

THE CYCLE OF 72

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The American Presidential election of 2004 had significance to all Americans, but for those Americans in the Southern States it was the final step in the return to domination of American Presidential politics. This evening's paper will address the rise, fall and rebirth of the South in American Presidential politics, a process that has covered three distinct seventy-two year cycles. The first cycle began with the Inauguration of George Washington in 1789. Seventy-two years after Washington's first Inauguration, with Abraham Lincoln's Inauguration, the Civil War and the second cycle began. Seventy-two years later, Franklin Roosevelt, was sworn in as the thirty-second President promising to bring the nation through the Great Depression; thus began the third cycle which will end this year. This paper will look at each of these cycles from the perspective of Southern influence in American Presidential politics.

In 1789 George Washington was unanimously elected the First President of the United States. For fifty of the seventy-two years following Washington's inauguration, the President of the United States was a native of either Virginia or Tennessee. Although their ideas of governance varied, each of these Presidents from the South represented the dominance of the Southern culture and leadership.

Washington was a Virginian. However, he did not promote or believe in regional or party affiliation for he thought that this would inevitably divide the new nation. As Washington's first term ended in 1792 he thought of retirement from politics, but Jefferson wrote to him "North and South will hang together if they have you to hang on [to]."¹ By serving a second

¹ David McCullough *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1991) page 436.

term, Washington postponed the advent of partisan fighting in Presidential politics. It should be noted that John Adams, Washington's Vice President and successor to the office of the Presidency, was not an advocate of political parties, also believing that the party system would be detrimental to the union of the states.

It was Adams' aversion to party politics which cost him the election to a second term in 1800. In that year Adams came in third behind Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, both of whom finished with seventy-three electoral votes. The decision in 1800 was sent to the House of Representatives where Jefferson prevailed by one vote over Aaron Burr, a fellow Republican, but a New Yorker.²

Thomas Jefferson differed from Washington and Adams believing that political parties were essential to the dissemination of his political ideas. It was Jefferson and fellow Virginian, James Madison, who formed the Republican party. To understand the political philosophy of these Virginians and the positions taken by the Republican Party throughout the first twenty-eight years of the 19th century, it is appropriate to study the ideas and beliefs of Thomas Jefferson and the statements made about him by the opposing Federalists. Some of these follow.

In Federalist pamphlets and newspapers, Jefferson was described as a hopeless visionary, a weakling, an intriguer intoxicated with the French philosophy, more a Frenchman than an American. He was charged with infidelity to the Constitution, called a spendthrift and libertine. He was accused of favoring states rights over the Union, and of being an atheist³

The Republican Party, under the leadership of Jefferson and James Madison, stood for human values and opposed the Federalists whose vision was based upon economic principles. The Southern Republicans under Jefferson espoused agrarian virtues and attacked the Federalists as corrupt. To Jefferson the Federalist vision was based in financial manipulation through the National Bank, stock jobbing, public credit, and centralized administration.⁴ In his opinion, the Federalist model of government founded on economic principles was a corruption based upon the premise of human greed and the appeal to the commercial interests and private ambitions of

² Paul F. Boller, Jr. *Presidential Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996) page 14.

³ David McCullough *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1991) page 543.

⁴ Garrett Ward Sheldon *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Johns Hopkins University Press 1991) page 83.

each man. Jefferson favored limiting the national government because he thought American politics was best when conducted in the local and state republics.

Jefferson based his political beliefs on a moral vision of man, not on the economic principles upon which the Federalists relied to channel man's greed for the good of the society. Jefferson's vision of a virtuous American public presumed the existence of social ethics appropriate to a naturally social being possessing a divinely ordained moral sense.⁵ Jefferson looked to ancient moral philosophy and Christian ethics, the former serving private goodness and well being (i.e., one's duties to oneself) and the latter serving public goodness and well being (i.e., one's duties to others and society). But the Christian ethics which Jefferson felt suited man's social nature and contributed to America's virtuous republic were often lost, in his opinion, in the elaborate ceremonies, dogma, and institutions of the various churches.⁶ For this reason he opposed organized religion, and was regarded by many as an atheist.

