

PAUL FRYMER

University of California at Los Angeles

JOHN DAVID SKRENTNY

University of Pennsylvania

Coalition-Building and the Politics of Electoral Capture During the Nixon Administration: African Americans, Labor, Latinos

In November of 1968, Richard Nixon became only the second Republican in four decades to win control of the Executive Office.¹ Unlike the administration of his party's predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, Nixon's presidency would ultimately display a willingness to aggressively confront the then-dominant New Deal order of the Democratic party and, in the process, attempt to forge a new electoral majority. In many ways, Nixon's efforts were shaped by historical and institutional circumstances. The civil rights movement of the early 1960s had successfully pushed Democratic party leaders to take legislative action against racial discrimination in the southern United States, effectively shattering their party's century-old alliance with white segregationists in the region. Meanwhile, efforts by the Supreme Court and Democratic legislators to provide substantive civil rights in areas of the country outside of the South strained their party's relationship with urban and blue-collar white-ethnic voters.² Nixon courted these disaffected Democrats in the 1968 campaign through both the "Southern Strategy" and appeals to the so-called "Silent Majority," a symbolic reference meant

1. For helpful comments, we would like to thank Shana Bass, Michael Brown, Scott James, David Mayhew, Corey Robin, Joel Silbey, Pam Singh, Stephen Skowronek, Tom Sugrue, Rick Valelly, and the anonymous reviewers for *Studies in American Political Development*.

2. See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), esp. chap. 8; and Jonathan Rieder, *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn Against Liberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

to contrast his supporters from the civil rights activists "blamed" for disrupting more traditional ways of life.

As a result of this appeal, most analysts of the period view Nixon's campaign as marking the end of the Republican party's century-old alliance with African-American voters, as well as solidifying a clear shift in the party system around racial issues.³ Yet what kind of Republican majority would emerge, and what the place of African Americans would be within it, remained both questionable and, to a certain degree, contestable within party circles. The Republican party of 1969 still contained many constituents sympathetic to liberal civil rights causes, with a number of its elected officials associating themselves with the legacies of the abolitionists, Abraham Lincoln, and the Radical Republicans.⁴ Large numbers of Republicans in Congress had aligned with Democratic majorities just a few years earlier to pass the dramatic civil rights initiatives over the stall tactics of southern Democratic legislators. Although African-American voters strongly rebuked Nixon at election time, prominent Republican party leaders continued to believe that any new majority coalition had to have a place for significant portions, if not the majority, of the black vote. Further complicating any efforts made by party leaders to create a new coalition based significantly on white backlash was the existence of a potentially important number of Latino voters in key electoral college states such as Florida, Texas, New York, and California. Playing the race card instrumentally to bring in disaffected white Democrats risked offending an emerging and potentially critical swing-group in national elections.

The story of Nixon's initially conflicted stance when he began his presidency in 1969 and his subsequent decisions over which groups were most strategically valuable is important to recount for several reasons. It has implications for the electoral battles of the post-1960s. It also offers a better understanding of the general awkwardness of presidential behavior during the Nixon years.⁵ But most critical for us is the illumination of the criteria which Nixon and other Republican party leaders used in choosing coalition partners.⁶ Here we have a unique opportunity to explore how certain

3. See Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Thomas Byrne Edsall with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

4. See Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans From 1952 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and A. James Reichley, *Conservatives in an Age of Change* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 1981). Reichley, for instance, counts the number of moderates and progressives as representing a little more than one-third of the Republican party's congressional coalition for the Ninety-first Congress. Another one-third of the Republican's congressional members, labeled by Reichley as "stalwarts," "remained generally loyal to the Republican party's progressive tradition. Memories of forebears who had been active in the abolitionist movement or who had fought in the Civil War helped produce votes among the stalwarts for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965," (p. 24).

5. Here we have in mind an elaboration of what Stephen Skowronek calls the "politics of preemption." See Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

6. For the purposes of this paper, we do not distinguish the strategic behavior of Richard Nixon from that of the Republican party. Clearly, the two are distinguishable in many different

groups such as Latinos came to find their interests at the center of electoral contestation, and how African Americans came to find their interests ignored by the Republican party and effectively “captured” within the Democratic party. More broadly, we argue that Nixon’s coalition-building efforts exemplify the double-edged nature of two-party competition: a competitive two-party system not only provides incentives for party leaders to mobilize some groups and incorporate them into the democratic process, it also provides incentives for party leaders to attempt to demobilize other political interests and, in the process, restrict their access to democratic representation.

THE COMPETITIVE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM AND ELECTORAL CAPTURE

If we assume that party leaders in the United States are primarily concerned with electing candidates to political office, then the winner-take-all electoral laws of national politics provides these leaders the incentive to promote policy positions that appeal to the broadest percentage of possible voters, or at least a population large enough to capture the voter median. When the ideological distribution of a society’s voters is shaped in a normal fashion, this effort to capture the median generally leads “rational” party actors to promote moderate policies.⁷ This Downsian construction has been complicated by a number of scholars who seek to more aptly characterize the motivations and behavior of actors in electoral politics. Party leaders, for instance, also recognize that their policy positions are often confined by the need to be consistent with the preferences of key segments of their organization’s elites and activists.⁸ Turnout and funding differentials among groups motivate party leaders to emphasize appeals to those groups that are highly mobilized.⁹ Moreover, national electoral battles are fought not in one winner-take-all election, but in fifty, separate winner-take-all electoral colleges. As a result, the median, or swing, voter can vary from state to state, requiring parties to make specific appeals to various important groups which maintain the balance of power in their respective states.¹⁰

ways. In fact, as Sidney Milkis has persuasively argued, presidential aspirations often conflict with party aspirations. Richard Nixon’s political goals, in particular, often worked to the detriment of the Republican party as an organization. See Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System Since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), specifically chap. 9. Nonetheless, Nixon’s position vis-à-vis the Republican party organization is less important for our argument than the fact that he and the rest of the party leadership face similar strategic incentives as political actors attempting to put together a winning coalition within the constraints and framework of a winner-take-all electoral system.

7. See Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

8. See John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties: The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chap. 6; and Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9. See Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).

10. See Scott C. James, “Building a Democratic Majority: The Progressive Party Vote and the Federal Trade Commission,” *Studies in American Political Development* 9 (fall 1995): 331–85.

But whether the matter is understood in strictly Downsian terms, or in terms of a more federated electoral politics, party scholars have maintained that all group interests will benefit from party competition. It is thought that as long as party competition exists, the incentive will also exist for each party to reach out and represent any and all groups that can increase the size of their coalition.¹¹ For spatial modelers, the point is conceptualized simply as the product of calculating mathematically the placement of the voter median. The mere existence of a group in electoral space ought to move the median voter closer towards the group's interests than it would be otherwise.¹² Historical work by students of American political development supports the conclusion that party competition promotes the incorporation of groups into the political process. Whether exploring moments in national or local party politics, the historical record seems to indicate that parties will find it in their interests to partake in mobilization efforts. As Martin Shefter has argued,

the losers in [electoral] conflict, in an effort to reverse the outcome, undertake to mobilize popular support for their cause, thereby threatening to swamp their opponents at the polls or to make it difficult for them to govern in the face of popular turbulence. To meet this threat politicians on the other side seek to establish a mass base for themselves.¹³

11. See Austin Ranney and Willmoore Kendall, *Democracy and the American Party System* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1956), 508: party competition, they argue, assures that "no group has reason to feel that the rest of society is a kind of giant conspiracy to keep it out its legitimate 'place in the sun.' No group feels that it may at any moment have to drop everything else and defend itself against onslaught by some other group." Similarly, William Keefe wrote that "parties are remarkably hospitable to all points of views and to all manners of interests and people," while Frank Sorauf agreed that "neither party ignores or writes off the political interests and aspirations of any major group (Keefe, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America* [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972], 10; Sorauf, *Political Parties in the American System* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1964]). Also see, E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1942), 1, 88, and 209. To recognize how commonplace this view remains in the political science literature, see John Kenneth White, "E. E. Schattschneider and the Responsible Party Model," *PS* 25 (June 1992): 167-71; as well as prominent textbooks such as Theodore J. Lowi and Benjamin Ginsberg, *American Government* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); and Edward S. Greenberg and Benjamin I. Page, *The Struggle for Democracy* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1995).

12. See Kenneth Benoit and Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Electoral Systems and Minority Representation," in *Classifying by Race*, ed. Paul E. Peterson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

13. Martin Shefter, *Political Parties and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7. For historical accounts on the expansion of white suffrage during the second party system, see Shefter, *Political Parties*, chap. 3; and Richard P. McCormick, "Political Development and the Second Party System," in *The American Party Systems*, ed. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 90-116. On the ways in which nineteenth century mass-based parties enhanced democratic behavior, see Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). On benefits provided by the urban machine, or at least the machine in its "embryonic stage," see Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), chaps. 1-3; and Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 32-62.

