

6 Race, Parties, and Democratic Inclusion

FEW INSTITUTIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY enjoy more reverence from political scientists than the two-party system. E. E. Schattschneider's (1942, 1) claim that the two-party system "created democracy" and that "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties" remains widely cited and adhered to. Among its most important attributes, the two-party system is thought to promote the inclusion of racial minorities and groups otherwise disadvantaged in terms of wealth, resources, and power because its existence "enable[s] the many to pool their resources to offset the advantages of the few" (Dahl 1967, 245). In his famous study of urban politics in New Haven, Robert Dahl (1961, 34) found that party competition was critical for the incorporation of new immigrant groups into American politics because "whatever else ethnics lacked they had numbers." V. O. Key (1949, 310), writing in reaction to African American disfranchisement in the one-party South, argued that the development of a two-party system in the region would ensure that one political party "of necessity must pick up whatever issue is at hand to belabor the 'ins.'" The belief that a competitive two-party system is inclusive so dominates the discipline today, including rational choice scholars, behaviorists, and historical institutionalists (e.g., Wattenberg 1990; Rhode 1991; Reichley 1992; Shefter 1994; Benoit and Shepsle 1995; Bibby 1997; Milkis 1999; Cain 2001; Sabato and Larson 2002),¹ that debate about the role parties play in American democracy "has been reduced to a matter of particulars, not theory" (White 1992, 170; also see Epstein 1986).²

It is perhaps surprising, then, that scholars of African American politics make dramatically different arguments about the two-party system's impact for democratic inclusion, emphasizing its limits and exclusionary nature (Walton 1972; Holden 1973; Pinderhughes 1984; Walters 1988; Guinier 1991; Tate 1993; Smith 1996; Lusane 1997; Frymer 1999; Eldersveld and Walton 2000; Kim 2001; Marable 2002).³ In turn, these scholars tend to explore strategies that in different ways involve the *weakening* of two-party politics. Some have raised the possibility of strategic voting, forming third parties, and changing electoral laws to allow for greater proportional representation (Walton 1972; Walters 1988; Guinier 1991; Tate 1993). Others have focused on the implementation of the Voting Rights Act and the potential of race-conscious congressional redistricting (Grofman and Davidson 1992; Swain 1993; Whitby 1997; Cannon 1999; Gay 2001; Tate 2003). Still other scholars focus on local politics where racial demographics provide more frequent opportunities for African Americans to win elections (Eisinger 1982; Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Pinderhughes 1987; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Sonenshein 1993; Reed 1995; Hajnal 2001), courtroom litigation (e.g., Ely 1980; see, however, Rosenberg 1991 and Lovell and McCann of this

volume as powerful counters to this argument), social movement activism (Piven and Cloward 1977; Chong 1991; Lee 2002; Costain, this volume), or political empowerment through changes in popular culture (Gilroy 2000).

Why this discrepancy between scholars who study parties and those who focus on African American politics? In part, it is simply a point of emphasis and priorities. Within the recent major edited volumes on U.S. party politics, for example the most recent editions of *The State of the Parties* (Green and Shea 1999) and *The Parties Respond* (Maisel 2002), not a single chapter or subchapter is devoted to the intersection of race and party dynamics. But this is just symptomatic of a larger reason: While party scholars recognize the importance of race in American politics, they do not see it as a central or fundamental feature of American politics or as intrinsic to understanding two-party dynamics.⁴ Following the famous traditions of de Tocqueville (2001), Myrdal (1944), Dahl (1961), and today's leading racial attitude scholars (e.g., Kinder and Sanders 1996; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000), party scholars treat race and racism as a set of ideas largely reducible to psychologically driven prejudice that exists independent of elite actors and institutions. Accordingly, these scholars believe that parties will sometimes manifest specific racist expressions, but they are not thought to independently further racial inequality; they merely echo existing views in society. And no matter how often parties manifest societal racism, it is thought that as long as two-party competition exists, black Americans will have an opportunity to provide an opposing view. Indeed, Key's (1949) argument mentioned above is typical of how party scholars understand the role of parties with regards to racial equality—it is only when the two-party system fails to be competitive that African American interests suffer inadequate representation: it is not something more intrinsic to party competition and institutional dynamics.

Recent attention to American political development challenges this conventional view. Rogers Smith (1997), for instance, has argued that racism is best understood as part of an essential ideological element of the American creed and nation building. If racism is recognized as an ideology, and as such, a structural or organizing principle of American politics (Bobo 1988; Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1996), then it cannot be dismissed as irrational or meaningfully separate from the workings of our political institutions. A number of scholars have made great advances in intersecting race with institutional dynamics, arguing that institutional rules and procedures not only provide avenues for racist actors to operate, but also have independent consequences by influencing individual preferences, privileging some groups over others, and providing "rational" incentives that motivate political actors to either behave in a racist manner or behave in a manner that motivates others to do so (Katznelson 1973; March and Olsen 1984; Lieberman 1998; Marx 1998; Kryder 2000; Skrentny 2002). Specific to the study of parties, scholars argue that electoral institutions provide incentives for party politicians to represent specific types of politics, ideologies, and groups, reshaping societal divisions in the process (Shefter 1993; Aldrich 1995; Valely 1995; Bridges 1997; Frymer 1999; James 2000; Wolbrecht 2000).

