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Y'ALL LIKE IKE:
TENNESSEE, THE SOLID SOUTH, AND THE 1952 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

by
Cameron N. Regnery

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

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ABSTRACT

CAMERON N. REGNERY: Y'all Like Ike: Tennessee, the Solid South, and the 1952
Presidential Election
(Under the direction of Dr. Darren Grem)

This thesis examines the changing nature of politics in the American South, specifically through the 1952 presidential election in the state of Tennessee. For much of the South's history, the region was dominated by the Democratic party, earning it the nickname the "Solid South". Following the Civil War and Reconstruction, the South became an aggressively one-party region in which the Republican party found little electoral success and the Democratic party reigned supreme. This partisanship began showing signs of fracturing in 1948 when southern Democrats began to leave the party over racial issues. The presidency of Harry S. Truman (1945-1953) further widened a growing intraparty divide that would greatly affect the 1952 election. In said election, Republican candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower was able to carry four southern states, including Tennessee, effectively tapping into the Solid South voting bloc. While historians generally attribute the 1964 presidential election to the end of the Solid South, Eisenhower's victory in 1952 nonetheless showcased a newfound political competitiveness in the region and laid the groundwork for a new age of southern politics.

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INTRODUCTION

The political history of the American South is an area that has received much scholarly attention and historical examination. Today the South is often thought of as a socially conservative region, with an aversion to a large federal government and a deference to the Republican party. While these beliefs about the nature of modern southern politics are in many ways accurate, they fail to illustrate the full history of the region. Understanding the electoral history of the South gives insight into what is a truly complex political region. For much of its history, the South was effectively a one-party voting bloc routinely supporting the Democratic party. This partisan alliance remained even despite ideological shifts, as the South supported both progressive Democrats such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and conservative Democrats such as Strom Thurmond with often equal fervor. To say the South was always ideologically or politically similar to today is false. The South's identity, however, is strongly associated with politics and the region's commitment to its beliefs, though they may change, is strong. It is for this reason that the South can be studied in such a uniform manner - the southern states were often aligned together politically. Regional unity is one of the few, albeit not guaranteed, constants in southern history. It thus is important to study those moments in which such unity was broken and the consequences thereof. Perhaps one of the most influential and under-appreciated of these moments was the presidential election of 1952. It was this monumental event that fundamentally transformed southern politics.

CHAPTER I: THE SOLID SOUTH ENTERS THE 1950s

One of the most reliable electoral patterns for much of the United States' history was the dominance of the Democratic party in the South. In particular, the party's long run of political hegemony in the region between the end of the Civil War and the mid-1900s has garnered specific historical scrutiny. As early as 1887, the term "Solid South" began to appear in reference to this region's unwavering commitment to the Democratic party.¹ The Solid South comprised the eleven former Confederate states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia and was a consistent and reliable base of Democratic party support at the local, state, and national level. In these states, Democratic primary elections were often more consequential than their accompanying general elections as the Republican party had little competitive strength in the region. To understand this unwavering union between the Democratic party and its southern base, it is important to trace the development of party loyalty in the region.

The Electoral History of the Solid South

Many parts of the American South were initially drawn to the Democratic party at its inception during the 1828 presidential election. The party's creation followed the rise of Andrew Jackson and his widespread popularity within the former Democratic-Republican party. Jackson, a senator from Tennessee, was a populist who had risen through the ranks of the Democratic-Republican party in its era of national dominance in the early nineteenth century. While the party had formerly prided itself on its adherence to the principles of "Jeffersonian" government,

¹ George Brown Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1972), 23.

an ode to its ideological leader Thomas Jefferson, it began to move increasingly towards the ideas of “Jacksonian Democracy” in the 1820s. Jacksonian Democracy emphasized the importance of representing the “common man,” relying largely on Protestant religious orthodoxy, ethnic unity, and a denunciation of elitism.² In quickly-growing urban areas of the American North such as New York and Boston, Jackson’s popularity mainly arose from indigent immigrant groups, particularly those of Scots-Irish descent. In rural portions of the country, particularly in the South, Jackson’s popularity emanated from small farmers, many of whom were also ethnically Scots-Irish. In a sense, the party was largely one of “antis,” those ignored by the powerful establishment in the United States at the time.³ As a result of this underdog status, the party found success in the South amongst poorer white males, most of whom owned few, if any, slaves and felt left out of the political conversation by the wealthy planter class. Jacksonian Democracy stressed political equality between all white males, regardless of economic status – a notion popular amongst poor white farmers in the South.⁴ While this aroused anxiety amongst long-standing landed elites in the South, two other facets of Jacksonian thought helped alleviate their concerns.

Jackson’s anti-elitist stance quickly morphed into sectional animosity for many southerners. As historian Peter Kolver remarks, the Jacksonian Democratic party’s constituency was “held together by a shared dislike, for many even a hatred, of New England Yankees”.⁵

² Wilfred E. Binkley, *American Political Parties: Their Natural History*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974), 120-124

³ Binkley, *American Political Parties*, 128.

⁴ Peter B. Kovler (ed.), *Democrats and the American Idea: A Bicentennial Appraisal* (Washington, DC: Center for National Policy Press, 1992), 70-71.

⁵ Kovler, *Democrats and the American Idea*, 78-79.

Indeed, the focus of animosity for poor southern whites soon became northern elites, deflecting their populist frustrations away from southern aristocrats and thus indirectly allowing southern elites a place in the Democratic party.⁶ As early as the late 1820s, wealthy planters in the non-cotton growing states of Virginia and North Carolina began rallying to Jackson's cause, denouncing wealthy New England elites and finding reassurance in Jackson's status as a native southerner. As historian Wilfred Brinkley writes, "from the Potomac to the Chattahoochee there was a bloc of congressmen and political leaders counting on Jackson to check the rising northern industrialists."⁷ Such sentiment took longer to attract the hearts of southern elites in the cotton-dependent Deep South however, as many wealthy planters favored the Whig party throughout the 1830s.

The Whig party was conceived largely out of opposition to Jackson and his populist reforms, espousing a more conventional party agenda. Many conservative southern elites were drawn to the party as it had both a "reputation of respectability" and strong leadership from figures such as Henry Clay of Kentucky.⁸ By the 1840s, however, notable portions of these Deep South aristocrats had switched to the Democratic party, forging an alliance with small farmers to preserve their most important institution: slavery.⁹ Slavery was undoubtedly the backbone of the southern economy and social order throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, as tensions over the issue rose at the national level, southern planters began to support the party

⁶ Kovler, 78-79.

⁷ Binkley, 131.

⁸ George Brown Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1972), 6-7.

⁹ Binkley, 131-132.

they believed would best defend slavery. Jackson's emphasis on the civic equality of all white males also brought with it a firm belief in the superiority of whites over other races, a belief popular throughout the slaveholding South.¹⁰ Accordingly, by the 1850s, the Democratic party had become welded to its southern base and become the party that protected both the preservation and westward expansion of slavery.

As the Democratic party warmed to an increasingly pro-slavery agenda, the rivalrous Whig party did not take a particularly firm stance in either direction on the issue. While this hurt the Whigs at an ideological level, it did allow the party to be politically viable in the South during the mid-nineteenth century. The majority of southern states fluctuated between the two major parties and voted with the Whig ticket frequently; Alabama and Virginia were the only two southern states to not vote for a Whig candidate at the presidential level. To Whig leadership, it was clear that adopting an anti-slavery platform would largely alienate the party from the southern electorate, an important base of support. As the issue of slavery grew to become the defining political contest of the century, the inability of the Whig party to effectively confront the matter aided in both its demise and in the formation of the second modern American political party.

Despite it having a more national partisan outlook and a short, albeit moderately successful electoral history, the Whig party could not survive the sectional divisions tearing the country apart by the mid-1800s. The inability of the Whig party to act assertively on the issue of slavery largely contributed to the party's collapse in the 1850s.¹¹ What arose to overtake the

¹⁰ Kovler, 71.

¹¹ Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South*, 6-7.

former Whig organization was the emerging Republican party. Unlike its predecessor, the Republican party was not shy about its stance on slavery, adopting a firm anti-slavery platform. Due to this fact, the party enjoyed almost no success in the southern states but managed to form a strong coalition on the national level, primarily centered in the free states of the Northeast and Midwest.¹² With sectional conflict looming large by the end of the 1850s, it became abundantly clear that the issue of slavery had divided the country to a breaking point. The election of 1860 would ultimately expose this ever-widening divide and plunge the country into civil war.

The election of 1860 set in motion many of the events that led to the party distinctions present long into the following century. The Republican party ran on a national platform, placing the preservation of the Union as the paramount concern of the election. The party chose the charismatic Illinois representative Abraham Lincoln to head the ticket, garnering optimism among both radical and moderate Republicans throughout the North and West. The Democratic party, meanwhile, faced a challenge similar to that of the Whigs in the decade prior. Sectional tensions, specifically surrounding the issue of slavery, threatened to tear the party apart. At the Democratic National Convention in Charleston in 1860, southern Democrats made it abundantly clear that they would maintain a vehemently pro-slavery agenda, going as far as accusing their northern counterparts of catering to abolitionists in the free states and not coming to the defense of the South.¹³ Southern Democrats were so unnerved that they did not support the nomination of Illinois senator Stephen Douglas to head the Democratic ticket and instead selected their own candidate, Vice President John C. Breckenridge, a native of slave-holding Kentucky. With no

¹² A. James Reichley, *The Life of the Parties: A History of American Political Parties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1992), 93.