As was the case with all Southern politicians in the first cycle, Jefferson believed that slavery must continue as an integral part of the Southern agrarian lifestyle. Although his writings expressed the hideous nature of slavery, when faced with the economic reality of abolition, Jefferson joined the extreme anti-abolitionists in advocating the extension of slavery into the West.⁷ Not only was slavery seen as an integral part of Southern agrarian culture, but it also took on direct political importance in the dominance of the South in United States politics during the first cycle. By virtue of the three-fifths compromise in the United States Constitution, whereby slaves were counted as three-fifths of the non-slave citizens for purposes of congressional representation and the electoral college, the South enjoyed a unique advantage in the House of Representatives relative to non-slave states. By 1820 this allowed the Southern states to enjoy twenty congressional representatives above those justified by their non-slave population.⁸ If Thomas Jefferson had to choose between earlier elimination of slavery through controls on its geographical expansion and the continued power of the Republican South in the

⁵ Ibid. page 103.

⁶ Ibid. pages 104-106.

⁷ Garret Ward Sheldon *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Johns Hopkins University Press 1991) page 129 citing to John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York: The Free Press 1977) Pages 2-3.

⁸ Garret Ward Sheldon *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Johns Hopkins University Press 1991) pages 135-136.

national legislature, he had little difficulty in choosing the latter.⁹ Throughout the first fifty years of the 19th Century the Southern political leaders were able to overcome reason and compromise to maintain their political power, but this ultimately led to the downfall that terminated their dominance of United States Presidential Politics for the following two cycles. The cancer of slavery and the blind support for it ultimately destroyed any pretense of national leadership for Southern politicians.

In closing the discussion of the Jefferson Presidency, a brief discussion of Jefferson's expenditure of public funds and attitude toward the Federal Judiciary is enlightening. Authorized by Congress to pay \$2,000,000 for the purchase of New Orleans and West Florida, Jefferson dispatched James Monroe and Robert Livingston to Paris with instructions to pay whatever necessary. These gentlemen negotiated the purchase of the Louisiana Territories for \$15,000,000. Although certainly a brilliant accomplishment, which more than doubled the size of the United States at a cost of about 13.5 cents an acre, it was the first foray of the Republican Party into "deficit spending." With respect to the Federal Judiciary, the Republican Party under Jefferson began its assault upon the Court on the grounds that the Court had made itself an independent power beyond the control of the electorate. Jefferson used articles of impeachment as his tool to attack the Judiciary. After the successful impeachment of a Federalist judge in New Hampshire, Judge John Pickering, Jefferson's failed attempts to impeach a second Federalist Judge, Samuel Chase, was a humiliating defeat, given that Jefferson was working with a predominantly Republican Congress.¹⁰

The Republican Party thrived during the Presidencies of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe. In fact, by 1812 the southern Republicans were in complete control of Presidential politics, electing James Madison for a second term, while the Federalists were in such desperation that they were forced to nominate a New York Republican named Clinton. By 1816 the Federalists had no candidates and never again participated in Presidential politics.

By 1824 all four candidates running for the Presidency were Republicans, three Southerners: William H. Crawford of Georgia, Henry Clay of Kentucky, and Andrew Jackson of Tennessee. The fourth Republican candidate, and only Northerner, was John Quincy Adams.

⁹ Ibid. page 136.

¹⁰ Page Smith *Jefferson A Revealing Biography* (New York, McGraw Hill 1976) page 272.

Although Andrew Jackson acquired the most popular and electoral votes, because he did not have a majority of the electoral votes, the House of Representatives, voting by states, chose the President from the top three, Jackson, Adams and Crawford.¹¹ The House chose John Quincy Adams, but only after the Speaker of the House, Henry Clay, gave his support to Adams.

Jackson won the election of 1828 defeating John Quincy Adams handily. He had run as a Democratic-Republican, but soon his party became known only as the Democratic party.

During his two terms in office he put through Congress and oversaw the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Jackson was convinced that the presence of Indians tribes within the boundaries of the sovereign states constituted a distinct threat to the nation and that the tribes must be expelled. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 authorized Jackson to exchange unorganized public land in the trans-Mississippi west for Indian land in the east. The Indians were to be given perpetual title to their new land as well as compensation for improvements on their old land. This bill had been approved by the House and Senate after bitter debate upon party lines.¹² The removal of the American Indian was one of the most significant and tragic acts of the Jackson administration. Jackson supported the Indian Removal Act out of a concern for the safety of the states, and in the belief that it was best for the welfare of the Indians who were removed. The Act resulted in atrocities such as the “Trail of Tears” in which over 18,000 Cherokee Indians were removed from Georgia and herded west during which 4,000 died.¹³