Similarly, in situations where groups are excluded from party representation, scholars have found explanatory power in the absence of two-party competition, and the consequent absence of the electoral incentive to reach out and incorporate any group currently outside the political process. Hence, it is argued that blacks and many poor whites were disenfranchised in the South at the turn-of-the-century largely because the Republican party failed to actively compete for votes in the region.¹⁴ In the early twentieth century, according to this argument, newly arriving blacks and immigrant groups failed to be incorporated into urban politics because of entrenched one-party machines.¹⁵ More recently, party scholars have pointed to the cessation of party competition between social classes as the main culprit for why working-class participation has declined in national elections.¹⁶

Certainly, the absence of party competition can have negative consequences for a democratic polity. It is our contention, however, that the mere existence of such competition is not sufficient for all groups to be included in party appeals. The incentive to reach out and incorporate a group into a party's coalition exists only if the group's votes are perceived to add to their pre-existing coalition. Party leaders will avoid making appeals to a group if they see such appeals as disruptive to their overall party building efforts. To form an electoral majority parties must avoid appealing to those groups that will either hamper their efforts to maintain the support of their existing coalition, or diminish their attempts to reach out to median ("swing") voters. Put another way, competitive party leaders have incentives not to appeal to a group if they believe that the results of such appeals would merely be off-set by larger numbers of voters supporting their opponents. Party leaders in this circumstance will perceive that support from the group has the potential to alter entirely the makeups of both parties' coalitions. In such situations, the leaders of competitive parties will find it in their interests to ignore the group and make them more or less invisible in electoral battles.¹⁷

There are, of course, many other reasons why a group may be more or less ignored by one of the major political parties. Party leaders, for instance, will be influenced by the size of the group in relation to the overall electorate, the ability of the group to offer financial support to party candidates, and the concentration of the group's votes within electoral locations

14. See V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), chap. 14; and Richard M. Valelly, "National Parties and Racial Disenfranchisement," in *Classifying by Race*, ed. Paul E. Peterson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

15. See Erie, *Rainbow's End*.

16. See Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970).

17. For other variations of this argument, see Paul Frymer, *Uneasy Alliances: Race and Parties in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming); Ronald Walters, *Black Presidential Politics in America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); and Robert Huckfeldt and Carol Kohfeld, *Race and the Decline of Class in American Politics* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

that are strategic for national campaign politics. Moreover, a party's leadership may find significant portions of the group's votes unattainable, as the group remains strictly loyal to the opposition party for ideological, historical, or organizational reasons. Our theory of electoral capture, while incorporating these elements, nonetheless addresses specifically those groups in the electorate that find at least one of the major parties making little or no effort to appeal to their interests or attract their votes *precisely because they perceive that group to be divisive*. For if one party perceives a group to be disruptive to its building an electoral majority, the group is left without a realistic alternative with which they can threaten to exit from their existing party ties. The group will, in effect, be "captured." In this situation, the group is likely to find its support taken for granted and its interests neglected by the other major party's leaders as well. Party leaders will ignore a group, regardless of the group's loyalty and regardless of whether the group could potentially provide the difference in electoral results at the local or national level.

The importance that the perception of divisiveness has in determining whether or not a group becomes electorally captured is illustrated quite dramatically in an examination of President Nixon's efforts to build a new Republican majority. A look at the Nixon years offers insight into the crucial moment when the existing party system is shifting from its New Deal moorings and the process of coalition building and electoral capture are taking place. President Nixon, we will see, was both institutionally constrained and initially unsure of how to put together a new Republican majority. He began his presidency with an attempt to reach out to a great number of different groups, most notably a combination of southern whites, African Americans, and Latinos – both the strongly Republican Cuban Americans and strongly Democratic Mexican Americans. He also reached out to disaffected southern white Democrats in an effort to appeal to George Wallace supporters, a potentially crucial swing group for 1972. At the same time, faced with institutional opposition from a Democratic Congress, the courts, civil rights leaders, and key elements from within his own party, the president made appeals to African Americans and Latino voters, albeit within the limits offered by the existing Republican coalition and his pursuit of southern whites. This led to Nixon's surprising support for affirmative action and bilingual education.

By the second year of his presidency, Nixon recognized that appeals to some groups were incompatible with his broader coalition-building opportunities. First, the vast majority of African-American leaders and voters chose to maintain their allegiances with the Democratic party: crucial to this was both their distrust of a president who was making simultaneous appeals to them and their southern white opponents, as well as their existing support of the Democratic party coalition. But the true capture of black voters in the Democratic party occurred only when Nixon and other Republican leaders began to perceive that appeals to black voters were actually hurting their coalition building efforts with other important swing groups. By distancing the party from black interests, Nixon believed the

party would suffer minimal defections from the existing Republican coalition to the Democratic party and simultaneously provide opportunities for greater gains to his party from “median voters,” white blue-collar workers, and Latino voters. Republicans simply believed that they could attract more voters by excluding a specific group. Indeed, as he excluded African Americans, Nixon maintained surprisingly liberal appeals to organized labor and Mexican-American voters. While the President recognized that labor union members and Mexican Americans were strongly identified with the Democratic party and had ideological interests compatible with the Democrats, he seemingly did not perceive appeals to these groups to be as divisive for broader coalition building, enabling continuing partisan competition for their vote.

All of this, in turn, has important implications for the political leverage of each of these groups in the subsequent decades. By the 1980s, southern whites, as well as many urban and blue-collar whites, found themselves the subjects of party contestation, a key component of a larger and more amorphous group of voters referred to collectively as the “Reagan Democrats.” Mexican Americans and other Latino voters also found their support contested. But African-American bargaining power in national electoral politics became limited largely to the margins. Republicans no longer actively campaigned for their vote and supported few high-profile African-American issues or programs. And although 80–90 percent of black voters came to identify themselves and vote for the Democrats, the Democratic party’s leadership increasingly attempted to distance themselves from specifically “black” interests in an effort to make their party more appealing to those voters who had crossed over to support Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush.¹⁸ Democratic party leaders came to recognize the captured status of their black constituents and like the Republicans focused their attention and policy agenda on those groups which they believed held the balance of power in national elections.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY ON THE EVE OF THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION

It is tempting to argue that by the beginning of the Nixon administration in 1969, both of the major political parties were already set in the make-up of their electoral coalitions. Most studies, in fact, point to Barry Goldwater’s nomination by the Republican party in 1964 and his subsequent opposition to the Civil Rights Act as dramatically altering the GOP’s stance towards African Americans from Richard Nixon’s more ambivalent position as a candidate in 1960.¹⁹ Black voters reacted both to Goldwater’s stance and Lyndon Johnson’s pro-civil rights stance by voting overwhelmingly for the Democrats that year, a trend that would continue in 1968 and remain

18. See Philip A. Klinkner, “Bill Clinton, the ‘New Orthodoxy,’ and the Politics of Race in the Democratic Party,” (Paper presented to the Western Political Science Association, 1995).

19. See Carmines and Stimson, *Issues Evolution*, 52–55; Edsall with Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, chaps. 2–3.

unfettered over the next three decades.²⁰ Yet while there is little doubt that there were a number of precursors to Richard Nixon's turning away from black voters in the early 1970s, it remains difficult to understand why African Americans would ultimately find their votes unwanted by the Republican party, and why large elements of the white working class would simultaneously become an important swing vote, if we consider the parties' positions on race as settled in 1964, or simply assume that Nixon was exclusively committed to the interests of southern whites when he entered office.

Once in office, Nixon had four years to improve on his 43 percent showing in the popular election. Although he recognized that opportunities existed for constructing a new Republican majority, how to go about it was not entirely clear. Party coalitions remained to a significant degree in flux and new coalition partners would have to be actively courted for Nixon and the Republicans to expect their support in subsequent elections. Moreover, any effort to court new groups would have to be done delicately, in a way that would not either alienate existing elements of the party's base or provide fuel for a resurgence of a weakened, yet still significant, pro-civil rights consensus among the nation's policy leaders. Though the Democratic party was severely shaken by its defeat at the national polls in 1968, neither its New Deal coalition nor the prominence and legitimacy of the civil rights agenda had entirely disappeared. Democrats continued to maintain majorities in both houses of Congress and pro-civil rights justices dominated an activist-minded Supreme Court, providing more than sufficient power to repudiate any efforts by the Nixon administration to dismantle civil rights policies.²¹

There were also reasons why blacks as a large voting bloc could not be simply cut out of Republican electoral strategies. First, African-American voters still gave hints that they would support Republican candidates who made direct appeals for their votes. As recently as 1960, nearly a majority of

20. See Katherine Tate, *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

21. As mentioned earlier, Nixon's situated position vis-à-vis a weakened but still vital liberal establishment, fits nicely within a theoretical category of presidential authority that Skowronek has labeled "preemptive politics." Skowronek argues that presidents are bound by the historical period in which they enter office; institutions, public discourse, and the president's relation to them are important in determining his political fate. Politicians such as Nixon who enter office during the "preemptive" period are

limited by the political, institutional, and ideological supports that the old establishment maintains. Intruding into an ongoing polity as an alien force, they interrupt a still vital political discourse and try to preempt its agenda by playing upon the political divisions within the establishment that affiliated presidents instinctively seek to assuage. . . . Opportunities for preemption are never difficult to find, but the political terrain to be negotiated is always treacherous. These presidents will in effect be probing for reconstructive possibilities without clear warrant for breaking cleanly with the past. (Skowronek, *Politics Presidents Make*, 43–44).

middle-class blacks, and one-third of all black voters, had given their support to Richard Nixon against John Kennedy. Although by 1964, less than one-fifth of black voters supported Barry Goldwater, they continued to offer support selectively to Republican candidates at the state and local level. In 1965, a near-majority of black voters supported Republican John Lindsay for mayor of New York City, as they did Nelson Rockefeller for governor of the state in 1966. New York Senator Jacob Javits received three times as many votes from black voters as Nixon in 1968 and senatorial candidate Henry Bellmon received support from blacks in Oklahoma. Huge majorities of black voters, meanwhile, supported Republican Winthrop Rockefeller in his campaign for governor of Arkansas.²²

As a result, many Republican leaders maintained that blacks, or at least a significant minority of black voters, remained an integral part of their coalition. Gerald Ford, minority leader in the House, pushed the party in Congress to avoid commitments with southern Democrats, fearing that Republicans would fail to attract potential black supporters.²³ The Ripon Society, an influential Republican-allied think tank of the time, argued that Republicans needed to pay attention to a rising black middle-class that could potentially operate as a swing-group as they looked to both parties for potential interest. Finally, Nixon recognized that in the late 1960s, an across-the-board civil rights rollback would have been repudiated. Despite several years of racial tensions in American cities, the national discourse remained centered around government involvement in societal problems, including racial problems. Nixon needed some civil rights accomplishments to counter potentially severe and damaging criticism that he was a racist and not a legitimate national leader in the post-civil rights era.