In the rest of this chapter, I argue both why we should pay closer attention to the links between race and party dynamics, even in periods when race is seemingly not on the public agenda, and why these links have profound implications for efforts at greater African American inclusion. I begin with a discussion of why party institutional design matters. I then look at the activities of the Democratic Party over the past two decades to illustrate how electoral incentives and the increasing success of the party went hand-in-hand with its efforts to distance itself from black voters.

THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM, RACE, AND INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

When we think about race mixing with politics we tend to focus on dramatic events. Americans fought a civil war over slavery and arguably fought a second war during the civil rights movement. Race issues have had huge consequences for national politics, precipitating at least one, may be two, electoral realignments (Sundquist 1983; Cowden 2001), the decline of urban political machines (Katznelson 1973; Kleppner 1985; Marable 1985), and the decline of the New Deal welfare state (Edsall with Edsall 1991; Quadagno 1994; Sugrue 1996; Lieberman 1998). The moments when race issues have dominated the political agenda, from the Civil War to the civil rights movement to the Rodney King beating and subsequent riots in Los Angeles, are indelibly etched in our memory.

In terms of understanding politics and democratic inclusion, however, it is problematic to consider race solely in terms of dramatic moments. Yet scholars have tended to do just that, creating a dichotomy between moments when race is not a part of public debate—and institutions and politicians seemingly function in a “normal” manner—and moments when race dominates the public sphere, and institutions and politicians behave irrationally because they are motivated by prejudice and anti-individualistic notions (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Poole and Rosenthal 1991). For these scholars, race matters—but only sometimes. It comes and goes, explosive when it is on the agenda, but then disappears and loses not only salience, but relevance. I argue alternatively that race should be understood as mattering not just in irrational acts of prejudice but in the day to day maneuverings of our political elites. Even when race is not publicly manifested in politics, its underlying presence has great consequences for both party leaders and the possibility of democratic inclusion as these party leaders work actively to keep race off the agenda to the direct detriment of African American representation.

Throughout the period when the founders were forming national political institutions, racial considerations were foremost on their minds. Starting with the Constitutional Convention, southern whites long maintained an effective veto power over proposed institutional designs that would threaten slavery (Freehling 1990; Finkelman 1996). Prior to the Civil War, this institutional design consistently benefited southern whites politically, enabling slaveholders to hold the presidency for 50 of the nation's first 62 years, the Speaker of the House for 41, and a majority of federal judgeships and appointments

(Richards 2000; Wills 2003). Although the Civil War ended slavery, many of the institutions that this original compromise birthed have proven stalwart. Whether it is the creation of the Senate, the Electoral College, the Full Faith and Credit Provision, or the Commerce Clause, the implications of institutional design remain significant. Initially designed to mitigate racial conflict, many of these institutions remain a powerful method of denying democratic inclusion because they privilege white and often specifically conservative white voters, resulting in a discourse and political agenda that gives primary to white interests.⁵

The two-party system is a perfect example of an institution that was initially designed to alleviate the effects of racial conflict, and continues to have significant implications for democratic inclusion. Scholars have traditionally viewed the rise of the two-party system to be in accordance with the nation's “exceptionalism” of Liberal-individualism, moderate political tastes, and the absence of great conflicts (e.g., Dahl 1966; de Tocqueville 2001; Huntington 1968). As an electoral institution, however, the two-party system first developed in the 1820s when political leaders believed that such a system could effectively side-step divisiveness over a fundamental conflict—slavery—and refocus national attention through partisan competition around moderate voters with appeals to nationalism, economic populism, and stylistic vagaries (Remini 1963; Aldrich 1995). Party leaders, and most notably the leading influence behind the two-party system's development, Martin Van Buren, at the time recognized that institutional engineering could determine what Americans thought about and acted on. By creating two majority-seeking party coalitions, each party necessarily needed to appeal to centrist voters who did not feel strongly about slavery in order to win the election. Writes John Aldrich (1995, 125) in discussing the formation of the Democratic Party: “The assurance that no one person or faction could become dominant also meant that no one region, even one holding a majority of the nation, could dominate. . . . ‘States Rights’ in the structure of the Democratic Party meant controls to ensure national unity in the party, and in particular, controls to keep the ‘peculiar institution’ of slavery off the national political agenda for as long as institutionalized partisan politics could do so.” As Van Buren wrote, “Instead of the question being between a northern and Southern man, it would be whether or not the ties, which have heretofore bound together a great party should be severed” (Remini 1963, 5). Van Buren selected Andrew Jackson to be the party's first candidate because he was perfect for avoiding ideological and regional conflicts. He was personally popular, unspecific in his ideas, and a war hero that Americans could unite around. “Indeed,” Van Buren wrote, “Genl. Jackson has been so little in public life, that it will be not a little difficult to contrast his opinions on great questions with those of Mr. Adams” (Remini 1963, 6).