¹³ Binkley, 202-203.

compromise in sight, the Democratic party was forced to run two candidates in the 1860 election, a move that severely hurt the party's chances of defeating Lincoln. Further harming the Democratic party was the formation of the Constitutional Union party by former Tennessee senator John Bell. This party was committed to preserving the Union through compromise and garnered the majority of its support from southern voters who had been previously partial to the Whig party and who opposed talks of secession.¹⁴ With the southern Democrats breaking for Breckenridge and Bell and northern Democrats voting for Douglas, Lincoln was able to achieve a narrow victory – a victory that would spiral the country into the destructive chaos of war. As historian A. James Reichley notes, “A new political force, sweeping most of the North and West and totally excluded from the South, has assumed control of the Republic.”¹⁵ Indeed, it was this divide between the South and the rest of the nation that led to both physical conflict and a tense political arrangement that defined the next several decades.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, the former Confederate states were re-admitted to the Union, accepting the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth “Reconstruction Amendments” aimed at ensuring black political freedoms. While the Republican party dominated the federal government for the rest of the 1860s, Democratic leaders saw an opportunity to regain power entering the 1870s. In 1871, former anti-war Democratic congressman Clement Vallandigham of Ohio pressured Democrats in the North to accept a “New Departure” platform. The long-term strategy of this New Departure Democratic party was to regain support among northerners uneasy by the Reconstruction Amendments and place southern whites back in control of state

¹⁴ Tindall, 6-7.

¹⁵ Reichley, 95.

and local governments, thereby giving the Democrats more control on the national level.¹⁶ The New Departure Democrats received their first political opportunity to implement this strategy during the financial crisis dubbed the Panic of 1873. With the nation reeling from economic depression, many voters looked for a change from a decade of Republican leadership, giving the Democratic party added excitement that upcoming elections could see the return of competitive Democratic tickets.¹⁷ Indeed, the party would proceed to reclaim the House of Representatives in the 1874 congressional elections and nearly win the presidency in 1876. With neither candidate receiving enough electoral votes to win the 1876 presidential election outright, Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes was forced to make a compromise with the newly-empowered Democrats in the House of Representatives. The resulting Compromise of 1877 allowed the Republicans to keep the presidency but ended military intervention, and by extension Reconstruction, in the South.

During the subsequent Hayes administration, the federal government largely appeased southern whites at the expense of southern blacks, allowing the Democratic party to establish essentially a one-party state in the South.¹⁸ Thus, the resurgence of a revitalized Democratic party successfully forced Republican leadership into make concessions that allowed the South to ignore much of the civil rights legislation passed following the Civil War. Consequentially, by the 1880s every southern state was again in the hands of wealthy, white Democrats labeling themselves the “Redeemers”.¹⁹ In full control of their local and state governments and in

¹⁶ Kovler, 132.

¹⁷ Binkley, 302-304.

¹⁸ Binkley, 308-309.

¹⁹ Kovler, 133-134.

cooperation with paramilitary groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Redeemers were able to pass restrictive legislation eventually culminating in the systematic disenfranchisement, segregation, and coercion of freed blacks by the turn of the century.²⁰ Despite these regressions on a regional level, however, the resurgence of the Democratic party established a newfound political competitiveness on the national level.

The next several decades were marked by a competitive national political scene with both parties experiencing successes nationally. The election of Democrat Grover Cleveland in 1880 began the era of “the closest balance of party strength in American history.”²¹ Republicans and Democrats routinely traded control of Congress and the White House over the next four decades, confirming the competitive two-party system that still exists today. While this was true on the national level, the turn of the twentieth century was a time of unparalleled Democratic party dominance in the South. From 1880 to 1920, not a single former Confederate state voted for a Republican candidate in a presidential election. Thus, while the national political conversation featured two prominent parties, the South remained a one-party region.

It would not be until the 1920s that a Republican candidate made significant gains in the South. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover of California was able to win five southern states (Florida, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) in the 1928 presidential election, a notable break from decades of Democratic dominance. Many in the Mississippi River region of the South were initially drawn to Hoover due to his tactful handling of the Great Mississippi Flood in 1927, a natural disaster that had hit the South particularly hard. Hoover had worked

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Binkley, 308-309.

under the Coolidge administration to provide relief in southern states along the Mississippi River, garnering his 1928 Republican campaign unprecedented support from southern states.²² Furthermore, the Democratic party's nomination of Governor Al Smith of New York, a Catholic who opposed Prohibition, unsettled southern Protestants, especially in the Upper South states of North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.²³ Hoover was also keen to secure the black vote in the South, albeit without publicly supporting black organizations or officials.²⁴ Thus, Hoover's campaign moved to capitalize on the inability of the Democratic party to field a popular candidate, using support from both white and black southerners to make headway in the region. As Republican leadership came to see the region as lucrative for party growth, their sights initially set on those states on the fringes of the South with more varied political histories.

Party History in Tennessee

Tennessee, despite its status as a Solid South state, has had an especially distinct electoral history. The state has long been a politically competitive one with geographic differences informing both cultural and political distinctions. Tennessee is a deceptively large state, measuring over five hundred miles from Memphis on its southwest border to Bristol on its northeast border. Within those five hundred miles are distinct geographic differences that have long informed Tennessee politics. Even entering the 1950s, political historians were keenly

²² John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York, NY: Smith and Schuster, 1997), 412-415.

²³ Reichley, 201.

²⁴ John M. Barry, *Rising Tide*, 412-415.

aware of this statewide divide. V.O. Key Jr., the famed scholar of southern electoral behavior, noted the polarized situation of Tennessee politics in 1949:

“Tennessee is a narrow ribbon of real estate stretching from North Carolina to the Mississippi. Tennessee’s far western counties are but northward projections of Mississippi; its eastern mountain counties share both the topography and spirit of western North Carolina and southwestern Virginia. Between West Tennessee and East Tennessee lies Middle Tennessee, a fertile bowl whose principal city is Nashville. To the problems of political management inherent in three distinct geographical sections are added patterns of political behavior deposited by the Civil War.”²⁵

Indeed, what largely informed Tennessee’s partisanship was the state’s stark geographic divide and accompanying differences in political and social attitudes. During the years leading up to the Civil War, Tennessee was already a conflicted state, with much of its eastern half remaining Unionist and siding with the Bell ticket and its western half remaining staunchly Democratic and advocating joining the Confederacy. At the root of such divisions was the existence of large-scale plantation agriculture in western Tennessee, as opposed to the mountainous, minority slave-holding economy of eastern Tennessee.²⁶ Geography was responsible for these distinctions and hence created the political divide evident in the state throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Like its Solid South counterparts, the state of Tennessee as a whole had remained firmly in the Democratic camp from the 1880s to the 1920s. Even with considerable and reliable Republican support in the eastern part of the state, Tennessee could be counted on to vote Democratic both on the national and state level. The first Republican to make significant gains in the state was Herbert Hoover in 1928. Although Republican candidate Warren G. Harding did

²⁵ V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949), 59.

²⁶ Key, *Southern Politics*, 59-61.

win the state in the 1920 election, due largely to state legislative battles over ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, his victory is much more anomalous than Hoover's eight years later. Hoover was able to not only garner support in eastern Tennessee, understandably, but also in middle Tennessee, winning Davidson County (Nashville) with a shocking 53.3% of the popular vote.²⁷ Davidson County had been a decidedly Democratic country prior to 1928 and returned to that status throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, Hoover proved that a Republican could not only secure votes in the Republican stronghold of eastern Tennessee but also in the more Democratic areas of middle Tennessee. This fact did not go unnoticed by future Republican candidates, nor by the Democratic elites in Tennessee.

Despite Hoover's breakout win in Tennessee in 1928, the Great Depression and administration of Franklin Roosevelt solidified Democratic support once again in the state. Indeed, the 1930s was a time of unprecedented Democratic party popularity in the state. In the west, Roosevelt won landslide after landslide, securing an astounding 96.6% of the popular vote in Shelby County (Memphis) in 1936. Even eastern Tennessee cities broke for Roosevelt, with both Bristol and the Republican stronghold of Knoxville voting Democrat by sizeable margins. Roosevelt's "New Deal" economic policies aimed at fighting the Great Depression were appealing to many in Tennessee, especially programs like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) which employed tens of thousands of Tennesseans and gave electricity to many more.²⁸

²⁷ Alice V. McGillivray, and Richard M. Scammon (comps.), *America at the Polls: A Handbook of American Presidential Election Statistics*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1994), 711-728.

²⁸ Tindall, 28-30.

The popularity of Roosevelt and his programs aided Democratic dominance in Tennessee in the 1930s and 1940s, a dominance that local politicians in Tennessee were eager to capitalize on.

