

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

TODAY POLITICAL OBSERVERS take for granted the idea that Democratic partisanship, economic liberalism, and racial liberalism cohere under a common programmatic banner, just as Republican partisanship is associated with economic conservatism and greater resistance to government programs to redress problems of racial inequality. But the emergence of these linkages is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the 1930s Republican elites provided greater (if often only tepid) support for civil rights than did their Democratic counterparts. By the mid-1960s, however, Democratic partisanship and economic liberalism were clearly identified with civil rights support and Republican conservatism had become identified with greater opposition to governmental action to redress racial inequalities. This book aims to explain the dynamics of this momentous transformation.

The partisan transformation on race is often depicted as an elite-led, center-driven shift that occurred in the 1960s, breaking apart the New Deal coalition that had dominated American politics for more than a generation. By contrast, I show that the realignment began with mass and midlevel party actors, that it was rooted in state and local politics rather than in Washington, DC, and that much of the important work was complete by the mid-1940s. In doing so, I aim to provide a new way of thinking about the nature of the New Deal coalition and of the political significance of New Deal liberalism more generally. This account also has important implications for theories of political parties and of political change in the United States. Thus the civil rights realignment is important both in its own right and as a window into the workings of the American political system more broadly.

THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS REALIGNMENT

Although scholars have studied the civil rights realignment from a wide variety of angles, three related claims have shaped the prevailing understanding of its dynamics. The first claim is that national party elites played the

decisive role in driving the change in each party's stance. Edward Carmines and James Stimson's pathbreaking study, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*, put forward the argument that the two parties took similar positions straddling (and often avoiding) civil rights in the 1940s and 1950s, with Republicans if anything a bit to the left of their Democratic counterparts.¹ The critical break point arrived when Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater took sharply different stands on the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As Thomas Edsall and Mary Edsall put it, "Goldwater ... publicly defined the Republican Party as anti-civil rights with his opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.... Johnson, conversely, firmly established the commitment of the Democratic Party to civil rights."² Once national party leaders made this dramatic break, party activists followed their lead, polarizing on civil rights policy, and the mass public gradually followed along.³ Indeed, the civil rights case is often taken as a leading example of the idea that public opinion generally follows cues from national party elites, with mass partisans polarizing on issues when these elites provide clear, distinct cues.⁴

This reshuffling of party coalitions launched the post-New Deal party system in which Democrats were identified with African Americans and racial liberalism, while Republicans were associated with racial conservatism.⁵ Lyndon Johnson's often-cited observation after he signed the Civil Rights Act that "we have delivered the South to the Republican Party for your lifetime and mine" nicely set the stage for the view that elite choice at a critical moment drove the racial realignment.⁶

Second, national political actors take center stage in this story, in part because federalism is understood to be a key blockage preventing action on civil rights. Federalism gave southerners secure control of law enforcement and the means of coercion in their region while allowing southern elites to appeal to the rhetoric of states' rights to justify their discriminatory policies. Federalism also meant that state party competition often focused on local issues, with the result that many northern state Democratic parties consisted of inward-looking political machines with little commitment to programmatic liberalism.⁷ Change had to come from the top down because only nationally oriented political actors had the capacity and (eventually) the will to move policy on racial issues. The civil rights movement figures into this story as an important source of pressure on these national political elites, but the crucial step was to persuade top party leaders based in Washington that they needed to act.

Third, leading accounts of the civil rights realignment date the partisan transformation to the 1960s. This focus on the 1960s as a "critical juncture" is not confined to works that embrace the elite-led view of the realignment. For example, Doug McAdam and Karina Kloos's *Deeply Divided: Racial Politics and Social Movements in Post-War America* does an excellent job of

tracing the creative role of the civil rights movement in generating the partisan landscape that has dominated American politics for the past fifty years. Yet they too accept the idea that the 1960s constitute the critical moment for the realignment, arguing that “the GOP was, in the aggregate, far and away more progressive on civil rights issues” than the Democrats at the start of the decade. A “seismic” shift occurred during “a fairly short span of time in the early to mid-’60s” when the civil rights movement and segregationist countermovement “decisively altered the partisan geography of the United States and in the process pushed the national Democratic and Republican parties sharply to the left and right respectively.”⁸

In sum, the conventional account treats the civil rights realignment as the disruption of one stable partisan alignment—rooted in the avoidance of racial issues—and its replacement by another alignment in which race played a defining role. The critical decisions driving this process occurred in the 1960s as national party elites grappled with the question of how to respond to pressure from civil rights activists and their opponents. The choices made at the center then reverberated throughout the political system, gradually remaking both parties at the mass and middle levels.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS REALIGNMENT: CONSTITUENCIES, LOCALLY ROOTED POLITICIANS, AND TIMING

In contrast to the conventional account, this book argues that the partisan realignment on civil rights was rooted in changes in the New Deal coalition that emerged in the mid- to late 1930s, not the 1960s. Rather than realignment starting in Washington and diffusing out and down, state parties and locally oriented rank-and-file members of Congress provided a key mechanism for pro-civil rights forces—which first entered the New Deal coalition in the 1930s—to capture the Democratic Party from below. Far from spearheading the realignment, national party elites—that is, the leaders of political institutions of national scope, such as the president, top congressional leaders, and national party chairmen—feared the disruptive potential of civil rights issues for their respective partisan coalitions. As a result, these national leaders generally sought to straddle the civil rights divide and were actually among the last to move.

Constituency-Level Changes

Changes in the constituency base of the Democratic Party that took place in the 1930s set in motion the partisan realignment on race. While the New Deal’s economic programs originally drew African Americans and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions to the Democratic Party, their entry

into the party coalition—and the reaction that entry provoked from southern Democrats—established important linkages between civil rights liberalism and New Deal liberalism that reverberated through the midlevels of the party and eventually forced the hand of top national leaders.