Nixon's initial efforts, then, included finding a policy agenda that might appeal to both blacks and white progressives on the one hand, and southern whites and traditional fiscal conservatives on the other. While a "southern strategy" was seemingly incompatible with the promotion of a civil rights agenda, Nixon would go to great lengths to try to make them fit. He showed a willingness to bring together any winning combination. During the campaign, he asked aide Bryce Harlow to "meet with the interests groups, and find out what they wanted, and then promise them that the Nixon Administration would give them what they wanted."²⁴ In a radio address to the nation during the 1968 campaign, Nixon proposed a "new alignment," which would combine southern whites with some "black militants" and "thoughtful critics like Daniel Moynihan and Richard Goodwin

22. Rae, *Liberal Republicans*. The Ripon Society found further evidence of the willingness of African-American voters to support racially progressive Republican candidates in the 1972 elections in Chicago. While strong majorities of the city's black voters supported Democrat George McGovern for president, significant portions split their tickets for progressive Republicans in both the Senate (Percy) and governor's (Ogilvie) races. See their publication, *Jaws of Victory: The Game-Plan Politics of 1972, the Crisis of the Republican Party, and the Future of the Constitution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 196–99.

23. Reichley, *Conservatives*, 86. 24. Quoted in *ibid.*, 55.

– both liberals.”²⁵ During his campaign and in the early stages of his presidency, employment programs, in particular, were seen as a safe way to appeal to potential black voters. Focusing on job programs fit well with his own experience and ideology, and that of large portions of the Republican party which opposed government funded welfare-based programs.²⁶ During the campaign, while expressing disapproval of federally enforced school integration measures and the need for stronger law and order measures to stop inner-city rioting, Nixon also stressed the importance of jobs and economic opportunity for black Americans.²⁷

Early in the campaign (April 1968), Nixon broke political ground with an explicitly race-targeted program: a promise to develop “black capitalism.” Although some of Nixon’s campaign advisers feared that black capitalism would upset the party’s simultaneous appeal to southern whites, Nixon went ahead undeterred.²⁸ He was careful to keep the program within the confines of the Southern Strategy; accordingly, the plan did not force southern whites to integrate, and it avoided stigmatizing them. In addition, the program was made more palatable to conservatives by having the private sector instead of the federal government pay for the program. Nixon described the program in a radio speech on April 25, 1968, with dynamic imagery of

the bridge of black success – a bridge that can only be achieved by those (blacks) who themselves have overcome, and who by their help or their example can show the way to the American dream. The bridge of black capitalism – by providing technical assistance and loan guarantees, by opening new capital sources, we can help blacks to start new businesses . . . and to expand existing ones. . . . What we need is imaginative enlistment of private funds, private energies, and private talents, in order to develop the opportunities. . . . It costs little or no government money to set in motion many of the programs that would in fact do the most . . . to start building a firm structure of (black) economic opportunity.²⁹

With strong opposition from the Democratic party and both electoral coalitions in flux, Nixon was at least ambivalent about what the best approach would be to form a new coalition, and was willing, as his radio talks

25. Quoted in *ibid.*, 54. Moynihan and Goodwin were the authors of Lyndon Johnson’s famous civil rights speech at the 1965 Howard University commencement, which compared African Americans to shackled runners in a race with whites, and for whom equal opportunity necessitated special help.

26. Nixon served as chair for a committee organized to oversee equal employment opportunity in government contracting. See *Five Years of Progress: 1953–1958: A Report to President Eisenhower by the President’s Committee on Government Contracts* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958).

27. Steven E. Ambrose, *Nixon: Triumph of a Politician 1962–1972* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 125.

28. See Rowland Evans, Jr. and Robert D. Novak, *Nixon in the White House* (New York: Random House, 1971), 137.

29. As quoted in Maurice H. Stans, “Nixon’s Economic Policy Towards Minorities,” in *Politician, President, Administrator*, ed. Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 239–40.

clearly showed, to try almost any combination.³⁰ More than that, we will argue that while the Nixon administration's policy toward blacks was somewhat disorganized, there was a discernible pattern. In the first year and a half, there were positive efforts to attract blacks and concern over the success of these attempts. Later, the historical record shows there was a clear moving away from blacks and black interests on a national scale – and regret that attempts were ever made to support “black” policies. The decision-making process was, as we will see, directly shaped by the ability of various groups to claim themselves as potential swing-voters and for the party to find these groups compatible with both important elements of the existing electoral coalition and with other crucial swing groups in national elections.

INITIAL EFFORTS BY THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION

Part I: Appeals to Southern Whites

Nixon won the 1968 national election by a little more than 500,000 votes, taking electoral college votes in the border South, but losing the Deep South to third party challenger and governor of Alabama George Wallace. Wallace clearly remained a wild card for the 1972 election. Once in office, Nixon began efforts to reward those southern whites who supported him at the polls and to win over those who had turned to Wallace. In practice, this meant slowing down the expansion of black civil rights. No matter how it was defended or rationalized, the Southern Strategy necessarily involved a dampening of the civil rights fire of the Johnson years. At the very least, it meant that civil rights would not be celebrated, and that policies would not be enforced with prominent moral authority – especially those regarding school desegregation policies. As southern politics adviser Harry Dent reminded Nixon in a memo dated January 23, 1969,

so far as Southern politics is concerned, the Nixon administration will be judged from the beginning on the manner in which the school desegregation

30. In fact, some would argue that Nixon simply had no organized plan. Historian Hugh Davis Graham has called Nixon's civil rights policy “incoherent,” with “no one in charge.” Hugh Davis Graham, “The Incoherence of the Civil Rights Policy in the Nixon Administration,” in *Richard M. Nixon: Politician, President, and Administrator*, eds. Leon Friedman & William F. Levantrosser (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 159–172. This is a characterization that might be extended to his domestic policy in general. Graham quotes an April 1969 “URGENT!” memo from chief of staff H. R. Haldeman to domestic policy adviser John Ehrlichman, which said that a frustrated Nixon “has to know what is the program, what is going down, etc.” since he clearly did not know what they were doing domestically. While there were clear gestures toward winning the South, as we describe below, even administration officials had trouble discerning any plan. See *The Nixon Presidency: Twenty-Two Intimate Perspectives of Richard M. Nixon*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 115. On civil rights policy, Nixon aide Leonard Garment candidly observed, “There was no real administration policy during [1969]. . . . The policy was all reactive, there was simply no strategy.”

guidelines problem is handled. Other issues are important in the South but are dwarfed somewhat by comparison.³¹

Nixon would be mindful of southern whites with all civil rights policies. He failed to send a civil rights message to Congress that year and agreed with advisers to keep civil rights issues in the upcoming State of the Union Address “very low key.”³² Meanwhile, outspoken administration supporters of civil rights in the schools, such as Commissioner of Education James Allen and Leon Panetta of the Office for Civil Rights, were pressured to resign.

Even at this early stage of his administration, Nixon began to recognize how he could use the protests of civil rights leaders to further his electoral strategy with southern whites. For example, a statement issued on July 3, 1969 declared publicly that deadlines for desegregation efforts would be delayed. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP responded that the administration was “breaking the law,” and that “it’s almost enough to make you vomit. This is not a matter of too little too late; rather, this is nothing at all.”³³ On July 8, Dent reported to Nixon that the southern reaction to the delays “was good – very good – in large part because of the adverse reaction from opponents of change, particularly Roy Wilkins’ ‘vomit’ comment.”³⁴ At two different times the administration asked for delays in implementing school desegregation in the South, but they were rebuffed each time by Supreme Court rulings. The threatened delays furthered feelings of dismay among civil rights groups, and a number of lawyers from the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division resigned in protest. Still, Nixon maintained a toning down on the enforcement of school integration as one of his top three priorities in domestic affairs (the others were recession/inflation control and crime control).³⁵

While schooling was the priority, Nixon sought to appeal to southern whites in other areas also. Seeking to remove the stigma of racism on the South, the administration proposed an amendment to the Voting Rights Act that would have expanded jurisdiction to all fifty states, set a minimum residency requirement for national election voting and eliminated the necessity of federal approval of voting law changes.³⁶ Even in employment rights, the Nixon administration sought the appeal of southern whites. For example, some southern textile firms (that had supported Nixon in the 1968 election) received contracts from the Defense Department, despite

31. Quoted in Michael A. Genovese, *The Nixon Presidency: Power and Politics in Turbulent Times* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 85.

32. John Ehrlichman, “Notes of Meetings with the President,” in *Papers of the Nixon White House*, ed. Joan Hoff-Wilson (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1989), fiche 7, 3-7-E08.2.

33. Quoted in Reichley, *Conservatives*, 184.

34. White House Special Files, Papers of Harry S. Dent, Box 2, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

35. Memo to Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Ehrlichman, and Dr. Kissinger from the President, Mar. 2, 1970, in *From: The President*, ed. Bruce Oudes (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 101.