As in many southern states during the mid-twentieth century, a political machine was responsible for maintaining and furthering Democratic party support throughout Tennessee. Working out of Memphis, the lead organization steering Democratic control in Tennessee was the political machine headed by former congressman Edward Hull (E.H.) Crump. Crump had controlled internal Tennessee politics for much of the 1930s and 1940s, bolstering the party and suppressing dissent.²⁹ Crump was heavily involved at the state and local level, using his influence to dictate the direction of Tennessee's politics in an almost authoritarian manner. Indeed, Crump controlled "every important office in Memphis and Shelby County, at least one congressman, one United States senator, and had political allies all over the state," even into the late 1940s.³⁰ Crump was strategic in his control of Tennessee, acknowledging the partiality of its eastern half to the Republican party. In a clever move to ensure his candidates for national and state positions continued to win their Democratic primaries (a win that would virtually guarantee a victory in a general election) Crump partnered the vote in Memphis with that from Democrats in east Tennessee. Crump understood that Democrats in that part of the state had to rely on either Memphis or Nashville for support in their Republican-dominated communities.³¹ As a result, Crump fought to keep their support coming to Memphis, keeping his machine in power despite growing challenges from Democrats in Nashville.

²⁹ Key, 59-67.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Challenges to Crump's power intensified following World War II, as returning veterans demanded a greater voice in state and national politics. Crump acknowledged this development and catered to it somewhat effectively by routinely showing support for the returning soldiers and giving them a voice, albeit a minimal one, in Tennessee politics. The real threat to the Crump machine, however, came in the 1948 Tennessee senate race. Opposition against Crump within the Democratic party had been building in Nashville, culminating in the victory of Democratic outsider Estes Kefauver over Crump-backed Tom Stewart in the Democratic primary. Kefauver was a rising star in both state and national politics, a progressive-minded Democrat hailing from Nashville who directly confronted Crump's Memphis machine. While Crump hit Kefauver with his usual attacks, Kefauver was able to brush them off, appealing to a more populist Democratic base and using the media to his advantage. Indeed, many cite the support Kefauver received from the liberal *Nashville Tennessean* newspaper as a major component to his success in 1948. The *Tennessean*, along with other politicized newspapers in Tennessee, had been a consistent voice in speaking out against Crump's organization during the primary.³² This use of popular media was a key strategy for the anti-organization campaign of Kefauver which appealed largely to working- and middle-class whites who opposed Crump's stranglehold over Tennessee politics. Also aiding Kefauver was the fact that the quickly-growing urban population of middle Tennessee was becoming more active politically. Kefauver's 1948 victory represented a distinct shift from the prior political status quo and foreshadowed a much larger development approaching the post-war South.

³² Key, 70-73.

1948 and the “Dixiecrat Revolution”

The 1930s and 1940s was a period of routine Democratic party success both in the South and throughout the nation. The popular New Deal programs of Roosevelt’s administration coupled with victory in the Second World War and its accompanying postwar prosperity led to continued Democratic victories at the ballot box. However, Roosevelt’s later New Deal policies had been met with criticism in the South over fears of racial integration. As it had always been, racial issues were of paramount importance to southern lawmakers and as Roosevelt’s policies grew more progressive, southern whites began to view the New Deal as a threat to white supremacy. Indeed, southerners grew increasingly frustrated by the perceived “northernization” of the Democratic party, decrying its increasingly liberal trajectory. Southerners were uneasy by a perceived “liberal-labor-Negro coalition” they believed had developed in the New Deal-era North.³³ The death of Roosevelt and subsequent end of his administration in 1945 did little to assuage southern concerns however, as succeeding president Harry S. Truman pursued an increasingly moderate racial platform. By 1948, southern fears over the direction of the Democratic party hit a breaking point. At the 1948 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, the delegates from Mississippi and Alabama famously walked out, opting instead to host a “states’ righters” convention in Birmingham. The newly-formed States’ Rights Democrat party, nicknamed the “Dixiecrat party,” would nominate Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina as their presidential candidate, championing both economic and racial conservatism against an increasingly liberal Democratic party.³⁴ This created a precarious

³³ Tindall, 34.

³⁴ Tindall, 36-37.

situation for Truman as his most reliable voting base was threatening to abandon his party. Indeed, Truman entered the election of 1948 knowing his name would not even appear on the ballot in almost a dozen states.³⁵ This unprecedented movement away from the Democratic party was one of the first instances of fracturing Democratic party loyalty in its southern strongholds.

The election of 1948 still was a win for the Democrats, however. To the shock of many observers, Truman was able to defeat the Republican challenger Thomas E. Dewey, despite losing several states in the South. Truman's success came almost entirely from the Midwest, the Mountain West, and the Upper South, as the Republicans dominated the industrial Northeast. Even more shockingly, Truman was able to win without carrying the Deep South, losing Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina to Thurmond's Dixiecrat ticket. As historian George Tindall notes, "The Deep South had remained the seat of southern white intransigence, the area in which politics had turned more on race than in the Outer South."³⁶ The socially-progressive platform the Democratic party had pursued during the 1940s had uneased the Deep South to such an extent that it was willing to take drastic steps, even against its beloved party. Thus, it was clear to Democratic leadership that racial issues had become the political linchpin of the party's southern base. Even though calls for further Dixiecrat rebellion had slowed entering the 1950s, the party was aware of the anxieties prevalent in its southern wing. Even at the Democratic National Convention in 1952, six southern states arrived on the condition that they could determine their actions following the convention, again ramping up fears of

³⁵ John Robert Greene, *I Like Ike: The Presidential Election of 1952* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 4.

³⁶ Tindall, 37.

southern exodus from the party.³⁷ Thus, the Democratic party was placed at odds with its most important base entering 1952, a situation that prompted a tumultuous convention season.

The 1952 Democratic Convention

As the 1952 election grew closer, the direction of the two parties came into question, specifically who would lead the party into a new postwar decade. On the Democratic side, party officials were keen not to repeat the chaos of 1948. Truman had initially posited two names as suitable successors, the former chief justice Fred M. Vinson and, ironically enough, the hero of the Second World War, Dwight D. Eisenhower. The resulting attention over Eisenhower's supposed "endorsement" from Truman prompted the general to write in his journal in September 1951, "I hear that the Democrats still rate me high – but that causes me no concern".³⁸ In reality, Truman's endorsements mattered little as the party eagerly awaited a new face. One who quickly emerged as a potential candidate was Estes Kefauver, riding high off his senate race victory in 1948. Kefauver's reputation as a maverick and his commitment to populist policies found him support amongst Democratic voters throughout the nation. This support was counterbalanced, however, by a wave of contempt Kefauver received from the Democratic establishment. Following his victory in the tumultuous 1948 Tennessee senate election in which he had directly confronted the Crump machine, Kefauver launched investigations throughout the United States against organized crime and political corruption. The famed "Kefauver Crime Committee" investigated corruption in fourteen major cities, putting him at odds with corrupt

³⁷ Tindall, 38-39.

³⁸ Greene, *I Like Ike*, 56-57.

politicians and crime leaders, all while making him a household name throughout the country.³⁹ The Committee exposed multiple cases of corruption in local and state governments, particularly within Kefauver's own Democratic party, prompting Truman and other Democratic leaders to endorse a less audacious candidate.

For many Democrats unsettled by Kefauver's apparent recklessness, the strongest candidate sat in the governor's mansion in Illinois. Adlai Stevenson II, sharing his name with his father, the highly-respected second vice president of Grover Cleveland, appeared to many as the strongest candidate in the Democratic field. He had become governor of Illinois in union with, rather than in spite of, the state's Democratic machine headed by Colonel Jacob Avery.⁴⁰ Unlike Kefauver, Stevenson was reserved and pragmatic, gaining a reputation for fairness and honesty during his tenure as governor.⁴¹ While this eased the concern of many Democratic party leaders, Stevenson's electoral appeal primarily derived from his commitment to liberalism, a commitment that had unnerved southern Democrats in 1948. The prominent liberal wing of the Democratic party, particularly centered in the Northeast, found solace in Stevenson, hoping he would resurrect a "Rooseveltian" spirit in the party.⁴² Liberals were not the sole base of Democratic support, however, and the party understood it had to reconcile with its southern wing by November.

³⁹ Greene, 59.

⁴⁰ Greene, 61-62.

⁴¹ Greene, 71-72.

⁴² Ibid.

While Kefauver was a southerner, he was not viewed as the candidate to reunite disillusioned southern Democrats with the party. Kefauver's liberal stance on civil rights issues made him unappealing to many whites in the South, prompting another candidate to enter the fray. In February 1952, with the backing of prior Dixiecrat leaders, Senator Richard B. Russell Jr. of Georgia entered the race. Russell did not share Stevenson's commitment to liberalism, praising Roosevelt's New Deal economic efforts but remaining conservative on social issues. Russell was heavily involved in the Korean War while in the Senate and staunchly supported Truman's policy of containment.⁴³ In essence, Russell was an antithesis to Stevenson and Kefauver's liberalism and a strong candidate to bring back unnerved southern Democrats. As the convention approached, Russell, Kefauver, and Stevenson emerged as the three primary candidates on the Democratic ticket.

At the beginning of the 1952 Democratic Convention in Chicago in late July, Kefauver appeared to be closing in on the nomination. He had won six-times the amount of popular support as any other Democratic candidate and appeared well on his way to the general election.⁴⁴ The Convention was again muddied, however, by discussions of racial issues, with more liberal northern Democrats advocating for greater racial integration. Fears of Dixiecrat flight again entered the convention hall, but were pragmatically curtailed by the southern delegations' chosen representative to the Convention, Senator John Sparkman of Alabama. Sparkman called for unity within the party, eventually prompting his northern counterparts to accept a paralyzingly bland civil rights platform.⁴⁵ Despite this apparent compromise, however,

⁴³ Greene, 70-71.