African Americans had voted Republican for decades but received little in return for their loyalty. By contrast, even as core features of the New Deal accommodated racial discrimination, Roosevelt's program offered real benefits to many northern African Americans, particularly when compared with the Hoover administration's dismal record. Recognizing these gains, African Americans voted decisively for Roosevelt in 1936 and stuck with the president for the remainder of his term. The emergence of African Americans as a potentially important source of votes for northern Democrats gave at least some rank-and-file Democratic politicians an incentive to show concern for civil rights.⁹

While the number of northern states and congressional districts with a substantial African American population in the 1930s and early 1940s was modest, the meteoric rise of the CIO gave African Americans an important ally within the Democratic coalition. Before the formation of the CIO in 1935, the American Federation of Labor (AFL)—dominated labor movement had a poor record on civil rights. But from early on, the CIO stood out among white-led organizations in its support for civil rights. Even as rank-and-file union workers often shared in the racial prejudice that was prevalent in their communities, the union's leaders and organizers made racial equality a key facet of their program. This support was rooted both in the union's internal organizing imperatives and in its broader programmatic vision. The CIO's leaders and organizers believed that African American support was crucial for the union's prospects in industrial workplaces in which replacement workers were a constant threat. At the same time, many of these same union officials had roots in left-wing political movements committed to the idea that racial divisions undermined the class consciousness required to fight economic exploitation. These interests and beliefs led the CIO to fuse concerns about class and race, arguing that the cause of economic justice required an encompassing labor movement willing to use governmental power to tackle the mutually reinforcing problems of economic and racial inequality.

This fusion was especially important as observers on all sides quickly recognized that the CIO had developed into the central mobilization instrument outside the Democratic Party itself on behalf of liberalism. The CIO became the leading symbol—both for supporters and for opponents—of the most ambitious strands of New Deal liberalism in the United States, urging congressional Democrats and the executive branch to move to the left across a range of policies.¹⁰ The CIO's outspoken civil rights advocacy meant that the group most associated with an expansive reading of the New Deal's goals was also associated with the civil rights cause.

These two constituency shifts provoked a furious reaction among southern Democrats, which had equally important implications for the future of New Deal liberalism. Southern Democrats had provided critical backing for the first and second New Deal.¹¹ But many southern politicians viewed African Americans' incorporation into both the Democratic Party and the labor movement as an existential threat to the racially oppressive "southern way of life."¹² Southern Democrats were soon the most consequential opponents of labor-sponsored expansions of the New Deal, cooperating with Republicans to push investigations and legislation that sought to undermine organized labor, and along with it, the liberal agenda more generally. Southern Democrats' fierce opposition both to the CIO and to civil rights meant that African Americans were no longer isolated claimants: their political enemies were increasingly identified as a crucial enemy of liberal advances, not just on civil rights but across a range of policy domains, including especially labor policy.

These changes gradually reshaped the meaning of New Deal liberalism. A new political alignment took shape in which the supporters of an ambitious reading of the New Deal's promise—CIO unions and African Americans, along with Jews and urban liberals more generally—found themselves opposed by southern Democrats who viewed both the CIO and African Americans as mortal threats. This alignment reached all the way down to the mass level of the parties, as economically liberal white northern Democrats were substantially more likely to back key civil rights initiatives by about 1940 than were economically conservative Republicans. The mass- and group-level developments had important implications for politicians: for Republicans to make civil rights their issue, they would have had to overcome the skepticism of their own economically conservative core partisans. For northern Democrats to skirt the issue, they would have had to ignore the views of their own core partisans—economic liberals and the growing number of African American Democrats.

Federalism and Geographical Decentralization

Northern state parties and rank-and-file members of Congress responded to these new constituency dynamics long before national party elites did.¹³ Traditionally, liberals have interpreted the history of civil rights as the classic example of why one should be suspicious of states' rights and local politics. This analysis suggests that may be too hasty. While federalism and geographic representation certainly facilitated the development of the Jim Crow South, they also helped to precipitate its downfall. Locally rooted politicians played a crucial role as intermediaries between constituency-based pressures and elite decision-making arenas in the civil rights realignment.¹⁴

The nationally oriented party leaders who had the greatest stake in maintaining the Democrats' North-South coalition were generally slow to respond

when advocates attempted to graft civil rights onto New Deal liberalism. But the independent power base of state and local parties and the election of House members through separate geographic districts channeled constituency pressure for civil rights, without requiring an immediate showdown with national party leaders. Even as many national political elites sought to avoid the civil rights issue, movement activists could appeal to rank-and-file members of Congress, mayors and other local officials, and state and local parties, each of which had its own, partly independent power base and constituency. These locally rooted politicians then contributed to civil rights activists' efforts to raise the salience of the issue.¹⁵

Specifically, Democratic partisanship and economic liberalism became associated with civil rights support among northern members of the House of Representatives starting in the late 1930s. By the end of World War II a substantial gap in civil rights support separated northern Democrats and economic liberals from northern Republicans and economic conservatives. Northern state Democratic parties displayed a similar pattern, adopting platforms and pursuing policies that were to the left of their GOP counterparts on civil rights by the mid-1940s, with the gap increasing gradually in the ensuing years. These midlevel party actors proved far more responsive to pressure to support civil rights than did most top national elites, who were preoccupied with holding together the increasingly precarious North-South coalition forged by Roosevelt.¹⁶

Federalism and the decentralized system of electing members of Congress thus provided key institutional mechanisms to facilitate the gradual incorporation of civil rights into the mainstream of the Democratic Party, undermining the implicit deal among national political leaders that had been a key foundation of the party for decades. Much like abolitionism in the 1830s–1840s and the currency issue in the 1870s–1880s, efforts by national party leaders to block a new issue ultimately failed and party lines were reshuffled.¹⁷ Congress and state parties emerge from this case as potential vehicles for new interests to gain access; localism and geographic-based districts are often seen as bastions of conservatism, but in this case they provided institutional footholds for civil rights liberals.

Midlevel party actors also played an important role in the GOP's transformation on race. Growing southern Democratic disaffection with New Deal liberalism stirred Republican hopes of a realignment more than two decades before Barry Goldwater entered the political scene. The appeals to states' rights and limited government that became a staple of conservative Republican attacks on the New Deal in the 1930s were well suited to wooing southern Democrats worried about the threat posed by the CIO's brand of liberalism. But the moderate leaders atop the national GOP were wary of the implications of a wholesale alliance with southern conservatives. As a

result, Republican presidential candidates generally sought to sidestep civil rights in the 1940s and 1950s.