36. The amendment passed the House but did not reach the floor in the Senate.

the fact that these firms had been ruled as noncompliant with equal employment opportunity standards by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance. And while civil rights supporters were nearly unanimous in support of granting cease and desist powers to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Nixon (though in this case, less directly benefiting the South) suggested instead giving the agency the power to take noncompliant employers to court.³⁷

Nixon's first two attempts at making Supreme Court appointments were also meant to appeal to disaffected white southern Democrats. His first nominee, Clement F. Haynsworth, Jr., had been Chief Justice of the Fourth Circuit of Appeals, a southern circuit which civil rights advocates argued had been especially resistant in desegregating schools. Notably, Haynsworth dissented when his court ruled against resistance to desegregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia, and also dissented in a ruling that stated that hospitals accepting federal funds must not maintain segregated facilities. Organized labor joined civil rights groups in opposing Haynsworth. AFL-CIO leader George Meany argued that the South Carolina justice had had the opportunity to decide on seven labor cases and supported the anti-labor side each time. Haynsworth's nomination was rejected in the Senate, 55–45; 38 Democrats and 17 Republicans, including all 9 of what A. James Reichley has labeled as Republican civil rights "Progressives," combined to resist Nixon's strategic appeal to southern white voters.³⁸

Pro-civil rights forces were active in areas other than the Supreme Court nominations. The Supreme Court continued to place pressure on Nixon by stepping up demands for the enforcement of school integration, and pro-civil rights Democrats and Republicans still had enough members in the Senate to block threatening legislation.³⁹ The newly created Congressional Black Caucus instituted itself as a prominent watchdog against the Nixon administration, initially declaring itself a "shadow cabinet" that would align with supporters in the Executive Office to stop the president from further disregarding civil rights legislation. Moreover, Nixon faced division within his own ranks, as key officials from the Departments of Health, Education, and Welfare; Housing and Urban Development; and Labor; as well as prominent members of his elite staff were calling for stronger levels of civil rights enforcement.

While public protests from black civil rights supporters to some degree helped Nixon in the South, he did not ignore these protests. With Democrats and liberal Republicans mobilizing against his administration, and with his own advisors still unclear about the best electoral strategy for 1972, Nixon still felt obliged to make efforts to reach out to black voters and civil

37. See Congressional Quarterly, *Nixon: The First Year of His Presidency* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1970), 49–52 for a review.

38. Reichley, *Conservatives*, 95.

39. Among the prominent Supreme Court cases were *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education* (1969) and *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971). On the influence of liberals in Congress, see Reichley, *Conservatives*, chap. 9; and Gary Orfield, *Congressional Power: Congress and Social Change* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975), chap. 9.

rights supporters in his party and in the Democratic party. After just three months in office, the White House was apologizing and defending itself to angry African-American House members.⁴⁰ Nixon also mobilized his own pro-black substantive policy agenda.

Part II: Appeals to Black Voters

In the first year and a half of his administration, Nixon and some members of his staff evinced a surprising concern over the degree of support he received from African Americans. While neither a complete plan nor clear goal guided its policy efforts, the Administration's actions went beyond empty rhetoric and symbolism. Patronage was employed, experts were consulted, and policy initiatives were undertaken.

In a meeting with black leaders before his inauguration, Nixon sought not only to assuage anxieties but to position himself as a national leader. The Republican president-elect told the group, including Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Dr. Nathan Wright, chair of the Black Power Conference, that he would "do more for the underprivileged and more for the Negro than any president has ever done."⁴¹ In late February, a Republican National Committee report on the lack of support from blacks ("Election Analysis: 1968 and the Black American Voter") was sent to the White House, with a cover letter urging Republican leaders to read it "with a view to understanding correlations between the performance of various candidates."⁴² Later, when civil rights supporters began to protest elements of the Southern Strategy, Nixon debated sending a message to Congress on equal employment opportunity.⁴³ Aides in the administration successfully encouraged Nixon to increase funding of existing civil rights agencies.⁴⁴ And because the various Southern Strategy initiatives were being promulgated haphazardly and faced too much resistance by key elements of both political parties, ("There have been several instances where the Administration has made decisions involving minorities with somewhat regrettable consequences due to faulty communication"⁴⁵), Nixon established, at the suggestion of African-American White

40. Letters were sent to Representatives Adam Clayton Powell, John Conyers, Louis Stokes, Robert Nix, Charles Diggs, Augustus Hawkins, and Shirley Chisholm from Nixon assistant Bryce N. Harlow on Apr. 11, 1969. See Hugh Graham, ed., *Civil Rights During the Nixon Administration* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1989), pt. 1: The White House Central Files, reel 1, frames 0819-0942.

41. Evans and Novak, *Nixon in the White House*, 134.

42. Memo from Clarence L. Townes, Jr. to Republican Leaders, February 26, 1969, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, part I, reel 1, frame 0707.

43. Memo to Arthur Burns, Pat Moynihan, Jerris Leonard, Jim Keogh, and Attorney General Mitchell from Ken Cole, Apr. 30, 1969, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 18, frame 0499.

44. Memo to the President from Robert J. Brown, July 11, 1969 in *ibid.*, pt. 1, reel 18, frame 0729. Funding did increase at both the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department. The EEOC budget, for example, more than doubled between 1969 and 1972. Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 93.

45. Memo to Staff Secretary from John Ehrlichman, Apr. 24, 1969, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. I, reel 1, frame 0961.

House aide Robert J. Brown, a “single coordination point for matters pertaining to Minority Affairs.” The new organization was to have “an ability to determine the reaction of minority groups to particular positions taken by the administration” and “a personal familiarity with the leaders of minority groups and an ability to command their confidence.” Upon assuming this new role, Brown was kept abreast of all legislative and policy statements as well as correspondence relating to minorities, and White House staffers were told to focus on possible new minority appointments.⁴⁶

In May, Secretary of Transportation John Volpe sent a letter to the president regarding Volpe’s own efforts at black recruitment “[a]s a follow up on some of our recent conversations dealing with the civil rights responsibilities and programs of the executive branch.” Volpe presented statistics of his department’s poor record at bringing in blacks, but promised “the full assimilation of minorities at all levels.” He described a “frank and hardhitting” conference with 150 top Transportation officials. Clarence Mitchell of the NAACP, an early critic of the administration, was a featured speaker at the meeting and claimed to be impressed with Volpe’s efforts. Volpe included news clippings from the April 26, 29, May 3 and 6 *Washington Afro-American*, which he correctly described as indicating “our special effort was generally well received by the minority group community.”⁴⁷

Nixon agreed to a meeting with Reverend Ralph Abernathy and his Poor People’s Campaign on May 13, 1969, where they were joined by Nixon’s Urban Affairs Council, including several cabinet secretaries. By all accounts, the meeting was a disaster. Nixon declared that any administration “owes justice to every American,” and, according to notes from the meeting, “emphasized the determination of this administration to do right, without regard to what groups voted predominately for what candidates.” Despite this and his grand promises to Abernathy only a few months before, Nixon was greeted with a great deal of suspicion and doubt. Despite efforts by the president to convince them otherwise, Abernathy and the members of his group were simply not satisfied with Nixon’s policies towards blacks and the poor. After Nixon departed the meeting, complaints were voiced to the remaining White House officials: “Mr. Nixon leave [sic] to avoid hearing our statements. . . Mr. Nixon said we should go back to Africa.” Three hours later, Abernathy told the press that the meeting was “the most disappointing and the most fruitless of all the meetings we have had up to this time.” Nixon himself scrawled on the bottom of a report, “This shows that my judgement about not seeing such people is right. No More of This!”⁴⁸

Early frustration with some civil rights leaders, however, did little to inhibit appeals to the broad spectrum of the African-American electorate. The “black capitalism” initiative was begun by executive order on March 5, 1969. It created the Office of Minority Business Enterprise. As Commerce

46. Memo to John Ehrlichman from Robert J. Brown, May 15, 1969, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 1, frame 0938, memo to the White House Staff from Robert J. Brown, June 19, 1969, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frame 0007.

47. Letter from John A. Volpe to the President, in *ibid.*, pt. 1, reel 1, frames 0931–0934.

48. Notes for the President’s File- (R. K. Price, Jr.), Urban Affairs Council – 13 May 1969, in *Papers of the Nixon White House* pt. 2, fiche 69-5-11; and Ambrose, *Triumph of a Politician*, 248.

Secretary Maurice Stans recalled, the OMBE was to serve “as a catalyst to draw together resources of government and the private sector to provide the opportunities, funds, know-how, and business orders for promising minority businesses to begin and grow.”⁴⁹ Nixon explained that this special help for blacks would integrate them more fully into the market-economy: “I have often made the point that to foster the economic status and the pride of members of our minority groups we must seek to involve them more fully in our private enterprise system,”⁵⁰ and “the first need is to replace dependence with independence.”⁵¹ The assumption was that this initiative would not be disruptive to broader efforts at coalition building. It provided an answer to the outrage of civil rights supporters, and at the same time held out the possibility of developing a class of black businesspeople that would see the Republican party as their closest ally.

At the same time, Nixon began strengthening and refining affirmative action through the contract compliance program. Early criticism of the Defense and Transportation Departments’ disregard of equal employment opportunity standards led to pressure from civil rights supporters in the Senate on this issue.⁵² Partly in response, the administration backed Assistant Secretary of Labor Arthur Fletcher’s decision to revive and revise the “Philadelphia Plan.” The plan was originally designed to deal with discriminatory Philadelphia construction unions, but it was intended to be expanded to other cities. Firms under contract with the federal government had to promise to make good faith efforts to achieve proportional black representation on the labor force. Secretaries Shultz and Fletcher sold the plan to Nixon as a way to “show blacks that the administration would help them gain the opportunity for economic advancement, now far more important than new laws or more welfare, the thrust of which was consistent with a spirit of self-reliance.”⁵³ The plan offered a civil rights policy that liberals themselves had thus far avoided, and it promised to divide Democratic supporters in unions and among blacks.⁵⁴ Yet, Nixon was not simply trying to divide the Democratic party. His efforts and later concern suggest that he hoped to win some black support with the policy as well.