⁴⁴ Greene, 112-114.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

calls for southern delegations to accept “loyalty pledges” to the party again threatened to tear apart the Convention. While Kefauver led the ballot during the first two rounds of nominating, he eventually would lose out to Stevenson on the third ballot, the round in which committed delegates could change their votes. Kefauver immediately backed Stevenson, calling for unity in the party and citing victory as the paramount concern of the upcoming election. John Sparkman was subsequently selected as the Stevenson’s running mate, finally putting to rest fears over another Dixiecrat departure. Sparkman was moderate on many issues, sided with segregationists on issues of race, and seemed to compliment Stevenson’s ticket well. By the end of the convention, the Democratic party had nominated an upstanding liberal candidate with a respected, relatively moderate running mate from the South.

The 1952 Republican Convention

The 1940s had been a similarly tumultuous time for the Republican party. While it did not experience sectional defections like its Democratic counterparts, the party did experience a notable divide between its conservative and progressive wings. For decades, the party had been the champion of laissez-faire business and economic prosperity – the party of economic conservatives. The so-called “Moderate Republicans,” largely centered in the Northeast, constituted the more liberal wing of the party and showed support for several New Deal policies and the Roosevelt administration’s handling of World War II.⁴⁶ Facing the widespread popularity of the New Deal Democratic party in the 1940s, the Republican party became more and more dominated by the Moderates. As a result, the poster child of the Moderate Republican

⁴⁶ Greene, 16-17.

wing, New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, was nominated for the presidency in both 1944 and 1948. Both times Dewey was defeated, his 1948 loss drawing particular criticism due to Truman's stunning upset (an upset stemming in part from a loss of support from conservative Republicans).⁴⁷ As a result, the Republican party, like its Democratic opponent, was at a crossroads entering the 1950s.

Witnessing the defeat of Dewey's more liberal ticket, the Republican party understood it needed a new appearance in 1952. This naturally put the spotlight on Robert Taft, the son of President William Howard Taft. Taft was rigidly conservative and believed he had the most effective strategy to deliver the White House back into Republican hands. Knowing he would not lose his support base in the Northeast and Midwest, Taft moved to gain votes in the South, claiming he would support states' rights, especially in matters of racial segregation.⁴⁸ Despite this seemingly sound approach, many Republicans worried about Taft's electability, both in a general election and with his party's more liberal base. Nevertheless, for much of 1951, Robert Taft appeared to be the lone choice for Republican voters.

Much of the reason why Taft seemed to be the only option for Republicans was because another prominent figure, Dwight Eisenhower, was not interested in the job. Eisenhower, the famed Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during World War II, had become a national hero for both his military exploits and natural charisma.⁴⁹ As a result, leaders on both sides of the political aisle looked to him as a potentially viable candidate. Eisenhower was initially very

⁴⁷ Greene, 17-18.

⁴⁸ Greene, 20-21.

⁴⁹ Greene, 31-32.

reluctant to enter the political fray, only doing so in response to Taft's looming nomination. Eisenhower was greatly unsettled by Taft's isolationist policies and reluctance to participate on the global stage. Eisenhower even went as far as to tell Taft that he would drop out of the race if Taft supported NATO.⁵⁰ Taft's subsequent refusal placed Eisenhower in a precarious position wherein he believed that his presidential run was necessary for the country. As a result, Eisenhower's began his candidacy in January 1952.

When the Republican Convention met in Chicago in early July 1952, it was not clear what the outcome would be. Unlike Kefauver, Taft did not enter the Convention with a clear majority of support, instead much of the popularity surrounded the Eisenhower ticket. While Taft initially held more delegates, as the Convention continued Eisenhower gained more and more support. Eisenhower was eventually nominated, largely due to defections from delegates in the southern states, particularly Georgia and Texas.⁵¹ Understanding Eisenhower represented the more moderate, internationalist wing of the party, the Republicans chose California senator Richard Nixon as his vice-presidential candidate. Nixon had become a rising star in the party for his virulently anti-communist stance and persuasive rhetoric.⁵² His nomination was a homage to the reactionary wing of the Republican party and took much of the onus off of Eisenhower to be the aggressive conservative figure in the upcoming general election. Leading the Republican ballot in 1952 would be a charismatic war hero and an ambitious upstart in politics, a ticket that garnered excitement throughout the country.

⁵⁰ Greene, 34.

⁵¹ Greene, 102-103.

⁵² Greene, 105.

Tennessee's Primaries

While the results of the national conventions brought about the party tickets seen the following November, the nomination conventions on the individual state level were far more varied. Interestingly, the state of Tennessee was one in which neither of the two candidates who secured the eventual nomination were selected by the state conventions. On the Republican side, the state of Tennessee held nine district conventions based on the state's nine congressional districts. Taft won all nine conventions in the state, with only mild opposition in Memphis, giving him all twenty of Tennessee's pledged delegates at the Republican National Convention that summer.⁵³ While there was a clear showing of support for Taft in Tennessee, it is important to note that these conventions occurred from January through May 1952 and thus Eisenhower had only just begun his campaign as conventions were already underway.

On the Democratic side, the situation was complicated by the prominence of Kefauver and his opposition to Crump's political machine. Despite some rivalry and heated debate, Kefauver was chosen overwhelmingly and with great enthusiasm at the party's caucus in Nashville in late May, giving him twenty pledged delegates from his home state at the July national convention.⁵⁴ Unlike in Eisenhower's case, other candidates had been campaigning in the Democratic field long prior to the Nashville caucus. As a result, Kefauver was not able to enjoy the virtually unopposed status Taft experienced. The steadfast support Kefauver received, however, displayed the state's commitment to its junior senator, a fact that may have allowed Kefauver to fare better than Stevenson in Tennessee had he been the candidate in the November

⁵³ Paul T. David, Malcolm Moos, and Ralph M. Goldman (eds.), *Presidential Nominating Politics in 1952: The South* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1954), 170-172.

⁵⁴ David, Moos, and Goldman, *Presidential Nominating Politics*, 176-177.

general election. In either case, it is noteworthy that the state of Tennessee, which made such a groundbreaking decision later that November, did not pledge their delegates to either of the two eventual nominees. Entering the general election in 1952, the state of Tennessee would become a coveted ground for both parties.

CHAPTER II: THE ELECTION OF 1952

Entering November 1952, the majority of Americans shared a dislike of Harry Truman. The Democratic president's surprising victory in 1948 had led to a disastrous four years in which Truman managed to alienate significant portions of the American electorate. In his home camp, Truman had lost key aspects of the New Deal coalition his predecessor Franklin D. Roosevelt had so skillfully built. While his proposed "Fair Deal" policies and ambitious progressive agenda appealed his more liberal Democratic base, his policy pursuits were generally met with harsh criticism.⁵⁵ Moderates and conservatives of both parties found Truman's progressive agenda overreaching, lamenting his grand plans for such matters as national health insurance and farm income stabilization. Even greater was the criticism arriving from one of the Democratic party's most important bases: the South. Truman's integration of the military, support of groundbreaking civil rights legislation, and friendliness towards black activists and organizations unnerved his southern base, to whom racial matters were paramount in political discussions.⁵⁶ Indeed, at the end of his second term in office, Truman was exhausted politically and had left the Democratic party, the party that had dominated national politics for nearly two decades, in a state of disarray. By October 1952, Truman's approval had fallen to a meager 32%, signaling an important change to come in November.⁵⁷

While the coming election would undoubtedly end in Truman's departure from the White House, the end of the thirty-third president's term also presented the American voter with an

⁵⁵ Greene, 2-6.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Lyn Ragsdale, *Vital Statistics on the Presidency*, 3rd ed. (Washington DC: Sage Publishing, 2009), 227.

important choice. The Great Depression-World War II era of government had dissipated into a new era of Cold War politics. As a result, the political dominance of Roosevelt's New Deal Democratic party would come into question, as Republicans gained new electoral opportunities in a new age of American politics. Crucial to seizing such opportunities, however, was a correct identification of the issues most pressing to the American voter entering the 1950s. The Eisenhower campaign astutely summed up these issues in his famous "Korea, Communism, and Corruption" (K1C2) platform. The ability to respond effectively to these issues in the eyes of voters would determine which party would emerge victorious in the election of 1952.

Korea

By late 1952, it was clear to the American public that the Korean War had become a virtual stalemate. The United Nations' military intervention in the conflict on the Korean Peninsula had morphed into an increasingly costly American war. Truman's escalation of the conflict and subsequent failure to achieve a peace settlement in October 1952 only further increased American anxiety at home. According to Gallup Poll reports, from 1950-1952 the most pressing issues on the mind of American voters were the war in Korea and the subsequent maintenance of peace.⁵⁸ As such, the proposals of the two major candidates in 1952 to bring the war to a close were followed closely by voters throughout the nation.