Developments below the top leadership, however, gradually tilted the balance within the GOP in favor of racial conservatives during the 1940s and 1950s. Rank-and-file northern Republicans in Congress—facing little or no constituency pressure to back civil rights—drifted away from their earlier advocacy of civil rights legislation and even made common cause with southerners in fighting strong fair-employment practices legislation in the 1940s. At the state level, President Dwight Eisenhower’s party-building efforts in the South—which aimed to create a suburban, moderate organization in his image—ironically created a new power base for his conservative rivals within the party. The Goldwater movement had deep roots in these earlier shifts within the party, which opened a pathway for racial conservatives to gain the upper hand and bring to fruition the long-standing conservative goal of drawing disaffected southern Democrats into the GOP.

For both Democrats and Republicans, the ability of state party organizations and rank-and-file members of Congress to adopt their own positions provided a mechanism for the parties’ existing and new coalition partners and ideological allies to gain a power base at the local level in advance of capturing the national party as a whole. The leaders of social movements and their interest group allies need not first win over national party leaders in order to transform party politics. Rather, at least in the case of civil rights, a series of victories at the state level paved the way for a national realignment. The federal nature of American parties and, relatedly, the existence of important offices controlled by lower-level units thus emerge as key elements in the civil rights realignment.¹⁸

Timing

Rather than viewing the 1960s as the critical moment in the partisan realignment on race, I argue that much of the political work involved in bringing racial liberalism into the Democratic program was undertaken decades earlier. Efforts by the CIO, African American activists, and other urban liberals starting in the mid- to late 1930s had remade the Democratic Party, so that economic liberalism, Democratic partisanship, and support for civil rights were connected at both the mass and midlevels of the party throughout the North by the mid-1940s.

But winning over northern state parties and members of Congress was not itself sufficient to transform national alignments. A complete takeover of the national Democratic Party required overcoming the resistance not just of southern party leaders but also of the nationally oriented officials atop the party structure. With a few exceptions, top party leaders struggled mightily

to tamp down the pressure to take a clear stand on civil rights. From 1944 to 1956, rank-and-file Democratic activists and convention delegates had been to the left of national leaders on civil rights, yet party elites generally succeeded in avoiding adoption of a platform or nomination of a presidential candidate that would alienate southern conservatives.

But civil rights movement activists—often acting in tandem with midlevel party actors—worked to force the issue to the top of the political agenda, eventually requiring leaders to take sides. Crucially, by the time the issue came to occupy center stage nationally, the liberals enjoyed a clear majority within the national party, while southern conservatives had become an isolated minority.

Long before Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater took their opposing positions on civil rights, their parties had been remade beneath them. Below the surface a series of developments dating back to the 1930s and 1940s had transformed both parties so that the intraparty pressures in favor of an embrace of racial liberalism were much stronger on the Democratic side, while Republicans increasingly were pushed toward racial conservatism and a concomitant alliance with southern civil rights foes. African Americans and their allies in the CIO had done much of the work in bringing together New Deal liberalism and racial liberalism in the late 1930s and the 1940s. The civil rights movement of the late 1950s and the 1960s provided the catalyst to fulfill the promise of these earlier developments within the parties.

IMPLICATIONS

This reexamination of the civil rights realignment leads to a revised understanding of the New Deal coalition and of New Deal liberalism, which in turn suggests the need to revisit how we think about political parties as institutions. The civil rights case also underscores the ways in which major political transformations can result from the intersection of multiple, partly independent historical trajectories. This understanding of political change puts a premium on a methodological approach that integrates historical and behavioral evidence and draws on diverse data sources for leverage.

Splitting at the Seams: Race, Section, and the New Deal Coalition

The New Deal coalition is often depicted as reflecting a stable bargain in which northern Democrats agreed to avoid addressing civil rights policy in return for southern Democrats' cooperation in building the New Deal welfare state.¹⁹ Such policy decisions as the exclusion of domestic and agricultural labor from the Social Security system have been interpreted as symbolizing a broader *détente*, facilitated by most northern Democrats' lack of

commitment to civil rights.²⁰ Franklin Roosevelt's refusal to push even for antilynching legislation, for fear of alienating southern Democrats whose votes he needed for his legislative priorities, underscores the extent to which an agreement to ignore civil rights demands seems to have underwritten the New Deal coalition.²¹ Although some revisionist accounts have pointed to behind-the-scenes Roosevelt maneuvers to promote racial equality, scholars have generally emphasized the timidity with which the New Deal addressed the problems facing African Americans.²²

From this standpoint, the pursuit of social democracy in the United States was divorced from the cause of racial equality owing to the peculiar nature of the New Deal coalition. Southern Democrats' pivotal position in Roosevelt's coalition sharply limited the reach of liberal aspirations.²³ It was only in the 1960s, with Johnson's embrace of civil rights, that racial liberalism was brought into the social democratic program. This linkage, however, created a backlash that weakened the cause of economic justice by empowering conservatives who were now able to use appeals to racial resentment to build a new Republican majority.²⁴

Rather than viewing the New Deal coalition as a stable equilibrium that was brought down by the disruptions of the 1960s, however, I argue that important actors within the Democratic Party were working to undermine the supposed "bargain" between northern liberals and southern racists starting in the late 1930s. Soon after the entry of the CIO and African Americans into the Democratic coalition in 1936, southern Democrats began to cooperate with Republicans to force antilabor investigations and bills onto the agenda that challenged one key pillar of the national Democratic coalition.²⁵ Meanwhile, northern Democrats were working to force civil rights bills onto the legislative agenda, thus threatening a second key pillar of that coalition.

In this sense, the New Deal coalition was being torn apart from within by about 1940: while most nationally oriented party leaders preferred to keep both issues off the agenda, southern members of Congress worked aggressively to exacerbate the party's split on labor policy, and northern members pushed civil rights policies that were anathema to their southern colleagues. The version of New Deal liberalism that CIO unions and other urban liberals articulated in the late 1930s—and that was incorporated into the commitments of rank-and-file northern members of Congress and state parties—was unacceptable to the southern wing of the party, and the southerners responded to this threat by seeking to weaken the same labor unions that were essential to electing northern Democrats.