Initial reaction to the plan, however, was negative from all sides involved, with the notable exception of liberal Republicans in Congress. For instance, Republican Senator Everett Dirksen was aghast at the proposal, telling Nixon, “as your leader in the Senate . . . it is my bounden duty to tell you that this thing is about as popular as a crab in a whorehouse. You will

49. Stans, “Nixon’s Economic Policy towards Minorities,” in *Politician, President, Administration*, 239–46.

50. *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 6, 1969. 51. *Wall Street Journal*, Mar. 12, 1969.

52. See U.S. Congress, Hearings, Senate Committee on Judiciary, Equal Employment Opportunity Procedures, before Subcommittee on Administrative Practice and Procedure, on S.Res. 39, Mar. 27–28, 1969.

53. William Safire, *Before the Fall* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 266.

54. John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture and Justice in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), chap. 7.

split your own party if you insist on pursuing it.”⁵⁵ A bipartisan group in the Senate led by North Carolina Democrat Sam Ervin attempted to add a rider to an appropriations bill in order to kill the proposal, only to be defeated by a high profile Nixon campaign which brought Shultz, Fletcher, and Nixon himself publicly into the fray.⁵⁶

One of the most important constituent groups in the Democratic party, labor unions, also came out in strong opposition to the plan. C.J. Haggerty, president of the AFL-CIO Building and Construction Trades Department, declared “we are 100 percent opposed to a quota system, whether it be called the Philadelphia Plan or whatever.” George Meany echoed Haggerty’s sentiments, declaring that Nixon was picking on the unions.⁵⁷ Yet labor leaders were not simply resisting federal interference. Condemning the proposal as “part of a pattern of conduct formulated by political strategists in the Nixon Administration to divide the labor movement while slowing down the process of implementing the civil rights program on voting and education in the South,” labor leaders were attempting to defend the fragile, yet potentially potent labor/civil rights coalition.⁵⁸

Nixon’s support for affirmative action was covered prominently in the *New York Times*,⁵⁹ and Nixon had copies of the coverage sent to civil rights leaders.⁶⁰ But many civil rights leaders, while by no means opposing affirmative action programs as a powerful tool to incorporate blacks into American society, joined Meany in questioning the President’s motivation. For example, the NAACP’s Clarence Mitchell called the plan a “calculated attempt coming right from the President’s desk to break up the coalition between Negroes and labor unions. Most of the social progress in this country has resulted from this alliance.” Democratic House Representative Augustus Hawkins agreed: “Nixon’s people are forcing employers to lay off workers and then telling them to put in a certain quota of blacks into these vacancies. It is a strategy designed to increase friction between labor and Negroes.”⁶¹ Bayard Rustin argued that the Plan was part of the Republican attack on organized labor, and that it “is designed primarily to embarrass the unions and to organize public pressure against them.” Rustin saw sev-

55. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 438.

56. Skrentny, *Ironies of Affirmative Action*, 198–209. Curiously, the administration were compelled to ask civil rights leaders for support in the congressional battle. See Memo for John Price from John Campbell, Dec. 22, 1969, in Graham *Civil Rights*, pt. 1, reel 2, frame 0266.

57. See William B. Gould, *Black Workers in White Unions: Job Discrimination in the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

58. AFL-CIO Statement quoted in Larry Hood, “The Nixon Administration and the Revised Philadelphia Plan for Affirmative Action: A Study in Expanding Presidential Power and Divided Government,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23 (1993): 150.

59. The generally left-leaning newspaper, however, offered no editorial support, angering the President. See memo for Alex Butterfield from John R. Brown, III, December 31, 1969, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. I, reel 18, frame 0837.

60. Memo for Herb Klein from John R. Brown III, December 29, 1969, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 18, frame 0828.

61. Congressional Quarterly, *Congress and the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1973), 711.

eral advantages for Nixon in the support of affirmative action, including the value of the Philadelphia Plan as cover for anti-black policies in the South, "and, above all, he weakens his political opposition by aggravating the differences between its two strongest and most progressive forces – the labor movement and the civil rights movement."⁶²

The reaction by many black leaders to Nixon's plan is understandable for a number of reasons. For one, Nixon's affirmative action policy threatened the newly formed coalition of white labor and civil rights organizations. Their coalition had successfully worked in mutually beneficial ways over the last few years, such as having Title VII put into the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and defeating the Haynsworth and Carswell nominations to the Supreme Court. The Philadelphia Plan threatened this coalition by antagonizing the rank and file of white construction labor, where skilled trades were zealously guarded from outside infiltration.⁶³ While many *local* civil rights organizations, including local NAACP chapters (the racial integration of trade unions had long been one of the organization's most prominent goals), enthusiastically supported the legislation, and while the national civil rights leaders recognized the problem of union discrimination, they also recognized the difficulty of finding coalitions with other significant political groups in the Democratic party and saw greater gains in the long-term by maintaining a coalition with labor unions.⁶⁴ On a practical level, this meant limiting civil rights advocacy to color-blind enforcement mechanisms.⁶⁵

But there was a more basic problem confronting blacks, both in leadership positions and among the electorate. It was difficult to give much credit to a president who, while proposing significant affirmative action legislation, was giving equal, if not greater, weight to anti-civil rights Southern Strategy appeals. There was a lot to be mad about, as an exasperated Rustin explained:

Why . . . would a President who had developed a "Southern Strategy," who has cut back on school-integration efforts, tried to undermine the black franchise by watering down the 1965 Voting Rights Act, nominated to the Supreme Court men like Haynsworth and Carswell, cut back on funds for vital social programs, and proposed a noxious crime bill for Washington, D.C. – which is nothing less than a blatant appeal to white fear – why indeed would such a President take up the cause of integration in the building of trades?⁶⁶

There is little reason to suppose that Nixon would have been more open to black demands if black leaders had given him their support. His priority need to attract southern whites into the party's coalition made substantial

62. Bayard Rustin, "The Blacks and the Unions," *Harpers* 248 (1971): 79.

63. Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chap. 3.

64. Herbert Hill, "A Critical Analysis of Apprenticeship Outreach Programs and The Hometown Plans," *Howard University Institute for Urban Affairs and Research Occasional Paper 2* (1974): 75.

65. See Skrentny, *Ironies of Affirmative Action*, chap. 2.

66. Rustin, "Blacks and the Unions," 79.

policy offerings to African Americans difficult and rendered them virtually unbelievable.

African-American voters soundly repudiated Nixon in the 1972 election, with about 85 percent casting ballots for the nationally unpopular Democratic party candidate George McGovern. A year later, a collection of angry criticisms of the President, *What Nixon Is Doing To Us*, reflected the continuing antipathy within black political and scholarly communities. African-American political scientist Charles Hamilton listed backward moves on civil rights but made no mention of the Philadelphia Plan.⁶⁷ In the same collection, Eleanor Holmes Norton, formerly chair of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, concluded in a piece entitled “Working Backward” that while Nixon did make some pro-civil rights moves, his overall effort was entirely dissatisfactory for black interests.⁶⁸

Still, efforts to appeal to the black community continued after the cold reception towards the Philadelphia Plan. In January of 1970, White House staff arranged for Nixon to meet with a group of black doctors.⁶⁹ In February, Nixon met with organizations involved with the OMBE to “show support,”⁷⁰ and the Department of Justice issued a press release of more than fifteen detailed pages defending Nixon against civil rights critics, claiming that “a most successful year in its expanding program of civil rights enforcement” had been completed.⁷¹ He met with a group of prominent social scientists (David Riesman, James Q. Wilson, Aaron Wildavsky, and Nixon’s critic, Charles Hamilton) to discuss black issues and how he might better appeal to the black community.⁷² Also in that month, however, the focus narrowed: plans were made to split the black community, targeting the more “stable” elements in the black working- and middle-class communities, and the so-called “black silent majority.” Nixon told his aides that they were “directing our appeal to the wrong group;” efforts should be made to “go after the probably 30% who are potentially on our side.”⁷³ In March, Nixon requested advice from his black appointees and a meeting was arranged to exchange views and “to get a photo of the meeting.”⁷⁴ In May, Harry Dent sent a revealing memo to John Ehrlichman, explaining, “The President recently asked me what I though would help most with the

67. Charles V. Hamilton, “Blacks and Urban Affairs: Saying is Not Doing,” in *What Nixon is Doing to Us*, ed. Alan Gartner, Colin Greer, and Frank Riessman (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 84–93.

68. Eleanor Holmes Norton, “Civil Rights: Working Backward,” in *ibid.* 204.

69. Memo for the President, Jan. 20, 1970, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. 1, reel 2, frame 0288.

70. Memo for the President from Dwight Chapin, Feb. 4, 1970, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frame 0310.

71. Department of Justice Press Release, February 3, 1970, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frames 0404–0427.

72. Memo for Dr. Moynihan from H. R. Haldeman, March 13, 1970; memo for the President from Daniel P. Moynihan, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frames 0394–0398; author correspondence with David Riesman, July 1, 1994.

73. Memo to Jeb Magruder from John R. Brown III, Feb. 3, 1970, in *ibid.*, frame 0300; memo to John R. Brown III from Jeb Magruder, Feb. 16, 1970, in *ibid.*, frame 0344.