Like President Truman, Adlai Stevenson viewed the war as a necessary means to stop the spread of communism in Asia. The 1952 Democratic nominee was largely persuaded by the president's notions of American exceptionalism, believing that American military power would

⁵⁸ Ragsdale, *Vital Statistics on the Presidency*, 3rd ed., 300.

prevail under any circumstances or conditions.⁵⁹ To that end, Stevenson campaigned largely on previous foreign policy, praising Truman's actions in Korea and calling for a continuation of the war until a proper victory could be achieved. In the second "fire-side chat" of his campaign (an ode to Roosevelt's famous radio addresses) in mid-October 1952, Stevenson specifically praised Truman, claiming American sacrifices in Korea were necessary to avoid a nuclear war with the Soviets.⁶⁰ Stevenson's commitment to Truman's unpopular foreign policy exposed an ineptitude by Stevenson and other Democratic leaders to understand the shifting attitudes of the American electorate in regards to the Korean War.

On the other side of the aisle, the Eisenhower campaign employed a clever strategy to increase his popular support on the Korean issue. Sparking criticism from Democratic leaders and the more hawkish wings of both parties, Eisenhower called for a swift end to the Korean conflict. Eisenhower preferred a rapid withdrawal of American troops and a deferral to the South Korean military – a "Koreanization" of the war effort. Eisenhower echoed the sentiment of many Americans in decrying Truman's policies as "inviting a wider scale of tragedy."⁶¹ As the war dragged on in Korea, more and more Americans warmed to Eisenhower's call to withdraw the United States from the conflict with all haste. As historian Elmo Richardson recalls, "The war made [American voters] view the prospect of a soldier in the White House as

⁵⁹ Greene, 10-11.

⁶⁰ James Reston, "Stevenson Says Korea Policy Helps Avert a World Conflict," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 17, 1952.

⁶¹ Robert C. Albright, "Stevenson Attitude Would Invite New Aggression, General Says in Statement," *Washington Post* (Washington, DC), Oct. 26, 1952.

desirable.”⁶² Utilizing Eisenhower’s famed military status, the Republican party presented a candidate that many Americans came to view as the best candidate to bring the ongoing struggle in Korea to an end. While the Democratic party promised a continued war effort with no clear end in sight, the Eisenhower campaign encouraged Americans that the hero of the Second World War could solve the conflict raging in East Asia.

Communism

Underlying the ongoing Korean conflict was the issue of communism and its influence across the globe. The late 1940s had seen communist advances in Europe and Asia, with the Soviet Union tightening its grip over the Eastern Bloc and with China succumbing to Mao’s Red Army. While fears of global communism persisted in American foreign policy, anxiety over the threat of domestic communism became a prevalent issue entering the 1950s. This was best evidenced in the case of Alger Hiss, a former State Department official who was accused of being a communist sympathizer and found guilty of perjury by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1948.⁶³ The media coverage of the Hiss trial exacerbated American fears of domestic communism and subsequent activities by the HUAC gave rise to flamboyant anti-communist figures such as Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. As political discourse became more concerned with the threat of internal communism in the United States, the American electorate became more anxious, looking for political leaders to reassure their confidence in governmental institutions.

⁶² Chester J. Pach and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, rev. ed. (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 21.

⁶³ Greene, 14-15.

Democratic leaders often brushed off these fears over homegrown Marxism, however. In an October 1952 state-wide address in New York, former Democratic party chairman James A. Farley noted that although communists “may have infiltrated agencies of the United States government,” Republicans were merely raising the “false issue of communism” to deflect from actual campaign issues.⁶⁴ Stevenson echoed this sentiment, specifically targeting Eisenhower’s stance on the Korean War as evidence of his flaky commitment to fighting communism. In an October 1952 campaign speech in Boston, Stevenson specifically called out Eisenhower, claiming that although Republicans like Eisenhower took a firm anti-communist stance, their crusade against homegrown communism was merely an attempt to “obscure their retreat from the fight against communism abroad.”⁶⁵ In the eyes of Stevenson and other Democrats, Eisenhower had cast his lot with McCarthy and others on the far-right in a wave of anti-communist hysteria that was harming, rather than helping, the global struggle against communist encroachment.

While Eisenhower, understanding the radical stance of McCarthy, was keen to appear distant from the controversial Wisconsin senator, his pursuit of the domestic communism issue despite Democratic criticisms proved effective in garnering popular support. Eisenhower’s choice of Richard Nixon, the fiery junior senator from California who had become a household name due to his involvement in HUAC hearings, helped to feed off of the growing support McCarthy, Nixon, and the virulently anti-communist wing of the Republican party was

⁶⁴ “Farley Calls Communism False Issue,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), Oct. 25, 1952.

⁶⁵ “Adlai Challenges General to Tell Real Trip Reason,” *The Nashville Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), Oct. 26, 1952

garnering.⁶⁶ While Eisenhower campaigned on a more moderate platform, Nixon became an attack dog on the homegrown communism front. Nixon repeatedly criticized Stevenson for his role in the Hiss hearings, in which Stevenson had spoken in support of Hiss' character.⁶⁷ The Eisenhower campaign attacked Stevenson's friendliness towards Hiss, with Nixon terming Stevenson "color-blind to the Reds" and decrying his minimization of the threat of homegrown communism.⁶⁸ Nixon and Eisenhower understood how troubling the prospect of communist infiltration was to the American electorate and again moved to capitalize on the inability of the Democratic party to effectively react to a key issue.

Corruption

Further hurting the Democratic party was a string of scandals that had befallen the Truman administration. In 1949, a wave of corruption allegations beset the Democratic White House. It was revealed that a group of Truman appointees had given lucrative government contracts to friends and that General Harry H. Vaughan, Truman's closest confidant, had been influence peddling on a criminal scale.⁶⁹ While Truman was not personally implicated in either of these scandals, his mishandling of them led to widespread public perception of fraud in the Oval Office. Indeed, in a February 1952 Roper Poll report, 52% percent of respondents believed

⁶⁶ Greene, 14-15.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "Nixon Declares Adlai 'Color Blind' on Reds." *The Washington Post* (Washington, DC), Oct. 25, 1952.

⁶⁹ Greene, 7.

there was significant corruption in the White House.⁷⁰ As such, Truman placed the Democratic party on the defensive regarding the issue of corruption entering 1952 and gave the Republicans further ammunition for their campaign.

While Stevenson was not involved in Truman's scandals, the specter of the previous administration's mishandlings was no asset to the Democrat's campaign. Prominent Democrats acknowledged the failures of Truman to effectively deal with corruption and stressed that Stevenson would not behave similarly. In the same speech in which Senator Estes Kefauver denounced Eisenhower's stance on Korea, he claimed that Republican investigations into corruption were only made possible by prior Democratic investigations and thus Democrats, specifically Stevenson, were more trustworthy to clean up any remaining ethical issues in Washington.⁷¹ Stevenson echoed this sentiment in a letter to the *Oregon Journal* that was made public in August 1952. Stevenson acknowledged the corruption that had befallen the Truman administration as a substantial problem and claimed that his work in fighting corruption as governor of Illinois would help him in combatting the issue.⁷² In short, Democratic leaders acknowledged prior corruption but held firm in their belief in the superiority of their party, whose members had committed much of the corruption, in solving the issue.

Conversely, the Republican party saw the corruption scandals of the incumbent president and subsequent admissions of Democratic leaders as a golden political opportunity. In the eyes

⁷⁰ Greene, 7.

⁷¹ "Kefauver Denounces Eisenhower on Korea," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Oct. 31, 1952.

⁷² "Adlai Admits There's Corruption, Duff Says," *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Aug. 19, 1952.

of many Republican leaders, the mere fact that the Democrats were admitting to corruption was in itself a win for the Eisenhower campaign. As Senator James Duff of Pennsylvania noted in August 1952, “since [Stevenson] admits corruption in government, it ought not be too difficult for [Republicans] to prove it.”⁷³ Republican leaders understood that Democratic acceptance of Truman’s corruption undermined Stevenson’s campaign in 1952 – a fact that seemingly alluded Democratic leaders who continued to argue their superiority in dealing with self-inflicted problems. Eisenhower routinely denounced the state of Washington politics, empowering voters, especially of younger generations, to pursue a revival of patriotism and public faith in government.⁷⁴ In confronting executive corruption, the Republicans seized on the Democratic party’s inability to distance themselves from Truman and to prove a level of trust to the American voter.

National Results and the Fracturing of the Rim South

The K1C2 platform proved to be effective in identifying and addressing the primary issues facing the American voter in 1952. Republican leadership capitalized on Democratic ineffectiveness to run on a similarly effectual platform, and a result Eisenhower was able to achieve a landslide electoral victory in 1952. Not only was his victory the first presidential win for the Republican party since 1928, it was a rout of Rooseveltian proportions. Eisenhower won the electoral vote by an overwhelming margin of 442 to 89, carrying thirty-nine states compared

⁷³ “Adlai Admits There’s Corruption, Duff Says,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Aug. 19, 1952.

⁷⁴ “Eisenhower Says Democrats Failed at Home and Abroad,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), June 27, 1952.

to Stevenson's nine (Alaska and Hawaii had not yet been granted statehood). Eisenhower also received the highest number of popular votes ever cast for a president in American history to that point.⁷⁵ The enthusiasm and support for Eisenhower's campaign was completely unmatched by Stevenson. Furthermore, while Eisenhower's largest pockets of support came from western and northern states, his most stunning victories came in the southern states, specifically in the "Rim South"⁷⁶ states of Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. In essence, Eisenhower had broken off the fringes of the Solid South, a feat that appeared unlikely to many even on the eve of the election. Campaigning for Stevenson in Long Island just two days prior to the election, Estes Kefauver renewed his belief that although the races in states such as Texas and Florida could be close, Stevenson would carry "every southern state".⁷⁷ His belief exposed a widespread misguided attitude within Democratic camps that the Solid South could not be broken, even by the charismatic Eisenhower.