Against the claim that racial liberalism was a belated 1960s addition to economic liberalism, this account suggests that New Deal liberalism—as articulated and developed by its firmest supporters starting in the late 1930s—had racially inclusive elements that ran counter to the well-documented

exclusionary aspects of Roosevelt's program. The CIO and its allies fused "class" and "race" in an alignment that was forged amid the vast social and ideological turmoil of the 1930s and early 1940s. Most top party leaders resisted this fusion, but its impact nonetheless was evident in the behavior of rank-and-file members of Congress and state parties. It also was reflected in the southern shift away from the New Deal, and in conservative Republican efforts to demonstrate that their party's antistatistism made it the natural home for disaffected southern Democrats. Modern liberalism and conservatism had their roots in these early battles over the future of the New Deal.²⁶

The Civil Rights Realignment and Party Theory

The civil rights realignment also speaks directly to recent theories of political parties. In an important series of studies, John Zaller, Kathleen Bawn, and their collaborators have developed a theory of parties as coalitions of intense policy demanders managed by politicians.²⁷ These intense policy demanders—composed primarily of interest groups and activists—negotiate with one another to forge a "long coalition" to nominate candidates committed to their program. In this view, the candidate nomination process is the key to ensuring that a party's officeholders adhere to a common program: "with only minor local variation, [the] policy-demanding groups" that form the core of a political party "espouse the positions for which their national party stands and require that candidates do so too." As a result, "any candidate who relies on local activists for support is likely to be a credible representative of the national party standard."²⁸ Ideologies reflect the coalitional bargains struck by these diverse policy demanders and do not necessarily have any intrinsic internal logic. After many elections, these party programs "become accepted as natural manifestations of competing worldviews: a 'conservative' one ... and a 'liberal' one."²⁹

Several aspects of the civil rights case nicely fit this understanding of parties. The role of African American voters and the CIO in pushing the Democratic Party to support civil rights exemplifies how group pressure can shape party positions. Similarly, the opposition of one of the GOP's core constituents, the business community, no doubt influenced Republican skepticism toward fair employment legislation.³⁰

But other elements of the civil rights case suggest that parties are not simply coalitions of intense policy demanders managed by politicians. The federal nature of American parties means that one cannot take for granted that the "party" is a single coherent entity with the same meaning across regions. The dueling northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party each had a concrete, independent electoral and institutional base that enabled its members to nominate candidates who viewed defeating the other wing of the party as a top priority. The Democratic Party that nominated the

racist labor-baiter Howard Smith to represent Virginia from 1931 to 1966 is hardly the same institution (or set of policy demanders) that brought Emanuel Celler, a Jewish pro-labor, pro-civil rights Democrat from Brooklyn, to Congress over these same decades.³¹ Yet they each occupied important positions of influence in Congress, with Smith the longtime chair of the Rules Committee and Celler leading the Judiciary Committee.

While it is true that presidential candidates and top congressional leaders sought to be acceptable to both northern liberals and southern conservatives, their leadership hardly reflected a long-term bargain that all sides of the party embraced. Smith and Celler may have each agreed to vote for the same presidential candidate and the same candidate for Speaker of the House of Representatives, but they each ultimately hoped to weaken and defeat the other wing of the party, not to coexist with it. The two regionally based camps pursued policy agendas that were deeply opposed to each other. In attacking labor unions, southern conservatives were seeking to undermine a key source of northern Democrats' support; in promoting civil rights legislation and labor rights, northern liberals threatened the core interests of many southern Democrats. Although presidential candidates and other nationally oriented elites sought to act as "party managers," keeping the various elements of the coalition in sync, many other powerful actors within the party maneuvered to disrupt the electoral foundations essential to their regional rivals.³²

While the divisions among Republicans in the 1940s–1950s were less stark than among Democrats of the era, the conservative "Taft wing"—with its base primarily in the Midwest—saw the potential incorporation of southern Democrats as a way to consolidate conservative control of the party. From the perspective of the northeastern moderate wing, however, this strategy threatened not just its influence within the party but its very survival. Chapter 10 will show that national party leaders' ability to manage the tension between these competing sectionally based interests was limited and that their efforts ultimately failed.

These cases, in which the groups composing a party coalition view one another as adversaries, is a far cry from today's more unified national parties.³³ The contemporary Democratic and Republican parties each nominate candidates who can reasonably be said to reflect a common national brand that resonates with voters and that reflects bargains struck by groups inside the party coalition. But this outcome is a historical product and not an inevitable feature of American parties. Such forces as the nationalization of fundraising networks and of the media landscape, for example, may generate greater pressure to conform to a single national brand.³⁴ But this pressure has been a variable, not a constant.

There is no single, overriding logic of party politics; instead, parties, like other political institutions, are historical composites shaped by multiple

logics.³⁵ The need to nominate a single candidate for president—along with nationally oriented media coverage and fundraising—introduces an incentive for the groups associated with a party to coordinate on a common strategy and program. But at times groups with sharply opposed interests may end up in the same party coalition. Southern Democrats had been core members of the Democratic Party since its formation in the nineteenth century. The passage of the Wagner Act, which provided expansive collective bargaining rights for workers, brought labor unions into the Democratic coalition.³⁶ While a few prescient southerners anticipated the threat presented by early New Deal labor policies, most did not foresee the danger posed by incorporating unions into the New Deal coalition until after the rise of the CIO.³⁷ Southern Democrats and CIO unions entered the party for different reasons and at very different historical moments; once they became important players inside the party, each could draw on an independent institutional base to prosecute their battle for control over its future.

Once one sees that parties may at times encompass deep conflicts, privileging any single type of actor as *the* party becomes problematic. The opposing players will have an incentive to draw on whatever resources are available and to work through a range of power bases—including support from ordinary voters and activists, organized groups, midlevel party officials, and top party leaders. The civil rights case underscores the importance of each of these actors in shaping the partisan transformation. To say that the groups called the shots on their own, or that party leaders successfully managed the groups' demands, or that any other single set of actors defined the parties' position obscures much of the important action, which consisted of the interactions—and battles—across these layers.