Jackson also oversaw the termination of the Bank of the United States. In the summer of 1832, he vetoed the bill for rechartering the Bank arguing that the bank enjoyed exclusive privileges conferred by the government which, for all intents and purposes, gave it a monopoly over foreign and domestic exchange. It was a matter of Jeffersonian Republicanism. Jackson stated in his veto that

“it is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes... when the laws undertake to... make the rich richer and potent more powerful, the humble members of society ...who have neither the time nor the

¹¹ The House chose John Quincy Adams. Paul F. Boller, Jr. *Presidential Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press 1996) page 31.

¹² Robert V. Remini *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1988) page 215

¹³ Ibid. page 218.

means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government.”¹⁴

Jackson was successful in his assault against the Bank and the Northeastern moneyed interests and on the strength of this was reelected to a second term later that year. He won fifty-five percent of the vote and 219 of 275 electoral votes

Throughout the remainder of the first seventy-two year cycle, three more Southerners served as President. These were General William Henry Harrison, a Virginian who had moved to Ohio, James Polk of Tennessee, and Zachary Taylor of Virginia.

By the election of 1860 slavery was the deciding factor and spawned four candidates: Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois as a Northern Democrat, John Breckenridge of Kentucky running as the Southern Democrat, Speaker of the House John Bell of Tennessee running on the Whig Party ticket, and Abraham Lincoln running as the Republican. With his victory in 1860, Abraham Lincoln reintroduced the Republican Party into American Politics, but this time as a Northern Party, supported exclusively by the Northern states. Lincoln won one hundred eighty electoral votes carrying the Free States of the North and West. Breckenridge carried eleven slave states winning seventy-two electoral votes. Bell's Whig party won thirty-nine electoral votes from three border states.

The division of the Democrats and the defeat of the South in the Civil War put an end to the meaningful participation by the South in American Presidential politics for the entire second cycle. The United States experienced a diverse political spectrum, from the laissez-faire conservatism practiced by the Grant, Garfield and Arthur administrations, to the T. R. Roosevelt years (1901 to 1909), featuring the incursion of government into trust busting and extension of its powers into the business community as a constraint upon unchecked expansion of monopolies. During this seventy-two years, no Southern politician was elected to the Presidency. Although Woodrow Wilson was born in Virginia and was raised as a boy in the South, he came north for his college education and remained in the North, serving as President of Princeton University and Governor of New Jersey prior to being elected President in 1912.

The third cycle began with the inauguration of Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. The Southern Democrats who had been staunchly anti-Republican for the prior cycle were now joined by a

¹⁴ Ibid. page 229.

strong Northern Democratic party galvanized by Wall Street's collapse and the Great Depression. The third cycle was significant for the fact that the Democratic party was able to accommodate the Northern liberals and the Southern conservatives. The major differences in political philosophies of these two groups was balanced by the disdain of both for traditional Republican business interests and the desire to reign in the excesses of the prior laissez-faire period. The Southern conservative Democrats despised these business interests because they represented the power behind the Northern victory in the Civil War, were contrary to the Southern way of life, and represented the Republican domination of American Presidential politics. The Northern liberal Democrats saw the excesses of business as the cause of the depression and the target of government control. The Northern liberal Democrats considered it the role of government to control business for the benefit of the people. Furthermore, the Northern liberal Democrats saw an expanded government as more capable of controlling business and providing for the needs of the people.

The Southern conservative Democrats may have questioned the advisability of large government; however, given the destitute nature of most southern states in the early years of this third cycle (1932 through the 1960s) and given the number of military bases built in the South, they realized that a large percentage of the dollars spent by government would come South. In fact, a disproportionate amount of the dollars from the government came to the Southern states for work projects, welfare relief and defense in this third cycle. The glue that held the Democrats together was the distrust of big Northeastern business, the flow of dollars South, and the shared dislike of Republicans.

