote divisions between the labor (that is, white working class) and black wings of the Democratic Party.

Opposition to affirmative action would not become a central feature of Republican appeals for white working- and middle-class votes until Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign. Reagan and the emergent conservative wing of the Republican Party argued that affirmative action constituted reverse discrimination against whites, par-

ticularly those from lower- and middle-income communities, and thus violated the civil rights movement's commitment to building a colorblind society. The most dramatic instance of the Republicans' use of affirmative action to draw working-class white votes came in the U.S. Senate election in North Carolina in 1990, when Senator Jesse Helms used a last-minute television ad (in which the viewer saw only the hands and flannel sleeves of a white worker opening a letter informing him that the job he "needed" had been given to a "minority") to win a come-from-behind victory over Harvey Gantt, his African American opponent.

In the legal arena, the charge of reverse discrimination was advanced, with some success, in the name of whites who claimed to have been denied educational or economic opportunity on the basis of their race—most prominently Allen Bakke, Jennifer Gratz, and Barbara Grutter, the plaintiffs in the 1977 and 2005 Supreme Court cases that defined how universities can and cannot use affirmative action procedures in admissions. Within the political realm, many of the leading opponents of affirmative action were black and Latino conservatives. Figures like Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, economists Thomas Sowell and Glen Loury, Republican activist Linda Chavez, and political essayists Shelby Steele and Richard Rodriguez argued that affirmative action violated Martin Luther King Jr.'s call for people to be judged according to the content of their character and not the color of their skin, and that it reinforced the view that racial minorities were incapable of competing on equal terms with whites. In 1995 Ward Connerly, a University of California trustee and Republican Party activist, emerged as the most prominent black opponent of affirmative action when he led a successful referendum campaign in California to ban the use of racial and gender preferences in all state government programs and contracts. Over the next decade, Connerly would lead similarly successful campaigns in Washington, Florida, Michigan, and Nebraska.

Black and Latino conservatives did not limit their political activism and advocacy to affirmative action, offering free market, self-help, and faith-based policy prescriptions on issues from poverty and the rising number of female-headed single-parent households to failing schools and insufficient economic investment in the inner cities. While Republican efforts to increase the party's share of the black and Latino vote produced only minimal results, advocates of self-help, entrepreneurship, and traditional religious and social values enjoyed

growing influence in black and Latino communities in the post–New Deal era.

Race and the Politics of Immigration

Bilingual education provides another example of the ways in which racial politics infused conservative efforts to discredit federally funded domestic programs. In 1968 Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act, which provided the first federal funding for bilingual education programs. But it was not until the early 1970s that federal education officials began to require that school districts provide bilingual educational programming to non-English speakers as a mechanism for promoting both immigrant educational achievement and ethnic and racial pride.

In the ensuing decades, the debate over bilingual education has proceeded on two separate, if overlapping, tracks. While educators debate whether bilingual transitional or monolingual immersion programs are the best mechanism for enabling immigrant children to simultaneously learn English and keep up with their English-speaking classmates, conservative activists, led in the 1980s by Reagan administration Secretary of Education William Bennett, have criticized bilingual education for promoting ethnic pride and multicultural identities over assimilation into American society. A direct result of the furor of bilingual education was the emergence of the “English-only” movement, which won passage of legislation declaring English to be the sole official language of the United States in 26 states between 1984 and 2007.

By the early 1990s, English-only campaigns were largely superseded by a broader conservative backlash against immigration, particularly that from Mexico and Central and South America. The policy agenda of anti-immigration activism has been to prevent undocumented immigrants from entering the country and to deny government services to those already in the United States. For example, California’s Proposition 187, enacted with 59 percent of the vote in 1994, would have denied social services, public health care, and public education to undocumented immigrants had it not been overturned in the courts. But while anti-immigration groups like the Federation for American Immigration Reform have long denied any racial motivation to their agenda, popular animus against Latino immigrants, whether legal or undocumented, has driven much of the demand for immigration reform over the last two decades. Latino immigrants are accused of being fundamentally different from previous generations of immigrants, of failing

to learn English and assimilate into “American culture,” and of taking jobs from American workers. In 2004, for example, Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington published “The Hispanic Challenge,” an extended essay later developed into a book, in which he argued that “Mexicans and other Latinos have not assimilated into mainstream U.S. culture, forming instead their own political and linguistic enclaves—from Los Angeles to Miami—and rejecting the Anglo-Protestant values that built the American dream.”

Within the Republican Party, however, opinion was split over whether to pursue an anti-immigration agenda or to campaign for Latino votes. One the one hand, California governor Pete Wilson was a strong supporter of Proposition 187, and the 1994 Contract with America promised to disqualify even legal immigrants from public assistance programs. Other Republicans argued that the party should make it a priority to reach out to upwardly mobile and socially conservative Latinos in states like Florida and Texas. For example, the Nixon administration’s initial support for bilingual education emerged from a desire to appeal to Latino voters. And Nixon did in fact double his share of the Latino vote to about 33 percent between 1968 and 1972. Similarly, support from Latino voters and a moderate position on immigration issues were instrumental in George W. Bush’s emergence as a national political leader during his years as governor of Texas as well as to his narrow victories in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

African American and Latino Politics in the Post–Civil Rights Era

Despite conservative gains since the 1960s, the final decades of the twentieth century were also marked by the unprecedented growth in the number of African American and Latino elected officials. By 2000 the combined total of black and Latino elected officials at all levels of governments exceeded 13,000. The majority of these politicians of color were elected to office in the “black belt” regions of the rural South and in California and Texas, the two states with the largest Latino populations.

It was in the nation’s big cities, however, that black and Latino politicians were most visible. From 1967, when Carl Stokes and Richard Hatcher became the first African Americans elected mayor of major cities (Cleveland, Ohio, and Gary, Indiana, respectively) to Antonio Villaraigosa’s election as the first Latino mayor of modern-day Los Angeles in 2005, urban politicians of color have sought to use election to public office as

radicalism

a mechanism for addressing the continued economic and social underdevelopment of minority communities in the United States. It was, in fact, this vision of black urban governance—particularly as practiced by Chicago's first and so far only African American mayor, Harold Washington—that first attracted Barack Obama to electoral politics. In the 1960s and 1970s, this strategy of winning control over city government was rooted in a view of the federal government as a willing and essential ally in efforts to revive the nation's urban economies. But even as the national political culture grew more conservative and the fulcrum of political power shifted from cities to the suburbs, many politicians of color maintained their vision of elective office as a mechanism for the collective uplift of their communities.

See also African Americans and politics; Asian immigrants and politics; civil rights; Latinos and politics.

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