In addition to the potential for incoherence introduced by the independent electoral base of state and local parties, the civil rights case also suggests a further limitation of the parties-as-policy-demanders perspective: there does seem to have been a broad, ideological dynamic concerning “what goes with what” that was evident to the actors on the ground early in the realignment process. The entry of the CIO and African Americans into the Democratic Party was widely understood to create a sharp cleavage between the southern wing, which had long been the backbone of the Democratic Party, and this newly ascendant “liberal” (as it was called) wing. This was not simply a dispute between narrow policy demanders: the CIO's drive to remake American political and social institutions represented a threat to the entire southern political economy.³⁸

Meanwhile, as Republicans increasingly positioned themselves in opposition to the New Deal on “states' rights” grounds in the mid- to late 1930s, many political actors—including elected officials, intellectuals, and group leaders—saw the basis for an alliance with disaffected southern conservatives.³⁹ It took several decades to bring that alliance to fruition; it developed

gradually, first as congressional Republicans worked with their southern counterparts to sponsor antilabor legislation and investigations and then broadening out to other issues and institutional venues, such as state party organizations and eventually national party conventions.⁴⁰

Strikingly, even ordinary voters appear to have recognized the connections across issues at this early stage. As noted above, economically liberal northern Democrats were especially likely to take the pro-civil rights (and thus antisouthern) view, while economically conservative northern Republicans were especially likely to be skeptical of civil rights. This conservative skepticism was not confined to fair employment legislation, where business organizations' opposition created a coalitional reason for Republicans to oppose civil rights. Indeed, as shown in chapter 5, economically conservative Republican voters provided substantially less support for antilynching legislation than did economically liberal Democrats as early as December 1937. Republican members of Congress also distanced themselves from their earlier civil rights advocacy, not just on fair employment policy but even on issues such as antilynching legislation and the poll tax (see chapter 8). The rise of the CIO, the entry of African Americans into the Democratic coalition, and the growing disaffection of southern conservative Democrats together started to forge a new ideological cleavage that cross-cut the old party lines and constrained the opportunities for both groups and party officials to manage coalitional alignments. The grassroots African American-led civil rights movement repeatedly worked to elevate the prominence of civil rights issues, sharpening this cleavage. As a result of these efforts and battles, liberals from various backgrounds and interests came to identify civil rights as a key element of liberalism, essential both for what it directly represented and for what it said about the place of conservative southerners in the future of the Democratic coalition.

In sum, the civil rights case points both to strengths and to limitations of conceiving of parties as coalitions of intense policy demanders. There is no doubt that group interests and conflicts played a critical role in shaping the development of the parties' positions on civil rights. At the same time, however, the civil rights realignment underscores the extent to which parties encompass conflicting logics and interests. Rather than a coherent brand managed by party leaders, the Democratic Party was at war with itself for decades. Federalism and geographic-based representation, in particular, provided enduring power bases for the contending sides to prosecute their battle for control. Furthermore, the sides in this battle had a clear ideological logic; the political economic vision promoted by the CIO was anathema to the interests of southern Democrats along several dimensions, and southern conservatives, in turn, viewed their survival as dependent on weakening the industrial labor movement. An ideological cleavage in which southern Democrats were identified as a crucial enemy of "liberal" advances across a range

of issues—including civil rights—emerged as a product of wide-ranging intense policy battles on the ground in the late 1930s and early 1940s, rather than as a product of some sort of coalitional bargain within the Democratic Party.⁴¹

Multiple, Intersecting Trajectories and the Realignment

The civil rights realignment exemplifies how political transformations can emerge from the intersection of multiple, initially separate political trajectories. As Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek demonstrate, political development is often driven by the tensions between political institutions that had their origins in different time periods and that thus incorporated contradictory logics or purposes.⁴² A focus on a single institution or political interest is unlikely to help understand major political transformations when much of the “action” occurs at the intersection of multiple institutions and political processes.

Along the first trajectory in the civil rights case, the party system was reshaped starting in the 1930s with little *direct* regard for civil rights politics, as the Democrats embraced New Deal liberalism and new coalition partners in response to the Depression, and Republicans countered with a turn to antistatism. The CIO unionists, African Americans, Jews, and other urban liberals who joined the ranks of the Democratic Party in the 1930s did so because of the Depression and the New Deal’s economic programs. With few exceptions, they were not responding to explicit civil rights appeals coming from the Democrats.⁴³ That is, few if any voters *became* Democrats in the 1930s because of civil rights, nor is it likely that being a Democrat directly led many voters to become pro-civil rights. But the presence of these voters in the New Deal coalition had crucial implications for how the Democratic Party would respond as civil rights reached the top of the national agenda.

Meanwhile, along a second political trajectory, the “long” civil rights movement played a critical role in using protest, litigation, and legislative strategies to force civil rights onto the national agenda.⁴⁴ A key initial step occurred during the mobilization for entry into World War II, when A. Philip Randolph’s March on Washington Movement pressured Roosevelt into creating a temporary Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to prevent racial discrimination in defense industries. Although the CIO and other urban liberals had expressed support for civil rights before the FEPC’s creation, the intense movement-initiated battles over permanent fair employment legislation in the early to mid-1940s raised the political visibility of racial issues, encouraging liberal leaders and groups to give civil rights a more prominent place in their program. By the end of the war, support for civil rights had become a key marker of one’s identity as a liberal.

After the war the violent reaction to a major movement-initiated voter registration drive in the South led to Harry Truman's creation of the President's Committee on Civil Rights. The committee, in turn, issued a set of recommendations that became the basis for Truman's civil rights program and for the ensuing Democratic Party platform fight in 1948 that led to a southern bolt. The far-reaching liberal civil rights coalition that emerged out of these battles reflected the efforts of movement activists to turn civil rights into a defining national issue.

Many of the civil rights movement activists involved in these efforts had ties to the Democratic Party owing to the New Deal's economic programs, but movement strategy had its own, independent logic: civil rights advocates sought to raise the salience of civil rights on the national agenda regardless of whether doing so would help Democrats or economic liberals win elections. Indeed, movement activists capitalized on whatever opportunities were available, even taking advantage of Cold War era concerns about America's international reputation to embarrass national leaders into addressing persistent discrimination.⁴⁵

The key is how these two trajectories intersected: when civil rights activists succeeded in pushing the issue onto the national agenda—despite the resistance of national leaders in both parties but with considerable support from rank-and-file Democrats and midlevel party actors—it was the Democrats who were disposed to embrace the issue because of the changes in the party system along the first trajectory. By remaking the Democratic Party outside of the South to be the representative of CIO unionists, African Americans, Jews, and liberal egalitarianism, New Deal advocates set the stage for the culmination of the civil rights realignment—though this result depended on actors on the second timeline forcing the issue to the decision stage. The changes in the 1930s and early 1940s meant that as civil rights activists moved to push their cause higher on the national political agenda, they would find their main allies within the Democratic coalition. They would also find a less receptive audience for appeals for strong national action among Republicans, who had fashioned a coalition and ideological vision focused on limiting the reach of national governmental authority.

