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NIXON'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE ROLE OF RACE IN THE 1968 AND 1972 PRESIDENTIAL
CAMPAIGNS

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During his first inaugural address in 1968, Richard Nixon stated “The simple things are the ones most needed today if we are to surmount what divides us, and cement what unites us... we cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another, until we speak quietly enough that our words can be heard as well as our voices.”¹ Naturally, the crowd cheered endlessly. Thousands of men, women, and children looked on in awe at the Republican who had won the hearts of just over 50% of the nation. Four years later, however, he won in a landslide with the help of Southern voters.

Popular culture references Nixon's election of 1968 as the official switch of the South from Democratic to Republican. Prior to this election, Southern states tended to vote along a hard Democratic line. However, the voting bases of the two parties swiftly shifted in the 1960s.

Nixon's contribution to the Southern Strategy began, but did not end with his election in 1968. Rather, this strategy began in its infantile stages in 1968, and was perfected in 1972. The Southern Strategy was more than a means of getting Nixon elected by southern voters; this new

¹ Richard Nixon, *Inauguration of Richard Nixon CBS News Broadcast*. Inauguration Speech (January 20, 1969).

political strategy was a means of getting the south to vote solidly Republican for decades to come. The goal of the Southern Strategy differed from other political strategies because it thought about the long-term goal of securing both northern Republicans and southern ideologies by striking a precarious balance between progress and rural conservatism.

To understand this political switch, it is necessary to compartmentalize voters: west, north, and south were the main targets. If a candidate could cater to a fair portion of voters in all three of these areas, they had already won. Nobody could quite do that, though, so they had to be strategic, specifically in which groups of voters they wanted to bring to the polls. For Nixon, this group was white, Southern voters. It is important to note that Southern voters did not fundamentally change; the Democratic and Republican parties did. Although the two parties switched in who they appealed to, “despite the fact that the South is now republican, the South has still really never changed.”² Although the South had previously been consistently Democratic, amidst a myriad of changes in the nation, they were slowly swayed to vote for Republicans.

The southern switch from Democrats to Republicans faced a brief transition period in 1968, during which many Southern voters voted for neither mainstream party, but rather for overtly racist and anti-Civil Rights ‘Dixiecrats.’ Both parties knew that they had to cater to the south to win these delegates to secure future elections and take command of the country. The race was on. In 1968, in order for Nixon to win the vote of the south, he realized that he needed

² Glenn Feldman. *Painting Dixie Red: When, Where, Why, and How the South Became Republican* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 3.

to cater to these political demands. This resulted in what is presently characterized as the ‘Southern Strategy.’

For decades, southern voters had generally been “anti-tax, illiberal, blindly patriotic, racist, and plutocratic.”³ However, within the pool of Southern voters, there are two subgroups: the south and the deep south. The deep south (i.e. Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia, etc.) were not won by Nixon in 1968; however, South Carolina, Virginia, and other quintessential southern states had been convinced to cast their votes for Nixon in 1968. Four years later, in 1972, however, Nixon managed to flip all of these states, winning an astonishing 96.6% of the electoral vote.

The question stands: why did Dixie-‘never Lincoln’-land decide to vote for the party of Lincoln at the close of the 1960s? The precedent set forth by preceding campaigns, political strategy of Nixon’s campaign team, and the larger ideological debate about the role of government in the lives of civilians, are all indispensable pieces of solving this puzzle. Looking back, southern voters did not change. However, the parties that represented their interests did in 1968.

There were, of course, previous attempts to switch the southern vote, beginning most clearly with the 1952 election of President Eisenhower. Herbert Brownell, one of Eisenhower’s key political strategists, was behind this large-scale shift. He recognized that “the weakness of the existing Republican organizations and the changing demographics of the area made it ripe for change.”⁴ In 1952, the draw of Southern voters was the campaign’s denouncing of the New Deal

³ *Ibid*, 319.