The two-party system may have, at least temporarily, saved a nation from civil war. But its development had both short- and long-term implications for the role of parties as agents of democratic inclusion. Most nations that have developed party systems in the context of racial and ethnic division have institutionalized some form of minority voice and power-sharing, usually

through a form of proportional representation (Lijphart 1977, 1984). The U.S. party system was designed in a similar historical and political context of racial division but with a far different outcome. Instead of creating a system of representation for all groups, the two-party system was designed to deflect the voices in the debates over slavery by attempting to remove the issue from political contestation. Proclamations of ideological consensus and liberal creed aside, the development of this institutional dynamic, has contributed a significant role in engineering this consensus on a national scale. By creating an incentive system for party leaders to campaign around moderate/median voter causes, at a time when society was highly polarized over slavery, the two-party system was understood to manufacture which elements of public opinion would be amplified and represented by politicians. Party competition around the median voter influenced the types of ideologies that could be generated and which groups would be mobilized and demobilized.

The primary features of the nation's two-party system, the necessity of attracting the support of the median voter to win elections and the resulting emphasis on moderation and nonideological campaigns, remain in place today. In this system, party scholars widely assume that a group's simple presence in the electorate should be sufficient for democratic inclusion. All groups are not considered equal, of course, and groups that have more people, higher turnout rates, more money, and are strategically located within the Electoral College, will get more attention from party leaders than will other groups. At the same time, as long as a group's votes are available, the voter median (and thus the expected place of party contestation) ought to move in the direction of the group's interests and at least one party ought to reach out for the group's support (Key 1949; Shefter 1994; Benoit and Shepsle 1995). To lure the group to its party, leaders are expected to bestow the group with promises of policy promotion and representation.

But throughout much of U.S. history, party leaders have perceived the potential support of black voters as not simply leading to more votes in their electoral coalition but as destabilizing and divisive for winning elections. In part this is because many civil rights policies are unpopular with a majority of Americans, and in part because African American voters tend to be more liberal on many issues than the median voter.⁶ But racism encourages party leaders to treat African Americans differently from other liberal and conservative groups that find themselves in the midst of party competition despite their ideological preferences. The presence of African Americans in the party coalition is often seen by party leaders as divisive for attracting the support of white voters, and hence the median voter. For instance, after African Americans entered the party system in large numbers during the 1960s, the voter median shifted but not in the direction expected by party theorists: Whites who saw themselves as economic liberals moved to the Republican Party in opposition to civil rights programs and because their perceptions about programs they once supported, such as welfare and active federal spending, changed as the programs became associated with blacks (Edsall with Edsall 1991; Kinder and Sanders 1996; Gilens 1999).

The combination of racism and electoral incentives leads parties to treat black voters differently than other similarly liberal or conservative groups. As long as African American votes are perceived as divisive to the building of party coalitions, their votes will not "count" in the same way as other groups. While black voters often make the statistical difference in election outcomes (Walters 1988), they are rarely given the political credit. In part this is because of party leaders' assumptions that black voters will vote Democrat regardless of any specific appeal; in every national election since 1964, African Americans have voted for the Democratic Party at rates higher than 80 percent (Tate 1993). But it is also because politicians perceive their votes as destabilizing the broader party coalition.⁷ Recognizing this, the Democratic Party tries to win elections by keeping race off the political agenda (in order to remain appealing to conservative white voters) while delicately balancing subtle race-specific appeals at different moments to both black and white voters. The Republican Party, meanwhile, tries to win elections by making direct appeals to white voters without portraying the party as out of the mainstream on race matters. Both strategies leave African American interests severely underrepresented.

The resulting capture of black interests within the Democratic Party places the representatives of African American voters in a quandary. While these representatives push for civil rights goals as emphatically as they can, at the same time they have little choice but to ultimately unite behind party strategy designed to appeal to white swing voters. They oppose many of the specific actions of the Democratic Party leadership but endorse the party come election time because it remains a better choice than the Republican Party. The quandary becomes further apparent when African American political leaders attempt to promote greater black representation through the Voting Rights Act in a manner that seemingly hurts the Democratic Party. The drawing of congressional districts with black majorities has had many positive benefits for African American inclusion (Whitby 1997; Cannon 1999); at the same time, Democratic Party leaders fear that the drawing of such districts has hurt their broader electoral chances, leading to a loss of power in the House of Representatives and further marginalization of black political interests (Hill 1995; Lublin 1995). This same battle has arisen within the party over its congressional rules: Most white members of the House Democrats, for instance, want an organization that empowers the majority of the party over the preferences of individual members. The Congressional Black Caucus, in contrast, has consistently favored devices such as seniority and committee autonomy—devices that once benefited southern Democrats who opposed civil rights reforms. Support of such devices reflects recognition on the part of the Black Caucus that rules that benefit the majority of the party are often at odds with the interests of its black constituency.

Before moving on, let me address two counterarguments. First, one might well argue that while this institutional dynamic might marginalize the voice of black voters, it has also quite often muted and marginalized the interests of other groups, including the very same white racists who would deny African

Americans the right of political participation. In this sense, one could identify an important democratizing function of the two-party system—it keeps extremists of all stripes out of mainstream political debate. Rabid pro-slave politicians were no more electable in the post-1820s two-party system than were passionate abolitionists. In the election of 1948 and again in the 1960s, supporters of southern segregation were effectively marginalized because they could not find direct expression within the two-party system and had to opt for third-party alternatives. George Wallace's 1968 third-party campaign endorsing racial segregation, for instance, captured 15 percent of the national vote and 46 of the 538 Electoral College votes and yet he gained no political power from this because of our winner-take-all electoral system.