The convergence of two initially distinct political trajectories over time thus shaped the civil rights realignment. It was a gradual process that started in the mid-1930s, gathered momentum in the 1940s as the war mobilization created a window of opportunity for civil rights activists to force fair employment laws onto the agenda, and received a final, decisive push from the reinvigorated civil rights movement of the late 1950s and the 1960s.

One needs to follow each of these trajectories—the remaking of the Democratic Party in the 1930s–1940s and the repeated efforts of grassroots movement activists to push civil rights onto the agenda—to understand the

realignment's timing and meaning. While the baseline receptivity to civil rights appeals of northern Democratic members of Congress and partisans was higher than that of Republicans starting in the early 1940s, national Democratic leaders were able to manage the coalitional stresses that resulted from this as long as the grassroots insurgency on behalf of civil rights had not reached overwhelming intensity. Democrats were able to include a relatively pro-civil rights northern wing and a fiercely anti-civil rights southern wing because civil rights was not so high on the political agenda that national leaders were forced to take a clear stand. But once the grassroots insurgency and southern violent response reached a crisis point in the 1960s, this management became impossible.

In the end, national party leaders were compelled to take sides in a context created by the earlier transformation in the party system. They sought to stave off the moment of choice but no longer could. National Democratic leaders, such as Lyndon Johnson, found themselves nominally atop a party in which key coalition partners and core party voters had long ago chosen the pro-civil rights side. National Republicans—men such as Everett Dirksen (R-IL) and Jacob Javits (R-NY)—became the rear guard of a party whose coalition partners had long since stopped caring about civil rights and whose core party voters took a conservative position on civil rights initiatives.

DATA AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

What should one make of an explanation of a broad historical phenomenon—such as a party realignment—that highlights the dynamic interplay of multiple forces over several decades? In recent years political scientists have been rightly focused on improving our ability to make precise, valid causal inferences, drawing heavily on the “potential outcomes” framework developed by Donald Rubin and others.⁴⁶ The fundamental problem of causal inference is that one can never observe both the actual value of the dependent variable, given the observed value of the independent variable, and the value that the dependent variable would have been under the alternative scenario in which the independent variable had taken on a different value. Random assignment in an experiment allows us to approximate this counterfactual: in expectation, the treatment and control groups are identical, so on average, the control group's “score” on the dependent variable is what the treatment group would have scored had it not received the treatment. The explosion of interest in experimentation—and in strong research designs that allow one to approximate the advantages of an experiment—has allowed political scientists to make tremendous progress in improving our causal analyses and in rooting out the tendency to move far too quickly from findings of a correlation to claims about causality.

But this important progress leaves open the question of what one should do with political phenomena in which there simply is no adequate counterfactual that allows one to identify causal effects with the precision and confidence made possible by the potential outcomes framework. One option is simply not to study such phenomena. This choice, however, would mean failing to address some of the most important substantive questions about politics. Major political transformations are rarely amenable to identifying a persuasive counterfactual that allows one to assess potential outcomes with confidence.

This book makes the case for drawing on diverse types of evidence and methodological approaches in order to gain insight into a question that is not ideally suited to isolating the causal effect of a single variable. In this substantively important case, tracing the interplay of multiple historical processes over the course of several decades is essential to understanding what happened, why it happened, and what it meant politically. From a methodological standpoint, one goal of the book is to show that even in the absence of a single, decisive test, wide-ranging and systematic data collection and analysis can yield insight into big, complicated questions regarding the sources of political change.

In seeking to understand the civil rights realignment, I draw on three major new data sources. First, I use the earliest available survey data to trace the mass-level relationships among partisanship, economic liberalism, and racial policy views. The analysis uses all the racial policy survey items included in national surveys from January 1937—when the first racial policy item was included—through 1952, along with many additional racial policy questions from the 1950s and 1960s. Starting in 1937 and including a wide range of survey items allow for a more fine-grained understanding of the timing and nature of mass-level change. These early data also provide insight into the timing and dynamics of African Americans' shift toward the Democrats.

Second, the analysis capitalizes on a new database of state party platforms that identify how state Democratic and Republican parties positioned themselves on civil rights from the 1920s through the 1960s. An examination of state platforms again tells a very different story about the timing of partisan change on civil rights from what is evident when one examines national platforms.

Third, I draw on extensive new data concerning congressional action on civil rights. A key limitation of prior studies of congressional decision making on civil rights is that they relied on roll-call votes as their sole measure. This provides an incomplete window into civil rights politics because much of the important action took place off the floor, as advocates struggled to overcome southern-dominated committees that blocked civil rights measures from the chamber floor. In collaborative work with Kathryn Pearson and

Brian Feinstein, I have developed new measures of civil rights views that assess members' support for forcing civil rights measures to the House floor. These new measures tell a much different story about partisan support from that which is evident in the roll-call record.

In addition to these major new data sources, the study employs a range of additional indicators to gain leverage. For example, content analysis of the *New York Times* provides a window into changes in how mainstream political observers viewed the main enemies and friends of New Deal liberalism in the 1930s. Analysis of the *Chicago Defender*—a leading African American newspaper—adds insight into trends in how the African American press viewed the New Deal and labor unions. Systematic examination of liberal publications in the 1930s and 1940s provides evidence of when prominent liberals came to see civil rights as a key element of their program. A survey of convention delegates from 1956 highlights the disjuncture between the position taken by the two parties' national platforms and the views of midlevel party actors.