Evaluations of Eisenhower's gains in the Solid South cannot be attributed to a sole cause, however. While racial issues undergirded much of southern political movement during the time, Eisenhower's victories in the Rim South varied in causation. For example, in the eyes of many political scientists then and today, the Democratic loss of Texas largely rested on Truman and Stevenson's handling of the Tidelands Affair. When oil was discovered off the coast of Texas and Louisiana in the 1940s, the states immediately rushed to claim the rights to the resource. Truman's executive actions deeming the oil federal rather than state property and Stevenson's

⁷⁵ Greene, 168.

⁷⁶ Reichley, 201.

⁷⁷ "Levittown Rally Hears Kefauver," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Nov. 3, 1952.

subsequent deferral to court rulings in maintaining this status largely alienated Texas Democrats, bringing them to “hysterical behavior”.⁷⁸ While this ongoing story had become a states’ rights crusade throughout the South, it did not fully explain Republican victories in the rest of the Rim South states. Developments such as Virginia’s growth in federal and military infrastructure and Florida’s growth in population and urban centers also helped develop Eisenhower’s support in those states. Thus, Eisenhower’s fracturing of the Solid South cannot simply be viewed as the result of one particular issue or root cause. It was a multitude of political shifts that caused Eisenhower’s success throughout the Rim South, especially in his monumental victory in Tennessee.

The Election in Tennessee – The Resurgent Republican East

In assessing the 1952 election in Tennessee, it is important to again note the stark geographic-based political divide within the state. Since Reconstruction, the eastern part of the state had been one of the few Republican strongholds in the South. Sharing its geographic and cultural landscape with the Appalachian regions of western North Carolina and southwestern Virginia, east Tennessee was politically and culturally different from the rest of the state.⁷⁹ This region encompassed the first and second congressional districts of Tennessee, the only two to elect Republican representatives alongside Eisenhower in the 1952 general election.⁸⁰ Indeed, it

⁷⁸ Greene, 3-4, 175.

⁷⁹ Key, 59.

⁸⁰ “Midstate Area Stands Firm with Democrats,” *The Nashville Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), Nov. 9, 1952.

was in this historically Republican region that Eisenhower solidified his most substantial base of support in the state.

While the rural, mountainous counties boasted the highest percentage levels of Republican support, it was the Republican dominance of the eastern cities of Johnson City, Knoxville, and Bristol that made the region such an important Republican base in Tennessee. Johnson City (Washington County) renewed its long-standing commitment to the Republican party, voting for the Republican candidate for a tenth consecutive time with 71.2% of the county vote.⁸¹ Knoxville (Knox County) and its outlying suburbs and townships in Anderson County also went solidly Republican, with Eisenhower winning 62.3% and 53.9% of the vote in those counties, respectively.⁸² While both Knox and Anderson County had fluctuated between the Democratic and Republican camps throughout the 1930s and 1940s, their movement towards the Republican party coupled with their relatively large and growing populations helped give the party a strong base in Tennessee. Furthermore, Eisenhower was able to reclaim Bristol (Sullivan County) for the Republican party, a feat not accomplished since Herbert Hoover's presidential run in 1928. While Bristol sits deep in eastern Tennessee Republican territory, it had consistently gone Democratic since 1932. Eisenhower was able to carry Sullivan County with 56.6% of the vote, a Republican gain of 10.4% from 1948.⁸³ Eisenhower's ability to solidify his base in key Republican counties in eastern Tennessee, while reclaiming those contested by the

⁸¹ Alice V. McGillivray, and Richard M. Scammon, 711-728.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Roosevelt-era Democratic party, helped strengthen his most important Republican base in the state.

The Election in Tennessee – The Seemingly Democratic West

While Eisenhower maintained and increased Republican support in the eastern part of the state, his campaign was not so successful in western Tennessee. Again, geographic differences were largely responsible for this political disunity. Unlike its eastern counterpart, western Tennessee was geographically and culturally similar to Mississippi and Alabama and thus held a strong allegiance to the Democratic party.⁸⁴ Western Tennessee shared much of its economic and political systems with the Deep South states as opposed to the Appalachian and Upper South states. As such, the Solid South found its Democratic foothold most prevalent in western Tennessee. Not surprisingly, all seven congressional districts west of Knoxville went Democratic and the vast majority of rural counties in the western half of the state remained overwhelmingly Democratic in 1952.

The major western cities of Memphis (Shelby County) and Nashville (Davidson County) also remained Democratic but experienced a subtle, yet profound partisan shift. While both cities broke for Stevenson with 58.8% and 52.4% of the popular vote respectively, Republican gains on the county level were stunning.⁸⁵ In 1948, both cities witnessed major defections of traditional Democrats to Strom Thurmond's Dixiecrat ticket. Surprisingly, these voters did not all return to the Democratic fold in 1952, with a large portion of this dissatisfied electorate

⁸⁴ Key, 59-60.

⁸⁵ McGillivray and Scammon, 711-715.

opting instead for the Eisenhower ticket. Indeed, while Democrats carried both of the major western cities, Republican gains hit a stunning 25.2% in Memphis and 18.7% in Nashville.⁸⁶ These gains outpaced even those in eastern Tennessee cities, where Republicans cruised to lopsided victories. Such a stark gain in Republican support in western Tennessee cities exposed the level of division within the Democratic party caused by the internal party fragmentations of 1948.

Cities Swing the Vote

Assessments of Tennessee's electoral shift in 1952 largely lie at the feet of the state's cities. It was in Tennessee's urban and suburban areas that the Republican party saw its greatest increase in support. In the reliably Republican east, Knoxville, Johnson City, and Bristol all broke for Eisenhower with significant Republican gains. In the solidly Democratic west, Memphis and Nashville both broke for Stevenson but with double-digit percentage gains in Republican votes. Another noteworthy city in terms of electoral shifts in Tennessee was a city that did not fall directly into either the eastern or western camp: Chattanooga. Situated on the Tennessee River in southeastern Tennessee, the city and surrounding Hamilton County shared geographic and cultural ties with the Appalachian east but political ties with the Solid South west. Indeed, Chattanooga had been solidly Democratic since 1928, breaking for Truman with 56.2% of the popular vote in 1948.⁸⁷ In 1952, however, the city experienced a 20.5% growth in Republican votes, breaking for Eisenhower with 55.1% of the popular vote.⁸⁸ Across the board

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ McGillivray and Scammon, 711-715.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

in Tennessee and best encapsulated in Chattanooga, cities experienced substantial Republican party growth in 1952, growth that flipped previously Democratic counties and cities to Eisenhower's camp.

This partisan shift in Tennessee's urban areas in 1952 was largely due to the growth in the postwar white middle class, a phenomenon that affected states throughout the Union.

Historian John Robert Greene detailed this middle-class break for Eisenhower as a profound shift in American politics in the 1950s, stating:

It was the solid support of one group that gave the Eisenhower landslide both its magnitude and its scope. Dwight Eisenhower held a hammerlock on the affections and the votes of the American middle class. Until 1952, it had been a fact of political life that wealthy Americans supported the Republican Party, poorer Americans supported the Democrats, and the growing middle class was fairly evenly divided between the two parties, depending on issues and candidates...what surprised contemporary observers, however, was the magnitude of the shift of the middle-class vote for Eisenhower. On average, an astounding 69 percent of the nation's middle class voted for Eisenhower. These voters were found in the populated suburbs, where the urban middle class had been moving in droves since 1945.⁸⁹

Indeed, Eisenhower's voting percentage in American suburbs ranged from an astounding 75-90%.⁹⁰ The quickly growing middle class, spurred by a period of postwar prosperity, was emerging as the suburban American voter base – a base crucial to both Eisenhower and the Republican party's success in 1952. Eisenhower's ability to tap into this base, effectively identifying and campaigning on the issues most important to the growing middle class, was perhaps the most prominent reason for Eisenhower's electoral success in Tennessee, the Rim South, and throughout the nation in 1952.

⁸⁹ Greene, 170-171.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Accompanying this urban, middle-class growth was a growth in female voting and national television viewership. As more households entered the middle class in the 1950s, female voting grew, especially in urban areas. Eisenhower targeted women with campaign advertisements and made them an important demographic group to his campaign. Accordingly, Eisenhower won 58.1% of the female vote nationally, giving him an added boost in growing urban areas.⁹¹ Similarly, television viewership was growing quickly, especially amongst wealthier urban Americans. While initially reluctant, Eisenhower eventually agreed to be the first candidate to air regular television campaign advertisements titled “Eisenhower Answers America” beginning on October 24, 1952.⁹² Perhaps even more impactful, however, was Eisenhower’s running mate’s use of the television. When Nixon was accused of misusing campaign contributions, he held an off-script interview, filmed by both CBS and NBC, in which he made public his entire financial history and reinforced his commitment to transparency. His references to both his dog “Checkers” and his daughters garnered outpourings of support and earned the ordeal the nickname, the “Checkers speech.”⁹³ Nixon’s call for transparency coupled with Eisenhower’s effective presidential campaign was a groundbreaking use of the television for political purposes and served the Republican ticket well in the general election.