⁴ *Ibid*, 222.

and similar economic strategies. They characterized the New Deal as un-American in nature, and evident of bureaucracy. The New Deal sought to put community on-par with self, which was considered to be a direct contradiction to the American sentiment of individualism. Embedded in the anti-New Deal message was the broader anti-government intervention message. In the South, Eisenhower won in a landslide for being the candidate advocating for classic capitalism and a return to our individualist roots.

Considering the previous list of Southern voting criterion: anti-tax, anti-foreigner, plutocratic, Eisenhower's propaganda lived up to their realities. In 1952, Eisenhower won by a landslide; by all measures, his strategy should have been considered the first Southern strategy, if not for the simple fact that he lost in seven states: Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Eisenhower successfully catered to Southern values, yet lost in nearly every single 'Deep South' state. This effectively illustrates that pro-American, pro-capitalist sentiments alone were not enough to shift the hard Democratic line along which the Deep South voted.

Eisenhower did not win the South; however, he set two important precedents. The first was that pro-capitalist, free-market messages were part of what it took to woo Southern voters. The second was that the Republican party was going to have to beat the Democratic party at their own game of racism to win the South.

For the years following, no Republicans played that game. Despite this, eighteen years later, Nixon successfully accomplished both goals in his run against Vice President Humphrey. The Democratic opposition, Hubert Humphrey, formerly Vice President to Lyndon B. Johnson, began his run for President while in office in 1967.

At the beginning of his political career, in the early 1950s, Humphrey was known as a “flaming radical on the left bank of the Democratic party”⁵ for his staunch pro-Civil Rights and taxation standpoints. By the time he ran for President, however, he sought to soften this title in order to secure more votes by denouncing his old, ‘radical’ views. He was unsuccessful. Despite his insistence that he was a non-radical candidate of the day, he was instrumental in promoting Johnson’s vision of a ‘Great Society’ with legislation such as “the 1965 Voting Rights Act, Medicare, establishment of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Office of Economic Opportunity... the National Endowment for the Arts, the Public Broadcasting Service, and solar energy research.”⁶ His support of these programs were in direct opposition to the illiberal values that many southerners held, as well as President Nixon. Humphrey was not moderate, and would have a difficult time swinging many moderate or on-the-fence voters.

Nixon started his campaign off strongly. In addition to not being the incumbent of a failing party, he also had a loyal campaign team to support him. In a fairly long article describing the nature and character of his team, the *New York Times* reported that “[Nixon’s] aides do not burn with the same obvious intellectualism as those who worked for Senator Robert F. Kennedy,” however, “their admiration for the man they call ‘boss’ is open and unashamed, and if he is criticized, they assume he has been misunderstood. Indeed, if there is any thread uniting

⁵ Joel K. Goldstein, *The Modern American Vice Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 122.

⁶ Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1984), 214.

their efforts, it is their attempt, as one put it, ‘to show the public the Nixon we know.’”⁷

Therefore, despite the actual capabilities of Nixon’s team, they were loyal, and willing to do anything to

In a televised campaign advertisement, Nixon displayed video clips of a nation in shambles: clips of race riots, anti-war protests, nuclear war tests, families in tattered clothes with dirty faces, and a generally discontented, dangerous American public. The accompanying voiceover bashed the Democratic rule of the nation, and asked American voters to consider two primary questions: firstly, in direct opposition to the Democratic programs Humphrey avidly supported, “how can [the Democratic party] that labels the results of its programs ‘The Great Society’ ever find any real solutions?” Secondly, “how can a country that can’t keep order in its own backyard hope to keep order in our fifty states?”⁸ These questions were vague, and effectively allowed Americans to evaluate their current discontents with a Democratic Administration, and project these onto Humphrey. Nixon, however, in addition to using evidence about Humphrey’s policies, also used careful rhetoric and images to downplay the positivity of the Civil Rights movement. For instance, in the aforementioned advertisement, Nixon flashed photos and short video clips of Civil Rights protests, and painted this ‘violence’ as failures of a Democratic Administration; what he failed to acknowledge, was the subsequent action that

⁷ “Nixon Staff is Low Key and Professional: 6-Man Committee of 5 Months Ago Now Smooth Operation All the Aides Share Open Admiration for ‘the Boss,’” *New York Times*, 117:40,329 (June 24, 1968), sec. II, 16.