74. Memo for the President, March 15, 1970, in *ibid.*, frame 0371.

Negro community. I responded, 'low cost home ownership.' He wanted to know what we are doing about this."⁷⁵ Yet by June, a Nixon aide was still seeking advice around the White House on how to change the administration's "totally unacceptable" relations with blacks, and was told by Lamar Alexander that the basic problem stemmed from "an unstated attitude (almost a policy) of disregard toward blacks brought about by a political concern for white votes."⁷⁶

Thus, despite what Nixon believed to be well-intentioned efforts to appeal to blacks, few were noticing or appreciating his initiatives, even inside the White House. Winning a majority of the white South *and* a significant minority of the nation's blacks had been a difficult project from the beginning and by the end of the year, there were clear signs that the President was giving up. In July, he told his staff he wanted once-a-month meetings with black leaders;⁷⁷ only two months later, he told aides that he had met enough with blacks.⁷⁸ He would soon turn his attention more exclusively to another Democratic group perceived to be more compatible with other aspects of his coalition-building strategy: white blue-collar workers. As Nixon would discover, the civil rights slowdown that was seducing southern whites provided similar strategic benefits for coalition building in the North.

NIXON'S APPEAL TO THE LABOR VOTE: THE NATIONALIZATION OF THE SOUTHERN STRATEGY

Given the role of organized labor in opposing important Supreme Court appointments, and the fact that the leadership of the AFL-CIO had strongly opposed his election, it is not surprising that Nixon did little to appeal to the labor vote in his first year. In fact, Nixon was making a point of blaming unions, especially in construction, for rising inflation.⁷⁹ Construction unions were also specifically targeted in one of Nixon's more controversial civil rights initiatives, the above mentioned Philadelphia Plan, which enforced racial hiring goals in these unions. This view towards labor would change as Nixon began to realize that the reactions of white union members and other blue-collar workers to civil rights and other social issues was quite compatible with his continuing pursuit of southern whites. Nixon would discover that this group was a significant component of the "silent majority" that he frequently espoused.

75. Memo to John Ehrlichman from Harry Dent, May 14, 1970, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Papers of Harry S. Dent, box 3, folder: Memos to Ehrlichman, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

76. "Report: Blacks," to Bryce Harlow from Lamar Alexander, June 17, 1970, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, frame 0765.

77. Memo for Robert Brown, John Ehrlichman, Leonard Garment, and Robert Finch from Dwight Chapin, July 25, 1970, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frame 0866.

78. Memo for Hugh Sloan from Peter Flanigan, September 11, 1970, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frame 0995.

79. Quadagno, *Color of Welfare*, chap. 3.

Ironically, when Nixon first spoke of the silent majority, he had little idea of who it consisted of, and did not recognize the potential support he could receive from union workers dissatisfied with vocal liberal demands for racial justice and an end to the war in Vietnam. An October, 1969 *Newsweek* story on the "The Troubled American" led Nixon to ask for "a list of ten items, each of the things we can do program wise and image wise to appeal to this group," but no one knew just who these troubled Americans were. A month later, assistant director of the Bureau of the Budget, Richard Nathan sent a terse memo highlighting the Administration's ignorance of just who was being courted: "The development of a specific profile for this group should precede the assessment of the impact of existing Federal programs on the Forgotten American."⁸⁰

In January of 1970, Nixon argued for building "our own new coalition based on Silent Majority, blue collar, Catholic, Poles, Italians, and Irish." The argument was partly based on the "Agnew upsurge," referring to the popularity of the tough-talking Vice President. Yet it was connected, in Haldeman's diary, with the sense that there was "no promise with Jews and Negroes."⁸¹ This came just weeks after Nixon made an effort (again receiving little credit) to defend the Philadelphia Plan from congressional attack. In February, during a month of pro-black activities, Haldeman felt that Nixon was determined "*not* to play to blacks and professional civil righters" since "we gain nothing," although it was still worthwhile to maintain support and communicate with "the *good* blacks" (original emphasis).⁸² Still ambivalent, however, as to the direction of the party's electoral coalition, two months later Nixon and Haldeman were "trying to figure out where to put together our base." Haldeman wrote in his diary that Nixon "broods frequently over problem of how we communicate with young and blacks. It's really not possible, except with Uncle Toms, and we should work on them and forget militants."⁸³

At approximately the same time that Nixon was expressing doubts over the possibility of making blacks a substantial part of his base, new developments began which would shape later race-specific appeals. In May, construction workers physically attacked anti-war demonstrators in New York City. Later in the month, 100,000 helmeted construction workers marched in support of Nixon and his Vietnam policies. This march was, as White House aide Michael Balzano later recalled, "an explosive moment in the creation of the New Majority."⁸⁴ Opportunities now became apparent for

80. Nixon apparently saw the link, however, between mainstream America and black politics. As related to Harry Dent from Ken Cole, Nixon stated that "we keep talking to the minorities (urged on by the establishment) and overlook our greatest potential." See the memos from Ken Cole to Harry Dent, Oct. 6, 1969; and from Richard P. Nathan to Harry Cashen, Nov. 3, 1969, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Papers of Harry S. Dent, box 8, folder: Middle America [1 of 2], Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

81. Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 117–18. 82. *Ibid.*, 126. 83. *Ibid.*, 145.

84. Michael P. Balzano, Jr., "The Silent v. the New Majority," in *Politician, President, Administrator*, 264.

the Republicans to appeal to substantial numbers of white labor workers without disrupting their existing coalition, and without disrupting their continuing appeal for the so-called “swing” group of Wallace-leaning, northern and southern white voters. Social issues and pro-labor actions could provide the wedge to bring these voters into a coalition with economic conservatives. Recognizing this, the President quickly invited construction representatives to the White House and hosted a much publicized visit.⁸⁵ By July, Nixon’s personal note pad showed he was seeking white working-class support by sticking a “race-liberal-student tag” on the Democratic party, and that being “more liberal on Race, Welfare, environment and troop withdrawal” did not win RN (as he liked to refer to himself) support.⁸⁶ Haldeman wrote in his diary on July 13 to give “more emphasis on basing all scheduling and other decisions on political grounds. Especially emphasize Italians, Poles, Elks and Rotarians, eliminate Jews, blacks, youth.”⁸⁷

The movement away from potential African-American voters began in part in January of 1970, with the failure to gain support for the Philadelphia Plan. In the spring, the hardhats’ dramatic support crystallized the new focus. Yet it was in September that African Americans were most unequivocally jettisoned from the coalition in favor of the overlapping groups that the Silent Majority (white ethnics, Catholics, blue-collar workers, labor unions, “Middle Americans”) brought in. An “EYES ONLY” memo to Ehrlichman, Finch, and Haldeman reported that “the majority of people in the West between the Alleghenies and the Rockies” had conservative beliefs about social issue politics, including racial politics: “Negroes have rights but forced integration will leave everybody worse off.” According to the memo,

The president asked that you take note of this. He feels that we’d better shape up and quit trimming the *wrong* way. It is very late – but we still have time to move away from the line of our well-intentioned liberals on our own staff. It is dynamite politically and wrong usually on the merits (original emphasis).

The new focus on “middle America” had Nixon wondering what he and his staff were originally thinking about blacks in 1969. Nixon’s new domestic policy would have little room for new initiatives specifically for African Americans:

The President went on to say that he can’t emphasize too strongly his concern that our Administration team – including White House staff – has been affected too much by the unreal atmosphere of the D.C. press, social and intellectual set. Perhaps Cambodia and Kent State led to an overreaction by our own people to prove that we were pro students, blacks, left. We must get turned around on this before it is too late – emphasize anti-crime, anti-

85. Ambrose, *Triumph of a Politician*, 359.

86. Herbert S. Parmet, *Richard Nixon and His America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), 602.

87. Haldeman, *Haldeman Diaries*, 84.

demonstration, anti-drugs, anti-obscenity. We must get with the mood of the country which is fed up with the liberals.⁸⁸

Having come to believe that racial liberalism was antithetical to a winning electoral coalition, Nixon backed away from support of pro-black policies in the North as well as the South. Though he had relished *New York Times* coverage of the Philadelphia Plan in December of 1969, Nixon no longer even discussed the program, and in fact soon replaced affirmative action aimed at construction unions with the less assertive "Hometown Plans."⁸⁹ "Most of the zip went out of that integration effort after the hardhats marched in support of Nixon and the war," speechwriter William Safire later recalled.⁹⁰ Liberal administration official Leon Panetta, who was forced into an early exit, said "principles of equality . . . would fall before the needs of November."⁹¹ Describing the politics of an administration policy to stop placement of mixed-race public housing in white neighborhoods, Ehrlichman bluntly stated, for votes "we'll go after the racists."⁹² Civil rights policies and other programs designed to bring more black voters into the Republican party simply did not appear to be compatible with a broader strategy to build a new majority-based electoral coalition around key white voting groups. Even if blacks had shown more willingness to support Nixon, administration policy would likely have been the same. Republican strategists saw policies pushing black civil rights as incompatible with party appeals to both southern whites *and* considerable portions of the northern-swing vote. Since appeals to the so-called "Silent Majority" seemed to offer considerably more opportunity for increasing overall vote totals, the courtship of the white northern working class voter became a major part of domestic strategy for the 1970 elections. In contrast to black initiatives, pro-labor initiatives were not seen as disruptive of coalition-building despite the absence of clear ideological compatibility with the Republican party's existing commitments.

On September 8, the day Nixon told his top staff that the national mood was "fed up with the liberals," Haldeman was reporting to Charles Colson that Nixon now felt that "there is a great deal of gold to be mined" in labor, and that the "President wants you to take on the responsibility for working on developing our strength with the labor unions and union leadership."⁹³

88. John R. Brown III memo to Mr. Ehrlichman, Mr. Finch, and Mr. Haldeman, in Oudes, *Ibid*, Sept. 8, 1970, 156–57. It was on Sept. 5 that Nixon told his staff that he no longer wished to meet with black leaders.