The results that emerge from these diverse analyses underscore how an integration of historical and behavioral methods allows for progress where experimental approaches are impossible. For historically oriented scholars, this study attempts to demonstrate the value of data on individual-level behavior and attitudes, along with systematic datasets regarding party positioning. For scholars of political behavior, the study aims to illuminate the importance of taking in a long time horizon and focusing on the interplay of multiple institutional venues. For example, the cross-sectional correlation between racial attitudes and partisanship that is evident today is put in much different relief when it is traced back to the late 1930s. Indeed, the relationship of partisanship to many civil rights policy attitudes among white northerners was not consistently stronger in the late 1980s and early 1990s than it had been in the mid-1940s.

Put simply, the inability to construct a satisfactory identification strategy to isolate the effect of a particular causal variable should not lead us to avoid efforts to understand large-scale political developments. Instead, it should be an invitation for broad-reaching efforts to gather the appropriate data needed to gain leverage, however incomplete, toward a fuller understanding of what happened and why it happened.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

This study builds on the work of several scholars who have contributed to a revised understanding of the civil rights realignment. In his important study *The Fifth Freedom*, Anthony Chen shows that Republican opposition to state-level fair employment measures took root in the mid-1940s in the

wake of business opposition to these proposals.⁴⁷ David Karol finds that northern Democrats emerged as slightly more liberal than Republicans on congressional roll-call votes on civil rights during the 1940s, while also fitting the civil rights case into a broader theory of party-group interactions.⁴⁸ Taeku Lee's *Mobilizing Public Opinion* challenges the idea that party elites drove the civil rights shift, instead arguing that a broad-based social movement mobilized mass opinion on civil rights starting in the late 1950s.⁴⁹ Most recently, Hans Noel highlights the role of policy intellectuals in bringing racial and economic liberalism together as an ideological package.⁵⁰ These works collectively undermine the notion that choices by national party elites in the 1960s were the decisive factor in shaping party alignments and instead suggest that deeper currents in both the Democratic and Republican Parties had a crucial impact on elites' strategic options.⁵¹

While building explicitly on these works, this book uses a wider empirical base of mass public opinion data, state party platforms, and congressional decision making to develop a new, broader argument about the sources and implications of the civil rights realignment.

The first key question addressed is how racial liberalism became a part of the liberal "project" in American politics. Part 1 takes on this question, charting and explaining the advent of a racially expansive conception of liberalism and the emergence of a new ideological cleavage in which support for civil rights was linked to economic liberalism. Chapter 2 examines the status quo before the start of the civil rights realignment, showing that civil rights was simply not viewed as part of the standard "liberal program" as of the early 1930s. Although African Americans were vocal in attacking Roosevelt's weak civil rights record, they were largely alone. When whites on the left pushed Roosevelt to be a more forthright liberal or progressive, they criticized him for inadequate support for labor, weak business regulation, and insufficient recovery spending—but not for his failure to back civil rights. At this early stage, the "enemies" of a liberal Democratic Party generally were not identified with the South but instead were probusiness Democrats from the Northeast, associated with Al Smith of New York. Economic questions were the key battleground in the eyes of white liberals, and civil rights did not figure in these debates.

Chapter 3 focuses on three developments in the mid- to late 1930s that together helped bring civil rights into mainstream liberals' program. The first is African Americans' emergence as a potential source of votes for northern Democrats. *Pittsburgh Courier* editor Robert Vann and Democratic politician Joseph Guffey worked in tandem to bring African Americans into the Pennsylvania Democratic Party in 1932–34, providing an early example of this potential and in turn inspiring a concerted Democratic effort in 1936 through the Good Neighbor League. The second key change is the rise of the CIO, which pushed for a new interpretation of New Deal liberalism that

included civil rights as a component. The third change arose as a response to the first two developments: southern Democrats emerged as key opponents of further extension of the New Deal. These changes brought about a new set of political battle lines, in which a coalition of southern conservatives and Republicans opposed the “ardent New Dealers” of the CIO, African Americans, and other urban liberals.

Chapter 4 documents the deepening and consolidation of these ideological changes as support for civil rights became a defining commitment of a more robust liberal coalition in the 1940s. African American movement activists capitalized on the World War II crisis to force new civil rights issues onto the political agenda—such as fair employment practices and discrimination in the military—and to forge a much broader civil rights coalition. After the war, continued movement activism laid the groundwork for the dramatic fight over the Democratic platform at the convention in 1948. The political work by African American groups, in cooperation with the CIO and other urban liberals, fostered a new understanding of “liberalism” in which support for civil rights was a key marker of one’s identity as a liberal.

How did this new liberal coalition—and its expanded conception of liberalism—capture the Democratic Party? The story unfolded in multiple stages and across multiple venues. The first key stage, however, was that racial policy views and attitudes toward New Deal liberalism came into alignment at the mass and midlevels of the party system. Part 2 shows that the civil rights realignment took hold among ordinary voters in the North, northern state parties, and rank-and-file members of the House of Representatives in the late 1930s and 1940s.

Chapters 5 and 6 ask how the mass public fit into the civil rights realignment. Chapter 5 traces the mass-level story among whites. The conventional understanding is that New Deal economic liberalism and racial liberalism were not related among whites until the 1960s or perhaps the late 1950s. According to Carmines and Stimson, the linkage was forged by national elites, while Lee attributes the connection to the actions of movement activists.⁵²

Nonetheless, chapter 5 shows that among northern whites, both Democratic partisanship and economic liberalism were linked to support for the major civil rights initiatives on the agenda in the late 1930s and 1940s. Although partisanship was uncorrelated with civil rights views among southern whites, economic conservatism was related to more conservative civil rights views. This connection between economic and racial conservatism in the South provided fertile ground for the GOP’s eventual “southern strategy.”

The opinion data also suggest that the tie between civil rights liberalism and Democratic partisanship in the North is less clear-cut in terms of racial prejudice and social segregation than on lynching, the poll tax, fair employment practices, and the more general idea of government action to counter discrimination against African Americans and other minorities.⁵³ Northern

white Democrats' views in the 1930s–1950s—more supportive than Republicans' when it comes to many civil rights policies but similar to their Republican counterparts on policies that encourage more intimate social mixing—presage the ambivalence that northern Democrats would exhibit toward busing and related measures in the 1970s and beyond. Still, the general message from the opinion data is clear: economically liberal northern Democrats provided much stronger support for most of the leading civil rights policy initiatives on the agenda than did economically conservative Republicans.