While Stevenson outperformed Eisenhower with the black vote, Eisenhower did do well in parts of the Black Belt region of the South. Unfortunately for Eisenhower, the Black Belt did not encompass much of Tennessee and the portions that did had largely fallen under Crump’s

⁹¹ Greene, 170.

⁹² Greene, 146-147.

⁹³ Greene, 154-155.

machine in Memphis. Crump had either suppressed the black vote or kept it in Democratic hands, not leaving any room for Republican intervention.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, despite Crump's machine and long-standing poll taxes enacted in 1890, Eisenhower was able to pull some support from Republican black voters in western Tennessee. Cities would indeed be the focal point of Eisenhower's victory throughout the entire South in 1952. While the rural areas of the southern states remained generally committed to the Democratic party, cities increasingly joined the Republican movement under the Eisenhower ticket. The effects of this shift carried over long after Eisenhower's ascendance to the presidency in 1952.

⁹⁴ Key, 59-67.

CHAPTER III: A NEW AGE OF SOUTHERN POLITICS

The election of 1952 effectively ended a twenty-year long period of Democratic control of the executive branch. Eisenhower was sworn in on January 20, 1953, placing a Republican in the White House for the first time since Herbert Hoover's presidency ended in early 1933. Not only had the Democratic party held the presidency for nearly two decades, but Roosevelt's New Deal policies and wartime measures had defined a generation of United States' political thought. The election of Eisenhower signaled a new generation of American politics, one forged not out of economic depression and war but rather out of prosperity and peace. Indeed, the ascension of Eisenhower to the Oval Office coincided with the major developments of the 1950s United States. These changes were subtle and often difficult to perceive at the time, but ultimately it was the ability of the two parties to adapt to a new socio-political environment that led to their successes or failures. At the heart of the result of the 1952 election was the inability of the Democratic party to effectively adapt to changing politics and an effective strategy by the Republican party to gain a new position in the South.

Intraparty Turmoil and Division

At the root of Democratic woes in 1952 was poor party management, particularly in dealing with intraparty disputes. What the Democratic party experienced in 1948 was unique and certainly unsettling to party leaders. However, the Dixiecrat revolution was not totally without precedent – in fact it had happened to the Democrats before. In the election of 1860, the Democratic party experienced a similar rift along sectional lines. The resulting fracture led to a mismanaged ticket that ultimately help Abraham Lincoln give the Republican party its first

electoral victory.⁹⁵ Similarly, in the 1912 election the Republican party faced a split between its progressive wing under Theodore Roosevelt and its conservative wing under William Howard Taft. The result was a fractured Republican ticket headed by Taft that resulted in Theodore Roosevelt running as a third party and Woodrow Wilson's Democratic party easily reclaiming the White House for the first time since 1897.⁹⁶ In both cases, mismanaged party divisions led to severe splits that cost the divided party the election. However, in 1948 Truman was still able to defeat his Republican challenger despite major defections from his own party. In a sense, Truman's victory masked the weight of the party's internal division entering the 1950s. Indeed, since the Dixiecrat rebellion of 1948, the eleven former Confederate states comprising the Solid South have not cast a unified Democratic vote in a presidential election.⁹⁷

Democratic leaders severely underestimated the toll of their 1948 party division in the 1952 election. In Tennessee, Republicans witnessed huge gains in cities such as Nashville, Chattanooga, and even Memphis – gains brought about by disillusioned Dixiecrats not returning to the Democratic party. In 1948, in the very heart of Crump's Memphis machine, Shelby County voted 41.1% for Thurmond, 36.6% for Truman, and a mere 22.4% for Dewey. In 1952, by contrast, the county voted 52.4% Democratic and 47.5% Republican, with the Republican party more than doubling its 1948 popular vote percentage.⁹⁸ Indeed, those Dixiecrats who had left the Democratic party four years prior did not all return. As historian Kevin P. Phillip notes, "There was a very strong correlation between 1952 gains and 1948 Dixiecrat strength, which

⁹⁵ Reichley, 94-95.

⁹⁶ Greene, 16.

⁹⁷ Tindall, 24.

⁹⁸ McGillivray and Scammon, 711-715.

accounted for part of Eisenhower's urban pickup...[throughout] the South, the 1952 trend of 1948 Dixiecrats was strongly Republican".⁹⁹ Thus, while the effects of the party's fracture may not have been evident in 1948, by 1952 they were resulting in major political shifts.

Party division is not inherently responsible for poor electoral performance, however. Party fracturing and reshaping is a constant in American politics and helps move the parties forward in accordance with the changing beliefs of their members. In 1952, the Republican party proved that an effective management of party divisions could in fact be useful. In the 1940s, the party experienced ideological differences similar to those experienced in the 1910s-1920s. Instead of allowing these divisions to escalate, the Republicans chose to nominate a unifying candidate in Eisenhower, whose war hero status and charisma mitigated any ideological pressure points. Similarly, understanding that they had chosen a more moderate presidential candidate, the Republican party nominated Richard Nixon for vice president to assuage its more conservative base.¹⁰⁰ In this way, the party was able to unify around the ticket and run an effective and eventually victorious campaign in 1952.

Party Management

At the source of Republican effectiveness and Democratic ineffectiveness in combatting party fracturing in 1952 was party management. Political parties must be responsive to their base in determining future direction and strategic in choosing their leaders. In 1952, the Republican party was more responsive to its constituency than its Democratic counterparts.

⁹⁹ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969), 200.

¹⁰⁰ Greene, 104-106.

Before Eisenhower's campaign even began, there were grassroots movements throughout the country calling for him to be the nominee. By November 1951, there were over 800 "Eisenhower clubs" throughout thirty-eight states calling for his nomination on the Republican ticket.¹⁰¹ The Republican party understood the charisma of Eisenhower and was willing to adapt to its base's enthusiasm. Choosing Eisenhower over the son of the stalwart Republican William Howard Taft was certainly not the most ideologically-pure decision for the party, but it was the strategic move that ended up securing the White House.

Also aiding the Republican party was its movement away from political machines by the mid-twentieth century. Political machines had taken form during the "Gilded Age" at the end of the nineteenth century and had been a major force in American politics for some time.¹⁰² But by the 1950s, these were largely an outdated political vestige – one the Republican party was more removed from than their Democratic counterparts. Democrats were still reliant on machines for control at the state and local levels in many places even into the mid-twentieth century. Perhaps the most notable example was E.H. Crump's political machine in Tennessee that consolidated Democratic control in Memphis and largely dominated state politics during the Roosevelt era.¹⁰³ Crump was not the only example of Democratic political machines at work in the 1940s, however. After all, it had been Colonel Jacob Avery's political machine in Illinois that had helped Adlai Stevenson achieve a governorship that eventually landed him on a presidential

¹⁰¹ Greene, 31-32.

¹⁰² Greene, 16.

¹⁰³ Key, 59.

ballot.¹⁰⁴ Democratic reliance on political machines kept them from being truly in tune with their constituency, a fact that hurt them in 1952.

Unlike the Republican party, the Democrats did not make a similarly strategic decision in their leadership in 1952. Like Eisenhower, Estes Kefauver had received an outpouring of grassroots support prior to the election. It was this grassroots movement that helped him secure a senate seat against the Crump machine in 1948 and become the frontrunner entering the Democratic National Convention in 1952.¹⁰⁵ However, Democratic party leadership, especially Truman, was unhappy with Kefauver's political rise and instead opted for the tamer choice of Stevenson. While this decision eased the Democratic establishment, it did little to garner a level of enthusiasm to match that of Eisenhower. Furthermore, the choice of John Sparkman as a vice presidential candidate proved to be ineffective as it also did little to provide enthusiasm. Sparkman was not conservative enough to bring back staunch Dixiecrats and not charismatic enough to garner personal enthusiasm making him a largely ineffective running mate, outside of strengthening the Deep South's vote. The Democratic party's reliance on machines and establishment candidates proved severely ineffective against Eisenhower's grassroots popularity and Nixon's conservatism.

Attitudes and Issues

In his description of the aftermath of the 1948 election, V.O. Key remarked, "the 1948 show of activity inaugurated no lasting activism of Republicanism in Tennessee".¹⁰⁶ This

¹⁰⁴ Greene, 61-62.

¹⁰⁵ Greene, 58, 112-114.

¹⁰⁶ Key, 8

sentiment was echoed by Estes Kefauver who claimed that not only would the Democrats win his home state in 1952, but every other southern state as well.¹⁰⁷ Such was the belief of many who viewed the Solid South as an unbreakable electoral body. This would not be the case, however, as Eisenhower would conclusively prove his ability to achieve “unrealistic” political goals. This belief by Democratic leaders in the steadfastness of the Solid South would not only prove to be incorrect but also harm their electoral outlook.

As noted previously, Truman was a very unpopular president by the end of his second term. Issues such as the Korean War, the Tidelands Affair, and the threat of domestic communism greatly frustrated and unnerved large portions of the American people and yet the Democratic party did not respond any differently. On nearly every issue, Stevenson called for a continuation of Truman’s unpopular policies. In Korea, Stevenson wanted to keep fighting; concerning the Tidelands, Stevenson favored Truman and the Court’s decision; on the threat of communism, Stevenson spoke glowingly about communist sympathizer Alger Hiss’ character.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, Eisenhower took a contrary stance to nearly all of Truman’s policies, understanding their lack of popularity amongst the electorate. The lack of a strategic agenda coupled with widespread beliefs amongst Democratic leaders in the supposed infallibility of the Solid South coalesced to produce almost an attitude of arrogance from the Democratic ticket. Stevenson offered essentially nothing new to the voter, even when running on the platform of an unpopular incumbent.