⁸ Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, *1968 Presidential Campaign Ads*. Campaign Advertisements (June 1, 1968).

Humphrey, as Vice President, took to ameliorate the cause of the violence by helping to expand Civil Rights in the nation.

The route of campaigning for Humphrey was not so effective. Comparatively, his advertisements did not induce as much of a personal, visceral reaction in the American public, largely because his advertisements lacked two pieces of rhetoric that Nixon had in abundance: pointedness, and playing to existing biases of key voting groups.

Consequently, debates between Humphrey and Nixon were interesting, when they occurred. As the *New York Times* stated in 1968, “nobody in the race has the answers to the problems of peace abroad and civil order at home; therefore, we have to rely on faith and trust the man in the White House.”⁹ This implied that the winner of the Presidential race might not necessarily be the most knowledgeable, nor the best man for the job of the President, but rather the most persuasive candidate. What America wanted was not a smart man, but a man who could cater to a wide array of opinions using illusive rhetoric. According to the same *New York Times* article, Nixon was the man for this job, as he was the master of “new politics,” or “the art of computerizing prejudice,”¹⁰ indicating that he was exactly the man for the job.

Nixon’s rhetoric was extremely effective. For a speech to the 1968 Republican National Convention, Nixon stated “the President is the one official who represents every American... I pledge, in a Nixon administration, American citizens will not have to break the law to be heard, they will not have to shout or resort to violence. We can restore peace if only we make

⁹ “The TV Debates: Mr. Nixon Then and Now,” *New York Times*, 118:40,452 (October 25, 1968), sec. II, 46.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Government attentive to the quiet as well as the strident, this I intend to do.”¹¹ This indicated that rather than rioting and protesting for solutions (e.g. as many Civil Rights activists had done throughout the 1960s), people should simply trust their politicians to make the right decisions. Despite Nixon’s political record and rhetoric, he attempted to persuade Americans that more than Humphrey, he would listen to the concerns of his constituents so much so, that there would be no more discontent in the American homeland.

In debates and in promises for policy-making, Nixon used embedded prejudice in his speech and rhetoric that shaped the new Republican party. In addition to this clear message in his campaign, once he was elected for his first term, his Presidency reflected the same coded, racist sentiments, carrying his covertly racist message from 1968 to 1972. Nonetheless, he got away with it by pretending to operate on a pro-racial equality platform whilst actually undermining the progress that black Americans had made thus far. Time and time again, he pretended to advocate for the social and economic prosperity of African-Americans, or for the safety of the nation as a whole, all whilst really pushing for policies to benefit white southerners. The first example was cutting welfare programs in the interest of the ‘prosperity’ of African-Americans through black capitalism, the second was with school desegregation, and the third was his stance on cutting down crime. We can see the Southern strategy operate in both 1968 and 1972 in all three of these areas. In 1968, Nixon proposed certain programs and expressed racially-charged sentiments on the campaign trail. This only won him a few votes in Southern states. However, in the election of 1972, as soon as Southern voters saw the effects of Republican President Nixon’s policies, they voted overwhelmingly for him.

¹¹ “Excerpts from Text of Speech by Nixon on Conception of Presidency,” *New York Times*, 118:40,417 (September 20, 1968), sec. III, 33.