This glue that held the Democratic Party together began to weaken in the 1970s. Two factors came into play. The first was economic and the second political. Economically, the South was growing strong through the development of business. With the advent of air conditioning many more businesses moved south. With the success of Southern businesses and the growth of cities like Atlanta and Charlotte, the negative view of business, as contrary to that in the first and second cycles, was no longer prevalent. In addition, strengthening of the South economically meant that a reducing portion of the overall government dollars were flowing south for welfare. In fact, with the decline of the Midwest, many of these dollars were flowing into depressed cities in the North thereby reducing the funds available in the South. The

major exception to this was in defense spending. A larger preponderance of dollars continued to flow South because of the number of military bases in Southern States.

The political change in the latter part of the third cycle occurred on Capitol Hill. In the 1950s the Democrats in the House were split between conservative Southerners and liberal Northern members. The latter were numerous, but the former more senior. Through seniority the Southern conservative members controlled many of the top committee positions.¹⁵ Liberal Democrats found the distribution of influence frustrating. As Tip O’Neill later wrote, “Congress in those days was dominated by a handful of old, conservative committee chairmen from the South.”¹⁶ The Committee chairmen wielded immense power and could thwart the liberals’ policy goals by blocking liberal legislation. There was no procedure or forum for holding chairmen responsible to the party majority.¹⁷ By the 1970s the liberal Northern Democrats who constituted a majority of the members, had achieved significant reform through the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970. A spate of subsequent reforms were introduced designed to make the Committee Chairmen more responsive to the party majority and to the sentiments of the Democratic caucus.¹⁸ This was a frustration for the Southern Democrats who began to look for a new political home.

By 1996 the country could see that the South was now back in charge and had in fact had “risen again.” In that year not only did the South control the House with Georgian, Newt Gingrich, as its Speaker, it also controlled the Senate with Bob Dole of Kansas as the Senate Majority Leader. The President was from Arkansas and the whole world looked to Atlanta for the 1996 Olympics. The pride of the South was restored. In its success, the South demanded one final political jewel, its own political party. Since the end of the first cycle, the South had been either insignificant, or a secondary player in American Presidential politics. It had enjoyed the presidencies of Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson. However, each had risen from the Vice Presidency upon the death of a Northern president, Roosevelt and Kennedy. Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush were both from the South but Carter was an outsider, a Democrat and a liberal. President Bush was a transplanted Northern carpetbagger. Even Bill Clinton was too

¹⁵ Roger H. Davidson, Susan Webb Hammond and Raymond W. Smock *Master of the House* (Westview Press 1998) page 291.

¹⁶ Ibid. page 293 and see also Tip O’Neill with William Novak, *Man of the House: The life and Political Memoirs of Speaker Tip O’Neill* (New York: Random House, 1987) page 138.

¹⁷ Ibid. page 293.

¹⁸ Ibid. page 296.

attached to the northern liberal establishment and too Democratic to be the “genuine article.” The fact that he married a Yankee and moved to New York after his terms in the White House only confirmed their distrust.

In the election of 2000 the South was hopeful. With George W. Bush running as a Republican from the platform as Governor of Texas, there was a strong indication that they had a new Southern leader. Mr. Bush’s success in the South Carolina primary, which led to his nomination and election, resulted directly from his appeal to Southern values in a speech at Bob Jones University. His victory confirmed that a Southern politician could win as a Republican on his own, but there was still the lingering doubt that he might not truly espouse the southern philosophy. In addition, he was running as a bit of a Northerner, relying, as many contended, upon his father and grandfather, to say nothing of his Yankee friends. Neither the South nor the rest of the country was sure.

In the election of 2004, President Bush ran as a Southerner, espousing Southern values in cowboy boots and a NASCAR racing jacket. Running on a platform of conservative family values born out of the evangelical movement in the South, W. was a Southern candidate running on a southern theme, under the banner of the party of Jefferson, Madison and Monroe, the Republican Party. Like Jefferson, Bush looked to human values rather than economics. Like Jackson, Bush showed a willingness to take whatever action necessary against perceived enemies to protect Americans from attacks within the country’s borders. As a final confirmation of the significance of the success for the dominance of the South, the Democratic candidate was from the Northeast. The opposition might as well have been named John Adams Kerry.

To the Southerners the election of 2004 was the final step in the return of the South’s domination of American politics. Southern domination of American politics was clear at the beginning of and throughout the first cycle, non existent in the second cycle, and present, but subordinate, in the third cycle. The outcome of the bitter election of 2004 is its re-establishment of the South at the center of American politics and a return to that place where we started in 1789. In the words of the great Yogi Berra, it’s “déjà vu all over again.”

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