¹⁰⁷ “Levittown Rally Hears Kefauver,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Nov. 3, 1952.

¹⁰⁸ Greene, 12-15.

Tennessee and the Solid South

The question of 1952 and its relation to the Solid South is still a contested one, however. The election marked the first time in decades that a Republican had won multiple former Confederate states. Furthermore, Eisenhower won a larger percentage of southern votes than any Republican since Reconstruction.¹⁰⁹ However, 1952 is not often the date associated with the ultimate demise of the Solid South. Nor is the election of Hoover in 1928, who also carried multiple southern states and received a large share of the southern vote. In this sense, the election of 1952 is situated in a precarious position in United States' electoral history. Eisenhower's victories in the South are not narrow enough to be attributed to a sole cause or exceptional moment, nor are they broad enough to signal the end of a political trend that defined the American electoral system for decades. Therefore, Eisenhower's successes in Tennessee and other southern states cannot be viewed as an outlier case or as a final decisive moment, but rather as a transformation that signaled a new system of politics.

While Eisenhower's victory in Tennessee and throughout the Rim South was stunning, it was not wholly without precedent. At the most basic level, the Republican party has always had a traditional base of support in the mountainous region of eastern Tennessee. Thus, Republican candidates did have a small but reliable foothold in the state. In 1920, Republican candidate Warren G. Harding would use this eastern Tennessee base to narrowly defeat Democrat James M. Cox and win the state of Tennessee, breaking the Solid South for the first time since 1876. Harding had done so primarily due to Democratic infighting over passage of the Nineteenth

¹⁰⁹ Greene, 169.

Amendment and a minor growth in Republican support in the middle Tennessee.¹¹⁰ However, the Nineteenth Amendment was soon ratified and middle Tennessee support disappeared as the state broke substantially for Democrat John W. Davis in the 1924 election. It was not until the election of Herbert Hoover four years later that significant trends began to appear.

The election of 1928 could be defined as the first real fracturing of the Solid South. Although the region went decisively Democratic for the next four election cycles, the election of Republican Herbert Hoover in 1928 foreshadowed the power of economic and social trends in determining political shifts. On its surface, it would appear that Hoover defeated his Democratic opponent Al Smith on social factors and political record alone. Smith was a Catholic from New York who opposed Prohibition – unpopular characteristics amongst many southern Protestants at the time.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Hoover’s efforts in dealing with the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 had earned him fame throughout the South. However, these explanations do not fully explain the story behind Hoover’s 1928 victory.

A more in-depth view of Hoover’s success suggests another trend at work. Like Eisenhower twenty-four years later, Hoover capitalized on a socio-economic trend occurring in growing southern urban areas. Hoover appealed to the budding middle class of the “Roaring 1920s” in southern cities to gain crucial urban votes in Rim South states such as Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia – all of which Hoover won in 1928.¹¹² Hoover’s support of business, laissez-fair capitalism, and minimal government interference was popular amongst a

¹¹⁰ Reichard, Gary W., “The Aberration of 1920: An Analysis of Harding's Victory in Tennessee”, *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (February 1970), 33-49.

¹¹¹ Binkley, 308-309.

¹¹² Phillip, *The Emerging Republican Majority*, 200.

growingly-wealthy middle class in southern cities. Obviously, this popularity would quickly fade under the economic destruction of the Great Depression a year later. Nevertheless, Hoover proved that the South's middle class could be a useful electorate for Republicans attempting to garner support in the heavily-Democratic South.

Following Hoover's example, Eisenhower capitalized on the growing urban middle class to increase his support in the South. In late September 1952, Eisenhower went on a tour of several urban areas in Virginia and the Carolinas while Nixon visited multiple cities in Tennessee. In Richmond, Virginia Eisenhower gave a speech on the steps of the state Capitol building praising famous Virginians such as Robert E. Lee and directly calling on the famed Senator Harry F. Byrd to consider voting for his Republican ticket.¹¹³ Standing on the steps of the former Confederate Capitol in a heavily segregated city touting Confederate generals and Dixiecrat leaders was a remarkably bold move on Eisenhower's part. He understood that such actions could appeal to southern middle-class whites in cities throughout the region, especially those prone to Dixiecrat and segregationist sentiments. His belief was not unfounded, as a *New York Times* writer remarked, "Everywhere he went – he was not only met by large crowds, but applauded more enthusiastically than anywhere in the West and the North".¹¹⁴ Indeed, Eisenhower's success in southern cities was felt throughout the region, with massive Republican gains in Rim South cities such as Memphis and Richmond and even in Deep South cities including Charleston and Savannah.¹¹⁵ Eisenhower strategically capitalized on a demographic

¹¹³ James Reston, "Eisenhower Asks Unfettered South," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Sept. 27, 1952.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Phillip, 199-200.

trend Hoover had uncovered nearly two decades prior – the political viability of the southern urban middle class.

1952 as a Transformation

It is hard to place the election of 1952 in the correct historical context. It does not seem to have the singular nature of Hoover's victory, nor does it mark the definitive end of the Solid South. To evaluate this true transformative nature of the election, it is important to look at its legacy and ensuing political developments throughout the 1950s. Following the election, Eisenhower's first term proved to be more challenging. Looking to toe the line between the conservative and liberal elements of his party, Eisenhower adopted a moderate or "middle way" agenda.¹¹⁶ While this may have helped maintain his amenable and moderate perception, it did little to help the Republican party. Republicans suffered numerous defeats in the 1954 midterm elections, losing the House of Representatives (a chamber they would not reclaim until 1994).¹¹⁷ Thus, while Eisenhower had performed well at the ballot box, his resulting presidency had not produced the same effect for his fellow Republicans.

Despite this fact, Eisenhower was the clear favorite to head the Republican ticket entering 1956. The election more importantly presented the Democratic party with a chance to put forth an effective ticket. The ensuing 1956 Democratic National Convention featured rising political figures including the ambitious senator from Massachusetts John F. Kennedy and the bullish Senate Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson. However, the Convention yet again selected Adlai

¹¹⁶ Greene, 180-181.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Stevenson to head the ticket, this time selecting Estes Kefauver to be his running mate.¹¹⁸ This move may have been aimed at garnering support in Tennessee and throughout the South, however it came to no avail. Eisenhower would win the 1956 presidential election by even larger margins, winning every Rim South state again, adding Louisiana. Louisiana, like many southern states, had wrestled with its Democratic affiliation, weary of an increasingly racially progressive party. Indeed, the only area of votes where Eisenhower saw losses in the South was in the Black Belt region, wherein the controversial *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 had driven southern segregationists to increasingly restrict political freedoms to African Americans.¹¹⁹ Thus, it appeared that Eisenhower's success in the South may have truly fractured the region, making it politically competitive once again.

¹¹⁸ Greene, 180-181.

¹¹⁹ Phillip, 201-202.

CONCLUSION

As the 1960s approached, the question of the South's partisan allegiance again came to the forefront. The Democratic party's decision to run the Catholic Massachusetts senator John F. Kennedy against Vice President Richard Nixon stirred fears of another Davis-Hoover election. However, both parties came out of the 1960 presidential election with a moral victory in the South. In one of the closest elections in American history, John F. Kennedy was able to maintain much of the Solid South, bringing Louisiana and Texas back into the Democratic fold.¹²⁰ Even though defeated, Nixon's ability to maintain a third straight Republican victory in the states of Florida, Tennessee, and Virginia reassured Republican leaders that Eisenhower had opened up the region long-term. Throughout the early 1960s, the Republican party would attempt to further penetrate the former Confederacy in a strategy known as "Operation Dixie".¹²¹ In the end, it would be the passage of groundbreaking civil rights legislation in 1964, signed into law by Democratic president Lyndon B. Johnson, that finally broke the Solid South. In the 1964 presidential election the states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina all abandoned Johnson's Democratic party, despite his status as a native Texan and southerner, and joined Arizona as the only states to vote for Barry Goldwater's Republican ticket. This mass exodus of the Deep South finally ended the Solid South coalition.

It is quite remarkable to observe the shocking collapse of the Solid South in seemingly a matter of about a dozen years. In 1928, religious objections to the Catholic Al Smith forced several southern states unprecedentedly to the Republican side – but by 1964, those same religious objections to an ethnically-Jewish Barry Goldwater weren't even enough to keep the

¹²⁰ Phillip, 203-204.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Deep South from abandoning their beloved Democratic party. As it had been in the early days of the party, racial issues remained paramount to southern Democrats and the open embrace of integration would ultimately be the nail in the coffin for the Solid South. In this context, it is crucial to view the election of 1952 as the pivotal moment that set in motion many of the events of the later 1950s and 1960s. Eisenhower proved that a Republican could not only win in the South but could maintain a competitive role in the region. He also proved the power of effective leadership and campaigning in turning votes in historically unfriendly regions. Today, the South is a politically diverse and competitive region, owing much of that development to the election of Eisenhower in 1952.

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