Still, there are many reasons why African Americans might find a political system that provides a greater voice to explicitly racist third parties in exchange for a greater voice to African Americans preferable to one that denies opportunities to both. One reason is that two-party politics already centers on white voters, enabling racist expression to remain viable in partisan politics. For much of America's history, this racism was quite explicit (Mendelberg 2001). But even since the civil rights era of the 1960s, a period in which racist hate speech is no longer an acceptable element in public discourse, code words with racial implications—such as “crime,” “welfare,” and “affirmative action”—have taken their stead (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Gilens 1999; Mendelberg 2001). Conservative political leaders utilized these code words during the seventies and eighties, engendering the support of large number of middle and working class white voters to dismantle many key New Deal social welfare programs (Edsall with Edsall 1991). Even when politicians are less subtle in their use of racism—for example, the Willy Horton commercial of 1988 or the Trent Lott comments of 2002—the Democratic Party has generally been reluctant to respond critically. By institutionalizing proportional power for African American voters with a multi-party system, African Americans would by no means be guaranteed policy victories, but they would be ensured a “voice” that could keep issues on the agenda and be confident that there would always be at least one political party with the incentive to mobilize black voters during campaign season.

The second counterargument asks: What explains the dramatic inclusion of African Americans during the 1860s and 1960s, as championed by first the Republican and later the Democratic Party? Three factors are notable about these two periods. First, African American interests were championed by a political party in each period during historically exceptional moments of weak two-party competition. In 1860, Abraham Lincoln won with less than 40 percent of the popular vote in a closely fought multi-party race; the passage of the Reconstruction Amendments subsequently occurred during a time when large numbers of southern whites were disenfranchised and the nation effectively had a one-party system. In 1964, Lyndon Johnson won with the largest popular vote percentage in American history; passage of much of the critical civil rights legislation during these years was marked not by competitive party dynamics so much as overwhelming bipartisan support. Second, in both cases, dramatic events outside of the control of party

actors were underlying the election. Outsider social movements, in particular, were influential—abolitionists emerged from a third party and civil rights groups were organizing largely in areas where the right to vote was denied African American citizens. Third, as two-party competition returned in both periods—as the Democrats reemerged as a powerful electoral counter between 1866 and 1876, and as the Republican Party won a very close 1968 presidential election—the party that opposed further civil rights reform used race as a wedge while the party that represented black interests attempted to distance itself from the issue. African American inclusion, then, came at moments of great instability; as the party systems returned to “normal” African Americans in both periods would find their interests less central to national debate.

The process by which parties returned to close competition by removing race from the national political agenda was in both cases halting and uneven. Parties in the United States are neither hierarchical nor unified. They are democratic organizations with many different voices and it is often ambiguous who represents the party, especially at the national level. The closest thing that each party has to an official leader—the elected chair of the Democratic National Committee and Republican National Committee—is rarely of much consequence in terms of power and strategy. At different times, national party power has been centered in city mayors, congressional committee leaders, populist outsider candidates, and small interest groups (Polsby 1983; Ware 1985; Shetter 1994). More often, and particularly in the recent decades since the McGovern-Fraser reforms mandated the use of primaries in picking presidential nominees, no one individual or group has held command of the national parties. As a result, party strategy has moments when it lacks coherence, as many different groups and individuals vie for leadership and have alternative goals and opinions about how to achieve those goals. This strategic incoherence can provide moments of opportunity for black representation. Jesse Jackson, for instance, capitalized on the Democratic Party's nominating rules in the 1980s to push an active civil rights agenda from within the party.

But what is historically striking is how the need for parties to win national elections to remain politically viable eventually encourages unity among its members. Whether one believes that parties are simply instrumental in their desire to win elections or whether parties are composed of ideological individuals desiring policy agendas, winning elections remains essential to the goal. When parties lose elections, particularly when they have sustained losing streaks, the necessity to win becomes more and more dominant, and the party tends to unify more clearly around strategies directed at changing their losing ways (Klinkner 1994). Ideologically driven people who prefer to maintain policy agendas at the cost of winning are marginalized by those who can emphatically proclaim that winning through compromise is better than ending up with nothing at all. It is this dynamic—the need to win elections by attracting a majority of votes, combined with a perception among party elites that the median voter is opposed to discussions of racial equality—that leads black voters to be continually excluded from the benefits of party contestation. Prior to 1964, this dynamic led to the denial of civil and voting rights

for most black Americans. Since 1964, much has changed and improved—black voting rights remain protected and even privileged by Congress and the courts, and their political interests institutionalized in different and important ways in the Democratic Party and the federal bureaucracy. Nonetheless, party dynamics continue to affect black political interests in powerful and important ways. After losing in the 1980s, for instance, the Democrats changed party nominating rules to try to prevent Jackson-type candidacies from having too much success and influence (Frymer 1999). Those efforts by the party are not foolproof, but there is a consistent and identifiable logic that works consistently to winnow out opportunities for the inclusion of black political interests. As we'll see in the following section, it was the return of close two-party contestation in the 1990s that most notably led the Democratic Party to distance itself from black voters and interests, leading to a significant decline in civil rights promotion on a number of critical issues from welfare and crime policy to school quality and job programs.

COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS AND AFRICAN AMERICAN REPRESENTATION, 1992–2000

The 2000 presidential election was among the closest in American history and followed similarly close elections in 1992 and 1996 in which no national party received a majority of the popular vote. According to conventional party scholarship, these three elections ought to have provided ideal conditions for the advancement and inclusion of African American voters and political interests (indeed, regarding the positive impact of these close elections for the inclusion of Latino voters, see Jones-Correa of this volume). First, the more competitive and closely fought the election, the more that any and all swing groups ought to be pivotal and subject to party appeals. African Americans were a critical group for Democratic Party success. No Democrat has won a presidential election with a majority of the white vote since 1964 and black voters in critical electoral college states such as Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, and (dare we say) Florida have frequently determined those states' outcomes. Second, none of the elections were dominated by racial animosity and they were certainly not elections that scholars would identify as particularly divisive. In the 2000 election, for instance, George Bush seemed sincere in his efforts to make blacks, as well as Latinos and Asian Americans, more visible in his campaign; even Patrick Buchanan nominated an African American woman as his vice presidential candidate.

Both the closeness of partisan electoral conflict in the last three presidential elections and the lack of prominence of racial divisiveness were marked changes from the prior two decades. Between 1968 and 1988, the Republicans dominated presidential contests, winning 5 of 6 elections. Democrats found their party under attack by the Republicans for policies that were perceived as simultaneously pro-black and anti-white. Party support for controversial issues such as government-enforced school busing to end racial segregation in schools, affirmative action, welfare rights, criminal procedure protections, and general government spending on national social programs was blamed

for the swing of white voters to the Republicans. Republican race baiting further fueled this exodus of white voters. Richard Nixon centered his campaign around two distinct groups whose identities were embedded in racial significance: the "silent majority," the group of voters who were portrayed as not protesting, not breaking the law, and who had jobs, families, and home mortgages; and a southern strategy which targeted whites opposed to school integration policies and in favor of state rights. Ronald Reagan courted the same groups, promoting states rights from a lecture in Mississippi and appealing to working class "Reagan Democrats" who were dissatisfied with welfare, crime, and affirmative action policies. George Bush, Sr., followed in their footsteps, as during the 1988 election he continually equated the Democratic Party with Jesse Jackson and was linked to a Willy Horton television ad in which Horton's face was shown to American voters as representative of what happens when Democratic Party politicians are soft on black criminals.

While Republicans race baited, the Democratic Party was subject to internal criticism for being too beholden to special interests and increasingly irrelevant as an electoral institution. In response to controversies within the party during the 1960s over the incorporation of African Americans into its nominating delegation (as exemplified in the battle over the Mississippi Freedom Democrats in 1964 and the powerful position of the Daily Administration in 1968), the party changed the rules that governed the way, its members, nominated presidential candidates. To mobilize the party's base, the McGovern-Fraser reforms made primaries central to the nomination of the party's presidential candidate, removing power from the hands of urban mayors and other regional leaders and giving it to rank-and-file voters and party delegates—delegates who were racially diverse as a product of strict quotas (Crotty 1978). These reforms greatly increased the numbers of blacks, women, and other previously underrepresented groups in the party's delegation. They were also criticized as making the party less competitive and leading its strategically important white base from the South and northern urban areas to flee to the Republican Party (Baer 2000). Nelson Polsby (1983, 147) described the Democrats after the McGovern-Fraser reforms as a party of crazes, manias, and fads. Byron Shafer (1983, 252) claimed that "at bottom, the result of all these reforms was *the diminution, the constriction, at times the elimination, of the regular party in politics of presidential selection*" (emphasis in original).

Fractured over race, policy, and electoral strategy, Democratic Party elites argued vociferously with each other as electoral defeats mounted. There was plenty to argue about in the interpretation of electoral results. On the one hand, until 1994, Democrats continued to win a majority of seats in the House and often in the Senate, producing less of a Republican realignment than a period of divided government. Public opinion polls, moreover, were not showing a great deal of depth among voter preferences in their shift toward the Republican Party. Perhaps as a result of the polls that showed voters continuing to support Democrats on issues most closely identified with the New Deal economic coalition, the conventional wisdom in strategic circles quickly became that it was the party's civil rights policies, particularly on busing, affirmative

action, crime, and welfare that were leading to its electoral demise (Edsall with Edsall 1991). A study by one of the party's leading pollsters, Stanley Greenberg, of traditionally white Democrats who were voting Republican in the suburbs of Detroit reported that the voters "express[ed] a profound distaste for blacks, a sentiment that pervades almost everything they think about government and politics. . . . These sentiments have important implications for Democrats, as virtually all progressive symbols and themes have been redefined in racial and pejorative terms" (Greenberg 1985, 13). These policies allowed Republicans to win by luring white working and middle class voters in the North and South without making economic appeals (Black and Black 1987; Edsall with Edsall 1991).

Whether this conventional wisdom was the product of campaign and public opinion realities or some of the party leaders' personal ambivalence about race, it resulted in successful efforts to make counterinstitutional reforms to the McGovern-Fraser rules so that the party could be more competitive in presidential elections with white voters. After the party's landslide defeat to Reagan in 1984, moderates created the Democratic Leadership Council with the intent of changing the party's agenda and moving it away from the civil rights and social spending goals of previous decades (Hale 1995; Baer 2000). "Super Tuesday," a one-day primary involving fourteen southern states, became the signature of the party's effort to return to electoral success. By grouping these southern primaries together early in the nominating season, party leaders hoped to provide a strategic advantage to candidates who were appealing to the region's conservative white voters and lead to the nomination of a candidate who would appeal nationally. If a conservative southern candidate ran in Super Tuesday (Al Gore was the initial target of party strategists), he or she would most likely exit with a commanding lead over other Democratic candidates; even if no southern candidate ran for president, theoretically Super Tuesday should force all candidates to adopt policy positions consistent with southern voters. Super Tuesday did not work as expected right away. In 1988, Jesse Jackson's candidacy mobilized black voters who became a disproportionately large part of the Democrat's southern base when most southern white voters (the group that the party was trying to target) ended up participating in the Republican primaries instead. Jackson won a majority of southern states that day with Gore and Michael Dukakis splitting the white vote.