Nixon was an avid supporter of “black capitalism,” which is characterized as giving black Americans the tools to prosper in a capitalist system rather than allowing them to remain in the same predicament of economic stagnance and economic discrimination to which they had been subject of. Nixon’s proposal was to spur economic enterprise opportunities by giving corporations tax cut incentives to train unskilled workers for a new world of economic excellence. By all means, ‘black capitalism’ sounded like a beacon of progress for African-Americans; however, Nixon’s true meaning of this ‘black capitalist’ sentiment was cutting social programs that primarily aided African-Americans, and labeling them as ‘wasteful spending of federal dollars’.

It was argued by Nixon that the government was paying so much money to low-income (especially low-income African-American communities that having good welfare programs was a dis-incentive for working. In his own words, “from government welfare programs can flow the rest -- black pride, black jobs, black opportunity, and yes, black power... in the best sense of that term.”¹² Therefore, more welfare meant less work, which meant less prosperity for low-income people of color. So, in Nixon’s mind, the only solution to the issue was to remove social programs that kept black communities alive as an incentive for black capitalism. And, in the words of Nixon’s campaign strategist Howard Callaway “we fight poverty. We work,”¹³ meaning that Nixon’s plan was to not give handouts, but jobs.

¹² Timothy N. Thurber, *Republicans and Race: The GOP’s Frayed Relationship with African-Americans, 1945-1974*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 271.

¹³ John R. Murphy, and Harold S. Gulliver. *The Southern Strategy*. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 27.

To accomplish the goals of ‘black capitalism,’ Nixon proposed an alternate welfare program: the Family Assistance Program (FAP), which Nixon promised would “correct the condition it deals with and thus to lessen the long-range burden.”¹⁴ This condition, of course, was poverty. Between the lines of Nixon’s plan, however, laid deep inequities in regional treatment. Take, for instance, the income floor of \$1,600; the government would pay a family of four making \$720 or less annually a sum of \$1,600 to aid with rent, groceries, and other expenses. The federal supplement would disappear as soon as a family earned an annual income of \$3,920 or more. It may have seemed fair to apply equally to habitants of all regions; however, when considering that Northern state welfare programs tended to give their beneficiaries greater sums of money, “[\$1,600] was twice what a Mississippi family was asked to live on, but in the North, where benefits were higher, it would not result in any increase to a welfare family, and it would soon be derided as abysmally low.”¹⁵ That being said, the federal supplement encouraged by Nixon’s welfare program disproportionately favored Southern states. In fact, on the campaign trail in 1968 at an Alabama Town Hall, Nixon argued that “there is more underemployment and unemployment in what is called rural America than there is in urban America. I don’t think rural America has received the attention it should receive.”¹⁶ Despite the fact that the problems seemed to overwhelmingly impact black, urban families, Nixon expressed in his 1968 campaign that he cared more about the well-being of rural white Southerners than actually afflicted groups.

¹⁴ “Welfare Reform: Born Aug. 8, 1968; Died Oct. 4, 1972: A Sad Story of the American Political Process,” *New York Times*, 122:41,987 (January 7, 1973), sec. II, 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Richard Nixon, *The Nixon Answer, Southern Town Hall*. Town Hall Address in Georgia (October 3, 1968).

The factor of race was evident in the design of this system, as it had a disproportionate negative impact on black, urban families, who were experiencing much of the poverty that the FAP meant to solve. In fact, in the first months of 1967, there were 64 disorders, and “nearly all the riots centered around race -- of the 31 cities where the proportion of blacks had doubled in the last twenty years, twenty had serious disorders.”¹⁷ This indicated that black, urban families were facing the brunt of income inequality; FAP attempted to solve this problem by giving money to the male head of the family. This created a situation that was no better for black families than the previous welfare system, especially considering that Secretary of Labor George Schultz admitted that “we are not going to be remaking the economy in this program. We can only put people in the jobs that exist.”¹⁸ The purpose of the Family Assistance Program was created to solve the crisis of poverty in the nation. This crisis primarily impacted urban black families. However, in both the intent and implementation of Nixon’s Federal Assistance Program, there was no significant change in the affluence of black families.