89. Bureaucrats in the Office of Federal Contract Compliance actually expanded Philadelphia Plan-style affirmative action in other, non-construction government contracts (Order No. 4), though we are not aware of any evidence that this was discussed in the administration, or indeed that Nixon was even aware of it. Order No. 4 was not used in the 1972 campaign to attract black or white liberal voters.

90. Safire, *Before the Fall*, 585.

91. Leon Panetta and Peter Gall, *Bring Us Together* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1971), 370.

92. John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 222.

93. Memo to Mr. Colson from H. R. Haldeman, Sept. 8, 1970, quoted in Oudes, *From: The President*, 158.

Colson's response: "I will take this one on with real delight." In an eight-page strategy memo to Haldeman, Colson elaborated on his basic strategy, that "we need to cultivate the leadership by our individual activities and the rank and file by both our policies and our reaching out to the state and local apparatus."⁹⁴ On October 6, Colson pushed for positive labor appeals:

As follow-up to the development of some pro-labor legislation, we should be thinking about federal legislation that would obviate the need for major strikes, some form of "voluntary" compulsory arbitration. This is something Meany is very interested in and would have broad general appeal as well as being strong in the labor area.⁹⁵

Colson was not alone in his enthusiasm for Republican gains in the labor vote. Nixon's directions for the 1970 Congressional campaign were straightforward:

Don't blame labor for inflation. Don't get an antilabor tag on any of our candidates. Here's the line: "Let's understand once and for all the candidates who say they are Democrats are not basically Democrats. They have broken away from the Democratic Party. These issues are bigger than Democrat or Republican. Vote against those who have deserted the principles of the Democratic Party."⁹⁶

While inflation was a serious issue during the Nixon presidency, a political concern for the labor vote shaped options here as well. Arthur Burns, Nixon's economic adviser, pressured the president for suspension of the Davis-Bacon Act, which ensured that construction workers on federal projects were paid the "prevailing wage in the locality," and kept wages high by putting a floor under the highest wage. Twice Burns strongly recommended suspension, and twice Nixon, influenced by Labor Secretary George Shultz, refused to do so. He would do nothing to alienate the potential labor movement.⁹⁷ As Nixon searched for the best way to forge an electoral coalition, his initial anger towards labor – for opposing him on the Haynsworth nomination, as well as other sins – was quickly forgotten.

THE APPEAL TO LATINOS

Nixon did not view the nation's growing Latino vote in the same way that he viewed the African-American vote. Whereas he eventually believed that black votes would disrupt his coalition, he was apparently unafraid to reach out to the Latino community. For example, his administration and the

94. Memo to H. R. Haldeman from Charles Colson, Sept. 14, 1970, White House Special Files, Subject Files: Confidential Files, 1969–1974, box 38, folder: Labor-Management Relations [1969–1970], Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

95. Memo to Henry Cashen from Charles W. Colson, quoted in Oudes, *From: The President*, 162.

96. Safire, *Before the Fall*, 320.

97. Reichley, *Conservatives*, 209–10, 217. On Feb. 23, 1971, Nixon finally did suspend Davis-Bacon – but later reinstated the law on Mar. 29.

Republican party made appeals to Mexican Americans, which is notable for a number of reasons. First, whereas Nixon distanced himself from African-American voters partially because of their association with noisy demonstrations and aggressive demands, he seemed unconcerned about the connections between Mexican-American voters and visible Chicano demonstrations. Second, the demands of Mexican-American leaders were not obviously more compatible with Republican party interests than were black demands. Third, Mexican-American voters supported Democratic party candidates at rates similar to that of blacks. Nonetheless, there is no evidence that Nixon believed that appeals to this group seriously threatened broader coalition-building efforts. In fact, what we do know is that he believed Mexican-American votes were potentially contestable, and he saw Mexican Americans as strategically significant given their concentrations in key electoral college states. For these two reasons, Nixon advocated policies such as bilingual education, which later would be seen as controversial, simply because Latinos appeared to want them.

From the beginning of his presidency, Nixon was being told to pursue the Latino vote, and specifically the Mexican-American vote. Advice frequently came from GOP congressmembers with high Latino concentrations in their states or districts. Ideology seemed to matter little. As early as January of 1969, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater told Nixon to follow up on a campaign promise to have a White House conference on Mexican-American "affairs and problems" "at the earliest possible time because these people are watching us to see if we will treat them the way the Democrats have," and warned, "you will hear a lot on this subject from me, so the faster you move, the less bother I will be."⁹⁸ Other congressmembers shared this concern and encouraged "efforts to make some headway among the Mexican-American people."⁹⁹

Mexican Americans were not the only group being targeted, but they were considered among the most important. In 1968, Nixon had achieved only narrow victories in California and Illinois, and lost a close vote in Texas. It was thought that if the overwhelming Mexican-American majorities for Democratic presidential candidates could be reduced by even 20–30 percentage points, the Democrats would have a great deal of difficulty carrying any of the three states.¹⁰⁰ In October, 1969, Nixon complained that the Republican National Committee's ethnic division was "overloaded towards Lithuanians, Estonians, and other middle Europeans," and that not enough emphasis was going to the "*key* ethnic groups – Italians, Poles, and Mexicans" (original emphasis). He instructed his own staff to "make sure that this situation is corrected and that we really move hard to get

98. Letter from Barry Goldwater to Bryce Harlow, Jan. 6, 1969, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. I, reel 1, frame 0021.

99. Letter from John J. Rhodes (R-AZ), to Peter M. Flanigan, June 17, 1969, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 2, frame 0004.

100. See "The Chicano Strategy': Boon for Republicans?" *Congressional Quarterly Weekly* 30 (1972): 534.

some attention in the areas where it can be really politically productive.”¹⁰¹ Nixon supported legislation turning Lyndon Johnson’s initial White House creation, the Inter-Agency Committee on Mexican-American Affairs, into a more inclusive Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for the Spanish-Speaking, though this entity remained primarily as an advisory body and watchdog group. He appointed Latinos to government posts such as the head of the Office of Economic Opportunity and the United States Treasury. He also promoted a plan to address a specific concern of Latino political leaders, increasing their levels of government representation, in the Sixteen Point Program that was designed to aggressively recruit, train, and promote Latinos in the Civil Service. The program included appointment of a full-time director, recruitment drives in areas of high Latino concentrations, use of Latinos for college recruitment, development of special bilingual positions in programs dealing with the “Spanish-surnamed population,” and a requirement that Federal agencies examine Latino hiring statistics and “make any necessary revisions to assure the full applicability of the [hiring] plans to [the] Spanish-surnamed population.”¹⁰²

While links with African Americans and the Philadelphia Plan were being de-emphasized for Nixon’s 1972 re-election campaign, efforts to gain support from Latinos were being simultaneously stepped-up. It was emphasized repeatedly by members of the Nixon administration that this group was strategic to party campaign interests, approachable, and not divisive for broader coalition-building. On May 10, a meeting with Latino congressmembers was advocated, since most of the approximately “twelve million Spanish surnamed Americans” were “strategically located in politically doubtful states;” in addition, “if we get or can get momentum going with these people, they will be very loyal and at present they feel neglected.”¹⁰³

Mexican-American political leaders were skeptical of Nixon’s motives and rejected at least some of his efforts, for instance, the offer by his administration to help create Mexican-American congressional districts. Nonetheless, this failed to deter the Administration.¹⁰⁴ That Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, moreover, were perceived to be “95% Democratic in affiliation,” (as they were in a July, 1971 memo attachment “ON THE SPANISH SPEAKERS: CAVEATS AND CONCERNS”) also did not dissuade the Nixon administration’s pursuit. Seeming to cancel out the Democratic affiliation were findings that “their [voting] turnout is low, and

101. Memo from H. R. Haldeman to Mr. Harry Dent, October 31, 1969, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. I, reel 2, frame 0219.

102. Press Release, Nov. 5, 1970, White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Papers of Harry S. Dent, box 13, folder: “Cabinet Committee on Opportunities for the Spanish-speaking,” Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

103. Memo for Clark MacGregor and George Shultz from George Grassmuck; Memo for Clark MacGregor from William Timmons, May 12, 1971, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. I, reel 3, frame 871–873.

104. See Richard Santillan and Frederico A. Subervi-Velez, “Latino Participation in Republican Party Politics in California,” in *Racial and Ethnic Politics in California*, ed. Byran O. Jackson and Michael B. Preston (Berkeley: IGS Press, 1991), 296–97.

the Democratic Party seems to be taking them for granted.” As with the party’s pursuit of the “Silent Majority,” blacks were seen as a dynamic factor in gaining the Latino vote. The perception that the Democrats were the party of African Americans could, it was thought, help the GOP become the Latino party:

[T]he Democratic Party appears to be the champion of Blacks. This does not go down well with the Spanish speaking. . . . They now see themselves as competing with Blacks. It is possible the Republican Party can champion the Spanish speaking groups.¹⁰⁵

Following suit, in September of 1971, Maurice Stans, Secretary of Commerce and overseer of the minority enterprise office, argued for increased budgeting for the OMBE. Using the same logic of coalition building as previous GOP Latino advocates, Stans emphasized that “there is a distinct vote-getting potential among the Spanish-Americans in an expanded (minority business) program,” especially in California, Texas, Florida, Arizona, New Mexico, and in Chicago and New York City. Stans quoted Texas GOP Senator John Tower who stated, “while I do not want to depreciate the problems of the blacks in gaining adequate economic opportunity, I do want to urge the business community to help foster greater opportunity among the less publicized minorities such as the Mexican Americans.”¹⁰⁶

During the campaign, a Mexican-American media consultant firm prepared three campaign advertisements focusing on bilingual education, Spanish-speaking presidential appointees, and job opportunities.¹⁰⁷ Shortly after, the Republican National Committee established the Republican National Hispanic Assembly. The logic remained consistent: their votes were available if Republicans appealed to their issues and there was no fear of potential disruptiveness for the party’s coalition. As Charles Colson told domestic policy advisor John Ehrlichman in December of 1971, “we could see some significant movement in the voting preferences of Spanish-surnamed Americans next year. I think we should do everything possible to encourage it.” In a fifty page political strategy research report, the case for pursuing the Latino vote argued that despite comprising only 5 percent of the United States overall population, “because of their great numbers in such key states as California, Texas, Illinois, New York, New Jersey, and Florida, Spanish-surnamed Americans must be considered a very important part of the nation’s political life.” The three major Latino groups were ranked in terms of their potential for votes. Mexican Americans, ranked number two, were largely liberal because of their low incomes and education, but “their strong ties with Church and family and their respect for law

105. Memo from George Grassmuck to Ken Smith, July 30, 1971, and attachment, in White House Special Files, Staff Member and Office Files, Papers of Robert Finch, box 16, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives.