But calls by leading Democrats to change the party's electoral strategy only became louder with Jackson's success and the party's eventual loss to George Bush, a candidate thought by Democrats as very beatable. By 1992, even progressive party leaders came to be persuaded by the importance of winning over ideological purity and leading members of the party's left wing became critical in legitimating the promotion of centrist candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore. Former civil rights activist John Lewis typified this response when he said of Clinton in 1992, "in the communities I deal with, people want to win, they want to see a Democrat in the White House. . . . They understand that in order to win, it's necessary to bring back those individuals who had left the party" (quoted in Edsall 1992). Party leaders, whites and blacks united, convinced Jackson to stay out of the race and unify the party around Clinton in

order to defeat Bush. When Jackson made overtures to third-party candidate Ross Perot, claiming that he could bring with him large portions of the black voting bloc, Perot wasn't interested.

The Clinton strategy of distancing the party from its black constituency both during the campaign and during his presidency has been well argued elsewhere (Frymer 1999; Klimner 1999; Kim 2001). Clinton's election in 1992 and eventual success in office was seen as part of the triumph of "third way" candidates throughout the United States, United Kingdom, and across the globe. He was tough on crime, making sure to participate in the execution of a mentally disabled African American man earlier on in his first presidential bid, and later making anti-crime legislation a major tenet of his legislative agenda. He criticized Jesse Jackson, Sister Souja, and Lani Guinier, and ended "welfare as we know it" just prior to his 1996 reelection bid, effectively taking away one of the leading ways in which Republicans were able to race bait Democrats. Clinton's strategy was certainly a "third way" as opposed to a straightforward cooptation of conservative causes. He stood behind affirmative action programs with a typically moderate but politically successful "mend, don't end" solution, he promoted social spending and programs in a way far different from the Republicans, and he promoted an ambitious if merely symbolic and substantively empty dialogue on race (Kim 2001). In the course of his impeachment hearings, he was even labeled by the famous African American writer, Toni Morrison, as the first black president and received overwhelming support from the black community.

Nonetheless, important concerns for large numbers of black voters—racial segregation in housing and schools, unequal access to health care and other important social services, and dramatic disparities in arrests and sentencing for nonviolent crimes—were largely ignored by the President and other leaders of the Democratic Party. Leading African American supporters of Clinton who promised opportunities for a race agenda after he was elected would be hard pressed to argue that Clinton at any time turned to such an agenda. Members of the Congressional Black Caucus were continually at odds with the President in his early years regarding welfare, crime, and social spending. The Caucus had some success during these years—they pushed the President to invade Haiti and increased spending provisions in some of the budget debates (Boylor 1994). But in a moment that in many ways symbolized the conflict between the Caucus and Clinton, when key members of the Caucus balked at a Clinton-sponsored Crime Bill in 1994 that they opposed because it failed to contain a provision about racial justice and the death penalty, Clinton simply moved further to the right to find additional votes to pass the legislation. He rarely went back in his subsequent years in office.

That Clinton made it safe for Democrats to be conservatives on civil rights is undeniable. Labeled "the president of a rational choice theorist's dreams" (Rockman 2000, 288), he was exceptional at balancing acts that alienated African American voters with acts that won wide approval, such as his attendance at all-black events, his symbolic yet earnest appeals at dialogue on national race issues, and his endorsement of black politicians for high-ranking political posts—many of whom he was close friends with as he was

arguably the first U.S. president to have close African American friends. He also made it safe for Republicans to make symbolic gestures at inclusion toward black voters. With the promise of a substantive discussion of racial issues no longer a primary point of division between the parties, candidates Bob Dole and Jack Kemp in 1996 and George Bush in 2000 found it safe to speak of the possibility of African American involvement in the Republican Party. Bush, in fact, seemed fairly successful with a balancing act of his own—opposing affirmative action, welfare, and federally mandated school integration, but equally emphatic in his support of basic civil rights principles, his endorsement of black politicians for high ranking political posts, and his campaign promise to leave no child behind.⁸

Al Gore's strategy in 2000, however, reinforced the problematic nature of the Democratic Party's efforts to return to competitiveness by denying the salience of racial matters. Most notable about the election campaign were not the brief moments of controversy over George Bush's visit to Bob Jones University or the numbers of black faces at the Republican Convention; it was how infrequently race came up as a point of discussion during the Gore campaign. Consider just two examples when Gore avoided raising racial issues when it seemingly made at least short-term political sense to do so. Months before the election, Texas governor George Bush approved the execution of convicted murderer Gary Graham. Graham's execution caused a great deal of outrage and controversy. Graham was convicted in a trial with little evidence and a single self-doubting witness, his lawyers were woefully unprepared for the case, and he had emphatically maintained his innocence until his death. Graham's execution symbolized the unfairness underlying the criminal legal system in which African American men are sentenced to the death penalty in grossly disproportionate numbers (Cole 1999). Graham defiantly declared at his execution that "this is what happens to black men in America," and the NAACP called the execution "a gross travesty of justice" (Mitchell 2000). Even a majority of Texas citizens believed Graham was innocent, notable in a state that executes far more people than any other state in the nation. But Gore remained silent throughout the controversy, maintaining his personal support for the death penalty, and stating on the day of the execution, "I do not know the record in Texas. I have not examined the cases. I've always tried to stay away from issues in criminal courts" (Moret and King 2000).