However ‘progressive’ black capitalism sounded at first glance, the reality manifested itself much differently. The reality of black capitalism was less government aid, and no new tools to help black Americans escape poverty. Rather, he argued that the only way to see solvency of the issues of unemployment and chronic poverty was to “move from the federal government approach... to private enterprise.”¹⁹ As Secretary of Labor George Schutlz already

¹⁷ Jill Quadagno, “Race, Class, and Gender in the U.S. Welfare State: Nixon’s Failed Family Assistance Plan,” *American Sociological Review*, 55:1 (February 1990), 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁹ Richard Nixon, *The Nixon Answer, Southern Town Hall*. Town Hall Address in Georgia (October 3, 1968).

revealed, though, the shift to ‘private enterprise’ was still a shift towards low-paying jobs. The reality of Nixon’s black capitalism was negative for African-Americans. Nonetheless, this approach, although not entirely sweeping the rural deep south, appealed to metropolitan southern areas who stood by the free-market. Referring back to southern voting criterion, this makes perfect sense: there was less government intervention, and less government assistance for black Americans in particular. There were no positive, tangible changes in the material conditions of black people as a result of Nixon’s approach to the poverty crisis.

White southern voters ate up the concept of black capitalism with a silver spoon. They saw Nixon’s anti-government intervention in aiding poor people as both anti-bureaucratic, and pro-individual. Nixon sought to create a national environment in which capitalism solved the problems of economic injustice with little input or aid from the federal government. White southern voters generally liked this idea, and believed it was a viable solution to the economic issues posed, as was seen when a crowd of Southerners gave Nixon a 13-second thundering applause for his explanation of the proposed anti-poverty plan.²⁰ And, so did some Northern voters. This was how Nixon walked a fine-line successfully, one that gave him more political leverage with the South than Eisenhower: dog-whistling, or lying about the probable outcome of a policy in order to win the votes of the most people possible. He was not entirely successful; in-fact, any black people, specifically black activists, denounced Nixon. Only weeks before his death, avowed Civil Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. called Nixon a “poor choice” for the GOP and stated that he had no viable mechanisms for solving the nations’ issues, especially the

²⁰ *Ibid.*

issues that most immediately impacted African Americans.²¹ Putting the pieces of this puzzle together, Nixon attempted to fix black people's 'problems' using racist, white southerners' perspectives of what their problems were.

Nixon's stance on school desegregation heavily mirrored the South's arguments for the creation and protection of Jim Crow laws. He argued that the federal government had no right to dictate what happened within the walls of locally-run schools. Catering to the south's anti-bureaucratic (yet simultaneously plutocratic) tendencies, Nixon fought to allow the continuation of school segregation by denouncing desegregation as a bureaucratic takeover of the south by the federal government. In doing so, Nixon's administration expressed opposition to school busing, and in speeches and actions alike, implied that rather than moving forward, that he preferred to slow down or even reverse the course of school desegregation. For instance, at a press conference in 1971, Nixon asserted that he "expressed views with regard to my opposition to busing for the purpose of achieving a racial balance, and supported the neighborhood school,"²² and would therefore take whatever actions possible to express this sentiment. Many southern voters applauded him for this.

Nixon's promises materialized for Southern voters in 1969, leading to his unanimous election among southern states in 1972. During his campaign in 1967, Nixon made a covertly racist platform, which piqued the interest of many white Southern voters. In his first term as President, he lived up to his promises.

²¹ Thurber, 71.

²² Richard Nixon, *President Nixon on School Busing*. Press Release (April 21, 1971).