Chapter 6 explores the mass-level changes among African Americans. The entry of African Americans created a new constituency for Democratic politicians; decades of migration from the South magnified these voters' potential importance in northern swing states. It has been difficult for scholars to study the African American realignment because of limited samples of African Americans in most of the early polls. However, the chapter leverages information across a substantial number of polls in order to provide the most comprehensive study of the African American realignment to date.

In addition to assessing the timing of African Americans' shift to the Democrats, the analysis highlights African Americans' distinctive economic liberalism in the late 1930s and 1940s. Perhaps not surprisingly given their socioeconomic situation, these citizens stand out for their liberal views across a range of issues. An important point, not lost on political observers in the 1930s–1950s, was that African Americans' strong economic liberalism left them significantly closer to the Democrats on issues other than civil rights, making it more difficult for Republicans to envision winning back a substantial share of African American voters.

The patterns of mass opinion described in chapters 5 and 6 created a permissive context for northern Democratic Party politicians as they considered incorporating racial liberalism into their interpretation of New Deal liberalism, just as it fostered opportunities for Republican politicians contemplating an alliance with southern white conservatives. However, translating this permissive context into changes in party alignments involved groups and movements working to force civil rights higher on the policy agenda and pushing state parties and individual members of Congress to adapt to these new pressures.

Chapter 7 traces the incorporation of civil rights into the program of state Democratic parties in the North and compares their stance to that of state Republican parties. The main evidence base is a collection of approximately a thousand state party platforms from 1920 to 1968.⁵⁴ The platforms show that neither party paid much attention to civil rights prior to the late 1930s, but starting in the 1930s and accelerating in the 1940s, northern state Democratic parties moved to the left on civil rights. Their civil rights positions were generally more liberal than those of their same-state GOP counterparts by 1944–46. Pro-civil rights positions were also more prevalent in states

with a substantial African American population, high levels of urbanization, union density, and Jewish population. Thus the same variables that were linked to strong support for New Deal liberalism after 1937 also came to be associated with state parties taking a strongly pro-civil rights position.

Chapter 8 argues that rank-and-file northern Democrats in the House of Representatives also responded to activist and constituent pressure for civil rights by the late 1930s and early 1940s. These locally rooted politicians proved willing to take on southern Democrats and party leaders by signing discharge petitions that extricated civil rights bills from obstructionist committees, forcing the measures to the House floor. Prior to the late 1930s, northern Republicans had outpaced northern Democrats in their civil rights support, and economic liberalism was essentially unrelated to civil rights support among Democrats. Northern Democrats showed increased civil rights support by the end of the 1930s, displacing northern Republicans as the leading advocates of civil rights during World War II. The Democrats most supportive of civil rights came from the highly urban, unionized areas that were most associated with New Deal liberalism, while the smaller number of GOP supporters tended to come from atypical districts for the party. The gap between the parties was substantial from the mid-1940s onward.

If the mass and midlevels of the party system had been transformed by the end of the 1940s, why did it take so long to complete the partisan realignment on race—and what finally brought about the culmination of the realignment? Part 3 takes up these questions, highlighting the tension between national party elites who sought to suppress the civil rights issue and mass- and midlevel party actors who wanted to change their party's position. The civil rights movement ultimately played the pivotal role in overcoming this impasse.

Chapter 9 analyzes the battle for control of the national Democratic Party as the players empowered by the coalitional and ideological changes after 1937 battled not just against southern Democrats but also against national party leaders desperate to hold together the fragile North-South coalition. The bland national platforms that Democrats adopted in the 1940s and 1950s belied the vigorous efforts by the liberal civil rights coalition to push for a strong platform plank, which became a regular focal point of dispute starting in 1944. The national platform fights exemplify both the much stronger push for civil rights on the part of important Democratic constituencies (compared to Republicans) and the efforts of national party leaders to avoid a clear stand. A survey of convention delegates from 1956 shows that despite the two parties' similar national platforms, the distribution of delegate preferences was decidedly more pro-civil rights among Democrats.

As movement activists engaged in direct action to raise the salience of civil rights issues, it became harder for national Democratic elites to limit

the impact of these underlying preferences. Where the party's presidential candidates and top congressional leaders in the 1940s and 1950s could generally get away with straddling civil rights, the pressure to take a clear pro-civil rights stand became much more intense starting in the late 1950s. Put simply, by the time Lyndon Johnson entered the White House, it was clear that failure to lead on civil rights would result in serious troubles holding on to the nomination. This shift reflected the intersection of two forces: civil rights activism had sparked a crisis that demanded a response while the earlier changes in the Democratic coalition had created a clear balance of power within the party regarding the appropriate response to that crisis.

Chapter 10 turns to the battle for control of the national GOP and asks how the conservative Goldwater forces triumphed over the moderates who had led the national party for more than two decades. As noted above, the idea of a realignment premised on Republican appeals to disaffected southern conservatives had been a topic of political conversation from 1937 onward. But many national leaders were wary of such a shift, which would tip the balance of power in the party decisively toward its conservative wing, risking a loss of support in urban, liberal states. The chapter analyzes GOP strategy toward civil rights in the 1940s–1950s, as party leaders sought to balance the rank-and-file's (general) lack of interest in pursuing vigorous action with the perceived need to appear at least mildly supportive in order to avoid alienating moderate voters in states like New York and Illinois.

The rough balance of power within the party was broken as Eisenhower's party building in the South created an institutional foothold for conservatives to gain power within the GOP. The Goldwater movement both capitalized on and reinforced these shifts. With most Republican voters critical of Kennedy for pushing too fast on civil rights, and with state parties in the South and West largely under the control of conservatives hostile to civil rights, racial conservatives were well positioned to gain the upper hand.⁵⁵ Even as Everett Dirksen and other congressional leaders continued to try to position the party as at least mildly pro-civil rights—providing crucial support for passage of the landmark legislation of 1964 and 1965—the coalitional bases of the party had been gradually transformed from beneath them, creating a party landscape that was now decidedly tilted in favor of the conservatives.

The final chapter turns to the theoretical and methodological implications of the civil rights case, with a focus on party theory and on the challenges of systematically studying major political transformations. The chapter also explores the civil rights realignment's implications for today's politics, considering the politics of backlash and the tensions facing contemporary Democrats' approach to racial issues.