106. Memo from George Shultz to The President, Sept. 17, 1971; Memo from Maurice Stans to John Ehrlichman, Sept. 16, 1971, in Hoff-Wilson, *Papers of the Nixon White House*, pt. 6, fiche 173, frames 32–52.

107. See Ripon Society, *Jaws of Victory*, 79.

and order and authority make them potentially vulnerable to appeal from the President." Puerto Rican Americans, the least advantaged, were seen as having community leaders "closely tied to the Democratic machinery in New York and New Jersey" and were "much less attractable." Finally, Cuban Americans were seen as "most open to Republican appeal," as they were "highly individualized and highly oriented towards material achievement" and shared Nixon's foreign policy views. All of these groups, according to the report, were conservative on social issues, which was seen as a plus for the Republicans.

The Nixon Administration looked to appeal to Latinos with economic policies as well. In fact, Latinos' lack of opportunity or resources "to work toward a productive solution to their many unique problems" helped make them "much more open to penetration by the President than their 80 to 90 percent Democratic registration would indicate." The fact that Latinos needed economic help was seen as a *plus*; this made it easier to make appeals by channelling resources to them. As early as August of 1970, the Administration was supporting such controversial policies as bilingual education. In a memo containing "talking points on the Administrations Programs for the Spanish Speaking," which featured bilingual education programs in the HEW Office of Education and funding in California of the Mexican American Manpower Agency, Nixon wrote, "this is an excellent record." And while efforts were routinely made to present such programs into the Latino press, Nixon suggested a special message to Congress on the topic and special emphasis from the "gringo newspapers."¹⁰⁸ In the December 1971 campaign document discussed above, the sense of freedom from constraints is clear as Colson suggested to Ehrlichman that "we might ask HUD to establish a permanent Spanish-speaking housing program and that it determine an administrative goal of the number of housing units that can be reasonably provided to Spanish-speaking families under federal programs . . ." and also that steps be taken to "further encourage the formation of Spanish-controlled banks and savings and loans." In the area of bilingual education, despite budgetary limits, Colson offhandedly suggested that "we could require that bilingual education programs be components of any educational institution receiving funds with more than a 10 percent Spanish-speaking service population." A major effort to get these programs moving and publicized through the Spanish press and Latino organizations made sense because "there is much in the way of fertile ground to be plowed hard."¹⁰⁹

All of this is quite in contrast with how the administration viewed the potential danger in their attempting to pursue African-American votes. Stans described the limits that the captured status of blacks placed on

108. Special Memorandum for the President, Aug. 25, 1970, in Hoff-Wilson, *Papers of the Nixon White House*, pt. 6, fiche 92, frames 42-43.

109. Memo from Charles W. Colson to John Ehrlichman, Dec. 20, 1971 and attached report, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. I, reel 3, frames 0899-0952. See also memo from Ken Cole to Ed Morgan, Jan. 10, 1972, in *ibid.*, pt. I, reel 3, frames 0896-0897.

targeting efforts for the Republican party quite clearly: “the civil rights issues have a two-edged impact. Actions deemed desirable by the Blacks leave many whites unhappy, and vice versa.”¹¹⁰ Charles Colson made a quite different argument regarding Latinos.

Unlike blacks, there is no well-established middle class leadership which is leading the Spanish-speaking sector irretrievably into the Democratic party. . . . Neither Republicans or Democrats have presented them enough to warrant their making such a choice. The political opportunity is, therefore, wide open. In crude terms, Spanish-speaking Americans will take what they can get from whomever will give it. Because it is relatively costless to give them more than what they had in the past, we should accelerate what we are doing and, where it is insufficiently publicized, work to gain it visibility in Spanish-speaking communities. At the same time, we should exploit Spanish-speaking hostility to blacks by reminding Spanish groups of the Democrats’ commitment to blacks at their expense. . . . Efforts should be made to contrast the Democrats’ alliance with blacks with Republican efforts to build alliances with Spanish-speaking people.¹¹¹

After sustained appeals by the Nixon administration, roughly 30 percent of Latino voters, more than double the percentage of Latino voters in 1968, supported Nixon in 1972.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have emphasized the role that electoral and institutional incentives play in shaping which political groups become perceived as “swing” voters, and which groups are ultimately marginalized as “captured” voters. African Americans became captured during the Nixon administration’s efforts to create a new electoral majority because, (1) Nixon came to believe that their votes were not contestable, (2) Nixon began to recognize the disruptive potential that appealing to black interests had for the rest of his electoral coalition, and (3) he recognized that he could reach out to many more voters, and in particular potential swing voters, by using race as a wedge to divide the Democratic party’s New Deal electoral coalition. Appeals to both white blue-collar workers and southern whites were compatible with each other and ultimately offered greater opportunities for the Republican party to forge electoral majorities. Appeals to Latino groups offered smaller numbers of actual votes, but these votes were strategically located in key electoral college states, and the disruptive potential that appealing to Latinos had for the rest of the Republican coalition was perceived as minimal.

110. Memo from George Shultz to The President, Sept. 17, 1971; Memo from Maurice Stans to John Ehrlichman, Sept. 16, 1971, in Hoff-Wilson, *Papers of the Nixon White House*, pt. 6, fiche 173, frames 32–52.

111. See memo from Charles W. Colson to John Ehrlichman, Dec. 20, 1971, and attached report, in Graham, *Civil Rights*, pt. 1, reel 3, frames 0899–0952.

We also wish to underscore the importance of the Nixon administration in understanding the current position of African Americans in electoral politics. Previously, scholars have stressed the year 1964 as the turning point. In a sense, it was: this was the year that the Democrats solidified their reputation as the party most liberal on civil rights. Yet it was not until late 1970 that Republicans – specifically, the Nixon administration – began to perceive political dangers in courting the black vote. An analysis of the first term of the Nixon presidency shows both the power of normal party politics to bring in voter interests and the power of race in America to disrupt those dynamics. A close election in 1968 prompted Nixon to try to bring black support into play; the aversions that most Americans seemed to have to “black” political interests subsequently led the president away from specifically black appeals. Before 1970, most election strategists saw this dynamic as operative only in the South. It took the experimental approach of the first year of the Nixon administration to clarify the national implications of support for African-American policy preferences. Future studies of American race politics should be mindful that the conservative rise evidenced by the Goldwater movement in no way made certain a Republican preference for a conservative civil rights policy.

Some would argue that African-American leaders, by resisting Republican appeals and maintaining their support with the Democratic party, aided in their ultimate electoral capture. Indeed, the emphasis of most scholars who study this period is on the capture of the Democratic party by African-American voters and leaders. While we disagree with important elements of this interpretation, it is certainly true that black voters chose to align themselves solely with the Democratic party; this in turn raises some interesting strategic dilemmas for the leaders of a potentially captured group. For instance, how pragmatic should black leaders have been in order to maintain a degree of autonomy from the Democratic party and retain their potential power as a swing group? With hindsight, it appears that the severe criticism aimed at the Nixon administration during that free-wheeling first year did not aid longterm black interests. White House officials were upset at the lack of credit given them by black leaders for such policies as the affirmative action of the Philadelphia Plan, and this seemed to reinforce Nixon’s moving away from black interests by late 1970.

Nonetheless, we must recall how difficult it would have been for black leaders to give support to Nixon even during 1969, since highly publicized efforts to win the South with civil rights slow-downs were occurring at the same time as pro-black policies in the North. African Americans, of course, were affected by both policy thrusts. No less important to understanding the fate of blacks as a voting bloc is Nixon’s discovery that northern majorities could be won in the same manner as southern majorities – by directly distancing his administration from black interests. A key element of the Southern Strategy was extended to national policy. Finally, we must recognize that African-American leaders did choose one option available to captured groups – they chose to maintain their allegiance with labor in the hopes of maintaining a viable majority coalition through the Democratic

party. That Nixon was able to simultaneously compromise this option is perhaps one of the most important implications of the era.

The driving argument of this paper, however, is more narrow. We wish to point out how electoral competition provides incentives for parties to capture those groups whose primary interests are perceived as incompatible with larger coalition building. Not all interests are represented merely by being present in an electoral system. Some interests, depending on the degree of capture, can become more or less invisible to the strategic decision-making of both political parties. Instead of competitive parties being uniquely suited to aid the incorporation of group interests into the political system, we argue that party competition can at times hinder such efforts. If ideological, or more specific to the African-American context, racial conflict makes an opposition party reluctant to appeal to the group's interests out of fear that it will disrupt attempts to maintain a majority-based electoral coalition, the group is likely to find its interests captured. Some groups may find, not merely that many of their most significant political interests are often in opposition to the interests of the majority, but that their consent to the formation and legitimation of governing coalitions becomes more or less irrelevant.