Leading up to his election, Nixon ran on a seemingly pro-desegregation platform. However, newspapers from the time report that as the November election grew closer, Nixon adopted an anti-segregationist platform. The *New York Times* reported that “what [Nixon] objected to, he said, was the use of economic power to achieve integration ‘in a positive way, through busing and the like.’”²³ Attorney General of both President Kennedy and President Johnson also criticized Nixon’s stance on race, and asserted that “when Richard Nixon, speaking in the south, said in equal defiance of the mandate of supreme law, that he would not enforce [federal] guidelines which define deliberate speed in school desegregation, he was opposing substantial desegregation.”²⁴ As critics of Nixon picked his rhetoric apart, they revealed that his stance for ‘slowed down’ desegregation was code for not desegregating school districts at all. This was the assertion of his campaign; in his first year as President, these assertions materialized.

In August of 1969, the first year Nixon was in office, federal courts ordered that school districts draw up plans for desegregation. These plans were to be drawn in cooperation with the U.S. Department of HEW (Health, Education, and Welfare). On August 11th, 1969, “plans were submitted to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals calling for the complete desegregation of thirty Mississippi Schools, beginning with the opening of school in September, 1969. As provided by the court, the plans had been worked out with the approval of HEW advisers.”²⁵

²³ “Wallace Shadow Causes Nixon to Consider a 3rd Party Appeal,” *New York Times*, 117:40,418 (September 21, 1968), sec. I, 17.

²⁴ “Clark Says Nixon Appeals to ‘Fear’ and ‘Prejudices,’” *New York Times*, 118:40,444 (October 17, 1968), sec. III, 38.

²⁵ Murphy and Gulliver, 57.

Though the case for desegregation seemed closed, in a reversal of opinion, Nixon's Department of HEW Secretary Robert Finch wrote to the U.S. Court of Appeals asking for a delay in the integration of the school district. The court of Appeals heard the case and granted the legality of Finch's request. The NAACP promptly challenged this ruling, taking it to the Supreme Court. The court voted unanimously that Finch's request was unconstitutional under the precedent set by *Brown v. Board of Education*. Nonetheless, there was still a partial reverse in Mississippi policy, as three districts were permitted desegregation delays on account of "unusually difficult problems."²⁶ With this decision, despite the official ruling of the court, it quickly became known that "the Nixon administration in its apparent effort to delay school desegregation for a year in these Mississippi school districts managed to achieve the reverse."²⁷ The Supreme Court's response was a demand to take desegregation action promptly; the court did not accept any more delays so as to maintain the phrasing in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that desegregation should occur in 'all deliberate speed.'

Consequently, the Nixon administration made a slight shift in policy; since now, despite their efforts, brisk desegregation was inevitable, they decided to undergo a paradigm shift, and promote desegregation as soon as possible. The reasons for this shift were entirely political; there was no moral explanation for this action, especially considering Nixon's continued opposition to busing and a racial balance within schools. Rather, in 1970, the Nixon administration received word that George Wallace, a candidate who had previously swept the deep south, once again, put his name on the ballot.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 59.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

With the opposing pressures of a pro-integration Supreme Court, and a pro-segregation Southern voting base, Nixon's best strategy was to integrate immediately; his administration appealed to the "real political feeling that if, somehow, the full brunt of school desegregation could be felt by reluctant Southern school districts in the fall of the school year of 1970, then the ultimate political impact might well have faded by the next presidential election year of 1972."²⁸ With so many factors at play, one thing was clear: Nixon did whatever he had to in order to get an edge in the political arena. Due to this, the final result of his school desegregation policies was a staunch pro-integration standpoint; however, this was a move made purely for political strategy. The reality was, without the demands of brisk integration from the Supreme Court, Nixon's administration would have continued their previous policy of allowing constant delays of integration, thereby allowing white Southern voters to get what they really wanted: continued segregation.

Nixon's third contribution to a Southern Strategy was announced as: 'tough on crime.' In addition to being credited with the beginning of the War on Drugs, Nixon's policies disproportionately affected people of color, sending many to prison. Nixon managed to distinguish himself from more radical conservatives by simply stating that "certain racial animosities... were the most visible causes [of crime]".²⁹ And, with this problem being evident, Nixon claimed in his political ads in 1968 that he was "the one man with the experience and the

²⁸ *Ibid*, 62.