The second example involves African American voters in the state of Florida who may or may not have been denied their right to vote on the day of the election, or had their votes voided by confusing ballots and "hanging chads." Newspaper articles at the time reported widespread complaints by African Americans in the state. Some were stopped at roadblocks and prevented from voting. Some were told at polling booths that they were ineligible to vote because they were incorrectly labeled felons (and thus denied by law the right to vote in Florida) or because they simply were not on the relevant voter registrars. For whatever reason, African American ballots in the state were also disproportionately voided for having holes punched in correctly. Yet, while more than 90 percent of African Americans voted for Gore nationally, and while the missing votes in Florida surely would have

avored Gore and probably would have provided the difference in the state and national election results, the Gore campaign did not precipitate these accusations or demand investigations into potential violations of the Voting Rights Act. In fact, when African American politicians such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton attempted to rally public support around the potential voting rights violations, they were quietly asked by leaders of the Gore campaign to tone down their complaints (Crowley 2000).

CONCLUSION

In some ways, we ought to be celebrating the relative absence of race from the 2000 campaign. An election that is unremarkable on race issues is indeed remarkable given the historical context. In past decades, the Republican Party too easily used race to drive a wedge into the Democratic Party's once reliable electoral coalition, a coalition unified on issues of economic liberalism but deeply fractured on issues pertaining to race. The absence of race in the 2000 campaign meant voters who agree that they want better health care, more social services, and improved labor conditions did not end up splitting their vote because of their differences on affirmative action, welfare, immigration, and crime. The lacunae of divisive race issues allowed Democrats to promote a modern-day twist on the New Deal economic liberalism that made the party so successful at the polls earlier in the twentieth century. Moreover, it is certainly a step in the right direction that the Republican race-baiting strategies of the 1980s and early 1990s have been replaced by at least a skin-deep effort at inclusion. National leaders of both political parties seem to recognize that explicit racism is unappealing to the mainstream American voter. In a nation that fought a civil war over the issue of slavery, and followed this war with another century of legal racial apartheid, this newly found consensus is not to be minimized.

But while this silence over race issues can be interpreted as an achievement in terms of national politicians maintaining civility, it is also a cause of concern for those interested in promoting a more vibrant and inclusive democracy. Racial harmony in our national election campaigns has come at a cost; it has meant avoiding discussion of causes and solutions to pressing policy issues concerning racial inequality, particularly with specific regard to African American voters. The major party candidates do not discuss critical issues of concern to African Americans such as racial segregation in housing and schools, the increasing racial divides in wealth and resources, and the continuing inequalities in criminal justice, health care, labor rights, and equal access to a clean environment. African American voices and interests have been largely ignored during recent campaigns as the parties focus on various groups deemed by party strategists to be potentially determinative of the election campaign. White Americans, moreover, are told little about race matters from political leaders and as a result remain largely ambivalent toward and unaware of critical inequalities. Even in the most civil of elections (such as 2000), national political discourse is merely racially generic—the parties fo-

While this might seem good in theory, in practice it amounts to a discourse that is quite race-specific, as it focuses on issues that can be discussed in white households without implicit connections to racial minorities.

Consistent with the institutional focus of this volume, I have argued that this racialized discourse is a direct result of U.S. electoral institutions. The ballot system, the rules governing the number of votes needed to win the election, and the number of parties favored by such rules, play significant roles in determining which issues are discussed during political campaigns. To win elections, politicians must appeal to swing voters. In recent U.S. elections, it has seemed political suicide for national politicians to discuss racial inequality, racism, or civil rights because Reagan Democrats, Perot supporters, soccer moms, and Nascar dads have a significant interest in maintaining the status quo. In a historically white majority nation with racially conservative swing voters, parties have little incentive—in fact, they often have great disincentive—to appeal to black voters. In the current context, this has resulted in a defensive politics: Democrats appeal to African American issues at the base level calculated to keep blacks in the party, and Republicans address racial issues with only enough care not to frighten white voters with unattractive racism. Discussion of race by both parties is minimal and centers largely on the symbolic. The result is that race issues have been institutionalized outside of the electoral arena, creating a large and problematic void in democratic politics in this country.

Given the historical context of racism in the United States, African Americans need affirmative government measures to rectify a long history of past wrongs. The political incorporation of African Americans has, in fact, arguably been the most dominant and important task in making American democracy a reality. The two-party system is hardly the only explanation for why equality has been so elusive, but it does provide us with arguably the primary engine that drives American democracy. While we should not minimize the myriad ways in which parties encourage greater democracy throughout the country, it is only when we recognize a significant irony—that this essential engine of democracy only works when we suppress national divisions over race—that we can confront its constant impact on the possibilities that exist for policy reform and democratic inclusion.