²⁹ Richard Nixon, "What Has Happened to America?" *Reader's Digest*, 46:1 (October 1967), 49.

qualifications to lead [the United States] in these troubled dangerous times.”³⁰ He argued that rather than being a great society, America was becoming a lawless society, largely due to racial riots.

This phrasing rang in southern voters’ ears as needing to incarcerate more people of color. ‘Racial tensions’ translated to ‘black people doing something wrong,’ and recognizing these tensions as the cause of crime translated to the increased incarceration of people of color. Therefore, by using this coded language that everyone had the power to unravel, Nixon was able to convince many southern voters that he was the candidate who would put an end to crime in the nation by cracking down on crime by black Americans.

This use of code words was effective; when polled, “more than four in five American citizens agreed that "law and order had broken down," that crime was on the rise, and that "Negroes who start riots" were the cause.”³¹ What many considered riots, of course, were a combination of both peaceful and rowdy protests aimed at ameliorating civil rights for people of color. Despite the public understanding of the roots and merits of the civil rights movement, Nixon, whose statements clearly stood in opposition to these pro-civil rights sentiments, could never be truly quoted or attacked for saying something racist or supporting the mass incarceration of people of color. However, he could effectively convince voters that black activists were the perpetrators of violence, and that “law and order” should be a major consideration at the voting booth. Effectively, Nixon convinced white voters that black people committed crime, and should be to blamed for various issues in the nation.

³⁰ Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon, *1968 Presidential Campaign Ads*. Campaign Advertisements (June 1, 1968).

³¹ Katherine Beckett, *Making Crime Pay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 38.

With careful examination of Nixon's rhetoric, it was clear that the underlying messages of Nixon's 1968 campaign were covertly racist. Due to this, he lost the vote of many progressives, who reverted to the Democratic candidate, Humphrey. The final tally in 1968 was as follows: 43.2% of the popular vote to Nixon, 42.6% to Humphrey, and 12.9% to Wallace (Independent/Dixiecrat). Nixon won by slim margins in the electoral college, with 56.1% of the vote. Nixon won many states in the West and Middle America, but lost in many states to the Democratic candidate Humphrey. Nixon also lost in the deep south to Wallace.

Wallace sweeping the deep southern vote has nothing to do with an ineffective Southern Strategy; rather, Wallace was simply a more overtly racist candidate who used loud rhetoric instead of code words. He famously stated "segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever"³² in his 1963 Alabama Governor's address, and used similar harsh, clearly racist rhetoric to rise to Southern political stardom. Additionally, although he was not the Democratic candidate, he was not Republican, meaning that the Deep South needed not split from their prior anti-Republican voting habits to vote for Wallace. Comparatively, at the time, Nixon pioneered a new, covert form of racism, setting a precedent for how the Republican political dialogue functioned in the years to follow. Nixon's new approach worked for the vast majority of historically Democratic states; however, a non-subtly racist and non-Republican candidate was precisely the hope that the deep south was still clinging to, which is why they casted their ballots overwhelmingly for Wallace. Although

overt racism used worked its magic [in the elections prior to 1968], that has increasingly been replaced by an effective 'politics of emotion' characterized by more subtle, coded references to race that could be termed the 'new racism.' The

³² Alabama Department of Archives and History, *Alabama Textual Materials Collection* (Inaugural Address of Governor George Wallace: Montgomery, 1963).

‘new racism,’ while employing careful wording and muted rhetoric, is also characterized by religious bigotry, authoritarianism, overt moral chauvinism, and an almost gleeful kind of public narrow-mindedness and intolerance in the guise of a rejection of ‘elitist’ political correctness, scientific knowledge, rationality, and of course, liberalism in all its various guises.³³

Recognizing this reality is imperative to recognizing how and why Nixon’s Southern strategy started slowly, and has since built momentum on the American political stage. The South was not yet ready for overt racism; they were still clinging to the idea of overt racism being espoused by Independent George Wallace.

By 1972, the year of the next Presidential election, however, Nixon had won the votes, both popular and from the electoral college, of every state but Massachusetts. In addition to swaying the West, East, and general South, Nixon had also swayed the Deep South to vote for a Republican. Although Nixon’s first hand at the Southern strategy (with nothing more than covertly racist rhetoric) was not dramatically effective in terms of winning votes, after running the same strategy for four years, and living up to his racist promises, his goal had finally been accomplished: Nixon created a strong Republican base in the southern United States in 1972.

One important note, is the continuation of the notion of ‘new racism,’ in Nixon’s campaign; in addition to espousing racism (either overtly or covertly), both candidates also sought to victimize the South by recognizing ‘individual rights.’ Again, although Wallace did so more explicitly, with statements such as “[Government’s] psuedo-liberal spokesmen and some Harvard advocates have never examined the logic of its substitution of what it calls ‘human rights’ for individual rights, for its propaganda play on words has appeal for the unthinking.”³⁴

³³ Feldman, 320.

³⁴ Alabama Department of Archives and History, *Alabama Textual Materials Collection* (Inaugural Address of Governor George Wallace: Montgomery, 1963).

Although Nixon was not so overt, he reflected similar sentiments. Upon accepting his 1968 Presidential nomination, Nixon expressed to the Republican convention that

we see Americans hating each other, fighting each other, killing each other, at home... there is a quiet voice in the tumult of the shouting. It is the voice of the great majority of Americans, the forgotten Americans, the non-shouters, the non-demonstrators... They are good people, they are decent people, they work and they save and they pay taxes and they care... This, I say to you tonight, is the real voice of America.³⁵

Through this, Nixon expressed that the core of America was not composed of dissenters to the norm, but rather of people who complied with old norms ‘peacefully,’ and didn’t upset the balance of the nation. This was overwhelmingly white Southerners. They didn’t intend to ‘rock the boat’ by pushing forth progressive policies, but rather sought a return to classic segregationist America. When Nixon made this statement to the Republican convention in 1968, he expressed that white Southerners were the core of America. And through his actions on the campaign trail in both 1968 and 1972, this rang true.

Nixon’s legacy has carried on for generations. The recipe utilized in Nixon’s southern strategy was a recipe to create a lasting impression of the Republican party in the south. Since 1968, the deep south has consistently voted for Republicans. Additionally, Nixon’s legacy was also to set a precedent regarding whose opinion we care about the most. Since he aggressively sought the southern vote, and hence controversy over which party would win the blind favoritism of southern states, Nixon created a political climate that heavily favors southern voters and those ideologically aligned with them. As critics of Nixon pointed out, “what *has* happened since the

³⁵ Richard Nixon, *Richard Nixon 1968 Nomination Speech*. Acceptance of Republican Nomination (April 19, 1968).

1960s is that ‘the southern way’ of politics has increasingly become the national way.’³⁶ Since Nixon desperately wanted their vote, the Southern wish became Nixon’s demand. This is clear with welfare programs, school desegregation, and crime rhetoric. At every turn on race-related issues, Nixon’s stance heavily mirrored the white Southerners stance.

The Southern Strategy relied heavily on racism and individualism. In doing so, with consideration to the fact that the fight for Civil Rights was one of the most defining conflicts of their generation, the strategy also relied heavily on racism and code words. Directly following the Second Reconstruction and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the nation catered to the interests of America’s white Southern voters. The resultant America is one where the South has effectively shifted the political scene in its own favor. Republicans won the Southern vote using coded racial rhetoric and policies in 1968; this precedent has continued for decades since. America took one step forward and two steps back with Nixon’s Southern Strategy.

³⁶ Feldman, 319.

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