NOTES

1. This is not to say that all U.S. party scholars agree. See Amy (1993), Lowi (2001), and Disch (2002). In his more recent work, Dahl (1989, 2001) has also become more critical of the U.S. two-party system.
2. Legal scholars are increasingly making similar arguments in defense of the two-party system (Kramer 2000; Persily 2001; Garret 2002) while the U.S. Supreme Court over the last decade has cited these arguments in denying opportunities to third parties and citizen groups to gain greater representation in electoral politics (see *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party*, 520 U.S. 351 (1997); *California Democratic Party v. Jones*, 530 U.S. 567 (2000)).
3. I focus specifically on African American representation and not the broader category of racial minorities in the United States not because the inclusion of other racial minorities

has necessarily been better or easier but simply because the inclusion of African Americans into the party system is meaningfully different than that of other racial and ethnic minorities (see Frymer and Skrentny 1998; Kim 1999; Fields 2002).

4. This seems to be a viewpoint specific to the understanding of U.S. politics. Scholars of comparative parties tend to see racism and ethnic conflict as far more fundamental and systematic and thus recognize that party institutions are both built around and constantly affecting these fissures (see Kymlicka 1995; Lijphart 1995; Horowitz 2000). Ironically, many scholars of American parties agree with this assessment when they confront what they identify to be racially and ethnically divided societies elsewhere. Dahl (1971, 116), for example, argued at the same time that he was promoting two-party politics in the United States that the two-party system will fail to adequately represent all of its members when racial cleavages are fundamental: "if a country is divided into majority and minority subcultures, then members of the majority have less need to be conciliatory toward the minority, since they can form a majority coalition among themselves. As a consequence, members of the minority may see no prospect of ever freeing themselves from the political domination of the majority; hence they, too, have little incentive to be conciliatory." Anthony Downs (1957, 121) agreed; while he argued that opportunities will exist for all groups to obtain majority status for at least the short term in a society with pluralistic divisions where no one group is consistently in the majority and no one group is consistently in the minority, he contrasts that with societies in which there is a fundamental cleavage and one side is consistently in the minority—"fear of this is precisely what caused many European aristocrats to fight the introduction of universal suffrage" (also see Epstein 1967).

5. Although certainly not all of these institutions continue to have the same impact. The Commerce Clause, for example, while initially protective of slave interests because it disallowed opportunities for northern anti-slave interests to tax slave-made commercial goods, later became a critical engine in the fight against southern civil rights violations (e.g., *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States*, 379 U.S. 183 [1968]).

6. Though as David Cannon (1999, 28–30) has recently shown, on non-civil rights issues, African American voters are not as liberal and are actually quite similar to whites in their political beliefs.

7. When African American political leaders have reached out to the Republicans and third parties in moments when those parties were behind in the electoral polls, they have been rebuffed despite their votes seemingly making a difference in the electoral calculus. In the 1990s, for instance, Jesse Jackson reached out to Ross Perot (1992) and Bob Dole (1996) without interest from either candidate.

8. Of course, this balancing act was not persuasive with black voters, as he was summarily rejected by more than 90 percent of black votes nationwide and in his home state of Texas. In fact, Bush received a smaller percentage of the black vote (8 percent nationally) than any Republican candidate since 1964.

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JAN E. LEIGHLEY

7 Race, Ethnicity, and Electoral Mobilization *Where's the Party?*

FEW WOULD DISAGREE that a fundamental indicator of democratic inclusion in a representative democracy is the extension of full electoral rights and privileges to racial and ethnic minorities. The history of the civil rights movement in the United States, as well as continuing legal conflicts over racial redistricting, voting systems, and election administration underscore the multiple dimensions of this central feature of democratic politics.

Various chapters in this volume speak to the importance of political institutions such as voting rights and legal systems in structuring the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, with some conclusions more optimistic than others. George Lovell and Michael McCann, for example, counter the notion that the federal courts are effective guardians of minority rights, while Canon details the normative and empirical evidence for redistricting as an instrument for enhancing minority representation. Kittilson and Tate discuss the role of the party in enhancing representation, focusing on whether such representation is elite driven ("top down," by elected party officials) or a reflection of societal change ("bottom up," by mass identifiers). Their comparative historical analysis suggests that neither model is fully satisfactory.

Yet the political process of including and representing racial and ethnic minorities in our political system surely also depends on political processes beyond those centered in the formal institutions of government or a conceptualization of political parties as either mass identifiers or elected officials. Having achieved the right to vote and gained a voice in national party institutions, an important question for racial and ethnic minorities then becomes what informal political processes facilitate or impede participation. These informal processes are especially important for previously disenfranchised groups that might lack information or skills relevant to electoral participation, resources that are gained through the exercise of the right to vote. Alternatively, weaker norms and social pressures to participate—given previous barriers to participation—might otherwise result in newly enfranchised groups participating less than other groups who have historically enjoyed the privilege of electoral eligibility.

The importance of the black church to the civil rights movement and as a source of political mobilization for African Americans is one example of how social institutions have helped to politicize previously disenfranchised groups (see, e.g., Dawson, Brown, and Allen 1990; Harris 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1996; Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 2001). Similarly, historical analyses often point toward political institutions that have historically